

Out of Focus

after a New York Times photo-essay, 'The Hunted', Daniel Rodrigues

'People with albinism are being attacked—usually with machetes and knives—for the purpose of obtaining their body parts (an arm can fetch as much as US\$2,000)' – Ikponwosa Ero, UN Independent Expert on Albinism

At a distance, my body leaps to think of him as kin—
both of us white in a Mozambique village.
But he is my subject, a victim, child.
I have my list of questions, my camera,

and these reckless mirror neurons.
He leans in, whispers into the microphone.

His father left them, thought the absence
of melanin a curse, proof his mother had slept
with a European. *I'm not a white animal*, he says,
looking away. I nod, make notes.

Some believe his white hair, thrown onto the lake,
will make fish leap into the net. Others think
a limb hacked off and held over the land
could lead them to seams of precious metal.

Money!, they call him, laughing when he walks past.
I finger the keys to my four-wheel drive.

The more he tells me, the quieter he gets,
until our only language is breath, and I become
acutely aware of every sound outside. Now
he wants to be left alone with his textbooks,

those maps to elsewhere. He wants to be known
for his intellect. I am thinking—as you are—

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of skin pigment and what can't be seen,
as I squint and shoot, and fail to capture him.

At play with his siblings, or alone against a crumbling wall—
however I frame him, it looks staged. Mistakes

might be more beautiful and true. Home,
in the safety of my own skin, there is one photo
I keep returning to. He is perfectly out of focus—
the sun is turning his face into a blur of light.

Andy Jackson