

Period: Japan, just after the Battle of Dan no Ura in 1185 won by the Minamoto clan over the Taira clan.

Set: Can be a pine tree to suggest the background tree in Noh. Anything that suggests a mountain area. A stream will be mentioned: it can be “located” behind the tree. Something like a bridge on the left...something that resembles the Hashigakari in Noh. A couple of rocks, which can be used as seats, and some grass. Some flowers. Noh Flute can be heard at the beginning and the end if the director so chooses.

Enter the monk, Makoto, reciting a poem as he walks on stage, He has a staff which also serves as a cane. He looks only at the tree, not seeing the young woman sitting on a rock, her kimono torn and bloodstained. She is looking intently at a knife. It is the smaller one that Japanese women of the period carry, large enough to be lethal. She doesn't notice him at first, but looks up when she hears him speaking. She is irritated at the interruption.

MAKOTO

My heart in middle age found the Way,
And I came to dwell at the foot of this mountain.
When the spirit moves, I wander alone
Amid beauty that is all for me...
I will walk till the water checks my path,
Then sit and watch the rising clouds —
And some day meet an old woodcutter
And talk and laugh and never return.¹

The monk suddenly realizes he's not alone as he sees Mayumi. He assesses the situation.

Good day to you, my young lady. Are you enjoying this fine spring day? The sun has just drunk the last red from the dawn. It's gold has washed away our suffering.

Mayumi, weeping, doesn't answer him.

You look as if you have been walking all night.

Look at the flowers. They slept all winter and then struggled to wake. These mountains

¹ “My Retreat at Mount Chung-Nan” a poem by Wang Wèi (699-759) trans. Witter Bynner in *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology* (New York: Vintage, 1929), p. 195.

welcome them. See, here they are! Survivors all!

MAYUMI, *wiping the blade of her knife with the edge of her kimono.*

But I don't want to survive. There's nothing left for me. My family's been killed: my husband, parents, and the child I was nursing. What have I left?

MAKOTO

You're one of those flowers and like them you owe your life to this spring!

Have you heard about duty? Most people think that duty is owed to our ruler, or a lord, or a friend, or family. It's really much simpler than that. Much simpler. Our duty is to life. We owe it to ourselves to walk the way...

His thoughts begin to wander and he walks up to look more closely at the pine tree.

MAYUMI

I owe nothing to anyone. Everything I had is lost. All that I trusted has been betrayed. I couldn't even save my child. How can I go on living?

MAKOTO, *looking at the tree*

Isn't this pine extraordinary? Green all year long. I couldn't even guess its years. I wonder what makes it so want to live?

MAYUMI

I was cooking some rice when they came into the house. I heard clatter and screams.

MAKOTO, *continues to look at the tree*

How does the mountain pine survive our droughts? Where does the water come from for it to drink?

MAYUMI

I pushed open the sliding door and saw what hell looks like.

MAKOTO, *still looking at the tree*

Deep green against the brown wood. (*chuckles*) It always surprises me.

MAYUMI

Blood everywhere. Kenji, my husband, was lying so still, his blood still flowing from his many wounds. He was so brave, trying to protect us.

There were three Minamoto samurais in the room. The samurai who had killed Kenji slipped in his blood as it pooled on the *tatami* mats. A bloody rain dripped down the landscape on the screen and trickled out onto the floor. The pale gold, greens, and yellows all were stained with crimson.

My baby Hiroshi was crying. I saw him. The second samurai saw him too. He picked him up as if he were a bale of rice and threw him to the third one who skewered him. He ran him through so easily with his sword, and laughed. Human targets for practice. My baby's screams soon grew silent...but his blood kept flowing ...

The samurais heard some noise in the street and left as quickly as they had come.

MAKOTO, *looking at the tree*

Ichi go, Ichi e. One time is all we ever have. I suppose that's why I'm always surprised.

MAYUMI

I fell as I tried to reach Hiroshi. I crawled to him and held him in my arms. I hoped no one would see me. Maybe another samurai would come...

I could not believe my better was dead. I sang to him...pretending he was only asleep. How I wish I could go on pretending: he's just someplace else. He'll be back soon. Staying with his grandmother.. I don't know now whether she is alive or dead.

All my dreams have become nightmares. My waking is a nightmare.

My kimono was soaked in the blood of those I loved. I'll never be clean again.

I was frozen from pain and fear. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't leave Hiroshi...or Kenji.

MAKOTO, *eyes fixed intensely on the tree*

Curiosity. Maybe that's it! The pine wants to know what birds will visit and build a nest in his head. What bugs will drone the bass for their bird song?

MAYUMI

Then some other samurais came. They laughed at me. I held my baby closer. They made some crude jokes. One dragged Hiroshi away from me and then he raped me. He took his time. They laughed and told more jokes as I provided their entertainment. More followed the first rapist.

I screamed and screamed, but they laughed even louder. Soon I was whimpering. No use. Nothing. I could do nothing. Eventually they grew tired. I'm surprised they didn't kill me.

They called me a filthy Taira camp follower. They think Tairas are always out to kill Minamotos, and in most cases they are right. The Minamotos were just as ready to kill any Taira they can find.

But I'm more a mother than a Taira. I give life. I could never take it away.

Except my own life. Now. Now that I see there is nothing left for me.

The soldiers didn't think I was worth killing. They saw my spirit was dead, that my soul was extinguished when my baby was killed, and my body raped. The Minamotos had left their stamp on me. I was their property.

When they were far away, I buried Hiroshi as well as I could. I've been wandering ever since. Chance brought me here.

Are wars always like this? Do people hate so blindly that everyone on the other side is a target for torture or killing? Does no one ever learn anything?

If anyone could see what war really looks like, or feel what losing feels like...? But no one thinks that he himself will be the one to die. If people did see their own deaths at the time they decided on war, I think we would have fewer wars.

If you don't fight, there will be no one to fight you. Fighting takes two. If you don't fight, you have no enemy.

MAKOTO

After adversity progress is possible: suffering is the seed that makes happiness bloom.

There's an old saying: "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

We have to learn how to bear the things we cannot change. If there is a chance of change, then we should have the courage to bring that about. But it takes a wise person to know the difference between the two.

You've told me what has happened to you, but not your name. What is it?

MAYUMI

Sakamoto Mayumi desu. But I am no one now. Mayumi died the day her child died.

My memories are sharper than this knife in my hand, and they never let up. I can't sleep, but when I do, I don't want to wake and face another day. I can't bear the light of dawn after a sleepless night. The sunlight sears my eyes with the reminder that I'm still alive, but those I loved are not. It's like a red-hot iron burning my flesh. It never heals. The pain never stops. Another day without Kenji and Hiroshi. A world without all that gave it value. All that made the struggles of every day worth it.

I hate this empty world. Every breath I take is painful. Everything I see burns my soul.

MAKOTO

Suffering comes and teaches us how to live.

Everything is change, Sometimes we return to what was, but "what was" is never exactly the same.

A frog leaps into an ancient pond.² Sound of frog meeting water, then ripples. Finally, peace again. A surface as smooth as a mirror to reflect your soul. Ripples come and go, but the pond stays. The mirror returns and sparkles with sunlight. Broken diamonds when a breeze ruffles the surface.

² Bashô's famous haiku says:

furu ike ya	old pond
kawazu tobi komu	a frog jumps in
mizu-no-oto	sound of water

When Bashô met the monk Takuan, Takuan took these words to show that Bashô had achieved enlightenment.