

MATT SALYER
Silly Old Bear

How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.
—A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*

Girlhood takes practice, like all proper violence.
Perhaps this is why I find it so natural
to accommodate the work

of my daughters, all the princess rehearsals, doll covens,
the confusing menagerie of picture book
killers with animal families.

There are never any mothers in their wild, just
the spontaneous generation of carnivore males'
cubs, and I, poor naturalist that I am,

must be constantly reminded of this fact; I must be shown
the big cats, bachelor wolves, bruised bad bucks,
and the silly old bear—they are all a mess

of me. Consider this, then: what makes Owl coax a suicide
of drones from my fur, or Rabbit unlock the queen's comb
from my jaw? It is not love, it's fear; it's not much

use telling that to daughters, though. Children are medievalists,
sucking crucifixion through every broken reed
in the hundred-acre wood,

and allegorizing every last cub, lost to the teat. Let them.
Girlhood looks so arduous, and it must feel good
to keep a killer beside you,

buttoned in bearskin. Who else should raise daughters?
Who else can make a hunter but a hunter?
I work my work

and do not question why nature seems to follow our nature
nowhere, or why the wild things pursue the hunt.
What did you think I was doing

all these years? My paws clang in a bother of brown pots
and honey. Did you hear me coming? Did you?
I should scare you to death.