

BO BARTLETT

Allegiance, 2007
oil on linen, 66 x 48 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST

REGINALD GIBBONS

Journey

My strong father and I will go hunting together. We will go in a truck, his pickup truck, and we will take guns, perhaps some large shotguns, perhaps big rifles. Let's take thirty-aught-sixes, he'll say. We will drive far out of the city, we will stop on a dirt road, with a meadow on our left; and a hundred yards across the meadow, the tree line of a deep-green, dark-gray forest.

I think some animals will be shot. Lions, perhaps. Or will be stalked, or will stalk us too at the tree line.

Carry your gun properly, my father says.

He is gathering his gear from behind the driver's seat. I am to gather my own in the same way. The autumn air is chilly, and we put on our favorite wool overshirts that are worn thin at the elbows. He locks the truck and checks both doors.

At the fence bordering the meadow he reaches through the barbed wire and lays his gun down carefully to the left on the ground, and then he holds the fence wires apart for me. He does this the proper way, stepping on the middle strand and pulling up the top one. I reach through and lay my gun down to the right, and I bend at the waist, keeping my back straight, and I step through and stand upright again. Then I hold the fence for him. The proper way. Then we pick up our rifles. We stand together, we load, we check our safeties. And then we start walking toward the tree line, to encounter what is waiting for us there.

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A male lion may have a mane, long like a woman's hair, that trembles and shakes when he roars, and the long blood-matted clumps of his mane are like snakes. The hair on a female lion's sleek head is short. It looks male, to me. But lions don't think this way.

I questioned a guide before my father and I began this journey; the guide said that there are no Medusas here, that Medusas live elsewhere and aren't even understood here. If a Medusa came here, the guide said, she would not even be much noticed as she walked through the market where the lively hawkers, wearing masks of gorgeous twigs, stand behind their mounds of pineapples and peppers, their buckets of flowers, their pyramids of tuber skulls, none of them dead yet.

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