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Coyote Song I

Imprints of claws on a cool riverbank
—proof of my thirst for the world—
and I come back & back back & back again because
people of the red clay need to hear songs
about eternity, consume it like feast born into the honor
beat
of their new Ghost Dance.

Yes, I have a nose for trouble, flinching.
Yes, I was born beneath the desert, screaming.
Yes, there is a heaven for mothers and daughters built by
strong sons and fathers.

In that place we call strength.

Woolnáx Wooshkák*

for Káalaa Miriah Twitchell

Those little birds go full speed into their home.
Raven named them “landed through a hole,”
and I watch, amazed at their precision.

You and I are just the right touch of chaos,
emerging from battery and booze and drugs,
creating home for these babies who are you, me, us.

An Unangan man once talked about watching
seabirds: a mass of thousands moving,
impossible fast yet never colliding.

The image keeps surfacing in my mind:
I first saw you hauling luggage off the belt,
I watched longer than I should have, but that was you.

He said those seabirds are a combined organism,
constant motion that relies on instinct,
watching them is meditation: bird cloud.

Life scratches around us, leaving new scars.
I nuzzle hills and valleys, twists and turns
that push me to oblivion.

* The Tlingit name for a wren, which translates to “landed through a hole.”

Among the hemlock, citrus breaks the mouth,
a bird that flies without sound moves between trees,
when they choose another it is for life.

These birds and their nests. I wonder about which worlds
they maintain, how I told you this time is forever,
and we rise and fall like love tides.