

Interlude: “The Devil Tile”

A feudal lord, who for a long time had stayed at the capital because of a law suit, was allowed to travel back home, with his land and property guaranteed free from loss or damage. He believed that this was due to the great help given by the healing-Yakushi which he had ardently believed in, and he visited the shrine with his attendants. Intending to build a Yakushi-shrine in his own region to deepen his reverence for it, he saw one shrine after another built by famous shrine-carpenters of Hida, till his attention was caught by a “devil tile” at the ridge end. It bore a great resemblance to his wife, who sent him off at the house-gate, saying with smiles that he should come home safely. Although he knew he would soon see her, yet as he looked at it, tears flowed up in his eyes . . .

Kazuraki

A traveling monk leaves Mt. Haguro (in Yamagata-Prefecture) on his pilgrimage to Kazuraki-Shrine. Having arrived at Mt. Kazuraki in Yamato (in present-day Nara Prefecture), and after crossing over the peaks of mountains, he is suddenly caught in a heavy snowfall and loses his way. A local woman with a bundle of sticks on her back finds him in trouble, and feels pity for him. She offers him to stay overnight at her humble cottage down in a shadowy valley, and entertains him by building a fire with *shimoto*—a bundle of sticks collected in deep snow, much famed in Mt. Kazuraki. Not knowing what it is, he asks her about it. She explains, citing an old *waka*-poem, that the sticks bound together by a creeper reed became so famous as to be commonly associated in their minds with the mountain, and narrates tenderly of poetry and Yamato dances. At last she tells that she, the Kazuraki Goddess, was ordered by *En no Gyoja* to build a rock bridge from Mt. Kazuraki to Mt. Ohmine, but failed in doing so because she did not want to work during the day, hating to expose her ugly looks to the world. Thus she incurred his anger and was bound to eternal agony and suffering. She, therefore, begs him to free her from bondage.

In the stillness of night, as his clothes dry up, the monk starts his religious service. Drawn by the healing power of the religious chanting, the woman appears in the shape of the goddess, and, freed from her bonds, performs before him the Yamato dance in the snow and in the moonlight, so gracefully as if surveying the whole expanse of the Yamato field from a mountain top. As the early light of dawn approaches, however, she hides herself in a rock cave, fearing to expose her looks.

* *En no Gyoja*: a semilegendary sorcerer endowed with supernatural powers, would order spirits and demons to do his bidding, and when they refused, he would bind them to a spell.

(Takao Saijo)