

APPENDIX ONE:***THE KINGDOM OF DESIRE*¹⁹²**

By Li Huimin
Translated by Karen Steffen Chung

Scene 1 Forest Mountain Spirit

[Character: Mountain Spirit. After the chorus song the wind blows.]

Chorus How regrettable that the people of this world
 Cannot see through fame, fortune, and position;
 In reality they are only like
 The reflection of the moon in water, an illusion;
 When you reach the abyss,
 Plans and schemes only lead to downfall;
 In the end, the waves still wash the sand;
 All that remain are dry bones and empty sorrow.

Mountain Spirit (MS)
 Mountain Sprites and water creatures show their form,
 Concentrating their evil powers to poison the hearts of men.
 Peace on earth is no joy for us;
 Let the winds whip up the waves, and let there be havoc.

I am the Mountain Spirit. The state of Ji is fighting a civil war that is about to end. When General Aoshu Zheng brings his troops back to the palace tomorrow, he is certain to pass by this forest. So I think I'll wait here until he comes by, and make a little sport of him. Look! The wind and rain are fierce, and thunder and lightning fill the sky. I will ride on the clouds and fog, drive the thunder and lightning, and cross over on the light. That's what I'll do...that's what I'll do...hee...

Scene 2 A Camp: The Drums and Horns of Battle Sound

[Characters: King of Ji; four Ministers—Min Ziyu, Wu Huai, Jiang Ji, and Wei Zan; the Reconnaissance Soldier; four Eunuchs.]

¹⁹²The translated text is modified from K. S. Chung's version (authorized by the Contemporary Legend Theatre) in three ways. First is the division of scenes. The 14 scenes are based on the 1987 version of the Taipei performance. The use of "acts" in Chung's English translation is dropped for it has created some confusion and for it is not a familiar way in traditional Chinese theatre. The second change is the addition of detailed stage directions from the Chinese version, which are omitted in Chung's translation. The third modification is concerning the translation of the characters' names; it is based on the Pinyin system rather than the Wade-Giles system which Chung's version uses.

King of Ji and the Ministers are discussing in an urgent, quiet voice.]

Reconnaissance Soldier (RS)

Your Majesty, the rebels have captured three cities, and they will soon be pushing toward the capital.

King of Ji Are Generals Aoshu Zheng and Meng Ting at the front?

RS Both have left to meet the enemy.

King How goes the battle? Quickly, report!

RS Your Majesty, the enemy troops are descending like a tidal wave. I'm afraid our soldiers will have trouble resisting. What does Your Majesty suggest?

King Return to your reconnaissance mission.

RS As you command, Your Majesty.

King Halt! That detestable Prime Minister Wei-lie! All this time I have treated him like a brother, and gave him full command over my troops. Who would have thought that he would turn an ingrate, collaborating with the barbarians to instigate a rebellion? Soon they will be encroaching on the capital. Ministers! Do we have enough rations in the city? Is our army ready?

Wu Huai Your Majesty, there are only enough rations in the city to last 30 days. The Prime Minister took the best troops and generals out to battle. All that is left are 300 royal bodyguards, and some old and injured soldiers. We face certain defeat.

King So you're saying we should just sit here with our hands tied until we're captured?

Jiang Ji Your Majesty, in my humble opinion, you should flee to another principality for the time being, then round up some rescue troops. We'll stay in the capital and feign a surrender. In this way we could save the common people, and we would also be buying time. Once the rescue soldiers came, we could coordinate an attack from within and without the city. We would be certain to retake our territory.

King Well, I...

Min Ziyu Sir Jiang, how can you suggest such a weak-kneed plan? In my opinion, we must stand our ground in the capital and fight to our deaths before we surrender. We can't deflate our ministers' and troops' morale just because the enemy has the upper hand.

King Well...

Jiang You...hold your tongue. You go ahead and throw your own life to the dogs, but are you planning on taking our Lord and the people to the grave with you?

Min You fear death.

Jiang And you know no discretion in your quest for valor.

King Ministers, stop your bickering. Oh, Heaven! What...what should we do?

Messenger Your Majesty, the enemy has just retreated an arrow's shot.

King [Surprised.] Are you sure?

Mes. Certain, Your Majesty.

King Get up, quickly and tell us about it!

Mes. Your Majesty,
General Aoshu has killed the enemy general;
He is fighting valiantly on the front line of battle.
A host of cavalry soldiers cannot block his way;
The troops of Wei-lie have fallen in body and spirit.

King Return to reconnoiter further.

Mes. As you command, Your Majesty.
 King General Aoshu is indeed courageous; he came like a gift from above; we must thank the Heavens for him!
 Mes. Your Majesty, the rebel troops are fleeing to Xicheng, and the two generals are in hot pursuit of them.
 King And two fine generals they are. Go back to reconnoiter.
 Mes. As you command, Your Majesty...[Exits and immediately enters.] Your Majesty, General Aoshu has taken Xicheng. The rebel troops have cast off their armor and surrendered. Our troops have achieved a complete victory.
 King That scoundrel Wei-lie!
 Mes. The rebel Wei-lie saw that his golden moment had passed; he has slit his own throat and died.
 King Ha, ha!...Arise! So this is what has come of his plot to usurp the throne. Send out an order for the two generals to return immediately to the court. I will reward them richly.

Scene 3 Meeting the Mountain Spirit: Prophecy

[Characters: 12 Soldiers; General Aoshu Zheng; General Meng Ting; and Mountain Spirit.]

Aoshu Zheng and Meng Ting
 Men, we are returning to the court.

[Music of triumph. After a military drill, thunders break out.]

Aoshu Halt! This was a bright, sunny day. Why is it suddenly becoming overcast in this forest? There will probably be a downpour. General Meng, let's hasten to our destination. If you please! Men, proceed quickly... [Soldiers exit. Sounds of thundering and horse neighing.] Ah, heavy clouds are gathering and the horses neighing; this kind of weather must be some kind of bad omen.
 Meg Why do you say that?
 Aoshu This warrior horse has followed us gallantly into battle after battle; tell me why he is so skittish now.
 Meng General, come and look. Those hoof prints are our own, from just a moment ago.
 Aoshu Indeed they are. We have taken this road thousands of times before. How can we have ridden so long today, and still be where we started?
 Meng Then let's try another road.
 Aoshu As you say. If you please.

[Laughter from the Mountain Spirit: Ha, ha...]

Aoshu Whence comes this hysterical laughter? [More MS laughter is heard.] Who goes there?
 Meng General, it must be a forest spirit making sport of us.
 Aoshu What have we to fear of her? I'll take the lead. [MS laughter.] Who goes there? [Laughter stops.] Come out and show yourself!
 MS [Sings] There are limits to all things in the world of men, with the changes of the fickle years. Who really will remain loyal to the

lord's commands until death, and sully the palace walls with the blood of his mutilated corpse?

Aoshu What is a maid doing here deep in this mountain forest?

Meng Let's go ahead and find out.

Aoshu Is this maid human or spirit, singing alone in this desolate mountain?

MS Hail, General! You have done a great deed in wiping out the rebels in Xicheng today. You are to be congratulated!

Aoshu How knows she of today's battle in Xicheng? Let us advance and get an answer.

MS Ay!

Aoshu What kind of apparition are you that dares to make sport of us!

MS Hail to you, Prime Minister of the land!

Aoshu Hold your tongue! The Prime Minister Wei-lie plotted to usurp the throne. He suffered a crushing defeat in battle with me, and has slit his own throat. Why do you call his name?

MS Do not be angered, General. Today when you return to the court, the King of Ji is certain to name you prime minister. He will confer upon you the name of Ping Yuan, and you will assume the rule of Xicheng. You will dwell in wealth and high position.

Aoshu What?

Meng It will come to pass.

MS There is something you do not know, General Meng. Today you will be placed in charge of Dongcheng.

Aoshu Nonsense! Wait for my arrow!... [MS disappears.] She's gone! She must be a spirit!

Meng General Aoshu, this place is bewitched. Let us not dally; let's find a way out of here!

Aoshu Wait a moment! Let's hear what the apparition has to say. You and I are going to rule Xicheng and Dongcheng, and I will have the title of prime minister. Something very strange is going on; let's go and ask her just what the story is.

Meng Well...all right. Let's go ahead.

MS If you want to know about what is coming in the next world...you will carry out your plans meticulously, but will end up with nothing. [Laughs] General Aoshu, judging from the look of things now, you have a winning hand. You will be lord of the state of Ji. Long live the King of Ji! Long life to the King of Ji!

Aoshu You impertinent ghoul, how dare you try to lure me into disloyalty...wait for my sword!

Meng Wait, General Aoshu, don't be so quick to anger. If you are truly master of your spirit, you can just laugh it all off. Wail while I go and find out just what she's talking about...Permit me to ask...since you know what will come of him, can you tell me what my future will be?

MS Just now, between chaos and order, your future course has for the most part been set. General Meng, your children and grandchildren will occupy the throne of the state of Ji.

Meng Ah. But what of me in this life?

MS You have an inescapable fate; better you enjoy ill fortune than good. [Disappears.]

Meng General Aoshu! [Aoshu is talking to himself.] General Aoshu!

Aoshu Ah, General Meng!

Meng That spirit just predicted our destinies; it was just like a dream.

Aoshu Yes, it was just like we saw the things we longed to see.
 Meng Ah?!
 Aoshu But no. General Meng, I don't think the words of that spirit are worth a second thought. It's getting late. Let's hurry back to the palace. [Turns back to pull his horse] It is:
 Meng Position and wealth are something everybody desires;
 Aoshu But turning on our Lord to win them would be unthinkable.

Scene 4 Advancement

[Characters: 4 Ministers, King of Ji, Attendants, 8 Eunuchs, Aoshu Zheng, Meng Ting.]

Group His Majesty, the King of Ji. Long live the King!
 King Hail, Ministers.
 Group Long life to our Lord!
 King It was our excellent fortune in this rebellion to have the services of General Aoshu and General Meng, who are unsurpassed in bravery. They delivered us out of crisis; they are the pillars of the state of Ji, and ministers of great achievement. In today's morning court, I will reward them richly. Attendant!

Attendant Yes.
 King Ask Generals Aoshu Zheng and Meng Ting to enter the court.
 Attendant As you command, Your Majesty. His Majesty requests Generals Aoshu and Meng to enter the court.

Aoshu, Meng As you command, Your Majesty!
 [Sing] Two heroic generals enter the court;
 Victory is won, and there is joy in the palace.

Aoshu [Sings] We enter gallantly,
 Befitting our rank and deeds.
 Meng [Sings] Onto great achievement is added title and fame.
 Aoshu [Sings] We released our enchanted arrows
 From our precious carved bows;
 Meng [Sings] Exposed from our sheaths,
 Our swords beamed brilliance.

Aoshu, Meng [Sing] Out of the jaws of death
 We return from the battlefield.
 Having brought peace to the land,
 We set up [sic] the routine of the court.
 Hail, King! Long life to you!

King Dear Generals, quickly, to your feet!
 Aoshu, Meng Long life to the King.
 King If you two Generals hadn't stepped in at the crucial moment and wiped out the rebel forces, I am afraid that our territory would by now be in their hands. Returning to the court from your victory I will reward you richly...Hear, General Meng: your quelling of his rebellion is unmatched in the world. For this, I confer on you the title of National Protector General, and award to you the city of Dongcheng!

Meng I thank Your Majesty for your great favor!
 King Hear, General Aoshu [Sings]:
 General Aoshu broke through the enemy lines,
 Surging ahead in the name of his Lord

Without regard for personal safety.
 I award you Prime Minister and the city of Xicheng;
 Your sons and grandsons will fill the palace gates.
 You wiped out the rebels and achieved total victory;
 Your heroism is unmatched among men;
 You will live in a golden palace
 With carved pillars encircled by double phoenixes;
 And the people will celebrate peace!
 Aoshu I thank Your Majesty for your great favor!

Scene 5 Aoshu Residence: Plotting

[Characters: Lady Aoshu; Ladies-in-Waiting; Aoshu Zheng.]

Lady Aoshu (LA) [Sings] My lord has fought wars
 East and West for his country;
 Struggling for supremacy and performing great deeds
 Regardless of the bitter elements;
 He now has the good fortune
 Of being appointed Prime Minister,
 Ever rising in position.
 He has won the title he desired,
 And will enjoy fame far and wide.
 Attendant Milady, the General has been named Prime Minister, and is
 returning victoriously.
 LA Hurry, let us go and meet him.
 Attendant Yes, Milady, let us meet him.
 Aoshu My Lady. [Enters and sits down.]
 LA Sir Prime Minister... Congratulations, Sir Prime Minister,
 congratulations to you. What honor and glory your victorious
 return brings. This is truly a great joy to me!
 Aoshu You flatter me!
 LA You have return victoriously as Prime Minister; you should be
 happy. Why are you so melancholy?
 Aoshu My Lady: [Sings]
 This day of my victorious return,
 As I hastened my horse through the forest,
 I was startled by a sudden bolt of thunder.
 A Mountain Spirit appeared
 And spoke with a sharp tongue,
 Talking up a ghoulish storm.
 LA Just what did the Mountain Spirit say?
 Aoshu [Sings] She said that when I returned to the court, I would be given
 charge of Xicheng.
 LA In that case, the words of the Mountain Spirit were on the mark.
 What else did she say?
 Aoshu [Sings] She said I would ascend to the throne of the state of Ji.
 LA Ah! She said you would ascend to the throne of Ji?
 Aoshu She did.
 LA Then could it be...that this is the will of Heaven!
 Aoshu [Sings] All the way back my disturbed mind kept returning to the
 words of that Mountain Spirit. Though hard to believe, they have
 indeed come true; I have the title as proof. But they unsettle me. I

have always been a loyal general, straightforward by nature, not a greedy ingrate turning on the favor of my King.
 LA My lord:
 [Sings] I implore you not to be so hard on yourself.
 Moving up in the world and winning power
 Are reasonable things, not wrong.
 An omen was sent to you by the gods
 In the form of a spirit in the forest;
 You are the true dragon chosen by Heaven
 To rule over the rivers and mountains of our land.
 Aoshu [Speaks] You are wrong, My Lady. Upholding the nation and protecting our ruler are the tasks of a faithful minister, things that must be done at all cost to life and limb. How can you entertain the idea of usurping the throne and betraying our country?...And all the more so now that I have today been awarded the high position of Prime Minister, something that anyone would envy. How can you be so ready to throw to the wind the position and fame we have worked so hard to gain?
 LA [Speaks] I only fear that your title of Prime Minister will be a difficult one to hold; the wealth and splendor you will enjoy could be gone within days!
 Aoshu What makes you say this, My Lady?
 LA Let me ask you: when you met that Mountain Spirit in the forest, was anybody with you?
 Aoshu Yes, General Meng Ting.
 LA And let me ask you: did he also hear the Mountain Spirit's words?
 Aoshu Of course he did. Why do you ask this?
 LA If General Meng Ting were to tell the King the words of the Mountain Spirit in order to protect his own skin, then Sir Prime Minister, I doubt you would be able to escape your death!
 Aoshu Hm... But Meng Ting and I have crossed the plains together for so many years; we are true friends to the end. Why would he want to betray me? He wouldn't do that!
 LA You can know a man's face but not what is in his heart. I'll bet that the King of Ji has known about this thing for some time now, and is preparing to send in troops. When that happens we won't even have a chance to flee disaster.
 Aoshu I don't believe it!
 Attendant Let us go. Lord Prime Minister, Milady, something is amiss.
 Aoshu What alarm you?
 Attendant There is a great cavalry heading in our direction from several miles away.
 Aoshu What kind of cavalry?
 Attendant It is hard to recognize the banners; they seem to be preparing to launch a surprise attack!
 Aoshu Command the officers on duty to put on their armor at once and ready their weapons for battle.
 Attendant As you command!
 A General Sir Prime Minister, Milady, a large cavalry of the King's is rapidly approaching; but I don't know what their mission is. [Aoshu is alarmed.]
 LA What?!

Aoshu Let me see! [Shocked, he gets up and walks out of the door to look out, his mind undecided and hesitant. Turning back, he hears some commotion.]
 Attendant The King has arrived.
 Aoshu [to LA] Make yourself scarce...

Scene 6 Arrival of King of Ji

[Enter four royal guards, Min Ziyu and King of Ji.]

Aoshu I apologize for not being quick enough to meet your party, Your Majesty. Long life to the King!
 King At ease, Ministers. [An attendant brings in wine.]
 Aoshu Long live the King! And what mission brings the King here at this time?
 King There is something you do not know, dear Minister. I have just received a secret report that Earl Linjiang of Beicheng is plotting to usurp the throne. I have made this special trip to discuss the matter with you and lift this heavy burden from my soul.
 Aoshu Your Majesty, Earl Linjiang has always been loyal and true; he may not really be planning to rebel; perhaps Your Majesty should investigate the matter thoroughly before doing anything rash.
 King I have always been one to see through truth and lie; and there is now a secret report to back up what I know. Things having come this far you need not try to cover up for him.
 Aoshu I would not presume to do such a thing, Your Majesty. You have shown such great favor to me; I would have no reason to cover up for another. I am prepared to meet ten thousand deaths to serve my lord! [Lady Aoshu hides behind the screen overhearing.]
 King Truly a fine minister you are! I left the capital in haste, taking only a light carriage and a few necessities. Ostensibly, I have come to enjoy a hunt; in reality, however, I have come to use some of your men and horses. Tomorrow we will take the plank road across the Eastern River and attack Beicheng. The traitor will be caught totally unaware and is certain to launch an unprepared defense. You and your men will lure him into the forest, then you and General Meng will finish him off before he knows what has befallen him.
 Aoshu An excellent plan! All will be done according to your command... [King of Ji yawns.] Your Majesty, you must be exhausted after this long trip, and the hour is late. Please rest yourself.
 King Then I will trouble you to accommodate me.
 Aoshu If you please... Heh.. heh... ha, ha, ha...

Scene 7 Murder

[Re-enters Lady Aoshu.]

LA Why do you laugh, Sir Prime Minister?
 Aoshu Eh...ha...I only laugh; you need not be so suspicious.
 LA Oh?
 Aoshu Do you know why the King has come?
 LA No, why?

Aoshu **Ostensibly, he has come for a hunt, but in fact he has come to use our cavalry to launch an attack on the traitor, Earl Linjiang of Beicheng.**

LA **If he is about to take a traitor, why has General Meng not yet arrived?**

Aoshu **General Meng and I will attack from two different sides; I will lead in front, and General Meng will come up from behind.**

LA **I only fear it is a trick.**

Aoshu **A trick? Why?**

LA **I venture to say that General Meng has told the King the words of the Mountain Spirit. But because of your military prowess they cannot easily subdue you. So they concocted a plan to 'lure the tiger out of the mountain,' with the King coming here personally to win your confidence. Tomorrow when you are off to battle, Meng Ting's men will meet up with the King's men inside the city; and when that comes to pass, my dear Prime Minister, you won't even know by whose hand you will meet your end! Don't you see it?**

Aoshu **Eh. When I hear her words, my spirit goes limp;
And my body breaks out in a cold, fearful sweat;
I panic and my thoughts are in disarray;
How can I stave off the disaster about to befall me?
My Lady! If what you say is true... what should we do?**

LA **My lord, come and see the sun set and the moon rise, the cycle of the elements, and the autumn of the contest for supremacy among the powerful. The strongest alone will occupy the throne. With your unmatched military might, your unrivaled resourcefulness, you should take first place among the thrones of Ji. And, tonight, if fate will have it so, you can protect the palace, become chief of the feudal lords, bring the rivers and mountains under your rule, and accept the homage of the feudal states. This is the will of Heaven, and the people's good fortune.**

Aoshu **I was once a pillar, holding up the sky;
A man of high bearing, tirelessly serving his lord.
Who wouldn't want to wear
The embroidered gown and pearled crown of a sovereign?
My crime will be a heinous one,
And my dream will end up in ashes.
My armor has been soaked in the blood of a hundred wars,
I now gladly accept the office of Prime Minister,
Plots to usurp the throne usually end in failure;
The crime of regicide would be a heavy one to bear.
I only want to enjoy wealth and position,
I don't want to become a broken corpse in Beicheng Mountain.**

LA **Whether it will be fortune or disaster is hard to say,
Nobility and destruction are divided by a mere hair.
Tomorrow when you go out to battle,
You may be snared in a treacherous plot,
And your heart pierced by countless arrows.**

Aoshu **I go to battle out of loyal devotion,
Not to send my soul needlessly to the netherworld,
And not because I wish to spill blood on the battleground.
How can I dodge this imminent danger?**

LA **To turn calamity into fortune,
You must tonight take action to gain the upper hand.
Opportunity knocks only once,**

Aoshu Offering you the nation on a platter.
 The weight of the nation is heavy to bear;
 It is not my fate to war the dragon robes.
 LA The weight of the nation is indeed heavy to bear,
 But nothing is keeping it from your grasp.
 Aoshu The king's troops are posted at the gate;
 How can you say that nothing is keeping it from my grasp?
 LA I will give them drugged wine;
 They will fall into a drunken stupor
 And be out like candles.
 Aoshu If the king is indeed a sea dragon incarnated,
 I, as his minister, disgrace myself.
 LA But the sea dragon is away from the water,
 Stranded on a shallow beach,
 Where he will find it hard to escape the sword.
 Aoshu The blood that flows from the slain dragon
 Will stain the Prime Minister's mansion
 And bring about its occupant's end.
 Once the sun is up, all will be known;
 How can it be hidden?
 How can this crime be concealed
 From the tongues that would expose it?
 LA We can use the swords of the bodyguards,
 And pin the crime on them.
 The moon is high, none will see;
 I will go now to set it up. [Picks up the wine jar and tries to leave.]
 Aoshu Where are you going?
 LA To subdue the guards with drugged wine, so we can carry out our
 plan.
 Aoshu You...you... you are really going ahead with it?
 LA Don't tell me you have regrets already?
 Aoshu But this is ...usurpation of the throne!
 LA Are you afraid?
 Aoshu I...
 LA Humph! ...

[Brings the wine jar and exits. Aoshu watches her leave, dumbfounded and unable to decide to kill or not to kill the King. Lady Aoshu returns, back to back bumping to Aoshu. Both are startled.]

 Sir Prime Minister, the king's bodyguards lie in a drugged slumber,
 hurry and act!
 Aoshu I...ugh...
 LA Humph! You call yourself a man, a valiant general, but what are you
 really? Impotent and weak-kneed! It's enough that your hero's valor
 has shrunk back in fright; just never again mention this grandiose
 plan to be the highest ruler under Heaven, or we will be the
 laughingstock of the land! [trembling with anger.]
 Aoshu All right! [Sings]
 It took just one word to provoke the warrior's ire;
 A lust for blood wells up inside;
 The sighs in the stars have been rearranged,
 Fate has altered its course.
 The hero now aspires to prevail over all under heaven;

The golden dragon will mount a rainbow,
His wings filling the skies!

[Lady Aoshu places the sword in the hand of Aoshu. The nightwatcher's gong is heard three times. Aoshu startles, raises the sword and exits. Lady Aoshu sees him leave, turning her back to the audience, visibly trembling. She moves to the table, leaning against it as if unable to support herself, her eyes looking towards the direction where Aoshu left. Suddenly an owl cries, she startles and falls into a chair.]

Voice from backstage The King has been assassinated! The King has been
assassinated!

Scene 8 Breaking a Horse

[Characters: Four Grooms, Meng Ting, and Meng Deng.
When the stage is lit, the Grooms are already in place. The horse
neighing is mixed with the calling of the Grooms. The horses are
struggling wildly. Meng Ting and Deng enter.]

Meng Ting (MT) I told you to prepare the horses, but a good part of the day is
gone and they are still not ready!

Groom I don't know what is wrong, Milord. The horses are high-strung
today and we cannot subdue them.

MT Useless knave! Today the new King will ascend to the throne. You
will see what you have coming if we are delayed.

Meng Deng (MD) Father, this horse is usually tame and gentle with men; I don't
know why he is so wild and won't calm down.

MT Don't worry son, you can leave that to the grooms. Groom!

Groom Yes!

MT Come and take this horse! [Mounts on the horseback. The jackdaws
caw, and the horses neigh.]

MD Father, the steed is kicking about wildly and is hard to subdue. I
hear the jackdaws cawing eerily. Might this be an inauspicious
omen?

MT Birds cawing and horses neighing are everyday occurrences. Don't
worry, son.

MD But, Father, this wild wind and skittishness of the horses are not at
all usual. I have an uneasy feeling. If this is going to be a banquet
celebration for the ministers, then why must I come along? There
must be something going on.

MT Well...all right then. As your father, I will tell you the truth. That
day after Uncle Aoshu Zheng and I quelled the rebellion, we passed
through a forest and ran into an apparition. She predicted that
Aoshu would become king, and that my son would succeed him to the
throne. So now he has invited the two of us to the banquet to show
that after he will pass the throne to you once he dies. This is the will
of Heaven. You need not say anything more about it. Father has
already told you all there is to know, and now you must go, whether
you want to or not. If you violate Heaven's will, you will be unable to
bear the consequences, so get on your horse and let's take to the
road.

MD Father!

Assassin Go! On the King's orders, Meng Ting and his son must be disposed of.

Scene 9 The Flight

Meng Deng [Sings] Heartless sword descending through the air,
 Sending souls to beyond the skies;
 Father and son have you rent asunder,
 Detestable Aoshu Zheng!
 You have turned on your brother!
 In order to usurp the throne,
 You have killed my father.
 I can only point to the capital and curse,
 Grinding my teeth until my gums are torn.
 My belly is in knots, a dam of tears about to break,
 And rage fills my chest.
 I am like a lamb away from its mother,
 Powerless in the face of destiny;
 I am like a fish that has just swallowed a hook,
 A knife runs through my heart.
 My fury reaches to the depths of the seas.
 I will search to the ends of the earth,
 I will rally relief troops,
 And seize the traitor! [Exits]

Scene 10 Banquet

[Characters: Aoshu Zheng; Lady Aoshu; Meng Ting's Ghost; 5 Ministers; Attendants.]

A banquet, where music and dance are being held, is starting. Music and dance suddenly stops. The stage light spots on an empty seat, which belongs to Meng Ting. Aoshu Zheng and Lady Aoshu look at each other. The atmosphere becomes solemn and quiet. Lady Aoshu picks up the wine jar to serves wine for Aoshu, hinting him to break the frozen air.]

LA Ministers, today the King will ascend to the throne, thanks to your kind support. Your assistance will be crucial in the future management of the stage's affairs.

Ministers Congratulations to the King on your coronation! May the nation dwell in peace and safely!

Aoshu Gentlemen, if you please! [About to drink but stops when seeing the empty seat of Meng Ting; all the Ministers also look at the seat, unable to drink their wine. A moment of silence.]

LA All the ministers are here today for the King's coronation. I only wonder why General Meng Ting did not make it.

Wu Huai Your Majesty, General Meng Ting must have had some business to attend to on the way. He would certainly not miss an occasion as important as your coronation. I hope you will forgive him.

Jiang Ji Your Majesty, the forest is like a great labyrinth. We sometimes lose our way in it ourselves, not to mention General Meng. Once he gets here we will penalize him in jest by having him drink three cups of wine to atone for his tardiness. [all laughs.]

Aoshu Yes, three cups. He must drink down three cups!
 [Drinks wine himself without toasting others. Suddenly sees Meng Ting's ghost. Greatly startled.]
 Oh, Meng Ting... when did you get here? [The Ghost disappears.]
 Don't...don't blame me! [All the Ministers are puzzled.]

LA My King...my King...what is with you?
 Aoshu Meng Ting...has come; there he is.
 LA [Looks hard] Where? I don't see him. My King, you must be drunk...[Aoshu raises his head and looks, and without seeing the Ghost, he is confused.] Gentlemen, please excuse the King. He must have Meng Ting on his mind, and it is putting him in bad spirits.
 Ministers Don't let it interfere with your merrymaking. Come...if you please!
 If you please!

[All frozen; the stage light dims; and Meng Ting's Ghost re-enters.]

Aoshu Ah, Meng Ting! You appear again! [The Ghost approaches him slowly.] Don't...Don't...blame me. It's not that I turned my back on our friendship. I did originally plan on passing the throne to your son after my death. But what could I do? My wife...she is with child. Don't...don't...come any closer or I'll...I'll...I'll...kill you! [Draws his sword, pushes the table away and leaps towards the Ghost, who darts to one side.]

LA My King, my King, what is with you? Gentlemen, the King must be drunk. He'll be fine once he is sober.

Aoshu If...if you don't leave, don't blame me for turning on a brother... I'll...I'll kill you!...You believe the words of the apparition, you wanted me to serve the land on a platter to your son. Heh, heh... Forget it!

[Saws the air with his sword. The Ministers are frightened and run around. Sweeps off the goblets from the table and continues to speak]

You want your descendants to have the title of king... so you think that I, Aoshu Zheng, will have no seed of my own?

[Dashes his sword towards the crowd. Suddenly sees the Ghost appear on the table, he climbs onto the table and shouts]

Meng Ting, I, Aoshu Zheng, have the strength to uproot mountains. I...am the true Son of Heaven. You can forget about seizing these rivers and mountains from me. I do not even fear that apparition, not to speak of you! Meng Ting!

[The Ghost disappears.]

All right, since you despise me, let us draw our swords and fight a duel to the death!

[Jumps from the table and trips. Falls on the floor. All are shocked.]

LA Gentlemen! The King has since his youth suffered from fits of madness that recur whenever he has a few cups of wine. He will be fine once he's sober. I am sorry, Gentlemen, to have to conclude the

evening before you have drunk your fill. Let us choose another day to celebrate. [Keeps a forced smile.]

Ministers [Still frightened] Yes, let us do so.

LA Attendants, be gone! [To Aoshu] What kind of madness was that ruined our banquet?! [Startled by a shadow on the stage right.] Who goes there?

Assassin Your Majesty, Milady. The head.

Aoshu [Raises his head and stands up. Avoids seeing the head and waves his hand] Take yourself to receive your reward.

LA Wait a minute. [The Assassin is startled.] Where is the other head?

Assassin [Immediately kneels down] Your Majesty, the boy Meng Deng caught me off guard...and fled. I know my crime, I implore Your Majesty's and Milady's forgiveness!...

LA Worthless rogue! [Grabs Aoshu's sword and thrusts it hard into the Assassin.]

Aoshu My Lady! [Tries to stop but it is too late.]

Assassin You...you...you...! [Struggles and falls down, but still tries to reach Lady Aoshu, who retreats fearfully. Falls and dies.]
[Intense music corresponds to Lady's cry of "Blood! Blood!"]

Scene 11 Night Watchmen

[Characters: 4 Night Watchmen. On the dark stage only light can be seen from four lanterns.]

A Serving in the court is no easy job;

B Every night we live in fear of encountering a ghost.

C Everyone worries about becoming prey to harm;

D So we'd be better off making some arrangements for the future.

A Comrades, if you please!

All If you please!

A Does anyone have any fresh news?

B The old ones are not exciting enough?

C Exactly, not exciting enough? Do you mean more strange things happened?

A I have something to tell. I heard that this newly crowned King - I don't know what brought it on - went mad right in the middle of a banquet he was giving in the golden palace!

D That's not news, that's old hat.

B I heard that on the same day General Meng Ting, as he was on his way to the banquet, was...

C They couldn't even find his head. Uh! Macabre!

D The strange thing is that Meng Ting dies, but his son escaped to the state of Yen.

B Aren't the Minister Min and his son in Yen now?

A That's something you'll have to ask me to find out.

All Tell us about it!

A The city has been buzzing with rumors that the late king died under rather suspicious circumstances. The state of Yen is now contacting the heads of other feudal states to plot a rebellion!

C Let me tell you... A few days ago, I saw an owl - an owl that usually feeds on rats - kill a powerful eagle. Nobody I tell believes me.

D That's a little tough to swallow!

- B Not a bit. Speaking of rats reminds of something else strange that happened.
- All What?
- B Yesterday evening when I was out on night watch duty, I saw hordes of rats banding together and heading out of the city. Now you tell me - what was the reason for that?
- A It's a bad omen! I've heard old men say that the only time rats will leave a place in hordes is when a house is about to burn down!
- All Ah!
- D Then why don't we all get out of here?
- A Ay...ay... come back here, come back here. You can't just run off at the drop of a hat. Our master the King runs a tight ship under martial rule. Leaving your post without permission would cost you your head!
- B Right. Stay away from any harebrained ideas. Let's all just stick to our night watch and put on a brave front.
- D What does such a big man have to fear?
- B It's not that I'm afraid—but these days during my watch I keep hearing a woman's weeping, coming to my ears in muffled sobs. It's so eerie...and frightening!
- C Ay! It must be a ghost!
- A Don't talk nonsense. Let's just stay close together as we walk! If we run into a spirit we can all holler!
- All Let's get moving!

Scene 12 Hand-Washing

[Characters: Lady Aoshu; Lady-in-Waiting; Aoshu Zheng; Attendants; Ministers. When the curtains open, Lady Aoshu are washing her hands behind the screen. The water basin is on a stand. She is mumbling.]

- LA Blood...blood... [Rubs her hands, looks at them and rubs them hard. Music starts. She sings:]
 No matter how I try, I can't wash them clean;
 The blood spots are still there...[Seems tired due to miscarriage.]
 [Sings] If only I could divert a river
 To wash off all traces of red.
 They must be illusions
 Born of a suspicious heart.
 If it is all in my head.
 And there is really nothing there,
 Then why does a rotten stench
 Plague my nostrils?
 I can't stop
 Because of the pain in my hands
 And the tears I try to hold back.
 They are like dots here and there
 That are at first only imagined,
 But then become real. [Waves her head and sighs, rubbing her hands hard in the water basin.]
 [Speaks] I hoped that my life would be filled with flowers in bloom,
 with nobility and splendor...who would have known...the child died
 in the womb, my dream has come to naught. A long night lies yet
 ahead. When, when will the dawn arrive?

[Sings] I am afraid to see
 The cold dewdrops on the waterwheel
 Drip into my dreams in the silent, heavy night;
 I am afraid to listen
 To the crows' cries in the night
 Interspersed with the clangs of wind chimes.
 I am afraid to hear
 The drips of the water clock;
 Each eerie drop wears away at my soul.
 I am afraid to watch
 The black shadows of the trees
 Lengthen and constrict under the autumn window.
 The souls of those who died unjustly come to demand blood.
 Filled with wrath, their unblinking eyes like glassy globes...first is
 the fierce assassin with unkempt hair; next is Men Tinge, gnashing
 his teeth in rage over the wrong done to him. But worst of all is the
 King of Ji, Ji Shen. I see him...tears streaming down his face, the
 royal robes on his scored body soaked in blood, pointing an accusing
 finger at me, his face a hideous sight...

[Her face becomes expressionless, like a sleep walker's. Her hands tremble,
 wash and rub each other very hard. Too weak, she almost faints. Enters
 the Lady-in-Waiting with Aoshu Zheng.]

Lady-in-Waiting and Aoshu My Lady, My Lady, what is with you?
 LA [Raises her head, crying] Ay, my lord, pity us two for the unborn
 child that has already died in the womb!
 Aoshu My Lady, do not shed tears over that. What's done is done; why bring
 it up now? Someday we will have a son to carry on our line.
 LA I only fear that the days of she who is wife are numbered!
 Aoshu Stop talking nonsense, and take care of your health. [Holds her
 hands to comfort her. Lady Aoshu suddenly remembers and starts to
 rub her hands again in the air.]
 LA Ay...blood! Blood! Blood!
 Lady-in-Waiting Uh... [Not knowing what to do, looks at Lady Aoshu and then
 Aoshu Zheng, wiping tears from her own eyes.]
 Aoshu My Lady! What... what's wrong with you?
 LA Blood...
 Aoshu My Lady! My Lady! My Lady! [Calls her loud and shakes her
 shoulders. She calms down finally.]
 LA Ay, my Prime Minister, look at the dark moon; I will drug the wine so
 you can carry out your plan!
 Aoshu My Lady! You! You! What kind of nonsense are you talking!
 LA Humph! Well, are you going or not? Don't tell me a big strong man
 like you is afraid!
 Aoshu My Lady! Ay!
 LA Well, are you going or not? [Grabs his hand and pulls him forward;
 suddenly sees blood in his hands and tries to wash them. Aoshu
 brushes her away.]
 Attendant [Enters] Your Majesty, outside the palace the ministers report a
 military emergency. Come and see.
 Aoshu I know. Let them wait outside the palace. [Attendant exits.] Girl!
 Lady-in-Waiting Yes, Your Majesty.

Aoshu Assist the mistress to the rear of the palace so she can rest. Take good care of her!

Lady-in-Waiting Yes, Your Majesty. [Supports Lady Aoshu to exit.]

Aoshu [Regrettable. Sitting down.] Ay! I, Aoshu Zheng, started out as a righteous and loyal general, but now am guilty of regicide and turning my back on what I know is right. Did Heaven really plan this fate for me? Heaven...Heaven...It looks as though I have indeed fallen victim to your plot. Ay...ay...ay...I won't believe it; I, Aoshu Zheng, lie at your feet, caught in your trap! [His fist hammering the table loud. Enters an Attendant.]

Attendant Your Majesty, the ministers have been waiting for some time now.

Aoshu Tell them I will receive them now.

Minister A Your Majesty, the state of Yen has mobilized a hundred thousand soldiers and they are advancing on us now. They have already surrounded Xicheng.

Aoshu Mm. So Xicheng is surrounded. What about Dongcheng?

Minister B Your Majesty, Meng Deng led a thousand cavalry to attack Dongcheng. The general in charge...

Aoshu What about him?

Minister B He...he opened the city gates and surrendered!

Aoshu Uh...He...so he surrendered too? The rebel deserves to die.

Minister C Your Majesty, we have just received a report that the troops of the rebel Min Ziyu are closing in on Beicheng; the situation is serious.

Minister D Your Majesty, the state of Yen has amassed a powerful army, and they will soon be heading towards the capital. The military situation is critical. We pray Your Majesty to devise a counterattack.

Aoshu All right, all right! Don't tell em the living daylights have been frightened out of all of you! Doesn't anyone have any ideas? You're just a bunch of ninnies who are afraid to die! [Anxiously. Suddenly a rain storm starts. Aoshu remembers the Mountain Spirit.] Come, come! Help make ready my horse! Hurry and make ready my horse! [Rides on the horse. All exit.]

Scene 13 Another Prophecy

[Aoshu rides his horse fast. Along the journey the shrieking laughter of the Mountain Spirit is heard.]

MS Ha, ha, ha, ha, hee, hee...

Aoshu [Anxiously shouts] Apparition of the forest! Where are you? Come out!

MS Hail, King! Long life to the King!

Aoshu Let me ask you, Spirit, will Meng Deng, son of Meng Ting, ascend to the throne and rule over Ji?

MS Keep a broad mind, my King. You now occupy the royal throne, and are ruler over all. What more could your heart desire?

Aoshu Hold your tongue! I am asking you, how long will I retain my rule over the land? What is my fate?

MS Your Majesty, hundreds of battles have proven you to be a general surpassed by none, and now you are ruler of the land. In this life you will be a peerless general undefeated in any battle, unless...

Aoshu Unless what?

MS Unless this forest moves toward the capital...Heh, heh, heh.

Aoshu This forest is filled with ancient, towering trees. Such a great, expansive forest—how could it move? Absurd! That's absurd! Then it looks as though my rule is rock-solid, and I don't have to worry about their approach.

MS Yes, Your Majesty. If you want to hold on to your rule, you must be merciless and unyielding, and kill to the very end. Kill until the plain is covered with corpses, and blood flows in a river!

Aoshu Merciless and unyielding? Kill until the plains are covered with corpses and blood flows in a river?

MS Yes. You have said it. Kill until the plains are covered with corpses and blood flows in a river... do not allow a scrap of the armor of the Yen army to remain! Hee...

Aoshu Yes, I will stack their corpses and bones in a mountain that reaches to the sky, and make their blood flow in a river that will never run dry. I will slay them off their horses until they shriek like ghosts and howl like wolves; I will kill until the sky turns black, and the sun and stars drop from the heavens! Come, Yen army, Min Ziyu, Meng Deng, all of you, come! Heaven has ruled that you will become ghosts by my sword, unless, heh, heh, ha, ha... [Sings]
 Unless the forest moves itself,
 Unless it sprouts wings
 And flies to the city walls;
 There will be no
 "Splitting of the base rock of Mount Tai,"
 Or other absurdities breeding doubt.
 And so, it seems, I am indeed
 The true ruler over all, by Heaven sent;
 I will be defeated in no battle,
 I am on a par with the gods;
 The mountains and rivers
 Are in the palm of my hand;
 What have I, who am unmatched on this earth,
 To fear from calvary troops
 Numbering in the thousands?
 [Laughs triumphantly] Ah! Ha, ha, ha... [Whips the horse and returns] Open the city gate!

Scene 14 Betrayal and Death

[When the second curtains open, the troops are in confusing commotion.
 Aoshu gets off the horse and asks one soldier]

Aoshu Why are you in such a panic?
 Soldier A Your Majesty, the Yen army... the Yen army...
 Aoshu What about the Yen army?
 SA The Yen army...
 Aoshu Let the Yen army drink your gall! [Pushes him away and grabs another soldier] Why are you so panicked?
 Soldier B Your Majesty, tens of thousands of Yen soldiers are approaching the forest, and will soon be attacking the capital!
 Aoshu You milk-livered wretch! Away with you! [Kicks Soldier B away; moves to the center and calls out] Soldiers! Men! Men! Don't be so

rash and alarmed! I have something to tell you... [All quiet down and listen]

Men! Though the Yen forces are approaching, we all know that the capital city is situated high above the surrounding land, and the enemy forces' movement are all within our grasp. Archer forces are waiting in ambush around the palace if the enemy attacks. A shower of arrows will knock the horses right out from under them, and they will flee in the chaos. Not to mention the thick forest that shields the palace with a natural labyrinth. Once the enemy forces enter it, they are certain to lose their way; then I will lead you out to advance and slay. That will spell certain doom for the Yen army! I am the true Son of Heaven, and have never been defeated in battle. If you don't believe me, then let me tell you something.
[The soldiers line up into two rows.]

I started out as a mere lead general of Dongcheng. On the road of my victorious return to the palace after quelling the rebellion, I crossed through the forest, and by chance saw an apparition in the mountain. It was she who said that I would someday first be named prime minister, then king. [Bragging]

As of now, every bit of what the spirit said has indeed come to pass. And just now, I again asked the spirit to tell me the outcome of this battle. She declared me a general among generals, and a great king on earth, and said that I will never lose a battle in this life.

Unless... ha, ha, ha... unless this forest moves toward the capital! Now, men, you tell me: how could the towering, ancient trees in this expansive forest move? How could they possibly move? Heh, heh...ha, ha...Ah! [Soldiers repeat: "Ha, ha!"] Ha, ha, ha...men, we must be tough and brave [Soldiers: "Tough and brave!"], rushing to the front, [Soldiers: "Rushing to the front!"] fighting to the death; level them to the ground; don't spare one piece of armor.

Crowd Ah!... [Loud and pompous music plays, and all Soldiers sing while doing a military drill; Aoshu proudly sees the high morale among his troops.]

[Sing] Our banners blot out the clouds and cloak the fields;
And we shake heaven and earth with our pounding drums.
We prepare our axes and spears, our bows and arrows;
We will show our might in battle;
Let us work together and struggle valiantly
To protect our lord and land.

Aoshu [Sing] I command the troops to prepare for war;
Heroic deeds will be rewarded; now do not tarry. [Triumphantly laughs. Suddenly the sky is filled with cawing crows; all Soldiers whisper to one another.]

Crowd The sky is filled with cawing crows! Is this an omen of disaster?

Aoshu Humph! Stop that drive! The mountain gods must have sent the birds to congratulate me! [A dry laugh.] Humph!

Messenger [Enters] Your Majesty... Min Ziyu is leading the Yen army through the forest!

Aoshu What is there to fear about that? Send in some more archers to protect the castle.

Messenger As you command, Your Majesty.
[re-enters] Bad news, Your Majesty.

Aoshu Why are you so alarmed?!

Messenger Her Highness!

Aoshu What about her?
 Messenger She...
 Aoshu Hurry and say it!
 Messenger Her old malady has flared up again; she has hung herself from a
 beam.
 Aoshu She...she...has hung herself from a beam?!
 Messenger Yes, Your Majesty!
 Aoshu [Trembling] Ay, she is dead... perhaps it is for the better... [Cries]
 [Angrily looks at the Messenger] Who needs you to report bad news
 at a time like this? You will hurt our fighting morale.
 [Draws his sword and kills the Messenger in rage.]
 Messenger [Enters] Your Majesty... bad news!
 Aoshu Now what?
 Messenger The forest...is moving!
 Aoshu What?!... How could that forest of old trees be moving? Nonsense!
 [Kicks him away] Let me see!

[All are in commotion. Aoshu moves to the fortress while nudging the
 soldiers away. The wind blows hard now. The soldiers spread the message:
 "The forest is moving! The forest is moving!" Aoshu climbs up the
 fortress.]

Crowd The forest...the forest is indeed ...moving! It cannot be!
 Aoshu The forest is moving! [From whispering to shouting]
 It cannot be! The forest! How...could the...forest... [Turns to see his
 troops, who are now in confusion.] Every man to his post! What are
 you doing there, just staring into space! [All are quiet and not
 following the order.] Huh! [Angry] Why is no one moving? Do not
 tell me...that you...you!...you are going to present my head to the state
 of Yen!

[Shoo! The first arrow flies over the air.]

Traitors! Seize them!

[The second arrow is shot toward Aoshu from another direction.]

Ah!...

[One after another, the arrows are shot up the fortress. One of them
 pierces into Aoshu's body. He staggers and falls off the fortress; he
 struggles to stand up and walk, the Soldiers retreat from him,
 frightened. Finally Aoshu falls to the ground and dies. The "forest"
 rushes into the scene, waiving slowly. The laughter from the
 Mountain Spirit is heard with the theme music: "Ha, ha, ha..."]