

Coyote Anthem

by Susan Starr Richards

As if something I always knew was there
 at last said so. Waking me
 to the first full moon of fall,
 one voice, and more than one—
 they're not supposed to hunt in packs,
 but this is a trio, if not more.
 In the paddock? The front field?
 The woods behind the house?
 It's hard to say where they aren't.
 Like the travelling music of geese or hounds,
 their clamor splits the night wide open,
 bouncing off earth and sky. Gravely,
 my little dog replies, till his bark
 cracks, leaning toward a howl.
 Out of this exchange, silence. I slack
 back to sleep, not giving them a name.

But they're still here, their sloped shapes
 hinting around the corners of my dreams,
 their silence sending up all other sounds,
 their voice uncaged in my mind.
 Oh holler high, coyotes, sing one for me,
 that natural anthem of us carnivores.
 We know it in our bones,
 our hackles rising, even as we sleep
 our human lives. Heaven's a hunt.
 The world's a hunk of meat.
 Hamstring it, before it gets away.
 Old night's out there, big with moon,
 pregnant as the moment before the tremor.
 We could run through the fields and howl,
 ourselves, but the neighbors might
 be listening. You do it for us.

The hounds make music, but you
 make something older. Rude,
 slippery, triple-tongued,
 you shatter the dim stars,
 give harmony a bad name.
 But even solitary beasts must sing
 together on some nights, feeling
 that loss of silence into noise
 and knowing, asking, wanting,
 having to say, having to let loose
 echoes singing back, tracking each
 other. In your lost voice, we pray.