

THE FOX'S TALE

A play for voices
by Neil Rathmell

Characters

Fox

Man

Wife

- FOX** *(Calls.)*
Excuse me!
(Pause. Calls again.)
Excuse me!
- MAN** Who's that?
- FOX** Over here!
- MAN** What?
- FOX** Good morning! I wonder if you could help me. I seem to have got myself in a bit of a fix. Got caught up in this wire netting.
- MAN** I hope you realise this is my property.
- FOX** Yours?
- MAN** Mine.
- FOX** Well, I'm with Proudhon when it comes to property.
- MAN** Proudhon?
- FOX** Late nineteenth century. French philosopher. They're all philosophers though, aren't they, the French? "Property is theft." Fundamental to the philosophy of anarchism. I seem to have got my leg stuck. If you could just...
- MAN** That's my hen house, with my hens in it. I'm on my way to collect an egg for my breakfast, as I do every morning.
- FOX** I was on my way in to collect a hen for my lunch, but one of my legs got caught up in this damned netting.
- MAN** You admit it, then?
- FOX** What?
- MAN** That you're a thief.
- FOX** Did I say that?
- MAN** If my netting hadn't done it's job, I'd have been missing a hen this morning. If not more.
- FOX** I try to make a clean sweep if I can. It's not stealing though. I'm not a thief.
- MAN** You just admitted it.
- FOX** Do you have cats?
- MAN** My wife does.
- FOX** Do you let them out at night?
- MAN** She lets them come and go as they please. That's about the only good thing about cats. They pretty well take care of themselves. You don't have to take them for walks, like dogs.
- FOX** Do you sometimes find dead animals on the carpet when you come down in the morning?
- MAN** Mice and voles? Little birds? Presents, she calls them. You've only to look a cat in the eye to know that the last thing they would do is give you a present.

FOX Yes. I don't know why they do that. I wouldn't. But the point I'm trying to make is that I'm only doing what your cats do. Apart from leaving a dead hen on the carpet. I'd have left them in the hen house. But that's irrelevant. The thing is, you don't accuse your cats of stealing, do you? But according to you, I'm a thief.

MAN Yes, because they're my bloody hens! I don't keep mice and voles and little birds, I keep hens and they give me eggs for breakfast.

FOX So they leave presents for you. Is that what you're saying? You see, the thing is, because you're a person, you see the world and everything in it from your point of view. And if anyone disagrees with you, you take it personally. Which Proudhon didn't, which is why he said that property is theft. Because it is. Those hens are only yours because you say they are.

MAN They're mine because I paid for them! I bought them!

FOX Yes, from another person. They didn't sell themselves to you, did they? That's what Proudhon meant. He meant that the only way a person gets to own anything is by stealing it. It's the same with this field.

MAN What field? It's not a field, it's my garden.

FOX It might be a garden to you, but to me it's a field. It's got hens in it that I like to eat, and it's got mice and voles and little birds in it that your cats like to eat.

MAN And it's got a hen house in it with eggs that I'm going to have for breakfast.

FOX And you're welcome to them, same as the cats and me are welcome to the mice and voles and little birds and hens, but they're not ours. They're not anybody's. Nobody owns anything.
(Pause.)

MAN Have you finished?

FOX I could go on.

MAN I'm sure you could.

FOX It's a matter of profound existential interest to me.

MAN But I wish you wouldn't.

FOX Fair enough.
(Pause.)
So, if you wouldn't mind just helping me to extricate my leg from this netting, I'll get out of your way.

MAN Just hold still.

FOX Right.

MAN This won't hurt.

FOX Thank you.
(Sound of a blow with a blunt instrument. Silence.)

WIFE Everything all right, dear?
(Pause.)
They're still laying then. They're very reliable, aren't they?
(Pause.)
Texting already?

MAN Tweeting actually.

WIFE What are you tweeting?

MAN "Already this morning I have killed a fox with a baseball bat. How's your day going?"

WIFE Hmm... One egg or two?

END