

## **The Princess and the Fox**

Once there was a princess who lived in a castle by an immense forest, she was beautiful, kind, gentle and a friend to all animals. One fine spring day, she sat in a forest glade, the birds and animals who claimed her as friend surrounding her.

Then from the woods came a low bark, then a fox emerged from the trees. The birds and animals pressed against the princess, scared of what the fox might do.

"Have no fear," said she, "for I will let nothing harm you."

She walked out to the fox, meeting its eyes. The fox shrank back at her approach.

"Come, friend," said she to the fox, "no one will harm you."

The fox walked up to her with a whimper, one of its front paws was bleeding from a wound.

The princess's heart was full of compassion. She knelt down and took the fox's paw into her hands, a single tear fell from her eyes like a precious jewel and fell upon the fox's paw. She then took her scarf, blue as the sky and of the finest of silks, and bandaged up his paw.

The fox then looked up at her, its golden eyes seeming to lock with hers. Then the fox turned and went into the woods.

Years later, when it came time for the princess to marry, her brother the prince consulted a wise old monk from the mountains. For word of his sister's beauty had spread far and wide in his lands and he wished to avoid any slight towards any samurai who did not win the princess's hand in marriage.

The old monk arrived. He met the prince, he met the princess and then he sat for many days and nights and meditated. At last, he spoke.

"The princess must choose whom she had already chosen."

This puzzled the prince, but he resolved to remember the monk's wisdom all the same.

The day came when the prince gathered all the samurai that served him. He declared to them that the one who would marry his sister would be the one she had chosen.

Many young samurai had gathered in the prince's castle. Many of noble birth, some with vast lands and some with more humble holdings but no less illustrious lineage.

But one samurai who was there looked as if he had no lands or lineage. In fact, he was a ronin, the clothing he wore threadbare and worn. His hair was red and long and wild, his eyes golden.

But when the princess saw him, she noticed something else. In his hand he held a scarf of soft blue silk. The princess and the ronin met eyes and each recognised the other.