

The Log Cabin Café Sundance, WY

The elk head is watching me
finish off my open-faced
hot beef sandwich,
the special today

brown gravy smothers
the meat
two slices of white bread
elbow the potatoes
the peas
from underneath

over my head
an unframed oil painting
I would title
Man Shooting Geese
is ashamed of its
signature:
a blue scribble smudged
before the artist,
(*smudge*) I-e (*smudge*) s-s-o-n,
ever got a chance
to be acknowledged

a *lesson* certainly
for me as I finish off
my pie and coffee
and wonder at the single goose
who took the shot
only moments before
the artist's eye suspended him
crookedly between the clouds
and the lake
forever

the elk is preparing
to bugle *taps*
it's in his glassy stare
the ripples of his
stiff neck
his hard, plastic tongue

as she gives me the check
and a smile

the waitress is wondering
where I'm from
why I'm here
what I've been writing

I imagine them
thinking I'm a food critic
from the city,
looking for the article in the
Sunday Journal,
recalling the extra portions
they served the stranger
the fresh coffee
the largest slice of pie

oh, the plans for expansion
the tourists flocking in
just to have that
hot, smothered beef sandwich
and give wings to the town hung
precariously between
flight and oblivion

Thanks—it was delicious
I tell her, signing my check
as legibly as possible
and including a tip of gratitude
to the *Café de la Mort en Suspens*