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Sukeroku: Flower of Edo

SUKEROKU YUKARI NO EDO ZAKURA

by Tsuuchi Jihei II and Tsuuchi Hanemon

First performed in March–April 1713 at the Yamamura Theater in Edo as the second or domestic part (sewamono) of an all-day play (tōshi kyōgen) with the fanciful title *Protection of the Cherries of Flower Mansion*, this play was written for Ichikawa Danjūrō II, who played Sukeroku. The exact circumstances of its authorship are unclear, but it is believed that Tsuuchi Jihei II, son of Danjūrō I’s favorite playwright, was consulted about the script and that most of the writing is the work of Tsuuchi Hanemon, the Yamamura Theater’s chief playwright. Jihei is credited with establishing the four-act form in kabuki and the two-part, history-domestic form of play. We do not know what the entire play was about, but the world of Agemaki and Sukeroku had been used for plays for thirty years. Conflicting accounts say a courtesan, Agemaki, and her lover, Sukeroku, killed themselves in Osaka in either 1673 or 1709. Regardless of the historical facts, several Agemaki-Sukeroku love suicide plays were played on Kyoto and Osaka kabuki stages in 1675 and others were to follow. The 1713 production in Edo abandoned the suicide plot popular in Kyoto and Osaka for a new one telling how Sukeroku, with the help of his brother Shinbei, kills Ikyū, a samurai rival. Jihei rewrote the play for Danjūrō three years later, keeping the basic story but setting it within the world of the Soga brothers. Danjūrō added the long danced entrance with the umbrella and played Sukeroku closer to soft wagoto style than in 1713. At the age of sixty-two, Danjūrō revived the play once more (1749). He further refined the acting (and presumably the dialogue as well), and changed the original Itchū Bushi music to Katō Bushi style music for his first entrance. Cherry trees, once associated with gardens of the aristocracy, were planted in Yoshiwara for the first time that spring, and Danjūrō lined the hanamichi

with cherry trees in full bloom. Fujimoto Tobun, the chief playwright, placed the story within another all-day play (*Story of the Brothers Named Soga*). The Katō Bushi music heard in performances today was composed for the 1761 production in which Danjūrō III played Shinbei. Shortly after that *Sukeroku: Flower of Edo* began to be performed as an independent one-act play. For the 1832 production, Danjūrō VII called it one of the “Eighteen Favorite Plays” (*jūhachiban*) of the Ichikawa family, the first of this group of famous plays to be so designated. Onoe Kikugorō V, an extremely popular actor, replaced the Katō Bushi music with Tokiwazu music when he played Sukeroku in 1870, and his son, Kikugorō VI, performed the role to Kiyomoto music in 1915. Either Katō Bushi or Kiyomoto music can be heard in current productions.

Because the play has been performed by every generation since 1713, it maintains many elements of its original Genroku style. It seems likely that Sukeroku’s long entrance dance was created to take advantage of the recently created hanamichi (probably for the play’s second or third production). The play shows close connections with life in old Edo. The Katō Bushi musicians were well-to-do merchants who were avid patrons of kabuki and of Danjūrō. Amateurs, they vied for the chance to appear on the kabuki stage. (This was what prompted Kikugorō to switch to professional Kiyomoto musicians.) Houses of assignation in Yoshiwara sent Danjūrō gifts of sake and costumes, and decorated the theater with lanterns advertising their establishments. The Sugagaki melody heard throughout the play was familiar to the audience as the music which accompanied real courtesans when they promenaded through the streets of Yoshiwara. Sugagaki is used in a unique way. Instead of being played quietly in the background during speeches, a single chord is played in the pause between phrases. The effect is unusually formal and sophisticated. A cast of over one hundred actors is generally employed to create a sense of color and spectacle. The many long speeches call for accomplished elocution. Comic scenes can be improvised as much as today’s actor dares; in the role of the Dandy especially, actors include contemporary references (a popular dance, exiting with a hula hoop, using the baseball term “double-header” to describe the experience of going between the legs of first Sukeroku and then Shinbei). The longest versions of the play today may last three hours, but it is usually reduced to two hours by cutting a superfluous opening scene of exposition between Agemaki, Shinbei, and Mankō (as in the translation). The love scene between Agemaki and Sukeroku, although no longer performed, is included in the translation.

The play has a simple sequential construction for the most part, and several situations are repeated. It is essential to the plot that Sukeroku and Ikyū be in disguise and that they reveal themselves later to be “in reality” (*jitsu wa*) other people. But when the disguise device is repeated by Mankō, Shinbei, and even the Samurai, it is obvious that it is being done for mere theatrical effect. Sukeroku and Shinbei have three encounters with passersby, but this could be reduced to two or to one or all could be eliminated without changing the plot (although the scenes are the funniest in the play). The play may end as it does in the translation—with Sukeroku emerging from a vat filled with water (the ending favored today by Nakamura Kanzaburō XVII)—or the vat scene may be cut and the play end immediately after Ikyū is killed (favored by the late Danjūrō XI).

The text for *Sukeroku: Flower of Edo* exists in many versions, but the variations among them are not significant. The oldest extant text is that attributed to Sakurada Jisuke used for the 1779 production. The translation is based primarily on the annotated text in Gunji Masakatsu, ed., *Kabuki Jūbachibanshū* (Collection of Eighteen Favorite Plays; Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965). Also consulted were texts in Toita Yasuji, ed., *Kabuki Meisakusen* (Selected Kabuki Classics; Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1956), vol. 15; Atsumi Seitarō, ed., *Nihon Gikyoku Zenshū* (Complete Japanese Drama; Tokyo: Shunyōdō, 1931), vol. 1; and Kawatake Shigetoshi, ed., *Kabuki Jūbachibanshū* (Collection of Eighteen Favorite Plays; Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1952); and the text, as performed by the late Danjūrō XI in 1962, published as a brochure with Victor Record set SJ-3001-3. Stage directions are taken from performances of the play by Nakamura Kanzaburō XVII (Kabuki-za, Tokyo, May 1967) and by Ichikawa Ebizō X (Kabuki-za, Tokyo, November 1969).

Sukeroku: Flower of Edo

SCENE 1

[Deep beats of the large drum and sharp notes of the flute playing Tōri Kagura, “Shrine Dance Procession,” drift through the striped kabuki curtain. Two sharp *ki* clacks signal the curtain to open.]

CHORUS [offstage, sings Dote no Chōchin, “Lanterns on the Embankment,” to shamisen accompaniment, as drum and flute continue Tōri Kagura] :

Rows of paper lanterns glow,

Yoshiwara’s nighttime brilliance, bright as the moonlight;

The pleasure quarter beckons, angling, drawing men;

Alluring, luring, luring, to Yoshiwara.

[Accelerating clacks of the *ki* accompany the opening of the curtain. Music and *ki* fade to silence. The scene is the front of the Three Harbors, a fashionable house of prostitution in the licensed quarter of Yoshiwara, in Edo (Tokyo). Heavy grillwork covers most of the building exposed to the street, except stage left where a divided curtain covers the entrance. The building is painted bright red and is decorated with black and gold designs. Masses of lighted paper lanterns, alternately red and green, form a brilliant display on either side. A huge vat marked “For Fire,” topped by a pyramid of wooden buckets, occupies a corner stage right. Sprigs of spring cherry blooms hang across the width of the stage. A number of simple benches, covered with crimson cloths, face the street. The STAGE MANAGER in dark kimono and formal outer garments, enters from the right and kneels center stage. He places his fan before him and bows ceremoniously.]

kojō

STAGE MANAGER: Hear ye to the east and to the west! May I respectfully introduce as our play “Sukeroku: Flower of Edo,” first performed by Ichikawa Danjūrō II in 1713—the third year of Shōtoku—and now a classic of the Edo stage.¹ [Bows deeply.] May you all, east and west, find pleasure and enjoyment in this, our spring play! [Glancing back.] Katō Bushi musicians, will you please begin!

1. The stage announcement (kojō) was changed for each production. This one dates from some time after the 1713 production, but which production is not clear.

[He bows low, rises, and exits right. The blinds center roll up, and seen seated inside the house are a dozen Katō Bushi shamisen PLAYERS and a CHORUS of as many singers.]

KATŌ BUSHI CHORUS [singing to shamisen music] :

In springtime hazes,

Blooms pink as Mount Yoshino fill Yoshiwara.

Tender shoots and gentle buds flourish in our view;

Of the Mountain Entrance House and the Three Harbors;

Where the bursting cherries of Edo flower.

[A distant temple bell tolls. As the CHORUS continues, a WATCHMAN enters from each direction, striking a metal staff on the ground to warn residents of the ever-present danger of fire at night. Each is nattily dressed in a dark blue happi coat and light blue, snug-fitting trousers, and carries a lighted lantern. They meet center, bow in greeting, and pass in opposite directions. The temple bell tolls in the distance.]

KATŌ BUSHI CHORUS [continuing] :

Fragrance of the evening drifting on the winds.

Is the tolling temple bell that of Ueno;

Or Asakusa famous for the Flower of Edo?

[The blinds drop. The bell tolls. Offstage, large drum and nō flute play stately Tōri Kagura and shamisen play Sugagaki, a special melody associated with the licensed district. Black-robed and hooded STAGE ASSISTANTS hold back the entrance curtain of the Three Harbors and five luxuriously dressed COURTESANS enter. The richly brocaded silk robe and hanging sash of each is of contrasting color and pattern. Their hair is piled high, in an elaborate style indicating they are courtesans of high rank. Each rests a hand on the shoulder of a young ATTENDANT to help maintain balance while sweeping forward regally on foot-high lacquered clogs. Two younger PROSTITUTES follow each courtesan. They stop center and pose. They speak with calculated elegance, in phrases of seven and five syllables, their voices first rising then trailing off insinuatingly. A quiet chord of Sugagaki punctuates the end of each phrase.]

watarizerifu

FIRST COURTESAN: Ahh, ah, everyone, gaze upon the view. Yoshiwara's cherry pink petals opening; is it not a wonderous thing, our springtime beauty?

shichigochō

SECOND COURTESAN: Another spring's fresh blossoms bursting wide with love; another season's dewy beautiful young buds . . .

THIRD COURTESAN: . . . the buds of Yoshiwara flower before man's eyes; softly bloom then fade away scattered in the wind.

FOURTH COURTESAN: Men's hearts steeped in spring's pleasures cherish your spring love . . .

FIFTH COURTESAN: . . . dwell well upon the beauties . . .

ALL [in unison]: . . . of Yoshiwara!

FIRST COURTESAN [looking down the banamichi]: Ahh, ah. The pride of Yoshiwara.

SECOND COURTESAN: I see a lantern . . .

THIRD COURTESAN . . . marked with the Three Harbors crest!

FOURTH COURTESAN: It is . . .

ALL [greatly prolonging the word]: . . . Agemaki!

CHORUS [sings Yami no Yo, "The Dark of Night," from offstage to accompaniment of shamisen, as large drum and nō flute play Tōri Kagura, and stick drum and hand bell play slow Watari Byōshi, "Crossing Over"]:
In a moonless night only Yoshiwara shines;

As bright as the moon . . . the moon, the moon.

[During the song AGEMAKI, a courtesan of the highest rank, enters the banamichi with her retinue, consisting of a LANTERN BEARER, a MALE ATTENDANT holding a large parasol over her head, another ATTENDANT upon whom she rests her hand as she walks, several younger COURTESANS, two CHILD MAIDS in bright red kimonos with trailing sleeves who carry trays with drinking and smoking implements, a FEMALE ATTENDANT in deep purple kimono, six adolescent COURTESANS in pastel kimonos of different colors, an elderly CHAPERON in black kimono, with two more MALE ATTENDANTS bringing up the rear. AGEMAKI walks with undulating, wide-sweeping "figure-eight" steps of a first-rank courtesan, a style both elegant and provocative. She has been drinking and her movements betray her condition. She stumbles slightly. At seven-three she faces the audience and poses elegantly. Offstage shamisen continue Yami no Yo quietly in the background.]

watarizerifu

FIRST COURTESAN [gently chiding]: My, look at Agemaki, how can she manage . . .

shichigochō

SECOND COURTESAN: . . . listing like a sail boat in a gusty wind?

THIRD COURTESAN: For shame, a reeling courtesan, leading her parade.

FOURTH COURTESAN: Agemaki, where did you . . .

FIFTH COURTESAN: . . . when did you . . .

FIRST COURTESAN: . . . get so . . .

ALL: . . . intoxicated? [Prolonged.] Ehhhh?

AGEMAKI [grandly]: Indeed, such an elegant assemblage greets me on my return.

[She catches her balance. Though inebriated, she still shows the wit and poise which make her the most sought-after courtesan in the quarter.]

Where did I, when did I, become intoxicated did you say? From the youth at the Pines, from a foul-mouthed samurai, from every corner hands thrust upon me brimming cups of wine when I pass through the streets of Yoshiwara. [Mimes receiving cup and drinking.] My mere appearance puts to flight the greatest sorts of Edo, with a "pardon me, I must go." [Delicately covering her mouth.] Ha, ha! For Agemaki, pride of the House of Three Harbors, drinks but does not . . . become intoxicated. [She lurches.]

MAID [tiny, high voice]: Mistress. Take care.

AGEMAKI [kindly]: I hear a small one's large opinion. Little one, do not fear. I am not incapacitated.

watarizerifu

FEMALE ATTENDANT [respectfully bowing]: You may say, that, Mistress, but the cherry's pink blossoms . . .

shichigochō

FIRST YOUNG COURTESAN: . . . are seen in your face . . .
SECOND YOUNG COURTESAN: . . . a blushing shadow of the . . .
THIRD YOUNG COURTESAN: . . . night-flowering cherry.
FOURTH YOUNG COURTESAN: We can clearly see you are . . .
ALL: . . . intoxicated.
CHAPERON [*sternly*]: Child, bring medicine for your mistress.
CHILD [*holding up tray*]: Mistress. May the Plum Blossom Sleeve brush your illness away.
AGEMAKI [*idly*]: Isn't there a poem . . . "Whose sleeve stirs the fragrance of plum blossoms?"²
CHILD: Medicine, Mistress, called . . .
AGEMAKI: Plum Blossom Sleeve. How amusing. Thank you, Child.
[Music tapers off. The female ATTENDANT mimes pouring water, then powder from a packet into the cup held by the CHILD. She politely offers the cup and holds tissue to cover AGEMAKI's mouth as she drinks.]
CHAPERON: And now, Agemaki . . .
ALL [*bowing*]: . . . let us go.
AGEMAKI [*with great dignity and formality*]: Children . . . we go!
CHILDREN [*high, prolonged*]: Aiiii!
CHORUS [*repeats Yami no Yo with different lyrics, to Tōri Kagura and Watari Byōshi accompaniment*]:
Where are they floating, delicate pink mists of spring?
On Mount Miyoshino . . . the flowers, the flowers.
[AGEMAKI crosses onto the stage. At the bench center she turns upstage and poses as her robe is lowered by a STAGE ASSISTANT and her attendants. The women follow AGEMAKI's lead, facing front and sitting as she does. The five COURTESANS sit in a row at the back and the lesser PROSTITUTES on benches to the side. Music ends. WOMAN comes out of the Three Harbors to fast Sugagaki shamisen music.]
WOMAN: Mistress Agemaki, Sukeroku's mother sends this letter.
[Surprised, AGEMAKI takes the letter, gives the envelope to a STAGE ASSISTANT, scans a few lines, and poses. The bell tolls.]
AGEMAKI: Because of Sukeroku, a quarreling son, a mother's life is black.
[She reads more.] Because of Sukeroku, my quarreling lover, my life, too, is black. How pitiful is woman's fate.
[She poses. The bell tolls. The curtain at the end of the hanamichi is flicked open. The blinds upstage center are raised revealing a dozen Kato Bushi shamisen PLAYERS and CHORUS of singers. They sing as the wealthy samurai IKYŪ and his retinue enter.]
KATO BUSHI CHORUS [*to shamisen accompaniment*]:
Multitudes throng up and down in Yoshiwara;
Floating, drifting with no aim but joy and pleasure.
Men of wealth and power, too, parade in splendor;

2. "Who stirs the plum blossoms with their sleeve?" in the *Shinkokin* (1205), and similar poems, probably inspired the name of this hangover medicine which was a big seller in Yoshiwara in the early 1700s.

It is a transient world of passing pleasure.

[First to enter is IKYŪ, old, bearded, dressed in a magnificent robe of gold, cream, and white embroidered silk. By his side and with her hand resting on his shoulder, walks the high-ranking courtesan, SHIRATAMA. Her costume and elaborate wig are like AGEMAKI's except in color. With a MALE ATTENDANT holding an umbrella high over her head, she moves past seven-three and stops. IKYŪ stops at seven-three and turns. Six RETAINERS, dressed in blue and white summer kimonos, carry his long sword, sword rack, armrest, tobacco box, and incense stand. No one on stage is aware of their presence. The blinds fall. Offstage shamisen play quiet Sugagaki between phrases of dialogue.]

watarizerifu
shichigochō

FIRST RETAINER: Master Ikyū, noble lord . . .

SECOND RETAINER: . . . have you chosen her . . .

THIRD RETAINER: . . . who will be the lucky whore . . .

FOURTH RETAINER: . . . to share your bed . . .

ALL [prolonged]: . . . tonight!

IKYŪ [heavy, insinuating voice]: The whore Agemaki is a treasure among a thousand pillows but unfortunately will not be swayed by the strength of China nor lured by gold. Each time she rebuffs me. [Vilely.] Tonight will my ardor be dampened by the rain or quickened by Yoshiwara's dewy petals? [Sees the group onstage.] Ha, ha! See the one in back. Is she the new one you were speaking of?

RETAINER [leans forward, poses]: Boss! They say she's like a virgin!

IKYŪ: Splendid! I have an urge to spend some time with her.

SHIRATAMA [haughtily, not looking at him]: Ikyū, Agemaki will despise you, if you are fickle. Or is your interest in her gone?

IKYŪ [unctuously]: Shiratama, renowned in the five districts of Yoshiwara, plead my suit with Agemaki.

SHIRATAMA: Are you sincere?

IKYŪ: Constantly she meets another patron who is never seen. [Turns front, furious.] I will not have it!

SHIRATAMA: Dear Ikyū, nothing I can say will help, but if you wish I shall.

IKYŪ: Yes. Speak with her. [She nods coolly.]

RETAINERS [in unison]: Then Master . . . ?

IKYŪ [poses haughtily]: We go!

[The procession moves majestically on stage, as shamisen play Sugagaki and the large drum and flute play Tōri Kagura. IKYŪ ponderously settles himself on a bench stage left, sitting on a white silk cushion brought out of the Three Harbors by a CHILD MAID. His sword rack, pipe, armrest, and incense stand are placed around him and his RETAINERS retire to a side bench left. He casually smokes a beautiful filigreed silver pipe as he waits for AGEMAKI to acknowledge him. When she does not, he glances furtively in her direction. The COURTESANS have been waiting for this and they gently taunt him.]

FIRST COURTESAN: Great Ikyū . . .

ALL: . . . is in our presence.

[The end of each phrase is punctuated by a chord of Sugagaki music.]

IKYŪ [with heavy sarcasm] : Kind whores, my name is known . . . by some,
I see.

SECOND COURTESAN [gently baiting him] : Not know Lord Ikyū, greatest
samurai of Edo?

THIRD COURTESAN: Even I, insignificant sparrow of a courtesan, know
wealthy master Ikyū.

IKYŪ [leering, but facing front] : You please me, whores. Later we shall meet.

FOURTH COURTESAN: Oh, Lord Ikyū . . .

FIFTH COURTESAN: . . . tonight is your favorite occupied?

IKYŪ: My favorite?

FIFTH COURTESAN: You know her name.

IKYŪ [slaps pipe on bench] : Agemaki, do you mean?

AGEMAKI [coldly] : Ehh?

ALL [giggling] : Ikyū is in your presence!

AGEMAKI [looks obliquely at him] : Indeed? An ostentatious customer. I have
been waiting for you.

IKYŪ [sneering] : Ehh? Me! You wait, you mean, for Sukeroku! [Poses.]

SHIRATAMA: Truly, Ikyū, you are churlish. spiteful ways do not persuade.

IKYŪ [catches himself] : You are right—"we carve Buddha's statue and give it
no soul."³ [Nods slightly in her direction.] I beseech you.

SHIRATAMA: Soft words reach my heart. [To AGEMAKI.] Dear Agemaki,
let me as a friend gently ask—meet with Lord Ikyū. His generosity is legend
in the quarter. How can his words offend? If you do not wish to sleep
with him, deign at least to meet and drink in private.

AGEMAKI [with haughty superiority] : Indeed. Not that I deign not to meet
privately, Lord Ikyū, but . . .

IKYŪ [face ugly with rage] : . . . but, in truth, you wait for Sukeroku!

AGEMAKI [feigning disinterest] : Sukeroku, you say?

IKYŪ: Do you think I do not know the one you see is Sukeroku?

AGEMAKI: I meet whom I please.

IKYŪ: Take care, whore. I have the money to meet you when I please.

[Strongly, drawing out his words.] I hate this Sukeroku! [Speaking front,
contemptuously.] You know, whores, don't you, this Sukeroku is a
petty thief?

AGEMAKI [poses in surprise] : Ehhh?

IKYŪ: Watch him when he fights, if you can call it a fight the way his hand
slides round the other fellow's hip searching out his wallet. A pickpocket
is what he is. Tell me, Agemaki, how long will a great courtesan relish the
company of a vagabond?

AGEMAKI [sadly, to herself] : Truly, he does not bring happiness. And yet for
all that, Sukeroku . . .

IKYŪ [sneering] : . . . charms you?

AGEMAKI [poses, serenely] : He is my charmed fate.

IKYŪ [bursting out angrily] : You are bewitched by the devil you mean! Will

3. We forget what is most important. A maxim in *Kefukigusa* (1645), a collection
of poems, by Matsue Shigeyori.

you keep him as your lover, Agemaki, until you've been stripped naked?⁴
It will be piteous to see!

AGEMAKI: You may say I jilt wealthy patrons to meet my lover. You may say
I am a fool. But to say my Sukeroku is a thief, Ikyū, is insupportable!
[She glances haughtily at him and poses.]

IKYŪ: What? [Mocking.] Insupportable? The whore that's fool enough to
love a gutter rat will end up in the gutter with him. Love a thief and you
will learn to love his light-fingered ways. Before you know it you'll be
lifting patrons' wallets while they sleep. And when you are thrown into
the street, the two of you beggars, do you think your heart will care for
Sukeroku then? [Poses, sneering.] Insupportable, indeed. Unsupportable,
you mean!

AGEMAKI [regally]: You are a tiresome old man, Ikyū. Do you think I fear
your anger because I give my love secretly to Sukeroku? Do you want to
strike me here, before everyone? Do you want to cut me down with your
sword? You may, but I will not take you as my lover. I am Agemaki, of the
House of Three Harbors. I love a man—Sukeroku! [Slyly.] Since I am
paramour to the devil, possessed by his spirit, as you say, I shall revile you
with a devil's tongue.⁵

[Music stops. She stamps and poses, holding her robe grandly open. She
slips off the robe to reveal a brilliant red inner kimono. She gestures with
her long silver pipe held vertically in her right hand to indicate SUKEROKU;
her left index finger disparagingly indicates IKYŪ. Sugagaki resumes.]

akutai
Compare Sukeroku and Ikyū, side by side. Here is the one, a young stag,
here is the other, an old crab. White and black, like snow and ink. One the
the broad ocean, one a mire of mud; one deep, one shallow, as the courtesan's beloved and the prostitute's customer. Black is the courtesan's life
bereft of her beloved, but in her blackest life, in the blackest night, she
could not mistake Sukeroku for Ikyū! Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!

[Enraged, IKYŪ partially draws. Music stops. She faces him disdainfully,
speaking rapidly, caustically.]

Ah, will you strike me? Kill me if you wish, but I will not give up my
Sukeroku. [He hesitates.] Come, come, great Ikyū. Strike me! Kill me, if
you dare!

IKYŪ [furiously slams the sword back in the scabbard]: Go!

AGEMAKI: Where?

share
IKYŪ: To . . . to the devil!

AGEMAKI: You do not mind, great Lord Ikyū, that I go to meet my Sukeroku?

IKYŪ [roaring]: Get out!

[He poses, one hand inside his kimono sleeve, the other resting on the hilt
of the sword in his sash. She looks at him contemptuously a moment, then

4. From the saying that a woman deeply in love cares nothing for herself, even to giving the clothes off her back for her lover.

5. Quoted as a folk saying by Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) in *Tamakatsuma*, a collection of essays, though it may have been current earlier than this. Literally, "they say the wife of the devil should be a devil herself."

turns upstage so her ATTENDANTS can lift and secure her voluminous robe preparatory to walking. Offstage shamisen play Sugagaki and the large drum and no flute Tōri Kagura. AGEMAKI turns and moves regally, provocatively onto the banamichi followed by her retinue. When she reaches seven-three, SHIRATAMA rises and steps forward.]

SHIRATAMA: Please stop, Agemaki.

[The procession stops. Shamisen continue playing Sugagaki quietly in the background.]

You are leaving rashly. Can you tell what your misfortune may be, or that of the one you care for, if you go this way? Like a younger sister, I speak out of turn, but say it still—please return, Agemaki. For all our sakes.

AGEMAKI *[looking out at audience]*: Joyfully I go to my dear love, yet I will not disregard the words of a friend.

SHIRATAMA: You will return?

AGEMAKI: Aiii.

[The procession music resumes, AGEMAKI turns and moves back to the stage followed by her retinue. She stops before IKYŪ. The music tapers off.]

Ikyū, we shall not meet again. Shiratama.

SHIRATAMA: Agemaki.

AGEMAKI: Children.

BOTH *[flaunting their disdain for IKYŪ]*: We . . . go!

CHILDREN: Aiii!

CHORUS *[sings Yami no Yo offstage, to shamisen accompaniment as large drum, and nob flute play Tōri Kagura and stick drum and hand bell play Watari Byōshi]*:

In a moonless night only Yoshiwara shines;

As bright as the moon . . . the moon, the moon.

[AGEMAKI sweeps past IKYŪ, pauses, casts him a withering look over her shoulder, and enters the Three Harbors, followed by her retinue. SHIRATAMA and her retinue follow. The offstage music stops and the clear notes of a bamboo flute are heard at the end of the banamichi.]

FIRST COURTESAN: The sound of a flute . . .

SECOND COURTESAN: . . . could it be a wandering monk . . .

THIRD COURTESAN: . . . or a passerby?

FOURTH COURTESAN: Ah, indeed . . .

[Rising, they flick their left arms inside voluminous kimono sleeves, and pose expectantly.]

ALL *[looking down the banamichi]*: . . . he comes!

[Single ki clack. The distant temple bell tolls. The blinds covering the interior of the Three Harbors roll up again to show the Kato Bushi ensemble. They begin a lively instrumental prelude to SUKEROKU's entrance. The COURTESANS sit. A RETAINER hands IKYŪ his silver pipe, which he smokes complacently.]

KATO BUSHI CHORUS:

Hear the shamisen sounding bright Sugagaki;

deha

Arousing our memories in the gay quarter;
When a bird returns homeward he is called lover;

Is it not so in the midst of flowering grasses?

[*The curtain at the end of the banamichi flies open and SUKEROKU swiftly enters. He strides to the seven-three position, wearing high clogs, half-crouching under a partially closed paper umbrella. He stops, stands boldly erect, flourishes the umbrella overhead, and poses. He is dressed in a solid black kimono piped in red and pale blue. An elaborate brocade sash is figured with the Ichikawa acting crest; from it dangles a lacquered tobacco pouch and a bamboo flute is tucked in it at the back. A purple headband holds his stylish hair in place. Thin but bold lines of red and black highlight the pure white makeup of his face. The audience applauds his entrance.*]

KATŌ BUSHI CHORUS [*continuing*] :

Impregnated kimono crest of Five Seasons;

Symbol of year's waiting, steeped deeply in love;⁶

[*SUKEROKU flicks his right arm in his sleeve, and looks at the crest dyed in the fabric. He plants his right foot forward, holds the umbrella overhead, and looks toward the audience, shifts position and poses looking in the opposite direction. He holds the umbrella in his other hand, and strides away from the stage, stops, looks back, and poses elegantly.*]

Waiting for their time to come, sleeping moist with love;

Dampened by the quarter's rain, the spring's bitter cold.

[*He closes the umbrella and poses with it held under his chin as if sleeping. He flicks the umbrella open and poses with it overhead, gazing up at the rainy sky, first in one direction then another.*]

FIRST COURTESAN: Dear Sukeroku . . .

ALL: . . . your headband . . . ?

SUKEROKU: Ah! Is it strange?

KATŌ BUSHI CHORUS [*continuing*] :

A headband such as this one in times long ago;

Spoke through its purple color of abiding ties;⁷

[*He stands with the umbrella held overhead, and slowly points with pride to his headband. He pivots and looks intently toward the Three Harbors, indicating his tie is with AGEMAKI.*]

This colored band if you permit, shall be seen by all;

[*He folds the umbrella closed, holds it up reverently to his forehead, and bows slightly to the COURTESANS. Then he straightens and poses with the umbrella open overhead.*]

In changed times like the unchanged needles of the pine;

[*He rests the umbrella shaft on his left shoulder, leans back, and gazes upward as if looking at a tall pine; he shifts the umbrella to the right shoulder and poses in the other direction.*]

6. The lyrics contain a number of kakekotoba and engo.

7. Alluding to a poem in the *Kokinshū* (905), that describes purple as the color which indicates ties of love.

Binding up a spray of hair dangling at the back;
Blown by the breezes of the wind, on the dike of cherries;
The eye falls on the willow, snowfalls of blossoms;
[Stamping twice as if halted on the dike, he looks in the direction of the Three Harbors, points toward it with the open umbrella, strikes his chest with his fist, and poses in a powerful mie to battari tsuke beats.]
Piling on the umbrella, in Yoshiwara;
[He bows his head beneath a kimono sleeve, as if heavy-laden with snow.]
Lying in the spot between Mount Fuji and Mount Tsukuba;
The grass lies silently though parted by his clogs.
[Closing the umbrella, he leaps with legs spread widely apart. Looking up to the left at Mount Fuji, he straightens up slightly; shifting the umbrella to the other hand, he looks up to the right at Mount Tsukuba and stands erect. He pivots, scuffing nonchalantly with his clog. A STAGE ASSISTANT takes the umbrella.]
A stylish tobacco pouch, double kimono;
[Turning his back to the audience, he places his hands on the tobacco pouch at the back of his sash. He faces front and adjusts the lapels of his kimono with a fastidious gesture.]
Do not hurry, do not rush;
The world is transient, a wheel that turns;
Time passes by day by day as expected.
[Assuming a soft wagoto pose, he places the umbrella on its edge, half-covers his face, and gently rocks the umbrella back and forth. Reverting to his usual swaggering self, he flicks the umbrella over his shoulder and poses strongly.]
It is to be expected that lovers quarrel;
That sweet words of endearment will follow harsh words.
[Miffed, he turns and struts away from the stage. He stops, poses, then strides back to the seven-three, gazing at the stage.]
You are charming! You are marvelous!
[He poses elegantly, with the umbrella slanted overhead.]
SUKEROKU: It is for you! For you!
KATŌ BUSHI CHORUS [continuing]:
Agemaki of Three Harbors, passionate sincerity;
Thus Sukeroku passes by lined-up courtesans;
With a dashing air!
[SUKEROKU swaggers onto the main stage. One-handed he snaps open the umbrella and, with a flourish, flicks it over his head. He thrusts his left fist through his kimono breast, and poses in a vigorous mie. The audience applauds and shouts. The blind falls, concealing the Katō Bushi ensemble. SUKEROKU relaxes the mie, passing the umbrella to a STAGE ASSISTANT. He preens. The COURTESANS flutter about him. Though he does not look at IKYŪ he is acutely aware of his presence.]
FIRST COURTESAN: Sukeroku . . .
SECOND COURTESAN: . . . rapturously, we . . .

tanzen roppō

watarizerifu

ALL: . . . welcome you!

THIRD COURTESAN: Stay with us!

[*They tug him by the sleeves first one way, then the other, as they ad-lib, "Stay with me," "With me," "No, with me."*]

SUKEROKU [*gallantly*]: What a lineup of beautiful faces. [Women titter.] I suppose I can squeeze in somewhere?

ALL: Please do.

SUKEROKU [*expansively*]: Move over, girls, make way for a man.

[*Shamisen offstage play rapid Sugagaki as SUKEROKU strides to the bench right and sits with a flourish. COURTESANS sweep past him, piling both upturned hands full of pipes, ad-libbing "Here Sukeroku," "Take mine, Sukeroku," "No, take mine." He chuckles. Sugagaki chords continue between dialogue phrases.*]

share

This beats my wildest pipe dream. Be careful, girls, my heart may go up in smoke! Ha, ha!

[*He slaps the pipes down on the bench, then nonchalantly takes up one to smoke.*]

ALL [*laughing in unison*]: Ah-ha! Ah-ha!

[*IKYŪ frowns, for it is a sign of affection to pass a man a lighted pipe.*]

IKYŪ [*ominously*]: Whores, I'll have one of your pipes.

FIRST COURTESAN [*sweetly*]: We should like to, noble Ikyū . . .

SECOND COURTESAN: . . . except our pipes . . .

ALL: . . . are gone.

IKYŪ [*reacts*]: Your pipes are gone?

THIRD COURTESAN: Indeed, they all have been taken.

IKYŪ [*ominously*]: All? Taken, by . . . ?

SUKEROKU [*brusquely, not looking*]: . . . by me. Why deny it, I attract the whores. Their hearts beat faster when I show up at Yoshiwara's Great Gate. Up and down the quarter they come running. Pipes shower down on me like the falling rain. [Strongly.] I am flooded with them! [Lightly again.] Why, last night in front of the Pines, I hardly sat down before the pipes piled up till they looked, so help me God, like a damned tobacco display. If you can't get a trivial sign of affection from the whores, what's the pleasure playing in the pleasure quarters? Ha, ha, ha! No titled noble, no fat moneybags can begin to buy what the whores of Edo give me for free every day. So, did someone say he wants a pipe? I'm the one to give it to him.

[*He slaps his pipe down and picks up another. With studied nonbalance he crosses to the bench center. Kicking off one clog, he plops down on the bench, slaps the pipe between his toes, and thrusts his leg insultingly in IKYŪ's direction.*]

You say you want a pipe? Here! Smoke it!

[*SUKEROKU brings his left fist out of the breast of his kimono, leans back on his right hand, and poses belligerently. Music stops. Without a word IKYŪ reaches out for the pipe, cannot find it and slowly turns until he sees SUKEROKU's foot. He reacts, then quickly catches himself; he so*

watarizerifu

akutai

*despises SUKEROKU he pretends to be unperturbed by this gross insult.
He looks front without moving.]*

IKYŪ [low, grating laugh] : Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! How sad, has this splendid fellow no arms? Do his hands stink of fish paste that he hides them in shame? Has he educated feet like a wine-presser?⁸ I see low trash masquerade as chivalrous youth. The spirit of chivalry protects justice, is moral, is respectful, and . . . is not quarrelsome. A man of fashion cultivates refinement as a matter of pride. He who cannot discern proper decorum from ill-bred behavior is a wretch beneath contempt. The quarter is filled with buzzing idlers. [Derisively.] When a mosquito irritates with its buzz, buzz, buzz, clap your hand . . .

[*He stamps forward with his right foot and gestures squashing a mosquito between his palms.*]

. . . and it is gone! Ha, ha, ha!

[*Poses in a strong mie to loud battari tsuke beats. SUKEROKU drops his pose and passes the pipe to a STAGE ASSISTANT. He sits center unperturbed.*]

SUKEROKU [easily] : It is written in the warrior's code, tactics should be flexible. Suit the method to the object, the style to the man: reason with a wise man, but kick a mule in the ass. I deflate the pompous braggart with a touch of my clog. Only when the brave resist do I draw my sword. Not birth, not training mark the courageous from the weak. The test of the chivalrous simply is—once drawn, does your sword cut through? [Roaring.] What do you think I am? Senile old fool!

[*He plants his right foot forward and poses in a mie, to battari tsuke beats. IKYŪ motions to his RETAINERS. They serve him a cup of rice wine which he drinks as SUKEROKU continues.*]

By the way, whores, have you heard? A great snake is running loose in Yoshiwara.

ALL [drawing back in fright] : Ehh?

SUKEROKU: Oh, he's a harmless enough snake girls. He makes a fierce face, has white hair, a beard, and looks exactly like the actor Yamanaka Heikuro.⁹ A very queer snake, he never tires of being reviled. He crawls back nightly though every slut in the quarter despises him. And the creature has lice in his beard, did you know that? So bad he fumigates it. Otherwise people couldn't stand to be near him. God, the reptile stinks!

[*SUKEROKU rises, scuffs his clog derisively in IKYŪ's direction, and crosses right. He sits facing upstage, closed out of the ensuing scene.*

IKYŪ trembles with fury and indignation, but does not move. Offstage shamisen play rapid Sugagaki and drum and flute play Tōri Kagura.

MOMBEI, a blustering bully, stamps out from the Three Harbors, to alternating batan and battari tsuke beats. He wears clogs and carries a small towel in one hand. With the other, he holds closed his flapping cotton bath kimono, for in his rush he has forgotten a sash. He is raging, and nothing the WOMAN of the house can do will calm him.]

8. Literally "skilled feet of a fu (wheat-flour cake) maker."

9. The name of the actor playing Ikyū; Yamanaka Heikuro played the part in 1713.

watarizerifu

MOMBEI: Where are they? Where are they? [She tugs at his sleeve.] No!
Bring me those sluts!

WOMAN: There, there, Mombei, simmer down. What will people say, hearing all this noise?

IKYŪ [annoyed] : Mombei. What's the grumbling about?

MOMBEI [surprised] : Oh, it's you, Boss. Listen to this story.
[Sugagaki continues between phrases. MOMBEI appeals to IKYŪ.]
Do you see that old witch there? She thinks I'm going to pay for the same women twice. [Glares at her.] I won't, I won't! Hag!

WOMAN [joshing him] : Oh, Mombei, you get too excited. You make the girls shy. Witch, hag, or virgin, you grab us all. Ho, ho!
[Hiding her laughter behind a sleeve, she retreats right.]

MOMBEI: Ehhh? You'd better not fool with a samurai, whore.
[Drawing himself up, he tells his tale, alternately bombastic and whining.]
I, exalted Kanpera Mombei, drank too much, and so I went into this whorehouse for a bath. Send in the girls to scrub my back, I said. Of course, as you wish, at once, you said. So I went on ahead, got into the bath alone, and alone I waited and waited and waited, without a damned whore in sight. I half melted in the heat! [Wipes face with towel. Thundering.] Has someone bought up all the women in the quarter? You! Throw those round-heels in my bath! Everyone! I'll feast on slut soup!

FIRST COURTESAN [with sweet disdain] : My, my, dear angry Mombei, do you think you are the only customer in Yoshiwara?

SECOND COURTESAN: Control your passion . . .

THIRD COURTESAN: . . . let patience be your guide . . .

FOURTH COURTESAN: Why, Mombei dear, your face is purple . . .

FIFTH COURTESAN: . . . seeing it, makes us . . .

ALL [in unison] : Ah-ha! Ah-ha!

FIRST COURTESAN: . . . laugh! [They break into peels of laughter.]

MOMBEI [whining] : Noisy bowlegs, pay me some respect.

SECOND COURTESAN [mocking] : Your face . . .

ALL: . . . looks so dreadful!

MOMBEI [insultingly] : Masters, haul out your sluts! Tie a rope around their bellies and lead them into the center of Yoshiwara where I can tick them off as I recite a million "Namu Amida Butsus"!

FIRST COURTESAN: Do you think you'll so easily get through a rosary of courtesans?

MOMBEI: You dare laugh at me? We'll see how much you laugh when I'm through with you!¹⁰
[Offstage shamisen play fast Sugagaki and large drum and flute play Tōri Kagura. MOMBEI flicks the towel over his shoulder and with his free hand grabs the WOMAN and tries to drag her into the Three Harbors. All the women try to prevent this and in the melee which follows a NOODLE VENDOR trots down the banamichi, finds no way through, and, to batan

10. Instead of saying *harai kiyomeru* (ritual purification), he says the nonsensical *warai kiyomeru*, "laughing purification," as a pun.

tsuke beats, accidentally bumps MOMBEI. They stagger apart. MOMBEI holds his head.]

Owww! Owww!

VENDOR [*bows briskly*] : Sorry about that.

[*Music slows and shamisen continue to play quietly in the background.*

The NOODLE VENDOR wears a dark blue happi coat. A red waistcloth—a sign of affectation for a commoner—falls to his knees. A small towel is wrapped around his head. A black lacquered box of noodles sways from one end of a pole which he carries over the shoulder.]

MOMBEI [*belligerently*] : What do you mean, “sorry”? You smashed into me with a box of noodles. [With each epithet he moves a step closer.] Idiot! Fool! Noodle-brain! Use your eyes!

VENDOR [*smartly puts box down*] : I said it once, I say it again. [Takes off towel, and bows briskly.] I am sorry about that. Girls, tell him it was an accident.

FIRST COURTESAN: Dearest Mombei, forgive him . . .

ALL: . . . please.

MOMBEI: Never.

VENDOR: Ehh? Never? [Challenging.] And so?

MOMBEI: So?

VENDOR: Do as you damn please!

[*He flicks up his happi coat and with a flourish sits cross-legged on the floor.¹¹ Offstage Sugagaki accelerate. MOMBEI raises his hand to strike, but SUKEROKU moves between them and effortlessly grasps MOMBEI's hand, bending it back to loud batan tsuke beats. Sugagaki quiets. The VENDOR moves stage right.*]

MOMBEI: Oww! Oww!

SUKEROKU [*casually forcing him left*] : Forgive him. Eh?

MOMBEI [*outraged but helpless*] : Forgive him? Eh?

SUKEROKU: Yes, yes, Do it, eh?

MOMBEI [*imitating*] : Do it, eh? [SUKEROKU releases his hand.] “Do it” sticks in my craw. [Looks SUKEROKU over.] You look like you’ve been around, friend, how is it you don’t know me?

SUKEROKU [*lightly*] : Not know you? In Yoshiwara, in all Edo, is there someone who does not know you?

MOMBEI [*happily*] : Ho, ho! You know me?

SUKEROKU [*turning casually away*] : I never heard of you.

MOMBEI: He picks a man up then he lets him down.

SUKEROKU [*back to MOMBEI*] : Who would know trash like you?

MOMBEI [*makes a face of impotent rage*] : Villain! Blackguard! Hmm. Since you don’t know who I am, it’s clear this is your baptismal trip to Yoshiwara. So, little baby, listen to what I have to say and it will be your inoculation against . . . the pox!

11. In some versions of the play the Noodle Vendor here delivers a clever *uirouri* speech (salesman’s pitch). The punning and rapid-fire banter of the Edo barker were once very popular with kabuki audiences.

[*Gestures broadly toward IKYŪ: lifts both open palms and bows in a gesture of respect.*]

First, this is my revered Master, the illustrious warrior Ikyū. Taking the Kan of my name from Kan'u, the Chinese general of the Three Kingdoms whose flowing Cloud Beard reminds us of Lord Ikyū, and the Mon of my name signifying a treasured temple gate, I am the samurai Kanpera Mombei, wealthy powerful Kanpera Mombei! [*He rubs his fat belly.*] Take off that insulting purple headband when you stand before me.

[*Stamps forward with his right foot and makes a threatening gesture with his raised fist.*] On your knees! Bow down three times!

SUKEROKU [*blithely, not looking*]: Thanks for the history recitation, friend.

You must be famished after such a speech. And, as luck would have it, here's a noodle vendor. I think you should eat. [*MOMBEI looks amazed.*]
No, no, don't say no; I'm buying. [*Crossing.*] Make it one.

VENDOR [*with a professional flourish, heaps noodles onto a small wooden box*]: One noodles with fish, coming up.

SUKEROKU [*sniffs them as he crosses to MOMBEI*]: Fish or no, I won't guarantee, but here, Mombei I serve you. [*Strikes a pose and thrusts the noodles under MOMBEI's nose.*] Have some noodles.

MOMBEI [*plaintively*]: Who? Me?

SUKEROKU [*lightly mocking*]: Yes. You.

MOMBEI: I don't like the way you're . . . it's not p-p-proper . . .

SUKEROKU: He says he wants pepper. [*He flicks pepper from the lid of the box into MOMBEI's face.*]

MOMBEI [*sneezing*]: I don't want noodles, I tell you!

SUKEROKU [*pushing the box under MOMBEI's nose again*]: Should I help you?

MOMBEI: I hate noodles! I hate them!

SUKEROKU: Then I'll serve them to you!

[*Offstage shamisen play fast, loud Sugagaki as the large drum and flute play Tōri Kagura. SUKEROKU brings the noodles up behind MOMBEI's back, where he cannot see them, and dumps the box upside-down on his head. MOMBEI falls, shocked, to the ground to series of double tsuke beats that taper off into silence. A STAGE ASSISTANT removes the box.*

SUKEROKU motions the VENDOR to leave.]

VENDOR [*passes MOMBEI, stops, and turns*]: Spectacular!

[*VENDOR trots briskly off left. SUKEROKU sits on the center bench as if nothing had happened. MOMBEI's lackey SEMBEI enters from inside the Three Harbors. He is dressed as a comic villain: yellow hose, green socks, tucked-up trousers, stiff outer garment over the shoulders, and makeup of red and white markings edged with black. He walks with a little hopping gait and when he stands he bends his knees and cocks his head forward, as if in a perpetual subservient bow. SEMBEI carries MOMBEI's long sword wrapped in his regular kimono. Music stops.*]

SEMBEI: Master, Master!

MOMBEI [*groaning*]: I'm dying! I'm dying!

SEMBEI: What is it? What happened?

MOMBEI: How badly am I wounded, Sembei? Look.

SEMBEI [horrorified]: Wounded?

[Peers from one side then the other. From behind MOMBEI, he picks apart the noodles and inspects his head.]

There's no wound here, Master.

MOMBEI [lip quivering]: The blood is dripping, dripping, dripping. [Puts his hand up and feels the noodles. He almost weeps.] My brains are . . .

[Brings down a handful and sees them for the first time.] I thought I was mortally wounded, but . . . noodles!

SEMBEI [front, covering a smile]: It is killing.

[MOMBEI throws the noodles over his shoulder; they are removed instantly by a waiting STAGE ASSISTANT. A dozen RUFFIANS, part of MOMBEI's gang, force their way on from the right. Their clothes are dirty and disheveled. They carry long poles and some have one shoulder bared, ready to fight.]

MOMBEI [seizing his sword and kimono]: Annihilate him!

RUFFIANS [brandishing their poles]: We will!

[Offstage shamisen play rapid Sugagaki and large drum and flute Tōri Kagura. Bata-bata tsuke beats accelerate as SEMBEI gestures the swaggering MOMBEI into the Three Harbors, then follows him off. The RUFFIANS advance in formation on SUKEROKU. Music softens.]

SUKEROKU: Striplings! What are you doing with those poles? Touch me and they'll build a mountain in Yoshiwara with your corpses! [Strikes a fierce pose.]

RUFFIANS [cowed]: Ehhh?

[The RUFFIANS fall back, then one by one slip away. Casually SUKEROKU sits. SEMBEI reenters, expecting to see SUKEROKU beaten. He is amazed to see the men retreating. He collects himself, crosses center, and begins a challenging speech, emphasizing each phrase with exaggerated posturing and rhetorical tricks.]

SEMBEI: Ahem, ahem. [Stepping forward on each word.] You are a rascal.

Your father was a rascal. Your father's father was a rascal and obviously made the original mistake. Ahem. Ahem. [Bends his knees and leans forward.] I do not recall any rascal who has opposed my patrician master Mombei. [Cocks his head at SUKEROKU.] And now, sir, you, sir, heap insults upon his head, sir, in the form of noodles. Cheap noodles. [Points to his head, then to SUKEROKU's.] You are a rascal! Apologize!

[He strikes a pose, fists doubled and left leg thrust forward. When SUKEROKU ignores him, the pose wilts.]

Apologize? Ahem, ahem. [Runs hand up and down kimono collar, straightening it.] My name, sir, is Morning Glory Sembei. Some days some pay Sembei—for their insolence. Today, sir, you pay Sembei, sir, for yours. Pay today to Morning Glory Sembei. Prepare to be pummeled by a man!¹²

Sembei zukushi

12. This famous passage contains many plays on words, the most elaborate of which is a sixfold pun on Sembei's name, a homonym for rice crackers.

[After striking a ridiculous pose, he strides up to SUKEROKU and seizes his collar on both sides. He tugs but SUKEROKU does not budge. With a flick of the hand, SUKEROKU sends him sprawling. He lands on his buttocks to loud battari tsuke beats. SEMBEI holds his head and bowls. MOMBEI reenters, having changed from his bathing kimono to a brown padded kimono. He runs over to SEMBEI.]

SEMBEI [rhythmically] : Ohh! Ohh!

MOMBEI: Sembei, Sembei?

SEMBEI: Mombei, Mombei.

MOMBEI: Well? Well?

SEMBEI: I tripped, I tripped. Over a root. [Points down.]

MOMBEI [kneeling to look] : Tripped? Over a root? Truly, Sembei?

SEMBEI: Truly, Mombei.

[They look at each other, nod in agreement, rise, and strut to either side of SUKEROKU.]

MOMBEI [fiercely] : Who do you think you are? [Stamps his right foot out and poses threateningly.] Arrogant wretch!

SEMBEI [same business] : Yes, yes, who do you think . . .

BOTH [stamp] : . . . you are!

[They strike identical poses, ludicrously leaning forward, fists raised threateningly. SUKEROKU does not look in their direction. He sits in a casual pose: right fist resting lightly on the hilt of his sword, left arm out of sight inside his kimono sleeve. When he begins speaking his voice is deceptively buoyant and casual. But inwardly, SUKEROKU rages at the effrontery of such fools.]

nanori

SUKEROKU: No one but an ass sets foot in Yoshiwara not knowing my name. So hear it well.

[MOMBEI and SEMBEI, enraged, strain forward. SUKEROKU moves his sword band slightly; they tremble with fear. SUKEROKU smiles.]

Knowing my name should cure your malarial shakes. [MOMBEI and SEMBEI subside.] Write it three times on the palm of your hand as you pass through the quarter's Great Gate and no whore can refuse you. Do I appear to you small? My exploits are legend, talked about by everyone from the charcoal-selling hags of Hachioji to toothless rustics in the fields. In the gay quarters I am the topic of gossip over pickled plums and tea. I spend without limit and the hell with the price.

ippon chōshi

[Rapid, strong, rhythmic speech gradually builds to a climax.]

A headband of purple, the pride of Edo, dyed in Edo, binds my hair, the strands of which as you look through them frame a face which, if it graced an ukiyoe print, would make that picture famous in Japan! Who does not know this dragon in the water, growing stronger as his enemies increase? From the carousers at the pleasure houses of Golden Dragon Mountain¹³ to the grim image of the ferocious god Fudō in Meguro, all Edo's eight-hundred-and-eight districts do not hide the man who does not know this

13. An allusion to Asakusa Temple, near Yoshiwara.

wearer of the crest of peonies, this dweller among the cherry blossoms of Yoshiwara, this youthful Sukeroku, Agemaki's Sukeroku! Scum! Bow before this face!

[*Still sitting, he stamps loudly with the right foot, to batan tsuke beats, and brings his right hand, spread wide, up past his face and over his head in a ferocious gesture. MOMBEI and SEMBEI collapse in fright.*]

Worship . . . it!

[*During the phrase, he executes a powerful mie to battari tsuke beats: left hand under the right elbow, right fist pressed against the chest, weight forward on the right foot.*]

MOMBEI and SEMBEI [awed, each holding up a hand to ward him off] : Ehhh!
SUKEROKU [rising] : Blockhead! Beanpaste brain! Outhouse ass! Get out of here. Get . . . out!

MOMBEI: Take him, Sembei!

SEMBEI [drawing his sword] : En garde!

tate

[*They draw their swords. Offstage shamisen play fast Oimawasu, "Chase Around," fighting music and the large drum and flute Tōri Kagura. A STAGE ASSISTANT pulls empty benches upstage. Batan and battari tsuke beats punctuate SEMBEI's and MOMBEI's attack. They strike alternately right and left. SUKEROKU seizes their wrists at the same instant. He looks at SEMBEI's blade, then throws him to the ground, stepping on SEMBEI's sword. He pulls MOMBEI forward to inspect his blade, kicks SEMBEI into a heap, and sends MOMBEI sprawling prostrate across SEMBEI. He strikes MOMBEI's back three times with the flat of MOMBEI's sword. Again RUFFIANS appear and advance on SUKEROKU. Music stops.*]

SUKEROKU [poses in a mie, MOMBEI's sword over his head, as he speaks] : Move and I will cut them through!

RUFFIANS: Ehh! [They slip away rather than face SUKEROKU.]

FIRST COURTESAN: Sukeroku . . .

ALL: . . . wonderful! Wonderful!

SUKEROKU [throws the sword down disdainfully] : Yattoko, totcha!!

[*Stamps out with his right foot, sweeping the right hand, palm open, up and out, then does the same to the left.*]

Untoko na!!¹⁴

[*Sits with a flourish on the bench, crossing his arms in front of his chest. He poses. Then dropping the pose, he turns rudely to IKYŪ.*]

Old man, if you want me do it yourself. Look at your fools. Well? Well?

[Taunting.] Draw! Draw!

[*IKYŪ does not respond. SUKEROKU leaps up and throws his bench—helped by the STAGE ASSISTANT—toward IKYŪ. MOMBEI and SEMBEI crawl away right. SUKEROKU plants himself on the bench beside IKYŪ, and puts his left foot on IKYŪ's sword bilt, an incredibly insulting action.*]

What about it white beard? Hey, samurai, can't you speak? Are you deaf?

14. A powerful exclamation, without literal meaning, uttered by an aragoto hero to express great strength and anger.

Dumb? [Pushes lightly, insolently with his foot.] Hey, draw, draw. He's as quiet as a rat chased by a cat. [Rises, briskly.] It looks like the old fool's dead. Someone should perform the last rites for him then. I'll donate a candle for the corpse's head.

[Removes a clog and puts it on IKYŪ's head, where it is held by a STAGE ASSISTANT. He carefully arranges his kimono, kneels facing IKYŪ, claps his hands three times, and with closed eyes intones a prayer.]

"Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu." Oh, Great Beggar King of Hades receive your own.

[In silence IKYŪ slowly reaches up, grasps the clog, and lowers it into view. He is enraged: he throws the clog over his shoulder, stamps, seizes his long sword, and begins to draw to batan tsuke beats.]

Now things are getting interesting. Kill me, kill me, kill me!

[SUKEROKU leaps up, slides the kimono from his right shoulder to free his arm for action, and pivots in toward IKYŪ with small sliding steps.]

Draw, Ikyū! Draw!

[SUKEROKU leans toward IKYŪ, exposing his neck as a target. The RUFFIANS sidle on from both sides of the stage.]

IKYŪ [hesitates a moment, then slams the sword back in its scabbard] :

I will not!

MOMBEI [on his haunches piteously] : Don't be a coward, Boss, it is discouraging!

SEMBEI: We are losing our samurai pride.

MOMBEI: What miserable warriors . . .

BOTH: . . . we . . . are.

IKYŪ [grandly] : You do not slit a rooster's throat with a sword. He is not worth my time. [Rises.] Mombei.

MOMBEI: Boss?

IKYŪ: Sembei.

SEMBEI: Boss?

IKYŪ [archly] : Watch for . . . pickpockets.

[SUKEROKU strides over to IKYŪ's bench, takes his arm rest, and places it on the floor. With a flick of the sword he slices it through. To battari tsuke beats, the two halves fall apart. He strides back to his bench center.]

SUKEROKU [returning the sword to its scabbard] : And that could be you.

[IKYŪ gestures to his RUFFIANS to attack, turns on his heel, and exits into the Three Harbors. MOMBEI, SEMBEI, and all the women follow. Offstage shamisen play very fast Oimawasu and the large drum and flute play Tōri Kagura. SUKEROKU kicks off his clogs, ready to fight. The RUFFIANS face him in two rows of ten each, poles ready. To single, regularly spaced tsuke beats they attack, moving from stage right to left, striking and passing in front of SUKEROKU alternately to right and left, as SUKEROKU moves through them. They turn, form two lines again, all pose in a mie. Again they attack, two by two, moving from stage left to right: SUKEROKU casually moves between them in the opposite direction. Using only the flute as a weapon, SUKEROKU glowers, forcing them

tate

back. To loud bata-bata tsuke beats, the RUFFIANS rush onto the banamichi and SHINBEI, SUKEROKU's meek elder brother, slips unnoticed among them. He is dressed in a wine-seller's light blue leggings, kimono, vest, and head cloth. He carries a thin staff. A white kerchief bides his face. He drops to his knees, head low. The RUFFIANS flee pell-mell down the banamichi. SUKEROKU, not seeing his brother, poses in a mie, flute brandished in the air.]

SUKEROKU [*laughing*] : They can't speak and they cannot fight.

[He turns upstage and a STAGE ASSISTANT helps him put on his clogs and slip his arm back into his kimono sleeve. He turns front and the STAGE ASSISTANT returns the flute to its place in his sash. He adjusts his kimono.]

And now for a cup of wine in Agemaki's bed. [*Turns and struts away.*]

SHINBEI [*softly*] : Please don't go, Brother.

SUKEROKU [*stopping*] : Brother? Here's a joker if I ever heard one!

[Over his shoulder.] Don't "brother" me. I am Agemaki's Sukeroku and knight protector of Edo's Great Temple of Buddha. On your way, fellow!

[Scuffs his clog at him and begins to go.]

SHINBEI [*softly, rapidly*] : Agemaki's Sukeroku and knight protector of Edo's Great Temple of Buddha, wait a moment, Brother.

SUKEROKU : Again? [*Turns to see who it is. SHINBEI flattens himself even more.*] Fool with me, fellow, and you'll end up in a ditch with a houseboat up your nose. Hear me?

[Scuffs his clog at SHINBEI, thrusts his fist derisively out his kimono breast, and struts away.]

SHINBEI [*softly, as before*] : Please wait, Brother.

SUKEROKU [*annoyed*] : Again "brother." I warned you.

[Strides onto the banamichi. Seizes his collar, and hauls him, like a young puppy, center stage.]

Now, who calls me "brother"?

SHINBEI [*kneels, takes off kerchief*] : It is I, Brother.

SUKEROKU [*amazed*] : Elder Brother. Jūrō! [*He is immediately respectful.*]

SHINBEI [*sadly*] : Goro! I do not think you see me as your elder brother.¹⁵

SUKEROKU : I did not know you, dressed like a wine peddler. What are you doing in Yoshiwara?

SHINBEI [*pouting*] : You should know why I'm here. I'm here because someone was pushed in a ditch. I'm here because someone had a houseboat shoved up his nose. I'll tell you why I'm here dressed like Shinbei, a wine peddler.

[SUKEROKU looks contrite. He quietly sits on a small stool brought forward by a STAGE ASSISTANT. Offstage shamisen play melancholy Tada Aikata, "Plain Melody," in the background. SHINBEI puts away his kerchief and composes himself.]

iken

15. Soga Jūrō Sukenari and Soga Goro Tokimune are the full names of the brothers. Within the family the final names would be used, but Jūrō and Goro are used here for simplicity.

iken
share

Every day mother and I heard stories of your fighting in Yoshiwara. Who pushed the man in the gravel pit? Sukeroku. Who laid to rest the man before the Temple of Eternal Peace? Sukeroku. Who cut down the cut-up of Takecho?¹⁶ Sukeroku. The day the crows don't caw is the day Sukeroku doesn't fight in Yoshiwara, they say. She could not believe this wastrel called Sukeroku was her son, Gorō. So she sent me to the quarter to see and I saw—Gorō dumping noodles, Gorō placing a clog on a warrior's head. [His lip trembles; he is close to tears.] For eighteen years we have waited to avenge father's murder at Hakone Mountain, but now that the time has come, you disgrace yourself with quarreling and debauchery. Honor your parents is the first precept of morality, honor your elder brother is the second. You esteem neither. The bond between us is broken. You are no longer my brother Gorō. [Covers his face with his hands.] I cannot imagine the divine retribution your unfaithfulness will bring.

SUKEROKU [*quietly, respectfully*] : My quarreling is reprehensible, Brother, I know. Please believe I am doing it with a purpose, from deep filial obligation.

SHINBEI [*sniffing*] : You brawl in the quarter . . .

SUKEROKU [*head bowed*] : . . . out of filial obligation. I quarrel to find father's stolen sword, Tomokirimaru. I take the name of Sukeroku that I can roam disguised, bickering, insulting men that throng the quarter, forcing them to draw so I can see if they are wearing Tomokirimaru. Is this it, or this? [He turns away.] But since I am reproached by my mother and my elder brother for fighting, hereby I renounce it. I will shun all quarrels and become a monk. [Closes his eyes and clasps his hands in prayer.] Deign forgive my sins, oh holy Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. "Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu."

SHINBEI [*slaps his knee delightedly*] : I knew it was something like this. I take back what I said, Gorō. [Shyly.] Forgive me, Brother.

[SUKEROKU turns away, mumbling prayers. SHINBEI is contrite. He faces front and slaps his mouth.]

You're a bad mouth. Why did you say those things? You were wicked, wicked, wicked. [He pinches his lip as punishment.] Ouch!

[SHINBEI rises and crosses behind SUKEROKU to face his brother from the left.]

I was wrong, Brother. Forgive me?

[SUKEROKU, pretending coldness, pivots right to turn away. SHINBEI scurries around to stage right to face him in this new position.]

Gorō, please listen to me. I apologize. [SUKEROKU turns left, and again SHINBEI follows.] Don't be angry with me, please, Gorō.

[SUKEROKU turns away, SHINBEI glances at SUKEROKU's back, looks front and poses.]

Hmph! How inelegant. "In Yoshiwara, you have to worship Buddha's backside."¹⁷ [Crosses right and kneels facing SUKEROKU.] Please forgive me, Brother.

16. A pun on *takecho* (Bamboo Ward) and *takewari* (cut in two down the middle).

17. The famous Asakusa Kannon statue faces away from Yoshiwara.

SUKEROKU [*slyly looking up*] : You won't be offended if I quarrel?

SHINBEI: Quarrel all you want. Wear a kimono with "I want to fight" written on it. [Mimes writing.]

SUKEROKU: I will fight, if you allow it.

SHINBEI: Make a meal of your quarrels. [Mimes eating.]

SUKEROKU: Ho, ho! [Drops his contrite pose and stands.] I will eat our enemies up!

SHINBEI: Take seconds if you want! [Laughs delightedly. Music stops.]

SUKEROKU: Ah, you set my heart at ease, Jūrō.

SHINBEI: And you mine, Gorō. [Rises. Pause, then looks shyly at SUKEROKU.] Brother, do you suppose I could help you find Tomokirimaru?

SUKEROKU [amused] : You, Jūrō?

SHINBEI: Do you know where it is?

SUKEROKU: Ikyū would not draw, even when I taunted him.

SHINBEI: He has a wicked face. [Hopefully.] I could fight by your side. I could back you up.

SUKEROKU [gently] : Dressed like that?

SHINBEI [realizing his peddler's dress is not suitable for a warrior's vendetta] : Oh . . . well . . .

[To look more masculine he ties a kerchief around his head, as fighters do, and thrusts the staff into his sash like a sword.]

There we are. Will . . . will this do?

SUKEROKU: Oh, yes, that is quite . . . excellent, Jūrō.

SHINBEI [nervous and excited] : All right, now teach me what to do.

SUKEROKU [seeing his brother is serious, he suppresses a smile and stands in a formal pose] : Very well, let me instruct you in the traditional art of fighting. Step one: fundamentals of the feet. Place your right foot firmly forward. [He does so.] Second, strike a pose with your arm so. [He flicks his right arm into his sleeve and brings the fist out the kimono breast.] Third, the challenge. [Bellicose.] Hey! Samurai! Don't shove me! I'll throw you in a ditch! I'll ram a houseboat up your nose! Hear me? [Stamps hard with his right foot, poses, and roars a challenge.] Well?! [He drops the pose and turns respectfully to SHINBEI.] That's what you do, Brother.

SHINBEI: That looks hard. [Sighs.] Well, let me try. Foot out. [He puts his foot out gingerly.] Arm in sleeve. [He has trouble doing it. He poses. Though he tries to be fierce, his voice remains meek and soft.] Hey, samurai, don't shove me, I'll throw you in a ditch, I'll ram a houseboat up your nose. Hear me? [He tries to stamp, the clog slips, and he almost falls.] Well . . . ?

SUKEROKU [gently] : You're doing this to provoke him, Jūrō. Anger him. Do it more strongly. [Demonstrating.] Hey! Samurai! Don't shove me! I'll throw you in a ditch! I'll ram a houseboat up your nose! Hear me? [Stamps and poses fiercely.] Well?! [He bows respectfully.] That's the way to do it, Jūrō.

SHINBEI: I think I have it. Here. [He does speak louder, but his gentle demeanor remains unchanged. SUKEROKU encourages him with empathic gestures.] Hey, Samurai. Don't shove me. I'll throw you in a ditch. I'll ram

a houseboat up your nose. Hear me? [Stamps and his clog slips again. The last line trails off helplessly.] Well . . . ? [Smiling happily.] Was that good? SUKEROKU [bows to bide his smile] : It was very good, Brother. [Sees someone coming off left.] Ah, here's luck, Jūrō. "A wandering crow is blown our way by the wind."

[SUKEROKU and SHINBEI turn upstage to prepare for an encounter. SHINBEI continues practicing.]

CHORUS [sings Kyō no Shiki, "Four Seasons of Kyoto," to offstage accompaniment of shamisen and hand bell] :

Soft symbol of spring;

Come, come see the pink blossoms on Eastern Mountain;
Color and fragrance combine, night-blooming cherry.

Man of mode or bumpkin;

Both are intoxicated by spring's soft beauty.

[During the song a SAMURAI enters. He wears the elegant long-sleeved kimono of a youth, with cloak and divided trousers over it. A wicker hat covers his face. A closed fan dangles from his fingertips. SUKEROKU confronts him, yanks his sword from its scabbard, inspects it, and contemptuously throws it to the ground. The terrified SAMURAI retrieves it and tries to pass. SUKEROKU spreads his legs, blocking his way. Music stops.]

SUKEROKU: Hey, samurai! Pass between my legs! [He lifts his kimono slightly.]

sutezerifu SAMURAI [timid, cultivated voice] : What's that? Pass between your legs? Not since I came from my mother's womb have I, at a gentlemen's insistence, passed between someone's legs. But if I must . . .

[Offstage shamisen, stick drum, flute, and hand bell play spirited, humorous Gion Bayashi, "Gion Melody." He carefully prepares himself. He removes his hat, and we see he is not young as expected, but a heavily rouged and powdered middle-aged roué. He gets to his knees and pushes through first the hat, then his sandals, and finally his swords. Opening his fan and fanning himself, he crawls through on hands and knees. He picks up his things and turns to go, but SHINBEI blocks his path standing on tiptoe, knees quaking. Music stops.]

SHINBEI [quavering voice] : Hey, samurai. Pass between my legs.

SAMURAI: Pass between your legs too?

[He is about to protest, but sees SUKEROKU's glare, and subsides. Gion Bayashi melody resumes. The SAMURAI looks suspiciously at SHINBEI and decides to back through clutching everything in his hands. He escapes onto the hanamichi. At seven-three he carefully arranges his clothes, fans himself, and poses.]

"I hear lovers quarreling; how embarrassing to pass between your legs; how embarrassing to pass between your legs."

[He looks archly at SHINBEI and exits fanning himself.]

CHORUS [sings Kyō no Shiki to offstage shamisen and hand bell accompaniment] :

Soft symbol of spring,

Come, come see the pink blossoms on Eastern Mountain.

SUKEROKU [*laughing*] : There's a strange one, Jūrō.

CHORUS [sings Ryūkyū Bushi, "Song of Okinawa," in country accent, to shamisen accompaniment and rollicking folk rhythm, Fushi Mawashi, "Playing Music," played on the large drum and hand bell] : Rikyū¹⁸ and Kagoshima. Ah!

Where's the land connecting you?

[A loutish, gawking COUNTRY SAMURAI enters with his SERVANT. They wear thick kimonos of country design. The SAMURAI's hair is done up in a high, awkward style. A ruddy complexion is visible beneath black stubble of an unshaven face. It is obvious he and his SERVANT have never been to the big city before, let alone a licensed quarter.]

sutezerifu SERVANT: Master, look. I never seen so many cherry blossoms. [Eagerly.] Should we go inside Yoshiwara? [The SAMURAI nods happily.]

[SUKEROKU suddenly blocks their way, yanks out their swords, inspects the blades, then throws them down. The two look at each other in blank amazement. They pick up the swords.]

SUKEROKU: Hey, samurai! Through my legs! [He stamps and hikes his kimono.]

SERVANT: It may be the custom here, Master. [In dumb rage the COUNTRY SAMURAI begins to draw.] No, Master, no!

[Offstage shamisen, flute, and stick drum resume Gion Bayashi. The COUNTRY SAMURAI allows himself to be led by his SERVANT up to SUKEROKU, and with his assistance passes between SUKEROKU's legs after mumbling a short prayer. The SERVANT slides along on his belly, but even so SUKEROKU kicks him as he goes through.]

SHINBEI [legs quaking] : Through my legs, samurai.

[Again the COUNTRY SAMURAI reaches for his sword. The SERVANT sees SUKEROKU glaring at them, he tugs his master's sleeve, and gestures for him to look at SUKEROKU. Shaking his head in bewilderment, the uncomprehending COUNTRY SAMURAI falls to his knees and goes through, accidentally tickling SHINBEI as he passes. The SERVANT follows. They rush onto the banamichi and stop at seven-three. Music ends. The SERVANT thinks.]

SERVANT: Master, we've been had.

[He reaches for his sword, but this time the SAMURAI stops him. As the offstage CHORUS sings, they look at each other, sigh with resignation, turn and strut off down the banamichi.]

CHORUS [repeating Ryūkyū Bushi] :

Rikyū and Kagoshima. Ah!

Where's the land connecting you?

SUKEROKU [chuckling] : He's a brave samurai, Brother.

CHORUS [sings Yo Zakura, "Night Cherry," to brisk shamisen accompaniment as stick drum plays Sawagi] :

18. Dialect for Ryūkyū (Okinawa).

sutezerifu

Night-blooming cherry,
The light-hearted wanderer, while dancing, dancing;
In the shade of the blossoms, see there is someone;
There is someone there.
[A rich young DANDY enters. He wears no swords, and is modishly dressed in pastel green kimono with matching cloak. His makeup is handsomely white. He carries a half-open fan. Shamisen continues in the background.]

DANDY: How smashing to float about this wild place, taking it all in. I'll never tire seeing the tender beauties of the quarter go by. They're so with it. They swing.

CHORUS *[repeats Yo Zakura to same accompaniment, as the DANDY flicks open his fan and ambles on]* :
Night-blooming cherry,

The light-hearted wanderer, while dancing, dancing . . .

SUKEROKU *[blocking his way]* : Pass through here!

DANDY: What is that? What did you say? I am to pass through there? You must be putting me on, vulgar man. Even here in this paradise of the senses, you ask too much. *[He sees SUKEROKU's relentless attitude and sighs.]* Well, if I must, at least I shall travel in style. *[Looks archly at the audience.]* Hereafter this voyage shall be known as "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seat." Let us begin. *[Gion Bayashi resumes. He prepares himself as if for a night out. He puts his fan away, then takes off his sandals and carefully pushes them through. He unfolds a white handkerchief which he places on his head to protect his hair. He removes a sachet from his kimono breast and scents himself here and there. After carefully arranging his clothes, he fastidiously crawls through on hands and knees. Rising, he sighs.]*

I thought I'd seen everything, but this is the end.

SHINBEI *[full of courage]* : Pass through here.

DANDY *[shocked]* : Again? Not again, not again through there? You can't mean it, you terrifying people, you're too much. I mean really, see Japan first, but you're out of your minds! *[He turns and sees SUKEROKU looking steadily at him.]*

Ohh. This is out of sight.

[He looks at SHINBEI and sighs wearily. Again he fastidiously prepares. He pushes sandals through, places the cloth on his head, and adjusts his clothes. Approaching SHINBEI on his knees, he sniffs and makes a wry face. He holds a sleeve to his nose to filter the air but that doesn't work. With elegant nonchalance he dangles the sachet before SHINBEI and fans the scent between SHINBEI's legs. Then, holding the sachet between his teeth, he crawls through, bumping SHINBEI in the process and sending him flying upstage. He crosses to seven-three on the hanamichi. Music stops.]

Really, look at me. My clothes are filthy, my hair ruined. How can I ever face the girls this way? Well I must, even if they spurn me. *[Brightens.]*

Who knows, I might just start a new fashion!

[He flicks his fan open as a signal to the musicians. They play a lively popular song, chosen from among current hits, and the DANDY abandons himself to a brief dance in contemporary style. Another flick of the fan and the musicians return to Yo Zakura. Instantly reverting to character, he dances gracefully down the banamichi and off.]

CHORUS [repeating original lyrics] :

Night-blooming cherry,

The light-hearted wanderer, while dancing, dancing . . .

SUKEROKU [laughing] : He's a funny one, Jūrō.

AGEMAKI [off] : Take care, traveling in the night.

SUKEROKU [bristling] : Agemaki? Seeing out a customer? "I wait for you," she said. I knew that whore was unfaithful.

SHINBEI: You tell her, Brother!

CHORUS [sings Fumi no Tayori, "A Letter's Message," to shamisen and hand bell accompaniment] :

Let us meet this evening,

She entreats in her letter.

[AGEMAKI, no longer wearing her outer robe, politely ushers out of the Three Harbors, her "customer" who is dressed in the severe black kimono and wears the two swords of a samurai. A deep wicker hat completely covers the customer's face. There is no way to know this is MANKŌ, mother of SUKEROKU and SHINBEI. SUKEROKU blocks their way with outstretched arms. Offstage shamisen continues Fumi no Tayori in the background.]

SUKEROKU [viciously] : Stop where you are, samurai!

AGEMAKI [protecting MANKŌ] : Sukeroku, don't be rash!

SUKEROKU: Don't meddle, slut!

AGEMAKI: You abuse me, Sukeroku.

SUKEROKU: What if I do?

SHINBEI: Yes, yes, what if he does?

[Hurt, AGEMAKI, moves away. SUKEROKU stands belligerently blocking MANKŌ's way. She hesitates a moment, then deliberately stamps on his foot. SUKEROKU grabs her swords, but she holds them fast.]

SUKEROKU [roaring] : Samurai! The street is wide but you step on my toes!

[Stamps foot out.] Lick them clean!

AGEMAKI: You will regret this, Sukeroku.

SUKEROKU: Out of my business, whore.

SHINBEI: Yes.

AGEMAKI: I can see from your face you hate me.

SUKEROKU [bitterly] : With good reason. [Turns to MANKŌ.] Speak, samurai! Are you deaf, are you dumb?

SHINBEI: Deafy. Dummy. Speak . . .

SUKEROKU [strongly] : Show your face! Show it or I'll . . .

[He poses before MANKŌ. Music stops. He seizes the brim of her hat, lifts it, and sees his mother's face.]

AGEMAKI: Yes, lift the hat, Sukeroku. Then will you scar the face you see?
 [He falls back, speechless.]

SHINBEI: My, my, what's this? Is the carnival over? Let me take my turn then.
 [SUKEROKU tugs his sleeve to dissuade him, but SHINBEI blithely brushes him off.]

Release me. I will do it. [Struts over to MANKŌ.] Hey, samurai! See this foot and this foot? [Hikes his kimono.] This foot is for booting bottoms of boys who don't obey. This foot is for stuffing in your eye, an idea I think I like very much. So, samurai, don't play footsie with me. [He stamps, trying to strike a powerful pose, and falls to the ground, clutching his foot.] Ouch. A gallant must not say ouch, so in silence I bear my pain. [Rises, and poses with his hand on the little staff.] I am the master of Agemaki's Sukeroku. Should you anger the wielder of this stave, stave off my blows as you will, willingly will I slice you through to the soles of your feet. So hats off. Pay me some respect . . .¹⁹ [He lifts the hat, sees his mother.] Ah, ah, ah! I die!

[SHINBEI falls weakly to his knees. SUKEROKU has removed his clogs and kneels facing his mother, his gaze downcast.]

MANKŌ [removes hat and speaks sadly to SUKEROKU]: How heroic is Agemaki's Sukeroku. Gorō, my son, will you strike me, kick me?
 [She turns to SHINBEI, who is crawling away on his hands and knees, hidden under a red cloth from one of the benches thrown over him by a STAGE ASSISTANT. MANKŌ passes her hat to another STAGE ASSISTANT and seizes SHINBEI under the cloth.]

Who is this contemptible one who helps you? Show your face.
 [She takes the cloth off and falls back amazed.]

Jūrō, my eldest son!

SHINBEI [a tiny voice]: Sun or moon, I'll never shine again.²⁰

MANKŌ: You too. How pitiful.
 [She removes her cloak and hands it to a STAGE ASSISTANT and poses.]

SHINBEI: Where is there a hole I can crawl in?

MANKŌ [sits bench center as offstage shamisen plays melancholy Tada Aikata in the background]: Virtuous sons would be taking vengeance on their father's slayer. My sons take aliases and brawl in public places. So unutterably ashamed am I, a woman, unable to strike my husband's enemy, remiss in the upbringing of his sons. It is punishment for the sins committed in a previous life. I shall beg your father's forgiveness by giving my life in apology.

[SUKEROKU and SHINBEI half rise to stop her, then SUKEROKU bangs his head in shame.]

SHINBEI: Wait, Mother. Please let me explain for Gorō. Without father's

19. Shinbei's speech is filled with wordplay. He says, for example, *sori ashi* (bent toes) when he means Osaka's *sori bashi* (arched bridge). The word *ashi* means three things in the phrase *Awaji no ashi ka omoi*: "reeds of Awaji" (*Awaji no ashi*), a contraction for "I" (*washi*) in "I think" (*ashi ka omoi*), and "foot."

20. The pun in the text is on Sukenari, his name, and *kaminari* (thunder).

sword, Tomokirimaru, even Gorō cannot defeat father's enemy. All the power of the great noble Yoshitsune resides in it, for it was a gift from him. Purposely Gorō hides his true identity. Purposely he fights in the hope of finding Tomokirimaru.

MANKŌ: Gorō, is it true?

SUKEROKU [*still bowing low*] : It is, Mother. Tomokirimaru will lead us to our enemy. I swear father's spirit will be avenged.

SHINBEI: Forgive us, Mother. [*Both bow.*]

MANKŌ: It lightens my heart to know you remain faithful to your obligations. [*Gets kimono from STAGE ASSISTANT.*] Gorō, as you search for Tomokirimaru, you must not quarrel. Wear this robe of paper. Its fragility will counsel you in patience. For my sake, bear humiliations. For your father's sake, endure even blows.

[*She and SHINBEI move downstage, hiding SUKEROKU from view as the STAGE ASSISTANT removes his outer kimono, revealing beneath it one identical to that brought out by MANKŌ. They separate and the audience sees SUKEROKU dressed in a soft, silk kimono of dark purple and lavender sections, the latter with writing on them. This is the conventional representation of a kimono patched together from love letters.*]

SHINBEI: This is a marvelous precept of forbearance.

MANKŌ: It is time to go. Agemaki. [*Looks at her significantly.*] I am indebted for your help. [*Bows.*]

AGEMAKI [*returning the bow*] : The night wind grows strong. Take care.

MANKŌ: Jūrō, let us go.

[*SHINBEI gets MANKŌ's hat, his hat and cane from a STAGE ASSISTANT. MANKŌ moves past SUKEROKU, then turns back.*] Gorō.

SUKEROKU [*head low still*] : One thing remains before I join you, Mother.

MANKŌ: I shall be waiting.

[*Music stops. Silence. MANKŌ and SHINBEI move to the seven-three position on the banamichi. MANKŌ looks appealingly at AGEMAKI, who rises and nods reassuringly. MANKŌ turns away and poses.*]

SHINBEI: Don't delay, Brother.

CHORUS [*sings Tada Uta, "Plain Song," to shamisen accompaniment*] :

Ahh!

Breezes blowing toward the pine.

[*MANKŌ slowly and with great dignity moves down the banamichi to the melancholy music. SHINBEI follows. SUKEROKU does not move.*

[*AGEMAKI crosses to his side and gently touches his shoulder.*]

AGEMAKI: Put your worries aside, Sukeroku. Since you've promised to no longer quarrel, tonight we shall be together for as long as you wish.

[*He does not respond. She becomes coquettish.*] I must tease you though, at least a tiny bit. Imagine, not knowing who your mother was! Ho, ho!

[*She leans against him provocatively.*]

SUKEROKU [*coldly*] : Fool. Two swords and a hat don't make a samurai. I know my own mother.

[*Rises, she falls slightly off-balance. He crosses and sits on the bench center.*]

kuzetsu

You're a two-faced whore, Agemaki.

AGEMAKI [*turns away in surprise*] : In spite of your mother's words, you are determined to quarrel, I see.

[*Offstage shamisen play Asazuma, "Asazuma Pleasure Boat," in the background.*]

It doesn't matter what I say, you don't listen to me, but really, Sukeroku, taunting every samurai that passes by is childishly absurd.

SUKEROKU [*reacts*] : You deliberately brought my mother here to get me out of the quarter. Lying whore.

AGEMAKI: I? What lie have I told you?

SUKEROKU: Do you think I don't know? Old white beard has been inside your kimono. [*Acting hurt.*] Now you want me out of the way. Damned faithless slut. [*He poses.*]

AGEMAKI [*her lower lip trembles, but she puts up a brave front*] : It makes me laugh—I, in bed, with Ikyū? Ha, ha!

SUKEROKU: Laugh, but I know he came to you and you slept with him.

AGEMAKI [*pouting*] : No, I won't have you say that. [*Slaps the floor with her hand for emphasis.*] Where did you hear this? Where?

SUKEROKU [*uncomfortable*] : Never mind where I heard it.

AGEMAKI [*crosses and sits beside him, wheedling*] : No, tell me. Where did you hear it?

SUKEROKU: I, uh, heard it in my ear.

AGEMAKI [*flounces*] : Oh! Who told you?

SUKEROKU: The one who told me . . .

AGEMAKI: . . . who told you is . . . ?

SUKEROKU: Well . . .

AGEMAKI: Well?

SUKEROKU: No one.

AGEMAKI [*pouting*] : Sukeroku. Without proof you believe this. Did you not say, in bed that time, "As long as I live I shall be grateful to Agemaki, the truest person I have ever known?"

SUKEROKU: I did.

AGEMAKI: You lied. Now you say Agemaki is a faithless slut. [*Looks at him gently.*] I swear I despise Ikyū. [*SUKEROKU does not react. She looks away and speaks with pride.*] I see you have grown tired of me. You want to say goodby without saying it, so you bring up this wild story about Ikyū. Or do you hope I will lose interest in you, and so save you the trouble of leaving me? Is that what you want? Is it? It is cruel of you, Sukeroku.

SUKEROKU [*covering his discomfiture*] : I will not press the point, if what you say is true. Look at me, Agemaki.

AGEMAKI [*rises coldly and sweeps right*] : It was said I have the appearance of a slut.

SUKEROKU: You heard me. If there's nothing to this Ikyū business, don't fuss so.

AGEMAKI [*taking a pipe from a STAGE ASSISTANT and pointedly not offering it to him*] : I am a lying whore.

SUKEROKU: I'll say nothing more about Ikyū. Come over here. [She continues smoking.] From the beginning I have treated you well, but it's clear you're just too conceited to appreciate me. Come, or I leave. And I will not be back. [He rises, and poses.] I am leaving the quarter for good. [He expects her to stop him. When she doesn't, he glances at her.] You're a fool, Agemaki. This is the end. [He draws himself up and crosses grandly to the banamichi.]

AGEMAKI [sadly, to herself] : To cry in regret is useless, yet the things you have said . . . [Lightly.] Sit down.

SUKEROKU: Sit down? Aha!

[He struts back and sits, thinking he has won.]

AGEMAKI [sweetly] : From what young courtesan did you receive the umbrella with the peony crest?

SUKEROKU [startled] : Eh? I bought it. At Nihon Bridge.

AGEMAKI: Oh, do be silent.

SUKEROKU [buffing] : Don't speak like a boor to Sukeroku.

AGEMAKI: You are the boor, Sukeroku, and I am bored with you. Leave me [She turns her back on him.]

SUKEROKU: You twist everything I say! [Sighs.] I was wrong in everything. It was my fault.

AGEMAKI: All you said before?

SUKEROKU: A mistake.

AGEMAKI: Truly?

SUKEROKU: I swear it.

[Music stops.]

AGEMAKI [savoring her victory] : You were hateful.

SUKEROKU [meekly] : I was hateful.

AGEMAKI [suddenly feminine again, she tenderly sits beside him] : You were, dear Sukeroku.

SUKEROKU [amorously embracing her] : Dear, dear Agemaki!

[He slides his hand into the breast of her kimono.]

IKYŪ [off] : Agemaki? Agemaki?

SUKEROKU: Ikyū!

[SUKEROKU leaps up, hand on sword hilt. Offstage shamisen play Sugagaki in the background. AGEMAKI restrains SUKEROKU and gestures for him to hide behind the bench. He does. She sits on the bench, whirling the trailing end of her robe over him. A STAGE ASSISTANT holds the robe over SUKEROKU's head. IKYŪ enters followed by two CHILD MAIDS. One places a white cushion on the bench, the other places an incense stand in front of it. IKYŪ sits.]

IKYŪ: Ah, here you are, Agemaki.

AGEMAKI [coolly] : Ah, Ikyū.

IKYŪ: I said before inside, what happened earlier is water under the bridge.

Now, it is rumored you will sleep with me tonight. Is it true?

AGEMAKI: Sleep with Ikyū?

IKYŪ: You will not?

AGEMAKI [*carefully*] : The lie that Agemaki will sleep with Ikyū . . . [IKYŪ
reacts angrily.] . . . is no lie.

IKYŪ [*grandly takes her hand*] : Then to bed, whore.

AGEMAKI: No.

IKYŪ: No?

AGEMAKI: I have drunk too much and need fresh air. You go on to bed
before me. Night air stiffens old bones.

IKYŪ: Then I shall wait in the night air with you! [*He laughs evilly.*] How it
would infuriate your ruffian friend Sukeroku to see us here. Eh, Agemaki?
[*He laughs and starts to slide close to AGEMAKI. The cloth shakes.*]

SUKEROKU *pinches IKYŪ's leg.*]

Ouch! Somebody pinched my leg.

AGEMAKI: Children, you are being naughty.

CHILD: Mistress, under your robe . . .

AGEMAKI [*silencing them*] : I will hear no excuses.

CHILD: But . . .

AGEMAKI: Silence.

CHILDREN: Aiii!

[*SUKEROKU stirs under her robe.*]

AGEMAKI [*under her breath*] : Don't come out.

IKYŪ: Don't come out?

AGEMAKI [*meaningfully*] : I was saying to the moon, do not come out . . .

IKYŪ [*mocking*] : The pure light of the moon? Shining in Yoshiwara?²¹

AGEMAKI: . . . from behind the clouds.

IKYŪ: Ah. The clouds . . .

AGEMAKI: . . . are hiding . . .

IKYŪ: . . . the moon? [*He shrugs.*] The moon is easily clouded, the flower
easily scattered, they say. Eh, Agemaki? Ha, ha, ha!

[*He reaches for his pipe. SUKEROKU slides the tobacco box out of his
reach, filches the pipe, and casually smokes it himself. IKYŪ looks about
suspiciously.*]

Who moved my tobacco box? Where's my pipe?

AGEMAKI: The children are naughty again. Go inside at once.

CHILDREN: Aiii!

[*Sugagaki music speeds up as they exit, then continues quietly between
dialogue phrases.*]

IKYŪ: No, Agemaki, this time it was not the children. It was . . .

[*He begins to slide close to her. She stops him, pointing to the sky.*]

AGEMAKI [*quickly*] : Ah, my, my, Ikyū, look. Look . . . the stars are out
tonight.

IKYŪ: And what is so interesting about the stars that come out every night?

AGEMAKI [*pretending to pout*] : But tonight there are so many. Ikyū, count
them for me.

IKYŪ: What? Count the stars for you?

21. A sarcastic reference to the well-known saying, "The moon will shine in its ebb
quarter as soon as prostitutes are truthful and eggs have square corners."

share

AGEMAKI [*coquettishly*] : Yes.

IKYŪ [*with a wicked smile*] : And while I am counting your stars, will you be counting on your star-crossed lover? Count on then, count on. Ha, ha! [Pointing.] The bright one there is the Morning Star. Above that is the Big Dipper. Ah, and there is a falling star, but you know about them. Don't you, Agemaki?

AGEMAKI: No.

IKYŪ [*darkly insinuating*] : A star that flashes brightly through the quarter, streaking in at night to rob a patron of the woman he has purchased, is a falling star.²² [Enjoying the game, he points again.] And there is the Weaving Maid, longing for her Cowherd lover to join her in the sky.²³ But the great Milky Way, called Ikyū, sits immovable between them so they cannot meet! Eh, Agemaki? Ha, ha, ha!

[SUKEROKU pinches his leg again.]

Ouch! Someone pinched my leg.

AGEMAKI: The children, Ikyū . . .

IKYŪ [*ominously*] : . . . are gone, Agemaki.

AGEMAKI: If not the children, then a mouse.

IKYŪ: A mouse?

AGEMAKI: Yes.

IKYŪ: A rat, you mean. A sewer rat, Agemaki. There he is.

AGEMAKI: Where?

[Music stops. IKYŪ rises, pushes AGEMAKI behind him, and points with his sword.]

IKYŪ: There!

SUKEROKU [*leaping out*] : Ikyū!

IKYŪ: Sukeroku!

[To loud batan tsuke beats, SUKEROKU and IKYŪ face each other, ready to draw. AGEMAKI restrains SUKEROKU.]

AGEMAKI: Wait!

[She gestures commandingly for IKYŪ not to draw and sweeps her trailing robe protectively around SUKEROKU, stamps, and poses. IKYŪ seizes his sword with both hands, but does not draw. SUKEROKU, remembering his promise, falls to his knees, struggling to suppress his anger. All pose in a tense group mie to battari tsuke beats. Offstage shamisen and flute begin melancholy Rokudan, "Six Part Melody."]

IKYŪ [*scathingly*] : Behind the skirts of the street slut Agemaki, hides the gutter rat Sukeroku, while the wise-beard old cat Ikyū sees it all! Sukeroku, you slink about like a thief. Is this the spirit in which you plan your great deed? [Sneering.] Soga Gorō the coward!

22. A pun on *yobai* (secretly slipping in to see a girl at night) and *yobai boshi* (falling star).

23. In Japanese mythology the brightness of Vega and Altair on either side of the Milky Way in midsummer is explained by the story of the Cowherd who is able to cross the river of the Milky Way to meet his beloved Weaving Maid each year on the seventh day of the seventh month.

SUKEROKU [*surprised, turns to face IKYŪ*] : If you know my name, you know I am no coward.

IKYŪ [*disdainfully faces front*] : Your father perished ignominiously. While you without the spirit to avenge him debauch with drink and whores, your father's murderer, Suketsune, lives in pomp at court. Do you think he is untouchable? Bah! Coward, must I beat some warrior's courage into you?

chōchaku

[*Music stops. IKYŪ strikes SUKEROKU on the head and shoulders five times with his heavy closed fan, each blow accented by batan tsuke beats. SUKEROKU grasps IKYŪ's wrist and they pose in a mie to battari tsuke beats.*)

SUKEROKU [*bitterly*] : Ikyū—fortunate man! How I envy you! For eighteen years I have searched out our family's enemy to strike him down. And now it is you who strike me! How bitter fate is. Revile me, beat me. I wear my mother's robe and will not draw! [*He releases IKYŪ's wrist, turns front, and clasps his hands together in agonized prayer.*] Strike, Ikyū! Strike me down!

IKYŪ: Hmm. To honor a parent's words shows you are not wholly lacking in resolution. Soga Gorō, listen.

[*Music resumes. He looks at SUKEROKU craftily, then places the incense stand center stage.*]

In achieving one's great ambition, you cannot be swayed by people's hatred or their love. Trifling with whores, petty squabbles erode your will. But join three wills together, Soga Gorō—you, your brother, and . . . one another—these three wills united beyond hate or love could achieve a father's murderer's death, the Shōgun's fall, even the rule of the nation itself! Together, nothing could stand against such strength. [*Indicates the stand. Meaningfully.*] No weight could crush the two Soga brothers if, like this incense stand, there were three pillars of support. But, lacking one you will fall like this.

[*Music stops. IKYŪ suddenly draws his sword and, to batan tsuke beats, slashes one leg from the stand, which falls to the floor. SUKEROKU seizes IKYŪ's hand and looks at the blade. Quickly realizing he has erred, IKYŪ replaces the sword in the scabbard to batan tsuke beats. SUKEROKU is about to draw. AGEMAKI comes between them. She restrains each with a hand gesture. The men glare fiercely at each other, hands on their swords. They pose in a group mie to battari tsuke beats.*]

CHORUS [*offstage repeats Tada Uta to shamisen accompaniment*] :

Ahh!

Breezes blowing toward the pine.

[*IKYŪ turns and walks ponderously toward the Three Harbors. He stops, slowly pivots, and looks at SUKEROKU with contempt and hatred. The music speeds up as he quickly exits.*]

AGEMAKI [*noticing*] : Your robe, Sukeroku, is torn.

SUKEROKU [*rising, with a laugh*] : Ha, ha. Then his fate is decided.

AGEMAKI: Is it . . . ?

SUKEROKU [*triumphantly*] : It is Tomokirimaru!

[*She reacts, then moves close and whispers a question into his ear. He nods emphatically.*]

Tonight I wait for . . .

[*He rushes onto the banamichi to fast bata-bata tsuke beats. At seven-three he stops, steps out with his right foot to a sharp ki clack. He leans forward in an aggressive mie, both hands on the hilt of the sword, as he speaks.*]

. . . Ikyū!!

[*To fast tempo Kyokubachi, "Drum Stick Rhythm,"—played by the large drum, stick drum, and flute—and bata-bata tsuke beats, SUKEROKU runs down the banamichi and off. AGEMAKI poses center stage, watching him. The curtain is run closed to gradually accelerating ki clacks. The large drum immediately begins beating Kaza Oto wind pattern. House lights remain low as the dance floor is removed. The interval is short. Kaza Oto becomes louder and with a single ki clack signal, offstage shamisen play fast Sugagaki. The curtain is run open to accelerating ki clacks. There is a moment of silence.*]

SCENE 2

[*The scene is the same, except that the huge water vat stage right has been moved downstage, the benches have been removed, and a slatted night gate now covers the entrance to the Three Harbors. It is night. Pale blue light comes up on the banamichi. The large drum booms out Kaza Oto and to fast bata-bata tsuke beats, SUKEROKU rushes on. He wears a simple white kimono, tied with a pale blue sash, and white leggings. Hair falls about his shoulders wildly. At seven-three he stops, peers into the darkness, and poses in a mie, naked sword held behind him, to battari tsuke beats. To softly ominous Kaza Oto drum beats, SUKEROKU moves stealthily on stage. A time bell tolls in the distance. He slips behind the water vat.*]

CHORUS [*softly sings Fukete, "Nightfall," to quiet, offstage shamisen accompaniment*] :

Our slumbers in the evening are quickly broken;

By regrets of past summers knocking at the door.

[*During the song, SEMBEI, a MALE SERVANT of the Three Harbors, IKYŪ, and two young COURTESANS enter through a small door set into the front gate. SEMBEI hands a lighted lantern to the SERVANT. Offstage shamisen play Fukete Aikata in the background.*]

FIRST COURTESAN [*bowing politely*] : Tonight you're leaving so early.

SECOND COURTESAN: Every night it's someone different, Ikyū.

FIRST COURTESAN: Come again, noble Ikyū.

[*They bow politely. He takes his sword from the FIRST COURTESAN.*]

IKYŪ: It will be light soon. [To SEMBEI.] Come. Come.

SERVANT: I will go with you as far as the river bank.

SEMBEI [*snatching the lantern back*] : What good is that? Never fear. Sembei, a warrior, will lead the way. Come.

COURTESANS [*bowing*] : Good night, then.

[*The time bell tolls. The COURTESANS go inside. The men move right.*]

CHORUS [*repeats Fukete*] :

Deep slumbers in the evening are quickly broken;

By regrets of past seasons knocking at the door.

[*The time bell tolls.*]

IKYŪ [*stopping*] : What time is it, Sembei?

SEMBEI: Three o'clock, Master.

IKYŪ [*glances about*] : Hurry, hurry.

[*Kaza Oto swells. SUKEROKU creeps forward in the dark. As the men move past him, SUKEROKU knocks the lantern to the ground to batan tsuke beats. The lights do not dim, but the scene is played as if in complete darkness.*]

What thief attacks without a word?

SUKEROKU: No thief, Ikyū!

IKYŪ: Sukeroku! Coward, sneak-thieving in the dark!

SUKEROKU: To avenge the honor of the Sogas I lie in wait for you, Ikyū.

[*Straining forward in the dark.*] Give me Tomokirimaru!

[*Offstage shamisen play Yachio Jishi, "Ageless Lion."*]

miarawashi

IKYŪ [*strongly*] : I shall never part with this sword which belonged to

Minamoto Yoshitsune, for the Minamoto clan are my hated enemies. I take the name of Ikyū, but now know who I really am: Ika Heinai Zaemon, general of the Taira!

[*A STAGE ASSISTANT helps him remove his robe and sash, revealing beneath a kimono of white tied with a soft purple sash. He stands, heels together, in a powerful mie, to battari tsuke beats.*]

SUKEROKU [*snarling*] : Tomokirimaru!

IKYŪ: With its strength I shall depose the usurping Minamoto from power and restore to rule once more the Taira clan! No power on earth will make me part with Tomokirimaru!

[*A STAGE ASSISTANT helps him tie a blue cloth around his head, as a sign he is prepared to fight.*]

SUKEROKU: I shall. Give it here!

IKYŪ: Draw, Sembei!

SEMBEI: Yes, Master!

tate

[*Yachio Jishi music becomes faster, Kaza Oto rises and falls, and alternating tsuke patterns of batan and battari accompany the fighting scene which follows. SEMBEI takes his right arm out of his sleeve, and rushes at SUKEROKU. He strikes awkwardly right and left. SUKEROKU easily pushes him away with the flat of his sword. SUKEROKU and IKYŪ move center, where they strike and parry. They pose facing each other in a mie. The tempo becomes more deliberate. The flute adds its haunting sound to the shamisen. SUKEROKU holds off IKYŪ's determined thrusts, until SUKEROKU steps aside and IKYŪ is pushed stage right. SEMBEI attacks and is forced to the ground. He holds his sword horizontally over his head: IKYŪ and SUKEROKU rest their sword tips on it and the three pose in a*

group mie, to battari tsuke beats. SEMBEI rises, is slashed across the neck by SUKEROKU, staggers, and falls dead behind a lantern stand left. A bead appears on the stand, as if the force of SUKEROKU's blow had sent it flying through the air. SUKEROKU and IKYŪ stand back to back, fall apart, and glare at each other. With sword tips touching, they pose in a mie, to battari tsuke beats. A STAGE ASSISTANT holds a black cloth in front of SEMBEI, and he goes off unseen. The two simultaneously slash at each other, IKYŪ screams, both clutch the base of their necks and fall. Loud Kaza Oto. They struggle to their feet and we see gashes of red on each, running from the top of the shoulder to the breast. IKYŪ, sensing where his opponent is, desperately jabs his elbow into SUKEROKU's stomach. SUKEROKU absorbs the blow with his hand, but pretends to have the wind knocked out of him and staggers, whirling stage left where he falls prostrate on his back. IKYŪ, at the hanamichi looks back, sees SUKEROKU fallen, and poses in a mie. Face contorted with pain, IKYŪ forces himself across the stage to where SUKEROKU has fallen. Thinking SUKEROKU is safely unconscious, he takes his time straddling his opponent and raising his sword in both hands for the final blow. Bata-bata and Kaza Oto crescendo. Suddenly SUKEROKU thrusts his sword up into IKYŪ's unprotected side. His ruse has worked. Holding his sword in place, SUKEROKU rises and forces IKYŪ center, turning him around and around. He twists the blade cruelly in the wound. IKYŪ gasps, his fingers claw the air. Staggering helplessly, he is slashed down the length of his back. IKYŪ groans, and falls. Music stops. In silence, SUKEROKU straddles his foe, and plunges his sword into IKYŪ's throat. Several TOWNSPEOPLE slip on and, in the dim light of lanterns they are carrying, witness the killing. They silently slip away to sound the alarm. IKYŪ's hand, still clutching Tomokirimaru, trembles violently. SUKEROKU twists the blade in IKYŪ's throat. His arm falls, the sword clatters to the ground. IKYŪ is dead. SUKEROKU holds Tomokirimaru high.]

SUKEROKU: Tomokirimaru!

[IKYŪ goes off unseen behind a black curtain held in front of him by a STAGE ASSISTANT. Booming drum beats of Mitsu Daiko, "Triple Beat," sound the alarm. From far off come cries of "Murder!" Startled, SUKEROKU holds the sword reverently to his forehead. Then he rushes to escape down the hanamichi. Cries of "Murder" from that direction force him back onto the stage. He moves left, then right; each time new shouts of "Murder" force him back. He falls weakly to one knee. Renewed shouts and ever louder and faster drum beats rouse him. Desperately, he looks for a way of escape. He sees the water vat and strikes at its pyramid of buckets with his sword. The buckets fall with a crash. He picks up one, knocks out the bottom with the hilt of his sword, and heaves it up into the vat. He climbs a ladder on the outside of the vat, poses for a moment on the edge, then plunges in causing a great wave of water to cascade onto the stage. He places the bucket over his head and disappears from sight. Mitsu Daiko drum beats pound unrelentingly. Several CONSTABLES, in

dark blue jackets and trousers and carrying short metal rods of office, rush down the banamichi carrying a ladder. Shouting instructions and encouragement to each other, they raise it and one runs nimbly up to look about. He points to the Three Harbors. They rush onto the stage and raise the ladder against the side of the Three Harbors. The same CONSTABLE runs up and looks again. This time he points off right. Shouting loudly, they run off, leaving the ladder in place. Drum beats become soft and ominous; the shouting fades. The bucket moves, water splashes down. SUKEROKU rises slowly out of the water holding the bucket over his head. He poses in a mie, as the time bell tolls. The audience applauds and shouts in appreciation. Offstage shamisen and flute play quiet Kono Ha, "This Leaf." Three times SUKEROKU tries to pull himself out of the vat, each time he falls back, causing a wave of water to cascade onto the floor. Finally he heaves himself over the edge, staggers to the center of the stage, and there falls unconscious, still clasping Tomokirimaru. Music stops. The alarm drum begins booming again and shouts are heard offstage from all directions. Rushing from the Three Harbors in her sleeping kimono, AGEMAKI takes in the situation at a glance. As TOWNSPEOPLE swarm on, she covers SUKEROKU with the long train of her kimono.]

YOUNG MAN: What's this, a woman?

SECOND YOUNG MAN: Whore, out of the way!

ALL: Stand aside! [They brandish sticks and poles.]

AGEMAKI: I shall not move.

YOUNG MAN: Is he inside?

SECOND YOUNG MAN: Where is he?

THIRD YOUNG MAN: He's here somewhere!

ALL: Bring him out!

AGEMAKI: Agemaki, pride of the House of Three Harbors, does not lie.

YOUNG MAN [frustrated] : I know she's hiding him.

SECOND YOUNG MAN: Tell us where he is.

ALL: Tell us! Quick!

[They raise their poies and sticks threateningly.]

AGEMAKI [haughtily] : Stop. Let one of your poles mar the beauty of Agemaki, beware—darkness will descend on Yoshiwara. [Men mutter.] If you oppose Agemaki, Agemaki will oppose you. [She strikes a regal pose and looks away disdainfully.]

CONSTABLE [coming on] : In the dark, he could be anywhere. Spread out and look.

[To boozing Mitsu Daiko, they run off in different directions. When they are gone, the drum shifts to faint, ominous Kaza Oto. AGEMAKI kneels beside SUKEROKU, sees his wound, takes off her robe and covers him. Then she climbs the side of the vat, wets her sash, returns, and squeezes a few drops of water into his mouth. He revives and clutches her.]

SUKEROKU [painfully sitting up] : Ah, Agemaki. The water was turned red with my blood. My strength drained away until for a moment I fell unconscious. [He stands, holding himself up with his sword.]

AGEMAKI: Then you have found . . . ?
SUKEROKU [*holds sword high*] : Tomokirimaru!
AGEMAKI [*bands clasped*] : How grateful we all are.
SUKEROKU: And now to find Suketsune.
AGEMAKI: The quarter is filled with men searching for you. There is no way out.
SUKEROKU [*sees ladder*] : I'm in luck! I'll go across the roofs.
AGEMAKI: And I will wait by the great gate, near the river bank. Be careful, Sukeroku.
[*He climbs painfully to the top of the ladder. He looks back at her as she kneels right and faces him.*]
SUKEROKU: Agemaki!
AGEMAKI: Sukeroku!
BOTH [*prolonged*] : Until . . . we . . . meet!
[*A sharp ki clack signals lights to come up full. Uchiage tsuke beats rise to a furious crescendo, fade, then swell again: he raises Tomokirimaru over head and clasps his wounded shoulder; she rises on her knees and looks intently at him. They pose in a final mie.*]
kōjō STAGE MANAGER [*enters quickly and kneels stage right*] : With this, we conclude today's performance!
[*The STAGE MANAGER bows low. SUKEROKU and AGEMAKI pose. The curtain is slowly walked closed to accelerating ki clacks as offstage shamisen play Shinnai Maebiki, "Shinnai Prelude," and the large drum Mitsu Daiko. A single ki clack signals the large drum to beat out Uchidashi, indicating the day's performance is over.*]



Shiratama, surrounded by her retinue, poses in front of the House of Three Harbors before she sits. (*Shiratama*: Nakamura Shikan; *Attendant*: Nakamura Shōsaburō) Page 59



Sukeroku enters on the hanamichi: Flicking his arm in the sleeve of his kimono to show the poeny crest dyed in the fabric, he plants one foot forward and leans back, glancing up under the opened umbrella. The Chorus sings: "Impregnated kimono crest of Five Seasons, symbol of year's waiting, steeped deeply in love." (*Sukeroku*: Nakamura Kanzaburō) Page 63

He holds the closed umbrella before him. "Sleeping moist with love, dampened by the quarter's rain, the spring's bitter cold." (*Sukeroku*: Ichikawa Danjūrō) Page 63



Stamping loudly with his wooden clogs, he flicks the umbrella under his arm, strikes his chest with his fist, and poses in a powerful *mie*, glaring at Ikyū.

“The eye falls on the willow, snowfalls of blossoms piling on the umbrella in Yoshiwara.” (*Sukeroku: Ichikawa Danjūrō*) Page 64

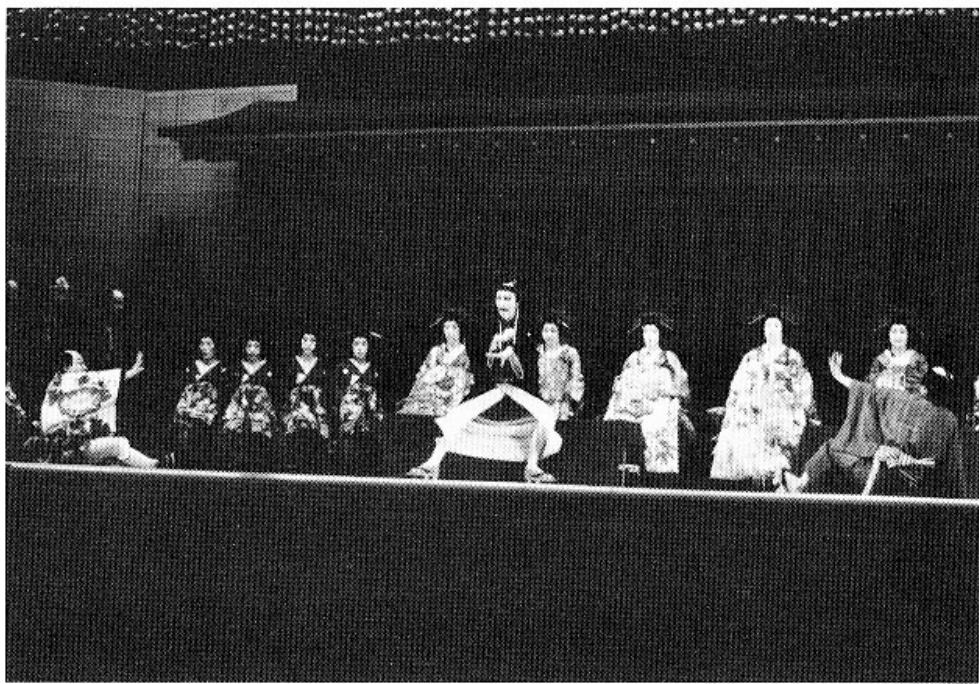
He strides onto the main stage and poses proudly, umbrella overhead and left fist thrust out of the breast of his kimono. The actor’s Stage Assistant watches, ready to take the umbrella. Kiyomoto Chorus behind the blinds sing, “Thus Sukeroku passes by lined-up courtesans with a dashing air!” (*Sukeroku: Nakamura Kanzaburō*) Page 64



"If you can't get a trivial sign of affection from the whores, what's the pleasure playing in the pleasure quarters? Ha, ha, ha! No titled noble, no fat moneybags can begin to buy what the whores of Edo give me for free every day. So, did someone say he wants a pipe? I'm the one to give it to him." (*Sukeroku*: Ichikawa Danjūrō) Page 65

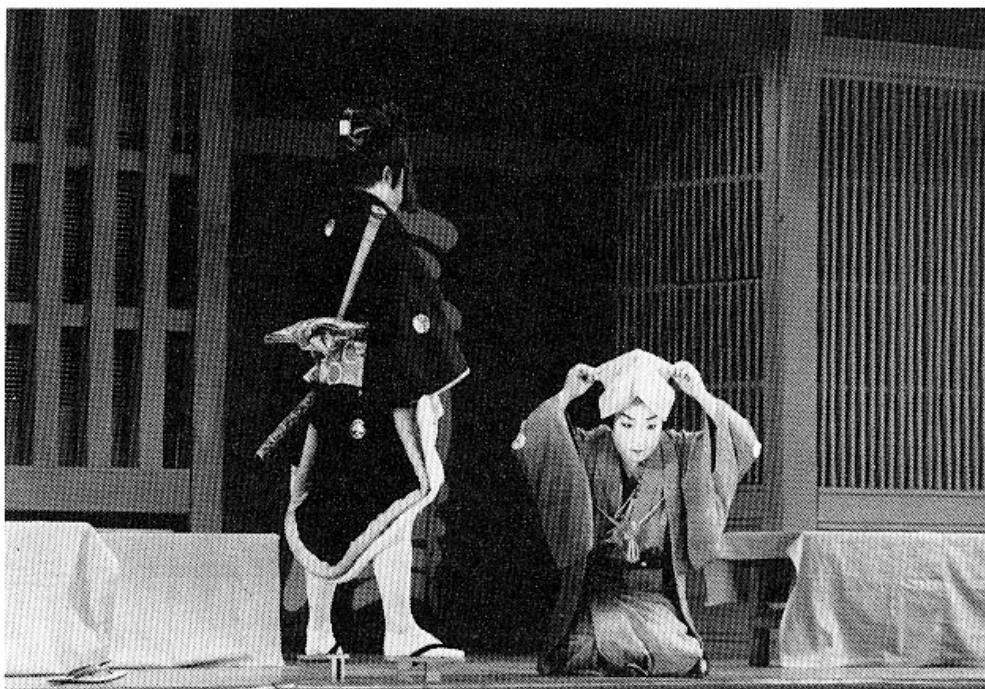


Challenged by Mombei, the Noodle Vendor sits defiantly. "Do as you damn please!" (*Noodle Vendor*: Ichimura Takenojō; *Mombei*: Jitsukawa Enjaku)



Sembei demands an apology from Sukeroku. "I do not recall any rascal who has opposed my patrician master Mombei. And now, sir, you, sir, heap insults upon his head, sir, in the form of noodles. Cheap noodles." (*Sembei*: Ichikawa Nedanji; *Sukeroku*: Nakamura Kanzaburō) Page 70

Sembei and Mombei fall to the ground in fright as Sukeroku strikes his chest with his fist and poses in a ferocious mie. "Scum! Bow before this face! Worship it!" (*Sukeroku*: Ichikawa Danjūrō) Page 72



The effeminate Samurai is shocked that Shinbei orders him to crawl through his legs. A Stage Assistant watches behind the bench. "Pass between your legs too?" (*Shinbei*: Nakamura Ganjirō; *Samurai*: Sawamura Gennosuke) Page 77

Dandy places a white handkerchief on his head as he prepares to crawl between Sukeroku's legs. (*Sukeroku*: Nakamura Kanzaburō; *Dandy*: Sawamura Tosshō) Page 79



Discovered by Ikyū, Sukeroku is about to draw his sword. Agemaki restrains him. (*Agemaki*: Nakamura Utaemon; *Sukeroku*: Ichikawa Danjūrō; *Ikyū*: Bandō Mitsugorō) Page 86



For their final battle Sukeroku and Ikyū strip down to white kimonos. Ikyū is tricked by Sukeroku into believing his opponent is wounded and so drops his guard. At that moment Sukeroku plunges his sword into Ikyū's side. He twists the blade cruelly in the wound. Ikyū gasps, his fingers claw the air.
(*Sukeroku*: Nakamura Kanzaburō; *Ikyū*: Ichikawa Danzō) Page 90



Sukeroku hides from Constables by leaping into a huge vat of water. Water cascades onto the stage. He knocks the bottom out of a bucket that he will place over his head so that he cannot be seen. A crouching Stage Assistant watches. (*Sukeroku*: Nakamura Kanzaburō) Page 90