

## Penny Chalmers / FOR ME IT WAS FOXES

The bounce of the old car, the sweet noxious smell of gas, nose filling, rumbling vibrations, sunk between my parents in the front seat. Who were large in those days, the steering wheel too, that vector: and thru the windshield, the looming blackness of trees. Remember when there were no shoulders to roads, and the woods reared immediately off the headlights, their colour, oranges, yellows, caught momentarily? It was that time, October, of shadows.

Sleepy, sleeping in my mother's lap. Nestled. When. A fox ran in front of the car. And. Was transfixed by the headlights. Ran and ran in front of the car but could not escape the trajectory of light. Caught. Turning head back, tongue lolling, as in the pictures of foxes hunted. The eyes like cats' catching the light and transmuting it phosphorescent, bouncing it back. Look! He shook his head and ran into the woods. Finally. I did not wake up.

That night, for nights afterward, there was a fox in my bed. Under my bed. In the closet, Mommy there is a fox in my bed. Make him go away. He was very large and his coat shot off sparks in the dark. His eyes were lit coals. He had sharp white teeth. He was hungry. He smelled musty. He was prowling. The sudden switch of the light evaporated him. I could just catch his tail glimmer away, up into the fixture. He would curl behind the light, cunning, until the light was turned off. Then he would continue to search.

My father for comfort explained that foxes were quite small, really, like little dogs, and they were more scared of me than I was of them. Well I couldn't imagine the extent of their fear, then. The fox I knew wasn't scared one bit. He was going to eat me up. Unless I played dead. I froze into the mattress. The folds of the sheet turned marble, a frieze. The fox could not smell out the stiff and still. I could sleep. Warily.

By day my father used his imagination. Foxes are really tiny, he said. So small you can hardly see them. That is because you watch from daylight eyes, I thought, and foxes come out in the dark. So small you can never see them. Look! There's one now! He followed a something flying and caught, cupped it in his huge hands. Slowly he opened them to let me see. Shh. It's a fox, he said, and they scare easy. Be very quiet. I peered into the dark cavern of his hand. The something, nothing, was gone, not in the palm's hollow, nor the crevices between fingers. Look, there he is! Flying there. There.

I followed his eyes, their darting, dubiously, till catching on. Hey, another one! He pointed, exulting. I'll catch it, I squealed and caught it. I've got one. The nothing in my hand brushed my skin like a moth's wing, tickling, powder. See? Dad looked in. The fox flowed out and perched atop the china cabinet where none could reach. Nevermind, there's another! We were all around the room after foxes. They never stayed in my palm for inspection the way they did in dad's. I tried to see their wings. I didn't know foxes had wings. They were all around the room, hovering, at the edge of sight, and prancing. Tiny pairs of eyes glowed from the chandelier, from the top bookshelves. They were like fireflies. Whose lights went on, went out.