

COWARD FOR COWARD

or

Archer Taro

(Yumiya Taro)

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Cast

Taro

Host

Taro Kaja

Head Guest

Guests

HOST I am a resident of this neighborhood. It is
my turn to host the celebration of this year's Tenjin
Festival that is to take place this evening.

Concerning which, I mean to call my servant Taro Kaja and give him a job to do. Taro Kaja, are you there?

TARO KAJA Here.

HOST There you are.

TARO KAJA At your service, Sir.

HOST You came quite quickly. The matter I have called you here about is of no great import. It is my turn to host the celebration of the Tenjin Festival, for which everyone is to come over this evening. When they arrive, you must let me know.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

HEAD GUEST I say, I say. Have you all gathered together?

GUESTS We are all here.

HEAD GUEST Somebody (name of actor playing the HOST) is to host this evening's celebration of the Tenjin Festival. As the time is about right, let us be on our way there.

GUESTS That is a fine idea.

GUEST III Oh, but Taro has not yet arrived.

HEAD GUEST When I went to invite him, I was told that he had gone off somewhere already as usual with his bow and arrows. So let us just go on without him.

GUESTS That is a fine idea.

HEAD GUEST Come, come. Let us be on our way.

GUESTS With all our hearts.

HEAD GUEST Hello in there? Is anybody home?

TARO KAJA Someone is at the door. Who is there?

HEAD GUEST Tell you master that we have
arrived.

TARO KAJA I will indeed inform him of your
arrival, so wait right where you are.

HEAD GUEST With all my heart.

TARO KAJA I have a matter to relate to you.

HOST What is it?

TARO KAJA Everybody has arrived.

HOST Then ask them to come all the way in here.

TARO KAJA With all my heart. He says you are to
 come all the way inside.

HEAD GUEST With all my heart. I congratulate
 you on your appointment as host.

HOST I am pleased that you have come.

GUEST II Taro Kaja, I am here.

TARO KAJA It is good that you have come.

GUEST II I congratulate you on your appointment
 as host.

HOST I am most pleased that you have come.

(Each GUEST enters in turn, greeting TARO KAJA
and the HOST in the same manner as GUEST II, and
they line up stage left.)

HOST All of you come all the way inside.

GUESTS With all our hearts. (They move to stage
 right, still in a line.)

HOST First, I beg you all to sit.

GUESTS With all our hearts. (They sit.)

HOST Well, I must say, it is good to see that
 everyone is here.

HEAD GUEST First, concerning your
 appointment as host for this evening. . .

ALL GUESTS (Bowing.) we wish to extend our
 congratulations.

HOST But I see that Taro is not here.

HEAD GUEST When I went to his place to invite
 him, I was told that he had gone off somewhere
 already as usual with his bow and arrows. So we
 came without him.

HOST Well, I must say, that Taro goes off somewhere each and every day with his bow and arrows, does he not?

HEAD GUEST And I have been told that he has never shot down so much as a single sparrow.

GUEST II I have never heard tell of him doing the least bit of archery training.

GUEST III I have been told that people go about calling him Archer Taro whenever his name comes up.

HOST Also, I have been told that he is actually a great coward, and that that is the reason that he always goes about carrying his bow and arrows

with him.

HEAD GUEST I am certain that that is indeed the
 case.

HOST In that case, if he should put in an
 appearance here tonight, I suggest that we relate
 horrifying tales to frighten Taro. What do you all
 think?

HEAD GUEST That is indeed. . .

ALL GUESTS . . . a fine idea.

HOST If that is the case, you must each think up
 some horrifying tale to tell.

ALL GUESTS With all our hearts. (All face front

and think.)

TARO I am a resident of this neighborhood, and I am known as Archer Taro. It is not from a desire to please myself that I go about day after day with my bow and arrows in hand destroying life, but rather that I kill wild birds and beast to prevent their wreaking havoc upon fields and paddies, and that I take aim at burglars and hoodlums to protect women, children, and the aged from sorrow. Now, tonight is the night appointed for celebration of the Tenjin Festival at the home of Somebody (the name of the actor playing the role of HOST). As I am a member of his group, I have decided to stop by his place. And since I would be late if I were to take the time to drop by my place and change into more proper clothes for the occasion, I have made up my mind to go just as I am. Hello in there? Is anybody

home?

TARO KAJA Someone is at the door. Who is there?

TARO Tell your master that I have arrived.

TARO KAJA I will indeed inform him of your
 arrival, so wait right where you are.

TARO With all my heart.

TARO KAJA I have a matter to relate to you.

HOST What is it?

TARO KAJA Taro has arrived.

HOST Then ask him to come all the way in here.

TARO KAJA With all my heart. He says you are to
 come all the way inside.

HEAD GUEST With all my heart.

HOST Here, Taro, I am most pleased that you have
 come.

TARO I congratulate you on your appointment as
 host for this evening.

HOST How very gallantly you are attired.

TARO Today as always I went hunting in the fields.
 And since I would have been late if I had taken the
 time to drop by my place and change into more
 proper clothes for the occasion, I made up my mind

to come just as I am.

HOST Please go make yourself more comfortable.

TARO I will go make myself more comfortable and
 come back.

HOST That is best.

TARO Here, here, Taro Kaja. I entrust my bow and
 arrows to you.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

HOST (To the GUESTS.) I say, I say, Taro has
 arrived.

HEAD GUEST You say he has arrived?

HOST Take care not to slip up.

GUESTS With all our hearts.

TARO Well, I see everyone is present.

HEAD GUEST I say, Taro, I went to your place to
invite you, but I was told that you had gone off
somewhere already as usual with your bow and
arrows. So I came without you.

GUEST II And the rest of us, as well. . .

GUESTS Came here without you.

TARO I thank you heartily for thinking of me.
Today as always I went hunting in the fields and

dropped by my place to change into more proper clothes for the occasion just now.

HEAD GUEST This is as it should be.

HOST Well, Taro, going off somewhere each and every day with your bow and arrows must be a most comforting pastime for you.

TARO Oh, no, never. It is not from a desire to please myself that I go about day after day with my bow and arrows in hand destroying life, but rather that I kill wild birds and beast to prevent their wreaking havoc upon fields and paddies, and that I take aim at burglars and hoodlums to protect women, children, and the aged from sorrow.

HEAD GUEST This is as it should be.

TARO I will relate my adventures to you all. Today as usual, when I passed through the foothills of the eastern mountain, I saw a huge wild boar wreaking havoc upon the ripened grain. So I took aim with my trusty bow, and pierced the boar's forefoot, and the huge beast immediately fell to the ground.

HEAD GUEST Well, I must say, what a brave accomplishment.

HOST I say, I say, Taro. Do wild boars really appear in the foothills of the eastern mountain?

TARO Not only wild boars, but also deer, monkeys, wolves, foxes, and badgers appear there as well.

HOST Haaa. And do you shoot foxes as well when they appear?

TARO Oh, it goes without saying that I shoot foxes as well when they appear.

HOST I think it would be advisable for you to stop shooting foxes in future.

TARO What makes you say that?

HOST It is because the fox is most fearfully vindictive, (To the GUESTS.) is it not?

GUESTS That it is, that it is.

HOST So I strongly advise you to stop shooting foxes.

TARO What are you talking about? The fox is a four-legged beast like all others, all of which I shoot down as soon as I discover them.

HOST Oh, no! Foxes alone you must most certainly abstain from. I know a most fearful tale about the vindictiveness of foxes. I will relate it to you all.

GUESTS That is a fine idea.

HOST Taro, you must listen carefully with the rest.

TARO With all my heart.

HOST Long ago, during the reign of Emperor Toba, there lived a woman of the court called Lady Tamamo.

TARO I say, what is a 'woman of the court'?

HOST A lady-in-waiting in service to the emperor.

TARO Hmmmm.

HOST But she was, in actual fact, a fox in disguise.

TARO What is this?

HOST One day during a gathering in the court, to attend a concert, just when the music began, a great wind began to blow, extinguishing all the lamps and candles in a trice. Then suddenly a light shone out from the body of Lad Tamamo that illuminated not only the palace, but every grain of sand in the garden as well. After that, she ran off to the Plain of

Nasu, and a warrior was sent out to quell her. But after she was killed, her vindictive spirit remained in that field where it continues to capture people to this very day. It is due to this fearful vindictiveness that I strongly advise you to abstain from shooting foxes.

TARO (Laughing.) What foolish words you utter.

That is a tale of most ancient times, during which I have heard tell, things of that sort did indeed happen. But as there is not a single fox of that ilk left today, I shoot them down as soon as I discover them.

HOST Oh, no. As the fox is a most wily creature, you never know when or where one might disguise itself as who knows what. And there may well be a fox in disguise among us here tonight in this very

room. (To the GUESTS.) Is that not so?

HEAD GUEST That it is. . .

GUESTS . . . most true indeed.

TARO What nonsense you all do utter. Here in this room tonight, there are the Host and you, and you, and you. (Using the names of the actors playing the GUESTS as he points at them in turn.) Not one of whom has the slightest resemblance to a fox.

HOST Well, it has been said since ancient times that if you extinguish the lights, a fox will show its true self. (To the GUESTS.) What do you all think of extinguishing the lights here tonight to discover whether or not there is a fox among us?

HEAD GUEST That is indeed. . .

GUESTS . . . a fine idea.

HOST Then, come, come, let us extinguish them.

GUESTS With all our hearts.

TARO Oh, wait, please wait!

HOST Wait for what?

TARO Well, I must say, what needless things you say. To begin with, it is best to consider things with care. No matter how devoid of shadows the light of the moon may be, it cannot compare with the light of the sun. Concerning which, since it is always best to light fires to enjoy oneself by night, what do you

mean by the irresponsible act of extinguishing the lights on such a dark night? So after all, it is best for us to relight the lights to enjoy ourselves.

HOST It is indeed a most dark night in this room tonight. But, even so, I think I see a light shining behind your, Taro.

GUESTS It seems something in disguise is about to appear.

TARO I will just move to another position.

HOST Yes, you should not stay where you are.

TARO Oh, I must say, your stories are most uninteresting tonight. Can you not think of some more amusing tales?

HEAD GUEST I have just remembered something
 about things that shine.

TARO Is there still more to be told?

HEAD GUEST Last night I had particular matter to
 pray about, for which I traveled to the forest of the
 Tenjin Shrine in Kitano at the Hour of the Ox (2am).
 As I arrived a bit too early, I sat down in the shade
 of the aged pine to rest. Suddenly the branches
 above began to rustle. In fear, I looked up, and what
 I saw was most frightening.

TARO What was it?

HEAD GUEST A demon appeared.

TARO What's that? You say a demon appeared?

HEAD GUEST It stood a full fifteen feet high, and
its eyes gleamed like the Morning Star. Its mouth
opened all the way back to its ears, and its hairy
arms stuck out a full six feet from its shoulders.

TARO Aaagh! (He falls flat on his back in a dead
faint.)

HOST Taro has passed out. Let's bring him to.

HEAD GUEST That is best. (All gather around
Taro.)

GUESTS Here, here! Taro, Taro! (They help Taro
into a sitting position.) Just look at that face of his!
(They laugh.)

TARO I say, here, here. Just what is it you all find
 so amusing?

HOST The way you passed out is what is so
 amusing.

TARO When did I pass out?

HOST Did you not pass out in fright at the tale of
 the demon just now?

TARO You mean the tale of the demon just now?

HOST Most certainly.

TARO There was a reason.

HOST What was it?

TARO As that tale was so very amusing, I dozed off
 during the telling of it, and fell into a deep sleep.

HOST Just listen to him! (All laugh.)

TARO Hey, Somebody! (Name of the actor playing
 the role HEAD GUEST.)

HEAD GUEST What?

TARO You are a coward!

HEAD GUEST Why do you call me coward?

TARO Why did you not call for me at that time. If
 you had called for me, I would have come and shot

that demon through the stomach with my bow and arrows. I must say, what a pity you did not.

HOST Just listen to his empty boasting. (All laugh.) I say, I say, Taro.

TARO What?

HOST Tell me, are you truly not frightened?

TARO And of what should I be frightened?

HOST If that is the case, go out to the Tenjin Forest right now.

TARO And what am I to gain if I go?

HOST I will give you a reward of one hundred gold

pieces.

TARO What's that? You say you will give me a
reward of one hundred gold pieces?

HOST Most certainly.

TARO This is amusing. I will go.

HOST Oh, wait just a minute.

TARO Wait for what?

HOST Just saying you have gone will provide no
proof. I will give you this fan to hang on the branch
of the pine tree in Tenjin Forest. And if you succeed,
I will reward you with one hundred gold pieces. But
if you fail, you must serve me as my servant

without pay for the rest of your living days.

TARO What's that? You say if I succeed in hanging this fan on the branch of the pine tree in Tenjin Forest, you will reward me with one hundred gold pieces, but if I should fail, I must serve you as your servant without pay for the rest of my living days?

HOST Most certainly.

TARO Here, here, listen, everybody! He says if I go hang this fan on the branch of the pine tree in Tenjin Forest, he will reward me with one hundred gold pieces.

GUESTS That he will do indeed.

TARO You must not take back your word when the

time come!

GUESTS With all our hearts, we will not.

TARO Oh, how happy I am. I must hurry on my
 way to Tenjin Forest.

(All laugh as they watch TARO exit.)

HOST Taro is gone.

HEAD GUEST He is gone indeed.

HOST Do you think he will pass out?

HEAD GUEST If he passes out, he will not likely
 make it back alive.

HOST Now, I have a matter of import to consider.
As he is a most sly rascal, he might just hire
someone to go in his place.

HEAD GUEST That he may just do.

HOST As it is important for there to be something
there that looks like a demon when he gets there, I
will disguise myself as a demon and go there to see
whether Taro passes out or not.

HEAD GUEST That is indeed. . .

GUESTS . . . a fine idea.

HOST As fortune would have it, I have a neighbor
at whose place I can disguise myself. So the rest of
you must go there too and hide where you can see

what happens.

GUESTS With all our hears, we will.

HOST Taro Kaja, you come along and hide where
 you can see, too.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

HOST What a strange matter this has developed
 into.

GUESTS It is as you say indeed.

(All exit. Pause. Taro enters in demon disguise.)

TARO I am a demon from the Isle of Horai. Each
 and every night I go to the Tenjin Forest at the Hour

of the Ox to catch and devour those who come to pray, and I plan to go there tonight as usual. I must hurry on my way. Truly, all those who come to pray at the Hour of the Ox are jealous women and those who wish to place a curse on others, prankish rascals one and all. So as soon as I find any such rascals, I catch and devour them, each and every one. Well, here I am already at Tenjin Forest. Well, I must say, what a dark night it is. As I have arrived a bit too early, I will sit down in the shade of this aged pine to rest.

HOST I am a demon from the Isle of Horai. Each and every night I go to the Tenjin Forest at the Hour of the Ox to catch and devour those who come to pray, and I plan to go there tonight as usual. I must hurry on my way. Truly, all those who come to pray at the Hour of the Ox are jealous women and those

who wish to place a curse on others, prankish rascals one and all. So as soon as I find any such rascals, I catch and devour them, each and every one. Well, here I am already at Tenjin Forest. Oh, I must say, what a dark night it is.

TARO Well, how very strange. Suddenly I hear a human voice.

HOST Well, how very strange. Suddenly I hear a human voice.

TARO Oh, I say, and how close it does sound.

HOST Oh, I say, and how close it does sound.

TARO Perhaps it is someone come to pray.

HOST Perhaps it is a worshipper at the Hour of the
 Ox.

TARO Oh, how creepy.

HOST Oh, how creepy.

(They run into each other, back to back, and, frightened out of their wits, the HOST falls on his back in a dead faint, and TARO tiptoes off to the opposite side of the stage.)

TARO (Aside.) Oh, I must say, what a fright I had, what a fright. This evening at Somebody's (Name of actor playing the HOST.) place, I was told that if I came too Tenjin Forest to find out whether or not demons appear, I would be rewarded with one hundred gold pieces. So when I got home and

conferred with my wife, she scoffingly insisted that there are no demons in Tenjin Forest and that everybody told me that just to frighten me as they know I am a coward, urging me to go quickly and come back to claim my reward of one hundred gold pieces. Out of fright, I came here wearing a demon mask, and a demon appeared, standing a full fifteen feet high, eyes gleaming like the Morning Star, mouth opening all the way back to its ears, hairy arms sticking out a full six feet from its shoulders, just like they said it would. Since neither greed nor gain can take the place of life, I must return home quickly. Oh, I see over there a huge crowd of people carrying pine torches and making an uproar. I must take care they don't see me. For the moment, I think I will just hide right here and see what is to be seen.

HEAD GUEST Come, come, Everybody, come along
with me, come with me.

GUESTS With all our hearts, with all our hearts.

HEAD GUEST I wonder whether Taro has arrived.

GUEST II How can you even think he might come?

GUEST III It is just as you say, I cannot believe he
would come.

GUESTS It is as you all say indeed.

HEAD GUEST Oh! There is a demon here.

GUEST II Do you not think it might be our host?

GUEST III Is it not Somebody? (Name of actor
 playing the HOST.)

LAST-IN-LINE GUEST First take off his mask and
 see.

HEAD GUEST Taro Kaja, take off his mask.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

HEAD GUEST Well, it is Somebody (Name of actor
 playing the HOST.) indeed.

GUEST II Let's bring him to.

GUESTS Somebody, Somebody, Somebody!!
 (Name of actor playing the HOST.)

HOST Oh, how glad I am to see you all here.

HEAD GUEST First tell us what has happened.

HOST Well, I must say, what a frightening
 situation I found myself in.

HEAD GUEST And what was that situation?

HOST Just like you said it would earlier, a demon
 did appear.

HEAD GUEST What is this?!

HOST It stood a full fifteen feet high, and its eyes
 gleamed like the Morning Star. Its mouth opened all
 the way back to its ears, and its hairy arms stuck
 out a full six feet from its shoulders. And it seems

that I feel into a faint here, but I remember nothing else at all.

HEAD GUEST Well, I must say, I do not know what to think of that. The tale I told earlier was made up merely to frighten Taro. So did Taro come here?

HOST Oh, dear me, I cannot recall whether Taro came here or not.

TARO (Nodding vigorously, and then jumping out and prancing menacingly.) Catch and gnaw, catch and gnaw.

HOST Oh, look, the demon has appeared. Oh, how frightful, how very frightful. (Running off.)

GUESTS Oh, how frightful, how very frightful.

(Running off, following HOST.)

TARO Catch and gnaw, catch and gnaw, catch and
 gnaw. (Chasing the others off.)