

THE CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN

Opera in Three Acts

by LEOS JANACEK

English Setting by Donald Pippin

ACT ONE SYNOPSIS

(A note: this translation differs considerably from the original Czech libretto, but faithfully follows a translation into German by Max Brod. Brod, a highly respected author in his own right, was also a close friend of Janacek. Since his translation was created and performed while the composer was still much alive and close at hand, I would presume that the changes were made with his blessings.)

It is a hot summer afternoon and the forest is bustling with activity, filled with the chatter of birds and insects, frogs and crickets. The forester enters carrying his shotgun, his faithful companion and partner in life. "You I should have married. No nagging, no whining." As for his wife, "Good woman, but too many questions." Nostalgically remembering the one night he spent with a lovely gypsy girl, he lies down and falls asleep. A mosquito, half tipsy at the prospect of fresh, tasty human blood, dances around the sleeping forester, to the music of the grasshopper, who is pleased to perform for an appreciative audience: "So you like my tune? Only one I ever mastered." A badger emerges from his hole smoking a long pipe. A baby vixen catches sight of a frog and is instantly fascinated: "Mommie! Mommie! Can I eat it?" The frog takes a terrified leap and lands on the forester's nose -- a fateful move for the baby vixen. The forester wakes up with a start, sees the vixen, whose beautiful eyes remind him of his lovely gypsy girl, and pounces: "Little fox, got you now!" As the baby screams for her mommies, the forester tucks her under his arm, and strides off. "Little present for the kiddies."

Life at the farmhouse, where the forester's wife has never welcomed her into the family, is far from pleasant for the little vixen. Dackel, the dog, reminds her that she is not the only one who is sometimes given a rough time: "As in song I howl my heart out -- all of it improvised -- I'm rewarded with kicks and curses." Admittedly, the vixen has a temper. When a friend of the forester's young son, pokes at her with a stick and wonders if she will bite, she has a ready retort: "Watch your language! A dog, am I? A bedbug? One of your lower classes?" She finds herself in serious trouble, however, when she fights back, and confirms the boy's worst fears. The forester's wife, running out of her short supply of patience, turns on her husband: "One thing after another! You might have known the consequence when you adopt wild animals." And even the more tolerant forester agrees that the vixen should be punished: "Tie her up and leave her."

Dackel, the dog, gives her some friendly advice: “Do as I do -- try to behave. Be more diplomatic. Start by wagging your tail.”

It grows dark. The vixen, abandoned on her leash, is mysteriously transformed into a dancing gypsy girl. Only with the coming of dawn does she return to her animal shape.

But she continues to stir up trouble. Her strident attempt to rally the shamelessly exploited egg-producing hens to rise up in protest leads to a crisis. “Sisters! Sisters! Who does the labor? Who gets the profit?” Disgusted at the craven submissiveness of these “spineless reactionaries” who recoil in horror at the idea of equal rights, she retaliates by wringing their necks one by one, thus incurring once again the wrath of the forester’s wife, who speaks ominously of her desire for a new fur muff. When even the forester is roused to apply his stick, she breaks her leash, trips up the forester, and escapes to the forest and to freedom.

ACT I, SCENE I

A dark gully in the woods, a badger’s hole in the background. A summer afternoon. From his hole, a badger’s head emerges, smoking a long pipe. Flies circle around. The Forester enters, gun on shoulder, puffing and panting.

FORESTER: In for stormy weather . . .
Forty winks would not be unwelcome.
Blame it on the poachers.
That’s all the wife need know about it.
Good woman, but too many questions.

The Cricket and the Grasshopper enter with tiny barrel organs.

Worn out, like after that one night with the gypsy girl.
Ah, but then ’twas well worth the effort.
So, my trusty shotgun! Faithful old companion.
You I should have married . . .
Perfect satisfaction!
No nagging, no whining.
My very own. *He falls asleep.*

CRICKET: Sit down, give Grandpa another evening concert.

GRASSHOPPER: Yes, any time to please a music lover.
So you like my tune?
Only one I ever mastered.

The Mosquito, half-tipsy, dances around the sleeping Forester.

MOSQUITO: Human blood, so fresh and tasty!
The Frog grabs at the Mosquito, who slips away.

FROG: Brekete! Brekete!

MOSQUITO: Hey, try talking my language.

FROG: Brekete!

MOSQUITO: Oh, these foreigners!
The nerve! Trespassing! *Flies off.*

The Baby Vixen enters, and is instantly fascinated by the Frog.

BABY VIXEN: Mommie! Mommy!
What is that? What is that?
Can I eat it? Can I eat it?

The frog takes a terrified leap and lands on the Forester's nose.

FORESTER: Jumping Jupiter! You nasty, slimy toad!

He looks around and notices the Baby Vixen. Like a beast of prey, he creeps up and pounces.

Little fox! Got you now!

BABY VIXEN: Mommy! Mommy!

FORESTER: Ha, ha, ha, ha!
Little present for the kiddies.

BABY VIXEN: Mommy! Mommy!

FORESTER: Beautiful eyes,
Like those of my lovely gypsy. . . .

He tucks the Baby Vixen under his arm, shoulders his gun and strides off.

BABY VIXEN: Mommy! Mommy!

FORESTER: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

The Blue Dragonfly comes looking in vain for the Baby Vixen.

ACT I, SCENE II

Scene: Courtyard of the Forester's lodge. An autumn afternoon. The Forester enters from the lodge.

FORESTER: *(to Dackel, the dog, lying near his kennel with Keenear, the Vixen)*
What is that growl about?

FORESTER'S WIFE: *(at doorway)*
Thanks to that wretched vixen! Fleas all over!

After pouring out a saucer of milk, both she and the Forester leave.

VIXEN: Ou, ou, ou!

DACKEL: Whimpering and whining!
Is *my* life a bed of roses?
The pain of loneliness!
May is the month for canines most cruel.
Art alone then comforts me.
As in song I howl my heart out --
All of it improvised --
I'm rewarded with kicks and curses,
Barred from knowledge
Of the love exalted by my verses.

VIXEN: Though I, too, have little first hand knowledge
On that subject.
Bits and pieces I have managed to overhear.

Near the hole we called home in the forest
Some starlings had nested,
Squabbling on a daily basis,
Each one calling the other down
And none with a leg to stand upon.
The daddy starling a shameless old philanderer --
Take it from me that his escapades were no secret!
One day some kites and crows caught him *in flagrante* --
A term they kept harping on.
He never heard the end of it!

So much for the elders,

But the little ones were no better.
One with the cuckoos played and carried on;
Others seen with ravens and rooks created scandal --
Hanky panky so outrageous
That the families at last were put on notice.

But in all honesty,
Who am I to sit in judgment?
Free love I applaud on principle.

Dackel, in a fit of passion, catches the Vixen by the tail; she knocks him over, whereupon he slinks off to the rubbish heap.

Don't get ideas!

Young Peter, the Forester's son, and his friend Frankie come running out of the house.

PETER: See what my Dad got me! She's a vixen.

Peter catches the Vixen and lifts her up, which emboldens Frankie to poke at her nose with a stick.

FRANKIE: Will it bite me?

VIXEN: Watch your language! Watch your language!
A dog am I? A bedbug?
One of your lower classes?
Boy, how dare you! Be gone!

FRANKIE: My, what a temper!
Go on, Peter, stick it to her.
Give her one! *Peter raps her on the nose.*

VIXEN: You'll pay for this. Blood for blood! *She attacks Peter.*

PETER: Boo hoo! Help, she is gnawing my ankle.
Help, or she'll finish me!

VIXEN: Freedom!

With Frankie in hot pursuit, she runs off toward the woods and stumbles.

FRANKIE: After her! Hold her down.

PETER: Boo hoo! Boo hoo!

The Forester's Wife rushes from the house, followed by the Forester.

WIFE: I told you! One thing after another!
You might have known the consequence
When you adopt wild animals.

FORESTER: Tie her up and leave her.

He puts a leash on her, then returns to the house with his wife. Frankie makes off and Dackel slinks indoors. The Vixen, mysteriously transformed into a gypsy girl, cries in her sleep. It grows dark. Dawn finally breaks. The Vixen returns to her animal shape.

DACKEL: *(stretching)* Do as I do -- try to behave.
Be more diplomatic.
Start by wagging your tail.

COCK: *(preening himself)* Never put your trust in the almighty human!
Yesterday a pampered vixen.
(pointedly, to hens) Now look at her. Down a peg,
And all because she's never laid an egg.
Who has seen her incubate?

(to Vixen). Only by practicing
Can you accomplish it.

HENS: By training and practicing,
With never a holiday.
By practicing, practicing,
We manage an egg a day.

CRESTED FOWL: Trrrrp! Earn your bed and board.

COCK: Proficiency through practicing!

VIXEN: Sisters, sisters! Why let him feed you garbage?
Helpless hens in a harem.
Who does the labor? Who gets the profit?
Stand up to him! Agitate!
Too long you've suffered oppression.
Demand freedom now!
Come the revolution, cry
Down with roosters! Down with tyrants!

HENS: *(aghast)* No more roosters? No more roosters?

VIXEN: Why do you put up with him?
Shoving you aside, he gorges on grain,
And only when he has stuffed himself
He offers you a bite.

COCK: *(with rising anger)* Don't be taken in!
Trumpeting rights and equality
She's out to destroy the family.

HENS: Clearly! Clearly! Clearly!

VIXEN: I refuse to tolerate
Spineless reactionaries!
I'll dig a hole and die in it --
Goodbye!

Scraping out a burrow in the rubbish heap, she digs herself in as the Crested Fowl, the Cock and the Hens watch apprehensively.

CRESTED FOWL: Courage, go closer, closer!
See if she is dead.

The foolish hens carry out orders, whereupon the Vixen springs to life, seizes them and wrings their necks one by one. The Crested Fowl runs around in a panic.

CRESTED FOWL: Kokokodak! Kokokodak!

FORESTER'S WIFE: *(rushing in to witness the mayhem, followed by her husband, then nearly fainting from shock)*

(to her husband) You criminal! You murderess!
Sooner or later, bound to happen.
All along I've told you
To leave her where you found her.

CRESTED FOWL: Oh, what a tragedy! Too, too horrible,
Facing an eggless future.

FORESTER'S WIFE: I still could use a muff.

The Vixen leaps to her feet in alarm, straining at her leash, trying to escape.

FORESTER'S WIFE: Hold it, hold it! You animal!
Look for no further mercy.

VIXEN: Now or never!

FORESTER'S WIFE: You villainess!

The Forester enters, armed with a stick, which he applies vigorously to the Vixen.

FORESTER'S WIFE: Go on, slaughter her!

VIXEN: You could not scare me
 If you were ten times bigger.

FORESTER: I will make mince meat of you.

VIXEN: Go ahead, try it!

Finally snapping the leash, she knocks down the Forester and runs off to freedom.

End of Act I

ACT TWO SYNOPSIS

The second act finds the vixen back in the forest and faced with the prosaic task of house hunting. Using the lowest of tactics, threatening to spread the lie that he is a sexual predator, she badgers the badger into abandoning his comfortable burrow, then moves triumphantly into her new home.

Is it mere coincidence that we next meet the parson -- like the badger, smoking a long pipe -- now being forced to abandon his parish and find a position elsewhere? "Slander has broken me." A certain gypsy girl whom we've already heard spoken of has made false charges of sexual impropriety. The scene is an inn. While a menacing crowd gathers outside in protest, he grimly watches the forester and the elderly schoolmaster as they play cards. The forester twits the schoolmaster, whom he suspects of long overdue romantic inclinations that burn beneath his dried up outer crust:

Way back from yesterday --
Sweet time of plenty! --
Spry as bees and birds at play,
You, too, were twenty.

As for himself, he confesses: "Only my gypsy girl, my faithless gypsy girl, stirs the embers." And yet fiery Terynka, the untamed gypsy girl, has in fact been nothing but trouble. As he tells the innkeeper, "I brought her to my house, hoping to govern her, just like my vixen. At heart a wild animal, she will never be domesticated. The schoolmaster instantly falls for her wiles and witchery. Concerned, I have her sent to the

rectory, and so it follows: the parson's been accused, and I go untainted." But he is far more perturbed than he is willing to admit. Is it love, hate, or a secret guilt?

Unsteadily wending his way homeward on an uphill path alongside a fence where a sunflower is in bloom, the now inebriated schoolmaster laments his lack of will power: "Why did I have to spend half the night playing cards in a tavern?... No assertiveness! I cannot let go of the things that matter little, and the things that I value I can never hold on to."

The vixen scurries in and crouches behind the sunflower. In drunken confusion, he takes her for the gypsy girl, to whom the darkness enables him to pour out his heart:

O Terynka! Had I but known
That you were waiting ...

In a gust of passion, he leaps over the fence and disappears, as the vixen darts away from the sunflower and hides in the underbrush. Her eyes flash out from the bushes as the parson enters, quoting a classical author: "Trust and follow the path of virtue." Hogwash! He reflects bitterly on the treacherous duplicity of the gypsy girl and his recent escape from his outraged parishioners: "To me they entrusted homeless Terynka . . . Pastor and pupil, daily we prayed together . . . Pregnant though of course unmarried, who the father might have been she would not or could not say. Rumor was rampant, all pointed in my direction. I had to flee an angry mob shouting obscenities -- She allowed it to happen. Thus rewarded for a life of pious dedication!"

He, too, departs hastily as shots ring out and the forester, who could have cleared his name but didn't, enters gun in hand, shooting apparently at random, in pursuit of the vixen who scurries across the stage.

The vixen's life takes a turn for the better on another summer moonlit night when she meets a gallant, handsome fox, who offers to escort her home: "Now is the season when hunters are on the prowl. These thugs are all too apt to take advantage of a young lady out alone." As they rapidly get acquainted, she gives him a somewhat modified account of her life story: "At the forester's lodge I was an adopted daughter . . . family member, nurtured and educated, I got to know *people!* And by and large felt ashamed of them." Finding humans altogether too difficult to live with, she tells him how she at last found freedom and independence by breaking away and running off to the forest: "Dank and dark as the deep dead of night, yet there I slept serenely."

The fox soon becomes an ardent suitor. Privately, she has to wonder what he sees in her that is so appealing: "Is it my personality? Or the way my sharp ears quiver? Or is my snout so special?" But the fox is unequivocal: "You alone are the one all my life I've been seeking. Understand, I am unlike other young foxes. For me it is not the body but the soul, your soul that I adore. Take my word: unlike your average fellow who would charm, then abandon you, my love is true forever and ever."

VIXEN: At times, he's not so fussy.

BADGER: That is enough,
You filthy scandalmonger!
My lawyer may decide to press charges
When I tell of your extortion.

VIXEN: Sue me! Those in glass houses
(echoed by the Forest Animals) Shouldn't go threatening.

Talk of scandal!
No less than a sexual predator,
He'd seduce an innocent virgin,
Pretending -- oh, you hypocrite! --
To offer counsel, comfort and salvation!
Dare if you will to deny it!
I myself was your gullible victim.

But so be it.
Hard times compel me now
To yield reluctantly.

BADGER: Lies! You are out to ruin me!
I shall not stay here to listen.

*Wiping away a tear, he departs, his head held high, his long pipe under his arm.
The Vixen triumphantly settles down in her new home.*

ACT II, SCENE II

*Scene: an inn, where the Forester and the Schoolmaster are seated at a table,
playing cards.*

PARSON: *(entering, and like the badger, with a long pipe)*

Slander has broken me.
I shall have to live elsewhere.

FORESTER: Your Reverence!
How can you be leaving
With a wedding on the way?
Unless our tongue-tied schoolmaster
Has misled this old timer.

PARSON: Non des mulieri corpus tuum.

FORESTER:



Though in dust-y Lat- in now you run for cov- er, you must have been a lov- er once.

Way back from yesterday --
Sweet time of plenty! --
Spry as bees and birds at play,
You, too, were twenty.

However hard we pray,
Spring soon is over.
Bones ache and teeth decay;
Arteries harden.

Comes winter, cold and gray;
Bare is the garden.

Lovers grow old and pass by as strangers.

SCHOOLMASTER:

And yourself?

FORESTER:

Only my gypsy girl --
My faithless gypsy girl stirs the embers!

SCHOOLMASTER:

I am told in the forest
You've found wilder beauty,
Catching a vixen, then taking her home with you.
Your wife I hope was happy?

FORESTER:

Must you remind me?
Total, total catastrophe!
What a relief when she left!
After childhood, mad adolescence . . .
Then no controlling them.
Good riddance!

When if ever comes peace of mind?
Look at our old Schoolmaster!
On my diamond deuce
Wasting an ace!
His heart is at sixes and sevens.

PARSON:

Non des mulieri corpus tuum.

FORESTER:

That's all Greek to me.

Maybe all right in church,
But not the way we hunters talk.

PARSON: Translated, "Woe to you that trust a woman."

FORESTER: Friend, why tell me now?
I should have got that message sooner.

(to Schoolmaster) But *you* should listen well.

SCHOOLMASTER: I shall pay it no attention. *He goes to the window.*
The cock crows. Let's break it up.

FORESTER: Vigilant cock! Good St. Peter heard it, too.
After he surrendered to cowardice.

SCHOOLMASTER: Bedtime! *(He leaves.)*

The Innkeeper enters excitedly and whispers into the Parson's ear.

INNKEEPER: Run for it!
There is an angry mob of people running rampant.

PARSON: *(to Forester)* You, you could clear me!

Pipe in hand, he hastily departs. The angry mob crowds the exit, threatening the disgraced Parson. The Innkeeper clears the path for his escape.

CHORUS: *(offstage)* Shame on you! Shame on you!

FORESTER: *(somewhat tipsy, partly to himself, partly to the Innkeeper)*

If so, maybe I'm the guilty party.
Yes, I in fact sheltered her.
Fiery Terinka, the untamed gypsy,
I brought to my house,
Hoping to govern her.
Just like my vixen.

(tenderly)

(furiously) She will never be domesticated,
At heart a wild animal.

(tenderly)

Like my vixen.

The Schoolmaster instantly falls for her wiles and witchery.
Concerned, I have her sent to the rectory.
And so it follows:

The Parson's been accused.
And I go untainted.

INNKEEPER: You and the gypsy!
What became of your other little vixen?

FORESTER: Damn your uncalled for curiosity!
Driven off. If you wonder why,
Ask my wife about it.
Then both of you can go to blazes!

He leaves in a fury, evidently deeply perturbed.

ACT II, SCENE III

Scene: a pathway leading uphill, alongside a fence with a sunflower in bloom. A moonlit night.

SCHOOLMASTER: Maybe I'm out of my mind entirely,
But it appears the planet
Is rotating backwards.
Something is way out of harmony.
Why did I have to spend half the night
Playing cards in a tavern?

Back to the same old failing:
No assertiveness!
I cannot let go of the things that matter little,
And the things that I value I can never hold on to.

(He stumbles.) Damn this slippery pathway!
Washed away again!
Grab a stick for balance,
A vital support for my spineless character.

Two feet, one stick --
Three essentials for stability.
Otherwise, weaving, wobbling,
I'd never get home at all.

Ready now, O wind, try to topple me!
He sways and staggers.

Easy there! Lightly touch!
Softly caress me!

The Vixen has scurried in to crouch behind the sunflower, which shakes mysteriously in the rising breeze. The Schoolmaster stares in rapt astonishment.

O Terynka! Had I but known
That you were here waiting,
I'd have left those idiots
Like a bolt of lightning.

Is it love that brings you?
O answer me!
I'm in agony.
A yes or no will decide
Whether I live or die.

In silence I love and suffer.
Punish me not for being by nature shy and tongue-tied,
Here in the dark I can say
I love you and shall forevermore!

Aha! . . . Quietly she beckons . . .
I go to claim my happiness!

In a gust of passion he leaps over the fence and disappears. The Vixen darts away from the sunflower and hides in the undergrowth. The Parson enters.)

PARSON: "Trust and follow the path of virtue."
Hogwash! Some classical author probably.
Never mind! Whoever said it was mistaken.
That lesson I paid for dearly.

To me they entrusted homeless Terynka.
For her I opened doors of enlightenment,

The eyes of the Vixen flash out from the bushes.

Made her a Christian.
Pastor and pupil, daily we prayed together.

Those warm, glowing eyes!
Pools of fervor and piety!
Deep as the sea itself.
Down in that darkness lurked
Devils of every known variety.

Pregnant, though of course unmarried --

Who the father might have been
She would not or could not say.
Rumor was rampant, all pointed in my direction.
I had to face an angry mob
Shouting obscenities --
She allowed it to happen.

Thus rewarded
For a life of pious dedication!
“Memnestho aner agathos einai.”
I quote from Xenophon,
I believe verbatim.

FORESTER: *(offstage)* There you are! *The Vixen scuttles across the stage.*
Now I’ve got you! *(Shots ring out)*

PARSON & SCHOOLMASTER: God help us!
Hunting at this hour!
Shooting at random,
Man or beast,
No matter which is hit.

They depart rapidly. The Forester enters, shotgun in hand.

FORESTER: My vixen! My little runaway!
Ah, that cunning little vixen!

ACT II, SCENE IV

Scene: the vixen’s burrow. A moonlit summer night. The Vixen catches sight of the Fox, who is partially concealed amid the branches.

VIXEN: Oh, my God! Is he handsome!
Is he gorgeous!

FOX: Sorry, didn’t mean to startle.
(stepping out nonchalantly)

VIXEN: *(shy, innocent)* No-o! No-o!

FOX: I apologize, if intruding.

VIXEN: Please!

FOX: What a cozy little clearing!

VIXEN: Yes, my very favorite getaway,
Not far from where I'm living.
Here I often come to enjoy the weather,
And today I felt a headache coming.

FOX: Then kindly allow me --
I can escort you home.
Now is the season when hunters are on the prowl.
These men are all too apt to take advantage
Of a young lady out alone.

VIXEN: Please ! Very k-k-kind of you.

FOX: A pleasure! Granted that your mother wouldn't mind.

VIXEN: Oh, no! I'm of age and independent.

FOX: Independent?

VIXEN: I have my own house,
One that my Uncle Badger left to me.

FOX: Making you the owner?

VIXEN: At the Forester's lodge
I was an adopted daughter.

FOX: *(most impressed)* Bed and board?

VIXEN: Family member,
Nurtured and educated.
I got to know -- people!
And by and large felt ashamed of them.
Pitiful!
True, the Forester was kind and friendly,
And often affectionate.

But I found his wife impossible!
And jealous to the max.
She scolded him incessantly.
Even when not around,
She'd call in her children
To pester and pick on me.

Once when I bravely tried to fight back,
She shouted:
“Just wait! Some day I’ll skin you,
Turn you into a nice fur muff!”

Once half dead with hunger,
I stole some chickens.
Both with stick in hand came running,
Cursing and swearing.

Unbowed, I held my ground,
I cried: “Why, why be so stingy?
You have more than enough,
And I, nothing at all.
I’m too proud for begging;
What does that leave but taking?”

Strike! Punish! Strike! Punish!
But then beware!
I’ll get back at you!”

War was on! Action followed.
Too eager, too hasty, they were thrown off balance.
The coast was clear. I ran to the forest.

Dank and dark as the deep dead of night,
Yet there I slept serenely.

Mightily impressed, the Fox makes a deep bow and introduces himself.

FOX: Call me Renard.
Family goes back to Ruddycoat, from Mossy Hollow.

VIXEN: My own name is Keenear,
Foster fox, ward of the Forester’s.

She extends her right paw, which the Fox kisses with the utmost deference.

FOX: If you would not mind my dropping by,
I’d like to visit now and then.

VIXEN: You are welcome any time.

FOX: But you’re often here for relaxation?

VIXEN: After midnight, as a rule.

Though tongues tend to wag,
I ignore my critics.
I am not breaking the law,
And it's no one else's business.

FOX: A thoroughly modern young lady.
Cigarette?

VIXEN: *(shocked, despite herself)* N-n-not yet.

FOX: You like fresh jackrabbit?

VIXEN: With a passion!

FOX: *(abruptly)* See you later. *(He leaves)*

The vixen, lying on her back, stretches out luxuriously.

VIXEN: Can he really find me attractive?
What about me appeals to him?
Is it my personality?
Or the way my sharp ears quiver?
Or is my snout so special?

The Fox returns and watches the Vixen slyly, while remaining hidden.

Though despite its flaws, my soul is beautiful.

FOX: *(from the underbrush)* (Pretty, maybe *too* pretty!
Some big flashy fox may grab her.)

VIXEN: *(oblivious to his presence)*

No, I'm really not unpleasing.
O my golden hero!

FOX: (Does she love me?)

VIXEN: My lean, handsome hero!
If you only knew how I adore you!

With a start, she sees him.

FOX: *(stepping forth)* Pray allow me. . . .

VIXEN: Why are you returning so promptly?

FOX: Chi chi chi! I have brought something fresh and tasty.

He presents a jackrabbit to the Vixen.

VIXEN: Aren't you terrible! Aren't you awful!
Taking so much trouble to please me!

(She trembles with pleasure, and they settle down to a light snack.)

FOX: Are you chilly?

VIXEN: No, I'm getting hotter.

The Fox, head to head, brush to brush with the Vixen, plants the first kiss on her ear.

FOX: Have you ever fallen in love?

VIXEN: No-o. But yourself?

FOX: Also no-o.

VIXEN: Why not?

FOX: Maybe, maybe
Maybe I've never found the right one,
The vixen I could live for,
One to call my very own.
But if ever my dream came true . . .

VIXEN: Then? . . .

FOX: Then I would ask without a moment's hesitation
If she could love me.
You say nothing?

He seizes the little Vixen wildly, passionately.)

VIXEN: Let me go! That is what you can do.
You scare me, so much stronger.
Go away! Stay away forever!

FOX: Fine! I'm going.
But I go broken hearted.
What's the use? Kill me off.

Why go on living?

VIXEN: Is it true? Life without me would mean nothing?

FOX: Only pain.
You alone are the love I have always wanted.

VIXEN: Me? Me?

FOX: How long I've waited
For such happiness!
You alone are the one I've been forever seeking.
Keenear, my love!
You alone are the one all my life I've been seeking.

VIXEN: What have I done? Why me alone?

FOX: Understand,
I am unlike other young foxes.
For me it is not the body but the soul,
Your soul that I adore.

Take my word:
Unlike your average fellow
Who would charm, then abandon you,
My love is true, forever and ever.

Why this hesitation?
Come and sit closer to me.
Trust me! Trust me!
Weep only tears of happiness.
Answer! Answer!

VIXEN: Yes! Yes!

Together they enter the Vixen's burrow. A blue dragonfly ballet follows, after which the owl, like a phantom, flies in, followed by the jay.

OWL: Neighbor, if you saw what I saw, oh my, my!
Saw with my very own eyes,
Let me emphasize.
Needless to ask it.
That Vixen's headed for hell in a hand basket.

JAY: Who with?

The sun rises. Squirrels giggle. From behind the tree trunk a hedgehog sticks out its tongue.

VIXEN: *(emerging from the burrow, in tears)* A-o-o-u!

FOX: Now sweetheart! Stop crying.
What is the matter, honey bun?
Dry your tears and tell me.

VIXEN: Dear, is not the reason obvious?

FOX: No, I can't imagine . . .

She whispers in his ear, then falls around his neck.)

FOX: If you are sure . . .

VIXEN How can we avoid a scandal?

FOX: We'll head straight for the altar!

WOODPECKER: *(sticking his head out of an old tree)*

Well . . . And about time!
Say exactly what you're driving at.

FOX: Well, you see, it's about
Getting married.

WOODPECKER: I'm to officiate . . . no?

And the wedding proceeds.

WOODPECKER: The fox Renard, resident of Mossy Hollow,
Taket the vixen Keenear
For his wife in marriage.

The forest animals sing and dance in celebration.

End of Act II

ACT THREE SYNOPSIS

The third act takes us into autumn. Harashta, a poacher just out of jail, coming down the path, is tempted at the sight of a dead rabbit lying by the wayside. Fortunately, he also notices the forester, who has arrested him before, now following behind him at a discreet distance, no doubt on the lookout for just such transgressions. No danger! Now reformed, so he claims. And a good thing, too, as he is about to get married. Who is the lucky lady? “Who would imagine? Me and Terynka. Untamed, but she will soon enough learn who is boss.” He pulls a bottle out of his pocket: “Drink up! To the carouser and the gypsy!”

They go their separate ways, the forester stunned and incredulous. But he, too, has noticed the dead rabbit as well as a fox trail around it. This time he will catch the vixen for sure! A gin trap taken from his knapsack will suffice.

Sure enough, the vixen and the fox, now a devoted married couple surrounded by their family, are out for an afternoon stroll. The lively little fox cubs, whose number they have long lost track of, are playing a singing game:

Little fox from London town
With potatoes loaded down.
Little fox, O guard your sack
From the badger at your back.

They see the dead rabbit, and the vixen is immediately suspicious: “Very odd! A hunter here, who leaves the rabbit on the road. You explain it! Leaves the rabbit. Doesn’t even pick it up.” Even the little cubs can recognize a trap. “Can this hunter and his goons take us foxes for raccoons?”

When Harashta the poacher returns singing a carefree song and carrying a basket of chickens, the vixen is on the alert: “Hide the family! This noisy character warrants further inspection.” She lies down on the path and pretends to be wounded. Harashta sees an opportunity. His gun is ready. “Just the thing! A pretty muff for Terynka.”

The vixen is unintimidated. She starts to run, limping as if crippled, all the time taunting him and goading him on. When he stumbles in the chase, falling and breaking his nose, she takes advantage of the distraction by ransacking his basket of poultry. “Grab your broken nose while I grab some dinner.”

Feathers fly, the little foxes come out to join the feast, and the vixen continues to defy and make fun of Harashta. In blind fury, he shoots. The frightened foxes hastily scatter amid a mass of feathers. The vixen falls to the ground bleeding, and there is left to die.

And so much for Terynka! Married to a ne’er do well bully. Back at the inn, the forester commiserates with the schoolmaster: “Friend, count your blessings. Say good

riddance! Not the right person -- nor for me either. She'd have us turning somersaults." Taking his hand, he notes: "Dry as a bone, a withered stalk, and yet his eyes are wet with tears of love . . ."

Autumnal melancholy prevails: "Time to pay and take off. The woods, then home again. There my poor old dog is waiting, legs getting creaky, happy just to doze all day, decrepit, same as us . . ."

Seeking comfort, he returns to the forest, his real home, which evokes so many memories: "I feel at home here at dusk when the forest starts coming alive. A forest forever youthful, each round of the sun a new beginning . . ."

A tiny fox cub scampers up to him. "Lord help me! There she is! Just as winsome, just as wayward, and the spitting image of her Mom!" He snatches for the little fox cub, but catches a frog instead. "Hey, you clammy, cold blob of ice! You again, blast it!"

The terrified frog squeaks out: "Not him! I am me, not him! That was Grandpa. I have heard often all about you. Funny old stories, stories all about you . . ." The forester smiles and drifts off to sleep, this time letting his gun fall carelessly to the ground.

ACT III, SCENE I

Scene: the edge of a clearing. Midday in autumn. Harashta comes down the path, an empty pannier on his back. The Forester, gun on shoulder, approaches on the same path, but keeping a distance.

HARASHTA: *(in carefree song)*

Strolling merrily,
Me and my banjo,
Here beneath her window,
Here beneath her window,
Softly I c-c-c-call:
"Come, love, come to me.

"I bring you today
Showers of kisses,
Tender, sweet caresses,
Tender, sweet caresses."
"If that's all, n-n-n-no!
Go, sir, on your way."

“Ah, but there is more!
Shining so pretty,
Satin from the city,
Satin from the city.”
Sir, why did you n-n-n-not
Say so before?”

He sees a slain hare on the road and is about to pick it up when he notices the Forester.

FORESTER: Hey there, Harashta! How’s the free man?

HARASHTA: So so!
(pointedly) Better than some were expecting.
But you know my old temptations.

FORESTER: Say no more! Too bad you are a bachelor.

HARASHTA: Not for very long!
Soon I’m getting married.

Yes, indeed!
Lucky for me, I have found the woman.
Who would imagine?
Me and Terynka!
Untamed, but she will soon enough learn
Who is boss.

He pulls a bottle from his pocket.

Drink up! To the carouser and the gypsy!
To our wedding day!

FORESTER: *(stunned and incredulous)* Terynka!

HARASHTA: What you left of her.

FORESTER: Terynka!

HARASHTA: *(gloating)* Wonderful specimen!

FORESTER: *(sternly)* I trust you have not been poaching . . .

HARASHTA: Raise my right hand on it!
I swear by the holy book.
No, sir! Absolutely!

Although . . . I've been sorely tempted.

FORESTER: Sorely tempted?

HARASHTA: *(with heavy sarcasm)*

While the Forester no doubt lay napping,
Someone left this rabbit --
Mine for the taking!
Never had it so easy.
But I have a conscience.

Hands off, Harashta!
If you get caught -- jail time!

FORESTER: Finally! You understand.

He comes so close to him that their noses nearly touch.

In the forest I'm ruler.
Luckily, I'm on to you.

Shouldering his gun, he walks over to the clearing, while Harashta observes him slyly.

You found this rabbit?

HARASHTA: Dead! Dead already.

The Forester notices a fox trail around the dead rabbit. He takes a gin trap from his knapsack and sets it.

FORESTER: Some sly fox has been at work.
Keenear, my vixen!
But when she returns,
She'll find a trap baited.

He leaves, frowning and perturbed, while Harashta observes him mockingly, then leaves in the opposite direction.

HARASHTA: Ha ha ha! Hi hi hi! Ho ho ho!

The little fox cubs come in, playing a singing game.

FOXCUBS:



Little fox, oh guard your sack
From the badger at your back.

Little fox from Africa
Carries pepper, paprika.
Little fox, watch out! Beware
Of the hedgehog and the hare.

VIXEN: (*inspecting the dead rabbit*) Very odd!

FOX & LITTLE CUBS: Very odd! Very odd!

VIXEN: A hunter here, who leaves the rabbit on the road.
You explain it!
Leaves the rabbit,
Doesn't even pick it up.

FOX: Watch out, children.

FIRST LITTLE CUB: Shall I tell you what I think? It's a trap!

VIXEN: That poor old hunter, he must be loony.

LITTLE CUBS: Yes, a trap! Try and catch us!
That poor old hunter, he must be loony.

VIXEN: Does he take us for raccoons?

LITTLE CUBS: Does he take us for raccoons?

VIXEN: He's much mistaken.
Call him nervy Ned Knucklehead.

LITTLE CUBS: Ned Knucklehead!

VIXEN: A chain that reeks of tobacco!
Can this hunter and his goons
Take us foxes for raccoons?

LITTLE CUBS: Ned Knucklehead!

FOX: (*rubbing up to the Vixen*)
 We have had how many children?
 You must know, dear.

VIXEN:
 Never counted .

FOX:
 Say then how many are still in the offing?
 You must know, dear.

VIXEN:
 Lower your voice,
 Unless you want the birds to know it.
 How they love to gossip!
 Leave it to them;
 It will be all over the forest.

FOX:
 Why not many?
 You're just as pretty as ever.
 Still just as pretty as ever.

VIXEN: (*dolcissimo!*)
 Dearest, later
 It will happen when flowers are blooming.
 Again, again
 It will happen when springtime is ours.

FOX:
 Dearest, I'll wait, I'll wait till then.
 Spring will be ours.
 Again it will happen when May arrives
 Bursting with flowers.

HARASHTA: (*offstage*)
 Take my roses while you may;
 Frozen winter's on the way.
 Then no matter ice and storm;
 Marry me and you'll be warm.

VIXEN:
 Who is that nuisance?

FOX:
 Who is that nuisance?

VIXEN:
 Hide the family!

Harashta approaches, his pannier full of chickens.

HARASHTA:
 Ah, my dear little bride to be!
 Here I am at liberty,
 So open up your door to me . . .

VIXEN: This noisy character
Warrants further inspection.

She lies down on the path where he is approaching and pretends to be wounded. Harashta enters carrying a basket of chickens, which he quickly sets down upon seeing the Vixen.

HARASHTA: Drop the basket. Here's opportunity!
Get the gun ready.
Just the thing! A pretty muff for Terynka.

VIXEN: We shall see!

She starts to run, limping badly as if severely crippled, while taunting Harashta.

Gun me down, already so disabled!
Gun me down, though I can barely hobble.
Gun me down!

While chasing after the Vixen, he stumbles, falls and breaks his nose. She takes advantage of the opportunity, by ransacking his basket of poultry.

VIXEN: Grab your broken nose
While I grab some dinner!

HARASHTA: Damn that vixen! Ow, ow, ow!
(nursing his nose) Dislocated!
Swollen, probably broken.
Blasted vixen! Ow, ow, ow!
Will Terynka now think me so good-looking?
Why did old Satan send me that vixen?

As the feathers fly from the pannier, the little fox cubs come running out to join the feast, while the Vixen continues to make fun of Harashta.

VIXEN: Gun me down,
A little fox, so helpless!
Gun me down,
Already so disabled!
Gun me down,
Though I can barely hobble.
(raiding the basket) Wish me hearty appetite.
Such a to-do over poultry!

HARASHTA: Go to hell!

In blind fury, he shoots. The little fox cubs who have been drawn to the scene scatter hastily amid a mass of feathers. The Vixen is left on the ground, dying.

ACT III, SCENE II

Scene: the garden behind the inn. The Innkeeper's Wife brings beer out to the Forester and the Schoolmaster, who are seated.

FORESTER: Quiet as a graveyard!

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: The city would suit me better.
Livelier . . . Music, even dancing . . . *(She leaves.)*

FORESTER: *(resuming his conversation with the glum schoolmaster)*

At last, reaching the foxhole,
Hot on the trail,
I find it cleaned out.
I promised my wife a nice, warm muff,
As she keeps on reminding me.

And the tongue I was hoping to give you.
They say it can make you invisible.
That could be of value
When you again go courting
'Mong the shy sunflowers.

SCHOOLMASTER: I'm through with that.
Dear Terynka's getting married tomorrow.

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(returning in time to overhear)*

She's got a muff. Brand new!

The Schoolmaster turns toward the fence, cups his palm to his eyes, and stares into the distance.

SCHOOLMASTER: *(to himself)* Too bad for his wife.

FORESTER: *(shaking the Schoolmaster's hand)*

Dry as a bone, a withered stalk,
And yet his eyes are wet with the tears of love. . . .

Friend, count your blessings.
Say good riddance!
Not the right person --
Nor for me neither.
She'd have us turning somersaults.

Where's our Latin scholar?
Settled down in his new parish?

INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Yes, he wrote to us . . . homesick. *She goes back inside.*

FORESTER: Time to pay and take off.

SCHOOLMASTER: Where to, so early?

FORESTER: Where to? The woods, then home again.
There my poor old dog is waiting,
Legs getting creaky,
Happy just to doze all day,
Decrepit, same as us . . .

Friend, do you remember?
You and I were full of mischief,
Always up to God knows what. . . .

Nowadays we move slowly
And, dull and drowsy, wait it out *(He leaves.)*

ACT III, SCENE IV

Scene: the same gully as in Act I, Scene I.

FORESTER: Armies of mushrooms!
Tiny soldiers in uniform,
Wearing hats chestnut colored,
Trim as country girls.

Is it real or am I dreaming?
My fantastic forest! The same familiar trees
As when we first came exploring together,
She so impertinent, and I so in love!

We, too, went mushroom gathering,
Probing deep into the murky forest,
Often back with empty hands,

Too much in love to notice;
Coming back instead
With an overflow of treasured kisses.

Wedding bells that day were ringing!
We were young, and wedding bells were ringing!

He sits down, his gun resting on his knees.

These pesky flies!
Without them, I'd be dozing in no time.

Yet I feel at home
Here at dusk when the forest starts coming alive.
A forest forever youthful,
Each round of the sun a new beginning.

Forest imps and fairies
Soon will return for a springtime
Of glorious revels and rapture.

Starting all over,
Back to undertake new miracles,
Once more they will scatter dew and sunlight
That turn into blossoms:
Honeysuckle, phlox and marigold.
Children and parents, other folk passing by,
Will stop to gaze in awe and wonder,
And may recognize
God's own heaven, right here!

Blissfully, he falls asleep. The tree branches divide, revealing all the animals of Act I. The Forester awakens with a start.

FORESTER: Ho! But my vixen is gone for good.

A tiny fox cub scampers up to him.

FORESTER: Lord help me! There she is!
Just as winsome, just as wayward . . .
And the spitting image of your Mom!
Watch out! Like your mischievous Mom,
I will catch you.
But I'll give you a better bringing up,
And this time around you'll behave yourself,
Grow up respectable!

He snatches for the little fox cub, but catches a frog instead.

FORESTER: Hey, you clammy, cold blob of ice!
 You again, blast it!

FROG: *(terrified)* Not him! I am me!
 Not him! That was Grandpapa.
 I have heard often
 All about you.
 Funny old stories, stories all about you

The Forester smiles and drifts off to sleep again, letting his gun fall carelessly to the ground.

THE END