

Koji (“Three Tangerines”)

On the previous evening Taro-kaja followed his lord to a party and was entrusted, when it was over, to carry home a souvenir, a rare product of three tangerines on one branch. As he had enjoyed many cups of sake in another room set apart for servants, he was more than merry that evening, and, arriving home, consumed all tangerines.

The next morning he was terrified to receive an order from his lord to bring the branch with its fruits to his presence. Hiding the awkward situation under an exaggerated mask of mirth, he started explaining that one of the tangerines fell from the branch on its own on his way home, and therefore that pernicious orange had to be punished by having its peel ripped off and suffering the indignity of being eaten.

The second tangerine, secured safely inside the breast of his kimono to prevent it from imitating the shameless disobedience of the first tangerine, was inadvertently crushed by the pressure of his sword-hilt: it too was instantaneously executed with a bite, peel and all. The loss of the third tangerine was explained by referring to the celebrated story of the three exiles in *The Tale of Heike*. When two of the exiles were called back to the capital, the third, Shunkan, was tragically left abandoned on the solitary island. Taro-kaja, when asked what had become of the remaining fruit, replied that it had been conveyed to Rokuhara, the headquarters of the Heike Clan. However, when the lord heard the second half of the word ‘Rokuhara’, which can mean ‘belly’ or ‘stomach’, he realized that he had been cheated, and dismissing Taro-kaja’s excuses, angrily banished him from his presence.

Miidera

A deranged woman who lives at Kiyomigaseki in Suruga Province (in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture)—deranged because her son has been kidnapped by a slave-dealer—makes her long pilgrimage to Kyoto in order to pray before the Kannon Bodhisattva of Kiyomizu temple for divine help in finding her lost son. She spends several days and nights at prayer. During her devotions, she has a dream in which the Kannon says she should visit Miidera temple if she wishes to see her child.

Without delay the woman sets out for Miidera temple which stands by Lake Biwa, or the Lake of Grebes as was called of old. It happens to be the night of the harvest moon, and a large group of priests and children are out in the garden in front of the lecture hall for a moon-viewing party. There, into the sanctuary which was strictly closed to women, steps the deranged woman. She climbs up the bell tower and rings the bell, and then recounts a number of famous stories and events, recorded in the classics, relating to temple bells and to the moon, and even expounding the teachings of Buddhism. While she is thus engaged, one of the attending children named Senmitsu recognizes in her his long-lost mother. Happily the mother and her son are reunited after their long separation. They travel homeward hand-in-hand, and live out their lives happily together in Kiyomigaseki.

by Takao Saijo