

# A dead whale can feed an entire ecosystem

by Rachel Dillon

but in this poem nothing dies.

Alone in the poem, I make myself  
brave. No—I show brave  
to my body, take both to the ocean.

Come hurricane, come rip current,  
come toxic algal bloom.

In March, I drift past the estuary  
to watch an eight-foot dolphin  
lap the Mill River

like a cat pacing a bathtub,  
sick and disoriented.

Biologists will unspool her empty intestines,  
weigh her gray cerebellum.  
She swam a great distance to die

alone. I'm sorry—I lied. I can't control  
what lives or dies. I need a place

to stow my brain. To hold  
each moment close as a sand flea  
caught in my knuckle hairs.

Please, someone—  
tell me a poem can coax

oil from a sea bird's throat.

Tell me what to do  
with my hands—my hands—

what can my hands do now?