

## The Success of the Hunt · *Pattiann Rogers*

There was a white hart that lived in that forest, and  
if anyone killed it, he would be hanged . . .

*My Antonia*

He was sighted once in a clearing at dusk, the gold  
Grass up to his shoulders and he standing like a pillar  
Of salt staring back; seen again from a high ledge,  
A motionless dot of white curled like a bloom  
In the green below; surprised along a lake shore  
At night, taken for an irregular reflection  
Of the moon on the surf.

Some looked only for his red eyes, believing  
The body could be too easily hidden  
By the translucent green of lighted leaves,  
That it could sink blue below the water  
Or become boundless against the snow, almost invisible,  
That it was not white at night.

Some who followed what was presumed to be his trail  
Found the purple knobflax said to grow only  
From his hoof marks, and some became engulfed  
By celina moths thought to spring from his urine.  
Others testified to the impassable white cliffs  
Alleged to be an accumulated battery of his shadows.

Those who lost their way were forced to rediscover  
The edible buds of the winter spruce, and to use  
The fronds of the selamone for warmth, to repeat again  
To themselves the directional details of moss,  
And part the pampas grasses clear to the earth,  
To smell their way east.

But those who followed furthest with the most detail,  
Who actually saw the water rising in his hoof prints  
And touched the trees still moist where their bark  
Had been stripped, those who recognized at the last moment  
The prongs of his antlers disappearing over the edge  
Of their vision, they were the ones who learned to tell  
By the imbalance of their feet on the earth where it was  
He slept at night and by their own vertigo how it was he rose  
To nip the dogwood twigs above his head. They learned to smell

His odor in their bedclothes and to waken suddenly at night  
To the silence of his haunches rubbing on the ash.  
Even now they can find the spot where he walked  
From the water dripping and trace on their palms  
The path of his winter migration. They can isolate  
From any direction the eight lighted points  
Of his antlers imprinted in the night sky.  
And these, who were methodical with the most success,  
Always meant to do more than murder.