

Walk To The Dock

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I went for a walk to the dock today to see what I could see.
A shimmering dead fish was hung on a hook, big saucer eyes staring at me.
The fisher who caught it smiled and laughed, "it's the biggest fish this year!"
Then a man much older than he who I hadn't noticed before, chuckled almost to himself and said
"if you've got a minute, I've got a story you are sure to want to hear".

The fisher and I exchanged a glance then he pushed over a box and I took a seat.
We looked to the old man to start telling his tale and he told us his name was Pete.
Pete worked on a fishing boat many years ago, back when the mountain tops were still covered in snow.
He reminisced on the times when the nets would fill before lunch so him and his pals would sun themselves and munch

He looked to the fish on the hook and began to tell his tale
"That may be the biggest fish of the year for you but to us that would barely tip our scale
Sometimes we'd pull up fish so big it looked like a science experiment by ol' Billy Nye.
Each day was much the same, so many big beautiful fish and we barely had to try.

The best one though gave us quite a fright, one bite and the boat was on her keel
I reeled and reeled and reeled, thinking of the scrumptious filet I would turn into a meal.
The boat rocked, the rod bent, my arms threatened to quit
But I persevered and so did the fish, each of us showing true grit.

The struggle went on for an hour or two but I finally had my way
The fish landed on the deck with a thud, it's scales flashing blue-gray.
But enough about the scales, that thing almost broke ours
It may well have been a being prophesied in the stars.

We stared at each other as we both gasped for air
The world went quiet and seemed to stop for a moment and I had to consider his welfare
This fish is so fantastic, it needs to reproduce
So with my last ounce of breath I called for a truce

Eight fisherman's hands helped support the weight
And we released it back to its watery estate
A big splash and in a hurry it was gone
Down into the depths it was drawn

Sometimes I wonder if we should have kept it that night,
It could have given many hungry bellies delight
Hopefully though new life was created
But over time the new life has been degraded

You see that fish you caught there, the biggest one today
Is the result of too many big ones being taken away
What was once a superabundant scaly silvery kingdom
Is now much more sparse; this is called the shifting baseline syndrome

Each year the change in size and amount is so small
That people don't seem to notice at all
It is not until we look back at the records
That we notice these changes across all the boards

The best thing to do is to take only what you need
And let the rest grow, and recover and feed.
I hope you enjoyed my story of release
And that maybe you will do the same until the populations increase!"

The old man stood and we both shook his hand
Now I know I am only one person but I can still take a stand
Maybe I will try urchins, seaweed, or herring- not cod
I think I'll stay away from slimy snails though, oh my god.