

## THE OCTOPUS

(Tako)

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A giant octopus was caught by fishermen, cooked, and eaten by the villagers. His ghost appears to tell his sad story to a wandering priest in song and dance.

Ghost of the Octopus     (Shite)

Traveling Priest         (Waki)

Person of the Place     (Ai)

PRIEST (Singing)

I consider myself to be a Buddha true,

I consider myself to be a Buddha true,

Paying not the least heed to what others may think.

(Speaking.) I am a resident of the Land of Hyuga. As I have never before visited the capital, I am on my way there now.

(Singing.)

Though the world says that men of Tsukushi are most  
Frivolous indeed,

I have undergone the true aesthetic training,

And I now arrive at the Bay of Shimizu.

(Speaking.) As I have made my way with haste, I have now arrived at the Bay of Shimizu. I will stop and rest for a while in the shadow of that stupa.

OCTOPUS Here, here! I have a matter to discuss with the aesthete who stands there.

PRIEST Is it me of whom you speak? What is it you wish of me?

OCTOPUS I am the spirit of an octopus who died in the spring of last year in this Bay of Shimizu. Please pray for the repose of my soul.

PRIEST What a strange thing to hear. You must change from your fishy form and enter the peaceful realm of Buddhahood.

OCTOPUS What you say is true indeed, but I cannot rid myself of the hate I feel for the fisherman who killed me. Oh, how sad this makes me. (Singing.)

Begging that the priest offer prayers  
For the repose of his spirit. . .

CHORUS (Singing.)

The Octopus disappears into the shadows,  
The Octopus disappears into the shadows.

(The OCTOPUS exits.)

PRIEST (Speaking.) Well, I must say, the one who just appeared to me said that he is the spirit of an octopus. There must be some story behind this stupa here. I will question a

person of this place about it. Is there a person of this place about?

PERSON Who is it who calls for a person of this place?

PRIEST The stupa standing here appears to have some special meaning. I am certain there must be some story behind it. If you know its story, I request that you tell it to me.

PERSON I will tell it to you. It was during the spring of last year, here in the Land of Harima at this Bay of Shimizu that a giant octopus was caught. The fisherman was overjoyed and the people of this place cooked the octopus and ate it. Then this giant octopus became a ghost, appearing night after night, so the people gathered together and built this stupa as a prayer for the repose of its soul. It seems that this helped it to achieve Buddhahood, as it has not appeared here since that time. Though you have no relationship with the octopus that would place any obligation upon you to do so, please take some time to offer prayers for his soul before you proceed upon your way.

PRIEST Please accept my heartfelt gratitude for taking the trouble to relate to me this tale. As you suggest, I will indeed pause here for a time and offer prayers for his soul's repose.

PERSON If there is any way I can be of further service, please do not hesitate to call on me.

PRIEST I will call on you indeed.

PERSON And I will respond with all my heart. (He exits.)

PRIEST Among the many differing Buddhist ceremonies, there is one pure chant from the sutras that brings particular joy to the souls of the dead. (Singing.)

Three hundred and three special octopus  
Sutras I must purchase and offer  
To the most holy Buddha of all octopi.  
Budd-raw octopus,  
Budd-raw octopus!

OCTOPUS (Singing.)

Oh, how hard the pain I bore throughout life on earth.  
I beg of you to continue your prayers for me now.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, how very strange.  
In broad daylight when houses can be clearly seen,  
A ghostly form appears to me, appears to me here.  
Who might you be, tell me now, just who you might be.

OCTOPUS (Speaking.) I am the spirit of the octopus with whom you exchanged words last evening. In gratitude for your thoughtful prayers, I appear to you here once more.

PRIEST (Singing.)

So you say that you are the ghost of the octopus,  
With whom I did exchange words yesterday at dusk?  
Relate to me your fateful end, confess all your sins,  
And then I will pray for the repose of your soul.

OCTOPUS (Speaking.) How painful it is to recall the time  
when I was caught in the fisherman's net and my skin was  
peeled off my flesh. (Singing.)

Placed upon the chopping block, that was smooth and flat,  
I was spread out for the kill and then from behind,

CHORUS (Singing.)

I was spread out for the kill and then from behind,  
A butcher knife was pressed down hard against my back side,  
The light went from my eyes, I could no longer breathe,  
Pinned down to the block in this unsightly manner,  
Blood gushed forth from my mouth,  
And I breathed my last breath,  
Blood gushed forth from my mouth,  
And I breathed my last breath.

OCTOPUS (Singing.)

Then I felt myself lifted up from the block,

CHORUS (Singing.)

Legs spread in four directions,  
And tacked up to dry, in the awful burning sunlight,  
Next my arms and legs were cut off,  
And salt was rubbed into my wounds.  
What cruel pain I suffered!

But then I found myself covered by the holy law,  
Entering the Buddha's realm.

What happiness I found!  
With this last word of parting,  
Singing praise to the Buddha,  
With this last word of parting,  
The Budd-raw octopus  
Gradually drifted off into  
The enclosing mist.