

River Man

"There are countries, there are rivers in your eyes."
— Pablo Neruda, "Lovely One"

It is early morning
somewhere on a river in Missouri;
first light breaks through the trees,
anoints your hands
as the ghost of last night's moon
rides over your shoulder;
you are holding the mythical fish
you've spent all your life pursuing.

You're six years old;
small and serious
you move like a minnow,
sheltered within your mother's shadow;
looming large in shoals of light,
your father leads you
to his favourite river.

At twenty-one you win
the gold in your country's lotto;
but you're too young for war,
too young to hold a gun,
too young to shoulder all that darkness home.

With family in tow you hit the road
sure that your America
must still be out there;
from Arkansas to Idaho,
from Idaho to New Mexico
you mask your sorrow,
cast out your line;
beneath a sky of exploding stars
you weep when it comes up empty.

Though weary when you reach Philadelphia,
you rescue old friends from their darkness,
you hold them oh so gently;
watching the world from the side-lines
you wonder, does anyone see their beauty?

I'm wandering the rugged shoreline
that runs to the Cape
when you rise with the mist
sweeping in from the North Atlantic.
Though I know you've never ventured
quite this far north before,
I watch you wash like daybreak on the shore;
for a brief, unbroken moment
you eclipse the stormy coast
as a cold November sun
falls in the sea.