

THE GRATEFUL STATUES Part 1

Once upon a time there lived a kind old couple in a village in Japan. They were very poor and spent every day weaving hats out of straw. Whenever they finished a number of hats, the old man would take them to the nearest town to sell.

One day the old man said to the old woman, "It will be New Year's Day in two days. Without mochi cakes we won't be able to celebrate the new year."

"Well, then," said the old woman, "after you've sold these hats, buy some mochi cakes for New Year's Day."

So early the next morning the old man took the five new hats that they had made and went to town to sell them. But when he got to town he was unable to sell a single hat. And to make things worse, it began to snow very heavily.

The old man felt very sad as he trudged wearily home with his hats. He was walking down a lonesome mountain trail when he suddenly came upon a row of six stone statues of Jizo, the protector of children, all covered in thick snow.

"My, my! Now isn't this a pity," said the old man. "Just think how cold they must be, standing here in the snow."

"I know what I'll do!" said the old man to himself. He unfastened the five new hats from his back and began tying them, one by one, onto the heads of the statues.

When he came to the last statue he suddenly realized that all the new hats had been used. "Oh, my!" he said, "I don't have enough hats." But then he remembered his own scarf. So he tied it on the head of the last statue. Then he went on his way home.

When he got home the old woman was waiting for him by the fire. She took one look at him and cried, "You must be frozen half to death! What did you do with your scarf?"

(334 words)