

Communicating

by

Vixxy Fox



In the quiet of a snow bound morning, booted footsteps thumped up the steps of the Whackadoodle Inn, pausing only a heartbeat as the door was hastily pushed open and then closed again against the cold. The small silver call bell on the diminutive front desk was struck by a paw and as its sweet metallic ‘tinggggg’ echoed the stranger quickly moved into the parlor to stand by the fireplace.

As if by magic, a Skunk in a maid’s uniform appeared bearing a tray with a tea setting which she sat upon the small low table. “Miss Vixxy’s regards, sir. My name is Victoria and the Inn’s mistress says you should undress from your winter clothing and sit for tea against the chill you must be feeling.” Though her dress was simple and light looking, she was well insulated under it by a set of full long handle under clothes.

The Fox looking fellow turned from the fire and smiled at the sight. “Well I never thought I would receive such a reception from the one I hear from folks in the village is the hardest sell in history.”

The young Skunk smiled in a demure way and curtsied. She then whispered, “She saw you coming from her window. It is winter, and it is cold. Hospitality is given to any who brave such to come here.”

“I see. Will lunch be served soon?”

“Presently; and we do have a superb cook. Here meals are well worth the cost and a body never leaves hungry. Just be forewarned, if you ask for a spicy dish it will be spicy.”

With that she turned and left, leaving the unexpected guest to hang his outside clothing on the coat rack standing in a metal tub next to the fireplace. Obviously the tub was meant to catch any melting snow not shaken off before coming in. Taking all of this in, and being of a more refined nature, the visitor was careful when he removed his coat and hat so as not to have anything fall upon the nice rug that was as much meant to keep the room a bit warmer as it was for decoration.

Sitting on the sofa which had its back to the window, he poured his tea, added a spoonful of sugar and then sat sipping while watching the fire which was well kept; not being too small or too large and burning evenly.

He was brought from his reverie by the slight noise of someone clearing their throat. Looking to the sound, he found a small Fox with very large ears looking at him. Her lips were smiling, but her eyes were hard and surveying.

Placing his cup and saucer on the table, the new guest rose and bowed slightly, giving his personage a feeling of foreign royalty or at the very least a dignity not so forth coming from the valley’s more common folk.

“I am pleased to meet you ma’am,” the Tod told her. “I have heard so very much about you.”

“All of it bad I will assume,” she replied. “I am rather known for my... shall we say, ‘harsh personality’?”

Moving out from behind the low table, the newcomer took up the smaller Fox’s proffered paw and bending, kissed it lightly. “Not at all,” he lied. “I have only heard the best about you and your establishment.”

“Very well,” she replied, “So we have established you are a salesman. Will you be needing a room?”

“Yes please,” he responded smoothly, “And if you could, just a moment of your time. I have a very innovative device that will revolutionize the world at large.”

“I’m sure it will. I believe it’s called a telefonio?”

“Telephone,” he corrected, and it has to do with communication. Imagine if you will, being able to pick up this simple device and then talking with someone in the village or even the next village over without the need to walk all the way to their house.”

She placed a finger on his lips. “Lunch first,” she told him, “That will be on me since you made the trek all the way out here from where?”

“I spent the night at the tavern. It was but a hard bench but it was next to the fire so I was comfortable enough.”

The Inn’s mistress smiled. “We do not serve spirits as does the tavern but we do have feather beds that are freshly laundered every other week.”

“That sounds very inviting,” he replied, “But I am on a rather tight budget.”

She looked at him, her eyes narrowing. “When was the last time you had a bite to eat?”

“Last night at the tavern,” he replied honestly, thinking of the stale basket of bread he’s been served with the one beer he could afford.”

Taking his paw in her’s she led him out of the parlor to the dining room muttering something about the bending of truth.

During the course of the meal, some of which caused him to perspire freely though he never complained of the spicy flavor, he told his name to be Wirez.

“You can call me Copper if you wish for simplicity’s sake.”

“You’re a police officer?” Miss Buns asked as she picked up his plate, to which she added, “Do you want more?”

“The answer to both questions is no. You are a lovely cook Miss Buns. I don’t think I’ve had such a meal since the last time I visited home.”

The Hare smiled, slowly filling her arms with the accoutrements of a meal eaten heartily.

“Copper for the color of my fur,” he told her, “And also for the wire used on the telephone poles. I didn’t invent the device but I do sell them... new technology to make life just a bit easier.”

“I take such statements with a grain of salt,” the Inn Keeper told him, sipping at her coffee, “It tends to make nonsense easier to swallow; though sometimes you have to swallow twice. I find simple to be so much more... peaceful. Now tell me of this tellephonio thing I presume you have bundled up outside on your sled.”

“Well,” he replied, “Marvin Mouse did say you would be a hard sell, but he also told me you had good business sense and might see this as something to invest your money in. The project would be very large but it is doable and I can show you the profit calculations on paper.” He paused to sip at his own coffee. “I imagine you knew I was coming. You probably got word of this through a delivery of some sort and that information might or might not have been all that accurate.”

When the Inn Keeper made to retort, he held up a finger. “Mind I am not calling anyone present or anyone who passed by a liar or expander of truths. It is only our nature to not accurately pass on what we have perceived as a truth.”

“You could write it down on a piece of paper,” Walter offered from across the room where he was softly plucking on his banjo, “Like the notes of a song.”

“Which you never do,” Duroc remarked as he passed through the dining room on his way to the kitchen.

“I most certainly do,” Walter retorted, his fingers stopping for a moment. He caught the look Miss Vixxy gave him and added, “Well sometimes I do. Curly Moe’s been teaching me, course he’s all asleep for the winter now.”

“I rest my case,” Copper threw into the mix, “And no insult meant. Now, suppose you could pick up a device, put it to your ear, and then speak directly to Marvin Mouse down at his store. There would be no need to send a runner to him bearing a note with what you need. He could have your order all ready for you to pick up as soon as you got there. That’s time saved is it not?”

“It is but a little time saved,” the old Fox told him, “And not enough that I would save any of the money I was paying out for this service.”

“Suppose there was a fire?” the younger Fox countered, “How would you summon the fire brigade? The sooner they got here the more likely there would be less damage, yes?”

“We don’t have a fire brigade; but we do have strategically placed buckets of sand around the Inn and water barrels at each of the corners of the house with five buckets at each.”

“The barrels are frozen solid and there’s rightly only three buckets,” Wirewolf told her as he placed an armload of firewood into the wood rack; carefully stacking it so it wouldn’t fall out.

“Let’s say you forgot the recipe to biscuits and you needed to know what it was right away,” Copper offered.

“Pray God she never makes biscuits,” the old sailor muttered as he tossed a fresh log into the fireplace and then adjusted it with the poker.

“I’d walk to the kitchen and ask Buns,” the old Fox replied sweetly. She then yelled at the Wolf, “I learned how to make very good biscuits thank you very much or did you become forgetful in your dotage?!”

He looked up at her, his expression never changing. “Why are you yelling like that? I didn’t say anything.”

The salesman, growing a bit frustrated, said, “Perhaps a demonstration is in order. Please give me a moment and I’ll set up my telephones. Have all the staff come in and we can have a little fun.”

True to his word, the demonstration was a good deal of fun. While setting up his equipment and explaining about ringing up the telephone operator, he handed one wire to Walter and one to Victoria and then wound the crank handle on his telephone box. They both giggled and looked surprised when, as the salesman told them, nothing happened. He then had them hold hands and cranked the contraption again. Both yelped and stood straight up from the table. Soon everyone had to give it a go with Duroc lasting the longest before calling it quits.

“So this electricity stuff travels over the wire and operates the call bell?” The ex-boxer asked; already seeing how he could pull more than a few practical jokes using the ring generator by fastening the wires to a door knob.

“That’s correct,” the Fox told him, “But first there has to be a central point for everyone in the system to call, and then that central point connects them to the person they’re calling.”

“So how do you make money doing this?” Vixyy asked him.

Smiling, Copper excused himself to the kitchen where the second telephone was set up. No sooner than the door to the dining room closed and the call bell on the telephone box sitting on the table jangled to life. When it continued to ring, Buns reached out and picked up the hearing cone, placing that part next to her ear and keeping her mouth next to the ‘talkie’ part.

“Yes?” she asked. Looking to the Inn Keeper after listening for a moment, she smiled and held the ear piece out. “He says to put you on the line. I guess that means he wants to talk to you through the tallephonio. Seems to me it’d be easier to just go into the kitchen and talk face to face. He is kinda cute.”

Wirewolf cleared his throat at that observation.

When the Inn Keeper placed the ear piece to one of her big ear, she leaned close to the ‘speaking’ device and said, “Tell me.”

His voice sounded scratchy and far away though the baser notes could be heard as an echo coming from the kitchen. “You charge your customers monthly for services rendered.”

“Sounds kinda like another business I used ta run,” she replied with a laugh, “But I always got paid in advance.”

There was a pause and then the other Fox replied slyly, “Well... conversation is another form of intercourse.”

“In that case, pay me,” she replied and then there was a click.

“And so,” he muttered to himself feeling the sale had been made, “Technology comes to the backwoods. Somehow I feel guilty about that.”