

Short-Horned Sculpin

Concrete bites my knees as I peer
over the public wharf, scanning
the shallows to find you. That bull-head,
tell-tale beef-bucket mouth – I've been told
you'll eat anything.

I see mussels, fastened against the force
of waves, ocean perch waiting for fish-plant
handouts, barnacles that bob up and down
with the two-step of moored boats.

A forklift bumps a fish tub, shaking me
from my trance. I turn in time to see a gravel-spread
of crushed ice, frozen capelin splayed out
like a hundred open knives. I walk to the end
of the wharf and see a small crab hustles across
the discarded shells of clams, tiny white saucers
dotting the sand.

Suddenly, I see you scaring others
with your bloated, bat-winged bravado. Mottled
grey-brown body, tapers sharply from the head,
tapers from the fleshy spade protecting
the need to devour, spawn. You rush the crab
in short bursts. Attempting escape, crab curses
its awkward, sideways-walk.

We both know you're bluffing. Your naive
teeth, baby-white belly. Short spines jutting suggestive
from gill plates, back-of-head. Warned as a kid
– *don't touch 'em, they're poison*. Nothing more
than the fear of hard-featured beauty.