

# A DOG'S PORPOISE

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Dedicated to Liffey, and also to Spree.



## CHAPTER ONE

# Bangor

*Puff!*

Bangor's favorite sound had always been one he made himself: the sound of his own breathing. Because Bangor was a harbor porpoise, he didn't have to breathe too often—in fact, one time he had stayed underwater for ten whole minutes, just to prove to his older brother, Belfast, that he could.

But he *preferred* to come up for air as often as possible. He enjoyed the brief break of the above-water world, his blowhole spurting away all the slick salt water on the surface of his back—*puff!*—before pushing out his old breath and drawing in a new one, all in a split second. Then his dorsal fin arced up and out and back into the ocean, and Bangor was on his way



back down until he decided he wanted to resurface again. Breathing kept him alive, of course, but more importantly, it was fun. And that was life all over for a harbor porpoise; being alive was more or less the exact same thing as having fun.

And now that he was thinking about breathing, he decided to do it again.

*Puff!*

But this time, as Bangor plunged back down, he got a surprise. At three hundred feet below the surface, a gray flash rocketed past his right flank, so close that bubbles exploded across Bangor's field of vision. He spun to the left and released a rapid burst of sonar clicks to signal his confusion. The sound waves raced through the roiling water, bounced off the source of whatever had shocked him, and returned to Bangor's ears in a matter of milliseconds. The moment Bangor heard what was in front of him, all of his confusion disappeared.

There, rolling in front of him playfully, was Belfast. Belfast loved teasing his little brother, and since Bangor was the oddball of the family, Belfast

had always found plenty to tease him about. Whether it was Bangor going to the surface too often, or swimming off without a moment's notice because he was lost in another daydream, Belfast was always there to keep him in check.

*Well, two can play at that game*, thought Bangor. He darted forward as fast as he could, and he was satisfied to see Belfast's left eye widen in shock just before Bangor caught up with him, swimming in tight circles over and under his older brother, releasing a cyclone of bubbles. Then Belfast joined in the dance, and all ill will was forgotten as the two of them shot off across the water, playing and clicking giddily, looping around each other at breakneck speed.

Some days, Bangor didn't feel like the family oddball. Some days, he felt like his entire family was just as odd as he was, and he loved it.

*"Eee-eee-ee-ee-e-e-e?"*

And there were the rest of the oddballs, right on cue. Bangor and Belfast slowed their pace at the sound of the traditional harbor porpoise greeting, and Bangor shot off the proper series of clicks to say hello

back: He started off low and slow, and then increased the frequency higher and higher in a chipper upsweep:

*“Eee-eee-ee-ee-e-e-e!”*

This got a delighted spin from their youngest sister, Bristol, and a lazy flap of the tail from their uncle York. Uncle York wasn’t much for frolicking or playing, but he was *very* much for eating frequently and in large quantities.

And there, bringing up the rear as always, was Bangor’s mother, Kittery. She didn’t hang back because she was the slowest swimmer of the pod—that was absolutely York, who had once eaten so many mackerel that Bangor had to push him along with his snout for a few miles while York regained his senses. If Kittery had wanted to, she could have swum circles around York, but instead she chose to keep her pod safe by making sure they were all within sight whenever possible. And now here they all were, united under her watchful—but clearly amused—gaze.

*“Ee-ee-ee!”* Kittery chirped.

Now that all of them were there, Bangor clicked again—not because he had anything to say, but just



because he was happy. He knew that not every porpoise had a pod like this. In fact, most of the harbor porpoises he'd met in his two years of life had been loners, just passing through this little northern patch of the Atlantic that Bangor thought of as home. But Kittery had always made a point of keeping her kids together, and York was far too lazy to live on his own, so a family pod had formed, and Bangor didn't think he'd trade that family for anything.

Well. Maybe for *one* thing.

Bangor had always been, by far, the most adventurous member of his family, ready to swim off or up or in any direction that seemed like it might contain fun or new friends or even new fish to eat. Everyone in the pod loved him dearly, but they all had their own reasons for staying put. Belfast scorned anything that was different from the norm; baby Bristol just couldn't keep up; Kittery was far too cautious to endorse that sort of adventuring; and even Uncle York couldn't be persuaded to swim out to new feeding grounds, clearly reasoning that a fish in the beak was worth two in the deep, and half the hassle, to boot.

Just once, Bangor would have liked to go on a real trip somewhere to find something new, or to make a new friend. But harbor porpoises tended to find one place to live and stay there, and while there was plenty that was odd about Bangor's pod, in this respect, they were happy to conform to the norm.

And no matter what, Bangor was happy to be with his pod.

*"E-e-e-e-e."*

Kittery's rapid-fire clicking interrupted Bangor's reverie. Bangor was very familiar with that clicking, especially from his mother. It was the sound of a warning—a heads-up that something was wrong—and Kittery's calm but insistent loops around the perimeter of the pod were a clear signal that she wanted them to pay attention to their surroundings. But what was Bangor supposed to be looking for? He echolocated as far into the distance as he could, and was surprised to hear something large and unfamiliar coming toward them from far away; but he was even more surprised to see Kittery shaking her head. He knew what that meant: *That's not what I'm worried about.*

Bangor focused harder, listening for any other new threats in the nearby water. Then he realized—it was the *water* itself! The water pressure all around them had dropped. Bangor had been so caught up in playing and dreaming—and the change had been so gradual at first—that he hadn't noticed it was happening. But now it was falling quickly enough that everyone could feel it. That, and the dark surface of the water, churning cloudy black where there should have been moonlight, could mean only one thing:

A storm was coming. And it was big.

Bangor's pride at figuring out the puzzle quickly gave way to nervousness over the danger this storm might bring. Even deep underwater, big storms could cause chaos. They often brought roiling waves violent enough to batter smaller fish in all kinds of directions; they changed the ocean's salt and oxygen levels in ways that were unpredictable and dangerous; and if the storm was strong enough, it could dredge things up from the bottom of the ocean, flinging seafloor sediment or even shipwrecks into the paths of unsuspecting animals.

The luckiest sea creatures were the ones who were smart enough to know what was coming and fast enough to get away before things got really bad. Harbor porpoises were definitely fast, and they were *definitely* smart. So now, Bangor realized giddily, they would go somewhere else—somewhere *new*. Bangor was about to get his wish!

Chittering excitedly, Bangor shot a few hundred feet south, and then rapidly returned to look at his pod expectantly: *This way! Let's go this way!* They'd never really ventured south before; harbor porpoises tended to stay where it was cold year-round, and this seemed like the perfect time to give it a try.

But Bangor's mother shook her head again, patiently indicating the other direction: *We always go north; we'll go north now.*

Bangor huffed, releasing a stream of bubbles that floated up to the surface, which was beginning to dapple with rainwater. The edge of the storm was arriving, and they didn't have much time for debate. Still, Bangor didn't know when he'd get another

chance at a trip like this, and he was determined to make it count.

He flipped around again, emitting a high-pitched squeak: *Pleeease? It could be fun!* Bristol, ever the impressionable little sister, got in on the act, flipping and wheedling like her life depended on it. Kittery turned to Uncle York, looking for some support, but he just gave his customary neutral flap. For a lazy porpoise like Uncle York, all movement was equally unpleasant, no matter what direction it was in.

Bangor clicked eagerly at Belfast, hoping his older brother could provide a deciding vote. But something had caused Belfast to become distracted. His attention was focused on something farther off from the pod, to the north. Bangor bumped up against his flank: *Hey. Buddy. Over here.* But Belfast brushed him away, moving a few feet farther out from the pod, echolocating ever more intently off into the distance.

The waves above them were getting bigger now, and Bangor was starting to get nervous. He wondered if he should let the whole thing go, and he also

wondered what could possibly have his brother so concerned. Then he clicked in the direction his brother was clicking, and stopped wondering.

A gigantic wall of high-pitched sound was coming toward them—the sound Bangor had detected earlier, but closer now, and pitched at a volume that could only mean one thing: boats. Human boats, and big ones. The kind that made sound waves that knocked porpoises way out of whack. For a harbor porpoise navigating by echolocation, swimming close to one of these ships was just like having a blinding light shone into your eyes, and just as likely to make a porpoise lose track of where they were, or even run into something—hard. And from the cacophony coming their way, this wasn't just one ship, it was a whole fleet of them. They didn't normally come this close to the pod's part of the ocean, but the storm must have been driving them back to land, forcing them to take an unexpected route. If Bangor and his family tried to swim past that fleet, there was no guarantee they'd get where they wanted to go as one pod, let alone in one piece.