

*Photograph of My Father  
in His Twenty-Second Year*

October. Here in this dank, unfamiliar kitchen  
I study my father's embarrassed young man's face.  
Sheepish grin, he holds in one hand a string  
of spiny yellow perch, in the other  
a bottle of Carlsbad beer.

In jeans and denim shirt, he leans  
against the front fender of a 1934 Ford.  
He would like to pose bluff and hearty for his posterity,  
wear his old hat cocked over his ear.  
All his life my father wanted to be bold.

But the eyes give him away, and the hands  
that limply offer the string of dead perch  
and the bottle of beer. Father, I love you,  
yet how can I say thank you, I who can't hold my liquor either,  
and don't even know the places to fish?

OTTO

1

He was the youngest son of a strange brood,  
A Prussian who learned early to be rude  
To fools and frauds: He does not put on airs  
Who lived above a potting shed for years.  
I think of him, and I think of his men,  
As close to him as any kith or kin.  
Max Laurisch had the greenest thumb of all.  
A florist does not woo the beautiful:  
He potted plants as if he hated them.  
What root of his ever denied its stem?  
When flowers grew, their bloom extended him.

2

His hand could fit into a woman's glove,  
And in a wood he knew whatever moved;  
Once when he saw two poachers on his land,  
He threw his rifle over with one hand;  
Dry bark flew in their faces from his shot,—  
He always knew what he was aiming at.  
They stood there with their guns; he walked toward,  
Without his rifle, and slapped each one hard;  
It was no random act, for those two men  
Had slaughtered game, and cut young fir trees down.  
I was no more than seven at the time.

3

A house for flowers! House upon house they built,  
Whether for love or out of obscure guilt  
For ancestors who loved a warlike show,  
Or Frenchmen killed a hundred years ago,  
And yet still violent men, whose stacked-up guns  
Killed every cat that neared their pheasant runs;  
When Hattie Wright's angora died as well,  
My father took it to her, by the tail.

Who loves the small can be both saint and boor,  
(And some grow out of shape, their seed impure;)  
The Indians loved him, and the Polish poor.

4

In my mind's eye I see those fields of glass,  
As I looked out at them from the high house,  
Riding beneath the moon, hid from the moon,  
Then slowly breaking whiter in the dawn;  
When George the watchman's lantern dropped from sight  
The long pipes knocked: it was the end of night.  
I'd stand upon my bed, a sleepless child  
Watching the waking of my father's world.—  
O world so far away! O my lost world!