

THE TURBAN SHELL

(Sazae)

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A large turban shell was caught and eaten at Shimotsu Bay. His ghost appears to a wandering priest and tells his sad story in song and dance.

Ghost of the Turban Shell (Shite)

Traveling Priest (Waki)

Person of the Place (Ai)

PRIEST (Singing.)

Aimlessly I wander in ascetic training,

Aimlessly I wander in ascetic training,

Just who will take pity on such a one as I?

(Speaking.) I am a resident of Shimotsu Bay in the Land of Bitchu. Recently I made a trip to the capital on business. While there, I also went around to pay my respects to the Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines there, and at one of the temples, I heard a most moving sermon. Due to the wonderful precepts it taught me, I took on the habit you see me wearing now. Since that time, I have spent many years and months on a pilgrimage through the Eastern Lands, but recently I have begun to feel homesick. So now I am hurrying toward my old hometown. (Singing.)

All fragrant sensual pleasures fade and fall away,

All fragrant sensual pleasures fade and fall away,

All things in our world suffer this destiny.

Thus I changed my way of life and donned holy robes.

As I have made my way with the greatest of haste,

I now arrive at a beach covered with seashells,

I now arrive at a beach covered with seashells.

(Speaking.) As I have traveled with haste, I find that I have already arrived at a beach in an unfamiliar land. And as I gaze upon the beach, I see that it is covered with countless seashells, among which there is one turban shell of prodigious size. I know not whether it was washed to the shore by the waves, or abandoned here by someone or other after cooking its body. But, in any case, seeing it reminds me of the horror of taking life. (Chanting.)

It is my deepest desire to spread

The news of the Buddhist virtues,

And to assure everyone, both man and shellfish,

That all can attain Buddhahood.

TURBAN SHELL (Speaking.) I say, I say, Oh Priest. Your chanting of the teaching that even shellfish can attain Buddhahood aided me in attaining salvation, for which I am most grateful.

CHORUS (Singing.)

As soon as he said this, he disappeared,

In among the waves of the sea, he disappeared.

PRIEST (Speaking.) Oh, how strange! I have lost sight of the one who just appeared to me. I find this such a strange phenomenon that I think I will go to the village nearby and request information about this place. Is there a person of this place about?

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

PRIEST It is I, one who has come to this place for the very first time. As I gazed at that beach over there, among the great number of seashells scattered there, I saw a remarkably large turban shell. As I am certain that there must be some tale about it, I request that you relate to me whatever you may know.

PERSON As you say, Sir. I will indeed relate to you all I know about it. Since this place is so very near the sea shore, there is no work for its people, so they have always been in the habit of fishing for a living. But during the autumn of last year, a remarkably large turban shell was caught in one of their nets. So all the young men of the gathered on the beach to roast and eat that turban shell. And it is said that since that time, every day at dusk, the spirit of that turban shell appears on that same beach. This has put the women and children into such a fright, that no one ever ventures out to the beach after the seventh hour. As you appear to be a priest who is in the midst of ascetic training, I would advise you to pass quickly on by that beach before the twilight falls.

PRIEST You have been most gracious to tell me this tale. If that is the case, I will indeed pass quickly on by that beach before the twilight falls.

PERSON If there is anything else you might need, do not hesitate to call on me.

PRIEST As you say, I will call on you indeed.

PERSON And I will respond with all my heart.

PRIEST Now that I have heard the tale told by that person of this place, I find the apparition I saw even more strange than before. I will go back to that beach once more and see what else I can find out. (Singing.)

From those on this beach,
I choose a single seashell, take it in my hand,
I choose a single seashell, take it in my hand,
On its surface I inscribe a single letter
From the wondrous Buddha's law.
Then into the sea,
I cast it in prayer and it sinks among the waves,
I cast it in prayer and it sinks among the waves.

TURBAN SHELL (Singing.)

Approaching dangerously close to hades,
I break free from the sorrows of this transient world,
Content with the fleeting dream of life that was mine,
I ascend to paradise.

How grateful I am!

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, how very strange!

With eyes as big and round as a turban shell's foot,
(Speaking.) Your face has such a brilliant mother-of-pearl
glow as you ascend that there is no doubt you have attained
salvation. Tell me now the tale of your end, and I will offer
prayers for your repose before I go on my way.

TURBAN SHELL If that is the case, I will tell you now the
tale of my end, so do please offer prayers for my repose when
I am done. Now, living in this bay, I was several hundred
years old when I was caught. All of my family and relatives
had been caught either by hand or in nets, so that I no longer
found any pleasure in life in this bay. But due to the felicitous
significance of my name, I continued to prosper in spite of
all.(Singing.)

On one fine day, when there were no clouds in my heart,
And the sea was calm with only gentle waves,
I rose up in a crevice among the rocks
To dance the lovely peace song of the shellfish.
(He dances to instrumental accompaniment.)

When I was enjoying myself with calmness of heart,
The fishermen of the bay,
With hearts full of joy at the lovely weather,
And smiles on their faces,
Brought all the children of the village together,
They all climbed across the rocks in search of shellfish,

CHORUS (Singing.)

They all climbed across the rocks in search of shellfish.
The shellfish all cried out in panic, "Here come the divers!"
Then scrambling over one another, the turban shells
Hid themselves deep among the rocks and held on tightly.

TURBAN SHELL (Singing.)

How sad to tell!
In no time at all, they had pried us loose and captured us.

CHORUS (Singing.)

Many companion turban shells
Were crushed and smothered in salt,
I heard their mournful voices
Rise up with the roaring flames,
And slowly die away as they expired.
Then before long, I found myself also caught in a net,
Drawn up out of the water, roasted over a charcoal fire,
My horns torn from my body.
Oh, how great were my sufferings!
But now that I have received the kind blessing of your sutra,
I am enlightened.
I abandon the evil thoughts within my heart,
And find myself drawn gently along the path of truth,
And find myself drawn gently further down the path of truth.
Thus I leave my shell behind, and attain glory.