

## **Rakuami the Flutist**

(Rakuami)

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The Ghost of Rakuami, a famous shakuhachi flute player of the past appears to a wandering priest who also loves to play the shakuhachi. They play together, and Rakuami tells the sad tale of his end in song and dance.

Ghost of Rakuami (Shite)

Traveling Priest (Waki)

Person of the Place (Ai)

PRIEST (Singing.)

With my Rosai flute I go to the gate to beg,

There a dog waits in ambush.

How sad am I!

(Speaking.) I am a wandering priest. Before I took the tonsure and became a priest, I was fond of the Shakuhachi and would travel from place to place to play it. But finally I found the mundane world to be devoid of hope, and it is for this reason that I became a priest. Also, as I have never yet visited the Grand Ise Shrine, I have decided to make a pilgrimage there. (Singing.)

My traveling robe becomes more tattered and worn

As I travel on,

My traveling robe becomes more tattered and worn

As I travel on,

And I have no place to sleep. How sad am I!

As I have made haste as I travel on my way,

I find myself at Beppo in the Land of Ise,

A place whose name I had only heard before.

(Speaking.) As I have made my way with haste, I have now arrived at the Pine Grove of Beppo. Seeing this pine standing here, I find that its branches are laden with countless Shakuhachi flutes. I am certain that there must be some story behind this matter. I think that I will question some person of this place about it. Is there a person of this place about?

PERSON Who is it who calls out for a person of this place?

PRIEST Countless Shakuhachi flutes hang from the branches of this pine tree. I thought that there must indeed be some story behind them, and I wish for you to tell it to me if there is.

PERSON I will do as you request. In the past, there was a Shakuhachi flutist who lived in this place named Rakuami who played the Shakuhachi to death, though this is not something of which people normally die. Feeling pity for him, the people of this place buried him in the ground here. People of sentiment hang Shakuhachi here as prayers for the repose of his soul. Though you have no relationship with him that

would place any obligation upon you to do so, please offer prayers for him before you continue on your way.

PRIEST I sincerely thank you for so kindly telling me his story. In that case, I will indeed offer prayers for him before I continue on my way.

PERSON If there is anything else you might require, do not hesitate to call on me.

PRIEST I will call on you indeed.

PERSON And I will respond, with all my heart.

PRIEST So this is the remains of the Buddha Rakuami.  
(Singing.)

Now I will offer prayers for the repose of his soul.

I draw forth my shakuhachi flute from the breast

Of my own kimono in preparation.

This shakuhachi flute I now blow to tune it,

This shakuhachi flute I now blow to tune it.

Fuuu.

RAKUAMI (Singing.)

Oh, how lovely are the colorful tones of the shakuhachi flute.

I see that your shakuhachi is a Sojo style flute.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, how very strange!

There on the pillow of infidelity of sound  
A grand shakuhachi, with a lesser flute,  
A quarter flute, a half flute, a double flute, together.  
What sort of person is he who finds my playing of  
The shakuhachi flute so very entertaining?

RAKUAMI (Speaking.) I am one who played the shakuhachi to death in the ancient past. My name is Rakuami. The allure of your shakuhachi music has caused me to appear here before you.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, I must say, what a strange thing it is to be  
Exchanging words with the very Rakuami Buddha  
Spoken of in ancient legends.  
I doubt my senses.

RAKUAMI (Speaking.) Why should you doubt your own senses? Even in the writings of Shakuhachi Master Roan of Uji, it is written that since ancient times, after severing the dragon head, the Shakuhachi is tuned by playing the Song of Transience, thus made so that it forms close friendships between those from places more than three thousand miles apart.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Truly, truly, this is a most amusing thing!  
I exchange words with the very Rakuami Buddha  
Told of in ancient legends thanks to the shakuhachi.

(Speaking.) And due to the fact that it has remained constant since ancient times.

RAKUAMI It is as you say indeed. It is also thanks to the shakuhachi that I became a resident of the Land of Bando.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Our friendship is also thanks

RAKUAMI (Singing.)

To the shakuhachi. . .

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh. . .

RAKUAMI (Singing.)

Oh, how amusing.

CHORUS (Singing.)

It is indeed amusing, but if I should play the shakuhachi,

All within three thousand miles would say it is noisy.

So for the sake of our close friendship,

Please allow me to remain silent,

While you play the shakuhachi alone for me.

PRIEST (Singing.)

At a time like this, we should play together.

RAKUAMI (Singing.)

No, that would only mean that your shakuhachi  
 Would be sadly defiled by my inadequate playing.

RAKUAMI & PRIEST (Singing together.)

Even as I/he speak(s) these words, I/he draw(s) forth  
 My/His great shakuhachi and we begin to play.  
 (Singing together in imitation of the sound of the  
 shakuhachi.)

To-ra-fu-ra, Fu-ri-ri-to, Ra-fu-ra-fu, Ri-ro-fu-u.

RAKUAMI (Singing.)

How fondly my heart yearns for the past,  
 But now I must leave and go back from whence I came.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, what a sad thing it is to part with you now.  
 Tell me the story of your end before you go.

RAKUAMI (Singing.)

I will reveal to you the tale of my past.  
 (He dances to instrumental accompaniment--kakeri.)

CHORUS (Singing.)

I will reveal to you the tale of my past.  
 From the start Rakuami was born  
 With a presumptuous cast of countenance.  
 First to those travellers over there,  
 Then to this tea house,  
 Then to the gate of that house,

He tried to play for one and all no matter how they may feel,  
Blowing his shakuhachi with great vigor.  
But in spite of all his efforts, no one even turned to notice,  
Nor did they donate even a single coin.  
This made Rakuami angry, so angry  
He went about disgruntled, speaking ill of one and all.  
All the world became indignant,  
And they decided to punish this incorrigible beggar.  
With thick poles they beat him,  
Three strong men knocked him down  
And pinned him to the ground,  
Tied his arms and legs to a stake with ropes,  
Then they burned and kicked and twisted  
And jerked him cruelly,  
In the manner that shakuhachi bamboo was treated.  
From the sufferings of hades for which I am destined,  
I humbly beg of you, Sir Priest, to rescue me.  
For after so many years,  
I am still obsessed by the cycle of rebirth,  
Due to my incessant fascination for the Lady Bamboo Flute.  
How I despise myself for this fascination!  
Speaking thus the spirit vanished into the bright mist.