



11.

BETTER LATE THAN EARLY

The staff of the Council of State used to hold what were called “morning sessions,” which took place before dawn. The participants would arrive carrying torches.

Once a certain secretary arrived after the controller, who outranked him, had already taken his seat. The secretary had been afraid this might happen, and his fears were confirmed when he got there and saw the controller’s carriage by the gate. Rushing to the council building he found the controller’s servants waiting for their master by the wall. Next, he ran in panic to the door of the East Council Chamber and peered cautiously into the hall. The lamps were out. No one was there.

This was a surprise. Back he went to the controller’s servants, who could only tell him that their master was already inside. The secretary called a guard with a torch and had him light the way into the chamber. At the controller’s seat there was only a bloody head. The hair was scattered far and wide. Nearby lay a ceremonial baton, a bloody pair of shoes, and a fan on which the controller had written the procedure for the meeting. The matting was soaked with blood. There was nothing else.

The horror of the scene can scarcely be described. At dawn an excited crowd gathered while the controller’s servants left with their master’s head.

After that, the morning sessions were no longer held in the East

Chamber, but were shifted to the West.

12.

THE RAVENOUS STOREHOUSE

The great lover Ariwara no Narihira made sure he courted every woman known to be a beauty, whether palace lady or common gentleman's daughter. He became especially fascinated with one girl who was supposed to be lovely beyond imagining, but unfortunately her parents had their hearts set on getting her a far more exalted husband than Narihira. He was not even in the running. Somehow, though, he managed to persuade her to run off with him.

But now that he had her, where was he going to hide her? Finally, he remembered an abandoned, tumbledown mansion in the mountains. The door on the big storehouse was lying broken on the ground, but since the house no longer had a floor, he spread a mat in the storehouse after all. He had just lain down on it with the girl when lightning flashed and there was a crash of thunder. Drawing his sword, he got the girl behind him and kept watch through the storm. At dawn it finally passed.

Puzzled to hear no sound from the girl, Narihira glanced behind him. She was gone. Nothing was left of her but her clothes and her hair. He fled, terrified.

Later he learned that that storehouse was known to eat people. It was not the thunder that had gotten her after all, but the demon in the building.

It just goes to show that you shouldn't go near a place you don't know. And as for spending the night there, you shouldn't even consider it!

13.

THE GRISLY BOX