

CHAPTER 5

THE FOX IN THE *KONJAKU* *MONOGATARI* (Continued)

The Story of a Fox Fond of Riding On a Horse's Buttocks

A YOUNG pretty girl would stand on the bank of the Kaya river to the east of the Ninnaji temple, Kyoto, of an evening. When she saw a man passing there on horseback in the direction of the capital, she would ask him to give her a ride.

The girl would invariably say:

"I want to go to the capital riding on your horse's buttocks."

The rider would answer:

"All right. You may ride on my horse's buttocks."

However when he went on for about 500 yards with the girl riding on the horse's back, she would slip down from on the horse and run away in the shape of a fox, barking with delight.

The mischief mentioned above was repeated several times, and the victims were always men passing on horseback along the bank of the Kaya river to the east of the Ninnaji temple.

Now at the Station of the *Takiguchi* (the Head-

quarters of the Guards belonging to the Imperial palace), somebody spoke about the girl riding on the horse's buttocks, on the bank of the Kaya river. On hearing this, a young *takiguchi* officer (we will call him *the takiguchi* in this narrative) said:

"Well, I will catch her and teach her a lesson."

Other *takiguchi* officers present said with one voice:

"Certainly we will catch her!"

Said *the takiguchi* who spoke first:

"I will capture her tomorrow evening."

Said somebody:

"Can you?"

"Certainly I can!" was the answer.

The takiguchi, on the following evening, went by himself to the bank of the Kaya river, riding a very intelligent horse. The girl in question, however, was not to be seen there. Disappointed, *the takiguchi* was riding back in the direction of the capital when he saw a girl standing by the roadside. On seeing *the takiguchi* coming riding, she said cheerfully:

"Hey, give me a ride on your horse's buttocks, won't you?"

"Surely. Climb on quickly. Where are you going?" said *the takiguchi*.

Answered the girl:

"To the capital. It is getting dark, so I want to go there, riding on your horse's buttocks."

As soon as the girl got on the horse's buttocks, the officer tied her by the wrist to the saddle with a rope used for hitching a horse.

Said the girl:

"Why do you do such a brutal thing to me?"

Replied *the takiguchi*:

"To prevent you from getting away from me, of course. I am now taking you to my quarters—to sleep with you tonight, my girl."

They continued riding. It was now quite dark. After passing Ichijyo, they proceeded along the road toward the east. When passing Nishi-no-Omiya, *the takiguchi* saw a procession approaching toward him from the east preceded by a forerunner on horseback, holding a pine-torch to light the road. By torch-light, *the takiguchi* could see some carriages drawn by oxen moving in stately fashion to the musical creak of their heavy wheels—with two men walking before each carriage, holding pine-torches in their hands. Their figures were seen in relief against the darkness of night.

The takiguchi thought it was the procession of some personages of high rank. Therefore he turned back out of respect, and went on, riding along the road of Nishi-no-Omiya toward the east—from Higashi-no-Omiya to Tsuchimikado.

At the gate of the Tsuchimikado palace, *the Takiguchi* called out to his followers whom he had previously ordered to wait for him there.

Said about 10 men under *the takiguchi*, coming out:

"At your service, sir."

Then *the takiguchi* pulled the girl down from the horse after unfastening the rope; and he ordered his men to make a fire on the ground. And then he went to the *Takiguchi* Station.

Aroused by the clamor, all his fellow *takiguchi* officers emerged from the station.

Said the captor of the girl:

"I have caught her."

The girl began to cry and entreated to be released.

The fire was now burning brightly on the ground.

Said all *takiguchi* officers with one consent:

"Release her! into the fire with her!"

The takiguchi who had caught the girl said that she might escape if this were done. However they said that it would be fun to throw into the fire and shoot her with bows and arrows in a volley.

About 10 *takiguchi* officers notched their arrows upon their bows. *The takiguchi* who had been holding the girl coming from the bank of the Kaya river threw her right into the fire!

The girl, however, turned herself, in a twinkling, into the shape of a fox and, before they could send a volley of arrows, effected her escape, putting out the fire....

In the dark, *the takiguchi* called to his men.

No response. Not a single man was there. And, to his surprise, he found himself on a lonely plain!

He could see that he was now in the midst of the cremation ground at Toribé-no, located in the suburbs of the capital. (The only crematory in the Heian Era, Toribé-no was a word used as synonym of death in those days.) He thought that he had dismounted from his horse at the gate of the Tsuchimikado palace. He was mistaken. He recalled that he had turned back to go to Tsuchimikado. He was mistaken. He had come to this desolate and death-like crematory, instead. He imagined that he had seen many pine-torches burning in the dark after passing Ichijyo. He remembered

seeing all these things clearly, including the two torch-carriers walking on each side of a carriage drawn by an ox. He was deplorably mistaken. Now he knew that the torches were nothing but the fire produced by foxes by stroking their tails.

Brave as he was, *the takiguchi* had no alternative but to go on foot. *He had no horse to ride on.* He returned home dog-tired and chagrined about midnight.

His fellow *takiguchi* officers at the station at Tsuchimikado, on the other hand, wondering what had become of *the takiguchi* since he left on his adventure, sent a messenger to *the takiguchi's* quarters to look for him two days later.

The takiguchi, in the evening of the third day, presented himself at the station, feeling like a sick man.

Asked his friends:

"Did you go to catch the fox-girl the other evening?"

Replied *the takiguchi* with some asperity:

"No, I did not. I was ill, very ill."

Asked his fellow officers again:

"What are you going to do now?"

"I will go and catch her this evening," was the rejoinder.

Said another *takiguchi*, laughing:

"Catch two of them this evening, I hope."

The takiguchi left the station without saying a word.

This time he said to himself:

"The fox may not come this evening as it was outwitted by me the other night. If it appears this evening, I will never loosen my hold on it. Never! I will hold it all through the night. If it does not appear this

evening, I will not present myself at the station, but keep to my quarters for some time."

He set out on horseback followed by several strong men for the Kaya river. He soliloquised once more:

"Going to make myself a fool again, eh? I cannot help it, though, since I said I would catch her."

The fox-girl was not in sight when *the takiguchi* crossed the Kaya river by a bridge. However when he was coming back disheartened, he saw a girl standing at the edge of the river. He found that she had a different face.

The girl accosted him, and said:

"Hey, give me a ride on your horse's buttocks, won't you?" I want to go to the capital."

The takiguchi obliged her. However, the moment she was on horseback he lost no time in tying her up with a rope as before.

It was getting darker and darker as *the takiguchi* was riding along the Ichijyo road in the direction of the capital, accompanied by his men. He ordered his followers to kindle pine-torches and carry them ahead of him and beside his horse. They went on, but they saw nobody until they reached the Tsuchimikado palace.

The takiguchi got off his horse. He seized the fox-girl firmly by her hair. She cried. But he would not have mercy on her. He brought her to the *Takiguchi* Station. He was deaf to her entreaties; and she seemed quite to realize the situation this time.

The fellow officers came to see the captive.

"So you have caught her at last, eh?" they said.

The fox-girl was tortured and tortured until she

could stand it no longer—and she turned herself into the form of a fox.

They scorched the animal with pine-torches.

"O spare me!" the fox yelped plaintively.

The takiguchi said:

"We have given it a lesson. Set it free!"

They released the fox. It scampered off, limping.

About 10 days later, *the takiguchi* went to the Kaya river. He wanted to see the fox-girl again out of curiosity. She was there. She looked ill—and beaten.

Said *the takiguchi* to the fox-girl:

"Don't you want to ride on my horse's buttocks?"

Responded the fox in the guise of a pretty girl weakly:

"I should like to ride on your horse's buttocks; but I don't like to have my precious fur scorched. No thank you."

With that, she vanished.

This is a very strange thing. Nevertheless it did happen—and not long ago, so this writer (Takakuni, the author of *The Konjaku Monogatari*) was told by the narrator of this tale.

The Story of the Man Infatuated with a Fox Saved by the Goddess of Mercy

HE was feeling very lonesome, a man of fifty, with his wife gone to the capital, Kyoto, on business. It was an evening in the autumn of 895. Yoshifuji, of Kayo County in Bittchu Province, was seen rambling alone along the country road. A rich man engaging in exchange business; he was wanton by nature and in the habit of taking to amours.

Presently he met an attractive woman. She was an utter stranger in the community. Yoshifuji, however, found it impossible to control himself. She smiled a charming smile as she approached him. She had a set of pearly teeth.

"A nice evening," he accosted her. With women his talk was usually gentle and soothing. "Where are you going? And who are you? I have never seen you before."

"I am nobody," the woman said laughingly.

Yoshifuji was now completely swayed by passion.

"Come with me," he said.

"No. I am going home," replied the woman, "you come with me."

"Where you live?" asked the money man.

"I live over there. Not far from here. Come with me," she invited him again.

They walked together. Yoshifuji soon saw a splendid house standing at a short distance.

"That is our house," told the woman.

He had never seen such a fine house before, in this neighborhood, a fact that puzzled him considerably. However he was now so fascinated with the woman that he did not pay much attention to that.

When he arrived at the house, he was welcomed by everybody as if each member of the household had known him well.

"You are welcome here!" they said heartily.

Yoshifuji spent the night there, with the woman.

The following morning, another woman who seemed to be the mistress of the household came and said:

"I am so glad you came. There is a Providence in it. I sincerely hope that you will stay here as long as you wish."

On seeing the woman, Yoshifuji instantly became infatuated with her. He decided to stay in the house as long as possible. Capricious by nature, Yoshifuji was inconsistent in love.

Thus he stayed in the house for a long period of time.

In the household of Yoshifuji, on the other hand, they were wondering what was the matter with him. He did not come back in the evening. He was away from home at night. Was he philandering somewhere,

as usual? Midnight still found him not at home. Gone for a long trip? No. It could not be so. He had left his house in his *white robe* (abbreviated clothes worn in those days, a wadded garment with skirt).

The day broke in alarm.

They combed the village for Yoshifuji. The whereabouts of the man were still unknown. Had he joined the priesthood, having grown weary of the world?— or drowned himself, realizing the uncertainty of life? *Strange, this thing*, they thought.

Now to return to the luxurious house where Yoshifuji, the wanton man, was leading a licentious life with the fascinating mistress. The woman with whom he was intimately related had given birth to a child, and they, the man and the woman, were bound up with each other, and their love was growing with the years.

Yoshifuji had two brothers: Toyonaka, his elder brother; and Toyotsune, his younger brother. The former was the chief of a sub-prefecture; and the latter, the priest of a big temple. Both of these people were also rich. They wanted to find the body of Yoshifuji at all costs through the favor of *Kanzéon*, the Goddess of Mercy. So they made her image out of a huge oak tree—and prayed night and day kneeling down before it.

They implored the goddess for the repose of the soul of the departed man. However their efforts seemed not to bear fruit. Still they continued to pray awake or asleep with untiring zeal.

Now it so happened, one day, that a person carry-

ing the long staff of a priest came to the house where Yoshifuji was staying.

"Here he comes!"

The members of the family cried in consternation on seeing this person. Then they flew in all directions.

The caller made Yoshifuji come out of a narrow place by prodding him on the back with the staff.

On the evening of the thirteenth day since Yoshifuji dropped out of sight, his people were talking together about him, sitting in a room when they saw a strange black creature looking like a monkey come creeping, on all fours, with his hips raised high, from under the floor of a warehouse standing facing the house.

Said the strange creature:

"I am here, folks."

He was no less a person than Yoshifuji!

Tadasada, his son, felt it strange. However it was the voice of his father that he heard. Therefore he got down on the ground and pulled him up.

Said Yoshifuji:

"I was staying alone at home feeling lonesome. I went out, and strolling along the road met a woman, who led me to her house, where I was obliged to become the father of a child. He was a boy and he was so cute and lovely that I used to hold him every day in my arms fondling him. I named him Taro (meaning first son). Therefore I will call you hereafter— Jiro (second son), as I respect his mother."

Asked Tadasada:

"Where is the child, father?"

"Down there!" replied Yoshifuji, pointing to the warehouse.

Tadasada and others, on hearing the words of Yoshifuji, were greatly surprised. They looked at Yoshifuji again. He looked haggard and sick. He was wearing the *white robe* he worn when leaving the house, a dirty robe now, and it smelt bad.

A servant was sent to look under the floor of the warehouse. At the approach of the servant, several foxes were seen running away helter-skelter. The servant found where his master used to sleep—under the cobwebby floor.

Now they learned for the first time that Yoshifuji had been bewitched by foxes and that he had forgotten to return to his own house, after becoming the husband of a female fox-beauty.

They called in a high priest to pray for his speedy recovery from the fox's witchcraft and a man exorcising evil spirits to purify him. They washed him several times, too. Still he did not look as he used to be.

Gradually, however, he came to his senses. He believed that he had lived with the fascinating fox-woman in the luxurious house for a period of thirteen years; but, in reality, he had spent only thirteen days with her under the floor of the warehouse. Now it was revealed that he had been saved by the favors of *Kanzéon*, the Goddess of Mercy, appearing in the form of a priest carrying a long staff.

This story, by the way, was told by Miyoshi-no-Kiyotsura, the feudal lord of Bittchu Province in those days.

The Story of an Imperial Household Guard Officer Disillusioned by an Act of a Fox

A *TONÉRI* (whose duty was to guard the Imperial palace in the Heian Era) by the name of Yasutaka was a man of romantic disposition.

Now you see him going home from the Imperial palace to bring one of his retainers who had failed to arrive at the palace. He was waking alone in the grounds of the palace. A refreshing night, with a bright moon, about the middle of September.

Presently, the *tonéri* officer caught sight of a young woman when he was approaching the pine-grove there. She was attired in an aster-colored dress of figured cloth. She had a superb figure, a fact he perceived at a glance.

She must be a beautiful thing, Yasutaka imagined.

The moonlight seemed to enhance her charm. Yasutaka followed her. He was wearing a pair of high wooden clogs.

Click-clack, click-clack... he walked after her bathed in the moonlight. One or two *suzumushi* (a kind of cricket with a sweet and sonorous chirping) were singing in the pine-grove.

Soon Yasutaka overtook the attractive figure. He walked drawing near her. She seemed shy. She walked covering her face with a pictured fan. She looked pretty, with her stray tresses of the side-locks playing on her forehead and cheeks. Yasutaka drew close to her and touched her. She was faintly redolent of *ranjatai* (a precious incense first imported from

Korea in the reign of the Emperor Shomu in the early part of the 8th century).

Said Yasutaka:

"At this hour of the night, where in the world are you going?"

A sweet voice responded from behind the pictured-fan:

"I am going to the house of a person living at Nishi-no-Kyo."

Said Yasutaka:

"You had better come with me, to my house. I live at Nishi-no-Kyo, too."

Said the girl with a sweet smile in her eyes, a pair of clear eyes:

"You know me, do you?"

Yasutaka simply smiled back.

She was, to the delight of the *tonéri* officer, a woman endowed with personal charms. They walked together in the moonlight....

Presently the girl entered the Konoyé gate of the palace.

Now Yasutaka said to himself:

"They say that there lives a fox in the habit of bewitching people here in this premises. Is this charming girl a fox? And she is still covering her face with the fan. Very strange, this. Well, I will put the matter to the proof."

Yasutaka seized the girl abruptly by one of her sleeves and said:

"Wait, girl. Stay right here for a moment. I want to say something to you."

On hearing this, the girl looked more bashful, covering her face with the pictured-fan. Said Yasutaka still seizing her by the sleeve: "Now I am going to disrobe you. Do you hear me?" So declaring, the *tonéri* officer unsheathed his short sword, about 8 inches long, a glittering blade; it looked cold and shiny like an icicle.

Continued Yasutaka:

"I am going to cut your throat. Take off your clothes!"

The *tonéri* officer now seized the girl by the hair. He pinned her against a pillar of the gate. He was on the point of plunging the sword into her throat when, unexpectedly, his nostrils were assailed with a pungent and offensive smell, so pungent and offensive, in fact, that, tough and daring as he was, Yasutaka loosed his grip on the girl, sneezing.

In an instant, the fascinating girl changed herself into a fox and took to flight. The fox was soon heard, barking somewhere in the distance outside the gate. The Imperial guard officer was left with the smell still hanging in the night air.

Yasutaka felt chagrined at his unsuccessful attempt. Later, it is said, he went out nightly to see the fox assuming the shape of the charming girl. He wanted to see her again—in spite of the smell. No further opportunities occurred, however.

One should not try to become friendly with a charming girl walking alone of a night. In the case of Yasutaka, however, he was clever and cautious enough not to be cheated by a fox, they said.