

## Lupo Mannaro

BY **Estlin McPhee**

Nonna, hurtling into her twentieth year,  
tucks herself into a train that scampers four-legged

over Italy, leaves a year behind  
in a refugee camp—changeling child,

could be anyone. Turns out to be  
just who she is. Sharp-witted, sweet

as swallowing a comet. She spins  
in the mirror until it's time to clamber aboard

the ocean, its long cold trail spitting her  
into another train, which zooms in slow motion

all the way across Canada to a city  
where she knows no one. A wolf

is a wolf wherever it's from  
unless you call it by a different name

and then it is exactly what it is.  
When she unlatches her suitcase

in her new language, the trinkets  
from home spring out like a pop-up book,

ghosting away into the forest  
around her. Someone else's life

is a story if that's what you say it is.  
She zips herself into a new tongue,

drops crumbs of her old Fiuman  
to follow back to herself later, droops

to sleep while night elbows  
itself into the frame. The narrator

smashes together cautionary folktales  
as needed. Nonna, remember—

if you sleep outside, cover your face  
to keep away the moon, strange predator.

Refuse excommunication. Don't turn  
into something else.

But she can't hear through the thick glass  
of time between us. All those old wives' tales

told too late, Nonna transforms  
into an old woman, or at least that's how she appears

to me now. When I squint  
to see the girl as she must have been,

ghostless and peering forward  
into the future as she swims by herself

off the cliffs in the warm Adriatic,  
I see her in black and white.

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### JUDGE'S COMMENTS

We don't think of poetry as good method for the construction of a character. "Lupo Mannaro" demonstrates that a poem can be the perfect place for such an endeavour, so long as the author is empathetic, observant, and aware of their proximity to subject. "Someone else's life / is a story if that's what you say it is." Here, a life story is said clearly. —*B.L.*