

Aya No Tsuzumi

SEAMI

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PERSONS

A Courtier.
An Old Gardener.
The Princess.

Courtier:

I am a courtier at the Palace of Kinomaru in the country of Chikuzen. You must know that in this place there is a famous pond called the Laurel Pond, where the royal ones often take their walks; so it happened that one day the old man who sweeps the garden here caught sight of the Princess. And from that time he has loved her with a love that gives his heart no rest.

Some one told her of this, and she said, "Love's equal realm knows no divisions," and in her pity she said, "By that pond there stands a laurel-tree, and on its branches there hangs a drum. Let him beat the drum, and if the sound is heard in the Palace, he shall see my face again."

I must tell him of this.

Listen, old Gardener! The worshipful lady has heard of your love and sends you this message: "Go and beat the drum that hangs on the tree by the pond, and if the sound is heard in the Palace, you shall see my face again." Go quickly now and beat the drum!

Gardener:

With trembling I receive her words. I will go and beat the drum.

Courtier:

Look, here is the drum she spoke of. Make haste and beat it!

He leaves the Gardener standing by the tree and seats himself at the foot of the "Waki's pillar."

Gardener:

They talk of the moon-tree, the laurel that grows in the Garden of the Moon. . . . But for me there is but one true tree, this laurel by the lake. Oh, may the drum that hangs on its branches give forth a mighty note, a music to bind up my bursting heart.

Listen! the evening bell to help me chimes;

But then tolls in

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A heavy tale of day linked on to day,

Chorus: speaking for the Gardener.

And hope stretched out from dusk to dusk.

But now, a watchman of the hours, I beat

The longed-for stroke.

Gardener:

I was old, I shunned the daylight,

I was gaunt as an aged crane;

And upon all that misery

Suddenly a sorrow was heaped,

The new sorrow of love.

The days had left their marks,

Coming and coming, like waves that beat on a sandy shore. . .

Chorus:

Oh, with a thunder of white waves

The echo of the drum shall roll.

Gardener:

The after-world draws near me,

Yet even now I wake not

From this autumn of love that closes

In sadness the sequence of my years.

Chorus:

And slow as the autumn dew

Tears gather in my eyes, to fall

Scattered like dewdrops from a shaken flower

On my coarse-woven dress.

See here the marks, imprint of tangled love,
That all the world will read.

Gardener:

I said "I will forget,"

Chorus:

And got worse torment so
Than by remembrance. But all in this world
Is as the horse of the aged man of the land of Sai;
And as a white colt flashes
Past a gap in the hedge, even so our days pass.
And though the time be come,
Yet can none know the road that he at last must tread,
Goal of his dewdrop-life.
All this I knew; yet knowing,
Was blind with folly.

Gardener:

"Wake, wake," he cries,

Chorus:

The watchman of the hours,
"Wake from the sleep of dawn!"
And batters on the drum.
For if its sound be heard, soon shall he see
Her face, the damask of her dress . . .
Aye, damask! He does not know
That on a damask drum he beats,
Beats with all the strength of his hands, his aged hands,

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But hears no sound.

"Am I grown deaf?" he cries, and listens, listens:

Rain on the windows, lapping of waves on the pool

Both these he hears, and silent only

The drum, strange damask drum.

Oh, will it never sound?

I thought to beat the sorrow from my heart,

Wake music in a damask drum; an echo of love

From the voiceless fabric of pride!

Gardener:

Longed for as the moon that hides

In the obstinate clouds of a rainy night

Is the sound of the watchman's drum,

To roll the darkness from my heart.

Chorus:

I beat the drum. The days pass and the hours.

It was yesterday, and it is to-day.

Gardener:

But she for whom I wait

Chorus:

Comes not even in dream. At dawn and dusk

Gardener:

No drum sounds.

Chorus:

She has not come. Is it not sung that those

Whom love has joined

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Not even the God of Thunder can divide?

Of lovers, I alone

Am guideless, comfortless.

Then weary of himself and calling her to witness of his woe,

"Why should I endure," he cried,

"Such life as this?" and in the waters of the pond

He cast himself and died.

Gardener leaves the stage. Enter the Princess.

Courtier:

I would speak with you, madam.

The drum made no sound, and the aged Gardener in despair has flung himself into the pond by the laurel tree, and died. The soul of such a one may cling to you and do you injury. Go out and look upon him

Princess: speaking wildly, already possessed by the Gardener's angry ghost, which speaks through her.

Listen, people, listen!

In the noise of the beating waves

I hear the rolling of a drum.

Oh, joyful sound, oh joyful!

The music of a drum.

Courtier:

Strange, strange!

This lady speaks as one

By phantasy possessed.

What is amiss, what ails her?

Princess:

Truly, by phantasy I am possessed.

Can a damask drum give sound?

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When I bade him beat what could not ring,

Then tottered first my wits.

Chorus:

She spoke, and on the face of the evening pool

A wave stirred.

Princess:

And out of the wave

Chorus:

A voice spoke.

The voice of the Gardener is heard; as he gradually advances along the hashigakari it is seen that he wears a "demon mask," leans on a staff and carries the "demon mallet" at his girdle.

Gardener's Ghost:

I was driftwood in the pool, but the waves of bitterness

Chorus:

Have washed me back to the shore.

Ghost:

Anger clings to my heart,

Clings even now when neither wrath nor weeping

Are aught but folly.

Chorus:

One thought consumes me,

The anger of lust denied

Covers me like darkness.

I am become a demon dwelling

In the hell of my dark thoughts,

Storm–cloud of my desires.

Ghost:

"Though the waters parch in the fields
Though the brooks run dry,
Never shall the place be shown
Of the spring that feeds my heart."
So I had resolved. Oh, why so cruelly
Set they me to win
Voice from a voiceless drum,
Spending my heart in vain?
And I spent my heart on the glimpse of a moon that slipped
Through the boughs of an autumn tree.

Chorus:

This damask drum that hangs on the laurel-tree

Ghost:

Will it sound, will it sound?
He seizes the Princess and drags her towards the drum.
Try! Strike it!

Chorus:

"Strike!" he cries;
"The quick beat, the battle-charge!
Loud, loud! Strike, strike," he rails,
And brandishing his demon-stick
Gives her no rest.
"Oh woe!" the lady weeps,
"No sound, no sound. Oh misery!" she wails.
And he, at the mallet stroke, "Repent, repent!"

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Such torments in the world of night
Ab rasetu, chief of demons, wields,
Who on the Wheel of Fire
Sears sinful flesh and shatters bones to dust.
Not less her torture now!
"Oh, agony!" she cries, "What have I done,
By what dire seed this harvest sown?"

Ghost:

Clear stands the cause before you.

Chorus:

Clear stands the cause before my eyes;
I know it now.
By the pool's white waters, upon the laurel's bough
The drum was hung.
He did not know his hour, but struck and struck
Till all the will had ebbed from his heart's core;
Then leapt into the lake and died.
And while his body rocked
Like driftwood on the waves,
His soul, an angry ghost,
Possessed the lady's wits, haunted her heart with woe.
The mallet lashed, as these waves lash the shore,
Lash on the ice of the eastern shore.
The wind passes, the rain falls
On the Red Lotus, the Lesser and the Greater.
The hair stands up on my head.

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"The fish that leaps the falls

To a fell snake is turned,"

I have learned to know them;

Such, such are the demons of the World of Night.

"O hateful lady, hateful!" he cried, and sank again

Into the whirlpool of desire.