

WHALE WATCH

**a 10-minute play
by Tom Baum**

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Characters

DARRYL, 20s, tour boat owner/pilot

TALIA, 20s, Native American/white, a whale watch guide

Unseen, unheard characters

ANNOYING GIRL asking TALIA questions

MAN WITH iPad taking pictures of TALIA

(The bridge of a small tour boat. Visible is the wheel and a laptop. At the wheel is DARRYL. He's on a mic.)

DARRYL: *(on mic)* —Hey, Darryl speaking, welcome aboard my vessel. You folks brought the sunny weather, thank you for that. Hoping to see a bunch of humpbacks today. Any questions on matters cetacean, you're gonna want to ask the lovely young woman on my left, she doesn't like me to use that word, lovely I mean, but lovely is what she is, and she knows more about these awesome creatures than any twelve PhDs in marine biology. So...without further delay...Talia, take it away.

(DARRYL hands the mic to TALIA.)

TALIA; *(on mic)* Hi everybody. Darryl was kidding, he knows I'll take all the compliments I can get.

(DARRYL grabs the mic back.)

DARRYL: *(on mic)* By the way, the coffee and the doughnut holes are free, help yourselves, and yes, I'm available for fishing expeditions. Talia, they're all yours.

(TALIA takes the mic again.)

TALIA: I know you've been promised you'll see at least one whale, money-back guarantee, and 99 times out of a hundred that turns out to be true. But hey, we're hoping to see way more than that. *(turns to unseen ANNOYING GIRL)* They're the ones that sing to each other, that's correct. *(pause)* That's right, the blue whale is the biggest whale, twice as big, you've done your homework...*(pause)* On my mom's side, uh-huh. Iñupiat [in-YOO-pee-at] tribe. *(pause)* That's a kind of Eskimo, that's right. My real name's Ta hyphen Leah, I simplified it. *(pause)* No, this is not a permanent gig. In the fall I'm going to UAF.

DARRYL: *(sotto)* What?!

TALIA: *(to ANNOYING GIRL)* University of Alaska at Fairbanks...I'll be majoring in marine science.

DARRYL: *(sotto)* Since when?

TALIA: *(to ANNOYING GIRL)* Excuse us. *(sotto, to DARRYL)* You knew I was applying to UAF.

DARRYL: Yeah, as a backup. What's wrong with UAS?

TALIA: Fairbanks has a PhD program. Juneau doesn't.

DARRYL: Fairbanks, that's 17 hours by car. I'd have to take Fridays off, you know what that does to my bottom line?

TALIA: You have your license.

DARRYL: Any idea what it costs to rent a plane? Jesus.

TALIA: (*back on mic*) Humpbacks travel up to 10,000 miles every year. They're the most migratory mammals on Earth.

DARRYL: Not counting humans. What's UAS gonna cost you?

TALIA: About twenty K a year. That's including room and board.

DARRYL: Can you get a student loan?

TALIA: No. Mom's on the no-booze list and her credit is in the toilet.

DARRYL: In other words, not a done deal.

TALIA: What, that makes you happy?

DARRYL: I didn't say that—

TALIA: Well, FYI, if I can't get a scholarship I'm heading south.

DARRYL: Why? Where would you go?

TALIA: Sea World.

DARRYL: No way. As what?

TALIA: Scuba Diver.

DARRYL: Oh great, you mean a tank-cleaner. A squeegee-warrior. That's got a lot of potential.

TALIA: And I'll care for the Orcas.

DARRYL: They stopped breeding Orcas.

TALIA: They're still keeping them around.

DARRYL: In other words, you'll be sleeping with the enemy.

TALIA: The Orcas can't help killing humpbacks. That's in their nature.

DARRYL: I'm not talking about the Orcas. Which Sea World, San Diego?
Please, not Orlando—

TALIA: Whichever one will have me. (*turns to ANNOYING GIRL*) Now and then, yes, we do encounter Orcas. (*pause*) Humpbacks, no, endangered? They used to be, thirty years ago. (*pause*) Really. I guess the Atlantic's warming up, that must have something to do with the decline in population. (*pause*) Yes, native people are allowed to kill a limited number of whales.

DARRYL: (*to ANNOYING GIRL*) Also seals, walrus, and polar bears. The law says it's OK, so deal with it.

TALIA: Darryl, I'm talking to the girl. (*turns to ANNOYING GIRL*) My mother's people, yes, they participate in the killing, for them it's a matter of survival. (*turns to MAN WITH iPad*) Sir, wouldn't you rather be photographing the whales? (*pause*) Yes, we used to be a couple.

DARRYL: Used to be?! What's the matter with you today? (*to MAN WITH iPad*) We lost our virginity to each other, that's how far back we go. Now do me a favor, point your iPad at some less attractive mammal.

(*DARRYL and TALIA watch the MAN WITH iPad leave.*)

TALIA: Are you nuts? "Less attractive mammal"?

DARRYL: I got rid of him, didn't I? That guy's a perv, he's been oggling you from the jump. Trust me on this.

TALIA: Trust you, that's great, don't I wish.

DARRYL: Whoa, what's that supposed to mean?

TALIA: You know darn well what I mean. (*on mic*) How are we doing out there? Remember, what you're looking for aren't humps as such. They're just arching their backs before making a deep dive. (*pause; to another passenger*) Monogamous? Humpbacks? That's a myth. Bald eagles, they're monogamous. Bald eagles fly solo during migration, but they return to their mates every year for life. (*with a look at DARRYL; pointedly*) Male humpbacks are notoriously unfaithful.

DARRYL: Aw jeez. I had a feeling.

TALIA: Apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

DARRYL: Now come on, that's unfair.

TALIA: Please, everybody knows about your dad. When his hitch on the rig was over he'd go straight to a whorehouse instead of home to your mom.

DARRYL: There's no comparison. A, I've never been to a whorehouse. Who ratted me out?

TALIA: Who do you think?

DARRYL: Oh wow, not Amka. What did Amka say?

TALIA: She said I was a lucky girl. So how many others have there been?

DARRYL: None. Zero. Just Amka. She was hammered, I was hammered, no, wrong, that's no excuse, the truth? I was proving something to myself.

TALIA: Proving what?

DARRYL: That I could satisfy another woman.

TALIA: I'm not proof enough?

DARRYL: You don't know male psychology.

TALIA: Oh believe me, I know all about it.

DARRYL: Whale psychology, that's what you know. (*pause*) Amka really called you "lucky"?

(Sound of creaking timbers, shrieks of alarm. Both TALIA and DARRYL lose their balance.)

TALIA: (*on mic*) Whoa, careful out there, we're experiencing a little turbulence. (*pause; to another passenger*) Well, if the concierge told you the sea was always smooth, I'd have to disagree. (*to DARRYL*) Maybe we should head for calmer waters, check out the sea lions.

DARRYL: (*wryly*) Calmer waters, yeah, I'm for that. So what's your excuse?

TALIA: Excuse for what?

DARRYL: Let me guess. You were pissed at me for doing Amka, you hooked up with the first guy who bought you a drink.

TALIA: Wow.

DARRYL: Talk about the apple and the tree.

TALIA: Who told you?

DARRYL: Yeah, who do you think?

TALIA: Ohmigod. That rotten little snitch.

DARRYL: Just watch yourself at Sea World, OK? Lotta animal behavior there, or so I've heard.

TALIA: I hate you.

DARRYL: You're right to hate me. I acted out of weakness. But don't blame Amka for spilling the beans. What you did, that was meant for revenge, and what good is revenge if I didn't hear about it? Oh wait, I forgot, Sea World is your revenge. *(suddenly)* Whoa!—

(More shrieks. The boat is rocking harder. TALIA and DARRYL grab onto each other for balance. Then quickly separate. Boat continues to rock.)

TALIA: *(on mic)* Sorry about this, folks. *(pause; to another passenger)* Oh gosh, that's awful, how sick is she? *(pause)* It's probably too late to take Dramamine, we're doing the best we can. *(to DARRYL)* What are you doing?

DARRYL: I'm trying to relax them, all right? Before they mutiny.

(DARRYL keys something into his laptop. Out pours humpback song.)

TALIA: *(on mic)* OK. What you're hearing, those are the famous humpback songs. Only the males sing them. The ones you're hearing, those are male mating cries. All males in a population sing the same song.

DARRYL: Don't rub it in.

TALIA: *(on mic)* Their songs can travel up to 20 miles.

DARRYL: I'll forgive you if you'll forgive me.

TALIA: *(on mic)* Sometimes they have to whisper, otherwise the killer whales hear them. The poor humpbacks, they have no way of fighting back. They don't have teeth. They suck up fish from the sea and spray the water out their blowholes...Amazing creatures...so elusive...*(distantly)* so unpredictable...

DARRYL: *(on mic)* Totally promiscuous...the females as well as the males...

TALIA: *(on mic)* So human in so many ways...

DARRYL: *(on mic)* Our superiors in other ways...

TALIA: *(on mic)* The males fight with each other but never with the females...

DARRYL: *(on mic)* We have so much to learn from our fellow mammals.

TALIA: *(on mic; to passenger)* I'm sorry, what? *(pause)* Yes, you're right, we should have seen at least one whale by now, I feel as bad about everything as you do...*(to another passenger)* I can't authorize a refund, you'll have to talk to your ship's concierge... *(to ANNOYING GIRL)* The scientific name for humpbacks? I honestly don't remember...*(pause)* Megaptera noviaeangliae, [meh-GAP-tera NO-vee-igh-ANG-lee-igh] isn't that interesting...

(DARRYL grabs the mic from TALIA.)

DARRYL: *(to ANNOYING GIRL)* If you knew that already, why in God's name did you ask? *(turns to MAN WITH iPad)* Did Talia ask you to stop taking her picture? Then why are you still doing it? Show some respect, people. Look at you all. Look what the cruise ships send us. We got the voyeur, the class grind, and a bunch of kids looking for whales on their phones, for Christ's sake. Folks, you've worn us out. "Where are the fjords? Why haven't I seen a moose? Do you live on the boat?" No, I don't live on the boat. The boat is history. I've got sixty thousand dollars equity in this vessel, which will pay for three years tuition at UAS plus room and board.

THALIA: Darryl, no, are you crazy?—

DARRYL: *(to TALIA)* I've still got that pilot's license. I'll do chopper tours. Glacier tours. Northern Lights tours. *(on mic)* Folks, I know this voyage has been a little bumpy, not to mention whale-free, but I hope that won't keep you from showing your appreciation to Talia, she's going to college in the fall instead of Sea World and we're gonna need all the coin we can get, because I'm saving the whales by marrying this beautiful reckless girl. If she'll have me.

(Sound of cheering. TALIA takes the mic back from DARRYL.)

TALIA: *(on mic)* Thank you. The answer is...yes, I'll have him. Thank you all for your support, that touches my heart.

DARRYL: Uh...those cheers weren't for us. A whale just breached.

TALIA: You're kidding, where?

DARRYL: Just pretend you saw it.

TALIA: *(on mic; professional again)* Yes, wasn't that awesome? No one really knows why whales breach. Some say it's to splash off parasites. Some say it's males showing their dominance.

DARRYL: *(on mic)* Me, I think they're just having fun.

TALIA: *(on mic)* And look, over there, starboard, two o'clock, that patch of white in the trees? Can everybody see that?

DARRYL: *(on mic)* That's a bald eagle returning to his mate.

TALIA: *(to DARRYL)* For life?

DARRYL: *(to TALIA)* For life. *(turns to MAN WITH IPAD)* OK, perv. You can take our picture now.

(DARRYL and TALIA pose for a photograph. Humpback song rises as they kiss. END OF PLAY.)