

— Kasajizou (Straw-hat Statuettes) —

Once upon a time, there lived a kind old man and his wife in a snowy village. They were so poor that they had no money to even buy rice cakes to celebrate the coming New Year, so they wove some *kasa* straw hats, which the old man took to town to sell. However, he could not sell a single hat, and the old man dejectedly began to make his way home, carrying the unsold hats. On his way home, snow began to fall, and the old man picked up his pace, as everything was quickly turning white.

At the entrance to the old man's village stood six *jizou* Buddhist statues, their heads covered with snow. Out of compassion, the old man brushed the snow off their heads with his hand, but since the snow kept piling on top of them, he decided to offer them his hats. He went about placing a hat on each of the *jizou*, but when he came to the sixth, he had no hats left. Without a hat to offer, the old man took off the handcloth he was wearing on his head and wrapped it around the head of the last *jizou*, and continued to walk home in the snow without anything to cover his own head.

By the time the old man finally returned home, he was thoroughly soaked by the snow, and caused his wife to worry. However, when he told his wife about how he offered the straw hats and his handcloth to the *jizou*, she smiled and said, "That was a kind thing you did! We may not have rice cakes, but we need not worry."

That night, while the old man and his wife were asleep, there were thudding sounds of heavy objects being placed outside the door. Awakened by the thuds, the old couple cautiously opened the door to see what was going on. When they opened the door, they saw in front of them rice cakes, rice, vegetables, fish and many other items. "What a blessing! We can now welcome in the New Year, but who could have given us so many treats?" the old couple wondered. When they looked into the distance, they caught a glimpse of six *jizou* walking away in a row. They all wore straw hats, except for the last *jizou*, who wore a handcloth on his head.



— 笠地藏 —

昔々、雪深い村にお爺さんとお婆さんが住んでいました。心の優しいお爺さんとお婆さんでしたが、とても貧しく、もうすぐお正月だというのにお餅を買うお金もありませんでした。そこで2人はわらで笠を編み、お爺さんはその笠を町へ売りに出掛けましたが、全然売れませんでした。しかたなく、お爺さんは売れ残った笠を持って家に帰ることにしました。すると、帰る途中に雪が降ってきて、あっという間に辺りが真っ白になるほどでしたので、お爺さんは帰り道を急ぎました。

村の入り口まで来ました。そこには6体のお地藏様(菩薩の像)が立っています。お地藏様の頭にも雪が降り積もっていました。気の毒に思ったお爺さんはお地藏様の頭の雪を手で払い除けましたが、またすぐに積もり始めます。そこでお爺さんは売残りの笠をお地藏様に被せてあげることにしました。6体のお地藏様の頭に1つ1つ被せていると、笠は5つしかなく、後1つ足りません。お爺さんは自分が被っていた手拭いを最後のお地藏様に被せ、自分は雪の中を何も被らずに帰っていきました。

やっと家に着きました。お婆さんは、お爺さんが雪にひどく濡れて帰ってきたので驚きましたが、お爺さんが売れ残った笠と自分の手拭いをお地藏様に被せてきた話をしたところ「それはよいことをしました。餅が買えなくても何も困りませんよ」と笑顔で言いました。

その晩、お爺さんとお婆さんが眠っていると、家の外から「どすん、どすん」と何か重い物が置かれる音がします。お爺さんとお婆さんはその音に目を覚まし「なんだろう」と恐る恐る家の扉を開けてみると、そこには大きなお餅、米、野菜、魚などがたくさん置かれていました。「なんとありがたい。これでよいお正月が迎えられる。だが一体誰がこれを置いたのだろう」お爺さんとお婆さんが不思議に思って辺りを見ると、お地藏様が並んで去っていく姿が見えました。お地藏様は皆笠を被った姿でしたが、最後の1体は手拭いを被っていましたとき。