

## The Mountain of Stone and Fire

Long ago there was a goddess who lived on a mountain, her home was humble but she loved it. She saw that the mountain plants and flowers grew, that the hot springs and streams flowed and that the animals flourished and were able to hide from hunters.

But given she was the mountain goddess and walked upon the earth, she did not travel to heaven as other gods and goddesses did. And she was most curious about heaven, and what she would be able to see if she was able to get there.

"The sun goddess Amaterasu must be able to see so much of the land from where she travels in the sky," she said to herself. "I wonder if I could get so high and see so much."

Then she had an idea. She gathered the earth and stones around her and pulled the mountain up around her feet. Higher and higher, the land cracking as it rose up and up and up. She was pleased to see that as she rose the mountain higher, more of the land could be seen. But when she looked above, she could still see the sky far above her which meant heaven was still far away.

She pulled the mountain further up, higher and higher until it was above the clouds. Heaven was nearer, but still far away.

From her place in the heavens, the sun goddess Amaterasu saw the rapidly growing mountain and it filled her with shock and alarm. Her own parents and the creators of the world, Izanagi and Izanami, had decreed that the gods and goddesses had to stay in their own domain. She called her son, the Lord of Flame, to her side.

"Go and strike her down, my son," she said. "Protect the secrets of heaven from those not worthy to see them."

With fire swirling around him, the Lord of Fire descended from heaven like a falling star and alighted upon the mountain. The mountain goddess turned, stunned to see this vision of light and fire that had come down from heaven.

She reached out to him, but the Lord of Fire cast a torrent of flames at her. The mountain goddess blocked them quickly with a wall of stones. The two then fought, the Lord of Fire attacking her with his flames, the mountain goddess protecting herself with walls of stone.

But then the goddess tripped and the Lord of Fire sprang forward, towering over her with his flaming sword ready to strike the killing blow. But the mountain goddess lay there, not proud, or even fearful.

He lowered his sword. "I cannot kill you," he said. He then offered her his hand and helped her stand. "My mother is protective of her domain, she sent me because she thought you would attack heaven and take its secrets for yourself."

"Oh no!" said the mountain goddess. "I only wanted to see heaven for myself, to know what it was like, to look down upon the whole land and see all its wonders."

"I see no harm in that, but I do not think my mother will agree," said the Lord of Fire. "But if you like, I can tell you what I know of heaven."

"Please do," said the mountain goddess.

And so the two sat there on the mountain while the Lord of Fire told the mountain goddess about heaven. He spoke of the mighty river, where upon the bridge his grandfather Izanagi had stood and created the world. He spoke of the High Plains of Heaven, the rice fields that his mother had carefully cultivated and the great weaving house where she wove clothing for the gods with her handmaidens.

"That sounds beautiful," she said when he had finished, but then she looked sad. "I suppose you must return now."

The Lord of Fire also looked sad. "I suppose I must." He looked up at the sky, to where he would have to descend.

"But I do not think I could return now that I have met you. I love you, and wish for you to be my wife."

The mountain goddess took his hands and smiled. "Then we shall make our home here."

And so the Lord of Fire and the mountain goddess lived in the mountain. Deep inside was a great forge where they wrought weapons and mighty artefacts for the gods, the fire exploding from its heart up to its very peak. And that fire has never dimmed.