

Women and Men in Niigata Folk Tales

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Fairy tales, myths and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick up the path left by the wildish nature. The instruction found in story reassures us that the path has not run out, but still leads women deeper, and more deeply still, into their own knowing. The tracks which we all are following are those of the Wild Woman archetype, the innate instinctual Self.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*

INTRODUCTION

In her best selling book, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, Jungian analyst, Clarissa Pinkola Estés, examines the roles of the heroines in a number of stories from various cultures. Through her extensive work as a *cantadora* (storyteller) and therapist, Estés has brought to light new interpretations of old, many of them familiar, stories, to help women uncover their unconscious, instinctual, “wildish nature.” Estés argues that with the passing of time, and changes brought on by religious and social conventions, many aspects of these old tales have been sanitized and “scoured clean.” Heroines, who in the old stories were strong, assertive and capable, slowly evolved into the passive princesses, the popularized Disney version, who seem incapable of doing anything but wait for their “Prince Charmings” to come along, give them a purpose in life and then “. . .live happily ever after.” According to Estés, the Wild Woman—and here the word “wild” is used with a positive meaning—is an “endangered species” because of numerous religious and societal influences brought on by modernization. However, through careful understanding of the older versions of the tales, Estés hopes that women can reclaim their

natural creative instincts and become empowered individuals.

When reading Japanese folk tales, myths, and legends it seems that, in many cases, the women in many of these old stories have retained some of this “wildish” nature. The heroines seem so much more “down to earth,” in control of their lives and have not been so altered by prevailing religious and societal sensibilities. Especially in the folk tales, which most often feature common people, the women come across as being as capable, and as bold as men. Niigata women in particular, seem to have a reputation for being strong and hard-working; in fact, some people blame the women of Niigata for the prefecture’s low standards of education—they say that the women here are so involved in the practical aspects of supporting their families that they do not have time to focus on their children’s education.

In this paper I have selected and translated stories from Niigata which primarily feature women. Each story is prefaced with a brief explanation of the cultural framework related to each tale. Although there is no attempt here to analyze the stories from a psychological perspective, these stories give us a fascinating glimpse of the lives of the “ordinary” women, and men, of Niigata.

BACKGROUND

In Japan, today and in the past, the abundant folk tales and legends have had an important influence on many aspects of society. Nineteenth century Western writers, such as Lafcadio Hearn and A.B. Mitford, were intrigued by the exotic tales that were so much a part of the Japanese social fabric. Even today, popular TV programs are based around folk tale themes; children firmly believe in the stories of the ghosts and spirits which haunt the lavatories and hallways of their schools. Yanagita Kunio, Japan’s pioneer in folklore studies, claimed that the Japanese have more tales and legends than any country in the Western world. It is difficult to dispute this. Every souvenir and gift shop, even in out-of-the-way areas, seems to

carry collections of tales from the local region.

Japanese folk tales and legends have a feeling of immediacy; the events related in the old stories seem to have happened not so long ago. The tales are almost tangible; the places where the events happened actually exist. There is physical "evidence" of these tales everywhere. In almost every neighborhood there are shrines, stone markers, revered trees, small temples and statues of Jizo. When highways are expanded, great pains are taken to carefully move the shrine or the Jizo to another nearby location; people feel the spirits associated with the place should not be angered or disturbed. Around each of these sites is usually a story of something that happened "Once upon a time..."

Niigata Prefecture is particularly blessed with an abundance of folklore and folk tales. Even today, throughout the villages of Niigata, there are many story tellers, or *kataribe*, who can relate hundreds of tales and legends. Yanagita Kunio, in his extensive field work throughout northern Japan, found that the best informants, not surprisingly, were the illiterate peasants, fishermen and hunters. For Yanagita, women in particular, with their "emotional receptivity" seemed to be the best narrators.¹

Climate and geography have contributed to the strong tradition of folk tales in Niigata. In size, Niigata is one of the larger prefectures, and in the past, many villages were remote and difficult to reach. In fact, the distance between Kaetsu, northern Niigata, and Joetsu, southern Niigata, is great enough so that there are, or were, significant dialectical differences between the two regions. The orally transmitted folk tales would evolve and change in the telling, thus creating more and more versions in the various areas of Niigata. Also, this region of heavy snowfalls and long-lasting winters, on the "other side" of Japan, has always been isolated from the rest of the country. This isolation has kept the old tales and traditions alive, much longer than in other areas of Japan.

Niigata, or Echigo, as it used to be called, is well-known

for its long winters and heavy snowfalls. Although there is less snow today, in the past, it was not at all unusual for 1 or 2 meters of snow to fall in one night; during winter months, entire houses and villages were completely enveloped in snow. People spent the days digging tunnels to get into and out of their houses, and pushing the snow off of their roofs to prevent their homes from getting crushed by the weight of the snow. Houses were dark, not only because the walls of snow kept out the light, but also because in this part of Japan, the winter months are overcast, gray and gloomy. The ground was covered with snow 5 or 6 months out of the year, effectively cutting off and isolating villages from each other, and Echigo from the rest of Japan. One can easily imagine how important the village story-teller, or *kataribe*, must have been, in helping to entertain and "educate" the people who gathered around the fires of the *ironi*, and *kotatsu*, foot warmer.

Geography has also played an important part in the creation and preservation of Niigata's folk tales. On one side, Niigata faces the Japan Sea; on other sides the prefecture is surrounded by mountains. For modern travelers, the long tunnels, "bullet trains," and expressways, have made these mountain passes almost unnoticeable, but for people living a hundred years ago, the journey over these mountains, to Edo or Kyoto, was a serious undertaking. Travelers coming from other regions were also rare.

Off the coast of Niigata is Sado Island, the largest island in the Sea of Japan. The island—with its scenic natural beauty, its history as an isle of exile for those out of favor with the powers in Edo, and the mystique and hardships associated with the gold mines there—has also been a rich source of Niigata legends and folklore.

A number of writers and folklore collectors have contributed in keeping a record of the lives, customs and tales of the people of old Echigo. Most notable among them, perhaps, is the early folklorist, Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842) and his work,

Hokuetsu Seppu (under the translated title, *Snow Country Tales: Life in the Other Japan*). He is remarkable because, at an early date, he recognized the unique aspects of Niigata. His essays describe in detail, all aspects of life in the region—particularly noting the ways the common people dealt with the snow and severe climate. More recently, the folk tale collector, Mizusawa Kenichi, has worked diligently to gather and record the folk tales from the aging story tellers throughout the prefecture. In his many anthologies of Niigata tales he has not just preserved the stories themselves but has also been able note the colorful local dialects used by the different *kataribe*.

The characters that appear in Niigata folk tales are most often people from common walks of life. They are the farmers and fishing folk who spend their lives laboring to support their families. The men and women in these tales, for the most part, seem to stand on equal footing. The women, in particular, appear strong, confident and assertive. They are very much in control of their own lives.

Although the strong women-folk of these tales seem to contradict the popular image of the shy, passive, subservient Japanese woman (perhaps a predominantly Western misconception), a brief look at the role of women in early Japanese mythology and premodern history can help to explain this phenomenon.

In many religions, the sun is associated with masculine powers, and the moon is feminine. However, according to Japanese Shinto mythology, as related in the *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki*, the deity of the powerful sun is the female goddess, Amaterasu. In early times the Amaterasu cult

embraced ancestor worship and nature worship: veneration for parents and grandparents as well as awe in the presence of every element of the earth. Because Amaterasu taught humankind how to grow food, how to make clothing, and how to build homes, she was looked upon as the great provider.

Her understanding, warmth, and rectitude heralded her as the goddess of peace.²

Thus, in ancient Japan, women were often thought to have had supernatural abilities which men lacked. Women, as shamanesses, were able to mediate between humanity and the divine powers, and therefore were directly linked to the ruling powers. In early Japanese history, there are a number of Empresses who had both religious and political power. Early references to Japan, taken from official Chinese sources, refer to it as society characterized by equality of sexes and women rulers.³

Until the first part of the Muromachi age (1336), Japan was a matriarchal society.⁴ During this period, marriage was centered around women, and it was customary for a husband to join a wife's family. It was the introduction of Buddhism and Confucianism from China, during the Heian period (794-1195), which gradually changed the status of upper class women in Japan. For centuries thereafter, women of the elite were to abide by the three "obediences" of Confucian ethic: obedience to fathers when young, then obedience to husbands when married, and finally, obedience to their sons. The teachings of Buddhism also emphasized the inferior and impure status of women. Buddhism and Confucianism "preached asceticism and intellectuality and minimized, if not denigrated, women, accounting to a great extent for the inferior position of the female in post-eighth-century Japan."⁵

These imported philosophies, however, did not greatly affect the lives of the common farming, fishing and merchant people who made up the vast majority of the population throughout Japan's premodern history. Women at the lower levels of society "enjoyed freedom (including freedom in such areas as love and marriage), equality, and power, as they worked under much the same conditions as men."⁶ The patriarchal family system did not penetrate to most of Japanese society until the

Meiji Period (1868–1912) when the Meiji Civil Code was introduced as a means of “modernizing” Japanese society. Therefore, for the vast majority of Japanese women, it is only quite recently that they have been, at least in theory, relegated to a lower position in society.

In the past decades, folk tales have been studied by many scholars and psychoanalysts. For them, folk tales can provide a key to understanding the subconscious. In folk tales one can find the expressed hopes, desires and fears of people. Many, in recent years, have focused, in particular, on what these tales can tell us about women—the “wild woman” archetype.

The following Niigata tales have been selected because the women and men in these stories seem to reflect some degree of freedom and gender equality. The women in these stories are not passively obedient; they make their own choices and often use clever tactics to get their way. They share with men in the work and dangers of life. The men, too, are not excessively domineering nor do they look down on their women partners. The men seemingly have an important role to play in the household as well: they are not *sodaigomi*, or large trash items, that some modern Japanese women call their husbands, many of whom are helpless around the house.

A NOTE ABOUT THE TRANSLATIONS:

Niigata tales frequently begin with expressions in the local dialect such as *Attateya*, *Attenga...*, *Attengano...* (roughly translated as Once upon a time...) and end with expressions such as *Ichigaburannto-saggata*, or *Ichigabontosaketa*. (They lived happily ever after.) In the Japanese, these opening and closing formulas add to the flavor and rhythm of the tale. Although some translators have included these formulas, I have chosen not to incorporate them because they seemed distracting from the story itself.

I have also chosen not to use Japanese terms which would require long explanations in parenthesis. In most cases,

using an English equivalent did not seem to detract from the story and was less awkward.

It is common for Japanese folk tale collectors to cite, after each tale, the geographical location and the name and age of the *kataribe*. This information was noted in the Japanese texts from which the tales below were selected. Due to limitations in space, I have not listed this information here. It is, however, interesting to note that, not unsurprisingly, all the tales here, with the exception of the last, were narrated by women over the age of fifty. The last tale, "The Farting Bride" is told by Kakuta Mitsuo, the author of *Niigata Ken no Mimwa*.

The Song of Okesa: Cats play a varied role in folk tales and legends around the world. According to some superstitions, the cat brings bad luck, is the devil or witch's associate, and is responsible for misery, disease and death. In other beliefs the cat is a sacred animal, associated with fertility and other fortuitous omens.

In Japan as well, the cat has this dual nature. In Japanese folk belief, if a cat is killed, it will avenge itself by becoming a monster cat, or *bakeneko*. In other stories the cat performs *jōruri* (a kind of narrative chanting) for an astonished witness who is told by the cat never to reveal its secret. The witness unwisely tells others about the cat's remarkable abilities, and then later, while sleeping, his or her head is bitten off by the angry cat.

The cat can also bring good fortune and prosperity to its owner. Many shops in Japan have a lucky *maneki-neko*, a figurine of a cat with one of its forepaws raised as if to draw in customers and riches.

In this legend, the grateful cat saves the family business by drawing customers to the shop with her song and the dance which evolved from it. This cat, like the cat in Charles Perrault's "Puss and Boots," brings good fortune and prosperity to her owners. The young girl Okesa—who is actually the transformed cat—is notable for her hard work, resourcefulness and loyalty

to her masters. These Confucian virtues are also admired in the animal tales included in Suzuki Bokushi's *Hokuetsu Seppu*. The legend here gives us one explanation, and there are many others, for the origin of the well-known folk dance of Sado Island, the "Sado Okesa."

There is a play on words on the names of the cat and the girl in this story. *Asa* means "morning" in Japanese; *Okesa* is the word *kesa*, or "this morning," with the honorific "O".

THE SONG OF OKESA⁷

Long ago, in the town of Ogi on Sado Island, there was a married couple who ran a *soba* (buckwheat noodle) shop called Nagisa-ya. They had a female calico cat named Asa. For sixteen years they doted on this cat.

One day, however, due to some problems in business, the hard-working, honest shop owner fell deeply into debt. In order to escape the debt collector, the couple decided to close up shop and secretly move away from the town that had been their home for many years.

On the morning of their planned departure, the shop owner spoke to Asa, the cat, and said, "Asa, please forgive us. We hate to leave you here, but our journey will be long, and we don't know where we'll end up, so we can't take you with us. You are a clever cat, so I'm sure you'll find a kind-hearted person to take care of you. You'll have a happy life."

Asa looked intently at him as he spoke, as if she could understand his words. Then, she meowed sadly and went off somewhere.

That night, as the couple was putting bundles together for the journey, they heard a knocking at the front door. The couple, fearing it was the debt-collector, held their breaths and made no sound. They then heard a soft, gentle voice say, "Good evening. I have come to ask a favor of you."

It didn't seem to be the debt-collector, so the man cautiously looked out and found a young girl standing at the

door.

“It’s so late at night—what on earth can we do for you?”

“My name is Okesa, and I am sixteen years old. I want to live in this area and I wondered if I could work at your shop. If you let me work here, I will not ask for any wages.”

If the noodle shop had been in business, this would have been a welcome offer, but at this point it was too late. The shop owner explained the situation to the young girl and turned down her offer. But Okesa stubbornly insisted.

“I have an idea. I have 20 pieces of silver which I have no use for. Use this money to start up your shop again, and then I will have a chance to live and work here.”

Saying this, she pulled a small packet containing the coins from her sash and placed it before the shop owner.

At first the shop owner refused to accept the money, but Okesa was so insistent that he eventually agreed to take the money as a loan. Because of this loan from Okesa, the next day the Nagisa Soba Shop was open for business again.

Okesa worked hard every day in the shop. When things were not busy, she would entertain the customers by playing the *shamisen* and singing songs in her strong, clear voice. They were lovely songs she had composed herself. One of them went like this:

Ahh, Sado, to Sado
The trees and grasses here beckon you
Sado is so lovely
Come to Sado, come to Sado.

Before long, the customers at the soba shop had learned the song and were singing and clapping along with her. Soon the customers began to wave their arms and sway their bodies to the rhythm of her song. Okesa’s singing became the talk of the town.

Thanks to the lively atmosphere, the Nagisa Soba Shop was always filled with customers. In half a year, the shop

owners were able to pay back all the money they owed. After one year the shop had expanded and had employed others to help out. During this time, Okesa's dance became popular throughout the town of Ogi, and all of Sado Island.

One night, the shop owner woke up with a strange feeling; he thought he'd heard a cat meowing. There, sitting at his bedside was Asa, the cat, who had gone away long ago.

"Asa! It's you! Where've you been? It's good that you've come back safe and sound."

He reached out to stroke the cat but Asa vanished into thin air. He shook his wife awake to tell her what he had seen, and strangely enough, she had seen the same dream. The two stayed up the rest of the night talking, fondly remembering their cat, Asa. As the sky brightened with the start of the new day, there were no sounds around the house and the couple began to worry.

"That's strange! I wonder what's wrong with Okesa? She is usually the first one to get up"

"Maybe she is not feeling well."

The shop owner went to check her room.

"Okesa! Okesa!"

No matter how loudly he called, there was no response, so he peeked into her room. The shop owner was stunned. There, instead of Okesa, was the dead body of the cat, Asa.

"Oh Asa! You were Okesa!"

Stroking the dead cat, the shop owner and his wife wept.

In the following years, even though Okesa was no longer with them, her song continued to be sung and was later called the Okesa-bushi. People on Sado Island dance and sing the Okesa-bushi to this day.

The Snow Maiden of Ginzan Daira: Generally, in Japanese folk tales, the Snow Maiden, or *Yuki Onna*, kills her victims by blowing her icy breath on them. In Niigata, the *Yuki Onna* were often called *Yuki Jorō* and, although they were blamed for

unusually heavy snow falls, they did not usually kill human beings. They say that sometimes, in some regions of Niigata, the snow that falls is faintly pink in color. According to folk belief, this means that some man in the local area has inadvertently married a Snow Maiden.

In this story, the main character is Gōsaku, the young man. The story illustrates the kind of filial piety which is so valued in traditional Japanese society. The son goes to great measures to try to catch fish for his ailing father. The Snow Maiden shows her assertiveness by taking the initiative in starting up the relationship with him. It is interesting to note the casual way in which the couple become "married." This kind of marriage relationship, with no formal ceremony or agreement and based more on mutual love and attraction, seems to have been quite common in rural Japan. As is true in many rural families, the married couple appear to have a fairly egalitarian relationship. When Gōsaku breaks his promise, the Snow Maiden must go away, but she seems quite confident that he can care for their children on his own, therefore, she leaves them with him.

THE SNOW MAIDEN OF GINZAN DAIRA^s

Long ago, deep in the mountains of Koide, in the region of Echigo, lived a young man named Gōsaku. His mother had died early on, and he now lived with this aging father.

One day, at the end of the year, his father was in bed with a terrible cold. Gōsaku made some rice gruel for him, but the father was too sick to eat it. Gōsaku worried about him and thought, "Father loves trout. If he could only eat some trout, I'm sure he'd get his strength back."

Gōsaku set out to get some trout for this father. He went over two or three snow covered mountain passes to get to the river at Ginzan Daira where he hoped to catch some trout.

"Even one fish would do. I want father to eat some fish."

Gōsaku went on and on into the mountains until it

became dark. By the time he stopped, he was trapped by a sudden mountain blizzard. He could not even open his eyes.

"This won't do! If I lose my way, I will surely die!" Gōsaku gave up on catching the trout and turned back to go home. As he crawled through the deep snow, his arms and legs nearly froze and he could barely breathe. Finally the driving snow let up a bit and Gōsaku could faintly see a charcoal maker's hut in the distance. He managed to get to it and threw himself on the floor of the hut. He lay there, exhausted.

By and by, a cold wind blew over him and he opened his eyes. The battered door of the hut had been blown open by the howling blizzard. A woman wearing a pure white kimono came floating in on the icy wind.

The astonished Gōsaku tried to say "Who are you?" but the words would not come out of his mouth. He tried to get up, but his body was pressed down as if a heavy stone were on him.

The woman came drifting toward him and peered into his face. Her skin was transparently white, her lips were coral pink, and her hair was glossy black. Her beauty was unearthly.

"I am a Snow Maiden. I came to take your life, but I've decided against it. You are such a fine young man I've become fond of you. However, you must never tell anyone that you met me this evening. If you tell any one, you will die. Do you understand?"

Saying this, she disappeared out of the hut as if swallowed up by the blizzard.

Shivering, Gōsaku remained in the hut until daybreak. When it became light enough, Gōsaku, feeling greatly relieved, made his way down the mountain and back home.

One year passed. His father had died and Gōsaku was living alone. One evening, when the snow was falling steadily, Gōsaku met a young woman struggling through the snow on the village road. The young woman told him she was on her way to Nikko.

“In this kind of weather, that’s crazy. You’ll never make it to Nikko. My house is just over there. Why don’t you spend the night with me, just until the snow lets up.” Saying this, Gōsaku brought the woman home with him.

However, the snow kept falling for three days and three nights.

“In this blizzard, going to Nikko is impossible. Why don’t you wait here until spring?”

So, while waiting for spring, the two became husband and wife.

When Spring came, Gōsaku’s young wife went out to the fields to work. No matter how many days she was out working in the hot sun, her skin remained snowy white. Not only that, but even though some years passed, she never seemed to grow older. She looked as young as the day Gōsaku first met her.

Gōsaku and the young woman lived together happily for five years, and three children were born to them. The three children looked very much like their mother, and their white skin never got brown from the sun.

One winter evening, when there was a blizzard blowing outside, Gōsaku’s wife sat by the fire doing some sewing and Gōsaku was making some straw rope in the entry. Gōsaku paused from his work and looked over at his wife. For some strange reason Gōsaku began to remember the night of the blizzard at Ginzan Daira.

“Something seems so strangely familiar...” he muttered to himself, and shook his head.

His wife looked over at him. “What seems familiar? Tell me about it.”

Egged on by her words, Gōsaku, without thinking, told her the story of that night in the mountains. “It happened long ago. I went to Ginzan Daira to catch some trout and I met a Snow Maiden. And her face, somehow...”

At these words, his wife stood up and looked intently at him. Her face was the face of the Snow Maiden he had met

that night at Ginzan Daira.

"Why did you speak about that night? I told you that if you told anyone you would die. You promised not to tell!" His wife looked at him with sad eyes.

"I am indeed that Snow Maiden you met at Ginzan Daira that night. If you had kept your promise we could all have lived together happily. Now I must go. But looking at the faces of our children sleeping sweetly here, I can't bear to take your life. I beg you to take good care of them."

As she spoke his wife changed into the pale figure of the Snow Maiden and swirled away into the winds of the blizzard.

Mermaid Monument: On a hill overlooking Kango Hama, along the coast of Niigata from where one can see Sado Island, there is a small stone monument which is dedicated to the young couple in this tale. The mermaid in this story is not depicted as a woman with a human head and body, and scaly tail of a fish, as is common in European folklore. Perhaps this young woman's unearthly beauty and her fearless travels across the sea from Sado, made her seem like a supernatural creature, or maid of the sea.

There are other variations to this story. In one version, the young man is so annoyed by the young girl who pursues him so shamelessly, that he deliberately puts out the lights at the shrine which are guiding her towards land, and thus she comes to a similar sad end. In this version, the man's mother disapproves of his relationship with the girl and prohibits him from meeting her that fateful night. Clearly, the moral here is that if the mother had not meddled in the young couple's relationship, they would have lived "happily ever after."

MERMAID MONUMENT⁹

Long ago, in the small village of Kango Hama (in today's Ōgata-machi) there was a little shrine dedicated to the god Myojin. From the village, in the distance, one could see Sado

Island. At night, many candles were lit at the shrine to help guide the local fishermen. These lights could also be seen over the rough seas by the people in Sado.

In this village of Kango Hama, there was a young man who lived with his mother. One day this young man went to Sado on some business and while he was there, he became acquainted with a charming young woman. She was a lovely maiden, with fair skin and thick, glossy black hair which was as fragrant as the fresh sea breeze. She looked like one of the mermaids that are said to live in the northern seas.

The two young people became very friendly and talked together about many things. By and by, however, the young man finished his business on Sado Island and returned to Kango Hama, leaving the young woman behind.

But the young woman's desire to see her sweetheart again was very strong. One evening, she wanted so desperately to see him, that she got into a *taraibune* (a wooden, barrel boat which is used to collect seaweed and shells) and started paddling across the rough seas. She headed toward the lights from the candles at Myojin Shrine.

The young man was thrilled that she had risked her life in the wooden barrel boat just to see him.

Alas, the night was short, and the two could be together only a short time. At the first cock's crow, the young girl sadly returned to Sado Island.

In this way, the young woman from Sado crossed the seas every night in her barrel in order to see the young man in Kango Hama. On windy nights the young man would make sure that the candles at Myojin Shrine would not blow out so the young woman could use the light to guide her across the seas.

However, the young man eventually became betrothed to a young woman chosen by his mother. One night his betrothed came to visit his home with her family, and they decided to spend the night.

This created a problem for the young man. When he was about to go out to the beach to meet the maiden from Sado, his mother stopped him, saying, "Are you going out there again tonight?" The young man didn't know what to say. He had not said anything about the young woman from Sado to anyone.

"I've known about this for a long time—that you were friendly with a young woman. I never said anything, since I thought it was just a casual relationship. But tonight, please don't go." His mother urged him to stay at home.

"You must have consideration for your betrothed, who has been waiting for the day to come when she can become your wife. Now, come along back into the house." With these words, his mother clasped her hands together and begged him not to go. The young man could hardly ignore his mother's wishes.

He said to himself, "Well, even if I don't go this one time, I'm sure I'll be able to see her tomorrow. And if I'm not there, the girl will just return to Sado." And so he reluctantly went back into his house.

As the evening went by, the winds picked up. The wind got stronger and stronger and the young man began to worry about the candles at Myojin Shrine. He reassured himself by thinking, "The lights have never all blown out before."

Finally the skies lightened with dawn and the young man could no longer sit still. He anxiously rushed to the beach.

The winds of the night before had died down and the sea was calm. The sun was shining brightly. At the seaside, five or six villagers who had risen early, were gathered around something in the shallow waves.

"The poor thing. Such a pretty young girl."

"She looks just like a mermaid."

"You know, last night all the candles at Myojin Shrine went out."

"Why on earth did she go out to sea at night?"

The young man went up to where the villagers were standing, and there, washed up by the gentle waves, was the lifeless form of the maiden from Sado. Her glossy black hair was loosened and plastered across her pale white face.

The heart-broken young man returned to his home, but later that night, he threw himself into the sea.

The villagers buried the two young people together near Myojin Shrine and put up a stone marker at that spot. In time, that marker came to be called the Mermaid's Monument. On the hills of Kango Hama, from where, in the distance, Sado Island can be seen, the stone marker can still be found today.

The Rainbow Bride: In English there is a saying that there is an illusive "pot of gold at the foot of a rainbow." In many societies the appearance of a rainbow is ominous and there are many taboos and superstitions surrounding it.¹⁰ In this story it is the rainbow which has brought the celestial maidens to earth to dance on the beach. According to Kakuta Michio, it is rare to find mention of a rainbow in Japanese folk tales.

The steadfast Mitani, who searches faithfully for years for his true love, is the main character here. This kind of devoted search for a loved one is more often attributed to women in folk tales. The reunited couple here live "happily ever after" but not, apparently, in wealth and splendor.

THE RAINBOW BRIDE¹¹

Long ago, in Iwafune, there lived an extremely wealthy man named Matsubara. A young man named Mitani worked on the estate of this wealthy man.

One summer day, after a rain, Mitani stepped out into the garden and saw a beautiful rainbow extending over the pine grove surrounding Matsubara's house. As if lured by the rainbow, Mitani walked in that direction and was astonished by what he discovered. On the beach, at the foot of the rainbow, he saw seven maidens. They were wearing rainbow colored

kimonos and dancing so gracefully that Mitani was spellbound by the sight.

After some time, the young girls became aware of Mitani and they ran off screaming, trying to hide themselves in the shade of a pine tree. However, after a few moments, the youngest of the maidens came out from hiding and fearfully approached Mitani. She said, "We are daughters of the rainbow. When the rainbow vanishes we will return to the heavens. Please don't tell anyone that you saw us here." She spoke in the loveliest voice Mitani had ever heard.

"Don't worry about it. I won't tell anyone."

When he said this, the other six maidens came out one by one and smiled shyly at Mitani. Among these maidens was one particularly fetching girl with a charming mole under her right eye. Mitani fell in love with her at first sight.

"Hey... I'm just crazy about you. Please marry me."

The maiden blushed and replied, "But, we are from heaven, and we cannot marry mortals."

"Don't say that... I really must marry you. If you will be my wife I will do anything you say."

"Well, if you insist, there is one way that is possible. Someday, somewhere, I will be reborn as a mortal. Even when I am reborn, I will still have this mark on my cheek, therefore you will know it is me."

On hearing this Mitani was overjoyed. "Good! No matter how many years pass, I'll be sure to find you."

Soon the rainbow above the pine grove vanished and the maidens gracefully danced away into the heavens.

The next day Mitani asked his wealthy master for some time off and thus began his journey. The rainbow maiden could be reborn as a mortal anytime, at any place and Mitani was sure he would find her. He traveled all over Echigo (Niigata Prefecture), Etsuchu (Toyama Prefecture) and Uzen (Yamagata Prefecture).

Months and years passed. Mitani's hair began to gray.

Even so, he was convinced that he would find the maiden with the mole under her right eye. One day, in the course of his travels, Mitani became a cowherd for a rich man named Sugiyama, in the town of Hida, in Shinano Kuni (Nagano Prefecture).

One day, a man-servant brought a homely, dirt-covered girl to Mitani and said, "This girl has come to help you. She can mow grass, take care of the cows and help you with other chores." So Mitani had this girl cut the grass and take care of the cows. No matter what he asked her to do, she proved to be a hard worker.

One day, Mitani and this girl were up in the mountains cutting grass for the cows when suddenly they were caught in a sudden downpour. The two, drenched to the skin, ran under a big oak tree to get shelter from the rain. As they waited for the rain to let up, Mitani glanced at the girl crouching next to him. Strangely enough, black, dirty drops were trickling from the girl's face. When Mitani asked her about this, the girl replied, "Listen carefully. There is a reason behind these dirty drops." Saying this, the girl began to tell him the story of her life.

Seventeen years ago, in the village next to Hida no Sato, a daughter was born to a farmer named Yosaku. The next day, when his wife woke up, she found another newborn girl sleeping peacefully next to their own baby.

The couple was surprised, of course, but they were convinced that the other baby was a gift from the gods, so they raised both little girls with great care. They named the child born to them Aomi, and the other girl, who was gift from the gods, Akemi.

However, as the years passed, and the girls grew older, there was something about Akemi's charm and beauty that attracted the attention of everyone in the village. Whenever Akemi played outside, the villagers gathered around and stared at her.

Even though Akemi was gift from the gods, to the

parents, of course, their own daughter, Aomi, was most precious to them. The couple would often say to each other, "If only it were the other way around." Little by little they began to resent Akemi.

When the girls became of age, the village headman came to the parents and asked for their permission to marry Akemi. In those days it was unheard of for a poor farmer's daughter to marry such an important person, so of course the couple happily gave permission.

Soon the happy day came. Instead of Akemi, Aomi was dressed in the bridal kimono. Akemi's face was covered with black soot and she was sent along with her sister, the bride, to be a maid at the rich village headman's house.

After hearing this story, Mitani took the girl to the bank of the river and washed her face. When the black soot was completely washed away, the girl's face nearly glowed with its beauty. And, amazingly, under the girl's right eye was a charming mole.

"Ahh... you are the Rainbow Maiden I have been seeking for so long."

Mitani grasped the girl's hands happily. He told her about meeting the Rainbow Maiden seventeen years ago, and how he had spent the years searching for her.

After hearing Mitani's story, Akemi gladly agreed to marry him and the two lived happily ever after.

Nuka and Kome: This is one of many Japanese versions of the well known Cinderella story. There seems to be no agreement on the exact origin of this type of tale, as there are similar stories all over the world. In 1964, Mizusawa Kennichi published a collection, entitled *Echigo no Shinderera*, of nearly one hundred different Cinderella type stories, gathered from all parts of Niigata. This story, collected by him at a later date, includes the "shoe-test," which was not a part of any of the stories included in *Echigo no Shinderera*.¹²

Many aspects of the story are somewhat similar to the European version: the wicked stepmother and step-sister; the dead mother's spirit who helps the poor girl; the festival, and the *tabi* (cotton, split-toed socks) which help the lord identify the girl who was at the festival. Nuka, the heroine in this story, while seeming quite naive at the beginning when she fails to realize that her sack is full of holes, is also quite remarkable in the way she takes matters in her own hands after receiving help from the spirit of her departed mother. The appearance of the obliging Buddhist nun is also very much in keeping with other tales from this region.

The names of the two girls, Kome and Nuka, are also worth noting. *Kome*, means uncooked rice, while *nuka*, means rice bran, a lowlier but far healthier part of the grain.

NUKA AND KOME¹³

Once upon a time, there were two young girls named Nuka and Kome. Nuka's mother had died and Kome was the daughter of the stepmother. The spiteful stepmother loved Kome dearly, but hated Nuka, so she plotted and schemed to somehow get rid of Nuka.

One day, in the fall, when the chestnuts were ripe, the step-mother said to the two girls, "Girls, go up to the mountains and gather chestnuts for me. Take these sacks and don't you dare come back until your sacks are full."

Saying this, she gave Nuka a sack with holes in it, and gave Kome a good sack.

"Kome, you are younger, so make sure to walk behind Nuka. Nuka, you are the big sister, so you'd better lead the way." She sent the two girls off to the mountains.

When they got to the mountains Nuka said, "I've found a chestnut!" and she put it in her sack. Of course, the chestnut just dropped to the ground out of the holes in the sack.

Then Kome picked up the chestnut Nuka had dropped and said, "I've found a chestnut too!"

And so it continued. The chestnuts that Nuka found kept dropping out of her sack, and Kome's sack kept getting fuller and fuller. Soon Kome said, "Nuka, my sack is full, let's go home!"

"No, my sack's not full, so I can't go home yet. If I go home now, Mama will yell at me."

"Well in that case, I'm going to go on home without you." And Kome went home all by herself.

Nuka stayed in the mountains to gather chestnuts. No matter how many she gathered, the chestnuts kept falling out of the holes in her sack. Soon evening fell and it became dark. Feeling scared, and not knowing what to do, Nuka sat down to rest on the roots of a tree. She was so exhausted, she quickly fell asleep.

While she was sleeping, her dead mother appeared to her and said, "There, there Nuka! Nuka! You poor thing! What's the matter?"

"I came to gather chestnuts, but my sack doesn't hold even one!"

"Let me see it. Well look! Your sack is full of holes! No wonder it doesn't fill up with chestnuts. I'll sew your sack up for you." And so Nuka's mother sewed up the sack.

"Nuka, I'm going to give you this magic little jewel box. If you want something, just ask three times and you can get whatever you want out of the box. Be sure to take good care of it."

With this, she gave Nuka a tiny little box.

The next morning, when Nuka opened her eyes, she was still sitting on the roots of the tree, and the little jewel box was there beside her. Immediately, Nuka asked the box for chestnuts and then, with her sack full, she went back home.

"Mama! I'm home!" she called. When she said this, Nuka's stepmother had a strange, sinister expression on her face; she was furious that Nuka had found her way back home.

One day, soon after, it was the day of the village festival,

and the stepmother dressed Kome in a lovely kimono. She said to Nuka, "Kome and I are going to the festival to see the show. You stay at home and take care of things. While you are at home, grind this rice into flour, you hear?"

And taking only Kome with her, the step-mother went off to enjoy the festival. Nuka, having no choice, stayed home and began grinding the rice flour. While she was doing this a Buddhist nun came along and said.

"Poor Nuka, I'm sure you want to go to the festival, too. You go and I'll grind this rice for you. Just make sure to come on home when the last scene of the show begins."

Nuka was delighted and let her take over the grinding. She climbed up to the eaves of the house where she had hidden the little magical jewel box. She took it out and said,

"Come out hair ornaments, come out combs, come out fine kimono, come out sash, come out *tabi*, come out wooden clogs!"

All these things came out of the jewel box and when Nuka dressed herself in them, she was indeed a lovely young girl.

Nuka then said "Come out, horse! Come out livery boy!" And so, dressed in her finery and suitably escorted, Nuka went off to the village festival.

When the astonished villagers saw her, they said among themselves, "Where did that maiden come from? She is so lovely!"

Kome saw her too, and said to her mother, "Mama, doesn't that girl look an awful lot like Nuka?"

"Don't be ridiculous! She doesn't have that kind of fine kimono, and besides she's at home, taking care of the house," the mother replied.

Just when the last scene of the play was about to begin, Nuka hurriedly left to return home. In her haste, she lost one of her *tabi*, but since she had no time to stop, Nuka rushed on home with only one *tabi* on her foot. When she got home the

nun was no longer there. Nuka quickly put her fine clothing back into the jewel box, and wearing her usual dirty, ragged kimono, she sat down to continue grinding the rice flour.

Soon the step-mother and Kome returned. Kome said, "What a great time we had today. The most beautiful girl came to the festival and she gave me a cake, as well."

"Is that so?" said Nuka nonchalantly, and kept on with her chores.

Then one day, not long after, a young lord came by their house. He said, "Does the young girl who left this *tabi* at the festival the other day live here? I want her to be my bride."

The step-mother was overjoyed to hear this, and exclaimed with excitement "My daughter Kome was the one who was at the festival."

So Kome tried on the *tabi* but no matter how hard she tried, it wouldn't fit.

The lord said, "I want your other daughter to try it on."

"No. That's just Nuka and she surely wasn't at the festival."

"Never mind, let's have her try it on."

Of course, when Nuka tried it on, it fit perfectly. And so that's how Nuka became the bride of the young lord. And they lived happily ever after.

Babakawa or The Old Woman's Skin: This is also a part of the Cinderella cycle of folk tales. In 1893, one version of this Japanese tale was examined by Marian Roalfe Cox, the first folklorist to do extensive work comparing various Cinderella type stories. In the Japanese Cinderella stories, The Old Woman's Skin Tale is often combined with the tale of the two girls gathering chestnuts, above. The *babakawa* story can be found in a Japanese chapbook which dates back to 1629, thus it seems to be nearly as old as the earliest European Cinderella tales.¹⁴

The clever girl in this story uses the old woman's skin to

protect herself in the mountains and also to find herself a employment as an old hearth tender. It is interesting to note that she spends her evenings reading, a pastime that may seem unusual for a woman in those days. Instead of the "shoe test," here we have an "accepting the tea" test. Many folklore scholars have suggested that the Cinderella stories are actually symbolic tales which relate to a woman's gaining of wisdom, becoming independent and growing into adulthood.¹⁵ The Cinderella stories frequently feature the wiser, older woman who helps the young heroine become self-reliant and able to achieve her goals.

BABAKAWA: The Old Woman's Skin¹⁶

Once long ago, there was a man who lived together with his lovely young daughter. However, his first wife died of illness and the man remarried another woman. One day the wicked wife drove the daughter out of the house.

Having nowhere to go, the young girl wept as she went through the deep mountain forests. Soon it became dark, and not knowing what else to do, she cried and cried loudly. She then noticed a faint light, shining in the distance, so she decided to go there to see if she could spend the night. She headed toward the light and came to a small house.

"Hello! Good evening!" she called out as she knocked on the door, and soon a filthy old hag came out.

"Granny, Granny. I have no place to go. Would you please let me spend one night with you here?" And the old hag agreed to let her stay.

The next morning, the old granny said to her, "You are much too pretty, if you walk along the mountain trails like that, the mountain ogre will certainly come after you, and that would be awful. I'll give you this "hag skin" to wear and disguise yourself. You'd better put it on."

The granny gave her a filthy "hag skin" which when worn, would turn the person into an ugly old woman. The

young girl was happy to receive it, and after putting it on, she went down the mountain. As she was going along, the mountain ogre came out, but she was so old and ugly the ogre let her go on her way.

When the girl reached the foot of the mountain she came to a village. She found herself a position tending fires in the home of a rich man. During the day the girl wore the "hag skin" and worked at her task. At night, she took off the "hag skin", becoming a lovely young girl again, and spent the time doing needle-work or reading.

One night, the young master came home late and noticed a light coming from the room of the fire-tending granny. The young master wondered what the granny might be doing at such a late hour, so he quietly peeked in the room. Much to his surprise he saw the loveliest girl he had ever seen, sitting there and reading. He was so astonished by her beauty that he fell in love with her at first sight. As the days passed he could think of nothing but that girl, and before long he had become very ill. His worried parents asked many doctors from far and wide to come and cure him, but the young master did not recover.

One day, a fortune-teller came to the village and the parents called her to look at their son. The fortune-teller said, "There's nothing any doctor can do for him. The young master is in love with a woman who lives in this house. If he marries her, his illness will be cured."

"In that case, how will we find that woman?"

"Have all your maidservants go to the young master's room and offer him hot water or tea, if he accepts and drinks the tea from one of them, that is the woman he is to marry." These were the fortune-teller's instructions.

So, all of the household maidservants went one by one to offer tea to the young master. They dressed themselves in fine kimono, made themselves up and went to his bedside. They tried to coax him, saying "Young master, what is the matter?"

Wouldn't you like a nice cup of hot water or tea?" However, the young master would not respond and paid no attention to them. All of the household maidservants went to him, but none of them attracted him. Only the old woman who tended the fire was left.

"You should go to the young master, too," the people of the household told her.

"Don't be silly! He wouldn't pay attention to an old hag like me," she said. But they insisted, so finally she agreed to go. When she had removed the "hag skin," bathed, and put on a fine kimono, she was truly a beautiful woman.

When she went to him and said, "Young master, how about a nice cup of tea or hot water?" he smiled and responded, "Yes, I'll have a cup of hot water." Then he drank the water in big gulps. The young master's health immediately improved and of course the maiden became the bride of the young master. They lived happily ever after.

The New Year's Guest: According to Japanese folk lore, events that take place on New Year's Eve are very closely connected to good fortune and prosperity in the approaching year. On New Year's Eve, the god of the coming year, sometimes disguised as a visitor, would bring happiness to a worthy household. There are numerous tales which tell about people who are rewarded for their kindness on New Year's Eve, the most well-known, perhaps, being the story of "Kasa Jizo."

In the story here, the god comes to the house disguised as a *goze*. The *goze* were blind women entertainers who traveled throughout Japan, particularly during the Edo period. They sang and accompanied themselves on the *shamisen*. Their performances included popular ballads and tales, as well long songs based on teachings from Shinto and Buddhism. The *goze*, usually in groups, would travel from village to village, household to household, and bring welcome entertainment and news from other areas. When the *goze* departed from a household, they

would stand at the kitchen entry and sing a special song to show their appreciation to the women of the house for the hospitality they had received. The *goze* were also thought to have supernatural powers, and many were consulted for their ability to heal the sick and cast fertility spells related to agriculture.

There are very few *goze* today, and interestingly enough, Niigata Prefecture is the last area in Japan where the tradition has been maintained. For the people of Niigata, who had to endure long, dark winters, the visit from a wandering *goze* was undoubtedly an exciting event. Niigata's cold winter climate and its isolation from other areas have probably been a factor in preserving the songs and ballads of these highly respected blind women.

THE NEW YEAR'S GUEST¹⁷

Once upon a time, a poor granny and grandpa lived next to a greedy granny and grandpa. One cold New Year's Eve a *goze* came to the greedy couple's house and said,

"Please let me spend the night at your house."

"Why should we let a filthy woman like you stay with us?" Saying this, they turned her away.

The *goze* then went to the poor couple's house and said, "Please let me spend the night at your house."

"Well, we are poor and our house is very humble, but if you want to stay here, you are most welcome." And so the *goze* came into their house.

The *goze* then said, "My feet are very dirty, let me go wash them off in the well shed."

The old woman said, "I'll go with you, since you can't see."

"No. I want to go alone," the *goze* insisted, and she went off to wash her feet by herself.

They waited for her to return, but she didn't come back. They began to worry about her, so they went to the well-shed to see what had happened to her. But she was nowhere to be

seen. "Where could she be, could she have fallen down the well?" They looked anxiously down the well, and heard a splashing sound from below.

They shouted down to her, "Hang on to the well bucket!" and they carefully pulled on the rope. Much to their surprise, the *goze* was not hanging onto the bucket. Instead, the bucket was filled with gold coins. They peered down the well and still could not find the *goze*.

"Oh, that *goze* was really a heavenly spirit!" Just as they were happily counting the coins, the greedy old neighbor woman came by.

"Our fire went out. Let me take one of the embers from your hearth."

When she saw what they were doing, she asked them "How did you get so many coins?" When they explained to her what had happened, she said, disappointedly,

"I guess we made a big mistake. We should have let the *goze* stay at our house." Then she scurried back to her house.

The following year, around New Year's Eve, the greedy old man went to the edge of the village to keep an eye out for the traveling *goze*. Sure enough, after some time, he saw the *goze* come plodding through the snow toward the village.

"Oh, Goze! Goze, tonight you must spend the night at our house."

"No, thank you. Tonight I must return to my home." The *goze* tried to refuse, but the man forced her to come to his house. When they got there, he urged her to go wash her feet and took her straight away to the well shed and dropped her into it. After leaving her there for a while, he returned and pulled up the well rope only to discover that the *goze* was still hanging on and had caught a terrible cold. The greedy granny and grandpa were in big trouble after that.

The Birth of a Fox: The shape-shifting fox is a common character in folk tales all over the world. In Japanese folk tales

the fox often has spiritual power and is known for bewitching people, most often by taking the shape of a lovely woman and then marrying a man. The fox is also considered to be the messenger of Inari, the deity of rice.

In this tale, the village midwife is summoned to assist in the birth of a fox. There are numerous tales of a midwife being tricked by the fox. In most tales, when she realizes that she has been deceived, she feels no malice or anger; she simply laughs at herself and her own gullibility.

In Japan, throughout history, the local midwife was a highly valued person in the community; the midwife was called on to assist in childbirth, and also helped mothers with their newborns. The midwife still plays an important role today, even though most babies in Japan are born in modern hospitals. In the West, on the other hand, with the spread of patriarchal Christianity in the Middle Ages, midwives came to be detested for their connection to pagan matriarchy and Goddess-worship; many were burned at the stake for their association with the devil.¹⁸ In Western societies it is not until recently that the midwife has once more been accepted by the established medical profession.

THE BIRTH OF A FOX¹⁹

One night, a young man came to the home of the village midwife. He said, "My wife is about give birth and she is having labor pains, please come in a hurry to help her."

And so the old midwife went along with the young man. "My house has very low ceilings" the man said, and they had to crouch to get into the house.

Sure enough, the young wife was having labor pains, but fortunately she gave birth to a healthy child. To show his gratitude, the young man gave the midwife three coins and a wild duck he had hunted. Then he escorted the midwife back to her home.

The next day, the midwife discovered that the coins

turned out to be leaves, but at least the wild duck was real. Also, her kimono was covered with dirt and fox fur. The midwife then remembered how low the ceiling of the house had been. The young wife's hips had been so slender and her belly had been covered with fur. The midwife realized she had helped a female fox give birth.

The Farting Bride: In rural families, a hardworking, good-humored wife was an asset to the whole household. So much so, that a woman's ability to contribute to the income of her family was often more important than her physical attractiveness. It was the hope of every man, and his sometimes domineering mother, that he find a suitable, energetic bride. This humorous story is obviously based on these wishes.

Folklore scholars have noted that humor is one of the basic characteristics of Japanese myth and folk literature. Females who behave wildly, with a ribald, bawdy humor, appear in Japanese mythology from ancient times. In one of the tales in the *Kojiki* (712) chronicles of Shinto mythology, the sun goddess, Amaterasu, hides in a cave because she is disgusted by the tricks of Susanoo, her brother. Darkness thus covers the islands of Japan. Finally, Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, another goddess, is able to lure the sun goddess out of the cave by doing a lewd dance exposing her breasts and genitals. This causes the other gods to laugh uproariously, and the curious Amaterasu peers out of her cave to find out why there is so much commotion, thus sunlight returns to the land.

There are a number stories in Japan where the humor is based around exposing of genitals, passing gas and other outrageous behavior. A.B.Chinen and Clarissa Pinkolo Estés, in their psychological analysis and interpretation of folk tales, have noted that this kind of un-selfconscious behavior in women suggests "a psyche which is spontaneous, free, uninhibited, close to the vitality of nature, but suppressed by social convention."²⁰

THE FARTING BRIDE²¹

Long ago there was an old granny. She had a fine son who was of marriageable age, and she was eager to find him a good bride. But it was so hard to find someone who would be right for him.

One day, an obliging villager came to her and said, "I know just the right person for your son... however this girl has one small health problem. If you can put up with this problem, I'll be happy to arrange things for your son."

"What kind of health problem is it?" Granny asked.

"Well, every once in a while, she makes huge farts," the villager replied.

"Farts? If it's just farting, that's nothing!" said Granny.

And so the young girl became her son's bride. The girl had a nice disposition and was a hard worker, so Granny was quite satisfied. However, as the days passed the young girl's face turned pale and she seemed to be holding something in.

Granny became worried about her and asked, "Are you not feeling well?"

The girl answered in a small, embarrassed voice, "I feel a fart coming, but I'm holding it in, so I have a bad stomach ache."

"Oh, don't worry about your farts. Just go ahead and fart freely."

"In that case, I will. But Granny, I don't want you to be blown away by my farts, so hang on to the edge of the hearth."

Who had ever heard of being blown away by a fart? Granny was sure the young girl was exaggerating, but she did as she was told.

But, my what a fart it was! When the young girl released the pent-up gas, Granny was blown up to the ceiling, where she got stuck in the chimney hole.

The shocked Granny shouted down to the young girl, "Get me down from here!"

So the girl “sucked in” a fart and the Granny dropped down beside the hearth where she had been before. The disgusted Granny then said, “I accepted you into our family because I thought we could tolerate your farts, but I had no idea your farts would be so bad. I’ll give you some time off, so please leave this house.”

The tearful young girl pleaded with her to let her stay, but Granny would not change her mind.

The son was sad to lose such a fine wife, but he had to follow his mother’s orders, so he agreed to escort the young girl home.

When the sad young couple came to the edge of the village, they came upon a group of villagers who were trying to right a large cedar tree which had blown over in the wind. No matter how hard they pushed and shoved, the tree would not budge and they were in a fix.

When the young bride saw this she said, “I’ll stand that tree up for you.” Then she turned her rear end toward the tree, bent over, and farted loudly. With a creaking and rustling sound, the tree slowly returned upright to the position it had been in.

The villagers were astonished at the amazing power of her farts and to show their gratitude, they gave her a good sum of money.

The young bride and the son then continued on their journey back to her home. They came to a road running along the side of a river. There they saw a ship run aground in the shallows. It was loaded down with bales of rice and was firmly stuck.

The young girl said, “I’m surprised they can’t move a little boat like that! Why don’t they just paddle it into deeper water?”

The ship’s captain, who overheard her comment, got very angry, and said, “If you think it’s so easy, why don’t you do it!”

“All right. I’ll give it a try. And if I succeed, you must give me half of those bales of rice.”

The captain was sure a girl like this would not be able to move the ship, so he gave his word that half the bales would be hers if she could move the boat.

Then the girl turned her rear toward the grounded ship, bent over, and farted loudly. The sound was deafening and the released wind was powerful. The boat slowly became dislodged from the shallows and drifted into deeper water.

“Now, since you promised, please give me half of the bales of rice on that boat.”

The ship’s captain turned pale and begged, “Please be content with only ten bales.” And the young girl agreed. She really wasn’t looking to make a profit, anyway. So she accepted ten bales of rice.

Her husband, the son, was beginning to think again about sending such a useful wife back to her hometown. He decided to return with her, back to his home. But what to do with all those bales of rice?

The clever young girl said, “No problem!” and farted ten times. One by one those bales of rice went flying through the sky and landed at the son’s home.

As the happy couple headed back home, they came across five or six people making a big commotion under a pear tree. When they asked what the problem was, it turned out that these people wanted to pick the ripe pears but they were unable to climb the tree and the pears were too high up to reach with a bamboo pole.

The son turned to his wife and said “Do you want to give it a try?” And she quickly nodded in agreement. She turned her rear end toward the tree, bent over, and farted loudly. All the pears came tumbling down.

Of course the couple received lots of the pears and they took them home as another gift for Granny.

From then on the girl took on many tasks and made good

use of her powerful farts. She was no longer embarrassed and she and her husband lived a happy and prosperous life.

NOTES

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