

At Salmon Lake

As well as mountains, river and sea
there is a lake
in my scarred landscape

it is spring-fed of course
and the snow geese
strut its marshy edges for a week
every year on their way north

Here the salmon return
every summer

The way up the river
is tortuous

the water rushes down in falls and swirls
the trail steeps its way at the edge
over rock, mud, roots
and slippery fallen firs

But every able citizen
has been there
at some time in his life
to see the salmon come
leaping and thrashing
in their suffering joy
of the struggle upstream
to the quiet waters
of spawning and death,
source and destination

It is a moving ritual for us all.

And always
we look for one fish in particular
one that has returned every year
since anyone can remember

Always
he comes to the edge of the crowded bank
and shows himself to us
his mouth working slowly

As he stands in the water before us
we see the whitish strip of nylon leader
hanging from his upper lip
We follow the short line
and make out (once again)
the huge dark fishhook,
barely visible under the thick skin,
imbedded just below the bulging eye

He holds himself
still and separate
long enough for all of us to see
then swims slowly back with the rest

He is a very old fish
and all of us in Scar City
know him well

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