

could. Oh, I wish I'd just left well enough alone!"
Then he disappeared.

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NO FOOL, THE HUNTER

A seasoned hermit, devoted to the Lotus Sutra, once lived on Mount Atago just northwest of Kyoto. Though he never left his hut, he did not starve, for a hunter who lived nearby and revered him often brought him food.

The hunter had not been around for a long time when one day he turned up with a sack of dried rice, and the relieved hermit mentioned that he had been getting worried. Then he told the hunter about something wonderful that had been happening. "Perhaps it's because I've been honoring the Sutra so faithfully all these years, I don't know," he said, "but the Bodhisattva Fugen has been coming here every night on his white elephant. Stay this evening and adore him with me!"

The hunter was impressed enough to say he would, but he took the trouble to question the hermit's boy servant. "What's the hermit talking about?" he asked. "Have you see Fugen too?"

"Yes, certainly, half a dozen times," the boy replied.

Waiting eagerly behind the hermit, the hunter wondered whether he too would see Fugen. It was the twentieth of the ninth moon, well into fall, and the night was long. At last, past midnight a radiance as of the rising moon shone over the peaks to the east, an eerie wind blew down the mountain, and the hut was filled with light as though illumined by rays from afar. The Bodhisattva Fugen, mounted on his elephant, rode toward them and halted before the hut.

The hermit worshipped this vision with tears of joy. "And you," he asked the hunter, "do you see him too?"

"Indeed I do," replied the hunter, "and so does the boy. This is extraordinary!"

Still the hunter was puzzled. He quite understood that the hermit, with all his years of devotion to the Sutra where Fugen

figures so prominently, might be given such a blessing. But he could not understand why the boy, and why he himself who knew so little about these things and who above all killed animals for a living, should see the vision too. So he decided there was no reason why he should not test this Fugen.

Fitting an arrow to the string, he took aim over the hermit (who was prostrate in adoration), drew to the full, and let fly. The arrow seemed to strike the bodhisattva's chest and the light went out. Something went crashing downhill through the brush.

"What have you done?" cried the hermit in an agony of distress.

The hunter explained. "If it really had been Fugen," he said, "the arrow couldn't have done any damage. So it must have been some monster."

At dawn they followed a trail of blood a hundred yards to the bottom of the ravine, where they found a huge badger lying dead with an arrow through its chest.

Saintly though he was, the hermit was ignorant too, and so had been open to deception. The hunter, on the other hand, having his wits about him, had killed the badger and exposed its hoax.



122.

THE HAIRY ARM

A man named Sukeyasu was on his way down from the Capital to Tamba province when, after a day of hunting, he sought shelter in an old chapel. A villager from nearby warned him that the chapel was haunted and that people who stayed there disappeared, but Sukeyasu paid no attention and made himself as much at home as he could. What with the blowing snow and the spooky story, however, he did not feel too comfortable.

There was a babble of eerie voices outside. Peering through a hole in a sliding panel, out into the garden white with snow, he saw the dark, indistinct shape of a monk as tall as the roof. Then a

skinny, hairy arm snaked in through the hole and felt over his face. Sukeyasu jumped and the arm withdrew.

Sukeyasu lay down in a ball to wait, facing the hole. The next time the hairy arm came through he grabbed it, and proved too strong for whatever was now struggling to get its arm back. Lifting out the whole panel, he stepped out on the porch of the chapel with the panel still between him and the owner of the arm. Then he tipped the panel away from him and jumped onto it. The creature may have looked as tall as the roof, but it had to be very small indeed to fit under the panel, especially with Sukeyasu sitting triumphantly on top of it! The arm was skinnier than ever.

Finally the creature let out a squeak. Sukeyasu had one of his men strike a light, and he found he had caught an old badger. He gave it to his men to look after until he could show it off to the villagers in the morning, but the men just roasted it and ate it. By morning only the head was left. Sukeyasu exhibited it to the villagers anyway.

Nothing haunted the chapel after that.



123.

EXPERT HELP

An ascetic traveling in the north once came at sundown to a mountain village and asked for lodging. No one would have him,