

THE FOX IN THE *KONJAKU MONOGATARI*

**The Story of a Young *Samurai* Who
Copied the Sutra of the Lotus
For the Repose of a Fox's Soul**

ONCE there was a young and handsome *samurai* living in Kyoto, the capital, name unknown.

One evening, on his way home, he was passing near the Shujaku gate of the Imperial palace when he saw a girl with a graceful figure, about 18 years old, attired in an exquisite robe of silk, standing on the main road.

She looked so beautiful with her raven-black locks straying in the gentle breeze that the *samurai* was instantly fascinated by her. He approached the girl and invited her to go inside the gate and have a chat for a while with him. She complied with his request, to his great delight.

They stayed in a quiet place inside the gate and talked together. Soon the stars began to twinkle here and there in the sky and even the Milky Way was seen faintly. It was a balmy evening.

Said the young man: "We have met here by a happy chance-by the Providence of God, I might say. Therefore you should accede to my request-*in every way*. We should share the same feelings. I love you-and you must love me."

Answered the girl: "If I comply with your request *in every way*, I must die. This is my lot."

"Your lot-to die?" the young *samurai* echoed her words, "It is hardly possible. You are simply avoiding me by saying so."

And he tried to gather her up in his arms.

The girl shook herself loose from his grasp, and said tearfully: "I know you are living with your wife; and that you are telling me you love me on the spur of the moment.

I am weeping because I must die for a man of mood's."

He denied what she said, again and again until she acquiesced. In the meantime the stars and the Milky Way were shining more brightly in the heavens. A night of romance.

They found a shed in the neighborhood, and spent the night together there. A lone cricket was heard chirping throughout the night....

The summer morning broke soon. The girl said: "Now I am going home-to die because of you, as I told you last evening. When I pass away, please say a mass for the repose of my soul by copying the Sutra of the Lotus and offering it to the merciful Buddha" Said the young man: "It is the way of the world that man and woman

have intimate relations with each other. You are not destined to die necessarily. However if you should die, I will not fail to do as you wish. I promise."

Said the girl sadly, tying back her stray locks: "If you care to see whether what I am now telling you is true or not, come to the neighborhood of the Botoku-den* this morning."

The young *samurai* could not believe what was told him by the beautiful girl.

She said in a mournful tone: "Let me keep your fan as a memento."

She took the fan. He took her hand, and looked straight into her eyes.

He followed her outside, and stood looking after the departing figure until it faded into the grayish veil of the morning mist.

The young man could not bring himself to believe what the girl had said. However during the morning, he went to the neighborhood of the Butoku-den as he was very anxious to know the fate of the girl.

There he saw an old woman sitting on a stone, bitterly weeping.

"Why are you crying so? What is the matter with you, old woman?" he asked her.

"I am the mother of the girl you saw near the Shujaku gate last night. She is now dead," she answered.

*The place where the Emperor used to see archery on horseback, horse races, and the like. Located to the west of the Imperial palace.

"Dead?" the young man said with a dubious look.

"Yes, she is dead. I have been waiting for you here—to break the sad news to you. The dead person is lying over there."

So saying, the old woman pointed to a corner of the big hall—and the next moment she was gone like magic no one knows where.

The young *samurai*, approaching the spot pointed, found a young fox lying dead on the floor, its face covered with an open white fan, *the very fan given by him!*

"So this fox was the girl I met last night!" he said mournfully to himself. He could not help but feel pity for the poor fox.

He returned home with a heavy heart.

He started copying the Sutra of the Lotus immediately, as was requested by the fox in the form of a beautiful girl. He found the task a hard one. However, he copied one sutra every week and offered it to Buddha and prayed for the repose of the soul of the dead fox, night and day.

One night, about six weeks later, the young samurai dreamed a dream, a strange dream in which he met the beautiful girl. She looked so noble and divine that he thought her to be a celestial nymph.

Said the girl in the dream:

"You have saved me by copying the Sutra of the Lotus and offering several of them to Buddha. I was re-born through your efforts in Paradise delivered from sin. I am eternally grateful to you!"

So saying, she ascended to Heaven to sweet celestial music. She was accompanied by two maids of honor, and he saw the Great Buddha sitting calmly with his saints in front of the Castle of Heaven, and several scrolls of the Sutra of the Lotus were seen flying in the air like so many birds as if welcoming the girl!

It was a dream. However the young *samurai* still continued to copy the Sutra of the Lotus for the repose of the soul of the young fox who died for him.

The Story of a Fox Coming Disguised As a Wife

ONCE the wife of a *zoshiki** went out at dusk on urgent business. She did not, however, come home for quite a long while. Her husband, naturally, felt it strange.

After a while, however, the wife returned home to the relief of the husband. Then, to his surprise, another woman entered the house. She was a woman exactly like his wife: The same face—the same figure—the same voice—the same manner—in the same dress!

The *zoshiki samurai* was puzzled, to say the least of it. *One of them must be a fox, or something in the guise of my wife, he thought. How to tell one from another? This was a very difficult thing for me to decide.*

*A petty officer, low in rank, not allowed to wear the robes of regular color. He wore a parti-colored dress. *Zoshiki* literally means parti-colored. Hence the name.

In desperation, the *zoshiki* finally pulled his sword from its sheath in an attempt to kill the woman coming home after the first one.

Said the woman, crying:

"Are you going to kill me? Have you lost your mind?"

Then the man, again in desperation, and reckless rushed toward the woman returning first, with the sword raised overhead. The woman screamed and implored him to spare her, clasping her hands. At this juncture, however, her behavior raised suspicion in the mind of the *zoshiki*. Therefore he seized her by the arm as he wanted to take her captive.

This woman, however, turned herself instantly into the shape of a fox, made water on the man, and ran away through the open door barking, and disappeared into the gathering twilight.

The *zoshiki samurai* was angry with the fox for making a fool of him. But it was now too late. He should have set his mind to work a little earlier. It was his fault. In the first place, he should have caught both women and bound them with ropes. If he had done so, the fox would have revealed its natural shape sooner or later.

However the fox was lucky in effecting its escape. The animal had evidently seen the wife of the *zoshiki* and wanted to disguise itself as the wife for fun. In such a case, one should be cautious not to be deceived by such a crafty and mischievous beast as a fox. The *zoshiki* was also lucky not to have killed his own wife.

The Story of a Fox Repaying Kindness For Returning Its Treasured Ball

ONCE there was a woman believed to have been possessed by a fox.

Said this woman to those present one day:

"I am a fox, but I am here not to bring evil upon people. I just came as I thought I could find some food here and there."

Presently she produced a whitish ball about the size of a mandarin orange, and she played with it by throwing it up in the air and catching it as it fell with her hands. The people who saw it thought that she had the intention of cheating them by some trick.

A young samurai who happened to see it took the ball when it was thrown—and pocketed it.

Said the woman possessed by a fox:

"How mean you are! Return the ball immediately! Give it back to me!"

The young fellow, however, laughing, would not return it to her.

The woman said again, with falling tears:

"It would be useless for you if you do not know how to use it. However it is a thing indispensable to me. If you do not give it back to me, therefore, I will cast an evil spell on you. If, on the other hand, you will be good enough to return it to me, I will protect you as your guardian angel."

"Is that true?" said the *samurai* doubtfully.

"Without fail," answered the woman. "In such things, I never tell a lie. And, mind you, I am not an ungrateful fox, either."

The young man produced the whitish ball of the size of a mandarin orange and gave it back to the woman, who received it gladly.

The woman believed to have been possessed by a fox came to herself a little later, thanks to the prayers offered by an ascetic who visited the house. Then they searched the woman for the whitish ball. Strange to say, however, it was missing! It must have been taken away by the fox who possessed the woman, they said.

Later the young *samurai* who returned the whitish ball to the woman possessed by a fox went to Uzumasa, the suburbs of Kyoto, the capital, one evening.

He went by way of Omuro. So it was quite dark by the time when he was passing the Oten gate. He did not know the reason why, but, at that time, he felt a chill creep over him. He was sure something was to happen and that he was in danger. He was wondering whether he could find some way of escape. Now he recalled what had been told by the woman possessed by a fox.

"She might protect me in such a case," he thought. Therefore he cried aloud in the dark:

"KITSUNÉ! KITSUNÉ!"

The fox did come. It came out from somewhere, barking softly in response to the call.

Said the *samurai* to the fox:

"You did not tell me a lie. I am very glad that you came, glad, indeed, to see that you are a reliable animal. I felt a chill creeping over me while I was passing here.

I thought something is wrong. I hope you will go along with me for some distance."

The fox seemed to understand what was said to it. It walked ahead of the *samurai*, turning back anxiously now and then. The road along which he was now being led by the fox, he found, was overgrown with low striped bambooes, a path he was not accustomed to walk before. He was tracing the path, following the fox proceeding at a trot.

Occasionally the fox stopped and looked around—and continued to walk stealthily with bent back. The man walked, following the example of the animal.

Soon the young *samurai* was conscious of the fact that there were signs of some people lurking somewhere. They were armed with bow and arrow and swords and halberds, and were a band of robbers. They were, as he thought, planning to break into somebody's house.

He could now understand well that the fox walking ahead of him had successfully passed the spot without being perceived by those rough men.

The fox left the *samurai*, barking softly again at the end of the path.

He came home safely. After that, it is said, the fox would act as his guardian angel, as it had promised, on several occasions. He found that *Kitsuné* was an animal very grateful, repaying the kindness of man.

The Story of a Fox who Got Killed Assuming the Form of a Cedar Tree

NAKADAYU, nephew to the chief Shinto priest of the Kasuga shrine at Nara, was once roaming about with his servant towards evening in a lonely mountain when they espied a gigantic cedar tree standing ahead of them, about 200 feet high.

Said Nakadayu to his servant:

"I never saw such a big cedar tree standing near here in this mountain before. Can you see the tree yonder?"

"Yes, master," answered the servant, "I can see a big cedar tree over there."

"I don't think we have such a gigantic cedar tree even in other parts of this province," said Nakadayu.

"We have cedar trees in this province. However I have never seen such a big one before," agreed the servant.

"In that case," observed Nakadayu, "we might have been bewitched by a fox. We had better go home now."

They had been walking about the mountain to cut plenty of grass for the horse kept at Nakadayu's house. They were unaware of the passing of time. In the gathering dusk, they saw the moon rise and cast a weird light on the gigantic cedar tree. A nocturnal bird screeched somewhere. A bush hard by rustled in the stillness of the mountain as if a bandit lurking behind it were coming out.

Master and servant exchanged glances, and each of them fixed an arrow to the string of the bow they were

carrying for self-defence. A squirrel appeared and quickly vanished across the path.

"Before we go home," said the servant, "let us shoot the cedar tree and come here again tomorrow morning to see it."

They notched an arrow upon their bows.

"We had better shoot the cedar tree from a shorter distance," advised the servant.

They proceeded a little farther—drew their bows to their full extent—and both shot at the giant tree at the same time.

"Whiz!" went the arrows—and the next moment they saw the huge tree disappear!

They were afraid that it might be the act of some uncanny hand, so they left the spot without delay.

The following morning they found an old fox shot dead with two arrows stuck in its body at the very spot where the gigantic cedar tree had been observed standing by Nakadayu and his servant.

The prank of the fox cost it its life.