

Processional

“Why do we let school out for the deer hunt?” repeated
The principal when I asked him if he thought it was a good idea.
“So you’re a troublemaker,” he said as he got up
And came round the desk. It’s true, I thought:
I care about my children’s education.
As I turned, I wondered about that albatross
Coleridge’s old mariner killed and had to wear for a collar.
And I remembered the Buddhist story I read in Japanese
About a man who saved a spider and later it saved him
From Hell by spinning a thread down for him to climb out.
What if everybody had to wear what they killed?
I’m not talking about butchers, of course,
Or men like my father, who killed a steer in the fall
And a pig at Christmas in order to feed the family.
I’m talking about killing just to be killing—
For the fun of it. I can see old Ernest Hemingway
Toting a menagerie with a Cape buffalo on top,
And most of the autumn hunters carrying the meat out,
Not the way they planned, but staggering sideways.

One bunch was a special case; these were the guys
Who didn't go after wounded deer, or who left them
If it was uphill or any trouble. Now they were stuck,
Not only carrying their deer, but along with each
A black brother from Africa who starved in Somalia
The same day as the deer hunt. And all the safari
Dudes were there, several with lions on their necks
And a gorilla-like guy smashed flat under his elephant.
Women were there too, a passel of fashion
Models with whole carcasses of leopards on them,
And a bevy of beauties with egrets slung
From their shoulders as they wailed together like a Greek
Chorus: "But I didn't kill them; you can't say I did it."
How long does it last? I wondered. The old sailor
Had to come down a few pegs and admit his relation
To an ugly sea worm before he was purged enough
To see the value of all life. "So when's the hunt?"
I asked the principal gloomily as I walked out.

—Edward L. Hart