

THE STONECUTTER

A one-act dramedy for young audiences by
Ruth Cantrell

Adapted from the Japanese folktale

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

OLD WOMAN

MOUNTAIN (MT. NOKOGORI)

EMPEROR

STONECUTTER

GUARDIAN SPIRIT

TOWNSPERSON 1

TOWNSPERSON 2

TOWNSPERSON 3

SUN

RAY

RIVER

RAINCLOUD

FARMER

SEED*

NORTH WIND

SOUTH WIND

EAST WIND

WEST WIND

OCEAN

SAILOR

ANOTHER STONECUTTER

Additional Townspeople, Sun's Rays and Seed characters may be added if needed.

CASTING NOTES

Potential multiple casting for 8 actors:

OLD WOMAN, FARMER

STONECUTTER

GUARDIAN SPIRIT

MOUNTAIN, SUN, OCEAN

EMPEROR, RIVER, WINDS

TOWNSPERSON 1, RAINCLOUD,

TOWNSPERSON 2, SEED, ANOTHER STONECUTTER

TOWNSPERSON 3, RAY, SAILOR

If casting with 8 actors, Winds may be played by one actor holding a four-sided masked staff. Each mask would depict one of the winds. The fans would not be needed.

JAPANESE TERMS

Hyōshig is an instrument made of two pieces of wood connected by a rope.

Nokogiri is a Japanese saw.

Kimono is a traditional robe tied with an obi (belt).

Kammuri is black lacquered imperial headdress.

Shaku is an ivory tablet that is the symbol of the imperial power.

SCENE 1

(Lights up: OLD WOMAN enters. She takes out a hyōshig and strikes it.)

OLD WOMAN: Come and hear a story. It can happen any place, at any time. I will choose where, when and who. For today's story, I choose the place to be near a mountain in Japan.

(Enter MOUNTAIN, wearing a headdress that is shaped like a jagged saw.)

This mountain is called Mt. Nokogori because its ridge looks just like the teeth of the Japanese saw, also called a nokogiri.

(Mountain bows and stands in place.)

We have the place for our story; now we need to set the time. Let us go back to when emperors ruled Japan in the Edo Period.

(Enter EMPEROR holding a shaku [tablet]. TOWNSPERSON 1, TOWNSPERSON 2 and TOWNSPERSON 3 follow him. Old Woman bows to Emperor as he and his entourage exit.)

During this time, stonecutters carved stone from the mountain to build great palaces and walls.

(Enter STONECUTTER.)

Every day for 30 years, the Stonecutter sharpened his tools and cut stone from the mountain.

(Stonecutter sharpens his tools and cuts stone from Mountain. Mountain makes a "clink" sound each time the Stonecutter strikes him.)

But the Stonecutter was not happy.

(Stonecutter frowns.)

He felt he was not important.

(Stonecutter sadly shakes his head.)

His Guardian Spirit saw how unhappy he was.

GUARDIAN SPIRIT: *(Off:) Stonecutter.*

(Stonecutter stops cutting and looks to see who is calling. He sees no one and returns to his work.)

(Off:) Stonecutter.

(Stonecutter looks around again and, seeing no one, returns to his work. GUARDIAN SPIRIT enters.)

Perhaps if I said, "Stonecutter, look over here."

(Stonecutter sees Guardian Spirit. She waves and Stonecutter waves back.)

You don't know me, but I certainly know you.

(Stonecutter scratches his head.)

I am your Guardian Spirit.

(Stonecutter starts to shake the Guardian Spirit's hand, then stops. He thinks he is about to die. He gets on his knees and begins to beg for his life.)

Let me assure you that your time isn't up. You will live for many more years.

(Stonecutter is relieved and stands up.)

I overheard your request to be powerful and important, and I'm here to help.

(Stonecutter happily nods.)

I was always under the impression that a stonecutter was powerful and important.

(Stonecutter shakes his head.)

He's not?

(Stonecutter again shakes head.)

I have the power to change you into whatever you desire, but my power is not without its limits; you must choose wisely. Who is more powerful than a stonecutter?

(Stonecutter paces, trying to think of someone. Emperor reenters followed by Townsperson 1, 2 and 3. As they are presenting gifts to Emperor, Stonecutter points to him.)

Is that an emperor?

(Stonecutter nods and makes a gesture showing power.)

I agree. An emperor certainly has power. Would you like to become an emperor?

(Stonecutter nods.)

Very well. If being an emperor makes you happy, then you shall be an emperor!

(Lights flicker.)

(Emperor and Townsperson 1, 2 and 3 are motionless. Stonecutter approaches Emperor and, seeing that he is motionless, starts to dance around him. Stonecutter makes faces and acts silly.)

What do you think are you doing?

(Stonecutter stops.)

Is that any way for an emperor to act?

(Stonecutter sheepishly shakes his head.)

I should think not. Now, would please hand me your hammer and chisel.

(Stonecutter is reluctant to give them to her.)

As Emperor you won't need them.

(Stonecutter nods and hands them to her.)

You will need the kimono.

(Guardian Spirit takes off Emperor's kimono and puts it on Stonecutter.)

And the kammuri.

(Guardian Spirit takes the headdress from Emperor and places it on Stonecutter. Stonecutter parades about.)

You are not yet emperor. You need the shaku.

(Stonecutter has no idea what the shaku is, but not wanting to appear ignorant, reaches for Emperor's shoes.)

The shaku isn't his shoes!

(Stonecutter shrugs.)

The shaku is the ivory tablet that is the symbol of the Emperor's power.

(Guardian Spirit takes shaku from Emperor and hands it to Stonecutter.)

Now you are the emperor. (Bows:) Would you like to view your empire?

(Stonecutter nods. Guardian Spirit motions, and the former Emperor, realizing he is no longer an emperor, bows to Stonecutter-Emperor and exits. Guardian Spirit motions, and Townsperson 1, 2, and 3 bow to Stonecutter-Emperor and exit.)

If you need me for anything, just whistle.

(Stonecutter-Emperor tries to whistle. He can't.)

(Guardian Spirit hands him a wooden flute.)

This might help.

(Stonecutter-Emperor blows the wooden flute.)

Good. Now go enjoy your new power.

(Guardian Spirit exits.)

OLD WOMAN: The Stonecutter was very happy being Emperor.

(Stonecutter-Emperor parades around showing off his new clothes.)

And he was very powerful. He traveled to the far regions of his kingdom.

(Mountain exits.)

One day...

(Enter SUN, dressed as a warrior, holding a golden shield.)

The Sun, and his Ray...

(Enter RAY, dressed as a warrior, holding a spear. Ray crosses to Sun who points at Stonecutter-Emperor.)

...began to shine over the Stonecutter-Emperor.

(Sun points at Stonecutter-Emperor. Ray moves towards Stonecutter-Emperor. Stonecutter-Emperor reacts to the heat by fanning himself.)

The Stonecutter-Emperor became very hot.

(Stonecutter-Emperor wipes his brow and takes off the kammuri as Sun motions for Ray to attack again.)

He was very uncomfortable.

(Stonecutter-Emperor takes off kimono as Sun motions for the Ray to continue the attack.)

Here was something that had power over him. Something not on earth.

(Stonecutter-Emperor shakes his fist angrily at Sun and blows the wooden flute. The Guardian Spirit enters.)

GUARDIAN SPIRIT: Yes?

(Stonecutter-Emperor points to Sun and begins to fan himself.)

Did you call me because you are hot?

(Stonecutter-Emperor nods.)

Do you need a fan?

(Stonecutter-Emperor shakes his head and points to Sun.)

You called me because of the sun.

(Stonecutter-Emperor nods.)

Do you think that the sun has more power than you?

(Stonecutter nods.)

Do you now wish to become the sun?

(Stonecutter nods.)

Very well. If being the sun makes you happy, then you shall be the sun!

(Lights flicker.)

(Sun and Ray are motionless. Guardian Spirit takes Sun's shield. Stonecutter-Emperor hands Guardian Spirit the kammuri and the kimono.)

And the shaku.

(Stonecutter-Emperor hands Guardian Spirit the shaku, and she hands Stonecutter-Emperor the Sun's shield. Guardian Spirit exits with the former Sun. Stonecutter-Sun takes a stance as Ray unfreezes and immediately crosses to him. Stonecutter-Sun realizes his power and crosses to another area. Ray follows. Stonecutter-Sun repeats this action several times, with Ray dutifully following after him.)

OLD WOMAN: The Stonecutter became the sun. He looked down and saw a river flowing gently.

(RIVER enters and hands one end of a cloth to Old Woman. They stretch it out to form a blue river. [*The cloth is blue on one side and brown on the other.]*)

He saw a farmer.

(FARMER enters plowing the land near River. As Farmer plows, Stonecutter-Sun motions, and Ray attacks. Farmer fans himself. Stonecutter-Sun motions, and Ray continues the attack. Farmer wipes his brow. Stonecutter-Sun motions, and Ray attacks again, causing Farmer to collapse near River.)

Although the Stonecutter-Sun had the power to make the farmer uncomfortable, he also had other powers.

(Farmer carries on a SEED wrapped in a brown blanket. [Inside the blankets are appliqued crops.] Farmer "plants" Seed and gets water from River. Farmer sprinkles water on Seed.)

He had the power to make the farmer's crops grow.

(Stonecutter-Sun motions to Ray. Ray points spear at Seed and, as he raises the spear, the Seed begins to "grow.")

But he was not content with his power.

(Stonecutter-Sun paces, then gets an idea and laughs mischievously.)

The Stonecutter-Sun wanted to test his powers, and so he grew warmer.

(Stonecutter-Sun motions, and Ray attacks Seed. Seed starts to wilt.)

And still warmer.

(Stonecutter-Sun motions for Ray to continue the attack until the Seed withers and dies.)

And still warmer.

(Stonecutter-Sun motions, and Ray attacks River. River and Old Woman turn cloth to the brown side. Farmer is upset and angrily shakes his fist at him. Stonecutter-Sun laughs.)

The Stonecutter-Sun thought he was very powerful, but then the sky became dark.

(Lights dim.)

(RAINCLOUD enters as a warrior, holding a black shield and a sword, with a blade shaped like a lightning rod. Raincloud holds their shield above Stonecutter-Sun's shield. Seed begins to grow, and River once more is blue.)

A raincloud appeared.

(Stonecutter-Sun motions to Ray to attack the Seed. Seed withers, and Raincloud laughs. Raincloud raises his black shield.)

(Sound: Rain.)

(Seed "grows" again. Stonecutter-Sun motions for Ray to attack the Seed again, but Raincloud raises his lightning sword.)

(Sound: Thunder and rain.)

(Stonecutter-Sun blows his wooden flute, and Guardian Spirit enters.)

GUARDIAN SPIRIT: I wonder what the sun could want.

(Stonecutter-Sun raises shield above Raincloud.)

Oh, there you are. I can barely see you because of the raincloud. Can't you make it go away?

(Stonecutter-Sun shakes the shield.)

Then this raincloud must be very strong.

(Stonecutter-Sun nods.)

I suppose this means you no longer wish to be the weak sun, but rather a powerful raincloud.

(Stonecutter-Sun nods.)

Very well. If being a raincloud makes you happy, then a raincloud you shall be.

(Lights flicker.)

(Ray and Raincloud are motionless. Guardian Spirit takes Raincloud's shield and sword. Stonecutter-Sun exchanges Sun's shield for Raincloud's shield and sword.)

(To former Raincloud:) Would you like to be the River?

(Raincloud nods as Old Woman hands Raincloud her part of the River. Ray and Guardian Spirit exit.)

OLD WOMAN: And so the Stonecutter was now a raincloud. He enjoyed his new powers.

(Sound: Gentle rain.)

(Stonecutter-Raincloud rains, and Seed grows. Stonecutter-Raincloud gets another idea and laughs.)

He decided to test his new powers by making it rain.

(Sound: Driving rain.)

(Seed reacts to the force of the driving rain.)

And rain.

(Stonecutter-Raincloud continues attacking the Seed.)

And rain.

(River billows up. It overpowers Seed and Farmer as they exit.)

He reigned supreme. Nothing was more powerful than him. Nothing!

(Sound: Gusts of wind.)

The Stonecutter-Raincloud began to hear sounds in the air coming from four different directions. They were the four great Winds. There was South Wind.

(SOUTH WIND enters with his paper fan, tossing Stonecutter-Raincloud about.)

North Wind.

(NORTH WIND enters and motions with his paper fan, tossing Stonecutter-Raincloud in the opposite direction.)

East Wind.

(EAST WIND enters and motions with his paper fan, tossing Stonecutter-Raincloud in another direction.)

And West Wind.

(WEST WIND enters and motions with his paper fan, tossing Stonecutter-Raincloud in another direction.)

The winds attacked the Stonecutter-Raincloud.

(Stonecutter-Raincloud is tossed about by the Winds. Stonecutter-Raincloud whistles for Guardian Spirit as he is tossed towards South Wind. Guardian Spirit enters by North Wind.)

GUARDIAN SPIRIT: Brrrrrrrr! Where are you?

(Stonecutter-Raincloud motions as South Wind tosses Stonecutter-Raincloud towards West Wind. North Wind tosses Guardian Spirit towards South Wind.)

(To Stonecutter-Raincloud:) Can you give me some signal of where you are?

(West Wind tosses Stonecutter-Raincloud towards East Wind, as South Wind tosses Guardian Spirit towards West Wind. Guardian Spirit and Stonecutter-Raincloud meet.)

I assume you have called me about this wind problem.

(Stonecutter-Raincloud nods as the Winds encircle them.)

I thought you were powerful. Can't you stop this?

(Stonecutter-Raincloud shakes his head.)

I suppose this means that the winds are more powerful than you.

(Stonecutter-Raincloud nods.)

But which one is the most powerful?

(Stonecutter-Raincloud shrugs.)

Hmmmmmm. East Wind, show us your powers.

(East Wind bows and motions with his paper fan. Guardian Spirit and Stonecutter-Raincloud are tossed about.)

Where are you taking us?

(Enter OCEAN followed by a SAILOR in a sailboat.)

The East Wind is very powerful, for it has taken us to the ocean. See how he makes the boats sail across the water. North Wind, can you do the same thing?

(North Wind raises their paper fan as Sailor reacts to the sudden change in temperature. An iceberg appears and stops the boat. East Wind slumps in defeat.)

The North Wind has the power to make ships stop their journeys because of the ice and cold. Does he have more power than you, South Wind?

(South Wind shakes head and raises their paper fan. Sailor reacts to the warmth, as the iceberg melts and his boat begins to move again. North Wind gets angry and motions as Sailor and boat stop. South Wind motions as Sailor and his boat begin to move again. The action is repeated several times as a fight ensues, with the poor Sailor and his boat caught in the middle.)

West Wind, can't you do something about this?

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(West Wind tries to calm things. West Wind is tossed back and forth by North Wind and South Wind. West Wind gets angry and starts to twirl. The other Winds, Ocean and Sailor are tossed about and exit. West Wind closes their fan, and all is calm.)

It seems that the West Wind has become a powerful typhoon. Do you wish to become the West Wind?

(Stonecutter-Raincloud nods.)

If being the West Wind makes you happy, then you shall be the West Wind!

(Lights flicker.)

(West Wind is motionless. Stonecutter-Raincloud hands Guardian Spirit the Raincloud's shield and sword. Guardian Spirit gives West Wind's fan to Stonecutter. Stonecutter-West Wind begins to experiment with his new power. He motions towards former West Wind, who is tossed about and exits.)

Don't try that on me!

(Stonecutter-West Wind closes his fan.)

I hope that you are satisfied with being the West Wind.

(Guardian Spirit exits.)

OLD WOMAN: The Stonecutter-West Wind decided to see how far the air would take him.

(Stonecutter-West Wind opens his fan and runs around the stage.)

He came upon a town.

(Stonecutter-West Wind closes his fan. Emperor enters leading a procession. He is followed by Townsperson 1, 2 and 3 holding banners.)

He watched the people celebrate.

(Townsperson 1, 2, and 3 hold up banners as they dance and celebrate.)

He decided to play with his powers!

(Stonecutter-West Wind opens his fan and begins to twirl it about. Emperor, Townsperson 1, 2 and 3 are tossed around. Stonecutter-West Wind quickens the pace of his fanning, causing them to exit.)

He destroyed an entire town. His new power seemed to be unchallenged, or so it seemed.

(Enter Mountain.)

But Stonecutter-West Wind soon discovered not everything would bend to his powers. He came upon a mountain called Mount Nokogori.

(Stonecutter-West Wind fans Mountain, expecting it to succumb to him, but Mountain merely yawns. Stonecutter-West Wind increases the pace of his fanning, with no result. Exhausted, Stonecutter-West Wind blows the wooden flute. Guardian Spirit enters.)

GUARDIAN SPIRIT: What's wrong?

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