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by David Marusek
Asimov's Science Fiction, May 1993
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pull
      the club from his belt. The malemute, harnessed to the small sled,
stopped
      behind him. The man stepped off the trail and wallowed through deep
snow
      to the thicket of scrub willow. The dog, mindful of her traces, tamped
      snow underfoot, made one tight circle, and lay down. Before she could
nap,
      the man returned with a frozen snowshoe hare. "Three!" he said to the
dog.
      "What does that mean, eh?" He scratched the dog behind an ear. "It
means
      the Earth is on the mend, it does. And what does the dog say to that?"
The
      dog stood up and wagged her tail. "I see," said the old man, "the dog
says
      this time you'd better not piss it all away."
      The next snare lay alongside the trail. The hare was still alive. It
      huddled calmly at the end of its tight necklace. "Four," whispered the
old
      man as he stepped slowly next to it. "Ah, little bunny," he crooned,
"we
      came quick as we could." The hare stared with bright brown eyes. "And
what
      does the bunny say?" The man raised his club. "The bunny says, 'I know;
Т
      know. Just do it.'"
      Black spruce trees teetered drunkenly under the load of snow. The land
      beneath the ridge lay in shadow. There, on the white expanse of a
frozen
      lake, moved a black shape. "A moose?" said the old man. "Nah, dream
on."
      He studied the shape's movements.
      He led the dog down to a rocky promontory overlooking the lake, careful
      not to break cover. He watched the man push a mound of snow off a
fishing
      hole, chip away the new ice lens, and check the line. Empty. "It's a
      fisherman who wears a bearskin parka," he told the dog. "Nice mukluks
      The next hole was near their hiding place, so the old man put his arm
      around the dog's neck and stroked her muzzle. "I thought we checked
this
      lake," he whispered into her ear. After a minute he added, "We did.
It's
      dead." When the fisherman pulled a long, black fish out of the hole,
the
      old man craned to see. "Ling cod," he whispered. "My oh my."
      The fisherman checked fifteen more holes, adding another fish to his
catch
      before leaving the lake. It was dusk when the old man led the dog to
the
      nearest hole. He cleared it and pulled up the line. The line was made
from
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The Earth Is On The Mend

sinew, except for the leader which was a yard of monofilament. He showed it to the dog. "Look at this, will you. And this." The hook was made of stainless steel and baited with a quarter trout. "Dolly Varden." He dropped the line back into the hole, changed his mind, and pulled it up again. "Don't you dare tell anyone," he said as he removed the bait, bit off a mouthful, and tossed the remainder to the dog. The fisherman's trail weaved among snow-choked hills. When darkness fell. the old man let the dog lead the way. The smell of woodsmoke told him they were near. The hut was built of poles and caribou skins and heaped with earth. A wannigan of arched snow blocks served as entrance. The old man stashed the sled behind a pair of birch trees not far from this entrance and unharnessed the dog. He fastened his parka and hood and sat on the sled. The dog curled up at his feet. After an hour or so, the moon came out and revealed the yard in pale light. There were drying racks and two small outbuildings. There was a food cache slung between two giant white spruce. There was a woodpile and chopping block. Two pairs of skis leaned against the wannigan. Every now and then a voice or laugh could be heard from inside the hut. "That means he's not alone," said the old man. He led the dog on a tour around the hut. There were no tracks behind it and, as best as he could tell, no back door. There was no dog yard or sign of dog. One of the outbuildings had a door with leather hinges. Inside were old tools: a shovel, a scythe, axes, a bow saw, and more. There were coils of rope, piles of caribou hide, and a crate of metal scraps. "Clearly, he's a man of wealth and industry," said the old man. "But who invited him? I didn't. Did you?" He eased the door shut. "He's got to go, I think. At least that's my take on the situation. What does the dog sav to that? The dog says it's that whole resource management thing all over again." Someone came out of the hut, a woman leading a child by the hand. The old man and dog stood still and watched as she helped the child pee in the snow next to the wannigan. The woman laughed. She sent the child back into the hut, then squatted in the same spot, peed quickly and hurried back inside. "Did you see that?" said the old man. "A family. Did you see it? What a tragedy. What a shame." He went back to the sled and pulled a carbine from under the cover. "We don't have many rounds left. I was saving them for something big we could eat." He pulled off his hood and overmitts. He cracked his knuckles. "Then again, maybe we should sleep on it. What does the dog say?"

The dog's ears went erect, and she snuffled the air. "What is it?" said the old man. Then he smelled it too, a new odor mixed with the

"Jesus," he cried, "cod skin on a hot griddle, getting all crisp and wonderful." He sat down on the sled. "Yes, and long, fat slabs of cod liver just dripping with oil. Dripping big greasy drops of oil." He stood

up. "I've made up my mind." He returned the carbine to the sled and reached for the game sack.

The old man stood in front of the wannigan. "Hello, the house," he shouted. When there was no reply, he shouted again, "Hello, the house." Then he heard a click next to him. The fisherman was aiming a pistol at his head from ten paces. The dog growled. "Now she growls," said the

old

man. To the fisherman he said, "Where'd you pop up from?"
The fisherman said, "Put your hands where I can see them."
"Glad to oblige." The old man spread his arms out. In each hand he held

snowshoe hare. "I make damn good company," he said. "What do you say to that?"

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