Poetry

Cody Miller

Souls Drifting from a Parking Garage Staircase

1.
It surrenders to the sway
Of the water on the bottom of
The Sable River and relaxes
In the gentle passing of sandy granules
Against its sides and whitened
Belly now empty of its purpose. I

Blink, but it's still there. The other fish
Avoid it like its polluting
The freshness of their space, like it stinks
Already even though it's not dead. The others
Scatter as a boy throws a rock or because
They smell fresh eggs sinking
Away from a female. It
Doesn't matter why, just that they glide away
And leave the salmon alone
To rest and gently chew nothing.

The salmons tried to see, I know it has,
Over the dam so many times,
Avoided hooks and colors of yarn,
Only to drift backwards with the falling
Leaves to settle in a small depression
Of pebbles in late October.

Longing to choke on the colors
Of leaves that seep
Through the surface and to let go
Is hard for anyone, so I think of
That prized moment when an old man
Removes his oxygen tubes with purpose

To stand until he must be lowered
Back into bed.

I think the moment sad
Until I look around at the fishermen
Snapping their lines like silky webs
In a storm. None of them care
That a beaten salmon is dying
Only feet from the bank. Instead, they
busy themselves with life, with food,
with joy, and not death.

2.
They don't think about dark
Birds scattering from above
An empty staircase—it reminds me of the city—
And how they look like ashes
Without fire. There's no rain,
Only a river, and heaven
Still burns like how everything
Must fall because almost all is
Human and animal and still existing
In those final moments. I say if birds turn to mist
Against the evening sun, we must let it happen
And not miss the moments when
A salmon whispers in its own voice,
"I don't want to go," finally
Leans up into the current,
And is gone towards something
Similar to life.