

# Fox Haunts

Penn Kemp



Aeolus House

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## A Child's Garden Fox

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 off into  
the woods. Finally. I did not wake up.

But that night, for nights afterward, a fox was  
in my bed. Under my bed. In the closet. Mommy,  
there's a fox in my bed! Make him go away. He  
was very large. 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. He  
might have been growling. A 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'd 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 alive. 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. That something, nothing, was gone, not in palm's hollow, nor the crevices between fingers. Look, there he is! Flying, 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 no-one could reach. Never mind, 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 book shelves. They were like fireflies. Whose lights went on, went out.



## **Steal, Stole, Stun**

The dried heads of black fox hung  
from my grandmother's stole as if  
ready to strike. Dead flat button jet  
eyes shut tight to their own secret

wiles. When she turned to talk to me  
from the front seat of dad's Meteor,  
the foxes would swing in turn back  
as if they too had something to say.

And what they whispered was darker  
than words, darker than the deepest  
lake they drowned in. That dark knew  
how to spread and fill the entire car.

Their dark buried my grandmother's kind  
words in black ink. They buried her and  
her stories of wild Irish banshees wailing  
on roofs to warn us of imminent death.

## On the Nature of Intelligence

Rewilding my senses to catch up  
with yours beyond thought and  
logic into the realm of scents.

A musky note on the dark side of  
lunar new. Ears sharpened to tips.  
Eyes accustomed to shifting dusk.

No extrasensory perception yours,  
heightened to distinguish illusion  
from moving shapes, from fright.

A fine intelligence tuned to what  
is naturally. Honed to acute slips  
in landscape. What weather calls

for: announcements clear as day to  
you. Unfamiliar to my more muted  
scrutiny, your acuity of bodymind.

## **What the Wag Entails**

A wild Fox confronted, cornered or caged,  
snarls at encroaching humans in fury and  
will not let us approach without resistance.

We could buy him as pet on the Internet at  
great expense, but why? He'd always prefer  
freedom in forest and meadow, his terroir.

The tame Fox stays skittish, undomesticated,  
untrained. Like border collies he's too smart  
or too skittish to put up with boredom.

His tail might swivel in greeting like a dog's  
or frustration like a cat's. Who can read sign  
language or Fox's inclination 'til it's too late?

Better keep him busy, entertained or he'll  
run amok into your cushion, your couch,  
your nightmare.

## **By her wits, you shall know her**

Utter focus. Long, live nose  
quivering intake of worlds  
dim to our blurred sense.

She stalks borders between  
discrete realms of possibility  
on soft black stocking paws

All up for grabs, for she is fast.  
One ear cocked. Eye alert.

Adapting to this adopted realm  
she feasts or fasts, dependent on  
chance and feeds her kits first.



## **Unleashing the Fox**

Why your family is called “a leash  
of foxes,” I can’t say. Maybe because  
you guard your kits so carefully.

It’s true you walk on toes like cats,  
like a ballerina of the wildwood.  
You stalk and pounce. You prowl.

“A skulk of foxes,” I can understand.

## How To Hunt

A predator is responsible for responding to his surrounds. A predator is responsible for keeping herself alive, her and her kits.

Fox circles her prey, closing in on her victim in ever tightening gyres. Her fixed glare freezes

poor rabbit into terror so pure it dissolves to acceptance, suspended acquiescence, adrenalin overload.

Almost like peace. Soft as comfort, this compliance in the fox's grasp. Just a single shriek before the

neck snaps. Fox's kits scurry over to tear below the fur and scabble for tender morsels. For the feast.

## Pointers

High-pitched harmonics disclose who knows what information. If it hurts our ears, imagine what sound carries to Foxes near and far.

Fox hears beneath the noise to the sound too deep that silence creates – when birds hush and she hears their heart beat.

I know Fox watches, invisible to me but not to birds or mice. They reduce heart rate and heat to go unnoticed. If the predator is hungry,

her prey is quiet. When Fox is full, her victims pay her no heed. They know intent when she sniffs the air for whiffs of food on the move.