

First Deer

In that thicket of creaking firs,
my sleeves rolled up, the cold
stopping its frosty blade on my spine,
I unlocked the warmth of a deer.
The sweet reek of his cedar-filled paunch
scented the air as my father,
placing his hands on mine,
guided them to the warm. Wet heart.
And as we felt under the hide, touching
the lungs and the stout cord of the windpipe,
he'd tell me what they were,
for he was pleased with this first deer
his boy had killed with one shot
through a screen of greengrowth.
He'd shot so many it tickled him
to see the thrill renewed in me
as I shivered with awe
and a little regret and winced
when I caught a whiff from the gut
or felt the hot blood trickle down my arm.
And as we worked on into dusk
without even checking a watch,
I thought of that quiet moment at mass
when the altar boy and the priest
get together to wash the chalice
and return the host to its house of gold,
unconcerned with who's looking on,
heads bent, eyes lowered, making sure
they clean everything up.
Then father flung the young nub horn
across his shoulders and struck off
while I tripped along behind him
until we reached camp in the dark
where we hung the carcass to drain
and went in to warm our bellies
with coffee, fried liver, and heart.

- Paul Corrigan