FLASH FICTION

# Lupine

by Eneida P. Alcalde



"Frosted" by Cynthia Yatchman

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The silver-white adult she-wolf ran through and in between the thick forest of pine trees covered in fresh-laid snow from the previous night's blizzard. She ducked under drooping branches and hurdled over fallen logs as she pursued the pungent scent that had infiltrated the blanketed woods that quiet morning.

After miles of pursuit, the wolf narrowed her deep-set golden eyes to scour a vast clearing. In the middle of the open space was a pond, iced smooth by the winter storm, framed by rows of white-capped evergreens and a swathe of orange-pink sky. She stalled. Strained her furred ears against the silence of the surrounding woodland. A bitter gust hit her smooth face carrying with it the scent. There, beyond the iced pond, in the shadows where the forest resumed, her wet-black nose detected the source of the smell. She lifted her large front paws with a start and raced to the other side, following the contour of the forest wall that bordered the pond, using the trees as camouflage.

Closing in on the stench, she paused at the sight of a downed birch tree in the near distance, its collapsed trunk splintered close to the base. The wolf clenched her powerful jaw as she observed the trunk, covered in a thin layer of snow. A moan perked her ears straight. The wolf breathed in and out as silently as possible, her deep breath's vapor in the crisp air. She crouched low to the ground and approached the tree.

Swirls of dark blood saturated the snow-covered ground. The wolf's nostrils flared at the iron stench as she followed the mysterious meandering red trail. A young white-tail deer lay bleeding by the collapsed tree. The deer's tanned chest heaved with strained breaths as its blood seeped into the surrounding mounds of snow. The animal blinked its black eyes as if sensing the wolf's looming presence.

A twig snapped, splitting the silence. An invasive smell wafted — sour and not of the woods. The wolf released a low menacing growl at the foreign presence, the silver-white fur rising on her back. Above the fallen tree trunk, a black-steel barrel peeked out, glinting under the winter sun. The wolf bared her sharp-cutting fangs.

A rifle's boom swallowed the woods. Lead pierced through flesh, tendons, and bone.

The wolf yelped and slumped. Warm blood gushed from her gut, pooling around her, staining the snow. With her muscular forearms and hind legs, she scrambled against the pain, pushing off the ground. But her legs buckled, weakened by the mortal wound. The world pulsated, her vision blurred.

Heavy footsteps crunched on the frost. A shadowy man appeared, aiming his rifle.

Faraway, the she-wolf's cubs waited for their mother to return, laying sheltered in their den. Another shot punctured the air — echoed across the miles.



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The cubs lifted their heads in unison and howled.



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