

### **Busshi (“The Sculptor of Buddhist Images”)**

A very pious man has his family altar built—a long-cherished dream. But as he has no Buddhist image to enshrine there, he goes over to the capital in search of a sculptor to carve one for him. There in the capital he meets a person who announces himself as a sculptor. Hearing that his order can be completed overnight, he is overjoyed and returns to the appointed place the next day. There he is shown the image, but it looks somewhat unpolished to him. So he asks for touches of correction here, there, and in many other places until the sculptor fails in executing all the corrections in quick succession. At last the carved image is exposed as nothing more than the swindler-sculptor himself.

### **Funa-Benkei (“Benkei in the Boat”)**

Minamoto-no-Yoshitsune (1159-89), who, with his superb generalship, had routed the Heike forces and driven them out of the capital, defeating them in the battles of Ujigawa (1180) and of Ichinotani (1185), to their final extermination at Dan-no-ura Coast (1185), suffered from the slander reported to Yoritomo the shogun by the villainous Kajiwara-no-Kagetoki (?-1200). Discord thus arose between the brothers, Yoshitsune and Yoritomo, and with disgrace on his name the younger brother had no choice but to seek safety in flight to the western seas. He came to Daimotsu-no-ura coast at Amagasaki in Osaka.

Lady Shizuka, Yoshitsune's mistress, travelled separately to the bay in order to follow her lord throughout life. Anticipating that a great deal of difficulties would arise, Yoshitsune decided to send her back to Kyoto, promising that he would see her there once he had restored his good name. At a farewell banquet, she, holding back her tears, performed a *chū-no-mai* dance in a white robe, wearing a courtier's hat, wishing her lord prosperity and a safe journey.

Urged by Benkei to make haste, Yoshitsune and his followers stepped on board and sailed away to the ocean, when all of a sudden a strong gale from Mount Muko battered them and made their way through the rough seas under the wild, dark sky. The boatmen's struggles were of no avail, and losing control of its helm, they could not prevent it from being tossed about by huge waves. Then, from beneath the ocean, the ghosts of Heike soldiers appeared, blocking their way. Among others, the vengeful Tomomori, the fourth son of Kiyomori, pre-eminent in wisdom and valour, charged at Yoshitsune with his halberd, but Benkei, not fearing what harm the evil spirits would bring them, began chanting, earnestly rubbing his rosary and invoking the five great deities to drive those spirits away. Through Benkei's zealous praying they were at last subdued and disappeared beneath the waves. It is a spectacular play, full of dramatic intensity and excitement.

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