

Red: an Invocation

I remember the fox in the light I drove forth. The headlights lit the fox's eyes, who did not blink but passed the light back, so it shone between us. Two beams of dust in their jittery silence spread and touched the dark brush by the side of the alley. The fox was ember-colored, fresh-snapped and already cooling.

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The next morning, I remember seeing nothing at first but a puff of crisp leaves, a burned smear in a tree. Then I stopped below the hawk. On the scythe-curve of its breast, I remember the color as blood-dried-in-air, as the rough, indeterminate edge of a notion, just forming. I remember thinking "it looms over us," then saying aloud "looming over" and then, to better myself, to sharpen my sight, when it flew I said "the air of the loom."

I was walking my son to nursery school when I saw how the notion forming was poised, with hawk-like curves, with fox-like silence.

With that red.

Red, come towards me. Stay, as I walk with him. Shorten the distance from this teeming place to that, as we cross, as we ford with one step, another, and another, ford as a pioneer girl did, 1846, vast rivers and mountains, and who, casting back for the story's beginning, mid-summer before the terrible snows, before Donner Pass was so named, wrote: "let me say that we suffered vastly more fear . . . before starting than we did on the plains."

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I looked along the hawk's burnished body, its smooth burnished weight. But "burnished?" No.

And "red" for the body of the fox isn't right, though when you look, as you might for long minutes if you've never seen a fox

before, not like this, you'd see, not red exactly, but how the color is a form, recognizable: a particular concentration inhering, a body's signature reflex and decision. The barest gesture we know a thing by, and by which, in a breath, it is gone.

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"As she forded the school yard, the loom of air shuttled fast above, and she took her son's hand . . ." I wrote of myself in my head as we walked, though I did not point the hawk out to him.

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As it disappeared, the tail of the fox was a wisp, a streaked, feathery plume. The moon was not even a sliver that night, and the light I drove forth showed the fox's front leg held aloft, strictly still: it could not know if this was the light of kindness or a killing spot, and so with one leap, all deftness and economy, the fox slipped into the alley's underbrush, wholly out of sight.

As the hawk lifted up, its brushfire tail was a breath, just a rustle. That is, that morning, the hawk with the breast of a useful blade, with its breath and intention and hunger contained, took off from the highest, steady branch. Its underwing red, its shoulders red-dipped.

By *red* I mean the last thing I could see as the hawk disappeared.

As the fox slipped away.

And yes, I led my child into that day.