

## Second sample chapter.

## Chapter Eighty

Anapa led his team of five well-trained snorkelers toward the distant misty shapes, a hundred meters away, of what he already knew—just by the way the calf hovered beneath the mother, protected by her long pectoral fins—were the ancient creatures who had come all the way from Antarctica to bless his island. The tourists in the hotels paid the bills, but the whales, and especially this mother and her calf, came to visit with an entirely different purpose. They were like pilgrims who had come to swim in the sacred waters of not only a sanctuary, but a church. A church where new life emerged into the world. And his job, since he had been a child with his first mask and snorkel, was to be a caretaker of that church.

Prairie Wind could feel, as she steadily kicked with her flippers and took long deep breaths through her snorkel, the faint fluttering of a butterfly. The Little One was moving in her uterus. She glanced at William, but he was staring straight ahead at the whales that were now only fifty meters away.

She wished, suddenly, that her grandmother could somehow be with her now. That she could see what her spirit knew must exist *somewhere* beyond the battered world in which she lived. Her grandmother had never given up on her belief that the world had been made for beautiful creatures, for caring creatures, for creatures crafted by the loving hands of the Creator. Never mind the barbarian invaders who understood nothing. In the end, the Original Plan would be fulfilled.

Anapa could tell that the mother whale now not only saw him, but recognized him. He wore an orange wet suit so that the tourists always knew where he was if they needed him. But the orange suit also made him readily identifiable to the whales.

The mother whale turned slightly toward him. The calf turned as well between her flippers.

As the six snorkelers approached, the calf swam with easy strokes of his flukes out from between his mother's fins and up to the surface ahead of her, where he paused to breathe. Prairie Wind could not see the spray, for her mask was in the water, but her ears, just above the surface, heard a faint burst of wet air.

After about half a minute at the surface, the calf dove down and circled beside his mother so that he swam back to his position between her long flippers. She moved slightly, embracing her child.

When the snorkelers were thirty meters away from the whales, Anapa held out his hand: We stop here.

They held their position for about five minutes, watching as the calf rose to the surface again for air, and as the mother humpback lifted her head to take a breath.

When Anapa had determined that the mother seemed comfortable with their presence, he gestured to the other divers that he wanted to speak to them. They treaded water in a vertical position, which enabled him to take the snorkel out of his mouth so that he could explain their next move.

“Both whales are comfortable with our visit. I suggest that we dive down to ten meters, so that you are looking at an upwards angle toward them. Raimana, you can take some excellent pictures of the whales in the blue water, with sunlight rippling on the surface. I will swim behind you and shoot the opening of a video with five divers and the two whales fairly close together, again with blue water wrapped around us and the sun shining on the surface.”

Everyone nodded that they understood.

“Try to dive fairly straight down, then hover in a line with a couple of meters between you, so that I can get a picture of five clear silhouettes with the whales in the background. Don’t bunch up in a cluster. Give each other room, with open water between you. When you need to go up for air, try to go straight up. We don’t want to get any closer to her. Let her get comfortable with one simple dive.”

Everyone again nodded that they understood.

Prairie Wind took several deep breaths, glanced at William, who gave her a thumbs-up, and then the two dove together. As she flipped down, she looked into the immense blue abyss below of her, the Big Blue that wrapped around the planet. Beams of sunlight, wrapped around her like a halo, reached down into the depths.

The five snorkelers hovered at ten meters, with open water between them, as Anapa had instructed them. Raimana aimed his camera at the two whales and took the most gorgeous picture he had ever taken in his life.

Prairie Wind could now clearly see the bellies of both whales, white with dark lines running the length of the long throat. She could see the undersides of the long slender fins, with their distinctive black markings. The calf had grown substantially

during the past month. When it rose to the surface to take a breath, Raimana took another sequence of pictures.

Anapa swam behind the group of five, positioning himself so that the snorkelers were a bit below the whales; the whales themselves were thus clear in his viewfinder. As he filmed, he swam in a half-circle to the left, so that he got a more frontal shot of the whales, and a more profile picture of the snorkelers. When they rose one by one up to the surface, he opened his lens to wide angle and kept shooting until all five were in the rolling silvery mirror, while the whales remained down in the blue. Then he too rose to take a breath.

Anapa looked at Raimana, who gave him a vibrant thumbs-up.

Anapa knew that many guides allowed their divers to move in for pictures almost as soon as they encountered the whales. So a few tourists got some shabby pictures, and the whales became increasingly disturbed.

He kept his divers quiet, at a respectful distance, for at least twenty minutes, so that the whales were comfortable, and the snorkelers—hopefully—felt the spirit of the ocean, the spirit of life, before they went chasing after their souvenirs.

Another whale swam far to the left, heading further out to sea.

Anapa gestured to his snorkelers, then they dove down again, this time a bit more in front of the whales. He beckoned Raimana to follow him, and positioned the student photographer at about forty-five degrees to the length of the mother whale, a perfect angle when she lifted her head to take a breath. Rings of water around her head caught the sunlight.

The snorkelers floated a third time, unobtrusive, unaggressive, unthreatening. And then . . . Anapa saw the mother whale give a sturdy push with her flukes as she began to swim toward the snorkelers. The calf swam along with her, just ahead of her long slender fins, with rhythmic strokes of his own flukes.

Anapa had always told his divers, “We keep a distance of thirty meters, one hundred feet, from the whales. If they want to come closer, that is their decision.” Now the mother humpback had made her decision. She did not swim directly toward the snorkelers, but would pass them with about ten meters, thirty feet, between them.

Anapa had to make a decision. Should they remain at the surface and watch the whales pass beneath them . . . Or should they dive down to ten meters, and thus be at the same depth as the calf when it passed by?

The whales were about twenty meters away, sixty feet, when he gestured to his team that they should dive. Without hesitation, all together, they dove straight down and hovered, while the mother and her calf continued to swim toward them. Anapa and Raimana hovered together at the left end of the divers, so that Anapa could shoot a close-up video of the whales without people, and Raimana could capture the picture that would be on the home page of the student Marine Ecology website that went out to the world.

Prairie Wind thought briefly, “Hey Boss . . .” but she could think nothing more. She was inside something now, inside a moment of existence, as close to the origin of life as she had ever been. Her heart was thumping, the blue ocean embraced her, and then as the calf swam past her, looking at her with his watchful eye . . . she felt the kicking in her uterus, sharp, distinct, and insistent.

“Yes,” she thought. “Yes. Yes.”

The calf, a miniature adult, was about a third of the length of his mother. He held out his long fins like wings—a knobby pointed tip passed about twenty feet from Prairie Wind—while his flukes undulated up and down with a steady rhythm.

The Little One was kicking, kicking, deep inside. It was such an odd, wonderful feeling.

The mother whale, swimming above her child with her flippers reaching down protectively, was unbelievably huge. She was dark, almost black, with flecks of white. Her long pectoral fins were black above, white below and white along the front edge. But it was her flukes, her enormous tail rising and falling as it swept through the water, eighteen feet wide, that showed the true size of the whale. As she slowly passed with ponderous yet graceful momentum, Prairie Wind could feel through her wetsuit the wash of the water pushed by the mother’s tail.

The rumbling continued in her uterus as the twin flukes, small and huge, sweeping each with its own rhythm, moved further and further away.

Finally she rose to the surface and breathed and breathed and breathed.

Peering down at the mother whale with her Little One swimming beneath her, she watched them become dim and misty in the distance . . .

. . . until they disappeared into the vast blue expanse of ocean.

They had more than given her their blessing. They had given her their strength, the unrelenting strength and determination and tenacity of life on this planet, so that

when she spoke on behalf of the whales—of *all* life—in the court rooms and the conference halls of South Dakota and New York and Washington and Paris and Geneva and The Hague, defending their *right* to live on this planet, she would prevail. She would demolish the paid prevaricators as if they were bowling pins. She would write the laws that needed to be written, and then she would defend those laws with the strength and tenacity and if need be, the ferocity, of a fierce mother defending her threatened child.

Trump? One more weasel. An oil pipeline? The last gasp of a scurvy bunch of thieves and thugs.

Her grandmother was right: the Original Plan would be fulfilled. In modern terms, it was called the Clean Energy Renaissance, built by young people who rose up with a bold new vision of life on this *gift* of a planet.

She would speak in the court rooms of the world with words like bolts of lightning. And life, precious, sacred *life*, would prevail.

William touched her arm and gestured that he wanted to talk with her.

They lifted their heads above the water and took out their snorkels.

Before he could say anything, she announced, “The Little One is kicking!”

“Kicking!” His eyes inside his mask were exuberant.

“She’s ready for her flippers.”

Prairie Wind and William held hands as they followed Anapa back toward the boat. The Little One kicked a couple of times more, then she settled down.

Her generation was coming. In all of its wondrous and magnificent forms, her generation was coming.

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