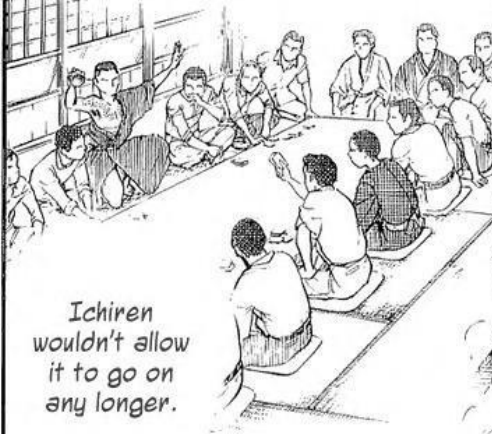


His "influential contacts" were mostly yakuza.

The company had no way of avoiding them.

The actors often left their gambling houses in debt.



Ichiren wouldn't allow it to go on any longer.



Hayami sponsored Moonlight Theater and the company performed plays in his buildings.

He invested in touring productions, too. Most of our profits went to him.



From time to time, there was even violence.

Soon, Moonlight Theatre was so badly crippled that it could no longer stage plays.



While Ichiren trained new actors, he was constantly forced to borrow actors from other companies.

He led Daito Art Production to prosperity and continued with productions of his own.



However, Hayami's presence had grown too great to be ignored.

Since he had money, he was able to recruit most of our company.

THAT MAN DOESN'T KNOW A THING ABOUT THEATER!

BAM



Ichiren cut all ties with Hayami.





Ichiren!

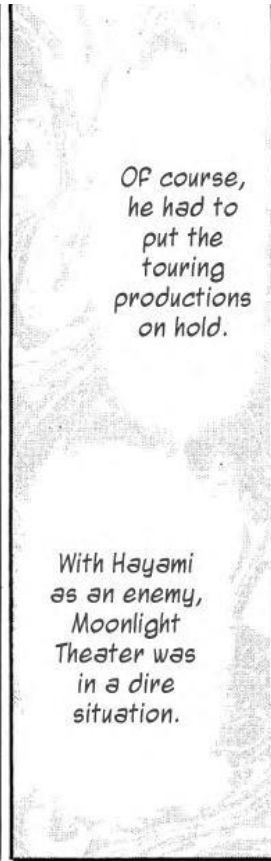


OXYGEN!

QUICK!

That was when its sparkle started to fade...

TSUKI-KAGE-SAN!



Of course, he had to put the touring productions on hold.

With Hayami as an enemy, Moonlight Theater was in a dire situation.

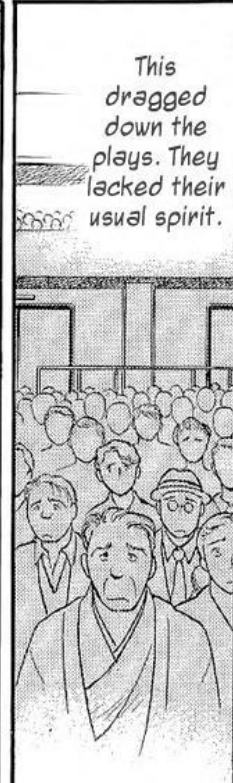


Arguments broke out between the new actors and the borrowed ones, causing most of them to leave.

Ichiren was torn between the two opposing sides.



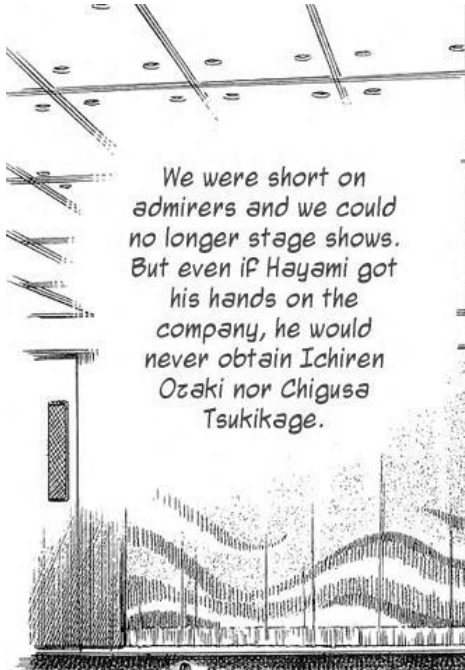
The audiences grew smaller and smaller.



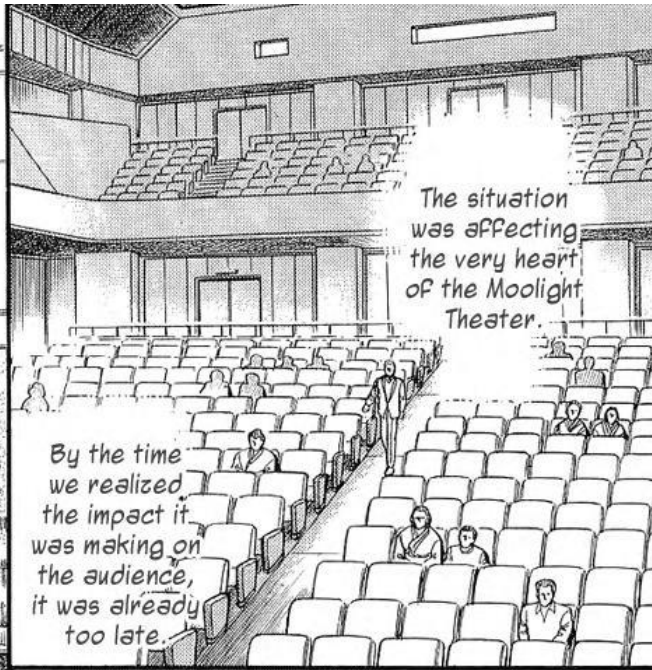
This dragged down the plays. They lacked their usual spirit.



Ichiren took great care with the new actors. To spare their feelings, he kept rewriting his scripts and changing his direction.

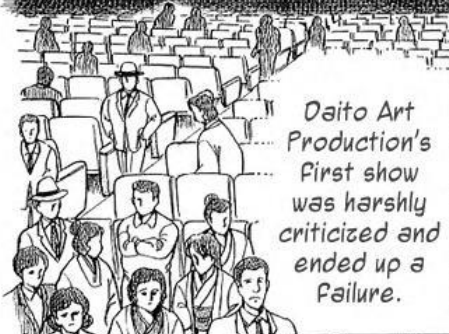


We were short on admirers and we could no longer stage shows. But even if Hayami got his hands on the company, he would never obtain Ichiren Ozaki nor Chigusa Tsukikage.



The situation was affecting the very heart of the Moonlight Theater.

By the time we realized the impact it was making on the audience, it was already too late.



Daito Art Production's first show was harshly criticized and ended up a failure.



Moonlight Theater went into such deep debt that Ichiren had to resort to loans.



He suddenly made an offer for the rights to stage it.

He offered huge amounts of money to Ichiren, but he was turned down every time.



Perhaps he was still too attached to the trademark show of the Moonlight Theatre, *The Crimson Goddess*.

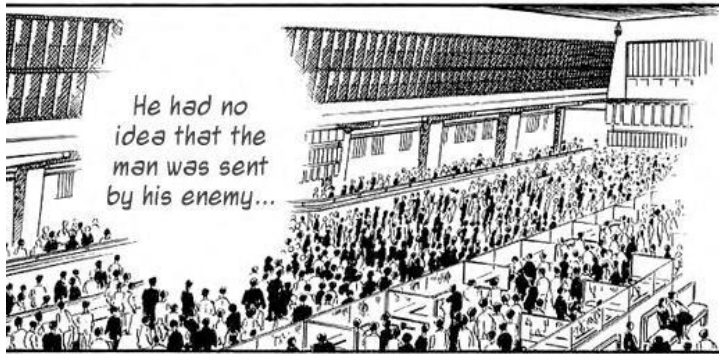
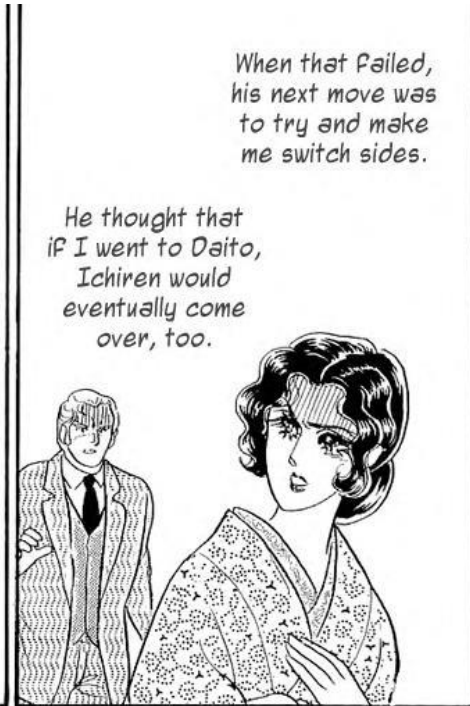


The second and third shows were no better. An upstart in the field, Hayami immediately lost all credibility as a producer.

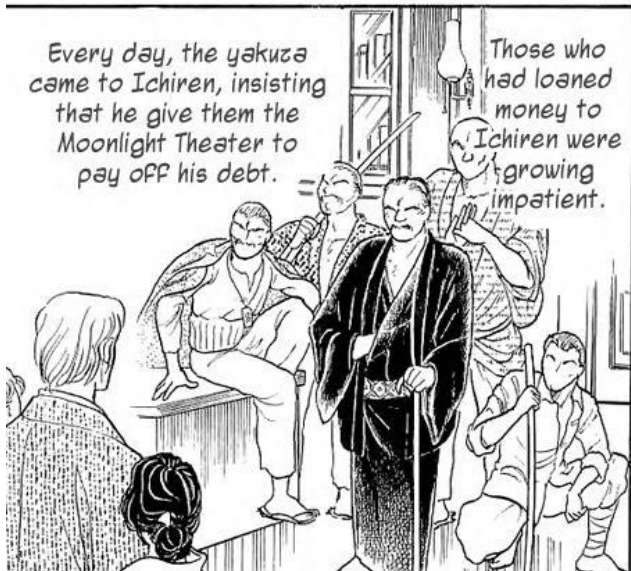


But I was immovable.

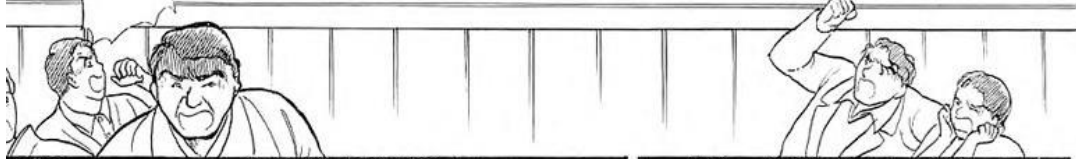
So he changed tactics again.



Lured by the promise of large gains, Ichiren took loans and risked everything, thinking he could pay back the loans with the money gained from the investments.

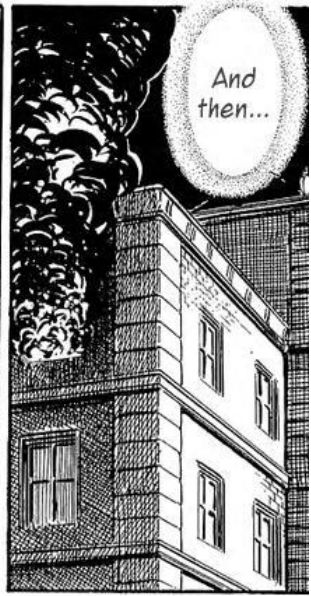


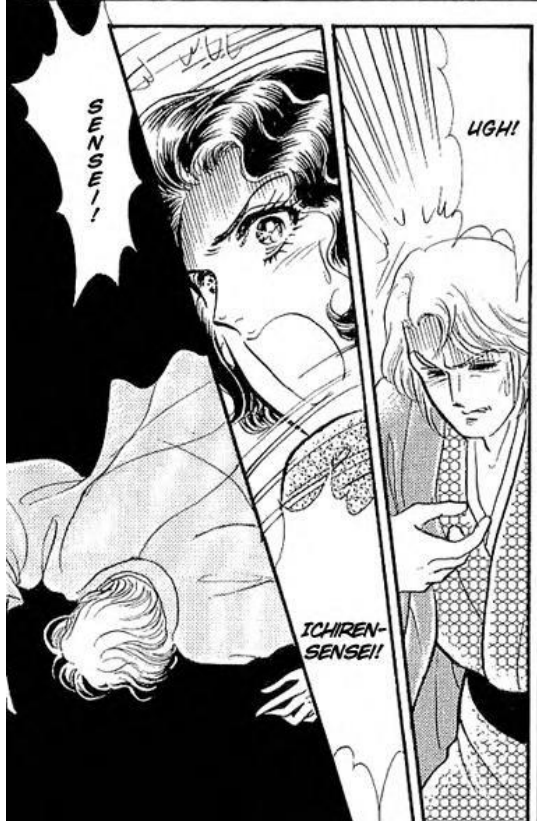


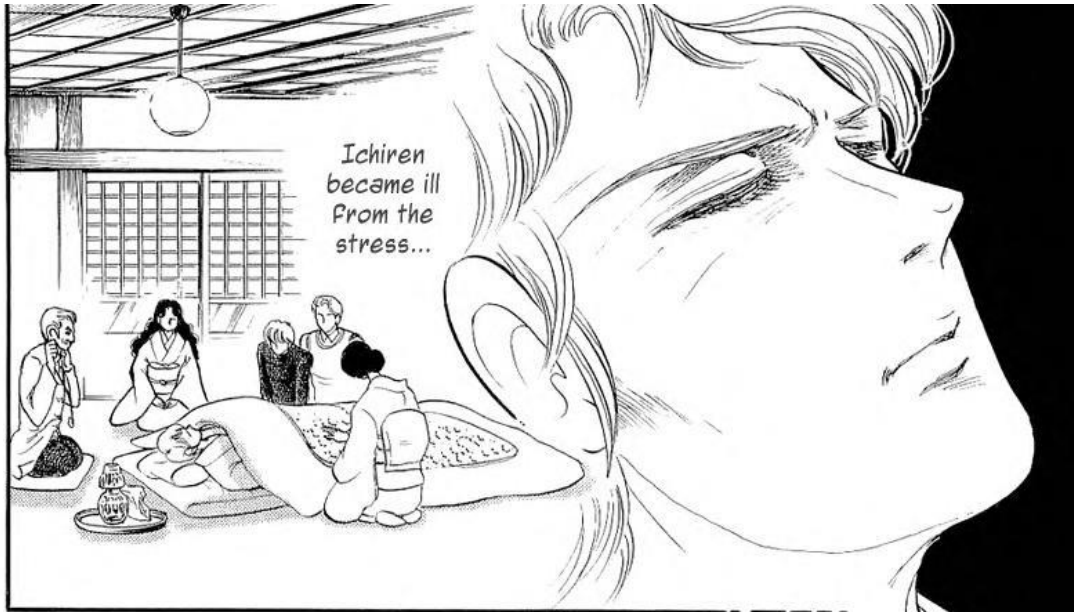




Fortunately, it wasn't a big fire, but it was enough to stop us from staging more shows.







Ichiren became ill from the stress...



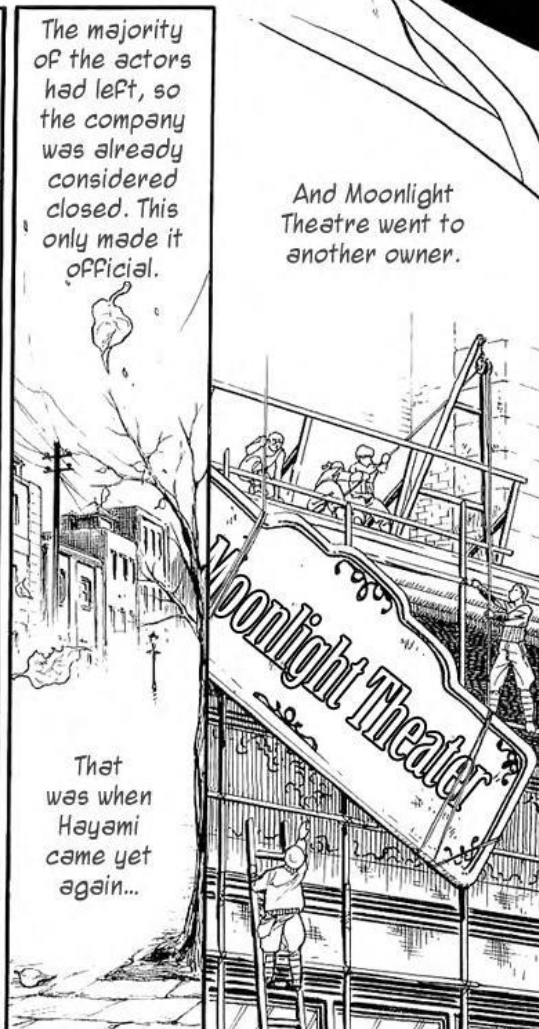
YOU MUSTN'T LET SUCH A TREASURE BE LOST!

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT SELLING ME THE RIGHTS TO THE CRIMSON GODDESS?

ICHIREN-SAN, YOU REALLY ARE IN A TIGHT SPOT.

Then he insisted that I also join Daito!

DAITO ART PRODUCTION WILL PROVIDE A MAGNIFICENT STAGE FOR IT!



The majority of the actors had left, so the company was already considered closed. This only made it official.

And Moonlight Theatre went to another owner.

That was when Hayami came yet again...

But even after Ichiren recovered, he didn't return to directing.



He kept his living expenses low to save money for Moonlight Theater.



MOONLIGHT THEATER IS NOT DEAD!

ONE DAY IT WILL RETURN!



NO MATTER HOW BAD THINGS GET FOR ME, I'LL NEVER BOW MY HEAD TO YOU!

GET THE HELL OUT!

THE CRIMSON GODDESS IS NOT FOR SALE!



His wife and son were gone.

Ichiren's life was drifting aimlessly...

I took some parts in films to earn money and to ease Ichiren's sadness, but Hayami bought the company that produced my films.

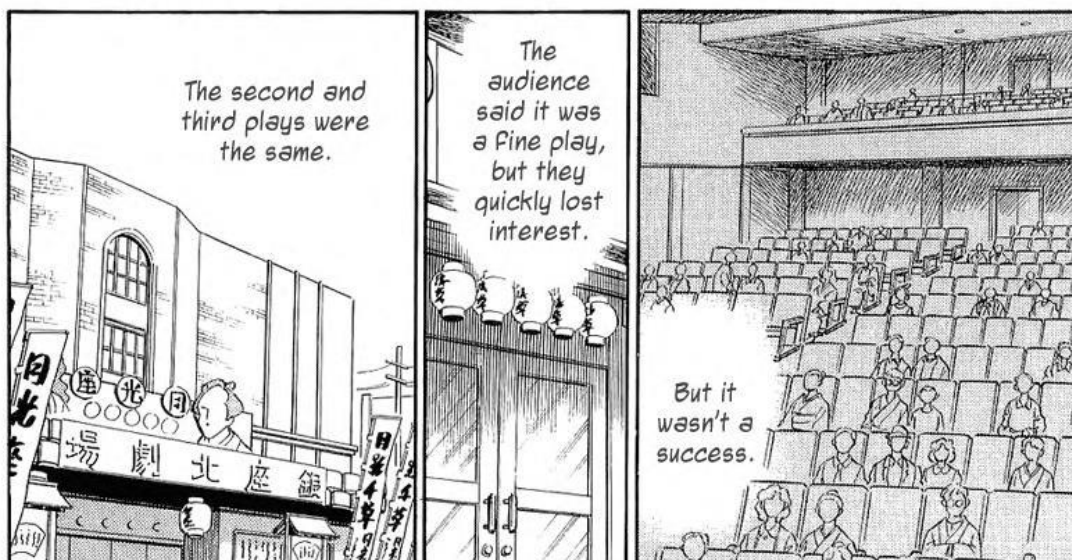
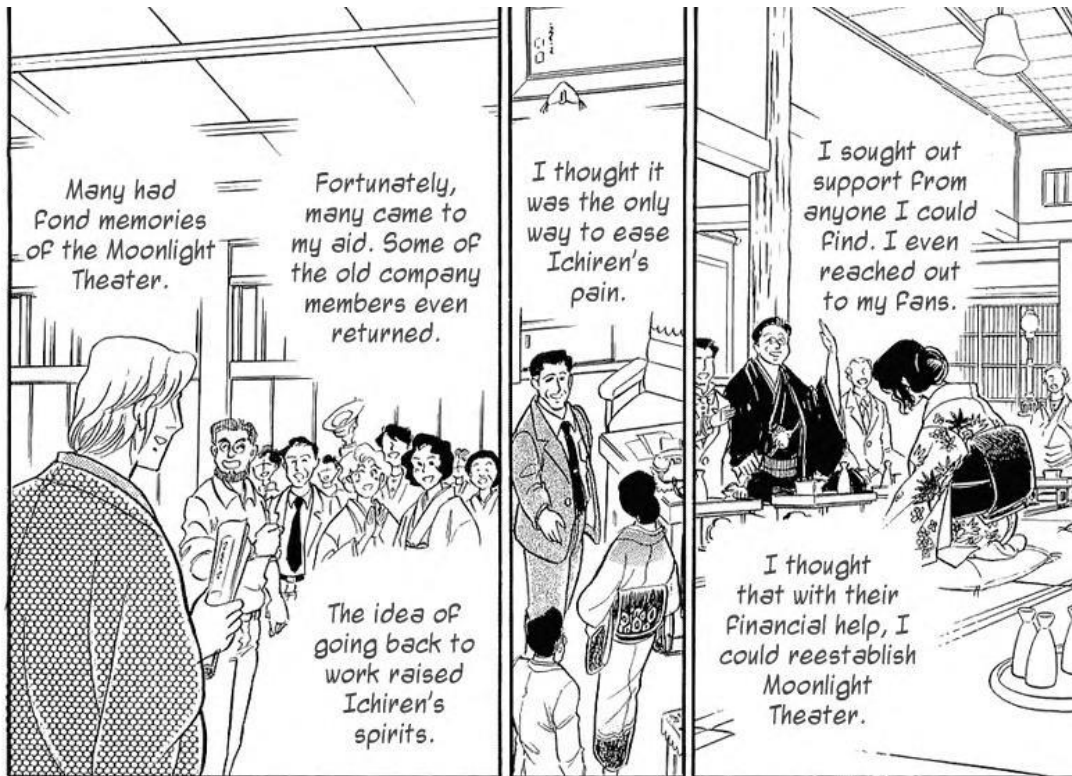


Sensei...



I was trapped.

I had signed a contract with that studio, so I couldn't work for anyone else.





Sensei...

You still have me...

Even if everyone else leaves, I am still at your side...

Always. No matter what happens...

Chigusa...



Ichiren's self confidence was completely shattered.

Our Financiers took back their money and the company members left again.



NO, SENSEI!

YOUR ACTING TALENT WOULD BE WASTED.

I CAN'T GO ANYWHERE WITHOUT YOU!

DIDN'T YOU SAY I AM THE OTHER HALF OF YOUR SOUL?



SENSEI!

YOU'D BE WELCOMED ANYWHERE.

YOU HAVE TO DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM ME, CHIGUSA.

IF YOU CONTINUE TO STAY AT MY SIDE, NOTHING GOOD WILL COME OF IT, CHIGUSA!





The cinema section was also going without a glitch.

Daito's original transport branch expanded all over Japan.



They were selected to produce shows with mass appeal.

Musicals, magic shows and variety became common sights in some theaters.

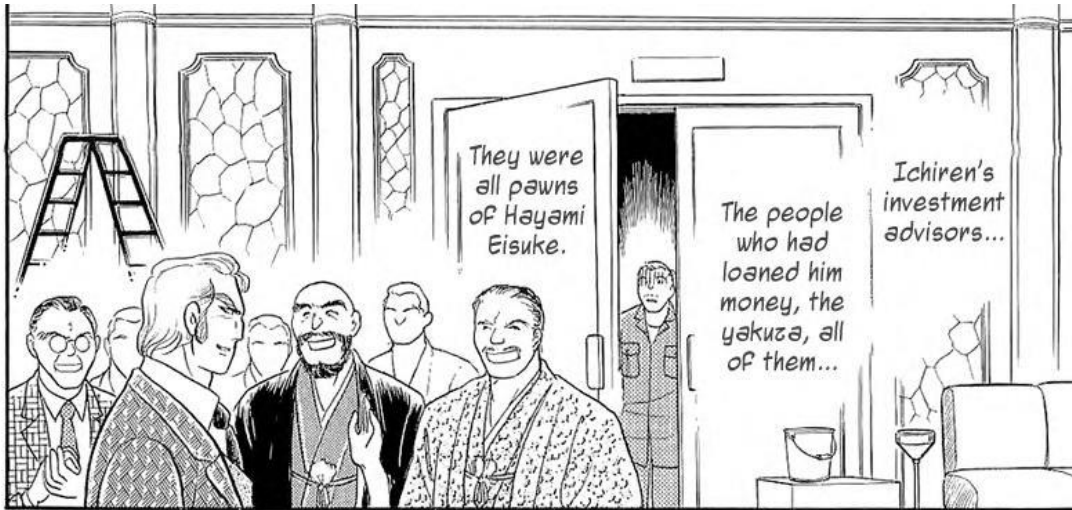


Once he took over Moonlight Theater, we understood what his goal had been all along.

Hayami had connections in politics and finance, and also in the underworld.



With all his connections, Hayami managed to gain an incredible reputation.



They were all pawns of Hayami Eisuke.

The people who had loaned him money, the yakuza, all of them...

Ichiren's investment advisors...



I'll never forgive him!



HE WAS THE ONE PULLING THE STRINGS...

THAT MAN IS BEHIND ALL THIS!

The custodian of the theater confessed to me.

IN ORDER TO STEAL THIS THEATRE FROM ICHIREN-SENSEI.



HA HA HA

I SURE WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS TO GET THE MOONLIGHT THEATER.



HA HA HA

SIR, YOUR CAR HAS ARRIVED.





Y...
YES...

SIR,
THE CAR,
IF YOU
PLEASE.



He was like
a mouse,
Frozen under
the eyes of
a hawk.



I'd never
seen him so
distracted.



Never!
No matter
what may
happen!

I'll
never
forgive
him!

One day,
I'll drag him
to the darkest
depths of
hell!



He ran
away without
uttering a
single word.

CHIGUSA-
SAN...



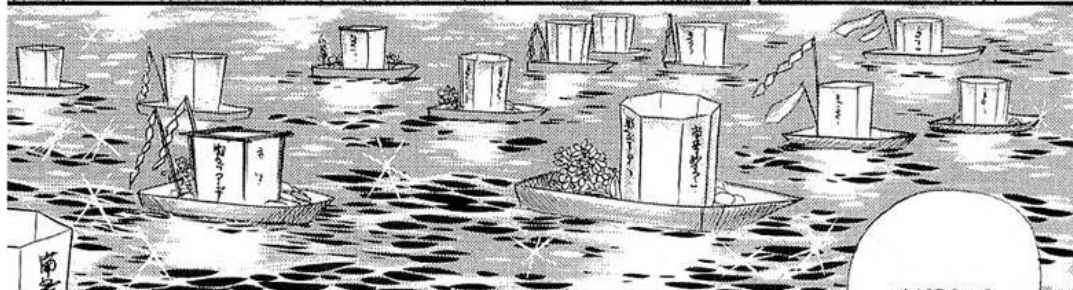
One day...

OOH HOO

CHIGUSA-SAN!

How I wish that one day....

OOH



AND WHY WOULD THEY WISH FOR THAT?

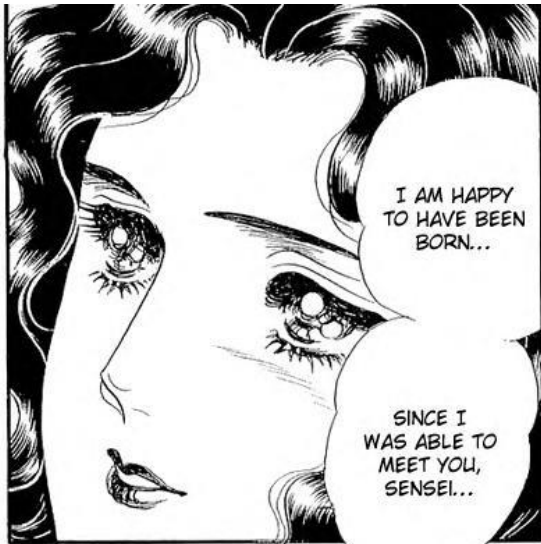
PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY WISHED FOR IT!

AND WHY ARE THEY REBORN?



WHERE DO PEOPLE GO WHEN THEY DIE, CHIGUSA?

WHO KNOWS... MAYBE THEY RETURN WHERE THEY WERE BEFORE THEY WERE BORN.



I AM HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN BORN...

SINCE I WAS ABLE TO MEET YOU, SENSEI...



WELL...

SO THEY MAY BE ABLE TO MEET, LIKE WE DID...

CHIGLI-SA...



CHIGLI-SA...

THIS IS ENOUGH TO MAKE ME HAPPY...



I KNOW I WAS BORN TO MEET YOU.

YOU'VE DONE MORE THAN ENOUGH.

I'VE NEVER DONE A THING FOR YOU.

A USELESS MAN LIKE MYSELF?

CHIGLI-SA...

I AM SURE OF IT.

YOU HAVE!



THE AGE DIFFERENCE NEVER MATTERED TO ME!

I... AM OLDER THAN YOU...

I'VE LOVED ONLY YOU.

I LOVE YOU, ICHIREN-SENSEI!
I HAVE SINCE I WAS ONLY A GIRL!

I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!
ICHIREN-SENSEI!

LET ME LOVE YOU!



SENSEI ...

HAS EVER SAID WORDS LIKE THAT TO ME...

THANK YOU, CHIGUSA.
NO ONE...

MEETING YOU WAS THE MOST WONDERFUL THING IN MY LIFE...

BEING TOGETHER WITH ME CAN'T BRING YOU ANY JOY!

I ONLY MADE YOU SUFFER...

BEING BY YOUR SIDE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO MAKE ME HAPPY!

DON'T SAY THAT!



Ichiren...!

I AM NO LONGER YOUR TEACHER...

SENSEI ...

STOP CALLING ME THAT, CHIGUSA.

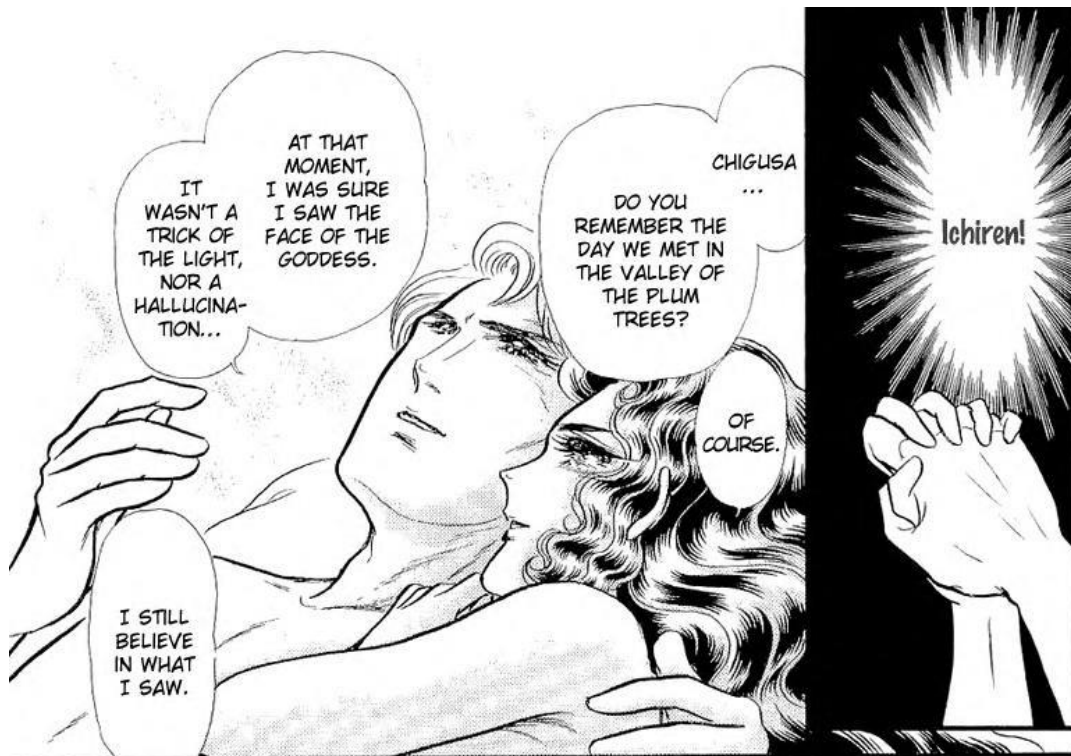
IT'S ICHIREN.

Aah!
I love you!

I love you,
Ichiren!

We share the
same soul!

I was born
to meet you!



IT WASN'T A TRICK OF THE LIGHT, NOR A HALLUCINATION...

AT THAT MOMENT, I WAS SURE I SAW THE FACE OF THE GODDESS.

CHIGUSA ... DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY WE MET IN THE VALLEY OF THE PLUM TREES?

OF COURSE.

I STILL BELIEVE IN WHAT I SAW.



Ichiren!

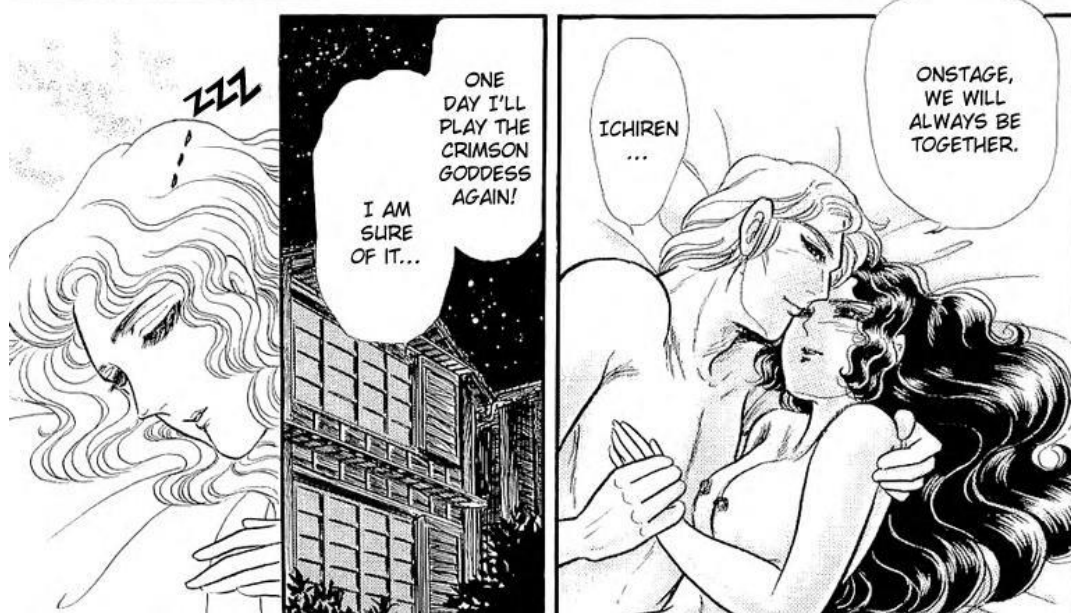


YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE ABLE TO EXPRESS IT.

WHEN YOU ACT ONSTAGE, YOU GIVE LIFE TO MY SOUL.

DON'T FORGET IT.

ONLY YOU CAN INTERPRET THE CRIMSON GODDESS, CHIGUSA...

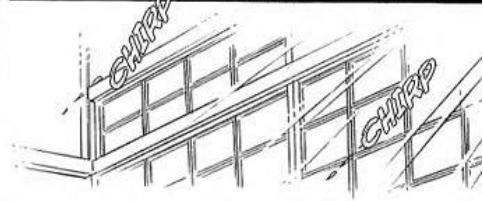


ZZZ

I AM SURE OF IT... ONE DAY I'LL PLAY THE CRIMSON GODDESS AGAIN!

ICHIREN ...

ONSTAGE, WE WILL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER.





Following my intuition, I went to the Former Moonlight Theater.

I didn't know why, but I had a bad feeling.

ICHIREN!

Ichiren
hanged
himself
backstage.





MEETING YOU
WAS THE MOST
WONDERFUL THING
IN MY LIFE...

CHIGUSA...

He left me the
staging rights
to *The Crimson
Goddess*...

ICHIREN!



I WAS
LIVING
FOR HIM!

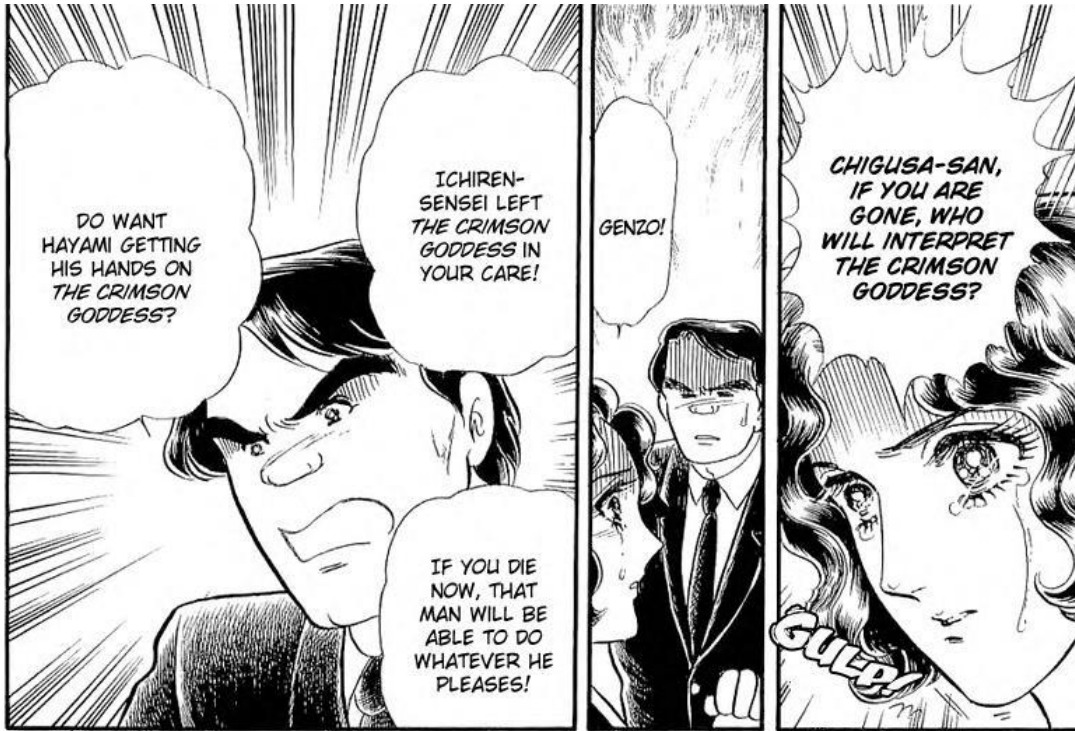
HOW CAN
I GO ON
WITHOUT
HIM?

LET ME DIE,
GENZO!

LET ME BE,
GENZO! LET
ME DIE!

WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?!
CHIGUSA-
SAN!

I CAN'T LIVE
WITHOUT
ICHIREN!





Silent as
the bottom of
the sea...

My soul
reawakened...

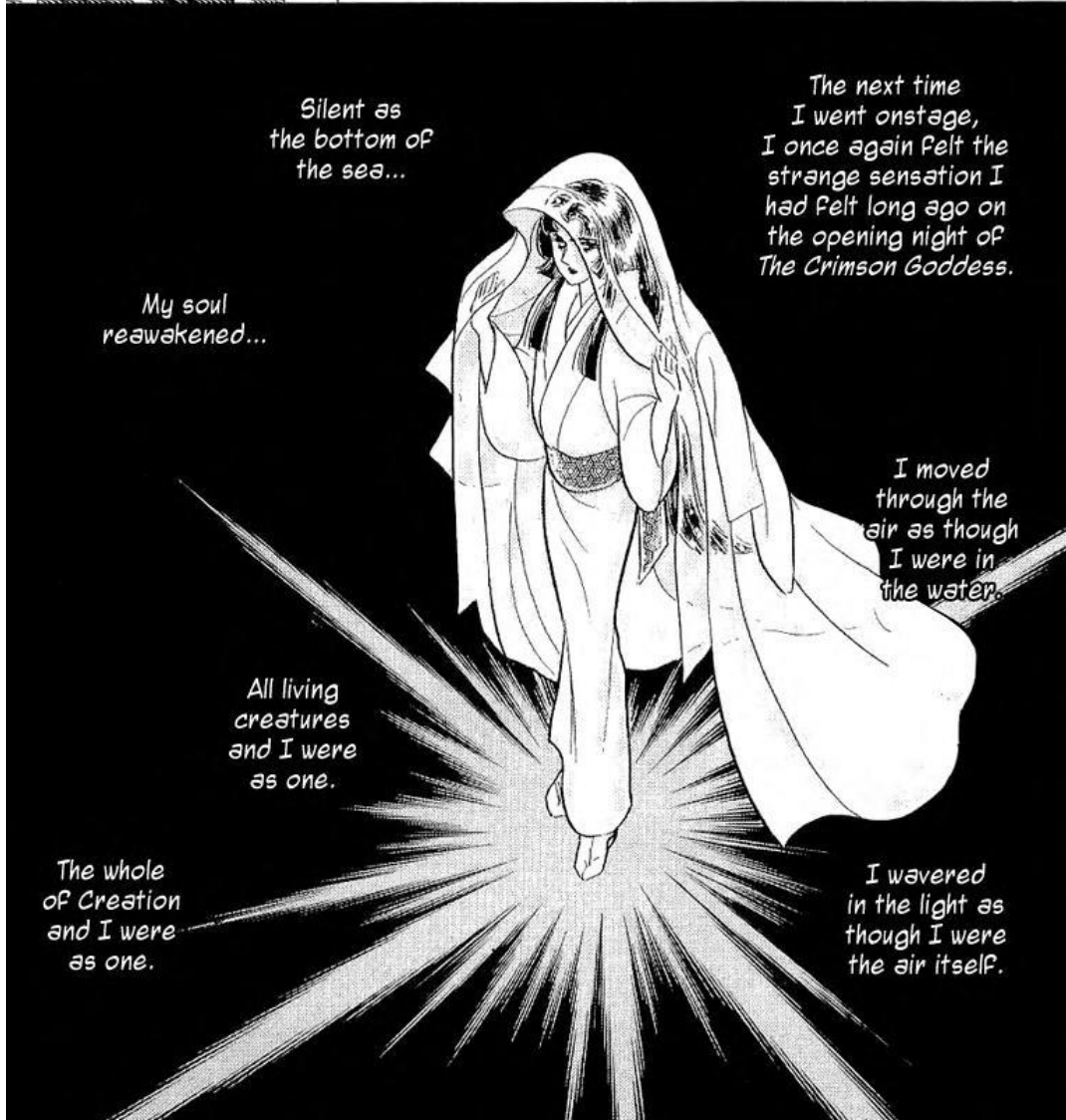
The next time
I went onstage,
I once again felt the
strange sensation I
had felt long ago on
the opening night of
The Crimson Goddess.

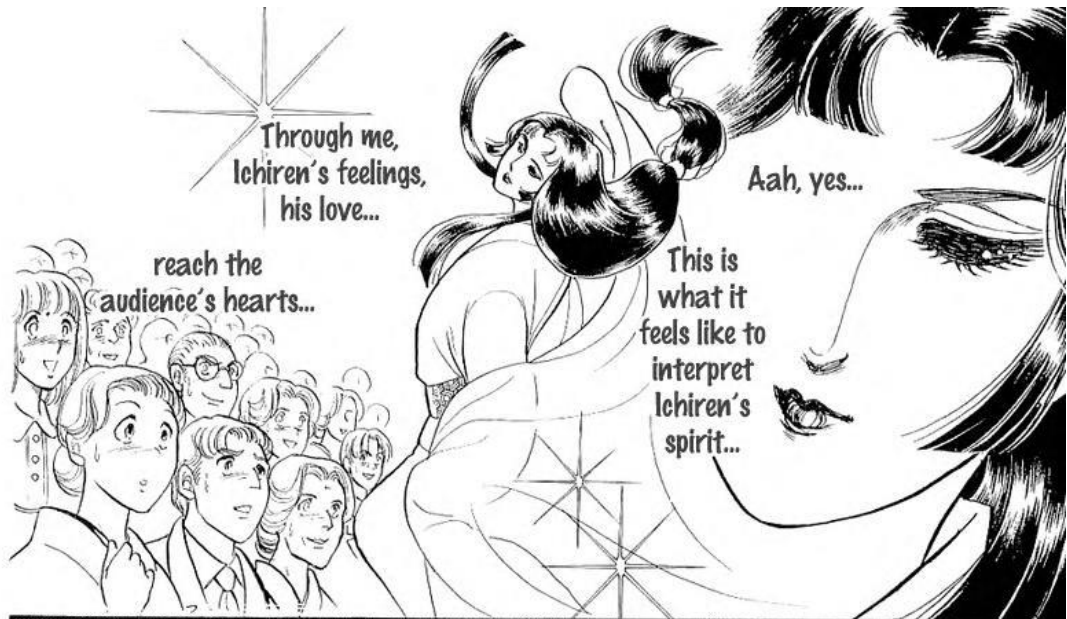
I moved
through the
air as though
I were in
the water.

All living
creatures
and I were
as one.

The whole
of Creation
and I were
as one.

I wavered
in the light as
though I were
the air itself.





Through me,
Ichiren's feelings,
his love...

reach the
audience's hearts...

Aah, yes...

This is
what it
feels like to
interpret
Ichiren's
spirit...



I LIVE
ETERNALLY!

I AM THE
CRIMSON
GODDESS!



YOU ARE THE
ONLY ONE ABLE
TO EXPRESS IT.

DON'T
FORGET,
CHIGUSA.

ONSTAGE,
WE WILL
ALWAYS BE
TOGETHER.

WHEN YOU
ACT ONSTAGE,
YOU GIVE LIFE
TO MY SOUL.



I will live!

I will live!

Ichiren!



To live together with you on the stage!

To give life to your soul!



WOW
WOW

I'll become stronger!
Stronger than anyone else!

The revival of *The Crimson Goddess* was also the revival of the actress Chigusa Tsukikage.



I won't allow
anyone to stand
in my way!

Least of all
that man!

You'll see how
strong I'll become,
Ichiren!