

of the family line shattered like the gritty glass
from the barn's busted window. What good did it do to name
what never once answered or showed a face

until the guts were given, laid out on the white bed
dainty, delicate as scales you can still see?

If you can answer that, do you know why they loved best
the blue, stunned eye grieving for the shimmer
of sea-depths, thumb-plucked like bait?

And why do you ache, returned to this half-way house,
for what crouched, invisible, to eat blue eyes
as if that translated a way
to stay alive? Or

if not that, at least, to see how a dark thing hungers.

Captain C. F. Hoyt (1826-1889) / Donald Hall

"In mid-August, in the second year
of my First Polar Expedition, the snows and ice of winter
almost upon us, Kantiuk and I
attempted to dash by sledge
along Crispin Bay, searching again for relics
of the Franklin Expedition. Now a storm blew,
and we turned back, and we struggled slowly
in snow, lest we depart land and venture onto ice
from which a sudden fog and thaw
might deliver us to the providence
of the sea.

"Near nightfall

I thought I heard snarling behind us.
Kantiuk told me
that two wolves, lean as the bones
of a wrecked ship,
had followed us the last hour, and snapped their teeth

as if already feasting.
I carried but the one charge
in my rifle, since, approaching the second winter,
we rationed stores.

“As it turned dark,
we could push no further, and made
camp in a corner
of ice-hummocks,
and the wolves stopped also, growling
just past the limits of vision,
coming closer, until I could hear
the click of their feet on ice. Kantiuk laughed
and remarked that the wolves appeared to be most hungry.
I raised my rifle, prepared to shoot the first
that ventured close, hoping
to frighten the other.

“Kantiuk struck my rifle
down, and said again
that the wolves were hungry, and laughed.
I feared that my old companion
was mad, here in the storm, among ice-hummocks,
stalked by wolves. Now Kantiuk searched
in his pack, and extricated
two knives—*turnoks*, the Innuits called them—
which by great labor were sharpened, on both sides,
to a sharpness like the edge of a barber’s razor,
and approached our dogs
and plunged both knives
into the body of our youngest dog
who had limped all day.

“I remember
that I considered turning my rifle on Kantiuk
as he approached, then passed me,
carrying knives red with the gore of our dog—
who had yowled, moaned, and now lay
expiring, surrounded
by curious cousins and uncles,
possibly hungry—and thrust the knives
handle-down in the snow.

“Immediately
he left the knives, the vague, gray
shapes of the wolves
turned solid, out of the darkness and the snow,
and set ravenously
to licking blood from the honed steel.
The double edge of the knives
so lacerated the tongues of the starved beasts
that their own blood poured
copiously forth
to replenish the dog’s blood, and they ate
more furiously than before, while Kantiuk laughed,
and held his sides
laughing.

“And I laughed also,
perhaps in relief that Providence had delivered us
yet again, or perhaps—under conditions of extremity,
far from Connecticut—finding these creatures
acutely ridiculous, so avid
to swallow their own blood. First one, and then the other
collapsed, dying,
bloodless in the snow black with their own blood,
and Kantiuk retrieved
his *turnoks*, and hacked lean meat
from the thigh of the larger wolf,
which we ate
gratefully, blessing the Creator, for we were hungry.”

The Desert of Melancholy / Lewis Turco

They have myriads in their mouths.

—Robert Burton

It is not far from here to
nowhere. Merely across the furniture.
We are experiencing
technical difficulties; please