

Dogfish

by Mary Oliver

Some kind of relaxed and beautiful thing
kept flickering in with the tide
and looking around.
Black as a fisherman's boot,
with a white belly.

If you asked for a picture I would have to draw a smile
under the perfectly round eyes and above the chin,
which was rough
as a thousand sharpened nails.

And you know
what a smile means,
don't you?

I wanted
the past to go away, I wanted
to leave it, like another country; I wanted
my life to close, and open
like a hinge, like a wing, like the part of the song
where it falls
down over the rocks: an explosion, a discovery;
I wanted
to hurry into the work of my life; I wanted to know,
whoever I was, I was

alive
for a little while.

It was evening, and no longer summer.
Three small fish, I don't know what they were,
huddled in the highest ripples
as it came swimming in again, effortless, the whole body
one gesture, one black sleeve
that could fit easily around
the bodies of three small fish.

Also I wanted
to be able to love. And we all know
how that one goes,
don't we?

Slowly

the dogfish tore open the soft basins of water.

You don't want to hear the story
of my life, and anyway
I don't want to tell it, I want to listen

to the enormous waterfalls of the sun.

And anyway it's the same old story — — —
a few people just trying,
one way or another,
to survive.

Mostly, I want to be kind.
And nobody, of course, is kind,
or mean,
for a simple reason.

And nobody gets out of it, having to
swim through the fires to stay in
this world.

And look! look! look! I think those little fish
better wake up and dash themselves away
from the hopeless future that is
bulging toward them.

And probably,
if they don't waste time
looking for an easier world,

they can do it.