

David Yezzi

Woman Holding a Fox

Buried inside, page three, below the fold,
a woman crumpled on fresh dirt begins to get the gist:
that she has lost the use of her left leg, that when she tripped
her hip gave out. Shock explains
this all to her, a self-assured young doctor mouthing, Rest.

The reason for the break, a rabid fox
that came at her when she stepped out for half a cigarette.
Age seventy-nine, the paper said; she hadn't toppled far,
merely down her few fronts steps,
but late enough that no one finds her till the following day.

And here's the eerie part. Just when she thinks
to drag herself down to the curb, the twisted fox comes back.
In hours her arms are bitten blue, waving her one defense.
Her glasses lost in tufted grass,
she hears it thread the underbrush before she sees it leap.

At two o'clock, a nurse toggles the lamp.
Something for the pain. Since after dark, the fox has come
to look on her as prey, the way he circles then descends.
This is no dream, she tells herself.
Yet it had seemed unreal from the initial streak of red:

a comedy at first, a photo-op,
then something else, an eye-white flash our unsuspecting trust
shields us from until the outward show no longer jibes.
She's landed in her garden row,
her Marlboro still smoking on the carefully weeded path.

Beyond the gate a sunset has begun,
the swatch of sky above her roof dyed jacaranda-blue.
These are things she sees as she assumes things can't get worse.

But then they do. When it returns,
she clasps it to herself. Somehow she's managed to affix

small hands around its muzzle and bared teeth.
All night she feels it panting and enraged, then weirdly calm.
So off and on for hours until someone spots her there.

A neighbor comes, she knows that now.
But on the sedge she hadn't guessed that it would end so well.

As for what crowds her head: a single thought
repeated in contrition, while the same minute extends,
infinitely regressing between mirrors set opposed.

Music's playing down the hall,
carried on a crack of light that shows the door ajar.

It's nearly dawn. I have not killed the fox,
my arms barely keep him hemmed, my fingers have gone limp.
Across the lawn an amniotic slick of dew gives off
a silver sheen and sudden cold.
I'm glad you happened by, she wryly croaks when he appears.

Before he batters in the hissing fox,
he asks her why she simply didn't let it run away.
I know this creature pretty well by now. She shows her skin.

It's true, she understands the fox
and wonders if she hasn't always known that he was there,

known it when her first child was born,
and known it, too, the day her husband died three years ago.
At any rate she knows it now, will always keep him close
in her embrace from day to day,
up to a time when memories of these no longer serve.