

HERALDRY

For a century, stealthy bowmen beseeched
couchant northerlies to rise and face them,
willing a frontal assault from the wolf-wind
to keep their hungry scent from the king's deer.

They had to be fast. There was a death penalty
for venison eaters, a slower one for those
past aiming true at browsing briskets
when the crops failed. Daily, more elders
went limp like soiled draperies piled
in corners, no fabric noble or whole,
no color proud. And only anger had the strength
to remain rampant.

Across escutcheons of hunters,
winter pried in bar sinister crevices of castle
and hovel, spiraling the borders of dark forest,
carving its bearings with dirks of ice.
And sometimes on its own bias,
offering a stag on morning's white field.

Yes, daughter, your knight's armor shines
and your banners are well-made,
cross-stitched crests elegant on mauve silk:
Splendid spread of golden antlers and poised hoofs,
regality balanced blackly with a bare-fanged entity--
panther, perhaps. Embroidered with more truth
than you were designed to inherit.