

THE FOX

Rosa Watt

Sleep, hunt, eat; repeat. That is my life. When the sun kisses the horizon upon waking and sleeping, I hunt. To the east of where I reside, a parallel succession of chicken coops adorns the skirts of a farm nearby. Every day, I choose to visit a new coop, all with sixteen chickens, and my teeth sink into the tender skin on their necks. And with that comes the snapping of bones; their squawking always ceases abruptly. No chicken remains with a head on its body. It's pretty exciting. You know, I'm good at what I do.

When I enter those coops, I feel an innate rush through my body, one that ignites my soul. However, I must confess that last night, for some reason, my soul felt unsettled. When I tried to sleep in the comfort of my den, my body was stagnant, cradled by the earth, but my mind raced insanely. It seemed to race faster than that of when I always pounce from chicken to chicken. And that's pretty fast. I think it's because I hesitated too much last time, just enough to almost feel the fear emit from the chicken's body.

You know, I will make a change. Today, I'll only kill two; that's all I need. I will not give in to these gluttonous desires of mine. I am not very good at that, I suppose.

Darting through the fields, I make it to the coop, where the complexities of interwoven wire loom over me. From the back, I dig a hole. The humans are oh so stupid and naive; they do not think to reinforce the coops against my cunning mind. Yes, I am a smart fox too. Motionless figures always make it simple for me to attack. Two. I only need two. With a pounce, the searing ends of my canines sink into their flesh, shredding and revealing the bones that lie beneath. One. My eyes dart to the chicken across from me, and I immediately run at it. Snap. Two. *Maybe one more?* I could try to bring three of them home. *Why can't I stop? Just two; no more. But one more won't hurt, will it?* Snap. Abruptly, my soul silences my mind, and the disaster unfolds. Sixteen acephalous figures bathed in the morning's oncoming rays, casting long, sombre shadows beyond the coop.

As I return home to my den, the earth taunts me. No matter how much I rearrange myself, the dirt moves in protest to me. It thrusts its branches into my posterior. Raising attention to my

esurient impulses. I am bad. I feel a slew of nausea dwell in the pit of my stomach, and I don't know whether it's the additional chicken or the guilt that churns my insides.

My routine continues, and the days blur. This relentless cycle seems worse than ever. Sleep, hunt, eat; repeat. Sleep, hunt, eat; repeat. Sleep, hunt, eat; repeat. It continues unabated. I wonder when it will stop; the lingering ache is still in my stomach. My mind is scattered; sleep eludes me.

One evening, as the sun dips below the horizon, I linger in the fields. The farmer is there, reinforcing the wire and muttering curses under his breath. Finally, the humans have caught on, but I will find a way. I always do.

Back to my den. I sink into the soil, curling into myself. Sleep, kill, eat; repeat. Sleep, kill, eat; repeat. Sixteen kills. That's my day. The forest grows deathly silent around me. Only mere whispers. Whispers that jeer at my behaviour. They hate me. They think I'm awful. I am bad. But I can't stop, and I am a monster for that.

Suddenly, the crunch of leaves underfoot signals a presence. A long, heavy stick, broad and dark as my guilt, hovers above me, its end aimed directly at my head. Again, I am pointed at. They cackle at me. They always do. Everyone knows what I have done. I really am a monster. A metallic casing appears to cover the wide end of the stick, glinting ominously in the moonlight. That's the last thing I see lying between my eyes.

The earth embraces me after so long. I want to thank it, but I can't. But I know it is just so pleased with my stillness.

Is this how the chickens felt? Nothing. No feeling. I thought nothing would be bad, yet it feels so comforting.

Sleep; repeat. Sleep; repeat.

Sleep.