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*Dramatic Publishing*

# MY FRIEND, THE FOX

by

**William Glennon**



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# MY FRIEND, THE FOX

A Play in Three Acts  
For 4 women, 7 men  
and 2 extras (male or female)

## CHARACTERS

THE FOX . . . . . a misunderstood animal  
JUSTI . . . . . a simple, honest woodsman  
THE PAGE . . . . . a servant  
THE KING . . . . . blustering and well-meaning  
SIR JASPER . . . . . the king's minister  
DUKE DARKBEARD . . . . . the villain  
TILLIE, THE QUEEN . . . . . warm-hearted, lovable  
LADY GREEN . . . . . lady-in-waiting to the queen  
LADY RED . . . . . nurse to the princess  
THE PRINCESS . . . . . a loud, uninhibited tomboy  
TWO PAGES . . . . . generally bewildered  
THE WORM . . . . . a tired old dragon

## ACT ONE

The forest of a tiny kingdom, long ago.

## ACT TWO

The forest next morning, and later the royal palace.

## ACT THREE

Again the palace, a few minutes later.

I have seen elegant and simple productions of this play and find that they both work, not just for me, but for an audience. Personally I feel the technical aspects should somehow match the innocence of the script. Where a handsome forest backdrop was lovely to look at, a cutout tree against a neutral background was equally effective. Some plays demand scenery; this one doesn't. The costumes can lend the necessary color and fairy-tale quality. There are very few props to worry about, and all of them easy to make or borrow or steal. (I know of one highly successful production done by junior high school students who built the entire show and acted all the roles themselves). Perhaps the best bit of advice to any director would be not to let the scenery stop the flow of the play, and not to let the "acting" hinder the honesty and believability of the characters.

W. G.

## ACT ONE

**AT RISE:** *We see the suggestion of a forest long ago. The scenery throughout the production should be more imaginative than realistic. The early light of dawn is beginning to glow and we can hear loud, even snores. It is the FOX, asleep against one of three hunter's snares on stage. His snoring continues happily until a rooster crows loudly in the distance. The FOX mutters in his sleep, turns over. Again the rooster crows, this time a nerve-shattering blast.*

**FOX** (*bolt upright*). Cock-a-doodle-do yourself! Quiet down! Go back to sleep! (*He settles down, mumbling, and is about to doze off again when several birds begin to chirp a light morning song. He glances about, menacingly, and oddly enough, they stop chirping. He smiles, settles down again, then suddenly the rooster and birds join together in a morning song that would wake the dead. The FOX leaps to his feet.*) All right! All right! It's morning! I get it. (*He stumbles about, shaking his paw in the direction of the birds, imitating their song and droopily giving vent to a series of long, loud yawns. During the following he begins to talk casually to the AUDIENCE, and does so off and on for the entire play.*) I wish I felt the way they do. Singing all day long. They like it here. Well, they can have it—It's for the birds. Let's see now—breakfast. (*He examines*

*the bait in each of the traps and carefully extracts it without releasing the snare. Chuckling, he sits on a stump to eat.)* Hmm. Not bad, not bad at all. Can't you just see the hunter's face when he finds the traps empty? And the bait gone? Face it, I'm very clever. *(He takes a knife and fork and maybe a bib from a pouch and eats.)* Gotta be, otherwise, no breakfast. 'Course, being clever doesn't help much when it comes to making friends. I try to curl up in a cozy cave for a snooze and what happens? Poppa Bear boots me out. Fact is, no one around here gives two hoots about me, not even the owls. Well, live and let live, I guess. But sometimes I get so lonely I think I'll wind up chasing my tail. *(He finishes off his meal and perhaps goes and sits on the apron.)* I've got one remedy that's sure-fire. I mean for when I get those chasing-my-tail blues. Know what I do? I make up a story. No, I really do, and it helps. It's fun, too. I might start off with, well, maybe a hero. Say he's poor. But very handsome, of course. *(We hear a BOY's voice off stage singing. The FOX starts up and looks off.)* To be continued. *(He hides.)*

*(JUSTI enters. He is very poor, very handsome—a young, gentle woodsman. He stops and finishes his song.)*

JUSTI *(singing).*

The forest is my home  
My roof's the heaven high  
My path a trail that never ends  
A lonely hunter, I.

*(He drops his sack and goes to examine the first trap.)*

Empty. Always empty. (*He looks at another trap.*) This, too. I'll never find a friend, the way Poppa said. I can hear him now. "Justi," he said, bless his dear soul, "use these traps I leave you to capture one of the forest creatures. And when you do, give that creature care and love, and from then on your life will be filled with goodness." Poor Poppa. I've tried, I've really tried. But if the forest creatures are afraid of my snares, how can I ever find an animal to befriend? And how can my lonely life possibly be filled with goodness? (*At this point, the FOX goes quietly to the last trap, lifts the spring and gently places his paw in it. He whimpers appealingly. JUSTI turns and sees him, caught in the trap.*) Why...why, I've caught something!

FOX. A little baby fox. (*Again he cries a bit.*)

JUSTI. You poor creature! Here, let me help you! (*He goes and frees the FOX, murmuring gently.*)

FOX. Oooh, my little paw is broken.

JUSTI. The spring isn't very strong.

FOX. Neither is my paw. Look!

JUSTI. Perhaps just a sprain. Let me feel.

FOX (*giving him the paw, overly brave*). Please don't hurt me.

JUSTI. Hurt you? I would care for you forever.

FOX. You would?

JUSTI. I don't think the paw is broken.

FOX. No?

JUSTI. Just a little bruised. Very little. I'll rub it. And when we get home...

FOX. Home? Where's that?

JUSTI. My little cottage...a hut really. But it's warm.

FOX. You mean a fireplace?

JUSTI. With a fire in it.



FOX. Great for sleeping!

JUSTI. And cooking, too.

FOX. And you'll be my friend?

JUSTI. I am already.

FOX (*jumping up*). Well, let's go! (*He realizes his sudden move has startled JUSTI.*) Ooooh, my head's spinning.

JUSTI. A little rest is what you need.

FOX. Yes, you're right.

JUSTI. And food for strength.

FOX. True.

JUSTI. There's some in my traps. (*He looks.*) Guess someone's taken it.

FOX. What a dirty trick!

JUSTI. Come on, there's more at home. (*He smiles at the FOX and starts to pick up the snares.*)

FOX (*to AUDIENCE*). Am I dreaming or what? A friend, and a home! Just like that! Best of all, our story has a hero—talk about a good beginning. (*Returns to JUSTI.*) Let me help, Master.

JUSTI. I'm not your master. I'm only Justi, a plain woodsman.

FOX. For now, perhaps. But just you wait. I see big things ahead. (*JUSTI smiles and continues to work with the traps.*) We've got to make plans. That's my job, and I'll get to work right away. Before I'm through the whole world will know my master! Justi! (*He considers the name.*) Justi. Bet I could improve on that.

JUSTI. Justi? You don't like my name?

FOX. Not much of a ring to it. Justi. What about Justi the Great?

JUSTI. Doesn't suit me.

FOX. Neither does Justi. We need something...impressive. I've got it! Giant Justi!

JUSTI (*amused*). Sort of a medium sized giant?

FOX. A hero named Giant Justi! With a name like that, no telling what might happen! (*A trumpet fanfare is heard off.*)

JUSTI (*as they look off*). Look. He's heading this way.

FOX. So he is. Well, things are happening already. (*He motions and they hide.*)

(*A PAGE enters and blasts another fanfare.*)

PAGE. Hear ye this! Hear ye...this is ridiculous. Who's around to hear? No one. Well, a job's a job. (*Rather offhand.*) Hear ye this. The king and his hunting party have entered the forest. The king is a terrible shot, so be ye warned. (*He exits.*)

FOX. The royal hunting party, master.

JUSTI. Yes.

FOX. Here in the forest. Why, it's almost too good to be true.

JUSTI. It is?

FOX. Master, suppose you return to your hut and wait there for me.

JUSTI. Why?

FOX. Oh, master, this is going to sound foolish, but...I want to say good-bye to all the creatures of my forest home...The noisy little birds, the bears who live in warm caves...and I'd rather do it alone.

JUSTI. Are you telling the truth?

FOX. I must kiss each tree good-bye.

JUSTI. Are you telling the truth?

FOX (*crushed*). Master!

JUSTI. Very well. I'll take these and go along. (*Starts after traps.*)

FOX. Leave one for me to carry, good master.

JUSTL All right. *(He takes two traps and starts to go.)*

My hut is in the valley just beyond the next hill. *(A little distressed, for the FOX has practically been pushing him out.)* And remember if you are to be a friend of mine...

FOX. I am, I am.

JUSTL You must always tell the truth. *(He exits.)*

FOX. Handsome, and modest, but not, I fear, very clever.

He needs me. Well, now, we have a hero, and with the royal hunting party right here in the forest, we just may have our first big chance. *(The sound of VOICES off is heard. The FOX goes to look. He takes the trap and again puts his paw in and "acts" caught. He lies down and waits, watching anxiously in the direction of the voices. They belong to the PAGE and the KING.)*

PAGE *(off)*. But Your Majesty, the queen told me I must warn everyone...*(The FOX reacts to the mention of these royal titles.)*

KING *(off)*. I don't care what the queen said. Who's in charge of this kingdom anyhow?

PAGE *(off)*. The queen, Your Majesty.

KING *(off)*. She is not. I am, you dolt.

*(The PAGE runs in, obviously trying to avoid any further words with the KING.)*

KING *(off)*. Come back here! I'll have your head, you donkey.

*(The KING enters. He is not, perhaps, the brightest king a kingdom ever had, but he is well-meaning and though*

*his bark is worse than his bite, he is uncommonly fond of barking.)*

**KING** (*spying the PAGE, who is really more wearily resigned than frightened*). Aha! There you are! Now you listen to me! (*Before the KING can continue, the PAGE lifts the trumpet and lets out a mighty blast*.) Don't blow that trumpet. How many times do I have to tell you. **DON'T BLOW THAT TRUMPET!** (*A sudden and rather alarming calm*.) Let me explain something. This is a hunting party. Well, this was a hunting party. Hunting for animals. Animals have ears. Which means that they can hear things. Noises. Are you following all this? (*PAGE nods*.) So how do you expect the hunting party to find any animals if you...(*He explodes*.) **BLOW THAT BLASTED TRUMPET!**

**PAGE**. The queen's orders. To warn people. I mean, you're such a terrible shot she said people should be warned. It's not for the animals.

**KING** (*sinking down on a stump, weeping*). It's more than I can bear.

**PAGE** (*who has spotted the FOX*). Look Your Majesty—a fox.

**KING**. Why this kingdom hasn't fallen into the hands of some wicked witch is beyond me.

**PAGE**. Quite a large fox.

**KING**. I plan a simple hunting party, I wind up with chaos.

**PAGE**. I think the fox is caught in a trap.

**KING**. A fox! *Where?*

**PAGE**. Over there.

**KING**. Quick, my bow and arrow!

**PAGE**. I don't have your bow and arrow.

KING. Where are they?

PAGE. You dropped them in the moat.

KING. Well, don't just stand there. Get help! That beast is about to attack!

PAGE. The fox is caught in a trap, Your Majesty.

KING. You're sure? *(The FOX moans a bit, tugs at the spring, and falls back.)*

PAGE. Yes, Your Majesty.

KING. Hmmmm. *(The KING cautiously advances toward the FOX. He rushes away when the FOX groans.)* Maybe I ought to get the others. The queen will know what to do.

PAGE. I'll go, Your Majesty.

KING. No. I'll go. I'm the king. I give the orders around here.

PAGE. But I'm a page, sire, and taking messages is my job! I'll go! *(Stomps foot.)*

KING. Well, tell them to hurry.

PAGE. Are you frightened, Your Majesty?

KING. Yes!

PAGE. I'll run. *(He exits. The KING looks warily at the FOX and is about to approach again when the trumpet sounds off stage.)*

KING. I should drop *him* in the moat.

FOX *(a little weakly)*. Your Majesty?

KING. Are you addressing me?

FOX. If you would be so gracious as to lift the trap...

KING. And set you free! What do you take me for—a fool? *(Pause.)* I said, "What do you take me for?"

FOX. A wise and noble king.

KING. Well, let me tell you something. You're absolutely right.

FOX. I know quality when I see it. It's something I learned from my master.

KING. Your master?

FOX. Yes, he's wise and noble, too. You know him, of course.

KING. Yes, of course. That is, no. What's his name?

FOX. If you could help me, sire.

KING. You won't bite me or anything?

FOX. No indeed.

KING. Well, all right.

*(As the KING starts to free the FOX, the PAGE rushes back in carrying the picnic basket.)*

PAGE. I signaled to them, Your Majesty, they're coming now.

KING. Good.

PAGE *(as though he's at court)*. Her Majesty, the queen! His Lordship, Duke Darkbeard...

KING. You don't have to announce people in the middle of the forest!

PAGE *(paying no attention)*. Sir Jasper, Minister of Stuff and Nonsense...*(The FOX, in the meantime, lets himself out of the trap, stands up and starts brushing himself off. The PAGE sees this.)* Your Majesty, the fox is loose!

*(The KING starts to run from the FOX and nearly collides with the two court members who now enter: DUKE DARKBEARD, the KING's prime minister, and someone who bears watching and SIR JASPER, a helter-skelter minister in charge of Stuff and Nonsense and the QUEEN, who is writing on a scroll.)*

DARKBEARD. What's going on?

PAGE. The fox is loose, m'lord!

JASPER. A fox? A loose fox? What kind of fox is a loose fox? (*The KING realizes his unwarranted panic and turns to the PAGE.*)

KING. Of course the fox is loose. I set him free! Honestly!

FOX. Thank you, sire. And now I must bid you good-bye. My master will be waiting.

DARKBEARD. One moment. As the king's prime minister...

FOX. Ah! The prime minister!

KING. Yes, this is Duke Darkbeard, my prime minister, and Sir Jasper...

JASPER. Minister of Stuff and Nonsense.

KING. And the queen. Oh, Tillie?

JASPER. She's composing a verse, sire.

KING. Again?

JASPER. Yes.

KING. Well, say hello to my friend, the fox, Tillie.

QUEEN. A cow is a beautiful thing...

DARKBEARD. A friend of yours?

FOX. Thank you, Your Majesty. And now, I must go.

DARKBEARD. A question first.

FOX. Yes? I'll try to answer, but I fear I do not have my master's good sense, nimble wit, and intelligence.

DARKBEARD. And who is your master, pray tell?

FOX. Surely you've heard the king speak of him?

DARKBEARD. You know his master, sire?

FOX. Everyone does.

DARKBEARD. What's his name?

FOX. Giant Justi!

KING. Giant Justi?