

A mercy killing

11-P-09

My return path wound more to the west
that autumn sunset a fitting last act
to an afternoon spent in the serenity of trees,
no squirrels slain, but bearing silent witness
to nature's softer side; the deer, slipping by like
Sandburg's fog, doe and fawns, pausing only as long
to find my scent; the turkeys, toms and hens, strutting
the timber, plumage like heavy Elizabethan-era robes,
chirping a chorus of turkey talk; and
the raccoon shinnies up a sapling, masked
like an urban thief, a two-story man
scaling a downspout

When I came upon a coydog entrapped atop
a woven-wire fence. I assessed that its climb
had led to misstep, locking a hind-leg
in the weave of the wire. Guessing that it
had hung there, a world turned 'round, upside down
for many painful hours (if not days), its
courageous efforts to free itself, resulting
conversely in disjuncting its hip, deepening
the wire's grip, increasing the pain, and stealing
its strength. Had I reached it earlier
it would have received me as a natural enemy,
would have curled its lip, flashed those canine teeth

which kept it fed and free, and its golden eyes
threatening, “we cannot bridge our natural inclination:
mine to fear; yours, not to care”. But now,
those eyes pleaded a haunting request. As if
Christ’s eyes, after those hours of pain and mental anguish
He, too, pinned to ruin by the metal works of man.
That gentle gaze could not disguise the despair
His hanging there on a man-made snare. So, too,
this beast, its spirit tortured and broken,
left only with an air of being forsaken.
There seemed a desperate yearning for liberation.
That pitiful stare said, “be thee
a good Samaritan or Dr. Kervorkian, I’m
mortally wounded and you must set me free”.
So it was with its urging, but with my regret
that I lifted the rifle and honored that request.

The next morning I returned and lifted him---
having shared our act of communion he was no longer
an “it”---from the wire and buried him beneath
the pasture sod. And now, each Fall, as I pass
that pasture hem, I pause, remembering an afternoon
of sacred circumstance, an accidental crucifixion
which happened atop that fence, and for me
a struggle, and a decision of significance.

*coydog: the offspring of a coyote and a dog