

The River

I waded, deepening, into the dark water.
Evening, and the push
and swirl of the river as it closed
around my legs and held on.
Young grilse broke water.
Parr darted one way, smolt another.
Gravel turned under my boots as I edged out.

Watched by the furious eyes of king salmon.
Their immense heads turned slowly,
eyes burning with fury, as they hung
in the deep current.
They were there. I felt them there,
and my skin prickled. But
there was something else.
I braced with the wind on my neck.
Felt the hair rise
as something touched my boot.
Grew afraid at what I couldn't see.
Then of everything that filled my eyes –
that other shore heavy with branches,
the dark lip of the mountain range behind.
And this river that had suddenly
grown black and swift.
I drew breath and cast anyway.
Prayed nothing would strike.

The Meadow

In the meadow this afternoon, I fetch
any number of crazy memories. That
undertaker asking my mother did she
want to buy the entire suit to bury my dad in,
or just the coat? I don't
have to provide the answer to this,
or anything else. But, hey, he went
into the furnace wearing his britches.

This morning I looked at his picture.
Big, heavysset guy in the last year
of his life. Holding a monster salmon
in front of the shack where he lived
in Fortuna, California. My dad.
He's nothing now. Reduced to a cup of ashes,
and some tiny bones. No way
is this any way
to end your life as a man.
Though as Hemingway correctly pointed out,
all stories, if continued far enough,
end in death. Truly.

Lord, it's almost fall.
A flock of Canada geese passes
high overhead. The little mare lifts
her head, shivers once, goes back
to grazing. I think I will lie down
in this sweet grass. I'll shut my eyes
and listen to wind, and the sound of wings.