

A photograph of a wooden desk with a brown leather top. On the desk is a small framed picture of a black and white dog, a book with a pair of glasses on top, and a lamp with a yellow shade. The background is a green wall with a window showing a dark landscape.

PAULETTE
CALLEN

Epiphany

Stories, Essays, and
Meditations on Animals





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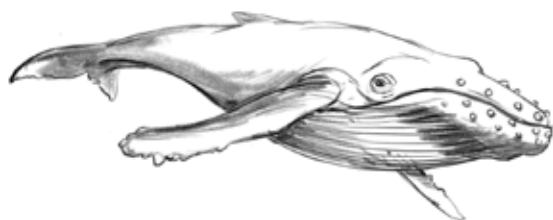
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Stories, Essays, and
Meditations on Animals



PAULETTE
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I have love for the footless,
for the bipeds too I have love;
I have love for those with four feet,
for the many-footed I have love.

-The Buddha-

For hundreds of thousands of years
The stew in the pot
Has brewed hatred and resentment
That is difficult to stop.
If you wish to know why there are disasters
Of armies and weapons in the world
Listen to the piteous cries
From the slaughterhouse at midnight.

-Ancient Chinese Poem-

I happily dedicate this book to Willow, a child
who gives me hope for the future, and to Bodhi,
a dog who gives me joy in the present.

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Introduction

BEFORE WE HAD LANGUAGE, ANIMALS informed our dreams. Our first scribblings were of animals. They were our first gods, our sustenance, and the sum of most of our fears. Often these fears had nothing to do with the reality of the animal.¹ Even the fiercest predators have always had more to fear from us than we from them—proven by the fact that almost every apex predator but us is a threatened or endangered, if not already extinct, species.

Today, as discovered by those who have taken the time to see and listen to them, animals are proving to be more interesting than we have made them in our dreams and metaphors. They are valuable in and of themselves, not simply for what they do or signify for us.

Anthropomorphizing them doesn't elevate their status (compare, for example, the nobility of wolves providing for their young and old with humans' frequent abuse of their children and elders) but rather may cloud our understanding and appreciation for who and what they really are. Saying someone "behaved like an animal" no longer has any meaning to a thoughtful, knowledgeable person. Animals are not (with rare exceptions noted by Jane Goodall and others in their observations of wild

chimpanzees who not infrequently make war on chimps from other groups) violent outside their imperatives to find food, mates, protect territory, and defend themselves. Getting drunk in a bar and going home to smash the furniture, smack the spouse and kids, and kick the dog is unique to humans; animals do not behave this way.

Some of the pieces in this collection were written years ago. Over time, I have mellowed in my approach but altered not a jot in my belief that we use and abuse animals to our peril, and that this is the most telling symptom of what is wrong with humans at our core. (Note that in the Genesis story, even before the blame for the fall of man was placed on a woman, it fell on an animal.) This belief is what turned me toward Buddhism a few years ago, not out of any religious fervor, but because the Buddha explicitly included animals in his circle of compassion.²

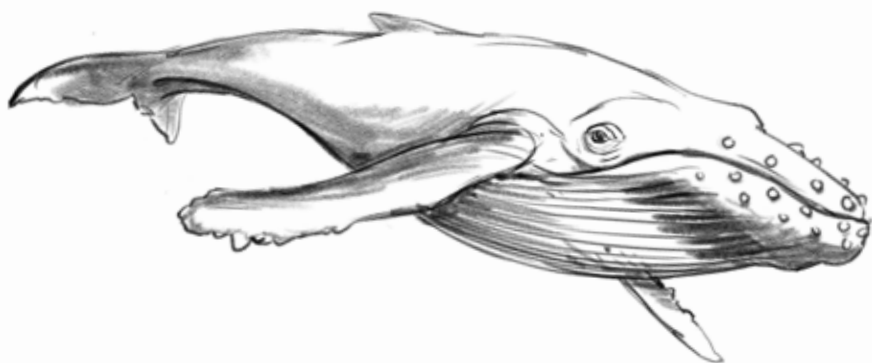
The stories, both true and fictional, the essays, and the musings in this collection are simply an offering, not to animals in the sense that I hold them as divine (any more or less than I hold all life sacred), but to the spirit of evolution that I hope envelops us all and will carry us toward a more peaceable kingdom.

1 *Bats, for example, still inspire fear and violent responses from people, to the point of making many of their kind extinct; and yet the bat herself is a winsome, shy, affectionate, exquisitely clean, and ecologically necessary being. Without her, our skies would darken with insects and many of our plants, from trees to food crops, would not be pollinated. The bat is a close relative of primates; yes, if chimpanzees (chimps and humans share 96 percent of the same DNA) are our brothers and sisters, the little bat is our second cousin.*

- 2 *Christianity has within it the seeds to be a leader in compassion and respect for animals, but established churches have not seen fit to encourage those seeds to grow. Andrew Linzey, an Anglican priest who has written a number of excellent books about Christianity and animals, maintains that if we understood the heart of the Christian message, which is the sacrifice of the higher for the lower, we could not abuse and use animals the way we do. We could not sacrifice them in our laboratories or our slaughterhouses. We would care for them, nurture them, protect them, and love them, the way our God demonstrated His love for us.*

A little passage in The Gospel of Thomas—a document purportedly rejected for the New Testament Canon by the early church men (those same men that tried to make of Mary Magdalene a prostitute, though nothing exists in any scripture to support that notion) quotes Jesus as saying, “Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.” What do you find when you split a piece of wood? What do you find when you lift a stone? The smallest, humblest, most unsung creatures of our earth. The tiny, crawling, scampering, or wiggling beings that hide their faces from the light. The beings, without whom, life would not be possible on this planet. This passage tells me that they, even they, are worthy of our respect and our mindfulness. And in this passage, Jesus tells us so.

FICTION



Satyagraha

YOU CAN TELL SAINTS, NOT by their miracles and thin faces, but by their smiles. St. Francis, I think, grinned from ear to ear at a sunbeam or a tree frog, at a child or a pope.

The Buddha smiles and is smiling still from Katmandu to Riverside Drive.

The whales smile beaming serenity in man-made charnel seas; diving and dancing around our bloody factory ships; singing their mantras while we dissect their stolen children; living and loving gently through our poisons, wastes, and wars; imprisoned, patiently playing our games; never repaying us in kind.

They are finally winning us over.

Epiphany

“DRESS FOR A MINNESOTA WINTER, Gram. Then you’ll be warm enough on the boat,” Kari had admonished her. “No matter how warm it feels on shore, once you’re out there on the water, it’s *cold*.” Hildy had had eighty-three Minnesota winters during which to practice dressing. Cold she wouldn’t be.

She took her time unpacking and arranging her things. She hated living out of a suitcase. She was all in from the trip. So much so, she nearly fell onto the bed without unpacking or doing anything other than taking off her shoes. She rested for a few minutes, then decided to get up and make a good job of it, so in the morning, she would not have to.

The train ride had been pleasant, but the last leg of the journey on that bone-rattling bus without a working lavatory was pure hell. “I’m going to write a thing or two to that bus company when I get home, believe you me,” she muttered. She was so relieved to be here that she wasn’t feeling her excitement yet. It lay dormant, shrouded by exhaustion. Years of dreaming about this trip, months of planning—what a fuss they had made! *A body’d have thought I wanted to go to the moon instead of the East*

Coast, for Pete's sake. She slammed the top drawer of the little motel dresser shut on her underthings, still annoyed with her daughters. Especially Leona: "What in the world do you want to go on a whale watch for, of all things, at your age?" Marion had been not much better, though not as vocal.

"At my age!" Hildy snorted. "*Now* is not the time to be putting things off." After carrying on to high heaven, they had finally accepted the idea and began making plans for her. Oh, the looks on their faces when she told them her plans were already made! She chuckled. They were especially put out when she declined the pleasure of anybody's company. Even Annie, her best friend. Even Kari. "The child is busy with her own life. What does she want to go traipsing off to Provincetown with an old lady for? Besides, she's already been there." And Annie couldn't go, even if she had wanted to (which she didn't) because she was moving into Hildy's apartment to look after Nick and Nora, Hildy's cats, who were too precious to be entrusted to her daughters.

Kari had met Hildy at LaGuardia and put her up for the night in her Lower East Side apartment. *What a horror!* Hildy thought when she first entered the shabby, cramped semi-basement. But the girl was a tidy housekeeper and seemed not to notice. "It's so dark!"

"It's a railroad flat, Gramma. I only have windows at the front and the back. You get used to it."

Hildy reminded herself that standards were different in New York City, and she said no more about the apartment. She did not want to be like Leona, Kari's mother, harping on every detail.

"Gram, if you wait a few days, I can go with you."

"I want to go alone."

"Why?" Kari wasn't challenging, just curious.

"This is something I've wanted to do for years. Don't fuss." *You're the only one I give a snap about, Precious.*

"You didn't tell Mom that you didn't book a return flight."

"No. She'd have had another fit. She likes to know the beginning, middle, and end of a thing before it happens. Why in Sam Hill do anything then?"

"She's going to be furious."

"Sweetheart, that's how I'll know I'm dead, when your mommy stops being mad at me."

Kari smiled a little. "What am I supposed to tell her when she calls?"

"Tell her the truth. I don't want you in hot water with her on my account. I'll be back when I'm good and ready. Now, Precious, make those calls for me. I don't hear so good over the phone."

Hildy took out a much-folded piece of paper from the side pocket of her purse and handed it to her granddaughter. "Amtrak is first, you see. Then the bus. The train only goes as far as Providence. Don't ask me why. The bottom number there, you see, is the motel. It's an inn or something like that. They have this package deal. I get a free whale watch for every weekend I stay there."

"What if they don't have any rooms? This is very short notice."

"My land, it's only May. They'll be empty. They'll be tickled pink to have me."

"How long do you want to stay?"

"As long as it takes. I don't expect whales to rally around the boat just because I'm on it."

"They have sightings just about every day in season, Gram."

"I don't want to just gawk at them like some yahoo. I want to meet them properly. And I want to see dolphins. Oh, land! I want to see dolphins. *They* don't come around every day. I can tell you that!" Hildy waved her finger in the air. "Make it for two weeks to start."

"This is going to be kind of expensive, isn't it?"

"I've planned for it. Don't worry. I have plenty of travelers' checks right here." Hildy patted the side of her purse. "I mean to use them all if I have to."

Kari was hesitant, but Hildy knew she'd make the calls. *You're nothing like your mother, thank the Lord.* Then she thought, *It's a good thing we mortal humans aren't yet telepathic. Whales and dolphins, they say, are.*

She found herself gazing at Kari, drinking her in, savoring every detail of this petite, brown-haired young woman, her only grandchild who, in looks, was a throwback to Ed...the curly, baby-fine hair, brown eyes, the small straight nose, and rosy skin. Leona would be harping on the girl's clothes. The long paisley skirt, the anklets and slip-on shoes, an oversized cardigan over a T-shirt. Her mother kept sending her shirtwaist dresses and A-line skirts, which Kari left at the thrift stores where she got most of her clothes. *Young girls aren't pressed and permed anymore, and it's a blame good thing,* thought Hildy. Anyway, Kari was cute as a bug no matter what she wore.

Hildy's eyes had blurred then. She fished in her purse for a tissue and took off her glasses to clean them. She could hardly see a blessed thing. She couldn't tell anymore if the glasses made things better or worse. Just different. The eyes were nearly gone, just like everything else.

She finished hanging up her shirts in the closet, including the wool Pendleton—still the warmest single thing she owned—that had been Ed's. Her pants and sweaters were folded in the bottom drawer of the dresser, and she put the empty suitcase in the back of the closet out of sight.

Then she took her overnight bag into the bathroom and drew a bath while she arranged her toothpaste, lotions, and dusting powder on the sliver of counter space around the sink. She was bone weary—more tired than hungry. She had raisins, peanuts, and an apple in her purse if she wanted something later. She smiled and shook her head. *Of all the foolishness.* A plane. A train. A bus. Then a cab to get here from the bus station. Tomorrow morning, the cab would carry her to the boat that would take hours to get to a place somewhere out in the ocean to see whales. *And, if I'm lucky, dolphins.*

Some excitement tingled through her aches and weariness. She had read that she could expect to see humpbacks here, perhaps a fin whale, although they were very shy and seldom came near a boat. And maybe dolphins. She took her empty overnight bag back to the bedroom and put it in the closet with her suitcase. Then she took off her sturdy sneakers and put them next to a pair much the same, but a half size larger so she could wear extra heavy socks inside them. She didn't want cold feet on the boat. She slipped into her Dearfoams, a present from Annie, and padded back into the bathroom.

Poor Annie. She didn't understand Hildy's wanting to take this trip any better than did her daughters. Hildy and Annie had been friends for—it felt like a hundred years.

Annie was her best friend, not because they shared interests, but because they were still alive and had known each other longer than anyone else they knew. They disagreed on most things. Annie fussed at Hildy constantly: her clothes were not ironed; she never went to the beauty parlor. "You know, they have senior citizen rates on Wednesday at A Cut Above on Hennepin. Jackie there does a nice job."

"Who cares about my blame hair? And I threw out the iron when I retired."

But mostly Annie worried for Hildy's immortal soul because she did not attend church anymore. "Well, if you don't like the church you went to, find another one. Minneapolis is full of churches, God knows. Find one of the crazy ones, where they wear sneakers and play guitars and things like that."

"I was baptized in a church, confirmed in one, married in one, and took my children till they were old enough to go on their own and had my mother's funeral in one. None of it did me a stick of good. It never made me happy. Do you want butter on your popcorn?" They settled in to watch the latest episode of *Murder, She Wrote*, one thing on which they did agree.

The tub was full. Hildy tested the water to make sure it wasn't too hot, undressed, and carefully lowered herself into the water. She had to be careful in everything she did. It was so tiresome. Though she pretended to her daughters that she didn't. Leona's ever mournful cry "What if she breaks a hip?" had become the family joke, she wailed it so often, whenever Hildy wanted to do anything. But Hildy knew it was no joke. Her body had been failing her, betraying her little by little over the years. She couldn't

trust it. When the apostle said the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, he was probably just talking about old age. Worst of all were her hands and wrists. "I can't even pick up my cast iron skillet anymore," she complained to Annie. "I had to give all my cast iron to Marion. Now I use these little aluminum things. I hate them. But—no strength left. Anyway, the only thing I fry nowadays is my pancakes. Don't taste any good without my skillet, but there's no help for that." She didn't even trust herself to pick up her cats. She always sat and let them jump on her lap for cuddling. She also had to be aware of balance in everything she did. Once her balance was lost, she knew there would be no catching herself, even if she had something to grab on to. Her wrists wouldn't hold her.

She soaked a few minutes to ease out the kinks and then scrubbed herself all over. She climbed out of the tub, carefully, and dried off with the motel towels that were much more luxurious than what she was used to, put on her bloomers, her undershirt, and slipped a flannel nightgown over it all. Then, even though there was plenty of light left, she crawled into bed settling back against the pillows to read for a while.

But she didn't read. She thought. This would be her last trip anywhere. She hadn't taken many in her life. Northern Minnesota when she was much younger. The Black Hills with her married daughters. She had enjoyed the scenery, except for Mount Rushmore. The wonder of that was not that some guy had carved those big faces into the side of the mountain, but that he had wanted to. Hildy couldn't see the point except to give someone the excuse to erect an unsightly tourist center across from it that sold cheap

souvenirs and fast food. No, the best thing about Mount Rushmore was that Cary Grant movie.

This place was utterly different from any place she had been before. She got up and cranked open her window so she could get a room full of ocean air and hear the susurrations of the waters, that, even on this windless evening, rose and fell, rhythmic as a pulse. She knew it wasn't just the wind that moved the seas, but currents and tides—the moon, maybe even the stars.

She sank into the blueness of this room: the faded blue walls, the dark blue carpet with its darker markings. The paint wasn't fresh, nor the carpet new, but she liked it. It was clean, simple, and right for this place perched on the edge of the world. The open-weave blue plaid curtains billowed inward and fell back. She pulled the blue cotton bedspread up and reached for her novel. Or perhaps she would just doze a little, then...

Something jangled in her ear. It took another two rings for her to orient herself and pick up the telephone.

"Hello? Mrs. Flanagan? This is your wake-up call."

"My land. What time is it?"

"Five o'clock, ma'am."

"In the morning?"

"Yes, ma'am."

A wake-up call! Now that was something. And it didn't cost anything extra, either. Kari had told her to ask for one at the desk when she checked in, and it was a good thing, too.

She still felt her weariness upon her like a heavy blanket and knew she was not going to be up and out on a whale boat this day. She relaxed and slept several hours

more. At 8:00 she got up, dressed, and found her way to the motel restaurant. The restaurant was not large, but through the plate glass windows she could see ocean and sky and seabirds riding the winds and scooping their own breakfasts from the sea. She ordered coffee and waffles. A nice change from pancakes.

She spent the day napping, reading, and sitting on one of the benches scattered on the manicured lawn in front of the Sea Scape Inn, which was the name of her motel, enjoying the frolic of waves, birds, clouds, and light. The Sea Scape was a modest place. She liked it for its hominess, the friendliness of the folks who worked here, and the fact it was so close to the water. She was tired but deeply content. She had the feeling that this place had been waiting for her.

For lunch, she ate her raisins and the apple outdoors, buttoned up in her Pendleton. For supper, she went back to the restaurant and ordered the chicken soup. It came with toast and a small salad and she enjoyed every morsel. By nightfall, when she again stepped out of her warm bath, she was feeling just pleasantly tired; she remembered to ring the desk for another wake-up call and went to bed.

When the 5:00 call came, she dressed and found the card the cab driver had given her: "Marvin...the only cab in town," which was literally true. During the drive from the bus station to the motel, he had been over talkative for Hildy's taste, but he'd carried her luggage in, refused a tip, and just before he left, had handed her his card. "Call me anytime," he said winking, which annoyed her further. "Special rates for senior citizens." Hildy took the card and sniffed. *He's no spring rooster himself.* Still, she appreciated the special rate. She dialed his number.

The wharf, almost at the other end of town, was like a street on stilts projecting far out over the water, a far cry from any of the docks she had known in Minnesota, even on the biggest lakes she had visited. It was so wide that, even with the small buildings along either edge, there was room for motorized traffic. She walked straight down the middle of it. This early there was very little activity. Seagulls squatted in various places over the dock, some at rest on the top of poles and coils of rope. One concession selling hot coffee and chowder was already open. Some places seemed to sell bait and tackle; some, those without signs, were perhaps privately owned. She didn't know where to go, but she kept her eyes open. *I'll see other people boarding a boat or something. I'll just ask.*

She didn't have to. Soon enough she saw a small crowd of people ahead, tickets in hand, parkas and jackets slung over their shoulders, gathered in front of a ticket booth not much bigger than a phone booth. Above it, the words **DANCER FLEET** emblazoned in blue on a white board sawed in the shape of a waving banner identified this as her fleet. Beyond it were two more ticket booths, similar to this one but in different colors and not yet open for business. She couldn't read their names, but it didn't matter. According to Kari, the Dancer Fleet was the best. The captains cared more for the comfort and safety of the whales than the convenience and curiosity of their passengers. They never moved in too close or too fast, and if there was already a boat zeroing in on one or more whales, they passed by. Fortunately for them and for the whales, their reputation attracted more passengers than it repelled.

Hildy exchanged her motel coupon for a ticket and stopped to look around again before boarding. Now she

was exhilarated. The smells out here on the wharf were decidedly fishy and salty, unlike anything she had ever smelled. The Midwest was earthier, grassier, even around the lakes. Only the piping of the gulls was familiar, for she had heard a similar piping when she and Ed had been to Lake Superior the summer before Leona was born. She didn't want to think of that now. It was grand to be in a place that looked and smelled different, where there were few associations with familiar things. Everything was fresh and new and she felt almost as if she didn't have a past or that she could choose any past she liked, it didn't matter. What mattered was here and now, and she liked that feeling very much.

She felt her back straighten a little as she boarded the boat. On its side was printed *Wave Dancer*. According to the brochure she was given at the inn, there were five boats in the Dancer Fleet. She loved their names. *Rainbow Dancer*, *Star Dancer*, *Wind Dancer*, *Blue Dancer*, and her boat today. *Good names for cats*, she thought, and she wondered how Nick and Nora were getting along without her. The brochure said that only two boats a day went out for public whale watches. At other times, the boats were used by researchers to study the whales and, all too frequently, to rescue whales entangled in plastic fishing nets, no longer a rare occurrence as the oceans became a dumping ground for the nets of the fishing industries of many nations. Hildy had stopped eating seafood when she read of the carnage produced by this "ghost fishing."

"What good's that going to do?" Annie had fussed the first time Hildy refused to eat her fish sticks.

"Maybe no good. Maybe a lot. I don't know. But my conscience is clean. Besides, I won't take food out of the

mouths of the creatures I love. I can eat something else. They can't."

"What about the cats? You still feed them cat food. That has fish in it."

"I know. I do what I can. Nobody's perfect. Make me a pancake."

Hildy remembered she hadn't had breakfast yet, so she went inside the cabin, fragrant with brewing coffee, clam chowder, and frying eggs. She read the menu on the blackboard (fortunately white-chalked in giant letters): Egg McDolphin, Danish, doughnuts, bagels, and rolls. For lunch there would be sandwiches and chowder, more coffee, and pop (though here they called it "soda"). No one would starve. She ordered coffee and a Danish. She believed this was the best coffee she had ever tasted and suspected the cold sea air made it so.

Coffees warm in hand, people settled themselves around the boat, inside and out, on upper and lower decks, while Moby, the captain's Newfoundland dog, bounded everywhere, ingratiating himself with all the passengers.

A young woman took the microphone on the lower deck close to where Hildy sat. She introduced herself as Carol, a marine biologist and their guide for today. Her black, curly hair was red-tipped from sun and salt. Her skin was baked brown, with deep lines around her eyes. Hildy guessed she was not yet thirty and aging fast in the sun—but for a good cause. Her voice carried throughout the boat as she explained whale biology and behavior. She knew her stuff, but Hildy paid no attention. She had read books on whales. Their singing, their migrations, care of the young, baleen, their big brains...it was all old news. Except... Hildy

pricked her ears when she heard the question posed by another passenger. If it hadn't come up, she might have asked it herself, just to hear the answer. Not, *Why* do whales sing? (*Why does anybody sing?* thought Hildy. *It's fun.* She thought that was a stupid question, though the songs probably had something to do with mating, as only the males were thought to do it.) But, *How?* Carol, bless her, gave the right, the wonderful, the simple and beautiful answer: "We don't know." She told the wide-eyed whale watchers that no mechanism had been found in a whale that would produce sound and they did not apparently need an outgoing breath to produce sound the way land animals did. "We just don't know," Carol said again. Hildy felt some goose bumps at the thought that a bit of magic remained in the world and it was to be found in the sea, and she would soon come face to face with it.

Hildy took a seat and settled in to enjoy the steady forward motion of the boat. She was, at last, on the ocean. She tried to comprehend its vastness and found her mind emptying out and expanding till she was almost in a pleasant trance. She also experienced a deep peace, a remembrance of a childhood and adolescence spent on a prairie farm, where the land lay flat, unbroken by trees except those few planted by the early settlers around their houses for shade, the expanse of wheat or prairie grass waving in the wind under cloud-born shadows that ebbed and flowed over the fields with the ever-changing skies. The curve of the earth was visible, and a car or truck would emerge over the horizon on the dirt road leading up to their farmstead like a small ship at sea. And you could drown there too, almost, as she did when she was four or five and wandered into

a cornfield and could not find her way out. The stalks of August corn, three times her height, closed in around her and she stumbled through them, crying until she heard her father's voice. "Hildy! Hildy!"

"Papa, Papa!" she had wailed and he had told her to stop right where she was and calm down. Then he said, "Okay, girl, keep talking to me now and don't move. I'll come and get you." And she kept saying, "Here I am Papa, here I am Papa Papa," and he followed her voice and picked her up and carried her out, back into the light. He just looked at her for a moment and set her down and said, "Okay, squirt. Now run home. Ma is waiting dinner for you. Tell her I'll be along." And he patted her bottom to see her off. She hadn't thought of her father in a long time.

The rhythmic hum of the boat's motor and the soft *shuushuushing* sound of the water parting around them eased her to her very bones. No wonder people went to sea. Occasionally someone would sit next to her and try to start a conversation. They were being kind to a cute little old lady alone on a boat. But she had had a lifetime of making conversation with people, most of whom she didn't care for. Now she wanted to be alone with the sea and its creatures. She was polite but reticent, and they soon wandered on to do their own sea viewing or to talk with their friends or fiddle with their cameras.

As they approached Stellwagen Bank, the atmosphere on the boat changed. Strains of Bach wafted over and around the boat. Carol had told them they would pipe music through the PA system because it seemed to attract the whales, and Bach seemed to work the best. Excitement was palpable even as people became more quiet. The

captain interrupted the music briefly and in a low voice, just loud enough to be heard, said, "Ladies and gentlemen. Keep your eyes peeled. We might see spouts or even backs of humpbacks. Moby will know they are there before we do. So if you can't see far out to sea, just keep your eyes on the dog. He's never wrong."

Hildy rose and squeezed in to stand right against the railing. The boat was moving very slowly now, not churning the water, and she got a surprise when she looked down. The color of the ocean was a dark slate, almost black, and it looked hard, like if you fell you'd land on it, not in it, and crack your skull. When she thought about it, the lakes back home were not blue either. They were green. Was there any blue water outside people's imaginations? Maybe the Mediterranean? The Caribbean? She didn't care. For now, the captain had stopped the motors and Moby, who had been cadging a bit of bagel from a tourist, suddenly bolted forward and around to the other side of the boat.

"There!" someone cried. "It's a humpback!"

"Please, don't everyone run to the same side of the boat. If they are here, and they are, you'll see them all around."

All but a few people disregarded the captain's request and scurried to the side of the boat where the whale was seen. "There's a calf!" Cameras clicked and people oohed and aahed. Many were silent, witnessing the spectacular, as two humpbacks breached, rising impossibly high, straight up into the air and falling to the side with a sea-displacing splash. The calf, like a curious youngster of any family, swam to the side of the boat, dived under it, and came up on the other side. People were delighted and the calf seemed to enjoy the attention.

Hildy clasped her mittened hands in front of her, so moved she felt near tears. And still, she scanned the waters for any sign of dolphins. She knew they didn't always come around, but sometimes they did. It was not impossible. Moby kept charging around the boat to be on the side where the whale calf emerged, and Hildy hoped he would respond to dolphins in a similar way.

The breaching whales had disappeared, and not long after, the calf swam away and dived. People relaxed a little, the captain announced it was time to turn back, and the lines for more hot coffee and chowder formed in the cabin. Hildy found the bathroom, then went to the concession for more coffee and an egg sandwich. She was pleased to her very core. She felt in her pocket for Marvin's number.

The common lobby/lounge area of the Sea Scape was not used much because most people were out exploring the town, the dunes, and the nightlife, or they were on the boats. So, Hildy spent much of her time there. She could watch her favorite evening television shows, *The Golden Girls* and *Murder, She Wrote* and the news or just sit and read in one of the recliners. But mostly, she enjoyed gazing out the big windows that faced the sea. She couldn't seem to get enough of the view. It was endlessly engaging and it filled her with a contentment she had never known. The staff treated her like their grandmother, bringing her coffee and cookies once in a while, free of charge. They weren't talkative and she appreciated their attentions, which were thoughtful and brief.

Marion and Leona were grown and they were still living with Hildy in her little house a few blocks from Lake Harriet in Minneapolis. Ed came to visit and she said to him, "Why

are you here now?" He had only ever taken the girls once every two months or so for an afternoon at the amusement park or the zoo, or in the winter, maybe to a movie. Hildy would have gladly given him joint custody, but he didn't ask for it. Her mother was there too, harping as she always harped about Ed. "Why do you let him into your dreams?" she scolded. "He's always here." "Well, so are you." "Not all the time." Even in her dreams, she knew she was dreaming. By the time Leona was twenty-one and Marion nineteen, Ed was dead. And so was her mother. None of them knew, as she did, that her last thought on this earth would be of Ed Flannigan, even though their marriage had lasted only long enough to produce two in-wedlock children. Neither had married again. Hildy supported them by working in the bank while her mother took care of the girls. Maybe that's why they turned out the way they did. Solid citizens with no imagination. Ed had, well, who knew what this hard drinking, happy-go-lucky Irishman actually did? She knew he was happier than he was lucky, since he always looked down at heel, but clean, sober, and shaved when he came for his daughters. He never remembered their birthdays. They had liked seeing him as they would have a congenial uncle who showed up occasionally, but their feelings didn't run too deep and when he was found dead in a rooming house, they did not mourn.

"Mrs. Flannigan? Mrs. Flannigan?"

"Yes?" She opened her eyes to the smiling face of one of the Sea Scape staff who was lightly touching her shoulder and saying her name.

"They are going to stop serving lunch in half an hour."

"Oh, yes. Thank you." Hildy was a regular for lunch when she wasn't on the boat. She took a moment to clear

her head and slowly rose from the recliner where she had spent the last hour, dreaming.

When she planned her trip, Hildy had imagined herself on a whale boat every day, but in the reality she was not up to it. So, she took her mystery novel out to the benches to read and watch the sky and sea. The view was eternal, infinite, and ever changing; her eyes were off her book more than on. She did most of her reading in the evening after her bath in her room.

One day, she called Marvin to take her up Commercial Street so she could wander in and out of the shops. She found a bookstore and was happy to see they had a mystery section, as she was going to come to the end of her Mary Roberts Reinhart paperbacks. She found a coffee shop where she ordered some kind of chocolate-filled pastry and black coffee and perused the local paper. She asked the waitress if it would be possible for the restaurant to call Marvin and have him pick her up outside the shop. They did so and he was there in about ten minutes.

She found that she could only go out on the boat every third day, but she was content with her quiet routine. She always asked the naturalist on board, sometimes it was Carol, sometimes a young man, if they had seen any dolphins. No one had, so she hadn't missed that at least.

After two weeks, which included five whale watches, during which she had seen humpbacks on every occasion, she knew she had to go back home. Provincetown was no longer the sleepy little village it was when she first arrived. The tourist season was picking up and so was the pace. The whale boats were getting crowded and so was the Sea Scape's restaurant. One afternoon there was not a

bench free on the lawn for her to sit and read. She asked the concierge to make the calls for her to get reservations home.

She bought one more ticket for a whale watch. She had been on all the boats but one, the *Star Dancer*, and this morning, she boarded it, noting it was smaller than the others and seemed much older. She found a seat inside at first, as she was accustomed to doing, while she finished her coffee and muffin. She did not go outside until they approached Stellwagon Bank, where today the humpbacks were already spy hopping to the delight of the watchers.

Unlike the other whale boats she had been on, one couldn't walk all the way around the deck of the *Star Dancer*. The way was obstructed by some metal boxes bolted to the floor. Cables attached to rings at the front of the topmost box stretched to the peaked roof of the captain's glassed-in perch. The obstruction also prevented her taking her favored position, seated facing forward.

She watched the humpbacks now, with a familiarity that pleased her, standing among the first-time whale watchers. Today two small humpbacks, small by whale standards anyway, were putting on quite a show, diving and dancing and circling the boat, or diving beneath it and coming up on the other side. Passengers followed them around and Hildy, keeping her seat as far forward as possible, caught a mercurial glimmer straight ahead of their boat, which was resting still in the water. The flash of silver seemed not to be a whitecap and it was getting closer. She peered hard into the distance. Humpbacks hadn't looked like this when she had seen them and there was no spout. Just silver crescents, yes, more than one, many, peaking above and

spearing through the waves. They had to be dolphins. She looked around her. No one else noticed and she glanced up at the captain's perch.

He was looking to his left, at the whales, and Hildy was the only one aware of the smaller moving shapes ahead in the water. She was sure now. They were dolphins. She sat on the side of the box and pulled herself up on her knees, and then to her feet by grabbing one of the cables. She could see better now and made her way forward carefully to the railing so she would be close to them when they approached the boat, as she was sure they must.

Her heart was beating fast and she held her breath and then breathed deeply. She was whispering, "Yes, thank you thank you," to the dolphins, to the sea, to no one in particular. They were leaping closer.

As she leaned out, salt spray carried on the sweet breath of the sea formed droplets like tears on her face. As they reached her lips, she licked them and was back in the last row of the ramshackle movie theatre, a lifetime ago, where that Gish girl silently portrayed all the sorrow and sweetness of a hopeless love, so that Hildy cried and was embarrassed because it was only her second date with Ed Flanagan. She didn't want him to catch her crying. She would feel humiliated if he laughed. She risked a glance at him, hoping he was looking at the screen and hadn't noticed her tears, and something unfolded inside her when she found him glancing shyly at her with tears of his own wetting his cheeks. They came together, hands touching hands and faces lightly, caressingly, kissing softly and licking the tears from each other's faces, like butterflies at roses—a gentle prelude to a rhapsody that sent her that

night, not home to her father's house and her own bed, but to Ed's and his. For ten years that passion danced between them like a joyous flame until it died as astonishingly as it was born, leaving a trail of tender ashes. The memory washed over her in less than a heartbeat as she leaned out trying hard to catch every flash of silver, arcing, plunging toward her in the sea. Suddenly she was out of balance and her hand gave up its grip on the cable. She fell forward, toppling over the side into the dark water.

The ocean closed over her at once. Her breath was knocked out of her on impact and the icy cold made her gasp, but she couldn't. Her throat was sealed. There was a searing rip all down her middle, a moment of utter blackness, and then she saw them clearly, swimming toward her—six dolphins, gleaming in the light-drenched water. *Oh, I was so afraid I wouldn't see you!* They laughed and greeted her with one mind, and yet she clearly sensed six distinct individuals. She understood she could be part of that mind too, and still be herself. She was happy.

Come with us, they invited.

She followed them feeling a strength and lightness of being that she remembered from a lifetime ago. *I can swim!*

Of course. They replied. *You can fly, too.*

I can?

You'll see. Their silent, merry laughter flashed silver in her mind as their bodies gleamed in the water.

Oh, look. She had turned back to see several people, two in the water and three on board, struggling to lift out a lumpish, dripping mass. *Oh dear, they should just leave it.*

The dolphins laughed again, their gentle merry laugh that she could feel more than hear. *That sort of thing is important to them. Let's go.*

She swam with them and they frolicked about her on all sides in water that changed from indigo to lightening shades of blue, to silver and then to gold. The waters became richer and warmer with golden light, and then she could see stars and systems of stars.

On board the Star Dancer, the whale watchers and crew were in shock. Those that had dived into the water now shivered inside blankets while others leaned over the lifeless body of the cute little old lady. A woman looked up and out to sea. "Look," she said and pointed. "Dolphins."

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