

# Intertext

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## The Deer

Cover Page Footnote

Written for WRT 114

# The Deer

Kai Sorensen

I didn't know death would smell of old sweat. Rotten limes, dirty hands, and wet anguish. I smelled the doe before I saw her. I smelled her on me for days: in my hands and in my hair and in my mouth. She had walked behind my blind without either of us noticing each other before coming around. I doubt she saw me at all, even when I finally pulled the trigger. If I had waited just a little longer maybe she would've. Like with the buck last season, the one just outside my range, I could have waited for my scent to drift downwind to her, snapped a twig, and lost my line of sight. "Oh, well," I would have sighed to my dad just like last time. "Next season."

My hand shook lining up the crosshairs. In my head, I heard the butt of the rifle my father had entrusted to me thud back into its cabinet. There the gun would have waited for another year. Waited another season on

its hickory haunch for blood, hungry for my hands, my eyes, and my breath.

I still get a ringing in my right ear sometimes. Without earplugs, a gunshot so close to your head can perforate an eardrum. I don't remember if it bled that morning.

She was a young deer, too young for me to shoot her—a yearling, still a fawn by hunting standards. From over a hundred yards away, farther than I had ever practiced, she was too far to make out the short snout and cotton-stuffed ears. I shot her through the branches perfectly across the heart just above the shoulder, clean through the upper atrium. She probably died instantly, the way they're supposed to, something I wouldn't realize until later. The consolation of my accidental humanity was lost on me. The meant-to-be-prized moment fell on half-deaf ears still ringing.

She fell in a ring of oak trees, where not



Layout by Rachel Jane Donato. Photo by Merve ÇAKIR from Pexels:  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-deer-lying-on-the-ground-17646988>.

many deer had been before. The undisturbed leaves piled up around my ankles, sounding like roaring fire as I walked up to the body. I don't remember if she was dead or dying when I found her—I had known she was doomed from the minute I had stood up from behind the tree—but I like to think she saw in my eyes that I was sorry before her time ran out.

The blood of the doe, heavy in its stench, sank into my gums as I dragged her to a clearing. It would be a long time before my father and his truck arrived to pick us up. I sat on a fallen log beside her body. While we waited, I wanted to sing to her, but I couldn't find a tune suitable for such an occasion. Instead, I spoke. I told her my troubles as if she were an old friend, imagining her ears perking up when I addressed her as "you."

"You didn't die in vain," I whispered,

her black-glass eyes reflecting my words. I thought then of the field dressing, the honor of sustenance from her sacrifice. The sacrifice of the dead and powerless. When I told her about my life, and the lives—the stories—that surrounded my own, and that now surrounded her, I wanted her to understand.

I stopped talking after a while. A coarse breeze whistled past bare branches, tearing at my cheeks as it flew in from the east. Despite the cold, I took off my glove and gently placed my hand on her neck. Her fur had been tangled by my dragging her. I brushed the kinks out of her coat and watched her lie there for a long time; where my fingers found her skin, her neck was still warm.

Skin as white as death.

I petted her until the noise of my father's truck revving up the mountain pulled me back to reality.