

Whale Song

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*Here it is, the fourth entry in the Cabot Cove Summer series! When we left off in *By the Beautiful Sea*, Jessica and Seth were taking a nap on the beach. Now, they're about to be awakened by a force of nature, as well as serenaded by two of the mightiest and most beautiful creatures in all of creation.*

A far-off rumble echoed somewhere in Jessica's dreams, pulling her out of the cozy world of slumber and back into the real world. Still slightly lethargic from her nap and unwilling to open her eyes, she slowly became aware that she was still lying on the beach, wrapped up in Seth's arms. As the knowledge that he was there sank in, she dismissed the rumble as nothing more than his snoring, because he was snoring like a bear.

Jessica had to smile. Frank had always snored, too. It had driven her mad when they were first married, but she soon got used to it... and came to rely upon it as a sign that he was always there right next to her, that she would be safe as long as he was there. After his death, the nights were quiet to the point of being eerie, and there were times when she would reach for him and touch the empty side of the bed where he used to lay. The quiet nights she had gotten used to, but waking up alone, without his arms keeping her safe, still made her heart ache.

This afternoon, however, had been different. Seth's snoring had been a lullaby rather than a headache, and his big arms holding her snugly against his body made her feel safer than she had felt in years. Safe from murder and from all of the storms that life could possibly throw at her.

Another rumble sounded, and this time, Jessica's eyes flew open. *That is not Seth's snoring*, she thought as she sat up and gazed out over the sea. Twilight had fallen while they were sleeping, and the beach was deserted save for them. Clouds had gathered in the sky, ranging from gunmetal gray

where they were to jet black over the horizon, and those black clouds were flashing with lightning that forked across the sky and jutted down into the ocean. It was a beautiful sight, yet a frightening one as well. "Seth," Jessica murmured, giving her snoozing friend a shake. "Seth, wake up."

Seth snorted and screwed up his already closed eyes. "What?" he grunted, sitting up and rubbing a hand over his whole face. "What's going on?"

"There's a storm coming in over the sea. Look out there."

Seth rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and, blinking to regain his vision, followed Jessica's pointing finger to the horizon far out over the now-inky water. "Darned if there isn't." Thunder clapped again, a low, distant rumbling. "Sounds like it's still a ways off, though. I think we're safe to stay here and watch the lightning show for a little while."

"Really?" asked Jessica, the corners of her mouth quirking upward. "That'll be an adventure. I haven't watched lightning over the water in ages."

"Well, now's as good a time as any. How often do you get a free show like this?"

"Any act of God is a free show, Seth."

"Good point."

The wind picked up and blew across Seth's bare chest; he shivered and slipped his shirt back on to keep warm. Jessica, on the other hand, was not so lucky. She had worn nothing but her sarong over her bathing suit, and now with the incoming wind from the storm, she was shivering, wrapping her arms around her slender form. *Good thing I came prepared*, Seth thought, reaching into the picnic basket and withdrawing another beach blanket. "Here, Jess," he said, draping the blanket around her shoulders. "Wrap up in that and get yourself warm."

Reflexively, Jessica pulled the blanket tightly around her body and gazed at Seth, a surprised smile touching her lips. "Where did this come from?"

"I brought it along just in case. You never know if something's gonna happen to the blanket you've already brought, or if someone's gonna get cold later on. I've learned to be prepared, no matter what."

Jessica looked down at the soft red terry blanket and then back up at her friend, who was trying to remain Spartan in his trunks and T-shirt. "Seth, you didn't have to give this whole blanket to me. It's big enough for the two of us."

Seth shook his head. "No, no, you need it more than I do. I've got a little more coverage on my arms and legs than you, so I'm fine."

Jessica's smile grew and her eyes began to shine. "Seth Hazlitt, I believe you're being chivalrous."

"Pshaw, woman; I'm just trying to make sure you don't catch your death of cold out here." But then his eyes softened and his own mouth curved into a smile. "And yes, despite the fact that I can be a cantankerous old chauvinist sometimes, I do know a thing or two about the right way to treat a lady."

"I think you know more than just a thing or two," Jessica said softly, sidling closer to Seth and draping one half of the enormous blanket around him so that they were both wrapped in a warm red cocoon. "You're still as cantankerous as ever, but your attitudes have definitely softened over the years. And just for the record, there is nothing chauvinistic about chivalry. Every woman deserves to be treated like a lady. I know that's how you treated Ruth." She slipped an arm around his shoulders. "And it's how you treat me."

Seth slid his own arm around her and pulled her into the nook between his shoulder and his chest. "I wouldn't treat you any other way. Aside from the occasional zinger, of course." He grunted as Jessica elbowed him in the ribs.

Lightning continued to fork in all directions, illuminating the sky, tingeing the blackberry-colored clouds with purple, and setting off a bright, crackling corona of St. Elmo's fire around the lighthouse in the distance. "'About, about, in reel and rout, the death fires danced at night; the water, like a witch's oils, burnt green and blue and white,'" Jessica observed upon seeing the brilliant blue-violet light creating a halo around Cabot Cove's ocean beacon.

Seth turned his head toward his friend, who was staring transfixed at the phenomenon. "If I'm not mistaken, that's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge, right?"

"Yes," Jessica said, sounding pleased. "I've always loved that poem. And those lines are a perfect description of St. Elmo's fire, although I wouldn't call it death fire."

"Well, you'd know, considering how frequently you dabble in death."

"It's not a sign of death. The symbolism that goes with St. Elmo's fire is amazing. Every time it appeared during a storm, sailors believed it was a sign of divine protection, because St. Elmo was the patron saint of sailors."

"Ayuh, you're right," Seth said. "Back in olden days, sailors used to consider that a sign of hope."

"And what are you hoping for, Seth?"

Seth gave her a rather mysterious smile. "That's for me to know and you to find out, Madame Detective."

They continued to watch the storm for some time until another distant sound filled their ears... a sound melancholy enough to pierce the hardest hearts and loud enough to filter through the deepest sea. "That's a whale," Jessica said, sitting a little more upright to hear the song. "A killer whale, I think."

Seth perked up his ears as well when the song began again. "That's a killer whale, all right. Sounds like he's pretty close to shore, too."

"I wonder why. They don't usually come in close to shore."

"My guess is he's probably looking for a safe place to wait the storm out."

Jessica's eyes roved hungrily over the ocean, which was becoming more active as the storm progressed toward land. "I know he probably won't because of the storm, but I wish he'd surface. Killer whales are such beautiful creatures."

"That they are," Seth agreed. All of a sudden, a second whale joined in from beneath the waves, a beautiful duet of whale song. "I'll be darned. Our whale has a friend."

"Or a mate," Jessica offered.

"That wouldn't surprise me at all, if that was his mate out there with him and they're trying to find a safe place together. You know, there's an old myth that killer whales are monogamous. They aren't in real life, but it's a neat story all the same."

"It's a beautiful story. I've done quite a bit of research into mythology and symbolism, both as a teacher and as a writer, and I've learned a lot about certain animals. Some cultures really did have the idea that killer whales mated for life, and they came to revere them as symbols of longevity, romance..." Jessica's voice suddenly became quiet. "And soul mates."

Seth waited for her to speak again, finally prompting her when she remained silent. "Jess?"

Jessica looked over at him, her big blue eyes luminous. "Seth, do you think it's possible to find another mate? To have loved someone so completely that you think it's impossible to love someone else, yet the possibility may still exist?"

Seth stared at her. Was she implying what he thought she was? At any rate, he had to choose his words carefully. "I think it's very possible. Just because someone's gone doesn't mean you ever stop loving them, or that you have to feel like you're betraying them if you find someone new."

Jessica's eyes never left his for a second. "You wouldn't feel like you were betraying Ruth?"

Seth shook his head. "I loved Ruth with all my heart and I always will, but she's gone." He took a breath, watering down the real thoughts on his mind. "And if I ever do find someone else to love, I'm going to love her because of the love Ruth had for me."

Now it was Jessica's turn to shake her head. "Seth... what you're saying makes sense, it really does. It's just that... I loved Frank so much, and I still do. I'm terrified of what might happen if I ever should fall in love again."

Would I feel guilty, would I feel peace? I don't know. It's the one mystery I can't solve."

Touched to his heart, Seth pulled her into a full-on hug. "Well, Jess, even the best detectives need a little help sometimes." He pulled back and looked into her eyes. "Let me ask you something, and be honest, 'cause I'll know if you're not. Do you think Frank would want you to be happy?"

Jessica blinked. "Yes."

"Do you believe he still loves you, even though he's gone?"

"Of course I do."

Seth smiled. "There's your answer. It may not be today, tomorrow, or a year from now, but if someone else does come into your life, it's Frank's love that will help you love again. You've just gotta trust your heart."

Jessica chuckled, a laugh mixed with a sob. "Not bad for a cantankerous old chauvinist."

Seth laughed softly. "What can I say? I'm becoming a marshmallow in my old age. And don't you dare tell my patients that. If word gets out that old Doc Hazlitt is a softy, I'll never hear the end of it."

Jessica made the locking motion at her lips and rested her head against his shoulder. "Oh, Seth, what a day. Shopping, swimming, and soul-baring. The three S's of any perfect summer day."

"And here I always thought the three S's were sun, sand, and surf."

"You know what I mean." She sighed and smiled as the whales began singing again. "Beautiful."

Seconds passed before Seth spoke. "'They say the sea is cold, but the sea contains the hottest blood of all.'"

Jessica tilted her chin up to look into his face. "D.H. Lawrence. *Whales Weep Not*."

"I know my poetry better than you think, Jess," Seth said dryly. "I paid attention to more in school than just medical science."

"Just when I think I know everything about you, you surprise me again."

"Well, you surprise me every day, so I guess we're even."

Jessica was about to come back with a clever retort when another clap of thunder rumbled overhead, much louder this time. "Oh my goodness. I think we'd better leave before the storm hits."

Seth looked up at the darkening sky. "Ayuh, we'd better get out of Dodge while we can."

They unwrapped themselves from the blanket, gathered up it and the other blanket and the rest of their paraphernalia, and made tracks back to Seth's car. Just before they shut themselves in, Jessica glanced back at the now-choppy ocean. "I hope those whales found a safe place."

"Don't worry, Jess. They'll be safe as long as they're together." Seth returned her grateful smile. "Now let's go where *we* be safe."

"And together?" Jessica asked as they got into the car and shut the doors.

Seth gave her a warm smile and squeezed her hand. "Together."