

package. She assumed immediately that it was a present for some mistress, and as soon as he was gone she took it down and opened it. It was full of gouged-out human eyes and severed male members with the hair still on them.

Her scream brought Tōsuke running. Remembering with horror what the woman had said about opening the box, he frantically put the lid back on and wrapped the box up again. Then he took it straight to the bridge and waited. Sure enough, a woman appeared. He handed her the package with a short explanation of how he had come by it.

“This box has been opened and looked into,” the woman observed as she took it.

“No, no it hasn’t!” Tōsuke protested, “I assure you!”

The woman’s expression became dreadful. “You’ve done a terrible thing,” she said, but accepted the box nonetheless. His mission completed, Tōsuke hurried home.

Ill now, he took to his bed. His wife bitterly regretted opening the box, but it was too late. Shortly he was dead.

14.

THE BRIDGE

A governor of Ōmi province had many brave young men in his service. One morning they were amusing themselves playing games, drinking, and telling stories when one of them said, “Have you ever heard of Agi Bridge? It’s right here in Ōmi. People used to use it all the time, but now they say no one can cross it, so nobody takes that way any more.”

One of his listeners seemed to have heard of the bridge already (or perhaps he simply did not believe the story) because he quickly declared that *he* would cross the bridge. “I don’t care what kind of demon is blocking it,” he continued, “I’ll get across as long as I’m riding His Lordship’s best horse, the roan.”

The others thought this a fine idea. “All right, let’s find out!” they cried. “Let’s see what sort of courage you’ve got!” The gathering got quite rowdy while they egged him on, till the

governor himself heard the noise and wanted to know what it was all about. When he found out he was not impressed with the demon-baiter's good sense, but he did not object to the use of his horse.

"This is crazy!" the daredevil exclaimed. "I'm sorry I ever brought it up!"

"Shame, shame!" the others shouted. "Coward!"

"Getting across the bridge is nothing," the man went on. "What makes me sorry is that I should ever have seemed to covet His Lordship's horse!"

Loud voices objected that the sun was already high and that they were wasting time. The roan was saddled.

Though he wished he had never opened his mouth, the man was determined to see the thing through. He smeared the horse's hindquarters liberally with grease, cinched the saddle on tight, and lightened his clothing, then slipped his wrist through the loop on the whip handle so that he could not drop it and rode off. By the time he reached the bridge his heart was pounding and he was frightened half to death, but there was no turning back.

The sun was sinking toward the mountains and the deserted landscape looked indefinably bleak. Wisps of smoke rose from the houses of a distant village. He gritted his teeth and pressed on. Halfway across the bridge a woman was leaning against the railing, though from further off she had not seemed to be there.

This no doubt was the demon. He looked her over with deep misgiving. Under her pale cloak she had on a dark gown and a long red trouser-skirt, and she was holding her sleeve over her mouth. She looked so pathetic that at first glance it was hard not to feel sorry for her. She might have just been abandoned there.

The demon watched him coming with signs of mingled embarrassment and pleasure, and for a moment he could think of nothing but the desire to lift her up on his horse and take her away; but the thought that she had no business being there let him steel himself to ride on by. She clearly expected him to stop, and when instead he galloped past with his eyes tightly shut she shouted, "Say, are you just going to leave me here? I didn't *ask* to be dropped here in the middle of this bridge! You could at least take me on to the next village!"

Her hair seemed to swell and thicken as she spoke. He only

whipped his horse on harder. "You brute!" she screamed, and the earth shook. Now she was after him. "Sure enough!" he thought, and prayed to Kannon to save him. Despite the horse's tremendous speed the demon caught up, but the horse's rump was too thoroughly greased for its clutching hands to find a hold.

Glancing back, he saw a red face with one amber-yellow eye as huge and round as a cushion. The thing was greenish and nine feet tall. The three fingers on each hand had five-inch, knifelike nails, and the hair was like a snarl of weeds. Maddened now with fear he galloped on, calling on Kannon with might and main, till at last he reached the village.

"All right, I'll get you next time!" said the demon, and suddenly vanished.

Panting and exhausted, the man dragged himself back as fast as he could to his lord's mansion and arrived at twilight. He was too weak to answer the barrage of questions that greeted him. All the household could do was try to bring him round. But when the governor, who had been concerned all along, finally asked him to tell his story he did so. The governor scolded him for having risked his life over a trifling wager, then gave him the horse. The man went home well satisfied and told the tale again to his horrified family and servants.

A spirit began to haunt the house after that, and the man called in a yin-yang diviner to find out what the trouble was. The diviner told him to be very careful the next time the day when he had thwarted the demon came round. When the day did come, the man shut his gate to all comers.

Now, he happened to have a younger brother who had gone off with their mother to Mutsu, in the provincial governor's entourage. This was the day when the younger brother came back and knocked at the gate. His older brother refused to talk with him except through a servant, and the only reply he got was, "I'm in strict seclusion. I'll see you tomorrow. Try somewhere else in the meantime."

"What do you mean?" the younger brother protested. "The sun has already set! *I* can go somewhere else, I suppose, since I'm alone. But what am I going to do with my baggage? I only just managed to come at all, and today was the only day I could find. Our mother has passed away, you see, and I wanted to tell you

myself.”

The older brother had been worrying about his mother for years, both because she was old and because he loved her dearly. When this news was relayed to him, he broke down and in tears had his brother let in.

The younger brother entered, all in black, and first had something to eat on the veranda. Then the older brother came out to talk to him. Both wept. The older brother’s wife stayed behind the blinds that curtained the veranda off from the house proper and listened to the two men’s conversation.

Suddenly, for no reason she could see, the brothers fell to grappling fiercely and crashed over and over, locked together, on the floor. She shouted at them to stop. When her husband got his younger brother under him, he demanded the sword he kept by his pillow. She answered that he must have gone mad and refused to budge.

“Give it to me!” he barked. “Do you want to get me killed?”

Just then the younger brother turned the tables, got on top, and with one crunch bit off his older brother’s head. As he fled he turned back to glance at the wife. “*That’s* better now!” he exulted. His face was the demon’s. Then he vanished.

There was nothing the distraught household could do. As for the awful intruder’s baggage, it turned out to contain only animal bones and skulls. So the man died for a petty wager and everyone who heard the story called him a fool.

After playing a few more tricks, the demon disappeared.

15.

THE ROOTED CORPSE

The elder of two sisters was married and lived in the mistress’s apartment toward the back of her late father’s mansion. The younger had served for a time in a noble household but now lived at home. She had no husband or accepted lover, only occasional, casual visitors whom she saw in her room at the front of the house, by the double doors in the west wing. The house was near the