

TRACKING

I followed a coyote in heavy snow
through pinewoods, sniffing
around rodent holes,
crossing the soft bowls of deer beds

until I reached
a spot of blood, a bone
freshly torn. A doe lay on its side,
fur stripped from a shipwreck of ribs.

Her perfect ear
pricked the air
and one leg bent as if to leap
over coyotes striking from all sides.

I picture coyotes
dismantling the hide, carrying off legs;
the tracks reach in
and radiate out from the red center

like spokes— coyote, fox,
crow, my own dark steps.
Wind shears the cleft hoof I take
in my hand the way you hold

the broken pieces of a cup.
I fix on the delicate flare
of her black nostrils
to keep from staring

at the entrails, her eye
socket dusted with snow.
What might I become
if I look long into this dark cup?

Sophie Wadsworth 2002

HIDDEN MEADOW

Twilight sifts into the grass.
Breath the only agitation
in the stillness, as before a storm.
Not one animal lurks the field edge.

In the hour between the visible
and the nocturnal
the mute birch
bows around possibility.

Any sign will do:
a blue chip of eggshell
might suddenly blaze
with the day's accumulated light,

or a buck leap through a gap
in the underbrush.
One could be drawn in
by a breath soft as an old leaf.

Eyes open or closed, no matter.
A pelt of darkness bristles in the pines.
Wings madly gesturing,
hurtling through the air.

Sophie Wadsworth 2003

LOST

If you've taken stock—
food, knife, matches,
fuel— if you've backtracked
and map checked and every tree
looks alike, the mind may start
its manic talk of broken ankles
and electrical storms.

Try to still that voice.
Listen for the ripple of birdsong,
synchronizing your breath
with the canopy's rise and fall.

Make your way deeper in;
let the compass swing
with abandon from your pack.
Refuse the desire for a houselight
or the drone of a search plane
until you've walked
too far to double back.

When being lost grows familiar
you'll see the fallen pine
not as a sign that you're going
in circles, but simply as itself—
with its deeply fissured bark
and stubborn knots of sap.

At dusk you can gather the wrecked limbs
into a hut, using your map to light a fire.
Sit then, sharpening the story
of how you came to this clearing
you weren't seeking, and settled in.

Sophie Wadsworth 2003