

A DEMON FOR BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS

(Shimizu)

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Taro Kaja -- TK

Master -- MR

MR I am a resident of this neighborhood. These days a great number of tea parties are being held. Concerning which, I mean to call my servant Taro Kaja and give him a job to do. Taro Kaja! Are you there?

TK Here!

MR There you are.

TK At your service, Sir.

MR You came quite quickly. The matter I have called you here about is of no great import. Don't you agree that these days there are a great number of tea parties?

TK As you have so astutely observed, Sir, they are being given with astounding frequency.

MR Concerning which, I am having everyone over tomorrow. Which water do you think would be best for tea?

TK Which would be best, I wonder?

MR Just which would be best?

TK Rather than haggling over this kind of water or that kind of water, what do you think of water from the spring in the field known as Shimizu?

MR That is a fine idea. And, you see, that is why I have called you here. While I realize it is a great imposition, I order you to go and draw some water.

TK As you say, Sir, but as there will most likely be things for me to do around the house, have Jiro Kaja go.

MR No, no! I have other work for Jiro Kaja. You must go.

TK If that is the case, I will go.

MR Wait there for a moment.

TK As you say, Sir.

(The MR gets his water bucket and sets it down stage center.) Now, listen well. This is my most treasured wooden water bucket. Take it with you and be careful not to lose it.

TK As you say, Sir.

MR Well now, do you know how to draw water?

TK No, I do not.

MR There are always many leaves floating in the spring. You must brush away the leaves floating on top and, while taking the utmost care not to stir up the dirt in the bottom, draw your water from the middle depth.

TK That much, (Picking up the water bucket.) I know!

MR Who would keep one at home who knows and send one who doesn't know? Go quickly and hurry back!

TK Haaah!

MR Ei! (He exits.)

TK Ah! Well, I must say, I have been burdened with a most bothersome task. Even for piddling tasks like drawing water, that a woman or a child could easily do, it is Taro Kaja go there, Taro Kaja come here. Working at this rate, neither my body nor my bones will hold out much longer. I did agree to go this time, but this sort of thing tends to become habitual. I wonder how I can get out of going. Oh, I know what I'll do. First, I'll take this bucket, (He goes up stage and put the bucket on the floor.) put it here on the ground. (He goes down stage, stamps, and raises his hands to his ears.) O, woe is me! (Staggering back and forth across the stage.) Ow, ouch! Ow, ouch! Ow, ouch!

MR (Entering.) What's this? That's Taro Kaja's voice I heart. (He goes and catches Taro Kaja by the should at stage center.) Here, Taro Kaja, what's happened?

TK Who is it?

MR It's me! What's happened?

TK Is it you, Sir?

MR It is indeed!

TK Isn't there anyone chasing me?

MR No, no one at all is chasing you.

TK (Showing the MR his neck.) Can you see any tooth marks here?

MR There is no sign at all of any tooth marks ever having been there. You've got me worried. Tell me what happened.

TK Well, Sir, you see, I've just had a most frightening experience.

MR Tell me what happened, quickly!

TK First of all, as you ordered, I went straight to Shimizu. When I got there and went to draw some water, suddenly the mountain beyond the plain began to roar and rumble. Then a stern-looking demon appeared, shouting, "Catch and gnaw! Catch and gnaw!" I was so frightened that I have no idea how I made it back this far.

MR I must say, I can't make this out! I've never heard of any demons at Shimizu. But where is the wooden water-bucket I gave you?

TK Sir, this is not time to be speaking of water-buckets!

MR What is this? After all the trouble I took to explain that that was my most treasured wooden water-bucket, and gave you careful instructions not to lose it, do you mean that you have forgotten all about it?

TK Now that you put it that way, I do indeed remember what happened to it.

MR Did you think you could get by with not remembering?

TK The demon came running after me, grinding its teeth and growling. I couldn't think of anything else to do, (Miming the following as he speaks.) so I took your wood water-bucket, threw it, right at the face of the demon. As I came running away, I heard the noise of crunching and cracking as his teeth broke up the wood. If you went there, you would undoubtedly find no trace of your wooden water-bucket.

MR What is this? I have never heard of demons eating wooden water-buckets. And besides, that was my most treasured wooden water-bucket, and was worth far more than your life!

TK This doesn't sound like you at all, Sir. Why, a wooden water-bucket like that could be ordered right now, and you would have no trouble getting any number of them made. To say that it is worth more than the life of your own Taro Kaja, who has served you these many years past, is just too pitiless of you, Sir.

MR What are you jabbering about? Go and get it!

TK I do not wish to go to such a demon infested place.

MR If you won't go, I will! (Moving forward.)

TK (Holding out his hands to stop his MR.) Wait just a minute!

MR (Stepping back.) For what?

TK Demons do appear there!

MR (Pushing TK away and moving on.) Get out of my way.

TK What's this? He'll get there and no demon will appear. What shall I do? Oh, I know what I'll do. (He goes upstage and puts on a demon mask and picks up a long cane.)

MR (During TK's dialogue and movements.) I have never heard of demons appearing at Shimizu. Besides, that rascal is such a coward that he probably saw some harmless beggar and thought it was a demon. When I get to Shimizu, I'll find out what's going on.

TK (Suddenly jumping out in front of his MR, flailing his arms and prancing as he shouts.) Catch and gnaw! Catch and gnaw! Catch and gnaw!

MR (He turns to run away and after a few steps, he kneels with his head to the ground.) Oh, forgive me, please forgive me! Oh, forgive me, please forgive me! Oh, forgive me, please forgive me!

TK (Chasing his MR and striking a menacing pose.)
Hey!

MR Haah!

TK You are a hateful rascal! You've come to get your wooden water-bucket. Haven't you?

MR Oh, no, I've come for no such thing! Please spare me my life.

TK What are you jabbering about? I have heard that you use your servants very badly. You have, among your servants, one called Taro Kaja. Don't you?

MR Yes, Sir, that I do.

TK That Taro Kaja is a most gentle-hearted soul. And though he serves you with the greatest loving case, you order him about at all hours of the night and day. Don't you?

MR Yes.

TK Also, he likes a soothing drink now and then. Are you going to give him all he wants to drink, nicely chilled in summer and warmed in winter. If you won't let him drink his fill, I'll catch and gnaw!

MR Oh, I'll let him drink all he likes. Please spare me my life.

TK You say you'll let him drink?

MR Yes.

TK There's more. You don't give him a mosquito net to sleep under in summer. Do you?

MR No.

TK Just stop and think. How can anybody sleep in summer without a mosquito net? If you don't, Aaaagh!

MR Oh, I will put up a mosquito net for him!

TK You say you'll put up a mosquito net?

MR Yes.

TK There's more! You haven't paid his back wages, have you? Are you going to pay up right away? If you don't, I'll catch and gnaw!

MR Oh, I will pay him, so please spare me my life.

TK You say you'll pay him?

MR Yes.

TK You seem to have had a true change of heart. I will spare your life.

MR Oh, I am indeed most grateful.

TK It is well known that a departing demon must never be watched. Be sure you don't look.

MR Oh, certainly not. I am not looking.

TK (Moving slowly away and looking back over his shoulder with every other line.) Don't look.

MR (Raising his head a little with each line.) I will not look.

TK Don't look.

MR I am not looking.

TK If you look, I'll catch and gnaw!

MR I will not look.

TK (Noticing that the MR has raising his head to look.) You're looking.

MR Oh, no, I am not looking. (Lowering his head to the ground.)

TK (Running to his MR and striking twice with his cane and stamping his foot as he speaks.) I told you not to look. You hateful rascal! (Moving away again as before.) Don't look.

MR (Keeping his head down for the remainder of the sequence.) I will not look.

TK Don't look.

MR I am not looking.

TK If you look, I'll crunch and crack your bones.

MR I will not look.

TK Don't look.

MR I am not looking.

TK (Bringing his right hand to his forehead.) Don't you look now. (He goes upstage to take off his mask and put down his cane.)

MR (Slowly raising his head.) I will not look. I am not looking. I will not. . . (Seeing that TK has disappeared, he gets to his feet and start off toward home.) Oh, my, what a fright I had! What a fright! I thought Taro Kaja was lying to me, but a demon really did appear. I must get home quickly.

TK (Coming forward and overlapping the last part of the above MR's line.) The time is about right now. I'll go meet my master.

(They collide at center stage and draw back a step.)

MR Taro Kaja!

TK It's you, Sir!

MR Where are you headed?

TK You were so late that I came out to meet you.

MR You need not have come.

TK Your face is very pale. Did something happen to
you?

MR There is no reason for my face to be pale.

TK It's a very strange color.

MR Is it really so bad?

TK It's no human color.

MR Is there anyone about?

TK (Looking around.) No, nobody at all.

MR Then come over here.

TK As you say, Sir.

MR I went to Shimizu thinking that you had lied to me, but a demon really did appear.

TK Of course, a demon appeared!

MR But there was something most strange about it. Do you have any relatives among the demons?

TK You must be joking indeed. How could I have any relatives among the demons?

MR Well, he certainly seemed partial to you.

TK Partial to me?

MR Most certainly.

TK Well, I am not sure what to make of that. I think I've got it.

MR Got what?

TK They say that one of my ancestors or other committed suicide by drowning himself in the Shimizu spring. Perhaps he came back out of pity for his descendant.

MR That's enough, I understand. I thought it was something like that. But when you went there, did the mountain beyond the plain roar and rumble?

TK Indeed it did roar and rumble. Then a stern-looking demon appeared shouting, "Catch and gnaw! Catch and gnaw!"

MR Wait right there for a minute.

TK With all my heart.

MR (Speaking aside as TK sneaks up behind him to listen.) What's this? The demon's voice and Taro Kaja's voice are the same. (TK is shocked and sneaks away.) I just can't make this out at all. Oh, I know what I'll do. Taro Kaja! Taro Kaja! Hey, Taro Kaja!

TK (Pretending innocence.) Huh?

MR What did the demon say?

TK (Speaking in a normal voice.) He said, "Catch and gnaw."

MR Say it like you said it before.

TK (Still in a normal voice.) Just like I said before, he said, "Catch and gnaw."

MR Say it in a loud voice, like you said it before.

TK (Speaking in his demon voice.) Like I said before, in a very grim voice, he said, (Speaking in a normal voice.) "Catch and gnaw."

MR (Coming toward TK with his hand on the hilt of his sword and speaking in a threatening voice.) Are you going say it, or not?

TK (Kneeling and raising his hands to stop his MR.) Oh, please wait.

MR Wait for what?

TK I will say it.

MR Then say it.

TK (In his demon's voice.) Catch and gnaw!

MR Once more!

TK Catch and gnaw!

MR Is that what he said?

TK (Bowling.) Yes.

MR The more I think of it the more I hate to lose that wooden water-bucket. I'll go look for it again.

TK You never get enough the first time. Even death you'd want to experience twice. I advise you to give up this rash plan.

MR No, no. I'll not give up my wooden water-bucket. (Setting out.) I'm going after it once more.

TK (Raising his hands to stop his MR.) Please wait.

MR Wait for what?

TK The demon will not appear again.

MR It will not appear again. (Pushing TK away and setting out.) Get out of my way!

TK (Aside.) Now I have to become a demon again. (He goes up stage and puts on the demon mask again.)

MR Oh, how spiteful! The demon was Taro Kaja after all. He really deceived me. If he appears again, I know what I'll do.

TK (Jumping out, he spreads his arms and prances.)
Catch and gnaw!

MR (Running away.) Oh, please forgive me!

TK Catch and gnaw!

MR (Turning around and taking the demon mask off
TK's face.) Catch and gnaw who?

TK (Unaware that his disguise has been removed.)
Catch and. . .

MR You are Taro Kaja, aren't you?!

TK (Realizing what has happened, he rushes
backward several steps and bows.) Oh, forgive
me!

MR (Chasing TK off.) You lazy rascal? You'll not get
away!

TK (Running off.) Please forgive me!

MR I'll catch you yet, I'll catch you yet!

TK Oh, forgive me, please forgive me!

MR I'll catch you yet, I'll catch you yet!

