

TWO WAYS OF LIVING IN THE NIGHT

I

Evening's End

When the moon swings out, then the mind comes clear,
so get up late and hurry,
slosh right thru the creek, cross against the light,
the sun is going down, a lover ought to be on time,
the night is huge like your dear, dark momma's belly,
night is a mountain you want to climb with the mind—

the high window dropping a tilted plank of yellow light
over the short yard to the hedge,
the ridge and the inevitable booted rider,
motionless, diamond-eyed,
an old immigrant, with money in the bank now,
sitting up in October over his small garden,
a charge of buckshot in the chamber,
guarding maybe thirty melons against the kids.

II

In the Morning Now

Your skin was slicker once, oily as a muskrat's,
so when you pulled yourself up on your evening's
white sandbar,
in an instant you were dry.
Then all night long your eyes would glint;
clouds move in, you can't depend on stars.
And it was necessary to be hard, ruthless even
—if the baby sleep would raise her head,
you drowned her in a coffee cup.
So you rose, enough above your station
to see day and night head-to-tail,
and yesterday and tomorrow.
The spit went thru your ears, the planet safe,
one side roasting then the other,
inside a shell of incandescent bone.

But that was then: now when you come home
you bring the river with you,
a clamshell in the pocket, a logjam in the head.
Meanwhile the baby sleep has grown huge;
she's hungry, there's not much else to eat.

So now you need eight hours!
As high as you have stood, that far you need to be
stuffed down,
in a sack like a cat but swimming,
a stone fish in cold basalt, eight hours,
eight hours in the infant's belly
—underneath the logs, eight hours,
there's that much work, whoever helps you.
A pike pole has to be found, a peavy,
and dynamite, dynamite, too.
And you shouldn't come awake suddenly,
you shouldn't come awake suddenly and surprise
whoever helps you.
Above all you don't want to surprise anyone.
You don't want to wake up until all those logs are free,
floating parallel with space between for you to surface;
your best hope is in the morning now.