

## Dead Fish · *Daniel Halpern*

The pale arc of line feeds  
into the green of the bank  
and drops its fly into the shallows  
of the stream in shadow  
without sound. The line floats down  
onto water and the current  
takes it on, deeper.  
Cast after cast the fly moves  
in the afternoon  
from one edge of the stream  
to the other, snapped into place  
as I move downstream, replacing  
cast with the imagined weight  
of a feeder trout unseen in current.  
Shadows wobble the stream.  
I see a fish hung  
near the bank, gills at rest,  
life only in buoyancy,  
its resistance against current.  
I move close, drop the fly  
upstream so it floats back  
over the dull eyes of the sleeper  
fish. The fly floats past.  
It won't move. It won't move  
as I move closer. It hangs there  
and won't move as I bring down the rock  
with terrified force. In the explosion  
of water I see the white fungus  
it has grown, the sucker-mouth  
and its full fish-body not trout.

It is imperfection I hate,  
the age, the gamelessness of immobility,  
the sudden decision to live.

When it floats to me  
later, having fought to free itself  
from branches of the stream trees,  
I need its dead weight against my leg  
to know ambition and its net, how it turns  
on the object pursued,  
dead now and my prize  
as I cast in pale light,  
the evening  
pulled in on a fly.