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By and By

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BY AND BY

In ceremonial swoosh, the netted
fish loops and loops
and drops, weighted and furious.
His skin, old as history is old,
gray as a memory, airs slightly
so one scale is dry
and beside it, one moist
like a pallet, dollops
of the same color in varying states
of rest—or unrest
of ever-motion
of a constant thing being
while it dies, while it knows
it is dying.
The odor is riverous, so ancient
it is the same smell, surely
as the few fish that fed thousands
and so pond-inspired, my grandmother
inhaled the same as her head dipped back
in baptism and she emerged magnificent
dripping in the sun in that languid moment
being, while knowing that we must one day bait the hook
and the next be the fish, the food.
Eventually our bones finalize
into salt spirits, minerals, mud, the froth
of rivers that churns like arterial cogs
over the bodies of those who come after us
over spiny fans of fins,
over flickering fish wings.

In the scud and scoff,
the silt sifts and settles
and shifts over fish, between the toes
of swimmers wading as far as they dare,
thrushes under the boats
where fishermen bait and cast and net,
where the ceremony of sun and tide and time
only seems to stop, where the moment
is not a moment, but an ever.