

EducationLINK

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PRESENTS

Bella Bella

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A story for children and adults to share every Thursday in the Anchorage Daily News

CHAPTER FOUR: Sea Wolves

STORY SO FAR: Aaron's sense of calm is rudely interrupted when he spots wolf tracks in the sand. Then he sees a grim-faced and threatening-looking man standing on the deck of a nearby motorboat.

"That's strange," Roger said, following the fishing boat with his eyes. "Fishermen always wave back out here. It's the etiquette of the sea."

"No class," said Willie, spitting into the sand.

"Maybe he was just preoccupied," Dad said. "I get that way sometimes." He was right. Dad's a bookish man, often lost in thought.

"He saw us alright," Willie said. "He looked right through us. I knew guys like him in Nam."

"He gave me the creeps," Lisa said, hugging herself.

"Well, mates," said Roger, "we're not likely to run into the likes of him where we're going. In fact, we're not likely to run into anybody."

* * *

Roger and Willie went out fishing in the cove. Dad and I lugged our gear across the spit and found a good spot to pitch our tent. It gave us a view of the open sea to the west, yet

afforded us a bit of shelter back in the brush.

I joined Lisa and Cassidy on the beach. Cassidy was doing standing backflips, one after the other, like an acrobat. He was stripped to his bathing trunks, and his muscles rippled in the sun. There was a small tattoo on his left pec: a red heart with the word MOM and an arrow through it. Lisa acted unimpressed, watching only out of the corners of her eyes. She was lounging in a blue bikini, twirling her black hair with a finger.

When Cassidy saw me coming, he dashed forward to tackle me. I faked left and juke'd him out. But he kept running, swooped Lisa off the sand, and threw her, shrieking, over his shoulder. Then he sprinted down the surf line with her hair hanging down and her body bouncing. I skimmed stones and tried to act as if it didn't bother me, but it did. Something unspoken caught like a stone in my throat. Jealousy was an ax to my ego, and it cut me in half. Lisa was the first girl I'd ever felt this way about, and I didn't know what to do.

* * *

The hurt receded for a while as we all sat around eating the salmon Roger and Willie had caught. Like last year on the Green River, Willie was the camp cook. But because of our kayaks,

we had to travel light here, so he had no Dutch oven and multi-burner stand-up camp stove to work his wonders. What he did have was fresh-caught fish and a driftwood fire to cook it over. As Willie said, "Outta the sea and into the pan!"

"Aye!" Roger said. "Nothin' seasons fish like sea salt and hard fun."

"Everything tastes good in the outback of nowhere," Dad said.

"This ain't nowhere, mate," Roger said. "This is the middle of paradise!"

Lisa leaned against a huge weathered drift log beside me and let her bare shoulder, still warm from the sun, brush against mine. My heart glowed.

Dusk comes late in the northern summer, and the fire had died to coals by the time the sun simmered in the sea. Lisa wiggled her toes in the sand and turned to me.

"Let's go skinny-dipping!" she said, her eyes shining like wet agates.

My heart lurched and my mouth dropped open.

"Just kidding!" she said, and jabbed me with a sharp elbow.

* * *

That night, in our tent, I dreamed first about Lisa (riding me piggyback through the surf), but then about the fisherman with the yellow

sunglasses. I was alone in our kayak, lost in the fog, when a fishing boat, shrouded in mist, became visible. It was a hundred yards away and slowly turning toward me; sitting in the bow was the man in the yellow sunglasses. He was aiming down the barrel of a rifle, right between my eyes.

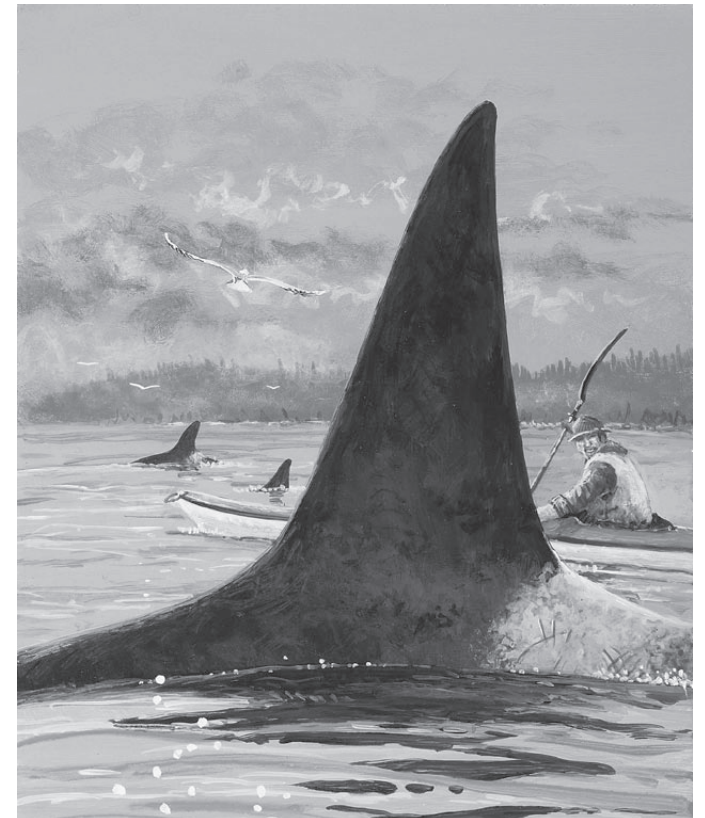
I woke to the sound of a wolf howling somewhere nearby. My skin crawled with goose bumps.

* * *

In the morning, tatters of mist hung in the trees around the cove as we pushed off with an ebbing tide. Bald eagles adorned the high branches like Christmas ornaments, and ravens flapped and cackled over a beached salmon. Just as the sun broke through the fog, an eagle swooped down and snatched the prize, scattering the ravens like tattered umbrellas in a storm.

The day was long and hard, but never really boring. We paddled by a family of sea otters—who followed us for an hour—and watched for whales and dolphins. I kept an eye out for the fishing boat from yesterday—the one in my dream—and thought about smugglers.

Suddenly Roger shouted, "Orcas!" At first I couldn't see them. We drifted close together and shaded our eyes.



"They're deep diving," Roger said. "They'll be back up in a few minutes."

"Sea wolves," Willie said.

"Killer whales!" I said, feeling fear and awe at the same time.

"Some call 'em sea wolves," Willie said, "because they attack like a pack of wolves, surrounding schools of salmon or separating out sea lions and whales, and workin' together. They can skin a blue whale—"

Just then the pod of orcas surfaced, breathing in unison—great spouts bursting in the sun. They were rolling straight toward us, their tall, sharp dorsal fins slicing the water.

Cassidy rocked our kayak, and I jumped.

"Keep still!" Willie commanded.

They were maybe eighty yards away. Seventy. At the last

second, they dove again.

"I read they weigh ten tons—" Dad started to say.

"Quiet!" Willie hissed.

Suddenly something bumped our kayak, and I let out a yell. I was sure this was the end: dinner for a sea wolf. Our boat slammed down, and there between our kayaks rose a column of bubbles, followed by something large and dark.

NEXT WEEK:

Aaron awakes at dawn to the sound of gunshots thundering and echoing between the islands.

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