

Uncle Cecil

Uncle Cecil lived
on wild game and cigarettes
his arms and legs thin
tough as sinew

I saw him only
when reunions came around
He would stand beside the door
with all the men and talk
of hunting, fishing and of Idaho
until he had to slip outside
behind the trees
to smoke

But Cecil shot his buck alone
this year
before his sons arrived
to find him
where he lay beside the deer
he dragged a mile or more
before his heart gave out

I'd like to ask him now
about the woods he walked
about his hours waiting
in the blind
between his sons

how he did it—
sat for hours watching
for the smallest movement
there, against the trunks
two hands on his rifle
never smoking once

I'd like to ask him
more than that
how silence kept between
a father and his sons huddled in
the blind
how *that* silence
spoke
how *that* silence
made the choice between
a freezer full of venison

and hunger
how *that* silence
carves a father's name
into the tender skin
of boys
so that the boys return
year and year again
full stride into manhood
to their father's blind

until they find camp empty
exactly how he left it
and his steady boot tracks winding off
into the trees