

MASATO AND THE MASK

ACT 1

Written by

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CUT TO:

*NOTE; ALL DIALOGUE IS IN JAPANESE (W/SUBTITLES), UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD - NIGHT

Is NIGHT in the Spirit World, and everything GLOWS; a realm of SUPERNATURAL WONDER, nothing artificial in sight.

Everything is ALIVE with a faint, beautiful WHITE LIGHT.

Several FOX SPIRITS RUN across a field. They TRANSFORM into ENERGY, almost FLYING for a moment, then take shape again as Fox Spirits, running effortlessly, lighter than air.

The biggest, FOX BRETHREN, leads. The SMALLEST, MASATO, is in the back, a WHITE STRIPE across his head.

MASATO

I don't think we should be doing this, guys!

FOX BRETHREN

Shh! Follow me!

The Fox Spirits and Masato HIDE behind a TREE, by a LAKE.

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)

There he is!

They SNEAK CLOSER. Masato FOLLOWS, hesitantly.

And there, at the edge of the lake, is a large, fat, FROG, SITTING on a ROCK.

The Fox Spirits GIGGLE amongst themselves. Masato does not.

Suddenly all the Fox Spirits DISAPPEAR. Masato is left ALONE.

Masato watches as a SMALL WHITE LIGHT appears around Frog. It HOVERS around Frog's head, DARTING and FLICKING annoyingly.

Frog tries to IGNORE IT, but it PESTERS him, TICKLING his FACE, DISTRACTING HIM. Frog tries to SWAT it away, but the small White Light is TOO QUICK. The small White Light continues to ANNOY Frog, almost TAUNTING him. Frog tries to CATCH it, but fails.

He tries again and again, and eventually CATCHES IT.

FROG

Aha!

But then, the ILLUSION IS REVEALED:

The 'small White Light' was just the very tip of Fox Brethren's TAIL, as Fox Brethren is HANGING from a TREE BRANCH above. Fox Brethren SCAMPERS along the tree branch, PULLING Frog along. Fox Brethren SWINGS Frog off his rock like a TARZAN-SWING, and at the highest arc YANKS his tail away from Frog's grip.

Frog goes FLYING out into the middle of the lake.

FROG (CONT'D)

Aaaauuuugghh!!!

SPLOOSH!!!!!! Frog lands in the water comically. The other Fox Spirits REVEAL THEMSELVES, LAUGHING.

FROG (CONT'D)

You trickster Foxes! I should have known it was you!

The Fox Spirits LAUGH and DART AWAY swiftly. Masato tries to follow, but he CANNOT KEEP UP. Soon, the Fox Spirits are OUT OF SIGHT, and Masato finds himself ALONE in the Spirit World.

He looks up, the moon and stars GLOWING among a SEA OF APPARITIONS, dream-like. Masato enjoys the moment, but then suddenly sees a SHARP CONCENTRATION OF THE WHITE LIGHT flash on a nearby MOUNTAIN PEAK.

The flash FADES. Masato TILTS HIS HEAD, curious. ANOTHER FLASH of the White Light. He SQUINTS HIS EYES.

Masato carefully moves toward it. As a Spirit, Masato EASILY ascends the mountain.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - NIGHT

Masato APPROACHES where he had seen the White Light.

MORE of the White Light continues to mysteriously FLOAT in the air, a few feet above the ground. Masato SNEAKS a bit closer, CURIOUS. The concentration of White Light becomes BRIGHTER, and creates a small, faint, sort of MAGICAL GATE.

Masato SNEAKS CLOSER. The White Light Gate INTENSIFIES, and the view of the other side becomes a bit clearer;

Through the Gate, the landscape looks the same, but it is DAY, and lacks the dream-like effects of the Spirit World.

On the other side, Masato can see a HUMAN MAN, sitting on the rocks. He is pleasant looking, in his late 20's, wearing simple/rural Japanese-style clothes of the 1950's. He GLOWS slightly with the White Light.

Masato WATCHES him for a while. The Human Man begins to MOVE the White Light in his hands slightly, SWAYING it around in CIRCULAR MOTIONS. Masato SNEAKS CLOSER to the WINDOW. The Human Man does not appear to see Masato.

Masato TOUCHES the Gate. It does not hurt. He puts his NOSE to the Gate, and it PASSES to the other side.

Masato PULLS BACK. Then, Masato GOES THROUGH THE GATE.

EXT. PHYSICAL WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

Masato ENTERS the PHYSICAL WORLD, through the Gate.

SUPER: "JAPAN - 1956"

The geography resembles the Spirit World almost exactly, except it is different;

There are no apparitions in the sky, and nothing but the Human Man and the Gate are glowing. Everything appears more stable, more solid. Some HUMAN DWELLINGS can be seen in the far distance; houses, fences, terraces carved in the hills.

Masato looks at his own PAWS; they are no longer smooth and spirit-like. He examines his ROUGH FUR and CLAWS.

Suddenly Masato is UNABLE TO BREATHE.

He PANICS, and tries to return to the Gate, but his feet are HEAVY and UNRESPONSIVE. He FALLS OVER, and GASPS for air, his ribcage and lungs STRUGGLING to breathe.

Desperate, Masato looks to the Human Man. The Human Man sees Masato SUFFERING on the ground. He APPROACHES, CONCERNED. He TOUCHES Masato, NUDGING HIM. But Masato is DYING. The Human Man BOWS HIS HEAD, and GENERATES MORE of the WHITE LIGHT, and PASSES the White Light into Masato's body.

Masato RESPONDS, suddenly TAKING IN A LABORED BREATH.

Surprised, the Human Man DOES IT AGAIN, and Masato begins to BREATHE AGAIN, though with difficulty. Masato and the Human Man make EYE CONTACT.

Soon Masato is able to stand, and TRIES TO WALK to the Gate. He manages a few steps, but his feet are TOO HEAVY.

The Human Man gently PICKS UP MASATO, and helps him towards the Gate, seeing the familiar SPIRIT WORLD on the other side.

Masato looks back at the Human Man, then RETURNS through the Gate.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - NIGHT

Masato RETURNS to the Spirit World, WEAKENED. The Gate FADES AWAY, the Human Man no longer visible. Masato COLLAPSES.

But just before he passes out, Masato blurrily sees two ELDER FOX SPIRITS running towards him.

INT. SPIRIT ELDERS SHRINE - MORNING

Masato WAKES UP on the FLOOR.

Around him are the 2 ELDER FOX SPIRITS he saw last night; one RED, with 7 TAILS, and one WHITE, with 9 TAILS.

There is also a very old-looking TURTLE, sitting on a stone block, and a RAVEN, perched not far above.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT
Good morning, young Fox Spirit. How
do you feel?

Masato SITS UP.

MASATO
I feel OK. Where am I?

TURTLE
You are in the Elders Shrine!

The Raven CAWS. Masato looks around;

The Shrine is made of NATURAL Materials, somewhat resembling the style of a Japanese SHINTO SHRINE. On the walls are several MASKS of different styles and animal faces, each GLOWING SLIGHTLY.

RED Elder Fox Spirit STEPS FORWARD. He is OMINOUS;

RED ELDER FOX SPIRIT
Did you create the Gate? Are you
playing with some forbidden magic?

MASATO
What?

RED ELDER FOX SPIRIT
Do not speak falsehoods! Or the
tether will be forever lost.

MASATO
Tether?

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT
Did you create the Gate, young one?

Masato is CONFUSED at the question. RED Elder Fox Spirit STARES at him. The eye contact is HYPNOTIZING. Masato looks back to WHITE Elder Fox Spirit.

MASATO
No. I just found it.

Red Elder Fox Spirit GRUNTS, and STEPS BACK.

MASATO (CONT'D)
I didn't know I wasn't supposed to
go through.

The Elder Spirits all shuffle over and CONVENE in a more private area of the Shrine. They WHISPER and DISCUSS amongst themselves, almost frantically, PEEKING back at Masato.

After a moment, Raven FLIES AWAY. RED Elder Fox Spirit likewise DEPARTS, with Turtle ON HIS BACK. Masato watches as they become energy and FLY into the Spirit Sky.

WHITE Elder Fox Spirit RETURNS to Masato.

MASATO (CONT'D)
What is it? What did I do?

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT
You have witnessed the birth of a
new root to the Physical World.

MASATO
Physical World?

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT
Come. You will show me where.

INT. SPIRIT WORLD - MORNING

Masato is walking with WHITE Elder Fox Spirit towards the MOUNTAINTOP where Masato found the Gate.

MASATO

What do you mean, 'a new root to the Physical World'?

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT

Young one, you and I exist are in the Spiritual World. But all around us, in this very space, exists a Physical World too. We do not see it, not without effort.

Masato continues WALKING along side her, amazed.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT (CONT'D)

Some beings exist mostly in a Physical Form. Some, like you, in the Spiritual.

They look to the SKY, at some BIRDS soaring, CHANGING from Spiritual form, to a more Physical appearance, and back.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT (CONT'D)

Some of us learn to cross over.

He looks down and Masato, dreadfully.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT (CONT'D)

Some never return! Hurry now. We're almost there!

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT

This is the spot. You must wait here for 3 days, alone, to see if the Human Man opens the Gate again.

Masato listens obediently;

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT (CONT'D)

If this Human has indeed saved your life, then you are forever tethered to him. You are part of a new root, connecting our worlds! Creation needs more of these roots. You've been charged with a special task.

MASATO

But I can't breathe in there!

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT

That is why I will give you a Mask.

The White Elder Fox Spirit MANIFESTS a simple FOX MASK.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT (CONT'D)
 This mask will help you maintain
 your Spirit. Take the mask off in
 there, and you will not survive.

The White Elder Fox Spirit begins to WALK AWAY, leaving the MASK behind for Masato, FLOATING mystically before him.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT (CONT'D)
 Never stray too far from the Gate!
 I will see you in three days!

White Elder Fox Spirit FLOATS into the sky and DISAPPEARS.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - AFTERNOON

Masato SITS and WAITS. Everything is calm.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - EVENING

Masato WAITS. Sunset in the Spirit World is BEAUTIFUL.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - NIGHT

The night is full of WONDER. Masato SITS, still WAITING. But no Gate to the Physical World has appeared. Masato begins to FALL ASLEEP.

But then, in the corner of his eye, Masato sees a FAINT CONCENTRATION of the WHITE LIGHT. It FADES for a moment, but then MORE SPARKLES appear. Masato COMES CLOSER.

A GATE TO THE PHYSICAL WORLD begins to OPEN.

Masato looks through at the flowering mountainside. The HUMAN MAN appears over the crest of the peak, with a WALKING STICK.

Masato PUTS ON THE MASK that White Elder Fox Spirit gave him, and GOES THROUGH THE GATE to the Physical World.

EXT. PHYSICAL WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - EARLY MORNING

Masato comes though the Gate. Everything is HEAVY. Masato examines his PAWS.

Masato WATCHES as the Human Man begins to GENTLY MOVE the White Light AROUND again in slow, circular movements.

Masato COMES CLOSER. He tries to MIMIC the Human Man's movements. The Human Man does not seem to notice him.

But then, Masato sees a young Japanese GIRL, 8, appear over the crest, dressed in peach-colored clothes of a 1950's Japanese style.

She is ADORABLE. Masato's EARS PERK UP.

GIRL

Father! How much longer?

She HOPS UP to the Human Man. Masato is SMITTEN, and HIDES.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Can we go back home yet? Maybe
Mother already has dinner ready!

The Girl suddenly sees Masato, hiding, and STOPS, WIDE EYED.

HUMAN MAN

Come, meet my fox friend.

The Girl LAUGHS OUT LOUD. She grabs a STICK, and WAVES it in the air, ready to throw it. Masato TILTS HIS HEAD, CURIOUS.

The Human Man continues his training, SMILING.

The Girl THROWS the stick. Masato's TAIL begins to WAG.

GIRL

Bet I can get it before you!

The Girl SKIPS off towards the stick, running and bouncing off the rocks with ease. Masato FOLLOWS. The Girl GRABS the stick first. She SMILES PROUDLY.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Again!

She THROWS the stick. They BOTH run off to chase it. But Masato is not used to his legs, and he STUMBLES.

GIRL (CONT'D)

What the matter? Are you hurt?

But Masato GETS UP.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Let's see!

She THROWS it again, as far as she can.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Go!

Masato and the Girl RACE across the slope of the mountain, HOPPING and JUMPING off the rocks and among the wild foliage.

Masato almost reaches the stick first, but the girl does a well-practiced DIVE ROLL and GRABS it FIRST.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Ha! Come on! I know a secret place!

The Girl RUNS to a SMALL OLD SHINTO SHRINE. Masato FOLLOWS.

INT. SMALL ABANDONED SHINTO SHRINE - DAY

The tiny Shrine is just big enough for the Girl and Masato.

She PETS HIM on the head.

GIRL

You're soft. I like your stripe. Is that your face? Or a mask?

Indeed, Masato does not look quite like a regular fox, his Mask still magically covering his real physical head.

She HUGS him, nestling her face in the fur of his neck.

GIRL (CONT'D)

You're not a real fox, are you? Are you a magic fox? I've heard stories about magic foxes. They say you can change into people sometimes!

They STARE into each other's eyes, BATHED in the WHITE LIGHT.

GIRL (CONT'D)

If you were a Human, we could have our own house someday, somewhere warm, by a beach! We could have our own little family!

Suddenly, they are both FLOODED with a powerful VISION:

- A young HUMAN COUPLE, on a tropical beach. The Husband a healthy Japanese young man, and the Wife a strong beautiful woman with dark skin and messy dreadlocks. A TODDLER sits upon the Husband's shoulders.

The VISION ENDS. Masato and the Girl are both STUNNED.

HUMAN MAN

Xiu! Let's go!

Masato and the Girl see the Human Man outside, WALKING down the TRAIL.

The Girl REMOVES a thin PEACH-COLORED THREAD from her clothes, and TIES IT around Masato's PAW.

GIRL

Here. A wedding promise! A magic wedding promise!

She HUGS him again, then KISSES him on the nose.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Bye!!!!

Masato watches the Girl and her father DESCEND the mountain trail, until they DISAPPEAR FROM VIEW over the crest.

Masato SITS for a while, then hears White Elder Fox's VOICE;

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT'S VOICE

Never stray too far from the Gate!

Suddenly panicked, Masato RUNS back up towards the peak.

EXT. PHYSICAL WORLD MOUNTAINTOP - AFTERNOON

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT'S VOICE

Never stray too far from the Gate!

His BREATH becomes SHORT, his LEGS and PAWS HEAVY. Masato can see a HINT of the Gate, but it is FADING AWAY. He STRUGGLES to make it there.

But just as Masato begins to PASS OUT, the Gate suddenly becomes BRIGHT, and OPENS UP. RED ELDER FOX SPIRIT enters, GRABS Masato, and PULLS him back to the Spirit World.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD MOUNTAIN TOP - NIGHT

RED Elder Fox Spirit DROPS Masato on the rocks. White Elder Fox Spirit, Raven are with him.

White Elder Fox Spirit SHUTS THE GATE and SEALS it with some magic. The Red Elder Fox Spirit, and the Raven ASSIST.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT

This Gate is no more!

The Gate DISAPPEARS in a FLASH OF MAGIC.

MASATO

What? No!!

White Elder Fox Spirit TAKES THE MASK from Masato's head.

MASATO (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT

You're not able to wield this mask!

The Mask VANISHES. The Raven CAWS.

MASATO

But I saw a Girl there!

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT

Yes! You were tempted to go further than you should have, and strayed too far from the Gate! That was not the instructions we gave you. This Gate will never open again, young Fox Spirit. Your root is no more.

MASATO

You don't understand!

The Elders begin back down the mountain.

WHITE ELDER FOX SPIRIT

Please, young one. Trust the Elders. Return to your burrow. Do not speak of this again.

EXT. SPIRIT FOREST - DAY

Masato is sitting under a tree, looking very sad. FOX BRETHREN and some other FOX SPIRITS run by, playfully.

FOX BRETHREN

Hey, kid!

Fox Brethren APPROACHES. The other Fox Spirits scamper away.

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)

Why the long face?

Masato does not reply. Fox Brethren SITS NEXT TO HIM.

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)

Come on, whatsa matter?

MASATO
You wouldn't understand.

FOX BRETHREN
Wouldn't understand? You
underestimate your big Brethren!
Come on, try me!

Masato HESITATES, looking at Fox Brethren skeptically.

MASATO
I just visited the Physical World.

Fox Brethren's demeanor CHANGES.

FOX BRETHREN
The Physical World?

MASATO
Yes. A Human Man on the other side
opened it up. I went through. He
saved my life. The Elders said-

FOX BRETHREN
The Elders? For real?

MASATO
Yes.

FOX BRETHREN
Was the Turtle there? The Raven?

MASATO
Yes. They told me I could go
through. They gave me a Mask.

FOX BRETHREN
The Elders gave you a Mask? Holy,
kid! You better not be tricking!
That's what this is, right? A
trick? We Fox Spirits are known for
being tricksters? Is that it?

Fox Brethren GETS UP, and CALLS OUT into the woods;

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)
OK, joke's over! You can all come
out now! I didn't fall for it!

But then he sees Masato SHED A TEAR. He SITS BACK DOWN.

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)
Wow. It's true?

MASATO

I want to go back. But the Elders
said I can't. They closed the Gate.

FOX BRETHREN

Well, there's more than one way to
World Hop.

MASATO

World Hop?

FOX BRETHREN

Yeah. Hop from the Spirit World, to
the Physical World. And hopefully,
make it back again!

Fox Brethren LAUGHS.

MASATO

Have you done it?

Fox Brethren hides a POKER FACE.

FOX BRETHREN

Couple times. Maybe.

MASATO

Can you teach me?

FOX BRETHREN

No. But I know someone who can.

MASATO

Do the Elders know?

FOX BRETHREN

Nah.

Masato SMILES.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD FIELD - DAY

Masato and Fox Brethren WALK across the field.

MASATO

Who is it, Brethren? Who will teach
me to World-Hop? Is it the Eagle?

FOX BRETHREN

No.

MASATO
Is it the Dragonfly? Oh, it's the
Dragonfly, isn't it??

FOX BRETHREN
Nope. You'll see.

They approach a LAKE.

MASATO
How far is it? How long will we
have to walk?

FOX BRETHREN
We're here.

MASATO
What? Here?

FOX BRETHREN
Kid, meet Frog.

The same fat Frog that Fox Brethren previously tricked is
SITTING on the same ROCK. This time, Frog SEES THEM COMING.

FROG
You foxes again! I'm wise to your
tricks now! Go play somewhere else,
if you know what's good for you!

FOX BRETHREN
I'm sorry I was tricking with you,
Frog. I was just giving the kids
some fun. We are Fox Spirits, after
all!

FROG
Hmmp! State your business!

FOX BRETHREN
Frog, my friend here needs some of
your mojo.

Frog takes a better look at Masato.

FROG
He looks pretty young. What for?

FOX BRETHREN
A Human Man on the other side
opened a Gate! The kid went
through. Human Man saved his life.

FROG

Hmmm. That is serious business.

FOX BRETHREN

Yeah, right? Come on, Frog! Let the kid have some fun!

Frog HOPS to another rock. Then HOPS to another. And another.

FROG

Hmmp! Are you coming, or not?

EXT. ENTRANCE TO FROG'S SECRET SHRINE - AFTERNOON

They arrive at a far corner of the lake; a small SWAMPY COVE. Many SPIRIT INSECTS buzz about.

Frog DIVES INTO the swamp, and goes UNDERWATER.

Fox Brethren JUMPS into the swamp, and goes UNDERWATER.

Masato HESITATES.

INT. SPIRIT SWAMP - AFTERNOON

Masato is UNDERWATER. Ahead, he sees Fox Brethren SWIM THROUGH a small UNDERWATER SHINTO GATE.

Masato FOLLOWS.

INT. FROG'S SECRET UNDERWATER SHRINE - AFTERNOON

Masato ENTERS into Frog's Secret Shrine through the GATE. Once through, he is perfectly CLEAN and DRY.

Frog and Fox Brethren are already there, also clean and dry.

It is a large hollowed out space under the earth, but of a clear JAPANESE SHINTO style. Several unique MASKS hang on the walls, among other HANDMADE ITEMS decoratively placed about.

Almost everything GLOWS to some degree with the White Light and other colors, illuminating the space. It is almost tall enough for a human to stand.

Frog hands Masato a TINY ROLLED UP PAPER SCROLL.

FROG

Here. This is a tiny, scroll of rice paper. From the Physical World. Light as air!

Frog GIVES IT to Masato, but Masato CANNOT HOLD IT. The tiny paper scroll DROPS to the floor, impossibly HEAVY for Masato.

FROG (CONT'D)

Ha! You can't even carry a tiny scroll! Do you know why?

MASATO

Why?

FROG

Because you have no muscles! Ha!
You are SPIRIT!!!

Frog PUTS THE SCROLL BACK.

FROG (CONT'D)

In the Physical World, you need muscles to move. You need a Physical form! Come here.

Frog takes out some larger PAPER, a jar of PAINT, and a BRUSH. He lays them on a TABLE.

FROG (CONT'D)

So. You want to World-Hop, do you?

MASATO

Yes, Sir.

FROG

Sir! Ha! I like that!

Frog shows them a SHALLOW POOL OF WATER.

FROG (CONT'D)

Spirit Water always reveals our true self!

Masato LOOKS into the WATER. The surface becomes STILL, offering a CLEAR REFLECTION of Masato. He looks at his own face, the white stripe across his head.

Frog places the PAPER over the WATER. The paper SITS on the surface, but the moisture makes the paper TRANSPARENT, Masato's REFLECTION still slightly visible underneath.

FROG (CONT'D)

This is a magic Mask-Making brush!
I stole it from the Physical world,
don't you know! Ha!

Frog DIPS the brush into the PAINT and GIVES IT to Masato.

FROG (CONT'D)
 Paint yourself! Trace what you see
 in the reflection!

Masato looks to Fox Brethren. Fox Brethren SMILES.

Masato TAKES THE BRUSH, looks back at his reflection again,
 and TRACES THE LINES with the brush onto the floating paper.

After a few strokes, Masato is DONE.

FROG (CONT'D)
 And the white stripe on your head?

Masato LOOKS AGAIN. He TRACES the stripe with the brush.

FROG (CONT'D)
 Good.

Frog TAKES the paper and CUTS OUT the face, leaving a MASK.

FROG (CONT'D)
 This Mask will help keep you
 connected with your True Self! How
 do you want to appear? As a Human?

MASATO
 No Sir.

FROG
 No?

MASATO
 I don't want to APPEAR a human. I
 want to become one, for real.

FROG
 For real? No, young one. We are
 just making illusions tonight. Ha!

Frog looks to Fox Brethren, and WINKS.

FROG (CONT'D)
 To gain a real Human Body, that is
 a whole different task. Let's see
 now; Human, Human...

Frog SCANS a shelf with many JARS, each filled with different
 colored SAND, HERBS, ROOTS etc.

FROG (CONT'D)
 Human! Here we go!

Frog grabs the 'Human' jar off the shelf, and OPENS it.

He SPRINKLES some of the contents onto the Mask. The Mask GLOWS BRIGHTLY. Frog HOLDS IT UP for Masato.

FROG (CONT'D)

With this Mask, you can hop to the Physical World for a short time. Take the Mask off, and, well... you'll see if you try.

Frog LAUGHS.

FROG (CONT'D)

You will also start to forget! Real fast! So come back soon!!

MASATO

And I'll look like a human?

FROG

For a short time, yes. But remember, it is just an illusion! You are still just a Fox Spirit underneath! Ready to hop? Ha!

MASATO

What, now?

FROG

Yes of course! The Mask is fresh! Fox Brethren will go with you!

FOX BRETHREN

What? Go with him? Why?

Frog gives the Mask to Masato. He PUTS IT ON, and TRANSFORMS into a YOUNG JAPANESE BOY, maybe 5 years old, STILL WEARING THE MASK. He is TINY, FRAIL, and WEAK. He is FULLY DRESSED, in typical rural style of 1950's Japan.

FROG

That's why! He'll get eaten alive out there, alone! What form will you take, Brethren?

Fox Brethren SIGHS.

FOX BRETHREN

I will remain a fox. I will assist the kid, and bring him back safely.

Fox Brethren takes an existing FOX MASK off the wall, and PUTS IT ON HIS HEAD. It MERGES with his real face, giving him a distinct look.

FROG
Bring me back a souvenir! Ha!

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

Masato and Fox Brethren CLIMB OUT of a STINKY SWAMP. Masato APPEARS as a young Human Boy. But Masato CANNOT SWIM, and so Fox Brethren must PULL HIM OUT and carry Masato to shore.

Fox Brethren has become a REAL FOX, larger than most. His face is slightly distinguished as a result of his own MASK.

They are both WET, and COVERED IN MUD and SLIME. INSECTS BUZZ and SWARM all around them.

MASATO
Aaaaugh!!!

FOX BRETHREN
Run!

MASATO
I don't know how!

FOX BRETHREN
Use your legs!

Masato tries to use his legs, but cannot coordinate them. More SWARMS of INSECTS ATTACK HIM.

MASATO
Aaaaugh!!!! Help!

Fox Brethren PUTS MASATO ON HIS BACK, and RUNS AWAY.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

There are no more Insects. But it begins to RAIN.

MASATO
I feel cold, Brethren!

FOX BRETHREN
Me too. We're getting wet. We need to find a place to get dry.

WOLVES are heard HOWLING in the distance.

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)
Come! I see a path!

EXT. MOUNTAIN VALLEY - NIGHT

It is POURING. Masato and Fox Brethren are SOAKED, SHIVERING.

The PATH leads to a humble HUMAN DWELLING. A WARM GLOW emanates, SMOKE gently puffing from it.

EXT. HUMBLE MOUNTAIN FARM - NIGHT

Masato and Fox Brethren APPROACH. BEHIND the dwelling is a covered Japanese-style outdoor climbing POTTERY KILN. The kiln is WARM, the inside partially visible and RED HOT.

Masato and Fox Brethren TAKE SHELTER.

MASATO

It's warm!

FOX BRETHREN

It's perfect. We can dry ourselves here until the sun comes.

Masato and Fox Brethren CURL UP against the kiln.

At the bottom of the kiln, near the dwelling, a HUMAN WOMAN softly SWEEPS the floor of the pottery studio. She is a naturally beautiful Japanese Woman in her late 20's.

She finishes TIDYING UP, and GOES INSIDE.

Masato and Fox FALL ASLEEP, still wearing their Masks.

EXT. POTTERY KILN - MORNING

The FRONT DOOR of the Human dwelling SLAMS, WAKING Masato up.

Masato sees the GIRL, STORMING AWAY down a PATH.

MASATO

Psst! Brethren!

Masato SHOVES Fox Brethren, but he DOES NOT WAKE.

MASATO (CONT'D)

Brethren! It's her!!

Fox Brethren SNORES, still SLEEPING by the pottery kiln.

EXT. FARM PATHWAY - MORNING

The Girl KICKS a ROCK as she goes. She appears ANGRY.

Inside the Human dwelling there is a CRASH. YELLING is heard.

The Girl DISAPPEARS over the CREST of the PATH.

More YELLING from inside the Human dwelling. Another CRASH.

Masato CHASES AFTER the Girl, but just then there is a VERY LOUD CRASH, much louder and bigger than before. A SCREAM.

Suddenly FLAMES erupt from inside. The ROOF CATCHES ON FIRE.

FOX BRETHREN

Kid!!

Masato looks to see Fox Brethren, now obviously awake.

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)

We have to go back!

Masato looks again at the fiery dwelling. A FIGHT can partially be seen inside. He looks again down the PATH, and RUNS to FOLLOW THE GIRL.

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)

Kid!!

EXT. RURAL JAPANESE ROAD - EVENING

Masato is running down the ROAD, still wearing his MASK. The Human Dwelling is GONE FROM VIEW. Some CARS typical of rural 1950's Japan can be seen driving about.

Up ahead, Masato sees the GIRL, STANDING at a BUS STOP. A HINT of the WHITE LIGHT is around her, faintly TETHERED to Masato. A TRUCK drives through the tether. It becomes FAINT.

Masato APPROACHES her. She is CLEARLY UPSET, but tries to be tough.

GIRL

Well? Who are you supposed to be?

Masato just STARES AT HER from behind his paper Mask.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Can't you speak?

Masato manages to speak weakly, in JAPANESE:

MASATO

Your Father... He needs help!

GIRL

You? Ha! How could you help him?

The Girl looks off in the distance, WIPING A TEAR.

GIRL (CONT'D)

No one can help him.

Masato sees that the Girl is now VOID of the White Light. The TETHER once connecting them has almost FADED.

The BUS arrives, STOPPING for the Girl. The Girl BOARDS the BUS. The DOOR CLOSES, and it DRIVES AWAY.

The TETHER FADES.

Masato TAKES OFF HIS MASK, revealing an innocent BOY not much younger than the Girl. The Girl SEES HIS FACE for a moment through the REAR WINDOW.

Masato STANDS there watching as the BUS DISAPPEARS from view. Masato begins to get DIZZY. He suddenly remembers Frog's advice, HEARING Frog's VOICE in his MIND;

FROG'S VOICE

You can also start to forget! Real fast! So come back soon!

Masato's BREATHING becomes DIFFICULT again. He CLUTCHES his CHEST, as he searches for and PICKS UP his MASK.

Weakened, he puts the Mask on, and BECOMES A REAL FOX again; the illusion is GONE.

A CAR ALMOST DRIVES OVER HIM. Masato SCURRIES off the road.

EXT. HUMBLE MOUNTAIN FARM - DAY

Masato, in Physical Fox form, RETURNS over the CREST of the PATH towards the Human dwelling. He is WEAK, his BREATHING SHALLOW, his FEET HEAVY.

As the dwelling comes into view, he sees that it has been BURNED. SMOKE RISES from the remains. Masato sees the BURNT CORPSES of the Human Man and Human Woman, HOLDING HANDS.

FOX BRETHREN

Back to the Gate! Now!!

Fox Brethren RUNS. Masato FOLLOWS.

INT. FROG'S SECRET UNDERWATER SHRINE - NIGHT

Masato and Fox Brethren RETURN through Frog's Gate.

FROG

Finally! You were gone too long!
What happened over there?

Fox Brethren removes his mask, then TAKES MASATO'S MASK.

FOX BRETHREN

He disappeared on me, the little
muskrat, that's what happened!

MASATO

You fell asleep! I tried to wake
you!

FOX BRETHREN

That doesn't make it OK to run off
in the middle of a hop! What were
you thinking? Do you know how lucky
you are that we made it back?

Fox Brethren TURNS to Frog;

FOX BRETHREN (CONT'D)

I'm done, Frog. I'm not gonna be
some kid's world-hop babysitter.

MASATO

But the Girl! She's all alone now!
You saw her parents! They're dead!

FOX BRETHREN

Girl?

FROG

What Girl?

MASATO

The Girl! We had a vision of our
future! It was so real!

FROG

Vision? Future?

FOX BRETHREN

You never told me about any girl! I
thought you were looking for the
Human Man!

MASATO

I love her, Fox Brethren!

FROG
 Hmm? True Love? Could it be?

Fox Brethren is BETRAYED.

FOX BRETHREN
 You didn't just put us both at risk
 out there, kid... You lied to me.
 That's not what Brethren do.

Fox Brethren LEAVES. Masato is left alone with Frog.

FROG
 It's true, then? You did this for a
 Girl?

MASATO
 Yes sir. I need to find her, Sir.
 Her parents are dead! She needs me!

Masato SHEDS some TEARS.

MASATO (CONT'D)
 I want to learn to World Hop for
 real. No Tricks. I want a real
 Human Form.

FROG
 Ah, Kid. That takes a thousand
 years to learn! Maybe faster, if
 you're a Shaman, or a million-year-
 old Turtle! Ha!

MASATO
 Then I'll learn!

FROG
 My son... Humans don't live that
 long! The Girl you are in love with
 will die a Physical Death, dream
 for a while, and then be take a new
 form somewhere else entirely, and
 will have forgotten everything. I'm
 sorry young Fox. What you seek is
 impossible.

Masato is HEARTBROKEN, and HANGS HIS HEAD in SORROW.

FROG (CONT'D)
 Well there is one other way, but...

Frog LOOKS at Masato, PITIFULLY.

MASATO
What? What is it?

Frog flips through some PAPERS. He looks at a CALENDAR, then STUFFS IT AWAY again.

FROG
Forget it. It would never work.

But Masato is EXCITED.

MASATO
What would never work? What?

FROG
I said forget it! You're too small.

Frog picks up a WALKING STICK.

MASATO
Too small? Too small for what?

Frog WHACKS the stick against the floor, LOUDLY.

FROG
Enough! Let us speak of it no more.

EXT. SPIRIT WORLD - DAY

Masato is FOLLOWING FROG. Frog carries the WALKING STICK and a small POUCH around his shoulder.

MASATO
But why won't you tell me, Sir? How can I get a real Human body? It is another type of mask??

FROG
No! Well yes... sort of. There's more to it than that. But I told you, it would never work!

But Masato MOVES IN FRONT of Frog, BLOCKING his way.

MASATO
But why? Why won't it work, Frog?

FROG
Because even if it DID work, by the time you get your Human body, your girlfriend will be an old woman!

Frog SIDESTEPS Masato, and CONTINUES WALKING.

MASATO

What?

FROG

That's right! An old woman! Is that what you saw in your vision? Ha!

Masato FOLLOWS.

MASATO

I don't care. I need to find her.

Frog STOPS.

FROG

OK. I'll tell you then, if you're so serious about it.

Masato's EARS PERK UP. Frog LEANS IN;

FROG (CONT'D)

There is one ancient tradition that Spirit Beings have been doing for ages, to cheat!

MASATO

Cheat?

FROG

Yes. One secret way that can give a Spirit Being a true Physical Human Form. A real Hop. No illusions! The Elders consider it forbidden magic.

MASATO

What is it?

Masato realizes they are standing at an ENTRANCE to a BURROW.

Frog SMACKS the entrance to the Burrow with his STAFF. Some DIRT FALLS INSIDE.

FROG

Fighting!

MASATO

Fighting?

Suddenly FOX BRETHREN pops his head up, DIRT ON HIS FACE.

FOX BRETHREN

What's the big idea out here??
Who's there??! Frog? Kid?

FROG

Brethren, do you know when the next event at Hakaku's Arena starts?

FOX BRETHREN

Hakaku's? Soon, I thought.

FROG

I checked my calendar. Starts tomorrow. Timing's quite synchronous, don't you think?

Fox Brethren DUSTS the DIRT from his face.

FOX BRETHREN

What? Him? You can't be serious.

Fox Brethren and Frog both look at Masato, PITIFULLY.

MASATO

What do you mean, fighting, Frog? I don't know anything about fighting!

FROG

Quiet!

Masato SHUTS UP. Frog looks quizzically to Fox Brethren;

FROG (CONT'D)

True Love, Brethren?

Fox Brethren CLOSES his EYES, and SIGHS.

FOX BRETHREN

I'll pack my things.