

Salmon Falls

I

The ancient river was
like my father's friend:
he loved to fish at
the base of the falls
in the misty calm of early morning
when the pool was clear and still
and held no image but the
guarded tension of its own being,
there in the hushed silence
the naked rock and water
drew itself up, majestically
into the cloudless heavens
toward the radiant sun,
while below the falls the ancient
rock stirred the cool
dark water into a turgid frenzy,
the water white and translucent
where the sun broke through
and lit the bottom of the falls
in an aura of light and mist.

It was here that the salmon
could be seen jumping toward the falls,
a volley of silver arrows
flashing brilliantly in the summer sun,
some landing half way up
the foaming cataract
where they flailed about the jagged rocks,
which claimed their toll
of torn fins and scales,
before launching upwards once more
to enter the cool womb of
the upper falls – their
long ascension complete.

From the base
of the falls though,
you could not see
the salmon as they
breached the top;
but you could see
the no man's land of
the riverbank where
black flies congregated
in swirling clouds
and the way the old river
made its way slowly down
through the valley
bend upon bend, until,
at last it slipped from the
jealous grasp of the rocky land,
and reached the shores
of the distant sea.

II

I remember how
my father stood,
knee deep in the slow
soothing current of the winding river,
the long wet line licking at the water,
reaching further and further
across the shallow pool
where the sunlight treads in broken steps,
waiting, watching, for the sudden jerk
which would draw the dripping line taut
and then the struggle of the gasping thing
frantic upon the bank, gleaming silver along its flanks,
dark blue along its back,
its lidless eyes as dark as pools
of the swirling river.

I watch my father bend
to pick the thing up,
and in a quick sudden motion
he dashes it lifeless against a granite rock,
before carefully placing the glistening salmon
into a basket of dry worn straw,
its faded leather latch
wet with the morning rain;
then, stretching, he smiles
and leaves me there
in the coolness and the stillness
of the undulating river.

III

Twenty five winters and springs
pass and the salmon return
their writhing bodies
impelled towards the falls
through the dark currents of
the winding river.

“To think”, he
said, “of the price
their suffering brings”;
but, as a boy,
I had never
quite understood.

Now, silent,
I stand alone
here in this place where
each death begets new life
wondering whether
he lies gasping somewhere
trying to breathe
the noxious air of some
alien sun or perhaps he has slipped
past the thundering falls
to waters where he now
swims unhindered
– triumphant,
in the shimmering, still
and placid deep.

**Salmon Falls
Senior Poetry Submission**

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