

A Painter and a Fire

Long, long ago there lived an old artist in a town. His specialty was to paint images of Buddha; especially *Fudo Myo-o*—the Buddhist Divinity of Fire.

One day he was painting as usual. He concentrated his attention on his work. The Buddha he was working on was almost finished, but he wasn't satisfied with it. He sat at the picture all day, took a look at it, and added a blush or two, and took another look, one more blush was added...



It was windy that night. Suddenly a fire broke out from the neighboring house.

"Fire! Fire!" his wife panicked and cried.

But the artist was still gazing at his picture with a frown and arms crossed. Soon the fire started attacking his house. The smoke came into his room with the sounds of burning. No time to escape! His wife pulled his sleeve desperately, and cried frantically,

"Get out, or you'll be burned to death!"

The husband said to her calmly,

"Wait! I have to finish this work." He brushed her hand aside and kept on staring at the picture. Then there was a big sound! Part of the roofs was burned to the ground.

"Wow," the wife jumped out of the room in a hurry.

The flame caught his picture. The artist came to himself and rushed out of the burning house. He had a very narrow escape from the fire. Then he stood on the other side of the street to watch his house burning. An hour later, it burned down completely.

"We feel great sorrow for you." the neighbors consoled him for his bad luck.

"....." he didn't answer them, but kept looking at the ruins.

People came to him one after another to express their sympathy, but he said nothing. It looked like he had been meditating. His wife was worried about him and spoke to him nervously,

"What happened to you? Are you all right?"

He babbled something to her and smiled. Seeing him, many people there thought that he had gone mad because he had lost his house.

His wife asked him again,

"Are you all right?"

Then he said to her rather clearly,

"I've kept painting for many years. But I was never completely satisfied with my work. Thanks to this fire, I've learned something important. It was a wonderful experience for me."

Somehow he looked happy. People around him calmly listened to him.

"As you know I've painted images of Buddha with flames on his back. Now I should say the way I painted the flames was wrong. I've just learned how to paint the flames for the first time in my life. That's an eye opener for me. I can't wait to paint a new image of Buddha. This experience will add a new perspective into my picture."

Fudo Myo-o—its appearance is impressive, the angry face is scared. But inside the Buddha is full of love to people who are agonizing. The Buddha tries to give them a hand with a sword in its right hand, a rope in his left hand. The flames on his back show they will burn people's 108 worldly desires.

The images of *Fudo Myo-o* he painted from then on drew people's attention. They said his images seemed to sit in the real burning flames to save people. They wanted to have one since just looking at the images, they felt relieved. Soon he made enough money to rebuild a bigger house. The Buddha painter *Yoshihide* was ranked among the most gifted artists at that time.

○絵描きはどうして有名になれたのでしょうか。

火事と絵描き

むかし、むかし、ある所に絵描きの男がいました。仏画、中でも不動明王（火の神）を描くのが得意でした。

ある日のこと。いつものように絵の前に座り、ひたすら絵筆を動かしていました。手がけている仏画は完成間近でしたが、何か物足りません。一日中、絵の前に座り、眺めては一筆、二筆加え、また眺めては、もう一筆、の繰り返しでした。

その晩は風がひどく吹いていました。突然、隣の家から出火しました。

「火事だー！火事だー！」妻はうろたえて叫びました。

絵描きは、顔をしかめ、腕を組み、絵をじっと見つめているだけです。まもなく火が家に迫ってきました。燃え盛る音とともに、煙が部屋に入ってきました。一刻の猶予もありません。妻は夫の袖を必死に引っ張り、気も狂わんばかりに叫びました。

「逃げて！焼け死ぬわ！」

夫はずかかに言いました。

「もう少し！これを仕上げてしまいたいんだ。」絵描きは妻の手を払いのけ、まだ絵から目を離しません。その時です。大音響とともに屋根の一部が燃え落ちました。

「きゃー。」妻は飛ぶようにしてあわてて部屋から逃げ出しました。

絵にも火がつかしました。絵描きはやっとならに返り、燃えさかる我が家から駆け出しました。通りの反対側にたたずみ、家が燃えるのをじっと見ていました。ほどなく、家はすべて灰になってしまいました。

「誠にお気の毒なことで。」近所の人々が絵描きの不運を慰めました。

「・・・」絵描きは何も言いません。ただ焼け跡を見ているだけです。

人々がかわるがわる火事見舞いにやってきましたが、絵描きは無言でした。まるで瞑想しているかのようです。妻も心配して、おずおずと声をかけました。

「どうしたの。大丈夫なの。」

夫は訳のわからないことをもごもご言うと、にこっと笑いました。それを見ていた人々は、家をなくして気が触れた、と思いました。

妻はもう一度聞きました。

「大丈夫？」

すると夫は今度ははっきり言いました。

「いままでずっと絵を描いてきたが、自分の絵に心から満足したことはなかった。この火事で大切なことがわかった。貴重な体験であった。」

絵描きはなぜか幸せそうでした。まわりの人々はじっと耳を傾けました。

「不動明王を描いてきたが、今までの火炎の描き方は間違っていた。生まれて初めて、やっとなら火炎の描き方がわかった。素晴らしい発見であった。すぐにでも新しい不動明王を描きたいものだ。この体験は私の絵に新しい様相を加えることになるだろう。」

不動明王—その外観は堂々としており、怒りに満ちた顔は見る人をおびえさせます—しかし、仏さまの心は、苦しみがく人々への愛情に満ちています。不動明王は、右手に剣を、左手に索（さく）を持ち、人々に救いの手を差し伸べようとしています。光背（こうはい）の火炎は人々の百八つの煩惱を焼ききるのです。



その後、この絵描きが描いた不動明王の絵は大評判となりました。まるで仏さまが人々を救うためにいきよよく燃える火の中に座っているようです。人々は彼の絵を欲しいと思いました。その絵を見て、ほっとしたいのです。

絵描きは、まもなく前より大きな家を建てるだけのお金を手に入れました。仏画師良秀は当時の人々に一流の絵描きと言われました。