

Elk Hunting, 12 Below

What isn't like this? We make our daily enterprises more difficult than we must for the sake of giving memory fresh meat for its freezer, or to have something

to chew when the morning is colder than today. We add so much complexity to what comes easily barreling down the smooth shoulder of the black butte, darker

than the star-salted sky, in a fluid school of hooves. Animal stench dodges between dome lights illuminating the hunters at ease in warm trucks pulled just off the road.

It is not only the coldest mornings when we work our way deep down Long Hollow that we nevertheless hear every shot in the fusillade and know what is most

difficult is escaping the thoughts we make, the cold projectiles we lob at what wild life still courses though what we have left of the vast wilderness inside each of us.

Beneath Your Bark

Would I could be a pine beetle
tracing my underneath cursive
on the inside of your fascia
not that slick blue bugger
who girdled your phloem
who separated your roots
from your reaching
but this one who goes nowhere
save wiggling through your liquid thump
in cul-de-sacs and curlicues

I wish I could get under
your skin again begin again
in my black sheen
a radiant radical pellet
pinballing beneath your flakes
your scales around your heart wall
not a wall at all permeable
a tub for sap to be sludge swam
slithered in under there
inside the soft side of your skin
outside the wooden stem
of your still ringing heart

Wolf Hunter¹

We strike up conversation
across the concrete island
between us. Sleet pelts
our faces as we refuel.

I am comfortable talking
in flurries to a man
in camouflage, but worry
about fumes roiling
out of our gas tanks.

I keep thinking about
warnings, pump stickers,
about the mass of fumes
collecting around us,
his idling engine,
my cell phone,
static electricity.

He tells me he shot a male
wolf earlier in the day.
He is specific about
the weight: one hundred
seventy pounds.²

¹ According to the Wikipedia
article “Gray Wolf,” the largest
American wolf, killed on July 12,
1939, 70 Mile River, Alaska,
weighed 175 pounds.

² According to the Wikipedia
article, “Human,” 170 pounds
is about average for a human
male.

On screen, the Vitruvian man
looks uncomfortable, as do
the naked Asian man, the naked
blond woman in the sidebar.

This is the first time I have looked
at pictures of naked people
on Wikipedia.

I listen in October sleet,
have a most common thought:
the world is a strange place
for all of us to go on living
together, full of contradictions:

wolf pups wag tails when
packmates return from tearing
elk calves to pieces, people
advocate replacing lead
bullets with copper to reduce
unintended mortalities.³

I want to ask the hunter:
his reason for shooting the wolf,
the kind of bullet he used,
his justification for the claim
his wolf is almost as large
as any wolf ever killed
by any North America man.⁴

I want to understand:
his method for establishing
heft of a carcass, why he keeps
the bed of his truck covered,
why he does not shut off
the engine at the filling station
as instructed.

But more than that,
I want to be happy

³ Several of the citations at the end
of the article, “Gray Wolf,”
credit “Graves.”

⁴ My comparison of footnotes
in the Wikipedia articles reveals:
146 citations, “Human,”
318 citations, “Gray Wolf.”
I do not understand why wolves
require more than twice
the documentation of people.

to live in a place with wolves
as large as men, to live
in a place where men talk
over warning signs.

More than that, I want to live
in a place where no one
wants to shoot anything
for any reason
easy to document.⁵

⁵ I think most of us know
something about exaggerating
the weight of things.

American Robin

Dun flight flares around the corner.
Mate or prospective mate gives chase,
red-breasted one who later waits
on a branch after the first hits
the back door's glass, collapses
panting, dull-eyed, on the new deck.

I hold the numb bird in my hands,
wrap her loosely in a green cloth,
keep a close eye out for magpies.
Given the opportunity
they would mob the male, chase him off,
whet the edges of their black bills.

My son comes outside only once
to touch with his index finger
between wings we think are broken.

We believe telling a story
could conjure that story straight out
of the air. Her story opens
in my palm. Braille points of talons
tug at whorls. A heartbeat pulses.
She regains her ability

to stand, to perch. Return to flight.
She reappears on a low branch,
unnoticed from inside the house.
No banner unfurls for this act:
saving one life from other lives,
from the windowed door between us.

Our story is hard as glass. We slam
against it with our hollow bones.
We slam against it with our bones.

Eagle Cap Rekindling

We have not seen each other in twenty-five years and even though back then I covered my naked body with your naked body I do not expect you to remember my name. I will speak truly, there is no reason not to be honest after so much time, I did not remember your name until I read it on a signpost as I made my way back to you although I have never forgotten the feel of you wet and then you drying slow on my skin, that glacial silt mud scent of you mixed with the spare change tang of my sweat how you washed me in your coldest springs until the only odors were snow and stone. You haven't changed as much as I have or if so for the better having reintroduced yourself to wolves. Whereas I am just as tonguetied around you as I always was. So I offer you my flesh, softer now, clothed or naked as you wish and the admission that you stunned the howl right out of me all those years ago when my tongue knew the feel of your skin better than it knew this voice is has grown so familiar with so resigned to. I have longed so long to revel in your muck and reek as one wild body savors the blood pulse thrum of every other wild body no matter how rocky or old.