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At the Dam

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At the Dam

Men stand tossing their snags,
jerking, reeling, jerking.
Rods pivot against their belts,
arching with each pull. I see
you in blue on the opposite
bank. Your Shakespeare
curls like a question mark
when you set the hook. A line
of light from your wrist-
watch marks my body
in quick X's. I watch you play
the fish. The river throws up
a shiny brown salmon that comes
down, "smack," like a centerfold pin-
up in *Field and Stream*. Its body
furrows the water as you drag
it in. In your hand it is an amputated
leg, kicking. You bend over it,
turning it into another piece
of still life around your feet.

To my right a glass wall
of water slides over the algae
spotted dam. Foaming water
below bubbles with fish hurling
themselves against the cement.

A drunken man hangs over the water
holding a grappling hook. "Through
the belly! Through the belly!"
his friends yell. The man lifts,
flips a fish onto the mud.
Blood sprays the grass as it beats
the earth like a drum. Men stamp
on its head until I hear it crack.
Then I see she's heavy with eggs.
Fingers lift her by her eye sockets
above a plastic pail. A man slips a knife
in her anus, moving it up her belly.
Out drop clear pink eggs the size of wild
grapes. Then he tosses her to a dog.

Sandra Sylvia Nelson

SANDRA SYLVIA NELSON has published work in many magazines and journals, including the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, the *North American Review*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Ms. Magazine*. Her work has appeared in *Hard Choices*, an anthology by *The Iowa Review* (1996), and in the textbook *Exploring Literature* (Longman Press, 2016). She lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.