

AFTERNOON FAWN
(Odocoileus virginianus)

Your mother is nowhere near.
She would have stomped her hoof,
a single muffled drumbeat
before her rump flashed a white flare.
And you'd merge with the vanishing point
in the musky collage of leadwort and tanoak.

You've already lost your spots,
your first ground-hugging pattern.
Now your first tines are budding, twin spikes
punching up through sueded taupe.
And your legs are splayed as if an inept sculptor
made your armature of the wrong gauge wire.

Your eyes and nose lavish me with curiosity.
Clearly you would let me touch you.
But you must learn certain lessons
about my kind. The county has counted
more deer than the forest can feed.
Thickets of decisions for your kind
have been planted, dug up, replanted.

The dilemma grows. I never want
to find you starved, beauty savaged
by woodland recyclers, hungry children
denied your meat. Yet, man the meddler,
however noble his aim,
seldom solves the whole, the interlocking
rings he doesn't see or understand. Nature
is well-rehearsed, time her ally.

But this moment is ours, young confidant.
I'll never forget this wonder we share.
With regret, I sharply clap you away.