

In a Grove - Ryunosuke Akutagawa

Ryunosuke Akutagawa's **In a Grove** was first published in 1922 and later translated into English by Takashi Kojima. The story centres around the death of a young samurai named Kanazawa no Takehiro of Wakasa, whose body is found in a bamboo forest near Kyoto. The events leading up to his death are told through different testimonies: first by a woodcutter, then a traveling Buddhist priest, a policeman, an old woman, and finally by the three main people involved—Tajomaru, Takehiro's wife Masago, and Takehiro through a medium. However, the truth remains unclear.

Confession of the Woodcutter

The first person to speak is a woodcutter who finds a man's body in the bamboo woods, about 150 meters off the Yamashina road. The man was wearing a bluish silk kimono and a wrinkled headdress. He had a sword wound in his chest, and the blood had already dried. When the commissioner asked, the woodcutter said he did not see any weapons or a horse. He only noticed a comb and a piece of rope near the body. He also mentioned that the leaves on the ground were messed up, which suggested there had been a big fight.

Confession of a Traveling Buddhist Priest

The second person to speak is a traveling Buddhist priest.

He said that he saw the man on the road from Sekiyama to Yamashina around noon the day before. The man was with a woman in a lilac-coloured suit. She was about 5 feet tall. The man had a sword, a bow, and a bag with 20 arrows.

Confession of a Policeman

The next person to speak is a policeman. He says that he has captured a famous criminal named Tajomaru.

The policeman reminded the commissioner about a murder from the previous year where two women were killed, and it was blamed on Tajomaru. He also wondered what Tajomaru might have done to the dead man's wife.

Confession of an Old Woman

The fourth person to speak is an old woman.

She says that the dead man is her daughter Masago's husband, samurai Kanazawa no Takehiro. She describes him as a kind man who couldn't have been hated by anyone. She believes her daughter only knows Takehiro and says she is a strong-willed person. The old woman is worried about her daughter's unknown fate and begs the police to find her.

Confession of Tajomaru

Tajomaru confesses to his crimes. He admits to killing a man but says he does not know where the missing woman is.

Tajomaru first saw Masago and her husband on the road. He decided he wanted to attack Masago. To trick her husband, he pretended to have old swords and mirrors to sell. He led the man away from the road, tied him to a tree, and stuffed his mouth with leaves.

After that, Tajomaru went back to Masago and told her that her husband was ill. When Masago saw her husband tied up, she tried to defend him with a sword, but Tajomaru took the sword from her and raped her. After the attack, Masago clung to Tajomaru and said that one of the two men who knew her secret had to die, and she would go with the survivor.

Tajomaru wanted Masago for himself. He untied her husband, Takehiro, and fought him in a duel, killing him. When Tajomaru turned to find Masago, she had already run away. Tajomaru ended his confession by saying that he was ready to accept the harshest punishment for his actions.

Confession of Masago

Masago says that she is the wife of Takehiro.

Masago felt deep shame after the incident. When she looked at her husband, she saw that he was filled with hate and contempt towards her. This made her feel even worse. In her despair, she decided that she no longer wanted to live. She also wanted her husband to die with her because she believed he could no longer love or respect her.

Masago thought that her husband agreed with her plan to end both of their lives. So, she took her sword and plunged it into his chest. Afterward, she cut the rope that was tying Takehiro to the tree and ran away. Even though she tried many times, she couldn't bring herself to commit suicide as she had intended. Masago's confession was filled with pain and regret.

Confession of Takehiro through a Medium

The final confession is told by the ghost of Takehiro, speaking through a medium. The ghost explained that after the rape, Tajomaru tried to convince Masago to leave her husband and become his wife. He said that everything he did was because he loved her. To Takehiro's shock, Masago agreed to go with Tajomaru and even told him to kill her husband.

Tajomaru, disgusted by her suggestion, pushed her to the ground and asked Takehiro if he should kill her instead. While Takehiro was still thinking about it, Masago ran away into the forest. Tajomaru then untied Takehiro and also ran away. Takehiro found Masago's sword on the ground and stabbed himself in the chest.

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In a Grove is a story by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, published in 1922. It is about the death of a young samurai named Kanazawa no Takehiro. His body is found in a bamboo forest near Kyoto. Different people give their stories about what happened, but the real truth is unclear.

First, a woodcutter finds Takehiro's body in the forest. He sees a sword wound and some messy leaves, which suggest there was a big fight. He also finds a comb and a piece of rope near the body but no weapons or a horse.

Next, a traveling Buddhist priest says he saw Takehiro on the road with a woman in a lilac suit. The priest noticed that Takehiro had a sword, a bow, and a bag of arrows.

Then, a policeman speaks. He has caught a criminal named Tajomaru. The policeman mentions a previous murder where Tajomaru was blamed. He is worried about what Tajomaru might have done to Takehiro's wife.

An old woman, who is Takehiro's mother-in-law, says her daughter Masago was married to Takehiro. She describes Takehiro as kind and worries about her daughter's safety.

Tajomaru confesses that he killed Takehiro. He wanted to take Masago for himself. He tricked Takehiro, tied him up, and then raped Masago. Tajomaru fought and killed Takehiro but couldn't find Masago. Tajomaru says he is ready to accept punishment.

Masago says she felt shame after the incident. She thought Takehiro hated her, so she decided to kill him and then herself. She stabbed Takehiro and ran away but couldn't bring herself to commit suicide.

Finally, Takehiro's ghost, speaking through a medium, explains that Masago agreed to leave Takehiro and go with Tajomaru. Tajomaru was disgusted by this and asked Takehiro if he should kill Masago instead. While Takehiro was thinking, Masago ran away. Takehiro used Masago's sword to kill himself.

In the story **In a Grove**, the mystery of Kanazawa no Takehiro's death remains unsolved. Each person involved gives a different version of events, creating confusion.¹

¹ ESB