

How to Speak the Crocodile's Name

Leah Alsaker

I could call you the crocodylinae,
fossil in wrinkled bronze skin,
lizard with the grin that launched a thousand

toothpaste commercials,
dragon with no flame,
or breathing echo of the dinosaurs.

They've caricatured you countless times,
drawn you into picture books
with a bashful smile and sparkling eyes,

as if that could drown out the rumors -
a stray theory at a theology conference,
a name whispered in a sleepless night:

*Leviathan. Are you he, lord of the seas,
whom the creator ringed about with fearsome teeth?
They say you cut through the oceans*

and stalked after ships.
They say sailors quaked
and dropped their harpoons when you roared.

But if you are the great Leviathan,
why are you penned in the zoo,
bloated on sunshine and rat carcasses?

You shuffle over rock
and gape at me with a gaze as dead as mud.
And I wish to see you rave,

until the walls crumbled
and the clouds thundered your name,

wish to see you do anything
but curl up in your cage, where you lie,
snorting, as you doze —

an overstuffed toad
in sea monster's skin.