



UNIVERSITY of HAWAI'I PRESS

Mabuigumi

Author(s): MEDORUMA SHUN and Kyle Ikeda

Source: *Mānoa*, summer 2011, Vol. 23, No. 1, Living Spirit: LITERATURE AND RESURGENCE IN OKINAWA (summer 2011), pp. 112-134

Published by: University of Hawai'i Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41479345>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of Hawai'i Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Mānoa*

Mabuigumi

Uta was sitting in the open veranda, gazing at the brilliance of her dew-drenched garden, growing brighter in the morning sun, when the calisthenics music from the radio in the community center nearby began to play. She sneered *humph* and sipped her tea through a chunk of raw sugar in her mouth. For generations the elderly had started the day with a cup of tea before getting to work. But in early April the Senior Citizens' and the Children's Associations had begun encouraging morning calisthenics in front of the community center. They claimed the sessions were good for such things as bringing together children and seniors, and for an "Early to Bed, Early to Rise" campaign. A month after the sessions began, members of the Senior Citizens' Association had begun wearing exercise outfits totally inappropriate for their age, and merrily making their way to calisthenics. Naturally, they urged Uta to join them. No matter how hard they tried, however, she curtly responded, "I won't go," and continued with her morning tea.

At the beginning, the music for calisthenics was blasted through a large loudspeaker on the roof of the community center. Uta had stormed into the center's office to complain about the excessive noise. Kawakami, the chubby, middle-aged president of the Children's Association, had just smiled at her from under his baseball cap and paid no attention to her complaint. So Uta had gone home, retrieved a reaping sickle from under the eaves of her house, and returned to the community center. She then barged through the children exercising in the public square, and started climbing the telephone pole to cut the wire to the loudspeaker. In a panic, Kawakami jumped up quickly and turned the speaker off. Thereafter, the music played from a radio, not through a loudspeaker. Although the noise continued to disrupt Uta's peace in the morning, she compromised out of regard for the children and left the matter at that.

Only children had showed up in the beginning. About a week later, however, five or six older folks started coming. By the end of the second week, children and seniors alike filled the public square. One of the former teachers who had personally encouraged the elderly to participate was Ōshiro, a retired principal on the board of education. On the way home from calisthenics one day, he collapsed in front of his house and passed on to *gusō*, the

Okinawan afterlife. *That's what happens when you don't listen to people*, Uta thought to herself as she stood at the edge of her garden watching the line of cars crawl down the narrow hamlet road toward the crematorium.

She expected Ōshiro's death to bring an end to the calisthenics, and for a while there was a decline in attendance. It wasn't long, however, before even more people were coming, and the sessions were thriving. She could understand why her fellow seniors would want to be around young children, who reminded them of their grandchildren. Like her, half of the elderly participants lived alone and therefore enjoyed the company. Nevertheless, she continued her boycott.

The music for the calisthenics radio program was just changing to the second set when Uta's neighbor, Fumi, came rushing through the entrance in the stone fence surrounding Uta's home. Going around an old pile of stones that was the *hinpun*—a barrier to keep out bad spirits—Fumi cried out, "Big Sister!" and grabbed Uta.

Surprised to see Fumi on the verge of tears, Uta asked her, "What in the world's the matter, this early in the morning?!"

"Big Sister, please, I need you to come to my house."

"Okay, okay. Wait until I at least have another cup of tea," Uta replied, and began pouring.

Fumi grabbed Uta's hand and began dragging her off the veranda. "What are you doing? I haven't even put on my slippers yet," Uta protested.

As Uta scrambled to put on her yellow rubber sandals, Fumi held her harder by the wrist and started off down the street, kicking up white sand as she went. Fumi's house was less than twenty meters away, and they arrived before they could exchange another word. Fumi went first through the front door, pulling Uta behind her and into the inner part of the house.

"Grandma!" In front of the closed door to the back room, Kentarō and Tomoko sat looking anxiously at Uta. The brother and sister were in elementary school, in third and first grade, and Uta loved them as if they were her own grandchildren. When she saw the looks on their faces, Uta became serious. Fumi let go then and slowly opened the door.

The sliding shutters were closed and a fluorescent light dimly illuminated the space. In the middle of the four-and-a-half-mat room lay Kōtarō, snoring lightly, a terry-cloth blanket over his abdomen.

"Did he have a stroke?"

Fumi silently shook her head. Uta sat down next to Kōtarō's head and placed her hand on his forehead. Temperature and pulse were normal. Although there was a little sweat on his brow, the expression on his sleeping face was peaceful, and nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

Fumi sat silently, her eyes filling with tears. Uta was becoming annoyed. As she looked at Kōtarō's peacefully sleeping face, Uta silently cursed

Fumi, thinking how helpless she was for someone in her forties with two children, and especially considering how proud she was that her ancestors had been members of the Shuri privileged class. Kōtarō's hair was thinning noticeably for someone in his early fifties, yet the ruddy complexion of his face was good health itself.

Just yesterday, Kōtarō had brought Uta some freshly caught *gurukun* and spoken with her for close to an hour. Kōtarō, a farmer-fisherman, had lost his parents in the war when he was an infant, and been raised by his grandmother, Kamadā. Living next door, Uta had always treated him with affection. She had no children, and her husband, Seiei, had disappeared during the war. For all those years she had lived alone, and she thought of Kōtarō as her own child. Kōtarō, sensing this, thought dearly of Uta and returned her affection.

Uta rubbed his cheek as she looked him over, thinking to herself, *He's lost his mabui again, hasn't he?* As a toddler, Kōtarō had often lost his spirit. He would be startled or overwhelmed with fright by the slightest thing. And when his spirit fled his body, he would lapse into a kind of listlessness. This would happen five or six times a year. It might happen when he had fallen from a tree or nearly drowned in the ocean. Either Kamadā or Uta would have to perform a *mabuigumi* to return his spirit to his body. After he reached adulthood, it happened less frequently. But even so, every two or three years Kōtarō would lose his *mabui* and Uta would be called.

"It looks like Kōtarō's lost his *mabui* again," she said to Fumi while lightly shaking her head. *So don't make such a big fuss out of nothing*, she thought. Right when she was about to say "I wonder what caused it," she realized that something black was sticking out of Kōtarō's nostrils. At first she thought it might be nose hair, but then it jerked in all of a sudden. Next, it poked out from between his lips about three centimeters, making small probing movements toward his cheek and jaw, as if searching for something. As Uta looked on in astonishment, two eyes the shape of matchstick heads jutted out of Kōtarō's mouth. A purplish-gray claw wrenched open his mouth, and a large *āman*, a hermit crab, about the size of an adult's fist, popped out. Startled by the sight, Uta reacted without thinking. Trembling, she grabbed a nearby fly swatter and swung it with all her might. The *āman* moved like lightning. By the time the swatter snapped against Kōtarō's face, it had already dived back into his mouth. He stopped snoring, and the skin around his nose and jaw turned red in a mesh-net pattern.

"Big Sister!" Fumi called out to her.

When their eyes met, Fumi bowed her face to the floor and wept bitterly. Uta let her cry for about five minutes and then asked her to describe what had happened.

Kōtarō was rather fond of liquor and playing the *sanshin*. After warming up with a few drinks during supper, he would frequently go down to the seashore by himself to play his *sanshin* and sing Okinawan folk songs.

Because he was the *utasā*, the singer, for the Eisā Bon Festival and the village dance that took place once every four years, many of the villagers looked forward to hearing his sweet voice floating into their hamlet through the *mokumaō* grove.

Kōtarō had gone down to the shore to sing the night before. When Fumi heard the music stop, sometime after ten o'clock, she went out to the beach to get him. As usual he had fallen into a comfortable, inebriated slumber. Fumi had hoisted her slender husband—who weighed only half the typical man—on her back and carried him home. She had put him to bed in the back room, which they used as a bedroom, and although she had slept next to him, it wasn't until the following morning that she realized something was wrong.

When she woke up, she had glanced over at him and had seen a black lump perched on his mouth. Still drowsy, she couldn't quite make out what it was, even though sunlight was coming through the slits in the sliding shutters. She had sat up, rubbed the sleep from her eyes, and taken a good look. Two tiny eyes, the shape of matchstick heads, had met her gaze. Fumi had frozen for a moment, then leapt backward in alarm. She kept backing away, her bottom sliding on the floor, until she bumped into a pillar. She had clung to it, risen to her feet, and rushed to open the shutters. Exposed to a shaft of light sparkling through the dusty air, the *āman* had disappeared into Kōtarō's mouth. But before long, it had appeared again, waving its feelers.

"This is terrible!" she cried. Fumi had gingerly reached out for the light cord dangling directly over her husband and pulled. The *āman* had held its two pincers over its eyes as if to shade them, and looked at Fumi. Afraid it might run loose, she had quietly moved along the wall to the door and then dashed from the room, straight to Uta's house.

While Uta was listening to Fumi struggle through tears to tell the story, she watched the *āman*. Its feelers were constantly moving, and its claw hovered over Kōtarō's lower jaw. The creature seemed to be some kind of hermit crab, but was two or three times larger than the common *āman* that could be seen dragging their spiral-shaped African turban shells through *adan* thickets and fields near the seashore. The common *āman* were no bigger than a child's fist, and their thick claws were just strong enough to snap a pair of disposable chopsticks. Surely, she reasoned, with such a large body, this one must have had a hard time finding a big enough shell. Even so, to force itself into a person's mouth seemed rather brazen.

"Come now, you're an adult. Don't cry. You've got two kids, you have to be strong," Uta said, taking a flannel handkerchief out of her pocket and handing it to Fumi. "Thing is, Kōtarō has lost his *mabui*. Since he couldn't protect himself, that *āman* was able to climb into his mouth. Don't worry, though. When his *mabui* returns to his body, the *āman* will leave right away. It won't be long before I bring his *mabui* back, so just hang in there." As she said this, Uta began to remove Kōtarō's T-shirt. Fumi nervously

helped her while keeping one eye on the *āman* as it scurried back into Kōtarō's mouth.

The *mabuigumi* ritual, which had long been passed down in the village, wasn't very complicated. First, the priestess performing the *mabuigumi* goes to the place where the *mabui* fell out, taking with her a piece of clothing the person had been wearing when it happened. After offering prayers and placing three small stones in the clothing, the priestess brings the bundle back home, offers another prayer, and puts the afflicted person's clothing back on. Then, the "lost" *mabui* would return to its original body, and the exhausted and dazed person would regain his or her vitality.

Uta removed Kōtarō's pale-blue T-shirt, which reeked of sweat and was stained with fish blood and soil. She carefully folded it, put it under her arm, and stood up. She confirmed with Fumi where Kōtarō had been sleeping on the beach and left the room. Sitting by the entrance, hugging their knees to their chests, were Kentarō and Tomoko. Uta patted the two on the head and gave them a reassuring smile, then urged Fumi to make their breakfast and send them off to school.

Uta went straight home after leaving Fumi's house. In her kitchen she gathered up the items she would use as an offering—*sake*, rice, and a tray—and bundled them up in a square cloth. She boiled more water for tea, and placed some as an offering on the family Buddhist altar. She then lit and placed incense on the altar, put her hands together in prayer, and drank two cups of tea. After feeding the chickens and the goat, she grabbed her cloth-wrapped bundle and headed for the beach.

The narrow road between the *fukugi* trees and the stone fence was covered with white sand. It led to a grove of *mokumaō* growing along the seashore for about a hundred meters and acting as tidewater control. Between the tree trunks she could see an ocean so blue that it looked as if it had just been born that morning. When Uta reached the grove, with its abundance of noisily chirring cicadas, she turned towards the sea. Stepping out from under the shade of the trees, she brought her hands together. She walked on the dazzling white sand until she came to an *adan* thicket just beyond the end of the *mokumaō* grove. In front of the thicket grew a lone *hamasūki* tree, its branches graceful as those of an old pine tree. Its swaying leaves were shaped like rabbit ears and felt like velvet. The shade of the *hamasūki* was just right for an afternoon nap, and Kōtarō frequently sat under the tree and played his *sanshin*.

As Uta approached, she saw a solitary figure sitting in the shade, wearing a pale-blue T-shirt. As she stared at his profile she thought, *It just might be him!* When she got closer, she saw that indeed it was Kōtarō's *mabui*. She sat down next to it, sighed deeply, and let the breeze blow in through her collar.

Though the ritual was called *mabuigumi*, it was usually nothing more than a few words of reassurance to ease someone's anxiety. In most cases,

the words were spoken as a charm to restore a child's vigor after he or she was startled or tired out. Every once in a while, however, older persons lost or became detached from their *mabui*. This time, she suspected a serious detachment had occurred, considering that an *āman* had entered Kōtarō's body. She was nervous. It had been a while since she had last seen a *mabui*, and besides, this one belonged to Kōtarō.

Kōtarō's *mabui* was gazing at the ocean with a blank expression. His face was suntanned from working out at sea and in the field, and his close-trimmed hair and stubby beard were streaked with gray. He had drawn his knees to his chest, and his arms hugged his legs. Unlike Kōtarō, who typically wore a perpetual smile and had a pleasant demeanor, the *mabui* looked sad.

Uta gazed out over the ocean with Kōtarō for a while. She didn't see anything unusual, just the dazzling white of sunlight on the sea.

"Hey, Kōtarō. Fumi, Kentarō, and Tomoko are all worried about you. Hurry up and come home already."

Though she called out to Kōtarō this way, he didn't respond. She spread out the square cloth she had prepared, put a small helping of rice on the tray, and filled the *sake* cup with *awamori*. With a disposable lighter, she lit some sticks of incense, stood them upright in the sand, and sat erect. Bringing her hands together and staring intently at Kōtarō's profile, Uta intoned a prayer in a faint, murmuring voice.

*Channēru riyū no ari shika wa wakaranu shiga, Kōtarō no mabui no ochite yā
ninju no shiwashiteoru kuto, mura no kamigami nkai taisuru uyamē, ugwansu
ni taisuru achikēde susō no aibiraba, sugu ni nōsu kuto, datin, Kōtarō no mabui
wo mudushite kimi sōre...*

I don't know why, but Kōtarō has lost his *mabui*, and his entire family is worried. If there are oversights in our reverence for the village gods or treatment of the ancestors, we'll correct them immediately, so please return Kōtarō's *mabui* to his body...

Repeating these words over and over again, Uta prayed to the gods of the *utaki* and the ancestral spirits everywhere watching over the village. When she finished, she hung the T-shirt over the shoulder of Kōtarō's *mabui* and tried to get him to stand. But the *mabui* refused to budge. When she reached out, all she felt was a faint sensation in her fingertips, as if she were touching water. Uta had performed *mabuigumi* hundreds of times, and until now all of the *mabui* had obediently listened and, for the most part, done as she asked. She was bewildered; Kōtarō's *mabui* made no attempt to move, and just remained as before, gazing at the sea.

"Is there something out in the ocean?" She squinted and looked again, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. For an hour or so, Uta continued trying to persuade the *mabui* to return to Kōtarō's body. When nothing

changed, she became exhausted and plopped down onto the sand. As she studied the side of his face, Kōtarō's *mabui* faded in and out with the sunlight filtering through the leaves. From behind her, someone called out, "Big Sister!" Standing there were Fumi and the ward chief, Shinzato Fumiaki.

"How's the *mabuigumi* going?" Fumi asked uneasily.

Look, *his mabui is sitting right there in front of you*, Uta was about to respond. Then, realizing that the two of them couldn't see it, she just shook her head in silence.

"It's not going well, is it?"

"No need to get alarmed. Kōtarō's *mabui* seems to have strayed from his body, but it'll come back soon," Uta responded, irritated with Fumi. She then looked at Ward Chief Shinzato.

Shinzato was in his second term in office. Three years ago, he had become the chief of the ward, right after retiring from his position at town hall. When he had gotten into mischief as a child, Uta had often given him a licking. To this day, he had a hard time looking her in the eye.

"Big Sister Uta, it's pretty serious, isn't it?" Shinzato crouched down to be in the shade of the tree and wiped his face with the towel hanging around his neck. "I just had a look at Kōtarō, and well, what in the world is that thing?"

"An *āman*."

"That much I can tell. What's an *āman* doing in Kōtarō's mouth?"

"How am I supposed to know? All I know is that when Elder Sister Guji was *nigami* high priestess long ago, she once said that bad things can happen to you if you lose your *mabui* and your body grows weak. That's what's happening to Kōtarō, and why I was just praying for his *mabui* to return to his body."

Shinzato muttered an ambiguous *hummmh* as Uta turned her back to him and Fumi. In a low voice she again urged Kōtarō's *mabui* to hurry back to his body. Even though Fumi had come, nothing changed. Kōtarō's *mabui* didn't even seem to be aware that the three of them were standing right there. It continued staring off into the ocean, making no sign of moving. Unable to do anything for the moment, Uta folded up the T-shirt and tidied up the liquor and the tray. "I'll try again later," she said, indicating to Fumi and Shinzato that they should leave with her for the time being.

After returning to Kōtarō's house, Uta and Shinzato went to the back room and sat on either side of Kōtarō. Fumi brought out breakfast, but with the *āman* popping in and out of Kōtarō's mouth, right before her eyes, Uta had lost her appetite and could barely touch the food. Shinzato, however, had already eaten three extra helpings of rice. As he picked up a piece of broiled fish with his chopsticks, Shinzato carelessly held it out near Kōtarō's face. Quick as lightning, the *āman* snatched the fish with its pincers and drew back into Kōtarō's mouth.

“You careless fool, what do you think you’re doing?!” Uta whacked Shinzato on the head with the fly swatter, and he apologized profusely. The room was unbearably hot, even with the electric fan on. Seeing that Kōtarō was incapacitated for the foreseeable future, Uta understood why Fumi needed to make arrangements with the ward chief for assistance. Deep down, however, she was disappointed that Fumi hadn’t waited until she had finished the *mabuigumi*. After Fumi had cleaned up the dishes, she returned to the back room. Shinzato then brought up the subject of his assistance.

He began by insisting that the incident be kept a secret, within a very small circle, and that it absolutely had to be kept from people in other villages. Since the ailment was not something doctors handled anyway, they would also keep it a secret from the Ōshiro Clinic, and work to help Uta succeed with the *mabuigumi*. Shinzato said that he would take responsibility for looking after Fumi and the kids until Kōtarō recovered. Fumi expressed her gratitude repeatedly, bowing over and over. “When things get rough, we stand together,” Shinzato said with a sheepish grin. Though Uta was feeling repulsed by Shinzato, she went along with his suggestion.

Shinzato had decided to hold a meeting later in the evening, so he departed to round up the top three officers of the Senior Citizens’ Association, the president of the Men’s Association, and other prominent members of the community. Uta consoled Fumi for a while, then she also left and returned home. Though Kōtarō’s lost *mabui* weighed heavily on her mind, Uta lived alone and had several things she had to take care of every day, such as working in the field and looking after the goat.

In the afternoon, after doing fieldwork and having lunch, she rested for about two hours before cutting grass for the goat. It was a little past five o’clock by the time she was able to go back out to the beach. Kōtarō’s *mabui* was still sitting in the same place and in the same position as before. As the sunlight softened, a faint glow enveloped the sea. A white moon floated beside a towering thundercloud on the horizon.

“Hurry up and come home.” Uta repeated these words once more in a soft voice. She even placed herself directly in front of the *mabui*, bringing her hands together in prayer. Still, it made no reply. She gave a sigh of despair. It felt as if the Kōtarō who had always called out to her upon seeing her from afar, and had treated her like his own mother, had somehow forgotten who she was. For half an hour or so, until Fumi came to get her, Uta sat silently and intently gazing at Kōtarō’s profile and the ocean. She scooped up the sand and let it spill from the palms of her prayerful hands.

When Uta arrived at the community center, the presidents of the Senior Citizens’ Association, the Men’s Association, the Young Adults’ Association, and the Women’s Association were waiting for her in the tatami-floored room next to the office. It was apparent that Ward Chief Shinzato and the

men had already opened several cans of beer. As they stuffed their mouths with the rice balls and sashimi that had been set out, the men were talking about the village council election to be held in three months. There was a rumor that Furugen Sōsuke, president of the Men's Association, was going to be a candidate. At the sight of Furugen tapping Kinjō Hiroshi—the president of the Young Adults' Association—on the shoulder and offering him a beer, Uta grew irritated. The atmosphere of the meeting seemed inappropriate considering Kōtarō's condition.

"Furugen, you counting your votes already?" she asked sarcastically. As she sat down, an awkward smile floated across Furugen's face, confirming his guilt.

"Not at all, Big Sister, not at all." He was about to pour soy sauce into a small plate for Uta, but she brushed his hand aside and poured it herself. Matayoshi Tsuru, the president of the Women's Association, held out a pair of chopsticks for Uta as she bowed to her.

When Shinzato saw Uta put her chopsticks down after placing two pieces of sashimi in her mouth, he addressed the group. Shinzato didn't waste any time getting to the point. Apparently, everyone had gone to see Kōtarō before coming to the community center. While Uta was surprised at how well informed everyone was, she also had a bad feeling.

"In any case, what I'm most concerned about is how this matter might affect the hotel construction plans by the company from mainland Japan," Shinzato said.

Uta was shocked. This was rather different from what he had told her earlier.

"After all, we're dealing with Yamato people, from mainland Japan, you know. And if they hear rumors about an *āman* entering someone's body—why, this would really alarm them! It might even spook them into canceling the plans for the hotel. And with other areas in Okinawa trying to attract hotel construction and investment, if word gets out about Kōtarō, then rumors will start spreading about our village. People will get the impression that strange things will crawl into your body if you stay here overnight. And as you all know, Yamato people get nervous about things like this, not to mention that most of them are prejudiced against Okinawa. So as you see, our bid for the hotel that we worked so hard for could go to ruin. And that's why, in this case, I feel we absolutely have to keep Kōtarō's condition a secret."

"Is that all the sashimi we have?" demanded Shimabukuro Genpachi, president of the Senior Citizens' Association, hardly waiting for Shinzato to end his speech.

"Okay, okay, I'll bring some more out right now," Kadena Miyoko—who worked in the community center office—replied in a cheerful voice. She promptly brought out a tray of sashimi and a half-liter bottle of *awamori*. Although she was only twenty-five years old, Miyoko had already

been divorced twice and had three children. She had a carefree personality, though, and had always assisted Uta enthusiastically with religious rites and rituals. Consequently, Uta was rather fond of her. After Miyoko had filled the women's cups with tea and returned to the office, Shinzato again asked for everyone's cooperation.

"On the other hand, Ward Chief..." said Kinjō, president of the Young Adults' Association, as he raised his hand. Apparently not expecting any resistance in the matter, Shinzato looked displeased. "On the contrary," Kinjō continued, "don't you think it might generate good publicity if word gets out there's a person here with an *āman* stuck in his mouth? I'm betting just about everyone would want to see something as strange as that. If it hits the newspapers and makes the TV news, my guess is people will be coming to our village in droves."

Shinzato looked like he was about to say something to get things back under control, when Uta shouted at Kinjō, "You rotten little brat! What're you trying to do—turn Kōtarō into a freak show?"

Kinjō half rose to his feet, ready to bolt away from Uta, who, from the fury in her face, looked as if she was about to leap over the table to get her hands on him.

"Big Sister Uta, please try to calm down. This youngster doesn't know what he's saying." In a flurry of confusion, Shinzato and Furugen did their best to restrain her.

"For the president of the Young Adults' Association, you sure don't understand how people feel. You can't just go spouting off as you please." Uta struck the table with her hand and sat down. Fumi, sitting next to her, hung her head, her shoulders trembling. Tsuru, the Women's Association president, placed her hand on Fumi's shoulder and glared at the men.

After watching both Shinzato and Furugen apologize, Genpachi finished off his cup of *awamori* and barked, "What is this? Giving in to the women like that. How pathetic!"

"You, *keep quiet already!*" roared Uta, causing Genpachi to fall silent immediately.

Despite the quarrel, in the end everyone agreed to go along with Shinzato's suggestion. Until Uta finished the *mabuigumi* and the *āman* left Kōtarō's body, everyone was supposed to keep the situation a strict secret, not discuss it with anyone outside of the group, help Fumi with the kids, and for the time being stick to the story that Kōtarō had gone to a relative's house in Naha to take care of a family matter.

While the men continued to drink and party at the community center, Uta left and walked Fumi home. Then she went back to the seashore alone. By the light of the white, budlike moon, she had no trouble seeing her way without a flashlight. She listened to the sound of the waves breaking on shore, and felt the velvety sand give way beneath her feet as she walked to

the *hamasūki* tree. In the faint blue shadows, Kōtarō's *mabui* was staring at the sea. Uta sat down next to it and looked out at the ocean, watching the moonlight flicker on the surface of the water.

In her youth, she and the other young people used to gather on the beach in the evenings and stay out late moon-gazing, drinking liquor, and singing to the accompaniment of the *sanshin*. They would sing songs to each other while everyone listened closely, passing on the best lyrics. Those who sang with feeling and sentiment were swooned over by everyone. It was during the many evenings spent in this fashion that she and Seiei had become acquainted. It was also the way Kōtarō's parents, Omito and Yūkichi, had first fallen in love.

Uta thought she could hear a *sanshin* accompanied by young voices singing from somewhere on the beach, and she felt an ache in the depths of her heart. She couldn't recall how long it had been since she had last come out to the shore at night by herself. Seiei, Omito, and Yūkichi had all died during the war, leaving her the only one to grow old. As she sat on the beach with these thoughts, she was overcome by a sudden loneliness, and called out to Kōtarō's *mabui*. "What is it that you're gazing at?"

There was no reply. As the moon drifted, concealing itself behind a cloud, and the moonlight grew fainter, Kōtarō's *mabui* seemed to fade.

"Kōtarō, let's go home," she said, and rose to her feet. Though the faint *mabui* continued to stare at the ocean, trembling as if in the gentle breeze, the figure appeared to tilt its head to one side, ever so slightly. The movement may have only been due to the flickering shadows of the swaying leaves, but Uta felt as if she had somehow, even just briefly, gotten through to Kōtarō's *mabui*. She put her hands together in prayer and left the beach.

From then on, Uta performed the *mabuigumi* in the shade of the *hamasūki* four times a day: in the morning right after her tea, around noon after finishing her work in the field, at dusk, and in the evening. Nevertheless, Kōtarō's *mabui* continued to sit motionless and stare out to sea. Uta grew more and more impatient, and by the third or fourth day, with a growing sense of helplessness and frustration, she was having trouble eating properly. She wasn't the only one growing thin. The departure of Kōtarō's *mabui* had left him listless; to make matters worse, his body was withering away because the *āman* was intercepting and consuming the food and the liquids meant for him. While Kōtarō withered, the *āman* grew larger day by day. It had grown so big that now it was nearly as large as the coconut crabs of Miyako and Yaeyama Islands. Whenever it popped out of Kōtarō's mouth, it practically dislocated his jaw. Everyone avoided talking about the *āman* in front of Fumi, but the mere thought of what it might be doing inside of Kōtarō's body made them all shudder.

On the evening of the fifth day, all those who were at the previous meeting gathered again in the back room of Fumi's house and sat around Kōtarō,

discussing what to do next. In the middle of the conversation, the *āman* pried open Kōtarō's mouth and lumbered out, revealing its entire body. It got a pincer caught in the tatami mat and tried to free itself, scraping at his quilt with one of its legs, which was over fifteen centimeters long. Kōtarō was lying on his side, and his head fell from the pillow. The *āman* made a grating sound as it bent its grayish-purple leg, and Kōtarō's body twitched ever so slightly right before everyone's dumbfounded eyes. Fumi screamed, Uta lifted up the fly swatter, and the *āman* instantly disappeared into Kōtarō's mouth. Furugen and Kinjō nervously put Kōtarō's head back on the pillow, and for a short while everyone was silent.

"All things considered, wouldn't it be best if we took him to a hospital and had the *āman* surgically removed?" Furugen suggested while trying to gauge Uta's feelings.

"But..." Shinzato stopped in mid-sentence, realizing that next to him Fumi was crying. Everyone was thoroughly exhausted. Genpachi had been gladly watching over Kōtarō during the day, as he was treated to meals and liquor. But finding two other people to keep watch all through the night was proving more and more difficult, especially because the others had their own work to attend to.

While Uta had been busy with the *mabuigumi*, the men had been trying ways to get the *āman* out of Kōtarō's mouth. Using dried squid and cheese as bait, they once had succeeded in hooking a pincer with wire; but the *āman* had snapped through it as if it were nothing. If this had been an ordinary *āman*, they could easily have forced it out by making an opening at the bottom of its shell and poking it with a nail or smoking it out with a lighter. But of course lighting a fire under Kōtarō's rear was out of the question.

Everyone was concerned about Kōtarō and Tomoko, too. After getting married, it had taken more than ten years before Fumi and Kōtarō had any children. By the time Kōtarō was born, Kōtarō was forty-two years old. This was one reason why Kōtarō was such a loving father and took his two kids down to the beach nearly every day at dusk to play with them. Over the last week, it had been unbearably painful to hear the children repeatedly ask, "When's Daddy gonna get better?" Everyone also felt guilty about making the children lie about their father being in Naha.

On top of that, there was another thing to worry about. A little past noon the day before, two young men with cameras were seen loitering around the village. Apparently one of them was a Yamato mainlander, while the other was supposedly from Naha. When the two visited Ward Chief Shinzato, they at first said they were taking photographs of each village's historical ruins and local events for a news story. By the end of the conversation, however, Shinzato could tell what they were really after—information about Kōtarō and his condition. "It seems that recently somebody has been confined to his bed with some peculiar ailment...", one of them had said.

After that, Shinzato made the two men stand out in the hot sun without

inviting them in for tea, and he evaded their question by mentioning that not too long ago a man in the neighboring section of the village had been confined to his bed with a swollen leg. Soon afterwards, the two tried to get more information from senior citizens at the croquet field and children playing in front of the farmers' co-op. At dusk, they even approached Uta, who was busy with her prayers out on the beach. She ignored them, but inwardly she was not so calm. With forced smiles, they went away after she faced the camera and flashed them a fierce look that said "Stop!"

When the issue of who had leaked the story had come up the previous evening, the first person everyone suspected was Kinjō. During the ensuing argument, Kinjō became so upset he said he had had enough and threatened to withdraw from the undertaking. The group managed to calm him down and prevent things from going that far, but the tension had not completely dissipated. In the oppressive silence that enveloped the group, Uta felt an overwhelming helplessness. *If only I had more strength and was able to succeed with the mabuigumi, then Kōtarō and everyone who was helping would not have to go through this misery*, she thought. Having completely lost her confidence, she even began to wonder if Kōtarō should have been taken to the hospital from the beginning.

"Let's give it one more day, shall we?" Genpachi suggested, exhaling the smell of liquor with his breath. "In any case, this isn't the kind of thing that will be healed just by going to the hospital, and there's not much else we can do about it anymore. So I say we ask Uta to try the *mabuigumi* for one more day, all right?"

In appreciation of the encouragement, Uta bowed her head.

The following day, Uta didn't bother going to work in the fields. Instead, she spent the entire day on the *mabuigumi*. Usually, sitting in the broiling sun on the hot sand for more than an hour was too much for her, and she would have to return home frequently to recuperate. This day, however, she poured her heart and soul into her prayers, remaining at Kōtarō's side even though Shinzato and Fumi pleaded with her to stop because she was putting her health in danger. Yet, despite her efforts, Kōtarō's *mabui* remained the same, staring at the ocean and showing no sign of change. When the stars began to come out in the cloudless sky, Uta returned to the back room where Kōtarō's body lay. Fumi and Shinzato supported her on either side. Because the sliding shutters had been closed all day, the room smelled sour and was intensely hot. Inside were Tsuru, Furugen, and Kinjō, all sweating profusely. Sitting near the head of the unconscious Kōtarō was an unusually sober Genpachi. Seeing everyone there, Uta got down on her hands and knees and put her head to the floor in apology for the ineffectiveness of her prayers.

"Come now, Big Sister, please lift up your head."

"That's right, Grandma, you didn't do anything wrong."

In a fluster, Tsuru and Shinzato made Uta sit up.

"We know you gave it your all," Genpachi said, with Furugen and Kinjō nodding in agreement.

"Thank you so much," Fumi said, as she knelt down and put her head to the floor. Uta was moved to tears, with a mixed feeling of vexation and unbearable guilt. Kōtarō and Fumi were good, honest people who had actively participated in the village's religious events, always helping her with her duties as priestess. Why did this couple have to meet with such misfortune? For the first time in her life, Uta resented the gods of the *utaki*, who were supposed to protect the village. Meanwhile, Kōtarō's round bulging cheeks and throat stirred restlessly, and two shiny black feelers poked out from his nostrils, assessing the situation. After the feelers drew back in, periscope-like eyestalks about the size of pencils popped out from between his lips. By gently poking Kōtarō's cheek with the fly swatter, Genpachi made the *āman* pull its eyestalks back in. Having kept it company every day, he had become quite used to dealing with it. After confirming that they would contact Ōshiro at the medical clinic the next day, everyone moved into the main living room for dinner and *sake*.

Uta could hardly bring herself to touch the *nakami* soup. She went over to Kentarō and Tomoko, who had been watching TV in the next room, and patted them on the head. In her heart she begged for their forgiveness. Telling Fumi she was going home to bed, Uta left. Worrying about her, Tsuru accompanied her to her house. After Tsuru left, Uta turned and went straight to the beach.

The brightness of the moon was all but drowning out the light of the stars, and the seashore looked as if it were shrouded in a blue haze. Uta removed her rubber slippers, and carrying one in each hand she slowly made her way to the *hamasūki*, treading on sand as soft and warm as the body of a living creature. The flickering shadows of the leaves caused Kōtarō's form to fade in and out, so every now and then Uta could see right through it. Sitting down in the sand, she stared silently at the ocean along with Kōtarō's *mabui*. Sea fireflies glistened at the water's edge. Soon it would be June. Before long it would be the rainy season, and she was worried about what would happen to Kōtarō's *mabui* when the rain came. Even if the *āman* was surgically removed at a hospital, it didn't necessarily mean that his *mabui* would return to his body. Tomorrow and thereafter, she planned to continue as usual with the *mabuigumi*.

Before she knew it, Uta was stretched out in the sand sound asleep. She was awakened by sand pelting her face and what sounded like a deep sigh. She lifted her head to look and noticed that the *mabui* was no longer sitting in the shade of the *hamasūki*. In a panic, she rose to her feet. About five meters away, she saw Kōtarō standing with his back to her. At his feet, something flat and black was tossing sand into the air. Uta drew closer, peered around Kōtarō, and saw a sea turtle over a meter in length. Its shell

was covered with sand and countless barnacles. As it dug its hole, the turtle breathed hoarsely, lifting its head every so often. With a solemn expression, Kōtarō watched.

“So this is what you were waiting for.” The instant she uttered these words, Uta realized this was the exact spot where she had seen a sea turtle lay its eggs on the night Omīto died. Knees trembling, she sat down on her heels, turned towards the turtle, and brought her hands together in prayer.

It had been close to a month after the attacks by American warplanes had burned down most of the houses in the area. The damage to Uta’s village was especially heavy because it was close to a Japanese naval base. Those living in other villages had the luxury of being able to return from the safety of the mountains to their undamaged homes and retrieve things necessary for daily survival, such as food, tools, and other supplies. Uta’s village, however, had been completely destroyed during the initial air raids. People from her village had to not only escape from the naval bombardment that followed, but also struggle to secure food. They had fled with only the clothes on their backs. In the evenings, Uta and others would leave their cave in the mountains and return to their village to dig up potatoes from the fields, or scavenge *miso* and salt from abandoned houses in neighboring villages. This was how they managed to stave off starvation.

On that fateful night, Uta and Omīto went to a field by the ocean. Most of the fields had already been completely dug up, with only barren, infertile ones remaining. In a field sandwiched between an *adan* thicket and a sea cliff, Uta was digging up a small potato about the size of her thumb when Omīto tugged at her sleeve. “Soldiers are coming.”

The two drew back carefully and hid in the *adan* thicket. They could see the silhouettes of three men walking along in the cover of the cliff, crouched down, their rifles in hand. The women could clearly hear the soldiers breathing and their steel helmets brushing against the tree leaves. With their chins buried in the sand, Uta and Omīto held their breath as they watched the Japanese soldiers silently pass by. Accounts had reached Uta’s cave that Japanese soldiers had executed the chief of the civil defense unit and the principal of the elementary school in the neighboring settlement on suspicion of spying. Furthermore, people in the cave had also heard stories about a man named Kaneku, from a neighboring village, who, after visiting a house next to the ocean, was taken away by Japanese soldiers on false charges that he had sent signals to U.S. naval ships offshore. He was never seen again. The villagers no longer naively believed that they could rely on “friendly forces” to protect them. So even after the three soldiers were no longer in sight, Uta and Omīto didn’t dare move.

Unexpectedly from behind them came the sound of sand being scattered, and Uta almost cried out. Lying flat on the ground, with Omīto clinging to her thigh, she again heard what sounded like the scattering of

sand on patches of grass. Realizing it was not the footsteps of the Japanese soldiers, she quietly brushed off the sand from her sweat-drenched face, and, prompting Omito to follow suit, she shifted her body and looked towards the beach.

There in the moonlight was a sea turtle, digging a hole and tossing sand in the air. Offshore were hundreds of American warships that had been bombarding the island for days. Amazed that it had survived the crossing and come ashore just to lay its eggs, Uta had the feeling that the turtle was somehow not of this world. As she stared at the black mass on the beach and listened to the sound of sand being scattered on *hamahirugao* leaves, Uta had the strange sensation that she was back in the village before the war had started.

For close to an hour, she and Omito lay hiding in the *adan* thicket, flat on their stomachs, bodies overlapping. Uta listened warily as she looked back and forth between the beach and the precipice, searching for any movement by the Japanese soldiers. Omito carefully watched the sea turtle lay its eggs in the moonlit sand. Before long, the turtle had filled the hole and was crawling back to the ocean. After the turtle disappeared into the waves, Uta signaled to Omito that it was time to return to their cave. Omito hesitated, staring at the shore as if she were planning something. Then she looked back and said, "I'm going to gather the eggs." In the next instant, she dashed out of the *adan* thicket. Uta had no time to stop her. Crouching as she ran, Omito finally threw herself on the place where the turtle had been and started digging at the sand with both hands.

"Get back here!" Uta called out to her in a whisper. But Omito ignored her. She was reaching down into the hole, up to her shoulder, scooping the eggs into the bag with the potatoes.

Uta watched, surprised at Omito's boldness and ashamed of herself for not thinking of gathering the eggs. Everyone back in the cave was starving: being without food was particularly hard on the elderly and the children, who were growing weaker and weaker by the day. Even though Uta felt she ought to help Omito dig up the eggs, she couldn't muster up the courage to leave her hiding place. She fretted as she watched, when suddenly a dry noise—like the crackling of bamboo in fire—reverberated across the beach and Omito toppled over sideways. Instinctively, Uta pressed her body and face deeper into the sand. Anticipating machine-gun fire to begin at any moment, she silently uttered Seiei's name and prayed to the gods of the *utaki*. When the echoing sound of the single rifle shot faded, she could again hear the waves and rustling leaves. Uta raised her head and looked toward her friend. Omito remained completely still. She had fallen on her side, her hand at the opening of the bag; Uta could see the bottoms of her two tiny feet. Only her disheveled hair moved, blowing about in the wind.

When tinges of green began to lighten the eastern sky, Uta finally slipped out from the *adan* thicket. Before heading back to her cave, she called to

Omito in a whisper, but the roar of the waves drowned out her voice. She promised she'd come back for her with Seiei and Yūkichi after nightfall. Then Uta started back toward the cave.

It took over thirty minutes, running nonstop, for her to reach the shelter of the cave. It wasn't until she saw the entrance that she began thinking about how to tell Omito's parents and her husband, Yūkichi, what had happened. Uta dashed inside and crouched behind some rocks to catch her breath. The rumbling of waves and sand still echoed in her head, and she was unable to gather her thoughts or find the appropriate words to say. Gasping for breath, she climbed down the slippery rocks, deeper into the cave. Reaching the inner refuge where there were many families, Uta immediately sensed that something had changed. Although the interior was as dark as the depths of the ocean, with only the light of the moon filtering in through the cracks in the rock walls, Uta could tell that there were fewer people huddling together in each family.

"Uta, is that you?" It was the voice of Kamadā, Yūkichi's mother, speaking. A hand appeared from the middle of the darkness and grabbed Uta by the sleeve.

"What happened?" Uta asked, as she took hold of Kamadā's hand. At that moment, crying broke out from behind some rocks. Only the women and children were left in the cave. Japanese soldiers had come and taken all of the men away—Seiei, Yūkichi, and the others, including the elderly. They were never heard from again.

Finished with spawning, the sea turtle buried her eggs, refilled the hole, and packed down the sand with her abdomen. In her movements, the creature looked like a person down on all fours striking the sand with her stomach.

Kōtarō had been sleeping in the cave, unaware that his parents had died. He hadn't yet reached his first birthday. Later, when the war ended and the village was rebuilt, Kamadā raised the infant by herself. Uta—who had had no children with Seiei—helped Kamadā with the child, looking after him as if he were her own. While he was still an infant, whenever Uta held him in her arms she would see the fallen figure of Omito lying on the beach.

After Uta was released from the U.S. military internment camp, she had immediately gone back to the beach, but by then Omito's body was no longer there. Uta never found out where her friend had been laid to rest. Furthermore, she never learned where the men who had been taken away—under suspicion of spying—were buried. All that was left were stories that they had been executed, and the location of their bodies remained a mystery. In time, Uta came to regard the care and affection she gave Kōtarō as her small way of settling accounts with Omito and atoning for her sins. More than anything, for the widowed Uta, watching Kōtarō grow into a man had given meaning to her life.

Uta had the impression that the evening moonlight had not changed for decades, even centuries. She had the feeling that the sea turtle—the one that had just dug its hole and was now returning to the ocean—was either the same one she had seen during the war or one born from that turtle’s eggs. The turtle glided into the ocean, and the waves washed away the sand from its shell. Then it bent its neck to look back at the shore. Kōtarō turned toward the ocean and slowly started walking.

“Don’t go! Kōtarō, you must not go!” Uta shouted. He paused for a moment and looked at her, then looked back toward the sea turtle, afloat in the ocean, its head bobbing up and down on the rolling waves. As Kōtarō again began walking toward the sea, Uta suddenly had the sensation that this sea turtle was the reincarnation of Omito.

“Hey, Kōtarō! Wait! Wait!”

She tried to grab onto Kōtarō from behind, but his form suddenly flickered and faded, disappearing as if it had been sucked down into the sand. Falling to her hands and knees, Uta ran her hand in circles through the sand where Kōtarō had vanished. Two sea fireflies that had attached themselves to the turtle glowed in the sand. Seized by a premonition, Uta rose to her feet and ran to Fumi’s house.

Before she even opened the front door, Uta could hear Fumi weeping. Hurrying inside, she found Genpachi sitting in front of the door to the back room with Kentarō and Tomoko in his lap, stroking their heads. He shook his head slightly. When Uta opened the door, Kinjō was standing by the entrance with a grim expression on his face. He saw her and moved out of the way to let her in. Fumi was crying and clinging to Kōtarō, her arms around his body, as Shinzato and Furugen looked on, their arms folded across their chests. In the back of the room, there were two sullen-faced men sitting by the sliding shutters with their hands tied behind their backs. A small pile of photographic film, pulled out and tangled, lay on the tatami next to a camera.

“These two guys—they suddenly opened the sliding shutters and started taking pictures, and, well, the *āman* was surprised by the camera flash, and in a panic it dove into Kōtarō’s mouth and got stuck in his throat, and...,” Kinjō explained, all worked up. Uta slowly sat down by Kōtarō’s head.

“Big Sister,” Fumi said, wrapping her arms around Uta.

Uta gently pushed Fumi away. She removed the white cloth that covered Kōtarō’s face and saw that his nostrils were packed with cotton batting. *Perhaps people who lose their mabui do not feel any pain, even if choked to death*, she thought, as she looked at Kōtarō’s peaceful face. At the sight of his grotesquely swollen throat, however, she found it difficult to breathe. Suppressing the trembling of her hand, she covered his throat and chin with the cloth and stroked his forehead. *Why did you have to die before me?* she thought, as the palms of her hands became cold.

From the time she had held Kōtarō's tiny body in the cave, when he could barely let out a feeble cry, she had never imagined that he might die before her. She knew that no matter how much love and affection she gave to Kōtarō, she could never replace Omīto, and yet she did her best. When he was a young child and lost his *mabui*, it always seemed as if Omīto was calling to him from the afterworld. Whenever Uta performed a *mabuigumi* for Kōtarō, in her prayers she would say, *I promise to do everything I can for Kōtarō, so please return his mabui to his body*. And, as soon as he regained his vigor, she would go right away to Omīto's *ihē*, the family mortuary tablet on which Omīto's name was inscribed, to offer incense and express her gratitude. As Kōtarō progressed from elementary school to junior high, he grew stronger, and the incidents of *mabui* detachment decreased. After finishing junior high, he went to the mainland to work. About three years later he returned to the village and began helping his grandmother with the farm. When she passed away, he gave himself up to gambling and liquor for a while. But even then, he never neglected his work; he expanded his fields, and even purchased a used boat for fishing at sea. Returning from a day of fishing, he was the spitting image of his father, Yūkichi. Kōtarō was quite pleased when Uta would tell him so. Kōtarō married Fumi and, after turning forty, was finally blessed with children, and he always remarked how at last he had something worth working for.

"Oh, Kōtarō." Fumi's tears fell on Kōtarō's thinly bearded cheek and parched lips. Then suddenly, without warning, the cotton batting stuffed in his nose fell out and two shiny black feelers extended from his nostrils. Kōtarō's lips moved, as if to say something, then contorted into a foolish grin as two purplish, pencil-shaped eyestalks jutted out, peering at Uta. Fumi stopped crying. Everyone stopped breathing and stared at Kōtarō's face. Before they knew it, two large pincers had pried open his mouth, revealing the front half of the *āman*'s body. At that instant, Uta grabbed the creature's left and right pincers with both her hands, braced her foot against Kōtarō's shoulder, and pulled with all her strength, yelling, "This rotten little *āman*!" The *āman* fought back, clinging to Kōtarō's jaw with its claws and snapping its pincers at Uta's fingers to cut them off.

"Hey, what are you all standing around for? Help me with this thing!" Uta shouted. Quickly, Kinjō responded by holding Kōtarō's jaw open, Shinzato and Fumi pressed themselves against Kōtarō's body, and Furugen took hold of Uta by the waist. "*Unehyā!*" he yelled as he pulled. The *āman*'s body creaked. Kinjō pressed down with his left elbow to keep Kōtarō's face from moving, and with his right hand pulled the *āman*'s claws off Kōtarō's jaw, one by one. The instant he removed the fourth leg from Kōtarō's left jaw, the claws grasping the right side tore through Kōtarō's cheek, and the *āman* popped out of Kōtarō's mouth. Uta and Furugen tumbled backwards. The *āman* immediately slashed Uta's hand, then ran towards the sliding doors, dragging its enormous, beetle-like abdomen glistening with slime.

“*Uwā!*” The cameramen, who had been watching in amazement, jumped out of the way of the approaching *āman*, and fell over Uta and Furugen. The *āman* scratched and clawed at the sliding doors. When it realized the doors wouldn’t open, it ran along the wall. Shinzato and Fumi screamed, and the *āman* scuttled across Kōtarō’s body, escaping to the other side of the room.

“Get out of the way and keep quiet,” Uta ordered. She brushed aside the three men who had fallen on her, and chased the *āman* into a corner. Uta raised the empty half-gallon bottle of *awamori* over her head and swung it at the *āman*. The bottle came down with a fierce crash, but the *āman* deflected it with its pincers and escaped completely unscathed.

“Hiroshi, bring me a hoe!” At the sound of Uta’s command, Kinjō leapt to his feet and ran out to the shed. Uta lifted the bottle back up to her shoulder and brought it crashing down again. This time the *āman* suffered only a bent feeler. Blood from the wound on her fingers inflicted earlier by the *āman* made her grip on the bottle slippery. The *āman* turned to face her in a defensive stance, holding up its large pincers as a shield; its eyes appeared to mock her.

Trembling with rage and indignation, Uta bellowed, “*Hiroshi, where are you?!*”

“Not ready yet,” Shinzato replied in a silly voice as he and Fumi clung to each other. Uta gave him a fierce look, and Shinzato flashed an ingratiating smile. At that moment Kinjō burst through the door. “*Ari, Big Sister, here!*” Kinjō said as he tossed Uta a flat-bladed hoe.

With her right hand Uta threw the bottle at the *āman* and with her left she caught the hoe, spun it halfway around, raised it over her head, and brought it down with a yell: “Die, you scum!”

The blade of the hoe made a clanging *gash’tt* sound as it cut deeply into the tatami. Two or three of the *āman*’s legs were severed by the blow, but the creature managed to skitter towards the door. Fumi, Shinzato, and the cameramen, clinging tightly together in one mass, shrieked as they frantically tried to scramble out of its way.

“Hiroshi, don’t let it get away!” Uta shouted.

“*Aaargh!*” Kinjō yelled, swinging a shovel from over his head down onto the *āman*.

“Whoah!” gasped an impressed Genpachi, who was behind the door, watching through a crack. The *āman* had skillfully blocked the first blow of the shovel with its two pincers. Uta didn’t let her chance slip away, however. The blade of the hoe came whizzing down again, striking the *āman*’s soft, ham-sized abdomen. With a dull *squish*, liquid squirted out in all directions, and the smell of fish filled the air. The *āman*’s abdomen split in two. But the creature didn’t release its hold on the shovel. Uta swung the hoe again, striking the *āman*’s joints and severing the pincers that held the shovel. As the pincers snapped off, Kinjō tumbled over. With its remaining legs, the *āman* dragged its wilting, oily body to the wall, turned around, and looked at Uta.

When she saw the fading gleam in the *āman*'s eyes, pangs of compassion suddenly welled up in her heart.

"Hiroshi, wait!" she yelled, but she was too late. Kinjō's shovel, already in mid-swing, struck the *āman*. The blow smashed the *amān*'s carapace, and a dark-green liquid gushed out. Even then, it was still alive. Uta realized that the creature's two eyes were still staring at her, and she was taken aback by a thought that suddenly flashed across her mind: *This āman might be the reincarnation of Omito...*

In a frenzy, Kinjō swung the shovel once more, delivering the finishing blow. For a short while, nobody moved or uttered a word. Then Uta went over to the dumbfounded, petrified cameramen and brandished the hoe.

"Big Sister Uta!" Fumi and Shinzato yelled at the same time.

The cameramen screamed in terror. The hoe blade whizzed past them and smashed their cameras to pieces.

"You are never to tell anybody what happened here tonight. If this old lady finds out otherwise, I swear I'll hunt you down all the way to Yamato and beat you to a pulp!"

The two men nodded their heads in submission over and over again. Then Uta asked Shinzato and the others to clear away the remains of the *āman* and bury them out on the beach. They shoveled up the pieces of the *āman* scattered around the room and placed them in an empty manure bag. Then Shinzato and Kinjō hauled the cameramen out of the house. Uta and Fumi carefully cleaned the room, wiped up the splashes of the *amān*'s body fluid that had landed on Kōtarō, and changed his clothes. In the living room, Genpachi was showing the children magic tricks as he gulped down glasses of *awamori*. After seeing Kentarō and Tomoko behaving so well as they watched Genpachi's tricks, Uta fought back tears. She then talked to Fumi about waiting until the next day to tell the children about their father.

The following day, the rest of the village was surprised to hear the news of Kōtarō's death. Rumors filled the air, but the funeral service was held without delay. What proved to be difficult was persuading Ōshiro, at the medical clinic, to let them proceed quickly. He insisted that an autopsy was necessary, and even though they confided in him, explaining everything that had happened, it was obvious he wasn't taking them seriously. In the end, Uta showed Ōshiro the wound on her hand and made her appeal. "Do you think I would lie about something like this?"

Seeing tears in Uta's eyes for the first time in his life, Ōshiro filled out the death certificate and made arrangements for the cremation to proceed as soon as possible.

Rumors about the *āman* continued to crop up. But with no way to verify them, they soon faded.

Forty-nine days. That's how long it takes for a person's spirit to make the journey to the afterworld and for baby turtles to hatch and enter the sea.

As she stood on the beach, Uta recalled her father repeating these words many times to her when she was a child. The rainy season was ending, and once again the light of the moon shone on the seashore.

That afternoon marked the end of the forty-nine-day period since Kōtarō's passing, so his photograph and the flowers, which had been placed before the Buddhist altar, were cleared away. Genpachi had purified the room by waving around a bamboo stick entwined with a potato vine. In a loud voice, he had encouraged Kōtarō's *mabui* to pass on to *gusō*, the afterworld, without any regrets or attachments to his home and village. While Uta was watching Genpachi, she had wondered if Kōtarō's *mabui* had been able to make it safely to the afterworld.

Uta left Fumi's house, where Shinzato, Genpachi, and the other men were drinking in the tatami room, under the watchful care of the members of the Women's Association. Before going to the beach, she returned home briefly to cut grass for the goat and have a quick meal. After Kōtarō's *mabui* disappeared in the sand, she never saw it again. For a time, she had gone out every night to sit under the *hamasūki* and gaze at the ocean. But after the rainy season began, she had visited the beach less and less frequently. The night before, she had started going to the beach again, because the time for the baby sea turtles to hatch was approaching.

Uta knew well enough that just past seven in the evening was too early, but she couldn't bear being at home any longer. She sat under the *hamasūki* and gazed at the ocean as she waited. The roar of the waves filled her ears. No longer able to distinguish between everyday reality and the memories that flooded her mind, she felt as if she herself had passed away and become a *mabui*.

Now Uta was a young child suffering from heat rash. Her mother was bathing her in the ocean, and her father laughed as he picked up the little naked Uta in his arms. She bashfully covered her newly budding breasts with her arms, and Seiei, who was standing under a *mokumaō*, came running up, moved her arms out of the way, and kissed her breasts. Letting out a giggle at the feeling of Seiei's tongue tickling her nipple, she wriggled loose and ran along the shore. When she reached the middle of the beach, she saw Omīto, Yūkichi, and a crowd of young people from the village sitting in a circle in the moonlight, singing and dancing, the twang of the *sanshin* barely audible over the roar of the ocean and the howl of the wind.

Born in a village by the seaside, raised eating creatures from the ocean, Uta had been taught that when people were alive, they drew their sustenance from the waters, and when they passed away, they journeyed to the land on the far side of the sea. She saw, in her mind's eye, Omīto's dark silhouette lying on the beach.

After Uta had been released from the U.S. internment camp, the first thing she had done was go straight to the seashore. With her back to the ocean,

she had stood waiting, staring at the sandy beach, so bright in the sunlight that it hurt her eyes. The dry sand at her feet had stirred, and the black face of a little creature, like the nut of a tree, had peeped out. Pushing aside the sand with their fore-flippers and thrusting their brown bodies out onto the beach, the baby turtles had been temporarily immobilized by the scorching sand. Before long, however, they had lifted their heads and started crawling towards her. When she had looked closely at the sand around her feet, she had seen countless tiny tracks, traced in the sand by the baby turtles' brothers and sisters who had hatched the night before. The hatchlings hesitated when they reached her shadow, then turned their heads to look about. Without warning, they broke into a vigorous rush towards the ocean. Leaping into the breaking waves, they disappeared into a lucent, emerald world.

And this must be what it is like for everyone when returning to the land on the far side of the sea, Uta thought. The smooth surface of the sandy beach was streaked by many small tracks leading into the waves. Uta got to her feet and looked down the beach. She saw many baby turtles spilling over onto the sand. As she watched, the hatchlings fanned out in the moonlight, all heading for the ocean. Uta marveled at their speed and vigor. Land crabs came running from every direction, seizing hatchlings with their pincers, lifting them over their heads, and carrying them off. Nevertheless, without pause, the vigorous drive continued as one after another of the baby turtles entered the ocean. Gradually the stampede of turtles lessened. Uta looked out at the white waves breaking on the coral reef in the offing. Her father had paid special attention to the time when the sea turtles would hatch, because large fish that fed on them would come near the shore on those days. Hoping to capture the big fish, her father would go out to sea with a harpoon in hand. Only a few of the hatchlings ever survived the frenzy they created.

As Uta looked around, she noticed the leaves of the *hamasūki* swaying ever so slightly, and heard the sound of *āman* crawling through a nearby *adan* thicket. The *mokumaō* forest at the high-water line was like a barrier separating the ocean from the village. Uta was the sole person on the beach. Suddenly overcome by loneliness, she couldn't bear it any longer and went down to the water, letting the waves wash her ankles as she waded in the gentle surf. The light of sea fireflies faded in and out in the warm waves lapping the shore. Uta stopped, turned toward the horizon, and brought her hands together. But her prayer never reached its destination.

Translation by Kyle Ikeda