

Origami Paper Ghosts

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*Dim smoke spirals out of a tall chimney
Marbling in the last rays
Of a low sun heading down
Glittering of stardust
And the dust of those long gone*

*It reaches high and tears the fading sky
Masking it in pale grey flames
Bundled up in marble spheres
That spread out and capture the world
Like a never-ending cumulus cloud*

*An angel brushes it with the tip of its wing
And tears through it a wide scar
In thousand droplets faltering below
An endless cry of mourning
Purifying the earth*

And there was no I.

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—for a second I thought it was raining white petals!

So said the fox, her golden-red fur blazing. We were walking in parallel, sometimes close, sometimes leaving a wide gap between us as if the earth were about to open up and swallow everything that was laying above.

Look here, the muddied stream opens up into a river and surrounds this tiny pebble. Isn't that odd? Are you listening?

It was the same way she would embrace herself with her tail on cold summer mornings.

Up and down, up and down, and waving between unknown faces like two paper boats racing for the crystal cascade. Before long though—

Over there!

—we saw a dark-brown bear wearing a gilt monocle, standing on the side of the road, musing about everything and nothing.

Are you an angel?

He raised his brow and scoffed at us.

No such thing as angels 'round here, not anymore they say.

Oh,
but—

There used to be, you could see their halos grouping up and shining, and you'd be mistaken for thinking they were bright lamp posts. But not anymore.

It's not like—

He was walking along now, and the fox still fixated on the water bursting between pebbles, so that's where we were going.

—they could have just vanished! You are blaming them when you're the one who knows not where to head.

She spoke this being very certain of herself, so that the certainty could be tasted from her voice; and her snout was glowing. And the bear adjusted his monocle.

Very well then, do have a look for yourself. But don't expect to find much on this path; its old by now after all, old—

We didn't know what he meant.

—and decayed, and there are no mourners left, only that one lamb who kneels next to the grave and lets her gown drown down and it gets all muddled.

The fox frowned and shook her head—

We will see about that!

—and we bid him farewell.



I thought he would know something, he sure seemed that

way. Too bad looks can be deceiving!

Her tail kept wagging and so we followed the stream, until it ended abruptly and the path forked in two.

Where to, where to?

We were heading for the old graveyard, so we took the right. It was a path full of trees and the light was blooming from openings between their water-color-green bunches of leaves, and resting on the half-dry earth below. We took turns—

I win again!

I approved silently.

—playing rock paper scissors and shuffling so I was once right, then left, then right again. The light would hit me and I would cower and the fox would laugh, and then it was clear that it was a fox with all her mischief and her antics and the like.

Once I was walking this path and I saw two large deer with their antlers poking out of each side, and they were so long, the antlers, that they left no room for me to go.

I was imagining the deer standing high and each curved to the other side, and the fox between their antlers like a flowing laminated picture of the Virgin Mary close to being impaled.

So I did my best to force my way between them but they were acting as though they could not even notice, and their antlers bit me—

Here, Virgin Mary was bleeding, taking the role of an absent Christ.

—and I yelled, but again they didn't seem to care! It was such a struggle and—

There was a deer walking now in front of us, he must have come off the other path that we just went by, and, overhearing us—

That, to me, must be the stuff of legend. I'm afraid your old fox must be hallucinating—

How dare you? Look at you standing tall and proud as if—

—he broke into our conversation without mercy and put blame on the fox.

So what? If they haven't moved, it must have been the case that they haven't noticed you; why not strive to make yourself heard clearly next time?—

He was tall indeed, wearing darkened eyes and a golden cross laying below his neck, surfing from one side to the other as he spoke.

—Our kind does not hold in high regard the bickering ones, such as you seem to be.

And the fox grew redder and her cheeks flushed, but regardless she did not say anything more than—

Curse you!

—in her head, and I was wondering what this was all about, with the deer standing like that, but I could not figure anything out and the fox was growing impa-

tient—

What are you staring at him for now?

—she whispered under her breath.

It was clear that she did not take warmly to their kind, and so we walked by the deer with his antlers shot out and outpaced him and kept walking until the path opened up with light.



I remembered her saying something about the scent of a decaying rat, left to melt away on the sidewalk even by the black crows; then we surfaced into the light and I had to cower again and she took her time to point and laugh at me like she always does.

What's with them and their snark when I ask about angels like that? How should I say it?

I couldn't tell whether she was being serious or not, and she could read it—

What are you making that face for?

Huh?

I was trailing behind her now, doing my best to catch up. Her voice, distorted by the wind, was reaching me half-empty half-full and I didn't know exactly what she was seeing or what face I was making then.

Angels, I know all about them.

A hare with long ears and a gilded top hat had said that.

What's with today and everyone looking into our conversation? We're not for sale, you know!

Do you?

However it may be, you would like to know about angels, is that not so?

Pray do tell!

His ears chuckled at that. I could see the pale-pink insides and his fur all fluttering.

I had once, long time ago—

We don't have time for this and that, long ears! What's that about the angels?

—Very well. I had bought an angel egg, from a one-eyed rabbit I had once met. It was perfectly round and shimmering with the trace of stardust; a thing of wonder.

An angel egg; are you taking us for fools?

She was visibly impatient and distrustful of the whimsy-eared fellow we had just met.

An angel egg indeed. I watched it every day, hidden in my flame-red scarf, waiting for the moment it would hatch. My own angel, so I thought. I could even imagine it granting me my three wishes.

So then, what came of it?

Oh, my angel egg! I guarded it all day, gave it whole my soul, and in the end, when it finally hatched—

It did?

—No, it broke! When it finally broke open, sides snapping and falling apart, what came out of it? Tiny

mayflies; mayflies, buzzing and with glassy gleaming wings!

That doesn't seem like an angel now, does it?

The fox grew disinterested by that point.

What was he trying to sell us?

—so she must have thought
upon hearing this and that and long stories with no moral.

It was no angel, just a den of mayflies, stuck inside
that pure-white egg. And I could have sworn that one must've
been there! Anyway, this was all a long time—

I've had enough of you, with
your pointless babbling! Let us head this way, and leave this
blabbering rabbit alone.

A hare, I am a hare! Listen here!

—so he pleaded, and we left.



We had reached the burial grounds and white flowers were rising everywhere like lances—

Paradise flowers! Should I pick some up?

—The fox was exultant. But then—

There's
no time for that, is there? Let's head along.

We walked on the shallow path between
ivory tombs, and all was empty and there was no one in sight;
it was a lonely place. We passed by the flicker of fading candles
and offerings left to die out at the bottom of gravestones.

This place is so very dreary! It reminds me only of the worst memories. Good thing the flowers are still sprouting, otherwise I would've thought we were marching on with the dead!

The fox was pacing and walking slightly faster than I would've liked, slightly more alert than the place demanded, but I did not point it out; instead, we kept walking, until we saw—

There she is!

Oh—

You know where we can find an angel, right?

An angel?

One of those with long, silky wings and beaming halos, like in the old stories!

I'm afraid there are no such angels anymore.

I looked at the sky and it was light blue and then I thought, this world as we know it, if you stare into the sky for long enough, you can witness its seams coming apart.

They say that true angels would choose to be here and inhabit this dying world—

Her ears were flopped down.

—to scatter their feathers and assist those who are in need of guidance. However, I saw the last of them depart not long ago. I wouldn't blame any angel for wanting to leave this place and return to Heaven after all.

The fox looked with the curiosity of a wild cat.
This angel, where did you see it going?

There—

She took my hand and jolted straight to where the lamb had pointed. I saw her sunlit wedding ring one last time before we moved on.



We climbed the legs of the decrepit church and went inside, with small steps and faint like two sinners.

This place is huge! And look at that!

—I imagined her saying, though she was solemn and didn't speak a thing. There was a tall stained glass pane depicting some biblical scene. Sun rays were breaking through in shades of monochrome blue and red.

We went forward and passed the rows of seats until the altar was close to us, and then I saw with the corner of my eye a half-sleeping, tired-looking fox resting on a gilt chair; he was folded like origami paper.

We approached him slowly and he, aloof, raised his gaze to meet ours but did not say a thing, and then sat back in silence and we stood in front of him.

The fox said nothing and sat next to its kind and I looked at them both. Their hands touched and their red and pale fur mixed together and they waited in somnolence. I thought at some point that perhaps they were waiting for an angel to show up. She did not say anything anymore.

Perhaps I saw the fox shedding a tear, tough and mis-

chievous as she was. So I got up and took one final look at them, their tails and ears unmoving and basking in the silence. I felt that I ought to do something, announce something, but I did not.

There was only the mourning and the air shuffling through a half-shattered window and the flowers outside had probably withered. And I looked, standing from afar, at the foxes, sitting neatly in their chairs.

And then I prayed.

And then I cried.

And then I faded away.