Fishing

Talvikki Ansel

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.4318

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.
dividing; rolling off
the alligator’s lip, through
the cooter’s belly, into Red’s
water dish. And everything
not in water is coming
out of water: the trees rising,
the hummock
where Ardith lived; the stand
of cypress, where there was still
an ivory bill, even the sky
at night—darkness
out of darkness, studded
with stars—which the granddaughter
now follows in the threads
of constellations:
the arc
to Arcturus; big dipper
to Polaris, the celestial pole.

FISHING

The beach rocks when he drops me off
in the morning—and the lawn
and my bed, when I sleep after fishing
all night. My chest
and stomach flat on the mattress.
Rise and fall, like a line
on the fathometer’s spool of turning
paper. My eyelids—I close
my eyes and see the red glow
of the compass in the cabin.
When I wake, everything will be still:
my boots at the door, the lawn
fresh with light, upright cedars,
horizontal stretch of sea.
In the cabin we drink coffee, pale
    hands cupped around mugs, below us
the net tears into mud. When the winter
flounder leave, the window
panes come into the bay. Their grey backs
speckled with color, bodies
so thin I can see bones through
    skin. I pick through them
with a nail on the end of a stick,
    save the largest, shovel the rest
back over the side. Some have been pressed
against the mesh of the net, flesh
like a child’s palm, bruised and soft.

I have tried so many times to take
this photograph: white door frame,
view beyond: green strip of lawn,
    sea wall, clouds above breakers,
but I can never focus the inside
    and the outside; the kitchen
darkens and the cedars blur. Ink flushes
onto my hands when I cut the squid
into squares; it comes clean in water.
    On days when I do not fish
I walk the island. In a sumac bush
    a mockingbird flutters like a scrap
of torn curtain.

When I was a child, they would bring up
    eels from the river by the house:
buckets full—they did not begin or end,
    twisting around themselves in a circle
continuous and winding; I still think
    some morning I will wake up
and everything will be clear to me:
squares of light on the ceiling,
    the wallpaper, the curtains in dotted
swiss, and I will say, “this
is my life.” The knotted fringe stilled
    in the breeze.