



Two-panel woodblock print by Utagawa Kunisada I (later Toyokuni III, 1786–1864). Nakamura-za, Edo, ninth month 1827. "Abe Yasuna" ("Onoe Kikugorō" III) kneels contritely before his wife, Lady "Kuzunoha" ("Segawa Kikunojō" V). (Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum of Waseda University)

Lady Kuzunoha
Kuzunoha

Takeda Izumo II
TRANSLATED BY CODY M. POULTON

THE ABENO WEAVING HOUSE
Abeno Hataya no Ba
THE INNER ROOM
Oku Zashiki no Ba
THE SHINODA FOREST JOURNEY
Shinoda no Mori Michiyuki no Ba

1734 TAKEMOTO-ZA, OSAKA



Lady Kuzunoha

INTRODUCTION

Lady Kuzunoha is part of a five-act, puppet theatre history play (*jidaimono*) by playwright Takeda Izumo II (1691–1756), first performed under the title *A Courtly Mirror of Ashiya Dōman* (*Ashiya Dōman Ōuchi Kagami*) in 1734. The full-length play is about the dynastic struggle (*ōdaimono*) between two court families during the reign of the Emperor Suzaku (930–946). The rarely performed Acts I, III, and V show Dōman, traditionally dramatized as a court villain, transformed by Izumo into a hero. Act II concerns Dōman's opponent, Yasuna, who goes mad with grief when his lover Sakaki dies. This is the source of the popular kabuki dance piece *Yasuna* (translated in Volume 3 in this series). Act IV is about Yasuna and his love for Sakaki's sister, Kuzunoha, whose form miraculously has been taken by the spirit of a white fox.

Lady Kuzunoha takes up the story at its climactic point, where Fox-Kuzunoha must give up her young son, Dōji, so the child can be properly raised by its human mother, Lady Kuzunoha. In events prior to this, court diviner Kamo Yasunori dies and Yasuna and his rival, Dōman, both aspire to be appointed his successor. But the secrets of his art of divination are passed on to Dōman, and Yasunori's adopted daughter, Sakaki, in love with Yasuna, kills herself in despair. Yasuna, driven mad with grief, wanders in the forest of Shinoda, where he meets and falls in love with Sakaki's little sister, Kuzunoha, a girl who so resembles Sakaki that Yasuna almost believes that his beloved has come back to life. Yasuna marries Kuzunoha and begets a child, Dōji. Unknown to Yasuna, however, Kuzunoha's place has been taken by the spirit of the white fox of Shinoda.

The scene translated here begins six years later. Yasuna and Fox-Kuzunoha are living in rural retirement when the real Lady Kuzunoha arrives with her parents. Fox-Kuzunoha's rapid appearances and disappearances soon make it evident that Yasuna has in fact taken up with Kuzunoha's double. Realizing that she can no longer keep up the pretense, Fox-Kuzunoha regretfully leaves her husband and child. In one version of the final scene, Dōman encounters Dōji, who has gone to Shinoda Forest with his father in search of his mother. Impressed with the boy's unearthly wisdom (Dōji is secretly prompted in his answers by his fox-mother), Dōman passes the secrets of divination to the boy and renames him Seimei.

Abe Seimei (921–1005) was a historical personage, and tales of his magical

feats were recorded in such late-Heian period works as *The Great Mirror* (Okagami) and *The Tales of Uji* (Uji Shui Monogatari). Seimei established a venerable line of court magicians who specialized in a form of divination based on the Chinese classic *I-Ching*, renamed *Tsuchimikado*. The family was still in charge of practicing divination at court during the Tokugawa period. Legend had it that Seimei's mother was a fox. Foxes are typically portrayed in Japanese folklore as shape-shifters, tricksters, and spell casters. There is still a shrine to Kuzunoha in Shinoda Forest, and within its precincts is a well in which, it is said, she gazed on her reflection while on her flight from Yasuna and her boy.

The story of the fox of Shinoda was already a conventional theatrical "world" (*sekai*) when Izumo wrote his play. A puppet drama entitled *The Shinoda Wife* (Shinodazuma) was staged in 1674, and the famous puppet theatre dramatist Ki no Kaion (1663?-1742) wrote a play on the same subject. Izumo's play incorporates a legend from Izumi province about a hunter who saved a wounded vixen; the vixen returned the favor by assuming the form of a beautiful woman and marrying the man. Some years later, she disappeared, leaving a poem, "If you long for me, / Come seek me in Izumi, / where, in the forest of Shinoda, / you'll find your Kuzu / of the clinging vine." The hunter goes to Shinoda Forest, where he finds the body of a fox who had committed suicide. This poem serves as a kind of lyrical climax in Izumo's play. The phrase "Kuzu of the clinging vine" is an attempt to render *urami no kuzunoha*. The leaves of the kudzu (*kuzunoha*) were a poetic epithet for jealousy and regret (*urami*), but the word "*urami*" can also be written to mean "seeing the future," underscoring the prophetic powers of the fox-mother and her son.

Japanese folklore is rife with tales of animals who, assuming the form of women, marry and beget children, and this motif is frequently employed in plays. Its appeal has much to do with the way in which it illustrates not only an important link for the Japanese between the human and the natural world but also the erotic otherness of the opposite sex. Izumo returned to the fox motif again with the character of Fox-Tadanobu in *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees* (Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura, 1747; trans. Jones 1993).

The story of Yasuna, Fox-Kuzunoha, and their son highlights the private pathos of maternal love, a theme far more appealing than the arcana of Heian politics, the subject of Doman's "world." Edo-period audiences, composed largely of commoners, could identify with the high and mighty only if their problems were brought down to earth, and the fox-mother motif was an excellent emotional device for leveling social differences. Twentieth-century novelist Tanizaki Jun'ichirō,

in his story *Arrowroot*, notes that folk songs associated with the fox of Shinoda were still sung by Meiji-period maids and apprentices in Osaka, their lyrics evoking the keen homesickness these country folk felt for their mothers back home. Many scholars also suggest that Izumo's play expresses a veiled critique of feudalism. Kabuki women and children, who are frequently sacrificed according to the harsh code of duty (*giri*), serve to throw into high relief the contradictions and cruelty of the feudal system. The expendability of Tokugawa women is summed up in the phrase "wombs are on loan," meaning that a woman's sole function was to bear children. In the play, once she has fulfilled this office, Fox-Kusunoha is no longer essential to the institutions that will determine her boy's fortunes. Yet she cannot abandon her abiding love for her child or for her husband.

Over the years, both text and staging have undergone numerous changes. In particular, the motif of doubling is cleverly exploited, providing opportunities to display the special effects (*keren*) unique to each. The play's first production was noteworthy for featuring, for the first time, the use of three-man puppets in a scene in which two identical retainers of Yasuna (one a fox-spirit) save the lives of Lady Kusunoha, Yasuna, and Dōji. A kabuki version was staged the next year in Kyoto, and the first production in Edo was in 1737. A dance play (*shosagoto*) based on Fox-Kusunoha's flight to Shinoda, *The Wild Chrysanthemums by the Forest Where I Dwell* (Waga Sumu Mori no Be no Rangiku) was staged in 1804. The version of *Lady Kusunoha* translated here is similar to this dance play in that it presents her journey (*michiyuki*) in song and dance. The original puppet play and other kabuki versions feature the more vigorous action of the loyal retainer Yōkanbei and his fox double Yakanbei. In some versions, a female retainer (yet another fox) saves Yasuna and the child.

The role of Fox-Kusunoha is technically demanding, involving a number of quick changes. Nakamura Baigyoku III (1875–1948) initiated the practice of playing the two roles of Lady Kusunoha and Fox-Kusunoha in 1894. The special effects scene where the fox-wife writes her poem on the paper screens holding the brush in her mouth while cradling her child—first staged in 1802—provides considerable scope for virtuoso acting. There are also special vocal requirements for this role: Kusunoha betrays her nature through so-called "fox talk" (*kitsune kotoba*).

Balancing the play's reputation for trickery, the beautiful *takemoto* lyrics—especially during the child separation sequence (*kowakare*)—help evoke enormous sympathy for the tragic fox-mother. Though this scene and its lament (*kudoki*) is a showpiece for her, the drama also provides tragic magnitude to Yasuna: his passions drive him to the edge of madness and death, and his dilemma—torn

between his love for three identical women (one of whom is a fox)—makes for powerful drama.

This translation is based on the script for a June 1998 production at the Kokuritsu Gekijō (National Theatre of Japan) in which much has been trimmed away that would divert attention from the story of Fox-Kuzunoha and her separation. Dōman is erased entirely, as are Akueimon and his henchman. Similarly, Yasuna's groping of Kuzunoha to determine whether she is human or a fox has been deleted (as it commonly is in performance) because of its distracting lewdness. Other texts consulted include the puppet text in Tsunoda and Uchiyama, eds., *Shin Nihon Kōten Bungaku Taikan*, Vol. 93; a kabuki version in Toita Yasuji et al., eds., *Meisaku Kabuki Zenshū*, Vol. 3; and Koike Shōtarō, "Kuzunoha Saiken" (A Close Look at Kuzunoha).

CHARACTERS

ABE YASUNA, a gentle, romantic man, a disciple of the court diviner Kamo Yasunori

SHINODA SHŌJI, a samurai, father of LADY KUZUNOHA

SHIGARAMI, SHŌJI's wife

LADY KUZUNOHA, daughter of SHŌJI and SHIGARAMI

FOX-KUZUNOHA, a fox who assumes the identity of LADY KUZUNOHA

ABE DŌJI, son of YASUNA and FOX-KUZUNOHA

SAMURAI ATTENDANTS

PALANQUIN BEARERS

STAGE ASSISTANTS, black-garbed kuwago

TAKEMOTO, narrator-chañter and shamisen player who accompany the action

The Abeno Weaving House

(A humble cottage with straw-thatched roof in Abeno, south of Osaka. The room at left is a workshop with a loom, its walls covered with bamboo latticework. A three-foot square window with paper screen is open to reveal a red clay wall inside and an entrance to the workshop; at left is a Shinto altar with doors decorated with ritual paper streamers, a sprig of holy evergreen, and a flask of sacred sake. Down left is a thatched gate, and, at right, a shed and an entrance to the house with a rope curtain. The curtain opens to the song "A Persimmon Grows Next Door," sung offstage by FOX-KUZUNOHA. Ki clacks are heard, signaling the beginning of the play. The stage is empty as the TAKEMOTO sings.)

TAKEMOTO:

In Abeno, / by a reed fence hard by the hallowed / Sumiyoshi Shrine and
Tennō Temple, / a scene where father makes his rounds / to pray for his
child's rising star, / while mother minds the boy, / her flying shuttle a toy to
while away the hours / as she spins her heart's colors into her loom. / Her
cares and sorrows are the warp and weft of her weave.

*(The sound of the loom comes from the room at right. Enter DŌJI. The child runs
down the hanamichi to rapid tsuke beats and stops at shichisan. He strikes a mie,
then moves to the stage and enters the door of the residence, stopping at the straw
matting that denotes the floor of the interior. He is wearing a child's kimono and obi.
In one hand, he carries a small pouch with a drawstring; in the other, a bamboo pole
on which is tied a dragonfly. He trips and falls at the gate, then strikes another mie,
to two tsuke beats.)*

DŌJI: I'm home now, mama!

TAKEMOTO:

No sooner has he called / than his mother rushes out from the weaving house.
*(Enter FOX-KUZUNOHA. She is dressed in a rustic kimono with apron and
sashes to tie back her sleeves. She is holding a cotton towel [tenugui]. An offstage
shamisen plays.)*

FOX-KUZUNOHA *(Scolding gently, with motherly concern)*: Are you up to your tricks
again, boy? Look at you! All covered in mud! Why, just yesterday your papa
scolded you for this bad habit of yours, spending all your time killing bugs.
"You'll never amount to anything if taking life is what gives you pleasure now,"
he said. Have you forgotten? What would your mother do if you were to hurt
yourself while your father's out? I forbid you leaving the garden and getting
into trouble! Come now, come here!

(DŌJI obediently goes to his mother, who takes him in and brushes off his kimono.)

DŌJI *(In a high-pitched voice)*: Mama, I'm sleepy.

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Come, I'll give you some milk. Then to bed with you.

*(To offstage singing, FOX-KUZUNOHA lifts the child in her arms and takes him
behind a low screen up left center to put him to sleep.)*

TAKEMOTO:

Suckling at his mother's breast, / what dreams will the boy encounter?

(The child having fallen asleep, she comes out and kneels center.)

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Children are such thoughtless creatures. Look at him now, would
you—fast asleep already. *(Pause.)* Now, back to the kimono I was weaving you.
(Rises and exits to room at left, looking back with concern at her child.)

TAKEMOTO:

She sets to work at the loom again. / "A persimmon grows next door." / Sweet
thing she is, at first sight, / scarcely sixteen, or seventeen, perhaps. / And

now, an elderly couple in travel dress, / (singing) through flowers and with-

ered grasses, / they make their way.

(SHOJI enters from the hanamichi, dressed in field-hakama, two swords, and sedge hat, followed by SHIGARAMI, in travel dress, carrying a cane and sedge hat. They are followed in turn by two BEARERS carrying a closed palanquin in which LADY KUZUNOHA is riding. An offstage shamisen plays during their dialogue.)

SHOJI: I'm dead on my feet, wandering all over the country like this. You must be feeling worse for wear, too.

(They proceed to the main stage.)

SHIGARAMI: Aye. I thought it'd be just a little further, but there's no getting past the fact that I'm not as young as I used to be. The man said we're almost there.

(SHOJI goes to the palanquin to get LADY KUZUNOHA.) That house yonder must be Lord Yasuna's place. Go call on him for us.

(The same actor playing FOX-KUZUNOHA enters as LADY KUZUNOHA via a trap underneath the palanquin. Dressed as a "red princess" [akahime], she alights from the palanquin and kneels center.)

LADY KUZUNOHA (Eagerly): Then, that is Lord Yasuna's house? Hurry, let me

see him!

SHIGARAMI (Shamisen continues): Old man, I can well understand our daughter's

haste. I, too, would have words with him. Go to the house and call for him.

SHOJI: I see what you mean. Come to think of it, it's been six years already since he left.

Not a single word all this time whether he lived or no, and though our hearts

haven't changed, it's hard to fathom what's been on Yasuna's mind. Let me go

speak to him first, then I'll call you both. (Pause.) Till then, hide yourselves in

that shed over there.

LADY KUZUNOHA: We'll hide ourselves for just a little while, papa, but hurry. Let me

see him.

SHOJI: That's a good girl. Quickly now, inside.

(SHIGARAMI and LADY KUZUNOHA hide in the shed up right and close the sliding wooden door behind them. The actor playing LADY KUZUNOHA then

descends down another trap underneath the shed and proceeds with yet another quick

change to reappear as FOX-KUZUNOHA.)

SHOJI (Enters the house and calls out): I say, is anyone home? Heavens! Seems no one's

here. (Paces back and forth, then goes to the window at right.) I say! Is anyone

home?

(FOX-KUZUNOHA peers out through the interior window, a white cotton cloth

covering her hair and hiding the actor's princess wig. Only the front half of her

costume has been changed, and a black-garbed STAGE ASSISTANT [kurogo]

holds it in place from behind. Shamisen music plays offstage.)

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Hello? Who is it?

SHŌJI (*Seeing her*): Why, how did you manage that? (*Stares.*)

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Excuse me?

(*Slams shut the window and quickly returns to the shed. SHŌJI runs around to the front of the house.*)

SHŌJI: Old woman, daughter! Come out, quick.

(*She comes out of the shed with LADY KUZUNOHA, who kneels between her parents.*)

SHIGARAMI: What now, old man?

SHŌJI (*Agitated*): What now, you say! This is most strange. Our daughter's in that room, weaving!

SHIGARAMI: Eh? Nonsense. What are you talking about? How could Kuzunoha be over there, too, weaving cloth? In this wide world, surely there's any number of look-alikes.

LADY KUZUNOHA (*Anxiously*): Someone like me, at Lord Yasuna's . . . ?

SHŌJI: Aye, but look-alikes are, generally speaking, like crows and crows, or snow and snow. This is of another order altogether. I swear to you, our daughter was there—in very name and form. If you doubt me, go to that window and see for yourself.

LADY KUZUNOHA (*Agreeing*): Mama, the way papa talks, perhaps it's the truth after all.

SHIGARAMI (*With a touch of finality*): As you say, your father wouldn't lie to us.

TAKEMOTO:

The three gaze at each other, nodding in agreement. (*The women return to the shed.*) / As they hide themselves, Yasuna returns.

(*To the accompaniment of an offstage song, YASUNA enters onto the hanamichi. He is dressed simply in a black and grey kimono, with a single sword in his obi. He carries a round, reddish, lacquered sedge hat. A pinwheel is tucked into his obi at the back and peeks out over his shoulder.*)

SHŌJI: Why, isn't that Lord Yasuna I see?

(*YASUNA stops at shichisan.*)

YASUNA: Oh, is that really you, Lord Shōji? (*Bows respectfully.*)

SHŌJI: You came at just the right time. How good it is to see you again!

YASUNA (*Surprised and delighted, he approaches SHŌJI*): Indeed, it is. You haven't changed at all! I'm so glad.

TAKEMOTO:

It is no wonder they are overjoyed.

YASUNA: You've found my house, I see. Come, come in, please.

TAKEMOTO:

He makes to enter, but Shōji grasps his sleeve.

SHŌJI: First, I've something to give you.

YASUNA: Give me?

SHŌJI: Our daughter, your betrothed. Shigarami, bring out the girl.
 SHIGARAMI (*To Lady Kuzunoha*): Come, come. No need to be shy.
 (*Shigarami leads Lady Kuzunoha out of the shed, the latter acting bashful at the sight of Yasuna. As their eyes meet, she shyly turns away, moves toward him, and then away, but her mother urges her back again. Lady Kuzunoha gracefully kneels, hiding her face behind her sleeves. She is between Yasuna on her left and her parents on her right.*)

TAKEMOTO:

Dragged out against her will to meet him, / and though bereft of speech, /
 Kuzu's countenance betrays her heart.

(*Both Lady Kuzunoha and Yasuna look embarrassed.*)

YASUNA (*Thinking this is some kind of prank*): Well, well! You've gone quite out of your way for me. It would seem she met up with you while I was out. Did you have her change and bring her back here so that you could have a little joke on me? You should know better, Kuzu. What's the meaning of dressing up so that you'd look like you just arrived with your parents? Ha, ha, ha! (*Taps Lady*

Kuzunoha's shoulder playfully. She rises and moves away to her mother. SHŌJI countercrosses to Yasuna, who kneels.) Well, what can I say? What a stroke of luck for the old couple! Listen, let me tell you our tale. (*Yasuna places his hat and pinwheel on the floor as he begins his narrative. An offstage shamisen plays.*) She came to my rescue in Shinoda Forest when I was about to put an

end to my life after my run-in with that villain, Akemon. It's been six years now since we fled that place. We made a home for ourselves here and gave birth to a son as well, our boy, Abe no Dōji. I've been meaning all this time to go beg your forgiveness, thinking I'll do it today or perhaps tomorrow, that telling you what a fine grandson he's grown up to be might give you some small consolation for the shameless liberty I took with your daughter. Easier said than done, however. Elking out the living of a *ronin*, I've not been able to do as I please. In deference to your grandson, I'd be eternally grateful to you were you to forgive me for all my indiscretions. (*Gesturing toward Shigarami, who is seated at right with Lady Kuzunoha.*) Mother, please put in a kind word for me to your husband.

TAKEMOTO:

He bows deeply and begs forgiveness.

(*Yasuna bows gracefully, with deep humility.*)

SHŌJI: Why, Lord Yasuna, this is no time for apologies! The fact of the matter is, something very, very strange is going on. When I arrived here a moment ago, somebody was weaving. Go look for yourself.

(*All the while, one can hear the loom at work in the weaving house. YASUNA rises and moves toward the house.*)

YASUNA: I truly hadn't paid it any attention, but if my wife is here (*wonderingly*), who's weaving?

(*He stealthily crosses to the window, left, and peeks in. Suddenly, reacting to what he sees, he reels back in shock. To TAKEMOTO singing, he moves distractedly from side to side at center. In perfectly timed movements, he returns to the gate, puts on his straw sandals [zōri], stumbles against the gatepost, steps in a spinning motion out the gate, closes the gate, and poses in perplexity against the post, right hand in kimono at his chest.*)

TAKEMOTO:

So muttering, he rises and goes to look. / Pale with shock, he quickly returns.

YASUNA: A Kuzu there, and a Kuzu here as well. What's this?

TAKEMOTO:

What, indeed? He is astounded. / Looking inside, he is amazed; gazing at the girl before him, / he is dumbfounded and cannot speak, nor stand, nor sit. / This unexpected shock has left him quite baffled. / Yasuna considers the matter carefully.

YASUNA: Whichever, forgive me, but please hide in the shed . . . till I decide on a proper course of action.

SHŌJI: Indeed, there must be something behind all this. (*To LADY KUZUNOHA.*)

Now, go with your mother, and wait where you were.

SHIGARAMI: We'll wait, but you get some answers from Lord Yasuna. Come, girl! Into the shed with you.

LADY KUZUNOHA: No! No! I'll stay here and cry myself to death!

SHŌJI (*Sharply*): Have some sense, child! Are you not the daughter of a samurai? You're too fond by half! If you've no sense of your own, I'll give you something to think about.

SHIGARAMI: Listen to what your father says. Come, I'll join you.

TAKEMOTO:

Mother gently coaxes her daughter back into the shed. / Shōji watches them go.

(*To TAKEMOTO singing, LADY KUZUNOHA and SHIGARAMI rise. The girl, exchanging longing glances with YASUNA, is led off into the shed by her mother, as the latter bows to YASUNA and closes the door. The men kneel opposite each other.*)

SHŌJI: Imagine our shock, Lord Yasuna, when we discovered two Kuzus here. It's no wonder you, too, were amazed. Surely this is the work of some kind of goblin, perhaps a long-nosed *tengu*. This is no time for the faint of heart. Take courage, then, Lord Yasuna. Go find out what it is.

YASUNA: Aye, you needn't concern yourself there. A disciple of the wizard Kamo Yasunori, I'll bring what's obscure to the light of understanding. I know what to say and do. I'll be sure to give you a sign.

SHŌJI: Take care . . . I wouldn't have you fail.

(*Offstage shamisen plays.*)

YASUNA: I'll not fail you.

TAKEMOTO:

With doubtful heart, Shōji hides himself inside the shed.

(SHŌJI rises, crosses to the shed, and enters it as YASUNA bows deferentially to him. YASUNA rises and crosses into the house, picks up the pinwheel, stumbles against the folding screen, and sees his sleeping child.)

YASUNA (*Shocked*): This won't do. Look at the poor lad, all tired out from his pranks!

You've thrown off your covers in your sleep. We can't have you catching cold.

Wife! (*Steps forward, and realizing that the child's mother is not there, calls to her*

more forcefully.) Kuzu, where are you? Kuzu!

(*The last word is drawn out emotionally for emphasis. YASUNA poses, holding the*

pinwheel against his raised upstage hand, suggesting his concern for the child. He

kneels forward.)

TAKEMOTO:

Calling "Aye!" his wife comes to the curtained doorway, / still in her apron,

with her sleeves tied back with cords.

(FOX-KUZUNOHA enters the room from left and moves to YASUNA's right,

kneeling while speaking. The offstage shamisen plays.)

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Did you just get home? It was rather windy today. You must be

chilled to the bone.

(*There is something strange in her intonation of the last word, a slight hint of her fox*

nature.)

YASUNA (*Not noticing the change*): No, being out in the world kept me warm today. I

made my rounds to Sumiyoshi and Tenuo Temple. (*Hands her the pinwheel.*)

Look, I've brought the lad a toy.

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Why, how thoughtful of you! The boy will be delighted. Give it

here—I'll surprise him.

(*She rises to go over to the boy, but YASUNA stops her with a gesture, and she*

resumes kneeling.)

YASUNA: Wait, we'll give it him when he wakes.

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Aye.

YASUNA: Which reminds me . . . I've got some happy news for you.

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Yes?

YASUNA: On my way home today, I happened to meet your father, Lord Shōji, with

your mother, at the temple's Hall of Hours.

FOX-KUZUNOHA (*Agitated, she turns to him*): Is this true?

YASUNA: Indeed, I did. (*Offstage shamisen begins.*) I felt so remiss for not getting in

touch that I was loath to go up to them, but they came over looking as if they

didn't in the least resent me. Having heard where we were living, they'd hurried to see their daughter . . . They said they'd come around sundown. It's been a long time for you, too. You must be pleased you'll see them.

FOX-KUZUNOHA (*Feigning happiness*): Sundown, you say? That's soon. I really ought to fix something special.

YASUNA (*Reassuring her*): Why, just showing off their grandson would be a feast in itself for them. And seeing you will be the next best treat. Go comb your hair, and get out of that shabby kimono and into something brighter. Make yourself beautiful . . . Ah, visitors from long ago, and plenty of tales to tell. We'll not get far if we don't have a bit of a nap first. Get me that pillow.

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Aye.

(FOX-KUZUNOHA rises, crosses behind the screen, puts the pinwheel by the child, and returns with a hard pillow on which YASUNA rests his neck, his back to her, head toward the audience. She kneels at his side, right.)

TAKEMOTO: Yasuna pretends to fall asleep.

FOX-KUZUNOHA (*Looks around, worried*): But there's a draft in here. Let's go inside. Get yourself a good sleep till sundown. (*Looks at YASUNA, who appears to have fallen asleep. Tentatively, she calls him.*) Hello? Are you asleep already? Come, you don't want to catch cold. I'll throw something over your legs. Goodness, what snoring! He must have been quite exhausted. I'll go dress up my hair.

TAKEMOTO:

Her heart darkening, the wife wraps her thoughts in a coverlet, / embraces her child, and regretfully goes within.

(*She adjusts the pillow under his head and covers his legs with a coverlet. She begins to go inside, then returns once, twice, three times, hesitating. As TAKEMOTO begins, she turns front, rises, crosses to the sleeping child, lifts him, and stands with him in her arms. She turns upstage, looks down at her sleeping husband, and slowly exits up center. As soon as she is gone, YASUNA raises his head, pushes the pillow aside, and rises sharply to his knees.*)

Yasuna's doubtful eyes follow her leave-taking.

(*He rises, lifts his sword, and takes a step backward. Then, slowly and cautiously, he crosses up to center doorway, pushes open the split curtain, and peeks inside.*)

YASUNA (*Perplexed*): It makes no sense whichever way I look at it. She wasn't shocked in the least when I told her about her parents, but even so . . . what if it is her?

TAKEMOTO:

So saying, he watches her in the inner room, putting up her hair.

YASUNA (*Peering in*): It's my wife Kuzu and no other, I'll be bound. (*He turns front, thinking, and takes the scabbard cord in his right hand.*) My wife of six

years . . . (He steps forward, distractedly.) I've no reason to doubt her, surely. But what about the girl Lord Shōji and his wife brought here? (He looks off into the distance, thoughtfully.)

TAKEMOTO:

Yes, what of her? he wonders. So he steals a look / into the perplexing darkness of his heart, / into the depths of the house.

(He crosses up to the shrine altar at the back wall, pulls down his sword, and, facing upstage, claps three times to pray. He picks up the ritual paper streamers by the shrine and crosses downstage a few steps to center, whisking the streamers side to

side, then poses resolutely with the streamers as a sharp ki cack signals the end of the scene. The large offstage drum [ōdaiko] plays under the TAKEMOTO music as the stage darkens and the set revolves, bringing on the next scene. The drum continues to beat [tsuimi] as the new scene, showing the inner room, comes into view. The drum gets louder and more rapid. A single ki cack signals the lights to come up and the scene to begin. The TAKEMOTO musicians, previously hidden behind bamboo blinds at left, now are in view, wearing formal attire [kamishimo] and sealed on their dais [yuka].)

The Inner Room

(The cottage's inner room. At left, an alcove with a scroll, and beyond, a wall, and an exit with a split curtain. To right, a partition with a latticed transom on top. Far right is a bamboo thickset. Down left is a gate made of woven sticks, which is operated by a hidden mechanism. At center, DŌJI is lying within a screened partition. The scene revolves to wind-pattern drumbeats [kaze no oto]. To TAKEMOTO singing, FOX-KUZUNOHA reenters, sadly, wearing a pale gold formal kimono with black lining, and a wide black obi. She stands upstage center in front of the divided curtain, looks over at her child, crosses to him, and staggers back tearfully. She falls to her knees, anguished.)

TAKEMOTO:

Yasuna spies in upon his wife. Now in a fresh change of clothes, / she enters from within to see her child, and with a heavy heart looks down / upon their sleeping son. She is about to speak, / but her voice is stopped with tears, and she sobs.

FOX-KUZUNOHA (To lyrical shamisen melody [meriyasu], she pauses, lost in thought): Ah, how wretched, how ashamed am I! All these years and months, the secret I have hidden has been in vain. That it should come to such a pass, that my true form has been revealed and I must now leave, breaking my ties as wife and mother! I would tell your papa, but I'd bow my head in shame were I obliged to confess my past. Hear me with your sleeping ears, then, and remember . . .

TAKEMOTO:

Tell your papa this . . .

(As she draws her outstretched left hand slowly toward her body, the hand curves unconsciously into a paw. She notices it and quickly hides it in her sleeve. Both hands, hidden in their sleeves, are held across her body, then placed on her raised knee.)

FOX-KUZUNOHA: In truth, I am not human. Six years ago, in Shinoda Forest, I was in the clutches of the wicked Akuemon and on the verge of death when Lord Yasuna saved me. Orchids and chrysanthemums bloomed again! A thousand years upon this earth . . .

(Unable to restrain her fox nature any longer, she makes a sharp, animallike movement of her head, scurries downstage a few steps, gestures to the gate with her paw as it magically opens and closes, scurries back into the room, facing the screen, and gestures with her paw again as the screen flips over upstage, revealing the sleeping boy. She faces front, posing in a foxlike attitude, in profile on one knee, slowly raising one leg backward into the air, suggesting a tail under her kimono. Eerie drum and flute music, "lightning" [raiho], underscore this business.)

TAKEMOTO:

I've lived. In truth, I am a fox.

(The strange intonation of the word "fox" conveys her real nature. She turns front, becoming more human in attitude, but with hands still formed as paws.)

FOX-KUZUNOHA: But your father, too, had been sorely wounded because of me.

Wishing to repay the favor he had shown me, I took on the form of Lady Kuzu, and just as he was about to take his own life, I stayed his hand and nursed him back to health.

TAKEMOTO:

As I kept him company, mercy turned to passion, / and our hearts desired to join as man and wife. / Since that time we made our vows . . .

FOX-KUZUNOHA: I've honored and treasured my husband.

(FOX-KUZUNOHA turns upstage and expresses her longing, then turns back and mimes her grief to TAKEMOTO singing.)

TAKEMOTO:

Truly a hundred times more devoted / than any mortals are the beasts!

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Above all now, since I gave birth to you.

TAKEMOTO:

Sweet words I'd exchange with my man and child, / each fast in my embrace as I lay between you of a night.

(She rises and crosses to the curtain, and looks off. She turns back, but turns upstage again, drawn powerfully by her husband's offstage presence. She tries to break the spell but stumbles against the screen and sees her child.)

But never again will I share your bed!

(She scurries on her knees to center, rises, crosses above child to left, and, as

TAKEMOTO becomes very emotional, poses in agony, then drops to her knees, weeping loudly. She twirls on her knees and bows in the direction of YASUNA, then turns to her child.)

With all her magic, has this unwitting fox / lost her dear, beloved ones?

(Arms crossed in front of her, she weepingly addresses the boy, TAKEMOTO music underscores her words.)

FOX-KUZUNOHA: That we must now part is not your papa's fault. Indebted as I am to

him, I bear no grudge. Lord Shoji and his wife are your grandparents now, so

love Lady Kuzu as your own true mother. Do not think ill of her, but end, once

and for all, your foolish pranks. Throw yourself into your studies and master

what you learn, so that you may be praised as your father's son. Ah! Truly,

there's nothing now I can do for you . . .

(Moving like a fox, she scurries on her knees to the other side of the child and

smoothens his hair, her hands held like paws. She hugs herself to restrain her

feelings.)

TAKEMOTO:

Do not call out your mother's name, / lest you be scorned and reviled as a

wicked fox-child.

FOX-KUZUNOHA (Speaking in increasingly agitated tones, her voice rising to a wail):

Though I must leave you now, you have a new mother to look after you in all

the years to come. So I say, but how can I abandon you, returning to my native

place? Our parting is like a dream; surely, when I'm gone you'll cry out for my

breast! Oh, my sweet, beloved child!

(She moves backward a step, beckons toward the child with her paw, and, via a

special effect sure to produce a chill in the spectators, he and the small mattress on

which he is sleeping suddenly slide to her side. She moves to his other side, then turns

to the right side and places herself across him protectively. She takes his hand and

sinks down over him, weeping.)

TAKEMOTO:

"Come, I cannot leave you!" she would cry, / but she breaks down weeping. /

Presently, she wipes away her tears.

FOX-KUZUNOHA (Composing herself): My tears cannot change anything now . . . At

least a message I could leave . . . Yes . . .

(To the accompaniment of an offstage solo [dokugiri], sung slowly and mournfully,

she touches her cheek to the child's face, arranges his bedclothes, and wipes her tears

away with her back to the audience. Then, she takes a tray with writing utensils of

brush and ink from a low table right, kneels, rises, crosses left, and walks along the

veranda as the stage revolves.)

OFFSTAGE SINGER:

The reeds of grief lie thick as dew in Shinoda Forest. / Alas, though I
yearn for dreams entwined with you, / weeds will be my bed, grass my
pillow. / The dew will tell my brush to speak: / tears on my sleeves are
white chrysanthemums.

*(The stage revolves and a new set comes into view, showing the outside of another
raised room with four simple sliding paper doors on the upstage wall. FOX-KUZU-
NOHA begins to write a verse on the one at right, her brushstrokes moving from above
to below and right to left. For the first line, however, she begins at the top and then,
indicating her supernatural nature, finishes it by writing it from the bottom up.)*

DŌJI *(Entering from right)*: Mama! Mama!

*(Mother and child embrace as TAKEMOTO music resumes. As she continues writ-
ing, she ad-libs with the distraught child, whom she must console as he plaintively
calls for his mother's arms. Holding his hand in her right hand, she is forced to write
on the final panel, at left, with her left hand.)*

OFFSTAGE SINGER:

The insects crying so confusedly in the fields, / burn with a love as bright as
fox fires. / Come look for me, Kuzu of the clinging vine.

*(The child insists on being held, and she must finish the verse by holding the brush
in her teeth. Yet she still manages to produce excellent calligraphy.)*

FOX-KUZUNOHA: Ah!

(She falls weeping, then turns on her knees and embraces the child.)

TAKEMOTO:

Yasuna bolts in when he hears / Kuzu burst into reckless tears.

(YASUNA enters from right, outside the house.)

YASUNA: I heard everything now. Why must you leave the boy?

TAKEMOTO:

Loath to let her go, he tries to hold her fast. / Then, suddenly abandoning
the boy, she vanishes from sight.

*(FOX-KUZUNOHA crosses down to center, where YASUNA tries to prevent
her from leaving. They move from one side to the other and pose with the child
between them. YASUNA takes the boy, and KUZUNOHA moves like a fox
to the right, where she drops to her knees. A STAGE ASSISTANT helps to
loosen her hair and make a rapid costume change [bukkaeri], revealing a white
inner kimono patterned with red flames. She rushes in foxlike leaps to shichisan,
turns back and faces YASUNA, then rapidly disappears into the hanamichi ele-
vator trap [suppon] as piercing flute and loud dorodoro drum pattern play.
YASUNA, holding the child on stage, has not seen this because his back is
turned to her. He now turns front, holding the child in his arms and sinking to
his knees.)*



One-panel woodblock print by Utagawa Toyokuni III (1786-1864). Nakamura-za, Edo, fifth month 1850. "Fox-Kuzunoha" (Bando Shuka I, posthumously Bando Mitsugoro V) writes a farewell poem to her husband, "Abe no Yasuna" (Ichikawa Danjuro VIII), shown in the inset. Her child cradled in her arms and with the brush held in her teeth, she begins to write on the paper screen: "If you long for me, come seek me in Izumi. . ." (Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum of Waseda University)



Abe Yasuna (Sawamura Sōjūrō II) looks on as Fox-Kuzunoha (Nakamura Shikan VII), having written a farewell poem on the screen, cradles her beloved son whom she must leave. (Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum of Waseda University)

YASUNA (*In rhythmic cadences to the TAKEMOTO shamisen accompaniment*): Can you not hear, wife? Though you have a vixen's body, surely you can take pity on creation, can't you? Can I not repay the debt I owe you for these six years you lived with us? And what of the child you bore? Let them laugh, those who'd laugh at me for taking a fox as wife. I'm not in the least ashamed. If indeed you have to leave us, then tell me to my face, let it be with my consent. Only then have done with it and be gone. I'd never leave you like this! (*Rising, he holds the final vowel in emotional torment.*) Hear me, Kuzu! (He looks left and right for KUZUNOHA as he carries the child in his arms. When he cannot find her, he kneels center in despair. Then, turning upstage, he notices the message on the paper doors.)

YASUNA (*Reading*): "If you long for me, / Come seek me in Izumi, / where, in the forest of Shinoda, / you'll find your Kuzu / of the clinging vine." (*He turns front.*) Would you abandon your child with nothing more than a poem as a keepsake? Very well, then. I'll bring your boy, and together we'll follow these thirty-one syllables that trace . . . (*emphasizing his anguish on the final word, he sinks to his knees, still embracing the child,*) the twisting path of your regrets. (*YASUNA releases the child, who climbs on his back. He rises.*)

TAKEMOTO:

"If you long for me, / Come seek me in Izumi . . ."

(As TAKEMOTO finishes the line, YASUNA runs to shichisan, to accelerating tsuke beats, then stumbles.)

YASUNA: Mother of this boy!

(YASUNA calls out to KUZUNOHA. Ki clack. Pose. He speaks his last line, then,

beginning slowly, he gradually accelerates in speed as he moves off down the hana-michi, the accompanying tsuke accenting his movement with rapid beats. Loud

dorodoro. A sharp ki clack signals the beginning of the scene change. The stage

darkens to the sound of rhythmic offstage drums, gong, and shamisen as the previous scene descends on a trap [seti] to reveal Shinoda Forest. Ki clack.)

TAKEMOTO:

And so, to the forest of Shinoda.

The Shinoda Forest Journey

(Lights up. Banks of chrysanthemums and pampas grass dress the stage and back the group of three TAKEMOTO singers and three shamisen players who appear onstage [degitari] on a platform at left. Overhead hang two lines of lights suggesting fox fires.)

TAKEMOTO:

She who would put an end to her sorrows here / is Abe no Doji's mother. / Go, then, return to your ancestral home!

(Loud, rapid dorodoro. Ferie flute music [natori-bue]. Lights darken. FOX-

KUZUNOHA rises into view on suppon, her strange entrance highlighted by two black-robed and masked STAGE ASSISTANTS who crouch on either side of her;

holding long, flexible black poles [sashidashi] on the ends of which are candles used to light her face in a reminder of an old-time kabuki convention. She wears a black-lined silver kimono with a black obi, a lacquered sedge hat, and carries a walking stick in her hand. Covering her face is a white fox mask with an extended snout.

As the TAKEMOTO plays, she slowly dances on the hanamichi in foxlike fashion, manipulating her stick and raising her head at one point to clearly indicate her facial transformation. Her dance expresses the pain she feels after having been

separated from her child.)

TAKEMOTO:

Her native village no more / than a passing abode of autumn mists, / and

bright chrysanthemums beguile her way, / ashamed that those she left would

know her as she truly is. / On nimble feet, she scurries, / scurries, now here,

now there, / her apparel and hair disheveled / in the clover and pampas grass.

(Sound of flute, stick drum, dorodoro. She poses suddenly, wheels about, and,

through a trick, her mask disappears into her hat, revealing the actor's face. Lights

up. She runs to the main stage, center, where she kneels on one knee as a STAGE ASSISTANT takes her sandals and stick and replaces her trick hat with another. She scurries left on her knees and poses, then moves back to center.)

With a sharp intake of breath, / she stops and straightens her dress. / Under her sedge hat, / the slanting sun's rays glare.

(She slowly crosses upstage center, moving up a sloped platform there to a higher level and looking around.)

Danger on all sides for one in flight: / here a village, there some passersby . . .

(She comes back down again and kneels on one knee as a STAGE ASSISTANT takes her hat. Through all this, intermittent dorodoro.)

Above all, the howling of dogs . . . *(rises and expresses alarm)* / chills her bones / and her spirits drenched by a sudden shower, / a burst of rain, then sun, then rain again . . .

(She begins dancing her feelings as the TAKEMOTO sings to shamisen accompaniment.)

What folk call a fox's wedding / is her body turning back to its old nest. / "But what of my boy?" *(Sinks to one knee and rises again.)* / "The dear, sweet boy I left behind?"

(She turns back to wipe away her tears, then turns front. She looks around, crosses to chrysanthemum bush left, takes a flower, and cradles it as if it were a child. She crosses to center with it.)

"Poor child, he'll surely grieve / without my breast to comfort him," / and her tears eclipse her way.

(She crosses left several steps. Posing, she sees her fox image reflected in the imaginary water. Dorodoro as she ruffles the surface of the "water" to disperse the image. She crosses rapidly to center and sinks to one knee, holding her arms across her breasts.)

Reflected in the pool, she sees her real form. / It is well that she makes this trek through the fields alone.

(Rises and executes slow movements expressing grief.)

"Though we had to part, / we truly had to part, / I'll cling to you like your very shadow, / I'll watch over you in all the years to come!"

(Kneeling, she wipes away her tears. Light dorodoro. She rises and crosses left a step.)

"I've no regrets, I'll not grieve," she says . . .

(Two low-ranking SAMURAI ATTENDANTS [yakko] appear at left and right, their trousers tucked up to expose their legs. They wear a fringed apron and red kimono patterned in white. Seeing them, FOX-KUZUNOHA rushes upstage to loud dorodoro and sinks to her knees. She does a backward bending "prawn-shaped" mie [ebizori no mie] to tsuke beats. She rises and, to rapid drumbeats,

Fox-Kuzunoha (Nakamura Ganjirō III), transformed into her true fox shape, poses on a red, cloth-covered platform in the final scene. (Umemura Yutaka, Engoki Shuppansha)



poses in a group mie with the SAMURAI, who hold out their hands to either side as if to prevent her escape. A choreographed combat [tachimawari] ensues to the sounds of the TAKEMOTO shamisen, swelling dorodoro, and tsuke beats that punctuate the more vigorous movements. During the dancelike battle, the SAMURAI try to seize FOX-KUZUNOHA, but she holds them off with fox movements. Every few moments, the group strikes a new mie. After a minute or two, she breaks away and rushes to downstage right, where she disappears through a secret door in the wall—painted with foliage—next to the offstage musicians' room [geza]. Four more SAMURAI appear from each side, whirling and tumbling on the ground under the fox's spell. They leap and fall to their bottoms, facing upstage. KUZUNOHA, now represented by a white puppet, peeps out through a small trap in the dais on which the TAKEMOTO musicians sit. She looks about and disappears. A black-robed puppeteer holding the fox enters from camouflaged doors set in front of the TAKEMOTO dais and moves upstage among the flowers, manipulating the fox to suggest its prancing movements. With a flick of the fox's tail, the six SAMURAI tumble backward, legs in the air. In the following sequence, the fox, upstage, seems to control the SAMURAI's movements, making them look foolish as they rhythmically execute her commands. Now they look here, now they look there, now they turn one against the other in comic poses and attitudes. They move with foxlike leaps and pounces, jumping, tumbling, and whirling about. As they pose, the fox moves from left to right, touching each in turn, causing them to fall to the ground, stunned. The fox-puppet exits right and the actor playing FOX-KUZUNOHA, hair hanging loosely, instantly appears from the same place, dressed in a kimono of white furlike material. FOX-KUZUNOHA poses on her knees at center and the fight resumes. The SAMURAI lift her into the air and assume a group mie. The stage darkens as the SAMURAI surround her in a pose on the center ramp. Ki clack. Loud dorodoro.)

But her thoughts are confused, / like the tangled blooms of the wild chrysanthemum / borne aloft upon the wind.

(A STAGE ASSISTANT attaches a wire to the actor's hidden harness and FOX-KUZUNOHA rises into the air as the SAMURAI fall back in amazement, three to either side, each holding up a hand for protection. Rapidly accelerating tsuke beats. The SAMURAI turn toward the audience and pose in a group mie. Lively off-stage musical accompaniment plays as the curtain closes, and FOX-KUZUNOHA, suspended in the air at center, leaps about in fox movements surrounded by fox fires. The curtain closes.)