

Venus Starfish raised two of her five orange arms. “Okay, girls, hit it!” she commanded. And swoosh, like a mermaid’s tail, thousands of fish darted into place. The Alaskan sun lit the flickering display and J-O-H-A-N-N floated across the sea in a shimmering water ballet.

Known around the world as the *Pavarotti* of whales for his beautiful tenor voice, Johann Sebastian Humpbach would soon be leaving these winter seas. His birthplace, Hawaii, called once again.

Bears and eagles, otters and seals, predatory orcas on good behavior all lined the rocky shore to see Johann off. It would be six months before he returned with tales of his Whale Song Tour. His friends and admirers longed to hear him sing, but Johann and his humpback clan only sang when they were in Hawaii.

Though he was already experiencing slight pangs of homesickness, Johann knew the feeling wouldn’t last for long. Thoughts of playing in warm Hawaii waters and performing for the multitudes filled Johann with warmth like the Hawaiian sun. There was nothing Johann loved more



than singing his head off. To him it was pure happiness.

Next to singing, breaching was most dear to Johann's heart. In a show of strength and joy he parted the waves with a slap of his tail. The surrounding throngs went wild, cheering him on like fans at a soccer match. He felt powerful because he had bulked up on his favorite food, krill, all summer.

Johann was big, fat, and bursting at the seams. He was ready to go.

The gathering grew louder and louder, the cries and wishes bittersweet.

“Farewell, Johann.”

“Make us proud, Johann.”

“Have a great trip.”

“Be safe.”


“Bring back a CD.”

Johann was deeply touched by the outpouring of affection. “Thank you, thank you,” he said in his melodious voice, and it sounded like singing.

Then, he was off.

The way to the Hawaiian Islands was well known to this plucky traveler. Once en route Johann was grateful for the solitude, especially after all the hoopla surrounding his departure.

He glided along, invigorated by the chilly water yet welcoming warmer seas as he headed south. He encountered familiar faces along the way and enjoyed brief visits with old pals from journeys past. He made the 3,500-mile trip in good time, just under eighty-two days.



In waters off the Big Island of Hawaii Johann put on a show for a passing cruise ship, breaking the waves in full view of the delighted passengers. “Look, look,” they cried. Johann appeared on one side of the vessel and then the other. He watched from the corner of his eye as people scurried back and forth on the deck like sand crabs on the beach.

Things continued to go swimmingly and Johann, comfortable with his thoughts, settled once again into a steady rhythm . . . until, that is, the water turned a deep, dark purple.

*Hmm, that's an odd color for the sea to be,* thought Johann. No sooner had the notion crossed his mind than an even stranger thing happened. Johann began to grow drowsy. His eyelids were heavy lead weights. His once clear thoughts became muddy as they gradually slipped away.



“No way.”

“I don’t want to dress like you either, Keoni,” said Leilani.

Auntie Pua sighed. “It was just a suggestion. It’s your birthday. You’d look so cute, *yeah*, just like when you were little.”

“Auntie, we haven’t dressed alike since we were four,” protested Leilani, and besides, we’d look like tourists.”

“Fine, but we don’t have all day. I’ve got a million and one things to do for tonight.”

“Lei! Rock-scissors-paper!” challenged Keoni.

“Ready—set—go!” Leilani replied. Her clenched fist shot out from behind her back and flattened out, fingers spread. “Paper covers rock. I win, *Brah!* Tough luck.”

Leilani was triumphant as she slipped on the red and yellow hibiscus print aloha shirt they both had their eyes on, available in boys’ and girls’ styles. “This looks *really* cool on me, better than it would on you,” she said, pleased with her reflection in the store mirror. She liked her new haircut too. Shoulder-length suited her more now, better than the

waist-length hair she had worn before.

“No problem . . . I’ll find something else. Anything’s better than looking like you,” said Keoni. He laughed as he dodged a punch that landed mid-air.

“Okay, you guys. Cool it,” said Auntie Pua, and that was that.



Johann woke slowly as if from a twenty-year sleep. His temples throbbed. Was this a headache? He'd heard of headaches before but he'd never had one personally.

Like a scrawny stagehand trying to raise a heavy curtain, Johann struggled to open his eyes. Little by little he realized he was in trouble. He was in an unknown place with zero visibility. For the first time in his life Johann trembled.

One minute he was basking in warm Hawaiian waters and now, this. "Don't panic," he told himself. "Be strong." He struggled to recover his courage as he found himself on the edge of fear.

A piercing cold filled the darkness. Johann couldn't stop shivering. An enormous chill crawled from the tip of his tail flukes to the crown of his head. Then it began all over again, creeping up his spine. Was he dying? He was confused and he knew it, so he began to sing.

Johann's voice was weak and cracked at first, but he kept on. "Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, do . . . do, ti, la, sol, fa, mi, re, do," he warbled, and felt better.



As his thoughts cleared he could have sworn he heard laughter. Not happy. Not joyous. But an eerie kind of laughter. Was his mind playing tricks on him? There it was again. He could hear it clearly in the deep, dark depths. Then it drifted away.