

Selected Plays of Kyōgen

Richard N. McKinnon

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.....SELECTED PLAYS OF KYOGEN

TSUBITSUNE (THE FOX AND THE)

Tsurigitsune: A Commentary

An old fox, the lone survivor of the deadly game of the Trapper, is on a desperate mission to persuade him to give up his trade. The Trapper has an uncle, the priest Hakuzōsu, whose advice he invariably follows. So at sundown the Fox calls on the Trapper, disguised as his uncle. On his way he pauses by a pond to look at his reflection, trotting back and forth along the edge scrutinizing his every move, until he is satisfied that his disguise is complete. Upon reaching his destination he expresses relief that the Trapper does not keep a dog, when suddenly he hears a bark. He dashes this way and that, criss-crossing the area, to escape or to confuse the dog of his whereabouts, stopping now and then long enough to stand on his toes, stretch and look around to see where the dog might be. "No, no, it's nowhere around here," he says, and mustering all his courage calls on the Trapper.

The Trapper is surprised by the unexpected visit, especially by the time of day his uncle chose to make this call. Still he does not doubt that it is his uncle, Hakuzōsu, who questions him closely about what he has heard regarding his nephew's activities. The nephew denies all at first, but when he realizes there is no escape, he proceeds to tell his uncle gleefully how he had gotten started and what he does with the foxes he traps. The fur he turns into wrap-arounds, the meat he uses for food, and the bones, charred and pulverized, he makes into a special ointment to offer for sale. The Trapper's description strikes terror in the Fox, but he passes it off as the shocked reaction of a pious priest, deeply anguished over the mortal sin in which the Trapper is caught. He tells the Trapper of the danger he is courting, for the fox is a vengeful beast, and its spirit will attach itself to the object of its hate and consume it. He relates several stories, events that took place in far away China as well as in Japan to illustrate his point. The *katari*, or "story telling" is given almost as a reward to the Trapper, who appropriately impressed promises to give up his trade, and at his "uncle's" insistence throws his snare away then and there, reluctantly however.

His mission accomplished, the Fox makes a quick, if cautious retreat, enjoining the Trapper to pay him a visit at the temple, even if he can provide no more than seaweed seasoned with pepper and a cup of delicious tea. He seems almost to disappear into thin air, leaving the Trapper puzzled.

But now the Fox is triumphant and happily goes his way, humming a tune to himself. But unexpectedly he comes face to face with the snare that had been discarded. "Huh! I see a small black object. I've never really seen a

snare before. This is as good a time as any. I'll have a good look." He proceeds to jab at the bait with his staff. The smell of the bait overwhelms him. "Now I see how the young ones got trapped one after another." He cannot escape the temptation himself. He tries, once, twice, three times to escape it all together. He reminds himself of the danger; he tells himself that he can do without it. He even tries to leave the scene by going in a different direction than the one he customarily takes. But invariably he is drawn back. The process of rationalization is set in motion, until finally he convinces himself that he must destroy the bait by eating it in order to avenge the lives of those of his kind that had fallen victim of the snare. Now it becomes a moral imperative for him. "Stay there!" he warns, "I'll get out of this seaweed robe and come back to eat you up."

This long, sustained scene is pantomime at its best. The full range of what is going on in the mind and heart of the Fox, alias the priest Hakuzōsu, alias Everyman—conflicting motives and desires, fear and resolve, adventure and caution, and the capacity of the heart to tame and shape the mind, all give the play its extraordinary dimension as a parable of life and of human nature.

The Trapper on his part reflects on the visit. There are several things about his uncle's behavior that seem strange. He has never come so late in the afternoon, and his persistence over the matter of discarding the snare, his sudden, almost uncanny disappearance—What could they mean? Perhaps if he took a look at the snare he had discarded partially set And now he knows. The footprints, the manner in which the snare had been tampered with, add up to only one thing. He had, indeed, been tricked by the Fox. The very same Fox—it simply had to be—that he had been tracking for a long time. This time, though, he will not miss, and resetting the snare he hides behind the bushes and waits for the Fox to reappear.

The Fox reappears with a shrill bark no longer in disguise. He is after his prey, and rolling, twisting, scratching and pawing, he comes closer and closer to the trap. Cautiously he raises one paw and brings it down on the bait, then quickly pulls away. He smells the bait on his paw. He comes back, drawn tighter and tighter into the ring of desire and temptation. Then he makes the final plunge. He is trapped. The Trapper moves in for the kill with mingled feelings of anger and joy. He strikes blow after blow. But at the last minute the Fox slips out and makes his escape. A long cry of relief rings across the valleys. The bitter disappointment of the Trapper who barks out, "There he goes. Somebody catch him, catch him! You won't get away with it! You won't get away with it!" remains a faint and de-spirited echo.

The Fox and the Trapper

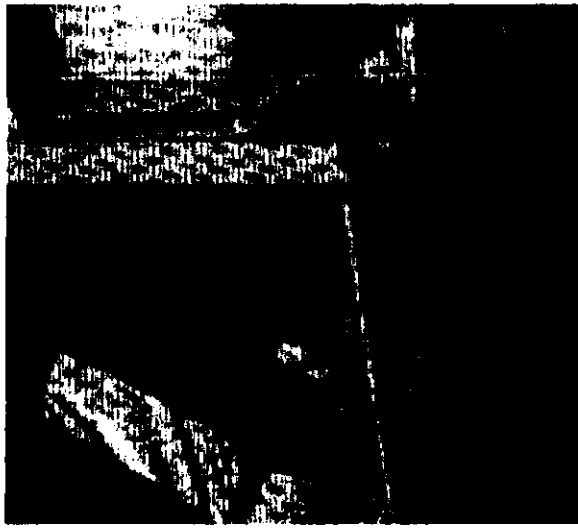
Tsurigitsune

Characters

FOX

TRAPPER

(The TRAPPER, the first to appear, proceeds to his position upstage Left and sits facing Front. The FOX makes a sudden and dramatic appearance from the end of the hashigakari and walks toward the stage with great deliberateness. His



back is bent and he leans heavily on his staff. When he reaches the edge of the forestage, he turns sharply to right, takes a few steps, then turns sharply around, moves diagonally upstage and stops. The opening lines, which are intoned, are given with his back to the audience.)

FOX:

After fond farewells, an old fox,

After fond farewells, an old fox,

Tears that cry of regrets,

Tears that cry of regrets.

(The FOX returns to upstage Right, faces Front and talks in a stylized manner.)

This is an aged fox more than a hundred years old. There is a certain man not far from here, who trapped a fox one day. He got more and more interested, trapped another and then still another, until all of my kind were gone. He's been after me also for a long time. But I've been alert and so far have been spared the fate. This man has an uncle, Hakuzōsu by name, whose advice he always heeds. So, I've disguised myself as that Hakuzōsu to urge him to give up his sport. *(In pantomime, the FOX creates the illusion of a scene in which he trots along the trail by a pond. Peers into it, to scrutinize his reflection, and to see if his disguise is flawless.)*

Thus, I've come in this guise. I must hurry on to his house. *(Intoned)*

Leaving the old mound where I live,

Leaving the old mound where I live,

I walk as fast as I can, *(takes a few steps downstage.)*

I walk as fast as I can, *(turns and slowly walks upstage.)*

And come to the Trapper's house.

(He stops, then turns sharply to Left and returns to the place from which he started. And in stylized speech.)

Having traversed fast, I've now come to his house. One can always find something redeeming in any situation. If the Trapper had a dog, I could never have come so carefree and easily. But, since he doesn't *(Suddenly, he hears the bark of a dog and jumps.)* I hear a dog barking! I hear a dog barking! *(He zigzags across the stage, stops now and then, stands on his toes as if to see where the dog is.)* No, it's no where

around here. I'll see if the Trapper's home. (*The FOX bends his head down to make himself appear inconspicuous.*) Hello, is anyone home!

TRAPPER: Someone's here. (*The TRAPPER comes downstage and turns to face the FOX.*)

Who is calling?

Why, its your honor Hakuzōsu.

You should've come right in. What brings you here? And so late in the afternoon.

FOX: I came because I had something I wished to talk to you about.

TRAPPER: What may it be?

FOX: I hear you've been trapping foxes.

TRAPPER: This is most unexpected, I've never in my life caught a fox.

FOX: There's no use denying it. Whenever my parishoners come to the temple, they are sure to tell me that my nephew was trapping foxes. They'd say; 'Weren't you aware of it?' And; 'Why don't you admonish him?' (*The FOX and the TRAPPER both turn to face each other.*) Don't deny it! Tell me the truth!

TRAPPER: So, you've really heard about it.

FOX: I have, indeed.

TRAPPER: Since you already know about it, there's no use pretending otherwise. I once happened to trap a fox, and this got me more and more interested. I suppose I've caught two, three, four, maybe five.

FOX: See, It's just as I said. What they told me was no lie. And what do you do with them after you catch them?

TRAPPER: Nothing special. First, I skin them and make fur wrap-arounds.

FOX: *Hoi!* (*Let's out an involuntary cry of anguish and raises his arms slightly.*)

TRAPPER: The meat, I prepare and eat.

FOX: Hmm. (*Facing TRAPPER.*)

TRAPPER: The bones, I char and then make into an ointment, which I offer for sale. (*The FOX starts to shake when he hears the word 'char,' and looks away with his head down.*)

FOX: Just hearing about it makes me shudder.

(*Raising his head.*)

The fox has a dark vengeful nature. You must, by all means, refrain from trapping them any more.

TRAPPER: I never realized that. I'll give it up.
 FOX: You say you'll give it up?
 TRAPPER: Yes.
 FOX: In that case, I'll tell an old story which illustrates how vengeful the fox can be. But, if you don't intend to give it up, there'd be no point in telling you.
 TRAPPER: I'll really give it up. I'd like to hear the story.
 FOX: Having traveled a long way, I'm weary. Let me sit on that stool.
 TRAPPER: Certainly. *(He bows, goes upstage and returns with a kazura-oke. The FOX pauses, then slowly moves to Center, where he faces Front and waits.)*
 Here's the stool. *(The TRAPPER pushes the stool forward from behind the FOX. The FOX shudders, then cautiously takes his seat.)*
 FOX: Listen carefully and I'll tell you the story.
 TRAPPER: I will. *(He resumes his seat downstage; his hands on the floor in front of him to indicate an attitude of respect.)*
 FOX: The fox, you see, is actually a deity. In India, it is called Yashio-no-Miya. In China, Kisaragi-no-Miya. And in Japan, the great illuminating deity of the Inari Shrine.
 TRAPPER: Indeed. *(Takes a deep bow.)*
 FOX: Once, there was a court lady named Tamamo-no-Mae. She was indeed beautiful. Her beauty was such that the glow was present from all directions and angles, much like a shining jewel. And this was why she was called Her Jeweled Presence. *(He turns to the TRAPPER, who nods to acknowledge the oration.)* She was also called Keshō-no-Mae, the origin of which I shall relate to you.
 The Imperial court, one year, held a gathering for a *uta-awase* session. Music was being played, when suddenly a violent storm came up and all of the candles in the palace hall were blown out. Rays of gold shone about Tamamo-no-Mae, however, to illuminate the hall. The Emperor, observing this, realized that she was no mere mortal, but perhaps a supernatural being. Thus, it was since she was called Her Supernatural Presence.
 It was not long after this that the Emperor fell ill. Abe-no-Yasunari, a soothsayer, came forth to offer

incantations, which he did flinging his divining sticks in all directions.

'One Advance, six Evils,
Two Doubts, three Harmonies,
The first Reverse, six Evils.'

The divination showed that the Emperor's illness was all the doings of Lady Tamamo. And why was this? Because, she was originally a fox!

She had disguised herself as Empress Hōji of the Emperor Yu in the great dynasty of Tang, China, and took the lives of as many as seven sovereigns.

The very same fox came to Japan to seek the life of the Emperor. A situation of this magnitude called for special prayers and incantations. Eminent monks and high ranking priests were summoned to offer prayers of every sort, but they were in vain. Orders were issued to prepare a four-tiered altar with elaborate offerings lining five levels, before which special exhortations were provided to rid the noxious spirit.

The fox, overwhelmed by these rites, fled to the fields of Nasuno in the Province of Shimotsuke. (*The Fox looks sharply to Right to suggest the idea of flight, then faces Front.*) The report of this incident quickly travelled throughout the country. Special measures had to be taken to capture the fox. And since the dog has similar features to the fox, the sport of dog-hunting was ordered. Two lords, Miura-no-Suke, and Kazusa-no-Suke, were given the assignment, which they both accepted. (*The FOX lowers his head to gesture acceptance.*) Taking their retainers with them, the lords proceeded to Nasuno for a hundred-day long dog-hunt. On the hundredth day, a huge fox suddenly appeared. It was enormous—forty feet long from head to tail. The first arrow by Miura-no-Suke, and the second one by Kazusa-no-Suke, both hit their mark. (*The FOX holds his staff straight up to indicate the flight of the arrows, then limply drops the staff.*) 'We got him,' they shouted. Alighting from their mounts, they drew their swords to finish the fox. The fox was presented to the Emperor and he instantly recovered. Order was restored throughout and peace again prevailed.

The vengeful spirit of the fox then transformed itself into a huge rock. The number of lives consumed by the rock was countless. Beasts that roamed the earth, (*The FOX looks down and moves his head from right to left.*) birds that soared the skies (*He looks up to the sky and moves his head from left to right.*) fell prey to the rock's spell. The rock was thus given the name of *sesshōseki*,⁶ because of the toll of lives it took.

There was a priest, Gen-ō by name. He challenged the rock in a philosophical debate.

'You, spirit of the rock, who's essential nature is to consume lives,' I ask you; 'Where does the spirit of life come from and where does it go to?' The priest struck the rock three times with his staff. (*The FOX raises his staff and drops it.*) The rock cracked, but the spirit of the fox still remained. It continued to rob people of their lives. The vengeful spirit of the fox holds such great power. You must, by all means, stop trapping foxes. (*The FOX folds his arms and holding his staff between his hands turns to face the TRAPPER. The TRAPPER turns to face the FOX.*)

TRAPPER: That was a frightening story you told me. I had no idea. I'd been catching foxes just for the fun of it. Now that I've heard your story, I'll never catch a fox again in my life. Please, your honor, put your mind at ease. (*In his seated position, and facing the FOX, he takes a deep bow, placing his hands on the floor.*)

FOX: What, you'll never catch a fox again in your life?

TRAPPER: No, never.

FOX: In that case, the thing you use to trap foxes . . . the *aaa . . . sss . . .* snare. Is that the name of it? You must have one. (*Facing the TRAPPER.*)

Throw it away!

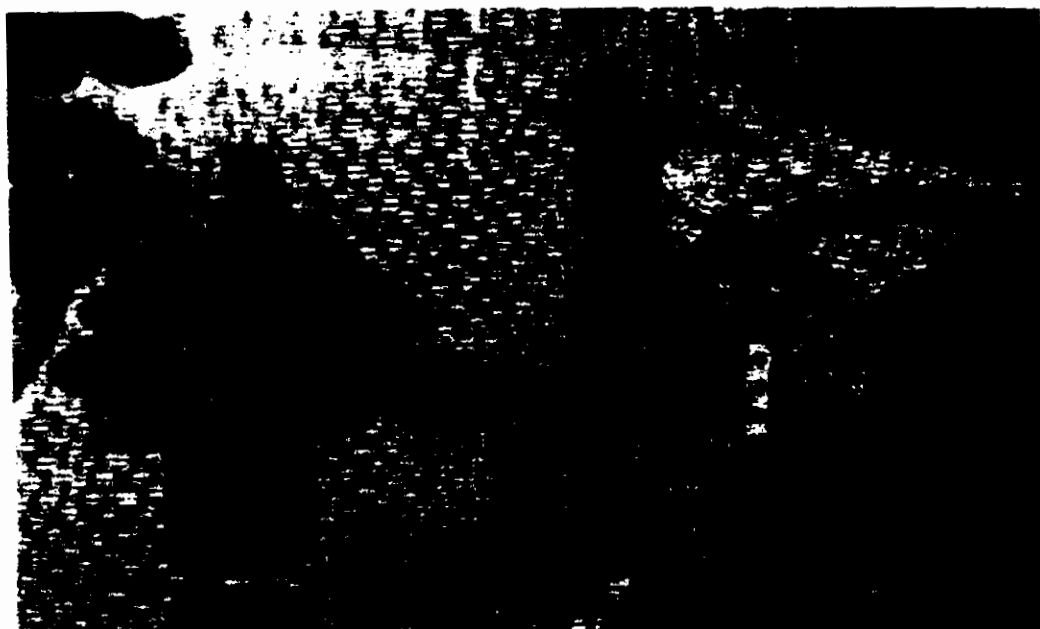
TRAPPER: I'll throw it away immediately after you leave.

FOX (*shaking his head*): No, that's what you say. But if you see the snare, you'll probably want to go trapping again. If you truly intend to give it up, throw the snare away before my own eyes.

TRAPPER: Very well. (*The TRAPPER goes upstage and returns with a snare. He flashes it in the FOX's face.*)

This is the snare.

FOX: (*Covering his face with his sleeve and trembling.*)



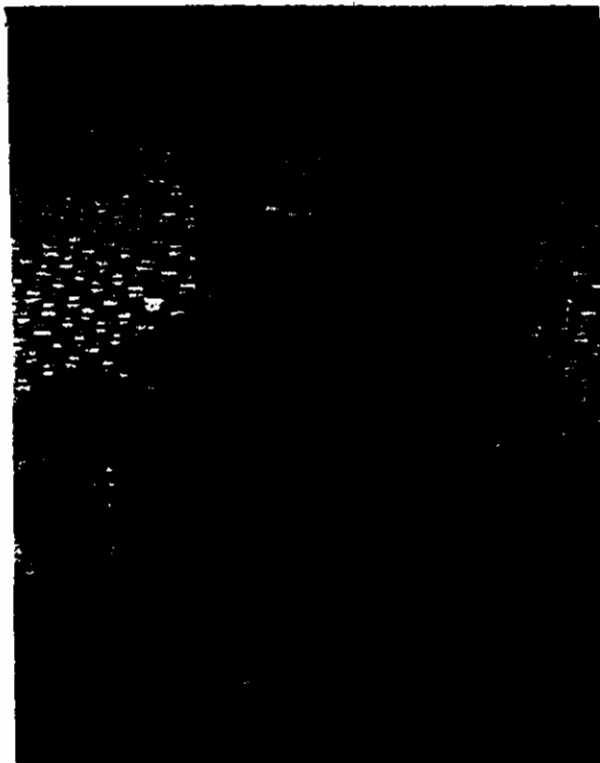
It has the smell of blood. What's the idea of thrusting such a thing before a priest's nose?
Quick, throw it away!

TRAPPER: Very well.
FOX: Quick, throw it away.
TRAPPER: Very well. (*The TRAPPER moves downstage and comes down to about two feet from the edge of the stage and tosses the snare away. A disconsolate expression crosses his face. Then, he returns to his previous position, and faces the FOX.*)
I've thrown it away.
(*The FOX turns and looks in the TRAPPER's direction.*)

FOX: What? You have thrown it away?
TRAPPER: Yes, I have.
FOX: Oh, I'm delighted! I'm delighted! I'm pleased that you have followed my advice. I'd really like to have a visit with your children in the back room, but this is not a good day. I'll come and see them another day.

TRAPPER: As you wish, sir.
FOX: Why don't you come to the temple once in a while?
(*He rises. The stage attendant removes the stool and takes it upstage. The TRAPPER also rises.*)
Even if you come, I've nothing special to offer you—seaweed seasoned with pepper is about all. But, I'll serve you delicious tea.

TRAPPER: That's very kind of you.
FOX: Since I am but a priest, I've nothing special to offer you. Just seaweed and pepper.
TRAPPER: Yes.
FOX: And tea I'll serve. (*Faces the TRAPPER, lowers his head, and pauses. The TRAPPER bows in a gesture of farewell.*)
TRAPPER: It was good of you to come. (*He looks puzzled, as he moves upstage, Left to the position he occupied when the play started. The FOX rises and starts to walk in a deliberate manner, toward the hashigakari. He delivers his monologue as he walks the entire length of the hashigakari and back, stopping at upstage Right. The hashigakari is used as an extension of the stage and gives a sense of distance the FOX traversed.*)
FOX: Oh, I'm so happy. I'm so happy I tricked him into giving up trapping. Now, I can go wherever I want. (*He turns to look to his left and right, and then facing Front.*) I've nothing to worry about any more. When I'm feeling happy like this, I should sing a song as I walk back to my old mound.



Living in this community
Is what brings me notoriety.
I'll go away—back to my old mound,
Prancing, prancing, I go.

(He moves about the stage and suddenly comes upon the snare.)

Fox:

How dreadful! He said, he'd thrown the snare away. I assumed that he'd thrown it far away, but instead, he threw it right in the priest's path. *(He eyes the snare.)* Those trappers, *(He turns to look upstage Right.)* are a suspicious lot. *(He turns and looks back at the snare a little more closely this time.)*

Huh! I see a small black object there. I've never really seen a snare before. This is as good a time as any. *(He skips toward the snare.)* I'll get close to it and have a good look. *(With his staff, he pokes at the object.)* You, you nasty little black thing! So, its you that caught all my kind. *(He pokes at it with greater vigor and finally strikes it. He then turns aside, brings the end of the staff to his nose, and smells it.)* Now, I see why the young ones got trapped one after another. He's taken a juicy young rat and deep fried it for bait. I'll gobble this one up.
(He rushes up to the baited snare.)



No, no! I've witnessed too many of my young ones being snared. I could fall into the same trap, too. I can do without it! I'll return to my old mound. *(The FOX slowly moves upstage Right and leaps up. He then turns, moves downstage a little, and sharply turns to look at the snare.)*

But, they were caught because they didn't know how to eat only the bait. There'd be nothing wrong in helping myself only to the bait. I'll do just that. *(He approaches the snare and then shakes his head.)*

Oh, how dreadful! I almost got snared myself. No, no, I can do without it. This is when I should change course and go back to my old mound a different way. *(He goes left, again moves upstage Right, and on to the hashigakari.)*

I can do without it. I've made up my mind to return to my old mound. *(He moves to almost the edge of the stage, again brings the end of his staff to his nose, and sniffs it.)* I can do without it. I'll change course and go back to my old mound a different way.

Come to think of it though, that bait is an enemy of my kind. I should take revenge and gobble it up. *(He moves quickly up to the snare again. Then takes a look at his disguise.)* But, it's hard to do it in heavy robe of green seaweed. *(He shudders.)* Oh, but I'd love to eat! Love to eat it! *(He skips to the left, to the right, and back again. In this pantomiming, he expresses the gradual rise of intense emotion that indicates the course of action he will take. He strikes out at the bait.)*

You, I'm going to take revenge. I'll get out of this seaweed robe disguise and come back to eat you up. Stay there! Stay there! *(He strikes at the bait again.)* Ei, ei, ei.' *(The FOX, with determined steps, turns to go. He lifts his robe with both hands to reveal a fox's bushy tail. He moves quick, taking angular steps, and his walk is occasionally broken with the cry of a fox as he retreats.)*

TRAPPER *(rising)*:

My uncle Hakuzōsu came a while ago and warned me, in no uncertain terms, against trapping foxes. I even threw my snare away. But, come to think of it, he's never visited so late in the afternoon. There was also something odd in what he had to say. Though I threw the snare away, I left it partially set. I'll go

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take a look at it. *(He moves downstage and walks along in a semi-circular pattern as he continues.)*

There was something very odd about the visit. He's not the type to be so insistent. Besides, when I went out to see where he had gone, I lost his track as if he had suddenly vanished. I'd feel much better if I see how the snare looks. Ah, ha! What!

(He picks up the snare and examines it.)

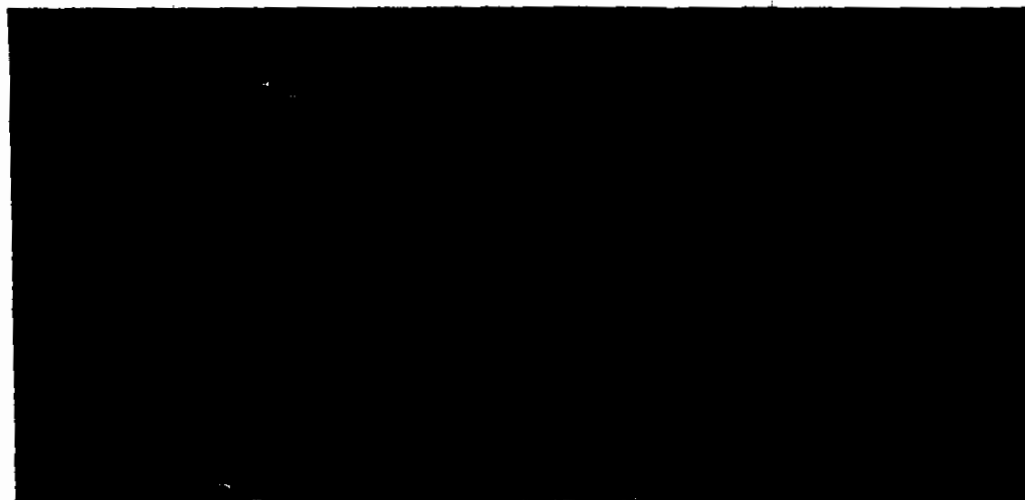
What on earth is this? The snare's been tampered with. No human being did this. This must be the doings of a fox. So, that Hakuzōsu, a while ago, must've indeed been that old fox I'd been stalking for such a long time. How disgusting! No wonder, I thought something was odd.

This makes me furious! What can I do? I've got it! It's obvious that he's tempted by the bait and he's sure to be back. This time, I'll set it real well and trap his honor Hakuzōsu. *(While setting the snare, he continues.)*

The fox is a very cunning creature. You never know when, and in what guise he may appear to trick you. What a masterful disguise that was! He was a perfect image of Hakuzōsu. I doubt that anyone could deny he was Hakuzōsu. I could go on forever, but it's still a shame. Had I known he was a fox, I wouldn't have needed this snare. I'd have caught him with my bare hands. What a shame! This time, I'll set my snare with the greatest care and be sure to trap him. There were a number of things that made me wonder, a while ago. In fact, I thought of seizing him to question him closer. But, I didn't. What if he was the real Hakuzōsu? I'd have been in a very difficult spot.

No matter how much I go on, I don't feel any better about it. This is most infuriating! Well, this ought to do it. Usually, he comes along this trail from over there. Uh hmm, this'll do. I'll go hide behind the pine tree and wait for his honor Hakuzōsu to come.

(The FOX crawls out onto the hashigakari, rolls about, and paws the ground. When he approaches the snare, the TRAPPER slips out his right arm from the over jacket and waits tensely for the critical moment. The FOX moves up to the snare and backs down. He jumps over it, sniffs around, until finally he gets himself snared.)



TRAPPER:

Ha I caught him. I'm so glad you came. You sure tricked me a while ago, didn't you? Take this, this, and this. *(He lashes the FOX with a bamboo whip. The FOX lifts his hands together asking forgiveness. They tug back and forth in a struggle. Finally, the FOX manages to slip out of the snare. The TRAPPER tumbles over backward. The FOX let's out a cry as he makes his escape.)*

TRAPPER:

He gave me the slip again. Where'd he go? *(The FOX goes down to the hashigakari and lets out a loud and extended cry.)*

Ah, there he goes. Somebody, catch him! Catch him! You won't get away with it! You won't get away with it!