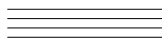


E L E G Y O N T H E F A R B A N K



D E B O R A G R E G E R

His taxes done, the garden planted,
my father didn't wish to spend even one night
in the hospital – then he laid his head back
and drifted away from the doctor.

For the first time in days he slept,
better than he had for years.
The coin in his mouth he surrendered
to the ferryman, and crossed a river

he'd never fished. What were we, his children,
but overgrowth crowding the bank he'd left?
Sand-bar willow, or Russian olive –
hard to say without his glasses.

My breath snagged on a fish hook.
From the gasping lip of something I caught
sixty years ago, he eased a barb.
The rock he forbade me to throw in the water

turned out to have a higher calling: deftly
he clubbed a fish big enough to eat.
Too small to keep? He loosed it in the shallows –
just so, he'd taught me the dead man's float.

Had I sunk? Only if mind and body flailed.
Catch. Catch and release.
Breath held a word as long as it could.