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The Humpback of Notre Gulf of Maine

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Mount Desert, Maine

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The Humpback of Notre Gulf of Maine

The massive body
of the humpback Spinnaker
named for the sail-shaped marking on her tail
wedged among rocks at the base
of Great Head on Mount Desert Island

is magnificent in death as in life,
broad flanks striped with ventral grooves,
vast belly open to the sky
as if she had gone to scratch
an itch atop barnacled ledges,

but a more nefarious cause is offered
by researchers who have traced her travels
across oceans (like parents
following the simulation of the flight
carrying their child from Amsterdam to Accra):

victim of entanglements—
not the romantic kind—fishing lines
hindering movement, scarring
skin, despite being rescued
multiple times by watchful human allies

who cut her wing-like fins free,
a mammoth mammal task, tiny boats
maneuvering around colossal creature
with sensitive eyes who struggles,
harried like the humpback of Notre Gulf of Maine,

who once breached and spouted
as watchers clung to rails,
who lived on krill and other schooling fish,
who might have lived to 100
but died at 11, whose skeleton

may one day bring awe to museumgoers
gazing through her arched ribs, along
jigsaw vertebrae, around the mighty skull
of the re-articulated Spinnaker,
baleen, rorqual, wondrous whale.

—*for Allied Whale*