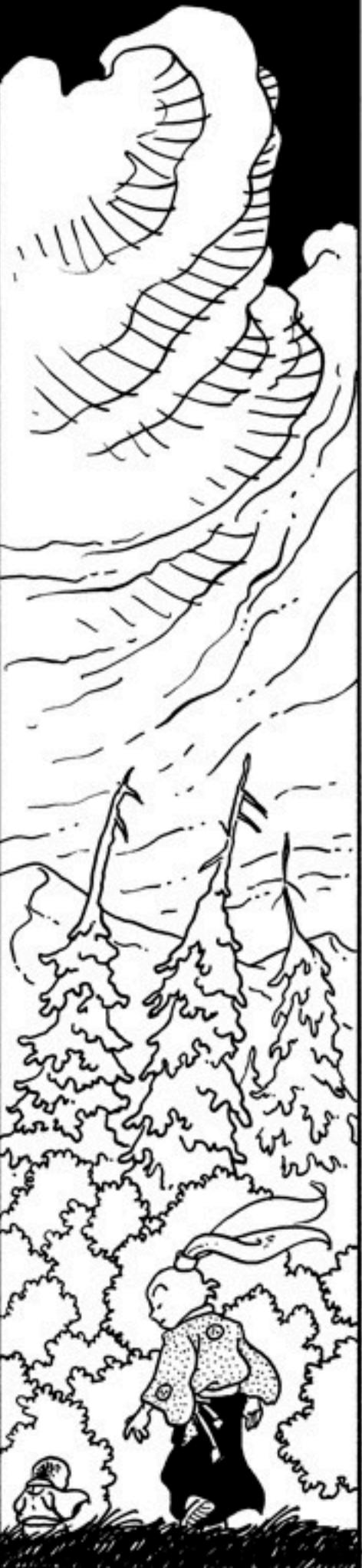


# THE BRIDE





NO DOUBT THE BANDITS  
WERE AFTER THE OCCUPANT OF  
THE PALANQUIN.

THEY  
PROBABLY  
ALREADY CAPTURED  
OR KILLED HIM,  
THOUGH.

BUT  
LET'S  
SEE...

NO!  
NO! DON'T  
HURT  
ME!

DON'T BE  
AFRAID. I AM  
MIYAMOTO USAGI,  
A FRIEND.

YOU CAN'T STAY  
IN HERE! THERE  
MAY BE OTHER  
BANDITS.

CLOSE YOUR EYES. A YOUNG WOMAN SHOULD NOT HAVE TO BE WITNESS TO SUCH DEATH.

BUT WHY WOULD BANDITS ATTACK A PROCESSION GUARDED BY SAMURAI?

PERHAPS IT WAS A KIDNAPPING ATTEMPT, AND THEY WERE GOING TO HOLD ME FOR RANSOM.

WHO ARE YOU?

I AM HARUKO, THE DAUGHTER OF THE SAKE BREWER OF MURA TOWN.

BE CAREFUL.

I AM PROMISED IN MARRIAGE TO EIJI, THE SON OF A BREWER IN THE TOWN OF TANSU, TWO DAYS AWAY FROM MURA.

YOU CAN OPEN YOUR EYES NOW, HARUKO-SAN.

AS YOU WERE SAYING?

I AM GOING TO MEET MY INTENDED AND WE WILL MARRY IMMEDIATELY UPON MY ARRIVAL.

IT IS A GOOD THING MY FATHER HIRED ALL THOSE SAMURAI ESCORTS SO I WOULD MAKE A GRAND IMPRESSION WHEN I ARRIVE, OR I WOULD HAVE BEEN CAPTURED FOR SURE!

THEN THERE MAY BE MORE PEOPLE AFTER YOU!

YOU'RE RIGHT! I HAD NOT THOUGHT ABOUT THAT! MY LIFE IS STILL IN DANGER!

I CAN'T TRAVEL TO TANSU TOWN ALONE! I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE IT IS! I MUST RETURN TO MURA!

TANSU IS CLOSER. I LEFT THERE YESTERDAY, AND KNOW THE WAY WELL.

I WILL ESCORT YOU TO YOUR BETROTHED!

THANK YOU, USAGI-SAN. I AM SURE YOU WILL BE WELL COMPENSATED.

