[Sanmai no Ofuda (The Three Charms and Mountain Witch)](http://japanfolklore.blogspot.com/2008/08/sanmai-no-ofuda-three-charms-and.html)



Once upon a time, there was a young apprentice who lived in a temple in the mountains. He was a mischievous boy and enjoyed playing pranks. He didn't train very hard and would often take naps or cause trouble for the head priest by chasing rabbits around.



One autumn day, when the leaves were changing color, the young apprentice saw that the chestnut trees in the mountains were beginning to bear fruit. The chestnuts looked very delicious.

"Master, I want to eat the chestnuts on that mountain over there. Can I go and pick some?"

"No, people say there's a mountain witch living there. You'll be eaten."

"Oh, that can't really be true. I'm sure someone just made that up. Pease let me go."

The priest shook his head at the boy who wouldn't do as he was told and said, "OK, it might do a mischievous young lad like you some good to be scared for once. You can go, but if you meet the witch, use these." The priest handed the boy three lucky paper charms. The apprentice took them and immediately scurried off toward the mountain.

When he reached the mountain the boy found many ripe chestnuts, just as he had thought. He became so absorbed in gathering them that he completely forgot about the time. He didn't notice the sun going down, and before he knew it, it had become pitch dark. "It feels a bit spooky when it's this dark. What will I do if the mountain witch really came out?" Just as he was thinking this, he suddenly heard a voice behind him.



"Well, well. Hello there, young boy."

Still thinking about the witch, the apprentice jumped with fright, but when he turned round he saw a gentle-looking old woman. "Have you come to pick chestnuts? Why don't you come to my house? I'll cook them for you to eat."

The boy was very hungry and happily followed the old woman home. He ate chestnuts until he was so full that he grew sleepy and dozed off. He woke up in the middle of the night, not knowing how long he'd been asleep, and found that the old woman was not there. He heard a strange noise coming from the next room. Puzzled, he peeped into the room and saw the frightful-looking mountain witch sharpening a knife.

"Aaaaah!" he screamed, horrified. The witch looked up and glared at him.

"You saw me, didn't you, boy? That's right, I'm a mountain witch. And now I'm going to eat you." As she said this, the witch tried to grab the youth.

Panicking, he said, "Uh . . . OK. But first let me go to the toilet. I'm going to wet myself if I don't go."

"Well, all right, I suppose. But I'm going to tie you up with rope and go with you so you can't escape."

The boy entered the toilet tied up with rope. The witch stood guard outside the door.

"Aren't you finished yet?"

"Just a little more. Wait a minute!" answered the boy, but he knew he couldn't keep this up forever. "What shall I do? Ah! Of course! I can use the paper charm the priest gave me to escape!" he thought. The boy attached one of the charms to the wall of the toilet and asked it to help him: "Oh lucky charm, please pretend to be me and answer the witch."

He snuck out of the toilet window and fled as fast as he could toward the temple.

"Boy! Haven't you finished? You're very slow!" the witch continued to shout, thinking the boy was still inside. "Just a little more. Wait a minute!" answered the charm in the boy's voice. The witch began to get suspicious since every time she asked the boy to hurry up, the same answer would come back. Finally, she couldn't wait any longer and peered inside. The boy was gone. "That rascal! He cheated me! He'll regret this!" fumed the angry witch and began to chase after the boy.

"Woah, that was close," said the boy to himself as he ran, calming down a little. Then he looked back.

"Stop where you are, boy! I'm going to eat you now!" The witch looked even more scary now that she was angry and was chasing him very fast.

"Oh no! If she catches me I'm dead! Lucky charm, please make a river appear behind me." As he made this wish to the second charm, suddenly a big river appeared, and the witch was swallowed up in its current.



"The witch will surely drown in that," sighed the boy in relief. But as soon as he thought this, the witch used her magic powers to swallow all the water in the river and started chasing him again.

"Oh no! This time make me a sea of fire," asked the boy to his last paper charm. Suddenly, a sea of fire appeared behind him and enveloped the witch. But the witch blew out all the water she had just swallowed, putting out the fire, and once again ran after him.

"I'm finished! She's going to catch me now," thought the boy as he ran for his life. But he scampered quickly enough to reach the temple just before the witch. "Master, please help me! The mountain witch is chasing me. She's right outside!"

"Ah, so you met her, did you? Have you learned your lesson?"

The boy thought about what had happened and asked the priest to forgive him. "I'm sorry, Master. From now on I'll be better behaved." Then he hurriedly hid inside a large jar.

No sooner had the boy hidden himself than the witch kicked down the temple door and barged inside.

"Hey, priest! Where's the boy who ran in here? Bring him out at once!"



The priest pretended not to know anything: "What? What are you talking about? I've been sitting here eating rice cakes. I haven't seen any boy." This just made the witch even angrier.

"You can pretend you don't know. That makes no difference to me, since I'll eat you instead if you won't give me the boy," said the witch, now very agitated.

"All right, but first let's see which one of us is better at turning ourselves into different shapes," challenged the priest. "If you win, you can do as you like. Now, can you change into whatever I say?"

"Don't make me laugh," replied the witch with great confidence. "I can change myself into any form. Go ahead and say anything you like."

The priest saw how arrogant the witch was and said, "Can you make yourself as tall as the ceiling?" No sooner had he said this than the witch grew to the height of the ceiling with no trouble at all. "Mmm. But I bet you can't make yourself as tall as that mountain over there," continued the priest.

"Piece of cake," replied the witch and made herself as big as the mountain.

The priest appeared to be impressed. "That's really something. You can make yourself bigger, but you can't make yourself as small as a bean, can you?" he said.

The witch became piqued. "That's easy. Just watch." Now she shrank to a size no bigger than the end of the priest's finger.

"Very impressive! So now it's my turn," said the priest. He then suddenly picked up the bean-sized witch and stuffed her in the rice cake he had been toasting and gulped it down in one mouthful.



From then on, the witch was never seen again in the mountains, and the mischievous young apprentice became a very good boy, listening attentively to everything the priest said.