

Ned Balbo

A Creature in Love

After Revenge of the Creature, 1955

You wonder how it all began, this life
sprung from the sea, like him: more fish than man,
unwilling specimen beyond the porthole
struggling, gills extracting oxygen
from water purer than the depths which spawned
him: thick, mud-black lagoon, primeval ooze.
Captured downriver from the Amazon,
mateless, he lashed out; lately tranquilized,
he waves a webbed claw right through your reflection—
angry, or in love? He swims to touch
you tenderly, as if you could ignore
the difference in your species (not a chance),
though now that he's sealed off, you pity him,
leg chained to the tank's blue floor. Yesterday,

you lay back, numbed in sunlight, blonde hair spread
against the blanket, slow tide peeling back
another layer of sand, while your companion—
your competitor?—square-jawed, dark-haired,
appraised your charms. You asked him, "Science, fish,
ichthyology—Where will it lead
me?" knowing full well Biology will tempt
and, finally, entrap us all. And yet,
not so fast: couldn't you resist while life
and limb held out? One chance is all you get—
He smiled—no, gloated—"I'm a man, so I
don't have to make a choice." Now, if you could,
you'd toss him in the tank. Maybe he's right,
but somewhere in that ocean is the clue

you need—we all need—to decipher how
the world creates us from itself. Alone,
the last of his kind, "He's like an orphan
of Time," you say as Lover Boy looks on,
both Missing Link and Darwin's chosen son
locked in each other's gaze. Your captive kicks,
grappling against the chain. Yes, he's in love,
but, more, the Creature is love: scaled and snub-faced,
shrunken in repose, flexing to full height
in his torment, fierce, his need so strong
that it repels us, though we recognize
our need in his—and that repels us, too,

both prey and predator, desperate to test
our strength to find out if the chain will hold.