

From Midnight to Dawn: Horror Stories You Don't Want to Read About

Kenneth Cavalcanti (ed.)

INTEGRAL

ALL THOSE TERRIFYING HISTORIES

#4

From Midnight to Dawn: Horror Stories

You Don't Want to Read About

feat. Yamauba, Jorogumo, Yurei, Oiwa, Yuki-onna, Okiku,
Ogiwara, Okuyu, Ugetsu, Moju, Ubume, Hook-Man, The
Bride in the Trunk, Weird Boy, La Catrina, Der Rote Baron,
MRE Candy, Leiba Zibal, Grigori Rasputin and many other
scary characters

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Notes on the Edition

The Secret of the Yamauba. Old Japanese Tales about Cannibal Phantoms and Other Mysterious Spectres

In ancient Japan, samurai would play a game: *The Hyakumonogatari Kaidan*. They would sit in a circle of one hundred candles and every time someone told a story, one candle would be blown out. Once the final candle was blown out, the room would be plunged into darkness and a ghostly figure would appear.

The Yamamba look like harmless old women, but are actually terrifying mountain *yōkai* that consume human flesh. One of their oldest legends is from the *Konjaku Monogatari*:

Once upon a time, a Buddhist priest was caught out in a storm but luckily passed by a lonely hut. A kind old woman invited him inside, welcoming him with food and a warm fire. As welcoming as she was, she gave the priest a strange warning: "No matter what, do not look in the back room!". Unable to overcome his curiosity, the priest failed to heed the old woman's warning. As soon as she stepped out to gather more firewood, the priest peeped through a crack in the door. To his horror, he discovered the room filled with half-eaten corpses. The priest realized that the old woman was a Yamamba, luring unsuspecting travelers into her home only to shred them to pieces for her next meal. He fled from the hut as fast as he could and never looked back...

Yamauba, Yamamba or Yamanba are variations on the name of a *yōkai* found in Japanese folklore. *Yōkai* (or ghost, phantom, strange apparition) are a class of supernatural monsters, spirits, and demons in Japanese folklore. The word *yōkai* is made up of the kanji for "bewitching; attractive; calamity" and "spectre; apparition; mystery; suspicious". They can also be called *ayakashi*, *mononoke* or *mamono*.

Yōkai range diversely from the malevolent to the mischievous, or occasionally bring good fortune to those who encounter them. *Yōkai* often possess animal features (such as the *kappa*, which looks similar to a turtle, or the *tengu*, which has wings), yet others appear mostly human like kuchisake-onna. Some *yōkai* look like inanimate objects (such as *tsukumogami*), while others have no discernible shape. *Yōkai* usually have spiritual or supernatural abilities, with shapeshifting being the most common. *Yōkai* that shapeshift are called *bakemono* (or *obake*). Japanese folklorists and historians explain *yōkai* as personifications of "supernatural or unaccountable phenomena to their informants". In the Edo period, many artists, such as Toriyama Sekien, invented new *yōkai* by taking inspiration from folk tales or purely from their own imagination. Today, several such *yōkai* (e.g. Amikiri) are mistaken to originate in more traditional folklore

In the town of Masaeki, Nishimorokata District, Miyazaki Prefecture (now Ebino), a *yamahime* would wash her hair and sing in a lovely voice. Deep in the mountains of Shizuoka Prefecture, there's a tale that the "yamahime" would appear as a woman around twenty years of age and would have beautiful features, a small sleeve, and black hair, and that when a hunter encounters her and tries to shoot at it with a gun, she would repel the bullet with her hands. In Hokkaido, Shikoku and the southern parts of Kyushu, there is also a *yamajijii* (mountain old man), and the yamauba would also appear together with a *yamawaro* (mountain child), and here the yamauba would be called *yamahaha* (mountain mother) and the *yamajijii* a *yamachichi* (mountain father). In Iwata District, Shizuoka Prefecture, the *yamababa* that would come and rest at a certain house was a gentle woman that wore clothes made of a tree's bark. She borrowed a cauldron to boil some rice, but the cauldron would become full with just two go of rice. There wasn't anything unusual about it, but it was said that when she sat to the side of it, the floor would creak. In Hachijō-jima, a *deiji* or *decchi* would perform *kamikakushi* by making people walk around places that should not exist for an entire night, but if one becomes friendly with her, she would lend you lintel, among other things. Sometimes she would also nurse children who go missing for three days. It's said that there are splotches on her body and she has her breasts attached to her shoulders as if there was a *tasuki*

cord. In the Kagawa Prefecture, yamauba within rivers are called *kawajoro* (river lady) and whenever a dike is about to break due to a great amount of water, she would say in a loud weeping voice, "My house is going to be washed away".

In Kumakiri, Haruno, Shūchi District, Shizuoka Prefecture (now Hamamatsu), there are legends of a yamauba called *hocchopaa* and it would appear in mountain roads during the evening. Mysterious phenomena, such as the sounds of festivals and curses coming from the mountains, were considered to be because of this hocchopaa. In the Higashichikuma District, Nagano Prefecture, they are called *uba*, and the legends there tell of a *yōkai* with long hair and one eye, and from its name, it is thought to be a kind of yamauba.

In the tales, the ones that were attacked by *yamauba* were typically travelers and merchants, such as ox-drivers, horse-drivers, coopers, and notions keepers, who often walk along mountain paths and encounter people in the mountains, so they are thought to be the ones who had spread such tales.

Yamauba have been portrayed in two different ways. There were tales where men stocking ox with fish for delivery encountered yamauba at capes and got chased by them, such as the *Ushikata Yamauba* and the *Kuwazu Jobo*, as well as a tale where someone who was chased by the yamauba would climb a chain appearing from the skies in order to flee, and when the yamauba tried to make chase by climbing the chain too, she fell to her death into a field of buckwheat, called the "Tendo-san no Kin no Kusari". In these tales, the yamauba was a fearful monster trying to eat humans. On the other hand, there were tales such as the *Nukafuku Komefuku* (also called "Nukafuku Kurifukk"), where two sisters out gathering fruit met a yamauba who gave treasure to the kind older sister (who was tormented by her stepmother) and gave misfortune to the ill-mannered younger sister. There's also the "ubakawa" tale, where a yamauba would give a human good fortune. In Aichi Prefecture, there's a legend that a house possessed by a yamauba would quickly gain wealth and fortune, and some families have deified them as protective gods.

Depending on the text and translator, the Yamauba appears as a monstrous crone, "her unkempt hair long and golden white... her kimono filthy and tattered", with cannibalistic tendencies. In one tale a mother traveling to her village is forced to give birth in a mountain hut assisted by a seemingly kind old woman, only to discover, when it is too late, that the stranger is actually Yamauba, with plans to eat the helpless Kintarō. In another story the *yōkai* raises the orphan hero Kintarō, who goes on to become the famous warrior Sakata no Kintoki.

Yamauba is said to have a mouth at the top of her head, hidden under her hair. In one story it is related that her only weakness is a certain flower containing her soul.

In one Noh drama, translated as, *Yamauba, Dame of the Mountain*, Konparu Zenchiku states the following: "Yamauba is the fairy of the mountains, which have been under her care since the world began. She decks them with snow in winter, with blossoms in spring... She has grown very old. Wild white hair hangs down her shoulders; her face is very thin. There was a courtesan of the Capital who made a dance representing the wanderings of Yamauba. It had such success that people called this courtesan Yamauba though her real name was Hyakuma".

The play takes place one evening as Hyakuma is traveling to visit the Zenko Temple in Shinano, when she accepts the hospitality of a woman who turns out to be none other than the real Yamauba, herself.

Lafcadio Hearn (known also by the Japanese name Koizumi Yakumo, a writer, known especially for his collections of Japanese legends and ghost stories), writing primarily for a Western audience, tells a tale like this: "Then [they] saw the Yama-Uba,—the *Mountain Nurse*. Legend says she catches little children and nurses them for awhile, and then devours them. The Yama-Uba did not clutch at us, because her hands were occupied with a nice little boy, whom she was just going to eat. The child had been made wonderfully pretty to heighten the effect. The spectre, hovering in the air above a tomb at some distance... had no eyes; its long hair hung loose; its white robe floated light as smoke. I

thought of a statement in a composition by one of my pupils about ghosts: *Their greatest peculiarity is that they have no feet.* Then I jumped again, for the thing, quite soundlessly, but very swiftly, made through the air at me..."

Japanese ghosts are called *yurei*, which means "faint spirits". A *yurei* comes into existence when a human spirit is kept from peaceful rest. A violent death or a simple mistake during the funeral rites could be enough to transform the once human soul into a supernatural being. Jealousy, sorrow, hatred, love and other powerful emotions can become a bridge between the two worlds and bring the spirit back. The lost soul will then wander our realm until the emotional conflict is resolved.

Dark, disheveled hair hanging in long strands over a pristine white kimono. Hands dangling lifelessly from its wrists. The figure approaches you slowly, but you hear no footsteps. If you can now also spot two will-o'-the-wisps beside it, one thing is for sure: you're being haunted by a Japanese ghost.

As most ghost stories emerged in Edo-era Japan, *yurei* are usually described as wearing a white burial kimono from that time. Long, black hair is another trademark and connected to traditional funeral rites. Back in the day, women used to grow their hair very long to be able to pin it up into elaborate buns and chignons. For the funeral, it was let down, creating the typical ghost image we have today. Modern novels and movies still use this imagery, creating creepy characters such as Sadako Yamamura in *The Ring*. Standing in a white dress with long black hair falling over her face, Sadako has been terrifying audiences for decades.

Outstretched arms with dangling wrists are also classic features of *yurei*. Same goes for missing legs and feet. Again, the Edo period influenced this trend. When woodblock prints started depicting ghosts this way, kabuki theater enactments, noh plays and such followed. It didn't take long for them to become well-known characteristics of *yurei*.

Will-o'-the-wisps, or *hitodama*, are souls on their way to the other side. The glowing orbs are spotted around graveyards, funeral homes or the houses of recently deceased people. *Yurei* are usually in the company of a pair of these floating flames.

If you are brave enough to go on the hunt for a *yurei*, you could try a number of places. Himeji Castle is haunted by the famous Okiku, the ghost of an unlucky servant maid. Aokigahara, dubbed the Suicide Forest, is an infamous place where many people have ended their lives. The dark, dense forest at the foot of Mount Fuji is said to be haunted by numerous vengeful spirits. Several other places across Japan offer good hunting grounds for those of you hoping for a ghostly encounter. However, you better be sure to know your ghosts before you go.

The most common types of *yurei* are angry spirits who want to right a wrong done to them during their lifetime. Most are female ghosts who were abused or neglected by their partners.

If a woman died in childbirth or died leaving a young child behind, she might come back as an *ubume*. The strong love these women feel for their children will bring them back to our world to help in times of need. *Ubume* often bring gifts or sweets for comfort.

Vengeful and very powerful ghosts. Martyred in life, they return for revenge. One of the mightiest *yurei* to exist, they are strong enough to destroy entire crops and bring earthquakes and typhoons upon their enemies.

Sailors have a dangerous profession. They can be swallowed by the stormy waves of the sea on any given day. If they are, they might come back as a *funayurei*, or "ship ghost". The ghosts of deceased sailors will approach ships at sea and ask for a ladle. If provided with one, they will use it to scoop water into the ship until it sinks.

Another interesting kind of *yurei* is the *zashiki-warashi*. These mischievous child-ghosts usually dwell in family homes and play harmless pranks on the residents. Although nasty little creatures, having one in your home is said to bring good fortune.

For those of you less eager to lose your lives at the hands of a vengeful spirit, a story might be enough to keep you chilled on a hot summer night. The number of Japanese ghost stories is endless, and sure to include something for everyone's taste—from mothers coming back for their children

and dead lovers seeking vengeance from the grave or young maids trying to finish their last uncompleted task.

The following story—*Black Hair*— is a tale of love, betrayal and regret:

Once, there was a poor samurai who lived in Edo. He had a beautiful wife with long black hair who adored him, despite having to live in poverty. One day, he was summoned by the lord of a distant land to work in his service. The samurai eagerly accepted the lord's generous offer. However, when it was time to move, he abandoned his wife, choosing another woman instead of her. A woman younger and more beautiful than she was.

When he was released from his duties with the lord, the samurai returned to Edo. Longing for his old wife, he went to the house he once called home. A full moon hung over his head, shedding its light on his old dwelling. The gate was open, and so the samurai stepped inside. He shyly called his wife's name but received no answer. The entrance was dark and silent save for the soft light of the moon shining through the window. When he reached the bedroom, he found his wife sitting silently on the bed, her face covered by her long black hair.

"My lovely wife!" he said, rushing to her side. "I missed you dearly, please forgive me!"

Not a flicker of anger or resentment crossed her face. Instead, she gave him a soft smile and said, "My dear husband, I've been waiting for you to come back to me. Finally, we are together again."

Overcome with joy, the samurai locked his arms around her and swore never to leave her side again. As she returned his embrace, a happy tear rolled down the wife's face.

The next morning, a ray of sunlight fell through the window, waking the samurai from a deep sleep. His arms were still folded around his wife, and when he opened his eyes, he could see her dark hair shining like ebony. But, when he turned down his face to kiss her, he froze in disbelief. His wife's skin was gray and lifeless—rotten flesh where once rosy cheeks had been. In horror, he looked into her bloody eyes, picked out by ravenous crows and now crawling with maggots. A pungent smell filled his nose and, tossing away his wife's corpse, the samurai dashed out of the door, screaming.

Outside, a curious neighbor came to the distraught samurai's aid.

"What happened to the woman next door?!" he inquired, shivering from shock as much as disgust.

"Her?," the old man said with sadness in his eyes. "She was abandoned by her husband not too long ago. Mad with sorrow, she killed herself, but with no family to give her a funeral, her body still lays where she died."

The *Jorogumo* is a half-woman, half-spider *yokai* that can transform itself into a beautiful woman when hunting for unsuspecting men to devour! A young samurai was accosted in the street by an alluringly gorgeous woman. Although she was beautiful, the samurai saw through her disguise, realizing she was not a human but some kind of *yokai*. He immediately drew his sword and plunged it towards her, but only injuring the strange woman before she quickly retreated. The samurai followed the scarlet trail of spotted blood, all the way to an old, abandoned house. Inside, he found dozens of bodies bound in spider silk, and a giant Joro spider, dead from the injuries it had received.

Not all scary stories are made up—The Tale of Oiwa is based on a real event that took place in 17th century Edo. Oiwa was a stunningly beautiful young woman who was married to the samurai Iemon, a petty man who only loved her for her head-turning looks. Another woman, Oume, was madly in love with Iemon and out of jealous rage, she tricked Oiwa into using a cream that was laced with poison. It disfigured Oiwa's face, causing one of her eyes to droop and her hair to fall out, without her even noticing.

Disgusted with her new appearance, Iemon wished to divorce Oiwa and marry Oume. The despicable samurai hired his friend Takuetsu to rape Oiwa, so that he would have the grounds for divorce. Takuetsu was so shocked by Oiwa's appearance, he couldn't follow through with the orders. Instead, he told Oiwa of Iemon's plan, and showed Oiwa her own face in a mirror. Seeing her deformed face for the first time, Oiwa was so horrified that she stole Takuetsu's sword, killing herself. With her last breath, she cursed Iemon's name.

On the night of Iemon's remarriage to Oume, the ghost of the disfigured Oiwa appeared before him. A terrified and guilty Iemon quickly fled from Oiwa, but no matter how far he ran, he couldn't escape her hauntings. After that night, no matter where Iemon looked—even in the very lanterns he used to light his path—he would see Oiwa's face staring back at him...

The Yuki-onna is a kind of snow spirit yokai. She usually takes the life of humans who wander into her frozen lands, sometimes even falling in love. A young man in search of his fortune was passing through the snow-covered mountains, when he's caught in a sudden snowstorm and loses his way. Nearly frozen to death, he almost gives up hope when a strange woman, covered in frost and with a face as pale as snow, appeared before him—a Yuki-onna. Because he was still so young, the Yuki-onna took pity on him, and guided him to a warm cabin in the woods, saving his life. In exchange for his rescue, however, she made him promise never to tell anyone of their meeting.

Years later, the young man met and married a charming girl named Yuki, and they lived happily together for many years. But one day, the young man told his wife about how he was once saved by the mysterious Yuki-onna, breaking his promise. As he reveals this tale to his wife, her face grew pale and frost began to cover her body—his wife's true identity was the Yuki-onna. The promise broken, she vanished back into the winter's night.

Okiku's story is sure to keep you up all night, and if it doesn't, her ghost will! There was once a girl, Okiku, who lived in Himeji Castle as a servant of the samurai Aoyama. One of Okiku's tasks was to care for her master's collection of ten valuable plates. But one day, while Okiku was washing the plates, she realized one was missing. No matter how many times she counted, she always came up one short. Her master was so enraged that she had lost his plate that he threw her down a well.

Murdered so brutally, Okiku's soul could not rest. Every night, her ghost crawled out from the well to continue counting her master's plates. She would count to nine, then, upon realizing that the tenth plate was still gone, she would let out an ear-piercing shriek. Okiku's screams kept everyone in the castle up all night long for weeks on end, until a Buddhist priest finally appeased her.

This thousand-year-old legend is one of the first terrifying stories within the *kaidan*. Once upon a time, there was an impoverished samurai living in Kyoto with his wife. A wealthy lord from a distant land invited the samurai to be his vassal. Because it was such an honorable opportunity, he had no choice but to accept, leaving his wife to wait in poverty at home until he returned.

Years later, having dutifully served his lord, the samurai finally returned to Kyoto. Although his house was in disrepair, his wife was still there to happily welcome him home. Finally reunited, the two spent the entire night talking and laughing together before drifting off to sleep. When the samurai awoke, the warmth he had felt just the night before from having his arms wrapped around his loving wife was no longer there. Instead, he opened his eyes to see that he was only holding a cold skeleton, shrouded in long, black hair.

The samurai learned that his wife passed away from sadness the summer before, but her skeleton had remained in the house all the while, waiting faithfully for his return.

Along with Oiwa and Okiku, Otsuyu is one of the three female ghosts that make up the "Nihon san dai kaidan" or Japan's big three ghost stories.

One dark night, the samurai Ogiwara spotted an elegant woman carrying a peony lantern wandering through the streets of Edo. For Ogiwara, it was love at first sight. He invited the beautiful woman, Otsuyu, to accompany him home where they talked, laughed, and enjoyed each other's company. That night, Ogiwara's neighbor, hearing eerie laughter coming from Ogiwara's garden, peeked over the wall. He saw Ogiwara holding, not a woman, but a laughing skeleton! The next morning, Ogiwara's neighbor revealed to him what he had seen. Horrified, Ogiwara went seeking advice from the priest at a nearby temple.

To his shock, Ogiwara found Otsuyu's grave at the temple. He realized that the woman he had fallen in love just the night before had died long before they had even met. Now that Ogiwara knew the truth, Otsuyu's ghost no longer appeared before him.

Even after discovering the truth Ogiwara missed Otsuyu desperately. After some time, he could no longer bear his sadness and returned to the temple where Otsuyu lay buried. At the temple gates, Otsuyu appeared before him once more. Reaching out her hand, she asked Ogiwara to accompany her home. Without hesitation, Ogiwara took her hand, walking with her into the darkness.

After his final visit to the temple, Ogiwara vanished. The priest, concerned, opened Otsuyu's grave. Inside the coffin lay two bodies: Ogiwara and Otsuyu, together forever...

It's night; someone is alone in a dimly lit room. There's an eerie stillness, a creeping anxiety. Then, behind them, you notice a strange shape: a hunched-over figure, lurking in a corner. It is standing deathly still. The head is obscured by what looks like tendrils of jet-black hair. A chill runs down your spine as you suddenly realize the person isn't alone. There's *something* in the room with them, something that shouldn't be there, something anomalous, incongruous ... menacing.

Scenes like this have come to define Japanese horror or "J-horror." The genre's ability to evoke the supernatural has made it into a worldwide cultural phenomenon, popularized by the films of Takashi Miike and Hideo Nakata, and also by anime, manga and video games. However, while a great deal of attention has been given to modern J-horror, relatively little has been said about its precursors, especially the literary influences that so deeply inform its aesthetic, remarks Eugene Thacker, the author of *In The Dust Of This Planet* (Zero Books, 2011) and *Cosmic Pessimism* (Univocal, 2015).

An interesting quiz-legend is that of the so-called Slit-Mouthed Woman, who, as the name implies, is a woman whose mouth has been slit. The slit extends up to both ears and is a terrifying gash across her face. The story goes that her husband mutilated her with scissors. The legend has evolved to include a cautionary tale of what will happen if you meet: she'll ask you whether you think she's pretty, and your life depends upon your answer.

If you answer *No*, she'll kill you with scissors.

If you answer *Yes*, she'll reveal her slit mouth (she'll take off the face mask she's wearing) and ask whether you still think she's pretty. Your answer here will be a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation.

If you answer *Yes*, she'll give you the same slit as her own so "both of you are pretty."

If you answer *No* she'll kill you.

Another layer to the legend is a way to escape: answer ambiguously or ask a question back, which will confuse her and give you time to escape.