

Oba-ga-Sake (Aunt's Sake-shop)

Taro-kaja visits his aunt who brews and sells *sake* at her shop. Proposing that he will act as a sales agent and feature her *sake*, he asks to be permitted to taste it to judge its quality. His aunt declines the proposal, saying that it is unusually well-brewed *sake* and therefore tasting is not necessary. Her reply puts him into an ill-humour and on his way back home he conceives a trick to play on her. He retraces his steps and tells her that a demon has fled into the mountains near her shop and will stalk through the village after 4 p.m. in search of victims. As she lives alone in this deserted place, she had better lock up the shop and keep a careful watch.

A little after 4 p.m. Taro-kaja appears wearing a demon-mask, and knocks on her door, claiming to be a neighbour, and asking in a loud voice for her to open the shop and sell him some *sake*. Hearing the solicitation of a neighbour, she opens the door to find a demon waiting to devour her, and when she appeals to him to spare her life, he says he might do so if she allows him to drink some fine *sake*.

Thus it is that the nephew spends some pleasant hours in the warehouse of *sake*, and then, putting the demon-mask on his knee to scare her away in case she comes in to the warehouse, lies down, and is soon in a deep sleep, snoring extravagantly. The aunt, after a while, peeps in the warehouse and, to her overwhelming anger and chagrin, finding her nephew asleep among the sake barrels, chases him out with a furious expression on her face.

Sessho-seki (The Killing Stone)

On his way from the deep North to Kyoto, Monk Genno is puzzled to observe that many birds flying over a huge rock on the Plain of Nasu (in present-day Tochigi Prefecture) suddenly fall out of the sky dead. When he comes near the place, wondering what might be the cause, a woman of the neighbourhood appears and warns him not to approach any closer, saying that it is the Killing Stone; that it takes the life of those who come near it. She then narrates the legend of the stone:

Tamamo-no-Mae was a beautiful courtesan, and was deeply loved by Emperor Toba (1103-1156). One evening, when an entertainment was taking place in the palace, all the lights were blown out by a great storm and the palace was submerged in darkness. In the confusion it was noted that the courtesan's body emitted light—bright enough for it to be like day. Soon after, the emperor fell ill, and an astrologer, Abe no Yasunari (the 7th descendant of Abe no Seimei) was consulted. As a result, Tamamo-no-Mae was found to be the cause of his illness, having been identified as an evil fox. She was exorcised by the astrologer, and fled, in her original form, from the palace to the Plain of Nasu. The Emperor ordered Kazusa-no-suke and Miura-no-suke, the most powerful warriors of the day, to hunt and kill the fox. Finally it was shot to death by an arrow, and its body turned into the Killing Stone, her evil spirit still remaining alive inside it.

The woman telling this story reveals that she herself is Tamamo-no-Mae, and disappears into the stone. But performing a powerful Buddhist ritual, Genno slits the stone into two, and from inside the fox emerges. Promising that thenceforth it will no longer commit evil deeds, it turns into a hard stone.

(The *Shite* in the second part is usually an evil fox exposed, but in “the woman-style” version started by Kongo Ukyo, it appears in the form of the bewitching Tamamo-no-Mae, wearing a mask with evil eyes and a big scarlet mouth—a style seen in Kongo School alone.)

by Takao Saijo