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Whales

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We were fishing the incoming tide for flounder one afternoon way over by the Long Spear Reef when Ted put his Budweiser down, looked at me and started talking.

“Hey Frank, I’ve been thinking.”

“Yeah, and?”

“And I was wondering, what do you make of this whole evolution thing?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, why do you think it stopped with us?”

“Are you trying to say,” I answered, “that you and me, right here, are the pinnacles of creation?”

I felt a bump in my line so I slowly let my rod tip down, just to give the bastard a little taste. When I decided he was hooked, I yanked up the pole until it bent into a perfect semi-circle. It wasn’t a long fight. The fish spit out my bait a few seconds later, and, as I was reeling up my line to string another strip of squid meat on the hook, I heard Ted start to mumble again.

“Well, I don’t know what a pinnacle is, but I guess we are the smartest.”

“What makes you say that?” I asked.

“I don’t know, I just don’t think there’s any animal around that can do everything we can.”

Watching a few tiny white birds make slow circles above the water and then dive sharply down into a wave after an unlucky anchovy or shad, I said, “Whales.”

Ted disagreed.

“I know they’re smart, and that they can swim in groups and everything, but they definitely can’t talk, at least not like people, like the two of us right now.”

I wanted to explain to him that whales travel in pods (not groups), that the vocalizations of an adult blue whale are the most powerful sounds that any animal can produce, carrying over distances of 1000 miles or more, and that the pitch of whale conversation is so low and complicated that underdeveloped human ears can’t even detect it, but a horse fly bit me square on the right shoulder blade so all I said was:

“Shit! That hurt.”

Which must have prompted Ted to ask, “And what about our houses?”

“What about them?” I replied, remembering that I’d promised to help

him unclog his gutters early the next morning.

“Well, don’t you agree we’re sort of smart for building them where we don’t have to worry about every little wave knocking us around?”

I was too busy losing another fish to explain that one of the great benefits of being a whale is that you don’t have to deal with nuisances like paying for a home, finding a job to pay for that home, fighting in wars to protect that home, or listening to friends who think they’re philosophers. You just let the current take you.

An hour later, the sun was going down behind Hunter’s Island and we’d had enough. I pulled up the anchor and the underwater mesh basket flopping with fish Ted had caught earlier in the day. Ted started the motor, turned the wheel until the boat’s bow faced the coastline. He steered us past Shotgun Inlet, around Fisherman’s Rock, and in between the barely visible formations he called the Lobster Trap.

When we pulled into our slip at the marina, the sky was almost completely black. Ted turned off the motor, went down into the cabin and climbed back out with a halogen lamp, two skinny knives and three still-wiggling fish. We gutted them on a stained plastic tray, pulling out their brown and blue insides.

That night we cooked and ate the fish, drank beers, laughed, and watched the Yankees pummel the Marlins 10-3.

—Chris Vola



Lost in Atlantis

—Garrett Pinder