TENNESSEE HILL

Night Coyote

I’ve come to protect the chickens,
to lock the shed, brush the cow

and sing to her before bed. Our father said,

_The thing to do with trouble is look_
 _it in the eyes, but the stars clatter_

like tin. The cow—I wish she’d bellow.

Our father said, _Never find yourself_
 _alone with danger_, meaning men.

Blackball eyes that don’t flinch or blink.

Now trained on me, somewhere between
 what they want and becoming what they want.

I wish the chickens had never been born.

Like our father, wish I had been a boy.
 Bright loudness turns into a howl,

a lesson in how to announce the night.

The coyote keeps its teeth. Lowers
 its head into flickering shed light.

Growl is a hum is a released bow string

against my ribs. As he backs away,
 I promise I will not tell my brother

what he will become, or that we were raised

 to fear it. His laughter cracks
 with adamant future, a warning.