

The fox

It is cold. Icy wind whistles through the arcades of the abandoned shopping centre. I'm in a hurry, shops are about to close and I need a present for my grandson. He'll be six today. I am a guest at his tea-party with five other children. I can't say I'm looking forward to it, I hate children, especially at birthday parties, which mostly degenerate into squabbling and shouts. It was such a mistake to accept this invitation from my ever so controlling daughter-in-law. I prefer the tranquility and safety of my own, rather self centred life.

The piercing cold attacks my face. Thanks to the old cane of my dead husband Tom I stay on my two tottering legs. Luckily I wear the fox. Only yesterday I dug it out from its moth balled wrapping. Today its comfortable warmth draped around my neck is so useful. Its natty head with alert beady eyes rests on my shoulder. I'll never forget Tom's proud face when he showed me the dead animal thirty years ago. He caught it with his bare hands and had this beautiful stole made out of it.

Back in the comfortable warmth of the car I drive deftly to the house of my son. Last time I saw him, he urged me to give up driving. The idea of it - he might as well have put me behind bars - such a loss of freedom that would be.

Light is fading fast now. I park the car and see a swarm of arms and legs in the lighted sitting room. I sigh, feeling already tired and leave the car. I set my mouth into a cheerful grin and walk towards the opening front door. 'Here's gran,' my son shouts to the fighting bundle and pecks me on the cheek. Tommy comes up, eager to receive his present. I bend over to congratulate him. At the same moment the pin securing the fox's head comes loose. In alarm the poor child shrinks back but the fox's snout catches Tommy's temple with a thump. He falls backwards, his head hitting the radiator. Shocked, we watch as a trickle of blood creeps down the side of his skull. The next moment his father lifts the lifeless body of his son onto the couch. Five pair of eyes, full of fear move from the dangling fox around my neck to the deathly pale face of my grandson, back to me again. In the distance I hear the sound of an approaching siren. Someone must have called an ambulance. They slide Tommy into the vehicle, like an apple pie into an oven. Doors close and the blue flashing light disappears with his parents into the darkness. I find myself alone with five completely strange faces, staring at me. The fox stares back at them. I see my reflection in their eyes.

The watercolour painting on the wall of sloping fields and woodland was the wedding present that my husband and I gave our son. The three of us hiked a lot in that landscape when he was a boy. I always watch it when I'm visiting my son.

But now the room starts to turn The picture blows up, twice, three times around me. Through hills and dales I run, my thick tail, red and brown swishing behind me, as a sword. I am hunting and zigzag around clumps of grass and copse. I jump into ditches and high above the grass to locate my prey. This life I enjoy so much.

Suddenly I lose my track. I brake hard, leaving a long trail in the sand. Too many smells invade my nostrils. I am confused, which way to go? I decide to give up on the chase. There is a new scent in my nose I want to follow. I slink stealthily between two big tree trunks; with one move of my snout I push a branch aside and catch sight of a delicious meal. A fat mother duck with five ducklings bask in the sun on a pool bank. I smack my lips together and watch this sweet scene a while, as I consider my plan of attack. Once in the water I will have no chance to grab them, so how to lure them away. I scratch my nails over the bark of a trunk, they don't move. Saliva drips from my teeth. I can't wait any longer so I move forward, one step closer. Risky, but neither the ducklings nor the mother move at all. I take another step, into the open space, closer to the pool. All of a sudden I feel unprotected and spied. The ducks seem to be carved out of stone, but their smell is unbearable strong. Then I realise, too late, this is a trap. Something heavy falls on me, my throat is closed. I try to bite. Gasping for breath I see the ducks from the corner of my eye, sitting motionless. Then my head falls limp aside. With stretched legs I am obliged to give up this so desired fox life.

Unconscious about life or death I am lifted up and thrown into the boot of a car. Dizzy from a very windy road the man pulls me out of the car. He throws me over his shoulder and calls his wife, 'Rena. Reynecke, look what I've caught, with my bare hands.' He shows me to a proud and cold woman. She looks into my dead eyes, before they hang me upside down in a drafty shed.

Helpless, with my fast legs bound together I am unaware of my next destiny. They drop me on a bench of a skilled tanner. He uses a razor sharp knife to zip open my belly. He pulls out my testines, my heart, all my organs. He replaces my eyes with glass beads. My muzzle is slightly opened to show my sharp teeth. My beautiful tail is cut off and sewn somewhere near my head. I am not myself anymore. I realise that for the rest of my life I will be a fox fur stole.