

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

(1854–1928)

THE CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN

Opera in three acts

ACT I

One hot summer afternoon a gamekeeper is walking through his forests. He lays down to rest for a while and soon falls asleep. The forest is full of life: flies circle above, a cricket and a grasshopper play a waltz, a mosquito staggers around, drunk on human blood, and is chased by a young frog. The young Bystrouška observes all of this in fascination. She is particularly taken by the frog, but when she tries to take a closer look the frog, terrified, leaps onto the gamekeeper's nose. The startled gamekeeper sees Bystrouška and before the fox can gather its wits, he is already taking her to his lakeside lodge.

• Scene change •

Bystrouška lives locked up in the courtyard of the lodge along with a dog, Lapák, and a brood of hens. The gamekeeper's grandson boasts to a friend about the new addition and teases Bystrouška with a stick. As a result the vixen bites his leg and the gamekeeper ties her up as punishment. Bystrouška moans and dreams all night about living free in the forest. In the morning she thinks up a new strategy. First on the receiving end are the rooster and its hens, who boast about their exemplary work-rate. Bystrouška easily dupes the fickle creatures and the rooster and the majority of his retinue pay with their lives. The angry gamekeeper goes after the vixen with a club, but she bites through her rope and disappears into the forest.

ACT II

Bystrouška is enjoying her new-found freedom. She ejects the old badger from its set and settles there herself.

• Scene change •

At the Pásek Inn, the gamekeeper is seated with his friends the schoolmaster and the priest, playing cards and enjoying their drink. They all leave the inn unsteadily on their feet. This drunken night-time walk is observed by a hidden Bystrouška. She is hiding between the sunflowers which the drunken schoolmaster soon approaches - he mistakes the shaking flowers for the face of Terinka, a woman he is in love with. The priest remembers his love from his student days, but his reminiscences are also interrupted by Bystrouška. The gamekeeper shoots at her and both men run away in terror.

• Scene change •

In the light of a summer night, Bystrouška meets the fox Zlatohřbítek. An initial fondness grows into love, which is consummated in the foxes' den. The forest creatures indignantly follow Bystrouška's immoral life, though they are placated by a hastily arranged wedding.

ACT III

Summer passes and in autumn the gamekeeper comes across Harašta, a poultry dealer, in the forest. Harašta boasts about his forthcoming marriage to Terinka, but the gamekeeper is more interested in whether Harašta hasn't been poaching in his forest. Bystrouška and Zlatohřbítek appear with a litter of fox cubs and when Bystrouška smells Harašta and his bag full of poultry, she decides to have some fun. She pretends that she is unable to walk on all fours, but when Harašta aims at her, she nimbly disappears. However, the game goes wrong - Harašta shoots and Bystrouška falls down dead.

• Scene change •

At Pásek's Inn, the gamekeeper discovers that Harašta's Terinka was given a new fox-fur muff for her wedding. The schoolmaster takes the news of Terinka's wedding very hard, but the gamekeeper soothes him by telling him that she wasn't the woman for him. Everyone starts to feel nostalgic and the gamekeeper decides it is better to go home. On his way through the forest he remembers his youth, he admires the beauty of the forest and realizes that life repeats itself. The forest looks as it did when he caught Bystrouška. And then he sees her...the spitting image of her mother! He wants to catch her again but he is prevented by a small frog, the grandson of the one from before. The circle of life is eternal.

Source: www.leosjanacek.eu