

THE MOUNTAIN POTATO

(Tokoro)

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A huge mountain potato was dug up, cooked and eaten, and his ghost appears to tell of his suffering to a wandering priest in song and dance.

Ghost of the Mountain Potato (Shite)

Traveling Priest (Waki)

Person of the Place (Ai)

PRIEST (Singing.)

In an ancient temple, I live a cloistered life,

In an ancient temple, I live a cloistered life,

Leaving it behind, I am filled with deep regret.

(Speaking.) I am a priest and I reside in Inner Tanba. As I have never visited, the capital, I have made up my mind to go there now. (Singing.)

Though night has fallen, I venture forth,

Alone on my lonely journey,

Though night has fallen, I venture forth,

Alone on my lonely journey.

Who will offer me shelter as I travel along.

Passing many barrier gates, before very long,

At the foot of the mountains, I arrive safely.

(Speaking.) As I have made my way with haste, I have now reached Nose County. Oh, how strange! Here stands a stupa that appears to have some special meaning. There must be some story behind it. I will question a person of this place about it. Is there a person of this place about?

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

PRIEST The stupa standing here appears to have some special meaning. I am certain there must be some story behind it. If you know its story, I request that you tell it to me.

PERSON I will tell it to you. It was during the spring of last year that a man of the mountains dug up a huge mountain potato, and the people of this place all participated in the cooking and consuming of it. Then someone among them said that being so very large, the mountain potato must indeed have a soul, and as that person predicted, its ghost began appearing night after night, so the people gathered together and built this stupa as a prayer for the repose of its soul. Though you have no relationship with the mountain potato that would place any obligation upon you to do so, please take some time to offer prayers for his soul before you proceed upon your way.

PRIEST Please accept my heartfelt gratitude for taking the trouble to relate to me this tale. As you suggest, I will indeed pause here for a time and offer prayers for its soul's repose.

PERSON If there is any way I can be of further service, please 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 grave of a mountain potato who passed away here last spring. Leaving the mutable earth, its beard was shaved off, and it left this bitter life, to go and sit on a serving dish in paradise. (Singing.)

Oh, how pitiful is the suffering
On the way to Buddhahood for plants and trees.

MOUNTAIN POTATO (Singing.)

Oh, how grateful am I for prayers to release me
From the deep attachment I have to this world.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, how very strange.
In broad daylight when houses can be clearly seen,
A ghostly form appears to me, appears to me here.
Who might you be, tell me now, just who you might be.

MOUNTAIN POTATO I am the spirit of a mountain potato who was dug up by a man of the mountains during the spring of last year, and it is this chance happening that cost me my life and for which I still harbor deep spite in my heart. And I

have appeared to you here in gratitude for your prayers for my soul.

PRIEST (Speaking.) So the spirit of the mountain potato has truly appeared to me. If you tell me now your story, I will offer prayers for the repose of your soul.

MOUNTAIN POTATO I must now tell the story of my sad end so long past as I remember it. (Singing.)

Long, long ago, this mountain potato
 Who lived in the mountains,
 Was dug up out of the deep ground
 By men with hoes and shovels,
 Then they rinsed me clean in the waters of the River Styx,
 Tossed me unmercifully into the pot of hell,
 The boiling water dashed me about and burned me,
 The the deep compassion of the holy Buddha
 Drew me out of the water,
 For what proved to be but a brief moment of succor,
 For in the next instant, sinners
 Attacked me with sharp swords and butcher knives,
 Plucking out my whiskers and slicing all my skin off me,
 Then they made me into cakes to eat with their tea,
 And sold me along with evil crackers to other sinners
 As they suffered and choked in the searing flames of hell,
 Surrounded entirely by flames,
 The sinners, who were tortured by great guilt,
 Also consumed flayed and boiled burdock,
 Millet-and-rice cakes, sour persimmons,

Eating so greedily that they choked on this mass of food,
Then for their desert they had sweetened dried persimmons.

They continued feasting ceaselessly until

Emma, King of Hell, came to eat his fill as well.

But I the bitter mountain potato was left alone untasted,

Inside the deep square serving dish,

Rolling here and rolling there, then back here and over there,

Rolling, rolling, and rolling, suffering greatly.

But soon I received a message that I would at last be saved.

I was made into tea cakes for priests on their night off,

Thus I found myself

Released from the tortures of hell, now I rest in peace,

Released from the tortures of hell, now I rest in peace,

In a most dark and lovely place, crouching in comfort.