

The Beaching of an Old Friend

by John Grey

I was about to
relate the death of a beached whale
to an obituary
that stunned me
when I flipped through the pages
of the newspaper this morning.

But that is a liberty
it is not mine to take.
That heavy, black-skinned,
barnacled baleen,
a boisterous college roommate,
are each their own tragedy,
not something merely reflected.

Volunteers tried to push
that beast back into the safety of the sea
just as, I expect,
doctors and nurses did
to an old friend
though thrusting hard against
a different kind of heavy surf.

God, I'm at it again,
too caught up in analogy
to grieve separately

for man and beast.
He deserves the distinction.
So does that sand-pocked sea mammal.

I was about to
mourn someone I knew
as if he'd washed up on the shore
and a humpback
like a creature
I'd known for all my life.
That's unfair to both deaths
though it works well incidentally.