

Elk River Falls

is where the Elk River falls
from a rocky and considerable height,
turning pale with trepidation at the lip
(it seemed from where I stood below)
before it is unbuckled from itself
and plummets, shredded, through the air
into the shadows of a frigid pool,
so calm around the edges, a place
for water to recover from the shock
of falling apart and coming back together
before it picks up its song again,
goes sliding around the massive rocks
and past some islands overgrown with weeds
then flattens out and slips around a bend
and continues on its winding course,
according to this camper's guide,
then joins the Clearwater at its northern fork,
which must in time find the sea
where this and every other stream
mistakes the monster for itself,
sings its name one final time
then feels the sudden sting of salt.

Billy Collins