

Times When You Cross The River

You cross Dinwoody Creek high on the face of the moraine
On this ratty log, buttscooting across nutjabbing branchstubs over
Not a stream so much as a waterfall sideways, boulders
Flinging flops of foam, wet air stinking of stonedust and ice.
Halfway over, you look down dizzy and lose it,
See the log fly upstream, feel yourself falling down around
The wet log gripless, then downbash into the pour.

Lower, crossing naked at a still pool, gold grass fingers you
Underwater. Halfway over, the glacier palms you through its
Water and ices you ice in the heart and you cannot breathe

And the darkest crossing: the Snake at sundown, New Year's Day
At the South Boundary of Yellowstone, in a blizzard.
You follow the waterpath walked by the Park Ranger,
You wearing the hipboots he brought over when you hollered,
Pushing crotchdeep through the black water
Slopping over hipboot tops and freezing on you,
You leaning upstream against the current and walking on a reef
Or bar or ledge of shallow you cannot see, rapids feet away to left.
The black flow blots black instantly the fallingdown snow.
You look down and you lose it, topple upriver, feel yourself
Falling with a footunder sweepout of gravel
Dropsitting in freezewater slopsluiced into rapids,
See the Os of your powerless companions' mouths as
They watch you, lone drowner, mouth a dark hole in your
Lost face follow the curveaways sliding black away
Into gray storm away.

Well, not really. None of us fell but we all talked
Later about walking untaken over the river of the dead.
To cabins and a highway on the other side.

Oh love, we are in the darndest pickle, mortal and knowing it,
Knowing what time it is and where all the highways go.
Still, we settle next to rivers: the stinking conveyors
Of the dead. We seat our governments at
Confluences of streams which carry us away to the seabed
To our next settlement as constituents of mud.

We authorize a few in all our lives to show us where
To cross where it happens: we look down, dizzy out and lose it.
From across the rivers of half a life the White, the Green,
The Mad, Kolob Creek, the Yampa, Little Cottonwood,
Stinking Creek, all the nameless rivers in Titicomb Basin
We look back and see marks that led us to those crossings:
Stomped banks, water-printed logs, twists
Of grass tied overhand and bent in meaningful directions,
Runes carved on twigs, cairns, stacks of rocks:
cross here.

How many loves do we get? Do we grow beyond crossing?
Beyond looking down into the brawls of foam, having crossed
For keeps intact, more or less? Which river is the last?
Above me with every moon is a remembered
Starblast above a Gray's Canyon sandbar campfire of
Cottonwood sticks. Wet, stinking of crossing
And the throatparch smokestrike of rotwood. And past that pool
Of light, chugging sandwaves pound the dark a hundred feet
Away. Tons of continental river shake the sandbar hammering
A continent to mud and sweeping away dizzy guys in love,
Drowners, mouthing Os going in the downing as they drain away
In love away under all the highway bridges to the dark, the dark
Delta where it stops. 🍷