The Fox

by **ZACH DODSON**

At
the
top
of the
mountain,
I gained the
cabin, alone.
I chopped wood and
warmed it. I had an
appointed task. To watch
for fires. The air was
snow, ash, or only milk.
Fire had no foothold in
the hills. Still, I stared out
from the porch, no words
rolling off my tongue.
I watched the light paint
a picture of the forest.
I forgot how to spell.
Time passed.

Welcome,
I said again.
It was taking a
long time for us
to become friends. The
fox had been sipping boiled
milk in my den for the greater
part of our lives. It seemed over
empty. The firmament rolled up.
I was in the badstorm kitchen, making
minor conversation. There are a people I've
heard stories of, called the Malays, who live in
the same, I told him. Truthfully wolves have been
missing everywhere. Our breakfast seemed a play of
sorts. He wouldn't use a knife. His eyes flashed the color
of a late-night executioner's lounge. I have found the great
round boulders, there, I said, in between the trees, taller than
them even. I have set a dish of milk at the base of each, always.
He reminded me that I couldn't speak. The sunset hesitated, took
a step back. I scratched under his chin. It was a strange funeral, by any
measure. But I was only following what had been spelled out in the snow.
Universal smoke aside. For years afterwards, if I had one boot on, I couldn't
put on the other. Right or left, the fox seemed to dance, the rug blowing
up around him like a flame of badger's breath. He motioned for me to
sit. He took my temperature. He said 'This is a cakewalk now.'

So what
I said again,
I've misled you.
I wasn't watching for
wild fires. I was watching
for the man who was to
watch for wild fires. This is
his box, lately. He made the
gone sun round. The mountain
now knew what it looked like, atoms
arranging themselves into this thought.
It was going to be universal soon. The light of
the sky spilt my tongue with the axe I had written.
The din of the woodsong, treesong, logsong died
down. I fixed myself a right bowl of snow, and set
about molding it into the cabin with a claw. I had found
the blueprints tattooed on the bottom of my feet at dawn.
It was still cold. I would say 2 or 12 below freezing. Milk spilled
on the floor froze in the shape of a sleeper car. Inside, they told
me that the lounge car was the next, but each time, in between the
cars, the sky reversed, I could find no way out of the night. Everywhere
every kind of man woke up all at once. What was I to do save light the
fox that is a fire and obeys no natural law? The smoke made words in my
mind's throat. I cooked cake on the end of a wand. I folded myself back
to bed. I packed up. I soaked the map. I thought down all the trees.

The fox
lived in
the wild
woods. He
appeared only
in the gloaming,
modest. Mornings
left his trail in the snow
around the cabin. Wherever
his paw had been the print of
a nightjar claw remained. Always
counter-clockwise, this often being
the northern hemisphere. He was the
lord of little night rocks and a wizard of his
own imagining. His tracks made a map under
the mountain. He ate old birds in the unnamed
afternoons of this side of these hills. He snapped at
death and drank from milk dishes, frosty in the snow.

I turned the page and woke. This was later.
I had slept suspiciously, like a person on a train.
I could hear stones scatter against the window of
the box. Or it could have been the tapping of
frozen light. Or a flock of microscopic petrels,
lost in the storm that we could all feel coming.
I thought certainly the cabin had been facing
the other direction, just that very afternoon
when I had been outside chopping a log.
Splitting Jack with my good hand, and spinning
nests from a fork in my left. Why would a
fox knock, I asked? Is the hour at the door, I
called out? The trees outside were a new race
of man, inching closer. I hadn't been sleeping
at all. I was gaunt and drawn as a sleigh. The
sky sounded hungry. When I was alive, that is.

No
one had
carefully tried
to hold him, not
even the old ideas
of birds.

storigami

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FOLD FIRST, READ SECOND. *Tear the bottom portion of this page off, follow the instructions, keeping the printed side out. Then, let the story unfold.*