

LINDSAY DOUKOPOULOS

Spawn

You, the luminous silver muscle, recognize home
coming as a kind of failure—a surrender to the hook.

The compressed, chromatic body that served so well
in other seas fractures into a swastika of limbs.
You falter past the Pizza & Pasta Express, hear the buzz
of the dusty toy train that might, someday, break
down but will never finish circling the ceiling. This town.

The shingle shops along Division Street, dirty windows,
names and puns written with shoe-polish in the local
high school colors: *Do it Here, Do it Wright!!!*
The sidewalks stained and missing squares, like a drunk's
smile, the dirt below soft as a gum. Warm cotton venting

from the Laundromat, your scrawny teenage boyfriend
with the big hands, sweet and dopey, till the day he grabbed
your neck and shoved your face to the tile
of your mother's kitchen. Where was your slippery
then? They say there's enough coal under this town

to power America for 100 years but the mines closed
decades ago. Now they yield the occasional sinkhole,
drive down property values, swallow the odd house.
Here optimism is the same as ignoring the problem.
Didn't your cheekbone heal stronger? The old high

school has been bull-dozed and there are other signs
of progress: cut grass and orange balloons lashed
to mailboxes—one for every football player. Trash
collected Tuesday and the Mayor promising roads
clean of possum carcasses and shattered turtles.

Maybe things change for the better. The old men who coffee
at Dairy Queen don't think so. They remember Better—
when the smokestacks pointed toward God and every man
who could wield a pick-axe had a job at the earth's black heart.
The roads out remain, in every direction, yet here you are.

This, your natal river, your gravel bed: wriggling over pebbles,
wavering in the stream. Wanting home. Wanting to be held by no one.

Soliloquy

Ah, velvet ears. How ill equipped you are
for these clackety train wrecks of language,
the slangs and echoes of outrageous jargon.
How brave, my faithful sentinels. Forgive
this mouth its curtain behavior. Its endless
openings and rehearsals of sense.
It cannot see you in the wings. It can
not imagine you behind the arras.

It plays the fool.

And you, discrete in your perfection,
your endless siftings for punctuation
o period, o comma, o perfect revenge:
To divide us from ourselves. To be
the two soft question marks that hang
at either end of every fact we take
for truth and every thought we entertain.