

### Oni no Mamako (The Demon's Stepchild)

A mother with her child in her arms was travelling across a mountain to visit her parents, when at Inami, Harima Province, a demon suddenly barred her way, threatening that he would devour her. As she begged him to spare her life, he proposed that instead she should become his wife. Scared, she reluctantly gave in to him, but was worried about her child. He said he would adopt it as his stepchild. So saying he began coddling it affectionately, carrying it on his shoulders, and dancing. While he was doing this, his natural instinct got the better of him and his mouth began to water. Horrified and lost herself, she pushed him down, and taking it away from him, took to her heels.

### Sumida River

On the bank of Sumida River covered in haze in early spring, a trader from the eastern provinces was about to step onto a ferry, when behind him came a crowd of people who surrounded a distraught woman hurrying towards the ferry. The ferryman, when asked for a seat in the boat, proposed that she entertain him with a dance performance in exchange for a seat. She recited a poem in 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?", and said 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 on the boat she saw a group of people chanting in front of a mound on the other side of the river. Asked what they were doing, the ferryman narrated a story in which a little boy was struck dead on that very day one year ago, 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, he was deserted by the trader and left to die on the roadside. The date was 15<sup>th</sup> March. The chanting was that of the villagers who gave a memorial service for the ill-fated boy. Having heard the story so far, 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 as her own child.

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

(Takao Saijo)