

Mon in the forest: a fragment

by James Knight

Mon wakes up surrounded by trees. The light is grey, the trunks black.

How long have I slept? he wonders.

He doesn't know which way to walk. In every direction, the same prospect of trees. He looks up at a blank sky. No sign even of the sun.

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He starts walking. Slowly, leisurely. If there is a right way to go, it isn't evident. So the going can have no consequences.

It occurs to him that the dense arrangement of trees constitutes a forest.

So I'm lost in a dark forest, he muses.

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As he treads on twigs, leaves, roots, he listens for the music of the woods.

Nothing.

And no birds sing.

Where's that from?

Memories of a brown classroom, words on a page. A poem about a pale knight.

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The forest deepens.

* * *

He keeps walking. He's been here before. Not here, geographically (as far as he's aware), but here, in this situation. Walking.

Between black trees: a momentary red, stark as blood. Mon's interest is aroused. The promise of adventure, or at least an encounter.

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He's nearer the place where he thinks he saw the red. He pauses and looks around.

A few yards away, to his left: a little girl.

He's never seen her before, but she's familiar. She carries a basket and wears a red coat with a hood.

Am I the wolf? he thinks.

The idea that he might be the wolf in the story makes Mon anxious. He doesn't feel qualified. He has neither the teeth nor the energy.

The girl doesn't move. Her smile appears arch, but he can't be sure.

He can't be the wolf; she's not scared.

Mon decides to ignore the girl and keep walking.

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After a time he looks back, but can't see her.

The forest, like the plot, thickens.

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The more he thinks about it, the more he's irritated at the thought that he's in a hackneyed mythical forest.

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Mon whiles away the time by thinking up metaphors.

The trees are the bars of a prison.

The trees are the wolf's teeth.

The trees are words.

If the trees are words, the forest is the story.

What does that make Mon? Punctuation? He has an affinity for the question mark.

If Mon is a question mark, where should he place himself? He can't read the language of the trees.

* * *

Walking still.

The uniformity of the forest is unpromising. Which way is out? Which way deeper in?

Every story needs a path.

* * *

He sits on a stump.

It becomes fractionally darker, or so it seems.

Mon thinks about the knight, palely loitering in the poem.

Memories of books and pencils and words scratched into wood
drag him into sleep.

* * *

Mon dreams of the forest.

* * *

Mon finds himself awake. He looks around. The forest is still
there. But it is different. The trees look flat. Or maybe it isn't the
forest that is different. Maybe it's the light. He remembers
yesterday's grey. This is yellowish. Like piss, he thinks.

The changed trees or pissy light make everything strange. No
longer deep, dark woods, but something like a stage set.

He knocks against a tree. It wobbles. None of this is real, Mon
reflects.

He decides to walk. It doesn't matter where to. A walk is a walk.

* * *

The light is above and behind him. He reasons that he must
therefore be heading upstage.

Some of the trees are broken. Splintered branches, scratched
paintwork.

* * *

Still walking, as before, as yesterday, as usual.

* * *

The stage, if it is a stage, is unusually deep. Mon pauses and looks
back. Planks of wood silhouetted against amber light.

To his right and left, beyond the trees, darkness like a black
curtain.

The heat from the lights is enervating.

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Yellow light at his back, heat all over him, scenery around him. No
option but to keep walking.

* * *

To occupy his mind, he thinks again about the knight in the poem.

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