1

Old conical hats made of sedge moved in the line of surf. Spray shot up from the breakers, first at the end of the reef-lined shore, and then closer and closer as the waves rushed in, until the water where Isaku was standing swelled up and smashed onto the rocks before streaming back out again.

The surface of the water was foaming white from the fierce rain. A mixture of raindrops and spume from the waves trickled down through the holes in Isaku's hat. There was only a sliver of sandy beach on this rockbound coast, and there, too, people in sedge hats were busy collecting driftwood.

Isaku waited for a wave to subside, then stepped into the water and grabbed a piece of driftwood stuck between two rocks. Judging by its gentle arc and the nailhole-like depressions, there was no doubt that it was from a wrecked ship. It was too tightly wedged in for him, a mere boy of nine, to dislodge easily, but when he planted his foot firmly against one of the rocks and pulled, the wood started to come free.

Isaku scurried back to shore when he saw the next wave surge in, hurling spray into the air. He heard it breaking behind him, and seawater rained noisily onto his hat. When the wave subsided and began to flow back towards the sea, he stepped into the frothing water and grasped the piece of driftwood again.

After several attempts, he managed to work the driftwood in closer until a big wave finally washed it ashore. He hung onto it to avoid being carried away by the next wave. Digging his fingers into the depressions in the wood, he pulled it towards the path to the village.

Pelted by the rain, people carried bundles of wood on their backs up the path. The timber Isaku was pulling was considerably larger than theirs, and looked to be of firm, good quality.

It seemed a shame to use it for burning a corpse when it could be used as firewood at home.

When Isaku reached the path, a woman wearing a sedge hat emerged from the house of the bereaved family and helped him with his load. They pulled it into the house and put it beside a rough pile of wood on the dirt floor of the lower section of the room.

He untied his hat and sat down on the woodpile, glancing across the room. The deceased was an old man, over fifty, named Kinzo. His body was naked except for a loincloth. When Kinzo had become too sick to move, he had lost his appetite, and for the last few days his family had been giving him nothing but water. Nobody would feed those judged certain to die.

Dead people due to be placed in a sitting coffin were tied seated with their back to a funeral post, their legs bent at the knees and then tightly bound with rough straw rope before rigor mortis could set in. Kinzo's bones jutted out beneath his skin; his abdomen was distended and taut. His head hung down and slightly forward, revealing the hemp stalk tied to a cross placed on the thin grey hair of his topknot to ward off demons.

Isaku's mother was wiping down the coffin that sat on the floor. A large pot of vegetable porridge, provided by the people of the village, simmered away on the fire, the smell wafting down to the dirt floor.

The downpour seemed to intensify. The noise of the waves faded as the house was enveloped in the sound of the rain.

Isaku gazed at the woman's hand stirring the porridge with a ladle.

The next morning the rain stopped and a typical clear autumn sky unfolded.

People emerged from their houses and gathered at the home of the bereaved family. Inside, the old women of the village chanted sutras in hushed voices.

Isaku left Kinzo's house carrying a bundle of chopped driftwood on his back. He joined men lugging unwieldy bundles of

sticks and twigs on their backs up the narrow village path onto the trail that led to the mountain pass.

The mountain's rugged face, flecked with bare rocks, loomed behind the village. The seventeen little houses seemed to be clinging to the narrow coastline so as not to be pushed down into the sea. Perhaps because of the constant exposure to the salty winds off the sea, the wooden walls of the houses were white, as if dusted with powder. The thatched roofs were weighted down against the wind with stones similarly blanched. Around the houses, on the more gently sloped land, there was a terraced field. Even with manure, the stony soil could yield only the meagrest of crops, nothing more than a few simple varieties of millet.

Isaku followed the men off the path into the forest. The ground was damp from the rain and there was an occasional puddle; at times he struggled to get his footing. Eventually the trees thinned out and they came to a clearing in front of a line of small headstones and old wooden grave-tablets. The men set down their bundles of firewood and dry branches near the three-sided stone crematory at one corner of the clearing.

Isaku sat down on a rock near the men. Sweat dripped from his brow and down his neck but felt good in the sea breeze. He looked down at his pile of wood.

The long, thin funeral procession moved away from Kinzo's house along the village path near the waterside. At its head a long white cloth fluttered on the end of a bamboo rod; next came the coffin, suspended from a thick pole. Children walked at the end of the procession.

'I don't want to be left for dead like him,' whispered one of the men.

Kinzo had been laid up at home since summer. One day he had lost his footing and slammed his back against a rock while out spearing octopus on the reef. Unable to work, he became a burden on his family. In a village flirting with starvation, an invalid would be written off as dead.

People would grieve for a short while, but as they believed in reincarnation they quickly reconciled themselves to loss.

Life was entrusted to humans by the gods, and upon death a person's spirit departed for a far-off place beyond the seas, but after a time it would return to the village, to take shelter in a woman's womb and come back in the form of an infant. Death was merely a period of deep sleep until the return of the spirit; excessive mourning would disturb the dead person's repose. The headstones and the wooden grave-tablets faced the sea to guide the spirits home.

The funeral procession slowed when it reached the mountain trail.

As he watched the procession, Isaku thought of his father. That spring his father had been sold for three years of indentured service to a shipping agent at a southern port frequently visited by ships on the east–west run. His father went willingly and was undoubtedly now working on the boats. It seemed that his father had made up his mind to become indentured at the end of the previous year when another baby girl was born, joining Isaku, the eldest, his younger brother, Isokichi, and sister, Kane.

He had heard that in other places people killed their newborns, but not in this village. A pregnancy meant the spirit of a dead person had returned to the village, and infanticide was unthinkable, even if the family risked starvation.

On several occasions, Isaku had seen his father's body moving rhythmically on top of his mother at night, in the semi-darkness of their room, her splayed legs bending at the knees then thrusting out straight. He knew that they were urging the spirits of his ancestors to return, but he also knew that another child would further impoverish the family.

The village was bordered on the south by the cliffs of a cape which jutted out sharply into the sea. The only path to the outside world was the trail to the north along the mountain pass. The path was steep and rocky, traversing two deep gorges and then ascending an almost sheer slope through a thicket of trees and vines. The village owed its isolation to the terrain. The villagers followed this path to other villages to exchange seafood for farm produce and the like. But this was never enough to satisfy their hunger.

A simple method of saving one's family from starvation was indentured servitude. In the next village beyond the pass there was a salt merchant who doubled as a labour contractor. He would pay a lump sum as a bond for service. The family would use this money to buy grain to take back home to the village.

Mostly daughters were sold, but sometimes even the head of a family would sell himself. A fourteen-year-old girl called Tatsu had left the village at the same time as Isaku's father, to enter into a ten-year term of bondage in return for sixty silver *momme*, but his father was given the same payment for a three-year term, to all eyes an unusually favourable arrangement. His father was noted in the village for his sturdy build, and was an expert helmsman as well.

'I'll be back in three years. Don't let the children starve while I'm away.'

Isaku's father had looked intently at him and his mother in the doorway of the broker's office.

His mother had bought some grain with part of the money, and carrying this on their backs they had set off along the mountain path toward the village. He was in awe of his father for receiving so much silver and wished for an admirable physique like his.

The men pausing to rest in the graveyard had all sold sons or daughters into bondage. The previous autumn, the frail man sitting next to Isaku had sold his wife for five years. The men who had carried the firewood and branches up to the graveyard and the four pallbearers were the only remaining male heads of households in the village.

On seeing the front of the line of people enter the forest, the men slowly stood up. They smoothed out the ashes left in the crematory and removed the dirt and ash blocking the draft holes in its stone walls. Untying the ropes round the bundles of dry branches, they placed the wood in parallel crosses inside the walls.

They could hear the sound of a bell. The procession was drawing closer to the middle of the forest. Isaku's mother carried the bamboo rod with the white cloth under her arm

and held it high as they emerged from the trees. Behind the aged man sounding the bell came the old women, chanting the sutras. Then the coffin swayed into view. Isaku's mother stuck the rod into the ground and the coffin was placed beside the crematory. The pallbearers sat down here and there, opening their shirts and wiping the sweat from their brows. The men who had prepared the pyre released the coffin from the pole used to carry it up, and lifted it onto the pyre. Following the men's instructions, Isaku slipped pieces of firewood into the gaps in the branches.

Smoke poured forth after the lighted hemp stalk was dropped onto the tinder and soon the branches began to burn. Those seated rose to their feet and stood around the stone walls. The bell was sounded, and again the sutras were recited.

As the criss-crossed pile of wood caught fire, the coffin was enveloped in flames. The sea breeze made the flames dance; they sounded like a cloth flapping in the wind. Sparks flew every time the wood cracked.

Isaku and the men had soaked some straw mats in a nearby stream, and now they threw them up on top of the pyre, smothering the flames to ensure that the body burned well. The coffin crumbled in the fire and colourful flames started to shoot out of the exposed corpse. Just when he thought he saw flames of a dazzling yellow, they would change and flicker green. More firewood was stoked and wet mats were again thrown on top.

When the body had become quite small, toasted dumplings made of millet were passed round. Isaku chewed away as he stared into the blaze. Tiny multicoloured flames spurted forth when the men poked sticks roughly at the charred corpse. After they had done this several times the fire died down, and the body turned the bright red of burning charcoal.

The sun began to set.

Kinzo's family would spend the night under a canopy of straw mats strung up in the trees at the edge of the forest; the next morning they would recover the bones. The villagers pressed their hands together in prayer and then left the clearing.

Isaku trailed his sturdily built mother down the path through the forest. He had been struck by her repeatedly in the past. She

was surprisingly powerful, and sometimes her blows left him temporarily deaf in one ear. She hit him for various reasons, but usually it was for being lazy. 'Just look at the fish!' she would scold him. 'They don't slack off.' She was a frightening figure, but at the same time he also felt a kind of security knowing that he could rely completely on this mother who beat him mercilessly.

They made their way through the forest and onto the mountain path. The scene was bathed in the afternoon sunlight, and the sea glistened. They could see crows circling above the little cape.

His mother chatted with the old women as they trudged along the path. Isaku was happy; for the first time he had helped the men carry firewood up to the crematory for a funeral. He was being treated as an adult; before long he would be carrying the coffin with the men. But he was small for his age and slight of build. His father was due to return in two and a half years, and like other teenage boys and girls in the village Isaku would no doubt be sent into bondage in his father's place, pretending to be two or three years older than he actually was. At such time, if he was small, the broker either would refuse to barter for him or would take him on for a paltry amount.

As he usually did, Isaku tiptoed down the path, trying to appear taller. The women walking in front of him came to a halt, and the villagers behind them also stopped. As one they looked to the left. Isaku did the same.

In the distance, between two low mountains with bare rocky faces, he could see a green-mantled ridge. 'The mountains have started to turn red,' whispered the old woman beside him.

The ridges glimmered in the setting sun, but the top of one ridge, towering conspicuously above the others, appeared to be a light shade of washed-out red. Two days of rain had kept the crest shrouded in mist, but during that time the trees must have begun turning red. Isaku gazed at the ridge.

Every year the autumn colour appeared on that crest first, steadily spreading to other ridges and then gathering speed like an avalanche, dyeing the surface of the mountain red as

it advanced downward. It would traverse the deeply chiselled valleys, envelop the hills, and soon colour the mountains behind the village. By the time that happened the yellowish brown of leaves about to fall could be seen unfolding on the more distant ridges.

In the village the feeling of autumn was thick in the air. When the eulalia grass came into ear the men would start catching the little autumn octopuses as they came closer to shore. These were a delicacy that could be eaten either raw or boiled. In most families the children would salt and dry them, cutting them in half and hanging them up on strings from poles.

The leaves would change to their autumn hues after these little octopuses appeared, and the villagers would be filled with anticipation at the sight of the red-tinted mountains.

The sea would become rough when the autumn colours faded and the leaves would begin to fall. If there were two days of calm, the next few days would be marked by angry, surging seas and spray from the waves raining down on the houses. But sometimes the rough seas would bring unexpected blessings, so much more bountiful than anything from the beach or the barren fields that no one would have to be sold into bondage for years. Such manna was all too rare, but the people lived in constant hope. The autumn colours heralded the time when the village might be visited by this good fortune.

The line of people moved along, their eyes still turned toward the top of the ridge. Isaku looked at the sea as he walked down the path. At low tide the rocks at the bottom of the sharply jutting promontory were exposed, and down in front of the village, set back ever so slightly from the sea, the tips of rocks could be seen projecting out of the foaming water.

The sea near the coast masked an intricate stretch of reef – home for octopus and shellfish, a haven for fish. Seaweed swayed back and forth and kelp lay thickly plastered against the rocks. The men fished in small boats, while the women and children picked seaweed from among the rocks and gathered shellfish. The sea around the reef was not only a precious fishing ground which sustained the village, it was also a source of such luxuries

as food, money, clothing and everyday utensils. But such bounty might come for two or three years in succession and then not for another ten. The most recent visitation had been at the beginning of winter six years earlier, when Isaku was three years old.

His memory of his early childhood days was rather dim, but he could vividly remember that incident. Everyone in the house had been unusually cheerful. His parents and all the other people in the village had been grinning, their cheeks flushed red with excitement. He remembered that the strange atmosphere had frightened him so much that he cried.

It was two years ago that he had learned the reason behind the excitement in the village.

As was the custom, when the autumn colours arrived the whole village took part in a ceremony that mystified Isaku. He asked a boy his age named Sahei what it was about.

'You don't know?' Sahei said, looking at him contemptuously.

Feeling ashamed, Isaku asked his mother when he got home.

'*O-fune-sama*,' she replied.

Isaku looked perplexed.

'Look, that bowl there, that's from *O-fune-sama*,' his mother said with obvious irritation as she glanced towards the shelf.

He looked at the bowl in a new light. It was different from rough-cut bowls that had merely been hollowed out of pieces of wood. This bowl was almost waferlike and of uniform thickness. It looked as though it had been lacquered in some way; the red surface of the wood had a shiny gloss to it, and two fine gold lines were drawn just below the lip. The bowl was used only to hold food placed before the ancestral tablets at New Year and the Bon festival; otherwise, it never left the shelf.

His mother said nothing more.

He had no idea what link there was between the bowl and the village ritual, and it was Sahei, who had earlier derided him for his ignorance, who told him about *O-fune-sama* and the significance of the wooden bowl.

Sahei told him that *O-fune-sama* referred to the ships wrecked on the reef that stretched out in front of the village. The ships

normally carried such things as food, utensils, luxury goods and cloth, which would substantially improve the lives of the villagers. Also, pieces of ship's timber smashed by the rocks and angry seas and hurled up on the beach would be used to repair houses, or even to make furniture. The late-autumn village ritual was carried out in the hope that passing ships would founder on the reef.

'So you wouldn't know about the cave on Crow Beach, either, then?' Sahei said condescendingly as he turned his rheumy eyes toward the south. There was the little cape jutting out into the sea, defined by the white spray of the waves. Often crows could be seen circling in the sky above the several small pine trees standing atop the cape.

'I've heard about the cave. You mean the place where they throw the bodies washed up on the beach,' said Isaku aggressively.

'Not just the ones that are washed up. It's also where they throw the bodies of the crew aboard *O-fune-sama*,' said Sahei with a smirk on his face.

Isaku struggled to make sense of what Sahei said, though he grasped the significance of the ritual and the lacquered bowl.

He mused afresh over his memories from when he was three years old. It finally dawned on him that his father, mother, and all the other villagers had been in such high spirits because *O-fune-sama* had come that year. He recalled that for the next couple of years he had eaten foods unthinkable nowadays and had set eyes on all sorts of remarkable objects.

On festive occasions, or when there had been a death in the village, his mother would scoop rice from an earthenware pot and make him some gruel. When he had a fever she would bring out a jar ever so carefully and let him lick some white substance off her finger. This amazingly sweet powder, called white sugar, was also said to be effective in curing all ailments.

The light of the candle he saw at night at the Bon festival was likewise etched into his memory. It had been grey, shaped like a thin rod almost three inches in length, and he remembered his amazement when the wick was lit. It was so incredibly bright

that he was dazzled by the glare. How could such a little stick generate so much light? Besides, unlike pine torches and wicks soaked in fish oil, it did not give off any black smoke, and the smell was quite pleasant. It had a beautiful glow, at times crackling ever so slightly, sending tiny beads of light flying.

These two were undoubtedly part of the bounty from *O-fune-sama*, but before too long they were gone.

Even so, vestiges of previous good fortune were still present. The old mat on the floor next door, the chest in the village head's house carrying the insignia of a shipping company. Also, some households had the ship's large wooden fire buckets. It was now clear that, like the lacquered bowl in Isaku's house, these were all from *O-fune-sama*.

2

Realising that autumn was fast closing in on the village, Isaku stared at the red hues unfolding on the far-off crests of the ridges through different eyes from the previous year. Though he was happy at being allowed to work alongside the men at the cremation, he was also aware of his position in this village made up mostly of old people, women and children. Until this year, as a child, Isaku had only watched village rituals, but from now on, he thought, he, too, would have to take an active part in the proceedings.

After the cremation, the villagers all disappeared into their houses. Isaku followed his mother into their house, past the straw mat hanging down at the doorway.

His sister Teru, born at the end of the previous year, was on all fours and crying on the floor. She seemed to have been crying for quite some time; her voice was hoarse. She crawled toward them when she recognised her mother.

His mother ignored her and headed to the urn in the dirt floor part of the house and scooped up some water with a cracked bowl, gulping it down noisily before going into the outhouse at the back. By and by she reappeared, stepping up onto the matted floor and adjusting the bottom of her kimono. She sat down, casually positioning Teru on her knee. She opened her kimono to expose a large dark nipple.

Teru moved her head from side to side impatiently as she tried to latch onto the nipple. Isaku could hear Teru feeding; she seemed to have a stuffy nose. At times she would turn her head away from her mother and breathe so heavily she sounded like an adult.

It was the custom in the village to refrain from working both on the day of bereavement and on the day of the cremation so as not to disturb the dead. Isaku felt at ease, glad that he didn't

have to go out fishing; at the same time, he feared his mother, knowing how she hated idleness. He cast furtive glances in her direction as he sat down on the edge of his bed.

There was no sign of his little brother and sister; he guessed they were playing in the woods behind the house. Faint wisps of purple smoke drifted up from the wood among the ashes in the fireplace.

'The mountains have turned red,' Isaku said ingratiatingly to his mother.

She didn't reply. The afternoon sun shone in through a knothole in the wooden wall, throwing a single beam of light across the murk of the room onto the back of Teru's slightly bent leg.

'Get some wood,' his mother said.

Isaku stood up immediately and went out through the back door. Heads of eulalia grass were swaying here and there on the rocky slope. The sun was sinking between the folds in the mountains, and the village was already half in darkness. He picked up some firewood from the pile next to the back wall of the house.

The next morning he went fishing.

The catch would fall off at the onset of winter when the sea became rough, so before then they would have to store as much seafood in their houses as possible. Fortunately, the autumn octopus was coming in to shore in greater numbers than usual.

Out by the reef, men and boys no more than ten years old were in little boats spearing octopuses between the rocks. Isaku worked the oar of his father's boat, steering it across the water. He stopped and took hold of his long, barbed fishing-spear. There was a piece of red cloth attached to the tip, and he stretched it out into the water towards the shadow of rocks or near thick clumps of duckweed. When the end of the spear was jiggled slightly, the octopuses would mistake the wavering cloth for food and emerge from their hiding-places in crannies in the rocks or deep in the duckweed. Isaku would then skilfully hook them with the barb of his spear.

There were so many that Isaku would sometimes find himself having to stab at as many as three or four octopuses each time he put the spear into the water.

Isaku's father had taught him how to fish and steer a boat two years earlier. Unlike his mother, Isaku's father never lifted a hand against him, but his taciturn moods struck terror into the boy. When Isaku was learning how to catch octopus, he dropped the fishing-spear into the water time and time again, but his father said nothing and only glared at him as he jumped into the sea to retrieve it.

Isaku was well aware that the status of manhood hinged upon becoming an expert fisherman. So he was eager to learn the art, and despite his inexperience he started going out on the water with the men from the time his father left the village to go into bondage.

On the shore, the old people and young children were collecting seaweed, while the women stepped into the water to pick shellfish off the rocks.

Isaku occasionally cast his eyes toward the far-off ridges as he fished for octopus. Day by day the reddish colour seemed to flow down from the crests, tinting the surface of the mountains as it went, with the autumn hues now beginning to reach the trees on the nearer slopes.

The days became colder and the chill on the water intensified. The octopus seemed to be coming into the shore in hordes, and sometimes a simple flutter of the red cloth would lure ten of the little creatures. Isaku jerked the hook up and then waited for the cloud of ink to disappear before putting the barbed spear into the water again.

The leaves of the trees behind the village reached their full autumn splendour. As happened every year at this time, the octopus suddenly began to leave the shoreline. However much he shook the cloth on his spear, only an occasional octopus would emerge, and before long they ceased to appear at all.

The octopus season came to an end, but that year's catch had been better than usual. Outside each house, octopuses hung from lines of straw twine, split open to dry in the autumn sun.

The octopus was not only an essential staple of the New Year but also a valuable commodity. It would be sold through the next village to people in the mountain hamlets, enabling the villagers to buy grain.

The *O-fune-sama* ritual was held around the time the village was enveloped in the autumn colours. With her husband at the helm, a boat carrying a twenty-eight-year-old pregnant woman moved off the thin strip of sandy beach. Looking out toward the horizon, she held up a small sacred straw festoon as the boat bobbled its way out into deeper water. It eventually came to a stop after being skilfully manoeuvred out past the rocks. The villagers gathered on the shore pressed their palms together in prayer when the woman tossed the festoon into the water. The pregnant woman represented their wish for a good catch of fish, and the casting of the sacred festoon into the water their hope that a passing ship would be wrecked on the reef in front of the village.

Isaku, his mother, with Teru tied to her back, his younger brother and sister, all watched the boat bob up and down as it headed back to shore. It was high tide, and the rocks were almost completely submerged, but even so the water foamed in spots.

The boat reached the shore, and the woman stepped out onto the sand. The people gathered on the beach parted ranks to let her pass, then followed her as she walked up the shore. Normally a cheerful woman, known for her shrieks of laughter, she seemed to be a completely different person as she walked purposefully up the slope.

Once on the path she advanced, with slow, deliberate steps, up to the village chief's house. Isaku followed them inside, stepping onto the dirt floor of the entrance and peering between the men standing in front of him. The old village chief was sitting cross-legged, upright, a box-shaped table and a bowl full of food placed in front of him. The woman knelt, placing her hands on the floor as she bowed deeply. It was the first time Isaku had watched this ritual, because until this year he had not been permitted into the house.

The woman stood, holding up the bottom of her kimono as she stepped toward the little table and overturned it with a solid kick. Then she knelt once more and bowed in front of the village chief. The kicking over of the bowl expressed their desire for a ship to capsize, and with this the ceremony ended.

The villagers began to return to their homes. Work was forbidden on the day of the *O-fune-sama* ceremony, so Isaku followed his mother back along the narrow path leading to their house.

In front of them a man named Senkichi was walking with his family. He had broken his thighbone when he was small, leaving him with one leg considerably shorter than the other, but he was famous for making the best dugout boats in the village. His eldest daughter had been sold into bondage, and there was talk that his fifteen-year-old second daughter would be sold in the near future.

Isaku's eyes followed the third daughter, Tami, as she walked behind her father. She was dark-skinned like Senkichi's wife, but she had sharp eyes and a straight nose. Her movements were lithe, like an animal's. Whenever he looked at Tami he felt strangely aroused.

In the village, when a young man turned fifteen he was allowed to make advances to the girl he wanted for his wife. It was the custom for the youth to creep into her house at night, and if the girl did not refuse him the family would turn a blind eye to his presence. Isaku yearned for a chance to hold Tami in his arms. He worried that Tami, a year older than he was, might give herself to someone else before he reached the required age. The thought frightened him.

He was also afraid that Tami might be sold into bondage like her older sisters. Women were normally sold as maids, and few returned home after their term of bondage was over. Some probably loathed the impoverished life in the village, and others would find a man during their indentureship and start a family once they had fulfilled their bond. Even if they did return, those who had served terms as long as ten years were too old to marry anyone except widowers. There were men with older

wives, but Isaku felt that he had little hope of ever being able to live under the same roof as Tami.

They came to a fork in the path, and Tami and her parents walked off along the track parallel to the coast. Isaku stared at Tami's legs, which showed underneath her kimono.

A north-westerly wind began to blow.

Isaku worked hard cutting down trees in the forest, dragging them back to the house to chop into firewood. On days when the sea was calm he went out in the boat and dropped a line into the water.

The reddish colour on the far ridges disappeared, and the leaves of the trees on the slope behind the village faded fast. The temperature dropped day by day. On windy days great clouds of dry leaves swirled into the air from among the rocks and fell on the village path or the roofs of the houses. Many were blown far out to sea.

The sea became rough, and spray from the whitecaps smashing on the rocks rained onto the houses near the shore. The village was enveloped in the sound of the waves.

When the sun set, the salt-making began on the thin strip of sand by the shoreline. The women carried thirty shallow boxes from the village chief's storehouse, lined them up on the beach, filled them with sand, then poured in tubs of seawater. Once the sand had dried in the sun, it was again washed with seawater. The heavily salted water would be drained into tubs and transferred to two large cauldrons placed on the shore.

Each household would supply equal amounts of firewood, and the men would take turns watching over the fires until daybreak, when the salt was ready. While this would provide an essential commodity for the villagers, the fires under the cauldrons also served to attract *O-fune-sama*.