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**The Weir**  
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**P.H. Liotta**

THE WEIR

Deadly coils tossed off in the sea, I used to dream about them as a kid, wake in the raw sweat of not knowing why . . . Outside Eastport, beyond the sucking witch named the Old Sow, whirlpool contorting in dream, far up even as Deer Island, these folding, circular traps—old as native ancients who first dreamed their use, curled into themselves like question marks, collapsing, needing repair, leading the school of herring on, then pulling them in.

Back then, there were no answers. Back then, too, we were young enough to believe there could be some. My father would cruise among the rocks of Blood Island. *There be pirates out there*, he'd whisper and grimace. And I'd believe him, believe the way he held the wheel of the boat, circling and circling the granite edge, as spooked harbor seals flopped from rocks and into the surf and away from our sight.

And now, years later, staring at those fisherman, again, I am in awe, much as ever, by such intricate guiles. *Never learned to swim, yah know*, one of them tells me, one who finally speaks after I have stood on shore for untold time watching them float, mending the unmendable weir.

*Just a damn trap*, a second fisherman snorts. He barks like a stranded seal pup. *Nothing else. That, and the eternal bitch of the sea.* But there is nothing more, and that's the point. All mortal schools bound by some internal coil, all that wants to pull then turn upon a final center, and all the paths from which we mark escape, bound toward some eternal casting off.

*Isle au Haut, Maine*