

## ŌSHIRO TATSUHIRO (1925- )

*Born in Nakagusuku on the main island of Okinawa, Ōshiro went to high school at an international academy in Shanghai. When World War II ended, he returned to Okinawa, where he worked in a government office and began writing fiction, drama, and essays that often had local subjects and settings. In 1967, he became the first Okinawan to win the Akutagawa Prize for his novella, Cocktail Party, and he has since continued to win acclaim for his literature, which spans a wide range of genres. Ōshiro regularly publishes novels and short stories, including works of historical fiction. He also writes dramas and advises theater productions, many of which are performed in Okinawa dialect. And his critical studies of Okinawan cultural history have informed a wide readership both inside and outside the prefecture. Yet he also finds time to advise younger writers and to serve on numerous selection committees recommending publication and literary prizes. Today, he remains among Okinawa's most well known writers and is undoubtedly the most prolific.*

*Ōshiro has drawn on his personal experience of the war and its aftermath, especially his years in China and early postwar Okinawa, for works offering an acute perspective on the psychological and moral implications of war and military occupation. "Turtleback Tombs" (Kame-nō baka) was first published in the regional magazine Shin Okinawa bungaku (New Okinawan literature) in 1966. Ōshiro has often remarked that he considered this work to be more deserving of literary acclaim than was Cocktail Party, which examines the injustices of American occupation rule and the complex legacies of Japan's war responsibility. But he attributed the popularity of Cocktail Party among mainland Japanese readers to its obvious contemporary relevance and ready accessibility. In "Turtleback Tombs," on the other hand, Ōshiro experiments with the use of regional dialect and explores Okinawan religious practices, which are so unfamiliar to the average Japanese reader that he chose to incorporate explanatory passages into the text. English-language readers should know that during the Battle of Okinawa, it was common for families to take refuge in the caves and ancestral tombs scattered throughout the islands.*

## TURTLEBACK TOMBS

ŌSHIRO TATSUHIRO

ON MOST DAYS, all Grandma Ushi and Grandpa Zentoku thought about was what went on inside the ninety square feet of their thatched-roof house on its quarter acre of land. Only on those days when they joined their neighbors to see soldiers off for the front or receive the remains of war dead did they think about "Okinawa Prefecture," "The Greater Japanese Empire," or "America." So they had no idea these things had anything to do with the noises they were hearing now.

First, a thundering seemed to shatter the air as their house shook. Outside in the goat shed, the horned male ran in panic three times around the post he was tied to, coiling the rope tightly around his neck. As Zentoku watched this, stunned, a man carrying a straw basket filled with grass appeared outside the front gate and shouted to him.

"Grandpa, they're gunboats. Gunboats firing. It's the war!"

Zentoku's hands, now motionless, had stopped weaving the straw mat he was holding.

"Gum boats?" What the hell did gum have to do with that crazy noise, he wondered.

"Not gum. Gun. Gunboats."

"What?"

"Battleships with cannons. Firing shells. The war's coming!"

After delivering this message, the man hurried away out of sight beyond the stone wall in front of the house. Now Zentoku dropped everything he was holding, stood up, and yelled toward the kitchen.

"Hey, Grandma, gunboats. It's the war!"

Ushi had just set a wooden bucket down on the black-dirt kitchen floor and was stirring potato mush for the pigs. "What? Gunboats? War? Coming today?"

"Yeah, we've got to get out of here. Where're the kids?"

"At school, practicing for graduation tomorrow." Ushi rushed outside and looked up at the sky. But seeing nothing, she went back to the bucket in the kitchen. "I better make sure the pigs get enough to eat."

A moment later, as she stood in the pig shed behind the house pouring potato mush into the feed bucket, there were two more thundering explosions.

"Grandma, what the hell are you doing? Think of your grandchildren before you throw away your life like that!" Zentoku yelled at her from the window in the sitting room where he was lowering an oil can filled with rice into a straw carrying-basket.

"We're not going to die this minute, Grandpa. Besides, the pigs have to be fed before we leave. We don't know when we'll be back."

"Well, then, while you're at it, fetch all the goats' grass and toss it out for them. They've got to eat, too. Damn war makes trouble for everybody! Hey, how much of the kids' school stuff should we take?"

Ushi didn't hear him. She had walked around to the well in front of the house and was washing her hands, which were covered with potato mush. "Grandpa," she yelled back. "Go get Eitarō. You'll need his help. There's no way you can pack everything by yourself."

When he heard this, Zentoku slammed the blankets he was carrying down on the floor and dashed outside. "Hey! I told you never to talk to me about that rotten bastard!"

"Rotten or not, we've got no young people at home now. We need him, even if he does have only one arm."

"Then you're rotten, too! So what if there's a war? To go begging for help from that bastard shackled up with our shameless daughter. Could you live to face people after that?"

"Sure I could live. Shackled up or not, we need his help."

Again came the thunder, followed by a deep rumbling from behind the western hills that got louder and louder until it faded away to the east. Just as Zentoku peered up toward the noise, his graying eyebrows

arching on his wrinkled forehead, an older man appeared at their front gate.

"Zentoku, I heard crows cawing. The hills are full of them flapping their wings. This is going to be a hell of a big battle. You folks have got to get out of here."

"Where's it coming from, Mr. Yamazato?" asked Ushi.

"America."

"I know that, but . . ."

"Look at the ocean. Full of battleships since last night. If those cannons start firing, we'll be wiped out"

"Where'll you go?" asked Ushi.

"Probably the northern countryside."

"That's far."

"The farther the better, where the guns can't reach us."

Ushi ignored his answer, which made Okinawa sound like a continent instead of an island. "Where should *we* go, Grandpa?"

"We'll decide that later," said Zentoku. "Right now we've got to feed the goats and pack our stuff."

After Mr. Yamazato left, Ushi shook the well water from her hands and feet. Then, just as she began wrapping her kimonos in a *furoshiki* cloth, the two grandchildren, sixth-grader Fumiko and fourth-grader Zenshun, came running up to the house.

"Grandpa, Grandma, it's war! War with America. We have to get away. The teacher says if we evacuate safely, we'll win."

"What'd she say about school?" asked Zentoku.

"It's war so there's no school."

"Then you won't graduate?"

"Graduate? In the middle of a war? Don't be silly, Grandpa."

"Yeah, and where's *she* going?"

"She didn't say where. Just that everyone should leave with their families and that we'd have school again after we won the war."

Again came the thundering.

"Fumi!" yelled Ushi. "Go tell Eitarō to come here." Ushi lifted the cooking pot off the dirt kitchen floor and set it down with a bang on the wooden floor of the house.

Fumiko's large eyes opened even wider as she stared at Ushi. "Are you sure it's all right to bring him here, Grandma?"

"Listen here!" shouted Zentoku. "Fumiko's old enough to understand." He gave Ushi another angry look. "So what if there's a war. Sin is still sin. How could we face our son if we did something so shameful in front of this precious grandchild he left in our care. You can talk that way about Eitarō because you're not a blood relative."

"What does it matter whose blood it is? Our lives are at stake. How can you complain about such things when we're trying to save lives?"

"Whoever said we should throw our lives away? Now let's get the hell out of here!"

"Oh, yeah? You think you can carry all this stuff by yourself? And just *where* are we supposed to go?"

"Hah! Asking at your age where to go and when to die. We'll move into the tomb, of course, and be with our ancestors."

"Into the tomb, Grandpa?" Zenshun let out a shriek.

"Sure, the tomb is our ancestors' home. They'll protect us."

"Won't it be scary?"

"Why should it? They'll chase away anything scary."

"Well, that'd make it even better," interrupted Ushi. "But how can you possibly open that heavy stone door by yourself? Better get Eitarō, Zenshun."

"Okay," answered Zenshun as he started to run off.

"Don't you *dare* go after him! What can he do anyway, with only one arm? I put that stone in by myself. I can take it out by myself."

"How old were you then? And now, past seventy. Even with one arm, he'd gladly give us the strength we need, especially to help his girlfriend's family. Nowadays we should consider ourselves lucky to have a young man around to rely on, even with a missing limb. Go get him, Zenshun."

"Huh?!" Zentoku seemed at a loss for words. Then, just as Zenshun started to run from the house, Zentoku's daughter, Také, rushed up to the front gate, screaming as she led her only daughter, five-year-old Tamiko, by the hand.

"Grandma! Where're you going? Please, take us, too!"

Now Zentoku was in a quandary. It bothered him that his daugh-

ter had called out first to Ushi, though she was not a blood relative. He knew this was because all he did lately was complain about Také. And when he saw the fear in Tamiko's eyes, his heart went out to his granddaughter brought here by this shameless daughter. Zentoku was still at a loss for words when the thundering roared again—sounding very nearby—so loud this time that the children shut their eyes tightly. At that same moment a man came flying through the gate almost as if blown in by the blast. With his one arm, he struggled gamely to carry blankets, pot lids, and other household goods. Zentoku looked at the empty sleeve where Eitarō's other arm would have been. It was flapping furiously in the wind and looked to Zentoku as if it were laughing at him.

"You . . . y-you . . ." Zentoku stammered.

"Hey!" Ushi yelled at her husband, who seemed to have forgotten all about packing. "If you're going to murder him, do it after we get this stuff to the tomb, okay?"

"What? Are you crazy? Talk about murder at the tomb and we won't bury you with the ancestors even if you die right this minute."

Ushi, stunned momentarily, could only stare at Zentoku. Among local farmers "murder" was hyperbole for punching someone, and she had said the word casually. But mentioning it in the same breath with "tomb" had been wrong, and now she hurried to explain. "No, I only meant . . ."

"Going to the tomb, Grandma?" Také interrupted Ushi as she tried to correct herself. "Then we'll go there, too." She nodded toward Eitarō, who put down their baggage with a clatter.

"You got a pole, Grandpa?" he asked. Without waiting for an answer, he walked into the storage shed, rummaged around inside, and came out holding a shoulder pole hung with two straw carrying-baskets. Then he gathered the things he and Také had brought and dropped them into a pile with Ushi's and Zentoku's belongings. After Také helped him pack everything into the straw baskets and tie it down securely, he hoisted the pole onto his shoulder. Zentoku, who had been watching them with a scowl on his face, now jumped down from the floor of the house and walked across the yard to the shed. From inside he took out a hoe and brought it back.

"Don't forget this."

"What do we need a hoe for, Grandpa?"

"Idiot! You're farmers, right? How're you supposed to eat if you move somewhere without a hoe?"

Silently, Eitarō untied the carrying-basket and opened it. Zentoku spoke again as he slid the hoe inside.

"We'll be bringing more baggage, so you go first. But don't open the tomb door. Wait in the grove next to it at the cemetery until we get there so you can't be spotted from the airplanes."

"That's enough stuff, Grandpa." Také spoke to her father for the first time. "The food and clothes are all packed. Our lives come first. We can't be too greedy with a war on."

"Who's being greedy? Even in a war, you try to live a normal life," said Zentoku as he walked defiantly in long strides toward the main house. Then, for no apparent reason, he stopped, turned around, and walked back. "Grandma, where's the crowbar?" he asked. "We need it to open the tomb door since he's only got one arm."

"Even with both arms you'd need a crowbar," Ushi said. "It's here, under the house." Stepping down from the wooden floor to the ground, she pulled out the crowbar, and Zentoku took it from her. Then Eitarō and Také, agreeing to leave for the tomb, walked out through the front gate with the children following, eldest first.

The whole family had been talking about "war" and "the battle," but none of it seemed real until they left home. Before that, war had only been something that kicked them in their sleep, that jolted them out of bed and spun them around. Now, as they walked together, time seemed to creep along until, suddenly, it was morning. Making their way from their front gate across the village grounds, they realized that war had come to the whole village. And when they reached the outskirts where the landscape opened before them, the whole world seemed to be at war. The village was surrounded by flat fields of sweet potato and sugarcane stretching 200 yards east to the sea. To the west, terraced fields and rows of tombs covered the slopes on a long line of hills—or could they be called mountains?—ranging to the north and south. Now the family set out on the 300-yard walk along a farm road that led to the tomb where their ancestors slept among the fields and

occasional rice paddies extending into the distance, north and south. The refugees they met on the road were constantly looking around in every direction. Whenever the family passed people from their village or met people coming toward them on the road from other villages, they doggedly asked and answered the same questions over and over again, as if for the first time.

"Where're you going?"

"To the Yanbaru countryside up north," most replied, or "South to Shimajiri." A few with elderly relatives among them said "To our tomb."

When asked if the enemy had landed, most didn't know. But Zentoku heard one man say it would be the day after tomorrow. This man had been a village councilman until last year, and he carried a piglet in the basket hanging from his shoulder pole.

"The Americans are coming by sea the day after tomorrow," Zentoku shouted.

"Who told you that?" Ushi shouted back, and Zentoku yelled the man's name.

"But did he say where he heard it?" Ushi asked as she reached out to take her granddaughter's hand from Také, who had been leading Fumiko but now headed for the cane fields to pee.

Zentoku thought about this man who had finished two years of middle school, had been a village councilman, and, even at a time like this, had the presence of mind to plan for earning money from the piglet he was carrying. He must be possessed of wisdom beyond that of ordinary people and was surely right when he said the enemy would land the day after tomorrow. It shouldn't matter who'd told him, yet Zentoku couldn't shake off wavering doubts. Perhaps he had misunderstood the words "landing the day after tomorrow" that he'd heard only moments ago. When he turned to look back, the man was still carrying the piglet along in a rhythmic step, moving toward the village Zentoku had just left. But by now that village and the one beyond it must be nearly deserted. As the man headed toward them, he seemed to vanish slowly into the hazy, distant sky. Zentoku, growing more confused by the minute, could only shake his head.

Ushi, too, found herself in a state of confusion. She had taken Tamiko's hand and started walking ahead but changed her mind all at

once, deciding to stop and wait for Také instead. Ushi worried there would be trouble if they got separated. Crouching down at the side of the road, she watched Také cross the ridge between two small potato fields and disappear inside a thicket of sugarcane. The moment she slipped out of sight, apprehension seized Ushi. It might have been the renewed thundering that made her think Také would never reappear. Until then Tamiko had been casually watching the sugarcane, waiting for her mother. But now Ushi wondered if some of her own anxiety might have affected the little girl, who seemed suddenly overcome with panic. Meanwhile, Eitarō, a man in his prime even with only one arm, was bearing the heavy load of their belongings and had gotten well ahead of the others. But now he, too, stopped and turned this way to wait for them.

Také must have been holding it in for a long time. The patch of soil she sprinkled inside the sugarcane furrow had turned a glistening black by the time she emerged, busily straightening out her work trousers tied at the ankles. Her face seemed to be tinged with an anxious shade of red as she stared up at the sky.

"Hey, hurry up!" Ushi yelled at Také. It was the first time she had felt like shouting.

Then Zentoku bellowed at Eitarō. "What the hell are *you* looking at, standing there like a zombie? Get moving!"

Listening to Zentoku, Ushi realized that from now on their lives would be like nothing they'd ever known before. It was strange enough with Eitarō barging unexpectedly into the family. But things were further complicated because, with Eitarō now in their midst, Také's relations with the others had changed, too. Perhaps because Ushi had come so far from home, things unreal and disconnected—like the refugees streaming in all directions as far as the eye could see—seemed to be driving the people in her family apart. Yet at the same time, Ushi felt that they were all clinging desperately to each other.

Zentoku had been wrong to yell at Eitarō, thought Ushi, but what she said trying to smooth things over could only have made them worse.

"He's right, you know. If we don't hurry, we'll end up in the after-

world." As soon as she blurted this out, Ushi knew she'd misspoken again. But this time, because of what happened next, Zentoku didn't notice.

Walking close behind Eitarō, Zenshun had spotted a wooden headrest that had fallen by the side of the road. "Look, a pillow!"

"That old man up there must have dropped it," Fumiko added quickly. "The one carrying the futon."

"I'll bring it to him," Zenshun volunteered, and he was about to run off with it when Eitarō stopped him.

"Hey! Hold it right there, or those gunboats'll fire on you."

At that moment Také seemed to come to her senses. "Let's take it," she said. "You can use a pillow, Grandpa. In your big hurry, you probably forgot one."

"What! Use someone else's pillow? Throw it back, stupid. Don't you know there's a war on?"

But Také refused to give in, certain that Zentoku was being needlessly finicky. "You better take it, Grandpa. You're the one who can't sleep without a pillow, war or no war." She snatched the pillow from Zenshun and stuffed it into one of the two straw carrying-baskets hanging from the pole Eitarō was carrying.

Now Ushi spoke in a high-spirited voice, trying to cover her embarrassment of a moment before. "C'mon, everyone! This is serious. Let's hurry up and get moving!" She waved her hand furiously and pointed ahead.

Just then someone yelled from right behind them; a group of people, unnoticed, had caught up with them on the road.

"Grandpa Zentoku, you all going to the tombs, too?" It was Zenga, Zentoku's second cousin, who had been principal of the local elementary school twenty years before. Clustered around him were his daughter-in-law and grandchildren.

"Yeah. You too? It's just *awful*, isn't it?"

Zentoku returned Zenga's greeting in an unnecessarily loud voice. After reaching down to roll up the cuffs on his serge trousers, Zenga picked up his walking stick again.

"When the American army lands, you have to keep going no

matter what. Dying in a war at our age would be a disgrace. Do all you can to get through it, Grandpa. Good thing you've got your grandchildren with you, and everyone's looking well."

Seeing Zenga's eyes fixed squarely on Eitarō, Zentoku seemed tongue-tied, so Ushi replied.

"Yes, and with this young man, we're stronger, too. Come on over and visit us."

"That was dumb!" Zentoku snapped at her in a hoarse whisper. "Visit us? In a war?"

Again Ushi realized she'd said the wrong thing, cheerful words spoken in the momentary illusion that this was just some communal migration on the way to a new village. Trying again to hide her embarrassment, she turned to the children. "Fumiko, Zenshun, don't get too far away from us."

Just as she spoke, from nearby the thundering roared again. Zentoku started to mumble as if he wanted to say something but cut it short, hurrying ahead with clattering footsteps. Only Fumiko, right in front of him, had heard the sound of Grandpa's voice emitting from his body like the meaningless grunt of pigs out for a walk.

THE tomb greeted the family as always, covered in a deep black coat of moisture. The three pine trees—in which of the family's generations had they been planted?—today reached a height of 30 feet, towering like guideposts at the cemetery entrance. Zentoku often spoke proudly of their majesty to all his relatives. Arriving on a hillside path, visitors to the family tomb entered the cemetery at the pine trees' roots and proceeded along a walkway 12 feet wide that resembled the front approach to a shrine. After walking 30 feet, they made a right-angle turn, then went another 18 feet to the tomb garden. The 450 square feet of lawn looked beautiful that day with its freshly cut grass. The large tomb within seemed to be leaning back against the hillside as it waited quietly for the family. It was called a turtleback tomb for the convex shape of its roof. On its mortar siding, which swelled voluptuously, curving lines branched out to the left and right, as if supporting that rounded roof, and coiled into whorls at both edges bordering

the large stone slab that was the tomb's front wall. From there the lines flowed downward all the way to the ground, where they seemed to embrace the garden. People familiar with these tombs compare them to a woman's body, shaped exactly as if she were lying on her back with legs spread. They say that the "tomb doorway" centered at the bottom of the front wall—large enough for one adult to enter, crouched down—is designed like a vagina, representing the source of life to which a person is said to return after death. Besides turtleback tombs, there are also "gabled tombs" in Okinawa, named for their triangular roof corners. These look more like an ordinary house with a front entrance. Both kinds of tombs are scattered throughout the island in various settings—backdropped by rolling hills, enclosed in groves of trees, or nestled in fields. They signify, probably first and foremost, the ancestors eternally asserting their presence. And perhaps they embody the hopes of ordinary people, whose lives are hard in the present world, for prosperity in the afterlife. For some families these dwelling places for their ancestors' bones are far grander than the houses they live in. And on this peaceful island now besieged as if by evil spirits, these tombs served well as fortresses where people driven from their homes by the monstrous gunboat assault could find spiritual strength.

This family's tomb, resembling a woman's supine body, her legs spread open, now looked out on an ocean where enemy warships floated in the distance. Yet it greeted the ancestors' descendants serenely, as if it knew the incantation that brings eternal life. The deep spiritual exhilaration Zentoku felt in its presence even made the thundering seem to stop for a moment. Back when he was twenty-five, the tomb's stone siding had begun to lose its shape after many years of weathering. The family had reconstructed it at enormous expense by selling off some of their farmland. As part of the rebuilding ceremony, Zentoku had, for the first time, closed the massive one-piece stone door filling the tomb entrance. Since then it had been opened occasionally for funerals and for the periodic ritual of washing the bones of the deceased. Today Zentoku was moved deeply to think that fate was now making him open the door to seek protection for his own life. After thumping his shoulder twice with his fist, he grasped the crowbar and positioned it next to the stone.

The proper days for opening tomb doors are prescribed by the yin-yang principles of ancient Chinese philosophy. Ordinarily, Zentoku and Ushi followed these strictly, but neither even mentioned them today since there was, of course, a war on. In this emergency, with cannon fire thundering far and near, such grueling work required the utmost courage and concentration. Realizing that his aging body would no longer do what he wanted it to, Zentoku finally came to appreciate how Eitarō had, quite literally, lent them his arm. Yet even after the dark cavity lay open—today with new meaning—and he had hurried inside with the children, Zentoku again felt it was wrong for Eitarō, Také, and Tamiko to be inside the tomb.

"You all don't plan to stay here, do you?" he asked Také.

She had put her hand on Tamiko's shoulders, trying to calm the young child, who was glancing around fearfully. But as soon as she heard Zentoku's question, she looked over quickly at Eitarō and Zentoku, then yelled as if hurling her words through Tamiko's shoulders. "And just where are we supposed to go?"

"Any damn place!"

"Hah! You make us carry the baggage and open the tomb door, and now you want to throw us out?"

"I never asked you to do it. You insisted, so I *let* you."

"All right then," said Také. "We'll leave. But if your granddaughter gets killed, it'll be your fault. So just make sure you apologize to our ancestors."

At a loss for words, Zentoku peered out across the 150 square feet of the tomb floor. Standing about three feet inside the doorway, he could see the stone shelves inside, built in levels like stairs from the floor to the ceiling, on which the mortuary urns of the family's successive generations were enshrined in their proper order of seniority. Most everyone Zentoku's age had memorized each of the ancestor's life stories. The family began seven generations ago with the marriage of the man who had established its independence. The history of succeeding generations included now familiar events in the lives of the family heads and, most important, where their wives had come from. Zentoku knew how many children each woman bore; that because one

wife could not give birth, a child had been adopted into the family; that when this child grew up he had been fond of women and kept concubines, scattering his seed; and that when his illegitimate child died, the relatives had objected when he wanted to bury the child's bones in this tomb. Zentoku also knew that the head of the family in one generation had worked as a servant in the house of the village lord, accompanying him on a visit to the royal castle at Shuri, where the servant received a gift from one of the palace nobles for being clever and helpful. The gift was stored as a family heirloom, but this man, fond of nightlife, had sold it and spent all the money on drink. This angered the relatives and resulted in his banishment from the lord's house, after which he drifted to another village. Because of him, the family still went to that village to offer incense in his memory both on the *O-bon* holiday, honoring ancestors' spirits, and on New Year's Day. All these things Zentoku had fully memorized. The mortuary urns were called "little shrine pots." Though made of cheap pottery, they were elaborately engraved and ornamented with covers modeled pretentiously on roof tiles so they looked like miniature "antique" houses. Enveloped in a faint blue darkness and smelling like dead leaves, the urns stood lined up in rows like aging dignitaries, never moving as they radiated enigmatic expressions and an aura of authority that pressed in on Zentoku.

Zentoku had heard the thundering again just as he'd passed through the tomb doorway, but, looking up at the dignitaries, he was relieved to feel their protective powers. Now Také's words jolted him with the realization that these same dignitaries could convert their powers to condemnation. As he looked around at the ancestors one by one, observing them intently in their proper order of seniority, strange thoughts troubled him. What galled Zentoku most was his wanton daughter. Her husband had gone to war as an honored imperial soldier and given his life in battle. Even though he was dead, when the mother of his child took up with another man, Zentoku could no longer think of her as his daughter. Now it occurred to him that Také might have inherited the blood of that philandering ancestor adopted into the family long ago. And if so, then his blood could be flowing in

Zentoku's veins as well. This possibility disturbed Zentoku deeply. He had maintained strict chastity until he remarried after he was past sixty. Even then, he had taken a wife mainly to appease the ancestral spirits, since only the women of the house could conduct the family rituals. Still, he was unable to rid his mind of the thought that this ancestor's blood coursed within him, and he now found this adopted son from the past truly hateful. Yet he also knew this was not a time to be concerned about such things. It was just as Také had said. By refusing to let her and Tamiko stay here, he was putting them in great danger, for which the ancestors would surely condemn him. With the cannons thundering in his ears, he knew that if he was going to depend on the ancestors to save their lives, he couldn't hold a grudge.

Confused and unable to see clearly in the dim light, Zentoku gazed around at that silent group of his ancestors. Ushi, beside him, grasped a handful of rice from one of the carrying-baskets and poured it onto the overturned lid of the lunch box. She then placed this as an offering on the lowest shelf of the altar. Next she clasped her hands together in prayer, raised them to her withered lips, and spoke in a voice barely audible but with a rhythm that was steady and sure.

"Today America brings war on us with the violence of their gunboats. Help in any way you can, oh revered ancestors, to save your many descendants from harm."

AND so began the family's cohabitation with their ancestors. Ushi looked again at the clothes and food they had managed to carry here and reflected on how theirs had been a safe journey.

"I wonder if Zenga and his family had any trouble moving?" she asked worriedly.

"The shelling's just started," said Zentoku. "So what kind of trouble could there be?" Whereupon Zenshun piped up, "This is war. If the cannons hit 'em, it'll be sudden death!"

"Hey, that's no way for a kid to talk."

"Kids or grown-ups—with cannons it makes no difference."

Zentoku and Zenshun were yelling at the top of their lungs, deter-

mined not to be drowned out by the thundering cannon fire. Their voices echoed loudly inside the stone chamber.

"Hey, you two. Quit your hollering!" Ushi glared at them. "How can you say a bad word like 'death' in front of the ancestors?"

Zenshun, looking puzzled, gazed again at the rows of mortuary urns, and Zentoku glanced up to see Eitarō crouched in the far corner of the chamber. To Grandpa he looked like a freeloader who'd barged in on them and was now eating their food but doing no work.

If only Zentoku would resign himself to Eitarō being with Také, at least the adults could adjust to the family's cohabitation with their ancestors. But the two older children couldn't get used to this place, no matter what. Tamiko, the youngest, seemed to adapt right away because she felt secure just being with her mother, but Fumiko and Zenshun were obviously frightened to be in a tomb with human bones. As dusk fell on the first day, they edged closer to Také and Eitarō. Zenshun asked again and again about the mortuary urns.

"Are there really people's bones inside?"

"Well, we don't keep pig's bones in 'em." Eitarō tried to make Zenshun laugh but only got another glare from Zentoku.

"Zenshun, Fumiko. Come over here." Sensing that something had to be done for the two children, Ushi called them away from Také and Eitarō. Then Zentoku set down the wooden pillow he had carried over to make his point and lay down, squeezing himself into a narrow corner. This was also done to teach the children.

"This is how we'll sleep. Just like our ancestors. You don't have to worry. They aren't ghosts, you know."

"That's right," Ushi chimed in. "There's nothing scary about 'em. They're *helping* us." This was her belief. And though she had embraced it reluctantly at first, she was even more fervent than Zentoku now in trying to get the rest of the family to believe, too. Thanks to her faith, she appeared to be mostly at peace after entering the tomb, even when night fell and the thundering roared.

That night Ushi woke up after midnight. "Také," she called in a low, raspy voice that wouldn't echo in the stone chamber. Her words seemed to fade into the darkness.



"Oh, Grandma!" Také, startled, answered in a sudden shriek. At the same time, though Ushi couldn't see it, Také was pushing away Eitarō's hand, which was searching for her breast.

"How are the kids?"

"They're asleep." Také's voice had recovered its composure.

"What about Eitarō?"

"He's . . . uh . . . sleeping."

"Everyone's asleep, then."

"Yeah."

"Got to get a good night's sleep in a war. But how can you, with all these damn mosquitoes?"

At a loss for an answer, Také grabbed Eitarō's hand in midair as it reached toward her for a second time. Just as she did, there was a dull, wet thud outside. Ushi went over to peek out the tomb door as Také and Eitarō sat up automatically.

"What are those things?" Ushi asked no one in particular as she peered outside. "They look like a whole bunch of fire spirits," she said, comparing the streaks of light she saw to the wisps of luminescent phosphorous gas that sometimes rise from the mortuary urns as the bones inside decompose.

"They're flares. For night vision," Eitarō explained.

"Is that right? To see the battle even at night, eh?" As she spoke, Ushi straightened out her collar and skirt, which had ruffled up in her sleep. She seemed to be doing this as a precaution, lest certain exposed parts of her body be suddenly illuminated.

"Don't worry, Grandma. Fire spirits would run away in a war." Také sounded as if she were trying to force a laugh, and Eitarō cleared his throat to speak in a voice that sounded full of courage.

"Inside the tomb even fire spirits can't scare us. The dead are our friends now. Right, Grandma?"

Without bothering to answer, Ushi stepped out through the doorway.

"Grandma, where're you going?"

Také's voice seemed to chase after her, but Ushi had already slipped outside and was making her way over the flat pavement along the stone wall. When she came to the sleeve-like contours at the base

of the tomb, she squatted down carefully. The wall, coming to right angles here, enclosed her body and made her feel safe.

Without knowing why, Také and Eitarō had followed beside Ushi. Now they watched in the starlight as she lowered herself, knees still drawn in, from a crouching to a sitting position, placed both hands in her lap, and quietly folded her fingers together.

"Také," Ushi called quietly as she stared into the darkness.

"Yes, Grandma."

"Keep your eye on the kids. If they die here, Grandpa won't put their remains in this tomb, and his ancestors would never forgive that."

"Does it really make any damn difference whose tomb it is in the middle of a war, Grandma?" Eitarō's tone in speaking to Ushi was much too familiar.

"It sure does. Are you crazy?" Ushi rarely spoke so harshly. "This tomb is Grandpa's. It's only right for you to go to *your* tomb."

Také and Eitarō exchanged glances in the darkness. Neither could make out the other's expression but thought it was probably gloomy.

"You've come here with us and don't seem to care about your own parents," Ushi explained. "There's nothing we can do about that now. But if you die here, your ancestors'll never forgive you. So you better live through this and go back to your family. And Také, you better apologize to *our* ancestors for the things you've done lately."

As they listened to Ushi's words, Také and Eitarō stared hard into the darkness out toward the distant sea.

THE thundering echoed day and night, with flashes clearly revealed after dark. By this time, countless warships, their cannons firing, clogged the ocean's surface. With a seemingly random violence, red gashes tore through the darkness as the thunder roared. An instant later, flare bombs exploded in the same patch of dark sky, lighting up grassy hillsides and potato fields below like faces pale and chagrined. The nocturnal landscape hid the real faces of living things, so only flashing patterns of light could be seen here and there, but the ghastly roaring echoed endlessly.

Now Ushi was thinking she might die here. Yet she wasn't

imagining her flesh torn apart by those thunderings into some hideous form so that she would end up like the pigs slaughtered in every household the day before the New Year's feast. Instead, her thoughts probably reflected her wish to die here rather than somewhere else. As Zentoku's second wife, she felt an especially strong desire to die at his ancestral tomb.

She had married him when she was past fifty, so she bore this family no children. Zentoku already had a boy and two girls by his first wife. The elder daughter had moved to the Philippines; Také was the younger daughter. When war approached, the son had sent his two children, Fumiko and Zenshun, to live at Zentoku's house. Ushi felt no connection with this son except through Zentoku and his grandchildren. And she wondered how much she could grieve if his son or elder daughter should die in some faraway place like the Philippines. Yet she knew she must be able to mourn like the others. It was another of the obligations and aspirations life had brought her during more than ten years in this family.

ZENTOKU had taken Ushi as his second wife so he could entrust to her the rites for his ancestors as well as those household chores that fell to a man living without a wife or daughter-in-law. Ushi understood this when she married him and had done her best performing the rites and doing the daily chores for Zentoku and his grandchildren. Being nearly sixty, she found her many obligations to Zentoku's relatives far less daunting than a young wife would have. And she was delighted with the respect often accorded her as the family matriarch.

In truth, she would have been in real trouble if she hadn't gotten on with them. When nearing age forty, she'd been turned out of the house by her first husband. She thought this was probably because the one child she'd borne him had died, but he also had another woman. She'd then returned to her parents' home, where she lived some ten years raising silkworms. But after passing fifty, she began to wonder where her bones would be placed when she died. One day at home she happened to ask about this and was told that if she died here, her remains would enter the family tomb but would be set in a special

place. Though they might not end up in a separate row, a special explanation would be required of her descendants each time they opened the tomb. She would thus have to bear the disapproval of her ancestors even in the next world. How painful it was, having once left home for marriage, to return to her parents' house. Life was hard for a woman.

Then, as luck would have it, just at that time a proposal came for her to become Zentoku's second wife. She agreed not so much because she was eager to marry him, but at least partly because, after death, her bones could then be repositied in the normal way at his family tomb. Just as rumored, Zentoku turned out to be rather clumsy and stubborn, yet he seemed to have a boundlessly sunny disposition. Having been chosen by him, she decided that if she didn't do her utmost to serve his family, punishment would befall her. She would have no excuses when facing the ancestors of a family who had generously welcomed this "surplus person" to join them through marriage. And so she performed her duties with everything she had and was called "Grandma" by Zentoku's grandchildren as they came to adore her. Then, all of a sudden, just when she thought nothing would be lacking in her relations with the family's ancestors in the next world, her time for cohabitation with them had come early and entirely unexpectedly. Of course, it wasn't true cohabitation as long as she was still living flesh and blood. Still, she wanted to believe that somehow the ancestors had wanted it this way. And though she felt she might die here, this feeling was in no way at odds with her belief that these ancestors would save the lives of the family. For her, both came from her desire for "peace of mind."

But now, Ushi thought, there was the problem of Také and Eitarō. Whatever could be said about Eitarō, Také was being a most unfilial daughter. Zentoku had good reason to be angry with her. Yet Ushi could understand Také's feelings, too. As a man, her husband had been expected to go off to war and even to die, but Ushi could sympathize with the wife he'd left behind. Také was caring for a small child with no husband to rely on. He had been a second son, so she was spared the hardship of serving a mother-in-law. Yet this also meant that no property was passed on to her that could support them. Hers was a

loneliness that Ushi, abandoned while still in her thirties, knew all too well. She could understand how Také had panicked when the war came and, ignoring shame and reputation, had rushed with Eitarō back to her parents. To take in this troublesome trio might be an imposition on the family ancestors, too, but with a war on, it couldn't be helped. Now it was more important that Také and Eitarō take every precaution not to die here. If they didn't somehow survive, there would be even worse troubles.

Unlike Zentoku, Ushi openly showed her feelings toward Také and Eitarō, always treating them kindly. Listening to Ushi, Také felt a rush of sadness and warmth and reached out toward Eitarō, who, she thought, was lying diagonally behind her. Instead, she grabbed his limply dangling empty sleeve and had to shift her grasp hurriedly. Eitarō helped her with his one hand until their two hands finally clasped together.

Just then the thundering roared again, this time from directly overhead, shattering the night sky with a bright red glare.

"Grandma!" Fearing for Ushi, Zentoku screamed from inside the tomb as if his heart would burst, and Ushi called back immediately.

"I'm right here, Grandpa!" Facing the tomb door, she had fallen down at an awkward angle, protecting her body with both arms. Také and Eitarō hugged each other tightly, keeping their eyes on Ushi, who held herself motionless as though glued to the tomb's stone foundation.

ON the morning of the third day there was an explosion so loud that the wobbling faces on the small shrines seemed to frown. At about this time everyone—young and old, male and female—began to feel a kind of unity. They all agreed when Zentoku said no one should go outside the tomb just to piss. But there was a momentary impasse when someone pointed out that this would be a problem for shit, since it couldn't be absorbed into the stone floor.

Eitarō tugged at Také's sleeve and whispered that the bottoms of the mortuary urn covers were hollow and could be emptied outside at night after use. But Také signaled him with a frown to keep his mouth shut. Then, in a low voice she told him that although this was a good

idea, if either of them were to suggest it, Grandpa might find it blasphemous and get angry. Now, when everyone had just started to feel this new unity, it was better not to upset him for a while. Eitarō agreed. Yet perhaps because his clever idea had stirred the ancestral spirits lined up before them, the same suggestion came from the mouth of the eldest descended grandson, Zenshun.

"That's yucky!" Fumiko objected, her scowling face blackened with dirt. But from beside her, Ushi replied.

"He's right. There's nothing else we can do because this is war. Later, if we wash the urns clean, punishment won't come to us." Having rationalized her actions, she removed the cover from a mortuary urn within easy reach. Then, thinking she needed to show extra respect, she again set out some rice—only three grains this time—as an offering and pressed her palms together. As she clasped her hands in silent prayer, she worried that if prayers were needed again after tomorrow, there would be no more rice for offering.

Shut up inside the tomb, the family had no idea how the battle was going, but after seven days, they were so inured to the thundering that no one gave it much thought. For them, the war had become thunder, hunger, and shitting in the urn covers. Také and Eitarō regretted that sex was no fun on the hard ground and rather lost interest in it. But in a way things got easier for them because, under the circumstances, their love for each other could hardly be a secret anymore. With his combat experience, Eitarō worried that the enemy might have landed. He mentioned this to Také, but she couldn't feel any real danger. Like Ushi, she was most concerned about their dwindling supply of rice, sweet potatoes, and miso. Anticipating shortages from the first day, they had economized more and more, often leaving the children feeling hungry. In time, instead of crying, the children began sleeping longer, something that troubled Také far more than the approaching enemy. Having yet to see any soldiers, friend or foe, the possibilities of victory or defeat had little meaning for her. She couldn't believe the nation's fall was imminent as long as the rows of mortuary urns didn't crumble to pieces.

On about the fifth day they realized that for a half-hour every morning and evening, the ships' cannons would stop firing. After the

war, it was learned that these had been the enemy's mealtimes. The breaks in shelling gave everyone a chance to forget their troubles and venture outside the tomb, where they felt slightly dizzy in the open air and the children played with pebbles.

It occurred to Eitarō that now he could walk out and shit leisurely in the fields. He found a suitable spot inside a thicket and, squatting down, gazed out calmly through the trees at the fleet of warships. For him they brought back childhood memories of the ships in long rows from Japan's combined fleet lined up in the bay. At night its searchlights had seemed like a reliable halo of protective power. But now he was looking at squadrons of the U.S. military, the bitter enemy well known for brutality. Yet it was too bad, he thought, that they had to be the enemy—those hundreds of warships lined up in rows of towering black silhouettes that hid the ocean horizon and seemed so full of confidence. The old adage, "Splendid, though an enemy" might be trite, but shut up by this war day and night inside a tomb side by side with other people's ancestors was starting to give Eitarō an inferiority complex. Now, as the dry spring wind played across his unwiped ass, he found physical pleasure in confronting this enemy. Thinking they could not see him, he had the illusion of being somehow on equal terms with them, and his spirits, too, were lifted.

Eitarō slipped back inside through the tomb door, still excited from his first sojourn outside, just as thundering broke out from resumed shelling. He and Také stared at each other in wide-eyed alarm. But the next morning he stayed outside longer, crouching down to face the enemy until the thundering started. Though he'd been ready to flee back to the tomb full speed at the first rumbling, he now embarked on a one-man insurgency. He stared out at the cluster of battleships, poised like a sprinter at the starting line, and let out a sudden cry, not knowing whether it was from shock or pleasure. In the next instant, countless cannons roared. It amazed Eitarō how the ships would lurch powerfully backward just after spewing their shell fire. He stayed put, as if held there by some mysterious force, concealing his lower body in the shadows of a nearby rock as he gazed far out into the ocean. The battleships were moving forward rapidly now, one after another, belching fire and lurching backward with a roar that split the sky and made

its colors seem about to dissolve and float away. Eitarō had seen combat in China, but from childhood he could only think of the sea, the sky, and this land now before his eyes as things of beauty. Witnessing this awesome destruction, he felt no panic, but was filled instead with a sense of wonder, as though he'd discovered some freakish form of life on earth. In the next moment a rush of power surged through his body with a strange crackling sound, and an unexpected desire welled up inside him. He ran back, waving his one arm wildly, and could feel all his muscles stiffen as he grabbed Také. Of course, she resisted, thinking he'd been frightened by the shelling.

Then Ushi hollered at him. "Maniac!" Her voice sounded weak. "How can you be so selfish, not even thinking of the children! Instead of doing that, you'd better start hunting for sweet potatoes tomorrow. The ones in the field below here should be ready to eat."

At first Eitarō thought he was being scolded for grabbing Také, but from Ushi's manner he realized she was telling him not to risk his life so recklessly. Still, apparently unable to cool his excitement, he did not respond to her. Meanwhile, Zentoku slept, looking very cramped with his body all curled up. Only his pillow lay straight.

Ushi and Také agreed to wait for the evening break in shelling to go out for sweet potatoes. Také told Eitarō he had to go, too, but he remained silent.

That afternoon things took an ominous turn. Along with the roar of cannons, they began to hear the popping of rifle fire nearby and the buzzing of airplanes. Inside the tomb they couldn't tell which direction these sounds were coming from, but every time the airplanes buzzed closer, after a few seconds, the thundering got closer, too. After listening for a while, Eitarō whispered, "Contact probes."

"Contact—what?" asked Také, but Eitarō didn't answer. Now there was more gunfire. Then came a noise they heard for the first time.

"Chase guns." Eitarō spoke again as a veteran of the fighting in China. He usually talked in Okinawa dialect, but he said the words "contact probe" and "chase guns" in standard Tokyo Japanese. For a moment he forgot about life inside the tomb and spoke of his combat experience with a certain wistful pride. Yet what he was saying mattered little to Ushi, Zentoku, and Také.

None of them thought about what these changing circumstances meant in the unfolding strategy of battle. But with the noticeable lull in conversation, fear seemed to be pressing in on everyone. That evening, for the first time, there was no break in the shelling.

"I guess we can't go hunting for potatoes, Grandpa," Ushi said as she peeked outside.

From his pillow Zentoku half-opened his eyes and answered with what sounded like a groan.

"Sounds like the battle's starting, Grandma," said Eitarō.

Again, he spoke as a combat veteran. At this point Zentoku finally took the trouble to sit up. "Hey, you can't even fight," he bellowed. "So what the hell are you blabbing about?"

"Grandpa, ease up on him," Ushi scolded. Eitarō, looking embarrassed, muttered softly so only Také would hear.

"Yeah, but for this family, even someone like me is handy to have around sometimes."

Také knew he was right and that she would have to convince Zentoku and Ushi of this. Fortunately, the next morning the cannons stopped shelling at the usual time. Rifle fire continued but seemed to grow distant, though they might only have imagined this. Také took this opportunity to speak up so everyone could hear her.

"Eitarō, let's go dig for potatoes," she said. "If we take the straw baskets, we can bring back enough food to last a while."

Without a word, Eitarō grabbed Také's hand, and together they slipped outside. "The baskets! Get the baskets!" Také tried to remind him, but Eitarō never even glanced back as he led her hurriedly through the tomb garden and into a thicket of trees.

"Look at those battleships!" he said. "Pretty, huh. They're really beautiful with their guns firing."

His tone was strangely passionate. Without knowing why, Také did as he said and peered out at the cluster of battleships lined up like a row of islands floating on an ocean so serene it seemed unreal. Until this moment she'd been overwhelmed with worry, cooped up inside that tomb with the old folks, the kids, and this man. But now the vast, open landscape before her seemed to bring a sudden feeling of release.

The smell of green leaves mixed with a burnt odor coming from nowhere in particular awakened in her an almost forgotten desire. The momentary calm on the battlefield took her mind off the fear she had felt for her life and, at the same time, emboldened her to forget all constraints. Eitarō's one hand began groping here and there on Také's bare skin. As his movements grew more fervent, she helped him to embrace her with his one arm by wrapping both her arms around his chest. Just then someone called from the other side of the thicket.

"Mommy!"

Tamiko's voice startled Také more than thundering cannons, and she struggled frantically to pull up her half-shed underwear.

"Those cannons'll hit you out here! Go back to Grandma, damn it. Hurry!" She had shouted with unintended anger as if the cannons really were about to fire on them. Then, suddenly frightened, she bolted out of the thicket and grasped Tamiko's hand without even a glance back at Eitarō. Though worried about losing this chance to gather potatoes, she hurried ahead and inadvertently let go of the child's hand. Then, just as she made her way through the tomb door, there was a dry, whooshing sound, as if a large package had been hurled down on the stone pavement behind her. Thinking this was a strange sound for a child falling, she turned around instinctively. At that same moment Eitarō, who had been following behind her, cried out in astonishment.

What looked at first glance like a package turned out to be a Japanese soldier. He'd tumbled down from the tomb roof just as Také was passing through the door, just missing her back but knocking Tamiko over as she ran behind her mother. Then, still tightly grasping his rifle, he'd fallen facedown on the gray stone pavement. When they saw both the fallen soldier and the child he'd knocked down lying motionless, Také and Eitarō stood in shock—one inside the tomb, the other outside. The thunder roaring at that moment brought the loudest screams yet from Také and sent her cringing backward. Zentoku, realizing something was wrong, leapt to his feet and ran toward them from the rear of the tomb. Reaching the door just as Také was backing away from it, he slammed into her from behind and their bodies

tangled, falling in a heap on top of Ushi. Now Ushi lay on her back, looking squashed, and yelled out between gasps. "Wh-what happened? Where's Tamiko?"

Hearing Ushi's words, Také leaped to her feet in fear for her daughter just as Eitarō came through the door carrying Tamiko.

"We can't stay shut up in here anymore with this war right on top of us. We've got to get out of here." Eitarō spoke as he lowered Tamiko to the ground, but no one was listening to him.

Také clutched her child with both hands, making sure Tamiko was warm and breathing. Then, after feeling her pulse, she asked, "Was that really a Japanese soldier?"

Eitarō nodded.

"Maybe this means Japan's losing the war."

"C'mon. Wars aren't lost because one soldier dies." Eitarō stared up at the ceiling as if straining to listen for something.

"No, I guess not," said Také, fervently shaking Tamiko, who lay motionless.

Yet a Japanese soldier falling from the tomb roof and dying right in front of them seemed like a terrible omen, frightening everyone. Tamiko soon revived but cried for a long time afterward. Now they could hear the loud droning of airplanes, and Ushi hurried to cover Tamiko's mouth, but the child twisted away and cried even louder. Her voice seemed to stir a desperate anger in Zentoku.

"Her spirit's gone! It must be brought back!" he yelled, and Ushi tossed him a look that told him she already knew this without his having to say so.

It is believed that when children are frightened after, for example, stumbling in the street, falling from a tree, or being bitten by a dog, they lose their spirits at the site of the accident and their bodies become like empty shells. At these times a *yuta* shaman is engaged to offer prayers at the site to restore the child's spirit. Ushi had thought of doing this as soon as Tamiko came to but realized at the same time that their situation would make it extremely difficult.

If no shaman were available, someone in the family would suffice, but Ushi had never used anything but rice for the required votive

offering, and besides, going out to the site where the child's spirit had fallen was out of the question.

"There's no rice and we can't go outside. How can we bring back this poor child's spirit?" Ushi wailed, stroking her granddaughter's dirt-smudged forehead.

"You can use miso or potatoes. And today we'll just have to send our prayers from here," yelled Zentoku.

Ushi knew he was right, especially since he was speaking in the presence of the ancestors. With two fingers, she scraped out what remained in the miso jar and spread it on a lunch-box lid. Then, turning to face outside in the direction of Tamiko's lost spirit, Ushi set down the miso offering and brought her palms together in prayer.

"Do we pray for the dead soldier? For his 'eternal good fortune in battle?'" Zenshun asked, raising himself slightly as he lay on his belly. His face, blackened with dirt, wore a serious expression.

"You can't have 'good fortune in battle' after you die," said Fumiko. "Pray for 'his soul to rest in peace.'"

Fumiko repeated a phrase she'd remembered from a memorial service, and then Ushi spoke.

"This soldier was sure to be punished, after causing another family's child to lose her spirit and then defiling their tomb."

Ushi resumed her prayers.

When everyone had fallen silent, the constant noise of airplanes and gunfire—fading away for a moment, then coming closer again—made them feel as if they were in the middle of a war being waged around this one tomb. And the presence of the soldier who had died right before their eyes made things seem all the more ominous. Fumiko and Zenshun took turns poking their faces outside the tomb door to check on his corpse.

"He's still there," said Zenshun fearfully for the umpteenth time.

"Well, I guess punishment hasn't come yet," Také murmured for no particular reason.

"Whose punishment are you talking about, anyway?" Eitarō scolded her in a low voice, and Také wondered if it would be the soldier's own punishment or the family's punishment that he would suffer. She

turned to look back at Eitarō, her eyes like a weary chicken's, but, thinking she would only get confused trying to answer his question, she said nothing.

"Eitarō!" Zentoku called out, and Eitarō wondered how much Grandpa had heard of their whispered conversation.

"Yeah!" Looking startled, Eitarō answered Zentoku crisply for the first time since they'd left home.

Ushi turned toward Eitarō, taking a break from her praying.

"We've got to give him a proper burial." Zentoku spoke to Eitarō, also for the first time, with a note of authority in his voice.

"Bury him? Where?" Eitarō answered more earnestly than he'd intended.

"Can't put him in here, so we'll have to dig a hole."

"But if we just lay him outside somewhere, the body will decompose on its own."

"No. That would bring punishment on us. After all, he's a soldier of our nation, fighting for us. He's got a hometown and parents somewhere. We'd be punished for sure, and all those ships would come shooting their cannons at us."

"You're right." Eitarō agreed so readily he even surprised himself. Yet all at once things seemed to be just as Zentoku had said. Grandpa's words echoed in Eitarō's mind as he recalled the brutal sight of the soldier's corpse, which he'd seen before anyone else. "But I can't do it alone," he said, making every effort now to look earnest.

"Of course not," said Ushi. "Grandpa will work with you. And if you need someone else, Také can help. The corpse is still fresh, so with a proper burial done right away, no one will be punished."

As they listened to this judgment pronounced with such apparent confidence, Eitarō and Také exchanged glances, remembering that just moments before, Ushi had predicted punishment for the soldier. Yet she seemed unaware of any contradiction. Stranger still, Eitarō now found himself staring intently at Ushi and nodding in agreement. She pressed her palms together, then turned again in the direction of the soldier, who looked as if his soul were caught in limbo between this world and the next. In Ushi's mind the soldier's punishment had already become one with their own. She didn't know where this pun-

ishment was coming from or who was meting it out, but she was sure that unless they acted now, those cannons and rifles were destined to come and make hideous corpses of them. Ushi prayed for her granddaughter's spirit in the firm belief that she was also praying for the soldier's spirit and that the two would merge with the spirits of the rest of the family and be calmed. In this way, her prayers extended to the soldier's burial. And, though they didn't understand what seemed logically inconsistent, Eitarō and Také felt somehow reassured by the faith Ushi and Zentoku shared.

That evening, with the break in shelling, Zentoku motioned emphatically for Eitarō to get the crowbar, and, with Zentoku carrying the hoe, the two of them hurried out of the tomb. Finding a place to bury the corpse wasn't easy. Though it looked like there was plenty of open space, the nearby trees had spread thick, hardened roots under most of the ground. Zentoku soon lost his temper.

"What the hell is taking you so long to find a spot?"

With Zentoku yelling at him, Eitarō began wandering around in confusion and came inadvertently to the place where he had stroked Také's bare skin earlier that day. Just as he was wishing he had avoided this spot, Zentoku spoke again.

"That's fine—right there. Now get out of my way!" Pushing Eitarō aside, Zentoku raised the hoe, but his aging body, deprived of food and sunlight for some ten days, staggered after just one swing.

"Let me do it, Grandpa."

"Oh yeah? With one arm?"

"Sure. I lay a woman with one arm. No problem digging a hole."

Zentoku glared at Eitarō, ready to scold him again, but Eitarō seemed unconcerned now as he snatched the hoe from Grandpa and raised it with his one arm. Though his stance looked precarious, he didn't miss his target. Zentoku stared, mouth open, at Eitarō's one-armed swing and at his other shoulder where the arm had been severed. His voice came out in a low monotone.

"If you hit any rocks, I can yank 'em out with the crowbar."

"No rocks, Grandpa. You just stand there." Strong as he was, Eitarō's voice came out in half-gasps as he swung the hoe down again and again, remembering all the while that this was the spot where his

lovemaking with Také had been cut short. He was also remembering how the soldier's corpse had fallen into their midst, and now the two events seemed oddly linked by destiny. Yet as he continued to dig, cursing and spitting, he could feel the weight of that destiny lifting bit by bit. Then, just when he'd dug deep enough to bury the corpse's shoulders below ground level, the thundering rang out again.

Eitarō gazed at the ocean. In the deepening dusk, flashes of fire from the roaring cannons lit up the sky with a red brighter than morning. But now, far from exciting a desire for lovemaking, the scene reminded him of the soldier's corpse. And the terror he'd felt a few years before on the battlefield in China flashed back inside him, ripping to the very core of his body.

"Grandpa, the shelling's started!"

"So what? We've got to keep digging and bury him before the day's over. Gimme that hoe." Grabbing the hoe, Zentoku let out a yell as he thrust it into the ground. "Hurry up and bring the corpse. Get Také to help."

Scowling as his last words were drowned out by the thundering, Zentoku swung the hoe upward only to have his own momentum spin him around and hurl him down on his rear end. After helping him to his feet, Eitarō took a deep breath, then dashed back toward the tomb where Také was waiting. She'd been poking her head out of the doorway, peering cautiously, but when she saw Eitarō motioning to her with his one hand, she rushed out toward him.

Wearing full combat gear, the corpse was too heavy to lift, so Eitarō pried the rifle from its grasp and hurriedly took off the steel helmet. Shorn of his helmet, the soldier's eyes seemed to bulge glaring from his head, and Také let out a shriek. In too much of a hurry now to remove the leather belt and ammo pouch, the two of them grasped the corpse by its arms and legs. Dragging it across the ground, they had to change grips constantly, and Také kept her eyes shut most of the time as she struggled with the weight and her fear. By the time they reached the hole, the corpse's head was covered with cuts and scrapes.

"Just a little more, Grandpa," yelled Eitarō.

"Yeah, the hole's almost ready."

With her nerves raw from fear, Také could sense in the men's

voices an unexpected warmth between them. She stared intently at Zentoku's face and suspected that the two had been crying as they spoke to each other. "I'll finish it, Grandpa," she said, snatching the hoe from his hands.

"Okay. It's almost done." Zentoku staggered as he stepped aside, and Také's face, tightly drawn as though she, too, had been crying, now broke into a smile.

"Eee-yah!" Také seemed to imitate Zentoku, letting out a yell as she swung the hoe down into the soil. "Keep an eye on Grandpa, Eitarō," she said.

"Sure thing," he answered, then walked over to where Zentoku was sitting on the ground and stood beside him protectively.

About the time they finished burying the corpse, shells fired from a battleship exploded over the thicket, spreading a red glow through the treetops and making them look like they'd caught fire.

"Grandpa!" Také's instinctive shriek was so piercing that it still echoed in everyone's ears even after they had made their way stumbling back to the tomb. Inside, Ushi greeted them and, with devoted hands, began gently patting and rubbing their bodies, which trembled from fear and exhaustion.

"Anything left to eat?" asked Zentoku, still trying to catch his breath. He turned his head to look back at Ushi as she massaged him.

"There's a little more miso, Grandpa," she said apologetically.

Zentoku tried hard to make out Eitarō's profile in the near-total darkness. "What'll happen to us now?" he asked in a barely audible voice.

"Listen, Grandpa." Eitarō also kept his voice down. "The battle's coming right at us. We can't stay here any longer, even inside the tomb."

"You mean the Americans are coming here?" asked Ushi.

"The gunfire's still a ways off, so I can't be sure. But if the Japanese soldiers run, the Americans will come after them. And before that happens, we've got to get the hell out of here."

"Would Japan just run away?" This was Zenshun's question.

"Well, I . . ." At a loss for words, Eitarō realized he'd never seen a battle with America attacking and Japan fleeing. But all at once he found himself able to imagine the Japanese army in retreat, maybe



because he was hearing gunfire and had seen nothing of this battle except one dead Japanese soldier. The sight of the corpse had affected him deeply, but it wasn't only that. Ever since he and Zentoku had risked their lives burying the soldier, Eitarō felt as though some fateful force were pressing in on him. He stared into the darkness. "Japan might retreat for now but will surely win in the end."

"Retreat where?" asked Zentoku.

"Can't tell now if the attack will come from the north or the south, though we may know by tomorrow morning. That'll be the time to get the hell out of here, Grandpa."

Nodding meekly, Zentoku agreed that what Eitarō said made sense, though of course none of the others could tell he had changed his mind about their leaving. Nor did anyone hear the words he spoke next in a thin, wavering voice that sounded more like Ushi when she prayed.

"I still want to stay here."

THAT night it rained.

"Eitarō," Zentoku called out suddenly through the darkness. "It's raining. Let's go dig some sweet potatoes."

At first Eitarō only groaned sleepily, but he'd understood Zentoku immediately. "In the rain?" he asked, and both men sat upright.

"That's why we've got to do it now, before the storm gets worse. We should leave at dawn, but we can't travel on empty stomachs. Besides, the shelling's let up. Now's our chance. What time is it, anyway?"

Since he was only slightly drowsy, Eitarō figured it must be close to dawn, but he didn't answer. He'd decided to do what Zentoku said, convinced that Grandpa was talking to him more now because the older man's feelings toward him had softened. He also sensed in his tone that Grandpa had decided that when the time came to leave, everyone would go together. Still, Eitarō wondered why Grandpa was so worried about digging sweet potatoes now. If they couldn't stay here, surely they could find food at the next place, so wouldn't it be

better to look for it after they got there? Zentoku's strict sense of propriety—insisting they go to all this trouble just to bring potatoes along from their own field—seemed more than a little strange under the circumstances. Yet, again, it seemed better to go along with him for the time being. Besides, Eitarō also realized that by eating and traveling together with this family, he was obligated to do what they asked of him.

"You'd better get going now," whispered Také, and Eitarō complied, following Zentoku outside through the tomb door.

What Grandpa had said, about the cannon fire letting up, turned out to be an illusion. Earlier, the sound of the rain had diverted their attention from the noise and light flashes of a relentless bombardment that shattered the night nonstop. Now it was the shelling that diverted their attention, and they barely noticed the rain, which made for treacherous footing in the muddy soil bulging with slippery rocks and tree roots.

"Grandpa!" Eitarō called out in vague apprehension. In the light flash of a bursting shell he saw Zentoku flip the straw baskets over the carrying pole and hoist it onto his shoulders.

"You know that field just below here?" asked Zentoku. "Under the 'Navy Commander'?"

"Sure, I know all your family's land, Grandpa." With the same left hand that held the hoe, Eitarō brushed away the slimy, wet *susuki* leaves that were slapping at his face as he raised his voice proudly over the noise of the rain to answer Zentoku's question. On their way down the embankment, Eitarō came dangerously close to slipping into a huge hole made by a cannon shell. As soon as he regained his footing, he was worried again about Zentoku. "Grandpa!"

"Yeah?" Zentoku called back from far below on the slope. He'd already gotten well beyond the shell hole and had climbed down to the billboard painted with the figure of the "Navy Commander," which was the trademark for Jintan breath mints. Now there was another flash and Eitarō could see the commander in his old-fashioned commodore's hat, wearing a look of robust good health and a serene expression on his face.

"I'm putting the baskets down here. We can toss over the potatoes we dig up." Zentoku's quavering voice revealed that he was already exhausted.

"I'll dig, Grandpa. You cut the vines."

This time Zentoku accepted the easier job without a word, unlike before when they'd dug the hole for the soldier. But as he started digging, Eitarō's frustration mounted because the hoe handle he grasped in his one hand was soon slippery with rain and mud. On top of that, he had to scrape off the mud that clung to every potato he dug up before heaving it toward the baskets.

"Don't bother with the mud," Zentoku yelled. "Just toss 'em over. I'll scrape it off later." Having forgotten his sickle at home, Zentoku had to stop at each plant and crouch down, using all the strength in his legs to rip the potatoes out of the ground. Thrust backward by his own momentum, he fell down again and again on his butt. "God damn it!" he cursed to himself, scowling each time he got to his feet.

When dawn started to break, the potatoes Zentoku had managed to scrape off were just beginning to form a mountain-shaped pile. "That's enough for now," he called out in a voice weak from exhaustion, then gazed off absently into the distance around him where several people stood in the fields within his view. From far away, everything looked calm and he felt somehow relieved. But what he saw a moment later instantly swept away all his sleepiness and fatigue. "Hey, that's Zenga, our school principal!"

Looking where Zentoku pointed, toward the opposite corner of the family's potato field, Eitarō was shocked to see Zenga now standing there, digging in the ground.

"What'll we do, Eitarō? He's stealing from us!" On this dimly lit battlefield, Zentoku had now run into a problem that, in his mind, was far more serious than all the trouble of digging up sweet potatoes.

"Aw, let him take some, Grandpa. We've got plenty."

"But he didn't even come to ask permission. And he's the school principal!"

"The cannons might have blown him away if he'd tried to get here. Besides, he's a relative."

"Yeah, but he's still the principal. So what the hell do we do now?"

Thrown into confusion by this unexpected betrayal of trust, Zentoku had forgotten about the rain. Several times he started to get up, then changed his mind and sat down again. Now he was remembering someone else—the village councilman carrying a piglet—who they'd happened to meet on the road the day the family left home. Zentoku had felt a vague admiration watching him walk away because he was, after all, a man of learning. But these days such learning was no longer respected. Carrying a piglet marked him as nothing more than a jittery old tightwad, and the principal was further proof of what things had come to. "Being a principal or a village councilman just doesn't matter anymore," Zentoku muttered in a hoarse voice heavy with regret.

Hearing this, Eitarō wondered if the village councilman might have joined in the thievery and looked out to survey the scene again. At that moment Zenga finally noticed them. At first he swung around to face them, then quickly turned his back. Hunching down, he started edging away in short, quick steps while hastily wrapping an armful of sweet potatoes in what looked like a man's kimono. Then, tossing the bundle over his shoulder, he took off in a staggering run in the opposite direction toward a nearby thicket of sugarcane.

"Hey, he's gonna get away!" yelled Zentoku, and without thinking, he started after him.

"Grandpa! No!" Eitarō dashed after Zentoku to stop him, but his foot caught on a potato vine and he tumbled down hard. At that instant he heard a shell explode with a roar and Zentoku scream.

Shrapnel from a battleship cannon had ripped a clump of flesh the size of a fist from Zentoku's back. Eitarō tried desperately to help him to his feet and saw that the upper half of his own body was smeared with Zentoku's blood. He tried shaking Grandpa and yelling to him, but he didn't move. Through it all Zenga had not even turned around once and seemed to have blended in with his surroundings as he stood among some local farmers.

By this time the morning sun had risen, bringing daylight, and Eitarō saw a shell explode against a hilltop just ahead, spouting debris. Below, where a thin mist hovered, was Zenga's family tomb. Eitarō wondered how long it would take Zenga, after "stealing" all the

potatoes he could carry, to get down there. How many times would he fall on the way? And, most important, could he make it safely? By now he was probably scrambling away on the other side of the sugarcane field, and as Eitarō imagined Zenga stumbling along, he barely suppressed an urge to yell at him. Though managing to lift Zentoku's body, already grown cold, off the ground, Eitarō was dripping with sweat and covered with mud, so, with only one arm, it took him a very long time to hoist the body onto his shoulder. Just when he thought he'd gotten it up there, it slid off and fell to the ground. Then he lifted it too far to one side and it slipped over his armless shoulder and fell again. Once he was on the verge of going back and bringing Také to help but decided it would be unforgivable to leave Zentoku alone even for a minute. Besides, he had an ominous premonition that, if he brought her here, the next shell would kill them both. At last he was able to hold Zentoku up on his shoulder by grasping him upside down, legs pointed upward. It took all his strength to crawl to the top of the embankment, where he took a few slow steps on the ground as he fought a crushing exhaustion that seemed to shatter into splinters, piercing his body from shoulders to feet. Suddenly a violent gust of wind sent him reeling, but as he started to tumble back down the embankment, his fall was checked just in time by the "Navy Commander" sign.

The moment he finally reached the tomb after his long struggle back, the wailing of Ushi and Také that greeted him made the whole ordeal seem worthwhile. He knew he had done the right thing and looked forward now to their appreciation and sympathy. So when the two women pushed him aside and abandoned themselves to weeping over poor Zentoku, Eitarō wanted to throw himself down and cry. But, resisting this urge, he soon felt a strange rush of pleasure welling up inside him.

It came most of all from the powerful solidarity he felt with Ushi, Také, and the children as they grieved together for Zentoku before the bones of their ancestors inside that cramped, narrow tomb. Knowing this precious unity was possible only because he had risked his life through rain, mud, and shelling gave him renewed energy and an unexpected sense of pride. *Starting today, I'll lead this family safely out*

*of this battlefield*, he vowed silently. And thinking how reassured they all must feel to have this young man with them enhanced his pride and sense of responsibility. He remembered now telling Také that "even someone like me will come in handy for this family someday." But soon his pleasure turned to loneliness as he realized sadly that his sense of fulfillment had come as a result of Zentoku's death.

Eitarō also knew that the only thing he should be feeling now was sympathy for Zentoku and his family. The moment of Grandpa's death replayed slowly in his mind, along with the painful memory of Zentoku's chagrin over a school principal who would steal when, according to Grandpa, even in a war he should have made the short trip to ask his relatives' permission. Grandpa was so old-fashioned to worry about such things at a time like this, thought Eitarō, feeling mildly dizzy from hunger. Maybe Zenga had no fields near his tomb and had decided that if forced to steal, it would be better to take from a relative. If only Eitarō had explained this to Zentoku in time, Grandpa might not have died so suddenly. Such thoughts were Eitarō's way of offering his sympathy to the two grieving women and expressing his devotion to this family. Taking responsibility for the family now, he told himself, would ease the women's minds. And, as their sobbing abated, he started to explain what had happened.

"I'd never expected it," he said, beginning his account from the time when he and Zentoku had set out from the tomb. But he quickly ran into the dilemma of many witnesses to tragic events. Though he tried hard to offer an objective, even scientific, explanation, the experience had been so personal—so solitary—that he found himself constantly digressing into a haze of subjective impressions. He clearly remembered falling down and feeling exhausted, but everything else he'd been through seemed shrouded in rain and darkness. When he came to Zentoku's final moments, Ushi wanted to know more and interrupted him with questions, her tear-stained eyes opening wide.

"Where were you when it happened?"

Eitarō answered without difficulty at first, guessing from memory how many feet he'd been from Zentoku. But when she asked this same question for about the fourth time, he stared at her intently, as though suddenly fearful. It was obvious that she was pressing her frantic

inquiry to make sure Zentoku's death had been truly unavoidable. And behind her questions loomed a heavy sense of responsibility that was now, unmistakably, shifting to Eitarō. Though he did not fully grasp her intent, he tried to evade this disturbing inquiry and rationalize his actions by plunging into a minute description of events. When he reached the point where they had spotted Zenga, his explanation became even more detailed, until he finally ended his account.

"So there was no way the principal could have known Grandpa died. And then I carried him back here, getting all sweaty, as you can see."

Eitarō tried to end the story in a way that avoided the issue of his responsibility, though he might have been overreacting to Ushi's questions.

"Well then, nothing could have been done. It was heaven's destiny," Ushi finally said while she finished wiping her tears. And, as though adding a last refrain, Také sobbed once more in a high, wailing voice. When she had quieted, Ushi spoke again, softly but forcefully.

"Now let's bury him."

Eitarō and Také both nodded. Yet hadn't they only last night finished burying a soldier whose name and hometown they never knew? Eitarō's heart sank as he remembered that ordeal. But at the same time he knew Grandpa would have to be buried, especially after all he'd gone through to carry Zentoku back to the tomb so he could lie with his ancestors. Lacking a coffin, they could bury him now in the garden out front, then re-inter him later with a proper ceremony when the war was over.

"All right, I'll get the hoe," said Eitarō in a tone of resignation as he got to his feet. The hoe and baskets were still out in the field.

"Let me go," offered Také.

"No, never mind. I know where I put it. And I can bring back some potatoes, too." Still covered with sweat, Eitarō shook himself as though warding off the cold. Then Ushi spoke.

"You'll have to go around to the relatives, too."

"Huh?" Také and Eitarō gasped simultaneously.

"First to Zenga's place. Then to Zenchō's. He's probably staying at his family's tomb on the hill right behind us. Then to Zenshin's. Oh,

and Zensei's wife is probably at her family's tomb. Just go see the people nearby. Can you think of anyone else, Také?"

"Grandma, this is hardly a time to be visiting relatives," Eitarō said, his voice wavering with shock and dismay, but Ushi was unmoved.

"With Zentoku dying like this, his ancestors would surely condemn me if I didn't give him a proper burial." She looked around intently at the rows of mortuary urns, then continued. "It's even more important because Zenga still doesn't know Grandpa died. We can't leave things the way they are or Grandpa will go to the next world bearing a grudge. And if he tells the ancestors there, it'll be awful for Zenga. No. As Zentoku's second wife, there would be no place in this family for me if I failed now in my duty to our relatives."

Her words came amid the relentless cacophony of exploding shells, droning airplanes, and pouring rain. Také and Eitarō looked at each other, their mouths tightly drawn. Both were remembering what Ushi had said to Eitarō with such fervency their first night in the tomb: "If you die here, you'll never be able to face your ancestors." Surely she had not forgotten her words then. So why was she sending him off now to risk his life on these errands?

"Oh, and Eitarō. There's one more thing." Ushi peered gently at Také and Eitarō, whose eyes were fixed on her. "Grandpa forgave both of you before he died. So burying him properly is your last filial duty."

Také burst out wailing in a voice so loud she seemed to explode. "Dad! Oh, Dad!"

Clinging to Zentoku's body, she barely wrenched out the words through her uncontrolled weeping. As for Eitarō, his face gradually settled into the expression of a wayward youth who had just vowed to reform. Their suspicion of a moment before over Ushi's apparent inconsistency had quickly evaporated, and they were now resolved to carry out the mission she had assigned them. Though unaware of it herself, Ushi's real purpose in asking them to perform "their filial duty" was to apologize to her own ancestors. The possibility that, in carrying it out faithfully, they might be killed by cannon fire never entered her mind. Meanwhile, the mortuary urns peered down at the three of them, as always, in silence.

Five more minutes passed and then Ushi, feeling now that she had

made full atonement to her ancestors, clasped her hands together in prayer. By now Eitarō and Také had decided which relatives each should visit. Eitarō had assigned himself the more distant Zenga and was running along the top of the embankment. He turned back to look at Také, but she was hidden from sight in the shade of some trees. At that same moment a nearby tomb was blown to smithereens, and the wind from the blast sent him tumbling down the embankment. After getting to his feet, he realized that at long last the rain had stopped. Surely, he thought, this was help from heaven to carry out his filial duty. And he looked up to see that the clouds hanging over the nearby ridge of hills were rapidly floating away. But now, smoke spewed up from those hillsides each time they were pounded by shells. Momentarily forgetting the danger of being exposed in the middle of a field, Eitarō stood upright to gaze out at the ocean. A battleship was burning in flames that shot upward as airplanes swarmed around it in the sky overhead. Seconds later one plane swooped down at the battleship in a sudden nosedive, and, from the place where it disappeared, more flames spewed upward. Eitarō gasped. Then, with a courage surging inside him more powerful than any he'd ever felt before, he took off trampling through the field at top speed. After about fifty yards he came to the sugarcane field where Zenga had hidden that morning. He could see that taking a shortcut through it would be much faster than running along the top of the embankment. But the going was rough inside, where the ground was furrowed with ridges and the cane leaves bore tiny teeth that slashed his hands and face, smearing blood all over them. Still, he was relieved to know he was concealed from view. Coming to the edge of the field, he paused for breath. Then, looking up ahead, he was thrown into sudden despair. Before him lay a river about thirty feet wide that he had to cross to reach Zenga's tomb, but the bridge had collapsed into the water.

Remembering that this was the only bridge, he took a deep breath, then started climbing down the embankment, letting himself slide the last few feet to the bottom. Near its banks the river came up only to his waist, but it got deeper as he moved out toward the middle and would soon be over his head. Still, even with one arm, Eitarō was a confident swimmer, certain that the swift current couldn't stop him, though it

might deflect him a little. Bracing himself, he felt his way along with his feet, reassured that he was safer in the river than he would be out in the open on land. But having misjudged the riverbed's depth, he suddenly felt his whole body sink underwater and his feet catch in the mud. He gulped down several mouthfuls of water before floating back up to the surface.

"Damn it!" he yelled, and after swimming a few more seconds, he finally reached the opposite shore. He had stopped to rest on the bank and catch his breath when all at once, from behind him, he heard an absurdly loud roar and saw countless clumps of earth hurtling through the air. He turned back to see that the spot of ground inside the cane grove he'd just left was entirely blown away. Now he could look all the way through to the fields beyond and noticed that the "Navy Commander" no longer stood in the place where he should have been. Perhaps he, too, had been blown away. The many clumps of earth that had just fallen into the river made the water even muddier in the quickening current.

But now Eitarō saw worse trouble ahead. Even if he somehow managed to climb the embankment looming before him—about 300 yards wide—and make it safely to Zenga's tomb, how could he ever bring the old principal back across the river?

He'd worried only about getting through shells, mud, and filthy water. And now, standing knee-deep in the river, he cursed his lack of foresight.

Nearby the thundering roared again, followed by more wind from the blast. Eitarō tightly clutched the weeds growing on the embankment and set his feet firmly in the riverbed. "All right! If I have to die, I don't give a shit where they bury me. But before that, I've got to get to Zenga."

Slipping and sliding through the mud, his legs smeared with blood, Eitarō finally climbed to the top of the embankment. Now he threw himself down to lie flat on the ground and turned to look back the way he'd come. Along a distant ridge of hills he saw something moving in the direction of the tomb where Ushi quietly clasped her hands in prayer. At first he couldn't tell what it was, but soon he heard heavy thuds in the surrounding area that sounded much more like

trench mortars than battleship cannons. And when the smoke cleared, again there was movement. Soldiers! Eitarō could see now that a huge force was moving in and realized he might not be able to make it back to Ushi.

With his last ounce of strength, he dragged himself to his feet, his body feeling like it would disintegrate. All he could think was that unless Zentoku and his ancestors acknowledged the loyalty he had rendered them even at the risk of his life, the family would be punished.

Knowing nothing of Eitarō's ordeal, Ushi waited impatiently inside the tomb for her loyal relatives. Together with her grandchildren, she gazed at Zentoku's remains while outside, slowly but surely, the firing line approached.

TRANSLATED BY STEVE RABSON

#### SHIMA TSUYOSHI (1939- )

*Shima Tsuyoshi is the pen name of Ōshiro Masayasu (no relation to Ōshiro Tatsuhiro). Born in Tamagusuku, Shima graduated from Waseda University in Tokyo. While working for the prefectural Office of Education, he has written dramatic works, film scenarios, and historical studies in addition to fiction. His historical survey, Okinawa in the History of the Shōwa Era (Shōwa-shi no naka no Okinawa), was published by Iwanami in a best-selling series on contemporary social issues. He has also written several historical studies of the Battle of Okinawa and was an editor of the multivolume History of Okinawa Prefecture (Okinawa-ken shi), published by the prefectural government.*

*His stage dramas and films often depict Okinawan civilians who fled U.S. enemy forces during the Battle of Okinawa and sought shelter in caves, where they were threatened, beaten, and sometimes killed by "friendly forces" of the Japanese Imperial Army*

*"Bones" (Hone) appeared in the Ryūkyū shinpō in 1973 and was the first work to receive the newspaper's annual Short Story Prize. Readers should note that it was published only one year after Okinawa's reversion to Japan. Reversion opened the floodgates for massive economic investment from mainland Japan, and the resulting construction boom generated tremendous excitement and optimism among Okinawans—at least for a while. As this story suggests, however, eager Japanese developers and local construction crews sometimes unearthed more than just soil.*

## BONES

SHIMA TSUYOSHI

THE WORK CREW had arrived at the construction site and was taking a break when a yellow safety helmet swung into view at the foot of the hill. The man in the helmet was moving at a fast clip as he made his way up the dirt road that cut through the pampas grass. Right behind him was an old woman. She relied on a walking stick, but she dogged him like a shadow.

The construction site was situated atop a stretch of foothills from which one could see the entire city of Naha in a single sweep. Long, long ago the area had been covered in trees, and many a tale had been told about the ghosts who resided in the dark, densely wooded hills. But that was until the war. The heavy naval bombardment from offshore had leveled the *akagi* forests down to the last tree. And then came the postwar expansion of the city that had altered the way the land looked down below once and for all. It was as though the whole area had been painted over in colors that gave it a bright, gaudy look. The denuded slope was like a halfpeeled papaya. The top had been lopped off, and from there to the road a quarter of the way down the hill, the red clay was exposed to the elements. According to the notice posted at the construction site, the hilltop was slated to become the site of a twenty-story luxury hotel.

The five men in the work crew were from Naha City Hall. Sitting under the shade of a giant banyan tree, they gazed at the city as it stretched before them. The plain was flat and dry and looked as though it had been lightly dusted in a silvery powder. The August sun had

risen to a point in the sky where it was now almost directly overhead. As the light danced over the whitecaps that broke against the coral reef lying offshore, it seemed almost playful. It was as though the sun had come to make fun of the men and the bored, fed-up expressions they wore on their faces. Meanwhile, some forty to fifty feet from the tree sat a big bulldozer. It was resting quietly for the moment, but the prongs on the shovel were pointed this way. It was just about there, too—the spot where the bulldozer was parked—that the bones had turned up the day before.

The man in the yellow safety helmet nodded in the direction of the assistant section chief as he approached the work crew from city hall. He was the man in charge of the construction site, and the company name, "TOA ELECTRIC," was embroidered on his breast pocket in fancy gold letters. They glittered in the sunlight.

"Well, where are the bones?" asked the assistant section chief, a round-shouldered man. He had grabbed a shovel and looked as though he was ready to get to work right away.

"I hate to say it, but there's been a new hitch." As the construction boss turned and looked behind him, the metal rims of his glasses seemed to flash as they caught the light of the sun.

There was the old woman—her neck thrust forward, her withered chin jutting out prominently into the air. She was out of breath from keeping up with the man in the yellow safety hat as they had climbed the long incline.

"So where is it, this spot you're talking about?"

There was a razor-sharp edge to the man's voice as he turned to address the old woman. With that, she lifted her walking stick and pointed it at the men from city hall.

"That's it there. I'm sure of it. Because the tree marks the spot. Any place from the tree to where you've got your bulldozer parked over there is where you'll find 'em. Yes sir, underneath it's nothing but bones. I know 'cause I saw it all with my own two eyes. There's no mistake. I'm absolutely certain of it."

The construction boss could hardly believe what he was being told and turned to the assistant section chief with a look of total incredulity.

"I never thought I'd have a mess like this on my hands. It wasn't until this morning that these people let me know there was a *graveyard* up here."

The construction boss introduced the old woman to the assistant section chief. She was the former owner of the property, and her family name was Higa. Higa Kame. Her given name sounded the same as the word for turtle, and the boss could not help feeling there was something tortoise-like about the old woman's appearance.

The turtle woman cut him short. "No, Mister, this is no graveyard. We just dug a hole and threw the bodies in. That's all there was to it. We were in the middle of a war here on the island, and nothing more could be done."

"But that's exactly what I needed to hear from you. Why in hell didn't you say something about graves before now? Letting heavy-duty equipment sit idle even for one day costs a fortune. We're taking a big loss."

The anger in the man's voice was countered by an equally furious look from the old turtle woman. Her aging, yellowed eyes had peaked into small triangles, and her lips were tightly pursed. The assistant section chief tossed his shovel aside. He knew trouble and could see it coming now.

"What kind of numbers are we talking about here?" he asked uneasily.

"Thousands. The mayor had us gather up all the bodies from around here and put them in a pile. There were so many you couldn't begin to count 'em. . . ." The old woman waved her stick in the air as if to make her point. Doubtless she was having trouble expressing herself in standard Japanese and felt the need to emphasize what she had to say.

"That many, huh?" A look of despair crossed the assistant section chief's face.

"There were so many bodies they wouldn't fit in the hole. Later on we used gasoline to burn them and then buried the ashes. The mayor said he'd look after the upkeep of the site, but then we never heard another word from him. Poor souls. There was no one to care for them

when they died, and now their bones have been completely abandoned."

"That's not how I heard it. No siree, that's not the story I was told." The frustration and anger in the construction boss' voice was almost palpable as he spat out the words in his own local Osaka dialect from mainland Japan.

*No, that was not the story.*

It was a line from the script recited to him by the people down at city hall. But the line was supposed to be delivered by them to him, not by him to someone else.

It was yesterday when he had phoned them from the construction site to say unmarked graves had been uncovered on the hill and that the company was asking city hall to step in and deal with the problem.

"Unmarked graves are the responsibility of the Health and Physical Education Section," he was told. "They're the ones to handle it."

But then again, if he was talking about the bones of war dead, "Well, *no, that was a another story* altogether."

"Where's a phone around here?" The assistant section chief seemed to have decided on some plan of action and needed to report it to the office.

The boss took the lead as the two men headed up the red clay slope of the hill. The others remained seated on the ground, watching the boss and the assistant section chief disappear into the distance.

The first to speak was the oldest member in the group. He was wearing a pair of rubber work boots. "Ma'am, when you say 'bones,' are you talking about the bones of mainland Japanese?"

The turtle woman inched her way under the big banyan tree. Her lips were in constant motion. It was as if she were chewing on something or muttering to herself. "Hell, what does it matter whose bones they are? They all died in the big battle. Japanese. Americans. Men. Women. Even little babies got killed while they were still sucking at their mothers' breasts. We dumped them all together into this one big pit."

"You mean there really are thousands of bodies buried under here?" This time it was the fellow with only one eye who spoke. He could hardly believe what the old woman had said.



"They talked about putting up a memorial stone. That's what the mayor told us, and that's why my father planted this tree to mark the spot."

Without thinking, the men let their eyes scan the tree that branched overhead. Now that she had mentioned it, there *was* something strange about a banyan tree growing here. But there it was, standing in the middle of a field of pampas grass. It had been free to grow as it pleased, and, tropical plant that it was, it had shot up to a height of ten yards. From its boughs hung a long red beard of tendrils that reached all the way to the ground.

"That means it's twenty-eight years old." The one-eyed jack blew a puff of smoke from his lips. He sounded impressed at the thought of how much the tree had grown.

"And, ma'am, that means when you got the boss here to buy the land you pretended not to know about the bones, right?" This time it was the youngster in the group who spoke up. What with a crop of whiskers on his chin, he looked like a hippie, and there was a smart-alecky grin on his face.

"No, idiot. The reason the company got the property was . . ." The old woman sprayed the area with the spittle that flew from the gap between her missing two front teeth. "It was all because of that dumb son of ours. He let the real estate agent pull the wool over his eyes. We tried to educate him. We tried to get him to understand what sort of property it was and that it ought not to be sold, but he never got the point."

It was not long before the assistant section chief and the construction boss were back. They both looked agitated.

"We've got no choice. We're the ones who will have to step in and deal with the problem, and that's that. The government is ducking it at both the national and prefectural levels, saying there's no budget. Or no manpower. That means we're elected for the job. So let's get to work." The assistant section chief turned to his men and addressed them in a voice that was more mature than expected for a person his age.

But no one moved. The men continued to sit, smoking their cigarettes and wearing the same dull expression that had been on their faces all morning. The construction company boss studied them with a

forlorn, even helpless, look. "Just how many days is this going to take, anyway," he asked.

"Hmm, I wonder. After all, these are the only men we could muster from the city's Disinfection Unit. With such a small crew, there's no telling how long it might take," replied the assistant section chief.

The construction boss walked in a circle, trampling the thick clumps of summer grass underfoot. It appeared he had some sort of plan in mind. Suddenly he stopped in his tracks and looked up, turning the full force of his charming baby face on the crew. "First, I must ask you men not to let anyone from the newspapers get wind of what's happening here. Once the press gets to shouting about it, we'll have a real mess on our hands."

The assistant section chief had a questioning look in his eye as he closely studied the construction boss' face. He seemed to be stumped and not fully prepared to digest what the boss might say next.

"We don't want any news to get out that will damage the future image of the hotel."

The assistant section chief nodded in agreement. Clearly, something in the boss' argument had impressed and persuaded him.

But by then Hippie-Beard was already on his feet. "Here we go again. And whose ass are we wiping this time? I can't believe we are going to do this." His heavy, gong-like voice resonated in the air. Yet if he was being sarcastic, his remarks seemed aimed at no one in particular.

"It's a helluva lot better than having to dig up undetonated bombs," piped up One-Eyed Jack.

All the men from city hall knew what he was talking about. They also knew he had a history of dropping explosives overboard in the ocean to catch fish illegally, and this was how he had lost an eye.

"Anyway, we start work right after lunch," announced the assistant section chief.

But Kamakichi was in no hurry, and he was the last member of the crew to get to his feet. The shadow that the big banyan tree cast on the ground had shrunk to nothing by now. In the distance, the cicadas were droning away. The mere thought of what was about to unfold was enough to make Kamakichi depressed. And, try as he might, he could not help feeling this way.

It was a little past noon the following day when the first bones began to surface. The men had been digging all morning, and until then the only noticeable change had been in the color of the soil as it turned from red to gray. As they dug deeper, they began to find some white things that looked like pieces of broken clamshells scattered in the powdered soil. Perhaps they only imagined it, but the earth seemed to give off the odor of rotting flesh.

"It's like the old woman said. The upper layer is all ashes."

The assistant section chief directed his crew to spread a canvas tarp along the edge of the pit. Kamakichi and the man in the rubber work boots were put to work doing the sorting. When each spadeful of dirt and ash was shoveled out of the hole, their job was to pick out the pieces of bone and put them in a burlap bag. Because the small, cremated pieces of bone had been reduced almost to a powder, it was impossible to identify any of them as belonging to a particular part of the human anatomy. Kamakichi closed his eyes. It was with a sinking feeling of dread and disgust that he forced his hands to sift through the piles of ashes.

The work went at a livelier pace once whole pieces of bone began to emerge from the pit. The gloomier the job became, the more it seemed, paradoxically, to raise the men's spirits. From out of the ashes came two round objects about the size of Ping-Pong balls.

"*What're these?*" When Kamakichi showed them to the man in the boots, Rubber Boots laughed and thrust them in the direction of Kamakichi's crotch.

"Fossilized balls."

All at once the men roared with laughter.

"No, no. It's not right to laugh at the dead. They're all bodhisattvas now, you know." The assistant section chief looked very serious, befitting his position of responsibility, and there was a mildly admonishing tone in his voice. "That's the hinge ball where the femur attaches to the hipbone."

"I bet you were born after the war," said Rubber Boots to Kamakichi.

Kamakichi felt as if the older man was trying to make fun of him. As for the war, he had no memory of it. "I was two when the war ended."

"Why, it's practically the same thing. If you ask me it seems like, ever since the war, we've all kept on living here in these islands by picking our way through a huge pile of bones. That's what's kept us going."

"Back then, nobody batted an eye at the thought of sleeping with a corpse," chimed in One-Eyed Jack.

Rubber Boots went on with what he was saying. He spoke with the authority of an older person who was the senior member of the work crew. "I was in the local defense forces when I was taken prisoner. One day I discovered a patch of big, white daikon growing in a field not far from the POW camp. But when I went to dig them out of the ground, I found they were growing on top of a huge mound of bones."

"Did you eat 'em?" asked Hippie-Beard.

"Of course I did. What do you think?"

Once again the men roared with laughter.

"It's the dead protecting the living," said One-Eyed Jack. The tone of his voice was almost reverential.

"This here banyan tree is a lot like us. It's had good fertilizer." Rubber Boots stretched himself upward from the waist and craned his neck to peer up at the tree.

"It's the same for everybody here in Okinawa," added One-Eyed Jack, sounding almost as if he were making excuses for himself.

"That may be true, but what about the others? You know, the ones who've used their fellow Okinawans as bonemeal to feed off them and make themselves rich and fat." It was Hippie-Beard speaking up again. He had been born after the war but was determined not to let this conversation pass without putting in his two cents.

"So just who is it you're talking about?" One-Eyed Jack had turned serious.

But now Hippie-Beard got flustered, at a loss to explain.

As Kamakichi sorted out the pieces of bone, he could feel the gorge rise in his throat, and he had to swallow hard from time to time just to be able to keep working. He felt oddly out of place amid the lively banter of the other men in the work crew. What they were saying struck him as terribly disrespectful, even blasphemous, toward the dead. At the same time, he kept trying to tell himself that the

bones were just objects, no different from what one might find in an archaeological dig of an old shell mound.

In the afternoon, as the men began to let their pace slacken, all at once the old woman silently reappeared, as if out of nowhere. They welcomed her back, trying to joke with her about the job they were doing. But she would have no part of it. She hunkered down next to Kamakichi and began to study the pile of bones. As always, her mouth was in constant but wordless motion.

"Hey, ma'am. Afterwards we want you to do a good job of saying prayers for the dead buried here to rest in peace. Otherwise, there'll be hell to pay if so many lost souls get out and start wandering all over the place." The assistant section chief seemed to be in an uncharacteristically jocular mood.

But the old woman said nothing, and presently she began to help Kamakichi sift through a pile of ash. She worked with the deftness of a farm girl trained to sort beans of different sizes. As her fingers sifted, her mouth in ceaseless motion began to form words that she muttered to herself. "You poor, poor things. Whose bones are you, here in this miserable place? Look what's become of you. Who were your parents? And who were your children? It's all so sad."

Her mutterings were like a pesky gadfly that flitted about Kamakichi's ears. As he watched the deft movements of the old woman's withered hands, suddenly he was reminded of his mother. And then he remembered the three stones she had told him about. She said she had collected them at the bottom of the precipice at Mabuni. That was the place where Japanese soldiers had jumped to their deaths rather than surrender to the enemy at the end of the Battle of Okinawa. But he knew that the story about the stones was no more true than the inscription "June 23rd," the last day of the battle, that was written on the back of his father's mortuary tablet as the date of his death in the war. He recalled the photograph placed on the family altar of his father dressed in the uniform for civilians in the Okinawa Defense Corps. His father had been taken from his job at the town office and conscripted into this citizens' army, which was supposed to be the island's last line of defense. It had all happened so very long ago that, to Kamakichi, it

seemed like some ancient, mythical tale that had no connection with him now.

Just as the men were about to finish for the day, the construction boss showed up. The straps of his safety helmet were, as always, tied firmly in place, and there was a folding ruler in his breast pocket.

"Looks like it's going to take a lot longer than expected." There was an arch look on his face as he peered down at the men in the pit.

"Look at it, will you? There are thousands of bones down here." Such was the cheerless reply the assistant section chief shouted back from the bottom of the hole.

Hippie-Beard shoveled a spadeful of bone and ash over the edge of the pit. "Wiping the ass of people who make a mess starting a war is no picnic, you know."

"THIS area here will be the front of the hotel's stroll garden," announced the construction boss as he walked around the pit one more time. "The landscape design is going to be quite elaborate."

"The view will be wonderful," said the assistant section chief, picking up on what the boss said and complimenting him.

"That's why, starting tomorrow, if it's okay with you, we'll get to work with the heavy equipment in the area next to your crew. As things stand now, we're way behind schedule, and it's time to start construction on the hotel."

"That's fine with us," replied the assistant section chief without a moment's hesitation.

That night Kamakichi sat drinking *awamori* at an *o-den* restaurant in Sakae-machi. It was his first night out in quite a while. But he had no appetite. It was almost as though his stomach were no longer his own. The mutterings of the old turtle woman continued to resound in his ears no matter how hard he tried to tune them out. Little by little, and long before he realized it, he had drunk himself into an alcoholic haze. He thought of his father, and the memories came back fast and furious, without letting up.

The bulldozer went to work in the area adjacent to the pit on the

crew's third day at the site. The loud, ferocious roar and the perpetual cloud of dust it generated assaulted the men mercilessly. Their mouths filled with grit, and they began to feel sick. It was as though something had swept them up in the air and was shaking their internal organs violently. To make matters worse, what had been the sole source of pleasure in their lugubrious task was now denied them because the bulldozer obliterated all possibility of conversation. Indeed, it stamped out anything they tried to say in much the same way it trampled the weeds growing on the hillside. The men now fell into a dark, sullen mood, and as the temperature climbed and their fatigue increased, they became wildly careless wielding their shovels. As they spit and tried to clear their parched throats, they felt a rising anger directed in equal parts at the steel-monster bulldozer and the idiocy of the assistant section chief.

The old woman was back again to help, having arrived in the morning. On the one hand, the din generated by what she called "the bull" made it impossible to hear her and thereby saved Kamakichi from having to listen to her gadfly-like mutterings. On the other hand, the lack of conversation or any other diversion left him all the more vulnerable to his private fantasies about the bones, causing him to withdraw into ever-deeper introspection.

It was a little past noon when the men began to uncover bones in the shape of whole skeletons. If not apparent earlier, it was now all too clear that excavating the gravesite would be far more time consuming than originally anticipated. The bones were solid, each one a heavy weight. In addition, buried along with them were all sorts of paraphernalia. Metal helmets. Army boots. Canteens. Bayonets. The mouth of the pit looked like a battlefield strewn with the litter of war.

All the bones had turned a rusty red. Collarbones. Shoulder bones. Thighbones. Rib bones. Tailbones. Skulls. One after another, bones like those Kamakichi remembered seeing in high school science class were chucked over the edge of the pit. Each time he went to pick one up, he could not prevent his mind from clothing it in fantasies about the living human flesh to which it had once been attached; and when he went to toss it in the burlap bag, he could not avoid hearing the dry, hollow sound it made. At times it seemed to him as if the bones were

quietly laughing, their laughter not unlike the sound of a stone rolling over and over, or of a cricket chirping.

A skull cracked in two right before his eyes. As he looked at the jagged edges, he felt he was about to be sick. He had been suffering from a hangover since morning and was sure his stomach was about to go on a rampage. In the midday heat, his head felt terribly heavy.

A tattered pair of army boots was slung over the edge of the pit. As Kamakichi went to set them aside, he saw a perfect set of foot bones inside. Each and every white piece of bone was intact, arranged in five neat little rows. As he began to pull them out, he heard one bone that had stuck to the boot's inside sole snap and break off with a crisp, popping sound. He felt his fingers go numb. And suddenly, his chest began to heave. The nausea swept over him like a great wave that rose from his stomach and then surged forward.

The old woman was collecting skulls from which she painstakingly wiped the dirt. No matter what skull she picked up, it always seemed to have the look of a living human face. Although everything else had turned a rusty red, the teeth eerily retained their original shining white. It was as if they were alive and wanted Kamakichi to know how hungry they were. He remembered the words his mother had said so many times. "War is hell. And, in that hell, no one escapes becoming a hungry ghost." She, too, had known what it was to fall into that hell and live among the hungry ghosts. Once, at the bottom of a dark cave at Makabe, she had taken a fistful of dirt and stuffed it into her little boy's mouth. Kamakichi was just a baby. He would not stop crying, and this was the only way she could silence him. She had seen a Japanese army officer silhouetted in the light at the mouth of the cave. His sword was drawn, and she knew that meant he would kill the child if he did not stop crying. And so it had become her habit to say to her son, "That's what war is like."

Doubtless these bones had been on the verge of starvation when the people died, and even now they wore a hungry look. Kamakichi's hands ceased to move, and kneeling there in front of a skull, he mentally traced on it what he could remember of his father's face.

Just then a canteen came rolling over the edge of the pit. Casually, Kamakichi picked it up, then realized he could hear water still

splashing inside. He felt as if his face had been dashed with cold water, and a terrible chill ran down his spine.

At the 3:00 P.M. break the assistant section chief asked if the men had come across any gold fillings. The engine on the heavy-duty equipment owned by Toa Electric had been switched off, but still the men made no effort to reply. "It's amazing. All these bones and not one gold-capped tooth in the lot. I wonder why." The answer to this question he had posed like some mysterious riddle was patently obvious, but something kept the men from speaking up. It required too much energy.

That was when Kamakichi happened to notice a flat piece of bone sitting right in front of him. It was shaped like a spatula, and a fragment of rusted metal protruded from its surface. When he picked it up and looked at it closely, he could see that a sharply pointed blade had pierced all the way through to the other side. "It must have hurt like hell," he said, muttering almost to himself. Even he was shaken by the implication of his own words.

*What was that?* Suddenly he was overcome by a hallucination that his father was lying right next to him. Yes, there he was, lying on his side. Kamakichi had never thought much about his father until now. It had always seemed natural for his father not to be around. Except once—and that was when he had gone for an interview at the bank and they had rejected him for the job. He had resented being a son with a father who had never been more than a fleeting figure—a ghost—in his life.

Before anyone knew it, the construction boss was back, standing around and talking with the assistant section chief. It appeared they were discussing the next step in the project. Since there was no sign that "the bull" was about to start up again, the men in the city hall work crew stretched out and decided to relax for a while.

"Cut it down?" They could hear the high-pitched voice of the assistant section chief.

"The landscape people will be here tomorrow to do their survey, and we can't wait any longer. We're way behind schedule."

"But what a waste. You can't just cut down a tree as big as this one. And didn't you say this spot was going to be part of the hotel garden?"

"But that's exactly why it's in the way. Besides, it's only a local tree

that grew here naturally. We'll be bringing in coconut and fern palms as part of the garden's motif."

The assistant section chief made no attempt to question the construction boss further.

"Since it has to be cut down, we might as well do it now," the construction boss said. "Then, starting tomorrow, we'll put up a tent over there for shade at break times."

"Damn it. This is an outrage! It's out-and-out violence, that's what it is. Now you've gone too far." Suddenly Hippié-Beard had leapt to his feet.

Startled by the young man's voice, everyone started to get up. But his expected protest did not last. And, looking as cool as could be, the construction boss ignored him.

"Our company has no intention of doing anything to inconvenience you."

Just then, the old turtle woman pushed her way through the men and stepped to the front of the group.

"Well, Mr. Bossman. You say you're going to chop down the banyan tree? And just who do you think it belongs to? That tree there was planted by my father. What's more, it has come to be possessed by the spirits of thousands of dead people. That's where their spirits live. Don't you have any common sense?"

There was something of the shamaness about the old woman. Her raised eyebrows floating high on her forehead and her old, yellowed eyes coated with moisture gave her the look of a woman possessed.

"I can't say I know much about the customs in these parts," said the construction boss. "Besides, the title to the land has already been transferred, and . . ."

"I'll never permit it. Never. Because this tree here is my father's. Don't you have any appreciation for all the hardship and suffering people had to go through in the past?"

"We can't allow you to interfere with our job. No matter what you say."

The men continued to stand where they were, silent and expressionless. The construction boss' face was full of anger as his eyes surveyed, one by one, the row of apathetic faces before him.

At last the assistant section chief spoke. "Isn't it possible to move the tree somewhere else?"

"There'd be no problem, if it were all that easy. But look, I only work for somebody else, just like you."

The turtle woman stepped between the two men. "Look here, you. If you so much as lay a finger on that tree, there will be a curse on you wherever you go in Okinawa, and, before you know it, bad luck will come crashing down on that head of yours."

Kamakichi leaned back against the banyan tree as he studied the withered nape of the old woman's neck. Given his druthers, it was a scene he would have preferred never to have witnessed. How much better it would have been if he had averted his eyes and looked the other way. He felt his head grow feverish, and from time to time a knot tightened in his chest that made him feel as if he were going to be sick at any moment.

The surface of the banyan tree was rough to the touch, and it hurt when he rubbed his back against the trunk. Still, there was something about the tree that made him feel cool and refreshed. It made him think of his father again.

For no apparent reason he reached up and tore a single leaf from the branch overhead. Almost automatically his fingers went to work, and after trimming off the edges, he rolled the leaf up. Then, pinching one end of the rolled leaf between his fingers, he blew through it as hard as he could. The piercing screech it made took everyone by surprise. Even the construction boss' yellow safety helmet appeared to flash and—bang!—explode in the bright sunlight as he turned toward the sound of the whistle.

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM J. TYLER

### NAKAHARA SHIN (1949- )

*Nakahara Shin is the pen name of Yamazato Katsunori. Born in Motobu, he is currently professor of American literature at the University of the Ryukyus. After receiving a B.A. from the University of the Ryukyus, he attended graduate school at the University of Hawai'i and the University of California-Davis, where he earned a Ph.D. in English. A member of an Okinawa writers group that meets regularly to critique each other's work, Nakahara has recently completed a book-length study of American nature writing and has written extensively about poet Gary Snyder. He has also coedited a volume on postwar Okinawan culture and writes as a literary critic for local newspapers and magazines.*

*"The Silver Motorcycle" (Gin no otobai) appeared in the Ryūkyū shinpō in November 1977 and won the newspaper's Short Story Prize that year. It alludes on page 186 to the famous ryūka poem quoted on page 16 of the introduction. The translation below is, to our knowledge, the first time that a Japanese fiction writer has published an English translation of his own work.*

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

FROM OKINAWA



EDITED BY

MICHAEL MOLASKY AND STEVE RABSON

© 2000 University of Hawai'i Press  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America  
00 01 02 03 04 05 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Southern Exposure : modern Japanese literature from Okinawa / edited by Michael  
Molasky and Steve Rabson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

Contents: A verse from "Translations of old Okinawan poems" (ca. 1922) /  
Serei Kunio – My last letter (1927) / Nakamura Kare – Entering the harbor of a  
southern island (1931) ; Dead body (1931) / Tsukayama Issui – A conversation (1395) ;  
Shell-shocked island (1964) / Yamanokuchi Baku – Dream revelations (1984) /  
Takara Ben – Officer Ukuma (1922) / Ikemiyagi Sekiho – Memoirs of a declining  
Ryukyuan woman (1932) ; In defense of 'Memoirs of a declining Ryukyuan woman' /  
Kushi Fusako – Mr. Saito of heaven building (1938) / Yamanokuchi Baku – Dark  
flowers (1955) / Kishaba Jun – Turtleback tombs (1966) / Oshiro Tatsuhiro – Bones  
(1973) / Shima Tsuyoshi – The silver motorcycle (1977) / Nakahama Shin – Love letter  
from L.A. (1978) / Shimokawa Hiroshi – Love suicide at Kamaara (1984) / Yoshida Sueko  
– Will o' the wisp (1985) / Yamanoha Nobuko – Droplets (1997) /  
Medoruma Shun – Fortunes by the sea (1998) / Matayoshi Eiki.  
ISBN 0-8248-2169-6 (cloth : alk. paper) – ISBN 0-8248-2300-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)  
1. Japanese literature—Japan—Okinawa-ken. 2. Japanese literature—20th century.  
I. Molasky, Michael, 1956– II. Rabson, Steve, 1943–

PL886.0542 S68 2000  
895.6'08095229—dc21 00-024001

University of Hawai'i Press books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines  
for permanence and durability of the Council on Library Resources.

Printed by The Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group

Designed by: Trina Stahl

Cover art: Beach on the border of Camp Schwab in Henoko, Nago City, Okinawa. The sign  
reads "U.S. Property" in English and "Tachi-iri kinishi" (No Trespassing) in Japanese.

Photograph by Ishikawa Mao.