

Fumi-ninai (“Delivery of a Letter”)

Taro-kaja and Jiro-kaja are entrusted by the Lord to deliver his love-letter to a certain place—not one of the two, but both together, as in that case, as the lord observes, they may not play truant and come back home early after delivering the letter. They reluctantly set on the journey, tossing the letter back and forth between them, complaining that it is heavy. But they become so curious about what is written in it that they cannot resist the thought of opening it secretly. There it begins with, “koishi, koishi” (“dearly, dearly”). They immediately understand why it is so heavy as it is fraught with “koishi” (“pebbles”). They vie with each other to read it further, and it is torn to pieces. The Lord, thinking they are late, goes out to meet them, and finds them absorbed in fanning the torn pieces in the air to send them to their destination.

***Aya no Tsuzumi* (“The Damask Drum”)**

An old gardener in the palace at Asakura, Fukuoka Prefecture, happens to catch sight of the Princess, and falls desperately in love with her. The Princess, having heard of his attachment, mentions that love transcends all class distinctions. She has a drum tied on the branches of a laurel tree by the Laurel Pond, and conveys a message to the effect that if the sound of the drum be heard in the palace, she will appear before the old man. Believing those words to be true and honest, he beats the drum. Somehow it does not sound. He continues beating it for days and months, thinking that he may have turned deaf owing to his old age. As it is, the drum is false, damask linen being stretched where skin should be. The old man, not knowing this, is sorely distraught with his failure, and flings himself into the pond. He is drowned.

In the second part of the play, the old man comes out of the pond in the form of Avenging Ghost, and appearing near the Princess, torments her with repeated demands to sound the drum. She grieves over her mockery of the old man, but the ghost does not hear her. Seeing her in great grief, it at last disappears into the pond still with deep grudges not the least appeased.

(Takao Saijo)