

Kan Kikuchi (1888-1948)

The Husetop Madman (1916)

Translated from the Japanese by Glenn W. Shaw

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Madman, Batsushima Yoshitarô, aged 24.

His Younger Brother, Suejirô, a middle school student, aged 17.

His Father, Gisuke.

His Mother, Oyoshi.

A Neighbor, Tôsaku.

A Servant, Kichiji, aged 20.

A Hag referred to as a Holy-woman, aged about 50.

Time—Meiji, in the thirties.

Place—An island off the coast of Sanuki in the Inland Sea.

[Scene—The yard behind the house of Katsushima, a prominent rich man of this small island. The inside of the house is invisible, being cut off by a surrounding bamboo fence. Only the high roof delimits the deep blue summer sky of this southern clime. The sea can be seen shining to the left. The elder son of the family, Yoshitarô, crouches on the very loft of the roof back center and stares at the sea. His father's voice is heard from within the house.]

Gisuke [*invisible*]. You, Yoshi, you're up on that roof again, aren't you? In that burning sun. You'll get a stroke. [*Coming out on the veranda*]. Kichiji! Isn't Kichiji here?

Kichiji [*enters right*]. Yes, is there something?

Gisuke. Won't you bring Yoshitarô down? On a hot day like this without a hat he'll get a sunstroke. How does he get up on the roof? Did you put wire on the top of the shed as I told you to recently?

Kichiji. That's all done fast and well.

Gisuke [*looking up at the roof as he comes out upon the stage through a swinging door in the bamboo fence*]. Doesn't it bother him to sit like that on those tiles hot as baked stones? Yoshitarô! Come down quickly. You'll die of sunstroke if you stay in a hot place like that.

Kichiji. Young master! Come down. It's bad for you to be in a hot place like that.

Gisuke. I say, Yoshi. Won't you come down quickly? Whatever can you be doing in such place? Won't you come down quickly? I say, Yoshi!

Yoshitarô [*absently*]. What?

Gisuke. None of your whats. Come down quickly. You'll have a stroke broiling in the fiery sun. Come, get down at once! If you don't come down, I'll poke you from below with a pole.

Yoshitarô. I don't want to. There's something interesting here; Shonenbo San of Kompira is dancing in a cloud. In a red robe, he's dancing with the angels. He says, "Come to me, Come to me."

Gisuke. Don't talk nonsense. The fox that's got into you's fooling you. Won't you come down?

Yoshitarô [*overflowing with the joy of the insane*]. It's interesting, I want to go, too. Wait. I'm coming, too.

Gisuke. If you talk like that, you'll fall and get hurt again as you did once before. On top of your madness you'll go lame and give your parents nothing but trouble. Won't you come down, you fool, you!

Kichiji. Master, though you get angry like that, against the young master, can it do any good? Rather, shan't I go and buy some of the fried bean-curd he likes? If we show him that, he'll come right down.

Gisuke. Better still, poke him with a pole. I don't care.

Kichiji. I couldn't do such a cruel thing. The young master doesn't know anything. 'Cause it's the thing that's got him that makes him do it all.

Gisuke. How'd it be to put a line of pickets around the edge of the roof? So he couldn't possibly get up?

Kichiji. Nothing would be of any use against the young master. He'd climb up on the great roof of the temple Hondenji without any scaffolding. It's nothing for him to climb a low roof like this. Nothing's any use, since the thing that's got him makes him go up.

Gisuke. What's to be done? He stumps me. Even if he's crazy, it'd be all right if he'd sit still in the house, but to climb up and squat on high places is just like advertising his own madness. Sue tells me that talk of Katsushima's goblin madman has gone all the way to Takamatsu.

Kichiji. The people of the island say a fox has taken possession of him, but I can't understand that. I've never heard of a fox climbing up a tree.

Gisuke. I feel the same. My guess is different. When Yoshi was born, I killed all the monkeys on this island with a rare imported breach loader. Those monkeys are in him.

Kichiji. That may be so, mayn't it? If it wasn't, there'd be no reason for his being so sure at climbing trees, would there? He can climb up on to anything, whether he's got footholds or not. The best tricks of the ladder performers can't come up to the young master's, they say.

Gisuke [*laughing bitterly*]. Don't talk nonsense. Turn into the father of a roof-climbing son and see how you'd like it. Oyoshi and I are both worrying about him all the time. [*Raising his voice, again.*] Yoshitarô! Won't you come down at once? Yoshitarô! Won't you come down? When he's up on the roof, he can't hear a man's voice; he's all in an ecstasy. Since I was troubled by his climbing them, I cut down all the trees around the house, but there's nothing I can do with the roof.

Kichiji. When I was little, there was a maidenhair tree out in front of the gate, wasn't there?

Gisuke. Ah, that tree? That tree had become the landmark of the island. Once Yoshitarô climbed to the very top of that tree. And didn't he sit empty-headed on a branch eighty-five or ninety feet up in the air? And just as Oyoshi and I had given him up for dead, he came slipping easily down again. We were all so surprised we couldn't talk.

Kichiji. You don't say. Positively no man's performance, was it?

Gisuke. That's why I say I think the monkeys have got him. [*Raising his voice.*] Yoshi, I say. Won't you come down? [*Suddenly changing his mind.*] Kichiji! Won't you go up?

Kichiji. But if anybody else goes up, won't the young master get angry surely?

Gisuke. All right. It's all right if he does get angry. Go up and pull him down.

Kichiji. All right, all right. [*Goes out to get a ladder. Just then the neighbor, Tôsaku, comes in.*]

Tôsaku. Master. Good day.

Gisuke. Glad to see you. Fine weather, isn't it? What did you get in the net you put out yesterday? A pretty good haul, didn't you?

Tôsaku. Nothing at all. The season's past.

Gisuke. That's right, I guess. It's a little late. Catch a few scomberomorus already, can't you?

Tôsaku. Yesterday there were two or three in Seikichi's net.

Gisuke. Is that so?

Tôsaku. [*looking at Yoshitarô*]. Is the young master up on the roof again?

Gisuke. Yes, he's up there as usual. I don't want him to be, but if you shut him up in a room, he's like a silver carp out of water. If you just take pity on him and let him out, he's up on the roof in a jiffy.

Tôsaku. But it's a good thing that the young master's sort's no trouble to those about them.

Gisuke. But he isn't altogether no trouble. He's a shame to his parents and brother, you see, climbing up on high places like that and sitting there.

Tôsaku. But his young brother Sue does so well at school in town that you can resign yourself, can't you?

Gisuke. Sue's as good as the ordinary, so I can bear it. There'd be no use living if they were both crazy.

Tôsaku. To be sure. Master. A most powerful holy-woman came to the island yesterday. I came over because I've been wondering how it would be to have her pray over the young master once.

Gisuke. Did you? But he's been prayed over more times than I can remember, only it's never had the least effect.

Tôtsaku. This one being a holy-woman of Kompira San she's a most powerful one. Since the spirit enters into her, hers are different from the prayers of hermit priests. How would it be to try her?

Gisuke. I wonder. About what'll it cost, I wonder.

Tôtsaku. If he doesn't get well, she says she wants nothing. If he does, she says to pay according to your means.

Gisuke. Suejirô says there's nothing in such things as prayers, but since I can't lose anything by it, I might as well try her anyway, mightn't I?

[*At this point Kichiji comes in with a ladder. He goes inside the bamboo fence.*]

Tôtsaku. Then I'll go and get the holy-woman from Kinkichi's where she's stopping. Get the young master down.

Gisuke. Thanks for your trouble. Then please bespeak her well. [*After watching Tôtsaku depart.*] Come on, Yoshi! Come on down quietly.

Kichiji [*crawling up on the roof*]. Come on, young master. Let's go down together. If you stay in a place like this, you'll have a bad fever in the night.

Yoshitarô [*like a Buddhist disciple in dread of an approaching heretic*]. I don't want to. The goblins are all beckoning me to come. This is no place for you to come. What are you thinking of?

Kichiji. Come on, don't talk nonsense, but come down.

Yoshitarô. If you but barely touch me, the goblins will rend you to pieces.

Kichiji [*goes suddenly up to Yoshitarô and seizing him by the shoulder, pulls him down. After being seized, Yoshitarô offers no resistance at all.*] Come, if you behave badly, you'll hurt yourself.

Gisuke. Be careful.

Kichiji [*comes down with Yoshitarô in front of him. Yoshitarô limps because of an injury to his right leg.*] Though called holy-women, there are some who do not the least bit of good.

Gisuke. Yoshi often says he talks with the spirit of Kompira. So I thought a holy-woman from there might have some effect. [*Raising his voice loud.*] Oyoshi, come out here a little.

Oyoshi [*inside*]. Is there something?

Gisuke. I've sent for a holy-woman. What do you think?

Oyoshi [*comes out at the swinging door*]. It might be all right. Through something or other, he might just chance to get well.

Yoshitarô [*with a discontented look*]. Father, why did you get me down? Just now when a five-colored cloud was descending to meet me?

Gisuke. Fool! Didn't you once say your five-colored cloud had come to jump off the roof? That's how you got crippled like that. Today a holy-woman from Kompira will come, and she's

going to drive out the thing that's possessed you, so don't climb up on the roof, but wait.

[*At this juncture Tōsaku comes in with the Holy-woman. She is a witchlike hag of about fifty with a crafty face.*]

Tōsaku. Master, this is the holy-woman I told you of a while ago.

Gisuke. Good day to you. It's good of you to come. Really he's a troublesome fellow, you see. He's the crying shame of his parents and brother.

Holy-woman [easily]. It's nothing, my good sir. Don't worry, I'll cure him straight off through the power and virtue of my spirit. [*Turning toward Yoshitarō.*] Is it this gentleman?

Gisuke. Yes. He's twenty-four now, you see. But he can't do a single thing decently but climb up on high places.

Holy-woman. How long has he suffered from this affliction?

Gisuke. He was born with it. He wanted to climb up on to things from the time he was a little mite and when he was four or five climbed up into the alcove and on to the household shrine and on to shelves. When he was seven or eight, he learned to climb trees. When he was fifteen or sixteen he would climb to the tops of mountains and not come down all day. And he would talk continually to himself as if he was talking to goblins or spirits or such things. What on earth could be the reason?

Holy-woman. Like the rest, he's surely possessed by a fox. Come, I'll pray over him. [*Walking toward Yoshitarō.*] Hear me well! Since I'm the messenger of the spirit of this land, Kompira Daigongen Sama, every word I say is spoken by him.

Yoshitarō [looking displeased]. You talk of the spirit of Kompira, but have you ever seen him?

Holy-woman [glaring at him]. What rudeness you talk! Is it possible to see the spirit's form with the eyes?

Yoshitarō [proudly]. I've seen him many times. Kompira San is an old man in a white robe with a golden crown on his head. He's my close friend.

Holy-woman [looking at Gisuke a little disconcerted at being put down]. This is a most advanced case of fox possession. Come, I'll try calling upon the spirit.

[*Chanting a magic formula, the Holy-woman makes mysterious motions with her body, while Yoshitarō, still held by the shoulder by Kichiji, looks on indifferently like one who has no connection with the business. After raving about like one in a frenzy, she falls in a swoon. Getting up again, she stares all about her with wide-open eyes.*]

Holy-woman [in an utterly different voice]. I am Kompira Daigongen, the spirit enthroned on Mount Zozu in this land.

All [with the exception of Yoshitarō, bowing]. Oh!

Holy-woman [solemnly]. The fox of Mount Taka-no-Jo has entered into and possessed the body of the eldest son of this house. Hang him up on the branch of a tree and smoke him with green pine

needles. Act not upon my words and the punishment of the spirit will strike you instantly. [*Swoons again.*]

All. Oh!

Holy-woman [*rising again, absently*]. What did the spirit say?

Gisuke. Ah, it was a most august thing.

Holy-woman. If you don't do as the spirit has commanded, you will be stricken with his punishment, so I speak that you may know.

Gisuke [*a little troubled*]. Kichiji! Then won't you pick some green pine needles and bring them?

Oyoshi. No matter how much she says it's the order of the spirit, we can't do such a cruel thing.

Holy-woman. It's the fox in him that'll be smudged and suffer. The man himself will feel no pain. Come, make ready quickly. [*Turning to Yoshitarô.*] Did you hear the spirit's voice? You'd best be gone before you suffer.

Yoshitarô. Kompira San's voice is no such voice as that. He'd have nothing to do with such a woman as you.

Holy-woman [*her dignity injured*]. Now I'll make you smart, so just wait. You dirty fox, you're a detestable rascal to abuse a spirit.

[*Kichiji comes in with an armful of green pine needles. Oyoshi is in a panic.*]

Holy-woman. If you don't obey the command of the spirit, his punishment will fall upon you!

[*Gisuke reluctantly helps Kichiji set fire to the green pine needles and pushes the protesting Yoshitarô up near the smoke.*]

Yoshitarô. Father, what are you doing? Don't! Don't!

Holy-woman. If you think that's the voice of that man, it'll be hard to smudge him. You must think that it's all the voice of the fox talking. You must think that you're hurting the fox that's hurting him.

Oyoshi. Anyway it's cruel.

[*Gisuke helps Kichiji and they push Yoshitarô's face into the smoke. Just then, Suejirô's voice is heard from the house.*]

Suejirô [*from within the house*]. Father. Mother. I've come home.

Gisuke [*lets go of Yoshitarô, a little startled*]. Sue's come home. It's not Sunday, and I wonder why.

[*Suejirô pokes his face out from the swinging door. He is a darkish dashing youth dressed in a middle school uniform. He is quickly aware of the extraordinary state of affairs.*]

Suejirô. What are you doing, Father?

Gisuke [*ill at ease*]. Er. . . .

Suejirô. What are you doing making a smudge of pine needles?

Yoshitarô [*having been coughing in distress, sees his younger brother and acts as if he has gained a savior*]. Is it you, Sue? Father and Kichiji pitched on me and have been smoking me with pine needles.

Suejirô [*changing countenance a little*]. Father! Are you doing that absurd thing again? Haven't I talked to you about it enough?

Gisuke. Yes, but a spirit has entered into a marvellous holy-woman, you see, . . .

Suejirô. Nonsense! Just because brother can't reason, doing such a foolish thing!

[*As the Holy-woman looks at him askance, he kicks and scatters the burning pine needles.*]

Holy-woman. Wait, that fire's a fire made at the command of a spirit.

[*With a derisive laugh, Suejirô tramples it out.*]

Gisuke [*changing his tone a little*]. *Suejirô*! I haven't any education at all, so I listen to every word that you who are bright at school say. But wouldn't it be well not to trample out a fire made at the spirit's command, no matter how suppositional?

Suejirô. Nothing can be cured by smoking with pine needles. People would laugh if they heard you were driving out a fox. If all the spirits in Japan gathered, it wouldn't cure a cold. This impostor of a holy-woman, thinking of nothing but money, . . .

Gisuke. But the doctors can't cure him either.

Suejirô. If the doctors say he can't get well, he can't. What's more, as I've said many times, if Brother suffers from this affliction, we must by all means try to cure him, but we can make him happy all day long if we just let him climb on the roof of the house. Not in all Japan, no, not in all the world, is there a man who can be as happy every day as Brother can. And suppose you did cure him now and make of him a sane man, what good would it do? He's twenty-four and knows nothing, not even the *i* of his *i-ro-ha*. He's utterly without experience. In addition, he'd be conscious of his own deformity and probably the most unhappy man in Japan. Is that what you want? Nothing could be so foolish as to think that it must be best to make him sane, and give him sanity to torture him. [*Looking at the Holy-woman out of the corner of his eye.*] *Tôsaku San*, if you brought her here, please go away with her.

Holy-woman [*most indignant at the insult*]. Who treats profanely his messenger, the spirit will instantly punish. [*Chanting a magic formula, she goes through the same sort of motions as before and, after falling down, gets up.*] I am the great spirit of *Kompira*. What the sick man's brother has just said is all from a selfish heart. For when the elder brother recovers, all the wealth of this house becomes his. Dare not doubt.

Suejirô [*knocking her down angrily*]. What are you driveling? Fool! [*Kicks her two or three times.*]

Holy-woman [*as she gets up, returning to her former self*]. Ouch! What are you doing? Don't be wild.

Suejirô. Fake! Imposter!

Tôzaku [*separating them*]. Come, my boy, wait. You needn't be so angry.

Suejirô [*still excited*]. Driveling nonsense! What does an impostor like you know of the love of brothers?

Tôzaku. Come, we'll go away at once. I did wrong to bring you here.

Gisuke [*giving money to Tôzaku*]. Please, since he's still just a boy, forgive him. He's awfully quick tempered.

Holy-woman. The insolent rascal that kicked me with his foot just when the spirit was in me is in danger of death before night.

Suejirô. What are you driveling!

Oyoshi [*holding Suejirô*]. Be still. [*To the Holy-woman.*] I'm very sorry.

Holy-woman [*going off with Tôzaku*]. He'll begin to rot from the foot that kicked me. [*Exeunt.*]

Gisuke [*looking at Suejirô*]. Won't punishment visit you for doing a thing like that?

Suejirô. No spirit would enter into such an impostor as that. She drivels absurd lies.

Oyoshi. I thought from the first she was a suspicious character, for if it was a spirit, would it say such cruel things?

Gisuke [*with nothing to suggest*]. That's true enough. But anyway, Sue, your brother'll be a burden to you all your life.

Suejirô. Who'll be a burden? If I succeed, I mean to build a high, high tower on the summit of Mount Taka-no-Jo and put Brother in it.

Gisuke. But where's Yoshitarô gone, I wonder.

Kichiji [*pointing to the roof*]. Up there.

Gisuke [*smiling*]. As usual.

[*During the confusion, Yoshitarô seems to have climbed up on the roof before anybody was aware. The four below look up at him and exchange smiles.*]

Suejirô. If it were an ordinary man, there's no saying how angry he'd be if he was smoked, but Brother's forgotten. Brother!

Yoshitarô [*as if there was a special brotherly love even in his insane heart*]. Sue! I asked Kompira San, and he says he doesn't know any such woman.

Suejirô [*smiling*]. Likely enough. He's entered into you rather than into such a woman. [*The golden evening sun breaks through a cloud and floods all the roof with light.*] A beautiful sunset, isn't it?

Yoshitarô [*his face shining with a strange brightness in the golden light*]. Sue, look. In that cloud over there, you can see a golden palace, can't you? There, you see it, don't you? There, just look at it! Beautiful, isn't it?

Suejirô [*as if he feels a little the sadness of a man who is not crazy*]. Yes, I see, I see. Great,

isn't it?

Yoshitarô [in a state of delight]. There! Out of the palace comes the voice of the flute I love. A sweet voice, isn't it?

[The father and mother go into the house and leave the mad elder brother on the roof and the wise younger brother on the ground gazing intently at the golden evening sun.]

[Curtain.]