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I came into this world flukes first. Light broke around me, vast and blue. Stroking me, my mother nudged me toward air. My first breath was tangy, my lungs filling and every cell welling as I breached in those Pacific waters.

My flukes unfolded. Two of my aunts prodded me along. Clumsily, I swam in the swells. I needed my mother's milk as much as that August air, and so I dove beneath her. As she slowed, I took her nipple. Her sweet rich milk streamed down my throat. My aunts and cousins sang to me. All about me, the sea and sky clicked.



This is my song, a hymn of life—my life and yours. My song is at once beautiful and painful. At times a ballad and an anthem. By turns a psalm and a lampoon—as we would expect from life. Not often an idyll, and never a lullaby. Not a dirge either, for I am not submerged in the inevitable losses of our lives. But a chant, a canticle, a litany.

I am, by nature, gentle. Even shy, at least around those outside my family and friends, my clan. And I hope you will remember this because some of what I sing is neither gentle nor bashful. When, at times, my song sounds harsh, it is that so much is at risk—our survival, certainly, and yours, as well. I do know that we are bound, as sure as a harpoon is to its line. So know that even when my words are sharp, when my barbs strike deep, I am, at the far end of the line, a gentle soul.

You have not yet understood or heeded our songs. Perhaps you never will. But I will do my best to have you hear me before it is too late. Before all of the songs, ours and yours, sink into time's depth and darkness. Listen. My life depends on it. Your life depends on it.



I weighed only a ton when I was born, but now I am enormous. My mother's milk was high in protein and minerals and, yes, fat—and I grew prodigiously. Now, as I approach my sixtieth birthday, I am just under sixty feet long and weigh fifty-nine tons. Indeed, now I eat a ton on a good day, and my blubber remains thick. My four-hundred-pound heart pumps five gallons of blood at a beat. Despite my gargantuan size, I am fast. Normally, I travel at four to seven knots; I dive at three. But I can swim at twenty knots when I need to. I'm not bragging. I just need you to know who I am.

My eyes look small because of my bulk, but they are two-and-half inches in diameter. Absolute size controls functioning in eyes—as it does, to a certain extent, in brains. My eyes really are large, and I see well—except, of course, that my huge head causes quite a blind spot. In fact, my head is one-third of my body, about twenty feet and twenty tons: I am the largest of the Toothed Cetaceans. But Blue Baleens are far bigger—the largest animals who have ever lived in this world. So my size is relative, titanic to you but not to a Blue.



I don't really look like anything else in this world. You would, I suspect, think me ugly. And, I suppose I am. My head is squarish—*blockish*, you might say. It contains the largest brain ever as well as vast amounts of spermaceti, the oil for which you slaughtered my ancestors. My blowhole is a slit on the left near the front of my head. My blow is bushy, forward, and skewed to the left.

My eyes bulge a bit. I have no visible ears, but I hear far better in water than you. Sound travels through my inner ears, my jaw, and my spermaceti cavity. I have no hair, as most other mammals do, but my blubber keeps me warm and, because it is lighter than water, buoyant. I can open my jaws ninety degrees. My lower jaw is long and narrow and underslung. My teeth—conical, thick, and heavy—fit into slots in my wide upper jaw, which is toothless. My throat is also wide, broad enough, in fact, for you to pass down it.

My skin is creased, *wrinkled*, unlike the smooth skin of other Cetaceans. In the millions of generations since my forebears returned to the water, my arms evolved into short fins with rounded tips. My back has no dorsal fin, just a hump and a series of knobs running toward my tail. My torso is extremely muscular (I have, after all, to propel fifty-

nine tons at speed), and I have no vestigial legs at all. My intestines contain ambergris, for which you also massacred my forefathers. It is nothing more than an intestinal by-product, but you still value it beyond measure.

My broad triangular flukes are horizontal—enough for you to know that I am no fish. The trailing edges of my flukes are pretty well frayed. *Scalloped* by life. I have been around a long time, roved the world, experienced much that living offers us all. I realize that my longevity isn't exceptional for a large-brained mammal, but in these last sixty years the changes in our world have been epochal, even apocalyptic. Of these I will sing.



Whenever one of you has spotted me, you have stalked me. You no longer have murder in your hearts, but you still cannot leave me be. I suppose it is my color. I am large, of course, but not much larger than some of my cousins or, had he lived, my brother. My whiteness gets your attention.

Your stalking, understandably, bothers me. My breath quickens, and I don't sing as much. I spend more time on the surface, and I find myself changing course more often than I would like. It's not just your constant noise, though that