

ROSE GOWEN

IN THE GARAGE

THE FOX KEPT ME HOUSEBOUND for three days. He must've been able to hear or smell my movements. Whether I tried to exit by the front or the back door, the fox appeared in my path, head lowered over stiffened legs, the fur on his neck bristling, his jowls rucked to show his teeth, glaring at me steadily, and growling.

A fox is smaller than you think. You think of a fox being like a red wolf, but a fox is maybe a third the size of a wolf. Still, any wild animal ready to kill you is intimidating. His attitude said, clearly as speech: Move, and I will attack your jugular. I won't miss.

He was guarding the garage. I could see him through the kitchen window. He lay on the gravel at the mouth of the garage as calmly as a domesticated animal, but his ears were alert. I tapped on the glass once to test him, and he jumped up.

I thought he would leave of his own accord, but he was still there on the fourth morning. My library books were due, and I was out of toilet paper and fresh vegetables, so I called the Humane Society.

They shot him with a tranquilizer. I was sorry to see him that way, slumped like an expensive coat in the gravel. The men from the Humane Society put him in their van, and I led them into the garage, where I store my gardening tools. It's an old structure, and leans to one side.

I took the flashlight I keep in a wheelbarrow just inside the entrance, and swept its beam into the dark.

The foxes had pulled apart a bale of straw I had been planning to use in the garden. They had made a nest. There was a mother and two kits. She gazed at me; the flashlight made her eyes glow, and lit a penumbra of fur around her body. The blind kits lay at her side, nursing.