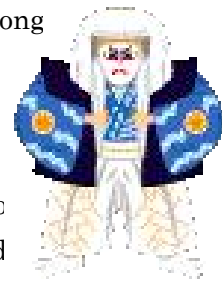


## The Great King of Emma That Likes Play

Long, long ago there was a wonderful actor who was very popular among people. When he was playing in a theater, he was called "A greatest actor in Japan" and thrown much money on the stage by many audiences. His name was known not only on earth but also even in Hell.



But one day he became ill to death. He was alone walking along the way to next world. On the way he came to the place which had two ways, a broad way and a narrow one.

"Which way should I go to?" he said to himself, wishing to go to Gokuraku(the Land of Happiness). Then he found a Zizo(a guardian deity of children) standing at the side of the road.

"Mr. Zizo. Please teach me which way to go so that I can reach Gokuraku."

But it did nothing only smile. He thought for a while.

"Broad way is for many people to walk along. So it is better to walk along the broad one."

To his disappointment he got to the entrance of Hell.

"Alas. It means there are more bad people than good people."

When he was trying to turn back, he was called by a loud voice.

"Welcome to Hell". He saw Emma, who was gorgeously dressed, sitting up at the counter of Hell's entrance. So afraid, he fell flat on the ground.

"You earned money by moving your arms and legs, by cheating people. So you must go to Hell." said Emma, glaring at him, who was too scared to move.

Then Emma said to him in a gentle voice beckoning him, "Come close to me."

He went to him timidly.

"I have never watched a real play before. I would like you to play here in front of me. If you can do successfully, I'll send you to Gokuraku,"

He was so pleased that he agreed to Emma.

"Do quickly." ordered Emma to him.

"Mr. Emma. It's a piece of cake, but I can't play here on such a low place." said he.

"What do you want?" asked Emma.

"I want to play on a high place as you are sitting now." said he.

"So come here and play." said Emma.

"But I can't play in white clothes like this." said he.

"What do you want?" asked Emma.

"I want to play in gorgeous clothes as you wear now." said he.

"So use my clothes." said Emma, taking off his clothes.

Emma and he changed their clothes and their place.

He, in gorgeous clothes, played successfully on a high place while Emma in white clothes watched the play on the low place. Emma said to him, trembling himself.

"You are a wonderful player. But I'm so cold in these thin white clothes. Do quickly."

He played in a loud voice beautifully moving his arms and his legs.



"You are the best player in Japan." cried Emma, beside himself with joy.

Soon he drew Emma's sword and cried,

"Red Demon and Blue Demon, come here. This is a man who earned money by moving his arms and legs, by cheating people. Take him to Hell."

Demons rushed Emma and pinned him to the ground.

"Be quiet. Don't move." said demons.

"What do you do? I'm the Great King of Emma." cried Emma.

"You are an outrageous man to use my name. Take him quickly to Hell." said the actor.

"It's me. It's me. Did you forget my voice? I'm the Great King of Em... ."said Emma.

"You are a wonderful player. You can speak in an exactly same voice that Emma does." said Demons and threw him into a huge burning pot in Hell.

He succeeded to take the place of Emma. Now all of his villagers could go to Gokuraku by his judgment.(2000/5/1)

## 芝居好きな閻魔さま

むかし、むかし、とても人気のある役者がいました。「国一番の役者」と呼ばれ、観客は舞台の上の彼にお金を沢山投げました。その名は、この世だけでなくあの世にも知れ渡っていました。

しかし、病気になり亡くなってしまいました。今あの世への途を一人歩いておりました。道中、途が二つに分かれている所に来ました。広い道と狭い道です。

「どちらを行ったものか。」極楽に行きたいと思っておりました。道の脇に地蔵が立っていました。



「お地蔵さん、極楽に行くのはどっちの方ですか。」

お地蔵さんは微笑んでいるだけです。しばし考えました。

「大勢が行くのは広い途。広い方を行こう。」

しかし残念ながら、地獄の入り口に来てしまいました。

「何と言うこと。善人より悪人が多いと言うことか。」

戻ろうとすると、大きな声で呼び止められました。

「こっちへ来い。」豪華に着飾った閻魔さんが地獄の入り口に座っていました。

とても恐ろしくて、役者は地面にひれ伏しました。

「お前は、手脚を動かし、人を騙して金を稼いだ。地獄行きだ。」閻魔さんは睨みつけて言いました。役者は恐くて身動きできません。

すると閻魔さんは手招きをしながら優しい声で言いました。

「近くに来い。」

役者は恐る恐る近づきました。

「拙者は本物の芝居と言うものを見たことがない。そちにここで演じてもらいたい。うまく演じたら、極楽に送ってやろう。」

役者はとても喜びました。

「早うせよ。」と閻魔さま。

「閻魔さま、わかりました。しかしこのような低いところではできません。」

「どうする。」

「閻魔さまが座っておられるような高いところで演じたいと思います。」

「そうか、それではこちらで演ぜよ。」

「しかし、このような白い着物ではできませんぬ。」

「どうする。」

「閻魔さまが着ておられるような豪華な着物で演じたいと思います。」

「そうか、拙者の着物を使え。」閻魔さまは着物を脱ぎました。

閻魔さんと役者は着物と場所を代えました。

豪華な着物を着た役者は高い所で見事に演じました。白い着物を着た閻魔さまは下に座って見ていました。閻魔さまは、身を震わせながら言いました。

「見事じゃ。でもこの薄い白い着物は寒い。早くやってくれ。」

役者は、手と脚を動かし低い声で見事に演じました。

「さすが国一の役者だ。」と閻魔さまは我を忘れて喜びました。

すると役者は閻魔さまの剣を抜くと叫びました。

「赤鬼、青鬼出会え。ここに手脚を動かし、人を騙して金を稼いだ者がおる。地獄に連れて行け。」

鬼は駆け寄り閻魔さまを掴み上げました。

「騒ぐな。じたばたするな。」と鬼。

「何をする。拙者は閻魔大王だ。」と閻魔さま。

「拙者の名を使うとは何と不屈き者。即刻地獄に連れて行け。」と役者。

「拙者じゃ。拙者じゃ。拙者の声を忘れたのか。閻魔大王の。」

「大した役者じゃ。閻魔さんと同じ声を話すとは。」鬼たちは、そう言う  
と地獄の燃え滾る大釜に投げ入れました。

役者が閻魔さまの後釜になり、村人達は、閻魔様のおかげで極楽に行ける  
ようになりました。(2004.12.14)

