

How the Whale got his Throat

Rudyard Kipling (adapted)

In the sea, once upon a time, there was a Whale, and he ate fishes.

He ate the starfish and the garfish, and the crab and the dab, and the plaice and the dace, and the skate and his mate, and the mackerel and the pickereel, and the really truly twirly-whirly eel.

All the fishes he could find in all the sea he ate with his mouth – so!

He ate all the fishes, till at last there was only one small fish left in all the sea, and he was a small 'Stute Fish, and he swam a little behind the Whale's right ear, so as to be out of harm's way.

Then the Whale stood up on his tail and said "I'm hungry".

And the small 'Stute Fish said in a small 'stute voice "Noble and generous Cetacean, have you ever tasted Man?"

"No" said the Whale, "What is it like?"

"Nice" said the small 'Stute Fish, "Nice – but nubbly".

"Then fetch me some" said the Whale, and he made the sea froth up with his tail.

"One at a time is enough" said the 'Stute Fish.

"If you swim to latitude Fifty North, longitude Forty West, you will find, sitting on a raft, in the middle of the sea, with nothing on but a pair of blue canvas breeches, a pair of braces" (you must not forget the braces) "and a jack-knife, he found one single, solitary shipwrecked Mariner, trailing his toes in the water." (He had his Mummy's leave to paddle, or else he would never have done it, because he was a man of infinite resource and sagacity).

Then the Whale opened his mouth back and back and back till it nearly touched his tail, and he swallowed the shipwrecked Mariner, and the raft he was sitting on, and his blue canvas breeches, and the braces (which you must not forget) and the jack-knife. He swallowed them all down into his warm, dark, inside cupboards and then he smacked his lips and turned round three times on his tail.

But as soon as the Mariner, who was a man of infinite resource and sagacity, found himself truly inside the Whale's warm, dark, inside cupboards, he stumped and he jumped, and he thumped and he bumped, and he pranced and he danced, and he banged and he clanged, and he hit and he bit, and he leaped and he crept, and he prowled and he howled, and he hopped and he dropped, and he cried and he sighed, and he crawled and he bawled, and he stepped and he leapt, and he danced hornpipes where he shouldn't, and the Whale felt most unhappy indeed.

Have you forgotten the braces?

So he said to the 'Stute Fish "This man is very nubbly, and besides he is making me hiccup. What shall I do?"

"Tell him to come out" said the 'Stute Fish.

So the Whale called down his own throat to the shipwrecked Mariner: "Come out and behave yourself. I've got the hiccups".

"Nay, nay!" said the Mariner. "Not so, but far otherwise. Take me to my natal-shore and the white cliffs of Albion, and I'll think about it".

And he began to dance more than ever.

"You had better take him home" said the 'Stute Fish to the Whale. "I ought to have warned you that he is a man of infinite resource and sagacity".

So the Whale swam and swam and swam, with both flippers and his tail, as hard as he could for the hiccups.

And at last he saw the Mariner's natal-shore and the white cliffs of Albion, and he rushed half-way up the beach and opened his mouth wide and wide and wide and said "Change here for Winchester, Ashuelot, Nashua, Keene and stations on the Fitchburg Road". And just as he said "Fitch" the Mariner walked out of his mouth.

But while the Whale had been swimming, the Mariner, who was indeed a person of infinite resource and sagacity, had taken his jack-knife and cut up the raft into a little square grating running all criss-cross, and had tied it firm with the braces (now you know why you were not to forget the braces!) and he dragged that grating good and tight into the Whale's throat and there it stuck!

Then he recited the following verse: "By means of a grating, I have stopped you ating".

The Mariner stepped out on the shingle and went home to his Mother, who had given him leave to trail his toes in the water, and he married and lived happily ever after.

So did the Whale. But from that day on, the grating in his throat, which he could neither cough up nor swallow down, prevented him eating anything except very, very small fish. And that is the reason why Whales nowadays never eat men or boys or girls.