

Throne of Blood

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Based on "Macbeth" by William Shakespeare

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THE RUINS OF A CASTLE

CHORUS

*Behold, the ruins of a castle,
inhabited by deep-rooted delusion,
perpetually haunted by spirits. The
ruins show the fate of demonic men
with treacherous desires.*

The ruins of Kumonosu Castle: crumbling stone walls, water of a moat with green scum, glimmering dimly. Among a vast stretch of rank weeds stands a decayed placard. On it are the faint traces of barely legible writing: 'The Ruins of Kumonosu Castle.'

A gust of wind runs through the grass and ruffles the surface of the moat, a sobbing old pine tree rustles against a stone wall, and in the whispering breeze through the pine tree a faint sound of a war drum and trumpet is heard.

KUMONOSU CASTLE

The stronghold of Kumonosu Castle towering among mountains. Viewed from outside, activity in the castle cannot be perceived. The architecture of the castle, the 'Black Style', profoundly depresses all who see it. A soldier approaches the gate. Riding up, the soldier, covered in blood, tumbles from his horse, and knocks at the towering door.

THE CASTLE COURTYARD

The Lord of Kumonosu Castle, KUNIHARU TSUZUKI, ready for departure to the front, sits upstage centre, flanked by NORIYASU ODAGURA, his war tactician, and other generals in attendance. Holding their breath, they hear the report of the bleeding messenger who kneels before them.

MESSENGER

As you know, the revolt of General Fujimaki of the North Castle struck like such a thunderbolt that the Fifth and Fourth Forts fell easy prey to flames, and the Third Fort had no time to prepare a defence.

KUNIHARU

What of the Second Fort?

MESSENGER

General Yoshiaki Miki of the Second Fort has rallied his collapsing forces and is now fighting with lion-like fury.

KUNIHARU

And what of the First Fort?

MESSENGER

General Taketoki Washizu of the First Fort is now fighting single-handed, against some four hundred men under Inui's command. He charge across the border, on seeing the Fifth and the Fourth Forts ablaze.

KUNIHARU

Oh, God! They've fallen into Inui's trap!

NORIYASU

What of Washizu, how are things going in his battle?

MESSENGER

(fainting)

De-sper-ate...

Unable to finish, the messenger falls unconscious.

OLD GENERAL

Help him.

The wounded messenger is taken away. KUNIHARU and his generals remain silent. Then KUNIHARU, surveying those present, speaks.

KUNIHARU

Shall we venture forth, or shall we hold this castle?

All are silent.

NORIYASU

(Calmly)

There's no choice but to hold this castle. If we fight to repulse the attack of a winning enemy, we only lead to the fatal defeat of our own troops, I fear.

(MORE)

NORIYASU (CONT'D)

The first thing to do is to deploy our advanced guards in Kumote Forest, lead the enemy into that labyrinth and cut them to pieces. Let us try to deal them as heavy a blow as we can, then withdraw our guards and shut ourselves in the castle. There is no other path to salvation.

KUNIHARU

Have we enough provisions?

GENERAL

Enough for three months if we eat watery rice-gruel.

They all remain gloomily silent.

A VOICE

If you please, my lord. Here is a messenger from the Second Fort.

OLD GENERAL

Let him enter.

A messenger comes in with faltering steps and, at the point of collapse, falls to his knees in front of KUNIHARU.

MESSENGER

My lord! I congratulate you on your fortune in battle.

KUNIHARU

Why?

MESSENGER

In the battle of the Second Fort, General Miki fought with such irresistible force that the enemy almost abandoned their attack. At that very moment, General Washizu of the First Fort, who had just defeated Inui's storming troops, seized the initiative. Shooting arrows, his men rode into the battle field, and...

KUNIHARU

Did he! Well done, Washizu.

MESSENGER

Yes, my lord. Before his attack the enemy gave way at once. The battle is almost decided.

2ND MESSENGER

The men of both General Washizu and Miki are now pursuing the enemy, who are starting to flee. They have pushed them back to the North Castle, intending to besiege them.

3RD MESSENGER

General Fujimaki of the North Castle sues for peace, offering to become a bonze.

KUNIHARU

No pardon. Noriyasu!

NORIYASU

Yes, my lord.

KUNIHARU

Go to the North Castle with your men and behead Fujimaki. Strengthen the border defence and if Inui shows no signs of moving his men, send Washizu and Miki back to the castle. I myself shall reward them for their service.

NORIYASU

I understand.

KUMOTE FOREST

Thunder and lightning. Enter two galloping horsemen. They stop at the fork of a road with many branches and look around, right and left. Suddenly sunlight breaks through and outlines the figures of these two horsemen in bold relief.

A horrifying fresh smell of war arises from the two armored figures, who are smeared with blood, mud and rain. They are TAKETOKI WASHIZU and YOSHIAKI MIKI.

YOSHIAKI

(looking up at the sky)
What a day today! I have never seen such strange weather.

Clouds again cover the sun, more thunder and lightning.

TAKETOKI

Let's hurry up. I'd rather not lose any time in seeing how delighted our lord will be to hear the news.

He whips his horse, and heads off. YOSHIAKI follows him. They gallop as fast as their horses can carry them, and then stop at a fork in the road.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

What? This is...

They stare at each other.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

This...this is where we stopped our horses before, is it not?

YOSHIAKI

Well. Behold, these trampled hoofprints!

TAKETOKI

How strange! Do you really think that this is Kumote Forest?

YOSHIAKI

Certainly.

TAKETOKI

Then, one more gallop will take us to the castle, you know.

YOSHIAKI

Yes.

TAKETOKI

But...we have already been galloping in the forest for some time, yet there is no sign of an exit.

YOSHIAKI laughs.

YOSHIAKI

Surely worthy of the name - Kumote, Cobweb Forest. Like the threads of a spider, roads run in various directions and misguide the enemy. This is really a strategic position for our Kumonosu Castle.

TAKETOKI

Nonsense! Unlike our enemy, we, who belong to the castle, are familiar with the forest, are we not?

TAKETOKI fires an arrow in his bow and shoots it at the root of a huge tree, as lightning flashes and thunder rolls. As if answering the shot, a strange laughter reverberates throughout the forest.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

You heard it. An evil spirit, it's the work of an evil spirit.

YOSHIAKI

Hum.

He cradles his spear.

YOSHIAKI (CONT'D)

Well, on the honour of my spear, I'll get out of this forest.

TAKETOKI

Yes. Witness, God of War, by my arrow and bow.

TAKETOKI fixes an arrow in the bow and YOSHIAKI brandishes his spear overhead. They break suddenly into a gallop, yelling war cries. Two men galloping; YOSHIAKI brandishing his spear in every direction and TAKETOKI shooting arrows before them, continue galloping. Two men galloping, shrouded in lightning, in thunder and in strange laughter. Two men galloping. Their horses suddenly stand erect, and cannot be pressed forward. The frightened eyes, gasping sounds, and trembling ears of the horses, YOSHIAKI suddenly stops spurring his horse. Looking ahead he shouts involuntarily.

YOSHIAKI

My god! What's that?

TAKETOKI looks hard to the front. Ahead of them is a place rather sparsely wooded, leaving a small open space of grass. There stands a small straw-thatched cottage, deserted. The thunder and lightning, which were so violent a moment ago, have mysteriously abated. A beam of light falling through the trees calmly shines upon the cottage.

YOSHIAKI (CONT'D)

Have you ever seen that cottage?

TAKETOKI

No, I have never seen such a
cottage. This also must be the work
of an evil spirit.

YOSHIAKI

But...

TAKETOKI

Behold, our horses! Their fright is
real.

TAKETOKI fixes an arrow to the string and draws it to the
full, aiming at the cottage. At that moment, a delicate, sad
song reaches them from inside of the cottage.

OLD WOMAN

*Ah, miserable, miserable! Born in
this human world, Living a
transient life like an insect's,
How silly to worry ourselves!*

TAKETOKI, involuntarily, relaxes his bow. They look at each
other. They approach the cottage as if drawn by the song.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

*Ah, miserable, miserable! The life of
flowers is too transient, Only to turn
into decomposed matter.*

The two men peep into the cottage over a fence.

INSIDE THE COTTAGE

An old woman, alone, singing and spinning threads.

OLD WOMAN

*Such being the case, what men do in
this world, Burning ourselves with
the flames of five desires, Bathing
ourselves in the water of five
impurities, Piling up our sins more
and more...*

OUTSIDE THE COTTAGE

TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI are quietly peeping inside.

INSIDE THE COTTAGE

An old woman still singing.

OLD WOMAN

*Reaching the last stage of
delusion, Rotten flesh turns to
flowers. Offensive odor becomes a
perfume, What a thrilling life for
man! How delightful, delightful!*

OUTSIDE THE COTTAGE

Breaking down the fence, TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI enter. They surround the old woman, TAKETOKI, ready with his arrow drawn, and YOSHIAKI, with his spear poised.

YOSHIAKI

What are you? A man or a devil in
the flesh?

TAKETOKI

Hey, you! No words? You surely can
speak, since you can sing.

OLD WOMAN

Yes, Taketoki Washizu, head of the
First Fort.

TAKETOKI

What! Do you know me?

OLD WOMAN

Yes, lord of the North Castle from
this evening.

TAKETOKI

What? I, lord of the North Castle
from this evening?

OLD WOMAN

Yes, my lord. And, lord of Kumonosu
Castle hereafter.

TAKETOKI

Stop this babbling! You carry your
joke too far.

OLD WOMAN

Why get angry at such auspicious
news?

TAKETOKI
 (Domineeringly)
 Besides our present lord, there is
 no lord in Kumonosu Castle.

The old woman meets TAKETOKI's gaze fearlessly with a calm yet strange smile.

OLD WOMAN
 How foolish a man is! Why, to be
 afraid to plumb his own heart!

TAKETOKI
 (In an uncontrolled fit of passion)
 You evil spirit!

He draws back his bowstrings.

YOSHIAKI
 Wait! Even though this woman might
 be a devil in the flesh, she
 doesn't look as if she is
 chattering nonsense for nothing,
 since your arrow is aimed at just
 above her breast. I'll question her
 seriously.

(To the old woman)
 Hey, you. Listen, carefully! Can
 you see the future as our eyes see
 the present?

OLD WOMAN
 Yes, General Yoshiaki Miki, head of
 the Second Fort and head of the
 First Fort from this evening.

YOSHIAKI
 What...head of the First Fort from
 this evening? Well, then, what of
 my future wealth and rank?

OLD WOMAN
 Your fortune is lesser and greater
 than General Washizu's.

YOSHIAKI
 What? What do you mean?

OLD WOMAN
 Your son is to be lord of Kumonosu
 Castle hereafter.

They look at each other, not a little shocked. Then, when they return their eyes to the old woman, no sign of her remains. They gallop through the cottage.

KUMOTE FOREST. AN OLD BATTLEGROUND

Enter TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI. They look around. There is no one to be seen. When they look back. No cottage stands. A small hill has appeared where the cottage once stood. A heap of skeletons in armor is visible if one concentrates. The armor is decayed and completely covered with weeds. Weird as a ghost's wails. Both TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI, stricken with horror, remain standing and staring at the heap.

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI, with absent-minded expressions on their faces, enter of horseback.

YOSHIAKI

Behold! There's our castle. Finally we've left the forest. Now a short gallop will bring us to the castle.

TAKETOKI

One second! I'm completely exhausted. My armor feels unusually heavy.

YOSHIAKI

Ah, no wonder. We have already ridden our horses to death three times since the battle yesterday. Shall we rest for awhile?

TAKETOKI

Yes.

Dismounting, they sit down on the grass and peer up at the distant castle.

YOSHIAKI

Awfully sleepy. My only hope is to get some sound sleep.

TAKETOKI

I myself feel as if now in a dream. I wonder if possibly in my dream I met that devil in the flesh.

YOSHIAKI

We say dreams are the expression of our five desires. Frankly speaking, every warrior has dreamt of becoming lord of the castle.

TAKETOKI

Did she not say that your son shall be lord of that castle?

YOSHIAKI

Why, you yourself shall become lord of that castle, indeed!

They both laugh.

TAKETOKI

He, he, he. But, before then, I am to be lord of the North Castle.

YOSHIAKI

I, too, will be head of the First Fort.

TAKETOKI

A matter for congratulations, is it not?

YOSHIAKI

Yes, indeed.

They both laugh, then suddenly stop, brooding over the matter. Then simultaneously they open their mouths.

TAKETOKI AND YOSHIAKI

But...

They become silent.

TAKETOKI

What were you going to say?

YOSHIAKI

You, too?

TAKETOKI

(Hesitating to speak)

Well, now, if I became lord of the North Castle and you head of the First Fort...

They remain still for awhile, then TAKETOKI suddenly stands up and jumps on his horse. YOSHIAKI also gallops off. They rush towards the castle.

THE CASTLE COURTYARD

Groves of spears and arrows shining in the bonfire light. Surrounded by them, TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI kneel in front of LORD KUNIHARU TSUZUKI, on whom other generals are also waiting. KUNIHARU presents TAKETOKI with a splendid long sword.

KUNIHARU

Taketoki Washizu, you rendered distinguished service in battle! From this evening, you are lord of the North Castle!

TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI, who sits next to him, both give a start. Groves of spears and arrows away, accompanied by roaring cheers. TAKETOKI, to the roar of cheers, raises his sword over his head with trembling hands, as a token of gratitude. KUNIHARU takes another sword and presents it to YOSHIAKI.

KUNIHARU (CONT'D)

Yoshiaki Miki, your service was no less distinguished. You are head of the First Fort from this evening!

Both YOSHIAKI and TAKETOKI give another start. Another roaring cheer. YOSHIAKI, with trembling hands, also raises the sword over his head in gratitude. They stand up and bow. Soldiers congratulate them by twanging bowstrings and beating shields. Among their cheers, TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI, empathizing with each other with strange keenness, silently go back to their seats, staring.

DISTANT VIEW OF THE NORTH CASTLE

Green rice fields everywhere. At the top of a little high mountain far away, the North Castle is seen with a thicket of assorted green trees at its back.

THE COURTYARD OF THE NORTH CASTLE

In the brilliant sun of early summer, Taketoki's retainers gather here and there, and busy themselves in attending to weapons, arms, and horses. Bush warblers singing in a hill at the back. Sprightly neighs of young horses. Everything in the scenery is peaceful and blooming. A group of retainers mend armor, sitting in a circle. One of them gives a wide yawn.

1ST RETAINER

How peaceful!

2ND RETAINER

Yes, it seems we are in Paradise.

3RD RETAINER

What a difference between living in the fort and living comfortably in the castle! Greatness is really relative, isn't it?

4TH RETAINER

We retainers are also fortunate, but imagine how satisfied our lord and lady are!

INSIDE THE NORTH CASTLE. TAKETOKI'S ROOM

Compared with the brightness of the fresh green outside, it is very chilly and dark here. TAKETOKI and his wife, ASAJI, sit facing each other in the room. Bush warblers sing. ASAJI, with a pale and immobile face like a Noh mask, talks with frequent pauses.

ASAJI

Did you...make up your mind...?

TAKETOKI raises his face in confusion, and talks in a restless tone.

TAKETOKI

Well...I dreamt an awful dream...In fact I have been bewitched. No more delusion! The lord of Kumonosu Castle...to have such an inordinate desire...

ASAJI

(Calmly)

You wouldn't say that it's an inordinate desire...You know well there's not warrior who does not crave it.

TAKETOKI

(In a high pitch)

No, I...I feel all right as I am! I'll be devoted to the discharge of my duties as head of the North Castle. I'd rather live peacefully, content with my lot.

ASAJI

(In a monotone)

You won't have that peace.

TAKETOKI

Why?

ASAJI

If...if General Yoshiaki Miki should reveal the prophecy of the evil spirit of Kumote Forest...to our lord, then...

TAKETOKI, frightened, stares hard at ASAJI.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

Then, we won't be left as we are. Our lord, taking you for a usurper threatening...he will surely besiege the North Castle with his men without delay.

Staring at ASAJI aghast, TAKETOKI broods.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

Only two choices exist...sitting and waiting to be killed by our lord...or killing our lord to become Lord of Kumonosu Castle yourself!

TAKETOKI

(As if screaming)

It is high treason to kill our lord!

ASAJI

(In a constant monotone)

The same lord...he himself ascended the throne by killing his previous lord, as you well know.

TAKETOKI

(Screams out desperately)

The reason was...that the previous lord distrusted our lord and tried to kill him! Our lord trusts me! I say, he treats me most kindly!

ASAJI

Because he doesn't know what's at the bottom of your heart.

TAKETOKI

(Wet, with greasy sweat on his face)
At the bottom of my heart? Why, there's nothing shameful in me!

ASAJI

(With a smile on her No-mask-like face)
You tell a lie.

TAKETOKI

(High-handedly)
Nonsense! I...I am satisfied as
head of the North Castle!

ASAJI

(Without changing her expression)
Even though it is true,...would our
lord believe it...after having heard
about that prophecy from General
Miki...?

TAKETOKI

Miki...From our childhood Miki has
been my closest comrade in arms. We
won't play such a mean trick!

ASAJI

In this world, struggling for fame
and distinction, parents kill their
own children and children kill
their parents. This is a corrupt
age when we must kill others to
avoid being killed. I'm worried to
death...that General Miki might
have already...revealed it to our
lord...

TAKETOKI

(In an agitated voice)
Asaji, don't be so distrustful!

At that moment, a flurry of footsteps is heard. One of the
retainers comes to the threshold of the room and kneels.

RETAINER

If you please, my lord. Some three
hundred men of Kumonosu Castle are
silently stationed in the forest to
our rear.

TAKETOKI

What?

Startled, he stares at ASAJI's face. She does not change her
Noh-mask-like expression. With flurry of steps, another
retainer runs in and kneels before them.

RETAINER

If you please, my lord. We see a tremendous crowd of men in arms, in every forest and in every mountain cave that surrounds this North Castle. They look like men from Kumonosu Castle, but they advance quietly, holding their banners and spears down and making their horses bite something in the mouths.

TAKETOKI, aghast, stares at ASAJI's face again. She does not make a motion, but conveys a terrible, strong will in her expressionless face. The flurried beat of horses' hoofs. TAKETOKI, snatching up his sword, stands.

THE NORTH CASTLE. THE FRONT GATE

A horseman approaches, galloping amid clouds of dust. He stops at the front gate and shouts in a loud voice.

HERALD

If you please, Taketoki Washizu, Lord of the North Castle. Our senior lord is coming!

THE NORTH CASTLE. AN OPEN CORRIDOR

TAKETOKI violently dashes out of the room and shouts.

TAKETOKI

What's the matter?

An elderly-looking retainer runs in.

RETAINER

Sir, our senior lord is coming.

TAKETOKI jumps down on the ground and runs out.

TAKETOKI

Hey, everyone, come out! Get ready for the meeting!

THE FRONT GATE

TAKETOKI comes running with a shout.

TAKETOKI

Hey, everyone, come out! Get ready for the meeting!

The HERALD soldier, hearing TAKETOKI shout, speaks to him.

HERALD

General Washizu, it's really not necessary. Our senior lord is paying a surreptitious visit, only for hunting. There's no need for such a pompous gathering.

TAKETOKI stares at him, half in doubt.

ON A ROAD

KUNIHARU TSUZUKI, lightly dressed in his hunting suit, comes on horseback, feeling relaxed. His heir KUNIMARU, NORIYASU ODAGURA, YOSHIAKI MIKI and several generals follow him, all in hunting suits and talking cheerfully. Behind them, beaters follow with game such as wild boars and deer on their shoulders. Everything looks peaceful, and there is no indication of hostility.

INSIDE THE NORTH CASTLE. TAKETOKI'S ROOM

KUNIHARU sits in the highest front seat, and KUNIMARU, NORIYASU, YOSHIAKI and others sit alongside. TAKETOKI and ASAJI lie prostrate before KUNIHARU.

TAKETOKI

I sincerely congratulate you on taking such a good bag.

KUNIHARU

Well...are you surprised, since we came so suddenly? To tell the truth, the hunting is only diversionary tactics...

TAKETOKI stiffens.

KUNIHARU (CONT'D)

In the guise of hunters, our soldiers advance; I'm going to attack Inui.

TAKETOKI, unintentionally, raises his face and stares at KUNIHARU. Surprised looks on everyone else's face as well. Only NORIYASU gives a slight nod as if he already knew everything.

KUNIHARU (CONT'D)

I can endure Inui's behavior no longer.

(MORE)

KUNIHARU (CONT'D)

When he caused trouble, helping the revolt of Fujimaki, we held back our pursuit...since we were looking forward to an occasion such as today. Hark! We'll station our headquarter in the North Castle. Gathering the main force on the border, we will let them attack the enemy when we are fully prepared...Before then, everything is secret...You Understand?

They all nod approval.

KUNIHARU (CONT'D)

Taketoki!

TAKETOKI

Yes, my lord.

KUNIHARU

Yoshiaki!

YOSHIAKI

Yes, my lord.

KUNIHARU

I will reward you for your service in the precious battle. I order Taketoki to serve as head of the van of the attack, and Yoshiaki to take charge of Kumonosu Castle during my absence!

TAKETOKI AND YOSHIAKI

Yes, at your command.

TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI, deeply moved with joy, bow prostrate. So does ASAJI, but her profile is still expressionless.

INSIDE THE NORTH CASTLE. A HALL. NIGHT

The light of a candle. TAKETOKI and ASAJI sit, facing each other.

TAKETOKI

Asaji, now your suspicious nature should be satisfied. Our lord trust me, I'm sure. In your suspicious mind, brooding over Yoshiaki's slander, an evil spirit lies hidden.

ASAJI

I...do not think so.

TAKETOKI

Why not? Listen...you see, our lord trusts me above all others...That is why he gave me such an important duty as head of the van.

ASAJI

The leader of the vanguard will be a target, both from the front and the back.

TAKETOKI is surprised but says nothing.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

How wicked our lord is, I dare say, occupying the North Castle by the power of eloquence, leaving Kumonosu Castle in charge of trusted Miki, without exposing him to danger, but exposing a man like you, whom he hates, to arrows and bullets.

Again TAKETOKI is silent.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

And General Miki will play the spectator on the watchtower of the castle and, with a smiling face, enjoy the end of his optimistic friend - you.

TAKETOKI is confused.

IN FRONT OF THE BEDROOM

In the open corridor, flooded with bonfires, three strong soldiers stand guard. Looking in one direction, all of them ready their spears.

SOLDIERS

Who's there?

RETAINER

We are retainers from the North Castle.

SOLDIER

This is the bedroom of our lord.
Even though you are from the North
Castle, you cannot enter this
evening.

RETAINER

We won't go near his bedroom. We
only go to open the never-opened
room.

SOLDIER

The never-opened room?

RETAINER

Yes, it is there that Fujimaki, the
former lord of North Castle, killer
himself. We keep it closed, since
the floor which was stained with
his slimy blood cannot be cleaned,
even with a hand-axe.

SOLDIER

Then why do you open it this
particular night?

RETAINER

We are going to make a bed there
for my lord, as our senior lord
occupies our lord's bedroom.

SOLDIER

Your duty is well served. Please
come in.

They leave with a bow.

IN FRONT OF THE NEVER-OPENED ROOM

They enter. Opening the door, they light the inside with
torches and peer uneasily into the room.

1ST RETAINER

How strange! I, the man who has
crossed a sea of blood many a time
in battle, I shudder at the sight
of this bloody stain, whenever I
see it.

2ND RETAINER

Because it is the blood of a
dog...the blood of treason and
injustice.

(MORE)

2ND RETAINER (CONT'D)

And yet, it is the blood of a
coward, who rebelled, was defeated,
then begged for mercy and life.

Sound of cuckoos.

1ST RETAINER

(Looking up)

Damn it! The bird of ill omen sings
tonight...come on, let's finish our
job and get our of here as soon as
possible.

THE HALL

TAKETOKI, motionless, is now a slave to his doubt. ASAJI
continues talking calmly.

ASAJI

You say that I'm too
suspicious...but even I could not
proceed without believing that
prophecy.

TAKETOKI looks surprised.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

Please, consider what is happening.
Observe that arrangements for the
fulfillment of the prophecy have
already been made.

TAKETOKI is confused.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

Is this not enough to convince
you?...Our Lord flew into your
reach by himself.

TAKETOKI is appalled.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

If you fail tonight, you will never
have such a good opportunity again.

TAKETOKI

What kind of pretext can I have for
committing treason? Nay, on what
pretext can I command all the
troops?!

ASAJI

Even though pretending to trust you, our lord leaves the guard to Noriyasu's men, which is an unexpected piece of good luck for us.

TAKETOKI looks confused again.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

You ply the guards with warm saké containing a drug, stab our lord as soon as they fall asleep, and cry out to all of the troops that it's the deed of Noriyasu!

TAKETOKI makes no reply. The sound of cuckoos is heard once more.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

How do you interpret the voice of the cuckoo? Does it not ask whether you risked your life for the whole world? I hear it that way. To me the note of a cuckoo is a voice from above, encouraging you to aim at the whole world, with Kumonosu Castle as the base of operations.

They stare hard at each other. Footsteps. 1ST and 2ND RETAINERS come in.

1ST RETAINER

We made your beds.

ASAJI

Thanks for your service.

They are going to leave with a bow. ASAJI calls them back.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

Well, the guards of our senior lord, how are they doing?

1ST RETAINER

They are keeping all night vigil, with their spears ready.

ASAJI

Oh, my! Then, I'll treat them to saké.

Standing up calmly, she goes in the darkness of the corner of the room. She comes out with the bottle of saké.

IN FRONT OF THE BEDROOM

Bonfires dwindle. Near the fire, three guards sleeping like the dead. A bottle of saké overturned near them. A rustle of clothes. The figure of ASAJI appears dimly through the darkness, and spies on the guards.

THE NEVER-OPENED ROOM

TAKETOKI alone sits in the center of the room. His shadow flickers with the light of the candle. A gloomy atmosphere. TAKETOKI, with glaring, bloody eyes, stares at something: a stain of dark blood splashed on the wainscot. TAKETOKI averts his eyes from it. However, on the floor where his eyes are fixed, there is a grotesque mark drawn in blood. TAKETOKI, unable to stand the atmosphere, suddenly stands up, but dares not move, seeing ASAJI enter. ASAJI, with spear in her hand, calmly enters. TAKETOKI stares at ASAJI, driven to the wall. ASAJI approaches him and hands the spear to him. Then, both, with faces as white as a sheet, stare at each other.

THE SKY

A cuckoo, flying close to a crescent moon looking like a sharpened sickle, cries an alarm.

THE NEVER-OPENED ROOM

Looking up at the sky, TAKETOKI stares at ASAJI for a moment with a grotesque smile, and leaves falteringly. ASAJI sees him off, and calmly sits down. She sits firmly in the same posture without the slightest movement.

A long interval.

With a horrifying expression on his face, spattered with blood, TAKETOKI dashes in, tries to stand erect, supported by his spear, but sinks down on the ground. Seeing him squat, ASAJI snatches the spear from his hand and leaves.

IN FRONT OF THE BEDROOM

ASAJI enters. She puts the blood-stained spear in the hand of one of the sleeping guards.

THE NEVER-OPENED ROOM

TAKETOKI, gasping, with his hands on the floor. ASAJI returns.

She goes to the corner of the room in haste, and washed her blood-stained hands in a basin. TAKETOKI, with vacant eyes, gazes at her washing. Throwing a contemptuous look at TAKETOKI, ASAJI runs out of the room.

THE NEVER-OPENED ROOM. OUTSIDE

ASAJI dashes out and screams.

ASAJI
Traitors! Traitors!

THE NEVER-OPENED ROOM

TAKETOKI, who had been dumbfounded, suddenly comes to himself and runs out.

THE NEVER-OPENED ROOM. OUTSIDE

Dashing out of the room, TAKETOKI thunders at the highest pitch of his voice.

TAKETOKI
Every one of you, come out! The
worst possible tragedy has happened
to our senior lord!

THE BEDROOM. OUTSIDE

Hearing alarm shouts and the rush of footsteps, three guards, who were lying asleep, stagger to their feet, and struggle desperately. TAKETOKI, dashing in, cuts one of them aslant through the shoulder.

TAKETOKI
Traitors!

A CAMP

A heavy morning mist. A war gong, a trumpet, a war cry far away like a tidal wave. Spears are laid low and horses run amok. Floods of spears, arrows, and pennons borne by armored warriors surge about. Completely tattered. Against the flow, KUNIMARU on horseback is shouting with a threatening look.

KUNIMARU
Let go! Let go!

NORIYASU also on horseback, is holding hard the bit of Kunimaru's horse.

NORIYASU

Don't lose your head. To the castle for the present, my young lord!

KUNIMARU

Nay! Let go! This is surely Taketoki's scheme! If we fly, leaving the matter as it is, we'll be stigmatized as traitors.

NORIYASU

Hark! My young lord! If we die to no purpose, the rights and wrongs of the matter can never be judged!

TAKETOKI's retainers surround these two.

RETAINERS

Traitors! Murderers of our senior lord!

NORIYASU draws his sword and pounds with its flat at the rear of Kunimaru's horse, which springs to a gallop. Sweeping away the retainers of TAKETOKI, NORIYASU follows KUNIMARU.

TAKETOKI

Pay no attention to the small game! Our enemy is Noriyasu!

Thundering at the highest pitch of his voice, TAKETOKI gallops on the wings of the wind.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

Where's Noriyasu? Where is he?

RETAINER

By a hair's breadth...

TAKETOKI

Did he flee?

RETAINER

Yes, towards the castle with our young lord.

TAKETOKI

(Changes color)

What?! Towards the castle, protecting our young lord?

He screams in consternation.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

Damn it! Yoshiaki Miki, who is guarding the castle,...if he lets them in the castle...no, no excuse to make to our senior lord if we allow such wicked men in our castle. Follow me! Follow me!

TAKETOKI madly gives his horse a kick and begins to gallop. A party of horsemen follow him.

A FIELD ENVELOPED IN FOG

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU keep galloping. TAKETOKI and his retainer, seven or eight, follow them.

KUMOTE FOREST

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU dash into the forest. TAKETOKI and his retainers also dash into the forest in pursuit of them.

INSIDE THE FOREST

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU fleeing. TAKETOKI and a party of his retainers pursuing. The desperate look of fleeing NORIYASU and KUNIMARU. The pursuing TAKETOKI looks like a furious demon. Both parties, hunter and hunted, continue at a gallop.

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU dashing out of the forest. After awhile, TAKETOKI and his retainers dashing out after them.

TAKETOKI

Damn it!

Turning pale, TAKETOKI reins up his horse. Several horsemen after him pull up their horses in rapid succession.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. A ROAD LEADING TO THE FRONT GATE

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU, galloping up a road.

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

TAKETOKI glares fiercely at them, with bloodshot eyes.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. THE FRONT GATE

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU, galloping to the gate. They swing down from their saddles and hasten to the door of the gate.

NORIYASU

(Keeps knocking at the door)
If you please, I must speak to
General Miki! Our senior lord, on
his way to the punitive encounter
against Inui, died an ignominious
death, due to the treason of
Taketoki Washizu...I, Noriyasu
Odagura, accompanying our young
lord, Kunimaru, cut our way through
the enemy and managed to return to
the castle...I say, open the door
immediately!

The interior of the castle is silent. NORIYASU shouts:

NORIYASU (CONT'D)

If you please, General Miki!
Taketoki's pursuing force are
approaching! Open the door at once!

Everything is hushed and deadly still in the castle. NORIYASU violently knocks at the door, losing patience.

NORIYASU (CONT'D)

Open the door! Open the door!

With a keen, whizzing sound, an arrow pierces the ground close to NORIYASU's feet. NORIYASU and KUNIMARU are thunderstruck.

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

TAKETOKI and his retainers, standing in their saddles, look closely at NORIYASU and KUNIMARU with curiosity, shading their eyes with their hands.

THE FRONT GATE

A shower of arrows from the two towers pour down on NORIYASU and KUNIMARU, who are shouting.

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

TAKETOKI and his retainers are stunned at the unexpected sight.

THE FRONT GATE

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU, warding off a shower of arrows with their swords, jump on their horses and retreat.

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

Taketoki's retainers, excited, prepare to chase them.

TAKETOKI

Wait!

He dissuades them.

THE FRONT GATE

NORIYASU and KUNIMARU, galloping back, scarcely have looked at TAKETOKI and his retainers in the distance when they change their direction and gallop towards the mountain at one side.

ON THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

Taketoki's impatient retainers.

RETAINER

My lord, let's pursue them!

TAKETOKI

Wait, wait a second! We can't take action without knowing Yoshiaki's real intention. If he intends to remain in the castle after our senior lord's death, Yoshiaki Miki himself is our present enemy.

He glares at the castle with resentment.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

All is hushed and still around the castle, which is, in its architecture, of the 'Black Style'.

THE EDGE OF THE FOREST

TAKETOKI, biting his lip, is glaring at the castle. Clatter of hoofs. TAKETOKI and his retainers turn, fully alert, towards the sound. One of his retainers dashes out of the forest, galloping.

RETAINER

My lord! Here's a message from our lady.

TAKETOKI

What is it?

RETAINER

If General Miki does not open the door of the castle, proceed with the hearse of our senior lord, and...

TAKETOKI

Hmm!

He nods vigorously and looks up at the castle again.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

The castle, still hushed and silent, and Taketoki's retainers, lined up in front of the castle. Holding their spears, arrows, and pennons low, they all reverently wait in line and guard the hearse covered with white silk, which several of them bear on their shoulders. TAKETOKI, at the head of the party, spurs his horse and gallops towards the castle.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. THE FRONT GATE

TAKETOKI dashes in, pulls up his horse and thunders to the castle at the highest pitch of his voice.

TAKETOKI

Open the door! The return of our lord! Open the door! I, Taketoki Washizu, enter the castle, guarding the hearse of our lord!

After this shout, he turns back his horse.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

TAKETOKI, having turned around, stands before lines of his soldiers, and gives an order to proceed, waving his hand. The files of soldiers, reverently moving.

THE FRONT GATE

Silence.

THE ROAD LEADING TO THE FRONT GATE

TAKETOKI proceeding in silence, and the files of soldiers after him, guarding the hearse.

THE FRONT GATE

Silence.

THE ROAD LEADING TO THE FRONT GATE

TAKETOKI, proceeding, and the hearse, proceeding. Fearing that they may be shot by arrows...a succession of facial expressions of soldiers filled with strain.

THE FRONT GATE

Silence.

THE ROAD LEADING TO THE FRONT GATE

TAKETOKI, proceeding, and the hearse, proceeding. The files of soldiers approach the front gate reverently in an extremely strained atmosphere. At that very moment...

THE FRONT GATE

The door silently opens. YOSHIAKI on horseback dashes out. TAKETOKI pulls up his horse with a start. YOSHIAKI gallops his horse and stops just in front of him. They stare fixedly at each other.

A pause.

After a little pause, changing the direction of his horse, YOSHIAKI rides side by side with TAKETOKI. They pass together through the front gate in silence.

INSIDE THE CASTLE

The men in the castle kneeling to meet the hearse, TAKETOKI and YOSHIAKI ride in silence through them. TAKETOKI casts a glance at the tearful waiting women, who are kneeling in a group.

TAKETOKI
Where's our lady?

YOSHIAKI
She killed herself.

TAKETOKI is amazed.

YOSHIAKI (CONT'D)
She told me that she couldn't stand
to witness the enemy being given
this castle before her very eyes.

They are both silent for awhile. YOSHIAKI suddenly speaks.

YOSHIAKI (CONT'D)
The evil spirit of Kumote Forest
made a good guess, didn't she?!

TAKETOKI glares.

YOSHIAKI (CONT'D)
(Feigning ignorance, with his face
to the front)
After the death of our lord, Inui
will surely attack this castle. A
person of considerable
strength...anyhow only your
strength would be able to defend
this castle against the
enemy...with this reason, I'm going
to appeal to the members at the
main conference.

Again they are both silent for awhile. The TAKETOKI makes as if to start speaking.

YOSHIAKI (CONT'D)
(Checking TAKETOKI with his eyes)
Let us talk it over at our leisure.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. THE FRONT TOWER

Taketoki's retainers, several of them, are looking down over forests and green rice fields which stretch far away under their eyes.

1ST RETAINER
Where's the North Castle?

2ND RETAINER
At the foot of that
mountain...there.

1ST RETAINER

Well, looking down on it from here,
it's really small, isn't it?

2ND RETAINER

Yes, greatness certainly is
relative. We are fortunate! Really
fortunate.

1ST RETAINER

On top of that, if a princely heir
is born in our household, nothing
will give us greater joy.

INSIDE THE CASTLE. A ROOM IN THE INNER CASTLE

The workmanship of the room, its furniture, and the garments
of TAKETOKI and ASAJI, who are sitting there, are noticeably
better. Only their expressions have not changed. But a
gloomier atmosphere than before hangs over the room. At
length, ASAJI speaks.

ASAJI

Then...it's decided...are you going
to hand over this castle to the son
of General Miki?

TAKETOKI studies ASAJI's expressionless face and speaks.

TAKETOKI

At the main conference Miki didn't
concede a point, recommending me as
the lord of this castle. I owe what
I am to his constant friendship. I
must reward him for his friendship.

ASAJI

I do not think so.

TAKETOKI looks surprised.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

It is not because of his friendship
that he recommended you...It was
because of...you know it well.

TAKETOKI

(Embarrassed)

Don't talk like that...Yoshiaki is
courageous. A man of resources...he
is the worst enemy, but surely the
best ally.

(MORE)

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

If I decide on his son as my successor, he will be willing to work for me. Now, understand me! Tonight's banquet is an important occasion to announce my successor. Extend the utmost courtesy both to Yoshiaki and his son.

ASAJI

I...I did not stain these hands of mine with blood in his son's favor.

TAKETOKI

(Stares at ASAJI in astonishment)
My reign is only for a single generation...and then Yoshiaki's descendents will succeed me. If I believe the prophecy which we heard in Kumote Forest...it cannot be helped, you know.

ASAJI

I hate it.

TAKETOKI

But...look, we have no child, and someday we must decide upon our heir.

ASAJI

(Calmly)

I...I'm expecting a child.

TAKETOKI

(Thunderstruck)

What? You, expecting a child?

ASAJI

Yes.

TAKETOKI's face flushes in an instant. A violent whirlwind rages in his head. With his glinting eyes set, he begins to walk up and down the length of the room restlessly.

THE NORTH CASTLE. THE COURTYARD

A runaway horse, raging. Yoshiaki's retainers, running after it. YOSHIAKI and YOSHITERU come out on the open corridor.

YOSHIAKI

You fools! What's the matter?!

One of his retainers runs to them, and feeling embarrassed kneels.

RETAINER

Today Asakaze, who is ordinarily very tame, is beyond our control. We tried to put a saddle on him, but in his rage he tore off the bridle and got free.

YOSHITERU

Father, this is a bad omen. Please, give up today's attendance at the castle.

YOSHIAKI

Certainly not! We are guests of honor for today's banquet. To fail to attend is out of the question.

YOSHIAKI enters the castle. YOSHITERU follows him.

INSIDE THE NORTH CASTLE

YOSHITERU, running after his father closely, speaks.

YOSHITERU

Father, as I already told you, I am much obliged for your kind arrangement, but...

YOSHIAKI

What objection do you have to it?

YOSHITERU

Oh, no objection...but, I just can't believe such a prophecy of an evil spirit...Absurd!

YOSHIAKI

Absurd? I saw it myself. And, the prophecy came true in Washizu's case. In my case, too. Tonight...

YOSHITERU

Such an expectation itself shows that you are bewitched. Bewitched by an evil spirit, you build up the events as she told you, with your own hands, and then you believe in the fulfillment of her prophecy...I doubt your sanity.

YOSHIAKI

If you can't believe it, you don't have to...but...Washizu's proposal that he wants you as his successor is neither a dream nor an illusion.

YOSHITERU is silent.

YOSHIAKI (CONT'D)

Listen! You are to have the castle for you own, without shedding blood and strewing the ground with corpses. In this world you can never be more fortunate. I question your own sanity in refusing such a proposal!

Again YOSHITERU says nothing.

THE FRONT GATE OF THE NORTH CASTLE

A train of attendants are ready for departure. Two saddled horses are gorgeously attired. One of them, Asakaze, is still in a rage and is giving trouble to the retainers who are holding him.

THE SAME (AT NIGHT)

Making a bonfire, retainers guard the gate. One of them takes off his leggings and presses his hand on his leg. He talks.

1ST RETAINER

Narrowly escapes breaking the bone of my leg! Fie on Asakaze, what made him so unruly? Thanks to him I couldn't accompany my lord.

One of his fellows teases him.

2ND RETAINER

You mean, 'Thanks to him I missed a treat of saké at the castle.'

They all hoot at him. The clattering of a horse's hoofs. They all strain their ears. The clattering of hoofs rapidly approaches them. The retainers stand up in haste and surround the gate with their spears ready.

1ST RETAINER

Who's there?

Asakaze pops up out of the darkness. They are all appalled. Asakaze, surrounded by them, gives a mournful neigh.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. THE GRAND HALL

One of the GENERALS is dancing, accompanied by the song of others, who sit on both sides of the hall.

SONG

*In the meantime, the horrifying
voice of a spirit is dead, Shaking
rivers and mountains, Reverberating
over the sky and under the Earth,
Violently stirring trees and green
hills in this world.*

Another of the GENERALS talks to his companion, who sits next to him.

GENERAL

Well, I wonder what happened to
General Miki.

Two seats of honor are unoccupied. TAKETOKI, who sits at the front sit, is gulping down saké, waited upon by ASAJI, and while drinking often glances at the seats with an extremely pale face.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Our lord is also worrying about his
absence. Why the absence of our
guests of honor? It's unbecoming to
General Miki...

SONG

*Mark our words, a spirit of the
dead. In olden times there was also
such an instance. The devil who
served a traitor called Chikata was
there. He had scarcely deserted
Chikata before he met with his own
destruction. It was Heaven's
justice on him for having revolted
against kingship.*

This song tingles in TAKETOKI's ears. He furiously waves his hand and shouts.

TAKETOKI

Damn it! No more of your dance,
please.

All those present become hushes in astonishment. TAKETOKI, with his bloodshot eyes, gets another glimpse of those vacant seats. His face is extraordinarily contorted. In the same seat, which was unoccupied a moment ago, sits YOSHIAKI MIKI, with the stamp of death on his face. TAKETOKI grabs at his sword and shouts, beside himself with rage.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)
You devil, Yoshiaki!

The GENERALS, in their astonishment, stare at TAKETOKI. TAKETOKI screams breathlessly.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)
You insolent fellow! Away with you!
Away!

All the GENERALS stand up simultaneously.

ASAJI
(Trying to keep them quiet)
If you please, stay quiet. He has
drunk too much...My lord! My lord!

She tugs TAKETOKI by the sleeve. TAKETOKI stares at ASAJI wits' end.

ASAJI (CONT'D)
(Smiling a forced smile)
Of late, our lord becomes like this
when drinking too much saké.

She laughs.

ASAJI (CONT'D)
I'm afraid the violent end of our
former lord has really been a great
strain on him.

TAKETOKI wipes greasy sweat off his forehead, and talks.

TAKETOKI
Well, I'm dead drunk...

He looks around at those present, who are hushed and still.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)
How about some merrymaking? At this
congratulatory banquet...

ASAJI

Even so, this delay of General Miki...It's rumored abroad that a spy under Inui's command has secretly sneaked into our country. He has not had an accident on his way, I hope.

TAKETOKI, with gloomy eyes, stares at the vacant seats. Again, in the seat which had been unoccupied, sits YOSHIAKI, with the same stamp of death on his face.

TAKETOKI

(Beside himself)

Damn it! Why appear again?! If you are so afraid of me, go ahead, draw your sword against me! I'll kill you again.

The GENERALS, startled, exchange glances. TAKETOKI slashes the vacant seat with his sword.

ASAJI

(Screams)

My lord! My lord!

TAKETOKI, who was brandishing his sword in a rage, suddenly comes to himself at ASAJI's scream, and stares at the unoccupied seat, stupefied, still standing.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

Please, don't be offended. The frenzy of our lord will be gone when he becomes sober. I am sorry that your pleasure was spoiled by an unfortunate disturbance. Tonight I wish you to leave the castle.

They leave saying farewells hurriedly. TAKETOKI and ASAJI remain alone in the big hall.

ASAJI (CONT'D)

You behaved very well...the man who is determined to conquer the whole world in the future, he was beside himself, frightened by a ghost! How absurd!
(Looking in one direction, she exclaims in a horrifying tone)
Who's there?

Before they know it, an armed soldier is in waiting at the corner of the hall.

He bows, and silently comes close to them. He presents a bundle covered with white cloth, which he was holding under his arm.

SOLDIER

As for General Miki, I surely did...

He opens the bundle, and shows its inside to TAKETOKI, who turns his face away.

TAKETOKI

That will do. Away!

ASAJI

(Casting a sidelong glance at it)
You, of all people...You must still ask him an important question...

TAKETOKI

(Coming to himself with a start)
What of his son?

SOLDIER

We gave him a heavy blow, but he fled, clinging to his horse.

TAKETOKI

What, he fled?

SOLDIER

I have no words to apologize for it.

TAKETOKI steals a glance at ASAJI. ASAJI with the same expressionless look like a Noh mask, looks hard at the soldier, then quietly leaves the hall. TAKETOKI gazes after her, glares at the SOLDIER who is throwing himself at TAKETOKI's feet, and thrusts his sword through the SOLDIER. The SOLDIER falls flat, his eyes filled with hatred.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

The sky is filled with dark clouds, flowering in whirls, and a violent wind is howling against the castle.

INSIDE THE FRONT TOWER

Soldiers are helping themselves to saké, and talking in whispering tones.

1ST SOLDIER

Goodness, how hard it blows!

2ND SOLDIER

It feels as if the foundation stone of this castle is shaking.

3RD SOLDIER

If you mean the foundation of Kumonosu Castle, it seems that it has already been shaking without wind.

4TH SOLDIER

The generals of the castles and forts who used to come to pay their respects to our lord every day until now...they have been quite negligent of late...

1ST SOLDIER

Keep clear of the devil, you know. Already two generals were forced to kill themselves, because of the lord's suspicion.

2ND SOLDIER

We can't believe that General Miki was killed by the spy under Inui's command, can we?

3RD SOLDIER

No, indeed. They say that Yoshiteru, the eldest son of General Miki, is staying with Inui. It's not at all likely that he remains with his own father's enemy.

4TH SOLDIER

Noriyasu Odagura and our young lord, Kunimaru, are also staying with Inui, they say.

1ST SOLDIER

I'm anxious to know how the matter will end...anyhow, now we can't feel safe in this castle, even though it was impregnable before.

2ND SOLDIER

Let me tell you the story which I head from the man at the water tower;

(MORE)

2ND SOLDIER (CONT'D)
 the other day he saw a crowd of
 rats swimming across the moat and
 fleeing from the castle.

3RD SOLDIER
 From olden times, people say that
 when a house burns, rats abandon it
 before anyone else.

They become silent. The sound of the wind, blowing violently
 aside.

INSIDE THE CASTLE. TAKETOKI'S ROOM

In a very chilly room, TAKETOKI is seated alone, looking
 blankly into space with restless eyes. The rage of the wind
 blowing like a groan in the distance.

After an interval, a wooden door silently opens. An old
 servant kneels outside the door.

TAKETOKI
 What's the matter? And what of our
 lady? How is she? Well?

The SERVANT is kneeling before him without uttering a word

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)
 (Cries aloud)
 You, answer me! Why, why do you
 remain silent?

SERVANT
 (With her head drooping down)
 I have no words to tell you...

TAKETOKI, frightened, stares at the SERVANT, and holds an
 elbow-rest tightly.

SERVANT (CONT'D)
 Our lady gave birth to...a dead
 child.

TAKETOKI
 What?! A dead child?

SERVANT
 And to make matters worse, it had
 been dead several days in the womb,
 and our lady herself cannot be
 freed from danger.

TAKETOKI is silent. A gust of wind shaking the castle violently. He staggers to his feet and screams in a wailing tone.

TAKETOKI
You fool! Fool! Fool!

Flurried footsteps.

RETAINER
Our lord! If you please, our lord!

TAKETOKI comes to himself and dashes into the corridor.

THE CORRIDOR

One of his retainers runs close to TAKETOKI.

RETAINER
Our lord! Here's a messenger from
the First Fort.

TAKETOKI
From the First Fort?

He runs.

A ROOM IN THE CASTLE

A violent wind. TAKETOKI enters, running down the open corridor. He looks down on the messenger, who kneels before him under the steps.

TAKETOKI
What's the matter?

MESSENGER
Inui's troops have surged into our
country across the border and
besieged the First Fort.

TAKETOKI
Oh, no!

MESSENGER
The leading general is Noriyasu
Odagura...and accompanying young
lord Kunimaru, they plead that they
are going to avenge their former
lord.

2ND MESSENGER

The Second Fort was also besieged,
and the general of the attacking
force is Yoshiteru Miki...

3RD MESSENGER

The First Fort and the Second Fort,
they both went over to the enemy,
and in cooperation with the enemy,
they are now surging forward to the
Third Fort.

THE GRAND HALL OF THE CASTLE

TAKETOKI, restlessly walking up and down, flanked by his
GENERALS in attendance. They are all gloomily silent.
TAKETOKI, glaring around impatiently, suddenly stops and
berates them.

TAKETOKI

Fools! We have already been
discussing the matter for some
time. Does no one have a scheme to
meet this emergency?

They are all silent.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

I won't ask you anymore! There's no
sense in asking the schemes of such
fools, who have turned pale and
cannot speak a word, frightened at
this event!

TAKETOKI again walks up and down restlessly. Thunder and
lightning. With a start, TAKETOKI stops walking and stares
fixedly into space. He suddenly begins to run.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

Get my horse ready!

THE FRONT GATE

Thunder and lightning. Violent wind and rain. The main door
swings open. Spurring his horse on, TAKETOKI dashes out of
the door like a gust of wind.

KUMOTE FOREST

In the midst of thunder and lightning, TAKETOKI continues
galloping, thundering at the highest pitch of his voice.

TAKETOKI
You evil spirit, come out!

Horrible laughter answers him.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)
Come out! Come out to meet me!

Horrible laughter reverberating throughout the forest.

KUMOTE FOREST. AN OLD BATTLEFIELD

TAKETOKI's galloping horse suddenly stops. Ahead of him is the heap of skeletons in armor. It is covered all over with weeds which are now in full blood-colored bloom.

TAKETOKI
(Shouts)
Come out to meet me, you evil
spirit! I have a question to ask
you! Come out!

On the heap of skeletons appears an old woman with dishevelled grey hair.

OLD WOMAN
Oh, you, lord of Kumonosu Castle.

TAKETOKI
At last you have appeared, evil
spirit. Answer me clearly. Is it
true that Yoshiaki's son will be
Lord of Kumonosu Castle?

OLD WOMAN
Oh, you finally came to the last
stop of delusion. How delightful,
delightful!

TAKETOKI
Damn it! Why not a word? If you
have the power of prophecy, tell me
Taketoki's fortune in war.

OLD WOMAN
(Laughs gloomily in horrible tone)
Be calm about it...you won't lose
the battle, unless Kumote Forest
advances towards Kumonosu Castle.

TAKETOKI
 (Surprised with joy)
 What? Unless this forest advances?
 It cannot be, I'm sure.

He laughs.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)
 ...then you mean I will never lose
 the battle?

The old woman disappears with a horrible laughter, and amid the heap of armor and skeletons appear blood-stained soldiers one by one.

1ST PHANTOM
 (Laughs)
 If you live a demon-like life, be
 devilish to your heart's content.

TAKETOKI
 All right! Noriyasu, Kunimaru,
 Yoshiaki's little monkey and Inui's
 fellows, I'll kill all of them.

2ND PHANTOM
 (Laughs)
 If you build up the heap of
 corpses, make it as big as your
 heart's content.

TAKETOKI
 All right! On these skeletons I'll
 build up the new heap of corpses!

3RD PHANTOM
 (Laughs)
 If you spill blood, let it flow to
 your heart's content.

TAKETOKI
 All right! I'll fill the moat of
 the castle with a sea of blood.

With his face crimson, he stands on his saddle, and screeches with laughter like one possessed.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)
 Come, Noriyasu. Join Inui if you
 dare. Kunimaru, Yoshiteru...well,
 unite even with the First Fort and
 the Second Fort, if you dare.
 (MORE)

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

Collect thousands, tens of
thousands of soldiers or as many as
they can, and come to Kumonosu
Castle!

THE FIELD

Noriyasu's troops advance, filling the field. The troops are disposed in a battle formation shaped like the scales of a fish. The clattering sounds of armor and hoofs is heard like the roar of the sea. Clouds of dust whirl up. Flags flutter. Horses neigh. The metal mountings of helmets and spearheads glitter in the sun. Noriyasu, Kunimaru, Yoshiteru and others go into the center of the battle array.

The camp - NORIYASU stares hard at Kumote Forest, which is just ahead of them, and looks back on the generals who wait on him.

NORIYASU

We lay out our battle formation
like the wings of a crane...Now,
the only advantage of Kumote forest
is the roads which stretch like
cobwebs. Don't take the roads where
you will go astray. When you have
once entered the forest, proceed
through the trees straight ahead.

The generals dash in all directions. The formation of troops is shapes like the wings of a crane and they solemnly advance to the forest.

THE BATTLE OF KUMOTE FOREST

Taketoki's troops, who have set nets and lain down in the labyrinth of the forest, are easily demolished by Noriyasu's troops, who understand their tactics and have silently advanced through the trees.

KUMONOSU CASTLE. INSIDE THE CASTLE

TAKETOKI and GENERALS.

TAKETOKI

What?! Our troops waiting in ambush
in Kumote Forest have fled back?

GENERAL

Yes, my lord.

TAKETOKI

You great fools! Even though you stationed soldiers in ambush in that stronghold, do you mean that you withdrew them without taking even one fling at the enemy?

GENERAL

Yes. The enemy is Noriyasu Odagura, who is familiar with the place, and he cannot be tricked.

TAKETOKI

Hmm!

Grinding his teeth, TAKETOKI furiously stands up and runs up the stairs leading to the tower. Other generals follow him.

THE TOWER

TAKETOKI and his GENERALS come up. They look down.

KUMOTE FOREST. PANORAMIC VIEW

The edge of the forest is filled to overflowing with Noriyasu's troops.

The TOWER

TAKETOKI, who was looking down steadily, suddenly breaks out into fits of laughter. The GENERALS, shocked at the news of their defeated troops and at the sight of the high morale of Noriyasu's troops, which they see below, all stare at TAKETOKI with a shudder. He shrieks with laughter again.

TAKETOKI

I, of all people...

TAKETOKI keeps laughing. The GENERALS stare in blank amazement. At last TAKETOKI stops laughing and looks about at the GENERALS. They all look as pale as death. TAKETOKI looks down towards the castle interior.

INSIDE THE CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

Soldiers fill the courtyard looking as pale as death and gazing at the tower with frightened eyes.

THE TOWER

TAKETOKI looks about at those soldiers and GENERALS, and gives a broad grin. He shouts at the highest pitch of his voice.

TAKETOKI

Every one of you. Hark!! The battle is won by the one who wins the final victory! The other issues of the battle are not important at all! Don't be frightened! Believe me, this is Washizu! I will never lose the battle!

The GENERALS are stunned.

INSIDE THE CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

The soldiers are astir, not convinced by TAKETOKI's words.

THE TOWER

TAKETOKI looks about at the soldiers and generals, and in an extraordinarily strong tone he begins to talk like one possessed.

TAKETOKI

If you can't believe me, I shall reason with you. It was when I was the head of the First Fort. On my way to the castle after having defeated Fujimaki's rebel troops united with Inui's, I saw an evil spirit in Kumote Forest. The evil spirit prophesied, 'You are the Lord of the North Castle from this evening, and the Lord of Kumonosu Castle shortly.' Behold, I am! That prophecy came true in the case of my fate, not a bit different. Now, today...I galloped my horse to Kumote Forest, and asked the evil spirit about my fortune in war.

He laughs.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

Congratulate yourselves! I, I will never lose the battle, even if the sky crumbles and the Earth cracks!

(MORE)

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

According to the evil spirit,
unless that Kumote Forest moves and
advances on to this castle, I will
never lose a battle. Now, every one
of you...well? Do you think that
forest moves?!

INSIDE THE CASTLE

Soldiers break into laughter.

THE TOWER

TAKETOKI

All right! Raise your weapons, if
you believe my fortune in war!

INSIDE THE CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

Soldiers raise spears, flourish arrows, and shout war cries.

THE TOWER

TAKETOKI answers them with a smile. With a contemptuous look
at the generals, who are at their wits' end, he turns his
eyes and looks down at Kumote Forest.

KUMOTE FOREST. A PANORAMIC VIEW

Noriyasu's troops are deady silent in the forest.

THE TOWER (NIGHT)

The outside viewed through observation holes is pitch black
and a hush has fallen over the darkness. Guards are staring
at the darkness.

GUARD

Can't see a thing. The fellows in
the attacking force...even without
making bonfires...I wonder what
they are doing?

The sound of axes resounding throughout the forest. Flapping
of bird wings, frightened at something.

GUARD (CONT'D)

What? What's up?

One of the soldiers, who is sleeping with his armor on, talks in a sleepy tone.

SOLDIER

Since they can't attack the castle,
they have begun to make a stockade,
I presume.

THE GRAND HALL

Making bonfires in the open corridor and with the doors wide open, TAKETOKI and several GENERALS are drinking saké. All of them have their armor and shoes on, with carefully worn leggings and footgear.

TAKETOKI

Ha ha ha ha...even Noriyasu won't be able to take measures against the noted architecture of this castle, 'the Black Style.' The attacking force cannot even get a glimpse of the inside of the castle...on the other hand, from the castle they are visible to our eyes. If they dare come with all their strength, we will draw them as near as we can and shower arrows upon them. That will do it.

Some kind of strange noise approaches. All of those present are startled.

INSIDE THE CASTLE. THE COURTYARD

Strange noises approach nearer and nearer. SOLDIERS, who had been sleeping at their posts, prepares for tomorrow's battle, are aroused and raise a clamor.

1ST SOLDIER

What's the matter?!

2ND SOLDIER

Is it the attacking force?!

3RD SOLDIER

Is it a night attack?!

THE GRAND HALL

All the GENERALS stand up simultaneously. TAKETOKI also stands up straight. With terrific flapping and ominous cries, a flock of wild birds, attracted by the light, fly into the room. They fly against the ceiling and wooden door, and fall thick and fast upon the floor. The GENERALS sense something ominous, and stand upright. TAKETOKI looks at them and laughs uproariously.

TAKETOKI
(Laughing)

Why do you turn pale, you stupid generals? Why not regard this as a good omen? What a shame you are ready to run away at the sight of a good omen that a large enemy force will fall into our hands.

The GENERALS are silent, biting their lips.

The dawn. The bonfires are out and a morning mist hovers in the dawn. TAKETOKI is alone dozing, while leaning on an elbow-rest. WOMEN's excited voices from the inner part of the castle.

WOMEN
Oh, my lady...My lady...

With a start, TAKETOKI strains his ears. The interior is hushed and still. TAKETOKI, driven by anxiety, stands up.

THE INNER PART OF THE CASTLE. THE CORRIDOR

Maids and an old waiting woman gather in a group and look to one direction with frightened eyes. TAKETOKI briskly enters. The maids and the old waiting woman sit in haste. TAKETOKI is transfixed at the sight in the room, as if chilled to the bone.

ASAJI'S ROOM

The light from the candlestand is dimly flickering in the twilight. ASAJI squats at the corner of the room, away from her sleeping-mattress, and repeatedly makes a gesture of washing her hands. Her expressionless face like a Noh mask is emaciated with the torment of serious illness and now assumes a ghostly visage. The color of her eyes is already abnormal. While making a gesture of washing her hands, she murmurs in delirium.

ASAJI

Cannot be removed...There, horrible
blood stain. With all my washing,
why doesn't it disappear, I wonder.
Oh, no, still smells of blood...oh,
these hands, why can they not be
wiped clean?!

TAKETOKI, struck with horror, stares at ASAJI, but being
unable to stand it anymore, runs close to her.

TAKETOKI

Asaji! Asaji!

ASAJI is deaf to his screaming voice. She continues her
gesture of washing her hands and babbles out in delirium.

ASAJI

Why is it that...oh, this
bloodstain...too strongly stained
on my hands to be removed. For all
my washing, for all my
washing...reeks of blood...this
disgusting bloodstain...

TAKETOKI is frightened out of his wits; trembling all over
and staring at ASAJI, he is rooted to the ground. Flurried
cries of the mob in the distance. TAKETOKI comes to himself
and runs out.

INSIDE THE CASTLE. THE COURTYARD

Soldiers, who have fallen into utter confusion, are
screeching, beside themselves, and running pell-mell.
TAKETOKI dashes out.

TAKETOKI

You great fools! How dare you
become upset and make such a noise
at this crucial moment! Be quiet!

One of the soldiers talks, with his face drawn.

SOLDIER

My lord! The forest...the
forest...That Kumote Forest...

He points to the direction of the front gate, and gasps for
breath. TAKETOKI becomes irritated.

TAKETOKI

Kumote Forest...what do you mean?

One of the soldiers talks, trembling all over.

SOLDIER

The forest has begun to move...and
is moving toward out castle.

TAKETOKI is shocked for a moment.

TAKETOKI

What nonsense...must be an illusion
imagined by fools like you...It's
hardly possible that the forest
moves.

He violently pushes the SOLDIERS away and runs up the tower.

THE TOWER

TAKETOKI comes running up the tower. He shoves aside the guard, who is frightened and rooted to the ground like an idiot, and he draws his face near an observation hole with a jerk. TAKETOKI's face suddenly turns pale, thunderstruck.

OUTSIDE THE CASTLE. A PANORAMIC VIEW

The forest is slowly moving through the mist which hangs over the morning mist. And it is advancing towards the castle, slowly and steadily.

THE TOWER

TAKETOKI is utterly at his wits' end. Over his face appears an indescribable horror. Like a beast in danger, TAKETOKI staggers, hesitates, and then, trying to run away from the tower, he gets his feet on the stairs. Then he looks down and is petrified.

INSIDE THE CASTLE. THE COURTYARD

SOLDIERS have gathered full to overflowing and are glaring up at TAKETOKI.

THE TOWER AND THE COURTYARD

TAKETOKI loses his self-control. Soon he is barely able to put up a good front.

TAKETOKI

What...what's the matter?! Don't
desert your posts!

Not a single SOLDIER answers him, and they all stare fixedly at TAKETOKI. He glares at them, with distraught eyes, and screams.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

To your posts! Return to your
posts!

The SOLDIERS are silent. Deprived of words, TAKETOKI turns pale. An arrow whistles from somewhere and grazes Taketoki's armor. TAKETOKI contorts his face with fear, and screams.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

You cowards! Oh, I guessed your
game! After killing me, you are
going to surrender to the enemy's
camp, with my head as a present!

The SOLDIERS are silent. Another arrow whistles and lodges in the wadded silk garment of his armor. TAKETOKI is completely distraught.

TAKETOKI (CONT'D)

You dogs! Traitors! It's high
treason to murder your lord!

A shrill voice comes in a flash.

VOICE

Who murdered our former lord?

A shower of arrows converge upon TAKETOKI. He hurries to run into the tower. One of the GENERALS shoots an arrow at him. That arrow lodges in his back. TAKETOKI falters. A shower of arrows converge upon TAKETOKI. One of them pierces TAKETOKI's head. TAKETOKI, bristling with arrows like a hedgehog, falls headlong from the tower.

OUTSIDE THE CASTLE

The forest silently and steadily advances in the morning mist. A gust of morning wind runs through and sweeps away the mist. It reveals that the moving forest is none other than Noriyasu's troops with their large and small cavalry camouflaged by twigs and branches. NORIYASU shouts to all of the troops.

NORIYASU

Our attacking forces can be seen
 from the castle! Put large and
 small horse contingents before you,
 and shelter yourselves behind them.
 Conceal yourselves among the
 branches and don't expose
 yourselves to the danger of arrows!

The troops answer him and raise war cries. The morning breeze
 sweeps by. They solemnly advance. The morning sun suddenly
 casts its first bright ray across Noriyasu's forces.

THE RUINS OF A CASTLE

Reeds growing thick and rank over the moat. A morning breeze
 running through those reeds.

CHORUS

*The attacking force were none other
 than the rustling reeds in the
 breeze. The war cries were none
 other than a breeze in the pine
 tree.*

A sobbing pine tree rustles against the stone wall.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

*The ruins show the fate of demonic
 men with treacherous desire. Life
 is the same now as in ancient
 times.*

Moss-grown stone walls. Water of the moat covered with green
 scum. 'The Ruins of Kumonosu Castle.' A decayed placard
 written as above. Everything looks desolate.

THE END