Owen's Shark

Peter Filkins

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I
When young Harold caught it, reeling it in, raucous, incredulous laughter soon ceasing as his father helped him land the shark, then beat its head in, hammering, hammering until the great grey length of it lay still,

no one could imagine that later, unable to resist another peek at triumph before bedtime, he’d find the shark standing upright on its tail, alive and menacing as he ran to Wilfred,

begging him come see it, which soon he did, the boys later convincing their father to let the fish go, take it back to the bay where for weeks they saw it swimming in the cold swift waters of the Irish Sea.

II
“It is a great life,” Wilfred later wrote, oblivious to “the ghostly glimmering of guns, the hollow crashing of the shells,” the front feeling like “neither France nor England, but a kind of paddock where the beasts are kept a few days before the shambles,”

as he was, dying a week before war’s end, leading his platoon across a muddy canal they’d captured, then lost, then captured again without him, who had reminded his mother, “There is no danger, or if any, it will be well over before you read these lines.”
And so the shark swam off the bow of the Astraea, Greek goddess of justice, launched on the day of Wilfred’s birth, but cruising now off the coast of Africa, the armistice signed, while Harold was sure the man who sat in his cabin before him was indeed Wilfred, silent and smiling, his eyes “alive with the familiar look of trying to make me understand,” though what it was he didn’t know in the warm waters north of Alexandria, where legend has it that a shark escorting any ship is thought a sign of a good day’s catch, harbor nets teeming with the pale, bruised bodies of the livid dead.