

L. E. Leone: "The Argument for a Shotgun"

You wake up in the middle of the night afraid of what? For me it's dead chickens, no more eggs and a bloodless bloody mess to clean. Weasels'll wipe out a whole houseload of chickens in one night, only knocking off the heads and sucking out the brains. For example.

For example I dream a fox with wirecutters and a crowbar.

"Where are you going?" asks my wife.

"Bathroom," I say.

"Why are you putting on your hat? Why are you putting on your shoes?"

"Go back to sleep," I say.

In the bathroom I open the window and stick my head all the way out into northern California, middle of the night. I think I hear a scratching sound coming from the vicinity of the chicken house. Bobcat, I think, trying to dig its way under the fence.

I need a shotgun. I really should have a shotgun, I think, running outside to meet the enemy with a curling iron and a toilet-bowl brush.

The enemy, this time, is fog, condensing into water droplets on oak tree leaves and dripping onto other oak tree leaves, dripping down all the way eventually into the dead, crispy stuff I never rake around the chicken run. I stand there under the tree in the dark until my eyes adjust to no bobcats, no foxes, no hungry eyes or glistening teeth; just fog, just watery particles of atmosphere, the is of what isn't, suspended like berries all around me—visible only because up there somewhere there's a moon.

I stand where I am until my heartrate returns to normal. Then I brandish the toilet-bowl brush, stab at the fog with the curling iron, and head back inside.

"What was it?" my wife asks.

"Nothing," I say.

(292 WORDS)