When I got to the car, I unloaded my shotgun and turned on the radio. I curled up on the back seat and pulled my father's old car coat over my head. Soon I was warm and comfortable, and I lay with my eyes open in the darkness underneath the coat. The sleet fell icily against the roof and scratched against the windows. I remember that "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," and "Kung Fu Fighting" played on the radio. I could hear each instrument playing individually. I could make out every note. I thought I understood, on some deep level, exactly how music worked. I don't remember ever feeling happier. I began to imagine that my father would never come back, that the sleet wouldn't stop, that the radio would continue to play, that I could lie forever in the warm and the dark and never have to leave again.

After a while I heard my father jacking the shells from his deer rifle out onto the ground. When he got into the car he didn't say anything. He turned off the radio and cranked the car and drove down the old logging road toward Lake Adger and home. I didn't pull the coat over my head. We drove for some time before he said, "Boy, don't you know better than to crap under your tree?" That was all he said. I was instantly filled with shame. Of course I should have known better. Deer have an almost supernatural sense of smell. I was stupid, stupid, stupid. I didn't tell him about the deer I had scared away, and I never asked him to take me deer hunting again.

The thing I always liked best about hunting was the moment when the animal wandered into my gun sights and didn't know I was there. It was like being invisible, like leaving my familiar self and becoming a different person. For years I wanted to write a short story in which that feeling served as a metaphor for the kind of searching one does in life. But the metaphor breaks down, of course, because the only way to validate that feeling is by pulling the trigger, at which time the self comes roaring back, and—at least for me—more painfully than before.

I'm the same age now that my father was that morning, and I don't feel any wiser than I did then. One of the things I use in the absence of any real wisdom is my father's hard question: Boy, don't you know better than to crap under your tree? Over the years it's become sort of a private metaphor, an admonition, a warning that I use to keep myself out of trouble. After all this time, those words still make me stop and consider whatever it is I'm about to do. It's the only thing I ever dragged out of the woods that lasted.