

Foxe

by

Vixyy Fox

The blue eyed Fox sighed as he looked at the poster displayed in the front of the theater. It bore his likeness, but looked more like a travel ad for a sunnier place than the small town in which it was displayed. Essentially it was the cover for his new album, but in this case it announced a concert to be given here in two days time. Someone with a poor sense of humor had drawn a black marker mustache on the face. It did, at least, cause him to smile.

“Children will be children,” he muttered.

‘And sometimes adults will be like children too,’ a quiet voice whispered in his mind.

He shrugged that one off and then tested the mustache with a finger to see if it would wipe off. It didn’t.

Though the day was not overly bright, it was cool, so he wore a dark Fedora and a secret agent style overcoat. Covering his identity was hardly a problem in this place, though it had been a thought earlier that morning. This small town was far away from the busy metropolis’ he was used to and the theatre parking lot was literally deserted. This did not bode well for his idea of a quiet rehearsal session. Taking his sunglasses off, he walked up the steps to the concert hall and tried the door.

At first the door appeared locked. He felt a sense of disappointment though wasn’t sure why. Lord knew the musician was bone weary of the concert grind. Banging upon the door frame, he peered through the window hoping to see someone. The inside area appeared as empty of life as the outside.

His ears detected a metallic click and his brain automatically told him what key (no pun intended) the mechanical noise was in. When he tried it, the same door then easily pulled open on squeaking hinges. The idea of a remote locking system did occur to him... but there’d been no buzz.

“Hello?”

His voice echoed back at him, and when there was no response he stepped inside.

In actuality, he was not yet supposed to be here since the concert was not for another two days. It was one of those rare cases where, in a fit of gut wrenching frustration, he’d snuck off of the tour bus and watched as it pulled away spewing noxious exhaust fumes. His manager would be so absolutely crazy because of this, and that thought rather pleased

him. Yes, he needed the large Slavic Wolf's prodding help. Yes he needed the Gray Back's managerial skills just to keep everything organized... but he was so absolutely tired. Veteran musicians would call the way he felt 'war weary'. As the bus pulled away, his mind replayed 'the boss' yelling at him in his accented voice; 'Do this... do that... dress in this... time for autographs now... no wait... no more; we have to leave now! Do you need a pill to help you sleep?

...to help you sleep...

Idolization was all well and good, certainly it paid his bills; but he was a living creature with feelings and needs and... and he was just so very tired. How had it become so crazy? He'd not played anything original in a long long time. That is to say; what was once original now sounded as weary as he was himself.

Finding the stage door, he pulled it open, pausing to let his eyes adjust to the darkness. He could make out a piano in the dim light from the open door and it seemed to call to him like an old enemy. The ivory colored plastic keys of the faux baby grand smiled a humorless grin.

'Come tickle me if you dare,' it whispered to him.

"Come tickle you, indeed," he replied in the silence. "I have learned to hate what you now represent in my life. Would anyone know me as me without you standing by my side?"

"Hate is not a good thing," said a small voice in the darkness. The Fox froze where he was. He was not so certain someone was there as he was certain he might just have slipped over the edge.

"I agree," he responded in a low voice, "Hate is a very bad thing; but it is how I feel. The magic of the music is all gone now... sucked away from my life by the requirements of popularity. I am but a hollow shell of who I once was; a Fox with no home to call his own."

"You're homeless?" the voice asked.

He thought about this. His mind showed him the bus and its narrow coffin sized sleeping compartments, completed by cardboard food served up on plastic plates interspersed with things meant to be a luxury but which satisfied no hunger.

"I'm not sure," he replied. "I suppose I could call myself homeless in a sense of the word. Property and things do not constitute the idea of 'home'. It's been a long time since I've breathed easily and played music found within my soul."

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, finally walking the few steps to the toothy instrument he knew so well. Reaching out he stroked a finger across the keys and then

asked softly of the darkness, “And who might you be? Please don’t tell me you are the piano, or I will surely kill myself.”

The laugh that greeted his ears was child like and musical. “Not hardly, though we are friends... this piano and I.”

The Fox found the right keys in his mind and his fingers went to them, pressing softly with a resultant chord. “I used to love you,” he said.

“Who... me?”

“The piano,” He replied smiling. “You did say it was not you.” He glanced up but could see nothing in the darkness. “Perfection happens when the mind becomes fused directly to the instrument and what you think comes to be without actual thought. During those moments, we truly became one; this musical monstrosity and myself. The hours and hours and hours I practiced just to please the strings upon which the hammers fell. Those hammers became exactly the tips of my fingers as they caressed the fur of my love’s body.”

“That was pretty... are you a poet?”

“Not really; but perhaps almost. And I would guess you to be... ummm... a clarinet, hiding away in the darkness, wishing to play jazz when your bassoon father demands that you play the classics.”

The voice in the darkness giggled again. The sound of it was both musical and young. The Fox’s fingers immediately found the keys to exactly mimic the laughter.

“No way you did that!” declared the voice.

“Way,” he said back. “I would guess that you are female. That much I can gather from the tones I hear. If you tell me who you are I might play you a small song.” He peered into the darkness again but could still not see past the mid section of the instrument in front of him.

“If you tell me who you are, I might dance to your little song,” she replied with just a hint of happiness. “But it has been a while since I have danced, so I might stumble. If I do you can’t laugh.”

“I am appalled that you even think I might.”

Taking off his hat and coat, he carefully laid them on the floor next to the piano. He then slowly played a few more notes, pressing down firmly on the plastic keys. The final few were sour and he stopped.

“Why do you hide in the darkness of a closed concert hall?” he asked.

“A question game... I like games. I’m not hiding, are you?”

Looking behind himself, he found the bench that went with the piano and pulled it over. The legs made a harsh scrapping noise on the wooden floor. “I’m not hiding either,” he replied. “Well, perhaps not in the sense that you mean. I do hide from life. Life, lately, has not been so kind.”

“OOOOooooooo... a riddle. This strange person, who is homeless, but not homeless, hides, but does not hide. Is the light on?”

“Is that your second question?” he asked. “If it is, then you will owe me two. Do you wish me to answer?”

“No.”

“Very well then,” he played a few more notes, getting the feel of the instrument; measuring its depth of sound without even realizing it. “My question is this; why are you here?”

“I am waiting for something... but I’m not sure what.”

“In the darkness?” he asked, looking up.

“Yes,” the voice replied, and then added, “That’s two questions, so now I get two back.”

The pianist sat up straight and played his fingers all the way up and then back down again on the keys. Each note played was singular and clear. When he was done he said, “Fair enough, oh voice in the darkness. You caught me fair and square; though as I recall I let you slide on the same mistake.”

“Play a ten second melody and I will recant the two and ask only one.”

He began with a child’s scales and moved into a further depth, ending exactly on the ten second mark; though the melody was unfinished. “That was ten seconds,” he pronounced.

“Exactly. You have a good sense of time and are a fair musician.”

“Am I now?”

“Yes.”

“An unfinished melody is a very sad thing, may I finish it?” He asked her.

“Please.”

He played for a further twenty seconds, the final notes echoing through the vastness of the empty hall.

“And your question would next be?” he managed, his voice trailing off as he asked.

“Are you tall?”

The pianist smiled, having not expected something so simple. “I am incredibly tall. As I play this black thing with teeth, I kneel in front of it all hunched over. My fingers are so large, that I had to grow out my claws and file them down just so I could hit the individual notes.” He played a thumpingly strong melody that parodied a huge hulking troll walking through the woods. He was rewarded with more giggles. “Would you dance for an ugly old Ogre?”

“Is that your question?”

He growled deeply and huffed his voice. “Yes... yes it is my question.”

“Play a tune then... something light, and trite... the notes of which are tight.”

“Yes Madam Pixie,” he rumbled back. “It is this ugly Ogre’s utmost wish to please you however I can.”

His fingers flew across the keys in a melody pulled from the air itself. In the darkness the notes placed colors in his mind which flowed, blended, and moved. A breeze passed over his head, and he felt a small body pass by him. As he played, he heard feet softly thumping on the wood floor in time with the melody. Throwing his head back he closed his eyes and let the music flow over him in a wash of yellow flowing to orange and then lowering to a soft umber until the notes faded; followed by a single note... and he saw in his mind a single white rose.

His breath rasped in as he remembered finally to breath. “That was wonderful,” he said when he could speak. “I haven’t felt the music like that in... in...”

“A very long time?” asked the voice.

“Yes,” he whispered.

“That is so very sad.”

“You are a delightful dancer,” he replied. “I saw your feet within the colors of the music.”

“You did?”

“Most certainly they guided my fingers... but that was a question,” he said and smiled. He then tinked away at some of the keys, deliberately making them sound off tune.

“That’s a horrible sound,” the voice told him.

“Is it?”

“That’s a question, so now we’re even.”

The Fox stopped playing and looked into the darkness. “Whose turn is it to ask... and no that one does not count!”

They both laughed.

“You ask,” the voice told him.

He played four slow notes, one after the other, and then said softly, “What is your name?”

She sat to the floor with a thump. It was not the thump of a large body, nor the thump of an indelicate size or shape; rather it was a thump indicating the very frustration he, himself, felt... and then there was a pause.

“May we be just as we are now?” the voice asked him.

“I’m sorry,” he said, playing his fingers over the keys, creating a soft and soothing melody. “I did not mean to offend...”

“No! You did not offend. That’s not it at...”

There was a loud clack of a huge lever being pulled down into place. With a hum the area was flooded with light. The pianist blinked at the brightness and looked around, finding himself in the middle of a large and old fashioned stage.

He was all alone.

“Here now... what do ya think yur doing messing with that piana? I’m told that if everything is not right here in two days time, some big muckymuck is gonna have hisself a hissy fit. If that happens I’m gonna get my tail handed to me and out the door I’ll go! Go on and away with ya now!”

Foxe turned to the voice as a moth will fly to the candle’s flame and found himself confronted by a rather elderly Fox dressed in work clothes. He rose to face this stranger.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m Little Lord Fontawhatzee, and I’m gonna cause a really large fuss in about ten seconds unless I see your tail moving back out that door.”

Years of working audiences kept the musician from being flustered. “I was speaking with someone a moment ago,” he replied evenly. “It was dark, and I have no idea what they looked like. I don’t know where she went to but the voice sounded as though it might have belonged to a little vixen; quite the dancer, actually, and a joy to talk to. Did you see her?”

The old Fox’s mouth opened as if to reply and then closed again. “That ain’t funny,” he finally growled. “There’s no one here except me and you... and soon there will be just me.”

“I meant no offense,” the pianist told him. “I’m being quite serious. Do you know who she was?”

“Get out before I go for the Sheriff. You had no right to break in here.”

“The door was open.”

“I locked it personal before I left home for m’lunch.”

“It was open. I’m telling you the truth...” Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew his wallet and took out a handful of cash. “Take this.”

“I don’t want it.”

“I wish to rent the hall... right now... this moment... turn the light back off and go away. Leave me here for an hour, two if you’ve a heart. That’s all I ask. I have found myself again in her dancing. It was wonderful... She is wonderful.”

The caretaker sighed and seemed to deflate just a little. “Her name was Jessica,” he finally managed. “I hear her laugh every now and again. That’s what keeps me here.”

Foxe slowly sat back to the piano’s bench, his eyes never leaving the face of the old Fox. “You said... ‘was’?”

“That’s right. Her school was to have a dance recital. There was a fire... back before the town even had a proper fire department. Unlike her classmates, Jessica was blind and couldn’t find her way out. I...” the old Fox stopped speaking. Reaching up, he wiped his eyes. “Her memory is all I have... that’s why I take care of this place. When they rebuilt the hall they named it after her.” He paused, and looked off towards the back “Every now and again I hear her laughter. I couldn’t afford a head stone or nothing.”

The pianist sighed. "She's quite the little girl," he said quietly. A cool breeze played across him and he heard a whisper in his ear... of musical notes, dancing feet, and all the colors of the rainbow.

"I have an idea," he told the caretaker quietly. "Perhaps we can give her what she has been waiting for all this time."

The old Fox just looked at him.

"I'm not crazy," the pianist said quickly. "Your daughter has been a true breath of fresh air for me... just the spark my life was lacking. I believe this is why I'm here. It was meant to be like this. Will you humor me in my request, sir?"

"I told ya; I can't. The place has to be perfect for the concert."

"Never fear friend... I am that big mucky muck coming to your town to do this concert. I would much appreciate the time to practice."

The old Fox took a step forward and squinted his eyes slightly. "You do look a bit like that poster out front. I'd know better if you had a mustache." With that remark, he smiled. "I think I have another in the back I can change out for that one."

Foxe smiled and patted the bench next to him. "Turn out the lights then and let us begin. Your Jessica told me it has been a long time since she has danced. I am pleased to be able to give her this as a gift."

When the lights were again off and the music once again came to life; the pair was not disappointed in what they heard and felt. Her dance was perfect.

A week later, after the concert was done and but a memory; a beautiful bronze statue of a young ballerina was delivered and set up in front of the hall... commissioner unknown.