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Coyote

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BRIAN SWANN

Coyote

neat in brown & gray, boater at an angle
on his head, airing his quiff, coming to consume
my deckchairs & gardening equipment, pick my moonflowers
& my wife, rolling down my path like water
until, seeing me, the turn & conflagration of his tail
dries him up at once. That spring, I'd found traces
of transcendence along that path, poked it with a stick
to see what went into it. But now—the *Ding an sich!*
Or was it? Like Red Riding Hood with my blueberry basket
on my arm, I continued on my way, unsure of what
I'd seen. Perhaps I'd read too much. I moved
cautiously out into my field that was now mine
no more, flowing down south-east like the alluvial silt
it once was, until a quick stir in the grass almost
made me jump into my basket, go with the flow.
I closed my eyes. When I opened them—nothing. Just
wooded mountains, empty path, blueberries like little bells
ringing right & left, pines counting the days &
whispering, & over all wind sounding the All Clear,
just like when I was a kid & the sirens signalled the
temporary end to doodlebug and shrapnel. So, all clear
on a dog-day afternoon, keys falling back to minor,
I settled down to a domestic picking. But as I moved
from patch to patch I felt little flames flicker &
a smell like glass flowed in from clumps of willowherb
& hardhack. I stood, waiting to hear, perhaps,
a hallelujah yodel from the other side of the wall &
scatter the cows, set off the dogs, make the farmer
look up in my direction & go get his shotgun. But
nothing. So I climbed the wall. Was I the only one
could smell the smoke, feel the rush of wind, see
a shadow like a gunshot? And then I heard

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a deeper breath. Was that me breathing, an air so cool
& local I wouldn't need to speak for some time?
A tree flared, & the blue sky showed a white half-moon
with a half crazy gray face in it as if the rest
of the body was too light to stay. Then, way off in a
dark stand of spruce & hemlock a yelp, a clatter,
a hawk, a gargle. Suddenly, a whole band was up there,
tuning up, then slowly sliding into a kind of
celestial circular breathing, all held together by
a swooping tenor sax. They ran through a few numbers,
stumbled, struggled, collapsed, ending in a silence
like the sound after the toilet has finished flushing,
the tank full, fresh water settled. And all the birds
started up again like I'd never heard before.