

Cutthroat

I once fell in love with a flyfisherman. He was an elegant man engaged in the justice of rivers. His preference was always toward small streams, tributaries to the Missouri. He dreamed of retiring in Montana.

He would walk the creek's willowed edges, halfway hidden, his fly rod in hand with an eye upstream and down for trout. And when he saw the sweet risings of lips to water, he entered the current.

This flyfisherman, whose name I cannot speak, would stand thigh-high in the Madison with rod in hand and make the most beautiful undulations, waving with his right arm, pulling the line with his left. Back and forth, the graphite extension of himself would arc above his head seconds before he cast his line of light.

"It is an art that is performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two o'clock," Norman Maclean writes in *A River Runs Through It*. This I saw on the river and recognized as the hours we secretly inhabited. Ten at night until two o'clock in the morning. We were awake while others slept.

Letting the line gracefully slip through his fingers, he placed the dry fly (I believe it was a Royal Wulf) perfectly inside the eddy where he imagined the cutthroat to linger. The ritual of the cast like a tease was repeated again and again between the man's daydreams. The trout would strike. The man would smile with a quick flick of the wrist to plant the hook and then slowly reel the creature toward him until it was time to surface the fish. Out of the water, the man would kneel on the bank with the rod between his legs, steady the trout (this time a brook trout with red circles on its side), unhook the fly from its white upper lip (she feels no pain he assured me) then return the fish cradled in both hands gently to the water (let her adjust and get her bearings), face the trout downstream, tickle her belly and then let her go.

Catch and release.

Our friendship was no different. It wasn't until he slipped with his tongue and said, "I made love to you because it was the only way I knew how to reel you in. I was afraid I was losing you."

Catch and release.

This man loves trout. This man loves women. To fish is to flirt. To flirt is to fish. Is this the sporting nature of love? Lips to water. We kiss. We bite the hidden barb. We are pulled out of the river and brought to shore barely breathing. Through the lens of a cutthroat's eye, we look up to what has desired us.

That night, I pulled the hook of the dry fly out of my own lip and swam downriver.

Catch and release.

There is an aspect of love that is not much talked about: the making use of another human being. The lover invariably feels like an object with which the beloved may take liberties... In being loved and desired we become flesh in the hands of someone else. And so whoever loves me makes possible the miracle of my incarnation.

— Aldo Carotenuto

In Butte, Montana, Our Lady of the Rockies stands at an elevation of 8500 feet on the Continental Divide. She is ninety feet tall and weighs fifty-one tons. Her spine is steel. Draped in the compassionate folds of her white robes, her hands open to the Berkeley Pit below where nearly one and a half billion tons of earth have been removed, including more than 290 million tons of copper.

Anaconda Copper Mining Company has loved Butte, Montana, for almost one hundred years. On December 18, 1985, Anaconda pulled out, leaving behind one of America's largest Superfund sites with pit water so toxic local citizens use firecrackers and flares to keep native birds from landing. On December 20, 1985, the last piece of

Our Lady of the Rockies was brought to the mountain by helicopter and erected by miners now out of work. She was their spark of hope, something new to love, the second largest statue in America next to Miss Liberty.

Call 1-800-800-LADY.

Call the cutthroat with scarred lips swimming in the Madison.

Call me.