

## ENCOUNTER WITH CANIS LUPUS

Fir-lined Montana morning. Backcountry  
brown and viridian laced every angle,  
seasoned each breath. We heard wolves

last night after moonrise. Blue ice peaks  
on my spinal graph. We never saw them  
but their chorus probably meant my family's wish

for a hasenpfeffer dinner would not be granted.  
Monday we'd go back to the city, back to our own  
warrens, our own versions of hopping.

Empty hunting bag or not, the scene was haute cuisine  
for the soul-- moss-napped carpet, overhead canopies  
sifting Monet impressions.

Then suddenly my gaze veered. A presence. Startled  
into perfect stillness, neck hairs alert,  
recognition pulsed, predator to predator.

The stance, the stare confirmed him. Pack leader.  
Confident enough to dare daylight on his own.  
Freshening a claim when he saw me.

Fear and hand-me-down hate lodged in my throat  
standing before that ancient symbol of savagery.  
Personification of danger, depravity, destitution.

He felt no need to summon the others. My rabbit gun  
stayed shouldered. My walkie-talkie stayed on my belt.  
Set in pale amber, the dark doors of his pupils

admitted everything: Sovereignty his jaws decided,  
warm secrets of the dominant female,  
the taste of deer marrow, hot blood, rabbit fur,

lunar-lit rituals of hierarchy,  
brief challenges ending with his fangs poised  
on a jugular, submission of long muzzles dubbing

his shoulders in surrender and tribute.  
Choirmaster, arbiter, his the sole right to breed.  
It was all there in his laser eyes: Long lineage

of wolf wisdom, alpha honesty, master of his role.  
His eyes did not blink. In a swift curve of light  
I entered for a moment the pure heat of their certainty.

And forgave all their knowing.

--Glenna Holloway