

from Juked #5, Spring 2008

LYNN VEACH SADLER

THE FOX THAT SPOILS THE VINES

I saw the fox
edge into the darkened room.
Fugue state? Dream? Nightmare?
It turned to look at me,
asked me into the darkened room.
I began to remember.

I didn't like for Mr. Rufe, the Preacher Man,
to touch me with
his old, pink cottony hands.
But Momma would be mad
if I insulted him,
so I'd sit there on the couch
in our cold living room,
and he'd stroke
my warm bare foot
and say his mixed-up Bible words over it.

How beautiful are thy feet with shoes,
O prince's daughter!
Stroke, stroke.
Hear me now,
for I am come into my garden.
Stroke, stroke.
In that garden is
the lily among the thorns.
Stroke, stroke.

I hated that stuff.
I'd sooner be a toad,

the thorn among Preacher Rufe's lilies!
And I'd forget about old Mr. Rufe
down there on the floor
mumbo-jumboing over my foot
and imagine all the kinds
of toads and frogs and pretend
I was turned into one
but was not going to stand
for being kissed by anybody.

 "Who is this
 coming up from the wilderness?"
Mr. Rufe ought to know
the answer to that one.
Stroke, stroke.

 "We have a little sister,
 and she hath no breasts."
It was not a thing Mr. Rufe
ought to be pointing out.
Stroke, stroke.

 "The smell of thy nose
 is like apples."
Is that not dumb?
Even if it is in the Bible?
Stroke, stroke.

At first, I'd feel kind of spooky.
Sort of tingly
down the back of my neck and . . .
Then Mr. Rufe's big voice would cut back
until I just about couldn't hear it,
and I'd feel tired and dozey.

 "Ah, yes, sleep but let your heart waketh,
 little sister, for I have come
 leaping down from the mountains,
 skipping down from the hills!
 Do not be the little fox that spoils the vines
 and the pomegranates,

but feed among the lilies with me.
Let me kiss you with the kisses of my mouth,
for they are sweeter than wine.”

Mr. Rufe would kiss
the top of my foot then,
but so gently,
like a butterfly landing.
At that moment, I was as close
to liking him as I'd ever be.
I would ponder that
and wonder at it
and think it was a weakness in me.
He could buy me
with his dog Doodlebug.
He could buy me
with Uncle Wiggley books.
He could buy me
with his talk of wine,
his kiss upon my foot.
Or almost.

And then I would rouse up,
thinking about the difference between
grownups saying, “Kiss my foot!”
and Mr. Rufe after me
with “kissing my foot.”
And when I thought about the differences,
I knew he couldn't catch me
because thinking about them
was all I needed to break his spell.

I tried to tell Momma,
but she wouldn't listen,
just said that a girl child
must never be the little fox
that spoils the vines.

Well, it's the fox who's
come up from the wilderness now,
and I thank him for it!