When They Are Gone

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For Jed

Not all of the Atlantic salmon will return—in Greenland, where the sea ice cracks under the pressure of a warming planet, are the nets and hooks of a hungry people, and black cutouts of porbeagle sharks moving through depth and darkness fathomed only by those who watch Arctic winter nights lengthen like sadness.

In the end, the cold swiftness of the loss seemed shocking, and made us wonder: “If one thing doesn’t come back, will anything?” Stumbling on a rocky shore, unsteady with grief we were thinking, perhaps, of spring light, and blue tides surging emptily into estuaries; we were focused on the ocean, salty as tears, instead of upstream, in freshwater rivers, where hope still lies in spawning gravel—walking through the mossy cathedral of spruce and fir trees, we arrived at the chaos of water and boulders where parr sipped insects and
a biologist tenderly knocked
a tree into its reflection on
a bend in the Narraguagus River
to provide cover, to protect young fish,
their short lives better for this love.