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Making Certain It Goes On

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MAKING CERTAIN IT GOES ON

At last the Big Blackfoot river
has risen high enough to again cover the stones
dry too many months. Trout return
from summer harbor deep in the waters
of the power company dam. High on the bank
where he knows the river won't reach
the drunk fisherman tries to focus on
a possible strike, and tries to ignore
the hymn coming from the white frame church.
The stone he leans against, bleached out dull gray,
underwater looked beautiful and blue.
The young minister had hoped for a better parish,
say one with bells that sound gold
and a congregation that doesn't stop coming
when the mill shuts down.

We love to imagine
a giant bull trout or a lunker rainbow
will grab the drunk fisherman's bait
and shock the drunk fisherman out
of his recurrent afternoon dream and into
the world of real sky and real water.
We love to imagine the drought has ended,
the high water will stay, the excess
irrigate crops, the mill reopen, the workers
go back to work, lovers reassume plans
to be married. One lover, also the son
of the drunk fisherman, by now asleep
on the bank for no trout worth imagining
has come, will not invite his father
to the happy occasion though his father
will show up sober and properly dressed,
and the son will no longer be sure of the source
of the shame he has always rehearsed.

Next summer the river will recede,
the stones bleach out to
their dulllest possible shade. The fisherman
will slide bleary down the bank
and trade in any chance he has of getting
a strike for some old durable dream,
a dream that will keep out the hymn
coming again from the church. The workers
will be back full shift. The power company
will lower the water in the dam
to make repairs, make repairs and raise rates.
The drunk fisherman will wait for the day
his son returns, divorced and bitter
and swearing revenge on what the old man
has come to believe is only water
rising and falling on climatic schedule.

That summer came and is gone. And everything
we predicted happened, including the death
of the fisherman. We didn't mention that before,
but we knew and we don't lie to look good.
We didn't foresee the son would never return.

This brings us to us, and our set lines
set deep on the bottom. We're going all out
for the big ones. A new technology
keeps the water level steady year round.
The company dam is self cleaning.
In this dreamy summer air you and I
dreamily plan a statue commemorating
the unknown fisherman. The stone will bear
no inscription and that deliberate anonymity
will start enough rumors to keep
the mill operating, big trout nosing the surface,
the church reforming white frame
into handsome blue stone, and this community
going strong another hundred years.