

Hara-kiri of a Woman at Nagamachi

by CHIKAMATSU Monzaemon

Translated by Paul S. Atkins

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Cast of Characters

HANSHICHI, a craftsman at a sword-fitter's shop

HANA, a courtesan at the Izutsu-ya teahouse

JINGORŌ, a maker and purveyor of fine incense

His wife, Hanshichi's AUNT

Her SERVANT

KYŪBEL, Hana's stepfather

IWAMI, owner of a sword-fitter's shop and Hanshichi's employer

CHŪJIRŌ, his chief craftsman

SASUKE and KIHACHI, craftsmen

TARŌ Saemon, owner of the Izutsu-ya and Hana's employer

His WIFE

TABEL, CHŌBEL, and GŌSUKE, employees of the Izutsu-ya

A Buddhist PRIEST from Kōmanji temple

SAYO, FUJI, SHIGA, HAGI, and SHIMA, other courtesans at the Izutsu-ya

RIN, a girl

SUGI, a serving-woman

DENSUKE, a chef

WARD OFFICIALS and OFFICERS, NIGHT WATCHMEN

ACT I

The shop of Iwami the sword dealer

NARRATOR: Among the words that those lads
press upon us, some have sense, and some have none.
Naniwa and Kyoto, once and current capitals,
are the settings for the tale to be told.
Changed into light verse, the quips
of the capital lads become satirical poems
repeated within the capital and without.
A single line turns into a story in the gossip papers
peddled on the streets, at Shimodachiuri Street
and Horikawa Avenue, where on the corner
stands a building owned by a sword-dealer,
a certain Mr. Iwami, granted honorary titles
and exemption from various taxes. He provides
swords with certificates of appraisal and anything else
to the Palace, of course, but also to the samurai.
“Dealer and Fitter of Swords and Daggers,”
—which are the soul of a man’s body—proclaims
his billboard in big letters. As for the shop,
he has abandoned it to his apprentices
so it’s hard to tell who’s the tip and who’s the pommel,
and with a loose grip on the hilt, even a gilded man
can get burned, turning bad and losing his edge
as he works and grinds himself down.
So it’s no surprise when the boss comes in,
rattling his saber and roaring, “Balance your books!”
Iwami, the owner, has the white pate of a Zen monk
to match his beady black eyes. He looks around
the workshop.

IWAMI: So, everyone gets busy when you hear me coming? Don’t get smoking confused with working! The days have been getting shorter since the equinox. So even if I had you work nights, the price of oil is so high, whatever profit to be made would be gone.

Speaking of which, has that sword-guard gone back
to Comeback Bridge? And the chrysanthemum guard
is due at the palace on First Avenue
by the ninth month, got it? When the black scabbard
is done, deliver it to Lord Karasumaru.
A small guard for Futakuchi, a bearskin hilt for Inokuma.
Twice a day or more he sends someone to ask why it’s late.
I doubt you’ve finished the dappled sharkskin hilt for Samegai.

And the fleur-de-lis design for the forge at the Third Avenue bridge
was ordered in the Fifth Month—why is it not done yet?
When you’ve finished sharpening the halberd, take it
to the ward that pulls the Benkei Cart.
The silver fittings to Moneychanger’s Street, the pommel
to Pond Avenue. For Brook Street, the sharkskin hilt—
get it to them today or tomorrow.

And the lady just here, who owns the liquor store downtown, wants something to give her
daughter’s new husband. “This is the tool my daughter wants,” she said, and bought a big
spear,

the blade only, and took it home. No doubt it’s for
her “widow’s sheath”!

NARRATOR: Even this tough man’s wisecracks
are as antiquated as the swords he sells.
Then Chūjirō, the chief craftsman,
presents the ledgers to his boss.
Sasuke and Kihachi are working their abacuses.
Three times three makes the Ninth Month Festival,
coming soon, when the careful calculations are due.

IWAMI: Aaah! That lazy lout Hanshichi can’t balance his accounts! Hasn’t shown his
face all day. Where’d he go? Gone ga-ga for Gion again? Or Miyagawa Street? Or
Nawate?

His pals would know. Go find him!

CHŪJIRŌ: Sir, Hanshichi has been sleeping in the cottage
since yesterday, with his head wrapped up. He says it hurts.

IWAMI: What is it? A headache? So young,
with a headache again, or a heartache: either way,
it’s from too much teahouse *sake*. Did you try
giving him some hot porridge?

CHŪJIRŌ: Yes, sir. He said he couldn’t swallow rice gruel,
much less porridge, but finally this morning he tried
drinking some hot *sake*.

“Can’t drink liquor without a lady,” he said,
and with a sour face he could only manage three cups.

NARRATOR: When the master heard this, he sobered up,
lost the will to scold, and cracked a grin.

The autumn sun is setting
close to the western hills,
dyeing them, a dyed cotton robe,
the sleeves of a pilgrim tugged
as she makes her way to Atago. This too
is one of the chores of the vain world.
Casting her fame upon the waters by Fourth Avenue
and piling up misery upon misery

is Ohana of the Izutsu-ya in the Ishigake district.
Her allure and desire are at their peak.
She is deeply involved with Hanshichi the swordfitter,
even though his wares are of a different sort.
Every time they meet, they whet each other's
sincerity, bound together with wrapped cords of affection.
The bindings of the hilt first began to fray
because of her father's neglect,
and then they stopped speaking.
Her beloved is in service to a master,
and she has been fretting over him,
so keen to see his face
that she rented a palanquin, put on straw sandals
and a cotton robe, and set out, as if on a trip.
Her gauze headdress looks dowdyish;
wearing her kimono crinkled at the back,
she calls in desperation at Iwami's shop.

OHANA: Ahem! Are you the owner? I'd like to see Mr. Hanshichi of your shop for a sec.

NARRATOR: The master is surprised.

IWAMI: A lady who speaks in such a way? Are you Hanshichi's wife?

OHANA: No way! I'm his aunt from Osaka. Well, is he still around?

IWAMI: Hmm. His aunt from Osaka... then you would be the wife of Jingorō the incense maker?

OHANA: Yes, the very one. We should have come sooner
to thank you, but my husband is a celebrated craftsman,
and there is no rest for the poor,
so I haven't come until now.
Your door is the gateway
to success for my precious nephew.
I departed for it in this auspicious month,
and came up to Atago by boat.
The other passengers were just too much.
I tried to sleep a little but kept getting poked
from behind, and across from me
someone was stretching out his big hairy legs.
One would be grinding teeth, another talking
in his sleep; heaps of strange things happened.
From Yamazaki a friend joined me,
and we climbed the mountain.
We came straight down to Saga,
and fortunately were able to see
the Shaka statue and have a meal together.
I freshened up at the inn and came straight here.

NARRATOR: From the very start she beguiles them
with practiced patter.

OHANA: Pardon me.

Oh, I'm so tired!

NARRATOR: She sits down and casually picks up a pipe.

OHANA: Do y'all work with Hanshichi?

What a tough job!

NARRATOR: A robe of glossy, soft silk
exposes her allure. To introduce herself as his aunt
and show herself before the swordfitter
was rather suspicious.

IWAMI: Kihachi, tell Hanshichi that his aunt has come to see him. (*to Ohana*) Has anyone offered you some tea? Not a single one of them is paying attention!

NARRATOR: As the master speaks, Hanshichi
slowly rises from his bed and peeks through a gap
in the screens. It is his beloved Ohana!

HANSHICHI: Oh, no! I've been secretly worrying
about that greedy-faced stepfather
and now he shows up all of a sudden
to bully her into extending her contract.
Looks like that's the sort of scheme
that's brought him here. In any event, it's too much.
It might be risky to see her, but if I don't,
there'll be no way out. Ah, what a mess I'm in!

NARRATOR: He pulls the bedclothes over himself
and feels as if he is no longer alive.
In all sincerity, the master says:

IWAMI: Why won't Hanshichi come out? Is he still in bed with a headache? This is no stranger. Aunt, would you go see him in his bedroom?

He's gone crazy over a courtesan, and had too much
of drinking and this and that,
so now he's gotten sick
and won't eat anything.
You there, show the lady in.

NARRATOR: The dish that Hanshichi had secretly hungered for
has been laid before him on a tray. A tasty outcome indeed!
After a little while, another pilgrim arrives
from Atago, carrying a flower with a shrine-card attached
and accompanied by a servant bearing a bundle.

AUNT: Is this Mr. Iwami's sword shop?

I am the wife of Jingorō from Osaka
and would like to see Hanshichi.
Please tell him his aunt is here.

NARRATOR: When she sends in this message,
the entire household is shocked.

IWAMI: Now what in the world is going on?

We've got one aunt at the door and another inside!
Must be a swindler, if not a fox.

NARRATOR: The master devises a plan, and whispers:

IWAMI: Now, now. You're making a ruckus. If they hear us inside, we won't be able to investigate. Quiet, quiet.

Bring in the other aunt.

NARRATOR: "Come inside," she is told,
so she removes her gauze headdress
and says demurely:

AUNT: What a lovely place! I have neglected to visit, so I don't know who's who. You there, young man.

Lend me a tray.

Since this is a private matter, I offer a token of thanks
to the lady of the house—sliced kelp from Hinoue.

It's embarrassing to bring such a thing to the Capital of Flowers.

NARRATOR: She offers the gift.

The master considers her age and appearance,
and sees a resemblance in her face to Hanshichi.

"So the one inside is a fake," he reckons, but just to make sure—

IWAMI: There's no need for gifts. The ladies are visiting a temple. When they get back I'll show it to them.

So, what has brought you here all of a sudden to see Hanshichi?

NARRATOR: The aunt laughs.

AUNT: Well, actually I didn't come only to see Hanshichi. I have a favor to ask of you, sir. My husband Jingorō should have come himself, but he has so many orders from the samurai, and a courier just didn't seem right, so I came myself.

NARRATOR: From the bundle that the servant holds she takes out a sword in a straight sheath.

AUNT: Here it is. I was told it is by Nobukuni. It's from the vaults of a certain lord and is to be presented to his son. A precious accessory. In Osaka there are all sorts of craftsmen, but we would like to entrust it to you, since you are a Kyoto craftsman, and for the sake of my nephew. Here is the order. I'm sure you are busy with various orders, but please do finish it soon. I wanted to see Hanshichi's face
and do some other things, so I came up to Kyoto.

NARRATOR: She hands him the sword.

Iwami examines it and the order.

IWAMI: This is my trade. I know what to do.

NARRATOR: He suddenly rises.

IWAMI: Aunt, let's take a peek
at the nephew you miss so dearly. Wait here a moment.

NARRATOR: He exits and, without warning,
kicks down the sliding screen and barges in.

The two of them are stunned.

Shocked, they clutch their chests.

IWAMI: Hanshichi, you damned pickpocket! You've done a fine job of walking all over your patron. Ever since that wench showed up, I haven't been able to swallow her way of talking. Now we see who she really is! Courtesan or whore, she's a cheeky one,

saying in broad daylight that she's your aunt. Imagine, bringing a fake to the house of an appraiser! How brazenly she had me lead her to your bed! You bastard, you dined on a tasty dish at your master's expense!

My family has dealt in swords for generations,
and you treat me like a panderer?
You have turned my house
into a brothel. Let me thank you for it!

NARRATOR: He shoves Hanshichi to the floor
and beats him mercilessly with a broomstick.
The aunt is pained to hear this, but even more ashamed
by the gaze of the onlookers.
Yet she feels sorry for her nephew's predicament,
and racks her brains for an escape.
Hanshichi and Ohana put on straight faces
and try to talk their way out of it.

OHANA: Pardon me, sir! Have you lost your mind? I am in fact the aunt of the man
you are beating. Be sure you don't do something you will regret later—

IWAMI: Ah, what a dignified thief, even in a jam! Are you still looking after this
whore? Squandering your master's property, and deceiving Heaven? Ha! Heaven has
punished you by sending your aunt up from Osaka.

I will drag you in front of her
and beat you to death to soothe my rage.
Come on out!

NARRATOR: He raises the stick. The whacks
bring the aunt running over, distraught.
"Master, wait a moment!" she says,
grabbing at him, but he pulls the stick away.
She clings to him, but he pushes her down.
Meanwhile, she comes up with a plan.

AUNT: Okichi! Is that you? What are you doing here? She's—excuse me, master.
She's my sister.

NARRATOR: The master's face sobers quickly.
Hanshichi still hasn't figured it out.
Ohana is flustered. The aunt tugs at her sleeve.

AUNT: Okichi, it's your sister.
Have you forgotten my face?
What a scatterbrain!

NARRATOR: She glares at Ohana
and signals with her eyes. The other
comes to understand.

OHANA: Oh, it's really you, sister!
It's you, it is!

NARRATOR: Her voice trembles.
The aunt tries to cover.

AUNT: My, you're a brave one! Instead of going back to that cheap inn on Fifth
Avenue,

you visit a house that even I haven't been to
and come off like a con artist.
That's what got you into this mess.
Master, it's no wonder you thought
she looked like a courtesan. Today at Atago
everyone kept calling me her mother.
That makes sense, too. She's my half-sister,
fifteen years younger than I. She may be Hanshichi's aunt,
but she's actually two years younger than her nephew.
When an aunt and her nephew are so close,
a stranger can't be blamed for thinking them husband and wife.

NARRATOR: She covers up for what
they are likely to be criticized for.

Her compassion surprises the couple,
who feel such joy, it is as if they are dreaming
during a dream. The master Iwami is completely taken in.

IWAMI: Hmm. So each of you is his aunt? At my age, I should know better. I was
mistaken. Forgive me.

Aunt, are you hurt?

NARRATOR: He rubs Ohana's back. She looks away.

IWAMI: Ah, the younger one was right.

Aunt over there, do me a favor. Cheer her up.

And you, Hanshichi, apologize for me.

NARRATOR: Fidgeting, he heads to the kitchen.

IWAMI: Why can't any of you fellows

spare the trouble to serve some gruel?

Losing my temper has given me an appetite;

go fetch me a bowl of soba.

And put out some drinking cups. . . .

I suppose it's awkward. I'll be at the noodle shop.

Ahh, I lost my temper and without knowing

punished "even the aunt!"¹

NARRATOR: With fast feet

he makes his exit.

Hanshichi sees him off, then goes before his aunt,

palms pressed together.

HANSHICHI: I'll say it plainly.

My heart is split into two parts:

shame and gratitude.

NARRATOR: His sobs of regret

bring Ohana to tears as well.

She is deeply moved.

OHANA: My name is Hana.

¹ An alteration of the risqué saying "When you're excited, do it with anyone, even your aunt" (*Kioiguchi ni wa oba de mo sei*).

I am a geisha at a teahouse called the Izutsu-ya
in the Ishigake district² near Fourth Avenue.
Hanshichi and I have vowed to care for each other
for the rest of our lives, but we had a falling-out,
and I had to see him to talk about our troubles,
only to find him lolling around.
As his aunt, you must despise me
for putting your precious nephew up to it.
Please forgive me. It was our destiny to fall in love.

NARRATOR: They both weep as she makes her plea.

The aunt too is blinded by tears.

AUNT: Yes, yes, I guess so. My husband is an incense dealer in Osaka, well-known
among the samurai and people of quality. Even I understand the evanescence of this
world.

Love belongs to the young.
If you come to a choice between life and death,
you mustn't lose heart.
There are many couples who kill themselves together,
but they are remembered only for their debts
and for failing their parents—
none of them died for love.
For a courtesan, without a home, life is especially
sad and cruel. So not dying—that is a sign
of true devotion. If you really care
for your true love, see him three times
instead of five, or once instead of twice.
Then his master will be pleased
and he will not destroy himself for love.
Hanshichi is an orphan. I am his only aunt
and he is my only nephew. We are descended from landed samurai.
Even though he has fallen to the level of an craftsman's apprentice,
the only person who feels affection or pity for him is I, his aunt.
I ask you to take care of him, forever.
If I hadn't come up to Kyoto today, your lives would have been lost.
How thankful I feel, and awed! It is a sign
of my pilgrimage to Atago, a blessing
from the buddhas and the gods.

NARRATOR: Such a sentiment proves the saying
that families share their sorrows.

Deeply moved by the lovers' plight,
all she can do is weep.

The aunt resumes.

AUNT: While you are weeping, here's something else

² Ishigake-machi, a pleasure district that straddled the Kamo River due west of Kenninji temple. Literally
“stone wall,” the name of the area was derived from boulders placed to hold back the rising river.

that will bring you to tears. Do you recognize
this short sword?

NARRATOR: Hanshichi pulls it from the scabbard
and examines the blade. It reads “Nobukuni.”
Near a hole in the hilt is stamped
the single character *kaze*, “wind.”
He claps his hands in surprise.

HANSHICHI: This sword has been in our family
for generations! How strange that after all these years
the sword my father treasured would come back to me.
It must be a lucky omen that I will become a samurai
once again. Magnificent!

NARRATOR: He raises the sword with both hands
above his head in reverence. The aunt grabs it back,
then flings it aside.

AUNT: What a pathetic samurai you are!
I’m not showing it to you to turn you into a warrior.
You must have heard as a child how, because of this sword,
our family was reduced to this. Ohana, was it?
This is your concern now. Listen to my sad tale.

Our family is originally from Kameyama in Ise. We are descended from a man named Inase Bunpei, who was Hanshichi’s grandfather. He led a platoon of musketeers and had a stipend of 150 *koku*. One of his fellow retainers was a man named Takagi Kunai, commander of the regiment, with a stipend of 800 *koku*. The two of them were the best of friends. One day a dealer from Kyoto came offering this sword for sale. It was discussed among the comrades, and his grandfather expressed the wish to purchase it. Takagi wanted it, too. The appraisal slip said 300 *kamme*. It was a friendly gathering, but Takagi blurted out, “Bunpei, that’s too expensive for someone with your income. Are you going to buy it?” Even though it was an offhand remark, it brought disaster upon both of them. With awkward smiles, the group broke up. Word spread across the province. Rumor had it that insignificant Inase was a fanatical collector of swords, but had competed against the well-paid Mr. Takagi and been humiliated in front of others. Could such a man really be a samurai? In order to save face, his grandfather sold his armor, his tack, his clothing, even his bedding. He bought the sword for 240 *ryō*—twice the appraised value of 300 *kamme*. Immediately he had the character *kaze*, meaning “wind,” stamped onto the blade,

meaning that he had triumphed over Takagi, the “tall tree.”

On the following day, the fifteenth day of the ninth month,
he waited on the road to the castle,
shouted, “You won’t get away, Takagi!”
and cut him down splendidly.

Afterwards, his grandfather returned
to his residence, bade his children farewell,
and told us never to permit the Nobukuni sword
to fall into the hands of a stranger,
since it had cost him his life.

Then he stabbed himself in the abdomen
and drew his sword straight across.
He was destroyed by a single sentence.
Hanshichi's father was my older brother;
at that time he was a samurai in attendance at Edo.
Soon after he found himself without a master.
His long trials and troubles and a sad life
caused him to fall ill. Finally, in agony, his last words
were never to give up the sword, even if we had to become beggars to keep it. He refused
medicine. Three years after your grandfather, in the same month,
he died of illness. How sad, how painful, and cruel!
Then your mother died of grief.
You and I were the only ones left.
You were still only nine years old,
lacking understanding. Imagine how I felt.
It seemed strange that the three of them would die
in three years, all in the same month.
I had the sword examined by a fortune teller, who said that your father and
grandfather were born under the Fire Sign, and the wave pattern on the sword represented
the Water Sign, so it was extremely unlucky. The sword is one *shaku*, four *sun*, and five
bu in length.

According to the ruler employed
for sword divination, that means disaster.
I was told that the sword was formed in such a way
that it would curse us for three generations.
I was shocked, so I sold it cheaply, and thirteen years have passed.
A samurai gave us an order to have it fitted,
and as soon as you laid eyes on it, you suffered
the misfortune of being beaten by your master.
That, too, seems strange to me. Don't envy the samurai.
Through the fault of a single sentence
your father and grandfather lost their lives,
and their descendants were ruined.
That may be due to karma from their previous lives,
but still it breaks my foolish heart.
"If only this sword had never been!" I think,
and bear a grudge against an innocent blade.
I feel like breaking it, or throwing it away,
but now it belongs to a daimyō. This sword
is your family's enemy. Treat it with great care,
as if it were your master. You won't have the sad lives
that they did. You are my only nephew, my only child.
Apply yourself to your work. How precious you are to me!

NARRATOR: She exhorts him earnestly, leaning against his knee.
Hanshichi too collapses. Ohana is no stranger. Both the teller
and the listener belong to Hanshichi's family. She and the aunt

both nod, and whisper, and cry quietly. How sad it is.

AUNT: Well, I've talked so long it's already closing time. I have to leave for Fushimi right away. There are boats available even at night. Make sure you come next year for the purification ritual.³ And do hurry with the sword; fit it out just as the order says. Regards to the master and his family. And Ohana, now that we are related, I'll be seeing you again.

NARRATOR: She rises to leave.

OHANA: Actually, I'm headed east, too. Why don't I go with you?

AUNT: No, finish what you came to do.

Hanshichi, I am acquainted with the ways of the world. Tell me everything later.

HANSHICHI: There's nothing to tell you.

AUNT: Then why don't you celebrate by wetting your lips before you go?

OHANA: No, we've already had some tea.

AUNT: Do you think tea is enough?

You need sturdier stuff, like a sweet-bun

or a tea cake. Feast with my nephew!

Don't be shy with Hanshichi!

NARRATOR: She pulls them together

and pushes them behind the screens in the bedroom.

The aunt knows what to do.

She makes her way up Horikawa Avenue

and then across on Second Avenue

to a flat-bottomed boat that will take her straight back to Osaka.

³ According to Nagatomo Chiyoji, this is a reference to the Tenmansai (Festival in honor of the deity Tenjin, Sugawara no Michizane), held at Tenmangu in Osaka on the 25th day of the sixth month.

ACT II

Scene 1: *The Izutsu-ya teahouse*

NARRATOR: Ishigake, the “stonewall” district—it’s a hard name
but the people are soft. Before it lies Pontochō,
where lovers plunge their wretched bodies
into the deep pools of desire.

This is where people come to fix their gaze
on the blossoms and moons of the capital’s seasons.
Of all the regular customers who come to play,
Ohana cannot bring herself to forget Hanshichi
from the sword-fitter’s shop, her cherished mate.
With her well-worn shamisen she vies
against the others, plucking away
as she tries to muffle her feelings,
but she cannot hold back her tears.

Praised as “the crow of the floating world,”
on moonlit and moonless nights alike
a customer comes to the district
from a temple called Kōmanji.
Whether this warbler who visits
the blossom called Ohana
belongs to the Lotus or Nenbutsu schools is unknown.
As if it were a curtain suspended
before a statue of the Buddha, the shop curtain
of the Izutsu-ya is parted boldly
by his mallet-head cane, which he raises high.

PRIEST: Tarō, are you here? I haven’t seen you for four or five days.

TARŌ: Yes, sir, it’s rare indeed. Which wind blew you this way?

PRIEST: No, no wind at all. Tonight only the wandering wind of impermanence is
blowing. Between you and me, I’m on my way back from a funeral. Thought I would
drop in afterward, so I rushed through it,

did a sloppy job of the incense offering.

What did I say in the sermon?

Too bad, doesn’t look like the departed
will be going to the good place today. . . .

Just another sign of my affection for Ohana!

NARRATOR: For him to rub his whiskers
as he pleases against those snowy cheeks
is like a *wasabi* grater shredding a boiled egg.
That painful-looking face must sting.
Ohana’s downcast expression
stirs the master and mistress to pity.

MISTRESS: Ohana, what's the matter?

If you were at the temple you could play the moody wife,
but here lighten up and show us a jolly Ebisu face.⁴

TARŌ: Yes, show a smile!

PRIEST: Oh, Tarō, hush now. I've spoiled her. When she gets mad, it's even better.

Madam, take her upstairs.

This evening the entire lineup of courtesans is here;

isn't it splendid? Skip the tired old dishes,

I'm going to drink until dawn

dining on nothing but grilled eels.

Have four or five of them split for me.

Namu Amida Butsu!

NARRATOR: With a clamor

everyone heads upstairs.

The evening moon has set

and already it is past eleven.

Hanshichi lacks a mind for making money—

he is banned from the teahouse as a deadbeat

and his master keeps close watch over him.

He has wept dry the well of his tears,

and wanders wearily up to the barred windows,

hiding in their shadows, waiting for some sign
from Ohana.

Then a stranger comes up, a few strands
of white hair on his head bald as a tangerine,
carrying a superfluous lantern. He puts it out
at the front door.

KYŪBEI: Ahem, is this the home of Mr. Tarō Saemon?

I am Kyūbei from Nishijin, Hana's father.

NARRATOR: He speaks like a bumpkin, a bit too loud.

The master and mistress greet him.

TARŌ: Oh, is her father here? Come in, come in.

Right in front of the kettle.

NARRATOR: Tarō Saemon grimaces.

TARŌ: As I informed you recently, your daughter Ohana came to us as an apprentice on a nine-year contract. The years have passed quickly and the term is about to expire without our incurring any losses. But, as is customary in this profession, there are debts to various shops—accessories, tobacco, paper, kimono fabric, and so forth. At the current rates of exchange the amount totals seven or eight *ryō*.

And you're not a wealthy man;

don't you depend on her?

You would have twenty *ryō* if she stayed

for another year, and the debts would be settled.

⁴ The wife of a Buddhist priest was nicknamed Daikoku, after the destructive deity of darkness who was a guardian of Buddhism and venerated in kitchens. The god Ebisu is typically portrayed as a jolly figure.

Twenty *ryō*, about two *kamme* these days,
with prices being so high.

I thought it would be in the interests of both of us for you to line your pockets, and although I've been trying to help you, that worm Hanshichi from the hilt-wrapper's shop has butted in and put various ideas in her head, so Ohana won't go along at all. From now on she'll do as she pleases. That apprentice Hanshichi can't even pay the bill he's run up here!

His luck has run out; you could beat him
for all he's worth, but it still wouldn't amount
to three *mon*, I'm sure of it. I just know Ohana
will end up homeless, sneaking around
with a scoundrel like him.

I've known her since she was little, so I wasn't pleased to hear of this. May I have your opinion?

Rushing won't do any good.
I've summoned her here for proof.

NARRATOR: At the front gate Hanshichi overhears them
and is filled with sadness and frustration.
He gnaws at the wooden window bars,
gnashes his teeth, and weeps.

The stepfather claps his hands together.

KYŪBEI: Well, well, well. Despicable! Putting her master to such trouble—isn't that a kind of unfiliality?

I am familiar with that bastard
from the sword shop. He's the lord of the losers,
a born beggar.

Hey, Hana! Where are you?

Come out, I wish to have a word with you.

NARRATOR: He goes to drag her away,
trying to humiliate her in front of customers
with his old-fashioned, curt tone of voice.

Ohana is embarrassed in front of the others.

OHANA: Yes! Fuji, Sayo, keep that sake cup for me, will you?

NARRATOR: She leaves them and descends the steep staircase.

HANA: Oh, Father! What are you doing here at this hour?

NARRATOR: When she approaches he shoves her to the ground.

KYŪBEI: You ungrateful daughter! I've heard everything from the master. If you marry that con artist Hanshichi, you'll turn your old father into a pauper. Do you think twenty *ryō* in cash falls out the sky? Or springs out of the ground?

Will you make a clean break with that con man
and serve under contract for another year?
You may not like it, but I have my reasons.
Well, what do you say?

NARRATOR: He glares at her, arms folded.

Ohana gasps. For a moment, she is blinded by tears,
but she brings herself to speak.

OHANA: Oh, Father! The other girls are close friends,
but I have customers to serve.
What a mean thing to say!
All the courtesans I know say
that their parents cherish them,
and spare no trouble on their behalf.
“Your contract is almost up.
Find yourself a successful man
and make plans for the future,
so we can see you settled!” That’s what every parent says!
You’re always short when the bills are due, so you want to add another year to my
contract

and separate me from my man—that’s just too cruel.
I’ve always tried to keep in mind that a stepfather
is even more precious than a father, and I have done
everything I can for you, but you don’t have the slightest bit
of concern for me. Kill me, or what you will,
do as you please! If I am separated from Hanshichi, I won’t work!

NARRATOR: She raises her voice, heedless of the eyes of others,
her body racked with sobbing.

The oblivious stepfather forces a smile.

KYŪBEI: What a clever escape! There really is no rest for the wicked. Your mother is
worthless, but I married her so I could sell you and live off the proceeds. Who taught you
how to say all that? Did you learn it from that thief Hanshichi? I’ll kick your chattering
teeth in!

NARRATOR: He seizes her roughly.

The master and mistress of the Izutsu-ya pull them apart.

TARŌ: She belongs to us for the rest of the year. Don’t hurt her.

OHANA: If I can’t be with the man I love, then kill me!

KYŪBEI: Don’t think I can’t!

NARRATOR: Slaps, twisted arms—it is an outright brawl.

With nothing left to lose, Hanshichi hitches up
the skirts of his kimono and marches straight into
the courtyard of the Izutsu-ya.

HANSHICHI: I am Hanshichi from the hilt-wrapper’s shop.

NARRATOR: He grabs Kyūbei and shoves him aside,
then sits down in the middle of the group.

HANSHICHI: You, Father, you’re Ohana’s stepfather, and you have every right to hate
me. But you call me a thief, a con man, a robber. When have I ever stolen, or swindled?
As far as I’m concerned, you’re a flesh peddler and an extortionist. But, be that as it may,
Ohana is my wife. Once she’s completed her term of service I don’t care whether you’re
her stepfather or a shakedown artist; you had better watch what you say to a married
woman.

NARRATOR: Fury has turned his face
the color of the green mats
that he pounds with his fist

as he closes in on the other man.

KYŪBEI: Hmm, so you're Hanshichi from the sword shop? Let me get a look at your face. What a handsome fellow! With your topknot and your jet black sidelocks, you have the head of a moneychanger, but the wallet of a pauper. Cut out the macho posturing. I've lived this long without ever taking medicine and I'm not about to be blackmailed by the likes of you. So you've married a woman without her parent's permission—how would you like to find yourself in Awataguchi⁵? If you want this girl for your wife, you need money, got it? But you don't even have a few beans of silver. What is this? You married Ohana? A brazen scam if I ever saw one!

What's your next racket?

Purse snatching? Break-ins?

NARRATOR: As the father shouts, Hanshichi's chest heaves.

HANSHICHI: Hmm. Well said. I may not have any beans, but I do have money. I'm going to pay you the twenty *ryō* that Ohana would have earned next year, and then she will be only my wife, no longer a courtesan.

NARRATOR: He takes twenty *ryō* in gold out of his wallet.

KYŪBEI: Cash in gold? Come over here.

NARRATOR: Hanshichi throws it straight at him.

KYŪBEI: Oh, Hanshichi. I don't care whether it's fifty years or a hundred; as long as that girl has that sexy face I've got to keep her working so I can eat.

Do you think you can have a girl worth a thousand *ryō*
for your lousy twenty? Not a chance in hell.

And if you try running off with her,
you'll have a lot of trouble later
with the investigations. Here you go!

NARRATOR: He tosses it back at him.

HANSHICHI: Why should I take money from you? Take it!

NARRATOR: He throws it back again. As they toss the money,
grappling and slapping each other,
Ohana bursts into tears.

Tarō Saemon stands up.

TARŌ: Now, now, Hanshichi. Ohana is our employee. If you wish to have a word with her father, then kindly take it outside. We can't have a big crowd at the front door keeping the customers away.

Fellows! Throw them out!

EMPLOYEES: Yes, sir!

NARRATOR: Tahei, Chōbei, and Gosuke
rise as one and drag the men out.

Ohana is beside herself with weeping
as she clings to Hanshichi.

"Where do you think you're going?

Where?" says her father, and pulls them apart.

A district guard appears, wearing a pair of mismatched sandals,
as useless as Hanshichi,

⁵ An execution grounds located east of Kyoto.

dragged away by his topknot.
 The sight is too much to bear.

TARŌ: Well, father, why don't you go home
 and we can discuss everything tomorrow?

KYŪBEI: Yes, I suppose so. Well, then, I'll come back tomorrow.
 It's goes without saying,
 but I'd be obliged if you made sure that Ohana does not leave the premises. You
 ungrateful daughter! I'll come back tomorrow to take care of you. Just you wait!
 With all that effort my throat is dry.

NARRATOR: He gulps some freshly brewed tea,
 shakes his teapot head, and heads westward
 across the river.
 At this poignant moment there is
 a racket on the staircase, and out pops
 the sour face of the priest.

PRIEST: Ohana, what are you doing down here?
 I gave you my cup to drink from—is it going to come back in this lifetime or the
 next? I can't drink tonight, there's no joy in your face.
 Let's change the mood and go raise the roof
 over at the Kantō-ya in West Ishigake.
 Tarō, lend me some girls, will you?

TARŌ: Oh, the other girls can go with you to West Ishigake,
 or even to India, for that matter. But Ohana has to stay here.
 Her relatives will be worried if we let her go.

PRIEST: There's no need to spill the beans.
 And speaking of billing the speans—⁶

NARRATOR: He produces three *ryō* in gold
 from under his robes and tosses it out.

PRIEST: A veritable miracle!

NARRATOR: He sings a ditty as they leave
 in a clamor for West Ishigake.

Scene 2: A teahouse in West Ishigake

NARRATOR: The west side of the district
 faces Gion and Maruyama.
 Even on nights when the theater marquees
 remain dim, the lanterns of visitors
 walking to and fro illuminates the quarter,
 making the moonlight superfluous.
 Looking down at the street, one sees
 a palanquin being set down. Out pops
 a physician wearing a cotton beret,
 introduced, perhaps, by the Medicine King Buddha?

⁶ A series of complicated puns in the original has been suggested by this brief wordplay.

The diagnosis is that he is a customer of the Tsubo-ya.
“Hurry, hurry!” The master and mistress of the house
are flustered. They send for an amateur girl.

Light sounds of quick footsteps.

“Is it Okaru? Is it Otama? Otama!”

“Do you really think she can hear you? Don’t be ridiculous.”

Wearing a patterned kimono,
a dissipated priest is dressed for a night on the town.
Viewed from the back, he looks somehow familiar.

PRIEST: Oh, him. My colleague from Mannenji temple.

He’s come here in secret, looking for love, but I’ve caught him now.

NARRATOR: A boy at the Fukamidori-ya chants a ditty
in the river breeze, which carries his voice
far and wide as an opened fan. The hostess Oman
from the Ōgi-ya passes by, accompanying—
Sawamura Chōjirō! Too bad, the man
has gone down to Osaka. Karyū and Kaneko⁷ too
are headed to the port of Naniwa, where these flowers
are blossoming.⁸ Rumors of those blossoms
plant seeds of love.

Hearing gossip about another courtesan
who has not a care in the world
increases the dewy tears of Ohana.
She is utterly without joy.

Of the tens of thousands of people
frolicking by the river at Fourth Avenue,
might he ...? She gazes intently.

That one, with his head covered in a violet cloth,
lurking in the shadow of the guardhouse
with a downcast look—that must be him!

OHANA: Oh, I wish I could see him for just a moment!

There is so much to tell him. But I have to serve
the other courtesans and the customers.

NARRATOR: She leans against a pillar next to the alcove
and chants the *nenbutsu* to distract herself.

The chef Densuke puts down his cup.

DENSUKE: Ohana’s *nenbutsu* reminds me of something. Shamisens and ditties are old-
fashioned. These days the fad in the city is called “The Light of Amida.” All the
courtesans can draw lots, and whoever picks Amida Buddha has to go out to buy tofu and
sake. Girls, how about it? You’ve never seen such a thing in the pleasure quarters, have

⁷ The three were kabuki actors who moved from Kyoto to Osaka around the time the play was first performed.

⁸ Allusion to a poem cited in the preface to *Kokinshū* (905): “At Naniwa Port / these flowers are blossoming. / They were dormant for the winter / but now that it is spring / these flowers are blossoming” (*Naniwa zu ni / saku ya kono hana / fuyugomori / ima wa harube to / saku ya kono hana*).

you?

A COURTESAN: Yes, how unusual! Let's do it!

NARRATOR: Someone spreads out a sheet of paper, and the lines of a halo are drawn in the shape of a spider's web. Another small sheet is torn into pieces, and on each is written an amount of money.

DENSUKE: A lottery is a matter of luck; no complaints afterward! Well, now for the big event.

NARRATOR: They peep like mice as they open their lots.

DENSUKE: Sayo, what did you get?

SAYO: Sixteen *mon*. Lucky, lucky!

DENSUKE: Fuji, how about you?

FUJI: Thirty-six *mon*.

DENSUKE: And little girl Rin?

RIN: Ten *mon*.

DENSUKE: That's the price of a streetwalker. Shiga, only two *mon* for you? Sugi, how much?

SUGI: Unfortunately, I got three hundred. Well, whatever. I may have to pawn my apron.

DENSUKE: No need for that; if you don't have the money, you can pull the stuffing out of your quilted kimono.

Hagi, Shima, you missed the Buddha too.

Well, now it's Ohana's turn. Draw a lot and open it.

HANA: Oh, I've got my hands full. What nonsense is this? And what sort of Buddha could someone with my bad karma hope to become? Look.

NARRATOR: She opens it.

HANA: There you go. Didn't I tell you?

DENSUKE: Well, then, Hana is Amida!

No substitutes! We'll send this lady courtesan out for tofu and then eat it here, grilled on a skewer with miso.

The whole house has perked up a bit.

Yes, this is fun!

NARRATOR: He laughs.

Ohana would love to go outside under any pretense, but she tries to hide her desire.

OHANA: What a nuisance!

I've never had to walk for such a thing before. Well, anyhow, off I go. While I'm gone, get everything ready.

DENSUKE: We'll be ready. We've got the mortar and the pestle and a scoop. We'll be waiting for you. Hurry up!

HANA: Alright, I get it.

NARRATOR: She dresses herself to look like a serving-girl, off to see the man she has pledged to love for two lifetimes, in her bare feet.

Hurriedly she wraps around her neck
a hand towel, which she is unused to wearing,
and her skirts rustle as she heads off,
in an apron borrowed from Sugi, and scurries across
a makeshift bridge.

From the shadow of the guardhouse
Hanshichi catches a glimpse of her.
“Here, over here!” Thus beckoned, she replies,
“Oh, Hanshichi, I missed you!”

They embrace and can only weep.

HANSHICHI: There’s no use crying. I have to go back to Osaka tonight. Come with me.

NARRATOR: He tugs her hand.

OHANA: Wait a minute. Where did you get the money you had? You didn’t get
desperate and do something awful, did you? Tell me what’s going on, and put my mind
at rest.

HANSHICHI: There’s nothing to tell you. Would anyone lend even a single *bu* to
someone in my position? I took that sword and sold it for thirty-two *ryō*.

Then I bought a Shimosaka sword
of the same size and make,
but without a stamp, for eight *ryō*.
For two *ryō* I had it stamped and fitted,
and sent it back to Osaka.

Even if they behead me there’s no giving back the twenty *ryō* I took for a
commission. If I’m caught, it’s just me.

I won’t make any trouble for my uncle or my aunt
and I’ll ask them to take care of you. That’s why
I’m headed to Osaka. Your stepfather wasn’t lying
when he called me a thief. I am frightened of myself.

NARRATOR: As he speaks, Ohana trembles.

HANA: Just as I had thought.

You poor, dear thing, gone mad
for my sake! If they investigate you,
pin it all on me and save yourself.

HANSHICHI: Whether we are punished or go free, let it be together.

OHANA: Really?

HANSHICHI: We’re husband and wife, aren’t we?

NARRATOR: Once again they embrace and shed tears.

Meanwhile, in the upstairs room a little later:
“Hana’s late.” “Did the tofu buy her instead?”
“Go find her.”

OHANA: Goodness! I mustn’t be discovered.

NARRATOR: As they walk in the dark
over the stones that dam the river,
she twists an ankle. With a long strip
of crimson silk from the lining of her robe
wrapped around her foot, she tries to run.

The night drum booms. They emerge
from Chestnut Crossing and find themselves
at Kenninji temple, where the tower bell tolls midnight.
Don't tarry! "Palanquin! Palanquin!" they shout,
but there are none, or the bearers can't hear them.
West of Ear Mound is the Penny Mint, that in name alone.
Since they have no small change, they must pay
one *ryō* in gold coin for two pairs of straw sandals.
How pitiful the plight of those who wear them!

Scene 3: Journey of Ohana and Hanshichi

NARRATOR: Night after night she plied her miserable trade,
deceiving the gods of Japan with seven-page vows
and false pledges. Is that why
she has been deceived? Was it a grudge
someone bore against her, or sheer envy?
In the end, it brought her down.
They have missed the downbound boat
and follow the Yodo River wherever
and to whatever punishment it leads them.
Where is the road to Osaka, and how many miles
more to go? They are the first geese
among the first frost of autumn. Hoping
to hide her sleep-rumpled hair, she takes off the apron
and fashions the cord that ties her sleeves back
into a simple sash to hold up her skirts.
Although she tries to walk, she cannot manage
these unfamiliar roads. On a woman's journey,
why must she pass Man Mountain?
Her sins are many, piled high as Yamazaki—
there are its foothills. Poignantly, they wonder
when they will ever return to the capital.
In spring, all sorts of flowers bloom
on the branchtips of the trees in the mountains
where they are wandering. Nearby, the green
hills of summer, and the fallen oak leaves.
Deutzia blossoms, and the mountain cuckoo
that paints its face with blossoms from the valley view.
Rainhats tilted forward, they wander the mountains.
In autumn there is not a mountain unreached
by the clear, cool moonlight.
They head toward the moon perching
above an especially famous peak,
and they wander the mountains.
Now in winter the clouds carry

sleet from the distant ranges
and the clever geese head south,
turning their backs to the north
and leaving the mountains behind.
Ah, mountain after mountain!
How white are the peaks!
Luring the snow, they wander the mountains,
they wind and wander. A jōruri song
about the goddess of the mountains among courtesans
was something they only talked about about last night.
Today she disguises herself like a townswoman,
but there is no hiding her frilled sash
and they approach Hirakata. Passing a grove of pine trees,
they see the river. “Look, look!” A woman
and her husband with a five-year-old child between them,
riding the riverboat. They laugh loudly, without a care
in the world. How she envies another couple’s love!
Though hers is a courtesan’s love, they say
that even a rope net can catch love’s breezes.
The wind blowing over the reeds, over the reeds,
sinks into her body. In a future life
she hopes to call him husband and be called wife
truly, without lying, even for a single night.
“How miserable!” The shortened sleeves that embrace her
are soaked through with tears. It was long ago
that he would visit her as a faithful lover.
“Do you remember?” he asks. It was the year
before last, the seventeenth day of the month,
under a hazy moon. We drank too much that night,
and then sat together with our feet under the quilts,
whispering sweet nothings until dawn.
Those awful crows woke us up. From that morning
when we said goodbye, still wanting more,
you sent letters every day, letters written in blood.
‘How I long to see you again,’ you wrote—was that the seed
of our love? Miscanthus grasses blossomed into flower.
How I cherished your pledges of love!
I dreamed of you night after night. And the notes you sent,
folded and twisted up: ‘To my dearest, from Hana’
and ‘You are in my thoughts.’ My desire for you deepened
in hue, and my love burst forth as if from a spring.
‘Just come see me again, come see me. I am waiting
for you.’ How the days have passed since you wrote
those words! What will become of us tomorrow?”

The river flows by, and the village of courtesans⁹
is far behind them. An evening storm on the Nagara River
ruffles their hair, and their hearts too
are in a state of disorder. The castle,
frightening to those with clouded hearts, looms nearby.
At Naniwa Bay, stands of reeds. Pleading with someone
stuck in the muck of sin, who knew the difference
between good and evil, is like preaching to the Buddha.
They take for their hideout a grove on the near side
of Kyōbashi Bridge, and rest for a while.

⁹ A reference to the village of Eguchi, located at the confluence of the Yodo and Kanzaki Rivers. It was famous for courtesans who served men traveling from Kyoto to the Osaka region.

ACT III

The incense-maker's workshop in Nagamachi

NARRATOR: Although they hurry, the autumn days
are short as the reeds at Naniwa Bay, and the sun set
while they were at Kyōbashi. In famous Nagamachi
they sniff out the aunt's house, recognizing it
from things she has said in passing.
He opens the side door.

HANSHICHI: Is this the house
of Jingorō the incense maker?
Ah, this must be the place.

AUNT: Who is it?

HANSHICHI: It's Hanshichi from Kyoto.

NARRATOR: He and Ohana enter together.

AUNT: Well, this is unusual. Your letter arrived the day before yesterday, and then I
had some errands. . . .

Ah, you brought someone along!
Who is it? Come in.

OHANA: Aunt, it's been a long time.
My name is Hana; we met a while ago. I trust you are well.

NARRATOR: There is something odd
about the seated couple. "Well, then, welcome,"
is all the aunt can say. She seems suspicious.
Hanshichi tries not to be found out.

HANSHICHI: Ohana has completed her contract, and she was going to see her parents in
Izumi, so fortunately we were able to travel together. And oh, yes—
about the order for that sword—
was the samurai pleased?

If, for some reason, he was not, and you
and Uncle Jingorō were to get in some kind of trouble,
then I would want to take responsibility.
That's what I came here to tell you.
It's been on my mind; how did it turn out?

AUNT: He's talking nonsense. Why would you or I get in trouble on account of the
workmanship? You should be delighted! When the sword was delivered the day before
yesterday, my husband took it immediately to the residence.

The hilt wrapping, the pommel piece,
the lacquer on the sheath—the samurai
was extraordinarily pleased by every aspect.
He kindly told Jingorō that his wife was lucky
to have a fine nephew, and that they would give us
more orders in the future, and you would be permitted
to call on them directly.

Keep working hard at your craft.

NARRATOR: When the two of them hear these words they press their hands together.

HANSHICHI: Yes, this is very good news. What an honor! It is truly a gift from Heaven. My life has been saved. Hana, aren't you pleased?

HANA: Yes, I'm happy to hear it. I feel relieved.

AUNT: You should be. This is a divine reward for taking every precaution when doing business with samurai. Today, all of a sudden, a messenger came with an urgent summons calling Jingorō to the residence about that sword.

He left after noon and still isn't home yet.
They're probably holding a joyous celebration
and a banquet to commemorate
the presentation of the sword.
I'm sure he will come back drunk.

NARRATOR: Hanshichi's face turns pale.

HANSHICHI: Um, they summoned him again about an urgent matter regarding the sword?

Well, Ohana, we were talking about this
on the way over from Kyoto. I thought this might happen.
I'll wait here for Jingorō. After I see him
I may have to take responsibility
for the celebration of the sword
and, depending on my luck,
may even be summoned to the residence tonight.
You stay at an inn near here and leave early tomorrow
to go to your parents.

NARRATOR: His voice fades away.

HANSHICHI: So even if I lose face—oh, what can I do? This is goodbye.

NARRATOR: He folds his hands against his chest,
and leans forward, trying to hide his tears.

Ohana also weeps and with trembling voice tells him:

OHANA: I can't understand you.

We share our joys and sadnesses. Didn't you promise me that?
I'm not leaving until I've met Jingorō and heard what happened.
Your aunt is a woman too—when her husband faces a crucial moment,
does she leave his side? Oh, Hanshichi, you say such cruel things!

NARRATOR: Resentfully, she pleads with him and weeps. The aunt watches them closely.

AUNT: What are you two talking about? I can't figure it out at all. My husband Jingorō associates with samurai; he's a fastidious man. And Hanshichi is from warrior stock. I've always been proud of what a proper young man he is. Do you think I'm going to let you meet your uncle for the first time in the company of a courtesan?

The next neighborhood to the north is full of inns.
Both of you go, and if you want to meet Jingorō,
then Hanshichi can see him alone, tomorrow.
After you have really become husband and wife

and settled down, then we'll have Ohana meet him.
I would hate for my husband to come home now
and write off my precious nephew after seeing him in this condition.
Precautions like this are very important. Well, then, hurry up.

NARRATOR: She presses them.

HANSHICHI: I am honored by your care for us
and shed tears of gratitude.

But I have a secret to tell you.

NARRATOR: He edges closer.

AUNT: Wait a minute.

The thought of him coming home is distracting me.

NARRATOR: She steps down into the garden and locks the door.

AUNT: Well, what is it that's troubling you? Tell me, I'm listening.

NARRATOR: At that very moment, Jingorō pounds frantically at the door.

JINGORŌ: The sun has just set. Why is the door locked? Open, open up!

AUNT: That's too bad. He's home. What should we do?

I can't send you through the alley behind our rental house,
and there are bedclothes and futons in the closet.
Where can I hide you? There is nowhere to hide.

NARRATOR: A trunk that held mosquito nets
and cotton robes during the summer—now in autumn,
it is empty. The stag and his mate burn with desire.
She pushes both of them inside, a sad scene to behold.

The aunt closes the lid and tells them to be quiet, then yawns.

AUNT: Just as I was dozing off comes this noisy knocking to my sleeping ears.

NARRATOR: When she opens the door, there is Jingorō,
a look of rage on his face. His eyes are bloodshot
as he storms into the house.

JINGORŌ: Hey, wife! I've been ruined by your glorious nephew. My life is on the line.
He took that sword with a certificate of appraisal and a real stamp by Nobukuni and
switched it with this Shimosaka, which no one wants, and put a fake stamp on it.

I was just at the residence of my samurai customer.
Since the thief is my wife's nephew, they believe there is no way
I could not have known. If I go to Kyoto to investigate
I'll be reported to the ward office as having absconded,
and then no one will believe me. I can do nothing but die.
Even the wisdom of Monjū¹⁰ cannot save me.

NARRATOR: He tosses the sword aside and simply sighs.

The aunt can barely breathe.

AUNT: That reminds me of something Hanshichi said. . . .

NARRATOR: Then it dawns on her. She is dazed
and for a moment cannot form a reply.
Hanshichi has already resolved himself; he lifts
the cover of the trunk and is about to come out.

¹⁰ A Buddhist bodhisattva associated with wisdom.

She glares at him, and picks up the sword.

AUNT: Now, Jingorō, I am just a woman and I don't understand the ways of the world, but there is no one—not great lords or aristocrats, wise man or scholars—who escapes the effects of karma.

Certainly the deed was Hanshichi's,
but it is as if he did it and yet did not.

What is there to hide? That Nobukuni was the one I have told you about, the sword that was too good for my family

and brought upon us a curse for three generations.

With a single glance I recognized it,
but I thought the sword could work its effects
only on a samurai. What curse could it impose
on someone who has descended

to the level of a townsman or a craftsman?

With it I hoped to make my only nephew, an orphan,
the favorite artisan of the lord of a province.

Because of my despicable intentions, an evil nature
took root for the first time in Hanshichi,
who had been the picture of integrity.

He was ruined by the curse of the sword
that circulated until it fell into the hands
of the third generation. Even though I recognized it

I proceeded, and for that I am guilty.

I cannot believe it is anything other
than karmic cause and effect.

How ashamed I am, Jingorō!

There are women who nurture their men.

I have been with mine for almost twenty years
and did nothing for him. For the trouble I gave you
you must feel resentment and hatred.

That saddens me. I have been disgraced.

Forgive me, please, Jingorō!

NARRATOR: She collapses on her husband's knee
and wails. Of course it is a poignant scene.

Jingorō has a manly disposition.

JINGORŌ: What kind of disgrace can there be
between husband and wife?

And can I possibly avoid humiliation
by pleading ignorance
of what my wife's nephew has done?

Even though I have never met him
or even seen him, it is a man's duty
to give up his life to fulfill his obligations.

Don't worry. They can lop off
my head, or throw me in jail, but I will take
full responsibility. I won't let them harm Hanshichi.

NARRATOR: He makes up his mind quickly,
but right now the decision depends on his wife.
He appears lost in thought.
She presses her palms together in gratitude.

AUNT: I appreciate the extent of your love.
Samurai understand matters like this,
so please tell them the story of the sword,
put all the blame on me, and avoid
punishment for Hanshichi and yourself.

NARRATOR: She takes the sword and slips it from the sheath.

AUNT: The real one was made by Nobukuni; this one by Shimosaka. Different
swordsmiths, but the same size and with identical patterns on the blades. Being of a pair,
they bring the same curse on our family. That is why my father killed a man, then took
that sword and removed his robe.

He grasped the blade
and pointed it at himself. Into his left side
he plunged it!

NARRATOR: With these words she pierces herself
and cuts across to the right side.

JINGORŌ: What are you doing?

NARRATOR: Jingorō clings to her. Hanshichi and his wife
leap out of the trunk.

HANSHICHI: Aunt, have you lost your mind? How awful!
I am the one who came here to die
for what I did.

NARRATOR: He clutches at the sword but she pushes him away.

AUNT: Oh, you fool! If I were going to kill you, then why would I make such a long
speech? Are you going to take your own life? You did a bad thing, but you ran away
without trying to disguise yourself and you came here to sacrifice yourself and make up
for the trouble you caused your uncle. Just what I would expect from someone of your
lineage! At least you did well in that regard.

Your father was my older brother.
Even though I adopted you
at his deathbed, I never did anything
for you, never gave you so much
as a change of clothes or a sash, and adopting you
has brought you no benefit.

At this critical moment I am not giving up my life for your sake. It is entirely out
of duty to my brother. If I die alone, then the punishment will be limited to one person.
The sword will be confiscated and there will be nothing else to investigate. The curse of
the sword will end with the third generation.

Make a success of yourself and take the name
of your father and grandfather.
Now go, hurry!

NARRATOR: Severely wounded, she is gasping
for breath. At the sight of her tears

falling into a pool of her blood,
 Hana bursts into sobbing
 and Hanshichi's eyes too are filled with tears.

HANSHICHI: You and my uncle are the same as my parents.
 Even if I am crucified, I will not retreat an inch!

NARRATOR: He clings to her.

JINGORŌ: Dimwit! Are you going to stay here panicking, and let your aunt die for nothing?

NARRATOR: He grabs both of them and throws them out, latching and bolting the door behind them.

HANSHICHI: Then we will go! Just let me see her one more time!

NARRATOR: Husband and wife slump against the door, sobbing.
 The aunt's breathing is labored.

AUNT: Ahh. . . Jingorō.
 I want to die soon, before a crowd comes. Where is the place on my throat, where is it?

NARRATOR: She is dazed and in pain. Jingorō weeps.

JINGORŌ: Even though you are a woman
 you performed seppuku like a samurai.
 For you to slit your own throat
 is asking too much.

NARRATOR: He approaches her to deliver the coup-de-grâce.

AUNT: No, no! When my wounds are examined it will be clear which places I cut and which were cut by someone else. You will have a hard time explaining yourself. Please, show me where to cut.

NARRATOR: He is dazed by the sight
 of his wife outdoing a man
 in taking her own life.

JINGORŌ: Here. Here it is.

NARRATOR: He points at his own throat.
 She nods and raises the sword,
 but her hands are weak and they slip,
 stabbing her thigh. She raises the sword again
 but misses, plunging the blade
 into her shoulder. She misses the left side,
 then the right; the pain is visible in her face.
 Her husband chants sadly, "*Namu Amida,
 Namu Amida Butsu*" and his voice
 gives her the strength to slit her throat.
 With a single groan the light fades from her eyes.
 Fragile crimson leaves scatter
 in a storm at daybreak, a fleeting last moment
 that could not be avoided.
 "What's all that crying about?" From the houses across the street

and next door, from the rented house in back, people come
and kick in the door, come charging in.

“Wow, a woman did hara-kiri. She killed herself!”

The neighbors, the ward elders, officials from the ward
and from the town, watchmen with their nightsticks

mill about. A life as fleeting as frost

on a blade of grass. *Namu Amida,*

Namu Amida Butsu. There is no doubt

that she was reborn in the Western Paradise,

and her story is told in this *jōruri* play,

its poignant sadness preserved.