

The Legend of Kanajo

A lone pine tree near Nemachi hot spring stands as a chilling reminder of a tale of forbidden love. Long ago, a Buddhist priest from Tanegashima Island lived in the village of Yumugi. Kanajo, the daughter of a samurai, lived in Honmura village. The two were in love, and Kanajo went to see the priest regularly, walking a treacherous route that took nearly three hours each way. Kanajo's older brother found out about the romance and warned her to stop seeing the priest so as not to tarnish the family's reputation. At the time, a monk was forbidden to have a wife. Despite her brother's admonitions, however, Kanajo got pregnant and gave birth. Her angry brother then lay in wait for Kanajo in the valley of Hoshigamine, and gruesomely decapitated her there. Kanajo's corpse and her child plunged to the bottom of the ravine, while her head was left dangling from the lone pine tree, her hair tangled in the branches. It is said that the child kept crying out for its mother, and that ever since then, the sound of a crying baby can be heard echoing in the mountains. Neither Kanajo's corpse nor her child were ever found.

Every year on September 1 of the lunar calendar, the anniversary of the tragic incident, Kanajo's descendants offer sashimi, red bean rice, salt, and white rice for the repose of her spirit, believing that misfortune will otherwise befall the family.

The site is now a thick forest. Traveling from Honmura to Yumugi takes around 50 minutes even by car, a journey that testifies to the hardships Kanajo endured to be with her beloved.