

## The Fox in the Attic - 8th April

James Robertson

I don't know how he got up there – how *could* he get up there? – but one night I woke and heard his movements, and knew at once, by some instinct I cannot explain, what I was hearing. After that first time I used to listen out for him pacing the joists, testing the spaces in between. Heavier than a mouse, subtler than a squirrel, not panicky like a bird. He was clever, understanding that the plaster beneath the insulation material wouldn't take his weight. I would hear him in my dreams, sniffing and pawing at the dust. Then I'd wake, and hear him for real.

That summer, which began so dry, was one of the wettest on record. After three days of particularly solid, unrelenting rain I needed to check the roof. I didn't want to disturb him but it had to be done.

I poised the ladder, lifted the hatch and hauled myself up. Searching the underside of the roof for signs of leaks, I smelled his wildness. When my torch scanned the farthest shadows, I saw two diamonds flashing in the beam. The roof was sound.

Common sense told me that he could not stay there indefinitely. I placed a dish of water by the hatch, and left the hatch open and the ladder in position when I descended. That night I left the door into the garden ajar, and slept with my bedroom door and the doors into all the other rooms shut tight. I left biscuits at intervals along this exit route. And somehow I did sleep.

In the morning he was gone. He left a few auburn hairs on the rungs of the ladder, a dusty paw print on the stair carpet, and the crumbs of his hunger in the back lobby. I closed up the hatch, put away the ladder and washed the empty dish. I felt sad but I had no reason to be. I consoled myself with thoughts of him running in the hills, in the woods, his tail a flaming bush of freedom.

I think of him often, even now. I miss him. I wish he would come again into my dreams, but he never does.

*This is part of the 365 Stories project, stories by James Robertson with music by Aidan O'Rourke - you can hear the music and learn more at [www.three-six-five.net](http://www.three-six-five.net)*