

The Girl who ate a Baby

Long, long ago three young men set out a journey. They passed fields and mountains and traveled on and came to the gate of a rich man's house. There they saw a sign that he wanted the most able youth in the country for the husband of his daughter.

"This is good news for us. Let's go in and apply," they said and went inside the gate.

He interviewed them. As they all looked like useful young men, he could not decide which one of the three was superior to the others. So he said to them, "I have a thousand-reap rice field to the east, a thousand-reap rice field to the west, and a thousand-reap field to the front. Each of you shall cultivate one of these fields. And I'll see who is the best worker."

Each of the three men was determined to become the rich man's son-in-law. They had rice cooked in a pot large enough to supply thirty men, and ate it all up. Then they began to cultivate the rice fields to the east, to the west, and to the front. An ordinary man might have spent ten days cultivating such fields. These young men, however, each having two forked hoes in both hands, dug up the land so speedily that they finished the work easily in one day. All three returned from the fields at the same time.

"Well, I am extremely surprised at your work today. You three have same ability. I can't rank you. May I ask you to stay here for a while and serve us?" the rich man said.

The young men willingly agreed to this proposal and stayed on as servants. Quite a few days passed. But to their disappointment, the daughter of the rich man never appeared to them. They only caught glimpses of her back. So they became very eager to see the girl. One night two of the young men conferred together and then secretly stole into the interior of the house and peeped into the girl's room. There the girl, in white clothes with her hair loosed, had opened the floorboards at one corner. From underneath the floors he took out a box that looked like a coffin.

Though the young men were frightened, curiosity overcame their fear, and holding their breath, they watched the girl. With a grin on her face, the girl drew a baby's corpse from within the coffin and cut off its arms with a knife. Then she began to eat an arm as if it were delicious food. She spoke to the young men, "Will you have some?" And she thrust out toward them an arm dripping blood. The young men were astonished. Far from wishing to become the son-in-law, they could hardly bear to stay a moment longer in such a place, and they took to their heels at the night.

Now the third youth, who was making a fire in the cook stove, heard of this. He said to himself, "Well, I'll look and see for myself." And he went to peep into the daughter's room. He saw a she-ogre in white costume, with flowing hair, eating the blood-dripping head of a baby. At first he was frightened, but when he looked at her carefully, he saw not an ogre nor a snake but a girl wearing an ogre's mask and eating a doll made of mochi (made of rice). What he had taken for blood was merely rouge. He thought that he could eat it himself.



So he said, "Young lady, please give me one of its legs." saying he slid open the door and stretched out his hands.

When the girl heard this, she replied, "You have said just what I wanted to hear. Until now, many and many young men have come here to be my husband. But at the sight of me they became frightened and fled. No one had enough courage to stay. You are the man to be my husband."

She took off the mask and white garment and revealed herself as a surprisingly beautiful lady. The rich man was much pleased. He invited all his relatives, friends and even servants to a great feast, on which occasion he announced the marriage of his daughter to the young man.

In due time a child was born to them. And their offspring prospered.(corrected:2002.8.14)

赤ん坊を食べた女

むかし、むかし、三人の男が旅に出ました。野を越え、山を越え、旅を続け、長者の家の門にやって来ました。そこで、国一番の能力ある娘婿を求む、という札を見つけました。

「これはいいぞ。早速中に入って、申し込もう。」三人は門をくぐりました。

長者は三人と面談しました。三人とも有能な男に見えたので、三人の内、誰が優っているか決めかねました。そこで三人に言いました。

「東、西、正面にそれぞれ千反の田んぼがある。それぞれがその一つを耕すのがよかろう。誰が一番の働き手か見てみよう。」

三人はそれぞれ長者の娘婿になる決心でした。三人は三十人分の釜で炊かれた米をたいらげて、それぞれの田んぼを耕し始めました。普通の人なら十日かかったかも知れない田んぼを、三人は両手に二本の鍬を持って、ものすごい速さで掘り返し、たった一日で終えてしまいました。三人は同時に田んぼから戻りました。

「うん、今日の働き振りには驚いた。三人とも同じ能力で決めがたい。もうしばらくここに留まって働いてくれるかな。」

三人は、喜んで了解すると召使いとして働きました。何日も経ちましたが、がっかりしたことに、娘は一度も顔を出しませんでした。背中をちらっと見ただけです。ますます見たくになりました。ある晩、二人が結託して、こっそり家の中に忍び込むと、娘の部屋をのぞきこみました。そこには、髪を振り乱した白い着物を着た女の人が、隅の床板を開けていました。床から棺おけのような箱を取り出しました。

二人は、恐ろしいものの、好奇心の方が勝りました。息をこらえて、女を見ました。ニヤっとすると、女は棺おけの中から赤ん坊の死体を取り出し、短刀で腕を切り落としました。そして、ごちそうのように腕を食べ始め、二人に話しかけました。

「食べる？」そして血が滴る腕を二人に押し出しました。二人は恐ろしくなって、婿を望む所ではなく、一時たりとも、そんな場所にはいたくありませんでした。夜、一目散に逃げ出しました。

さて、もう一人の若者は、台所で火を起こしていましたが、このことを耳にしました。

「よし、俺が確かめてやろう。」娘の部屋を覗きに行きました。髪をなびかせ、血の滴る赤ん坊の頭を食べている白装束の鬼女がいました。最初、驚いたものの、よく見ると、鬼でもなく、蛇でもなく、鬼の仮面を被って、もちでできた人形を食べている女の人でした。血に見えたのは単なる紅でした。自分も食べられると思い、若者は声をかけました。

「娘さん、脚を一本下さい。」と言うと、戸を開けて手を伸ばしました。

これを聞いて、娘は、

「それを聞きたかったの。今まで、何人もの人がここへ来て私の夫になりたがったの。でも私を一目見て、怖気ついて逃げてしまいました。誰も留（とど）まる勇氣はありませんでした。あなたこそ、私の夫に相応しい人です。」と言いました。

仮面と白い衣を脱いだ娘は、目もくらむほどの美人でした。長者も大喜びです。長者は、親戚、友人、召使いも宴に招きました。そして娘の結婚を発表しました。

やがて、二人の間には子供が生まれ、代代、家は栄えました。(Kudos)



言