

though, he had just died. Of course the cast did not realize this, what with the music and the excitement, and they went on vainly offering him the canopy and the throne in the hope that he would say or do something. When they finally went away, the holy man stayed as motionless as ever. His alarmed disciples shook him and found he was already stiff.

At last everyone understood that he had actually gone to rebirth in the Land of Bliss, and they wept.

118.

NOT EXACTLY THE LAND OF BLISS

A hermit whose only practice was calling Amida's Name had lived for years in the Ibuki Mountains of Mino province. He was calling the Name one night when he heard a voice from the heavens saying, "You have devoutly trusted me and have called my Name countless times. Early tomorrow afternoon, at the hour of the Sheep, I promise I will come and welcome you into my Western Paradise. Do not stop calling upon me!"

The hermit redoubled his devotions. He washed, lit incense, scattered flowers, and sat down with his disciples facing the west so they could all call out the Name together.

When the time came, there was a gleam in the west. Amida appeared in glory like the full autumn moon breaking through clouds, and the hermit was bathed in the sublime rays that streamed from between his eyebrows. Flowers floated down from the sky. The hermit prostrated himself with such fervor that when his forehead touched the ground his behind rose high in the air. The cord of his rosary all but snapped with the vigor of his invocations. Then Kannon advanced among downy purple clouds to offer him a lotus throne. The hermit crept reverently forward, mounted the throne, and sailed away westward. His disciples wept with joy and awe as they watched him go.

A week or so later, the servants at the hermitage decided it was time to make the monks a bath and went into the mountains to cut firewood. When they came to a great cryptomeria growing over a

waterfall, they heard cries from high in the tree. A monk was up there, tied naked to a branch. One particularly good climber discovered that the monk was their master who had sailed away to paradise. He was tied to the tree with vines.

“Master!” the horrified servant cried as he began working on the vines. “What happened?”

“He promised he’d be back for me any minute,” the hermit babbled, “and he told me to stay right here! Don’t you go untying me!” The servant untied him anyway. “Amida Buddha!” his master screamed, “this man is killing me!”

In the end they got him down and took him back to the hermitage. It was a tragedy. He had completely lost his mind, and two or three days later he died. Simple as he was, a tengu had tricked him.