

Earthquake Light

March 11, 2011

Earlier tonight an owl nailed the insomniac white hen.
She'd fluttered up onto a fence post to peer at the moonlight,
to meditate in her usual way on the sadness of the world

and perhaps the hundreds of vanished eggs of her long life here.
I was watching from the porch and thinking she ought not to be
where she was, and then she wasn't, but taken up, a white hankie

diminishing in the east, one the owl would not ever drop.
Now an hour after, the new night wind spins up a leghorn ghost
of her fallen feathers under the moon and along the meadow grass:

corpse candle, friar's lantern, will-o'-the-wisp chicken soul
dragging its way toward me, that I might acknowledge her loss
and her generosity, and wonder again about her longstanding

inability to sleep on certain nights. There are sky lights
beyond our understanding and dogs whose work it is to scent
the cancer no instrument can see. On the nights she could not sleep,

the hen Cassandra Blue perched herself with clear view to the east
and studied the sky, every two seconds canting her head a few degrees
one way or the other. What she saw or if she saw it I cannot say,

though it seemed that something always somewhere was about to go
badly wrong. Then again, it always is. Now there's a swirl
of wind in the meadow, spinning three or four final white feathers

west to east across it, and there's a coyote come foolishly out
into the open, hypnotized by feather flicker, or scent, then seeing
by moonlight the too-blue shimmer of my eyes, and running for its life.

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