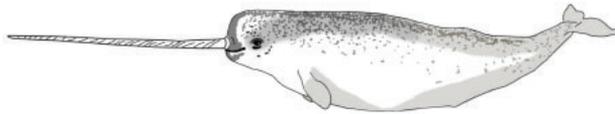


# Chapter 13

## Sharkface and the Narwhals



One week after his second close call with ice, Sharkface was swimming in open water off the east coast of Baffin Island when he noticed a line of what looked like posts on the horizon. It seemed to him like some kind of strange fence, but what was a fence doing here in the ocean? He had to investigate so he swam off in the direction of this latest curiosity.

As he got closer, he noticed that even though the sea was calm, each of the “fence posts” was slowly moving, and stranger still they were all moving together. One of the posts fell over and Sharkface noticed a whale coming towards him with a “fence post” stuck in his head and he remembered a tale that his beaked whale friend, Cuvier, had told him. One time when he was in the far north Cuvier encountered a strange-looking whale with one very long tusk. The whale was called a narwhal, but that was about all that Cuvier knew about these strange creatures.

As the narwhal approached, he called out, “Who are you and why are you disturbing our listening?” Sharkface found that he could understand the narwhal’s language because it was like the speech of the blackfish that he knew from back home.

“I am an elephant seal named Sharkface and I have just come from the ocean on the other side of the frozen sea. I am traveling to visit my relatives who live far away. I am sorry that I am disturbing you. I mean you no harm. By the way, what are you listening to?”

The narwhal replied that they were listening to their favorite program on the CBC and that if he really meant them no harm; he would continue his journey and not disturb them any more. If, however, he did mean to cause a mischief, they would all be very pleased to stab him with their sharp tusks. The narwhal then quickly departed, rejoined his companions, raised his tusk up into the air at the end of the “fence” and began to sway back and forth with the others.

All this was too much for Sharkface’s curiosity and instead of leaving, he slowly swam towards to the line of narwhals. He was very quiet as he did not want to risk a poke with one of their shark tusks, but he found that they ignored him. As he got closer he could hear faint sounds; it seemed as if the narwhals were singing, but it was not like any whale song he had ever heard. It sounded like they were singing in some kind of human language.

As the singing got louder and louder, Sharkface began to make out the words of the narwhal’s song.

“Heeeeeey good lookin’ ”  
“Whaaaaaat ya got cookin’ ”  
“How’s about cookin’ “  
“Somethin’ up with me.”  
And then,

“Heeeeeey sweet baby”  
“Doooooon’t you think maybe”  
“We could find us”  
“A brand-new recipe.”

Sharkface was amazed. He had heard this song before! One time when he was at Guadalupe he swam up to a boat anchored just off shore. The people were all sitting on the back, drinking beers and listening to this song playing on the radio. This was a song by a man named Hank Williams, but why were the narwhals singing it here off Baffin Island?

“I got a hot rod Ford and a two-dollar bill”  
“And I know a spot right over the hill”  
“There’s soda pop and the dancin’s free”  
“So if you wanna have fun, come along with me.”

The narwhals sang for hours and Sharkface heard so many Hank Williams songs he could not remember them all.

There were twelve whales and they came up with some pretty complex harmonies; the larger ones would sing the lower parts while several smaller ones – some without any tusks – would sing the higher notes. Sharkface thought the sound was wonderful. He had enjoyed the night with the people on the boat off Guadalupe and he enjoyed listening to the narwhals off Baffin Island, but he was still very curious about how they came to know so many Hank Williams songs.

After they finally stopped singing and lowered their tusks, the narwhals started to swim away in different directions. The same whale who first spoke with Sharkface swam over. “Well I see you are still here,” he said in narwhal speech. “Did you enjoy our singing?”

“Yes, I did enjoy it, rather a lot,” Sharkface replied. “I’ve heard Hank Williams before and I like him. You do a very fine job of singing his songs, but where did you learn them?”

“We hear them every Saturday night on the CBC,” the narwhal said.

“I have never heard of CBC. What is it?” Sharkface asked.

“Well, CBC stands for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It’s radio. You have heard of radio, haven’t you?” Sharkface replied that indeed he knew about radio, but he thought that only humans had it.

“Well, that’s not exactly correct; we narwhals have radio too. Many years ago, we discovered that by sticking our tusks out of the water we could hear radio shows. The more tusks we had,

the more stations we could receive and the better we could hear them. Every Saturday night we all get together to listen to Country Music Classics on the CBC; it's our favorite show. We like to sing along and everyone has a big time down on the Old Narwhal Ranch."

"What a fascinating story," Sharkface thought. "I can't wait to tell this one to Cuvier." "What other stations do you receive?" he asked the narwhal.

"We get the news every day; we are especially interested in the weather. We get ice reports during the winter that are helpful in keeping us from getting trapped. Some of us like to listen to the morning classical music show, but I find it rather boring. I like a show called The Vinyl Café and I also like to get the Newfoundland news from St. John's. We narwhals are really up on our current events, don't you know?"

The narwhal was looking over his shoulder and seemed anxious to leave but Sharkface thought that he might be interested in some of his stories. As he started one it was obvious that the narwhal had other things on his mind. "Some urgent kind of narwhal business, I suspect," Sharkface said to himself. "Thanks for the concert, it was glorious."

The narwhal simply replied, "You're welcome," and swam away. Sharkface was about to leave too when he heard a sound that made him turn around and swim towards it. He had heard this sound before. Once again it was from tourists who came down to Guadalupe to swim with the sharks. Every night they

would play recordings of music that drew him closer and closer. There was one man whose singing was so powerful that Sharkface came by every night to listen. The man's name was Pavarotti and the kind of singing was called opera. Sharkface found that he liked to listen to this singing very much and he was disappointed when the boat and the tourists left taking the music with them. Now the sounds of the opera were coming from the middle of the ocean.

There was one large narwhal with a very powerful voice who was singing the lead part in an opera called *La Traviata*. He sang in a wonderful voice and Sharkface floated with his head just under the surface and listened. Narwhals sang the other parts in just as passionate a manner and it was so beautiful that Sharkface was disappointed when, after a very long time, the opera ended.

It was so wonderful hearing the narwhals sing, whether it was opera or Hank Williams, that despite his being very hungry, he wanted to stay and listen. But after the opera was over and the narwhals all swum away, the ocean was quiet. Just as he was resuming his journey one narwhal passed close by and Sharkface asked him about the weather and the ice conditions to the south.

# Sharkface and the Narwhals

