

nearby he built a tower and enshrined the Lotus Sutra in it. The tower and the Sutra itself have long since crumbled away and there's nothing left but *myō*, or 'wonderful,' the first word of the Sutra's title. I'm that *myō*. I've already saved nine hundred and ninety-nine people from that demon and you're the one-thousandth. Go home now. Never give up your faith in the Buddha and your devotion to the Lotus!"

A divine boy came out of the cave to see the secretary home. Weeping, the secretary prostrated himself in gratitude and adoration, then followed the boy to the gate of his own house, where the boy vanished. The secretary prostrated himself once more before walking in. It was the middle of the night. He told his family everything that had happened to him, and they were very, very glad to have him back!

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INCORRIGIBLE

Toshiyuki, a respected poet and calligrapher, had such beautiful handwriting that people were always asking him to copy the Lotus Sutra for them. They took it for granted that Toshiyuki's elegant rendition of the sacred text would help them toward a better life next time. Toshiyuki had copied the Sutra two hundred times this way when he suddenly died.

Not realizing what had happened, he only knew that he had been abruptly seized and dragged off. He was outraged and could not understand how anyone, even the emperor, could do such a thing to a man of his standing.

"What have I done to deserve this?" he asked the officer who he thought had arrested him.

"Who knows?" the officer replied. "I was ordered to go and get you, and that's what I'm doing. Come to think of it, have you been making copies of the Lotus Sutra?"

Toshiyuki said he had.

"How much of this copying was for yourself?"

"None. It's all been for other people. I must have done a couple of hundred Sutras."

"That's it, then. There have been complaints and I suppose the case has come up."

That was all Toshiyuki could get out of him. They marched on in silence.

Soon they met a force of two hundred warriors, wearing grim battle armor and riding strange, terrible horses. The eyes in their ghastly faces flashed like lightning and their mouths were like fire. Toshiyuki almost fainted with fear, but the officer forced him back to his feet and they went on, with the soldiers before them.

"Who are *they*?" Toshiyuki managed to stammer.

"Don't you know? They're the people who had you write out the Sutra. They were counting on the merit getting them reborn in heaven or at least giving them another try as humans. But you — you were eating fish and enjoying women all the time you did your copying. You never purified yourself. On the contrary, you had your mind on nothing but the ladies. So they had no merit whatever from your work and were born instead into these fierce, warlike forms. They're so angry they

want revenge, and that's why they've been demanding that you be called in. To tell the truth, it wasn't actually your time yet, but they insisted."

Toshiyuki felt as though a knife had gone through him and his heart froze. "What are they going to do to me?" he asked.

"Obviously they're going to cut you up with those swords and daggers of theirs into two hundred little pieces, and each of them is going to keep one. Every piece will be you, fully conscious, so you'll suffer horribly any time any one of them tortures the piece he's got. Oh yes, you'll find it worse than anything you can imagine!"

"What can I do to be spared?"

"I've no idea," the officer replied. "I can't see what would save you."

Toshiyuki was nearly out of his mind with terror.

On they went till they came to a great river running as black as the blackest ink. Toshiyuki asked what these strange, inky waters might be.

"Don't you understand?" the officer answered. "This is the ink from all the Lotus Sutra copies you made. A sutra copied with pure heart is accepted instantly into the palace of the Dragon King who guards the Buddha's Teaching. But copies made like yours, with defiled mind and filthy body, are thrown away in the fields, and the ink washes off in the rain till it makes a river."

"Oh please, please," sobbed Toshiyuki, "is there no help for me, nothing I can do?"

"I'm sorry, I might possibly be able to do something for you if your sin were a commonplace one, but I'm afraid it's unspeakable. You'll get no reprieve."

Just then a frightful fiend charged up, growled at the officer that he had been slow bringing the prisoner in, grabbed Toshiyuki by the neck, and marched him off. They came to a great gate through which countless others, dragged like Toshiyuki, or bound, or in irons, were pouring from every direction till it was hardly possible even to pass. Inside the gate, the two hundred warriors whom Toshiyuki recognized all too well were glaring at him with fiery eyes and licking their lips in grim anticipation. Toshiyuki was frantically cudgeling his brains for a way out when the fiend who was dragging him whispered in his ear, "Make a vow to copy the Sutra of Golden Light!" As they went in through the gate, Toshiyuki vowed to copy the Sutra of Golden Light by way of atonement.

He was hauled in to stand before the court of Emma, the king of hell. "Is this Toshiyuki?" a bailiff growled. Another bailiff demanded to know why, considering the huge number of complaints lodged against him, Toshiyuki had been so slow to appear.

"I brought him straight here, sir, after I seized him," said the arresting officer.

"What was it you did up there in the world?" they asked Toshiyuki.

"Nothing, really. I just wrote out the Lotus Sutra for people who asked me to. I made two hundred copies."

"Actually," they told him, "your life-span had a little more to run, but you've been brought in because of complaints that you copied the Sutra while you were unclean. Our orders are to deliver you to your accusers so they can dispose of you as they see fit."

The two hundred soldiers prepared to take charge of their victim.

"But I made a vow," protested Toshiyuki, shuddering with fear, "to dedicate to the Buddha a copy of the Sutra of Golden Light, and I was seized before I could fulfill it.

It'll be a terrible sin if I don't go through with it, one I could never atone for."

This brought the bailiffs up short. They declared that if this were true the whole arrest had been a mistake, and they ordered Toshiyuki's claim checked in the great Register of Deeds. The secretary of the court of hell leafed through the register and read off every last deed of Toshiyuki's. They were all sins. Only at the last split second, when he had gone through the entire list, did he finally announce, "Yes, it's true. The entry is here at the very end."

"Well, then," they told Toshiyuki, "we'll have to set you free. Go accomplish your vow and continue your life as you think best."

The grim host of two hundred, that just now had felt their hands nearly on him, suddenly vanished. Toshiyuki returned to life.

For two days his wife and children had been mourning him when all at once he opened his eyes and was back. Joyfully they gave him something hot to drink, and it was only then that he finally understood he had been dead. In his mind he saw again everything he had just witnessed as though reflected in the clearest of mirrors, and he resolved to copy and dedicate the Sutra of Golden Light, properly purified this time, just as soon as he should be himself again.

In time he recovered fully and hurried to have a craftsman prepare a scroll of paper to receive the sutra. But at the same time his thoughts began wandering again, and it was not toward the Buddha and the scriptures that they roamed. He was quickly absorbed in romantic visits and fancies, and worried only about how to write the nicest possible verses. So the months and years flew by without his ever copying the sutra until his life reached its allotted term and he passed away.

A few years later the poet Ki no Tomonori had a dream. There came to him one whom he understood to be Toshiyuki, although fearfully changed from what Toshiyuki had once been and terrifying to look at. "A vow I made to write out and dedicate the Sutra of Golden Light gained me a reprieve," the apparition said, "and I was returned to life. But my heart stayed as frivolous as before and I finally died without ever copying the sutra. For this I'm now suffering the most horrible tortures. Have pity on me, find the paper I had prepared for the sutra, take it to a certain monk at Miidera, and have him make the copy and the dedication!" Then it screamed.

Tomonori awoke soaked in sweat. Dawn had barely broken when he hurried off on his errand. He found the paper and soon was knocking at the monk's door. The monk was glad to see him because, as he explained, he had been on the point of sending a messenger to Tomonori's house. Tomonori asked why, concealing for the moment his own reason for having come, and the monk related the precise counterpart to Tomonori's dream. Toshiyuki had appeared to him, told him that Tomonori would be able to find the paper, and asked him to copy and dedicate the sutra. The monk's dream, like Tomonori's, had ended with a horrible scream. Tomonori and the monk wept bitterly over Toshiyuki's awful fate, and Tomonori produced the paper with an explanation of how he had come to bring it.

The monk did exactly as Toshiyuki had asked. When the two dreamed of Toshiyuki again, he seemed in far better spirits. He told them that the merit they had gained for him had greatly lightened his suffering.