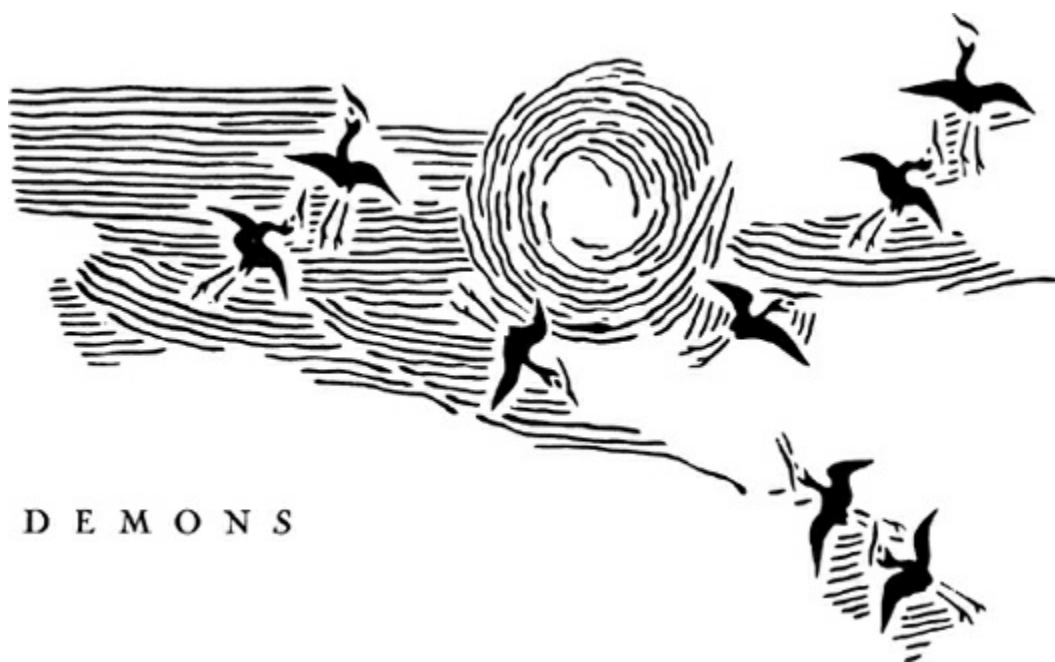




167. TWINLEAF

The legendary musician Hakuga no Sammi spent one brightly moonlit night wandering up and down in front of the Suzaku Gate, near the palace, playing his bamboo flute. As he did so another man appeared, dressed just like Sammi himself, and began to play too. Sammi could not imagine who the fellow was, but the tone of his flute was truly divine. Neither man said a word.

The two met and played that way every moonlit night. The sound of the other's flute was so extraordinary that Sammi, devoured by curiosity, at last suggested that they try exchanging their instruments. The other man willingly did so. Sammi found that his flute was of a quality unknown in the world.

The two saw each other often enough, but since the other never said anything about wanting his flute back, Sammi simply kept it. After Sammi's death, His Majesty took possession of the flute and had all the best players of the time try it. Not one of them could get a note out of it.

In time His Majesty had the great flutist Jōzō try the flute. Jōzō

played it as beautifully as Sammi himself. “This flute’s former owner is supposed to have gotten it at the Suzaku Gate,” said His Majesty, deeply impressed. “Go and play there yourself, Jōzō, and see what happens!”

The next moonlit night Jōzō went to the Suzaku Gate and began to play. “Aha, another one!” cried a pleased voice from high in the gate’s upper story. Jōzō reported this to the emperor, who realized that the flute had belonged to a demon who lived in the gate.

The emperor called the flute Twinleaf because it had two leaves on it, one red and one green. Legend has it that every morning the two leaves had fresh dew on them.

Later on the flute became the property of Lord Michinaga and was eventually deposited in the Sutra Hall of the Byōdōin in Uji. Someone who saw it more recently noted that the red leaf had fallen off and that, alas, there was not a trace of dew.

168.

NO NIGHT TO BE OUT COURTING

In Emperor Daigo’s reign a certain Minister of the Right had a son named Tsuneyuki. The young man was both major counselor and commander of the Left Inner Guards, a very promising combination that clearly destined him for the highest posts in the imperial government. He was also handsome and amorous, and absorbed like no other in dreams of women. Every night he was off on one romantic expedition or another.

The minister’s residence was in the western part of the Capital. Tsuneyuki was in love with a woman in the eastern part of the city and his constant visits to her worried his parents a great deal because the streets were unsafe after dark. Again and again they tried in vain to keep him at home.

One night he rode off as usual, accompanied by a single mounted page. As they traveled east past the Bifukumon’in Gate, one of the southern gates into the palace compound, they saw a noisy crowd approaching with torches. “Who can they be?” the young lord asked. “Where can we hide?”

"I noticed when I came this way today that the north gate to the Shinsen Garden was open," the page replied. "Let's go in, my lord, and close the gate. You can wait there till they've gone by."

Tsuneyuki hurriedly dismounted and crouched beside a gatepost.

The crowd started past. The two had kept the gate cracked open, and when they spied not people but demons they all but lost their wits with terror. Through the confusion of their own panic they heard a demon say, "Hmm. I smell a man! I'll go catch him." Something hurtled toward them and Tsuneyuki thought he was lost. Then it ran away again.

"What happened? Why didn't you get him?" another cried.

"I couldn't!" shouted Tsuneyuki's would-be assailant.

"Why not? All right, *you* go after him!" Another demon rushed the gate, only to turn and flee.

"Well? Where is he?"

"I couldn't touch him either!"

"What's the matter with you? All right, *I'll* do it!" With this boast the speaker charged. He got closer than the others, and his hands were almost on Tsuneyuki (who thought this *was* the end) when he too suddenly fled.

"What's wrong?" a chorus greeted him.

"The Sonshō Darani! He's got the Sonshō Darani on him!"

Suddenly all the torches went out. Footsteps ran off in all directions, then there was silence. The dark and quiet were even more eerily frightening than the demon's assault, and the hair rose on Tsuneyuki's head. Then he fainted.

At last, more dead than alive, he remounted his horse and set out for home. By the time he reached his room he was ill, and he collapsed with a high fever. His father sent someone to find out where Tsuneyuki had been, but learned only that the young master had been out late last night. Finally the minister came himself and found his son lying helpless in bed.

"What is it?" he asked, feeling Tsuneyuki's body. It was burning hot.

"Oh sir," cried Tsuneyuki's nurse, "I just don't know what the matter can be!" But when Tsuneyuki had told his story the nurse exclaimed, "Gracious! Last year my brother, who's an exorcist, had me write out the Sonshō Darani and sew it into the collar of the young master's robe. So it really has power, then! If it hadn't been

there, what would have become of the young master?" She pressed her hands to Tsuneyuki's forehead and burst into tears.

After several days of a fever which caused his parents anguished worry, Tsuneyuki began to mend. A glance at the calendar showed that it had been the night when demons are known to walk abroad, and when for safety's sake you should be careful to stay at home.

Obviously you should always have the Sonshō Darani on you. Why, Tsuneyuki had not even known it was there!

169.

LUMP OFF, LUMP ON

An old man had a big lump on the right side of his face, as big as a big tangerine. It made him so ugly that he avoided other people and instead worked alone in the mountains cutting wood. Once he got caught in an awful storm and had to stay in the mountains overnight.

No one else was around. He hid, wide awake and terrified, in a hollow tree. Feeling as lonely as he did, he breathed a sigh of relief when he heard other people coming. Then he peeked outside. The crowd, a hundred strong, was a horrible sight. Some in it were red dressed in green, some were black with a red loincloth, some had one eye or no mouth, and most were just indescribable. They built a fire as bright as the sun and made a circle round it, right in front of the old man's tree. He was frightened nearly out of his wits.

One monster, apparently the chief, sat down by the fire in the place of honor, and the rest sat in twin rows to his right and left. Next, they all began drinking and carrying on the way people do. As the wine jar went round and round, the chief got awfully drunk. When a young monster with a tray made his way slowly up to the chief, mumbling something or other, the chief burst out laughing and waved his cup. They really were just like people! The young monster danced, and when he had finished another began. Each one took his turn, right on up to the senior monsters, and if some danced badly others danced well. The old man could hardly believe his eyes.

“This is the most fun we’ve ever had!” the chief declared. “Now let’s have something really special!”

Goodness knows what got into the old man then — perhaps some god or buddha put him up to it—but he suddenly wanted to get out there and dance. At first he checked himself, but the monsters had a fine rhythm going and the temptation was just too much. Out he burst from his hollow tree, with his hat down over his nose and an axe dangling from his belt, right before the chief.

The monsters jumped up. “What’s this?” they cried. The old man leaped high and squatted low, he twisted and wriggled all around with hoots and shouts of “Ei!” and “Ho!” till everyone burst out laughing.

“We’ve been having these parties for years,” chuckled the chief, “but no one like *you* has ever joined us! Be here every time from now on!”

“Say no more!” cried the old man. “I will! But it was all so sudden this time that I forgot how to end my dance right. If you liked me tonight, just wait till you see me dance properly!”

“You were wonderful!” the chief insisted. “Make sure you come again!”

One of the chief’s lieutenants was not quite convinced. “The old fellow’s full of promises,” he objected, “but I’m not so sure he *will* be back. We’d better keep something of his as security.”

That sounded like a good idea. The chief asked what they should take.

There was a buzz of voices. “What about the lump on his face?” the lieutenant suggested. “A lump’s good luck and he’ll miss it.”

“Oh please,” the old fellow begged, “take my eyes or my nose, but not my lump! I’ve had it for years! You’re too cruel!”

“Aha!” said the lieutenant. “You see? That’s what we need!”

A monster stepped up to the old man and twisted the lump off painlessly. “Be sure you’re at our next party!” he warned.

Soon it was dawn and the birds were singing. The monsters went away. The old man felt his face and found that the lump he had had for so long was gone. He forgot all about cutting wood and hurried home to his astonished wife.

Now, the old man next door had a lump on the *left* side of his face, and when he saw his neighbor’s was gone he wanted to know how the old fellow had done it. “What doctor did you go to?” he

asked. "Please tell me! I can't stand mine!"

"It wasn't a doctor, it was a monster."

"Well, either way, I'll just do whatever you did. So what did you do?"

The first old man told his story and the second listened carefully. He went to hide in the hollow tree, and sure enough the monsters came. They sat in a ring, drank and carried on, and roared, "Where's that old man?"

The second old man was terribly afraid but he staggered out anyway. "Hurray!" the monsters shouted, "Here he is!"

"All right!" said the chief. "Now, dance!"

He danced, but his faltering steps had nothing in common with his neighbor's gleeful zest.

"That was terrible," the chief grumbled. "Give him back his lump!"

Up stepped a junior monster. "Here's your lump back," he said and stuck it on the other side. The old man had gotten himself two lumps instead of one.

170.

TAKE A GOOD LOOK!

Late one night a man was sleeping with a prostitute in a room under the festival reviewing stand on First Avenue. The wind was howling, the rain was pouring down, and the atmosphere was definitely spooky. Suddenly a passerby outside on the avenue sang, "Nothing lasts, no, all things pass ..."

"What's *that*, I wonder," thought the man and cracked open the shutter to peek out. It was a horse-headed demon as tall as the roof. Frightened, he hastily closed up again and backed as far back in the room as he could, but the demon raised the shutter and stuck its face in. "That was a good look you got at me, yes, a very good look!" it growled.

The man drew his sword and got ready to strike if the demon came in, while the woman cowered beside him.

"Well, take another good look!" said the demon and went its

way.

The man decided every fiend in the world must have been abroad that night. He never slept under the reviewing stand on First Avenue again.

