

ground.

The astonished warrior could not imagine what was going on. He tried asking people, dozens of them, but all they did was keep bowing to him. No one would tell him a thing. Then he spotted a monk who was bowing and prostrating himself like the rest.

“Why are you all bobbing up and down at me like that?” he asked in a rich country brogue.

The monk told him about the dream.

The warrior explained that the other day he had fallen from his horse and broken his right arm, and had come to heal his arm in the spring. People poured after him wherever he moved, bowing and carrying on like mad.

At his wits’ end, he finally decided that he must actually be the bodhisattva and might as well become a monk. Throwing down his bow, quiver, sword, and dagger, he cut off his hair and entered religion. The crowd wept with devout emotion.

At last someone who knew him by sight cried, “Heavens, that’s Master Kan from over in Kōzuke province!” So they gave him the name Kannon, the blessed bodhisattva’s own.

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THE AWAKENING

A young monk on Mount Hiei had *meant* to study after entering religion, but ended up so busy having a good time that he never actually applied himself at all. He had only barely learned a bit of the Lotus Sutra. Since he still planned to study *some* day, he often went to pray for scholarly success to the Kokūzō of Hōrinji, a temple just west of the Capital, but his pilgrimages never inspired him to do anything in particular. He really was a proper dunce.

He knew this perfectly well, and it bothered him so much that one day in the ninth moon he went again to Hōrinji. Just before starting back, he fell into conversation with an acquaintance there, and the sun sank low while the two monks talked. He walked as fast as he could when he did set off, but at sundown he was still in the western part of the city. A friend he thought he might be able

to stay with in the neighborhood turned out to be away in the country, and there was no one home but a maid left to watch the place. Then he remembered another acquaintance and went looking for his house.

On the way he came to a Chinese-style gate with a pretty young woman standing beside it. She was wearing several layers of casual clothing against the chilly air. He told her who he was and where he was going, explained that the sun had set, and asked if he could have a night's lodging.

She had him wait and promised him an answer shortly, then went into the house. Soon she was back to tell him he was welcome. His room in the semidetached guest wing contained a pretty screen, and the floor was spread with several elegantly trimmed straw mats. The lamp was already lit. He finished off to the last crumb and the last drop of wine the nice dinner the young woman brought him, and was washing his hands afterwards when he heard sounds from the neighboring room in the main building. A door slid open and curtains were being set up. Apparently the lady of the house wanted to talk to him.

Sure enough, a woman's voice called over to ask him who he was. On hearing his answer, the lady pressed him to stop at her house every time he should visit Hōrinji. When the door between him and her slid shut again, a bit of curtain got caught in it so that it did not close properly.

At nightfall the monk went outside. Pausing before the shutters on the south side of the house, he noticed a hole in one of the panels and peered through. A woman whom he took to be the lady was lying with a low lampstand by her, reading a book. She looked about twenty years old and was extremely beautiful. Her robe was of figured stuff, light mauve and green, and he could see that her hair was long enough to trail along the floor behind her. Two ladies-in-waiting were lying beside her curtains, with an ordinary maid a little further off. Apparently it was the maid who served the lady's meals and who generally fetched and carried. The room had every touch of comfort and elegance. A gold-sprinkled lacquer comb box and an inkstone box rested with easy informality on a two-tiered set of shelves, while exquisite incense smoke rose from a burner.

Gazing at the lady who was mistress over all this, the monk

forgot everything else. How on earth, he wondered, could his karma have brought him here to see her like this? Suddenly the thought of living on without loving her made no sense at all.

Once the household was in bed and the lady herself apparently asleep, he opened the door which had never quite shut, slipped into the room, and lay down beside her. She was sleeping too soundly to notice. Her fragrance was indescribably delicious. Afraid to wake her up and tell her his feelings, though that is what he really wanted to do, he instead said a prayer, pulled her robe open, and fondled her breasts.

Now she *did* wake up and demanded to know who he was. He told her.

"I thought you were devout," she said. "That's why I let you stay. I'm certainly sorry I did."

He kept trying to snuggle up to her, but she clutched her robe around her and would have nothing to do with him. This drove him wild, but he did not force her because he feared being heard.

"I don't necessarily mean to refuse you," the lady went on. "You see, my husband died in the spring of last year. A lot of men have courted me since then, but I've decided not to encourage anyone unless he has something special about him. That's why I live alone like this. If I'm to give myself to a monk like you, I want him to be particularly accomplished. I *might* say yes to you, you know. Can you chant the Lotus Sutra by heart? Do you have a good voice? I could give people the impression that I'm deeply devoted to the Lotus and all the time be in bed with you. What do you say?"

"I've *studied* the Lotus Sutra," the monk replied, "but I don't have it by heart yet."

"Is it difficult to memorize?"

"No, not really. No doubt I'll master it sooner or later. I'm sure it's my fault that I haven't managed it yet. I've just spent too much time having fun when I should have been studying."

"Then hurry back to your mountain and come again when you have the Sutra by heart. Then we can be as intimate as you like."

At this the young monk's desire vanished. As soon as the sky began to lighten, he said good-bye to the lady and stole out of her room. She made sure he was properly fed before he set off.

Home again on Mount Hiei he found he could not forget her, and he resolved to memorize the Sutra as quickly as possible so he

could visit her again. It took him only three weeks. Meanwhile he wrote her often, and received with each reply a hamper containing food or a robe. As far as he could tell she really cared for him, and this made him very happy.

Now that he had the Sutra by heart he set out as usual for Hōrinji, and on the way back stopped, as before, at the lady's house. Again she had him served a meal, then came out to speak with him herself. Late in the evening the monk washed his hands and began intoning the Sutra. Although his voice was stirring, in his heart he hardly knew he was chanting at all because he could think of nothing but the lady.

In the night, when everyone seemed asleep, he again slid open the door into the lady's room. No one saw him. The lady, who must have been expecting him, woke up when he lay down beside her. Eagerly he began insinuating himself under her robe, but she hugged her clothing to her and kept her distance.

"I've something to ask you," she said, "so listen to me first. This is what I think. You have the Sutra by heart now, and we could say that's enough and go ahead and make love. If we did, and if we went on being fond of each other, you could hold your head high before anyone; and I, for my part, would be stained far less by taking *you* for a lover than by choosing any ordinary man. But I'd be sorry to think that my lover was one to be satisfied simply with having memorized the Sutra. I'd much rather you at least went through the motions of becoming a proper scholar. From now on you ought to be getting yourself invited to look after nobles and princes, but they won't call in a monk who can't do more than chant the Sutra, or keep him in their service either. It's lovely having you here with me, and *that's* the way I'd like you to be when we're together. Now you see how I feel. If you really love me, stay on the mountain for three years, study hard, and make yourself a scholar. Come back after that, and I'm yours. But until then we really can't be lovers. I'd rather die. I'll keep writing to you while you're on the mountain, and I'll take care of you as long as you're poor."

The monk was moved. He knew it would be wrong to force heartlessly a woman who spoke so thoughtfully of his own future, and with her material support he would in the end command recognition. These thoughts prompted him to renew his assurances

of love and then to withdraw. In the morning after breakfast he returned to Mount Hiei.

He tore into his studies and never faltered again. The thought of seeing her drove him on like fire. By the time two years had passed, his sharp intelligence had already gained him recognition as a scholar. After three years no one doubted his exceptional learning. In every scholastic debate at the palace, for example, and in every set of formal discourses on the Lotus Sutra, he completely outshone all his colleagues. On Mount Hiei the word spread that he was by far the most talented scholar of his generation.

During those years the lady asked after him constantly, and her support meant that he lived for the most part an untroubled life. When the three years were over he went as before to Hōrinji and at dusk, on the way back, stopped at her house.

He had already let her know he was coming and was shown to his usual room. The lady talked with him indirectly, through one of her women, about the last three years. Apparently she had never told a soul about her earlier, private encounters with him, for she presently let him know, in a rather formal tone, that she would speak to him in person.

The monk's heart beat faster but he gave the message only a polite acknowledgment. The messenger asked him to follow her. Outside the curtains that surrounded the lady's bed, near her pillow, was a pretty mat with a round straw cushion on it. A lighted lamp stood behind a screen. As far as the monk could tell there was one lady-in-waiting sitting at the foot of the lady's bed. He sat down on the cushion.

"I've wondered so much all these years how you've been getting on," the lady began. "Are you a scholar now?" Her lovely voice conveyed warm affection.

The monk trembled with nervous excitement as he answered, "Well, I can claim no great achievement, but yes, it's true I've been praised when I've debated or lectured here and there."

"That's wonderful. Now I have some questions for you. I'll ask them because I feel you're now a real teacher. I wouldn't dream of putting these questions to someone who could do no more than *chant* the Sutra."

She went through each chapter of the Sutra, from the beginning, posing difficult queries on the points she felt she did not quite

understand, and he answered her as his studies had taught him to do. When hard pressed he developed interpretations of his own, or brought in apt quotations from the ancients. The lady was entirely satisfied. "How could you possibly learn so much in so few years?" she exclaimed. "You must be a genius!"

The monk for his part was amazed by the lady's own learning. "She may be a woman," he thought to himself, "but she certainly knows the Teaching. I'd never have believed it possible! She's going to be worth knowing! Anyway, she's made all the difference for my own studies."

They chatted till the monk finally lifted her curtains and went in. She did not protest as he lay down beside her.

"Just stay like that awhile," she said; so they lay there holding hands and talking some more. But having walked that day from Mount Hiei to Hōrinji and part of the way back, the monk was tired. He soon drifted off and fell fast asleep.

When he woke up, his first thought was that he had slept and that he still had not told her how much he loved her. Then he opened his eyes. He was lying on a clump of pampas grass which his weight had crushed. What a shock! A quick glance around told him he was alone in the middle of a moor, he had no idea where. There was no one in sight. His heart beat wildly and his stomach churned with terror. When he stood up he discovered, scattered around him, the clothing he had taken off the night before. Clutching it to him, he stood staring at his surroundings. He now recognized the waste which forms the eastern part of Saga Moor.

It was nearly dawn and there was a bright moon. The air was very chilly since it was still only early spring, and shivering had soon driven every other thought from his mind. He hardly knew where to go, but if Hōrinji was as close as he thought, he could spend the rest of the night there. Starting off at a run, he forded the Katsura River at Umezu, though he had to be careful not to be swept away by the current, which came up to his hips. Finally he reached Hōrinji, shaking with cold. He went straight to the main hall, prostrated himself before the altar, announced his plight, and prayed for help. Then he fell asleep.

He dreamed that a small and very proper monk with a blue-shaven head came from behind the curtain that screened off the image of the Bodhisattva Kokūzō. "It was no fox or badger that

concocted what happened to you tonight,” said the monk, “but I myself. You’re very bright, you know, but you were so addicted to your little pleasures that you never studied and showed no sign of ever becoming a scholar. At the same time you were dissatisfied with yourself and often came to me to pray for scholarly talent and achievement. For some time I was unsure how best to answer you, but I saw you were drawn to women and I thought I’d use *that* to inspire you. You needn’t be afraid. Hurry back to your mountain and study harder than ever. This is no time for you to rest on your laurels.” Then the dream was over and he woke up.

It dawned on him that for years Kokūzō had been appearing to him as a woman in order to save him, and he was profoundly embarrassed. At daylight he returned to Mount Hiei, weeping with remorse for his own wanton behavior, and dedicated himself more singlemindedly than ever to his studies. He really did become a famous scholar.

What Kokūzō plans will come to pass. Ah, the beautiful and noble deed!

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THE LITTLE GOD’S BIG CHANCE

The monk Dōmyō, a great lover, was having an affair with the famous lady poet Izumi Shikibu. Dōmyō also happened to chant the Lotus Sutra very impressively.

Once he was spending the night with Izumi Shikibu when he woke up and decided to chant the Sutra. He had gone through all eight scrolls and was just dozing off again when he glimpsed someone outside.

“Who is it?” he called.

“The old man who lives at the crossing of Fifth Avenue and Nishi-no-tōin street,” a voice replied.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’ll never forget, through all the lives I’ll live, how you chanted the Sutra tonight!”

“But I chant the Sutra all the time. What was so special about