

Approach

Arms stretched wide,
right hand to the dawn,
left toward eventual night,
I face north.
As latitude rises,
life flattens:
forest to taiga,
to tundra, to permanent ice.
Everything will have
a name of cold:
polar bear, arctic fox,
glacier flea, snowy owl.

A compass is known to stray
from true north, lured
by the earth's magnetic heart.
Now the needle swings
at the approach
of a frost spirit
from those barrens
I'll have to cross
without advice,
without a companion,
or a harness of wolf-dogs,
or good boots.

Approach

Lore

Trust water only from springs:
Creeks and rivers murmur of white quartz,
willow shade, minnows flashing silver sides -
dissembling the doe, dead upstream.
Place no hands where eyes haven't been:
A rock ledge on a warm March morning
crawls with snakes knotted around nothing
but the expectation of an open palm.
Douse a fire twice, then cover with dirt:
One ember can smolder a resinous root
to flame that runs to bedded leaves, spruce
boughs, trunks fingering fire straight to the sky.
Carry it in full, take it out empty:
But mistakes, hollow as bottles, get heavier
the longer they are carried, the farther
you try to haul them.

Filler

Start in the right place
and you can manage the job efficiently:
no hacking, no false moves.
Respect this tool.
Hold it lightly in your hands
because like a prayer
it can turn on you.
White flesh unfurls
like wings; the bones
cage the worldly weight.

Father Showed Us the Aurora Borealis

On lawn chairs sunk
to the webbed seats in snow,

we sat bundled in blankets,
faces tilted to the unrolling scroll:

Colors of a hummingbird gorget,
parrot fish, shallow seas,

mandevilla, bougainvillea,
flametree,

tropicalities weaving
in the airless

ineffable between
earth and moon,

glories we couldn't
yet compass,

our eyes since birth
whetted against sun

on snow, a palette
of twig and bone,

knowing only north.



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Origami Poetry Project™

Glories

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