

# Chapter 17

## The Children of the Oodon



Sharkface was still pretty shaken up after his close call with the giant squid. He had a full belly from his feast on the Newfoundland soft squid, but he was not ready to continue his journey just now. He wanted to relax and forget about his latest near brush with death. He remembered a story that Cuvier told about some whales who called themselves the Children of the Oodon. They lived far to the east of Newfoundland around Iceland and Norway so Sharkface decided to head out and search for these strange, secretive whales.

Even though they were his distant relatives, Cuvier did not know a great deal about these reclusive cetaceans but he knew that they did not like to mingle with strangers and that they had some secret myths and rituals. Sharkface thought that if he were to get to know them, he would have to disguise himself. Since their eyesight was not very good, he figured that this might not

be too difficult. He knew he could speak their language because Cuvier's beaked whale vocalizations consisted of the same kinds of clicks and squeals.

The Oodon are a strange-looking kind of whale. They are long and slender with a pointed snout on top of which is a large, basketball-shaped forehead. Their eyes are small and weak, but they can hear everything that is going on in the sea for many miles around. They use their voices like radar to give them a picture of their surroundings, including any creatures that approach them. They are bigger than Sharkface, but not by very much and he did not think that he would have any problem blending in. They have a perfectly good horizontal whale tail, which is unlike Sharkface's two hind flippers but, like him, their bodies are covered with scars.

Sharkface had been swimming to the east, away from Newfoundland for a few days when he heard faint sounds coming from far away in the sea. They sounded very much like the clicks and squeaks that Cuvier made. He had found the Oodon at last near Iceland and floated on the surface listening as they talked to each other in their beaked whale language. He was pleased that he could understand what they were saying. He was able to make out one especially deep, booming voice in particular and this is what he heard.

“Take notice all you Children of the Oodon. If you can hear me, gather together at the sound of my voice. It is the time of year when we will be telling our ancient tales and singing our

ancient songs and preparing for our sacred trip to The Gully. We will set off when the moon is full; so do not delay. Come one and come all you Children of the Oodon and join us as we celebrate the life of our ancient Bottlenose Kings and tell once again the story of the *OODON* and feast on the Sacred Shrimp of the Gully.” Sharkface heard this same speech repeated over and over again for two days and he decided to follow the sound of the thunderous voice and join the Children of the Oodon on their sacred journey.

He knew that there were going to be great tales to hear and maybe even something good to eat. He practiced his Oodon speech and blew up his snorter to look resemble their melon-shaped heads. He put his hind flippers together to look like a whale’s tail and set off for Iceland.

When he arrived, the Oodon had gathered in great numbers near the island of Grimsey in the Greenland Sea. There were thousands of them and they were having the time of their lives, playing games and generally frolicking like only whales can frolic.

They were rubbing against one another and scratching their smooth skins affectionately with their two front teeth. Some were telling tales of meetings with killer whales and of wonderful schools of fish and squid. Sharkface felt right at home and told his story about nearly being eaten by a pack of killer whales. The Oodon squealed and clicked and slapped Sharkface on his back with their flippers and Sharkface squealed and clicked and slapped

the Oodon on their backs with his. There was much good cheer in the waters off Grimsey on the eve of their journey and Sharkface fit right in like a long-lost relative.

There was a contest where each whale would dive to see who could stay underwater the longest. The Oodon are known for hunting very deep in the oceans, but when it comes to submergence Sharkface can hold his own with any sea creature and, in the end, he stayed down longer than every Oodon except one.

After the deep diving contest, they all swam into a shallow bay where they had a feast on what the Oodon called vampire squid. Sharkface always looked forward to a feast but after the wonderful Newfoundland soft squid, he found the vampire squid rather watery and tasteless and not at all up to his gourmet palate. Nevertheless he ate his fill and told his hosts he thought the vampire squid were indeed a fine delicacy.

Despite all their songs and stories, none of the Oodon had mentioned anything about the Gully or their ancient Bottlenose kings and Sharkface was getting curious. He was eager to hear their legends and myths and was just about to ask when the leader of the Oodon announced that the moon was full and it was time to leave. That very night they all started swimming west from the island of Grimsey toward the Gully.

At first they traveled silently. This was so different from the week of high-toned frivolity that Sharkface began to wonder just what was going on. It seemed to him that the entire mood of the Children of the Oodon had changed and that they were now

respectfully meditating on their legends and on their ancient kings. Sharkface wisely kept quiet as well. After four days of silent swimming, the oldest and grayest of the whales began to tell The Legend of the Children of the Oodon.

“In a time long, long ago, we whales who now call ourselves The Children of the Oodon were known at the Bottlenoses. This was in the time of our great-great-great-grandfathers and it was a very calm and peaceful time for all the whales and for all the other creatures that lived in the sea. The skies were blue and the waves were gentle and we could go about our business without a care in the world. Then one day some men came among the Bottlenoses. They came in small, fast ships with big and powerful guns and started killing all the whales. The men in the fast boats would kill the whales and take them up onto the land where they would cut them apart and boil them in huge iron kettles and make their bodies into oil. It was a very bad time for the Bottlenoses. All of the whales and all of the other creatures of the sea were very sad and afraid.”

“One day when the King of the Bottlenoses was swimming with his friends, men came and chased him in a fast boat with a big gun. It was a very difficult chase for the men because the king was very fast and very smart. He would swim away from the boat, moving from side to side and just as the men got close, he would dive and swim underwater back from where he had come. It took the men many hours, but finally the king was so tired that they caught him and he was killed. When the other Bottlenoses

saw the men with the big gun shoot their beloved king, they were so mad they all got together and slammed into the small fast ship. The ship sank quickly and all of the men were drowned. As the smashed wreck of the king-killing ship sunk to the bottom of the sea, the Bottlenoses read the name that was written on its side, *OODON*.”

“The friends of the Bottlenose King had rammed the ship so quickly that the men did not have time to tie up the king’s body and he too sank deep down to the bottom of the sea not far from the wreck, near a place called ‘The Gully. After the King of the Bottlenoses had been killed, and the *OODON* sunk, the men in the fast boats with the big guns went away and the whales were left in peace, but the Bottlenoses were all very sad that the one nearest to their hearts, their beloved king was dead. After the death of the king and the revenge on the men who had killed him, the Bottlenoses started calling themselves ‘The Children of the Oodon, or simply Oodon, in memory of their fallen leader.”

“Every year we Children of the Oodon return to ‘The Gully to honor our fallen king and to celebrate the sinking of the ship that killed him and that gave us our name.”

As the Oodon arrived at ‘The Gully, they began to slowly form one long line that snaked its way into a deep canyon and Shark-face fell in at the end. He was feeling a bit uncomfortable, being a disguised outsider and sharing the sacred ritual of these ancient whales, but he also wanted to honor the King of the Bottlenoses. When each of the whales got to the head of the canyon, they

could see the twisted wreck of the *OODON*. Each of them swam rapidly toward the sunken ship as if they were ramming it all over again. At the last minute they veered off towards the bow where the great Bottlenose-killing gun still stands and brushed it with their tails. So many of The Children of the Oodon have brushed against the once feared gun that they have polished its brass barrel to a brilliant shine. After the ritual reenactment of the sinking of the *OODON*, the whales all swam to the grave of the Bottlenose King and make three slow, somber circles in a clockwise direction around his final resting place. After all had completed the ceremony, they turned around and swam father up The Gully to feed on the tasty Sacred Shrimp that are only found in these cold, deep waters off Sable Island.

Sharkface was the last in line and he swam rapidly at the wreck as the other whales had done. His hind flippers brushed the gun just like the other Oodon, and none of them ever suspected he was anyone but one of their kin. After he had made his three circuits of the king's grave, he felt that he had become one of The Children of the Oodon. He felt the horror of their slaughter and the sweetness of their revenge, maybe even more than he knew. After the ritual at the Gully he was looking forward to sharing a feast with his newfound friends.

The Sacred Shrimp were the best by far that Sharkface had ever eaten and he stayed with the Oodon for many days and ate his fill. One by one the whales left and swam off to their home in the northern oceans and eventually Sharkface swam away from The Gully as well.

As he swam southwards in the direction of his elephant seal relatives he thought about the wonderful time he had at the island of Grimsey and about the old Bottlenose King and the killer ship and all the drowned men at the bottom of the sea. He thought about the friends he had made and about the stories they had told him but mostly Sharkface thought about the horrible slaughter of the Bottlenoses by the men in the small, fast ships with the big guns.

