

FOXFINDER



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NICK HERN BOOKS

London

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Foxfinder was first performed at the Finborough Theatre, London, on 29 November 2011, with the following cast:

SAMUEL	Gyuri Sarossy
JUDITH	Kirsty Besterman
WILLIAM	Tom Byam Shaw
SARAH	Becci Gemmell

<i>Director</i>	Blanche McIntyre
<i>Designer</i>	James Perkins
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Gary Bowman
<i>Sound Designer</i>	George Dennis

The play won the 2011 Papatango New Writing Competition, and was produced by the company.

Characters

WILLIAM BLOOR, *a foxfinder, nineteen*

SAMUEL COVEY, *a farmer, late thirties*

JUDITH COVEY, *his wife, attractive, early thirties*

SARAH BOX, *a neighbour, early thirties*

1

A farmhouse kitchen. Minimal decoration, scrupulously clean. SAMUEL and JUDITH are sitting at the table. Both are in their Sunday best – neat, plain clothes of timeless appearance. It is raining heavily outside.

SAMUEL. Went up the top this morning. I reckon half that wheat has had it.

JUDITH. It might recover.

SAMUEL. Not if this weather keeps on.

Pause.

And east-gate field... waste of seed that was. It's like a bog.

JUDITH. We might get something from it. Better than nothing.

SAMUEL. I planted it too early. You can say that.

JUDITH. We don't know yet, do we? The rain could stop tomorrow.

Pause.

There's a good crop of leeks coming.

SAMUEL. Huh. I wouldn't call it good.

Pause. The rain batters against the windows.

Listen to it. It's stupid travelling on a day like this.

JUDITH. He'll be soaked. And frozen.

SAMUEL. Aye.

Pause.

Show me the letter again.

JUDITH holds out a letter. SAMUEL takes it. Looks at it.

Fancy hand he's got. Very nice.

JUDITH. It's an honour having one of them stay. Everyone says that.

SAMUEL. Huh. 'Investigating the area.' What does that mean?

JUDITH. I don't know.

Pause.

SAMUEL. I don't see why it has to be us.

JUDITH. It doesn't say.

SAMUEL. There are plenty others as has more room. In 'the area'.

JUDITH. Yes, but he –

SAMUEL. He should be staying at the big house.

JUDITH. He asked to stay here.

SAMUEL. Aye. He did.

Pause.

If there was something going on, on our land, I'd know. Don't I know my own land? I'm out there all times of day and night and I've seen nothing. You've seen nothing. The men have seen nothing. There is nothing.

JUDITH. They're clever. They hide, that's what people say.

SAMUEL. I'd *know*.

JUDITH nods. Pause.

He's heard something. Must have.

JUDITH. What?

SAMUEL. Someone's been telling tall tales, I bet.

JUDITH. Don't say that. Who'd do that?

SAMUEL. Could be anyone.

JUDITH looks worried.

JUDITH. No. That can't be it.

SAMUEL. I'll ask him when he gets here.

JUDITH. Don't you dare! If someone's said something, you'll just make it worse!

Pause.

SAMUEL. Fine. Let him waste his time chasing rumours. I'll say nothing.

Pause.

JUDITH. What time is it?

SAMUEL. Twenty past. He's late.

JUDITH. He'll be here soon.

SAMUEL. You said that an hour ago.

JUDITH. Maybe the roads are flooded.

SAMUEL. Aye, I reckon. And the bridge will be out before long.

JUDITH. It's no good, Sam, you'll have to go out looking for him.

SAMUEL. I'll not. I've got animals need feeding. They won't wait.

JUDITH. What if he's lost?

SAMUEL. Then he won't come. So I can get on.

He gets up.

JUDITH. No, you're not leaving me to meet him alone!

SAMUEL. All right.

SAMUEL sits back down.

JUDITH. When he comes, you can't be rude to him. Be polite. Promise me.

SAMUEL. He'll have to take us as he finds us, won't he?

JUDITH. Sam!

A knock at the door. JUDITH jumps up.

It's him.

She hesitates.

SAMUEL. Open it then.

JUDITH. I can't.

SAMUEL opens the door. WILLIAM stands there. He wears a black greatcoat and wide-brimmed hat. He carries several heavy bags.

SAMUEL. William Bloor, is it?

WILLIAM. Yes.

SAMUEL. I'm Sam Covey. Come in.

WILLIAM smiles apologetically.

WILLIAM. Not yet.

SAMUEL. Oh.

WILLIAM. Is the lady of the house present?

SAMUEL. Judith!

JUDITH goes to the door.

WILLIAM. Are you Judith Covey, Mrs?

JUDITH. Yes, that's right.

She puts out her hand.

Come in. You must be freezing!

WILLIAM. And you're Samuel Covey, Mr.

SAMUEL. I am. I said that.

WILLIAM. Do you have any identification?

SAMUEL. Excuse me?

WILLIAM. I need to see some identification. For both of you. Please.

JUDITH's hand droops.

JUDITH. Uhm.

JUDITH goes over to a chest of drawers and starts rummaging.

WILLIAM stands in the rain, holding his bags.

SAMUEL. A funny way of greeting people.

WILLIAM. I'm sorry, but you could be anyone.

SAMUEL. You think we've chucked the real Coveys down the well or something?

WILLIAM. I don't know. Have you?

JUDITH shows him some papers. He nods. Finally he comes inside and puts the bags down.

You'll have to excuse me for seeming rude. Judith.

He offers his hand. She shakes it. He smiles.

Samuel.

SAMUEL *shakes his offered hand.*

Thank you for letting me stay. We appreciate your help in this matter.

Pause.

JUDITH. It's no trouble. We're glad to have you. We don't get many visitors. I'll put the kettle on.

WILLIAM. If you don't mind, I'll put my bags away first.

JUDITH. Oh. Yes. The room's quite small, I'm afraid.

WILLIAM. I'm sure it will be more than adequate.

SAMUEL *bends to pick up his bags.*

No, I'll take those, if you don't mind.

SAMUEL *steps back.*

JUDITH. It's this way.

JUDITH goes out. WILLIAM picks up the bags, nods to SAMUEL, and follows her.

2

WILLIAM, *now dressed in a plain shirt, black waistcoat and trousers, sits with JUDITH and SAMUEL at the table. The remains of a meal of soup and bread are in front of him.*

WILLIAM. Thank you. That was delicious.

JUDITH. Will you have a cider to finish off? Or we've got beer?

WILLIAM. No –

JUDITH. Or tea? Coffee?

WILLIAM. – thank you. No.

JUDITH. I'll get these.

JUDITH gets up and clears WILLIAM's plate and bowl away.

WILLIAM *brushes the table free of crumbs. He gets out a notebook and unfolds a map on the table. SAMUEL watches him.*

WILLIAM. I just need to ask you a few questions.

SAMUEL. Now? Can't it wait till morning?

WILLIAM. It won't take long.

JUDITH *sits back down.*

The farm is sixty acres?

SAMUEL. Aye.

WILLIAM *makes a note.*

WILLIAM. And what kind of animals do you have here?

JUDITH. Do you mean... because we've not seen any.

WILLIAM. I mean, simply, what kind of animals does the farm have?

SAMUEL. A few cows, pigs, some chickens. That's it.

WILLIAM. This is an arable farm.

SAMUEL. Yes.

WILLIAM. What about pets?

JUDITH. We had a cat but it ran off.

WILLIAM *makes a note.*

Is that important?

WILLIAM. A missing cat as a single, isolated incident is not important.

JUDITH....Oh.

WILLIAM. When did this happen?

JUDITH. March.

WILLIAM *points to the map.*

WILLIAM. This is the boundary line we have for your property. Is it correct?

SAMUEL. Uh. Looks it.

WILLIAM. It is correct?

SAMUEL. Yes.

WILLIAM. And this land belongs to David Johnson, Mr.

SAMUEL. Yes.

WILLIAM. And this to Abraham Box, Mr.

SAMUEL. It says that on the map already.

WILLIAM. I'm checking my facts. What's this?

JUDITH. That's the woods.

WILLIAM. Woods? Mature trees, young trees... bushes?

SAMUEL. Aah... yes.

WILLIAM. Which?

SAMUEL. Both.

WILLIAM. Pardon?

SAMUEL. All. I mean.

WILLIAM. And who does that belong to?

SAMUEL. Well. No one.

WILLIAM makes notes.

WILLIAM. Have you seen pheasants on your property?

SAMUEL. Yes. Johnson raises them to hunt. They fly over the fence.

WILLIAM. What about deer. Have you seen deer on your property?

SAMUEL. Ahh...

JUDITH. No, not very often.

WILLIAM. So your answer is yes?

JUDITH. Yes.

WILLIAM. Ducks. Have you seen ducks, either flying overhead, or on the land?

JUDITH. Uhm...

SAMUEL. No.

WILLIAM. You've never seen ducks here?

SAMUEL. We see ducks, but we don't have ducks here.

WILLIAM. So the answer is yes. You have seen ducks. Flying overhead, or on the land?

SAMUEL turns away, annoyed.

JUDITH. Both.

WILLIAM. Have you seen more ducks flying or more ducks on the land, speaking generally?

JUDITH. Uh. Flying.

WILLIAM makes notes.

WILLIAM. Badgers?

SAMUEL. Yes. In the thirty-seven years I've lived here, I have seen a badger.

WILLIAM. Samuel, these questions are simply to help me get an idea of the situation here.

SAMUEL. There is no situation here.

WILLIAM. I sincerely hope not. Now, could you both think very hard please before answering this next question. Would you say that the frequency with which you've seen these birds and animals – pheasant, deer, duck, badger – has been more or less in the past year?

They think.

SAMUEL. The same. Not more, not less.

JUDITH nods agreement. WILLIAM makes a note.

WILLIAM. That's very useful. Thank you.

JUDITH. Aren't you going to ask us... about...

WILLIAM. No.

Long pause. WILLIAM looks at the map, and his notes.

Samuel, my notes tell me that the farm is not on target to meet its quota

for this year.

SAMUEL *frowns*.

SAMUEL. Aye.

WILLIAM. So far, you've produced less than two thirds of what you did last year.

JUDITH. It can't be that bad.

WILLIAM. Look at the figures.

JUDITH. We'll make it up with the winter harvest.

WILLIAM. Frankly, that's impossible.

SAMUEL. That's why you came here.

WILLIAM. I'm here to help you.

SAMUEL. Huh.

WILLIAM. We take the security of England's food supply very seriously. There's little margin for error. If one farm falls behind, another has to pick up the slack. Or people go hungry.

SAMUEL. We know that.

WILLIAM. And a country marches on her stomach, Samuel. Without food, we're defenceless. Open to exploitation by any foreign power.

SAMUEL. Abe's behind as well.

WILLIAM. Abraham Box won't make his quota?

WILLIAM pages through his notes. JUDITH shoots SAMUEL a warning look.

The Box farm is almost on target. Are you saying that their winter harvest will be low?

SAMUEL. Half his fields are underwater. What do you expect?

WILLIAM. England expects that every citizen will do their duty.

JUDITH. Yes, of course.

WILLIAM. What about your other neighbours? Do you know anything about them?

SAMUEL. My great-grandfather built this farm. Does it say that in your notes?

WILLIAM. Yes. An impressive heritage. Do you know anything about –

JUDITH. Don't take our farm.

SAMUEL. Jude, be quiet.

JUDITH. We've had a bad year. The flooding. And the leaf blight. And... our son.

WILLIAM. Your son?

JUDITH. He died.

Pause. WILLIAM looks in his notes.

WILLIAM. Your son Daniel, aged four?

JUDITH. Yes.

WILLIAM. You didn't notify us.

JUDITH. I. No. I'm sorry. We... we forgot.

WILLIAM. I see.

JUDITH. It was a bad time.

WILLIAM. I'm very sorry for your loss.

JUDITH. Thank you.

WILLIAM. And you don't have any other children.

JUDITH. No.

SAMUEL stands up.

SAMUEL. I've to lock up. It's late.

WILLIAM. I know this is difficult but I have to ask. When did Daniel die?

JUDITH. March.

SAMUEL leaves the room.

WILLIAM. And... how?

JUDITH. An accident.

WILLIAM *writes notes.*

Mr Bloor... I...

WILLIAM. Call me William.

JUDITH. William. My husband... he's been ill. He...

WILLIAM. He has? I'm sorry to hear that. What form of illness?

JUDITH *frowns.*

JUDITH. Sam's fine now. We're doing fine.

WILLIAM. Judith, this farm has everything it could possibly need in terms of workers, land and equipment. And yet, you have failed to meet the targets set for you. The question we must ask is 'Why?'

JUDITH. Bad luck.

WILLIAM. There's no such thing.

JUDITH *doesn't know what to say.*

You're uncomfortable with my presence here. You obviously want me to leave.

JUDITH. Well no, I...

WILLIAM. Is there something you'd like to confess?

JUDITH *is shocked.*

JUDITH. No! I just meant. That. Sam needs quiet and... I'd like you to get done here as soon as possible, for his sake, is all I meant.

WILLIAM. And for his sake, for your sake, and the sake of our country, I'll do my job. Is that clear?

JUDITH *nods.*

Now, tell me, when did Samuel fall ill?

JUDITH. March.

WILLIAM *makes a note.*

WILLIAM. And his symptoms?

JUDITH. It was flu. Bad flu. Left him weak as a kitten. He couldn't work for weeks.

WILLIAM *looks at JUDITH. She is lying and he knows it.*

WILLIAM. I see.

He writes more notes. JUDITH stands there looking increasingly uncomfortable.

Eventually WILLIAM looks up.

Thank you, Judith. That's given me a lot to think about.

Dismissed, JUDITH leaves.

3

SAMUEL *and JUDITH's bedroom. SAMUEL is sitting on the bed, staring into space.*

JUDITH *comes in. She sits on the bed.*

JUDITH. Sam?

Pause.

SAMUEL. He's here because we're behind.

JUDITH. He didn't say that.

SAMUEL. He's here because we're behind. And we're behind because of me.

JUDITH. It wasn't your fault.

SAMUEL. You never should have married me.

JUDITH. Sam, don't.

Pause.

We'll be all right. They won't take the farm because of one bad year.

SAMUEL. They took Billy Gunn's place and gave it to Johnson.

JUDITH. That's different. He was old. And... he had no heir.

SAMUEL. Aye.

Pause.

JUDITH *takes SAMUEL's hand.*

JUDITH. Sam, the quickest way to get rid of him is to answer all his questions and show him there's nothing wrong here.

SAMUEL. Huh.

JUDITH. Once he's gone we can think about the future. Next year's going to be better.

SAMUEL. It could hardly be worse.

She puts her arms around him.

JUDITH. We'll be all right, you'll see.

He nods.

SAMUEL. I don't deserve you.

JUDITH. Don't be stupid.

She kisses him. He kisses her back. She presses, trying to make the kiss more passionate. He pulls away gently.

SAMUEL. I... it's late.

JUDITH *nods, resigned. They start getting ready for bed.*

WILLIAM *is in the spare bedroom, on the other side of the wall.*

His travelling coat is hanging on the back of a wardrobe, dripping. His bags sit at the foot of the single bed.

WILLIAM. The Personal Journal of William Bloor. Monday. Arrive at the farm of Mr and Mrs Samuel Covey. During the journey here, I noted several birds circling overhead in a suspicious manner. Due to the rain, was unable to make an accurate identification, but was in any case glad to reach cover. The Covey's farm is very remote; prime territory for an infestation. It is late, I am tired and this room unusually cold, but this only serves to drive any distractions from my mind and remind me of the seriousness of my mission. My preliminary questioning, which took place after an excellent leek and potato soup provided by Judith, and my own first impressions lead me to some immediate conclusions – 1: The death of the Covey's only child Daniel, Samuel's illness, disappearance of cat and downturn in the farm's productivity all occurred in March of this year. 2: Judith is attempting to be friendly but is clearly afraid of me.

Despite this, she challenged my presence here and came close to telling me to leave. An unusually brave woman, or a desperate one? 3: Death of son was not reported. Why? 4: Samuel tense almost to the point of aggression. Parental grief combined with stress, possibly, but it could be something more.

WILLIAM *puts his ear to the wall separating his room from JUDITH and SAMUEL's. There is silence from the room – they are lying still. WILLIAM makes a note in his notebook.*

WILLIAM *opens one of his bags and takes out a shirt. He opens the door of the wardrobe and is hanging the shirt up when he sees something inside the wardrobe.*

He pulls it out. It's a child's toy, a wooden horse on wheels, very dusty.

4

Morning. JUDITH is in the kitchen pouring a cup of coffee for SARAH, a neighbour.

JUDITH. It's not you he's investigating.

SARAH. If he thinks he's found something here, he'll be knocking on our door next. Stands to reason.

JUDITH. He won't find anything if there's nothing to find.

SARAH. If?

JUDITH. You don't think we've got them, do you?

SARAH. No. Definitely not.

JUDITH. Then he won't find anything. He'll be gone in a few days.

SARAH. I hope so.

Pause. SARAH looks at JUDITH.

How've you been? You look tired.

JUDITH. I am. Feeling... like this, every day... it's exhausting.

Pause.

SARAH. I don't know how you cope.

JUDITH. One of us has to be the strong one.

SARAH. At least Sam's out of bed now.

JUDITH. He is. He's doing much better.

SARAH. What about...

JUDITH. Well. No. He keeps saying he's tired. Or he stays up until I'm asleep.

SARAH. You've got to keep trying.

JUDITH. I don't want to push him. Might make it worse.

SARAH. It's been half a year, Jude. More.

JUDITH. He needs time.

SARAH. What about what you need?

Pause.

If *he* finds out you're not... it'll count against you.

JUDITH. How's he going to find out? I'll not tell him.

SARAH. And Sam...

JUDITH. Sam won't even talk to me about it.

SARAH *nods*.

SARAH. What's he like?

JUDITH. Young. Thin. Too thin.

SARAH. They raise them up like monks. And they live like monks too. No women. No drinking. No nothing.

JUDITH. Oh. I offered him a drink last night.

SARAH. Be careful! You don't want him thinking you're a couple of lushes!

JUDITH. I asked him if he wanted a cider, that's all. We didn't have any.

SARAH. Good. He's dangerous. One word from him and that's it, you're out.

JUDITH. He says he's here to help us.

SARAH. Jude... last time I went up to town with Abe... someone gave me this.

She pulls out a crudely printed pamphlet entitled 'Foxes – Not Our Enemy'. She gives it to JUDITH.

JUDITH. Good God! Why did you bring this here when I've got him under my roof?

SARAH. It says the fox is almost extinct in England.

JUDITH. That's wonderful!

SARAH. Is it?

JUDITH. Of course!

SARAH. If the foxes are gone, things should be getting better. Do you think things are getting better?

JUDITH. I... I don't want this, Sarah.

SARAH. You need to read it.

JUDITH. No! Take it back. I've got enough to worry about.

JUDITH pushes the pamphlet back into SARAH's hands.

WILLIAM appears in the doorway. He is behind SARAH so he can't see what she's holding.

Mr Bloor. Good morning.

WILLIAM. William, please, call me William. Good morning...?

SARAH pushes the pamphlet into her pocket.

JUDITH. This is Sarah. Sarah, this is Mr William Bloor.

WILLIAM. Sarah Box, Mrs. Married to Abraham. Children; Nathaniel and Rebecca. Your farm is west of here, I think?

SARAH. That's right.

WILLIAM holds out his hand, smiling. SARAH shakes it.

I... I was just saying to Judith. She's lucky, having a foxfinder stay. It's a real privilege.

WILLIAM. I'm sure Judith would rather I wasn't here getting under her

feet.

JUDITH. No. I mean. I'm glad you're here. You're trying to help us.

WILLIAM. Indeed I am.

JUDITH. You've missed breakfast.

WILLIAM. Yes. I had a rather restless night. And then I overslept. Not like me at all.

JUDITH. Something wrong with the room?

WILLIAM. No, no, it's fine.

JUDITH. Sit down. I'll make you something.

WILLIAM. Do you have a piece of bread?

JUDITH. Uh...

WILLIAM. I'll take it with me.

JUDITH gives WILLIAM bread. He puts it in his bag.

Goodbye then, ladies.

WILLIAM leaves the house.

SARAH. Oh –

JUDITH. Ssh!

JUDITH goes to the door.

He's gone.

SARAH. Do you think he heard what I said?

JUDITH. I don't know. No. No I don't think so.

SARAH. You said he'd already gone out!

JUDITH. I thought he had!

SARAH. You should have checked his room!

JUDITH. I listened outside the door. How was I supposed to know?

Pause.

SARAH. If he heard me...

JUDITH. He didn't.

SARAH. I'm going home.

JUDITH. Sarah...

SARAH. What?

JUDITH. He knows that you and Abe are going to be low this harvest. Sam said something about it.

SARAH. It's not Sam's business to talk to him about our farm!

JUDITH. He didn't mean to –

SARAH. For God's sake! We don't need you giving him reasons to investigate us.

JUDITH. No. I know.

SARAH. I'm going. I need to talk to Abe.

JUDITH. I'm sorry.

SARAH. Just be careful what you say around him.

JUDITH. I will.

She leaves the pamphlet on the table and goes out.

Don't leave that here. Sarah!

JUDITH looks at the pamphlet on the table as if it were a dangerous animal. Eventually, she picks it up, folds it small and shoves it into her pocket.

5

WILLIAM is crouching in a muddy field. He stares intently at something in the distance.

SAMUEL appears at the edge of the field. He looks at WILLIAM.

SAMUEL. Uh.

WILLIAM. Samuel. Good morning.

SAMUEL. It's one o' clock.

WILLIAM. Ah. Good afternoon then.

Pause.

SAMUEL. What're you looking at?

WILLIAM. Those woods.

SAMUEL. Oh.

They both stare at the trees.

Did you see summat?

WILLIAM. I found...

WILLIAM *reaches into his bag and pulls out a small animal skull.*

...this. It was lying in the next field, with its empty eye sockets pointing directly at those trees. Directly. As if it were staring. Do you see?

SAMUEL. It's a rabbit skull.

WILLIAM. It's a message.

SAMUEL is totally nonplussed.

SAMUEL. What?

WILLIAM. The red beast preys on the rabbit. Which makes the rabbit our ally.

SAMUEL. Does it? Because they eat half my crops every year.

WILLIAM. I think the rabbits on your farm could be trying to warn us.

SAMUEL. You're saying this rabbit... it decided to lie down and die, pointing at that tree, because it knew that you'd come along and find it?

WILLIAM. Nature is full of symbols, Samuel. You just have to know how to interpret them.

SAMUEL. Huh.

WILLIAM. This field, this farm... this entire country is a battleground between the forces of civilisation and the forces of nature. If we lose, England will starve. Our towns and cities will crumble, and trees will grow amongst the ruins using the bones of dead men as fertiliser. Do you see? They want nothing less than our complete annihilation, Samuel. Without man, the fox will rule.

SAMUEL. That's why the rabbits are helping us?

WILLIAM. Exactly. I hypothesise that when I investigate those woods, I will find further evidence of an infestation.

SAMUEL. You'll find rabbit holes. Loads of bloody rabbit holes. And you don't need to... interpret the symbols of what that means.

WILLIAM. On the contrary, I do.

SAMUEL. Rabbits. In those woods. That's all. And when I see a rabbit, I shoot it. So I'm damn sure they're not trying to help me any.

Pause.

I'll show you. The rabbit holes. Come on.

WILLIAM. No. Thank you.

Pause. SAMUEL is at a loss.

SAMUEL. Right. Well. You coming in for lunch? Judith'll have something laid out.

WILLIAM. No.

SAMUEL nods, is about to leave.

Samuel. While you're here, there's something I want to ask you.

SAMUEL. Oh?

WILLIAM. Your son. Daniel. How exactly did he die?

Pause.

I know this is hard for you, but the sons and daughters of farming families are a valuable shared resource for the future of this country. Daniel's death affects us all.

SAMUEL looks as if he's considering punching WILLIAM in the face. WILLIAM takes a small step back. He puts on his gentlest tone of voice.

Sam, I thought it better to spare Judith these questions. But if you'd prefer, I can ask her instead, this evening.

Pause.

SAMUEL. No. Ask me.

WILLIAM. How did Daniel die?

SAMUEL. Drowned.

WILLIAM. How?

Pause.

SAMUEL. It was just getting dark. Jude had gone to Abe's to see Sarah. I put Dan to bed. Fell asleep in front of the fire. I woke up. I thought someone had said my name. But there was no one. I saw the door was open. I looked at the clock. My dad's clock. Ten past nine, exactly. I went upstairs. He wasn't there. I called for him. I went out... I looked everywhere.

Pause.

WILLIAM. Samuel?

SAMUEL. Found him. Found Dan. Dead... in two foot of flood water. He slipped in the mud, is what I reckon. He was all muddy.

Pause.

WILLIAM. Did you call for a doctor?

SAMUEL. I think he must of said my name. When he come downstairs. He said my name. Dad, he said. That's what I heard. In my sleep. But I didn't wake up quick enough.

WILLIAM. Did you call for a doctor?

SAMUEL. I should have locked the door. I should have... I was looking after him. It was my fault.

WILLIAM. Sam. Did you call a doctor?

SAMUEL. I tried to get him breathing. But he was dead. Cold.

WILLIAM. Then he must have been there for some time. If you woke because Daniel spoke to you, only a few minutes would have elapsed. He would still have been warm.

SAMUEL. It was a cold night.

WILLIAM. Hhm. A doctor came?

SAMUEL. Said he drowned.

WILLIAM. I'll have to see the death certificate.

SAMUEL *nods.*

SAMUEL. Ten past nine. I was going to give him that clock. My dad's clock.

Pause.

WILLIAM. Tell me... was Daniel a sleepwalker?

SAMUEL. No.

WILLIAM. He'd never gone outside by himself at night like this before?

SAMUEL. No.

WILLIAM. Thank you for telling me. I know that must have been hard.

Pause.

SAMUEL. I'm going in.

SAMUEL *leaves.* WILLIAM *makes a note in his notebook.*

6

JUDITH *is in the kitchen, setting the table.* WILLIAM *is watching her, and she is uncomfortable under his intense gaze.*

JUDITH. Did you, uh... have a good look round then?

WILLIAM. I did.

JUDITH *nods.*

JUDITH. The weather stayed clear for you.

WILLIAM. Yes.

Pause.

JUDITH. I wasn't sure if you'd be eating with us. You didn't come in for lunch.

WILLIAM. We try to avoid eating to excess.

JUDITH. No lunch?

WILLIAM. I had the bread you'd given me.

JUDITH. That's not enough. Not for breakfast and lunch together. Didn't you get hungry?

WILLIAM. Hunger is a suitable reminder of the spectre of starvation that haunts our land.

JUDITH. Oh. Why don't you sit down? Sam will be in soon.

WILLIAM. I will. Thank you.

WILLIAM sits.

Can I do anything to help?

JUDITH. No, no... you're our guest.

WILLIAM is pleased to have been called a guest.

WILLIAM. It does smell very... appetising.

JUDITH. You must be hungry. If you don't want to wait I can –

WILLIAM. No. I can wait.

Pause.

What is it?

JUDITH. Casserole.

WILLIAM. Oh, good.

Pause.

JUDITH. You must do a lot of travelling.

WILLIAM. So far, I've worked entirely in this county.

JUDITH. Like me then. I was born in the next village. Lived here all my life.

WILLIAM. It's a beautiful area. Very green. Very English.

JUDITH. Very wet.

WILLIAM. Indeed. Quintessentially English, in that respect.

JUDITH. Where are you from?

WILLIAM. Uh...

WILLIAM *frowns*.

I went to The Institute when I was five, to begin my training.

JUDITH. What about your parents?

WILLIAM. I'm sure they were very proud.

JUDITH processes what WILLIAM has said. She's not quite sure what he means.

JUDITH. Who looked after you... at The Institute?

WILLIAM. Each dormitory had a house father, and we were taught to consider this England... this... Earth... as the only mother we would ever need. Indeed, she is mother to us all.

JUDITH. Yes, but... she couldn't tell you a bedtime story. Or comfort you, when you felt afraid.

WILLIAM. She feeds us, she clothes us. She gives us everything we have. I think her a very good, kind mother.

JUDITH. And your... house father... was he kind?

Pause. WILLIAM thinks.

WILLIAM. He instilled in us the necessary discipline. I am often thankful to him for that.

JUDITH. Ah.

Pause.

WILLIAM. I was glad to leave him behind when I left The Institute to begin my work, but isn't every son glad to leave his father when he comes of age? My mother, though, will be with me always. When I want to see her, I go outside.

JUDITH. You never saw your real parents again?

WILLIAM. No.

JUDITH. I can't imagine giving up a child. Do you know why they –

WILLIAM. I walked up the hill today. And... the way the valley curves... it's like a mighty hand, cradling the farmhouse. As if the Earth sought to shelter those who live here.

JUDITH. Ah... it does. The worst of the wind breaks up on the ridge. The tops of the trees are bent, from growing into it. Did you see?

WILLIAM. No. It's a breathtaking view.

JUDITH. It puts things in perspective.

WILLIAM. Oh?

JUDITH. Our problems... our lives... they're so small. They don't matter. Not really. The sun rises every day... the wind blows, the rain falls. Things go on, just like they did... just like they did... before.

Pause.

WILLIAM. This year has been very hard for you.

JUDITH. Hard. Yes.

WILLIAM. Remember, the night is darkest just before the dawn. We suffer and toil to bring our country back into the light. History is watching us, Judith. We have to fight! We can't give up!

JUDITH. This farm is all we've got. I'd fertilise the fields with my own blood if I had to. I'll not give up.

WILLIAM is impressed.

WILLIAM. That's the spirit. But... I hope that you won't have to use such extreme measures.

JUDITH smiles at WILLIAM. She puts a basket of bread down in front of him.

JUDITH. Here. Help yourself.

WILLIAM looks at the bread. He wants to take a piece, but instead he pushes it away from him and gets out his notebook. He opens it and reads himself for a moment before speaking.

WILLIAM. Judith. Before Samuel gets back... I have a few more questions.

JUDITH. Oh?

WILLIAM. I need to ask about your... conjugal relations.

JUDITH looks at WILLIAM, shocked.

Nothing to worry about. Just a few easy questions.

JUDITH. Why do you want to ask me about that?

WILLIAM. I have to examine every part of my patient. Otherwise how can I be sure that I haven't left the tumour festering in the dark?

WILLIAM tries a reassuring smile. JUDITH stares at him.

I thought, given what you've said about Samuel's illness, that you'd prefer it if I put my questions to you. But I can put them to Samuel when –

JUDITH. No. I'll answer.

WILLIAM. Good. Could you sit down?

JUDITH sits at the table.

Judith. You and Samuel have no heir. This puts the long-term future of this farm in jeopardy.

JUDITH. We're trying for another baby.

WILLIAM. Ah. Good. That's good.

WILLIAM makes a note.

You are having regular... sexual intercourse?

JUDITH nods. WILLIAM makes a note.

With your husband?

JUDITH. What?

WILLIAM. I have to ask. Are you having intercourse with Samuel, or with other men?

JUDITH. With Sam!

WILLIAM. And is your husband having intercourse with anyone else? A neighbour, perhaps... Sarah?

JUDITH. No. Of course not. He's not... We're not like that!

WILLIAM makes notes.

WILLIAM. How many times a week do you have sexual intercourse? On average?

JUDITH. I don't know. Once. Twice.

WILLIAM. Have your sexual habits changed over the last year?

JUDITH. No.

WILLIAM. Does Samuel suggest new or unusual practices?

JUDITH. No.

WILLIAM. No violence or...

JUDITH. No!

WILLIAM. Good. Uh. In what position do you usually... uh.

WILLIAM takes a breath. Swallows.

Face to face? Or does he... uh... from behind...?

JUDITH. I don't see how that –

WILLIAM. Answer the question.

JUDITH. Face to face.

WILLIAM. Is it... good?

JUDITH. What?

WILLIAM. Is it good? Does he... does he make you orgasm?

JUDITH stares at him. WILLIAM looks away, flushed.

The door opens and SAMUEL walks in.

SAMUEL. More questions?

SAMUEL glowers at WILLIAM. WILLIAM flips his notebook shut and puts it away.

WILLIAM. Nothing important. I'm finished now.

SAMUEL. Finished? You're going then?

WILLIAM. I'm finished for today.

SAMUEL. Huh.

JUDITH. Dinner's nearly ready.

JUDITH gives SAMUEL a quick kiss on the cheek. He's not expecting it.

Casserole. You like casserole.

SAMUEL. Aye. Aye.

SAMUEL takes off his coat and hangs it up. He washes his hands at the sink, and dries them with a clean tea towel.

Temperature's dropping. Might be a frost tonight.

JUDITH. Good. It'll make the leeks sweet.

SAMUEL sits down at the table opposite WILLIAM. He takes some bread, butters it and tears off a chunk with his teeth. Chewing, he looks at WILLIAM. WILLIAM squirms a little under his gaze.

SAMUEL. How old are you, Mr Bloor?

WILLIAM. I'm nineteen.

SAMUEL. 'S young.

WILLIAM. As I was telling Judith earlier... I began my training at the age of five.

SAMUEL. How many farms you been to then? How many...

JUDITH. Investigations.

SAMUEL. Aye.

WILLIAM. Three.

SAMUEL. Huh.

WILLIAM. I'm fully qualified, Samuel.

SAMUEL. Did they have foxes, those other farms?

JUDITH. That's none of our business. I'm sorry, William.

WILLIAM. I'm happy to say that my other investigations led me to conclude that the farms were simply victims of bad management and nothing more sinister.

SAMUEL. Bad farmers.

WILLIAM. Exactly.

JUDITH. What happened to them?

WILLIAM. I recommended that the farmers remain in residence and simply... try harder.

JUDITH is heartened to hear this.

JUDITH. You gave them a second chance.

WILLIAM. I did what I thought best for the productivity of the farms in question.

JUDITH brings warm plates and a jug of water and puts them on the table.

SAMUEL. He found a rabbit skull, Jude. Did he tell you?

JUDITH. No.

SAMUEL. It's a symbol, he says. A warning.

JUDITH. Oh?

WILLIAM. It could be. It's too early to say definitively.

SAMUEL. How long will it take to say?

WILLIAM. It's too early to say.

SAMUEL glowers at WILLIAM. Annoyed, WILLIAM glares back.

JUDITH gets the casserole dish out of the oven and brings it to the table. She puts on a smile.

JUDITH. Shall we eat?

7

WILLIAM is sitting on the bed, his head in his hands.

Anguished, he pulls off his nightshirt, reaches into his travelling bag and brings out a small whip.

He kneels on the floor and begins to whip himself, bringing the whip down rhythmically over his shoulders and onto his back.

WILLIAM. I. Am. Clean. In. Body. And. Mind.

8

The garden of SARAH's farmhouse. SARAH is pegging wet clothes – mostly children's clothes – on the line. JUDITH is helping her. Both keep

one eye on their surroundings, looking out for anyone approaching.

JUDITH. In the morning he takes some bread and he goes out. All day, even when it's raining. He comes back covered in mud... shivering, shaking... I feel sorry for him.

SARAH. I don't. I hope he catches pneumonia.

JUDITH. Sarah.

SARAH. What's he said? He going to give you the all-clear?

JUDITH. I don't know. He was friendly at first, to me at least. But now he's gone quiet. He has dinner with us every night and he barely speaks.

SARAH. Good. You won't have to listen to his idiocy.

JUDITH. A couple of times I've caught him looking at me...

SARAH. Looking at you how?

JUDITH. I'm not sure. It's strange.

SARAH. Well... he's been at yours a week today. Maybe that's how long they're supposed to stay. Maybe tomorrow morning he'll take his bread and his bags and bugger off.

Pause. JUDITH doesn't look convinced.

Abe says the worst thing we can do is panic. It'll make us look guilty. Arouse suspicion. We carry on as normal. All of us.

JUDITH. I can't be more normal without acting like a lunatic.

SARAH smiles.

SARAH. Did you read the pamphlet?

JUDITH. Yes.

SARAH. And?

JUDITH. Who wrote it? How do you know they're telling the truth?

SARAH. Have you ever seen a fox? Has anyone you know ever seen a fox?

JUDITH. Foxes are sly. Everyone knows that. Just because you can't see them. Doesn't mean they're not there.

SARAH. Wake up, Jude! It's a fairy story, the whole thing! The foxes are

gone, but anyone who speaks out, anyone who talks about their doubts... they're arrested!

JUDITH. Why?

SARAH. Because they're terrified of the truth and what it can do, that's why! They don't know why the weather's gone bad, or the crops are failing, and they don't know how to stop it. They've been wrong all this time, and all those people who lost their farms... all those people who died... Something like this... It could bring the whole bloody Government down.

JUDITH. He believes it. William Bloor. He believes in what he's doing.

SARAH. Course he does. Wouldn't be very convincing otherwise, would he? Anyone will believe anything if you get to them young enough.

Pause. JUDITH sighs.

JUDITH. I don't know what to think. I just want him to give us the all-clear.

SARAH. He's not been over here yet. That's a good sign. And you said he's never found foxes before... Maybe he thinks you're behind because of... bad management.

JUDITH. Maybe.

SARAH. Abe was right. No point panicking. This could all come to nothing. So long as you keep on...

Rain begins to fall. SARAH looks up.

JUDITH. Being normal?

SARAH. Yes. Bloody hell.

The women unpeg the clothes from the line as quickly as they can.

One dry afternoon. That's all I needed....

They run off inside with the washing in their arms.

9

WILLIAM stands in his room holding a large, leather-bound book.

WILLIAM. The red fox, *Vulpes Vulpes*, is as the name suggests, most usually reddish brown, but its colour ranges to silver and black. It has slender paws, a long muzzle, erect, pointed ears and a tail covered in longer hairs, giving the appearance and name 'brush'. The eyes of the beast are a dull yellow-gold with dark, vertically oriented pupils like those of a cat.

Usually the size of a large dog, an adult male can grow up to two and a half metres long from nose to tail tip. Novices should be aware that from a distance, a large brown dog can resemble the beast, but their silhouettes are in fact quite different. Study the diagrams and illustrations that follow and submit them to memory to aid you in your identifications.

The fox is an omnivore and will eat almost anything; fruit, carrion, insects, and small- to medium-sized mammals such as mice and rabbits, unwary cats, small dogs, newborn lambs and sickly calves. Many incidences have been recorded of a mother leaving her baby unguarded outside for only a few seconds, returning to find it gone, taken and devoured. The beast's bloodlust far outstrips its appetite and it will slaughter every hen in a henhouse, leaving the headless carcasses behind. A perfectly evolved killing machine, the beast's teeth can grow up to ten centimetres in length, and its claws can disembowel a man. Sly in nature, the beast is active mainly at dusk and during the night, when it can go about its deadly work unseen.

The beast has influence over the weather, and blights farmers' crops with unseasonable rainfall or periods of drought. It can also cause fires (see 'Fox Fire', Chapter Four), and is riddled with parasites and dangerous diseases to which it is immune but which it revels in spreading about the countryside.

The fox has powers to confuse and can send visions to the mentally unstable and disturb the dreams of the weak. Under its influence, the good and hard-working become fat, lazy alcoholics or...

WILLIAM is disturbed. He takes a minute to collect himself.

Or sexual perverts.

Some are victims, turned away from their honest labours unwillingly. Others have allowed the beast to sway their minds or welcomed it with open arms. Differentiating between the guilty and the innocent is very difficult and it is better to view all those living on contaminated farms with suspicion.

You, foxfinder, must be clean in body and mind. Always remember that the smallest fault in your character could become a crack into which the beast may insinuate himself, like water awaiting the freeze that will smash the stone apart.

Clutching the book to his chest, WILLIAM sits down on the bed.

10

WILLIAM *is sitting at the kitchen table. It's almost dark. He looks nervous. He gets up. Looks out of the window. Paces. Sits back down again.*

JUDITH and SAMUEL *enter in coats and boots. JUDITH has mud all over her hands and front.*

WILLIAM. Judith. Samuel. Where have you been?

SAMUEL. Pigs got out.

JUDITH. We've been out there an hour trying to catch them. I went over in the mud like an idiot. Thank God the rain let up before –

WILLIAM. Are you injured?

JUDITH. No, no.

WILLIAM. Good. I'm glad you're back. I need to –

SAMUEL. Pigs are smart. If someone leaves their gate unlatched, they'll open it.

WILLIAM. I didn't leave the gate open.

SAMUEL. Huh.

JUDITH. I'm sorry, William. You must be starving. I haven't had a chance to put dinner on yet.

SAMUEL. Could have put it on himself if he was that hungry. Don't they teach you how to cook at your Institute?

WILLIAM. There's something we need to discuss.

JUDITH. Oh.

SAMUEL lets out a weary sigh.

SAMUEL. Can we take our coats off first?

WILLIAM. Yes. Yes, I suppose so.

SAMUEL and JUDITH take off their coats. JUDITH wipes her hands clean.

JUDITH. Should I put some coffee on?

WILLIAM. No. Sit down. Please.

They sit down at the table. WILLIAM takes the fox leaflet that SARAH gave to JUDITH out of his pocket and puts it on the table in front of them. He smooths it out.

Would either of you like to explain this?

SAMUEL. What is it?

WILLIAM. Propaganda. This leaflet supports the fox and his kind.

JUDITH. Someone shoved that in my hand when I was at the market last week.

WILLIAM. Someone?

JUDITH. It could have been anyone. It was crowded. I meant to burn it. I'll burn it now.

JUDITH tries to take the pamphlet but WILLIAM takes it and puts it back in his pocket.

WILLIAM. I'll keep hold of that, thank you.

JUDITH. I couldn't throw it on the floor, could I? What if a child had picked it up... or someone saw it and thought I was the one giving them out?

WILLIAM. I found it in the pocket of your dress.

SAMUEL. You went through my wife's dresses?

WILLIAM. I searched the house and the outbuildings while you were both out today.

SAMUEL. You've no right!

WILLIAM. On the contrary. I have special dispensation to search the properties of anyone under my suspicion.

JUDITH. I forgot about it. I forgot it was there.

WILLIAM. You wore the dress last week. On the day Sarah Box came to see you. Didn't you notice it still in your pocket?

JUDITH. There's often bits of paper in my pockets. Lists... notes...

SAMUEL. She's busy, for God's sake.

WILLIAM. Did you read it?

JUDITH. Only enough to see what it was.

WILLIAM *nods*.

WILLIAM. I don't think you were distributing these leaflets, Judith. But mere possession of this is enough to get you in serious trouble. You should have destroyed it as soon as you were given it.

JUDITH. I'll do that. If it ever happens again.

Pause.

WILLIAM. There's something else. As you both know, I spent this week examining your land. Early on, I noted several ominous signs, which required further investigation.

JUDITH. What signs?

WILLIAM. And on the second night, I became aware that the beast was... attempting to influence me.

JUDITH. What do you mean?

WILLIAM. It is impossible to explain to the untrained. Rest assured, I resisted him, easily. This... incident, the signs I have mentioned and your answers to my questions have led me to conclude that this farm is indeed suffering from contamination.

JUDITH. No. God, no.

WILLIAM. I know this is very serious news for you both.

SAMUEL. Did you see a fox?

WILLIAM. I wanted to confirm or deny my fears with an actual sighting and searched for hours both during the day and –

JUDITH. You didn't find anything.

WILLIAM. No.

JUDITH. So it's all right. You were mistaken.

WILLIAM. I was not mistaken! It is hardly surprising that I could not find the beast after an incomplete search of only a few days. In any case, there is enough evidence to confirm my belief, not least the cluster of negative events that occurred here in March this year and, I think, marked the beginning of his assault.

JUDITH. But if you haven't seen one how can you –

WILLIAM. I believe that the beasts may be responsible for the death of your son.

Pause. SAMUEL and JUDITH are speechless.

Your son was not a sleepwalker. There was no reason for him to go outside. He had never done so before. Is that not correct?

JUDITH. He was curious. I think he woke up and went exploring.

WILLIAM. Curious. That fits my theory.

JUDITH. I don't...

WILLIAM. I suspect that the beasts were watching your house that night. They saw you, Judith, leave. They crept closer, and through the window saw you, Samuel, fall asleep. For a few moments Daniel lay unguarded and they used that time to call to him. They lured him outside. They led him into the muddy water and they laughed as he drowned.

JUDITH. It was an accident.

WILLIAM. There is cancer here, Judith. And if you ignore it, it will destroy you.

JUDITH. We don't have foxes.

WILLIAM. Continued denial of the infestation is one of the signs of collaboration. The corrupt farmer wants to hide the truth for as long as possible so that they can continue to sabotage their own farm and –

JUDITH. But we'd never!

WILLIAM. – hasten the collapse of civilisation. Is that what you want? To live wild and savage? To rut in the woods, grunting and sweating like a filthy beast?

JUDITH. No!

WILLIAM. Then you agree with my findings? Your farm is contaminated?

JUDITH. I... I suppose... it's possible.

WILLIAM *nods.*

WILLIAM. Good. Good.

JUDITH. What does this mean... for us?

WILLIAM. I will need to perform a more extensive examination before I can make any recommendations. It may take some time.

JUDITH *takes WILLIAM's hand.*

JUDITH. I swear to you... we're not collaborators.

WILLIAM *is disturbed by her close proximity.*

WILLIAM. I, uh...

He draws his hand away from hers.

I have work to do. Could you make me a simple sandwich, and bring it to my room? Be sure to knock before you enter.

JUDITH *nods.* WILLIAM *goes upstairs.*

JUDITH. Oh God. What do we do now?

SAMUEL. Make him his sandwich. You sit down. I'll do it.

11

The fields.

WILLIAM *is standing in the darkness, notebook in hand.*

Suddenly SAMUEL appears out of the dark. He is carrying a shotgun. He scares WILLIAM.

WILLIAM. Samuel!

SAMUEL. Seen anything tonight?

WILLIAM. What are you doing out here?

SAMUEL. I need to see.

WILLIAM. See...?

SAMUEL. Two people looking. More likely to find what's there to be found.

WILLIAM. Absolutely not. No.

SAMUEL. It's my land. My responsibility.

WILLIAM. That's an admirable attitude, but you can't help me. My superiors would not accept your findings as the truth.

SAMUEL. They accept your word?

WILLIAM. They do.

SAMUEL. Then we stay together.

WILLIAM. No. I'm sorry.

Pause.

SAMUEL. Where've you looked so far?

WILLIAM. I am working to a grid system. I've walked the entire farm in daylight. And I am now working my way across the grid in darkness.

SAMUEL. You looked in the woods at night?

WILLIAM. No.

SAMUEL. Why not? If an animal's hiding, that's where it is.

WILLIAM. I'm working from the south.

SAMUEL. Wood's in the north.

WILLIAM. I know that.

SAMUEL. No point leaving it till last.

WILLIAM. I eliminate one square at a time.

SAMUEL. Huh. What d'you do if you see one?

WILLIAM. The beast can be deadly. We do not approach him. We retreat and make our report.

SAMUEL. Can't make a report if the deadly beast rips you groin to gullet.

Can you?

WILLIAM. The beast is unlikely to attack a fully grown man.

SAMUEL. You'd think they'd want you fully grown then. Not half-starved.

WILLIAM. I am perfectly capable of looking after myself!

SAMUEL. I've got this.

He indicates the shotgun. Pause.

But you don't want my help.

Pause.

WILLIAM. Will you follow my methods and do as I say?

SAMUEL. I will.

WILLIAM. As I said. We eliminate one square at a time.

12

SAMUEL and JUDITH's bedroom, later that night. JUDITH is lying in the bed. SAMUEL enters. He's trying to be quiet, but JUDITH is already awake.

JUDITH. Where've you been?

SAMUEL. I went out.

JUDITH. You can't just... in the middle of the night! I didn't know where you'd gone!

SAMUEL. I'm all right. I heard him go, so I followed. I'm helping him look.

JUDITH. What?

Pause.

SAMUEL. What he said makes sense. No reason for Dan to go out like that.

JUDITH. Dan went out because he was bored, or because he thought I was outside, or because –

SAMUEL. Because I didn't lock the door before I fell asleep.

Pause.

JUDITH. I was the one who went out and left the door unlocked! Why don't you try blaming me, instead of yourself?

Pause.

SAMUEL. Could be they did it.

JUDITH. No, Sam.

SAMUEL. I heard something that night. I thought it was Dan, but it could have been them.

JUDITH. No! For God's sake, we don't have foxes!

SAMUEL. He's going to hear you.

JUDITH. We don't have foxes! You know that. You said that to me a week ago.

SAMUEL. I've never looked properly. Another thing I should have done.

JUDITH. It wasn't your fault, it wasn't foxes, it was an accident!

SAMUEL. If they're out there, I'll find them. Then we'll know.

13

SARAH and Abraham's farmhouse kitchen.

WILLIAM is sitting at the table. His notebook is in front of him. He is waiting. SARAH enters. She's shocked and horrified to see WILLIAM.

SARAH. Mr Bloor?

WILLIAM. Good afternoon, Sarah. How are you?

SARAH. I'm... fine. Thank you.

WILLIAM. There was no one here so I decided to come in.

SARAH. The door was locked.

WILLIAM. Yes. You don't mind, do you?

SARAH. No, not at all! No point standing outside in the rain. How long have you been waiting?

WILLIAM. Not long.

SARAH. If I'd known you were coming... I'll get you a cup of tea. And I've got some –

WILLIAM. No, thank you. Why don't you sit down?

SARAH *sits*.

I've taken a look at your numbers. In terms of productivity, you have been slightly behind this year. However, with a good winter harvest, you will make your quota.

SARAH. Yes.

WILLIAM. I walked your land today. You are suffering from significant flooding in low-lying areas.

SARAH. It'll dry out, in the spring.

WILLIAM. Perhaps, but from my observations today I'd hypothesise that your winter harvest has been ruined. You won't make your quota.

SARAH. There's still time. We're hoping for the best.

WILLIAM *makes a note*.

WILLIAM. Nathaniel and Rebecca. How are they?

SARAH. Happy. Healthy.

WILLIAM. Excellent. And your husband. Abraham... he's fifty this year. Is that right?

SARAH. Fifty. Yes.

WILLIAM. That's quite an age gap.

SARAH. You can't help who you fall in love with.

WILLIAM. How is his health?

SARAH. He's an ox.

WILLIAM. An ox with a weak chest.

SARAH. No...

WILLIAM. I have a doctor's report here. Bronchitis.

SARAH. That was years ago! And it's not come back.

WILLIAM. Abraham was hospitalised.

SARAH. Only for a few days.

WILLIAM. A week.

SARAH. He's healthy now. I'll go and get him. He can tell you about it himself.

WILLIAM. That won't be necessary. You have a wonderful family.

SARAH. I do.

WILLIAM. Many people would view your life here as one of almost unimaginable good fortune.

SARAH. I know that.

WILLIAM. You have access to fresh vegetables, meat, eggs, dairy products...

SARAH. Yes.

WILLIAM. City dwellers have one egg a week on their ration, and three ounces of cheese. A factory worker... well... they live on what they get. A factory worker would think you very, very lucky.

SARAH *shifts uncomfortably in her chair. She's not sure what WILLIAM is getting at.*

A man like your husband. A strong man with a weak chest... how long do you think he'd last in the factories?

SARAH. I don't know.

WILLIAM. The current life expectancy is three years. How long do you think Abraham would last?

SARAH. I don't know.

WILLIAM. Guess.

SARAH. Three. Three years.

WILLIAM. If we took your farm, and sent you and your husband to work in the factories, you'd never see your children again.

Pause. SARAH is frozen with fear.

They would go to an orphanage. Perhaps Rebecca would be adopted.

She's the younger... isn't she? Would you like your children to be raised by strangers?

Pause.

I have something to show you.

WILLIAM *takes the fox leaflet out of his pocket. He puts it on the table.*

Pause.

I found this at Judith's house. In the pocket of the dress she was wearing when she saw you last week. You gave it to her. Didn't you?

SARAH. No.

WILLIAM. I had hours to search your house before you came back. I found a stack of these leaflets, hidden under a floorboard.

Pause.

SARAH. They're not mine. I'm keeping them safe for someone.

WILLIAM. Who?

Pause.

You gave this... poison to Judith. Didn't you?

SARAH. People need to know the truth.

WILLIAM. Oh yes. Very clever. Convince England that her enemy is defeated. And when we lower our defences... you and your kind rise up and destroy us all! Who gave you the leaflets?

Pause.

If you force me to report your farm as the source of this propaganda, you and Abe will swiftly find yourselves working in the factories.

SARAH. Abe doesn't know about it! I only gave one to Jude... no one else.

WILLIAM. Then protect yourself. Tell me who made the leaflets.

SARAH. I'll tell you if you give me your word as a foxfinder that you'll keep me and mine out of it.

WILLIAM. Are you trying to bribe me?

SARAH. I'm trying to make a trade.

WILLIAM. A foxfinder can't be bought. If you won't tell me, we have nothing more to say to each other.

WILLIAM *gets up to leave.*

SARAH. I'll give you the name, and something else. Information.

WILLIAM. I said I can't be bought.

SARAH. It's about Jude and Sam. Two things.

Pause. SARAH has got WILLIAM's interest. He frowns.

WILLIAM. I thought you and Judith were friends.

SARAH. We are.

WILLIAM. And yet you'd betray her?

SARAH. Do you want to know, or not?

WILLIAM *thinks.*

WILLIAM. Yes.

SARAH. Give me your word.

WILLIAM. You have my word. I'll keep you and Abraham out of my report.

SARAH. James Cross. The baker. He's the one.

WILLIAM *makes a note of this.*

WILLIAM. And the information?

SARAH. Did you know Sam was ill?

WILLIAM. I did. Judith told me it was the flu.

SARAH. She lied.

WILLIAM. I already knew that. It was obvious.

SARAH. But do you know what was really wrong with him?

WILLIAM. Go on.

SARAH. When Dan died in March, Sam got into bed. And he didn't get out until June.

WILLIAM. He was ill?

SARAH. He just lay there. Barely ate, barely spoke. Jude had to take charge of everything, and she was grieving too. That's why they're so behind.

WILLIAM. I see.

WILLIAM *makes a note.*

And the second piece of information? Sarah? If you won't tell me I'll have to cancel our trade.

SARAH. Jude told you they're trying for another baby.

WILLIAM. Yes?

SARAH. But they're not. They haven't had sex since Dan died.

WILLIAM *is shocked.*

WILLIAM. This is a decision they've made?

SARAH. No. Jude wants to. But Sam... he can't.

WILLIAM. Do you mean that he's physically incapable?

SARAH. They haven't tried. He won't. That's what I mean.

Pause.

It's not Jude's fault. And Sam's better. They'll get back on their feet in no time. They're good farmers. You're not going to take their farm, are you?

WILLIAM. I think it's a little late for you to worry about that. Goodnight, Sarah.

WILLIAM *gets up and takes his coat.*

SARAH. Can I ask you a question?

WILLIAM. What is it?

SARAH. Have you ever seen a fox?

WILLIAM. Not yet.

SARAH. Has anyone you know ever seen a fox?

WILLIAM. Of course.

SARAH. Who?

WILLIAM. My teachers at The Institute told me countless stories of coming face to face with the beast.

SARAH. Stories. Old stories.

WILLIAM. Not so old.

SARAH. What about the young foxfinders, the ones like you?

WILLIAM. In the past six months alone, my colleagues have discovered several contaminated properties.

SARAH. But did they see any foxes?

WILLIAM. No.

SARAH. Don't you think that's... incredible?

WILLIAM. The fox is sly. Everyone knows that.

SARAH. They tell us that to explain why we never see one.

WILLIAM. I know what you're trying to do, but –

SARAH. We never see one because they're all gone, and killing them didn't make things better, because they were never our enemy!

WILLIAM. You might as well save your breath. Your filthy propaganda will have no effect on me.

SARAH. They taught you to believe in a pack of lies, and they're using you to keep the rest of us believing. You've been played for a bloody fool, can't you see that?

WILLIAM. I see nothing but a diseased collaborator.

SARAH. We have to find the real reasons for our problems, or things'll just go on, getting worse and worse!

WILLIAM. Our trade is cancelled. Peddle this misinformation in the factories, if you can.

SARAH. You gave your word as a foxfinder that you'd keep me and mine safe.

WILLIAM. You just tried to convince me that my mission, and therefore my word, is meaningless.

SARAH. If you break it, I'll know I'm right.

Seething with rage, WILLIAM turns to leave.

WILLIAM. Stay away from Judith and Samuel.

SARAH. Will you keep your word to me? Mr Bloor?

WILLIAM has gone. The door slams shut behind him. SARAH blows out a long breath.

14

WILLIAM's bedroom, later that night.

WILLIAM is in bed, restless.

After a moment he throws himself out of the bed, pulls off his nightshirt and reaches under the bed for his bag. He brings out the whip.

He brings it down on his back. Almost instantaneously, someone bangs on the door. WILLIAM jumps.

SAMUEL (off). William!

WILLIAM. Wait! Don't come in.

WILLIAM's barely had time to push the whip back into his travelling bag before SAMUEL opens the door. He strides straight over to the window and looks outside. WILLIAM frantically pulls a shirt on.

What in God's name –

SAMUEL. Did you hear it?

WILLIAM. What?

SAMUEL. A fox. I heard a fox!

WILLIAM. When?

SAMUEL. Just now! You must of heard it.

JUDITH comes into the room. She's wearing her nightgown. WILLIAM pulls his trousers on.

JUDITH. What is it? What happened?

WILLIAM. Samuel heard a fox.

SAMUEL. Did you hear it?

JUDITH. I heard you shouting, that's all.

SAMUEL. She was asleep. I'm going down. Might still catch it.

WILLIAM. Hold on, hold on.

WILLIAM opens the leather-bound book.

JUDITH. What did you hear, Sam?

SAMUEL. A fox! A bloody fox!

JUDITH. Yes, but –

WILLIAM. Fox call. Here it is... dog-like barks and yelps... and the fox mating cry, a sound not unlike a human screaming.

SAMUEL. Aye. The scream. That's it. Didn't you hear it?

WILLIAM. No.

JUDITH. Nor did I.

SAMUEL. You were both asleep, then.

WILLIAM. I was... awake. But this room and your room are on opposite sides of the house. It must have been outside your room calling up. That's why I didn't hear anything.

SAMUEL. Aye, that'll be it.

WILLIAM. Incredible. This is proof, Samuel. Proof!

SAMUEL. I'm going to look.

WILLIAM. We can't go rushing off unprepared.

SAMUEL. Aye. Could be a trap. I'll take the gun.

WILLIAM. That's not what I meant. We should stay calm, stick to the grid and continue our search as planned tomorrow night.

SAMUEL. Huh. I'll look in the garden. There might be prints.

WILLIAM. Oh, yes, I'll come with you, just let me put my...

SAMUEL goes out.

SAMUEL! Wait!

WILLIAM *pulls on his boots.*

JUDITH. William...

WILLIAM. Excuse me.

WILLIAM *rushes out.*

15

JUDITH *and SAMUEL's farmhouse kitchen. Half an hour later.*

JUDITH *is in the kitchen. SAMUEL and WILLIAM enter from outside.*

WILLIAM *looks disappointed.*

JUDITH. Did you find any prints?

WILLIAM. No.

JUDITH. Nothing?

SAMUEL. Just means he's too smart to walk in the mud.

JUDITH. The whole garden's muddy. How could a fox get underneath our window to call up without leaving prints?

WILLIAM. Uh...

JUDITH. Sam, maybe you were dreaming.

SAMUEL. I heard it, I tell you!

JUDITH. It could have been a rabbit caught in a snare. Or an owl.

SAMUEL. I know what an owl sounds like! He believes me, don't you?

Pause.

WILLIAM. Yes. Tomorrow we'll redouble our efforts. I feel certain that we will find something.

SAMUEL. Aye. I'm going to bed.

SAMUEL *walks off upstairs. JUDITH looks at WILLIAM.*

JUDITH. I didn't hear a scream, and I'm a light sleeper. You didn't hear it, and you were awake.

WILLIAM. As I said, the rooms are on opposite sides of the house.

JUDITH. A scream would have carried through.

WILLIAM. Not necessarily.

JUDITH. I think Sam might have... imagined it.

Pause. WILLIAM thinks.

WILLIAM. The fox can manipulate people's dreams. Did you know that?

JUDITH. No.

WILLIAM. Perhaps he called to Samuel in his dream. That would explain why neither of us heard it and why there are no prints outside the house.

JUDITH. I'm sure you know what you're talking about, but... Sam didn't even know what a fox call sounded like until you read that description out of your book.

Pause. WILLIAM looks at JUDITH, doubt on his face.

WILLIAM. That's not important.

JUDITH. Right. Well, goodnight then.

WILLIAM. Yes. Goodnight.

JUDITH *goes upstairs. WILLIAM sinks down into a chair, frowning.*

16

JUDITH *and SAMUEL's farmhouse kitchen, very early morning. JUDITH is talking to a nervous SARAH.*

SARAH. He's not here?

JUDITH. No.

SARAH. Where is he?

JUDITH. He went out with Sam last night and they're not back yet.

SARAH. Are you sure?

JUDITH. William! William!

SARAH *cringes, but there is no response to JUDITH's call.*

I went to your house to see you. Three times. Nobody came to the door.

SARAH. Oh.

JUDITH. I could hear you talking inside, but when I knocked you went quiet.

SARAH. It was a bad time.

JUDITH. It's all right. I understand. I'm dangerous. I've got the plague and you don't want to catch it. If I was you I wouldn't open the door to me either!

SARAH. What plague?

JUDITH. William says our farm's contaminated. I thought you'd heard. I thought that was why you...

SARAH. No. Something's happened.

JUDITH. What? What is it?

SARAH. We're leaving –

JUDITH. No.

SARAH. – and we want you to come with us.

Pause.

The foxfinder came to our house. He knew I gave you that leaflet.

JUDITH. I didn't tell him it was you.

SARAH. Didn't matter. He got in and searched the place, found some more there that I'd hidden. He was going to send me and Abe to the factories and put Nate and Becky in an orphanage! So I made a deal with him. I gave up the one who made the leaflets. James Cross. He's gone. The bakery's all closed up.

JUDITH. When was this?

SARAH. Wednesday.

JUDITH. It worked then. He didn't have you arrested. You don't need to leave. You're safe.

SARAH. No. That's the worst of it. Every night I lie awake thinking; tomorrow he'll change his mind. Tomorrow that bastard will decide it's his duty to turn us in.

JUDITH. You don't know that.

SARAH. Yes I do! Our lives are in his hands! We're not going to sit waiting for the blade to fall on our necks! We're getting out. Now. All of us.

Pause. JUDITH is upset.

JUDITH. Where?

SARAH. Some old friends have got a big place in Scotland. It's a dump, but it'll do. We'll go there, ask if we can work. In return they'll hide us.

JUDITH. For the rest of your lives?

SARAH. Or until things change. It can't be too long. They can't hide the truth for ever...

JUDITH. You want to travel... without being caught... all the way to Scotland?

SARAH. We'll go by night. Sleep in the day.

JUDITH. What if you get there and your friends say no, they can't take the risk?

SARAH. Ha! Would you turn away free labour?

JUDITH. Don't make jokes!

SARAH. I'm not, they need the help! And they're good people.

JUDITH. They'd need to be bloody saints! If they say no –

SARAH. They won't!

JUDITH. You'll have no shelter, no food. You'll starve to death.

SARAH. I know other folk we can try if Scotland doesn't work. It's a good plan! Now go pack bags for you and Sam. We're leaving at seven.

JUDITH. Today?

SARAH. Yes! We're travelling light, mind; your warmest clothes, money, valuables, food and –

JUDITH. It's impossible.

SARAH. It's an adventure. That's what Abe's told the children.

JUDITH. Sam would never leave the farm.

SARAH. Talk to him. Make him!

JUDITH. William says that the foxes killed Dan. That it wasn't just an accident.

SARAH. Oh God.

JUDITH. Sam says he has to know if it's true. He's helping William!
They've been out there every night this week, looking.

SARAH. He believes it?

JUDITH. He wanted to. Now he does. He's started hearing things, Sarah...
and the way he talks... it's scaring me to death.

Pause.

SARAH. You'll have to leave him behind.

JUDITH. I can't do that!

SARAH. He's no husband to you.

JUDITH. He's the only one I wanted.

SARAH. See sense, Jude!

JUDITH. I won't run while there's still a chance.

SARAH. Of what? Dying in the factories? No. No, you're coming with us.
Get your things and meet us by the bridge at seven. We won't be able to wait long... Don't be late and don't let either of them know what you're doing. You'll come, won't you?

JUDITH *nods.*

JUDITH. You're a good friend to me.

They hug briefly.

SARAH. Seven o'clock.

SARAH *leaves.*

JUDITH *watches her go.*

17

The fields.

Early morning. SAMUEL is standing with the shotgun hanging in one hand. WILLIAM has sunk into a miserable crouch and is almost asleep. They have been here for most of the night. WILLIAM rouses himself.

WILLIAM. It's time to go in.

SAMUEL *doesn't move.* WILLIAM *sighs.*

The fox is abroad in the evening and during the night. It's getting light.
We won't see anything now.

SAMUEL. Sssh.

Pause.

WILLIAM. Samuel, I admire your... tenacity. But even the strictest of my teachers at The Institute would tell me to make sure I get enough rest. We must go back to the farmhouse and refresh ourselves for tomorrow's... I mean tonight's... assault.

SAMUEL. Huh.

Pause.

WILLIAM. We can cross this square off. We've been here long enough.
Let's go in.

SAMUEL. You go.

WILLIAM. I can't leave you in the field alone. You know that.

SAMUEL. Stay then.

WILLIAM *sinks back towards the ground. A long pause.*

WILLIAM. I've never actually seen a fox. Do you think that's... strange?

SAMUEL. No.

WILLIAM. One of my colleagues, Mr Jacob Fairweather, discovered a cluster of contaminated farms. Five farms... and yet he didn't see a single fox.

SAMUEL. Foxes are sly.

WILLIAM. Yes. Jacob could see the evidence, the signs of his influence, but the beast himself was too clever, too canny, too... sly, to be seen. If in

that case he did not see the beast... then it's no wonder that I... or even you... or any of my colleagues... it's no wonder that we've never seen one. Is it?

SAMUEL. Shhh.

WILLIAM *frowns. A long pause.*

WILLIAM. We've yet to find so much as a single paw print on your farm. There are no prints, no sign of a den or hiding place, no droppings... But you could say that the absence of the fox is another sign of his presence and is to be expected.

SAMUEL. He's here. I know it.

WILLIAM. Yes. Of course he is.

Pause.

SAMUEL. You see that?

WILLIAM. What?

SAMUEL. On the fence. Just there.

SAMUEL *points to a nearby fence.*

WILLIAM. What? What am I looking at?

SAMUEL. Those white things, like flags.

WILLIAM. Uh...

SAMUEL. That's sheep's wool. Caught on the wire.

WILLIAM. There aren't any sheep on your farm.

SAMUEL. Abraham Box used this field to graze his flock a few months back, when his was too wet. Look. There's a pattern.

WILLIAM. Is there?

SAMUEL. Dot, dot, dot. Dash, dash, dash. Dot, dot, dot. That's Morse code. S – O – S. It's a sign. A warning.

WILLIAM *peers at the fence.*

WILLIAM. No, Samuel. That's just... wool.

SAMUEL. That rabbit skull you found. That looked just like a skull. But it

wasn't. It was a sign. That's what you said.

WILLIAM. Uh. Yes.

SAMUEL. I'm telling you. That right there, that's a sign.

Confused, WILLIAM looks again.

WILLIAM. Ah, yes. I think I see the pattern now. You're right.

SAMUEL. Follow that fence, you get to the woods. The sheep are telling us, that's where they are. And that's where we'll go, tonight.

WILLIAM. No, we still have another three squares of the grid to search before we get to that area.

SAMUEL. You won't come, I'll go alone.

WILLIAM. You know I can't allow that! What if you saw something and I wasn't there to verify it?

SAMUEL. It's your job to find the fox. If you won't do it, I'll do it for you.

WILLIAM *sighs, defeated.*

WILLIAM. All right. If we... if I, search the rest of the grid afterwards, we can go to the woods tonight. Now... can we please go in?

SAMUEL. Aye. Aye.

SAMUEL *strides off, and WILLIAM follows.*

18

JUDITH *and SAMUEL's farmhouse kitchen.*

JUDITH *is sitting at the table, a cup of coffee in her hand. She's been here since SARAH left. WILLIAM and SAMUEL enter from outside.*

WILLIAM *is exhausted.*

SAMUEL. Jude.

WILLIAM. Good morning, Judith.

JUDITH. What time is it?

SAMUEL. Nine.

JUDITH *nods*. WILLIAM *sits down at the table*.

WILLIAM. Is there anything to eat?

JUDITH *pushes the bread basket over to him*.

JUDITH. It's stale.

WILLIAM. Oh.

JUDITH. I didn't have time yesterday to make any fresh. I've had to do all of Sam's work too... as he's been so busy helping you.

WILLIAM. I didn't ask for, nor do I need, Samuel's help.

JUDITH. The leeks need bringing in, Sam. Soon, or they'll rot.

SAMUEL. Won't be much longer. We're making progress.

JUDITH. You found something?

WILLIAM. No.

SAMUEL. Yes. We found a sign. Telling us where to look.

JUDITH. A sign.

SAMUEL. We'll go to the woods tonight.

WILLIAM. Excuse me. I'm going to get some rest. Samuel, I suggest that you do the same.

WILLIAM *gets up and stumbles out*.

JUDITH *pours coffee for SAMUEL. She lowers her voice*.

JUDITH. Sarah and Abraham are gone.

SAMUEL. Gone?

JUDITH. Run away, with the children.

SAMUEL. Huh.

JUDITH. Is that all you can say? Our oldest friends!

SAMUEL. Must have had something to hide, if they've run.

JUDITH. They were afraid, Sam. I'm afraid.

SAMUEL. Nothing for you to be scared of.

JUDITH. Sarah asked me to go too. She said I should leave you behind.

Pause.

But I said no, because I love you.

SAMUEL. Aye.

SAMUEL *kisses JUDITH on the forehead. He gulps his coffee down and starts stuffing bread into his pockets*.

JUDITH. What are you doing?

SAMUEL. I've to go back out. Need some things.

JUDITH. Things? What things?

SAMUEL. For tonight. I'm going to find them, and I'm going to kill them. The ones who killed our son.

JUDITH. It was an accident!

SAMUEL. I'd like to use dogs. More painful. But a bullet will do it. I'll bring back the heads, so you can spit on them.

JUDITH. Don't go back out there.

SAMUEL. It's you I'm doing this for.

JUDITH. No it's not!

Furious, JUDITH slams her hands down on the table.

I want you to forget about foxes and stay with me tonight! Please, Sam. I need you to be strong now.

SAMUEL. When the foxes are gone, things'll get better. Us. The farm. The future. Like you said. Wish me good hunting.

JUDITH *turns away*.

SAMUEL *leaves. JUDITH starts to cry*.

19

WILLIAM's *bedroom, later*.

WILLIAM *is lying on the bed in his shirt and trousers, asleep*.

There's a gentle knock at the door. Then another, but WILLIAM doesn't wake up.

Slowly, JUDITH pushes the door open.

JUDITH. William?

WILLIAM. Hhh?

JUDITH. William.

WILLIAM. Judith... what?

JUDITH. I know you're tired, but...

WILLIAM. Uh. Come in.

JUDITH sits down on the bed. WILLIAM is immediately on edge.

What... uh... what is it?

JUDITH. I need to ask you something.

WILLIAM. Of course.

JUDITH. Whatever you find out there tonight, you have to leave tomorrow.
Please.

WILLIAM. I'm sorry?

JUDITH. I'm asking you to leave tomorrow.

WILLIAM. But my investigation isn't complete.

JUDITH. You say we've got foxes, we agree. Surely that's all you need?

WILLIAM. I'm afraid not. I have to finish my searches before I make my report.

JUDITH. Say you finished. I'll swear that you did if they come asking.

WILLIAM. A foxfinder doesn't lie.

JUDITH. What difference does it make? If you're going to report that we're contaminated, can't you just do it and leave?

WILLIAM. I have to complete my investigation.

JUDITH takes WILLIAM's hands in her own.

JUDITH. Please. You have to go, I'm begging you. Please.

WILLIAM. I'm sorry, Judith –

JUDITH. You say you want to help us, but all you've done since you got here is make things worse!

WILLIAM. I've done all I can! I've ignored things you've said and done, ignored certain pieces of information... I know... for example... that Samuel was unfit to work the farm for several months after your son died.

JUDITH is shocked, but she tries to remain composed.

JUDITH. He was ill. I told you that.

WILLIAM. You lied. He didn't have the flu. Sarah Box told me the truth.

Pause. JUDITH digests this information.

JUDITH. Sam was better before you came, and he'll be fine again once you're gone. All this is upsetting him. That's why I want you to go.

WILLIAM. I've bent the rules for you already, more than I should have.

JUDITH. I didn't realise.

WILLIAM. Another foxfinder would have condemned you. Perhaps I should do so... But I... I think you deserve a second chance.

JUDITH. You do?

WILLIAM. I intend to state in my report that you are innocent of collaboration and should keep your farm.

JUDITH. Oh, thank you. Thank you.

JUDITH hugs WILLIAM briefly. Overwhelmed, he closes his eyes before she lets him go, leaving him dizzy.

You must be starving. Come down... I'll make you some breakfast.

JUDITH goes out.

WILLIAM. My God, my God.

20

The woods. Evening.

SAMUEL *is standing under a tree. He's tied a few long pieces of cord to its lower branches, and they are hanging down, fluttering in the breeze. He's holding a sack in one hand, and his shotgun is propped up against the tree trunk.*

SAMUEL *reaches into the bag and takes out a dead rabbit. He ties the rabbit to one of the cords so it's hanging in the air. He does this again, with another rabbit.*

WILLIAM *appears. He's out of breath.*

WILLIAM. Samuel.

SAMUEL. Catch.

SAMUEL *throws a dead rabbit at WILLIAM. He catches it, then recoils in horror and drops it when he realises what it is. The rabbit leaves blood on his hands.*

'S just a rabbit. Tie it up, over there.

SAMUEL *gestures to the tree. WILLIAM wipes his hands on his trousers and shakes his head. Sighing, SAMUEL picks up the rabbit himself and ties it to the tree.*

They're on our side, you said. Huh. Sorry, rabbit.

WILLIAM. What is this? What are you doing?

SAMUEL. Baiting a trap.

SAMUEL *ties another rabbit.*

A hungry beast can't ignore the call of blood. That's his nature. He'll come, and I'll be waiting.

WILLIAM. This is completely against protocol.

SAMUEL. Don't tell anyone about it then.

WILLIAM. We're not supposed to approach the beast. We're supposed to observe, and make our report. There's an extermination team, specialised in –

SAMUEL. Don't need a team. I'll do it.

WILLIAM. The extermination team is better –

SAMUEL. God's sake! All you do is yap! Shut up!

There are now several rabbits hanging from the tree. SAMUEL throws another couple on the ground underneath the branches.

You should go in. It's not a job for a boy.

WILLIAM. I'm staying.

SAMUEL. Then stay by me. And keep quiet.

SAMUEL *picks up his gun and the empty sack, and moves away from the tree. He takes up a position some distance away and settles down, with a good view of the tree. Unhappily, WILLIAM joins him.*

Time passes. It gets darker. The wind picks up, rustling the tree branches.

SAMUEL *comes to attention. He talks in hushed tones.*

Smell that?

WILLIAM. What?

SAMUEL. Rotting meat. Piss.

WILLIAM. No.

SAMUEL. He's coming.

SAMUEL *sees something. He aims the shotgun towards the tree.*

There.

WILLIAM. Where?

SAMUEL. Going for the rabbit. But he can't get it. See his eyes?

WILLIAM. No. Where?

SAMUEL. Right in front of you!

WILLIAM. I don't...

SAMUEL. Mouth's hanging open. He's laughing. Bastard! There's another.

SAMUEL *tracks the gun in a wide circle.*

One there. One there. Circling us.

WILLIAM. I don't see anything.

SAMUEL. Bastards. Bastards.

SAMUEL *raises the gun and fires.*

There's another. Three of them.

WILLIAM. There's nothing there.

SAMUEL. Killed my son. Made me sick. I'll kill you!

SAMUEL *fires again.*

'S not like a normal beast. Not scared. The way it looks... like it knows you...

WILLIAM *grabs hold of SAMUEL and shakes him.*

WILLIAM. There's nothing there. No foxes. Nothing! Put the gun down!

SAMUEL. Get off me.

SAMUEL *easily throws WILLIAM off. He falls. SAMUEL starts reloading the gun.*

Running. Like cowards! I'll catch you...

SAMUEL *runs out after the foxes, leaving WILLIAM standing by the tree.*

WILLIAM. There's nothing out there.

WILLIAM *sinks down to the ground and begins to sob. From somewhere in the distance comes the sound of the shotgun. Then another shot, further away.*

A long pause, silent but for the wind in the leaves and WILLIAM's sobbing. Then a loud crack comes from nearby as someone steps on a twig. WILLIAM gasps with fear.

Who's that? Who's there?

JUDITH *appears from between the trees, carrying a paraffin lantern.*

JUDITH. Oh my God. William?

Concerned, JUDITH puts the lantern down and goes over to WILLIAM.

WILLIAM. Are you hurt?

WILLIAM. No.

JUDITH. What happened?

WILLIAM. You shouldn't be out here.

JUDITH. Neither should Sam. I'm taking him in. Where is he? I heard shots!

WILLIAM. He ran off.

JUDITH. Where to?

WILLIAM. He's shooting foxes.

JUDITH is horrified to hear this.

JUDITH. He's what?

WILLIAM. He sees them but I can't. Why can't I see them?

JUDITH. I don't know.

WILLIAM. If you went after him, would you see them?

JUDITH. I...

Pause.

WILLIAM. Would you?

JUDITH. I don't know.

WILLIAM. Do you believe that there are foxes on this farm?

JUDITH. Yes.

WILLIAM. You have to say that. I told you denial was a sign of collaboration.

Pause.

It's all lies. Isn't it?

Not sure what to say, JUDITH doesn't speak. Her lack of response is all the answer WILLIAM needs.

Does everyone know?

JUDITH. I don't know. I don't think so.

WILLIAM. Oh God. They told me my doubts were a sign of weakness...

Desperately, he clutches at JUDITH.

My mission. My life...

JUDITH. It's all right.

WILLIAM. Oh God... please...

He sobs. JUDITH comforts him.

JUDITH. Ssh. It's all right. It's all right. Ssh.

WILLIAM *kisses* JUDITH. *She pulls away, shocked.*

William... no. I'm sorry. I don't...

WILLIAM. I thought you... You were kind to me.

JUDITH. Kind, and that's all. I'm married.

Pause.

WILLIAM. He hasn't touched you in months. Sarah Box told me.

JUDITH. That's got nothing to do with it! I'm going to find Sam.

WILLIAM. No, you can't. He's shooting into the trees. It's too dangerous.

WILLIAM *moves in front of her, blocking her way.*

JUDITH. Sam would never hurt me.

WILLIAM. Stay here. Please. I...

WILLIAM *tries to kiss her again. She pushes him off.*

JUDITH. I said no.

WILLIAM. All my life I've denied myself the things I wanted. That's what a foxfinder does, for the sake of his mission.

JUDITH. Let me past, please. I need to find Sam.

WILLIAM. I've dreamed of you day and night for fifteen days. It's been like torture!

JUDITH. That's not my fault.

WILLIAM. Judith...

JUDITH. Get out of my way.

Pause. WILLIAM becomes very calm.

WILLIAM. I'll make a trade with you.

JUDITH. What?

WILLIAM. I'll go. I'll leave tomorrow, and I'll give your farm the all clear.
If you... sleep with me.

Pause.

JUDITH. No.

WILLIAM. Then... I'll say the foxes came here because of you, because you're a drunk, an adulterer. I'll say you have sex with animals, that you're the foxes' whore.

JUDITH. You wouldn't.

Pause. He looks at her.

I thought you were better than this.

WILLIAM. I thought I was a lot of things.

Slowly, JUDITH lies down on the ground.

WILLIAM *gets on top of her and awkwardly begins to have sex with her. She turns her face away from him.*

SAMUEL *appears out of the dark. He stands there, his eyes wild. He has the shotgun.*

SAMUEL. You!

JUDITH. Sam!

WILLIAM *gets up. He backs away from SAMUEL, who advances upon him.*

WILLIAM. Please... please don't.

SAMUEL *shoots WILLIAM in the chest. He falls. JUDITH looks at SAMUEL in horror.*

SAMUEL. I shot a fox.

22

JUDITH and SAMUEL's farmhouse kitchen. Two days later. JUDITH and SAMUEL are sitting in their Sunday best. Winter sunshine is pouring in through the windows. JUDITH is extremely anxious, but SAMUEL is relaxed.

JUDITH. What time is it?

SAMUEL. Quarter past.

JUDITH. I thought they'd be here by now.

SAMUEL. They'll be here soon.

Pause.

You were right about the leeks. Another few days in the field, they'd have been rotting.

Pause.

A good crop. Things're turning for the better already.

JUDITH *goes to the window and looks out.*

JUDITH. Where are they? I can't stand this waiting.

SAMUEL. They'll be here soon.

JUDITH *sits back down. They wait.*

JUDITH. Where did you put... William?

SAMUEL. In the barn.

JUDITH. Did you... cover his face with something?

SAMUEL. A bit of sack. More than he deserves.

Pause.

JUDITH. We should have buried him and said that he'd vanished.

SAMUEL. No. I told you. We've nothing to hide.

JUDITH. You killed him, Sam.

SAMUEL. Aye, I did. And I'm proud of it.

Pause.

We should get a reward, for what we've done. Compensation.

JUDITH. You're not going to say that.

SAMUEL. I am. They sent him into our house. A fox in the shape of a boy.

JUDITH. Don't say that. Call him a collaborator. And don't get angry. That

won't help.

SAMUEL. He says he's come to help, really he's come to try and finish us off, because his friends couldn't do for us in March!

JUDITH. When the foxfinders get here –

SAMUEL. I'll have a few choice words for them.

JUDITH. We've got to explain it, calmly. We've got to make them understand, or...

SAMUEL. I'll tell them all right. How he didn't want to search the farm properly. Kept making excuses. Didn't want to go to the woods, because he knew that was where they were hiding.

JUDITH. He ignored the sign. The message in the wool. Don't forget to say that.

SAMUEL. Aye, that's right.

JUDITH. What else?

SAMUEL. He said he couldn't see the foxes in the woods, when they were right there, right in front of him!

JUDITH. He tried to stop you from shooting at them.

SAMUEL. Aye. Didn't follow me when I chased them. And when you came... he attacked you. I'd had my doubts, but that's when I knew. I saw the beast in him.

Pause.

We ought to be compensated. It's not right, what happened.

JUDITH. What if they don't believe us?

SAMUEL. Course they will. It's the truth, isn't it?

There's a knock at the door.

The End.