

LEDGE POND

The lake lies like a stainless knife set deep
Into the hill. The hemlock root-gills seep
Cold tears over the winter quarry heap—
Water runs out of the loosened vise
Of frost; the winter's pelt is flayed.
The lake in sheath of thinning ice
Lies deep and deadly as a blade.

Standing on the stony iron and brown,
I have shouted at that shore and heard my own
Voice repeated over, urgent-grown,
More and more hollowed out by ledge surprise,
Fleeing its own startled sound
Backward over the wild marsh rice
Till suddenly the voice was drowned.

Once, foxhunters, scrambling down these steeps,
Saw a vixen lead with long light leaps
And their hound follow till his heavier steps
And sorry yelping broke the ice. A prize
Dog's bones in that deep mud are laid.
The bitch-fox fled, despite their cries,
Light and elusive as a maid.

Lies tell, and are believed, that the lake's too deep
To plumb with hook and line or any rope.
It comes into the mind when I have hope
To catch a phrase for love that tracks and flees.
And then I hear the claw of hound
Pawing on the trap of ice,
And suddenly the voice is drowned.

—RICHARD SEWELL