

Bill Siverly

Elizabeth Lake

My father and I hiked Elizabeth Creek to its source,
A small lake found only on the map of my father's memory,
Eleven miles above the North Fork of the Clearwater—
Trout said to be so hungry they would fight to strike our flies,
As when my father had once hiked in, caught his limit, and hiked out.

I had never hiked so far and by such steep trail,
Bearing my full pack through thimbleberry brush in August heat,
Until my father hushed me and pointed at two cow elk
Looking back at us on the trail ahead, their bronze mantles—
The full ruff of rutting season—glowing in afternoon sun.

We passed fresh wallows along the creek and kept sharp eyes
For bull elk in rut, the equal of moose for headlong rage.
Darkness fell, and we rolled out sleeping bags on a slope.
All night long we heard elk crash and snort in the woods,
Sure their crazy rivalry would drive them pell-mell over us.

Next morning my father shook me awake, and fifty yards above,
We came to our destination, sparkling in the sun:
An acre of glacial cirque at the base of a high rock wall,
Rippling blue-green depths reflecting wilderness and sky,
An invitation to break out rods and flies.

That day the trout refused to bite, so my father agreed
To let me launch a makeshift raft I found among the reeds.
Drifting to the center of the lake, I lay back naked like an image
In the pupil of an eye, delighted to receive the sun,
Happy to inhabit this ancient, warm, and inexhaustible life.