

The Prince and the Badger

By A. B. Mitford (Lord Redesdale)

In days of yore there lived a forefather of the Prince of Tosa who went by the name of Yamanouchi Kadzutoyo. At the age of fourteen this prince was amazingly fond of fishing, and would often go down to the river for sport, And it came to pass one day that he had gone thither with but one retainer, and had made a great haul, that a violent shower suddenly came on. Now, the prince had no rain-coat with him, and was in so sorry a plight that he took shelter under a willow-tree and waited for the weather to clear; but the storm showed no sign of abating, and there was no help for it, so he turned to the retainer and said—

“This rain is not likely to stop for some time, so we had better hurry home.”

As they trudged homeward, night fell, and it grew very dark; and their road lay over a long bank, by the side of which they found a girl, about sixteen year’s old, weeping bitterly. Struck with wonder, they looked stedfastly at her, and perceived that she was exceedingly comely. While Kadzutoyo stood doubting what so strange a sight could portend, his retainer, smitten with the girl’s charms, stepped up to her and said—

“Little sister, tell us whose daughter you are, and how it comes that you are out by yourself at night in such a storm of rain. Surely it is passing strange.”

“Sir,” replied she, looking up through her tears, “I am the daughter of a poor man in the castle town. My mother died when I was seven years old, and my father has now wedded a shrew, who loathes and ill-uses me; and in the midst of my grief he is gone far away on his business, so I was left alone with my stepmother; and this very night she spited and beat me till I could bear it no longer, and was on my way to my aunt’s, who dwells in yonder village, when the shower came on; but as I lay waiting for the rain to stop, I was seized with a spasm, to which I am subject, and was in great pain, when I had the good luck to fall in with your worships.”

As she spoke, the retainer fell deeply in love with her matchless beauty, whilst his lord Kadzutoyo, who from the outset had not uttered a word, but stood brooding over the matter, straightway drew his sword and cut off her head. But the retainer stood aghast, and cried out—

“Oh! my young lord, what wicked deed is this that you’ve done? The murder of a man’s daughter will bring trouble upon us, for you may rely on the business not ending here.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” answered Kadzutoyo: “only don’t tell any one about it, that is all I ask;” and so they went home in silence.

As Kadzutoyo was very tired, he went to bed, and slept undisturbed by any sense of guilt; for he was brave and fearless. But the retainer grew very uneasy, and went to his young lord’s parents and said—

“I had the honour of attending my young lord out fishing to-day, and we were driven home by the rain. And as we came back by the bank, we descried a girl with a spasm in her stomach, and her my young lord straightway slew; and although he has bidden me tell it to no one, I cannot conceal it from my lord and my lady.”

Kadzutoyo’s parents were sore amazed, bewailing their son’s wickedness, and went at once to his room and woke him; his father shed tears and said—

“Oh! dastardly cut-throat that you are! how dare you kill another man’s daughter without provocation? Such unspeakable villany is unworthy a Samurai’s son. Know, that the duty of every Samurai is to keep watch over the country, and to protect the people; and such is his daily

task. For sword and dirk are given to men that they may slay rebels, and faithfully serve their prince, and not that they may go about committing sin and killing the daughters of innocent men. Whoever is fool enough not to understand this will repeat his misdeed, and will assuredly bring shame on his kindred. Grieved as I am that I should take away the life which I gave you, I cannot suffer you to bring dishonour on our house; so prepare to meet your fate!”

With these words he drew his sword; but Kadzutoyo, without a sign of fear, said to his father—

“Your anger, sir, is most just; but remember that I have studied the classics and understand the laws of right and wrong, and be sure I would never kill another man without good cause. The girl whom I slew was certainly no human being, but some foul goblin: feeling certain of this, I cut her down. To-morrow I beg you will send your retainers to look for the corpse; and if it really be that of a human being, I shall give you no further trouble, but shall disembowel myself.”

Upon this the father sheathed his sword, and awaited daybreak. When the morning came, the old prince, in sad distress, bade his retainers lead him to the bank; and there he saw a huge badger, with his head cut off, lying dead by the roadside; and the prince was lost in wonder at his son’s shrewdness. But the retainer did not know what to make of it, and still had his doubts. The prince, however, returned home, and sending for his son, said to him—

“It’s very strange that the creature which appeared to your retainer to be a girl, should have seemed to you to be a badger.”

“My lord’s wonder is just,” replied Kadzutoyo, smiling “she appeared as a girl to me as well. But here was a young girl, at night, far from any inhabited place. Stranger still was her wondrous beauty; and strangest of all, that, though it was pouring with rain, there was not a sign of wet on her clothes and when my retainer asked how long she had been there, she said she had been on the bank in pain for some time; so I had no further doubt but that she was a goblin, and I killed her.”

“But what made you think she must be a goblin because her clothes were dry?”

“The beast evidently thought that, if she could bewitch us with her beauty, she might get at the fish my retainer was carrying; but she forgot that, as it was raining, it would not do for her clothes not to be wet; so I detected and killed her.”

When the old prince heard his son speak thus, he was filled with admiration for the youth’s sagacity; so, conceiving that Kadzutoyo had given reliable proof of wisdom and prudence, he resolved to abdicate;¹ and Kadzutoyo was proclaimed Prince of Tosa in his stead.

¹ *Inkiyô*, abdication. The custom of abdication is common among all classes, from the Emperor down to his meanest subject. The Emperor abdicates after consultation with his ministers: the Shogun has to obtain the permission of the Emperor; the Daimios, that of the Shogun. The abdication of the Emperor was called *Sentô*; that of the Shogun, *Ogoshô*; in all other ranks it is called *Inkiyô*. It must be remembered that the princes of Japan, in becoming *Inkiyô*, resign the semblance and the name, but not the reality of power. Both in their own provinces and in the country at large they play a most important part. The ex-Princes of Tosa, Uwajima and Owari, are far more notable men in Japan than the actual holders of the titles.