

River of the Red Fish

Now, after all this time, I return to you.

Forgive me for forgetting the languages
you taught me. My banks are flooded
every season with indifference.

My boat has found no pilings safe as yours.
There is nowhere to hide, no cool sand
beneath no bridge, beside no forest
ripe with the sweet smell of marsh cabbage
blooming always in late summer.

I have lost no shoes swimming
when I should have been at school.
No mouth has entranced me as yours does
when you meet the Fraser. No bones
are buried deeper in me than those
of a tribe lost forever.

Nothing terrifies like you in January.

No dogs cross the water behind me
carrying all I need to survive.

I'm not even sure I survive
without you. Certainly I have not
found timber strong enough
to navigate you. It is my shame
that long ago I gave up searching.

Your banks consume me now to the waist.

In thirty years
my heart will emerge
from the mud like an eel
to drink with you.

— *Paddy McCallum*