

ENCOUNTER WITH CANIS LUPUS

Fir-lined Montanna morning. Backcountry
beige and viridian lacing every angle,
seasoning each breath. We heard wolves

last night after moonrise. Blue ice peaks
on my spinal graph. We've never seen them
but their chorus may mean my daughter's wish

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

Empty hunting bag or not, this is haute cuisine
for the soul— mossy carpet, overhead canopies
sifting Monet impressions.

My gaze veers. A presence. Startled
into perfect stillness, neck hairs alert,
recognition pulsates, predator to predator.

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

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

His pale ocher irises admit everything:
Sovereignty his jaws decided,
warm secrets of the dominant female,

the taste of hot blood, deer marrow, rabbit.
Lunar-lit rituals of hierarchy,
brief challenges ending with 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's all in his laser eyes: Long lineage
of wolf wisdom. Master of his role. Lessons
in alpha honesty. My trigger finger eases.

His eyes do not blink. In a swift curve of light
I enter for a moment the pure heat of their certainty.
And forgive all their knowing.