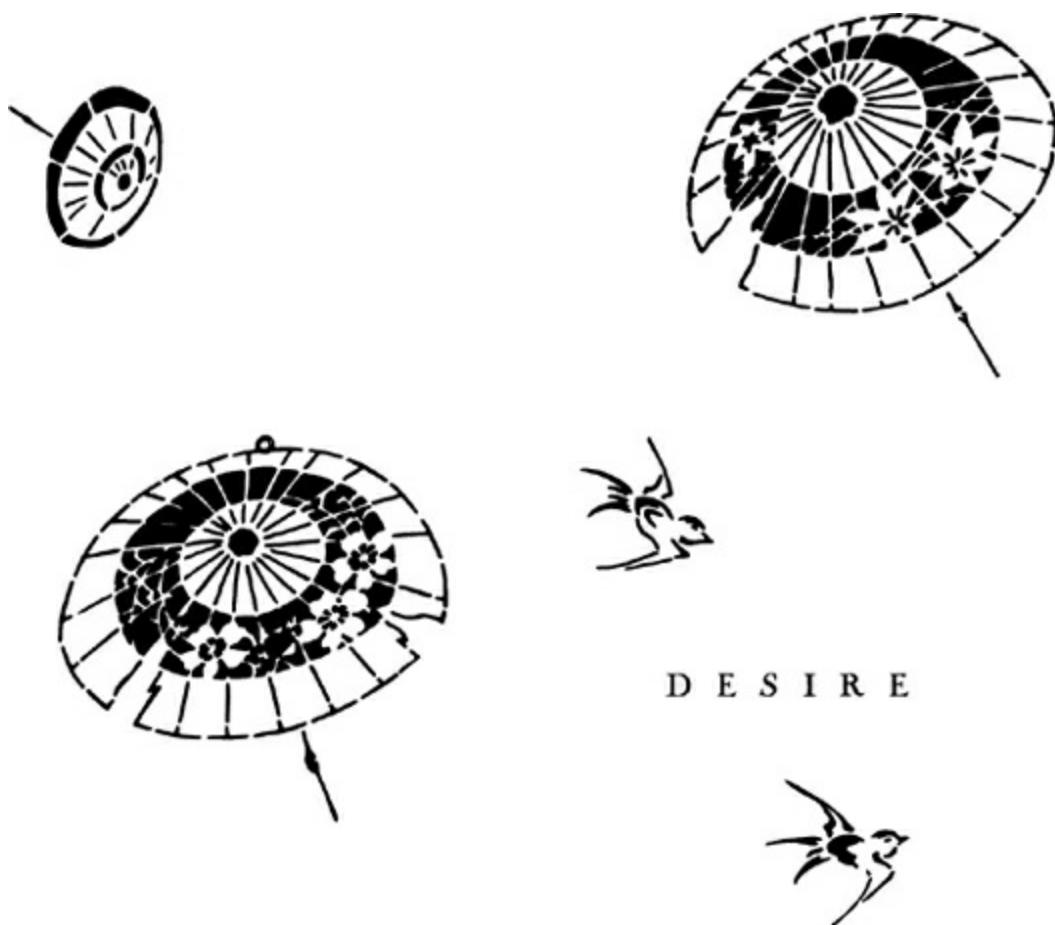




108. YOUNG LUST

In Owari province a girl of eleven or twelve was out gathering greens in the fields when a farmer working nearby noticed her flat on the ground. He thought he had better investigate. A five-foot snake was about to wrap itself around her. The farmer ran for his hoe to beat it off with, but the snake, now very close to the girl's head, suddenly flinched, slithered away, and vanished. When the farmer got back, the girl was unconscious. He kept calling her till she came to and he could ask what had happened.

"Such a wonderful, handsome boy was just here!" she said. "He told me to lie down and I did. I'd have done anything he asked! But then for some reason he got frightened and ran away."

The farmer wanted to know whether she had an amulet on her. She said no, but he searched her all the same. In the end he found she had tied up her hair with a bit of paper that had the Sonshō Darani on it.

This is supposed to have happened in the 1260s or early 1270s.

109.

THE PRETTY GIRL

A young monk served a very distinguished master. One day he went with his master to Miidera, the great temple near Lake Biwa. It was a summer afternoon. He soon felt sleepy, and in the spacious residence his master was visiting he had no trouble finding a quiet spot for a nap.

He dreamed that a beautiful girl came and made the most wonderful love to him. When he woke up, he discovered a five-foot-long snake next to him, and was on his feet in fright before he realized the snake was dead. Its mouth was open. Next, he saw he was wet in front where he had ejaculated. The beautiful girl who had made love to him must have been the snake. Horrified, he peered into the snake's mouth and saw traces of the semen which the snake had apparently spit out.

He must have had an erection while he slept, and the snake had seen it and taken his penis in its mouth. That was when he had had the dream about the girl. His ejaculation had been too much for the snake and it had died. What a weird and awful thing to have happen! He went right away to wash his penis thoroughly, in secret.

He wanted to confide in someone, but kept quiet because he knew that if he did he would end up being known as "the monk who did it with a snake." Still, he was disturbed enough by the incident to talk about it to a monk who was a close friend of his. His friend was very sympathetic.

Clearly you shouldn't fall asleep where there's no one else around. It's true, though, that nothing special happened to the monk afterwards. They say a creature will die if it swallows a

man's semen, and apparently it's true. The monk was not quite himself, either, for some time.

The story was passed on by the friend the monk talked to.

110.

MESMERIZED

One summer day a young woman walking west along Konoe Avenue in Kyoto, on the south side of the street, apparently felt a sudden urge to relieve herself, for she squatted against the earthen wall she was passing and did just that. Her little girl attendant paused discreetly to wait.

It was fairly early in the morning. The little girl knew her mistress must have finished, but time kept passing and the young woman never moved. An hour went by. The girl called to her mistress in vain. Another hour. The sun was climbing toward noon. Nothing the little girl could say got any reply. Finally she burst into tears.

A man riding by with a large company of followers saw the little girl crying and sent someone to ask her what was the matter. The girl told him, pointing to her mistress who was still there with her skirts tucked up, squatting against the wall.

"How long have you been here?" asked the rider himself.

"Since early morning, sir," the girl sobbed. "She's been like that for hours."

It certainly was strange. The rider dismounted and examined the young woman's face. She was as pale as death.

"What is it?" he asked her. "Are you sick? Has this ever happened to you before?"

The woman said nothing, but the girl assured him that this was the first time.

The rider could see the woman was not of the commonest class, which made him feel all the more sorry for her. He tried lifting her to her feet, but she was rigid.

Happening to glance over at the wall, the rider noticed just inside a hole the head of a large snake which was staring straight

at the woman. It must have seen her relieving herself, felt lust for her, and mesmerized her. That was why she was stuck.

Having grasped this, the rider drew his sword and planted it before the hole with the cutting edge toward the snake. Then he had his men pick the woman up bodily and carry her away. Suddenly the snake hurled itself like a spear from the hole, cut a foot of its length in two on the sword, and died. What strange and frightening creatures snakes are!

The man remounted his horse while a follower retrieved his sword. Still worried about the woman, he assigned some of his men to stay with her. In a little while she began to be able to walk again, with someone supporting her, just like a person who has been very ill.

111.

RED HEAT

A pair of monks, one old and one young and handsome, were on their way to Kumano. On reaching Muro county, not far from their goal, they found lodging with a young widow who lived all alone, aside from the company of a few maids.

The widow noted the younger monk's good looks, and desire made her treat him well. After dark the two monks retired, but in the middle of the night she stole to the younger one's bed and lay down beside him. When he woke up in alarm, she did her best to calm him. "I don't normally have people to stay," she said, "but I knew I wanted you as soon as I saw you today. That's why I asked you in and that's why I'm here. I'm a widow, you see. Please be nice to me!"

The monk jumped up, protesting that he had vowed long ago to remain chaste, and he reminded her that he had come a long way to make this pilgrimage. "If I suddenly break my vow, we'll both suffer for it!" he cried. "Stop! Please forget your desires!"

His refusal only stung her to anger. All night she twined herself round him, though he managed both to humor her and to put her off. "It's not that I really want to refuse you," he explained. "As

soon as I've spent a few days at Kumano I'll be back, and then I'll do whatever you want, believe me!" Finally she accepted his promise and went away. At dawn the monk and his companion set off.

The love-struck widow counted the days and prepared to receive the handsome monk on his return, but he was frightened and took care to go back another way. She got worried when he failed to come and began questioning the people passing outside on the road. One pilgrim said yes, a pair of monks like that, one old and one young, had left Kumano several days before. The widow panicked when it dawned on her that they had avoided her house altogether. She rushed home in a rage, shut herself up in silence in her room, and quickly died. Even as her maids were mourning her, a foul snake, immensely long, suddenly issued from her room, left the house, and slithered down the road away from Kumano. The travelers it passed were terrified.

Up ahead, the two monks heard that a huge snake was racing their way over hill and dale and catching up with them fast. They knew right away who the snake really was, and they fled for their lives to seek refuge at Dōjōji. Having heard their story, the monks of the temple decided to help. They held a council, then let down their bell over the young monk and barred the gate.

The snake soon came, got easily over the barred gate, slithered a few times around the compound, then went straight for the hall with the bell. When the door collapsed under its furious blows, the snake darted inside and wrapped itself round the bell. It stayed that way for hours, beating on the top of the bell with its tail, till despite their fear the monks surrounded the hall and opened the doors on all four sides to watch. The snake lifted its head. Its tongue flickered and tears of blood streamed from its eyes. Then it fled in the direction it had come from. The bell glowed red-hot from its foul, burning breath, and the monks could not even get near it till they had dashed it with water to cool it down. When they finally lifted it they found that nothing, not even bones, was left of the monk inside. There was only a little heap of ashes. The monk's older companion wept as he took his leave.

Later on, the abbot of Dōjōji dreamed of an even larger snake. "I am the monk who hid in the bell," it said. "Once that evil woman had become a snake she took me prisoner and made me hers. Now

I suffer horribly in this awful snake body and I can't save myself from my pain. When I was alive, I devoted myself to the Lotus Sutra. Please, Your Grace, show me mercy and put an end to my torment. Purify yourself, copy the 'Revelation of the Buddha's Eternal Life' chapter of the Sutra, and dedicate it for both of us snakes. Oh, save us from this agony!" The snake then went away and the dreamer awoke.

The abbot copied the chapter in question and called the monks of the temple together for a day-long ceremony to dedicate it for the two snakes. Soon he dreamed again. This time a monk and a woman came to Dōjōji together, all smiles. They prostrated themselves before the abbot and told him that thanks to his kindness they were rid now of their snake bodies and happy at last. "For," said the woman, "I have been born into the Tōri Heaven." "And I," said the man, "have gone up to the Tosotsu Heaven." And with these words they flew up into the sky.

The Tōri Heaven is where the great god Taishaku has his palace at the top of Shumisen, the cosmic mountain; and the Tosotsu Heaven is the even higher realm where Miroku, the Future Buddha, waits to be born into our world.

112.

LOVESICK

Sick with love for a boy, a girl in Kamakura confessed her trouble to her mother. The mother, who knew the boy's parents, immediately arranged for him to visit her daughter sometimes, but he all but ignored the girl and hardly ever came. In the end the girl died. Her grieving parents put her ashes in a box and prepared to send them off to a certain temple in Shinano.

Next, the boy became ill too, and went so thoroughly mad that he had to be shut up in a little room. Hearing him talk in there, his parents peeked in through a crack. He was talking to a large snake.

When the boy died, his body was placed in a coffin, for burial on the mountain nearby. At the funeral a large snake was found coiled around his body, right in the coffin, and the two were buried

together.

Before sending their daughter's ashes to Shinano, the girl's parents opened the box to take out some which they wanted to deposit in a temple in Kamakura. They discovered that their daughter's bones had turned into little snakes, or were in the process of doing so.

They told the whole story to the priest they asked to pray over the remains, and the priest passed it on to his colleagues. It happened in the 1270s, within the last ten years. I know the names of the people involved but would rather not record them here.

