

THE LOCUST

(Semi)

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A huge locust was killed and eaten by a flock of crows, and his ghost appears to tell his sad story to a wandering priest in song and dance.

Ghost of the Locust (Shite)

Traveling Priest (Waki)

Person of the Place (Ai)

PRIEST (Singing)

With no place in mind I wander from place to place,

With no place in mind I wander from place to place.

Who knows what will become of me when it all ends.

(Speaking.) I am a wandering priest. As I have never visited the Zenko Temple of Shinano before, I have just made up my mind to make a pilgrimage there. (Singing as he sets out.)

In Shinano I find myself

At Sowa Bridge and go across it,

In Shinano I find myself at Sowa Bridge and go across it,

Where I find the tangled threads of Sarashina,

The moon's shadow lingers on Mount Asama.

Knowing not where I will sleep,

My feet lead me on till I find myself

At the Agematsu Village.

(Speaking.) As I have made my way with haste, I have now arrived in the village of Agematsu. Seeing this single pine standing here, I find that it has such a wealth of lovely branches that I have made up my mind to rest here for a while. Oh, how strange! Gazing at these drooping branches, I find that they bear poem cards. (Singing.)

Like dew drops that fall on the wings of
 The locust and cling to them
 Silently, most silently,
 My sleeves dampen with true love.

(Speaking.) Well, I must say, it appears that this poem was written in regret for the parting of a locust in the distant past. 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 Many poem cards 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. Each summer the cool voices of locust are heard singing in this pine grove, and all the people gather here to enjoy themselves composing poems about them. But one summer in the distant past an unusually large locust came to rest on a branch of this pine tree, and before long crows gathered and killed it. All the people who

witnessed its sad plight felt sorry for the locust, and hung poem cards on this pine tree after that. Even today, persons of sentiment still hang poem cards here as prayers for the repose of the soul of the locust. Please stop here a while, Sir Priest, and offer your prayers for the locust before you continue on your way.

PRIEST I sincerely thank you for so kindly telling me this story. In that case, I will indeed stop here a while and offer prayers for the locust 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.

VILLAGER And I will respond, with all my heart.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, how pitiful

Is the transient life of the locust of the summer

That never knows spring or fall.

Like the life of dew drops that shimmer for a moment

Ending their lives in the too brief space of a dream.

Oh, how very sad.

(Praying.)

Now I pray to the Great Buddha,

Now I pray to the Great Buddha.

LOCUST (Singing.)

Beneath the tree where the locust lit and lost its life,
Someone appears And offers prayers for my soul.
Oh, what memories come back.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, how very strange!
Just as I was dozing off, my head on my pillow
What is this apparition that comes in human form?
What sort of being are you?
Tell me now your name.

LOCUST I am the spirit of the locust. And I have appeared to you here in gratitude for your prayers for my soul.

PRIEST So the spirit of the locust has truly appeared to me. Now you have entered the world of pain after life, where the same rules are imposed upon man and beast alike. You must describe to me now in detail your pain and suffering.

LOCUST (Speaking.) If that is your desire, I will indeed relate to you of the pain I was made to suffer. (Singing and dancing.)

In the village at twilight,
Crows spread wide their wings,

CHORUS (Singing.)

In the village at twilight,
Crows spread wide their wings,

Swifter than the black-eared kite.
 Here they come flying
 Grabbing me in their talons, they crush my body,
 Pecking unmercifully at me with their unclean beaks.
 As they thus pulverize my bones.
 My companions all,
 Though they try to hide themselves,
 In among the withered branches,
 Not a one of them is able to escape alive,
 Not a one of them is able to escape alive.

LOCUST (Singing.)

Now I will describe to you the aspects of purgatory,

CHORUS (Singing.)

Now I will describe to you the aspects of purgatory.
 I spy a friendly-looking branch, try to rest my wings upon it,
 Suddenly it changes into the edge of a steely sword,
 Slicing at my body.
 If I fly up in the sky,
 Spreading all about, filling every space,
 Looms the mountain spider's web of iron of blackest hue,
 Catching me, holding me in its thousand strands of rope
 Round and round it twists me, whirling without ceasing,
 Till the horned owl flies up
 And grabs and eats me for its supper.
 What an awful fate.

This goes on both day and night time,
 Such are the horrid tortures that I must suffer there.
 But if now I become your devoted disciple,

Buddhahood and salvation, then,
I will achieve without a doubt.
Thus I shave off all my hair,
Swear to the five admonitions,
After which I don the robe
Made of true locust wings,
Completing my transformation
Into blessed monk.