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River of Much Pollution

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River Of Much Pollution

J.M. Romig

Once upon a time
This was known as "the river of many fish"
We are told this as children
like it's a fairytale
our parents, trying not to laugh
as they tell us of a time
long before their own
when this was the place to be
If you wanted to be somebody
you came to the town
with the name you can't pronounce
and you could have your American Dream

Newly free men and women
arrived early and bright at our train station
their sleeves rolled up and heads held high
ready to kickstart their lives.
The gears of industry were turning here
in the land of wine and covered bridges.

Once upon a time
there was a trainwreck here
a lot of people lost their lives
even more lost their way
as time rusted over the wheels of progress
and our water
-once so full of hope and prosperity-
caught fire and burned for miles in all directions
scorching the water, and suffocating the fish

Today
this is "the river of much pollution"
We have always known it as such
A town where depression
is both a hereditary emotional and economic condition
Where pessimism is our only tradition

The train station no longer operates
The free man's grandchildren's children are up before
the birds
trying to find a way to kickstart their high
chasing the American Delusion

“Ashtabula does not have a drug problem”
The police told a friend of mine
as her two year old daughter looked on curiously
at a strung out stranger who wandered into their home
and took their bathroom hostage for two hours

He shook uncontrollably
His eyes overflowing with emptiness
By the time the cops showed up, he was long gone
tossed back into the river

The fish in this water have nothing to lose
If evolution is true, we can sprout legs and lungs
crawl onto dry land and breathe
but the current prevents it here

It's hard to see the glass as half full
when you can't drink the water
I suppose we could drink the wine instead
and stumble inside of a bridge
seeking shelter from the toxic rain

Jacki Byler

