AFTER THE FOX

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Black Lawrence Press
for Elizabeth Robinson

Neither dark nor light
is my true love.

—Robin Blaser, Cups
Contents

Nocturnal, when was the last time you slept the whole night through? 1

One
Atlantic 3

Two
After the Fox 41

Three
Pacific 49

Four
The Table 95

Acknowledgments 101
Night and Day draw near and greet one another as they pass the great threshold of bronze: and while the one is about to go down into the house, the other comes out at the door. And the house never holds them both within; but always one is without the house passing over the earth, while the other stays at home and waits until the time for her journeying …

—Hesiod, *Theogony*

Catch us the foxes,
the quick little foxes
that raid our vineyards
now, when the vines are in blossom.

—*The Song of Songs*
Nocturnal, when was the last time you slept the whole night through?

_The last time I held a book and listened to the leather rain._

The last time the rain was steady. Like footsteps.
Like marching up these empty halls. Filled.

_Footsteps and pages turning. And pages torn, dropped one by one into an alley for passing birds and winter._

Birds or rats. Or birds. I can’t tell which. I can’t tell who has wings.

_These old pages are wings, and made of stretched skin. Skin scraped with knives to near white._

Old pages are old, though. The thinnest in the wind.

_So difficult to hold age or whiteness. So both and neither land in the hands that grasped for them._

Neither land on land, either. But the sea.
There is always a sea. Close.
Or near close. Or near near.
I want to believe that. Yes, I need to hear it in the curl of a paper shell. Say the sea is near this open book. Say so again.
ONE

Atlantic
In other words,
the coastline.
In other words,
The Empire State Building.
In other words,
after the fox.

Dear Nocturnal,
have you jumped into the edge of the Atlantic?
Have you
forgotten me?

•
After the fox, see
the chase. Feel the theater.
A grasp at something
with a velvet waist.
An overcoat fails. In other words,
midtown. In other memories,
hands were held in place
by pearl bangles.

By starlight.
May I call you

Morning, Morning?
I would say “again.”
But it’s been said,
again, and better than
once. I did not jump.

Once, I did not know
you or your other
more comfortable shoes, then,
worn when you strode
dripping from the ermine sea.

I do not forget
what I owe. I do not
sleep on your account.

•
The chase is accounted for, Nocturnal;  
the chase is no longer  
your biggest problem.  
These streets run north and south.  
This island, you see, is narrow.  
The problem is there’s never  
enough time to catch you.

And starlight?  
It’s not summer anymore.  
In other words,  
I haven’t been to the sea.  
In other words,  
I haven’t seen you for days.

Go on,  
talk about all the memories  
you have in your head.  
Go ahead and make a joke.  
I’ll be here,  
watching the sun light  
the skyline, light  
the tallest buildings,  
one at a time.  
In other words,  
the chase is accounted for  
but I don’t sleep either.  
Dear Nocturnal,  
this island:  
it’s narrow.

•
You speak of narrow, of this island. I would not dare to joke about something so serious. Because I’m talking about legs. We can agree here on the tallest, yes. And longer. We can agree on haste. We can agree on December.

An overindulgence of black leather seemed more comfortable then, after the fox. In other words, not erotic. In other words, neurotic. Talking, time squared and squared again until one hour became four hours blown walking. In other words, crosstown. A tandem stagger past buildings lit from inside.

It’s not a gaptooth summer.

Say the sun won’t slide down like a tongue licks glass canyons. Say the sun is not really chasing, either. Not at this pace.
Morning, do
you ever grow tired
of your narrow tracks
in concrete, or the white
stare always scorching your back?
One hour squared
is one hour,
and that’s all.
And that’s a fact.
But you’re right about one thing:
say the sun won’t slide down.
Say the sun is sick of the chase.
The chase is sick of the sun.
In other words, Nocturnal,
after the fox there are no tracks,
no tired eyes.
After the fact,
there are no apologies,
no jokes to be made.

Somewhere someone
is looking for you.
Sometimes the Atlantic cries.
Somewhere else I might be someone.
But I’m not,
seriously, I’m not.

If I could, I would speak like you.
But I can’t, seriously.
When I say “once more”
I prefer to say “again.”
So, again, how easy is it
for you to live with your decisions;
how easy is it
to stare at the sun.