

Hunger



Susan Austin

Oil on Canvas by Kathryn Turner

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by Susan Austin

He had only a few things: a lot of hair, chew, and a heart complicated by loss. Pennies tossed in fountains, the first star damned by city lights, the man he nearly killed because he resembled the missing father. He yanked loose a few black strands, pulled a plug of chew from a foil pouch and put the two, hair and tobacco, beside the cow moose, her hindquarters steaming in the cold still sparkle of hoarfrost, first the forelegs buckling, then the hind giving way, her black eyes not bothering with us now. He smoothed the wiry brown hair and with the slightest shove and her bit of giving in she rolled on her side and died. Justly, I didn't care for what he did next—a kind of *ho-yo-yo* to all the directions. Finally the knife from his hip, immaculate and sharp, severing sinew, the mesenteries snapping clean in the cold, sorry for our hunger. It took five trips through deep snow to carry the carcass out, her blood seeping through layers of my clothes, her bulbous nose and dewlap slung over his shoulder, bobbing like the drunk man he carried thirteen blocks to the hospital, blood let from his own miserable fists soaking both their shirts and set him in a chair in the waiting room, sponged dried blood from that familiar face.

Susan Austin lives in the foothills of the Teton mountains. She loves maps, all kinds of maps, the topographic maps stacked in the mudroom closet. She was the recipient of a James Michener Fellowship. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *BOAAT*, *Blood, Water, Wind*, and *Stone: An Anthology of Wyoming Writers*, *Clerestory*, *Borderlands*, and elsewhere.



