

CRESCENT MOON

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST PATH - SNOW - DAY

SUPER: SOUTHERN JAPAN - 1553

A medieval Japanese funeral procession is underway. An army of men dressed in formal wear march quietly across a snowy road.

At the center of the procession is a large casket highly decorated and carried by a team of samurai warriors.

Directly behind the casket on horseback is a proud, elderly man: GRANDFATHER (75). He is as fit as any man half his age, and he has the battle-scars to prove it.

Riding next to him is JOHGEN (25). He is a model of leadership with a youthful, but commanding presence.

JOHGEN (V.O.)

My father was killed in the winter of 53. He will be buried with our ancestors at our family shrine, as is his right as Clan leader. Our family, the strong, proud, honorable Crescent Moon Clan, have ruled this province for over 100 years. We have been blessed with fertile fields and great fortune. Many have tried to take it from us. All have failed.

SMASH CUT TO:

BATTLE FIELD: Two great armies clash. Johgen and his FATHER are covered in blood as they hack through men like timber.

JOHGEN (V.O.)

My father died an honorable death, the most noble death a warrior could ask for: death in glorious battle.

Johgen's father is stabbed from multiple attackers.

BACK TO:

FUNERAL PROCESSION - SHRINE

The procession has stopped now at the shrine. Shinto priests perform their ceremonies. Johgen looks on.

JOHGEN (V.O.)

While I will miss my father's strength and wisdom, I shed no tears for him. That is the way of things. Every man here would shed his life if my father but asked him to. A warrior does not hesitate when facing death. A warrior does not question his master's request.

A grave has already been dug. The men ceremoniously lower the casket into the ground.

JOHGEN (V.O.)

Now, at my father's passing, the rule of this land falls to me. Now I have but to wave my hand and any one of these brave men would gladly fall on their sword.

Johgen's eyes stray from the ceremony as he fixates on a red robin perched on a branch.

JOHGEN (V.O.)

Their fate is sealed with me now. It is our honor to defend these lands to the death.

(beat)

But just as this snow will melt in the spring, all things must come to pass. That is the way of things. That is the way of the samurai.

EXT. JAPANESE LANDSCAPE - SPRING - MORNING

Mount Fuji shimmers in the distance on this quiet, beautiful spring morning.

Cherry blossoms fall gently into a babbling brook.

Sunlight pokes through the leaves of swaying treetops.

A small group of deer peacefully graze on a mountainside meadow.

Then, in the distance, horse hooves slowly inch forward.

The deer's heads pop up from the tall grass.

The horse hooves pick up speed.

Sensing danger, the deer sprint away just as six samurai on horseback come racing across the meadow at full gallop.

Johgen leads the pack. Grandfather keeps up pace. Johgen calls out directions to the four other samurai to circle this way or that in effort to head off the deer. The men react without hesitation as they follow his orders.

The deer dart back and forth across the meadow and finally head into the tree-line. Two of the deer break off, but the horsemen stay fixed on the leader.

Without missing a beat, two samurai gallop on each side of the deer; two bring up the rear -- herding them right down the middle of the forest floor. Johgen comes racing up behind them, positioning himself directly behind his prey.

IN THE FOREST

Johgen pulls an arrow from his quiver, loads his bow, and steadies himself atop his horse still at full gallop.

He digs deep into the stirrups as he slowly elevates himself, pulling the arrow back to full tension. As though he were floating on a cloud, he steadies his aim.

Meanwhile, around the bend, a simple peasant man, KAN (45) hauls firewood SINGING a happy tune.

Not seeing each other, Johgen and Kan almost collide just as Johgen releases his arrow. The deer bolts off in another direction. The arrow flies off in the distance. Johgen is thrown from his startled horse. Kan cowers in fear.

Grandfather and the other samurai catch up to Johgen. They dismount and tend to their fallen comrade.

IESADA (28), looks at Johgen, then turns his rage towards Kan who dares not lift his head off the ground.

Iesada draws his sword and is ready to strike.

GRANDFATHER

Hold your sword, Iesada.

Kan's life is temporarily spared. Iesada reluctantly puts his sword away.

Johgen catches up with the group. He's not happy at all.

Johgen kicks Kan hard in the chest. He is about to deliver another blow when his Grandfather interrupts.

GRANDFATHER

Have we been reduced to beating up peasants on the road?

Johgen's anger cools. He gathers his composure and re-mounts his horse.

IESADA

(angry)

This peasant nearly cost the life of our young Lord! He must be punished according to the law!

Iesada draws his sword.

GRANDFATHER

We should pick up the deer trail soon or we'll come back home empty handed.

Iesada looks to Johgen for instruction.

JOHGEN

We can't allow weakness to overcome us. These are times of war, and the law must be obeyed.

Iesada raises his sword to strike.

GRANDFATHER

This peasant was walking on the road. Is that a crime?

Johgen moves his horse over to Grandfather. He scolds the old man in private.

JOHGEN

(quietly)

Do not question my authority again, old man. I am the clan leader now, and it is I who will decide when, where and how the law is carried out.

GRANDFATHER

Your father was a ruthless warrior, but even he would not be so rude to me.

JOHGEN

I am not my father, and you will be dead soon. I must set an example to my men. They must follow me into battle and into death if they necessary. I musn't show any weakness in these dark times.

GRANDFATHER

You are not a boy anymore, and what you say is true. These are hard times.

Grandfather leans over to Johgen so only they can hear.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

(quietly)

But remember this, I will break every bone in your body if you ever speak to me like this again. I didn't get these scars from hunting deer in the forest.

Johgen backs off a bit as he examines the brutal scars on his grandfather's face. He turns back to Iesada and the other men.

JOHGEN

Take the right hand.

The men grab Kan's arm and pull it straight. Kan is terrified.

In one swift, clean strike, Iesada severs the hand a the wrist.

Kan falls to the ground and cries out in pain as the men let him go.

They mount their horses.

JOHGEN

Come. The trail is still fresh.

The men ride off into the forest.

EXT. CASTLE TOWN GATE - EVENING

The sun is setting as Johgen and his hunting party return to their castle grounds. Two deer are strapped to their horses.

Iesada rushes up to the gate and yells commands at the guards.

IESADA
Don't just stand there, bring some
men to help unload these deer!

The guards yell for a few more men nearby. They rush up and unload the deer.

IESADA
(to Johgen)
We'll have a fine feast tonight.
I'll have the cooks prepare it
immediately.

The men are finished unloading the deer, and Johgen is about to proceed through the gate when a crescent moon rising on the horizon catches his eye. He seems to be in deep thought.

IESADA
Sir?

Johgen snaps out of it. He notices that the rest of his party is already moving through the gate.

IESADA (CONT'D)
Sir? Are you alright?

JOHGEN
Go on and begin the feast without
me. I'll be back soon.
(points to two of his
samurai)
You and you. Come with me.

Everyone is puzzled as Johgen and his two men ride off down the road.

EXT. BUDDHIST CONVENT - SAME NIGHT

Johgen and his two men arrive at the front gate of a modest countryside convent.

JOHGEN
(to his men)
Wait here for me.

Johgen dismounts and rings the bell hanging from the gate.

A few moments later, the gate opens and young woman dressed in nun's robes and a shaved head answers.

JOHGEN
(commanding)
Omiyu.

The woman smiles, bows, and leads Johgen in without a word.

INT. BUDDHIST CONVENT - COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

The woman gestures towards another nun (OMIYU - 45) on the opposite side of the courtyard. She smiles, bows, and leaves again without a word.

Johgen calls across the courtyard.

JOHGEN
(commanding)
Omiyu.

The bald, middle-aged nun doesn't respond. She carefully lights each lantern with ceremony and purpose.

Johgen is impatient. He strides around the perimeter towards her.

JOHGEN (CONT'D)
Omiyu.

Again, Omiyu ignores him. She lights another lantern with a small torch.

Johgen walks straight up to her.

JOHGEN (CONT'D)
Answer me when I'm speaking to you,
mother.

Omiyu finishes lighting a lantern, then continues on her path -- straight through Johgen as if he isn't even there. Shocked, Johgen has to leap out of the way to avoid getting burned by the torch.

Omiyu lights another lantern.

Johgen finally gives up. He sits down on a bench in resignation.

She continues to light the lanterns around the courtyard.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OMIYU'S ROOM - SAME NIGHT

Johgen and Omiyu enter and sit in a tiny room lit only by a lantern. There is only a rolled up sleeping mat, a simple tea set, a small window, and a single, white carnation in a vase.

Omiyu mends a robe.

Johgen waits to be served some tea that's sitting right next to him. Omiyu doesn't seem to notice his impatience. He gives up and serves himself.

JOHGEN

You didn't come to your husband's funeral.

OMIYU

He hasn't been my husband for years.

JOHGEN

Still, you should've paid your respects.

Silence passes between them.

OMIYU

Why are you here, son?

JOHGEN

It's my duty as a son to ensure the wellbeing of his mother.

OMIYU

You haven't ensured the wellbeing of me in over three years?

JOHGEN

It's hard for me to see you...like this.

OMIYU

Like what? As a woman mending a robe, or as a human choosing peace over war?

JOHGEN

As a samurai who has abandoned her honor.

OMIYU

You mean a mother and a wife who's abandoned her family and husband?

Johgen's silence says it all.

OMIYU (CONT'D)

I am not ashamed of leaving your father, if that's what you're getting at. We all have to make hard choices in life, and I made mine. The way of the samurai is full of blood and misery. I couldn't live like that anymore, so I left.

Johgen sips his tea.

OMIYU (CONT'D)

I know you're ashamed of me, son, but I'm happy here. Can you not see that?

Johgen gets up and walks over to the tiny window in the wall. He peers out at the stars and the crescent moon on the horizon.

Omiyu watches him closely.

OMIYU (CONT'D)

The last time I saw that look on your face your father and grandfather were preparing for the Hanto Battle. You're going to war again?

Johgen is taken back by her perception.

OMIYU (CONT'D)

My eyes are old, but a mother always sees the fears of her son.

Johgen's face turns hard.

JOHGEN

There is no fear here. And lower your voice when you speak of war.

(beat)

You can sit here in your mountain retreat for the rest of your life, but we in the real world must fight to survive. Blood must be shed so that the people may live in peace.

OMIYU

Hmmph! The people? Since when did a samurai care about the people?

JOHGEN

(instantly angry)

You will hold your tongue! You know nothing of the sacrifices we samurai make for our land and the peasants in our charge.

Omiyu isn't the least bit fearful of his rage.

OMIYU

Do you hear yourself? You speak of your land before the farmers. If it were not for the farmers, the entire clan would shrivel and die. They're your true wealth, not the land or your precious samurai honor. Whatever war you're planning now will not fulfil you. It will only lead to more fighting and more death. This is what your father could not see. This is why he's dead now. And now you and your Grandfather must continue in this endless cycle? When does it end? How much land is enough?

Johgen quickly gets up to leave.

JOHGEN

(changing the subject -
civil)

I see that you are doing well, mother. I will leave you to your mending.

He bows deeply to the floor, then slides open the door to leave.

OMIYU

Johgen.

He pauses for a moment before leaving.

OMIYU (CONT'D)

One strike only leads to another.
It only ends when one person
decides not to strike back.

With that, Johgen leaves.

EXT. SHRINE RUINS - NIGHT

Two samurai horsemen stand guard outside of a small, abandoned, mountaintop Buddhist shrine. A group of riders approach in the distance. Lanterns light their way.

INT. SHRINE RUINS - CONTINUOUS

KAGATORA (47), a stout, muscular, balding man sits facing a weathered old Buddha statuette. He rubs the back of his head as he stares at it.

Two men enter the shrine behind him: SHIGEYOSHI (43) and TAKECHI (50). Both carry themselves with the air of a samurai Lord.

Before they can sit...

KAGATORA

What do you think they see in this round little man, Lord Takechi? He sits in placidity while the world crumbles around him: indifferent to the suffering of men.

Shigeyoshi and Takechi seat themselves behind Kagatora.

TAKECHI

But that is why he sits in placidity, Lord Kagatora. The Buddha is engrossed in the suffering of men. He is the center of compassion and therefore dwells in the acceptance of suffering...or so the monks tell me.

Shigeyoshi has had enough.

SHIGEYOSHI

Did we come here to debate religion, Kagatora?

Kagatora finally turns to face them.

KAGATORA

Ah, Shigeyoshi. I knew I could count on you to get to the point.

SHIGEYOSHI

We're risking our necks being here.
We've crossed swords in battle, if
you recall.

KAGATORA

Of course. And your men fought
well. But we have a new problem on
the horizon. Rumor has it that
Crescent Moon is planning to expand
north.

Shigeyoshi's face turns to dread.

SHIGEYOSHI

North?! That's my land!

KAGATORA

And yours will be next, Lord
Takechi. And mine will surely
follow.

TAKECHI

You are certain of this?

KAGATORA

I have reliable men close to the
Clan. Plus, why wouldn't they
expand? After the battle of Cedar
Hill we were all weak and depleted,
but the Crescent Moon land is
fertile and rich. They've been just
biding their time. They are strong
again, as they were before.

Shigeyoshi bolts up to leave.

SHIGEYOSHI

I must prepare my men.

KAGATORA

Easy, Lord Shigeyoshi. Have you
learned nothing from our round
little friend?

(gesturing to the Buddha
statue)

Patience is our ally.

SHIGEYOSHI

You expect me to just sit and do
nothing while Johgen's men march
across my border?! I'll be
slaughtered!

KAGATORA

Exactly.

Shigeyoshi is offended and angered by this. Takechi eases him back.

TAKECHI

Are you proposing what I think you're proposing, Lord Kagatora?

KAGATORA

Stand alone, and Johgen's men will surly defeat us one by one. But stand together, and he is no match for us.

SHIGEYOSHI

Preposterous! I would never allow my men to fight alongside you!

TAKECHI

Individually, we could only repel Lord Johgen for a time, but the Crescent Moon Clan are not ones to give up so easily. They will try again.

KAGATORA

(smiling)

Perhaps some of your wisdom will rub off on our anxious friend here. You're right, Lord Takechi. Individually, we can only fend them off for so long.

SHIGEYOSHI

(impatient)

Then what exactly do you have in mind?

KAGATORA

Do you like festivals, Lord Shigeyoshi?