

THE GRATEFUL STATUES Part 2

The old man shook the snow out of his hair and came to the fire. He told the old woman how he had given all the hats as well as his own scarf to the six Jizo statues. He also said he was sorry that he hadn't been able to bring home any mochi cakes.

"That was a very kind thing you did for the statues," said the old woman. She was very proud of the old man and said, "We'll get along without any mochi cakes for New Year's Day."

The old man and woman soon went to bed.

Just before dawn, while they were still asleep, suddenly there was the sound of voices in the distance, singing:

"A kind old man walking in the snow,
Gave all his hats to the stone Jizo,
So we bring him gifts with a yo-heave-ho!"

The voices came nearer and nearer.

The footsteps came right up to the house where the old man and woman were sleeping. And then all at once there was a great noise, as though something heavy had been put down just in front of the house.

The old couple jumped out of bed and ran to the door. What do you suppose they found?

Placed very neatly in front of the house was the biggest rice cake the old couple had ever seen.

"Whoever could have brought us such a wonderful gift?" they asked.

In the snow they saw some tracks leading away from their house. There in the distance, walking through the snow, were the six Jizo statues, still wearing the hats that the old man had given them.

The old man said, "It was the stone Jizo who brought this wonderful rice cake to us!"

The old woman said, "You did them a kind favor, so they've brought this rice cake to show their gratitude."

And so the old couple had a very wonderful New Year's Day celebration after all.

(325 words)