

HUNTERS

S A L C E T R A N O

Laughter condenses among the trees
as wraiths in bloody plaid
materialize at clearing's edge.
Where the hickories end, abruptly,
chalk line snapped root deep, Ed Busby's
landscaped Tudor glades emerge,
old wood sniffing new meadow.

Cobbly freshets toast this border.
Bent slightly forward, the four old friends
and neighbors cradle blue steel heirlooms,
inlays endlessly eloquent to fingertips
callused way back when.
Now, mitts still glad to smell of oil
cloak manicures behind trigger guards.

Four fathers hunt their last on land
their sons ache to carve with purpose.
Already, the deer miss this timber—
here, soon, upscale Fairfax couples
will mortgage trophyless destinies.
A sliver of George Barrow's spread
goes next, tight spruce grove and

magnet pond. Last bullfrogs, to boot.
Here is memory of a first rabbit,
of *serious* games, of gain by death,

all fit for bulldozing. The check
from the Mall people had been so large,
he'd both chortled and cried.
Every plot had its price, every man his time.

The hunt, they knew, now mocked itself,
old stalking ground so rudely checkered.
Stopping for a few belts, talk turns
tired, familiar—kids and divorces, turnings.
Bird Cooper, class clown
gone bifocalled, bellows “Stag!” and blasts
a mildewed scarecrow to smithereens.