

THE FOX



Séán Lysaght

from the Irish of Erris, Co. Mayo

On the road to Portacloy with a pretty bay beyond,
one man's fine morning was another's final stand.
I had just set up my easel in the middle of the path
when a fox burst out of a gateway and stopped to catch his breath.

Like an actor from a panto, he didn't seem to fit,
with his silk Regency breeches and his floppy musketeer's hat.
You could see they were after him but he wasn't letting on
to be afraid of the hunters with their gundogs and their guns.

I took my cue from his lordship to bow down to the ground
and ask him how his wife was, if his family had grown.
He said, "But I'm an orphan now. My parents fought the Boers,
and since they went away, I've been in the wars."

Now I'd no geese to worry me, and no chickens to close in,
but I couldn't say the same for my neighbour Dominic Deane.
He'd spent the autumn feeding up a fine handsome goose
until one night the fox got into the roost.

Well if he didn't throw a fit when he found the goose was dead
and all the fox had done was bitten off the head.
The bird was meant as a gift to please the widow Flynn
and so he'd lost his best chance of courting the woman.

Says I, "I've no quarrel with you, but I know the things they say,
so if I were you I'd gather myself and be on my way."
But he blustered on about his good name and how a fox has rights,
and huffed and puffed a bit more but time was getting tight.

I had just come to paint. The hunters were closing in.
Dark jackets and dogs appeared on the horizon.
He suddenly turned in a sweep of finery and trotted up the road,
still the figure from the panto. How it ended I don't know.