

Ereth's Birthday

by Avi

Readers Theatre excerpt. Six voices.

VOICE 1

Two young foxes, head cocked to one side, were looking at Ereth the Porcupine with bright eyes.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Hello Porky! You looking for someone?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

What did you call me?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Porky. Isn't that what you are, a porcupine?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

My name is Erethizon Dorsatum.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Male or Female?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Male, needle nose.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

My name isn't needle nose, it's Flip. And I'm a male.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

I'm Nimble. I'm female.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Do you live here?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Oh, sure. There's me and my brother Flip. Tumble is sleeping. Then there's our mother. Her name is Leaper.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

When we heard you coming, we thought you were Mom.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Why?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

She's been away an awfully long time. But guess what happened today? Some humans came by.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

They were walking around the field. Doing stuff.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

The trappers. What did you do?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Nothing. Hid like Mom told us to do.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Don't worry. They never saw us.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Ah . . . Guess what?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

What?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Here's the news. (PAUSE) I'm not your mother.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Oh, I know what. I may be young but I'm not stupid. You don't look like her at all. I mean, she's very beautiful.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

And, no offense, you're ugly. But have you seen her?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

See Mom went hunting this morning. To get us some fresh food. Like she always does.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

She hasn't been back for a very long while. We think it's this white stuff.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

You mean the snow?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Is that what it's called? We never saw it before.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Why not?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Because we were born only a couple of months ago, silly.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Lollypop loogies.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Why did you say that?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Because I wanted to, bean head.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Oh, I get it. You're trying to be funny.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Gallivanting glowworms. I am not trying to be funny. I'm serious.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Who's that?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Oh, hi Tumble. This is a very funny old porcupine. His name is Earwig Doormat.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

It's Erethizon Dorsatum!

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Doormat is easier to say.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

He smells nasty. Has he seen Mom?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

I asked him.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

What did he say?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

He didn't.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Mr. Doormat, have you seen our mother?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Look here, brush tails, the name is Ereth, not Doormat and I've been out in the snow all day and night. I'm cold. I'm wet. I'm hungry. Do you think you could show me some manners and invite me into your den? Or don't foxes know how to be polite?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Of course we do. Mom taught us. I just didn't think you'd want to. Come on in and make yourself at home, Doormat.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

The name is Ereth.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Perish?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Ereth!

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Okay. Just watch your step.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

I'm sorry we can't offer you any food. We've eaten everything.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

That's why Mom went out.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

But she'll be back any moment.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Which is okay. Except we're pretty hungry.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

With all this white stuff Mom probably had to go a long way.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

That's why she hasn't gotten back yet.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

What do you think?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Giraffe gas.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

What?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

I said *Giraffe gas*.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Mr. Perish, how come you came here?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

The name is Ereth. As for why I'm here Ilike taking long walks.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

In the snow?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Do you have a problem with that dribble nose?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

I guess not.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Look here, I've got something to say to you. Something really important.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

We'd really like to hear it.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

It's ... it's ...oh sugared snail spit. I ...spoke to your mother.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

You did!

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Where is she?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Why hasn't she come home?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

She...she...won't be coming home. And that's because ...

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Because of what?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Great gopher underpants. What makes you think I know?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Because you just said you did.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Sour snake sauce. Forget it.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Mr. Perish Doormat, did . . .did something happen to mom?

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

We need to know.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

No you don't!

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

We do too.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

No!

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Just tell us.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Oh... fish feather fruitcakes ... your mother is . . . dead!

PAUSE

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Would you repeat that?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Sorry. Didn't mean to say it that way. And I wouldn't have either if you hadn't made me. I mean I'm sorry.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

But did you say Momdied?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Yes.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

How . . how do you know?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

It had nothing to do with me. I was an innocent bystander.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Died?

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

But how's that possible?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Moms can't die.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

They're supposed to take care of us.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Always.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

She ...stepped into a trap. And she...couldn't get out.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Did you speak to her?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Yes.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

What did she . . . say?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Look here, I never had to do this before. Never wanted to. And I ...oh peanut butter on a pink poodle. I don't know what to say!

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

I don't care what you have to say. Just tell us what *she* said.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

She said a lot of things. Mostly sentimental slip-slop. (REACTION) No, I didn't mean that. I mean, well, she said you were helpless. That you couldn't take care of yourselves. Wanted me to find you and tell you what happened. And she asked me to take care of you. (PAUSE) It was all ... well ... I mean, sad. And I suppose I will stay. Understand? That's what she said.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Nothing –

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

– else?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Well, she also said ...she...loved you.

(ALL FOXES howl)

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Stop it!

(Howling stops.)

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Food! You said you hadn't eaten all day.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

That was because Mom –

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Right. Now just tell me, what do you eat?

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Whatever she brought us.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Chipmunks.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Moles and voles.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Rabbits if she was lucky.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Mice, too.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

They're great appetizers.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

I hate meat eaters.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

It's what Mom always gave us.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Don't you eat anything else?

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Bugs.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Oh, green goose cheese. How about some decent food? Like vegetables.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Only if we have to. You know, berries and stuff.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

No offence, but we like meat a whole lot better.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

In fact, we hate vegetables.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Nasty.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Do you do any hunting for yourselves?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

I caught and ate a grasshopper once. It was crunchy.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Did you mother hide any food? Foxes, do that, you know.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

They do?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Course they do. Everybody knows that. She probably had another den, too.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Oh, sure. It's down along the bluff a bit.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Can you find it?

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

I suppose.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Then why the mangy muskrat mites if you were so hungry didn't you go look for food there?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

I guess we didn't think of it.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

We were waiting for Mom.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

The way she told us too.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

And we always do what she tells us.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Mr. Doormat are ... are you going to be our mother from now on?

VOICE 3 (EARTH)

Look here, you simple smear of weasel wax, the name is Ereth, not Doormat. Secondly, I am not your mother. I can't be your mother. I don't want to be your mother. I'm only going to take care of you until –

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Until what?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Sorry you asked. I just want you to know this is the worst birthday of my life.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

What's a birthday?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

It's the day you're born.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Does that mean Doormat was just born today?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

No, way. He's got to be ancient.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

How old do you think he is?

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

From the way he's acting, I'd say two hundred years at least.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Does that mean he'll die soon?

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

Probably

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Mr. Perish?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

I'm going to sleep.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Mr. Earwig, when we sleep at night, Mom lets us snuggle up close to her. She even wraps her tail about us.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

It keeps us very warm.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Have you even looked at my tail?

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

What about it?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

It's full of quills.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Are you *completely* covered with quills?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Well . . . no.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Where aren't you?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

My ... belly.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Oh great. It looks fat enough. Can't we snuggle there?

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

No!

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

But we can't sleep. Our mother ...

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

I am not your mother!

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Please ...

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Oh all right ... come on.

VOICE 2 (NIMBLE)

Thank you Mr. Doormat.

VOICE 5 (FLIP)

Good night Mr. Earwig.

VOICE 6 (TUMBLE)

You know what Mr. Perish? You're not too bad.

VOICE 3 (ERETH)

Baked Birthday boogers! I'm trapped. Completely, utterly, miserably trapped!