

OPPORTUNITY COLLABORATION

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Colloquium for the Common Good 2010 Session One: Leadership and Human Nature

The Wonderful Musician By Anne Sexton (1971)

My sisters,
do you remember the fiddlers
of your youth?
Those dances
so like a drunkard
lighting a fire in the belly?
That speech,
as piercing as a loon's,
exciting both mayors
and cab drivers?
Sometimes,
ear to the bedside radio,
frozen on your cot
like a humped hairpin,
or jolt upright in the wind
on alternating current
like a fish on the hook
dancing the death dance,
remember
the vibrato,
a wasp in the ear?
Remember dancing in
those electric shoes?
Remember?
Remember music
and beware.

Consider
the wonderful musician
who goes quite alone
through the forest
and plays his fiddle-me-roo
to bring forth a companion.
The fox

was a womanly sort,
his tongue lapping a mirror.
But when he heard the music
he danced forth
in those electric shoes
and promised his life
if he too could learn to play.
The musician despised the fox
but nevertheless he said,
You have only to do as I bid you.
The fox replied,
I will obey you as
a scholar obeys his master.
Thus the musician
took him to an oak tree
and bade him put his left paw
in its wooden slit.
The he fixed him with a wedge
until he was caught.
The fox was left there
kneeling like Romeo.

The musician went on
playing his fiddle-me-roo
to bring forth a companion.
The wolf,
a greedy creature,
his eye on the soup kettle,
heard the music
and danced forth
in those electric shoes.
He came forth
and was bilked
by the same order.
The musician fastened
both his paws to a hazel bush
and he hung spread-eagle
on a miniature crucifix.

The musician went on
playing his fiddle-me-roo
to bring forth a companion.
The hare,
a child of the dark,
his tail twitching
over the cellar hole,
came forth and was had.
With a rope around his throat
he ran twenty times around the maypole
until he foamed up
like a rabid dog.

The fox
as clever as a martyr
freed himself
and coming upon the crucifixion
and the rabid dog,
undid them
and all three swept
through the forest
to tear off the musician's
ten wonderful fingers.

The musician had gone on
playing his fiddle-me-roo.
Old kiteskin,
the bird,
had seen the persecution
and lay as still
as a dollar bill.
Old drowse-belly,
the snake,
did not come forth –
He lay as still as a ruler.
But a poor woodcutter
came forth with his axe
promising his life
for that music.

The wolf, the fox,
and the hare
came in for the kill.
The woodcutter
held up his axe –
it glinted like a steak knife –
and forecast their death.
They scuttled back into the wood
and the musician played
fiddle-me-roo
once more.
Saved by his gift
like many of us –
little Eichmanns,
little mothers –
I'd say.