

The Short Order Cook in the Mountains · *Susan Schweik*

Lady, the fresh lake trout

you ask for
comes sealed
in plastic, its pink
eyes greased
with a film of Idaho
tap water.

I break its bag without remorse and paprika
its gills and curl its tail to tease you
with the illusion of fresh
speed, a violent rumba
of panic and heat.

I don't care if you do
pay more to choke on a local bone, Lady
Mark, Lady Menu, Lady Need.
I want you to know

they thaw from the deep freeze
in a sink. I stir them
with a spoon I call "Spawner."
Their tails are stubborn, stunned, feel
in the palm as passive and unreal
as sleeping in vaseline, as the give
of a glissade.

I stack the days like plates
to be scraped, like odds
against: nine to five. I call out
my short orders. Like you,
I get what I want. But friend,

friend, after the night shift
towards morning we'll wade out
into that dark infant chill
called Sacred Dancing
and feel the long and sharp
recede, recede
of glaciers in the small and twisting
bones of our spines—holding,
in each hand, hooks.