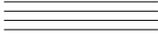


A P O R T R A I T O F M Y
F A T H E R I N S E V E N M A P S



D A V I D B A K E R

1.

Here I heard them. Here the big rocks. Here the place
with the tent. Did you cut enough willows for the lines, did
you hang them, are they treble are they single, we'll need
the right hooks for the bait. We walked across water
so cold here it was burning. It was warm. When you
put your slippers on you have to watch your step, the grass
is wet the tiles are wet it's pitched a little down. So here
hold the rod. When you don't know where you are –

2.

In Ptolemy's *Geometry* the uncharted is not far away.
Written in lampblack ink made from soot.
Where is she. Never far beyond Serica beyond
Sinae nothing the island of Taprobane then nothing and
Aurea Cheronesus. Did you hear them first. Did you
tie the boat to the willow to a stone. Inscribed on a roll
of papyrus cut from plants growing along the Nile Delta.
Why have you chosen Ptolemy do you think –

3.

Harry T. Kelsh's patents (1949–55) for the machine
he sat at for a decade – my father working the arms, tracing
contours with mechanical pencils onto semi-transparent
paper – include photogrammetric plotting, gimbaled

diaphragms for optical projection, stereoscopic projection,
 compensator designs for *moving the floating mark of
 the mapping table, instead of the lenses*. Hence
 the Kelsh machine. He sat me down. To trace a path –

4.

who could find his way
 in the woods in the dark
 in rainstorm and snow-cover
 when he fell the first time
 how did they know it
 he said he was disoriented
 who could tell which weed
 which root some manner of knot
 starlings in the blue crab
 kingfish or jay on a low branch
 of bobbing lindens
 where were you going but
 I don't remember that
 who waited the last night
 quietly still through the long night
 and holding her hand –

5.

I am seven or eight. He's about thirty. Keep still now.
 Only cartography's general reference map has
 the hubris to present the world, you know, *as it really is*,
 as if to say now and forever. Ground the heel to a stone,
 rock the rod to get your reading when the hash-mark's high.
 Who carries me over water to our fire cicadas star-dots among
 weeping willows scent of the older herds. Any tree could
 be the axis mundi around which the universe turns –

6.

Here I heard them singing. Marsh wrens. Her singing.

Let's chalk a path to the dining room. Let's put
a piece of tape on the drain on the floor to the north-point.

This way we know where we are. His latitude expressed as
climata, the length of the longest day, not degrees of arc.

It's where we stood. Furrows in a cornfield.
What Ptolemy called chorography was simply a survey,
it was not the world. He fell from a chair a ladder a tree –

7.

It's maybe four miles from East Circle to Adams Street Place.

Place being where. Ptolemy's purpose was not to imagine
the whole of natural existence but account for the known edge,

beyond which. He is eighty-eight. I am sixty. Beyond which

we can't see. The arms the pencils the 3-D stereo-glasses

on a table stand. Limestone ledge there's the back way down.

Bring it up slow and check what we caught. Here hold on.

I know where we're going. She heard. I know. We won't be back –