MYTHOLOGIS

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY AND YOKAI

Kami, spirits, and the yokai who haunt Japanese folklore

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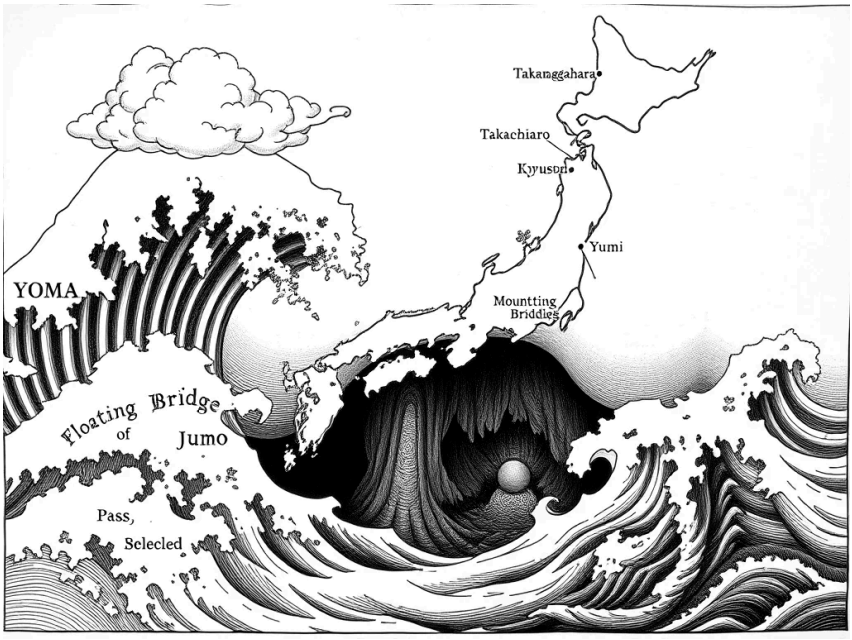
Takanggahara
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Floating Bridge
of
Jumo
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For those who still leave offerings at the roadside shrines.

INTRODUCTION

I am standing before a vermillion torii gate in Fushimi Inari, Kyoto, at dawn. The air smells of cedar and incense. Ten thousand more gates climb the mountain behind this one, each donated by a petitioner seeking favor from the fox-kami of rice and prosperity, and somewhere in the forest above, a crow calls. Perhaps a messenger, perhaps just a crow. The light is still grey. A salaryman in a dark suit bows twice, claps twice, bows again, and walks through. He does not look like he is performing folklore. He looks like a man asking for something real from something real. That is the first thing worth knowing about Japanese mythology: it never stopped. I came to this material the way I came to most things, by accident and then obsession. A decade in the French Navy teaches you to read encrypted traffic and to respect systems you do not fully understand. Mythology is both. It is a transmission from people who saw the world differently, encoded in stories that survive because they carried something true enough to keep copying. I read the way a signals officer reads: looking for the pattern under the noise, the structure that holds when you strip away the decoration. Japanese myth has that structure, but it also has something else. It has two faces, and they do not always agree. The first face is political. In 712 CE, a court scholar named Ō no Yasumaro compiled the Kojiki, the Record of Ancient Matters, at the command of Empress Genmei. Eight years later, in 720 CE, the Nihon Shoki, the Chronicles of Japan, followed. Both texts do the same work: they anchor the imperial line to the gods. They begin with the creation of the islands by the deities Izanagi and Izanami, trace the descent of the sun goddess Amaterasu, and end with her great-grandson's great-grandson sitting on the throne. It is myth as statecraft, cosmology as constitution. The message is clear: the emperor rules because the gods said

so, and here is the paperwork. The second face is older, wilder, and far less interested in thrones. It is the world of kami and yokai, of spirits in the rice field and demons at the crossroads, of mountains that watch you and rivers that remember. This is the mythology that lives in the Konjaku Monogatari, a sprawling 12th-century collection of Buddhist tales and ghost stories, and in the yokai catalogues painted by Toriyama Sekien in the Edo period. It is oral tradition written down, folk memory given shape. Where the Kojiki speaks in genealogies, this tradition speaks in warnings: do not walk alone at night, do not disrespect the fox, do not assume the world is yours alone. The tension between these two faces is not a flaw. It is the load-bearing beam. Japanese mythology is both imperial and wild, both written and whispered, both shrine and forest. The Kojiki and Nihon Shoki tell you who the gods are. The yokai tales tell you what it feels like to live in a world where the gods have not left. The cosmology begins with kami. The word is often translated as gods, but that flattens it. Kami are gods, yes, but also spirits, presences, forces. They live in mountains, in ancient trees, in the waterfall, in the sword your grandfather carried. They are not distant. They are not elsewhere. Shinto, the way of the kami, does not ask you to believe in another world. It asks you to notice this one. The torii gate I stood beneath that morning does not mark the entrance to sacred space. It marks the moment you realize the space was sacred all along. Buddhism arrived in Japan in the sixth century CE, carried by monks and sutras from Korea and China. It brought with it new hells, new heavens, new ways to think about suffering and release. The result was not conquest but fusion. Kami became local manifestations of buddhas. Buddhas became honored guests at Shinto shrines. The boundaries blurred until they were barely boundaries at all. By the Heian period, from 794 to 1185 CE, you could not separate them cleanly, and no one tried. A single temple might house both a Buddhist altar and a kami shrine, and the priests saw no contradiction. The world was large enough for both. The Heian period is when the mythology becomes literature. Courtiers in Kyoto wrote ghost stories to entertain each other, and those stories were copied, retold, and eventually compiled into collections like the Konjaku Monogatari. The yokai of this era are not cute. They are hungry, resentful, and often justified. A woman wronged becomes an onryo, a vengeful ghost. A monk who breaks his vows becomes a demon. The supernatural is not separate from the moral. It is the moral made visible. Then came the Edo period, from 1603 to 1868 CE, and with

it a kind of renaissance. Japan was unified, peaceful, and literate. Woodblock printing made books cheap. Artists like Toriyama Sekien began cataloguing yokai the way a naturalist catalogues beetles: with care, with humor, and with an eye for the absurd. His Gazu Hyakki Yagyo, the Illustrated Night Parade of One Hundred Demons, is part bestiary, part joke book. Some of the creatures in it are ancient. Some he invented. The line between scholarship and play was thin, and Sekien knew it. The yokai faded during the Meiji Restoration, when Japan modernized and the government tried to scrub the folklore clean. But they came back. In the 20th century, the manga artist Mizuki Shigeru revived them, drawing on Sekien's catalogues and his own childhood in rural Tottori. His yokai were strange, funny, sometimes sad. They were not monsters. They were neighbors. His work gave the tradition a second life, and that life is still growing. Today, yokai appear in anime, in video games, in films. They have gone global, and they have done it without losing their shape. I find it striking that Japanese mythology survived this journey. Many traditions did not. The gods of the Mediterranean became literature and stopped being gods. The kami did not. Walk into any Shinto shrine today and you will see offerings: rice, sake, coins. The rituals are not reenactments. They are continuous. The mythology is still operating system, not museum exhibit. This matters for two reasons. First, it gives us a rare view of how myth functions when it is still alive. The Kojiki is not scripture in the way the Bible is scripture. It is a record, a reference, a starting point. The real theology is in the practice: the bow, the clap, the salt scattered to purify. You cannot understand Japanese mythology by reading alone. You have to watch what people do. Second, the worldview embedded in Shinto is one we need. The idea that a river has presence, that a forest has dignity, that the non-human world is not a resource but a community of kami, is not superstition. It is ecology in ritual form. The Japanese have been thinking about how to live with the land for longer than most of us have been writing. The mythology is the record of that thinking. The yokai are part of the same system. They are not decorative. They are the boundary markers, the reminders that the world is not tame, that there are rules, that you are not alone. The kappa in the river teaches children not to swim in dangerous currents. The tsukumogami, the tool that comes alive after a hundred years, teaches you to respect what you own. The yokai are pedagogy. They are the old way of teaching people to pay attention. This book covers three layers. The first is

the high mythology: the creation of the islands, the descent of Amaterasu, the storm god Susanoo and his battle with the serpent Yamata no Orochi. These are the stories in the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, the ones that shaped the culture and the state. The second layer is the kami themselves: who they are, what they govern, how they are worshipped. The third is the yokai: the demons, ghosts, shapeshifters, and spirits that populate the night and the margin. I treat all three seriously, because the sources do. I have tried to write this the way I would explain it to a friend over coffee: clearly, without jargon, with the primary texts named and the uncertainties acknowledged. Where the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki disagree, I say so. Where a yokai has five different origin stories, I give you all five and let you choose. I am an editor, not a priest. My job is to hand you the material in a form you can use. The sources are listed as we go. You will meet Ō no Yasumaro, the compiler of the Kojiki. You will meet the anonymous monks who wrote the Konjaku Monogatari. You will meet Toriyama Sekien and his painted demons. You will meet Mizuki Shigeru, who brought them back. I have drawn on translations by Donald Philippi, Royall Tyler, and Michael Dylan Foster, and I cite them where it matters. If you want to go deeper, the trail is marked. One last thing. Japanese mythology does not explain itself the way Greek mythology does. There is no Hesiod writing a Theogony, no single text that lays out the system. You have to build the picture from fragments: a shrine here, a story there, a ritual that no one remembers the origin of but everyone still performs. It is a cryptographer's dream and a summarizer's nightmare. I have done my best to make it clear without making it simple. Now we begin. The first chapter opens in the void before the islands, when heaven and earth were not yet separated and the gods were just beginning to take shape. Close this introduction and step through the gate.


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CHAPTER 1

ISLANDS BORN FROM BRINE

Two gods stand on the Floating Bridge of Heaven. The structure beneath their feet is neither stone nor wood but something older, woven from cloud and starlight, suspended over an ocean that has no shore. Izanagi holds the Heavenly Jeweled Spear in both hands. His sister-wife Izanami steadies the shaft with him. The spear is coral and jade, its tip sharp enough to split the fabric between what is and what might be. They thrust it down into the brine below. The ocean is not blue. It is the color of iron before it oxidizes, grey-green and churning, lit from below by something that has not yet been named. The spear sinks through cloud, through the boundary where sky becomes sea, and into the water itself. Izanagi begins to stir. The motion is slow, deliberate, the way a cook stirs miso paste into hot water. Izanami's hands move with his. The ocean resists, then yields, then begins to spiral. When they lift the spear, brine clings to the tip. It drips. The first drop falls, and before it can rejoin the sea, it hardens. The second drop lands on the first. The third becomes stone. Within moments, an island stands where there was only water: Onogoro, the self-congealing isle, the first solid thing in a world that until now has been only motion and salt. The gods descend. The island is small. Volcanic rock, black and porous, still warm from its own creation. Steam rises where seawater laps against the new shore. There are no trees yet, no birds, no soil. Just stone. Izanagi plants the spear upright in the center of the island, and it becomes a pillar.

He looks at Izanami. She looks back. They are brother and sister, born in the seventh generation of gods who emerged after the separation of heaven and earth, and they have been given a task: to make the world solid, to give it shape, to populate it with kami. Mountains. Rivers. All the things that a world requires to stop being an idea. Become a place. They begin to circle the pillar. Izanagi moves to the left. Izanami moves to the right. When they meet on the far side, Izanami speaks first. "What a beautiful man," she says. Izanagi replies, "What a beautiful woman." They lie together on the bare rock, and Izanami gives birth nine months later to a child with no bones. It slides from her body like water, formless, and they place it in a reed boat and push it out to sea. The leech-child Hiruko drifts away, and the gods know they have done something wrong. They circle the pillar again. This time, Izanagi speaks first. --- The Kojiki, compiled in 712 CE at the command of Empress Genmei, opens not with gods but with a cosmological murmur. Heaven and earth exist, but they are not yet separated. Something moves in the space between them. The text calls this period the time when "the land was young and resembled floating oil, drifting like a jellyfish." Three gods appear spontaneously in the High Plain of Heaven: Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi, Takami-Musubi, and Kami-Musubi. They are invisible. They perform no actions. They simply are, and then they hide themselves. Two more gods follow: Umashi-Ashi-Kabi-Hiko-Ji and Ame-no-Tokotachi. These five are the Separate Heavenly Deities, and like the first three, they leave no myths, no children, no stories. They exist to mark the transition from chaos to order, from formlessness to form. After them come the seven generations of the Age of the Gods. The first two generations are also solitary deities. The remaining five are pairs, brother-sister couples, culminating in Izanagi-no-Mikoto and Izanami-no-Mikoto, whose names mean "he who invites" and "she who invites." The Nihon Shoki, completed in 720 CE, offers a slightly different genealogy. It lists fewer generations, compresses the timeline, and presents multiple variant accounts in parallel columns, as if the compilers understood that cosmology is not a single story but a chorus of voices. Both texts agree, however, on the central act: the gods are commanded by the earlier deities to "complete and solidify this drifting land." They are given the Ame-no-Nuboko, the Heavenly Jeweled Spear, and they descend to the Floating Bridge of Heaven. The act of stirring the ocean is not unique to Japan. The Hindu tradition preserves the story of the churning of the cosmic ocean, in which gods and demons twist

the serpent Vasuki around Mount Mandara to churn the sea and produce the elixir of immortality. The Norse Ginnungagap, the primordial void, is also a space of potential that must be acted upon before creation can begin. What distinguishes the Japanese account is its tone. There is no violence here, no cosmic battle. The gods do not wrestle chaos into submission. They stir it, coax it, and it solidifies willingly. The ocean wants to become land. Onogoro is the first island, but it is not the last. After the correction of the marriage ritual, when Izanagi speaks before Izanami and the proper hierarchy is restored, the couple begins to give birth in earnest. The Kojiki lists the islands in order: Awaji, Iyo (modern Shikoku), Oki, Tsukushi (Kyushu), Iki, Tsushima, Sado, and finally Yamato, the heartland of Japan, the place from which the imperial line will later claim descent. These eight islands, the Oyashima, form the core of the Japanese archipelago. The Nihon Shoki adds smaller islands, atolls, and reefs, but the sequence remains the same. The births are not metaphorical. The islands emerge from Izanami's body the way children emerge from a mother. The text does not shy from the physicality of this. The gods are not abstract principles. They are embodied, gendered, capable of pleasure and pain. After the islands come the kami of natural phenomena: the god of the wind, the god of trees, the god of mountains, the god of plains, the goddess of fog. Each birth is a naming, and each naming brings something new into existence. The world thickens with presence. The marriage ritual itself deserves attention. The pillar at the center of Onogoro becomes the axis around which the cosmos organizes itself. Circling it is not merely a symbolic act but a generative one. The direction matters. The words matter. When Izanami speaks first, the result is Hiruko, the leech-child, and the Awashima, the island of foam, both of which are cast away and do not count among the proper children of the gods. The Kojiki is explicit about the cause: "It is not proper that the woman speak first." The Nihon Shoki softens this slightly, attributing the failure to a breach of ritual order rather than gender hierarchy, but the outcome is the same. The second attempt succeeds because the gods follow the correct sequence. Scholars have debated the origins of this ritual. Some see in it a memory of actual marriage rites practiced in the Yayoi period, between 300 BCE and 300 CE, when wet-rice agriculture was spreading across the islands and communities were formalizing kinship structures. Others, including Matsumura Takeo, argue that the pillar is a later addition, inserted by the compilers of the Kojiki to align indigenous myth with

Chinese cosmological models, in which the axis mundi is a common motif. The text itself offers no explanation. The pillar is simply there, and the gods know what to do with it. --- Izanami crouches on the black rock of Onogoro, her hands pressed to her belly. She has just given birth to the god of waterfalls, and the labor was easier this time, quicker, the body slipping free with a sound like water over stone. Izanagi kneels beside her. He holds a bowl of seawater, still warm from the sun, and she drinks. The island is no longer bare. Grass has begun to grow, thin green blades pushing up through cracks in the volcanic rock. A pine tree stands near the pillar, though neither god remembers planting it. The air smells of salt and sap. Gulls circle overhead, the first birds, born from the goddess of the sea three days earlier. Izanami looks at her husband. "How many more?" she asks. Izanagi does not answer immediately. He is counting in his head. Islands, winds, rivers, mountains. They have made 14 islands so far, and 35 gods, and there are more to come. The fire god is still inside her, waiting. He can feel it, a heat that was not there before, a weight that makes her wince when she moves. "Not many," he says, which is a lie, and they both know it. She stands. Her legs are steady. She walks to the edge of the island and looks out at the ocean, which is no longer grey-green but blue, the color of distance. More islands are visible now, scattered across the water like stones thrown by a child. Awaji to the south, Oki to the west. She can see smoke rising from Tsukushi, where a volcano is being born. The world is filling in, gaining detail, becoming the kind of place where people might one day live. Izanagi joins her at the edge. He takes her hand. They stand together in silence, watching the light change on the water, and for a moment, the work does not feel like work. It feels like something else. A gift, perhaps. Or a debt. Then the pain begins again, low in her belly, and she knows the fire god is coming. --- The birth of Kagutsuchi, the god of fire, is the hinge on which the entire mythology turns. The Kojiki describes it in clinical detail: "When she gave birth to the fire god Kagutsuchi, her genitals were burned, and she fell ill and lay down." The Nihon Shoki is more circumspect but no less final. Izanami dies. Her body, which has given birth to islands and seas and winds and mountains, cannot withstand the heat of fire. She is buried on Mount Hiba, on the border between Izumo Province and Hōki Province, in what is now Shimane Prefecture. Izanagi's grief is immediate and volcanic. He draws his sword, the ten-span blade called Ame-no-Ohabari, and beheads Kagutsuchi. The blood that sprays from the fire god's

neck becomes eight more deities: gods of metal, gods of thunder, gods of volcanic stone. The sword itself, stained with divine blood, will later be enshrined at Isonokami Shrine in Nara Prefecture, one of the oldest Shinto sites in Japan. Even Kagutsuchi's severed body parts become gods. His head becomes the deity of the mountain peaks. His hands and feet become the gods of the valleys. Nothing in this cosmology is wasted. Every death generates new life. But Izanami does not return. Her body lies on Mount Hiba, and Izanagi, overcome with longing, decides to follow her. This descent into Yomi, the land of the dead, will be the subject of the next chapter, but its seeds are planted here, in the moment when fire consumes the mother of the world. The Kojiki preserves a poem that Izanagi speaks over her grave: "Oh, my beloved wife, that I should have to give you in exchange for a single child." The word for "beloved" is *natsukashiki*, which carries connotations of longing, of something precious and irretrievable. The geography of early Shinto is encoded in these myths. Mount Hiba, where Izanami is buried, is a real mountain. Izumo Province, where much of the early action takes place, is the western edge of Honshu, facing the Sea of Japan. It is a landscape of mist and basalt cliffs, of rivers that run fast and cold from the mountains to the sea. The Kii Peninsula, to the south, is where Kumano Shrine will later be established, one of the great pilgrimage sites of medieval Japan. Ise, on the eastern coast, will become the home of the Grand Shrine dedicated to Amaterasu, the sun goddess, who has not yet been born but whose arrival is already implicit in the structure of the myth. The Kojiki and Nihon Shoki are not neutral recorders of tradition. They are political documents, compiled at a moment when the Yamato court was consolidating power and needed a mythology to justify its rule. The emphasis on Yamato as the final and most important island is not accidental. The genealogies that connect Izanagi and Izanami to the imperial line are carefully constructed to place the emperor at the apex of a divine hierarchy that stretches back to the creation of the world. But beneath the political scaffolding, something older persists. The islands are real. The mountains are real. The gods are not abstractions but presences, tied to specific places, specific rocks and rivers and forests. The marriage ritual at the pillar has parallels in other Indo-European mythologies. Georges Dumézil, in his comparative work on the tripartite structure of Indo-European religion, notes that many creation myths involve a primal couple whose union generates the cosmos. The Norse Ymir, the Greek Gaia and Ouranos, the Vedic Purusha:

all are bodies from which the world is made. What distinguishes the Japanese account is the emphasis on correction. The gods make a mistake. They acknowledge it. They try again. There is no shame in this, no divine infallibility. The cosmos is not perfect on the first attempt. It requires adjustment, refinement, a willingness to start over when the ritual goes wrong. The leech-child Hiruko is one of the strangest figures in the mythology. Cast out to sea in a reed boat, he vanishes from the Kojiki after a single mention. But he does not vanish from popular tradition. By the medieval period, Hiruko has been conflated with Ebisu, one of the Seven Lucky Gods, a deity of fishermen and commerce, often depicted holding a sea bream and a fishing rod. The transformation is striking. The failed child, the one who was supposed to disappear, becomes a god of prosperity. The reed boat drifts, and something survives. The Kojiki preserves one more detail about the birth of the islands. After the main sequence is complete, Izanagi and Izanami give birth to six more islands, smaller ones, scattered around the periphery of the Oyashima. These are not named individually in most versions, but the Nihon Shoki lists them: the islands of the Inland Sea, the atolls off the coast of Kyushu, the rocky outcroppings that serve as navigational markers for sailors. The world is not just the big islands. It is also the small ones, the ones that barely break the surface of the water, the ones that matter only to the people who live near them. The gods do not forget these places. They make them too. --- The sun is setting over Onogoro. The sky is red, the color of Kagutsuchi's blood, and the sea reflects it back, turning the water into a mirror of fire. Izanami lies on the ground near the pillar, her body still. Izanagi sits beside her, his hands empty. The ten-span sword lies a few meters away, still wet with divine blood, and around it, eight new gods are standing, newborn, silent, unsure of what to do with themselves. Izanami's eyes are open. She is looking at the sky, at the red light fading to purple, and she is thinking about the children she has not yet named. The god of rice paddies. The goddess of mist. The spirit of the mountain streams. They are inside her still, waiting, but the fire has burned too deep, and she knows they will not be born from her body. Someone else will have to finish the work. Izanagi leans down and closes her eyes. His hands are shaking. He has never touched a dead thing before, and he is surprised by how quickly the warmth leaves. Her skin is already cool, already beginning to feel like stone. He lifts her body and begins to walk. The other gods part to let him pass. He walks north, toward the mountains,

toward the place where the border between Izumo and Hōki will one day be drawn. The sun sets. The stars come out. By the time he reaches Mount Hiba, it is full dark, and the only light is the faint glow of the fire god's blood still clinging to his sword. He buries her on the summit. No marker, no ceremony. Just a shallow grave in the volcanic soil, covered with stones to keep the animals away. When he is finished, he stands and looks back toward the ocean. He can see Onogoro from here, a dark shape against the darker water, and beyond it, the other islands, scattered like the drops of brine that fell from the tip of the spear. The world is not finished. But the first part is done. The islands are solid. The gods are born. And somewhere below, in the land of the dead, Izanami is beginning her descent.


SCIENOKE

CHAPTER 2

THE DESCENT TO YOMI

The darkness in Yomi has weight. It presses against the skin like water, cold and thick, and it smells of earth that has never seen sun. Izanagi stands at the threshold between the land of the living and the land of the dead, one hand braced against the stone lintel of the gate, the other clutching the comb he has pulled from his hair. The comb is boxwood, pale yellow, its teeth carved fine as needles. He breaks off the end tooth and holds it to the small flame he has coaxed from a piece of tinder carried in his robe. The tooth catches. The flame is tiny, barely enough to light his own face, but in Yomi even a spark is an intrusion. He calls her name. "Izanami." The

echo comes back wrong, flattened by the weight of the dark. He takes a step forward. The ground beneath his feet is not stone but something softer, yielding, like clay that has been worked but not fired. The air tastes of copper and rot. He holds the burning comb-tooth higher and calls again. A shape moves in the darkness ahead. It is tall, hunched, draped in something that might be cloth or might be shadow. It turns toward him. The light catches the edge of a face. Izanami. But not Izanami. The flesh of her cheeks has gone grey-green, mottled like meat left too long in summer heat. Her eyes are open but filmed over, the whites turned yellow. Her hair, which was black and glossy when she descended, hangs in matted clumps. Her mouth moves. She is speaking, but the words come slowly, as if her tongue has forgotten how to shape them. "You should not have come here." Izanagi takes another step. The light from the comb-tooth flickers, and in that flicker he sees more. Her arms are bare. The skin has split in places, and beneath it, something pale and segmented

writhes. Maggots. Hundreds of them, threading through the meat of her forearms, her shoulders, the hollow of her throat. On her chest, crouched like sentries, are eight figures. They are not human. Their limbs are too long, their heads too large, and their eyes glow faintly in the dark, the color of embers in a dying fire. Thunder-gods. Born from her decay, feeding on it, bound to her corpse the way flies are bound to carrion. She takes a step toward him. The thunder-gods shift, their heads turning in unison to watch. Izanagi's hand tightens on the comb. The flame is already half-consumed, eating its way down the tooth toward his fingers. He has perhaps a minute of light left. Perhaps less. "I came to bring you back," he says. Izanami stops. Her mouth opens wider, and the sound that comes out is not laughter but something close to it, wet and rasping. "You cannot bring back what has already eaten the food of Yomi."

The Kojiki, in its ninth section, recounts Izanagi's descent with the matter-of-fact tone of a clerk recording a transaction. Izanagi,

grieving for his wife, follows her to Yomi-no-Kuni, the land of the dead. The text does not describe the journey itself, only the arrival. He reaches the gate of Yomi and calls to her from outside. Izanami comes to the door but does not open it. She speaks to him from the other side, and her first words are a refusal: "Why did you not come sooner? I have already eaten the food of Yomi. I am ashamed that you should see me now, but let me discuss this with the gods of Yomi. Do not look upon me." The prohibition is immediate and absolute. Izanagi agrees. He waits outside the gate while Izanami retreats into the darkness to consult with the deities of the underworld. The wait stretches. The Kojiki does not specify how long, but the implication is that it is long enough for doubt to take root. Izanagi grows impatient. He breaks off the left end-tooth of the comb he wears in the knot of his hair, lights it as a torch, and enters Yomi to search for her. What he finds is described in language that is clinical and unsparing. The Kojiki states that maggots swarmed in Izanami's

body, and that eight thunder-deities had been born from her rotting flesh: Great-Thunder in her head, Fire-Thunder in her chest, Black-Thunder in her belly, Split-Thunder in her genitals, Young-Thunder in her left hand, Earth-Thunder in her right hand, Sounding-Thunder in her left foot, and Reclining-Thunder in her right foot. The text does not flinch from the physicality of decay. The body of the goddess who gave birth to the islands has become a host for new and terrible gods. Izanagi flees. The Kojiki is explicit: "He was frightened and ran away." There is no heroism here, no attempt to fight or bargain. He sees what his wife has become and he runs. Izanami, shamed and enraged, sends the hags of Yomi, the Yomotsu-shikome, to pursue him. These are not ghosts but furies, female demons who inhabit the underworld and serve as its enforcers. Izanagi throws down his headdress, and it becomes a cluster of grapes. The hags stop to devour them. He throws down his comb, and it becomes a stand of bamboo shoots. Again the hags stop to eat.