

GRANNY MOUNTAINS

A Cycle of Nō Plays

(The second of two volumes)

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ASAINA

(To music, Emma enters, walking with a staff and wearing the buaku mask. He stands at main spot facing back of stage.)

EMMA

Hell's own master Emma the King Hell's own
master Emma the King, he's off begging for
alms!

(He faces front.)

I'm the master of Hell, Emma the Great King.
People are getting smart these days; they pick any
one of the eight or nine Sects, and zippedy-doo,
they're zooming off to Paradise. Damn, Hell's
starving to death! So today King Emma himself is
going out to the crossing of the Six Ways. And
when a promising-looking sinner steps by, why, I'm
going to harry him right down to Hell!

(Below, Emma shows travel by taking two or
three steps forward, then back.)

My dear old home Helldown, good-bye, up and
away Helldown, good-bye, up and away now I
follow my footsteps now I follow my footsteps
till here I am at Crossroads of the Six Ways.
Hurrying that way, I've gotten to Crossroads of the
Six Ways. I'll just wait here, and when a promising-
looking sinner comes along, why, I'll harry him right
down to Hell.

(He goes to sit before position of \bar{n} Chorus.
Now Asaina enters, and stops at first pine. He has
a big bamboo pole.)

ASAINA

With strength at last down Asaina hurries on his
way to the Dark Reaches. You see here Asaina no
Samurō Yoshihide, whose name in the human realm is a
household word. Before I knew it, I found myself drawn

along on the winds of impermanence, and at present I'm en route to the Dark Reaches. Well, I'll just be easing on down there.

(He saunters onstage.)

EMMA Sniff! Sniff! Sniff! Aha! A sinner's come, I can tell, it stinks of man. Where's he headed, I wonder?

(He goes to Sideman's spot, then gropes and sniffs his way along toward mark post. On the way, he bumps straight into Asaina.)

Aha, a top-choice sinner! I'll harry him down to Hell, and fast!

(Emma addresses Asaina from before drums.)

You there, sinner! Move along!

(He makes a big production out of brandishing his staff, with many a ferocious gesture. Music is equally dramatic.)

Move along, quick, move along!

(Asaina, down front, just stands there.)

ASAINA Hey, you!

(Emma is by now at Sideman's spot.)

EMMA What?

ASAINA You, jitterbugging around like that right in front of me, who are you?

EMMA You don't know me?

ASAINA Nope. Sure don't.

EMMA I'm Hell's own master, Emma the Great King, that's who I am!

ASAINA Huh? Hell's own master, Emma the Great King?

EMMA In person.

ASAINA Bah, you look pretty seedy. I'd heard in the human

realm that the master of Hell, Great King Emma, wore a jeweled crown, was girded with boulders and adorned with chiseled silver and gold. I'd heard he glittered enough to light up the whole neighborhood. But it's just not true.

EMMA

Well now, once upon a time this same King Emma did indeed wear a jeweled crown; he was girded with boulders and adorned with chiseled silver and gold, and he glittered enough to light up the whole neighborhood. But people are getting smart these days; they pick any one of the eight or nine Sects, and zippedy-doo, they're zooming off to Paradise. Damn, Hell's starving to death! So today King Emma himself is out at the crossing of the Six Ways, figuring on harrying any promising-looking sinner who comes by right down to Hell. And here you are. Well, I'm going to harry you a whopper, and shoo you on down to Hell.

ASAINA

Fine! Then harry away! Pour it on!

EMMA

Then harry I will!

(He goes before drums.)

Hell, you see, is no distance; it's Paradise that's far. Now, sinner! Move along!

(Menacing music and ferocious gestures as before.)

Move along, quick, move along!

(Asaina does not budge. Emma speaks from Sideman's spot.)

Hey, you! Here King Emma's harrying you with all he's got, and you don't even budge. Who are you, huh?

ASAINA

You don't know me?

EMMA

Nope. Sure don't.

ASAINA I'm Asaina no Samurō Yoshihide, whose name in the human realm is a household word.

EMMA Huh? Asaina no Samurō Yoshihide?

ASAINA In person.

(Emma drops his staff, sits.)

EMMA Rats, I've really been had. You can bet I wouldn't have harried you if I'd known you were Asaina. But now I do know, I've got to harry you a whopper, and shoo you on down to Hell!

(He stands.)

ASAINA Fine! Then harry away! Pour it on!

EMMA You bet! Harry I will!

(He speaks from before drums.)

All right, Asaina! Move along!

(Harrying proceeds as before. Toward the end, Asaina saunters off to Sideman's spot, then to main spot.)

That's it! That's the way!

(Delighted, Emma straddles his staff and hops along down bridgeway; then he stops and waits for Asaina to catch up. Asaina, however, stops at center. Emma comes back, drops his staff, and, seizing Asaina's bamboo pole, tries to move it. As Asaina lets the pole move a little, Emma clings tighter and loses his balance, till he does a back-flip and lands at Sideman's spot.)

ASAINA King Emma, harry me a bit more!

(Emma gets up.)

EMMA Yow, I don't feel like harrying.

ASAINA I don't believe it.

(Asaina goes to main spot.)

EMMA Say, I've got a question for this guy. Ahoy! Ahoy!

ASAINA What's up?

EMMA I keep asking people who come by here what was behind Wada's Battle. But everyone's biased one way or another, and I can never get the true story. If you're the real Asaina, tell me what was behind Wada's Battle.

ASAINA That's no problem. I'll tell you all about it. Give me a stool.

EMMA Fine.

 (He fetches a stool from back of stage and brings it to center.)

Well now, tell me, tell me!

 (Asaina leaves his pole at main spot, comes to center.)

ASAINA Get back.

 (He pushes Emma away and sits on stool.)

EMMA What for?

 (He is now facing Asaina, to Asaina's right.)

ASAINA Sit down.

EMMA Damn, this sinner's rough with King Emma.

 (Asaina takes off his back a bundle of weapons called the Seven Implements, and thrusts it before Emma's face.)

ASAINA You see this?

EMMA Ouch, looks like trouble! What is it?

ASAINA These are the weapons I made my name with in the human realm.

EMMA I believe it, it looks like awful trouble. Come on, come on, tell me the story!

(Asaina gives the Seven Implements to stage-hand, who puts them with Asaina's pole at main spot.)

ASAINA

Now then, you wanted to know what was behind Wada's Battle. The fellow called Egara no Heida Tanenaga was abducted at Usui Pass, and not once but three times delivered up to Kamakura. Yoshimori, my father, so burned to wash away the shame--that Heida had been bound like a criminal--that he seized a helmet and put it on his white head. After that, who could have stayed behind? So on the second day of the fifth moon, we crowded against the south gate of Kamakura, and there all together gave a great battle yell.

EMMA

Goodness!

ASAINA

Well, that brother of mine yanked the heads off I don't know how many men, or split them from crown to sole; and the way I myself was tossing them around, like pebbles, was quite amazing to see. Just then Yoshimori, my father, sent me a message: 'I'm sure you can break down the gate, Asaina, so go to it!' 'By all means,' I replied. Down I jumped from my horse, and strode on over to the gate. 'Watch out!' the men on the other side were yelling. 'Asaina's going to break the gate down! Don't ever let him!' So they laid eight arc beams across, and drove in bolts and nails till the whole thing looked like the Mountain of Swords. Wondering what the job would take, I just took hold of the gate and teased it a little. Well, all that steel melted to water and ran off. Then I drew my Vajra Guardian sword, laid hold of the gate again, and gave a good shove. From inside they shoved back to hold me. Heave and shove back and forth we went at it, till everything was shaking just like in a big earthquake.

EMMA

No joke!

ASAINA But Asaina just got stronger and stronger. The eight arc beams snapped, the gate bar and the doors crashed inward, and the warriors inside, a full thirty of them, were crushed to death. It was just like packing rice into sushi balls.

EMMA I'd like to have had a good mouthful of that sushi!

ASAINA If you'd been there at the time, I'd have given you as much as you wanted.

EMMA Wonderful! Keep talking!

ASAINA Just then, one of the soldiers from the palace, a fellow named Igarashi no Kobunji, decided he'd try and finish me off. 'What next?' I thought to myself, and grabbed that Kobunji and pulled him close.

(He grabs Emma, shakes him right and left as he tells the story, and finally tosses him off toward Sideman's spot.)

Then I pushed him up on the forward hump of his saddle and whizz! to the right, whizz! to the left, whizz, whizz, whizz, wheel! spun him round and round.

(Emma gets up after his hard landing.)

EMMA Ow, I don't want to hear any more about Wada's Battle! No more! No more!

ASAINA You just keep listening a while.

EMMA But I don't want to, I tell you!

ASAINA Then guide me to the Pure Land!

EMMA Damn this Asaina, even King Emma he treats just as he pleases! I'll take you in my direction.

ASAINA You mean you won't guide me?

EMMA You can say that again.

ASAINA You're sure?

EMMA Sure I'm sure.

ASAINA Positive?

EMMA Final.

(Now Asaina begins singing. His song is picked up by Chorus, which has by now slipped in through the slit door, and is sitting at back of stage.)

ASAINA Asaina now bursting with wrath

CHORUS Asaina now bursting with wrath

(Asaina stands and goes to main spot.)

and servantless, with no one to carry his bearpaw,
his man-mower, his iron cudgel,

(He picks up the Seven Implements, to which stagehand has tied the bamboo pole, and loads them over Emma's shoulders.)

on Emma the King on Emma the King dumps them
without ado; so Asaina is off, bound for the
Pure Land.

(At main spot, Asaina stops dancing.
Emma staggers out with his load, followed by
Asaina. Chorus exits via slit door.)