

The Story of Susa, the Impetuous

Green Willow And Other Japanese Fairy Tales

Japanese

Intermediate
17 min read

When Izanagi, the Lord who Invites, turned his back upon the unclean place, and bade farewell to Yomi, the World of the Dead, whither he had journeyed upon a quest, he beheld once more the Land of Fresh Rice Ears, and was glad. And he rested by the side of a clear river that he might perform purification.

And Izanagi-no-Mikoto bathed in the upper reach. But he said, "The water of the upper reach is too rapid." Then he bathed in the lower reach; but he said, "The water of the lower reach is too sluggish." So he went down for the third time and bathed in the middle reach of the river. And as the water dropped from his beautiful countenance there were created three sublime deities—Ama Terassu, the Glory of High Heaven; Tsuki-Yomi-no-Kami, the Moon-Night-Possessor; and Susa, the Impetuous, the Lord of the Sea.

Then Izanagi-no-Mikoto rejoiced, saying, "Behold the three august children that are mine, who shall also be illustrious for ever." And, taking the great string of jewels from his neck, he bestowed it upon Ama Terassu, the Glorious, and said to her, "Do Thine Augustness rule the Plain of High Heaven, shining in thy beauty by day." So she took the august jewels and hid them in the storehouse of the gods.

And the Lord of Invitation commanded Tsuki-Yomi-no-Kami, saying, "Do Thine Augustness rule the Dominion of the Night." Now this was a youth of a fair and pleasant countenance.

And to the youngest of the deities, his Augustness the Lord Izanagi gave the Sea Plain.

So Ama Terassu ruled the day, and Tsuki-Yomi-no-Kami softly ruled the night. But Susa, the Impetuous, flung himself upon the ground and violently wept, for he said, "Ah, miserable, to dwell for ever upon the confines of the cold sea!" So he ceased not in his weeping, and took the moisture of the valley for his tears, so that the green places were withered and the rivers and streams were dried up. And evil deities increased and flourished, and as they swarmed upon the earth their noise was as the noise of flies in the fifth moon; and far and wide there arose portents of woe.

Then his father, the Lord of Invitation, came and stood terribly by him and said, "What is this that I do see and hear? Why dost thou not rule the dominions with which I charged thee, but lie here, like a child, with tears and wailings? Answer."

And Susa, the Impetuous, answered, "I wail because I am in misery and love not this place, but would depart to my mother who rules the Nether Distant Land, who is called the Queen of Yomi, the World of the Dead."

Then Izanagi was wroth and expelled him with a divine expulsion, and charged him that he should depart and show his face no more.

And Susa, the Impetuous, answered, "So be it. But first I will ascend to High Heaven to take leave of Her Augustness, my sister, who is the Glory of Heaven, and then I will depart."

So he went up to Heaven with a noise and a great speed, and at his going all the mountains shook and every land and country quaked. And Ama Terassu, the Light of Heaven, she also trembled at his coming, and said, "This coming of His Augustness, my brother, is of no good intent, but to lay hold of mine inheritance, and to take it by force. For this alone does he invade the fastness of High Heaven."

And forthwith she divided the hair that hung upon her shoulders and rolled it in two august bunches to the left and to the right, and adorned it with jewels. So she made her head like the head of a young warrior. And she slung upon her back a great bow and a quiver of arrows, one thousand and five hundred arrows, and she took

in her hand a bamboo staff and brandished it and stamped upon the ground with her armed feet, so that the earth flew like powdered snow. So she came to the bank of the Tranquil River of Heaven and stood valiantly, like unto a mighty man, and waited.

And Susa, the Impetuous, spoke from the farther bank: "My lovely sister, Thine Augustness, why comest thou thus armed against me?"

And she answered, "Nay, but wherefore ascendest thou hither?"

And Susa replied, "There is nothing evil in my mind. Because I desired to dwell in the Land of Yomi, therefore has my father deigned to expel me with a divine expulsion, and I thought to take leave of thee, and so I have ascended hither. I have no evil intention."

And she, bending her great eyes on him, said "Swear."

And he swore, by the ten-grasp sword that was girded on him, and after that he swore by the jewels in her hair. Then she suffered him to cross over the Tranquil River of Heaven, and also to cross over the Floating Bridge. So Susa, the Impetuous, entered the dominions of his sister, the Sun Goddess.

But his wild spirit never ceased to chafe. And he pillaged the fair lands of Ama Terassu and broke down the divisions of the rice-fields which she had planted, and filled in the ditches. Still the Light of Heaven upbraided him not, but said, "His Augustness, my brother, believes that the land should not be wasted by ditches and divisions, and that rice should be sown everywhere, without distinction." But notwithstanding her soft words Susa, the Impetuous, continued in his evil ways and became more and more violent.

Now, as the great Sun Goddess sat with her maidens in the awful Weaving Hall of High Heaven, seeing to the weaving of the august garments of the gods, her brother made a mighty chasm in the roof of the Weaving Hall, and through the chasm he let down a heavenly piebald horse. And the horse fled hither and thither in terror, and wrought great havoc amongst the looms and amongst the weaving maidens. And Susa himself followed like a rushing tempest and like a storm of waters flooding the hall, and all was confusion and horror. And in the press the Sun Goddess was wounded with her golden shuttle. So with a cry she fled from High Heaven and hid herself in a cave; and she rolled a rock across the cave's mouth.

Then dark was the Plain of High Heaven, and black dark the Central Land of Reed Plains, and eternal night prevailed. Hereupon the voices of the deities as they wandered over the face of the earth were like unto the flies in the fifth moon, and from far and near there arose portents of woe. Therefore did the Eight Hundred Myriad Deities assemble with a divine assembly in the dry bed of the Tranquil River of Heaven, there to hold parley, and to make decision what should be done. And His Augustness the Lord of Deep Thoughts commanded them. So they called together the Singing Birds of Eternal Night. And they charged Ama-tsu-mara, the Divine Smith, to make them a mirror of shining white metal. And they charged Tama-noya-no-mikoto to string together many hundreds of curved jewels. And, having performed divination by the shoulder-blade of a stag of Mount Kagu, they uprooted a sacred tree, a sakaki, of five hundred branches. And they hung the jewels upon the branches of the tree, and they hung the mirror upon its branches. And all the lower branches they covered with offerings, streamers of white and streamers of blue, and they bore the tree before the rock cavern where the Sun Goddess was. And immediately the assembled birds sang. Then a divine maiden of fair renown, who for grace and skill in dancing had no sister, either in the Land of Rice Ears or upon the Plain of High Heaven, stood before the cavern door. And there was hung about her for a garland the club moss from Mount Kagu, and her head was bound with the leaves of the spindle-tree and with flowers of gold and flowers of silver, and a sheaf of green bamboo-grass was in her hands. And she danced before the cavern door as one possessed, for heaven and earth have not seen the like of her dancing. It was more lovely than the pine-tops waving in the wind or the floating of sea foam, and the cloud race upon the Plain of High Heaven is not to be compared with it. And the earth quaked and High Heaven shook, and all the Eight Hundred Myriad Deities laughed together.

Now Ama Terassu, the Glory of Heaven, lay in the rock cavern, and the bright light streamed from her fair body in rays, so that she was as a great jewel of price. And pools of water gleamed in the floor of the cavern, and the slime upon the walls gleamed with many colours, and the small rock-plants flourished in the unwonted heat, so that the heavenly lady lay in a bower and slept. And she awoke because of the song of the Eternal Singing Birds, and she raised herself and flung the hair back over her shoulder, and said, "Alack, the poor birds that sing in the long night!" And there came to her the sound of dancing and of high revel and of the merriment of the gods, so she was still and listened. And presently she felt the Plain of High Heaven shake, and heard the Eight Hundred Myriad Deities as they laughed together. And she arose and came to the door of the cavern, and rolled back the great stone a little way. And a beam of light fell upon the dancing maiden where she stood,

panting, in all her array; but the other deities were yet in darkness, and they looked at each other and were still. Then spoke the Fair Glory of Heaven: "Methought that because I was hidden the Plain of High Heaven should be dark, and black dark the Central Land of Reed Plains. How, then, doth the Dancing Maiden go thus, adorned with garlands and her head tired? And why do the Eight Hundred Myriad Deities laugh together?"

Then the Dancing Maiden made answer: "O Thine Augustness, that art the sweet delight of all the deities, behold the divine maidens are decked with flowers, and the gods assemble with shouts. We rejoice and are glad because there is a goddess more illustrious than Thine Augustness."

And Ama Terassu heard and was wroth. And she covered her face with her long sleeves, so that the deities should not see her tears; howbeit, they fell like the falling stars. Then the youths of the Court of Heaven stood by the sakaki tree, where hung the mirror that was made by Ama-tsu-Mara, the Divine Smith. And they cried, "Lady, look and behold the new paragon of Heaven!"

And Ama Terassu said, "Indeed, I will not behold." Nevertheless, she presently let slip the sleeves that covered her countenance and looked in the mirror. And as she looked, and beheld, and was dazzled by her own beauty, that was without peer, she came forth slowly from the rocks of the cavern. And the light of her flooded High Heaven, and below the rice ears waved and shook themselves, and the wild cherry rushed into flower. And all the deities joined their hands in a ring about Ama Terassu, the Goddess of the Sun, and the door of the rock cavern was shut. Then the Dancing Maiden cried, "O Lady, Thine Augustness, how should any Deity be born to compare with thee, the Glory of Heaven?"

So with joy they bore the goddess to her place.

But Susa, the Swift, the Brave, the Impetuous, the Long-Haired, the Thrice Unhappy, the Lord of the Sea, him the deities arraigned to stand trial in the dry bed of the Tranquil River of Heaven. And they took counsel, and fined him with a great fine. And, having shorn him of his hair, which was his beauty and his pride (for it was blue-black as an iris, and hung below his knee), they banished him for ever from the heavenly precincts.

So Susa descended to earth by the Floating Bridge with bitterness in his heart, and for many days he wandered in despair, he knew not whither. By fair rice-fields he came, and by barren moors, heeding nothing; and at last he stayed to rest by the side of the river called Hi, which is in the land of Izumo.

And as he sat, moody, his head on his hand, and looked down at the water, he beheld a chopstick floating on the surface of the stream. So Susa, the Impetuous, arose immediately, saying, "There are people at the river head." And he pursued his way up the bank in quest of them. And when he had gone not a great way, he found an old man weeping and lamenting very grievously, among the reeds and willows by the water-side. And there was with him a lady of great state and beauty, like unto the daughter of a deity; but her fair eyes were marred with many tears, and she moaned continually and wrung her hands. And these twain had between them a young maid of very slender and delicate form; but her face Susa could not see, for she covered it with a veil. And ever and anon she moved and trembled with fear, or seemed to beseech the old man earnestly, or plucked the lady by the sleeve; at which these last but shook their heads sorrowfully, and returned to their lamentations.

And Susa, full of wonder, drew near and asked the old man, "Who art thou?"

And the old man answered, "I am an earthly deity of the mountains. This is my wife, who weeps with me by the water-side, and the child is my youngest daughter."

And Susa inquired of him again, "What is the cause of your weeping and lamentation?"

And he answered, "Know, sir, that I am an earthly deity of renown, and I was the father of eight fair daughters. But a horror broods over the land, for every year at this time it is ravaged by a monster, the eight-forked serpent of Koshi, that delights in the flesh of young virgins. In seven years have my seven sweet children been devoured. And now the time of my youngest-born is at hand. Therefore do we weep, O Thine Augustness."

Then said Susa, the Impetuous, "What is the likeness of this monster?"

And the deities of the mountain made answer: "His eyes are fiery and red as the akakagachi (that is, the winter cherry). He has but one body, with eight heads and eight scaly tails. Moreover, on his body grows moss, together with the fir and the cryptomeria of the forest. In his going he covers eight valleys and eight hills, and upon his under side he is red and gory."

Then the Lord Susa, the Impetuous, cried, "My lord, give me thy daughter."

And the earthly deity, seeing his strength and great beauty and the brightness of his countenance, knew that he was a god, and answered, "With all reverence do I offer her unto thee. Howbeit, I know not thine august name."

And Susa said, "I am Susa, the Sea God, the exile of High Heaven."

And the mountain deity and also his fair wife spoke, saying, "So be it, Thine Augustness, take the young maid."

And immediately Susa flung away the veil and saw the face of his bride, pale as the moon in winter. And he touched her on the forehead, and said, "Fair and beloved, fair and beloved...."

And the maid flushed faintly to stand thus barefaced. Howbeit, she had little need, for the tears that stood in my lord Susa's eyes were veil enough for her modesty. And he said again, "Dear and beautiful, our pleasure shall be hereafter, now we may not tarry."

So he took the young maid at once, and changed her into a crown for his head. And Susa wore the crown gallantly. And he instructed the earthly deity, and together they brewed saké, refined eight-fold; and with the saké they filled eight vats and set them in readiness; and when all was prepared they waited. And presently there was a mighty noise, like the sound of an earthquake, and the hills and valleys shook. And the serpent crawled in sight, huge and horrible, so that the earthly deities hid their faces for fear. But Susa, the Impetuous, gazed upon the serpent with his sword drawn.

Now the serpent had eight heads, and immediately he dipped a head into each vat of saké and drank long. Thereupon he became drunken with the distilled liquor, and all the heads lay down and slept.

Then the Lord Susa brandished his ten-grasp sword, and leapt upon the monster and cut off the eight heads

with eight valiant strokes. So the serpent was slain with a great slaying, and the river Hi flowed on, a river of blood. And Susa cut the tails of the serpent also, and as he struck the fourth tail the edge of his august sword was turned back. So he probed with its point, and found a great jewelled sword with a blade sharp as no known smith could temper it. And he took the sword and sent it for an offering to the Sun Goddess, his august sister. This is the herb-quelling sword.

And Susa, the Impetuous, built him a palace at the place called Suga, and dwelt there with his bride. And the clouds of heaven hung like a curtain round about the palace. Then the Lord Susa sang this song:

“Many clouds arise. The manifold fence of the forth-issuing clouds
Makes a manifold fence, For the spouses to
be within. Oh, the manifold fence....”

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com