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SF PERUSALS

The Fox

A PLAY

by **Allan Miller**

Based on the short novel
The Fox

by **D. H. Lawrence**

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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THE FOX was first presented by the Back Alley Theatre in Los Angeles, April 4, 1981. It was produced by Laura Zucker and directed by Allan Miller. Lighting was by Christopher Milliken, costumes by Hilary Sloane. Production Stage Manager was Michael Wymore.

CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

NELLIE MARCH ..... *Jenny O'Hara*

JILL BANFORD ..... *Margaret Ladd*

HENRY GRENFEL ..... *Michael Horton*

The first New York production of THE FOX was at the Roundabout Theatre Company, Gene Feist and Michael Fried, Producing Directors, on July 7, 1982. Allan Miller directed. Scene Design was by Roger Mooney, Costume Design by A. Christina Giannini, Lighting Design by Ronald Wallace, and Sound Design by Philip Campanella.

THE CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

NELLIE MARCH ..... *Jenny O'Hara*

JILL BANFORD ..... *Mary Layne*

HENRY GRENFEL ..... *Anthony Heald*

CHARACTERS

JILL BANFORD---nearly thirty. A small achey creature.

NELLIE MARCH---nearly thirty. Tall and strong-looking.

HENRY GRENFEL---twenty. A soldier. Fair and lean.

The time of the play is November, 1918. The scene is the old Bailey Farm, England. The farm is a modest affair, and so is the house in which the girls live. Nothing is ramshackle, but neither is there any sign of prosperity. The colors inside the house are warm, but with only the fire and one or two lamps to light the place the rooms crawl with dark spots and shadows.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The symbolism of Henry as The Fox, so wonderfully wrought, so early on, in the D.H. Lawrence novella, must be allowed to develop ever so subtly and gradually in this dramatization.

I have written Henry here as a truly innocent woods spirit whose predatory instincts come into play well before his consciousness can define them. He is finely curious of these two women on the farm. He's never met creatures like them. He admires their boldness in trying to live their lives separate from the demands of the town cultures they've moved away from, but he also recognizes their lack of knowledge and the quick-wittedness necessary to survival on their terms.

So his first actions toward them are generous, engaging, even mischievous, but not in any way possessive. Only as he begins to draw out Nellie's inner needs and desires, and fancies, does his predatory nature assert itself. Even so, till almost the very end, he is still willing to sacrifice some of his own aspirations to achieve his soul-mating with Nellie. His offer to get a job, and his offer to stay on with Nellie and Jill after he and Nellie are married, are meant as testimony to his need for her. It is Jill's instincts that lead her to perceive what Henry is really up to and capable of.

ALSO

I've written in an auto-harp for Jill to play. Any similar instrument will do. Even a piano.

THE FOX may be performed with one intermission by playing Act II & III without a break.

The Fox

ACT ONE

SCENE One

The stage has two playing areas, the parlor, and Stage Left of it, a raised area that is the woodshed. The parlor contains a fireplace far Stage Right, with two rough but comfortable armchairs in front of it. Upstage Right is a doorway leading to the kitchen. Stage Left—Upstage of the back wall of the woodshed—is the front door of the house. Just Upstage of the front door and Stage Right of it are the stairs leading to the second floor. Immediately Downstage of the front door is a blanket chest. Upstage Center is a marble topped sideboard with bottom cabinets tucked in under the stairwell. To the Right of the sideboard are several bookshelves, obviously handmade. In the woodshed, in the Center of the space, is a tree stump that is used for sawing logs.

It is a brisk November evening, dark, and the wind very much alive. JILL *is in a chair by the fire, a shawl wrapped around her shoulders, playing her auto-harp.* NELLIE *is at a small work table with the kerosene lamp for light, working out a design on a porcelain vase, wearing her breeches and boots, and a sweater.*

NELLIE *smiles at* JILL. JILL *crosses to her.*

NELLIE. What is it?

JILL. I miss you. (*They laugh.* NELLIE *turns back to her painting. A single dog barks off in the distance.* NELLIE *reacts sharply.* JILL *puts her hand steadyingly on* NELLIE*'s shoulder.* NELLIE *reaches up to touch her hand.*)

NELLIE. You get back to the fire. You'll catch a chill. (JILL *moves back to her chair. The single dog is now joined by a group of others, all excited.*)

JILL. They sound as though they've found something.

NELLIE. Sshh.

JILL. What do you think it is?

NELLIE. Sshh! (*The dog sounds become louder, seeming very close.* NELLIE *hurries to the door and flings it open.*)

JILL. Nellie! (NELLIE *swings around to face* JILL. *The dogs suddenly move further away.*) It's cold. Close the door . . . ! (NELLIE *closes the door. The dog sounds gradually disappear.*) What do you think it was? Hm . . . ? Nellie!

NELLIE. What?

JILL. What did you think that was?

NELLIE. I don't know.

JILL. Then why did you jump so?

NELLIE. I didn't jump.

JILL. You flew! What were you afraid of?

NELLIE. Don't be silly.

JILL. I know when you're frightened and when you're not.

NELLIE. I wasn't frightened . . . ! Do you want the lamp now, I'm not going to paint anymore.

JILL. Nellie!

NELLIE. What?

JILL. What did you think that was?

NELLIE. Nothing!

JILL. What did you think that was? What have you been thinking about . . . ! Do you know you've been moaning in your sleep?

NELLIE. I have?

JILL. And you've cried out twice?

NELLIE. When was that?

JILL. Last was Saturday night.

NELLIE. What did I say?

JILL. Nothing. But your face was wet and your hands were cold. You sat up when you called out but I talked to you and you lay back down again. What were you dreaming about, Nellie? Tell me.

NELLIE. I was dreaming the water turned cold in the middle of a bath, you cuckoo. Is that what you're so bothered about?

JILL. Nellie—

NELLIE. What?

JILL. Winter is coming—

NELLIE. It always does.

JILL. The chickens won't lay, the barn's falling down . . .

NELLIE. The barn'll be mended.

JILL. The house is getting cold again, and my shoulder's always hurting . . .

NELLIE. Ohh—

JILL. The fox is stealing all our hens, and we never have enough money! How are we going to feed ourselves when the ground's dried up and we can't even draw out a vegetable? My mum was right, we'll never last another winter!

NELLIE. Yes we will.

JILL. How can we? How can we? We've got to face up to it, we're losing here, Nellie. We're not living the life we hoped for in this empty house, with not enough food

and never enough time for all the things that have got to be done. Why can't we visit somewhere 'till we're settled and calm again?

NELLIE. Where?

JILL. We could go to my place.

NELLIE. And do what?

JILL. Anything we like. We wouldn't be tied to the house. And my brother Jack's coming home soon. We could do so many things with him. And we could always come out here again next summer!

NELLIE. If we leave now you know we'll never come back.

JILL. Yes we will.

NELLIE. This is what we planned for. This is what we chose.

JILL. But nothing's working out properly.

NELLIE. We came here to live our own lives, didn't we? Without having to strut about to other people's ideas, and other people's demands—

JILL. But look what's happening to us now . . . ! (*She accidentally knocks the porcelain vase that* NELLIE *was painting to the floor.*)

NELLIE. It's only a piece of porcelain . . . We haven't had any flowers to put in it since September . . . ! (JILL *bends to the floor to help pick up the pieces. Suddenly there is a sharp crack of a twig in the yard.*)

JILL. Nellie, someone's out there. It may be a tramp!

NELLIE. Turn down the light.

JILL. Get the gun.

NELLIE. Turn down the light!

JILL. Get the gun! (*As* NELLIE *rushes into the kitchen for the shotgun there is a knock at the door.*)

NELLIE. Who is it? (*Instead of a reply the door opens*

and HENRY *appears, in uniform, with a pack on his back. He smiles as* NELLIE *levels the gun at him.*)

HENRY. Hello!

NELLIE. What do you want here?

HENRY. Why, what's wrong?

NELLIE. What do you want here? Speak up or I shall shoot!

HENRY. Why I've come to see my grand-dad.

NELLIE. Who is your grand-dad? Who is he?

HENRY. William Grenfel.

NELLIE. There's no William Grenfel lives here.

HENRY. There isn't?

NELLIE. You know there isn't. Now move away or I shall shoot!

HENRY. I lived here with my grand-dad five years ago. What's become of him then?

JILL. There was an old man lived here before us, Nellie. He lived all alone.

HENRY. Ay, that's him. What's become of him then?

JILL. We were told he died.

HENRY. Ayy, that's where he is.

NELLIE. How is it you didn't know if your grand-dad was alive or dead?

HENRY. I joined up in Canada, you see. That's where I ran away to. I hadn't heard from him in three or four years.

JILL. We've been here almost three years.

HENRY. Have you?

JILL. Nellie, put up the gun. Mr Grenfel's a visitor.

HENRY. Ay, we've seen enough of guns.

JILL. Nellie . . . ! (*She gestures for* NELLIE *to lower the gun.*) Would you like to sit down a bit, Mr. Grenfel? Have you come from very far?

HENRY. Salonika.

JILL. Salonika? I have a brother coming home from France.

HENRY. Coming here?

JILL. No, going to his house, in Islington, where my family lives.

HENRY. I know the town.

JILL. Do you? My dad owns a clothing shop there.

HENRY. Does he? What's his name?

HENRY. Banford. Brawleigh Banford.

HENRY. Is that the name of the shop?

JILL. No. "Woolens" . . . ! Would you like a cup of tea, Mr. Grenfel? To take the chill off?

HENRY. Thank you I would, Miss Banford.

NELLIE. I'll get it.

JILL. No, no, I will, Nellie—(*But* NELLIE *has crossed into the kitchen before her, with the gun.*) Well there's no need of the two of us for a pot of water. Did you come in on the train, Mr. Grenfel? (*She gestures* HENRY *to the chair she occupied at the fire.*)

HENRY. Yes I did. (JILL *hurries to the chair to remove the harp before* HENRY *sits, and leaves the kerosene lamp on the fireplace mantel.*)

JILL. And then you walked the whole way out here?

HENRY. Ay.

JILL. You must be tired then.

HENRY. A little.

JILL. Were you planning to live here with your grand dad again?

HENRY. Until I'm sent to Canada. I'm on leave now.

JILL. Where will you stay then? How long have you got? (*She places her harp in the cabinet part of the sideboard.*)

HENRY. Oh I know some people in the village. I can always stay at the Swan.

JILL. The Swan's quarantined with the influenza. It's brought down half the town by now.

HENRY. Has it?

JILL. I'm sure it has.

HENRY. Is that why you stay out here? Afraid of catching the flu?

JILL. We've had lots worse than that, Mr. Grenfel.

HENRY. Have you?

JILL. Our first year here I caught pneumonia.

HENRY. Did you?

JILL. I was bedded down for a fortnight. I came to this place for my health, but it hasn't improved any yet, believe me.

HENRY. And what has Nellie caught since she's been here?

JILL. Nothing. She's never sick. That's why I've got to make it up for the two of us. (*She sits in the downstage chair by the fire.*)

HENRY. But you said you've both had worse than the flu.

JILL. Well wouldn't you call mending coops and chasing chicks and chopping wood and draining ditches from twelve to fourteen hours a day at least as much as catching the flu?

HENRY. Yes I would.

JILL. Well Nellie does more.

HENRY. Does she? (NELLIE *comes in, carrying a tray of food.*)

JILL. Don't you Nellie?

NELLIE. Are you chattering about me?

JILL. I was just telling Mr. Grenfel that . . .

HENRY. Henry—

JILL. Henry. How you do all the heavy work, and I do all the bed watching.

NELLIE. Tea'll be a minute. There's nothing but bread and margerine and jam to chew, I'm afraid.

HENRY. A bit of bread'll taste quite a lot just now, Miss Nellie. Thank you. (NELLIE *crosses into the kitchen again.*)

JILL. How long since you've eaten, Henry?

HENRY. Since noon today.

JILL. Since noon? That's a terrible stretch for a growing boy. You gobble this then and I'll slice you another.

HENRY. Thank you.

JILL. I'm just so sorry we haven't got a chunk of meat to go with it. Food's been awful scarce in the village with the rationing, and we've had little luck in the woods on our own.

HENRY. Hunting used to be good out there.

JILL. It still is, but we haven't got the time and we haven't got the patience. There's all the feeding and weeding, and mending and cleaning, and oh, there's never an end to what has to be done out here. Well you know about that.

HENRY. What kind of stock do you have beside the chickens?

JILL. We've got ducks, and a horse, and a heifer—No, we had a heifer. We had to sell her.

HENRY. Why?

JILL. She was always crashing fences, and then she got herself pregnant . . . Well, we're not out here to slave our lives away. Heifers are always trouble, so we had to sell her . . . ! Nellie, what are you up to out there?

NELLIE. (*OFF.*) I had to build the fire from scratch.

JILL. Well why didn't you set it on in here . . . ? Nellie makes a fine pot of tea, Henry, you'll enjoy it.

HENRY. You make a fine slice of bread.

JILL. Does it feel good?

HENRY. It's like a heaven sent gift to my poor aching body. My grand-dad would have had me out dragging in wood for the week by now.

JILL. On your first night back?

HENRY. Ay.

JILL. Is that why you left him?

HENRY. That, and the cut of his tongue. He had a way of making the sun seem cold.

JILL. He sounds terrible.

HENRY. Terrible he was. He brought me here when I was twelve years old, and . . .

JILL. How long did you stay?

HENRY. Till I was fifteen.

JILL. And you left five years ago. That makes you twenty in all. My brother's twenty-one!

HENRY. He'll come home an old man then, won't he . . . ? You've done a wondrous thing in here, Jill. My grand dad kept this room a cellar bin. The walls were always bare, the floor was always black . . . (NELLIE *comes in with the tea.*)

JILL. Here we are.

NELLIE. You pour out, Jill.

JILL. Of course, don't I always . . . ? You see a difference in the room, do you Henry? (NELLIE *crosses to the blanket chest near the door, and sits on it.*)

HENRY. Don't I though?

JILL. I put up the curtains and I found the furniture. Nellie put up the shelves, but I brought in most of the books.

HENRY. I like to read.

JILL. I love it, but my eyes can't always take the strain. Nellie's a great reader too, but lately she's become most fond of filigree work on porcelain, these cups are hers . . . (JILL *crosses to* NELLIE *with her tea.*)

JILL. She's done pitchers and vases, and lots of others.

HENRY. Your handiwork is lovely, Nellie. Very.

JILL. Say thank you, Nellie.

NELLIE. Thank you.

JILL. Come sit by the fire, Nellie, where it's warm.

NELLIE. I'm all right.

HENRY. But we can't see you.

NELLIE. I can see you . . . ! (JILL *crosses back to pour her own tea.*)

HENRY. Well you've both made a little dream world out here in the forest, ladies, take my word.

NELLIE. You haven't seen the outside.

HENRY. What?

NELLIE. You haven't seen the outside.

HENRY. The outside needs sturdying up, and so does the barn, but a good hand could clear that up in a wink.

JILL. Nellie is a good hand, but this place takes more clearing than she can do.

HENRY. Why have you never taken anybody on then?

JILL. We did once, but he turned out to be more worthless than the hens.

HENRY. What's wrong with your hens?

JILL. Tell him, Nellie. (*She and* NELLIE *laugh.*)

HENRY. What?

NELLIE. Go on.

JILL. (*Still laughing.*) They won't lay! When we give them hot food in the morning they flop out for hours in a trance, and when we give them their hot food at night they peck about like a pack of sleepwalkers in all the early hours of the day! And then when the government passed the Daylight Savings Bill the stupid birds refused to go to sleep until nine o'clock or later, and that spoiled them. Now they click and clack about all day and all night like a bunch of wacky clocks . . . It's no laughing matter!

HENRY. (*Laughing, too.*) I could get your hens to sleep. And I could get your hens to lay.

JILL. How?

HENRY. Hot food's for Wyandots. You've only got Leghorns, haven't you?

JILL. How do you know that?

HENRY. I looked . . . ! I could get your hens to lay all right. And I could sturdy your barn, and bring you in food for your kitchen.

JILL. Could you?

HENRY. Take my word.

JILL. Could you also shoot us a fox?

HENRY. I've shot more than my share before.

JILL. This one's clever. He makes us stand guard when we're too tired or too blind to catch him. Nellie saw him once, but she couldn't get a shot at him.

HENRY. What did he look like?

JILL. Nellie?

NELLIE. What?

JILL. What did the fox look like, Henry wants to know?

NELLIE. Why?

HENRY. I might know something about his habits if I knew his colors.

JILL. Tell him.

NELLIE. He has a golden brown and grayish white muzzle, with a thick white tipped tail, and with white . . . under the tail. And a thick, fiery brush all over his body.

HENRY. A "fiery" brush?

JILL. She's been dreaming about him.

HENRY. Has she?

NELLIE. Jill!

JILL. Well you have, haven't you?

HENRY. And how long has he been about?

JILL. Almost a year.

NELLIE. He came last winter.

HENRY. Always the same one?

NELLIE. Always.

HENRY. How do you know that if you've only seem him once?

NELLIE. I know.

JILL. Nellie knows, Henry. It's always the same one.

HENRY. And has he bothered any of the other farms?

JILL. Oh yes.

NELLIE. But he always come back here.

HENRY. That's because he knows you don't have a man about the place . . . ! Well farming is an all day chore. My grand dad and I never had time for curtains or filigree work.

JILL. We don't believe in living for nothing but work, Henry.

HENRY. Ay, that's it. To work a farm you might as well be a beast yourself. But if your hens won't lay,and your larder's bare, how much longer do you think you can last?

NELLIE. We shall hold on a time.

HENRY. What will you do when you've used up all your capital?

NELLIE. Hire ourselves out for landworkers, I suppose.

JILL. Or borrow another bit from my dad.

HENRY. There won't be any demand for women landworkers now the war's over. And suppose your dad was to decide to have you home again? A farm needs a man about the place, take my word . . . ! Well I better be going now or I'll find the other half of town in bed, asleep.

JILL. How long is it till your leave is up, Henry?

HENRY. A week.

JILL. And then they're shipping you back to Canada?

HENRY. That's where I want to be. First they're sending me back to camp though.

JILL. Where is that?

HENRY. Near Salisbury Plain. About sixty miles.

JILL. Do you have a home in Canada, with relations?

HENRY. I have a home with no one. I have no home, but I have the country. It's a wild place, but you've seen no more beautiful sights in this world. I've lived snowy nights and soggy days in cabins and lean-tos, and I've slept on the side of a mountain to watch the clouds rise like balloons below me. England is my birth, but Canada is my life . . . ! I thank you for your kind good thoughts, ladies, I'll be on my way now.

JILL. Henry . . . ? Suppose you find no one with a bed to spare?

HENRY. I'll trade with a horse. Goodnight.

JILL. Nellie . . . ? I'd say you could spend the night here, Henry, only . . .

HENRY. What?

JILL. Well, propriety, I suppose.

HENRY. It wouldn't be improper, would it? How could it be?

JILL. Not as far as we're concerned.

HENRY. Not as far as I'm concerned. After all, it is my own house, in a way.

JILL. It's what the village will have to say. They don't take kindly to our being out here as it is.

HENRY. They're all half sick with the flu, that's what they get from minding how you live.

JILL. Well what do you say, Nellie? Hm?

NELLIE. It's all the same to me. We can look after ourselves. (*She crosses into the kitchen with her cup.*)

HENRY. Of course you can, I've seen that.

JILL. Well then stop if you like, Henry. We have a bed for you.

HENRY. If you're sure it isn't troubling you too much.

JILL. Oh it's no trouble. It's good to have company again.

HENRY. It's awfully good not having to turn out again, take my word.

JILL. Sit yourself down then and rest, while I ready your room.

NELLIE. (*Coming back in.*) I'll tidy the room.

JILL. I'll do it, Nellie. You stay and build the fire up . . . ! We have two rooms, Henry. Would you rather face the sun or the shade? (*She takes the lamp from the mantel and moves to the stairs.*)

HENRY. Either.

JILL. Not that there'll be much sun for you to see this time of the year.

HENRY. I'll take the shady one then.

JILL. I'll give you the sunny one, it's brighter . . . ! Oh, and would you like to scrub up tonight before turning in? I can run a tub for you if you want?

HENRY. Ay, I'd like that.

JILL. I'll heat the water for you soon as I've done upstairs.

NELLIE. I'll get the water.

JILL. You sit, Nellie, you've done enough today. I'll be down in a jiff . . . ! (*She hurries up the stairs with the lamp.* NELLIE *crosses out the door and returns in a moment with some logs. As she moves to the fire* HENRY *gets up behind her, and touches her on the shoulder.*)

HENRY. Can I help you with that, Nellie? (NELLIE *almost cries out.*) What is it, did I frighten you?

NELLIE. No.

HENRY. I'm sorry if I did.

NELLIE. You didn't . . . ! (*She stoops to the fire again.* JILL *appears again.*)

JILL. Henry, I forgot to ask, do you use a pillow? We have two extra.

HENRY. One will be fine, Jill. Thank you.

JILL. I'll give you the fluffy one then . . . ! Henry, why don't you come and unpack now, then you'll be all settled for the night after your tub. Do you want to do that? Hm?

HENRY. Ay.

JILL. You come along too, Nellie. We can talk up here . . . ! (*She disappears again.*)

HENRY. Are you coming, Nellie?

NELLIE. In a minute.

HENRY. Hurry . . . ! (*He smiles at her, and then climbs the stairs.* NELLIE *stares after him, and . . .*)

THE LIGHTS FADE

SCENE TWO

Early morning. The parlor is still dark. A light can be seen at the head of the stairs.

JILL. (*OFF.*) Henry? Henry . . . ?

NELLIE. (*OFF.*) Go on down. (JILL *comes down the stairs and* NELLIE *follows.*)

JILL. Henry . . . ? He isn't here. (NELLIE *opens the door.*) Do you see anything?

NELLIE. Dark woods and a tipsy barn. The logs need piling. (*She closes the door and crosses to the fire.*)

JILL. Nellie, aren't you concerned about him?

NELLIE. What shall I do?

JILL. Call him.

NELLIE. Why?

JILL. I want to know if he's left us or he hasn't.

NELLIE. Then you call him . . . !

JILL. Well you're in a nice state this morning.

NELLIE. You'd like a fire, wouldn't you?

JILL. Yes.

NELLIE. Then I've got to clear away the ashes, haven't I?

JILL. Suppose something's happened to him?

NELLIE. He looks as if he could manage.

JILL. Nellie!

NELLIE. What?

JILL. What's happened to you? Don't his whereabouts concern you at all? This is his first day here. Where could he be? What could he be doing?

NELLIE. Perhaps he took a walk.

JILL. Why?

NELLIE. Why not?

JILL. I don't know. But why wouldn't you call out for him then? What happened to you last night, did you dream again?

NELLIE. Did you hear me get out of bed?

JILL. No! Why? Did you . . . ? Hm?

NELLIE. I thought I heard someone singing outside the window.

JILL. Singing? Who?

NELLIE. The fox!

JILL. The fox?

NELLIE. The singing went all round the house and out into the fields. I had to get up to make sure. He was out there, in the yard, right at my feet, looking up at me. And I wanted to touch him but when I stretched out my

hand, he bit me. Right through the wrist. And then he whisked his brush against my mouth. And it burned . . . ! Then he made off, laughing . . . I'm not a staring post, Jill. You've dreamt queer things haven't you?

JILL. Nothing as queer as that.

NELLIE. I've felt you snuggle round me in the middle of a night.

JILL. Because I was cold.

NELLIE. You've got your water bottle to keep you warm.

JILL. You know it doesn't last but a little time.

NELLIE. Listen now! I'm telling you what I saw and heard in my sleep . . .

JILL. All right.

NELLIE. It was a trick. That's what dreaming is, isn't it? We see at night what we can never even imagine during the day . . .

JILL. All right, Nellie.

NELLIE. But if I can't even confide in you anymore what's the good of things between us?

JILL. I'm sorry, I'm sorry . . . ! (HENRY *suddenly enters carrying the gun, two pheasants on a thong, and some eggs in his pockets.*)

HENRY. Did I wake you while I was in the woods? I went out deep so . . .

NELLIE. Must you break in here like that? Without a knock, or even a cough? You're a soldier and you've traveled, but you haven't learned any manners yet, have you?

JILL. Nellie.

HENRY. I beg your pardon.

NELLIE. (*Crossing to him.*) And what are you doing with my gun.

HENRY. I thought you might like . . .

NELLIE. Put it down and leave it down! (*She takes the gun and puts it in the kitchen.*)

HENRY. I'm sorry, Nellie. I didn't think to ask.

JILL. What's that you're carrying Henry, pheasants?

HENRY. For your table. And here's what your hens have done this morning.

JILL. Ohh, Henry.

HENRY. I'll round you up a dozen more before sun-time.

JILL. How in the world . . . Our hens never lay before noon.

HENRY. They do now.

JILL. That's why we've always had to put aside an egg or two for breakfast! Nellie, look what a good wind Henry's brought us. And how in the world did you ever get the pheasants? They're usually so quick Nellie can never get a sight on them!

HENRY. They were just sailing into the wood when I caught them!

JILL. They must have been sailing fast with wings like these. Nellie, come look! You must be a golden shot, Henry. Where did you pick that up, during the war?

HENRY. Before the war, when I was here with my grand dad. (NELLIE *comes from the kitchen with some small branches for the living room fireplace.*)

JILL. Well the practice was good for the pudding. You just wait and see what I'm going to make us out of all this. We have enough here to entertain Lloyd George and the palace guard now, don't we Nellie? Don't we?

NELLIE. (*At the fireplace.*) Yes, we do.

JILL. We thank you for the treat, Henry. There'll be feasting and no fasting at the Old Bailey Farm tonight!

HENRY. I'll take them out and trim them up for you.

JILL. No, no.

NELLIE. I'll do that.

JILL. Nellie'll do it, Henry.

HENRY. You must have lots else to do, don't you Nellie?

NELLIE. Not so much that I can't manage these.

HENRY. I have a way with these creatures though. So let me trim them for you, can't I?

NELLIE. I have a way with them too, Henry. I'd rather trim them myself.

HENRY. Why would you when I've offered?

NELLIE. Because it's my job. You've done the hunting.

HENRY. Is that why?

NELLIE. Yes it is. Let me have them.

HENRY. Let me, Nellie.

NELLIE. Give them to me.

HENRY. I want them, Nellie. Please?

JILL. Let him have them, Nellie. They're his to do with.

NELLIE. Have them then. Have them! There's more wood to bring in and I've no time for talking . . . ! (*She crosses out through the kitchen. We hear the door slam.*)

HENRY. Your partner's got queer streaks in her, hasn't she Jill? She likes to beat her own path, doesn't she? Like a big, dark bird.

JILL. You're not one to hedge either, Henry.

HENRY. I hope I didn't make her mad though. Do you think I did?

JILL. No, not Nellie. She never minds anything much. She'll carry around a bother about as long as I can milk a cow.

HENRY. How long is that?

JILL. From here to here . . . ! You do what you have to then, while I poach us some breakfast.

HENRY. Jill.

JILL. Yes?

HENRY. Why does she always wear men's clothing, though? Doesn't she like to think of her figure?

JILL. She's got dresses. For the summer time.

HENRY. Has she.

JILL. She only wears what she does now for all the mucky work, and the weather.

HENRY. I like women to wear dresses all year round. Ladies ought to look like ladies that's what I think. Like you do. Like a little white flower. That's the way a man wants to see you, take my word . . . ! Well I'll tend to these two and then I'll chase out your fowl. Where do you keep their feed, in the barn?

JILL. Henry no, don't you do that.

HENRY. Why not?

JILL. You're not going to spend your day handing out chicken food. It's barely six o'clock. Time you were still in bed.

HENRY. Six o'clock's an army hour too, Jill. At six in the morning I've had to be sighting on Bulgars and Huns. I'll trade your chicken feed for my rations, and killings, anytime . . . ! Now you hear me, I'm going to have those hoppers of your laying twice their load before I leave today, you see if I don't.

JILL. Henry, don't chase them out yet though. Not until we're ready to stand guard.

HENRY. Guard for what?

JILL. For the fox. We have to watch him every day or he'll have us down to bankruptcy. He's carried off eight of our hens already.

HENRY. Eight?

JILL. Eight of our fattest.

HENRY. Well I can't abide that. I ought to stand on till I catch that beastie myself. You'd have no fox stealing while I was about, I could promise you that . . . ! Well, you give a shout when food's on, the air has brought my appetite full up. (*He crosses out the front door.*)

JILL. I'll call in a jiff. You hurry Nellie in though. I need the logs.

HENRY. (*OFF.*) I'll hurry her. (JILL *brings a drop leaf table in from the kitchen, and two chairs. Lights down on the house. Lights up in the shed as* HENRY *steps in.* NELLIE *is sawing some logs.*)

HENRY. I didn't know you'd have to be sawing your own timber, Nellie. Where do you draw it from?

NELLIE. From the trees, where it grows.

HENRY. Do you do your own chopping them, too?

NELLIE. I do.

HENRY. Is there anything you haven't done out here?

NELLIE. Not that I could mention.

HENRY. (*Hanging the pheasants up on a nail.*) If I've upset you, Nellie, I apologize. You may think I've no manners, but that may just be a sign of my trust and good faith. If I'm to be leaving today I'd like to think I haven't left behind an enemy. Couldn't we shake on it, so I know your mind?

NELLIE. You can leave with a clear conscience, Henry. We're not enemies.

HENRY. I'd feel much firmer about it if I had your hand.

NELLIE. You have my word.

HENRY. I'd rather have your hand.

NELLIE. You don't need my hand, Henry!

HENRY. You're not afraid of me, are you?

NELLIE. No, I'm not afraid.

HENRY. Then why don't you shake? Take my hand, please.

NELLIE. Why should I?

HENRY. As a pledge.

NELLIE. Of what?

HENRY. Of us. As friends. Nellie, please.

NELLIE. Henry, stop it now. Don't be foolish!

HENRY. I'm not being foolish, Nellie! Please!

NELLIE. No!

HENRY. Why not?

NELLIE. Henry, stop!

JILL. (*Calling from the house.*) Nellie, where are you? The house is cold, and breakfast waiting!

NELLIE. I'm coming . . . ! (*She bends to pick up the logs.*)

HENRY. Let me carry that for you, Nellie.

NELLIE. Henry, stay away from me now. You've done enough . . . ! (*She grabs a few of the logs and hurries out of the shed.* HENRY *watches her go, and then picks up a knife to skin the pheasants. Lights down in the shed. Lights up in the house as* NELLIE *enters.*)

NELLIE. Why are we eating in here?

JILL. It's roomier, isn't it?

NELLIE. (*Taking the logs to fireplace.*) You mean it's prettier. It's a bigger spectacle for Henry, isn't that what you mean? I just wonder why you're rushing on so about this soldier boy, Jill. I wonder what you think is so special about him. You've never been this concerned with any boy before. What have you been thinking about him? Hm? (*She crosses into kitchen.*)

JILL. I've been thinking about you too, Nellie. I thought you might enjoy the change of view.

NELLIE. You don't have to strain yourself on my account. You've enough to do without . . .

JILL. It was no strain. I can lift a table.

NELLIE. (*Crossing in with a pan of hot coals.*) You can? That's the first I've heard about it lately . . . !

JILL. Nellie, I don't understand you today, really I don't. You've something twisting and churning around inside you, but I can't fathom it. I just like having somebody new to fuss over, you know that's the way I am. Henry's only got the one week leave, and he's just brought us in enough to fill our table four times over, and I wanted to try to return some of his thoughtfulness, that's all . . . ! Nellie, please.

NELLIE. (*Working at the fireplace.*) What?

JILL. He told me that he's had to do killing. Killing people! He looked so strange when he said it, so hurt. He said he'd trade our kind of life for what he'd had to do, anytime. It gave me a queer jump to hear him, truly it did. He's so like my brother, he's so young, Nellie. I thought a show of friendliness might help to prop him up for his trip back to Canada. He's all alone now . . . ! I'm sorry, Nellie, maybe I was just being greedy. He's company for me too, and I need that so badly now. I can't go on otherwise . . . ! (*She begins to cry.*) I'm sorry. I'll move the table back.

NELLIE. Jill, don't.

JILL. It's all right, Nellie. I'm just being silly, I know.

NELLIE. You're not being silly. It's me should be apologizing to you.

JILL. Why?

NELLIE. Because I'm letting all my dreams and my frights wash over everything we've had between us! We came out here to a creaky shop in a lonely wood and we stored it up for business, didn't we? With all the wind and the work and the war and everything else we've had to pit up against we're still running, aren't we? And we're going to keep running. If you get the chance

to relax a little by fussing for Henry or anybody else, why then you do it! I won't bark at you again, I promise. You're a sweet touch of a thing, and I'm a big crusher. I've no right to spoil your kindness, so you forgive me, do you hear?

JILL. Ohh, Nellie.

NELLIE. Do you?

JILL. Of course I do.

NELLIE. Then we'll spend our days doing good deeds from now on! And whenever you catch me in a grump again, you send me to muck out the cesspool as penance. And then you can make me pump out the pond, climb for apples, and jump into the well . . . ! Aren't we two crazy birds though? Aren't we?

JILL. You are. I've always kept my sanity.

NELLIE. You won't keep it long if I make you tend to the outdoors once in a while. But you are a pretty thing when you smile, so you keep to it. One of us has to have the looks in this family . . . ! Now you rush us some breakfast, I've other things to get to.

JILL. Nellie?

NELLIE. What?

JILL. As our first good deed then, what would you think of asking Henry to stay on till his time's up? I think it'd be worth having him. If he's half the shot he was today, he could keep us in meat for the whole winter. Then we'd surely be able to keep running. Do you think you'd mind?

NELLIE. It may not suit him.

JILL. Well we can ask to find that out. But would it bother you?

NELLIE. Of course not.

JILL. Tell me if it would.

NELLIE. It wouldn't. Why should it?

JILL. Then we can do it? Shall we? Oh, I know he'll be pleased.

NELLIE. I know you will.

JILL. I know you will too, you're not fooling me. You'd like a change from my face, you know you would. But you ask him then, you're better at invitations than I am.

NELLIE. I'm no better than you.

JILL. Yes you are. You do it.

NELLIE. Why not you?

JILL. He might say no if I ask him. You do it, Nellie. Please. Please! Oh, he's coming. Ask him as soon as he's in, will you? I want to know in time for some shopping! (*She disappears into the kitchen.* HENRY *enters the kitchen, offstage.*)

HENRY. (*OFF.*) Here you are, Jill. Ready for the pot.

JILL. (*OFF.*) Thank you, Henry. Don't you go out again, though, we'll be sitting down in a jiff. You get in there and rest the meanwhile.

HENRY. (*OFF.*) Resting's for night time, isn't it?

JILL. (*OFF.*) Not for you. Now don't you go out again, you hear? Or I'll poach your eggs with mustard seed. You get in there and sit! (HENRY *enters the parlor.* NELLIE *is at the fireplace.*)

HENRY. I wish you'd let me help, Nellie. I haven't had the chance to set a proper fire since I left Canada.

NELLIE. Is that what you missed most?

HENRY. Oh I missed a lot of things.

NELLIE. Like what? Hunting?

HENRY. That.

NELLIE. Farming?

HENRY. Not much farming in Canada. Not yet, thank goodness.

NELLIE. What else?

HENRY. A good spring bed.

NELLIE. What else?

HENRY. I'm flattered you'd like to know that much about me.

NELLIE. Jill was asking what army life was about, and I couldn't tell her.

HENRY. She has a brother in service. Didn't he write?

NELLIE. He wrote from France. You came from Greece.

HENRY. Well I'll bet he didn't miss half what I did, being in France.

NELLIE. Why didn't he?

HENRY. Greece is small. There's rocky country all around. With fighting most of the time I was there. Not much chance to relax and enjoy ourselves, I can tell you that . . . ! What have you missed most being away out here? Anything special you've had to do without?

NELLIE. No.

HENRY. Nothing?

NELLIE. No.

HENRY. If only the farm'd come out right you'd have all you want, would you?

NELLIE. That's right.

HENRY. Then it's a shame the stars haven't shined properly for you.

NELLIE. Yes it is.

HENRY. I wish I could help somehow.

NELLIE. You've helped quite a lot already.

HENRY. Have I?

NELLIE. Yes you have.

HENRY. I'm very pleased to hear you say so . . . ! (JILL *enters from the kitchen with a tray of bread, margerine and jam.*)

JILL. Breadfast's on . . . ! Well now that's a pretty sight. You look right at home by the fire, Henry.

HENRY. I feel it.

JILL. I hope you'll stay then to enjoy it. Have you decided yet?

HENRY. Decided what?

NELLIE. I haven't asked him yet, Jill.

JILL. Oh shoot!

HENRY. Asked me what?

JILL. Ask him, Nellie!

HENRY. Ask me what?

NELLIE. Go on.

JILL. Ohh! If you'd consider staying on with us. Not the whole time. Not if you don't want to. Only whatever you decide. But as long as you'd like to try with us, we'd be glad to have you. It'd be no trouble, Henry, truly it wouldn't. And you've only got the few days to put up with us, so what do you say? Hm?

HENRY. What do you say, Nellie?

JILL. Nellie's said, it's your turn now.

HENRY. Ay then.

JILL. Good!

HENRY. I'd like to try forever.

JILL. I wish you had the chance . . . ! Well it's done then. Happy to have you, Henry. I only hope you like my cooking now. Sit over here and try it. I'm going to cycle into town later so we can have some fresh spreadings for dinner, and cheese. And maybe some wine. Do you like wine?

HENRY. Ay.

JILL. Then that's what we'll have with the roast pheasant I'm preparing. You'll have to do with what's left over in the meanwhile. (*She crosses back into the kitchen.*)

HENRY. I don't mind. Come to the table, Nellie. (*He holds a chair for her.*)

JILL. (*Coming in with plates.*) Well I tell you it's a

pleasure to have a gentleman in the house, truly it is . . . You sit now, Henry, I'm not finished yet. (*She returns to the kitchen.*)

HENRY. You look very handsome at the table, Nellie . . . You don't mind my being here, do you? I'd rather not stay if you do . . . Are you happy to have me?

NELLIE. You'll hear me if I'm not. (JILL *comes in with a platter of poached eggs.*)

JILL. What're you smiling about, Henry, are you comfy?

HENRY. I have two ladies to wait on me, a house to live in, a farm outside, and the woods nearby. I'll have hunting and walking and reading and talking. There's no man alive could want more. Is there?

JILL. Don't you intend to marry one day?

HENRY. Ay. If I find the right sort.

JILL. What sort would she have to be? Hm? Don't be bashful, what would she?

HENRY. Tall and strong, with a will to work and make me happy.

JILL. And how could she best do that?

HENRY. If I told you that then you'd know it all, wouldn't you Jill? And then there'd be no mystery. Such things should be a secret. Like two animals come to drink in the dark. Side by side but they don't know it. They nuzzle around with their heads in the water, and then no matter what else is about, they suddenly feel themselves close. And then they sniff. And then they test. And then they make their little noises. And then they go off together. They know when they've found what they want . . . ! (JILL'S *caught* NELLIE *staring at* HENRY *and he smiles.*)

JILL. You're keen on nature, aren't you Henry?

HENRY. You have to be to live, Jill.

JILL. Not us.

HENRY. No?

JILL. We get along very well without nature, Nellie and I. You see if we don't. Your two animals in the woods'll have to be satisfied without our joining them . . . ! I'm pleased to know you can smile about it, Henry, that means we'll get along all right. (*But* HENRY *is staring at* NELLIE *again.*)

JILL. Eat now, you're forgetting your food.

HENRY. Thank you, Jill. I see what I'm doing. (*He grins at her, and then continues eating.* NELLIE *doesn't look up from her plate.* JILL *watches them both, as she tries to eat, and . . . THE LIGHTS FADE.*)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE One

Night time. The fire crackling. HENRY *is hidden in the stairwell.* JILL *returns from the kitchen to continue clearing the dinner dishes.* HENRY *suddenly leans in.*

HENRY. Hoo! (JILL *gasps.* HENRY *laughs and leaps out of the stairwell. He is clearly teasing* JILL *, and is in high good spirits. He ends up at the bookshelves.*)

JILL. What do you like most to read, Henry?

HENRY. Anything except orders.

JILL. We've got a whole stock of Captain Mayne Reid.

HENRY. Is that how you like to spend your evenings, Jill, with the Captain?

JILL. I've got lots else to read. And do, if I want. It's just that usually by the time we've finished with all the chores that have got to be done—

HENRY. What then?

JILL. Well the days are short and the nights are long so we usually pick a sitting job to keep us till bedtime. I do anyway. I write letters and I play the harp . . .

HENRY. Do you?

JILL. Yes, and I sew, and . . .

HENRY. Do you play well?

JILL. Not so bad you'd have to leave the room.

HENRY. Do you mean your hens never squawk while you're at it?

JILL. Our hens squawk at anything, you've seen that.

HENRY. They were tame enough today, weren't they?

JILL. Yes they were.

HENRY. And laid a basketfull, didn't they?

JILL. I don't know what you fed them but they surely did.

HENRY. I fed them what they've always had, but I told them something, too.

JILL. What?

HENRY. That I'd have their necks the next yap out of them! Especially that big white leghorn with the brown marking. There's the yappiest thing I've ever heard in a yard!

JILL. That's Patty. She's Nellie's bird.

HENRY. Is she?

JILL. She won't touch her food unless Nellie holds it out for her.

HENRY. Won't she though?

JILL. Nellie'd no sooner lop away at her than she would me.

HENRY. Then I'm liable to have the both of you before I'm done. If you turn out to be a squawker, too . . . ! (*He follows her as she crosses to the kitchen.*)

JILL. Henry, stay here.

HENRY. Come play the harp for me first.

JILL. Henry.

HENRY. You cooked a marvelous dinner, and you stuffed me full, and now you've got to help me work it off.

JILL. Nellie's alone in there.

HENRY. I'm alone here.

JILL. She's put in a hard day today.

HENRY. Haven't I?

JILL. You have, but we didn't ask you to.

HENRY. And now all I'm asking you to do is lead me to the harp . . .

JILL. Henry . . .

HENRY. And play while I sing. I've got to clear my lungs somehow!

JILL. Clear them of what?

HENRY. Of happiness! I'm so full of good spirits, I'm liable to pop away into the woods and dance the night to Islington!

JILL. Well dance then, I have to help Nellie . . . ! (*She crosses into the kitchen.* HENRY *stares after her for a moment. Sound of a dog barking.* HENRY *opens the front door and stands looking out.* NELLIE *comes hurriedly into the room,* JILL *a distance behind her.*)

NELLIE. You'll blow out the fire, Henry.

HENRY. There's no breeze tonight, Nellie. Even the sky is still.

JILL. But cold!

HENRY. Ay. (*He closes the door.*) You finished without Jill's help, I see.

NELLIE. I always do.

JILL. The washing. I have to pile the things for her.

HENRY. Have you finished piling them now?

JILL. What's left'll dry 'till morning.

HENRY. Well who's for a walk in the woods, then? We can take the gun and stock up for the morning.

JILL. You must be dizzy Henry. Now's no time to be tramping about out there. (NELLIE *crosses to the blanket chest for her needlework.*)

HENRY. Now's the best time, Jill. When all the rest of the world's away indoors. When all the busybodies are

shut up tight and you can walk free, without interruption . . . ! You come with me, Nellie. Will you? You're not afraid of a little night air, are you?

NELLIE. No.

JILL. She's afraid she may have to use her legs tomorrow and they'd be all wearied out.

HENRY. That's a small reason.

JILL. Big enough for us.

NELLIE. Thank you, Henry. I think I'd rather stick to my needling tonight.

HENRY. Is that your last word?

NELLIE. Yes it is.

HENRY. Then that's how we shall have to leave it. I don't want to make myself a pest . . . !

JILL. Is walking in the woods what you were most fond of in the evenings, Henry?

HENRY. Ay. Looking out for rabbits, and trying to scare up a deer or two.

JILL. We heard you used to scare up all the neighbors.

HENRY. Where did you hear that?

JILL. In the village. This afternoon, when I cycled in.

HENRY. What did they tell you?

JILL. Mostly there were just a lot of dark looks and shaking of heads when I mentioned your name.

HENRY. There were, were there?

JILL. And they talked about you not being the greatest milker in the world.

NELLIE. Jill.

HENRY. Did they?

JILL. And about your loafing off the work and chasing your rabbits and jollywogging all day while your grand dad tended the farm.

HENRY. Who told you all that? What were their names?

JILL. They're none to get fierce about, Henry.

HENRY. Now I've reached my size I can get fierce about any of them. That's what's needed!

JILL. Why?

NELLIE. They're small-minded people, Henry.

HENRY. I know what they are. And I know what they say! Are they friends of yours, these loud mouths?

NELLIE. We try never to meet them, but we have to on shop days.

HENRY. Ay, that's it. That's all they're good for is their bloody shop days! They're the kind that never care if the stars burn, or the world spins, or a mountain moves. They're tiny, tiny people, crowding the earth for no good reason except to squeeze off anybody that interferes with their shop days!

NELLIE. You sound as though you've had some run-ins with them. Have you?

HENRY. Run-ins enough.

JILL. What kind?

HENRY. I've had to bend to a switch for skipping through a street because of them!

NELLIE. What?

HENRY. My grand dad used to whip me on anyone's complaint, and they all had something to say about how and why a strip like me shouldn't be crossing their property, or fishing their streams, or passing their stores in the middle of a day. That's what they complained about! They couldn't stand to see me roaming the land while they sat fast thinking about their linens, and their gardens, and their next day's business! (NELLIE *laughs.*) They couldn't stand to see me laughing at them for the poor frightened things that they are. Life is a run, and they're afraid to move! Life is a wind, and they sit huddled in their houses, hugging their belongings, and sucking their thumbs! They live in green houses, that's what

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