

From Hiruma Nabuko's Play "Closing Night"

ACT V, SCENE VII

(Isoko, Nichiko and their mother Tomono are the only ones left on stage. There is a violent BEATING on the outer door, stage left. They freeze.)

VOICE: Isoko? Nichiko?

NICHIKO: Father! *(She runs towards the door. Isoko grabs her.)*

ISOKO: You idiot! Stay still! *(to her mother)* Can you walk?

TOMONO: I don't know. *(Isoko gently probes the gash in the kimono.)* Aaaahhh!

VOICE: Nichiko...open the door.

(A moment.)

ISOKO: Is it the bushi, mother?

(Another moment: a dreadful one.)

TOMONO: No.

(More violent BEATINGS on the door. Nichiko draws back behind her mother.)

ISOKO: It could be them... couldn't it?

VOICE: Isoko? Aren't you in there? It's all right, my cherry blossom, we've won. The Hida came, and the Hida do not fail.

NICHIKO: It is Father!

TOMONO: That thing out there is not your father.

NICHIKO: *(getting hysterical)* But they said they've won!

TOMONO: The bushi would douse the smoke from the outer towers first. *(pause)* Isoko...hand it to me. *(Isoko picks up the naginata and hands it to her, and Tomono uses it to struggle to one leg.)* Nichiko-chan...

you know what must be done. *(Nichiko stares in disbelief at her mother and sister, then...)*

NICHIKO: I can't! I'm not a bushi! I can't fight, I'll die!

TOMONO: Are you a Hiruma?

NICHIKO: You said I wouldn't have to have my *gempukku* until I was thirteen!

TOMONO: This is the inner tower, Nichiko. We are the last.

NICHIKO: Stop looking at me! STOP IT! I can't! *(She is crying.)* Sensei said I was the worst. I can barely lift it. He said if you have doubt in your mind you'll fail, and... and I'll just hit myself again. I can't.

ISOKO: *(quietly)* Nichiko... she's not talking about that.

(We think at first she didn't hear...then she looks up. Her sister nods. She looks at her mother. Another nod. More BEATINGS on the door shock Nichiko, but the other two are as cold as porcelain. Splintering sounds. Tomono's hands slither down the naginata.)

TOMONO: All you have to do is bow. *(No reaction.)* Please... face the portrait.

(Another long pause before Nichiko makes her decision.)

NICHIKO: Faaaaaaaaathher! *(She sprints to the door.)*

TOMONO: IYE! *(It doesn't work, and the eight-year-old dashes through the inner door and slams it just as Isoko wedges her fingers in. Nichiko bites them and as her sister draws back, she slams the door and bars it, lying against the foyer wall.)*

NICHIKO: Father...

VOICE: I heard them, darling. They want to kill you. They have the Taint.

ISOKO: You liar! You black tarry-blooded spawn! I hope you eat jade and it burns your intestines all the way down!

VOICE: Open the door, Nichiko-chan. I won't let them hurt you.

ISOKO: Don't you dare! Nichiko, it's only wearing his skin!

TOMONO: *(weak, but never showing it)* Isoko... turn to face the portrait... if you please...

ISOKO: I can't, mother. If you take mine, who will take yours?

TOMONO: My other daughter is lost. He will never have both of you.

ISOKO: Together, mother. With... with no doubt in our minds, we can do it together.

VOICE: Nichiko-chan... open the door.

ISOKO: *(soft)* It's just like cutting bamboo. *(She picks up the other naginata.)*

TOMONO: You are a Hiruma.

(They raise the naginata. Tomono tries to control her labored breathing. She limps forward, testing the range. They touch each other's necks with the blades. Isoko closes her eyes, once, a long blink. They draw back. The BEATINGS and Nichiko's crying are constant now.)

ISOKO: Just a moment. *(composed again)* On san.

TOMONO: On san.

(Isoko takes a few breaths.)

ISOKO: *(practically a kiai)* Ichi!

TOMONO: *(trying, but with no breath)* Ni!

(The BEATINGS are intermittent, stopping before they swing. The stagehands douse the lanterns. Both of them hit the floor heavily. A pause of at least twelve beats before a candle is lit. Blood is all over the stage, and Isoko lies headless. Tomono groans and rolls over, holding her blood-matted temple.)

TOMONO: You... doubted. *(She feels her own neck. It's still there.)* I will look for Hida.

VOICE: Nichiiiiiko-chan... please.

TOMONO: *(lucid)* Don't open that door.

(Her eyes relax, wide and staring. Nichiko holds very still and quiet.)

VOICE: Nichiko... it's all right. I'm here. The Hida do not fail.

NICHIKO: They're dead.

VOICE: You don't have to be, Nichiko. They were very sick.

NICHIKO: They're all dead.

VOICE: I can take you away, Nichiko. There is a secret place I know.

NICHIKO: Crabs don't have secrets.

VOICE: It is a wonderful place where no one has to commit *seppuku*. One of the kami showed it to me. Don't you want to honor the kami?

NICHIKO: No! I hate the kami, I hate this stupid castle, and I hate you!

VOICE: I'm sorry, cherry blossom. Because I love you. Please... Nichiko-chan. Open the door. For your father. You know fathers must love their little ones. Always.

(Stagehand douses the final candle. There is silence for three beats, then in the darkness, we hear fumbling at one of the door bars. It draws back with a rasp. There is a growl and a child's scream that lasts for ten seconds. It is cut off by the sound of a body being slammed against the stage. The scream continues on a second breath, until it turns into a gargle. More slams: four of them. Stagehands tear meat.)

(CURTAIN.)

