

to look out for his own safety,” he said, “and I don’t want that fellow in here. Tell him to go away.”

“All right,” said the enemy, “but if he won’t open the gate, at least he could put his head out the little window there.”

Perhaps it was just Mochisuke’s karma to die, because that is exactly what he did. He put his head out the little window and asked his visitor what he wanted. As he did so the diviner heard his voice and saw his face, and laid on him the most powerful curse he could summon. Since the visitor actually had nothing to say, he could only answer that he was going down to the country and thought Mochisuke should know.

“He must be mad to have called me out just to hear *that*,” Mochisuke fumed as he drew his head back in.

Soon his head began to ache, and in three days he was dead.

They say that the man who commissioned the curse died shortly afterwards under unfortunate circumstances. It was frightening how his curse turned right back on him.

164.

THE HARMLESS HAUNT

As a scholar, Ki no Haseo was so magnificently learned that he had no rival in all the world. However, he knew nothing of yin-yang lore.

A dog kept jumping over the wall to piss in Haseo’s garden, and Haseo was puzzled enough to consult a yin-yang diviner about it. He hoped to learn whether the dog’s doings boded well or ill.

The diviner divined. “Well, there’ll be a demon in your house on such-and-such a date,” he announced. “Don’t worry, though. This demon doesn’t hurt people or put curses on them, or anything like that. The thing to do is to shut yourself up in seclusion on that day.”

By the time the day came, Haseo had forgotten all about it. Seclusion was the last thing on his mind. Instead, he had his students over to his house to compose Chinese poetry. Learned meters, metaphors, and rhymes were blossoming on every page

when suddenly a lugubrious howl issued from the closet nearby. The assembled scholars quaked where they sat. Then someone cracked open the closet door. A demon burst forth. It was two feet tall, with a white body and legs and a black head, and it had a single black horn. They were all frightened out of their wits.

But one among the company, a wise and brave man, kicked at the demon's head as it darted by. The black thing fell off. Why, the creature was a white dog, barking and yapping like mad! The thing on its head had been a bucket. During the night the dog had gotten into the closet and ended up with its head stuck in the bucket, which was why its howl had sounded so weird. The relieved scholars burst into laughter.

So it hadn't been a demon after all, but the diviner had seen it as a demon because that's what the people first thought it was. Everyone admired how the diviner had even specified that the demon wasn't going to do any harm or lay any curses. What a masterly insight *that* had been! On the other hand, no one thought much of Ki no Haseo. No doubt he was very learned, but it hadn't been very clever of him to forget all about the diviner's advice.

165.

IN THE NICK OF TIME

A moderately pious old nobleman, now a monk, lived in the southern part of the Capital. He was wealthy enough to have everything he wanted in life. On receiving a cryptic oracle in his own house, he sent for a yin-yang diviner named Kamo no Tadayuki to find out whether the oracle boded well or ill. Tadayuki determined that on such-and-such date the nobleman should stay strictly secluded at home, or risk being killed by robbers.

When the day came, the frightened nobleman barred his gate and admitted no one. Finally toward evening there was a pounding on the gate. At first the nobleman did not answer, but when the pounding continued he sent someone to find out who it was and to let the visitor know that the master of the house was in strict seclusion. The visitor identified himself as Taira no Sadamori, just