



The Tale of the Straw Millionaire

ONCE upon a time there lived a young man who was all alone and penniless. Unable to bear the burden of his poverty any longer, he prayed to Kannon, the god of mercy. “Please give me some money,” he pleaded.

He continued to pray, and one day he heard a message from Kannon: “Once you leave this temple, take good care of the first thing you touch. Then go west.” As the young man left the temple gates, he stumbled and fell. His hand landed on a piece of straw. This single stalk seemed useless, but he held it tight and began walking west.

As the man walked along, a horsefly came by and started buzzing around his face. He grabbed the fly,

tied it to the tip of the straw stalk to play with, and let it continue buzzing about. He then came across a boy who, entranced by the stalk and buzzing fly, asked if he could have it. The man gave the boy the stalk, and in turn received three oranges from the boy’s mother. He was quite happy to see that a piece of straw had turned into three oranges.

As he continued walking, he came upon a young woman who was parched with thirst from the heat. Because he didn’t have any water to give, the man gave her the oranges instead. The woman ate the oranges and regained her strength. As a gesture of gratitude, she gave the man an exquisite piece of cloth. The man was ecstatic that



three oranges had turned into a fine piece of cloth.

As he continued walking, he came upon a man struggling with a sick horse by the side of the road. “What is the matter?” he asked. The man told him that he had planned to take his horse to market to trade for some cloth, but the horse fell ill and stopped walking. The young man offered his cloth in exchange for the horse. Delighted at this deal, the man exchanged his horse for the cloth, and headed back to his village. For the remainder of the night, the young man did his best to nurse the horse back to health. By the next morning, the animal was back to its old self. The young man had turned the cloth into a horse.

Riding his new steed, he continued his journey. He came across a man who was closing up his house and making preparations for a journey of his own. The man saw the horse and said, “I am setting out on a journey and need a horse. Would you trade it for my house and rice field?” The young man readily agreed, and took possession of the home. He was amazed that a horse had turned into an entire house and a field as well.

In the end, the man became rich with the house and field he obtained. Since he gained his wealth starting with just a piece of straw, the locals took to calling him “the Straw Millionaire.” 

THE HOME OF THE STRAW MILLIONAIRE LEGEND

Hase Temple is located in Sakurai City, Nara Prefecture. A peaceful area surrounded by mountains, Hase is featured frequently in the *Manyoshu*, Japan’s oldest collection of poetry, and Japan’s literary greats often traveled to this place. A statue of the Eleven-Faced Goddess of Mercy, the Bodhisattva Kannon, is enshrined here, and legend holds that this is where the young man from the story prayed to Kannon.

