

1. EXT. EMPTY LOT OFF A TOKYO STREET - DAY

The troupe is loosely gathered in their ad-hoc rehearsal space. It is clear from their posture that Itabashi has been lecturing for a while now.

Even when he isn't in character, Itabashi speaks bombastically with drawn-out, over-emphasized vowels and very elegant movements (think: the performativity but not the camp factor of an out-of-drag RuPaul)

ITABASHI

...now they meet as equals for the first time since their boyhood - joined by their shared sorrow at the devastation of their country and their loyalty to the Empress. The feeling of the meeting is...

(He searches for the word, trying to pluck it from the air)

Bittersweet. Do you understand, Sato-kun?

SATO

Yes, Sensei.

ITABASHI

We will see.

He sinks down slowly and elegantly to sit on the ground. This is clearly a cue for the other two actors, who also take up their places: SATO standing facing his teacher, and ADACHI kneeling a few paces behind and to the left of the scene, acting as the singular hayashi (musician; in this case the percussionist).

Itabashi notices her sitting alone. It reminds him of an earlier conversation.

ITABASHI

Didn't you say you had a friend who played the shamisen?

ADACHI

He took a job up in Wonderland today.

ITABASHI

Again?

ADACHI

Everybody's gotta get paid, Itabashi-Sensei.

ITABASHI

Wages sustain the basest functions  
of the body. The need to eat. A  
place to sleep. Music and  
performance... they maintain the  
soul. Tokyo cannot function  
without art.

ADACHI

It's harder to play the shamisen  
when you're dead from hunger  
though, huh?

To emphasize her point she strikes the *hyōshigi* (percussion  
clappers) together to create one loud *crack!*

Itabashi does not like this misuse of kabuki instruments,  
especially when they're being used against him.

ITABASHI

Well. Be that as it may. Ask him  
when he will be free to rehearse  
with us.

ADACHI

Yes, Sensei.

*Crack, crack!* with the *hyōshigi*. Wow, does Itabashi hate  
that.

ITABASHI

Sato-kun!

SATO

Sensei?

ITABASHI

The first line is yours.

SATO

(As Fudaraku)

You have traveled far, my old  
friend. Will you tamp down the  
dust of the road with some fine  
sake?

ITABASHI

(As Kaijura)

I wish the road had been dusty.  
The hooves of my horse were  
weighted down -

ALL

With thick mud.

2. EXT. EMPTY LOT OFF A TOKYO STREET - DAY

ITABASHI and ADACHI face off as Kaijura and Zaitso. SATO, acting as the hyashi for this scene, kneels off to the side.

ADACHI

(As Zaitso)

I cannot buy your trust? There is nothing in this world that you desire more than my blood on your hands?

ITABASHI

(As Kaijura)

There is nothing in this world or the next -- not in the celestial realm nor the seven hells -- that I desire more than your death.

He pulls a stick from a sash tied around his waist. This is clearly supposed to be a sword, and he handles it with such grace and dignity that it almost seems like a real weapon. Sato plays a series of beats, increasing in rapidity.

ADACHI

(As Zaitso)

A pity.

She flings her arms outward, then drops them in frustration to her sides.

ADACHI

(As herself again)

Then there's supposed to be an earthquake.

ITABASHI

Correct.

ADACHI

How?

Itabashi makes a frustrated noise and lowers his stick.

SATO

The earthquake is imaginary, Adachi-sama.

ADACHI

I'm not stupid.

SATO  
 (Embarrassed)  
 That's not at all what I meant!

ADACHI  
 His sword is imaginary, too. But  
 he still has a stick.

ITABASHI  
 The stick is inconsequential.

He throws the stick to the ground, then takes up his  
 fighting stance again without it.

ITABASHI  
 (Cont'd)  
 To hold a sword, I must only take  
 it in my hands. I must feel its  
 weight. I must see the light shine  
 off of it.

He moves slowly, thrusting and parrying elegantly with his  
 "sword".

ITABASHI  
 (Cont'd)  
 I must know its deadly power. That  
 any man I threaten -

He lunges towards Adachi as if driving the sword into her  
 stomach. She stumbles backwards a step, hand flying to her  
 stomach, then realizes that he hasn't touched her.

ADACHI  
 Hey!

ITABASHI  
*That* is how I make the sword real.

Sato claps. Itabashi preens at the praise.

ADACHI  
 So, what, I can just...

She raises her hands again. Itabashi shakes and loses his  
 footing, as if being thrown around by an earthquake.

SATO  
 The earthquake!

ADACHI  
 The power of the gods themselves!

ITABASHI  
Good! And now the *mie*.

He strikes a dramatic pose. So does Adachi. Itabashi immediately drops his pose.

ITABASHI  
Not like that.

ADACHI  
I'm doing it the way you showed me.

He strikes her pose. She copies him.

ITABASHI  
No.

ADACHI  
What?

SATO  
(Rising)  
Adachi-sama, it's more like...

He does the pose. Itabashi does the pose. Adachi does the pose.

ITABASHI  
Look at Sato-kun! See how he moves his head?

ADACHI  
He's doing the same thing I'm doing.

ITABASHI  
He is moving like a kabuki actor. You are moving like a drunk yakuza.

Sato does the pose again. Adachi copies him. Itabashi puts his face in his hands.

1. EXT. EMPTY LOT OFF A TOKYO STREET - DAY

The three actors are each holding a *mie*: one of the dramatic, full-body poses that Kabuki is known for.

ADACHI  
 (Without moving)  
 How long do we have to do this?

Itabashi does not answer. He moves to the next mie, gracefully, as if he's practicing tai chi. Sato mimics his movements fluidly. After a moment, so does Adachi.

ADACHI  
 Itabashi-sensei? How long do we have to do this?

ITABASHI  
 (Not moving)  
 We'll do it until you can get it right.

Adachi drops her pose in a huff.

ADACHI  
 I'm doing it the way you showed me.

ITABASHI  
 (Turning to face her)  
 Really.

Adachi does the first pose again.

ITABASHI  
 No.

ADACHI  
 What?

SATO  
 (Apologetically)  
 Adachi-sama, it's more like...

He does the pose. Itabashi does the pose. Adachi does the pose.

ITABASHI  
 Look at Sato-kun! See how he moves his head?

ADACHI  
 He's doing the same thing I'm doing.

ITABASHI  
 He is moving like a kabuki actor. You are moving like a drunk yakuza.

Sato does the pose again. Adachi copies him. Itabashi puts his face in his hands.

2. EXT. EMPTY LOT OFF A TOKYO STREET - DAY

The troupe is preparing to rehearse. Adachi sits down with the hyōshigi (percussion clappers) and prepares to accompany the onstage action. Itabashi notices that she is the only musician.

ITABASHI

Where is your friend? The shamisen player?

ADACHI

Yaks picked him this morning. He's working up top.

ITABASHI

Again?

ADACHI

Everybody's gotta get paid, Itabashi-Sensei.

ITABASHI

(Like he's given this lecture many times)

Wages sustain the basest functions of the body. The need to eat. A place to sleep. Music and performance... they maintain the soul.

ADACHI

Too bad the soul can't play shamisen, huh?

To emphasize her point she strikes the hyōshigi together to create one loud *crack!*



3. EXT. EMPTY LOT OFF A TOKYO STREET - DAY

SATO and ADACHI are sitting on a stoop, practicing their lines.

SATO  
(Reading from the script  
in his hand)  
Now the spider sits in his web,  
waiting for the clumsy fly!

ADACHI  
Too long we have suffered the rule  
of the worm -

SATO  
The fly.

ADACHI  
What?

SATO  
The rule of the fly. Not the worm.

ADACHI  
But you already said fly.

SATO  
Right, so we both -

ADACHI  
Is there ever a worm?

SATO  
(Reading from the script)  
Too long we have suffered the rule  
of the fly, of the centipede, of  
the worm. The rule of the blind,  
crawling things -

ADACHI  
Right, okay. Fly, centipede worm.  
Fly, centipede worm. This guy's  
crazy for bugs, huh?

SATO  
I don't think he's actually  
talking about bugs...

ADACHI  
No, no, I get it. The people are  
worms.

SATO  
The people are flies.

ADACHI  
Fly, centipede, worm. I know. I'm  
just saying, it wouldn't hurt to  
use another metaphor once in a  
while.

SATO  
When you write a play, you can use  
whichever metaphors you want.

ADACHI  
As if that blowhard Itabashi -

SATO  
(Interrupting forcefully)  
Shall we continue? The rule of the  
blind, crawling things...

ADACHI  
...Of the blind, crawling things  
dragging Nippon... down to live  
with the worms?

SATO  
Forget about the worms!

Adachi drops her head into her hands.

ADACHI  
Itabashi's going to kill me.

5. EXT. EMPTY LOT OFF A TOKYO STREET - DAY

The troupe is loosely gathered in their ad-hoc rehearsal space. It is clear from their posture that Itabashi has been lecturing for a while now.

ITABASHI

...now they meet as equals for the first time since their boyhood - joined by their shared sorrow at the devastation of their country and their loyalty to the Empress. The feeling of the meeting is...

(He searches for the word, trying to pluck it from the air)

Bittersweet. Do you understand, Sato-kun?

SATO

Yes, Sensei.

ITABASHI

We will see.

Itabashi and Sato take their places for the scene, sitting on the ground facing one another. Sato mimes pouring a drink for Itabashi.

ITABASHI

(Reprimandingly)

Play it seriously, now.

Sato relents and pours an actual cup of sake for Itabashi. Itabashi drinks it and holds his cup back out. Sato pretends to not see it, and begins the scene.

SATO

(As FUDARAKU)

Maybe these typhoons were a punishment; maybe they were a test! The gods beating Nippon on an anvil and finding our metal true.

ITABASHI

(As KAIJURA)

If that is so, then the gods are cruel beyond measure.

He shakes his cup to catch Sato's eye. Sato pours him another. Itabashi sips, then begins to recite.

ITABASHI

(Cont'd)

*(Note - here Kaijura and  
Fudaraku are engaging in  
renga: a form of  
collaborative Japanese  
poetry.)*

What was once a road  
is now endless grey salt water.  
The horses must swim.

SATO

From grey sky to grey water,  
the tern dives for his dinner.

ITABASHI

A shrine that stood since  
man first knelt before the gods,  
reduced to matchsticks.

Itabashi takes the sake from Sato and pours his own cup.

SATO

Sparks catch on a pile of twigs.  
Our fingertips warm slowly.

ITABASHI

Father searches through  
the bones of his homestead for  
the bones of his son.

SATO

The master potter can fix  
even a broken teacup.

Itabashi mimes pouring a cup of sake for Sato, then drops  
character.

ITABASHI

Your rhythm still needs work,  
Sato-kun.

He turns to Hiromi.

ITABASHI

(Cont'd)

What did you think? Is it  
serviceable?

4. EXT. EMPTY LOT OFF A TOKYO STREET - DAY

The troupe is rehearsing. If Hiromi stays outside the trigger area, the following scene occurs:

ITABASHI

(As KAIJURA)

I'd hoped it wasn't true.

SATO

(As FUDARAKU)

My friend. You do not understand.

ITABASHI

I understand enough. You have pledged yourself to something worse than a man: a demon whose only love is power.

SATO

It is for the best, can't you see? The Empire is in disrepair. Lord Zaitso is triumphant. The only way is forward.

(He recites:)

Seabirds wheel over  
what once was farmland. Who else  
will harvest the minnows?

ITABASHI

(Also reciting)

A wild dog eats carrion  
and thinks himself a hunter.

SATO

Loyalty cannot be bought;  
only earned through hardship.

4A. SAME

If Hiromi enters the trigger area, the following conversation occurs:

ADACHI  
(Noticing Hiromi)  
Demon alert.

ITABASHI  
(Dropping character and  
rounding on Adachi)  
I didn't have to cast you, you  
know! If you don't stop  
interrupting --

Sato also notices Hiromi. He and Adachi hurry to bow.

SATO  
Demon-sama.

Itabashi finally notices Hiromi and bows too, clearly embarrassed.

HIROMI  
Don't let me interrupt.

ITABASHI  
Forgive us, Demon-sama. We are  
rehearsing a small entertainment.

HIROMI  
I love entertainment.

The players look at one another nervously.

SATO  
Then you would love this one.  
Itabashi-sensei wrote it - I mean,  
he made it up. All fiction.

ITABASHI  
(Nerves and false  
modesty)  
That is true - it was my my humble  
pen, ahhh... Exploring Japan's  
mythic age, you know. In the  
tradition of the old Kabuki  
masterworks.

HIROMI  
This scene you were just working  
on. Tell me about it.

ITABASHI  
Well. Lord Kaijura -

SATO  
- the tragic hero -

ITABASHI  
Discovers that Fudaraku -

SATO  
- his best friend from childhood -

ITABASHI  
Has used the chaos in the  
aftermath of a... the aftermath of  
a tsunami...

He falters.

HIROMI  
Go on - I'm at the edge of my  
seat.

ITABASHI  
...to stage a coup. And give the  
throne to Lord Zaitso.

*Awk-ward.*

ADACHI  
(Cheeky)  
Lord Zaitso's the bad guy. Fuck  
him, am I right?

*Crack, crack!* with the hyōshigi, to underscore her point.

HIROMI  
And that's all fiction.

6. EXT. THE SAME EMPTY LOT. DAY.

HIROMI pulls RIN towards the troupe. They all bow when they see the DMNS, low and terrified.

HIROMI

What were you doing the other day?  
The thing with Fudo?

ITABASHI

(Still bowing)  
The Fudo mie, Lady Demon. One of  
the oldest traditions of the  
kabuki stage.

HIROMI

(To Itabashi)  
Right, that. Show my friend.

Itabashi doesn't exactly know what's going on, but he doesn't want to be the one who goes down for it. He pulls Sato forward.

ITABASHI

Sato-kun - show the Demons what  
you've learned.

Sato and Adachi also rise.

SATO

(Like: are you *sure*?)  
...Sensei?

ITABASHI

The Lady Demon wants to see your  
work, Sato. So show her.

He pushes Sato between himself and the Demons.

Sato stumbles forward, then looks towards Adachi for help. She shrugs and marks him in with the hyōshigi. Suddenly, Sato strikes a dramatic pose: the Fudo mie.

HIROMI

It's you!

RIN

...You know, they really captured  
me.



6A. SAME

(If we can't get Rin in a scene, here's a version with just Hiromi)

HIROMI approaches the troupe. They all bow when they see the Demon, low and terrified.

HIROMI

What were you doing the other day?  
The thing with Fudo?

ITABASHI

(Still bowing)  
The Fudo mie, Lady Demon. One of  
the oldest traditions of the  
kabuki stage.

HIROMI

(To Itabashi)  
Right, that.

She pulls out the recorder on her AI interface.

HIROMI

(CONT'D)  
Do it again. I want to take a few  
pictures to show a friend of mine.

Itabashi doesn't exactly know what's going on, but he doesn't want to be the one who goes down for it. He pulls Sato forward.

ITABASHI

Sato-kun - show her what you've  
learned.

Sato and Adachi also rise.

SATO

(Like: are you *sure*?)  
...Sensei?

ITABASHI

The Lady Demon wants to see your  
work, Sato. So show her.

He pushes Sato between himself and the Hiromi.

Sato stumbles forward, then looks towards Adachi for help. She shrugs and marks him in with the hyōshigi. Suddenly, Sato strikes a dramatic pose: the Fudo mie.

HIROMI

(To the recording)

Rin, check it out! I think they  
really captured you.

EXCERPT 1: KAIJURA AND FUDARAKU DISCUSS THE CATAclySM OVER  
SAKE

Fudaraku leads Kaijura to a comfortable table where a sake  
set waits for them.

Fudaraku

You have traveled far, my old  
friend. Will you tamp down the  
dust of the road with some fine  
sake?

Kaijura

I wish the road had been dusty.  
The hooves of my horse were  
weighted down -

ALL

With thick mud.

Kaijura

Even now, the sea is loath to give  
up its grip on the land.

Fudaraku

Well then, sit and drink a cup  
with me only because I have missed  
you these many years. There's a  
proverb that says: time falls away  
only in the arms of a beautiful  
woman or the company of a friend.  
Let's weaken time's grip together.

They sit on either side of the table. Fudaraku pours a cup  
of sake for Togunaka, who drinks. They then reverse their  
roles.

Fudaraku

You are troubled by Namazu's  
restless movements, aren't you?

Kaijura

When the great carp flicks his  
tail, earthquakes and tsunami are  
set trembling. Who would not be  
troubled?

Fudaraku

For all his recent wiggling, it  
seems he is asleep again.

Kaijura

For now, yes, but I still worry.  
What if Namazu wakes again? What  
if the gods wake him, or send us  
another manner of misfortune?  
Surely they are displeased with  
Nippon, to have wrought such a  
disaster.

Fudaraku pours another cup of sake for Kaijura, who drinks.

Fudaraku

Why must you always fear the  
worst? Maybe this cataclysm was a  
punishment; maybe it was a test!  
The gods beating Nippon on an  
anvil and finding our metal true.

Kaijura

If that is so, then the gods are  
cruel beyond measure.

(He recites)

*(Note - here Kaijura and  
Fudaraku are engaging in  
renga: a form of  
collaborative Japanese  
poetry.)*

What was once a road  
is now endless grey salt water.  
The horses must swim.

Fudaraku

(Also reciting)

From grey sky to grey water,  
the tern dives for his dinner.

Kaijura

(Still reciting)

A shrine that stood since  
man first knelt before the gods,  
reduced to matchsticks.

Fudaraku

Sparks catch on a pile of twigs.  
Our fingertips warm slowly.

Kaijura

Father searches through  
the bones of his homestead for  
the bones of his son.

Fударaku  
The master potter can fix  
even a broken teacup.

Fударaku pours another cup of sake for Kaijura, who drinks.

Fударaku  
And here we all are: the master  
potters of every stronghold and  
prefecture, ready to daub the  
broken edges of our country with  
gold to fuse it back together.

Kaijura yawns and begins to sink where he sits.

Kaijura  
I hope it will be that easy, my  
friend.

Fударaku  
Trust that every man in the palace  
has the nation's best interests at  
heart.

He pauses and listens. Kaijura has fallen asleep where he sits.

EXCERPT 2: Fudaraku AND Zaitso DISCUSS THEIR PLOT

Zaitso enters. Fudaraku bows at his feet.

Zaitso

The spider weaves his web over many hours. Again and again, he walks over the same threads: here he tests the warp, there he adds to the weft. The work seems endless. But finally:

Fudaraku, still on his knees, looks up at his master

ALL

The trap is prepared!

Fudaraku stands.

Fudaraku

Everything stands ready, my lord. Tomorrow's sun will set with you on the throne.

Zaitso

You are sure? If anything goes wrong, I will want your head as repayment.

Fudaraku

I have been as diligent as a hunting dog and as generous as a Buddha. A river of gold has flowed from my hands, the streams winding their way into the pockets of humble guards and dignitaries alike. Some men have been hired. More than one has been killed.

Zaitso

What has this bought?

Fudaraku

Many things, Lord.

It has bought a spear, well-crafted and sharp, hidden in the ceremonial chamber. Thirsty for royal blood, ready for the touch of its master.

So too has it bought the silent mouths and stilled hands of the palace guards, that the Empress may not turn to them for aid.

(MORE)

## Fudaraku (CONT'D)

And a great lock on the palace gates, to keep the world from interfering too soon in your master plan. By the time they open again, these islands will be under your generous rule.

Zaitso  
Money well spent.



Fudaraku  
For you, my lord, I would give it  
ten times over.

ALL

Now the spider sits in his web,  
waiting for the clumsy fly!

Zaitso strikes a *mie* displaying his depravity and excitement. He can practically taste the power.

Zaitsu

Too long we have suffered the rule  
of the fly - of the centipede, of  
the worm. The rule of the blind,  
crawling things who drag Nippon  
behind them in the dirt.

(MORE)

Zaitso (CONT'D)

There is not enough water in the world -- no typhoon or tsunami -- that will wash our islands clean while they yet live.

EXCERPT 3: Zaitsu BLOCKS Kaijura'S  
ENTRANCE TO THE ROYAL HALL.

Kaijura stands on the hanimachi. Zaitsu stands between him and the entrance to the royal hall.

Kaijura  
(Striking a *mie*)  
Your very presence in this hall is rank sedition. Lord Zaitsu! Step aside or face my wrath!

Zaitsu  
You are the very picture of the loyal retainer. Does that make you proud?

Kaijura  
I serve irrespective of my pride. I would serve Nippon if the action heaped shame upon my head. I would serve her if it killed me.

Zaitsu  
Have you ever thought that I felt the same?

Kaijura  
Impossible.

Zaitsu  
To kill an empress is to invite the greatest of all shames. If I were to fail -- if I were to die in my attempt -- my family's name would be torn from history. Why risk this, if it were not the only possible action?

Kaijura  
A lust for power beyond all comprehension.

Zaitsu  
Think ill of me if you want -- I think we are more similar than we are different. I think we want the same thing: to see the tide sweep back and our islands rise up proud again. To rebuild the temples. To once more sit in the halls of our fathers, content in the knowledge that we serve justice.

(MORE)

Zaitso (CONT'D)

Can I convince you, Lord Kaijura,  
that I want only the best for our  
homeland?

Kaijura

Never.

Zaitso

And you will not trust the wisdom  
of your friend and mine, Lord  
Fudaraku? The man who has sword to  
be my hands in this matter? The  
man who, even now, stands before  
the Empress with the spear of  
justice?

Kaijura

I thought I knew Lord Fudaraku's  
heart. Now I see that it is as  
rotten as yours. I mourn my  
friend, but I will not join him.

Zaitso

And I cannot buy your trust? There  
is nothing in this world that you  
desire more than my blood on your  
hands?

Kaijura draws his sword.

Kaijura

There is nothing in this world or  
the next -- not in the celestial  
realm nor the seven hells -- that  
I desire more than your death.

Zaitso

A pity.

He raises his arms. There is an earthquake. Kaijura is  
thrown to the floor. He attempts to rise, but is frozen  
where he stands by Zaitso's outflung hand.

A *mie*. Kaijura's fear and despair. Zaitso's selfish joy at  
his victory.

EXCERPT 4: JUST BEFORE KAIJURA'S  
DEATH.

Fudaraku stands in the Royal Hall, surrounded by destruction. Many of the surviving retainers are kneeling in fealty to him.

Kaijura  
I'd hoped it wasn't true.

Fudaraku  
My friend. You do not understand.

Kaijura  
I understand enough. You have pledged yourself to something worse than a man -- a demon, whose only love is power.

Fudaraku  
It is for the best, can't you see? The Empress is dead. Lord Zaitso is triumphant. The only way is forward.

(He recites)  
(*More renga!*)  
Seabirds wheel over  
what once was farmland. Who else  
will harvest the minnows?

Kaijura  
(Also reciting)  
A wild dog eats carrion  
and thinks himself a hunter.

Fudaraku  
Loyalty cannot be bought;  
only earned through hardship.

Kaijura  
Enough! You cannot distract me forever with the games of our childhood. I no longer know the man who stands before me as anything but an enemy.

**NOTE:** *Kabuki plays are rarely performed in their entirety. More often, a troupe will present individual scenes or excerpts. The full arc of this plot may be something that Itabashi has written/is writing in its entirety, but it would not be unusual for the troupe to only be performing key scenes (I doubt Itabashi has written the whole play by the time we meet the group). Characters will be mentioned who do not have assigned actors; these scenes will not be performed.*

### **CHARACTERS**

Kajiura no Mikoto - The *tachiyaku* (hero, Keiji). A loyal retainer of the Empress Kogyoku.

Zaitso no Ōe - The *kugeaku* (master manipulator, Zaizen). Wants to overthrow the Empress and claim the throne of Japan. Has helped orchestrate this moment of political turmoil towards these ends.

Fudaraku no Kamatari - The *kunikuzushi* (evil foil to the hero, Tagawa). Boyhood friends with Kaijura. Secretly working for Zaitso.

### **SETTING**

The royal court of Japan in the 600s. The action of the play is inspired by the Isshi Incident, a famous assassination that took place in the Japanese Imperial court.

### **PLOT**

Just before the action of the play, there is a devastating earthquake and tsunami. Retainers from all over the kingdom have been called to court to report to the Empress on their strongholds and how their people have fared. As well as being an important strategic meeting, this will be an extensive ceremony that honors the Empress and reminds the fractured nation of her power.

Kaijura arrives at the Imperial Court. He is greeted ceremonially in a large dance scene. At the end of this ritual he is approached by Fudaraku, a man of similar rank to Kaijura & his boyhood friend. They greet each other warmly. Kaijura does not know that Fudaraku is now in the employ of the evil Zaitso.

Over sake, Kaijura and Fudaraku discuss how restless Namazu (the "earth shaker," aka the legendary carp that lives under Japan and causes natural disasters by flicking its tail) has been recently.



Kaijura worries that it is a sign that the gods are displeased with Japan, and that more evil might befall the nation. Fudaraku laughs at his superstitious nature, encouraging him to rejoice in the fact that they are alive. Kaijura responds by describing the devastation of the tsunami in his own prefecture: shrines destroyed, roads flooded, commoners searching through mud for the bodies of their family members. Fudaraku counters by describing the beauty of the things that still exist: birds hunting for fish in the flooded plains, the untouched gardens of the Imperial Palace, the grace of the gods. Overcome by the sake and the exhaustion of his travel, Kaijura falls asleep at the table.

Once Kaijura is asleep, Fudaraku is approached by Zaitso, who asks if everything is ready for their plot to go forward. Fudaraku describes the lengths he has gone through to set the assassination in motion: closing and locking the palace gates, bribing several palace guards, hiring armed thugs to accompany him to the ceremony, and hiding a spear in the ceremonial hall to use in killing the Empress. Zaitso congratulates his minion and assures him that he will have a seat at his right hand when Zaitso ascends the throne. He also reminds Fudaraku that the signal for the plot to go ahead will be Zaitso leaving the ceremonial hall, as it would be spiritually polluting for him to be in the same room as a violent murder. Fudaraku re-states his allegiance and the two men part ways.

Kaijura awakens, unsure if the plot he just heard was a dream. He doesn't want to think so badly of his friend Fudaraku, and reasons that if he can't find proof of the assassination plot then he must have been dreaming. He walks to the palace gates, which he finds open. Relieved, he retires for the evening.

On the day of the ceremony, the court gathers in the royal hall. Kaijura is still on guard and decides it would be better for him to be slightly late to the ceremony because he checked on the gates again than let a tragedy happen due to negligence. He walks to the palace gates to find them closed and locked. Alarmed, he asks a guard why this is so. Instead of answering, the guards attack Kaijura in a dramatic *tachimawari* (one-against-all fight scene, emblematic of a dramatic kabuki play). Ultimately victorious, Kaijura rushes to the royal hall to warn the Empress of the plot against her life.

Just as he is about to enter the royal hall, Kaijura comes upon Zaitso, who's just leaving. Kaijura remembers that this is the signal for the assassination attempt to commence. He demands that Zaitso allow him into the hall. Zaitso instead tries to persuade the retainer to join him in exchange for riches and power once he becomes emperor.

Kaijura refuses and draws his sword to fight his way past Zaitzu. Startlingly, Zaitzu reveals magical powers. He calls forth an earthquake that knocks Kaijura aside and threatens to collapse the palace. Undaunted, Kaijura lunges again at Zaitzu, only for the villain to freeze him in his tracks. Before Zaitzu disappears in curls of smoke, he mocks Kaijura for his allegiance to a dead Empress and a Japan that no longer exists. He claims that he will build a new Japan from the ruins of this tsunami, and that nobody will even remember Kaijura's name.

When he disappears, Kaijura is unfrozen. He rushes into the throne room, to find a scene of devastation. The Empress has been murdered, along with several members of court who tried to defend her. Fudaraku stands in front of the throne with a bloody spear in hand, clearly the murderer. The retainers who did not fight for the queen are bowing before him. Heartbroken, Kaijura challenges Fudaraku. Fudaraku repeats his master's arguments, offering Kaijura wealth and power alongside his oldest friend. He compares them to the birds hunting in the flooded plains, claiming that everyone has to take care of themselves during times of disaster. Kaijura and Fudaraku fight and end up killing one another. As they lay dying, Zaitzu appears in the room to claim the throne. Banners with his sigil unfurl from the ceiling, and the turncoat retainers bow and declare allegiance to him as emperor. In his final moments, Kaijura mourns the fact that he was too trusting of his friend and expresses fear for the future of his beloved Japan.