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Run Salmon Run

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RUN SALMON RUN

I watched it
Leap and scream
Into the churning waters,
Up the gashing rock
Again and again
To be hurled,
Rejected, back
Down the falls
Into the waiting pool,
Where it panted,
Regaining forces,
To try again.

So determined
To survive.

To complete
Its journey.

The fish inspires me.
Fills me with awe,
And courage,
And sadness.
I can't make up my mind
If I really
Want it to try again.

A piece
Of its flesh
Lies ragged
By its dorsal fin.

Give up. Give up,
I want to
Scream.
But silence
Holds my sides
In runner's pain.
And out of breath,
I pray for it.

"Only two in four thousand
Survive,"
I read
On a metal sign
Posted by wardens,
Pitted with pellets

Shot by young men,
Not wanting to know
How hard
Life promises to be.

And with a splash
Of cold water
To the face,
I am reminded
Of another scientific discovery
"Three in three thousand
Survive
The pregnancy,
Do not self-abort."

My eyes
Return,
Held,
Fixed
On the pain
And the courage
Of the leaping salmon.

And I think
Of you
With your twisted
Legs
And weakened body.

I turn,
Walk away,
Afraid to watch
The pool of teaming fish.
Afraid they'll try too hard.

A splash.

I turn.
I see one
Large, splashed with red,
Swim into the stream,
Free,
Home free.
Up the falls,
The last ordeal.

Alive!

I race.
I follow the flash of flesh.
I want to follow
Out to sea.

I almost crash
Into the boy,
Hockey stick in hand.

There are more,
Five or six.

Crouched on flat rocks,
Positioned across the stream.
The narrow stream,
The shallow stream.

The fish's final,
Easy passage
To the sea.

The stick flashes,
Catches the red giant.
The boy races out.
The salmon hurls
Across the water,

Another boy,
Young, alert,
Full of healthy energy,

Reaches forward,
Catches it with his stick.

The broken body flies again.

Splat.
Splat.
A living hockey puck.

I am paralyzed.

I stare at the boy,
Who looks at the falls,
Alert for
Another game.

The urge to race,
Savage, wild,
Into the boys

To break and tear,
And kill

Fills me with such
Rage and despair,
And memory
Of your childhood
Pain,

The brunt of
Jest and joke and jeer,

I sink
To my knees
And sob
Into the cold, clean water.

And then
Quietly,
With serenity,
And certainty,
The salmon swims away.

-Carolyn Marie Mamchur