**Loving Monsters**

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Over the course of this summer, late at night past midnight or in the early hours of three am, the crickets chirr to a halt and the night chorus of the coywolves begins. It starts with murmurs and ascends into hysterical yips and yaps, and finally rounds into full-throated howls that make your heart thud. There is nothing like laying in bed under civilized bamboo sheets and feeling the responsive tingle that begins in your toes and exits through the top of your head—your body and mind on a high-tension wire plucked by the wild sounds.

Nocturnal laments. Lunar lullabies.

We have recently moved to this farm on the side of a mountain in Nova Scotia. We had only been living at our farm for a few weeks when the nightly songs began. When first I heard them, I thought—coyotes. But the sound was not solitary nor soprano like that of the prairie coyote of my experience. As the sound became that of multiple beings and the tone deepened to mournful long howls I thought - wolves. Then a neighbouring farmer told me of the coywolf—a large hybrid coyote/wolf sometime mixed with dog, that has become common to the area around our wild farm.

They come down from the mountain behind us and up from the valley to run the moon paths across the fields or along the trails where the railway tracks have been pulled up. The sound of them echoes off the basalt walls of the slope. I sometimes find scat in the yard close to the house. And on our walks after a rainy night I find their enormous paw prints in the disused road.

When they sing their night-time canticles, the local dogs whine and call out over the wind themselves. They sense the wild. It calls to them and, if they are chained, they pull at their tethers and chew at their feet, feeling that same wire that I feel, vibrating in their bones and blood. Dogs can be full of heartache and poetry too and dream of running, full-throated.

I know, in my human scientific mind, that coyotes and wolves and our resident coywolves do not actually howl at the moon. They will ululate and keen whether there is a moon out or not. But I know of a wolf that missed the moon. He lived his entire life in a zoo. His enclosure was concrete, the bars were heavy and rusted, and at night he was shut away in a roofed ghetto where not a single glint of starlight fell through the cement ceiling, let alone moonbeams. Every weekend of my childhood living in that city I went to the zoo and sat by the wolf's cage. He was already very old. The keeper loved to tell all who would listen about the oddity of this wolf - he never howled. Not ever.

That wolf lived to be 27 years old. Never howled. Never followed nor sang along a lane of light. The keeper boasted of how it was the fact that the wolf was captive that he lived so long—that if he had been left wild, he would have died after a short life. I think, maybe, lives of misery and restlessness and sadness are very long lives. Lives of bliss are short.

I remember another experience of wolves. We were camping with our two small boys, waiting for a meteor shower; so, we were up very late, high in the mountains, with only the night sky for illumination. Around our camp the darkness was deep, and beside our camp the river ran heavy and turbulent; our ears so acclimated to the sound of it running to the ocean that it was mere ambience.

Laying on our backs, we waited for the meteor shower. We guessed at which were planets, which were stars, and which were satellites spinning endlessly until they died.

Sputnik. Asteroid. Moon.

The meteorites began streaking across the night-fallen sky. One, then two, then twenty. Then, un-countable. They spoke, those meteorites. The fizzle of a flame. The swish of ladies' skirts. The sibilance of snakes. The whisper of vast rocks dying in the sky.

And out of the woods came the shadows of wolves. The pant-gutter sound of pursuit. The innuendo of foot-falls. The murmuring secret of them. They stood, just for a moment, and looked our way. The gold-flecked feral yellow of wolves' eyes in the moon-soaked night. And, just for a moment—with tumbling river, and sizzling skies, and silent taciturn forest about us . . . . we were wild too.

My sons barely breathed. I felt the fluttering tremble of my youngest son’s heart as he leaned back against me. It went from his chest, through his back, to my chest. Like that high-tension wire, plucked and thrumming—tingling, a shiver.

I think of that sometimes when I lay in bed at night, listening, and I think of that moon-starved wolf too. And I think of wide-eyed young lads under star-spilled skies feeling that same pull at something deep behind their bellies—just like the neighbour’s fettered dog.

It doesn't matter if they are coyotes, or wolves, or coywolves—or for that matter small boys in the dark trying to tell fireflies from falling stars. What matters is that they all know how to find the wakes left by moonlight . . . and how to sing the untamed and weeping notes of the truly wild.