ABSTRACT

EAST ASIAN FOX LEGENDS:
READ AT YOUR OWN RISK, POSSESSION POSSIBLE

By Lauren Noelle Schmidt

In my sophomore year at Miami University, one of my professors, Dr. Tom Romano, challenged us to create a multi-genre research project for our major assignment. After a brainstorming exercise, I decided to focus on the fox spirit legends of Asia, specifically those of China, Japan, and Korea. As I worked on the project, I found that I had a lot of fun, and I poured passion into my work. I was quite proud of the final project. So proud, in fact, that I decided to expand this project into my Creative Writing Honors Thesis. I felt that there was so much more I could do with it.

Over the span of several years, I learned a lot about the fox spirits, using various books and websites in my research. Those of Japan and China can be benevolent as well as malicious, and foxes in Japan have even been elevated to the status of gods. However, in Korea, fox spirits are wicked creatures who prey on humans. Many stories have been written about them, and in Japan, they have made their way into popular media such as television shows and comic books. These fictional fox spirits have attracted many fans. In fact, the inspiration for this project comes from a surprisingly male fox spirit character named Kurama, from Yoshihiro Togashi’s manga and anime entitled Yuu Yuu Hakusho. This manga author and artist based his story on traditional Japanese legends, but gave them a modern twist and created a unique and fascinating character through his ingenious imagination. I would like to dedicate this project to Mr. Togashi and his wonderful character, as well as the many fans of fox spirits all over the world. Without them, this thesis would not have been created.

As I stated earlier, my thesis incorporates many genres, including short stories, poems, flash fiction, articles, letters, and even a table comparing and contrasting the fox spirits of each country. I have divided the thesis into three sections: China, Japan, and Korea. Before each section, I have provided a short introduction to the fox spirits of the section’s country. In addition, I have also included a “Dear Reader” introduction. Some genres were harder to write than others, but in the end, I am satisfied and proud of my work. I incorporated many voices not normally seen in fox legends, such as the voice of the fox, which is normally female, but I decided to use the male fox as well.

I also dedicate this thesis to Dr. Tom Romano and Dr. Susan Kay Sloan, my thesis advisor, for helping me to make this project the best it could be by offering helpful feedback on my work that allowed me to make crucial revisions.

One day, it is my hope that this thesis will be on bookshelves, as a handy guide to readers. This is the essence of my work—a fox spirit field guide. May it be of use to all of those who want to learn about these fascinating and mysterious creatures.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In addition, I thank Mr. Yoshihiro Togashi for sparking my initial interest in fox spirits and the legends about them.

I dedicate this work to them.
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Dear Reader,

This is an attempted guide to fox spirits. I have encountered many problems in the field, but I feel that I have put my best effort into the project. To the one who has found it, I humbly present this work to you, and hope it proves informative.

I believe I have compiled this guide with the foxes’ blessing. However, what started out as a wonderful and exciting endeavor soon turned into a headache and a nightmare. I have been irritable. I have wondered what fried tofu actually tastes like. I have felt odd sensations in my fingernails. I have wanted many times to abandon the project. These elusive creatures have proved a difficult subject, and there is so much to be learned, that I felt my head would explode. But I kept on, as if possessed by one of these foxes to continue.

I wonder if perhaps the foxes tried to warn me that this would happen. I believe that the dream I had during the course of writing this project was an ill omen. Let me explain.

In the dream, I followed a fox out to an open field. It began to glow with a golden aura, looked straight at me, and stood up like a human. At first I thought that it was giving me its blessing. But, as I have found, fox gifts can come with a price.

I became obsessed. I tried to fight it, but I poured my heart and soul into it. My soul was crushed with the prospect of revisions to be made. I felt a failure to the foxes.

I also feel that I must explain to you how this all started. I have long been a fan of Japanese animation. A few years ago, I developed an obsession with a character that happens to be a fox spirit. You could say I fell in love.

Then the dreams started. And the weird coincidences.

My first dream was of a pure white fox, which appeared like a true spirit. It had multiple tails, and came to me after I had been running on all fours during the course of it. I was in awe, both in the dream and when I woke up.

My latest summer vacation to Florida proved full of foxes. The sand was even the color of the fur of the red fox. I found two shells—one in the shape of a fox’s head, and the other with a hole in the shape of a fox’s head. And I found a sweatshirt with the same thing on it. I was allowed to keep the sweatshirt, but I have lost the shells. I think the foxes took them back.

The only fox gift I have been able to hold onto is a geode. The hole is, again, in the shape of a fox’s head.

My curiosity compelled me to buy several books containing stories and information about fox spirits. And when it came time to do this project, I felt I just had to do it on them.
Once you read this guide, there is no turning back. If you do not believe you can handle the information presented in this guide, drop it now, and run far away.

For you, too, run the risk of becoming like me—driven insane by curiosity.

But who can control their curiosity? Go ahead, turn the page. Wisdom is a great gift.

And I hope that this guide saves you from the same fate as I.

Sincerely,

Daimyoujin Ainari
FIELD GUIDE TO JAPANESE FOX SPIRITS

In Japan, foxes are the same as fox spirits. There is no distinction. The kitsune (fox) is a fascinating creature, and can be good or evil, god or demon.

The myoubu are the messengers of Inari, a god (some say goddess) of prosperity, rice, and foxes. To followers of Inari, the white fox is a good omen. However, in another superstition, the white fox means disaster, and the black fox brings luck. Myoubu are guardians as well, acting as angels to protect people and bring them good luck. It is also said that they know all and see all, and appear in dreams. Offerings are made to the foxes, which usually contain fried tofu (abura-age), for it is said to be the fox's favorite food. The number of tails denotes its age, and they can live for thousands of years, reincarnating after death. Sometimes they are immortal. Aged foxes have silver or gold fur.

The other foxes—nogitsune (field fox), youko (monster/demon fox) are just other names for the kitsune. They are fearsome creatures, with a wide range of powers. They are able to bewitch people by casting illusions, and possess people, usually women, by entering through the fingernails or the breast. They can transform into humans, usually a beautiful woman. In some stories, however, they do appear as a man. The fox may achieve such a transformation by putting on a human skull. People can see through this disguise if the transformation is incomplete—if a tail shows, perhaps. A reflection can also give the fox away, because in the reflection, one will see the fox instead of the woman or man it pretends to be. The most typical way to expose a fox's trick is a barking dog. The fox will be afraid of the dog, and show its true shape, running away afterwards. The fox is also capable of speaking like a human, and can disappear at will. Another weakness of the fox is its hoshi-no-tama, or star ball. It carries this jewel or ball in its tail or mouth, and the jewel contains some of its power—it is unclear which powers. If this ball is stolen, it will be forced to do a favor in order to get it back. Sulfur and smoke are supposed to be weaknesses as well, most likely due to the fox's sensitive nose.

Foxes will do a person favors or take revenge for wrongdoing. If a man injures a fox, it may inflict a similar wound, either through regular means or possession (although possession is usually used to get food or deliver a message). They have also been known to commit arson or harm children as revenge for harming a fox cub. The gifts of
a fox are usually immaterial, such as good luck and protection. Material fox gifts may not be wholly real—money could be leaves, for example.

They are capable of personal sacrifice as well. One fox family sacrificed their own cub in order to cure the son of a man who had saved the life of their cub. And a loyal vixen died in place of the man she loved. And a fox wife returned to her human husband every night despite his dog.

One vixen, however, was thoroughly evil, inhabiting a stone and killing anyone who came near. Her soul was eventually redeemed with the help of a Buddhist priest. Stealing the life-force of men is a way for the fox to become immortal, which is why foxes turn into women.

The kitsune has become a part of Japan’s culture, appearing in many fairy tales. In one tale, foxes marry when the sun is shining and the rain is falling simultaneously. The Japanese call this strange weather “the foxes’ wedding.” Will-o’-the-wisp is known as “kitsune-bi,” or fox-fire. To call someone a fox is to call someone a prostitute, most likely due to the tales of seductive foxes.

Foxes have even invaded pop culture in Japan. Three characters in particular are notable. Silver-haired and golden-eyed Kurama/Youko Kurama of Yoshihiro Togashi’s Yuu Yuu Hakusho is a powerful and legendary thief who is forced to merge with a human embryo and reincarnate as a human, hiding his true self. He reforms, and becomes a fighter for good. He is extremely intelligent, and uses plants as weapons. However, his powers are not like the typical kitsune.

All in all, the kitsune is an elusive and ancient creature, capable of both good and evil. Whichever variety one runs into, however, the best advice would be never to make them angry, and to use caution in dealing with them. They are truly amazing and powerful.
Kitsune Haiku I

Yami no ban ni
Kitsune no waza ga
Shiyasui da

Translation:
In the dark of evening
The fox’s trap
Is easy to make.
|---------------|--------|---------|-------------|--------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Both          | -Shapeshifting  
-Ilusions/Glamour  
-Omniscience  
-Speech  
-Ability to Possess  
-Ability to Reincarnate  
-Can disappear  
-Immortality | Over a thousand years, can be immortal | -Kitsune (fox)  
-Myoubu (Inari’s divine messenger)  
-Nogitsune (Field fox, wild fox)  
-Youko (Monster fox, demon fox) | Yes  
Connected with the deity Inari | Uses a human skull | Red  
White (lucky/unlucky, depends on who you ask, I think)  
Black (lucky)  
Gold/silver (only for foxes of a great age) | Dogs  
Smoke  
Sulfur  
Hoshi-no-tama (contains some of its power) | The number of tails increases with age | 1-9  
-In the wild  
-People’s homes (not often, though)  
-Graveyard | -Shapeshifting  
-Ilusions/Glamour  
-Speech  
-Ability to reincarnate?  
-Size-changing  
-Can become mist-like  
-Can disappear and reappear  
-Immortality | Goo Mi Ho/Gumiho (another name for kumiho) | Kumiho (nine-tailed fox)  
-Goo Mi Ho/Gumiho (another name for kumiho) | Uses a human skull  
Eats someone | No specific fur color given |
| Both          | -Shapeshifting  
-Ilusions/Glamour  
-Speech  
-Ability to Possess  
-Ability to Reincarnate  
-Immortality | Over a thousand years, can be immortal | -Huli Jing (fox spirit/faery)  
-Huxian (heavenly fox)  
-Jiwei hu (fox w/nine tails)  
-Laohu (an aged fox) | Yes | Uses a human skull | Red  
White  
Black  
Gold/silver (only for foxes of a great age) | Dogs  
The rising of the sun (in some stories, they can only take human form during the day) | The number of tails increases with age | 1-9  
-In the wild  
-People’s homes  
-Human dwellings of their own (they live and act like humans in these homes) | -In the wild  
-People’s homes  
-Graveyard |
| How to tell apart | -Transformation may be incomplete  
- Barking dog  
- Reflection | -Transformation may be incomplete  
- Barking dog  
- Reflection | -One can just tell  
- See through glamour  
- Dogs  
- Taking off clothes |
| Demonic Deeds | - Seduction  
- Making fools of people  
- Possession  
- Giving partially fake gifts (money turning to leaves, etc.)  
- Stealing life-force | - Seduction  
- Stealing life-force  
- Deception/playing tricks | - Eating people and livestock in a horrific manner  
- Sucking blood  
- Seduction |
| Angelic Aid/Good Deeds | - Saving people from calamity (bandits, falls)  
- Announcing good luck  
- Being faithful to human spouse  
- Personal sacrifice (sometimes dying in a human’s place)  
- Gifts (material items, wisdom, pregnancy for a barren woman, etc.) | - Being faithful to human spouse  
- Becoming a heavenly fox through the path of religion  
- Helping to find lost documents  
- Gifts (Immortality, material items, etc.) | None |
| Ambiguous Acts | - Revenge for a wrong made against it (Arson, murder, possession, etc.)  
- Dream appearances | - Revenge for a wrong made against it  
- Dream appearances | None |
| Offerings made to Fox? | Yes - fried tofu (abura-age/oage, red beans and rice, etc.) | No | No |
| Expressions | “The fox’s wedding”: Rain while the sun shines  
“Kitsune-bi”: fox-fire. Will o’ the wisp.  
Calling someone a fox is calling a person a prostitute | Calling someone a fox is calling a person a prostitute | To call someone a fox is like calling someone a fox in America. |
| Origins of Legend | - Came over from China in the 7th century | - 324 A.D., Kuo Pu and Pu Songling (1766) | - Came over from China |
| How to Become Immortal | - Doing good deeds  
- Already being a myoubu  
- Stealing the life-force of men | Being religious and good  
Stealing the life-force of men | Eating people |
THE TYGER

By William Blake

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art.
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?
And now:
**The Youko: Parody of William Blake’s ‘The Tyger’**

Youko! Youko! Eyes aglow
In deep forests white with snow
What immortal god of east
Could birth this all-entrancing beast?

In the cursed homes you dwelt
You played tricks to make men melt.
For what strange purpose did you play?
Why did you lead them all astray?

And what message, now I dare pray
Did good Inari wish conveyed?
And when your vengeance was complete
Did he reward you with a treat?

What’s the motive? What’s your game?
Do you feel any shame?
How’d you do it? What cruel traps
Did you use for man’s collapse?

When the gods descended here,
Creating islands with their spear,
Did they smile their skill to see?
Did they who made the dog make thee?

Youko! Youko! Eyes aglow
In deep forests white with snow
What immortal god of east
Could birth this all-entrancing beast?
A crowd of people gathers around a fox sitting in front of the gate of a shrine. They have selected a panel to ask the fox questions. The rest will remain in the back of the crowd, listening.

I see that there is some confusion over my nature. Humans have so many questions. Well, I am here to answer them. You shall be confused no more, mortal.

I am sure you are all horrified over the idea of me possessing someone. But I am not, as you believe, a spawn of Satan that will cause you to do evil. Inari, no! You have it all wrong. There are only three main reasons for fox possession—food, message delivery, and revenge.

Now, you may think it silly that we possess people to get food. But sometimes we get desperate, you know? It might be our only way, especially if we grow too old to hunt. Humans steal food when desperate, don’t they?

As for message delivery, divine foxes, or myoubu as they are called, are servants of Inari. Sometimes Inari wants us foxes to tell you something. And I would imagine that seeing a talking fox would make you drop dead of a heart attack or make you think that you need a good psychologist. So we possess people in order to get you people to pay attention better.

Basically, it comes down to this: we do what we have to do.

Foxes like me take revenge when we are wronged. I believe the saying you humans use is “an eye for an eye.” If someone shoots us, we might inflict the same wound on you, but in a different way. Possession is one of those ways. If you shot me in the leg, I might possess you, and then you wouldn’t be able to walk either! It would serve you right.

What? You want me to go back to the whole possession thing? Oh, of course. You want to know what happens if I possess you. Well, you’d start acting like a fox, of course! Barking, walking on all fours, and eating foods we like. Like red beans and rice, or fried tofu. If I didn’t like you, I’d probably make you act rudely, too. But if you happened to be illiterate, you’d be able to read. We foxes are smart, you know. And of course I would talk through you, and you’d be able to hear me. Understand now? Good.

Back to revenge. Let’s say you hurt my cub. I guarantee you that your own child would not be safe. I would want you to feel my pain. If you were really nasty to me, I’d burn down your house. We don’t like being tortured for sport, and without provocation! Revenge is just a way of protecting ourselves, and to teach humans a lesson.

Oh, you want to know what would happen if you were nice, if you did me a favor? Then I’d do you a favor in return, or give you a gift. I might protect you from harm—like a fall or bandits, or give you wisdom, or tell you of good luck. I might give you that good luck, too.

Some foxes have even gone out of their way to return a favor. According to a story, a man saved a cub’s life. In return, when the man’s child got sick and needed medicine made from a fox’s liver, the foxes gave the man their cub’s liver. The man was unwilling to kill a fox, and they were moved, you see. One vixen gave her life for the man she loved.
Hmm? What about material gifts? We don’t really give material gifts. Humans are greedy! They always want something tangible, but the best gifts aren’t! Humans are so focused on the material world, that they can’t see the things that really matter. So if you get money from us, it’ll be leaves under a spell. Your new clothes would really be made of straw. Consider it a lesson in being perceptive, and realizing that things, and even people, are not always what you think they are.

I suppose you want to know why we play all these tricks, like creating illusions, giving you fake gifts, and making fools out of you. Well, we think humans are too boastful. They have too much pride, and think that they’re better than every other species on Earth. We’re just trying to give you lessons in humility. If you think you can outsmart us, we’ll prove you wrong. Remember, we’re watching you!

We’ll play tricks to marry a human, too. Vixens transform into women to seduce men. I know, now you’re thinking that all vixens are prostitutes and whores. Not so! Many vixens stay with their human husbands. Even when they insist on having those horrid dogs around.

And do you really expect us not to have one-night stands when you have them, too? Don’t hold foxes to your standards if you don’t hold yourselves to them.

But you see, it’s not all about the pleasure of sex! Oh, no. Foxes are full of yin energy, the energy of the night, the feminine energy. Human men are full of yang energy. To advance spiritually, foxes need both yang and yin, and a way to get yang happens to be sex. The man gets a pleasurable experience and the fox rises in spiritual rank. There are no material items involved. So don’t be so quick to judge!

How do male foxes get their yang? Silly! They’re already male, so they already have yang!

You want to know about my hoju-no-tama, eh? Well, this is a special jewel or ball that we carry in our mouth or our tail. It contains some of our power, though what power is unknown. A man stole one once, and blackmailed the fox into becoming his protector. The fox kept its word, and saved him from bandits.

I wouldn’t recommend trying to steal it, though. You might fail, and then you would find yourself in trouble.

And no, I don’t know why we love fried tofu so much, or eat red beans and rice when we possess people. We just do.

That ends this session. I hope it proved enlightening. Please leave your donations of fried tofu on the ground.

The people leave their offerings to the fox. The fox picks up the food with its mouth and some of its tails, and vanishes, leaving the crowd in awe of its powers.
**Possessed**

The golden eyes  
The silver pelt  
I am entranced  
By your charms.

Create me an illusion  
A world in which  
We make love  
Until the dawn.

I will lose  
All my senses  
Possessed  
By your charms

I will wake up  
From the dream  
Confused and yet  
Exhilarated.
Fox Possesses Local Woman
By Youtsu Kiko

Fox possession. Many think it only happens in fairy tales. However, many would argue that it is a real and terrifying occurrence. In fact, there are claims that it happened recently to a woman right here in our little town.

Mrs. Buno Netsuko, a respected woman and owner of the teahouse on Hoshitama Road, says she heard a strange noise outside her house on the night of April 12th. When she went outside to see what it was, she saw that it was a red fox, out hunting for food. A dog belonging to her neighbors began to bark and growl at the fox, startling the creature. Mrs. Buno states that “it vanished like mist once it heard the dog.” She was unaware that the fox had fled into her body, though she did feel a funny sensation in her right breast.

It wasn’t long before her husband and her customers began to notice that Mrs. Buno was acting strangely. She seemed very irritable, and demanded that red beans and rice be served to her. And for meals, she would only cook “fox foods” with abura-age (fried tofu) in them—Inari-zushi, kitsune-udon, and the like.

“At first I thought she was pregnant,” Mr. Buno says. “But all the tests came back negative.”

Her odd behavior didn’t stop there. Her customers report that she became very unladylike. Sometimes she walked around on all fours, barking “Kon! Kon!” like a fox. Soon, she began to lose business, especially when she was seen spitting into an elderly man’s tea.

Not only was she losing money, she began to pay her bills in leaves instead of yen. Naturally, her husband was very concerned. He decided to take her to a friend of his, the Inari priest of the Myoubu Hill Temple.

The priest, the esteemed Onari Korou, determined that Mrs. Buno was indeed possessed by a fox. This fox spoke to him through Mrs. Buno, telling him that it was not just out of fear of the dog that it took up residence in her body. It had in fact wanted to make Mrs. Buno lose face. Then after her ruination, it had planned to leave her body and transform into a woman so it could seduce her husband. When the priest asked for a motive, it was that, according to him, “the fox was angry that Mrs. Buno had not kept her promise to make offerings to it.”

When asked about this, Mrs. Buno confessed that it was true. A fox had once saved her from a fall as she was walking home from the market. In return, she promised that she would make an offering of fried tofu and tea to it every week at the Inari shrine. However, she had not been doing so, as she believed that it had all been a dream, and the fox had not really rescued her.

“And even if I wanted to believe,” Mrs. Buno remarked, “I thought that people would surely think I had lost my wits”.

The fox left once the priest assured the fox that the offerings would be made without fail. Indeed, Mrs. Buno intends to fulfill her promise, in hopes that the fox will be appeased and no longer cause trouble.

She will begin making offerings this week, she says.

So, the next time you run into a fox, make sure to treat it with respect. For if you don’t, disaster will certainly strike you.
What am I going to do? Oh gods I think it’s possessed me I’m not myself anymore. The fox the fox it’s taken over me I need some help I can’t stop myself the red beans and rice they taste so good I can’t stop eating them now I’m walking around on all fours and barking why am I doing this somebody stop it oh gods please someone stop it what does it want I hope it leaves soon now the priest is coming I feel it taking over again and

The food was good, it was very good; I think I’m full now. Maybe I should leave, I think they’re going to force me to leave but I kind of like this place and it’s much better than being outside. I like the woman’s husband but I don’t think he likes me after what I’ve done to his wife so I guess I’d better be going. Oh wait, who is that man, what is he going to do? Oh it hurts, it hurts; I’m coming out now before they kill me, back to the den where it’s safe.
Once upon a time, long ago, there lived a young lord by the name of Toshirou. He was famed throughout the land for being the most handsome and charming among all the lords.

Now he was a studious young man, a scholar, and paid no heed to superstition. So when gossip spread in the court about foxes’ tricks, he scoffed at the tales.

“Be careful,” one of the ladies warned, shaking a finger at him. “The foxes love to make fools of skeptics like you.”

“Surely no fox can make a fool of me,” Toshirou replied. “I am a well-learned man.”

A few days later, the young lord decided to take a walk near the forest in order to meditate on nature. All of a sudden, a fox crossed his path. The creature stopped and looked up at him. Its staring unnerved Toshirou, and he suddenly became frightened.

“Begone, you vermin!” he shouted, taking out his sword.

The fox dashed off, and Toshirou continued on his way. Some time later, as he strolled along the path, he saw a young woman in a red kimono coming towards him. She appeared to be of age.

“Hello there, miss. Why, you are walking alone! Pray, let me be your escort,” he said, striding up to her.

“I would be honored, sir,” the girl replied, smiling. “My home is not far from here, and I decided to take a shortcut through the woods, forgetting its dangers.”

As Toshirou journeyed with her to her home, he noticed that her eyes were a remarkable golden hue. He had never seen anyone with eyes this color before, and he felt compelled to comment on them.

“My, you have such beautiful eyes!” he remarked. “They are such an unusual color!”

The girl’s cheeks turned slightly red. “You are too kind. The color runs in my family.”

After a short while, they reached the girl’s house, located on the other side of the woods, at its edge.

“You must come inside and meet my parents, sir,” she said as she approached the door. “They will want to thank you for your honorable deed.”

Though Toshirou had promised to return home by sundown, he could not say no to her. All he could think about was her charm and beauty.

The girl’s parents came out of the house to greet their daughter, and upon spotting Toshirou, invited him inside. Now that the request had been made again, he decided that he must stay for a while.

The parents treated him to a feast, complete with sake. During the meal, they talked of their daughter and how they were looking to marry her to a respectable man.

“Only a lord such as myself would make a good match for her,” Toshirou said. “She is a fine lady, and deserves nothing less. I will take your daughter’s hand in marriage.”

“Then you shall have her,” the girl’s father said. “Here, have some more sake! A toast!”
Soon Toshirou began to feel drowsy from the food and wine. The whole world seemed to him a dream. Coins, spilling out from a small purse on the table now looked to him like leaves.

*Perhaps I drank too much,* he thought. *I must be seeing things.*

The woman of remarkable beauty began to change. Her face—was it becoming hairy? Toshirou gasped. It couldn’t be! He had been possessed by her charms, and now he was beginning to see her true shape.

He struggled to keep his eyes open, so he could get a better look at his new bride. But sleep overtook him, and he missed his chance to find out if it was all in his head, an illusion brought on by too much sake.

When he woke up, he found himself sitting in the grass, near a foxes’ den. Light rain was falling, but the sun was still shining—the foxes’ wedding.

Toshirou, confused and with a terrible headache, tried to sort out what had happened. He slowly stood up, and looked around for the mansion, but it was gone. Near the fox den, he noticed a tattered sack with leaves spilling out from it.

A golden-eyed vixen with a red pelt emerged from the den, and picked up the sack with her mouth. Toshirou staggered back. The ladies at the court had been right after all! His reputation would surely be ruined after this.

He was never seen at the court again.
Myoubu

Inari’s loyal servant,
Messenger.
White-furred angel,
Protector.

In a hall of reflective crystal,
In a dream,
I stared up in awe at you.

My muse, my inspiration.
My guardian spirit.

Please be with me
Always.
Inari-sama, thank you for sending your myoubu to save me. I would surely have died otherwise. I thought that man was really going to kill me. I was so frightened!

But you sent your white fox to save me, that beautiful white-furred angel, to confuse him and chase him away. I am forever in your gratitude. From now on I will make offerings to you and that myoubu.

I know it wasn’t a dream, because it left some of its fur on my carpet. I put it in a little box and made a little shrine. I hope that’s all right.

I did dream of it, though. It told me it would keep protecting me. I knew feeding that red fox the other day would certainly come back to me. But I am still in awe.

Inari-sama, what wonderful miracles you work!
THE WOMAN AND THE FOX

Once upon a time, there lived a young woman named Ainari who desperately longed for a husband. She went to the Inari shrine daily, making offerings of fried tofu, favorite food of the foxes, to the god and his messengers. The torii gates had been painted in the old days, a brilliant red color, and fox statues flanked each side of the shrine, made of stone. One had a scroll in its mouth, the other a key. Both held a wish-granting jewel. As Ainari approached the shrine, she would clap three times and ring the bell before praying, making sure her hands were clean beforehand. She hoped the god would hear her prayers for a husband. It was spring now, and the sun blessed the people and plants with warmth. The cherry blossoms had begun to bloom, and the pink petals produced a more pleasing rain than the ones the clouds had been bringing. One day as she prayed, she proclaimed:

“I would marry anyone that Your Augustness would send, even if it is a fox! Yes, even if you were to send one of your wise messengers to me for my husband, I would be happy!”

She sighed heavily when no visible sign was given that her prayer would be answered. However, she tried to remain hopeful. As she walked down the path on her way home, her long black hair cloaking her shoulders, something ran past her and jumped into the bushes. From seeing its tail as it jumped, she concluded that the animal was a red fox. This she took to be her auspicious sign, but she wondered if she had not made her last prayer in haste. Shaking her head, she told herself that such an idea was ridiculous. People did not marry animals, and besides, foxes usually transformed themselves into women, not men.

The sun began to set, painting the sky with a vibrant pink color. Marveling at its beauty was bittersweet for her, for she knew that it was not good to be walking home alone in the dark. Oh, why hadn’t she brought someone with her? Why had her parents let her go alone? She
shuddered as she thought of all the wild animals and lustful men, drunk and hoping for quick pleasure, that could prey upon her at any second. She’d heard stories of women walking alone and being assaulted by such ruffians.

All of a sudden, the sound of footsteps could be heard, ones that were not her own, and she quickened her pace, hoping that the other person would not approach her. How her heart nearly stopped when a young man emerged and walked swiftly up to her! He had a fair, round face, and unremarkable brown eyes. As for his clothes, they showed him to be of middle rank. In short, he was someone that one might pass by on the road and never remember, or even bother to notice, for that matter.

“Hey, what are you doing out here at this time? Let me walk you home,” he offered, his words coming out like a person walking through slush on a winter day.

Ainari frowned. She could smell a faint hint of sake on the man’s breath, and his gait was unsteady.

“No thank you, sir. I’ll be fine,” she replied, continuing on her way. But the man came around in front of her, and grabbed her wrist.

“Aw, come on. Don’t you want a fine man like me for a husband? You’ll live well.”

“No! Let go!” Ainari struggled, trying to wrench her wrist free.

“Wrong answer! Now I’ll have to show you what a good lover I can be!”

Before the drunken man could push her down, however, a fox came up from the direction of the shrine with a blazing torch in its mouth, and set fire to his trousers.

“Yow!” the man yelped, letting go of Ainari’s wrist and rolling on the ground to try and put out the fire. While he was doing this, Ainari ran as fast as she could home. The fox ran by her side, the torch in its mouth lighting the path. When the young woman reached the door, she
bowed to the fox in gratitude, and then disappeared inside the house. The fox vanished with its torch.

Later that night, a thunderstorm began a war with the sky and the earth, rain hammering the ground as thunder and lightning went off like heavenly cannons. As Ainari and her parents readied for bed, there came a loud knock at the door.

A different young man than the one before stood there, holding a lantern. He wore a red cloak and a pile of leaves on his head for a hat, but they did nothing to shield him from the rain, as he might have hoped. In fact, it put the family in mind of the transformation methods of supernatural creatures.

“Do you think he’s been bewitched?” Ainari’s mother whispered.

“The fellow’s probably been out drinking,” the father suggested.

“Perhaps we should let him in. If he’s bewitched, we can send for a priest, or a doctor if he’s had too much to drink,” Ainari said. There was something about the man’s face, something she couldn’t place. That shape, those eyes that looked almost golden, gave her the impression that she was in the presence of something more than human. He gave her a slight smile, and it enchanted her. It made him seem all the more mysterious, as if they shared a secret that she had forgotten.

Her parents nodded. “It isn’t good karma to leave someone standing in the rain.” And so they allowed the man to enter.

“Thank you,” the stranger said as he walked hastily into the house, shivering. He took off his wet cloak, and towels were brought to dry him off. The leaves fell to the floor as he shook his hair in attempt to dry it.
“I’ll make you some tea. It will help warm you up,” Ainari said, wrinkling her nose at the stench the stranger had brought in with him. It reminded her of a wet animal. “By the way, have you lost your dog?”

“No, but I had the misfortune to run across an unfriendly stray earlier,” he replied. “It gave me quite a scare. I thought it had been bewitched, the way it was acting.”

“Here, have a seat,” Ainari’s mother patted a sitting cushion at a low table.

The stranger hesitated. “But I am still not completely dry.”

“It is an inexpensive cushion. Please, I insist.”

Hesitantly, he sat down, and took a sip of the tea from the cup that Ainari set in front of him. He noticed the way she was wrinkling her nose.

“Forgive me for the smell. Once I’m dry, I am sure it will go away.”

“Perhaps I should go light some incense to clear the air of it,” she suggested.

“I’d rather you didn’t. I have an allergy to many types of incense, and it causes such a terrible cough.”

Ainari thought a minute. “I know. I’ll cook you some food. You must be hungry. And it will improve the smell.” She had noticed some odd characteristics about this man, and decided to cook up a plan along with the food.

It all added up. He had to be a supernatural being of some sort. If I make an array of foods that certain creatures like, and see which ones he eats, then I will know what he is! I know he cannot be human. No human smells like that, and everyone knows that incense drives away spirits.

She laid before him many different dishes, and watched carefully, all the while making conversation and eating some food herself.
The stranger avoided the sushi with cucumbers, and wouldn’t touch the fried bits of leftover tempura batter. Well, that was a bit of an exaggeration. He did try everything, out of adherence to etiquette.

He took up the bowl of thick, udon noodles. Between the long white strands were bits of fried tofu, fish sausage, and other ingredients. He might have devoured the bowl if he hadn’t noticed a particular kind of sushi.

Ainari had to stifle the urge to laugh. This was almost too funny.

“You look tired. Why don’t you stay the night?” she offered.

“I’m afraid I cannot. I have matters to attend to in the morning, but thank you for your hospitality, miss.” His meal finished, the young man stood up to leave.

“But you must stay! It is still raining, and you will meet death if you venture out again,” Ainari pressed.

“Our daughter is right. Come, we will have a servant prepare a room for you, sir,” Ainari’s father said in a tone that ended all discussion on the matter.

“All right. But I must leave in the morning,” their guest insisted. “Even if it is still raining.”

Soon, it was time for everyone to turn in. Lamps were put out, things were put away, and futons were spread out onto the floor.

Ainari had trouble falling asleep. She had to confirm her suspicions, but that would require waking up very early, before the stranger left. What if she overslept, and was too late? Tossing and turning in bed, she eventually gave into her heavy eyes’ plea, and let herself be led into slumber.
She awoke after a dreamless sleep, yawning. Quietly, she put on her slippers and tiptoed down the hall to her guest’s room. It was just after sunrise. Carefully, she opened the sliding paper door, and peeked into the room. What she saw amazed her, but she was not surprised.

A red fox lay in the futon of the guest’s room. Its ears perked up, and appeared startled when it noticed Ainari, leaping out of bed. But rather than dashing out of the house, it stared at her as if to say, You knew all along, didn’t you? Ainari gave a nod. There was an unspoken communication between them, a sort of link in their minds. Was this fox the god Inari himself?

I was sent here to answer your prayers, miss, but how can we live as husband and wife, with you being human, and me being a fox? You would not wish to live only in a world of shadow, only coming out at night.

What if one of us became like the other? I could become a fox, or you could become a human. Think of it. You could be a real human. Or, I could live in your world, and achieve eternal life like so many humans desire. And I would be eternally happy, with you, Ainari suggested.

But you barely know me, miss. How can you be so sure you will be happy with me? The fox seemed to sigh, its eyes downcast.

Let us get to know each other, then. I have waited so long for my prayers of a husband to be answered. If you are the answer to my prayers, I am sure you will not disappoint. Let us go to the Inari shrine together, and we will ask him what is best. I am willing to spend my life and share my love with you, even if I have to change. Somehow, things had to work out. The gods, though they must have a sense of humor, must have an answer to this problem. She was willing to do anything for love. Whatever it took, she would do it.
The fox smiled. *That is what I needed to hear*. He stood on his hind legs, and once again began to take human form. However, this form was different. He became a striking figure with an ethereal glow, like the moon, and his humble garb became royal robes, complete with the crown of an Emperor.

Ainari rubbed her eyes and did a double take. “How?” she asked.

“I am not just a fox, miss. I am an incarnation of the god Inari. You have been devoted to my service for many years, and I began to develop affection for you. But I had to test you first, to see if you could love someone despite hard circumstances. I also wanted to see if you were clever enough to see through my disguise. Through my power, I can indeed make you immortal, so we may live together.”

The surprise on Ainari’s face could be seen as clear as a reflection in pristine water. “You mean…I would be…”

“You would be able to take any form you wished, including that of a fox, and be able to ascend to Heaven as a goddess.”

Ainari bowed low. “My lord, I am not worthy of such an honor.”

Inari smiled. “You need not bow to me, my bride-to-be. Come, we will share the news with your parents.” He took her hand, and led her into the dining room, where breakfast was being served.

Ainari’s parents bowed low before the god, but again he told them to rise. “Your daughter is to be my bride,” he said. “I should bow to you, now that you will be my in-laws.”

“I have no doubts that you will take care of our daughter my lord,” Ainari’s father replied.

“I could have not prayed for a better son-in-law,” her mother added.
The wedding would take place the following month, with both humans and foxes in attendance. Even some of the other gods descended from Heaven to come to the wedding. Thus, the event was rather large. Thankfully, there was no lack of refreshments, and plenty of room. The wedding cake featured a pair of two white foxes on top of a cloud of white icing, and wedding gifts had been sent by the Emperor himself. The gods gave their blessings on the new couple and Ainari’s family. Prosperous would they be for a thousand generations.

At the end of the ceremony, the two ascended into Heaven. Ainari’s parents bid her farewell, tears in their eyes, a mix of joy for their daughter and sadness that she was leaving.

“Don’t worry. We’ll come to visit,” Ainari reassured them. “I won’t forget!” She waved from the cloud that appeared under her and her husband’s feet, hovering off of the ground.

A light rain began to fall, with the sun still shining. The cloud rose up, and eventually disappeared, but a rainbow, like a bridge, came down in its place. The guests began to dance and sing.

“Oh, the rain came down while the sun was out, and the foxes had their wedding...”
A FIELD GUIDE TO CHINESE FOX SPIRITS

The Asian fox legends began in China. Kuo Pu (324 A.D.) and Pu Songling (1766) are responsible for shaping the characteristics of the Chinese fox spirit/faery, or Huli Jing. The huli jing can take the form of a person at night. They live in their own dwelling, such as a mansion, that only appears at night. In these homes, they will live like humans, talking in human speech and partaking of human fare, such as wine. However, the food and drink they have may not be what humans are used to, and in fact they may taste even better. The huli jing can become either a beautiful woman or a handsome man, unlike the Japanese and Korean stories in which the fox usually transforms into a woman. They use a human skull to transform. When they have sex with a human, they gain yang or life-force, and advance spiritually.

Besides transforming and illusions, the huli jing can change its size, become mist-like, and disappear and reappear. They are also very wise, and will share their wisdom, if humans will follow their instructions. Thus they are like scholars, or professors. Foxes will also share their immortality, but this gift may be a curse. The fox will achieve heavenly bliss upon death, but the human will tire of endless life.

The huli jing takes revenge for wrongs done against it. In one story, a vixen in the guise of a woman was raped, and in revenge, she committed arson against the rapists.

Weaknesses of the huli jing include dogs and the rising of the sun, for during the day, they lose their human shape.

Huli jing have different names depending on their age and power. A heavenly or immortal fox is called a Huxian. A nine-tailed fox is a Jiuwei Hu. An aged fox is a Laohu. The fox’s number of tails depends on their age, and they grow more powerful as they age. Once they are old enough to have nine tails, which is a thousand years of age, they will become a Huxian and gain the ability to communicate with the heavens. The huli jing can become a Huxian through religion as well. One story seems to imply Daoism or Buddhism.

Foxes were worshiped to some extent in China. Shrines were built to them, and it was believed that they helped people to find lost papers. But calling someone a fox today is to call them a prostitute.

Chinese foxes, thus, are ambiguous creatures, of a different nature than humans, but not exactly evil. Their legends spread to Japan, where they seemed to take on more evil qualities, and also more godly qualities. Korea’s version of the fox spirit is wholly evil. The
Chinese fox spirit is the faery of Asia, the eastern version of the Celtic faery folk, a trickster yet a wise creature concerned with its own spirituality.
Transformation and Deception

Lao Li’s Wife

One night, during a period of heavy rain, a man named Lao Li decided to seek asylum in a mansion. He was just a poor beggar, but hoped that the mansion’s occupants would be kind and let him in.

He knocked on the door. Once. Twice. Finally, someone opened the door—a handsome man with slanted golden eyes. A woman of remarkable beauty stood behind him, and Lao Li thought she possessed the charm of a goddess.

“Come in, stranger, and take your fill of whatever you see on the table. We have just finished feasting, and we have plenty leftover,” the woman said.

Lao Li, moved by the woman’s generosity, accepted the invitation. The food and wine tasted wonderfully, and soon he found himself getting drowsy from the drink. All the while, the man and the woman looked on. They smiled at each other.

“You will make a suitable husband for me,” the woman said. “Come, let us make love.”

Nodding and grinning, Lao Li agreed. Soon after, he fell asleep, exhausted from the love-making. He felt as if he’d given his yang, his very life force.

When Lao Li awoke, he found himself on the ground near a fox den and a graveyard. A vixen lay on his lap.
Memoir of an Immortal

I have lived for hundreds of years. I inhabit the mansion my dear wife gave me. It has been 200 years since she left this world and ascended to the heavens through the grace of the Buddha. Today is the anniversary of our marriage.

My wife was famed for her beauty, but only at night could she be seen, for she had a special condition, and a sleeping pattern that required her to rest during the day.

She left me only one child, who passed the Imperial Examinations and brought honor to my name. He was said to be the most brilliant man in the country. I believe he inherited my wife's wisdom.

You see, my wife was a fox faery, a huli jing. She died giving birth to our son. Her immortality passed to me, for as I gave her yang, she gave me yin.

Normally, she would not have died in childbirth. I believe she willingly gave up her endless life. After living for so long, I can see why. Her generous gift has become a burden. I long for eternal rest, but I will forever be denied.

It is an odd thing, to see your son die before you. I may live to see all my descendants. And how the world has changed! I cannot keep up with the times.

As I write this, I feel my hands becoming paw-like. The sun is rising, and I will soon become as my wife did during the day—an ordinary fox, living in a den where my mansion stands at night.

I hold the brush in my mouth now, and I think it is time for me to sleep. I have been up all night, writing these memoirs. But who would read the writings of a man like me?
ONE OF US

Once upon a time, there was a man named Lao Wang who wished to discover the secret of immortality. His friends and family warned him against prying too much into that which was privy only to the gods, saying that they would surely punish him. However, much of his time was spent concocting various elixirs which he thought would prolong his life.

One day, as Lao Wang was out picking herbs for his latest elixir, he spotted an old fox sniffing the ground. The fox gobbled up the very herb that Lao Wang had been gathering and planning to include in his new formula. Angry, he chased the fox off, shouting and threatening it with a large stick.

The next day, Lao Wang went out to a different spot in the forest to procure ingredients. However, he was surprised to see the fox again eating the herbs and roots he sought to gather. This time, his efforts to scare it off failed. Frustrated, he stomped back home with his paltry stock of ingredients, and mixed up the potion, resulting in a lilac colored liquid. The process of making the mixture calmed him down, and he drank it down as if it were tea.

“Does it taste good?” his wife asked. “Why don’t you let me taste some?”

“Aha! So you do believe in my skills! You want it for yourself, don’t you? You want to steal my secrets! Well, I won’t tell you a thing!” Lao Wang snapped.

His wife sighed. “I don’t want the formula. It smells nice. I thought perhaps we could sell it as a new kind of tea with miraculous health benefits. It would be a very lucrative business.”

“No! I won’t let anyone else drink it! I don’t want everyone to be immortal, just me!” Lao Wang stubbornly protested. He was in one of his cantankerous moods.

“You really believe it will give you eternal life? Come on, now. No one can discover the secret of the gods. Not even our great Emperor can live forever.”
“Hmph. You’ll see. One day you will be a wrinkled old woman, and I will remain as fresh and new as a tree in spring.”

His wife said nothing as she continued to eat her dinner.

Several days later, Lao Wang discovered that there was a new spring in his step. He felt as if ten years had been taken off of him. Giving a shout of happiness, he jumped up in the air. The elixir was working!

Then he had what he thought was a brilliant idea. That old fox was eating the same things that he was gathering for his elixir. If he followed that fox and observed what it was eating, he would have the perfect formula.

So the next day, he hid in the bushes, waiting for the fox to arrive. Sure enough, the fox emerged from behind a tree, and began eating certain flowers, herbs, and plants. However, it let its usual prey of rabbits and mice pass by. Lao Wang also noted that it was discriminate about the plants of which it partook. As he wrote the names of the fox’s diet down, he was perplexed. Why had the fox taken to this kind of fare? Why didn’t it eat any meat? Was it a practicing Buddhist monk? The thought was absurd, and Lao Wang laughed it away. Then he remembered his theory, and the old legends of foxes that seemed to live forever. Perhaps the fox really had stumbled upon the secret of everlasting life. Though aged with silvery-gray fur, the fox was cavorting and jumping around as playfully as a young cub. He wished he could talk with it and ask it some questions. He had heard stories of foxes taking human form at night, something that the townsfolk often gossiped about in hushed tones. If he followed the fox home, maybe he could find out if the stories were true, and strike up a conversation with his vulpine helper.

Lao Wang followed the fox as it moved through the woods. Eventually, the fox went into a dilapidated building that looked as if it could crumble to ashes at any minute. The grass was
high and thick, and weeds thrived. Lao Wang was puzzled. If the fox did turn into a human, how could it live in a place like this?

His answer came at moonrise. The crumbling building, in the blink of an eye, seemed to rebuild itself into a stunning mansion, vividly painted with an array of stunning colors—crimson, viridian, gold; turquoise. The lamps were lit outside, and sounds of merriment came from inside. Lao Wang could smell a wondrous feast coming from an open window. He rubbed his eyes. Was he dreaming? Did the elixir make him hallucinate? No, this was real, he was sure of it. There was no way a dream or a hallucination could incorporate all the senses like this!

Tentatively, he walked up and knocked on the door. A young man dressed in servant’s clothing answered the door. Flecks of gold could be seen in his slanted brown eyes. “Ah, there you are, sir! The master of the house has been expecting you! Please, come in!”

Lao Wang furrowed his eyebrows. Expecting me? Why? Does the fox know what I came here for? He stepped into the house, and followed the servant down the hall to a room full of people. Just as he’d thought, there was a lavish banquet spread out on the table, with sparkling jeweled goblets filled with the finest wines and delicate porcelain dishes of the most delightful delicacies of haute cuisine. There were plates of steaming hot dumplings, bowls filled to the brim with delicious noodles, dim sum, hearty soups, and even whole roast chicken and duck, marinated with delicious herbs, spices, and sauces. Never before had Lao Wang been to such a high-class gathering. His talents had not yet brought him the wealth and prestige he and his wife desired, but here he was, right in the middle of what he’d been working so hard to achieve all his life.

The host, sitting at the head of the table, looked up at Lao Wang and smiled. “Come, sit down! Don’t be shy! Tonight, you are our honored guest!” The man sported a long silver beard
and, like the young man, had slanted eyes with flecks of gold in them. He wore a fine crimson robe with a pattern of gold and silver dragons, the symbol of an Emperor. Despite being old, he still seemed vibrant and cheery. He raised his glass of wine in a toast. “May all those who attend tonight enjoy good fortune, happiness, and long life. Now, we feast!”

The old woman beside the host, his wife, smiled at Lao Wang. With her long hair fashioned into a bun, and the lovely dress she wore, Lao Wang could picture how she might have looked when she was young. Usually old women wore duller colors, but she was dressed as a young lady in the prime of her life in a regal Han-style dress of yellow satin with a pattern of red flowers and green vines, as an unmarried maiden whose looks had been cruelly stolen by demons. “So tell me, how is your new elixir coming along?” she asked. “Is it working in the way you desire?”

Lao Wang felt a jolt course through his body. “Honored Lady, how did you come across this knowledge?” he stammered out.

“Why, all of us know about it. My husband has been working hard trying to lead you to the right ingredients,” she replied with an amused expression on her face.

“Well, um, yes, it is working quite well, but I think there’s something missing yet.” Lao Wang felt sweat trickle down his forehead, which he quickly wiped away with a cloth napkin. “So…you are…?”

“Yes, we are a family of foxes that have lived here for generations, the descendants of the famed Hu family,” the host answered. “Tonight we have invited you here to offer you a very special gift—the very thing that you seek.”

Lao Wang tried to get over the shock that held him paralyzed, and soon elation took over. He smiled eagerly. “You will tell me the secret of immortality?”
“Indeed. We will give you the last ingredient. Once you drink the completed elixir, you will become one of us, and be given powers and knowledge beyond your imagination, as well as eternal life.” The host leisurely took another sip of wine. He seemed to change, his beard becoming an ebony color, and the wrinkles on his face being erased like pencil lines. In a matter of minutes, he had become a handsome young man. His wife had undergone the same change, and she was now a woman of unrivaled beauty.

The offer tempted Lao Wang like a cat is tempted by a dangling string. However, something held him back. “What about my wife?” he asked.

“If she so wishes it, the offer will be extended to her as well. Tomorrow, we will invite her here to see you.”

“Tell me!” Lao Wang cried out. “What is the formula?”

The now young man grinned and leaned forward, whispering into Lao Wang’s ear. Lao Wang’s eyes went wide at the knowledge. “I must hurry and make a batch of the elixir! I must return home right away!” He stood up and started for the door at a pace that neared a run. Before he could leave, Lao Wang felt a hand on his shoulder. “There is no need. We have all the ingredients and equipment you need right here. Come and see.” The host led Lao Wang down the hall into another room. Everything necessary to mix up the elixir was there, as had been said.

“There is only one condition. You must tell no one this formula, not even at the promise of great wealth or power. If you tell anyone, even your wife, it will lose all of its power, and you will become old and die.”

Lao Wang nodded and set to work. After some time, just before sunrise, the elixir was complete, now the color of a sweet plum, and he drank it down like mother’s milk from one of the special jewel-encrusted silver goblets. Immediately, he felt a change within him. The lines on
his face disappeared, and his skin looked better than ever. Looking in the mirror, he found that he had regressed in age to his early twenties. He leapt up into the air. “It works! It works!” he exclaimed. “Eternal youth and life are mine!” But before his celebration was over, he gasped in horror. His hands were becoming furry and paw-like. Soon his entire body was covered in fur. His eyes became golden and more slanted. It was then that he realized that he was turning into a fox! The clothes slipped off his body as he changed.

“Yes, that is the price we must pay. At sunrise, we become foxes again.” The host, too, was reverting to a vulpine form.

It was then that Lao Wang truly realized the impact that this would have on his life. He would become a creature of the night, never free to mingle in human society. The fox-people and other such creatures would be his only companions. Then again, he would want for nothing. The foxes lived in luxury. Wasn’t that what he desired?

Lao Wang felt the uncontrollable urge to sleep, and so he did, right there in the laboratory. When he awoke, the sun was setting, and he was a man again. He composed a letter to his wife, telling her that he had gone on a long and perilous journey, and might die in the effort, to find the last component of his elixir. He urged her to find a new husband, one that was kind as well as rich. He could not bear the thought of allowing his wife to live the life that he was now fated to. She would never be happy this way. A few weeks later, he sent out a servant to tell his wife that he had died from a fall off a mountain.

As the years passed, Lao Wang resigned himself to his new lifestyle. He found a new wife in one of the daughters of the head of the family. He had acquired all the fine things in life—money, haute cuisine, fine clothes, the best wines, and servants at his command. The head
of the family retired after a few years, passing the title down to him. He kept his promise and never told anyone the secret of the elixir, for he feared the impact it would have on the world.

No one ever learned the truth about Lao Wang, but some people, late at night, swore they see him walking down the road with a beautiful young woman, and they still do to this very day. They say that there is sadness in his eyes as he gazes heavenward, wishing for the peace of Heaven that will never be his, regretting his foolish choice to seek immortality. Those who find it, or choose to live on as ghosts, are doomed to an existence in the shadows of the night, begging for the happiness and serenity that can only be achieved in the next world.
FLYING FOXES SURPRISE SAILORS, CRYPTOZOOLOGISTS INVESTIGATE
By Huyu Mei Hua

A strange phenomenon has been seen in the skies above the waters of the Far East. Chinese sailors report seeing groups of foxes flying east, possibly migrating the island country of Japan. According to the sailors, the foxes do not have any wings that would enable them to fly like birds, but they seem to possess a supernatural power that allows them to transport themselves in this manner. It is speculated that the foxes will stay in Japan, but others say that they will return to China; that they are taking a vacation of sorts.

“It would be interesting to study the migration patterns of the foxes,” professor and scientist Dr. Chang Qing said. “Do they make this trip every year? How many will stay in Japan? Will any of them return to China?”

An expert on East Asian myths and legends, Mr. Liu Feng, said that foxes have been flying from China to Japan for centuries.

“That is how the fox spirits came to Japan in the first place,” he explained. “The Japanese people say that during the Tang Dynasty, in the 7th century, the foxes came to their country by using their powers to fly.”

So what is the truth? Are foxes really flying over the ocean to Japan, or is this a clever lie to get attention? Cryptozoologists, those who investigate reports of supernatural sightings and attempt to find such creatures intend to find out. A team of American cryptozoologists are heading out onto the ocean to see for themselves. Until such experts come back with conclusive evidence that fox spirits do indeed exist, all one can do is speculate.

When asked to describe the foxes, a sailor, Mr. Wang Jun, had this to say:

“They were all different colors—red, grey, white, black, even silver and gold! Several of them had more than one tail. I saw a couple of them with nine tails. The nine-tailed ones, they’re powerful. I was afraid. I’m glad they’re going over to Japan!”

Several of the other sailors expressed the same sentiments, and corroborated Mr. Wang’s description. Fox spirits are said to bewitch people, transforming into humans and causing mischief or seducing men, sucking out their yang, or life force. However, there are stories of their good deeds, such as helping scholars pass their examinations and sharing their wisdom with humans. They are said to be very wise and have many powers such as omniscience and casting illusions. They are said to live like humans at night, transforming old, dilapidated houses into fabulous mansions and having a good time.

The fox spirits may have good reason to travel to Japan. They are seen as attendants and servants of the god Inari, and some people even worship the foxes themselves, giving offerings to them, such as fried tofu—supposedly the favorite food of the fox. There are many stories of fox spirits in Japan. Some focus on their misdeeds, while others on the good they do. The nature of fox spirits, then, can be compared to ours—not entirely good, but not entirely bad, either.

However, some people doubt the veracity of the sailors.

“Personally, I think they had too much to drink,” citizen Zhao Ping scoffed. “Flying foxes! Who would ever believe such a ridiculous story? Maybe they’re making it up to get attention.”
Dr. Charles Silver, one of the cryptozoologists, says he is excited at the prospect of proving that such foxes are real. “It would turn the scientific community on its head,” he remarked. “Discovering a new species would be remarkable. If they really do have powers, how do they work? Is it in their genes? The legends say they are capable of human speech. If they are that intelligent, maybe they could tell us themselves. But that intelligence might be our downfall—it would mean they would be able to hide from us easily. I’m excited, but I’m not certain of our finding anything. But we’re sure going to try!”

Dr. Silver did not reveal the methods that will be used to find the fox spirits. He believes that they need the element of surprise. However, he did issue a statement reassuring that the methods will be humane, and will not harm the creatures. “Our goal isn’t to kill them, or even capture them for study,” he said. “We want to observe and study them in a non-threatening manner.”

This paper will update this story as details unfold.
FIELD GUIDE TO KOREAN FOX SPIRITS

In Korea, the fox is an evil creature with no goodness in it. The most popular variety is the kumiho, or nine-tailed fox. Like the Chinese and Japanese fox, it transforms into a seductive woman using a human skull. But unlike its counterparts, it uses this ability to commit gruesome acts. They not only steal life-force, they eat humans and livestock. Sometimes they will eat a human in order to transform, or to attain life force. Kumiho also suck the blood from their victims, like vampires, and can create illusions.

There are several ways to expose the kumiho. A family member or friend of the person the fox has turned into will be able to tell that it is a kumiho in the guise of their loved one or comrade, and can see through the illusions. Apparently, the transformation is not always complete, for taking of the clothes of a disguised kumiho will also expose it—in more ways than one. It shares the Japanese and Chinese foxes’ weakness of dogs as well.

Similarities between the Korean fox and those of China and Japan include their powers, lifespan, immortality, human speech, and the relation of tail number to age. All three may dwell in graveyards, and in the homes of humans.

Calling a person a fox in Korea is the same as calling someone a fox in America—sexy, seductive, etc.

It is not recommended to go seeking the kumiho or Goo Mi Hoo, for it may be the last thing one ever does.
Dear Sachiko,

How are you? I am doing well. The weather is quite nice, isn’t it? The cherry blossoms are in bloom, and it has been sunny. It is much easier to find food now.

Today, as I was on my way to my den, I happened upon a Korean nine-tailed fox, a kumiho, that happened to be going the same way. Now, you remember how I met one of our Chinese sisters last month? She was so similar to us. But this fox, she startled me with how different she was. Let me explain.

The kumiho told me that in her country, she has attained much power by seducing and eating humans. Now, I can understand the seducing—we do this too. But to eat a human! Surely that is against the law of both heaven and earth. How can she talk of such a thing as if it is nothing? Not even for revenge would we perform such a detestable act.

These kumiho are evil through and through, and wholly selfish. I do not know what god allows them to become heavenly foxes after doing such things. Now, we may do some things that the humans call questionable, but our good deeds balance out our karma, do they not? We may be a bit selfish, but only for our survival and spiritual enhancement. The kumiho is a monster. I daresay she enjoys her barbaric acts! Indeed, she began to speak of the joys of sucking blood, and becoming a woman just to gain a meal of human flesh!

I saw the way she eats, too. Disgusting. Do Korean foxes have no manners? She ate ravenously, as if she had not eaten for days, and I know that was not that case, for her belly looked quite full already. I do hope she has not made a meal of humans here. That would tarnish our reputation! How dare she come here and cause trouble!

I do not think I shall visit Korea if I get the chance to travel. China would be better. I wonder what America would be like. I hear they have coyote legends similar to the legends about us.

I look forward to my visit to you tomorrow. I am eager to meet your new husband. Humans are so interesting, as well as amusing.

Yours truly,

Nariko
May 3rd

Dear Journal,

Japanese foxes sure are strange. They don’t know the pleasures of eating humans or sucking blood. In fact, they think kumiho like me are monsters for doing so. But if they would just try it, I’m sure they wouldn’t think that way. How dare they look down upon us! They have their methods for transformation, spiritual advancement, and gaining power, and so do we. Why are our methods bad just because they are different? I could easily call the kitsune a whore! But I won’t, because I’ve seduced many a man. And they were delicious, in more ways than one.

The kitsune I met seemed to think there was something wrong with the way I eat. I could tell by the way she was looking at me. I bet turning into a human so much has made her lose touch with her natural fox ways. She’s becoming like them! It makes me sick. But then, I wonder why transforming hasn’t made me like that as well. Maybe it’s because I don’t actually live with humans like kitsune do I don’t emulate them. Even stranger are those Chinese foxes, the huli jing. They actually live like humans during the night! And they like it! I get what I want, and then I drop my disguise. Why the foxes of other countries continue theirs throughout their lives, I’ll never know. But I think they like humans too much.

At least the kitsune and huli jing hate dogs, too. They’re such horrible creatures, chasing us and barking! I wish they would all drop dead. I’m going back to Korea today, before I get chased away by another one of them.

I wish I could transform all the way. Underneath this dress, my body’s still fox-like. All someone has to do is take it off, and they’ll know.

But not if they’re drunk. I’ll have to make sure I give my next victim lots of wine.

And how is it that people always seem to know when kumiho masquerade as their family? That always ruins the best of plans.

I’m so close to gaining more power! I can’t afford to have my plans ruined now. I just hope no one will see through my illusions. That would be a disaster, for I would surely be killed for my “crimes.”

In my opinion, humans are the evil ones, killing foxes just because they are trying to get what’s good for them.

One day, I hope foxes like me will run the world. Then everything would be perfect. No dogs, plenty of livestock and humans to feed upon, and nothing to stop us from becoming heavenly foxes.
Well, I’ve got to pack, so that’s all for now.

Sincerely Yours,

Miho
Kumiho

Nine-tailed horror
Who walks in
The graveyard,

Finishing a meal
Of human flesh.

Blood dripping down
Her lips, she smiles
With stained fangs

And licks the liquid
With her tongue.

Tails disappear,
A woman’s garb
Wraps around her
To conceal the fur
Of the demon.

Her visage,
The seductress,
The succubus.

Strolling up
To the house,
She prepares wine
And awaits
The husband.

She licks
Her crimson lips
With her tongue.
MYSTERIOUS CRIMES BAFFLE POLICE IN SMALL KOREAN TOWN: KUMIHO BLAMED FOR THEFT AND MURDER
By Go Min-Ho

A series of strange deaths and crimes that remain unsolved by the police have the locals turning to the supernatural for answers. Many have reported seeing a strange creature around the town graveyard, and they say it resembles a fox on two legs, wearing a traditional hanbok, a colorful garment consisting of a skirt called “chima” and a type of long-sleeved blouse called a “jeogori.” The creature, the people say, is a kumiho, a fox that transforms in order to devour humans.

But why is the kumiho being connected with the deaths of six people from two different families? The evidence at the crime scenes seems to suggest its involvement. The victims’ bodies were mutilated, and the liver and heart of each was removed. Several farm animals also had their livers taken out. The liver especially is said to be favored by the kumiho, because according to the legends, it is the organ that contains the energy that the beast seeks. This malicious creature is also thought to be responsible for the desecration of bodies in the cemetery, taking skulls and hearts to transform. In addition, hospitals have reported organs missing, organs that would have been donated to patients that desperately need them.

The people suspect that more than one kumiho is involved, due to the amount of crimes that have been committed. But if that is true, then why has only one alleged kumiho been spotted? Are the others hiding? Does only one venture out at a time, and are the townspeople seeing a different one each time? Perhaps we will never know, until one is caught and interrogated—if it can be interrogated. Local hunters have gone on a massive fox hunt, searching for the culprit, but only ordinary foxes have been found so far, and no hanbok has been found in the dens of the foxes that have been chased from their homes by the hunters, or in the local cemetery. However, if the kumiho continues its pattern, it may be caught in the act of trying to deceive a family. It is said that if one transforms into a family member, sometimes the other members of the family will be able to see through its illusion. And its transformation is never complete, like the kitsune of Japan and the huli jing of China. Under the hanbok will be the body of a fox, not of a beautiful woman or a handsome man.

In the meantime, townspeople are advised to be suspicious of any strangers, especially beautiful young women traveling at night, and to make sure to keep livestock guarded. Extra security has been placed around the hospitals and cemetery, and any suspected kumiho crimes are to be reported to the police. Though it is not advised to go looking under the dresses of women, there is one characteristic that the kumiho cannot hide: its nature. There will always be something fox-like about it, in the face and mannerisms. Is it any wonder that men are cautioned to beware of “foxy ladies?”
KUMIHO’S KEY

I am one of those rarely-heard-of creatures of the night, a nine-tailed horror that stalks the graveyard. I am the kumiho. My name is Hwa Young, a name befitting my beauty and power, my ability to live for centuries. My visage is that of the seductress, the succubus, licking my crimson lips with my tongue. With sparkling golden eyes, I seek out and mesmerize my prey with my charms. I’ve seduced many a man, and they were delicious, in more ways than one. Deception and temptation are my weapons against those who rule the world.

Humans are the evil ones. My victims got what they deserved, as did I. In the end, I hope we’re at the top of the food chain, with every dog eradicated from the world. How wonderful that would be! I can see it now: a banquet table of livers, in the finest porcelain bowls, and goblets full of that red liquid of life. We toast each other. The red drink dripping down our lips, we smile with stained fangs, licking the liquid with our tongues. No need to wear the disguise, no need to dress in human women’s garb, which conceals our fur. The gods bestow upon us the blessings of Heaven.

I think we have a long wait ahead of us before anything like that happens, especially in these wretched modern times. People have forgotten how to fear us. They scoff at the tales recorded so long ago. They send those who claim to see us to ‘professionals.’ Ha! How foolish. We must make them fear again. I thought it would be easier to prey on humans in these times, but apparently not. They’re still wise to us. I just saw today’s newspaper. Apparently, we are not as forgotten as I thought.

Recently, I’ve taken six people and a few farm animals with the help of some of my friends, who are also searching human buildings for delicacies. But now I fear the human security forces are getting some dogs to protect themselves. I hear their barks and growls outside,
patrolling the hospitals and other sources of food. This is most vexing. But with such an uproar, I can at least be satisfied with the fact that we are causing trouble for the humans. When they try to hunt us down, we must not run away like frightened little squirrels. No, we must fight back! If only there was some way to get more power. Some mystical item, perhaps, could do the trick. Ah, but I have been watching too much human television. There are so many examples of humans fighting creatures of the night with magical relics. Why can we not possess something like that? Humans put curses on each other. We could do the same. Maybe we can find something in a mummy’s tomb, or by invoking the power of other spirits to aid us. But for now, all we can do is feed on humans to gain more power. Their flesh gives us energy. It gives us strength. From it we gain the status of deity. But to feed on humans these days, we need more power. I hate vicious circles! Hmm. Perhaps it is not just mystical power we need, but the ability to use our skills to the maximum. We could go into politics or business, and take over from the inside! What an idea. I must share this with my friends. If we can succeed in this, the world will be ours….

THE NEXT DAY

My search for power has led me to a famous shrine in Japan. I will seek the help of the god of the foxes, Inari-sama. He is powerful, and the foxes are his messengers. Foxes are worshiped as gods here. Surely he will help me. I wash my face and hands to make myself ‘pure,’ then ring the bell three times. I await the god’s answer.

Ah! Here he appears before me. He comes to me in the form of a handsome fox, with an ethereal glow that makes his white fur seem silver. Even his eyes are shimmering silver, pools of mercury in their sockets.

“What do you seek of me?” he asks.
Though it hurts my dignity and pride to do so, I prostrate myself before him. “Oh, all-powerful Inari, give me the power to destroy the humans!”

“I cannot do that,” he replies. “If the humans were to be eradicated from this world, I would have no one to worship me.”

“But surely, you can at least give me something to help me overcome them? To create a world in which foxes rule?” I give my charm a try. This time it is not blood, but sweet syrup that coats my tongue.

“Seek elsewhere!” he commands. “You are a foul and wretched creature!”

“But I heard you were the god of foxes,” I protest.

“I serve only the interests of good foxes. I punish those who perform wicked deeds. Now be gone, before I decide to strike you down myself instead of letting the wheels of fate run you over,” He scowls at me, his long canine teeth bared.

“How dare you call yourself a god!” I shout as I dash from the shrine. I will board the next plane back to Korea!

By now, I am sure that the humans all have a dog in their home. I will have to move to another village.

**ONE MONTH LATER**

I think I have finally found what I am searching for! Down underground, sealed away for centuries, is a tome full of wicked spells. One of them contains the formula to create a magical key. At the temple in Japan, I noticed statues of foxes with keys in their mouths. So I did some research. How marvelous are the miracles of the Internet! This key will enable me to put all humans under my power. Tonight, I shall begin my search.
THAT NIGHT

I begin to dig in the spot in which the book is supposed to be located. Deeper and deeper I make the hole. Soon I hear the barks of other foxes. My companions have come to join me! Together, we uncover the secret to our power. And here it is! The pages have been wonderfully preserved. The key will soon be ours. Now to gather the ingredients!

TWO WEEKS LATER

We finally have all the ingredients necessary to make the key. Working together, we gathered the blood and bones of sixty-six humans. How did we accomplish this, you ask? It was easy. There is a messy war going on now, something about North and South. Disguising ourselves as nurses, we ‘took care’ of the wounded.

To this mixture we add the tears of ten foxes, the ashes of ten dogs, and a blend of herbs that grow by moonlight. We drop in the liver of a young maiden and the heart belonging to a strong warrior. Special roots and berries, apples to represent youth, and mushrooms poisonous to humans are dropped into the cauldron. We stir it with a giant ladle, and all of us take a sip. We fill our bowls with our special soup and drink to our new world.

Then, we look in the bottom of the cauldron. A glowing golden key beckons us to take it, and I do.

“Hey! Why do you get to be the one to hold it?” one of my fellow foxes asks.

“It was my idea,” I reply curtly.

“But we should share the power!” another argues.

“It isn’t fair that you alone should have it!” a third agrees.

“The key should be mine!” one proclaims.
“No, mine!” the one standing next to her cries.

Before I know it, all my ‘friends’ are upon me, trying to grab the key from my paws. I manage to squirm out from under the pile and run, but they chase me. In their haste, one of them knocks a torch over onto the tome. Curse it all!

I hide in a pile of straw on a nearby farm. And then I hear it. The barking of a dog! I leap out of the pile, the key in my mouth. The dog gives chase, and it tackles me to the ground. The other foxes, having heard the dog, have scattered off in different directions, abandoning their pursuit of the key, which by now has fallen out of my mouth. I try to reach for it, but it is no use.

Oh no! I see a human! Not now! Not when I was so close! The human, a tall man in his 30s, eggs the dog on. In one hand he carries a gun. He spots the key, and picks it up, putting it in his pocket. How am I to survive this? I must think quick…

I aim for the dog’s throat and bite it, then dash off into the nearby woods, emerging minutes later as a woman.

“Excuse me, kind sir, but I seem to have lost something. It’s a little golden key…” I smile sweetly, my golden eyes matching his ordinary brown ones.

“This key?” he asks, taking it out of his pocket.

“Why, yes. It is very precious to me.” I try to keep my composure and not rip the key out of his hand.

He smiles. “Sorry fox, but no.” He whistles, and more dogs appear. “I’ve been tailing you for months. I’m really a priest. This key isn’t magic. The spell was real, but I switched the key while you were getting drunk on blood. And you won’t find the real key. I destroyed it.”

I gasp. “No!” But before I can say any more, the dogs make their move. I am forced to flee.
THE NEXT DAY

Now here I am, in my new den, licking my wounds. All my hard work has been for nothing. But one day, I swear I will have my revenge on that priest. I have gathered a new set of friends, and we are making plans to ruin him. First, we have to get rid of those dogs. I will win this time. Because…

I am one of those rarely-heard-of creatures of the night, a nine-tailed horror that stalks the graveyard. I am the kumiho.
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