

7-3-2018

When They Are Gone

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Recommended Citation

Bernier, Matthew E. (2018) "When They Are Gone," *The Catch*: Vol. 6 , Article 8.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/the_catch/vol6/iss1/8

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When They Are Gone

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.