



80. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

The foxes which infested the house and grounds of Major Counselor Yasumichi's old mansion were always making mischief, but since they never really did any harm Yasumichi let the matter pass. They got naughtier and naughtier as the years went by, though, until one day he angrily decided that enough was enough. Those foxes would have to go.

He announced a grand fox hunt to his household, for the next day. The servants were to bring bows and arrows, sticks, or whatever weapons they could devise, and flush out every last one. They would surround the house, and men would be posted not only on the garden wall but on the roof as well, and even in the space between the ceiling of the rooms and the roof. Every fox that showed itself would be killed.

Near dawn on the fateful day Yasumichi had a dream. A white-haired old man, looking rather like an aged menial, was kneeling under the tangerine tree in the garden, bowing respectfully to him.

"Who are you?" asked Yasumichi.

"Someone who has lived here in this mansion for many years, sir," the old man answered nervously. "My father lived here before me, sir, and by now I have many children and grandchildren. They

get into a lot of mischief, I'm afraid, and I'm always after them to stop, but they never listen. And now, sir, you're understandably fed up with us. I gather that you're going to kill us all. But I just want you to know, sir, how sorry I am that this is our last night of life. Won't you pardon us, one more time? If we ever make trouble again, then of course you must act as you think best. But the young ones, sir — I'm *sure* they'll understand when I explain to them why you're so upset. We'll do everything we can to protect you from now on, if only you'll forgive us, and we'll be sure to let you know when anything good is going to happen!"

The old man bowed again and Yasumichi awoke. When the sky had lightened, he got up and looked outside. Under the tangerine tree sat a hairless old fox which, at the sight of him, slunk under the house.

The perplexed Yasumichi gave up his fox hunt. There was no more troublesome mischief, and every happy event around the house was announced by a fox's sharp bark.



81.

THE LOVING FOX

A man was once walking at twilight along Suzaku Avenue in Kyoto when he met an extraordinarily beautiful woman. She seemed happy enough to let him strike up a conversation with her, and from close up he found her even more alluring. Unable even to imagine letting the opportunity pass, he filled her ears with so many sweet nothings that he soon very nearly had what he burned for.

The woman tried to hold him off. "Now that we've gotten this far," she said, "I'd like so much to go all the way! But you see, if we do you'll die."

Much too excited to listen, the man kept pressing himself on her

until she gave in. "I really can't refuse you," she said, "since you insist so urgently. Very well then, I'll do whatever you wish and die in your place. If you want to show me gratitude, copy the Lotus Sutra and dedicate it for me."

The man seemed not to take her seriously, and he finally consummated his desire. They lay in each other's arms all night long, chatting like old lovers. At dawn the woman got up and asked the man for his fan. "I meant what I said, you know," she told him, "I'm going to die instead of you. If you want proof, go into the palace grounds and look around the Butoku Hall. You'll see." Then she left.

At daylight the man went to the Butoku Hall and found there a fox lying dead with his fan over its face. He was very sorry. Every seven days after that he finished a copy of the Lotus Sutra and dedicated it for the fox's soul. On the night following the forty-ninth day he dreamed that she came to him, surrounded by angels, and told him that thanks to the power of the Teaching she was to be born into the Tōri Heaven.

82.

TOUCHED IN THE HEAD

Kaya no Yoshifuji lived in the village of Ashimori in Bitchū province. He had made a fortune trading in imported Chinese coins.

In the fall of 896, Yoshifuji's wife went up to the Capital, leaving him all alone. He was far too randy a fellow to stand this for long. One evening at twilight, he was out for a stroll when he spotted a lovely young girl he had not seen before, and wanted her right away. She tried to run when he grabbed at her, but he caught her and asked who she was. Very sweetly, she answered, "Nobody."

"Come to my place," said Yoshifuji.

"Oh no, sir, I couldn't!" She tried again to pull away.

"Then where do you live? I'll go home with you."

"Over there." She set off with Yoshifuji beside her, keeping a good hold on her. It was not far, and the house was lovely. What a

surprise to find a place like this so close by! Male and female servants clustered round to greet their mistress, and Yoshifuji realized that the girl was the daughter of the house.

The two slept together that night, to Yoshifuji's delight. The next morning a man whom Yoshifuji understood to be the girl's father came in. "You were always meant to come here," he said, "and now you must stay!" The girl was ever so nice to him, and he was so taken with her that he forgot all about his wife. As for his house and children, he never gave them a thought. He and the girl pledged each other eternal love.

Yoshifuji's household assumed, when he first disappeared, that he was just catting around as usual; but as the hours passed and he failed to return, they began to worry. "What a lunatic!" they grumbled. "We'll have to look for him!" Servants sent in the middle of the night to comb the neighborhood turned up nothing. Yet Yoshifuji could not have gone far since he had been dressed only casually and all his clothes were still at home. By daybreak every likely place had been searched in vain. The household was at a loss. If he were young, he might have become a monk in a moment of folly, or even killed himself, but surely not at his age. It was very strange.

Meanwhile Yoshifuji was comfortably installed in his new home and his lady was pregnant. After she had an easy delivery, the two grew closer than ever. Time flew by. Yoshifuji had not a care in the world.

Back at his old home, they never found him. His brothers and his only son Tadasada, affluent men all, were very upset, and wanting at least to find his body they banded together, felled a tree, and carved an image of Eleven-Headed Kannon just Yoshifuji's height. When the statue was done, they prostrated themselves before it and prayed to find the corpse. Be it noted, too, that from the day of Yoshifuji's disappearance they had been calling the Buddha's Name and reading sutras to guide Yoshifuji's soul toward the next life.

Suddenly a man with a stick arrived at Yoshifuji's new house. While the whole household fled in terror, the man poked his stick into Yoshifuji's back and drove him through a tight passageway to the outside.

This was the thirteenth evening after Yoshifuji's disappearance. The people at his old home were still shaking their heads over what

had happened when a strangely dark, monkeylike creature crawled out from under the storehouse nearby. What could it be? Through the jabber of the excited onlookers came a voice saying, "It's me!" It was Yoshifuji. Even Tadasada found it hard to believe, but there was no doubt about the voice. Tadasada jumped down from the veranda and brought his father up into the house.

Yoshifuji explained how desperate he had been for a woman while his wife was gone and how he had married a fine gentleman's daughter. Now he had a little boy. "He's so pretty I carry him in my arms all the time!" Yoshifuji declared. "He's my heir, you know. You're only number two from now on, Tadasada. That's because I think so much of his mother."

"Where is this little boy?" asked Tadasada.

"Why, over there," Yoshifuji answered, pointing at the storehouse.

This was strange news. Yoshifuji looked terribly thin and sick, and he had on the same clothes as when he had vanished. A servant sent to look under the storehouse found lots of foxes, which fled in all directions. That was where Yoshifuji had been. Obviously a fox had tricked him. He had married the fox and was no longer in his right mind.

A holy monk and a yin-yang diviner were called immediately to purify Yoshifuji, but after repeated ablutions he still was not the man he had once been. It was only later that he finally came back to himself, and he was horribly embarrassed. The thirteen days he had spent under the storehouse had seemed to him like thirteen years, and the few inches of clearance between the ground and the floor of the building had looked to him like a stately home. The foxes had done all this. The man with the stick was an emanation of the Kannon Yoshifuji's brothers and son had carved.

Yoshifuji lived on in good health another decade and died in his sixty-first year.

83.

YAM SOUP