

# CutBank

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## Story

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STORY

§

Once the whole family gathered in the yard  
And we shielded our eyes against the sun  
To watch a hawk circle lower and lower,  
Or, we watched the hawk's shadow move  
Slowly over the fields by our house, while  
My father wasted fourteen rounds attempting  
The impossible shot. I watched as he levered  
The last cartridge into the carbine's chamber.

I'm flying too close to the earth.

§

Near dusk we shot a buck. Twice we found  
Places where he'd fallen and rolled, fought  
To get up as the foreign sound of our boots  
Came crisp through cold air—and in those spots  
The blood looked black on the snow and it stunk  
Like the undersides of moss—and we came down  
Into a field of winter briars and lost the tracks  
And began to hunt in widening circles for blood.  
There was a blood-trail on the undersides of clouds  
Away from which the earth visibly rolled  
And I felt then my own stink, in me, welling up.  
Circles moving out from the epicenter  
Of a dead animal hardening in snow—  
Other circles which close violently inward.

§

We couldn't tell the branches  
From the briars—crouching

Above the gully—the dog  
He'd shot bawled in the thicket—

The wind had a body we could hear  
It shaving down the ridgeline

Toward us—nothing arrived—  
Third time out she wouldn't hunt—

Explosion of blood at the haunches—  
Still she ran—home was far—

I was smallest—he gave me  
The .38—the sky ticked—

I pushed in—held the briars  
To balance myself in the mud—

What she was saying in there  
Is untranslatable—do something

Like that, you'll want to get  
Close—let out a half-breath—

Plant your feet—  
Plant your body—

§

Running near dawn, my heart warbles,  
My kneecaps are magnesium crucibles.  
On the ground I'm awkward. I want  
The sun and sea. Keep moving.  
Let night pour its strange liquid  
Around me, let this chest propel me  
Until I collapse under my weight  
Like ice. Two boys will find me and kick  
My skull down railroad tracks toward

A shack where the skeleton of a hawk  
Is nailed to the door, where my father  
Will step out with a lantern and a mailbag,  
Where he will take me in and rest me  
On a splintered table—where no one writes  
*There are other earths and skies than these*  
Next to the dim candle that barely  
Throws its light over the small  
Ocean of wax from which it burns.