

Sleeper Shark

Henry Hughes

At Oregon State University's Big Fish Lab

Flopped on the dissection table
in dingy gray pajamas,
your blunt face faintly smiling. What can you tell us?
Are you nothing but a deep-sea dullard?
Lazy eater of dead whales and sailors. Or something more
glimpsed a mile below
in the submersible's hazy beam? Pearlescent eyes,
octopus scars, the sucking white bite and head shake.

That flabby little dorsal doesn't scare us.
We track your vertical ascent to the choppy light,
pull you from long lines and nets,
find you beached in seaweed.

Above those huge fatty livers,
your soupy gut spills snails, squid, flounder,
and a fresh seal surprised by your silent thrust.
Your eyes are fogged by centuries,
when the world was cooler and filled with fish.

Sleeper shark,
wake us,
before it's too late.

Oblivious

Henry Hughes

Wildfires, dust, and record highs
choking our summer, but not the sea
waving its blue welcome
as we sandal through plasticky sand
and crab shells
toward the lacy surf,

swimming, drinking,
stacking a castle
with more friends cooling-in.
Tunes, dancing, pretzels,
a hit off the pen—

Look! Out there. Spray
and glistening dark dorsals.
Dolphins!—
haven't seen them in years—leaping
just like us
across the planet.