

Tracks

by David Ackley

When, like they say, "dogs ran free,"
Mickey, his long black hair brushing
the blueberries, would wander the back field
where the townies used to play ball,
the basepaths scrubbed over, boys gone to men,
old times indifferently scrubbed;
his ramblings always the same,
whether it was some scent he followed,
an invisible trail in his mind,
or habit instantly ingrained, I don't know.

He had his ways, the most intelligent,
least obedient dog I've ever had, who came when
he pleased and went where he chose.
Or maybe it was my own failing;
either way it goes, I've never loved control.

Defeated, in the end I joined him, following where
he felt like going, which was always the same route,
through the scrub and another neighbor's woodlot,
through the maple, fir and black spruce to the
low ground, swampy in spring, with the little slough
where peepers railed a constant miniature
uproar at their painful abbreviate fate. Up and around
we'd stroll past the ghosts of neighbors long gone
supplanted by others we'd never met,
to the other end, where we could glimpse
the trailer park through the pines, and the town
cemetery, more certainly inhabited, just beyond,
returning home still on the paths he'd cut
that I'd merely deepened with my heavier tread.

After he was gone, others found our track
through the field and woods, hikers,
and bikers and skiers; the occasional fox,
or deer or hungry bear, scratching the dead trees for grubs,
each no doubt thinking it theirs alone.

Now. in our town, the leashed dogs
are hauled along the hard sidewalks;
I keep the trail as best as I can,
still following his memory, and
this legacy trod into the ground,
this map of old occasion,
this track of love.

