

Higeyagura: The Fortified Beard

translated by Rika Kawamura, 2011

Husband: I am a resident of the capital. It is the day of a festival enthroning the new emperor in the Imperial Palace, and I, a heavily bearded man, have been appointed a position as a spear bearer to guard the procession in and out the city of Kyoto. There are no other suitable men with a beard as grand as mine. I am truly grateful for this honor. I think I shall call over my wife and have her groom my beard and sew me a ceremonial robe to celebrate. *(Walks to the center stage and faces the curtain.)* Hey there, are you home?

Wife: Did you call for me? What do you need?

Husband: Come, I have a favor to ask.

Wife: Certainly. *(The two enter: the HUSBAND stands in front of the Chorus seat and the WIFE in front of the Shite's site)* I'm a little wary when you say something like that- but what might it be?

Husband: Oh, it's nothing special. I was appointed as the spear bearer to guard the procession in and out the city of Kyoto for the festival enthroning the new emperor in the Imperial Palace because there are no other men who possesses a beard as grand and luxuriant as mine. Isn't that splendid?

Wife: My, my, that is just splendid. I'm sure you will be presented with an elaborate ceremonial robe for the occasion?

Husband: What absurdity! To be appointed this position is such an honor; why would they feel the need to add to it by presenting me with a robe? And, calling you meant nothing special by the way. I just needed you to groom my beard and prepare my robe.

Wife: How absurd! You're talking nonsense. How can we possibly afford the time and money to prepare you a robe when we are hardly making ends meet?

Husband: I'm not going to back down on this offer. I cannot take back my words, anymore than an Emperor could – they are absolute. You must prepare my outfit!

Wife: And yet you still talk nonsense. How can I possibly prepare an outfit given our circumstances? I know- that beard of yours is the root of all our problems. Something must be done. I've always thought it was filthy looking- this is the perfect opportunity to have it shaved.

Husband: My goodness, how can you be so ignorant! Whose beard do you think this is? This majestic beard is a gift from the heavens. Try touching it; it's irresistible!

Wife: I'm going to pull it out, no matter what you say. *(Heads toward the HUSBAND.)*

Husband: You're despicable! How dare you! There's no use letting you off easy. I am going to beat you so hard, you ungrateful hag! (*Hits the WIFE with a fan.*)

Wife: Ow, ow, ow! You lowlife! Abusing me like this won't do you any good!

Husband: Won't do me any good? How so?

Wife: I'll show you!

Husband: Who?

Wife: I will!

Husband: What a laugh. It's said that a woman talking back is the seed of a divorce. And yet you're still going at it? Shoo, shoo! Get lost! (*Chases off the WIFE with a fan.*)

Wife: Ow, ow, ow! (*Dashes to the First Pine.*) You're going to regret this!

Husband: Heh, as if I will!

Wife: I'm going to make you pay for this! Oh, the nerve of that man! (*Exits.*)

Husband: (*Faces the front of Shite's site.*) My, my, what a despicable woman. She's been talking back a lot recently- and now I've given her a good beating for it. I won't be satisfied until I show her who's the one in charge around here! But, I suppose I'll go to the back and have a nice nap first. (*Sits in front of the Flute seat.*)

Village Mediator: (*Standing in front of the First Pine.*): Oh, is it true, is it true? This is terrible! How can you stay calm in a situation like this? (*Enters the main stage and sits in front of the Stick-drum seat.*)

Husband: What's there to worry about?

Mediator: If I heard it correctly, didn't you have a feud with the Missus?

Husband: I wouldn't say it went far as a feud- I wanted to teach her a lesson or two for talking back to me.

Mediator: Well, she's so upset over it that she has gathered the local wives to devise a plan of attack.

Husband: What in the world are you talking about? What on earth could she possibly do with a bunch of women?

Mediator: Please don't underestimate them. They say they're coming armed with spears and swords.

Husband: What? With spears and swords, you say?

Mediator: Indeed, sir.

Husband: Well, I suppose I have to take some precaution then if they come armed- even though they're all just a bunch of women.

Mediator: Then let us prepare ourselves. Please follow me.

Husband: Certainly. *(He bends down in front of the Flute Player to encase his beard with a wooden "fortress.")*

Mediator: Let us first put up a fortress around this beard. *(When the HUSBAND stands, a large wooden box, shaped like a fortress, rests in front of his beard. He wields a long sword while the MEDIATOR waits by his side.)*

Husband: What a splendid idea.

Mediator: Now, guard your beard with this sword and all your might.

Husband: Thank you. Say, won't you come back and help me clean up the aftermath of this war? Your help would be appreciated.

Mediator: Of course.

Husband: I'm counting on you.

Mediator: Certainly. *(The MEDIATOR exits and the HUSBAND sits facing forward in front of the Waki seat.)*

(Lead by the WIFE, the VILLAGE WOMEN appear one-by-one onto the stage and line up along the Bridge as the flute, hand drum, and shoulder drum plays. From here on, the words are chanted in a mock serious Noh-style, rather than spoken.)

Wife: Although we vowed to stay together into our next life,

Village women: we are about to crash into rocky shores, pushed by waves of resentment.

Husband: *(Standing)* There's a fortress fortifying these 'whiskers of old bog moss.' Just try and get them!

Wife: Oh, what a hard-hearted man,

Village women: Oh, what a hard-hearted man indeed! But how can just one stand against so many? How pitiful, how pitiful!

Husband: Even if you outnumber me, you women still wouldn't dare touch my beard; You don't have the guts to step on a tiger's tail nor pluck a dragon's whisker.

Wife and Village women: Our arguing is useless; let us now rip off your beard. Prepare the short sword! On guard! (*Enters the main stage wielding spears.*)

Husband: This can't be happening!

Wife and Village women: He says this can't be happening; but now he pushes open the gates of his fortress, revealing the inner chamber, and swings his sword this way and that. (*The HUSBAND opens the doors of the fortress, unsheathes the long sword and slashes threateningly at the VILLAGE WOMEN*) We run away unable to bear the terror (*The VILLAGE WOMEN retreat onto the bridge.*)

Husband (*Spinning around triumphantly*): Hah! Yes! (*laughs.*)

Wife: At that moment, the wife's anger flares. (*The VILLAGE WOMEN reenter the main stage.*)

Wife and Village women: She strikes the fortress first, then all strike with bamboo rakes and hoes. (*The WIFE hooks onto the fortress and the rest of the women follow sequentially.*) We pull, "Heave-ho! Heave-ho!"

Husband: Oh god! Are you really going to pull out my beard?

Wife and Village women: Now he worries that we will indeed pull out his beard!

Husband: The end is near...

Wife and Village women: for he cannot win against the power of many. We're going to dismantle his fortress, his weak armor. (*The tear the fortress apart.*) Everyone gather quickly around! (*The WIFE and the VILLAGE WOMEN close in on the HUSBAND.*) I will snip your treasured beard with my tweezers and snatch it away. (*The WIFE pulls out extremely large tweezers and waves them menacingly.*) I will tug it out from the very roots. (*The WIFE yanks the HUSBAND's beard out. The HUSBAND either leaves the stage immediately, or collapses on the stage, and leaves disconsolately after the women.*)

Wife: (*She raises the tweezers clamping the prized beard triumphantly and chants a victory call.*) Hip, hip, hurray! (*The Wife leads the VILLAGE WOMEN off the stage.*)

