

THE POWER OF MUSIC

A Japanese legend

Adapted by Carole L. Cooney

The hichiriki is a Japanese instrument, somewhat like a flute. It is difficult to play and is one of the “sacred” instruments, producing sounds that are haunting.

Setting: A harbor in Japan

Characters:

Narrator

Kazuo, a musician

Captain Raiden, a pirate

Narrator: Kazuo, a fine hichiriki musician, was traveling home in his boat from a week’s trip to the North. He had spent seven days playing music at many village halls and was very tired.

Kazuo: Ahhh... the moon hides in and out of the clouds tonight. I am so glad to be close to my village for soon I will lay my head on my pillow and get a good night’s sleep.

Narrator: The trees by the harbor were casting long shadows on the water. In the distance a large sailing boat moved slowly toward Kazuo’s boat.

Captain: Drop the anchor! Pull up the oars, men! Move to your posts and make no sounds!

Kazuo: (blinking his eyes) Is that a boat coming toward me? The shadows make it difficult to see clearly.

Captain: (calling) Who goes there! Halt your boat!

Kazuo: (calling) Yes, sir! I’ll do as you say.

Captain: Climb on board, men! Take charge of this boat and make it quick!

Narrator: The pirates scrambled onto Kazuo’s boat. Kazuo had no way to defend himself and he was very frightened. He thought they would kill him, so he climbed to the top of his boat’s cabin.

Kazuo: Captain, please hear me. I am Kazuo, a poor, humble musician. Take whatever pleases you, but do not kill me. I have been away to the north playing my hichiriki. The only thing I can give you is my music. You and your men look as if you’ve been struggling for a long time. Please, please, allow me to play a melody I have been working on for many years. It will be my gift to you so that you will remember this night.

Narrator: Captain Raiden lowered his head and thought a few moments. He remembered his grandmother telling him about the sacredness of the hichiriki. He remembered the beauty of its sounds when he heard it played. He then raised his head and gave his men orders.

Captain: Men! Stop what you are doing. Sit! We will listen to the music this man makes on the hichiriki.

Narrator: Once the men were seated, Kazuo, thinking this would be the last time he would ever make music, began to play a haunting melody. It was so beautiful that tears began to flow from his eyes. The music floated out of the boat, over the waves and into the harbor.

The pirates listened in silence. They, too, had tears in their eyes. When the music ended, Captain Raiden stood tall.

Captain: Most humble musician, I came to take your boat but your playing the hichiriki has eased my mind and softened my heart. The tears in my eyes show that I could never harm you. Men, quickly get into our boat! Most excellent man, we leave you in peace.

Narrator: Kazuo's face beamed with joy as he watched the pirates sail away. He held his hichiriki close to his heart. Once again, it proved its sacred power.