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Dramatic Publishing



Dragon of the Winds



A Japanese Folk Tale

By
Carson Wright



The Dramatic Publishing Company

Dragon of the Winds

Hanazo, the village kite maker bullies the local sign painter Uji into helping him fool the “unsophisticated” townfolk into believing that a (real) dragon will ascend from their lake at an appointed day and time. Things get out of control when the Emperor himself decides to attend. Inspired by a Japanese folk tale, **Dragon of the Winds** explores the territory between fact and fantasy.

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by

Carson Wright



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(DRAGON OF THE WINDS)

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DRAGON OF THE WINDS

A Play in One Act
For 11 Men and 8 Women
(doubling possible to reduce the cast to 15)

CHARACTERS

UNOSUKI	..... a teller of tales
NOKOHI	..... a village housewife
GOI*	..... a boy
TAJO*	..... another boy
MORITO	..... an old farmer
IKENO	..... a young farmer
HANAZO	..... a kite maker
UJI	..... a sign painter
KESA	..... a young woman
MASAGI	..... a young woman
TAKIKUNI*	..... an old woman
SUJIKI	..... a geisha
TAKAHIKO	..... a samauri
YOKINAGA	..... an advisor to the Emperor
SHUISHU*	..... Hanazo's mother

The following may be played by the actors portraying the characters marked by an asterisk.

SERVANTS: TWO GEISHAS in training as servants to
Sujiki and TWO NINJA BODYGUARDS
for Yokinaga

Playing time: 37 minutes

TIME: Once upon a...

PLACE: A lake shore near the Japanese village of Sarusawa.

DRAGON OF THE WINDS

SCENE: *URC, a pier with cattails and other bushes extending to stage R to suggest a lake shore. ULC, a willow tree. Stage L, more bushes. Entrances are DR, UL, and DL. There is a log DRC just above curtain line.*

AT RISE: *Music up, [author suggests the last 45 seconds of "Kushimoto-Bushi," a Japanese folk tune]. UNOSUKI is sitting on log. NOKOHI is kneeling on pier washing clothes in lake. After 15 seconds she rises, crosses to DL, pausing to bow to UNOSUKI and exits as two boys, GOI and TAJO, enter and cross to pier, bowing to UNOSUKI as they go. They begin fishing as MORITO and IKENO enter DR carrying farm tools. They cross, bow to UNOSUKI and continue to DL and exit. UNOSUKI addresses the AUDIENCE as music fades.*

UNOSUKI. One of the advantages of advanced age is that no one knows whether sitting about is important rest or laziness. The other is knowledge. Having lived so long I have acquired a great deal of that, mostly about my village and the people in it. There are great stories to be found in such a place, though it may not appear so at first glance. It has not always been so sleepy here. There have been battles fought here, and visits of important people. Great storms have come and gone, and

many people have been born and lived their lives and died here, and each is a story. This is true of all places where men dwell. But, this village of Sarusawa is unique in one very special way. It was visited by a dragon. How this happened is perhaps the best story of all. It began on a day like today when two small boys, named Goi and Tajo, were fishing in the lake...

GOI. Have you caught something?

TAJO. No, I have a snag. It must be a log beneath the surface.

GOI. There's never been anything there before. It must have floated in overnight. Let me help you.

TAJO. Be careful you'll break the line!

(HANAZO enters and stands DL)

GOI. Hey, look who's coming from the village. It's the kite maker Hanazo, the one they call Big Nose.

TAJO. Has he got a new kite with him?

GOI. He has a package which is probably a kite...and I've got an idea. They call him Big Nose because he cannot keep out of other people's business. So, what we do is...*(GOI whispers to TAJA.)*

TAJO. Okay...Uh huh...Gotcha!!

GOI. Get ready, here he comes...Don't let him get away! Hold on! Watch out! Play him carefully!

TAJO. He must be the greatest fish in the lake! What a fighter! I can't haul him in! I haven't the strength!

GOI. Let me help; he is so big, he's pulling you in! It's all we can do to hold him! We need a strong man for this!

(HANAZO approaches.)

HANAZO. What have you got there, boys, a monster?

TAJO. Yes! And he's a real fighter!

HANAZO. Be careful, don't jerk the line like that! You're not playing him right! You foolish boys are going to lose him! Let me help you, I am an expert fisherman!

GOI. I don't know, it takes two of us to hold him. He might pull you in!

HANAZO. You insolent brat! I am as strong as an ox! Now, get back and hold this kite. Give me part of the line, we can pull together!

TAJO. All right! On three! One...two...three! (*TAJO lets go of line, HANAZO falls backward into lake when it breaks. The BOYS jump with glee and laughter, and wave the kite.*)

GOI. The monster has pulled him in!

TAJO. Do you think it will eat him?

GOI. Of course!

TAJO. Do you think he would want us to have his kite?

GOI. Naturally! (*The BOYS exit laughing as HANAZO staggers from the lake.*)

(UJI enters carrying sign painted with Japanese characters.)

HANAZO. Why...you...kite thieves! I'll get even with those twirps. The next kite they buy from me will fall on their heads!

UJI. Isn't it still a little cold for swimming?

HANAZO. Uji, you idiot, I wasn't swimming! I was attacked and thrown into the lake by hoodlums...delinquents of the worst kind...attacked and robbed!

UJI. Robbers! Where? I'll protect you, I'll fight them all! Out you cowards! Fight like men! (*UJI swings sign, knocking HANAZO back into lake.*) Oops, I'm sorry! (*UJI helps HANAZO out.*)

HANAZO. I already chased them off, you fool! Be careful with that thing! You almost took my head off! What is that, anyway?

UJI. It's the sign you told me to make for you to advertise your new kite design.

HANAZO. Let me see. Look at this! Look, you incompetent fool! You've done it wrong! It's supposed to say, "A dragon kite will ascend from this spot on the first day of summer at noon." You left out the word kite! This says a dragon will ascend, not a dragon kite! You'll have to do it over; it won't do at all!

UJI. But the other words are done so well, couldn't you use it anyway?

HANAZO. Why would I want a sign advertising dragons? I sell kites not dragons!

UJI. You could switch to selling dragons. *(HANAZO does a take, throws the sign down, and crosses to log. UJI picks up sign and sets it up, lovingly.)*

HANAZO. This village is full of fools and thieves! Every time I even try to talk to anyone I get criticized, insulted, or treated to some really stupid babble. I, who have been to Kyoto, Edo, and Osaka. I should have stayed in one of those cities!

UJI. But, Hanazo, this is your home. Your grandfather was born here, your father was born here, you were born here. You belong here.

HANAZO. I belong with people of true taste and refinement, not among country bumpkins! There is nothing here for me.

UJI. Sarusawa has some good points.

HANAZO. Oh yeah, what? It doesn't smell too bad? It's not in the swamp, only next to it? Come on, Uji, show me something good about this village.

(KESA and MASAGI enter DL)

UJI. How about that? Hello, Kesa; hello, Masagi. *(GIRLS cross to them giggling.)*

KESA. Hello, Uji.

MASAGI. Hello, Hanazo.

HANAZO. Uh, hello.

UJI. Are you out walking alone? You must be careful! Hanazo was just robbed by a gang of hoodlums!

MASAGI. How terrible! Were you hurt?

KESA. Robbers near Sarusawa! How awful! Will you stay with us and protect us?

UJI. Of course! We won't let them harm a hair on your heads.

HANAZO. I don't think you have to worry; I fought them off. They ran away in the direction of the hills. They will think carefully before returning to face me again!

MASAGI. Then we should thank you for making it possible for us to walk safely and enjoy this beautiful day.

KESA. It is so close to summer and the weather is so warm that we decided to wear our new summer kimonos.

UJI. Why Kesa, they are truly beautiful. Did you and Masagi sew them yourselves? You have done a beautiful job of sewing!

MASAGI. Thank you, Uji, we tried to do our best and reflect credit on our village.

UJI. And look at the obis you are wearing! They are so beautifully embroidered.

KESA. That is Masagi's work. She plans the designs as well as sews!

UJI. Look, Hanazo, isn't it beautiful? A work of art!

HANAZO. Yes, it does show some talent, however, in Osaka they are no longer wearing embroidery on their

obis. It is out of fashion. To be considered well dressed nowadays the obi should be plain. I suppose you could improve your style a little by removing the more obvious decorations.

MASAGI. Oh!

HANAZO. And the kimono, well, it just isn't up to date. It's well-done for a country girl, I suppose, but it could use some improvements. Maybe a little fuller in the sleeves, then...

MASAGI (*breaks into tears and runs off stage*). Boo hoo!

HANAZO. What's the matter? Is the girl sick?

KESA. Good-bye, Uji. We must go. We will talk to you again when you are in better company! We prefer gentlemen with manners! (*KESA exits.*)

UJI. I don't believe it! You've run them off!

HANAZO. Nonsense! I was instructing them in their finer points of fashion. I simply wanted to improve their taste!

UJI. I think they taste just fine!

HANAZO. They obviously have no appreciation for education! They are perfect examples of people in this village; poor, ignorant, and unwilling to be instructed.

(*As he speaks, TAKIKUNI enters with laundry, crosses toward lake, sees sign and stops to read it.*)

HANAZO. Maybe it is my duty to be here. Maybe I am meant to improve these people in spite of themselves. To do that I need their respect. I wonder how I could teach them to listen to me as they should. (*UJI notices TAKIKUNI reading sign and tugs on HANAZO's sleeve.*) What is it? Can't you see I'm... Well, look at that. I am surprised, there is someone in this village besides myself who can read!

TAKIKUNI. My goodness! I can hardly wait! Uji, Hanazo, did you see the sign? What a marvelous thing!

UJI. Yes, it is a well made sign, but...(*HANAZO clamps hand over UJI's mouth.*)

HANAZO. Tell me, old woman, what does it say that has you so excited?

TAKIKUNI. You haven't read it? Come see! It says, "A dragon will ascend from this spot on the first day of summer, at noon." Isn't this the most wonderful thing!

HANAZO. You believe this sign?

TAKIKUNI. Of course, why would it say that if it were not true? I'm off. I must go tell the village about so important an event. (*TAKIKUNI exits. HANAZO releases UJI.*)

HANAZO. What do you think about that?

UJI. Why didn't you let me explain? If people see that sign, they will think it is true and have expectations of a great event which will not happen! They will suffer great disappointment!

HANAZO. I will instruct them myself, since it is my sign ...(*HANAZO takes out a coin and waves it in front of UJI who reaches for it. HANAZO pulls it away.*) that is, if you swear to keep your mouth shut!

UJI. It is your sign. I suppose I should let you explain it. (*Takes coin.*)

HANAZO. Good, we understand each other. Now keep quiet, here come the villagers. I will tell them the truth, but in their disrespectful way, they will believe nothing I say. Then, when nothing happens on the first day of summer, they will finally respect my superiority.

(Villagers, MORITO, UNOSUKI, KESA, MASAGI, NOKOHI, TAKIKUNI, and IKENO enter together and cross to sign, ad libbing excited comments.)

HANAZO. What is all this ruckus?

MORITO. Takikuni has told us of this marvelous event, and we have come to see for ourselves!

IKENO. Yes, such a great thing has never happened in all Japan, and to happen in our village!

NOKOHI. We will be famous! There will be a shrine here!

HANAZO. Don't be ridiculous. Such a thing will never happen here. A marvelous creature such as a dragon would never choose such an ignorant and isolated village for his ascension! He would choose a place of refinement, like Kyoto or the palace at Edo! *(VILLAGERS react with insulted murmurs.)*

MORITO. Hanazo, you are always criticizing us, telling us that we are not as good as the people in other places. And, now that a marvelous dragon has chosen our village for his ascension, you cannot see, for all of your conceit, that he would not have done so if we were not worthy!

HANAZO. You believe this will happen because of a sign? I tell you it is a mistake or, worse yet, a jest! And, ignorant peasants that you are, you fell for it! *(VILLAGERS ad lib, angrily.)*

NOKOHI. Hanazo, you will be sorry you said that! The day the dragon ascends you will be the one to lose face! *(VILLAGERS exit, ad libbing jibes at HANAZO and excited comments about the dragon. Only UNOSUKI remains watching HANAZO and UJI from behind tree.)*

UJI. You were right. They didn't believe you.

HANAZO. Of course not! They prefer their fantasies to the truth, and they will ridicule the wise man who dares to speak it. If I were you, I'd keep the bargain you made. Keep silent about this or they will revile you as they do me. I will be vindicated, however, on the first day of summer! (*HANAZO exits.*)

UJI. Hanazo is so educated, I guess he is right. But, it seems to me that the truth is so harsh sometimes, and fantasy so inviting. Wouldn't a dragon be wonderful? (*UJI crosses and sits on log.*)

UNOSUKI (*to AUDIENCE*). And so the days passed. The townspeople prepared for the big event by fixing up their village and decorating the lake side.

(KESA and NOKOHI enter, with 6 x 2 inch strips of paper with Japanese writing.)

KESA. Uji, look! We have made poem papers to decorate the willow tree!

NOKOHI. Almost everyone in town has written one. When the dragon ascends he will look down and see them and know that we are not ignorant, like some people have said.

KESA. Would you like to write one, Uji?

UJI. Me? I...uh...I don't...I'm no poet, Kesa.

KESA. That's the wonderful part! You don't have to be! Just relax and let the thought of the great dragon inspire you!

UJI. Maybe later.

(KESA and NOKOHI cross to tree and decorate. IKENO and MORITO enter and cross to UJI.)

IKENO. Hi, Uji! You want to help me trim the bushes?

MORITO. Or help me paint the pier? We have already painted and trimmed and decorated the village.

UJI. You sure are going to a lot of trouble. Hanazo says that there will be no dragon.

IKENO. Uji, when are you going to stop letting that know-it-all kite maker do your thinking for you?

UJI. Well...I...but you see...

MORITO. See what, Uji?

UJI. Nothing. *(IKENO and MORITO look at each other and shrug, then MORITO crosses to pier and begins painting while IKENO crosses to bushes and trims.)*

(MASAGI enters, running to UJI.)

MASAGI. There you are, Uji! I must get your measurements. We are making new clothes for everybody! We will look very nice on the day of the big event.

UJI. But, Masagi, isn't that very expensive?

MASAGI. Yes, but we will make it all back when the pilgrims start coming to visit the shrine.

UJI. What shrine?

MASAGI. The one the town is building to commemorate the dragon's ascension.

UJI. Oh! But...but...but...

MASAGI. Yes, Uji?

UJI. Nothing, Masagi. *(UJI sits, dejected. MASAGI exits.)*

UNOSUKI. Uji kept his bargain of silence, feeling guilty all the while. But Hanazo argued long and loud against the sign. And no one listened.

(HANAZO enters, crosses to UJI.)

HANAZO. Watch this! (*He crosses to pier.*) Hey, Morito!

You have spent a fortune on paint and it's all for nothing. The sign's a fraud! There is no dragon!

MORITO. Hanazo, go stick your nose in someone else's business! Go away! (*HANAZO crosses to tree.*)

HANAZO. You ladies are wasting paper on a tree that no dragon will ever look at!

NOKOHI. Kesa, do you hear a funny noise in the wind?

KESA. I am not sure, Nokohi, but it may be the voice of someone that we are not speaking to!

HANAZO. You'll be sorry! (*Crosses to IKENO.*) Ikeno, you trim bushes so well that it is a shame that no pilgrims will visit this village to see your handiwork.

IKENO. I trim big noses, too! (*IKENO chases HANAZO around stage with the hedge shears.*)

HANAZO. Stop! Get away! You're a madman! Help!

VILLAGERS (*ad lib*). Get him! Teach him a lesson! Ha ha! (*They stop.*)

HANAZO. You are all fools! I tell you, there will be no dragon!

VILLAGERS (*in unison*). Hanazo, SHUT UP!! (*VILLAGERS exit laughing as HANAZO winks at UJI, who is sitting miserably on the log. They freeze as UNOSUKI speaks.*)

UNOSUKI. This continued until the eve of summer arrived. The lake shore was all decorated and the villagers were all at home making the final preparations for the next day's celebration. (*UNOSUKI exits.*)

HANAZO. Look at this, Uji. They have gone completely foolish. They have spent large sums of money on decorations, and food, and clothing. All for nothing!

UJI. Yes, they have great faith.

HANAZO. Faith in foolishness! Not in wisdom. I tried to stop them, you must admit, but they will no longer lis-