

THE SEA

Written by

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EXT. BLACK SAND ISLAND - NIGHT

CHILDREN'S FACES lit by fire. They move in an out of view, one after another: right to left and left to right, in circles. They dance to drums and strings. They sing.

One of the faces is FETU. Her eyes are keen and warm. She is dark-skinned and wears her hair in two puffs. She is nine years old.

The dance goes on, the children's bare feet skipping across the black sand beach. Child after child. Face after face. Circle within circle.

INT. FETU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fetu sleeps on a large mat on the floor with her SISTER AND BROTHER. Their bodies lie tangled together.

EXT. EATING HOUSE - DAY

Fetu eats her midday meal surrounded by rows and rows of her neighbors, mostly organized by age.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Fetu and OTHER CHILDREN play in the yard. They climb trees to get coconuts and chase each other around, tossing the coconuts back and forth.

Fetu climbs higher than anyone her age and manages to hold her coconut for a while before she is tackled and falls, with a big laughing smile, beneath a pile of her friends.

SOME MINUTES LATER

The children debate a rumor they've heard.

CHILD 1

My brother says she has pumpkins
even in the wet season.

CHILD 2

Your brother drinks piss.

CHILD 1

He could still be right.

WALI

My sister says she keeps a skull
that knows tomorrow.

CHILD 4
What kind of skull?

WALI
She didn't say.

CHILD 1
Human skull.

CHILD 2
Liar's skull.

CHILD 1
It's not a lie.

FETU
Then let's go see!

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

The children follow a path through densely-grown trees.

Soon they are forced to leave the path. One of their number turns back.

Traveling off-trail, avoiding roots and pushing back branches and leaves is hard work. Another child turns back, tired.

The remaining four sit together and share a breadfruit.

Their path gains elevation. Soft dirt yields at times to dark, forbidding rock. The foot of the volcano at the center of the island. At last they cross a shallow stream and reach their goal.

EXT. THE WITCH'S HOUSE - DAY

On the green hill above them, nestled under a tall rock formation, stands a small dried-grass cottage.

The children kneel to avoid detection. Another shakes with fear.

CHILD 4
I don't see any pumpkins!

She rushes back in the direction they came. Now there are only three.

WALI
Should we go inside?

CHILD 1
Crazy! What if she's there?

WALI
How will we know unless we look?

CHILD 1
I didn't come this far to be
cursed.

WALI
I didn't come this far to turn
back.

FETU
Shh!

They hush and fall to their bellies, looking to see what Fetu sees.

There is movement on the rock behind the house. A human form. It disappears for a moment before reappearing in plain view. Child 1 gasps and Wali hits him. They hold their breath.

THE WOMAN is light-skinned, dirty. Her flesh is scored with scars and with strange tattoos. A great deal of it is visible, as she wears only a kind of breechclout. She carries a sling that whistles gently as she walks off into the forest opposite the children.

She also appears to have horns.

Fetu stares after her, while her friends set to arguing.

WALI
She's gone. Now someone can go
inside.

CHILD 1
No! Now's our chance to run away!

WALI
Coward!

CHILD 1
Fool!

Suddenly they notice that Fetu is standing and walking towards the house.

CHILD 1 (CONT'D)
Fetu! Fetu!

WALI

Good girl, I'll keep watch!

CHILD 1

Me, too. From home!

Child 1 runs back into the forest.

Fetu approaches the house. She hears a sharp, nearby noise but quickly discovers it is only chickens. As she comes to the door, she looks once more down to the forest where the witch woman disappeared.

From the hiding place below, her friend sees tiny Fetu enter the witch's home.

INT. THE WITCH'S HOUSE - DAY

Inside is a single, open room. It is dim thanks to shades the owner has stretched over the windows to keep the cool in.

Fetu pokes around, discovering in one side of the house an array of crafting projects: woven baskets, clay jars, bone instruments.

Her eye drifts to shelves filled with objects unrecognizable to her. They are trade goods. Toys. Tins. A polished wood phallus. A beautiful sky-blue tea kettle. On the wall a map of islands and a painting in foreign style. Old letters scattered atop the table alongside a red umbrella.

Movement catches Fetu's eye. The witch's sleeping area is surrounded by lizards and birds. The blanket wiggles, and Fetu moves closer.

A WHISTLE FROM OUTSIDE.

Fetu hears the steps of the witch approaching. She casts about in a panic for a hiding place, finally ducking into a corner behind a ceramic jar.

The door opens. The shadow of the witch's form falls onto the floor, horns unnaturally clawing the ground, as if reaching for Fetu. A wet bundle smacks the ground near other food supplies, and various lizards and mice rush in to sniff it.

The witch's face is before Fetu. It is deeply lined, mask-like. Fetu screams and cries but no sound comes out. The witch looks in closer, curious. She reaches out for the child.

The witch's creased, impossible face and her bare, middle-aged breasts come in and out of view as Fetu shakes her head in desperate denial. With a sharp sound, the witch fixes her so that she can look nowhere else.

Fetu looks deep into the witch's face. She sees the skull behind it. It is coming closer. The witch smiles and draws the child to her breast.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY

Fetu's eyes open. The sun shines low across the trees. A web of shadow and light falls onto the dirt path under her feet.

She looks behind her, frightened, but finds no witch. She looks wildly around, discovering only the early evening life of the forest in all directions.

Her breath is heavy, panicked. She rushes down the path and stops short.

Her village spreads out in front of her. She is home.

EXT. BLACK SAND VILLAGE - SUNSET

As Fetu pads into the village, there is an odd hush around her, so that the SOUND OF THE WAVES CRASHING seems as near as any of the life of the people.

Passing the outlying houses, she sees CHILDREN gasp and point at her. A MOTHER makes a warding gesture and drags her young son inside.

Wali comes running up the path, smiling.

WALI

Fetu! Fetu!

But he stops short. His eyes go wide as his feet stagger and freeze. The name Fetu halts on his tongue. His hands rise unconsciously towards his own face.

FETU

Wali!

Fetu takes a step forward, and Wali turns and runs screaming back to the village.

ANGLE ON the back of Fetu's head as she lifts her hands towards her cheeks. They recoil.

She rushes to the rain barrel outside the nearest home. And peers inside.

HER FACE IS NOW A WOODEN MASK.

She falls back on her butt. Then she gets up to look again. Yes, there is a wooden mask lying atop her face.

She tugs and tugs at it, but it won't come off.

EXT. FETU'S HOUSE - SUNSET

Fetu races to her door. Her brother and sister scream and scatter.

Her mother, hearing the noise, reaches the door at the same time as Fetu. Her face wrinkles, puzzled, then sinks into an expression of horror.

FETU
Mama! Mama!

Her mother grabs her roughly and yanks at her face.

FETU (CONT'D)
Ow! Ow!

INT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

By candlelight, the DOCTOR examines Fetu's face, and WHISPERS, possibly to himself, as he rains crushed herbs over her.

Fetu's mother whimpers in the shadow beyond the candles.

The doctor disappears for a moment, and Fetu sits up to see him soaking a white cloth in a shallow basin.

INT. FETU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fetu's brother and sister sleep tangled on their bed.

Several feet away, Fetu lies on her side alone. Her face is wrapped in the white cloth. The SOUND OF THE WAVES crashes on her ears. She closes her eyes and sees the dark water.

At last falling into sleep, she sees again the shadow of the witch's horns extending across the floor. The witch herself leaning down to Fetu. She sees the village emptied and herself alone among the houses.

INT. FETU'S HOUSE - DAY

Fetu's mother unwraps the white cloth on her daughter's face.

INT. ELDER'S HOUSE - DAY

An OLD WOMAN pours salt in a circle around Fetu, who stands in the middle of the dirt floor. The Old Woman sets a breadfruit on the floor near the wall to Fetu's right. She sets a fish on the floor near the wall to Fetu's left. Behind Fetu she places a colorful bird's feather. In front of Fetu she places a palm leaf.

The whole while she sings a wordless song. Returning to face Fetu, she repeats a chain of notes. She does so again, and Fetu understands she is to repeat after the Old Woman.

INT. EATING HOUSE - DAY

Fetu eats all by herself. Her face is still the same.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Fetu peers into the school, where friends are all learning. She turns and sits with her back to the outer wall.

In time her friends come charging out to play, running right past Fetu. A few of them glance at her, but then, as if remembering something, they turn their eyes away and run on.

She climbs a tree and brings down a coconut. But no one chases her.

The coconut drops in the grass.

EXT. BLACK SAND VILLAGE - DAY

Fetu's mother, the elder woman, and others gather, shouting. A mob forms.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The ADULTS OF THE VILLAGE march down the forest path. BLADES glint in their hands.

EXT. THE WITCH'S HOUSE - DAY

The mob gathers just where Wali watched Fetu enter the witch's house. But the witch's house is there no longer.

Save for a couple of chickens poking around in the grass, there is no sign of life.

INT. FETU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Again, Fetu lies several feet from her snoring brother and sister.

Her mother bends down to kiss the two of them goodnight. Then her feet approach Fetu. She kneels and brings her lips nearly to Fetu's rough forehead, then pauses, not breathing. Fetu feels this hesitation. Finally her mother kisses her.

As her mother withdraws, Fetu looks in her eyes, which are loving but full of tears.

The witch's face is there once more. Fetu rolls over, moaning and sees the sleeping bodies of her siblings. She sits up and sees, further away, her mother's back curled away from her.

EXT. FETU'S HOUSE / BLACK SAND VILLAGE - NIGHT

Fetu bursts onto the porch to the sound of waves and nothing but waves. Her hands go to her face, and she begins to tug.

With all her might, with her full body, she yanks at the mask, trying to pry it from her skin, it is a grunting, exhausting physical effort, a dance that takes her far from the house.

But it is no use. Discovering herself on the outskirts of the village, drained, aching, and no better off, her eyes fall on a crop of black rock. She touches it gingerly. Then, with a cry, she slams her face into the rock.

BLACKOUT

Sound of a GUITAR. Joined by PIPES and a WHISPERING DRUM.

In the black, COLORS begin to appear, little more than fireflies in the distance: egg yellow, ocean blue, spring green, and soft gray.

As the lights grow, shadowed trunks of trees resolve. The lights bob through the trees. Fetu hoists herself onto her side, staring.

The music is real. There, on a path leading down to sea are FOUR MUSICIANS, curiously illuminated. They step to the rhythm of the drum, in a kind of walking dance. Their hair ribbons and hats wave gracefully above their heads.

Entranced, Fetu follows them to the shore.

EXT. BLACK SAND ISLAND - BEACH - PRE-DAWN

Trailing in their wake, she arrives down at the beach, down at the water, the first light of dawn tinting the sky, the moon still high above.

The musicians' dance goes on. They continue right into the surf. And then, when the water reaches their hips, they begin to change.

The first player, with his drum, becomes a turtle. The second player, with his guitar, becomes a dolphin. The third player, with his ukulele, becomes a flounder. And the fourth player, with his pipes, becomes a fat little whale. Standing in the shallows, Fetu watches them swim away.

Her eyes follow them out to the open sea.

Turning back to land, she sees she is where the children danced and for a moment she sees the bonfires and the great circles, but she is standing outside of them.

Her eyes fall upon the little dock, where a MERCHANT VESSEL has moored for the night. She glances out again, searching the direction the musicians' took through the waves.

Fetu looks back once more at her village.

EXT. MERCHANT VESSEL - DAY

Fetu squirms toward a bright light peeking beneath a heavy cloth, lifting it to get a look out.

The sky is bright, with hardly a cloud. She is facing aft and can see a small island, growing ever smaller. Her home.

She is squeezed painfully between crates of goods, rocking against each other in the ship's hold. It is a small, double-hulled vessel, with a cloth covering the storage deck running between.

With each wave, she is jostled painfully onto the deck.

Splashes in the ship's wake draw her attention downwards. Gray backs of dolphins carve the surface.

A gull cries as it wings by her, then glides high off the starboard side.

Fetu marvels at the open water. As she follows the gull's path, her view passes a MERCHANT ROWING. He sees her out of the side of his eye and does a double-take, but when he looks again, she is back under the cloth.

Through the little porthole remaining, Fetu stares straight aftward. Her island is hardly there at all.

The view DISSOLVES as hours pass. The boat enters choppy water, and Fetu is bashed against platform and cargo. When a sudden heave knocks over one for crates, she CRIES OUT.

In no time, the cloth is yanked up, spilling into her field of vision sky, sail, and the angry face of the MERCHANT she saw earlier.

He yanks the crate clear and reaches towards her, then RECOILS.

MERCHANT

(a whisper, then a yell)
Witch! Witch!

His anger turns to horror, and he trips backward into his canoe. Fetu crawls out of her trap to see THREE MORE MERCHANTS staring at her. A moment of still tension. Then they leap.

MERCHANT 2

Demon!

One tries to grab her arm, but she wrenches free.

FETU

I'm not a demon! I'm just a girl.

MERCHANT 3

Cursed girl!

Another jabs an oar at her, backing her towards the fore of the platform. She slips around the mast to avoid his oar, but that puts her back in range of the first merchant.

FETU

Please, I need help.

MERCHANT

You won't destroy us!