



126. QUITE A STINK

Emperor En'yū had been ill for a long time, and since a spirit was causing the trouble, all the greatest healers of the time had been called in to do their best. Nothing had worked, though, and the emperor was beginning to be afraid.

Finally someone told him about an ascetic who had been practicing for years on Kōzen, the mountain near Nara. "He's built up such power that he can stop wild animals in mid-run with his spells, and bring down birds from the sky," the informant went on. "Summon him, Your Majesty! *He'll* help you!"

The ascetic came as fast as he could. All the way to Uji, about half the journey, flowers floated down on him from the sky — a sight that boggled the mind of everyone who saw it. (After Uji there were no more flowers.) The emperor called him in as soon as he got to the palace and had him begin his incantations. In almost no time His Majesty felt perfectly well.

Some of the great monks and healers whose intervention had failed found this instant success a bit odd. Among the doubters were five men who had just worked together in a particularly powerful Fudō rite.

"For years we've trusted in the Buddha and practiced his Teaching," one of the five complained. "Day after day we've prayed with heart and soul for His Majesty, and still we've failed. Who is this ascetic? What's *he* done to get such quick success? Perhaps he really is more powerful than any one of us, but he can't be more powerful than all five of us put together! It doesn't make sense!"

Having some more rites to perform, the five took the occasion to get near the ascetic from Kōzen and to direct some special incantations right at him.

The ascetic was seated by himself, entirely surrounded by curtains. In a moment they heard a vigorous scrabbling and scratching noise from inside the curtains, and a disgusting stink of dogshit filled the room. The nobles present were horrified, and so was His Majesty, but the five monks could tell that the truth about that ascetic was now beginning to come out. They redoubled their efforts.

Suddenly the ascetic hurtled out through his curtains and crashed to the floor, where he lay sprawled on his back. "Help!" he shrieked. "Good sirs, save me, please! All these years on Kōzen I've worshipped the tengu and prayed to them to make me famous. And it worked, you know, because I was called here to the palace! But what an awful mistake it was! I've learned my lesson now, yes I have! Please save me, oh please!"

The five monks were quite satisfied. As for the emperor, his first thought was to arrest the man and throw him in jail, but he changed his mind and only ordered him banished from the Capital. The ascetic was glad enough to make himself scarce. Some laughed to watch him go, while some just wished they could get their hands on him. He had been treated like a Buddha in person when he cured the emperor, but he made a very sorry sight as he fled.

127.

THE MASTER

Though expert in scholarship and in the mysteries of the faith, the monk Yōshin from Mount Hiei found himself passed over for promotion year after year in favor of younger and less experienced monks, and became so disappointed that he eventually left the mountain and wandered off toward Iyo province. On the way he stopped at Akashi, a harbor in Harima.

An epidemic had affected every household around Akashi. Yōshin found the villagers scurrying about. They told him about the sickness, and explained that a monk and strolling diviner had come by and promised them he could stop it. They were now hurrying around, on his instructions, to distribute the things