

A Certain Distance

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

Early November, the night before deer season starts, and the hardwoods in northern Vermont are nearly bare. Only beeches keep their leaves until buds force them off in spring. When snow falls the leaves crackle like a thousand tiny fires.

I stand still, barely breathing, by the window and watch a doe group make its way to the deer yard part of the woods. There they will browse on the beeches closest to a headwater stream that has never had a name.

The does keep a certain distance apart as they walk on the old logging road, filing like virgins down an aisle to an altar. Like obedient bridesmaids under gun grey skies, each knows its place, its small non-speaking part in the pageantry. They seem careful to be exactly where told.

Even bucks are doe-eyed. Once I watched one walk on wobbly ankles down a gravel driveway like a young girl wearing high heels for the first time.

Tomorrow, in the dark of morning, women--daughters, wives, sisters, mothers--will be at stoves, cooking breakfast for men who come to tables unshaven, in heavy boots, in camouflage clothing designed to make them hard to see. At daybreak the killing and wounding will begin. Men, faraway strangers, diasporic in the forest, hiding in blinds, pretending they are only shooting deer.

