

Hiroshima by Michael Wilkinson

- I. Araku Sensei prepares for his daily class,
Tying the straps of his hakama,
He smooths the pleats, each representing an ideal
Of the samurai: honor, courage, fidelity, integrity,
Courtesy, sincerity and benevolence.
He has come to teach and to train, to battle
A formidable enemy, the dark and angry
Lion that dwells within his heart.

Class begins with a bow;
The white gis and black hakamas
Swirl in movement, in harmony,
A symphony of possibilities.

With each throw and fall, each slap, each lesson,
Each drop of sweat that dampens the resilient tatami,
Araku Sensei hears a bell toll a promise:
“We shall not repeat the evil.”

- II. Ishikawa bows before the sword,
Old before his grandfather’s grandfather
Received it as a gift from Tokugawa himself
For services rendered.

Long and curved, sharper than the summer sun,
It rests on its stand, enshrined
In the Tokyo apartment
The Ishikawas call home.

It has killed more men than memory permits,
And in the darkest part of the night,
Their souls restlessly prowled
The worn carpeting of the narrow hallway.

The blade, destined to kill no more
Still is wielded in another battle,
The war that rages in each man’s heart.

The deadly edge stands for a new destiny:
The fire-forged temper of compassion,
The sundered family of man reconciled anew,
The sword so sharp it cuts things together.

Ishikawa bows again, fixes his tie,

Looks in on his sleeping children,
And leaves his apartment, a smile on his face.

- III. High above the earth, a kite bobs and weaves,
In the cobalt sky where decades ago,
A new sun scorched the souls of the world.

Far below, the green grass yields to silent
Monuments to peace, testaments to the howling
Rage of Oppenheimer's deadly work,
The ghastly genie uncorked, with no way home,
No way to put him back in the bottle.

The strings of folded paper cranes festoon the shrine
To Sadako Sasaki, dead at fourteen of radiation poisoning;
The Peace Bell rings at the hands of mourners.

Faces turn to smile at the boy,
Who lets his brightly colored kite run.
Soon it will be time to go, to wind in the string,
Giving the sky back to the white doves
Who flock in the City of Peace.
But for now, the boy grins,
Delighted in the dance of air and sky,
Of paper and thin shafts of bamboo,
Far above the memory of skull and shadow.