

something, like a nun?”

She turned her brimming gaze to his, as though dew had touched her frost, yet a shadow seemed to fall between them. How cruel she must have thought him all these months! Moroie too broke down. What if he should never see her again! Could he live without her? The question would not leave him, and he shivered with foreboding.

Her sutra done, the lady began fingering an aloeswood rosary trimmed with amber, and lost herself in prayer. When she lifted her head again, so strange a look came over her face that Moroie flinched. “I asked you in,” she began, “because I wanted to see you one more time. Now my anger and hurt ...” Her voice stopped. She was dead.

Moroie could not believe it. The first time he called, nobody heard him. Finally a maid looked in and asked what was the matter. Moroie simply sat there. The maid quickly lost her composure too, and no wonder. As a single strand of hair breaks, the lady was gone. Moroie could not very well stay on because if he were to do so the pollution of death would oblige him to go into seclusion afterwards. As he left, her face was all he could see.

It was not long before Moroie sickened and died. Some supposed it was the lady’s ghost that took him. In fact, those close to Moroie may even have had reason to be sure.

Other people assumed that since the lady had all but died with the Lotus Sutra on her lips, she must have gone on to paradise. But it’s also true that she died with deep resentment against Moroie in her heart, and while looking straight at him. Surely the sin of both was very grave.

133.

SHE DIED LONG AGO

A Kyoto man, too poor to make ends meet, learned one day with surprise that a gentleman he knew had been appointed governor of a distant province. He went straight to the new governor’s residence, explained his situation, and offered his services in any

capacity whatever. The gentleman was pleased to engage his old acquaintance on the spot.

The man and his lovely young wife had always been inseparable, despite the hardships of poverty; but now that he was going so far away he left his wife for another, richer one, who not only provided for his journey but came with him and took very good care of him in his province.

In time, however, he began to miss his first wife badly. He could hardly stop himself from rushing back to the Capital, and he tormented himself endlessly with speculation about how things might go if he did. Meanwhile his master's term of office ended, and he set out with his master for Kyoto.

How bitterly he now regretted having left his first wife! He promised himself that he would go directly to her when he reached the city. The way seemed unbearably long. On arrival he rushed to her house, found the gate open, and went in.

Everything had changed. The house seemed uninhabited and was falling to ruin. A wave of anguish swept over him as he gazed at the desolation, lit up as it was by an autumn moon just five days off the full. The night was chilly, too. He felt very sad.

In the house he found his wife lying all alone, just where she had lain in the old days. She showed no sign of anger when he came in, greeting him instead with joy. "How did you get here?" she asked. "When did you get back?"

He told her how he had longed for her and promised that from now on they would live together again. "I'll get all the things I've brought with me delivered here tomorrow," he said, "and I'll get my men moved here too. I just wanted to let you know right away, tonight." She looked very happy. After talking till late about the past, they finally lay down in each other's arms. "Have you no servant at all?" he asked. She explained that she had been too poor to keep one. He knew that her plight was his fault, and pity for her mingled in his thoughts with disgust at what he had done. It was nearly dawn when they fell asleep, with the shutters still open.

Sunlight streaming full into the room woke the man up. The woman in his arms was dried skin over dead bones. In horror he leaped to his feet, desperately hoping it was a hallucination. But no: what had once been a woman was now a long-dead corpse.

He dressed in frantic haste and burst into the neighbor's little

house. "Where's the woman who used to live next door?" he shouted. "There's no one there!"

"She? Oh, her husband left her and went off to some province, and she was so hurt she got sick," the neighbor replied. "She had no one to take care of her and this past summer she died. Of course, there was no one to dispose of the body either, so she's still there. People are afraid to go near the place. That's why it's empty and going to ruin."

Terrified though he was, there was nothing further he could say or do, and he went his way.

134.

I SAW IT IN A DREAM

Magari no Tsunekata lived in Owari province with his wife and was very comfortably off. After many years of marriage he fell in love with another woman. His wife made quite a fuss about this, as a woman might be expected to do, but he could not give his mistress up. He tried all sorts of dodges to keep seeing her in secret, but his wife had spies out after him, and any report that he was with his mistress would literally give her fits.

Once Tsunekata had business in the Capital and spent some time preparing for his trip. The day before he was due to leave he was overcome by the desire to see his mistress. Since his wife's fierce jealousy made it impossible for him to go openly, he announced instead that he was wanted by the provincial administration.

At his mistress's house, he and his mistress talked awhile in bed. When they eventually fell asleep, he dreamed that his wife burst in on them. "Ah, there you are with that woman again!" she screamed. "That's all you ever do nowadays, lie around with her! You with your innocent face and your smooth lies!" She went on like that for a while, then fell on him and thrust herself violently between him and his mistress. At this Tsunekata woke up.

Frightened and confused, he started home as soon as he could, and by daybreak was back with his wife. "It's really too bad!" he complained. "Here I'm about to leave, and they had to call me in