

A Kelp-peddler

As his servants are all out at work and none is available to act as a sword bearer, the lord is obliged to visit the Hirano Shrine by himself. But without a sword bearer behind, he does not feel like himself. Happening to find a peddler selling kelp on the way, he stops him and asks if he would help him. The peddler excuses himself saying that he has never seen such a beautiful sword, much less having held it in hand, but the lord doesn't listen to him. So the peddler reluctantly accepts the job. But the lord incessantly criticizes the peddler for his manner of bearing the sword, and at last when he is called "Taro-kaja" and is commanded to follow him, the peddler becomes irritated, and, drawing the sword behind him, demands that the lord give up his short, second sword. Much elated when he finds his command easily followed, he next commands the lord to sell kelp as hawkers do employing the traditional rhymes and songs. After poking fun at him in this way, the peddler finally runs off with two swords, chased by the duped lord. Their hierarchical positions are facetiously reversed in the manner so typical of *kyogen* humour.

The Sumida River

On the bank of the Sumida River on a hazy morning in early spring, a trader from the eastern provinces was about to step on to a ferry, when behind him a distraught woman came hurrying towards the boat surrounded by a crowd of people. The ferryman, when asked for a seat in the boat, proposed that she entertain him with a dance in exchange for a seat. She recited a poem from the *Ise Monogatari*: "With such a famous name / Let us ask of you / Fair birds of the Capital, / Is the one of whom I always think / Alive and well?" She explains that she had travelled all the way from Kyoto in search of her kidnapped child. The ferryman, deeply moved, invited her into the boat.

From the boat she saw a group of people chanting in front of a mound on the other side of the river. When asked what they were doing, the ferryman narrated the story of a little boy who was struck dead on that very day one year before—a little boy who, while living happily with his parents in Kyoto, was kidnapped by a slave-trader, and was brought to this distant eastern province. But, overcome by illness and exhaustion after the long journey, he was at last deserted by the trader and left to die on the roadside. The date was March 15th. The chanting was part of a ceremony performed by the villagers in memory of the ill-fated boy. Having heard the whole story in the boat, the mad woman asked in tears where the boy came from, what his father's name was, how old he was, and what his name was; and at long last she identified him unmistakably as her long-lost child.

Faced by this painful reality, the mad woman headed for the mound in a deranged manner, and attempted to dig it open with her bare hands. Invited by the villagers to join their prayers instead, she, while chanting, recognized the voice of her child and piteously wished to hear it again. In answer to her wish, a phantom of the child appeared from out of the mound. She extended her hands to clasp him, but they cut the empty air in vain. When she came to herself, day had already dawned, and she found nothing but the grassy mound before her.

(Takao Saijo)