Coyote Speaks to Me

So you want to know this place? Be up at dawn, when first light brushes the sky beyond the grove of madrones you call the seven sisters.

Don’t whine. Learn by exposing yourself to the dark and cold. I sleep in the blackberry tangle edging the hayfield, my thorn fortress warmed by southern light.

Every fall, glossy fruit hangs outside my door. Breakfast. There’s the pioneer orchard, trees gnarled, apples like knobs, but I tell you – nothing like a feast of field mice and fallen apples.

It’s a quick lope along the fence to the ravine. Good mousing by the cedar posts bunched with grass and ragged leaves. Listen. The water, eighty feet below, roars with yesterday’s rain.

Stick with me! I’ll show you persistence and the art of pounce. Watch me shrug off disappointment.

In solitude you learn your story. Only then can you riff on the moon.
I Take My Chances with a Seasonal Man

There was a time, your green shirt ripe
with herring roe was pungent comfort.

You, gone again for the salmon run.

Me, city bred, newly wed
plunged into cold water living:
prime the pump, lime the privy, sliver kindling.

I polish the cook stove’s blue porcelain door,
such a fine Wedgewood,
tidy the drawers of the kitchen hutch,
first date receipts, errant buttons, string too short to save,
a clutch of mismatched dice.
Shake for luck and roll.

Stuck, I scour the sour whiff of mushrooms,
grey decay crouched in corners.
I must not cower.

Alone. Trim the wicks, light the lamps.
Feed the fire. Listen to coyote chatter.
Riffing on the Moon

A full moon rides the scruffy sky.  
Restless as incoming tide, I wander,  
room to room, in raw pursuit of sleep.

Led by mosaic light, I step into the yard  
to breathe frost and stars  
and expanded space.

A coyote yips an opening chord.  
The pack jubilates – howling tremolos,  
braided barks, a high descant.

Across the valley another band accepts the challenge,  
riffs with alto warbles, solo yelps,  
a running keen.

Echoing pitches volley, a call and response  
of boundaries and bonds.  
As the canticle fades, final alpha barks

dissolve all illusion of aloneness.
Coyote Chatter

Let it roll! Odds on such a pair!
Howl, growl, bicker. Yip, yip, yap!
Late night harmonies.

Listen for the snap of shells, the click of chamber load,
distrust the musk of snares, the scent of sentimental.
They call me trickster, hipster, predator, editor.

Here’s the truth –
Each day is a Rorschach blot.

The tape deck croons, *Just the Two of Us.*
Take a chance, but remember:
cord the wood, wrap the pipes.
What We Dreamed

An old logger told us about this place
a south sunny knoll, fine break for a boy
lugging sugar sacks to the moonshine still
cached in the ravine.

Luck and meager savings bought us that land,
acres etched with generations of stories
to which we might add our own,
a reprised “go west” dream.

Christmas Eve, drenched in the Milky Way,
we warmed ourselves with possibilities.
We assumed blessing in the winks of stars.
Dessert

After supper,  
we abandon the dishes to walk through the orchard.  
Choosing a summer apple, you offer first bite.  
Dimpled redness breaks to bright flesh,  
cider drips through my fingers.

I hand it back. Your teeth fit the ledge  
created by mine. Three quick bites  
and you flip the core to the cows.

We move on to plums,  
golden green oozing nectar, or purple  
hiding tart interiors? We alternate,  
then think of blackberries in the far field.

Threading through nettles and thorns,  
we pick only the plumpest clusters,  
ruddy juices stain our lips and fingers.

Saving some for breakfast, we stop to read coyote scat,  
appraise our future in the clouds.
Aria: We Are Introduced to Our Future

Fifteen degrees, snow slumps drape
   across the windows.
In the loft, under outer shingles,
   a winter wren fluffs feathers
   warming the air.

You lie awake in sharp–strummed pain,
   still so I can sleep.
I lie awake, white–knuckle still,
   afraid to provoke your pain.
Above us, the winter wren rustles.

Tomorrow, it will perch on an elderberry stalk
   and trill with cascading joy,
   crescendos bursting the air,
in this deep winter, a radiance
   against bleak days.

Tomorrow, your morphine–laced body,
   splayed on steel–edged tables,
   pictured and probed,
will reveal in grainy images the seismic shift
   in our dreams.

Come night, the wren rests above us,
   composing comfort out of air.
Hospital Admission

I.

You’re stuck
awaiting injections, projections, analysis, dialysis.
Sirens wail in the street like a southeaster screaming
across the corner of our cabin.
Uremic smells outdo the chickens’ coop.

Self–diagnosing my anxiety, I walk out
into the urban forest where magnificence
is measured in the height of steel and glass
instead of layered cambium.

II.

I hear the creek’s swollen roar
in the channeled freeway, a cascade
of freight trucks, high–octane cars.

Confined by curbs and stoplights,
pedestrians crowd like chickens
pressed against the fly pen
clamoring for kitchen scraps.
III.

Shops promise forever in faceted stones, 
such bright window dreams. 
I have an emerald ring, authoritative swirls 
and matriarchal heft. Could it make me urbane?

It fits my finger, but not my frame. 
I need a wizard’s ring, a sapphire laser to bewitch reality. 
I need the feel of one warm, fresh laid egg 
in the palm of my hand.

IV.

My body craves the lush displays, 
cashmere cocoons to defy the coming chill. 
But my hands betray me,

unpolished hands that love dirt and buck hay. 
Rough hands aching for the curve 
of your calloused palm.
Re–entry

Jays and squirrels siege the walnut tree,
mice mementos litter the kitchen,
raccoons raid the neglected orchard.

In our absence,
the urgency of autumn arrived.

City frayed, we covet sleep,
but a flicker hammers the eaves
insisting otherwise.

All this animal bunkering,
they know the winds have changed.

Unable to even sort the mail,
I watch the jays, undaunted
by the walnuts’ brittle husk
and fisted shell.