In elementary school, I became fascinated with coyotes. My best friend lived near the woods. She always used to say...

Mom says we can’t go out at night, the coyotes are out and they’re hungry, too...

I can hear them howling.
I was a little afraid of them. So I watched some documentaries to find out more about them.

The documentaries told me coyotes were intelligent, adaptable, bold, and opportunistic. All things I wanted to be.

The first time I actually saw a coyote, I was mountain biking at Potato Creek State Park with my family. I was alone, far ahead of them.

Red fur flashed before my eyes.

It saw me and darted away. It was just as majestic as I had always imagined.

You might wonder why I wasn't more fond of the wolf, an animal far larger and more domineering.

Every year in Yellowstone, as much as 1/3 of the coyote population is killed by wolves. But coyotes breed like rabbits and their numbers keep growing.

The answer is simple: the power of predators at the top of the food chain is unambiguous and, to me, uninteresting.
Stories of survival from the ranks of the scavengers, the hunted, the crows and coyotes of the world, are far more admirable.

Coyotes thrive despite systematic attempts at eradication. No other animal has ever survived such an attempt to stamp it out.

So why have I spent so much of my life chasing after people who overshadow my landscape like a wolf on the hunt?

I have long been drawn to worshipping people who behave like they're BETTER than me.

...from my preschool best friend with her pretty green dresses...

LUCY, the PERFECT GIRL

FRANKIE! Pick up my toys!

OK...

To my parents, who I still can barely force myself to contradict...

To cruel lovers whose anger sent me scuttling like a cockroach for dark space, CRAMPED but safe.
I let them look at me with the gaze of a predator, unable to imagine another’s consciousness. Empathy has never been a necessary part of the wolf’s survival toolkit.

It’s hard to tell a wolf from a coyote until it bates.

don't know when this wolf-worshipping part of me began to fade–maybe it has been fading by degrees.

maybe it isn't gone yet. maybe it tempts me every day.

that strange feeling of leaving my own life in perfect capable, infallible hands.

maybe that feeling has disappointed me enough times that I won't fall for it again. I hope so.
The other night, I was driving home from Michigan on a back-country road. My drunk friend was asleep in the passenger seat. My drunk boyfriend was asleep in the back.

I was just looking at the moonlight hitting cornstalks when a coyote emerged from between the tall yellow rows.

I slowed down. He glanced back at me.

and trotted across the street.

I didn't know whether the coyote was chastising me or congratulating me or whether it had no message for me at all. But all the fascination of my childhood came back to me. I glanced at the calm, dreamless face pressed against the window of the passenger seat, and then the back seat.

And all the way home I wondered:

have I finally outrun the wolves?

because it's hard to tell a wolf from a coyote

until you're close enough to get hurt.