

# Chapter 9

## Lost in a Stormy Sea



Fur Seal  
of the North

Soon after Sharkface left Amukta Pass, the water got colder and the seas rougher. The wind blew the tops off the huge waves, forming a kind of fog. It was impossible to see the stars at night and without them to guide him, he was lost.

Because of the rough weather his dives were longer and the time spent on the surface shorter, but he still dozed off and had his diving dreams. In one, he was flying high over Guadalupe Island. It was the time of year when all the elephant seals were supposed to be on the beach. There should have been lots of activity with males honking and fighting and moms and babies calling out to each other, but there was silence. The same thing was true on all the island's beaches. There was not one elephant seal to be seen. Sharkface was very confused. Where was everyone?

He awoke from his dream as he broke the surface. The ocean was still raging and the wind shrieking. In the trough between two mountainous waves, it was difficult to tell where the sky stopped and the sea began. After ducking under the crest of a

huge breaker, he noticed a faint but familiar odor and after a couple of minutes recognized it as the smell of thousands of seals; there must be an island nearby. On his next dive, he headed off in the direction of the comforting scent.

The storm in the Bering Sea continued to get more and more violent and diving in the turbulent water beneath the towering waves had gotten difficult. It was a struggle both on the way down and on the way back up, but the smell kept getting stronger and stronger so Sharkface was heading in the right direction. One time at the top of a big wave, he saw a splotch of land far away on the horizon. Finally, some land where he could crawl out of the water and take a rest, maybe even someone would tell him where he was.

After swimming around the island, Sharkface found all the beaches completely covered with seals who looked and smelled like the fur seals back home on Guadalupe. He needed some rest and wanted tell them about their cousins down south, and to find out where he was, but the fur seals completely ignored him. With neither a greeting nor a challenge he felt invisible.

The seals were packed so tightly, Sharkface could not find a place to lie down. They were literally shoulder-to-shoulder down to the water's edge. There were males and females and lots of babies; the sound was incredible. He called out loudly in the Guadalupe fur seal language, which he knew well, "Hello, my name is Sharkface and I have news of your cousins in the south. Hello, Hello. Does anyone hear me?" but he got no response.

Usually seals will stop what they are doing to hear news from far away, but these noisy ones were not interested. They were yelling at the top of their lungs, all at the same time, and Sharkface could barely make out some of the things they were saying over the din.

“Get Back!”

“Stay away from me!”

“Get off my flippers!”

“Keep away from my family!”

Sharkface quickly realized he was not going to get any rest on this island no one was going to pay any attention to him, so he reluctantly left the beach and swam back out to sea.

Leaving the chaos of the seal-covered beach, Sharkface ran in to an old male who was swimming towards the shore and they had a brief chat.

“I can’t talk long because I’m late. I’m afraid the party has started without me,” the fur seal said in a rushed, somewhat sad voice.

“What is this island called and why didn’t anyone talk to me?” Sharkface asked.

“Our home is called Saint Paul; it is one of the Pribilof Islands. They call us the fur seals of the north and now is the time of our big party when we all get together and yell and fight and have our babies and I am about to miss it. I have to go.”

“Just one more question; I am headed to the north towards the ice. Which way shall I go?”

“Just swim away from the island in that direction,” the fur seal motioned with his flipper. “In a couple of days you will smell the Island of the Walruses. Stop by there and they can help you out. Good-bye, and good luck,” and with that, the old fur seal swam quickly towards Saint Paul Island and the fur seal party.

