Seirai the Falconer and the King of Hell

(Seirai)

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Seirai

Seirai’s Fellow Huntsmen

Emma, King of Hell

Demons

Dogs

(EMMA comes on, followed by his demon bodyguards.)

EMMA (Singing.)

Emma, the king of hell,

The great king of hell, Emma

Now ascends into the mundane world

To beg for alms.

DEMON 1

(Singing.)

To beg for alms.

EMMA  These days,humans in the mundane world have become so very clever with the laws of their eight or nine different religions that they all troupe off to paradise, both those who do Zen meditations and those who adhere to the Pure Land sect, throwing hell into a desperate state of famine. As a result, I, the Great King Emma, accompanied by the most hellish of my demon army, have made up my mind to go up to the Crossing of the Six Roads. Any and all sinners who come by, we will capture and eat on the spot.

(Singing.)

From the home I love,

From my beloved home in hell,

I venture forth, From my beloved home in hell,

I venture forth,

Allowing my feet to lead me where’er they will.

(Speaking.) The king of hell, Great King Emma is I. Allowing my feet to lead me where’er they will,  I now arrived at the Crossing of the Six Roads Traveling with urgency, I now find myself at the Crossing of the Six Roads. I say, Demons, are you there?

DEMONS Here.

EMMA There you are. If any sinners come along, we must torment and capture them, so keep a careful lookout.

DEMONS As you say, Sir.

SEIRAI (Singing.)

I am a sinner who has never committed a crime,

Somebody come and help me on my way.

(Speaking.) I am known throughout the mundane world as Seirai the Falconer. Life expectance is set for no one, so urged on by the winds of transience, I am now headed for the netherworld.

(Singing.)

Throwing off regrets for the familiar mundane world,

Regrets for the familiar mundane world,

I proceed with faltering steps,

And now arrive at the crossing of the six roads..

(Speaking.) With unexpected speed, I have now arrived at the crossing of the six roads. I have been told that one becomes confused at this point. I will take care to avoid confusion as I continue on my way.

DEMON 1 Suddenly I smell a human, I smell a human.

DEMON 2 I too distinctly smell a human.

DEMON 1 It must certainly be a sinner coming this way. Let’s torment and capture him quickly.

DEMON 2 That is a fine idea.

DEMON 1 Hey, you sinner.

DEMONS 1&2 Come this way quickly.

SEIRAI I am not one who should be tormented.

DEMON 1 So what were you in the mundane world?

SEIRAI I am Seirai the Falconer.

DEMON 2 Then is not the falcon you carry on your arm a falcon that catches birds?

SEIRAI That it is indeed.

DEMON 1 Then that means that you are guilty of the great sin of taking of life.

DEMON 2 Truly a great sinner.

SEIRAI How vexing and what a great bother. A Falconer is one who uses a falcon to catch birds. In other words, it is for this purpose that I feed and nurture this falcon. This could not possibly constitute taking of life.

DEMON 1 No matter how light or heavy your sin may be, we must torment you and present you to Emma the great god of hell.

DEMON 2 That we must.

DEMON 1 So hurry up, you sinner.

EMMA Hey, I say, who is this sinner?

DEMON 1 Answer him honestly.

SEIRAI I am Seirai the Falconer. A Falconer is one who uses a falcon to catch birds. In other words, it is for this purpose that I feed and nurture this falcon. This could not possibly constitute taking of life.

EMMA What nonsense you jabber. Is it not true that you force your falcon to catch birds against its will, causing the falcon a great deal of trouble, and that you kill the birds caught by the falcon and eat them yourself?

SEIRAI You speak without the least knowledge of the falconing art, and it is for that reason that you make such a mistaken declaration, for the truth of the matter is that we use falcons to catch all sorts of birds, and immediately let them eat them, and what is left after they have eaten, we dispose of for ourselves. To begin with what is known as falconing in the mundane world is a pastime of the nobility, and is definitely not considered a crime.

EMMA Hey, how could it not be a crime? To begin with it consists of a means of providing food, not as a pastime for the nobility, but a skill of the lower classes.

SEIRAI Actually, it was pastime of emperors of the ancient past. So I will relate to you how and when and where it originated.

EMMA Well, then relate to me the origins of falconing, quickly tell me the details of the pastime of falconing.

SEIRAI I will do as you say, Sir. (Speaking in narrative style.) The felicitous way to go best about the pastime of falconing is to put a hood on its head for its eyes are sharp as the morning star, and its beak and claws are like crescent moons. With the summit of the mountains in the foreground and the rivers behind, the falcon folds its wings and arranges its lovely feathers, for those feathers are the most felicitous element of its appearance. And its claws are of the sharpest and most efficient for catching birds, in every aspect. And from the tip of their tails to the bells attached to their necks, are impervious to the attack of large or small rocks. On top of this, falcons go by different names in different countries. In the Land of Makada, they are called Shu-ou, in the Land of Shinra, they are called Kocho, in the Land of Kudara, they are called Kuricho, and in the ancient Land of China, they are called Shucho. And in Japan, they are known as Taka. During the 42nd year of the reign of the 17th generation Emperor Nintoku falcon hunting was first introduced by setting falcons in flight to case pheasants. Thus was falconing brought into being. And it has been passed down to the present day in the mundane world and the greatest of all sporting pastimes. Is this not an interesting tale?

EMMA Here, here, hearing your tale, has put me in an awful fright. So do you mean that falconing is of interest and enjoyable?

SEIRAI Why, there is nothing anywhere that exceeds it in in enjoyment and interest.

EMMA Then you must show me how falconing is done.

SEIRAI If there is a bird about, I can show you how it is caught.

EMMA That over there is known as the Mountain of Death. In its foothills there should be many birds.

SEIRAI Do you have any dogs?

EMMA What are dogs needed for?

SEIRAI A dog trainer brings out his dogs, and causes them to dash about among the grassy plains to flush out the birds.

EMMA There are any number of dogs along the Road of Beasts.

SEIRAI There is also a need for a number of beaters to beat down the high grasses.

EMMA Use my demons as beaters. And we will include any sinners who are already fallen into hell. Hey, you demons, go bring dogs from the Way of Beasts and also bring any sinners who look as though they would be good beaters.

DEMONS As you say, Sir.

SINNERS Here, here, where are you taking us?

DEMONS The great king of hell has something for you to do.

SINNERS This is most frightening.

DEMONS We have brought you dogs and sinners who were in hell.

EMMA Here, here, Seirai, do your falconing for us.

SEIRAI First we must send out the beaters.

EMMA I will lead the dogs.

SEIRAI That is a fine idea. (Singing.)

Here we go a-falconing

CHORUS

Here we go a-falconing,

The great king of hell releases his dogs,

The demons beat the underbrush,

On male bird flies out

from the Mountain Death,

Seirai sets his falcon flying

And the bird is captured.

EMMA There, you captured it.

SEIRAI First present the captured prey to Emma, the great king of hell.

DEMONS With all our hearts. Here is the prey.

EMMA Let me see it. I will eat it right away. Meri, meri, bari, bari. Well, I must say, how delicious. It is far more tender than humans. You demons also eat some of it. Well, I must say you have shown me something most unusual. I was most entertaining. So now I will reward you with whatever you may desire.

SEIRAI For that I am most grateful.

EMMA I assume that the thing you most desire is to be led to paradise, but I beg you to come along to hell with me, so that I can continue to enjoy falconing with you.

SEIRAI My most ardent desire is to return once more to the mundane world.

EMMA If you go back to the muldane world you will continue to be troubled with pain and sorrow. Also, there has never been human who has come into the netherworld and succeeded in going back to the mundane world.

SEIRAI Oh, but I have left important things yet undone in the mundane world. On top of this, there are birds called cranes in the mundane world. So I will send you much prey, for please allow me to part with you and return to the mundane world.

EMMA In that case, I will give you the reward of just three more years in the mundane world. When those three years have passed, you must come back here quickly.

SEIRAI As you say, Sir.

EMMA So during that time, I will see to it that nobody dies of illness, nor dies by being shot with an arrow from a bow. So send me prey whenever you find it convenient.

SEIRAI As you say, Sir.

EMMA (Singing.)

I say, I say, Seirai.

I grant you leave to return

To the mundane world for three years.

During that time, you must catch

Pheasants, ducks, cranes, and geese,

And send them here to me

As you have promised.

But seeing you leave is

so deeply saddening to me,

So now I call you back

To present you with my jeweled crown,

My sash of stone,

So please accept them,

As you travel back once more

To the mundane world.