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The Whale Hunters

The world wants them to stop, but it's the trade of their grandfathers. With a harpoon and their wits, they ply the waters of the Caribbean in search of their 40-ton prey. And when they're gone, it all goes with them.
By Sebastian Junger

The last living harpooner wakes to the sound of wind. It has been blowing for two weeks now, whipping up a big ugly sea, ruining any chance of



JIM ERICKSON

putting out in the boat. On this strong, steady wind, the northeast trades, European slave ships rode to the New World bringing 15 million Africans across the Atlantic. One of their descendants now creeps through his house in the predawn gloom, wishing the wind would stop.

The man's name is Athneal Ollivierre. He is six feet tall, 74 years old, as straight and strong as a dock piling. His hair rises in an ash-gray column, and a thin wedge of mustache suggests a French officer in the First World War. On his left leg, there's the scar of a rope burn that went right down to the bone. His eyes, bloodshot from age and the glare of the sun, focus on a point just above my shoulder and about 500 miles distant. In the corner of his living room rests a 20-pound throwing iron with a cinnamon-wood shaft.

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Ollivierre makes his way outside to watch the coming of the day. The shutters are banging. It's the dry season; one rainfall and the hills will be so covered with poui flowers that it will look like it just snowed. Shirts hang out to dry on the bushes in front of his house, and a pair of humpback jawbones forms a gateway beyond which sprawls the rest of his world: seven square miles of volcanic island that drop steeply into a turquoise sea. This is Bequia, one of 32 islands that make up the southern Caribbean nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Friendship Bay curves off to the east, and a new airport, bulldozed across the reefs, juts off to the west. More and more tourists and cruise ships have been coming to Bequia, the planes buzzing low, the gleaming boats anchoring almost nightly in the bay, but at the moment that matters very little to Ollivierre: He's barefoot in the tropical grass, squinting across the water at a small disturbance in the channel. Through binoculars it turns out to be a wooden skiff running hard across the channel for the island of Mustique. It emerges, disappears, emerges again behind a huge green swell.

"Bequia men, they brave," he says, shaking his head. He speaks in a patois that sounds like French spoken with an Irish brogue. "They brave too much."



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Ollivierre hunts humpback whales from a 27-foot wooden sailboat called the *Why Ask*. As far as he's concerned, his harpooning days are over, but he's keeping at it long enough to train a younger man, 43-year-old Arnold Hazell, to do it. Otherwise the tradition, and the last remnant of the old Yankee whaling industry, will die with him. When they go out in pursuit of a whale, Ollivierre and his five-man crew row through the surf of Friendship Bay and then erect a sail that lets them slip up on whales undetected. Ollivierre stands in the bow of his boat and hurls a harpoon into the flank of an animal that's 500 times as heavy as he is. He has been knocked unconscious, dragged under, maimed, stunned, and nearly drowned. When he succeeds in taking a whale, schools on Bequia are let out, businesses are closed, and a good portion of the 4,800 islanders descends on the whaling station to watch and help butcher, clean, and salt the whale.

"It's the only thing that bring joy to Bequia people," says Ollivierre, a widower whose only son has no interest in whaling. "Nobody don't be in their homes when I harpoon a whale. I retired a few years ago, but the island was lackin of the whale, and so I go back. Now I'm training Hazell. When I finish with whalin, I finish with the sea."



JIM ERICKSON

When a whale is caught, it's towed by motorboat to a deserted cay called

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Petit Nevis and winched onto the beach; the winch is a rusty old hand-powered thing bolted to the bedrock. Butchering a 40-ton animal is hard, bloody work--work that has been condemned by environmentalists around the world--and the whalers offer armloads of fresh meat to anyone who will help them. Some of the meat is cooked right there on the beach (it tastes like rare roast beef) and the rest is kept for later. The huge jawbones are sold to tourists for around a thousand dollars, and the meat and blubber are divided up equally among the crew. Each man sells or gives his share away as he sees fit--"Who sell, sell; who give, give," as Ollivierre says. The meat goes for \$2 a pound in Port Elizabeth.

If there is a species that exemplifies the word *whale* in the popular mind, it's probably the humpbacks that Ollivierre hunts. These are the whales that breach for whale-watching boats and sing for marine biologists. Though nearly 90 percent of the humpback population has been destroyed in the last hundred years, at least half of the remaining 11,000 humpbacks spend the summer at their feeding grounds in the North Atlantic and then migrate south in December. They pass the winter mating, calving, and raising their young in the warm Caribbean waters, and when the newborns are strong enough--they grow a hundred pounds a day--the whales journey back north.

It is by permission of the International Whaling Commission, based in Cambridge, England, that Ollivierre may take two humpbacks a year. In 1986 a worldwide moratorium was imposed on all commercial whaling, but it allowed "aboriginal people to harvest whales in perpetuity, at levels appropriate to their cultural and nutritional requirements." A handful of others whale--in Greenland, Alaska, and Siberia--but Ollivierre is the only one who still uses a sailboat and a hand-thrown harpoon. These techniques were learned aboard Yankee whaling ships a hundred years ago and brought back to Bequia without changing so much as an oarlock or clevis pin.

"You came and put a piece of your history here, and it's still here today," says Herman Belmar, a local historian who lives around the corner from Ollivierre. Belmar is a quiet, articulate man whose passion is whaling history. He is trying to establish a whaling museum on the island. "Take the guys from Melville's *Moby Dick* and put them in Athneal's boat, and they'd know exactly what to do."



One day at dawn I drive over to meet Ollivierre. His house is a small, whitewashed, wood-and-concrete affair on the side of a hill, surrounded by a hedge. Except for the whalebone arch, it's indistinguishable from any

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other house on the island. I let myself through a little wooden gate and walk across his front yard, past an outboard motor and a vertebra the size of a bar stool. It's mid-February, whaling season, and Ollivierre is seated on a bench looking out across the channel. I stick out my hand; he takes it without meeting my eye.

By Bequia standards, Ollivierre is a famous man. Many people have stood before him asking for his story, but still I'm a little surprised by his reaction. Not a word, not a smile--just the trancelike gaze of someone trying to make out a tiny speck on the horizon. I stand there uncomfortably for a few minutes and finally ask what turns out to be the right question: "Could I see your collection?"

If you wander around Port Elizabeth for any length of time, a taxi driver will inevitably make you the offer: "Come meet the real harpooner! Shake his hand, see his museum!" A museum it's not, but Ollivierre has filled the largest room of his house with bomb guns, scrimshaw, and paintings. The paintings are by a local artist and commemorate some of Ollivierre's wilder exploits--ATHNEAL DONE STRIKE DE WHALE, reads one. As Ollivierre discusses his life, he slowly becomes more animated and finally suggests that I walk up to the hilltop behind his house to meet the rest of the crew.

A path cuts up the hill past another low wood-and-concrete house. Split PVC pipe drains the roof and empties into a big concrete cistern, which is almost dry. (Every drop of drinking water on Bequia must be caught during the rainy season.) At the top of the hill are some wind-bent bushes and a thatch-and-bamboo sun-break that tilts southward toward the sea. Four men sit beneath it, looking south across the channel. They gnaw on potatoes, pass around binoculars, suck on grass stems, watch the sky get lighter. In the distance is a chain of cays that used to be the rim of a huge volcano, and seven miles away is the island of Mustique. When the wind permits, the whalers sail over there to look out for humpbacks.

"Hello. Athneal sent me," I offer a little awkwardly.

The men glance around--there's been some bad press about whaling, even the threat of a tourist boycott, and everyone knows this is a delicate topic. An old man with binoculars motions me over. "We can tell whatever you want," he says, "but we can't do anything without Dan, de cop'm."



After Ollivierre, Dan Hazell, who bears some distant relation to Arnold Hazell, is the senior member of the crew. He's the captain, responsible for

maneuvering the boat according to Ollivierre's orders. A young man named Eustace Kydd says he'll round up Dan and a couple of others and meet me at a bar in Paget Farm. Paget Farm is a settlement by the airport where the whalers live: ramshackle houses, dories pulled up on rocks, men drinking rum in the shade. Most of the men on the island make their living net-fishing. They go out before dawn and one crewman strings the nets along the ocean bottom--30 feet down with just two lungfuls of air, but it's a living. Later, the crew hauls in the catch, hoping to find snapper, kingfish, and bonita caught up in the twine.

I nod and walk back down the hill. Ollivierre is still in his yard, glassing the channel and talking to a young neighborhood man who has dropped by. They give me a glance and keep talking. The wind has dropped; the sun is thundering impossibly fast out of the equatorial sea.

Unfortunately for Ollivierre, the antiquity of his methods has not exempted him from controversy. First of all, he has been known to take mother-calf pairs, a practice banned by the IWC. In addition, Japan started giving St. Vincent and several neighboring islands tens of millions of dollars in economic aid after the imposition of an international moratorium on whaling in 1986. The aid was ostensibly to develop local fisheries, but American environmental groups charged that Japan was simply buying votes on the IWC. The suspicions were well founded: St. Vincent, Dominica, and Grenada have received substantial amounts of money from Japan, and all have voted in accordance with Japan's whaling interests over and over again.

Things came to a head last year when the IWC introduced a proposal to create an enormous whale sanctuary around Antarctica. The sanctuary would offer shelter to whales as the worldwide moratorium was phased out in keeping with growing whale populations. The Massachusetts-based International Wildlife Coalition, headed by Dan Morast, threatened to organize a tourist boycott against any country that voiced opposition to the proposal, and in the end only Japan voted against it. St. Vincent, Dominica, and Grenada abstained from the vote, and the South Seas Sanctuary was passed.



But the controversy over Bequia is more emotional than a vote. Ollivierre has become the focal point for dozens of environmental lobbyists, for whom everything he does is drenched in symbolism. First there was Ollivierre's flip-flop: In 1990 he announced his retirement, but a year later he was back at it, sitting on his hilltop, looking out for whales. It was a move that angered environmentalists who thought they'd seen the last of whaling on Bequia. The reaction was compounded by Ollivierre's efforts to

sell the island of Petit Nevis, the tiny whaling station that has belonged to his family for three generations; a Japanese businessman's offer of \$5 million was an outrage. Of course, Ollivierre's personal impact on the humpback population is negligible. Morast's point seems to be more conceptual: that the land sale is just another form of bribery to encourage the St. Vincent representative on the IWC to vote for whaling.

And contrary to Morast's view, Ollivierre would love to retire. His joints ache, his vision is clouded, he's an old man. Harpooning is dangerous, and apprentices are hard to come by. Several years ago he trained his nephew, Anson Ollivierre, to harpoon, but Anson branched out on his own before even bloodying his hands. Now he's building his own whaleboat, and Ollivierre fears Anson will get his whole crew killed. So this year Ollivierre tried again, taking on Arnold Hazell. Hazell's great-grandfather crewed for Ollivierre's great-grandfather, and now, a hundred years later, the relationship continues. Since there are no whales to practice on, Hazell just hangs out at Ollivierre's house, listens to the old stories, soaks up the lore.

When Hazell has killed his first whale, Ollivierre will retire. And the antiwhaling community will have a new face upon which to hang its villain's mask.

A short time after meeting with Ollivierre and his crew, I drive down to Paget Farm. On the way I pass a new fish market, paid for by the Japanese government as part of a \$6 million aid package. According to the Japanese, it's a no-strings-attached token of affection for the Bequia fishermen. Past the market I turn onto a narrow cement road that grinds up a desperately steep hillside. At one end of the road is the sky; at the other end is the sea. The appointed bar is a one-story cement building halfway up the hill. I park, chock the wheels, and wander inside. It's as clean and simple inside as out: a rough wooden counter, a half-dozen chairs, no tables, a big fan. The walls are a turquoise color that fills the room with cool coral-reef light. A SAVE THE WHALES poster hangs in tatters on one wall, and a monumental woman opens soft drinks behind the counter. Five men are ranged at the far end of the room. They are dressed in T-shirts and baggy pants, and one has a knife in his hand. Captain Dan, too shy to speak, just looks out the window into the midday heat. Arnold Hazell greets me with a smile.

"In Bequia we don't have much opportunity like you in de States," he begins. "We grew up on de sea an live from de sea. Even if we don't cotch a whale for de next ten years, it will be good just to be whalin. Just to keep de heritage up. Japanese an Norwegians-- they killin whales by the thousands, an those



people could afford to do something else. They have oil, they have big industry, they have a better reason to stop." He pauses. "You know, we can put the boat out, we can talk to you, you can take snaps, but it a whole day's work for us. We need something back."

Luckily, I've been told about this ahead of time. It's a tourist economy--the sunshine, the water, the beaches, it's all for sale--and the whalers see no reason why they should be any different. A young man in dreadlocks steps in quietly and leans against the bar. He listens with vague amusement; he's heard this all before.

"A few years ago a French crew come here," says Eustace. "They come to make a film. They offer us thousands of dollars; they prepared to pay that. But we say no because we know they makin so much more on the film. Why should we work an they make all the money?"

After this statement, negotiations proceed slowly. Some careful wording, a few ambiguous phrases, and finally an agreement is reached: We'll meet at Friendship Bay tomorrow before dawn. "And," says Captain Dan, his eyes never wavering from the horizon, "you'll see the *Why Ask fly*."

In the distant past, most of the Caribbean Islands were inhabited by the peace-loving Arawak people. Very little is known about them, because most were killed, and the rest were driven from the islands, by the Caribs, whose name comes from the Arawak word for "cannibal." Unfortunately for the Caribs, Columbus discovered their bloody little paradise within years of their ascendancy, and 200 years later most of them were gone as well. Bequia--dry, tiny, and poor--was one of their last hideouts, and when the French finally settled here, they found people of mixed Carib-African ancestry hiding in the hills. The Africans, as it turned out, had swum ashore from a wrecked slave ship, the *Palmira*, in 1675.

France ceded Bequia to Britain in 1763, and inevitably the Black Caribs, as they were called, were put to work on the local sugar and cotton plantations. Only free labor could coax a profit from such poor soil, and when the British abolished slavery in 1838, Bequia's economy fell apart. The local elite fled, and islanders reverted to farming and fishing--and eventually whaling--to survive.

The first Bequian to kill a whale was Bill Wallace, a white landowner's son who went to sea at age 15 and returned 20 years later with a New England bride



and an armful of harpoons. As a child on Bequia he'd watched humpbacks spouting offshore during the winter months, and he didn't see why boats couldn't put out from the beach to kill them. Crews could keep lookout from the hilltops and then man their boats when they saw a spout. He recruited the strongest young men he could find and established the first whaling station on Friendship Bay in 1875.

There was nothing benevolent in Wallace; he was a tough old salt who was essentially out for his own gain. He'd lost his father shortly before leaving the island and had grown up in an industry that was considered brutal even by the brutal standard of the times. Whaling crews were at sea for three or four years at a stretch, under conditions that would have made prisoners of war balk. Captains had absolute authority over their men, and some were known to demonstrate it by occasionally whipping one to death. The crews themselves were no blessing, often largely composed of criminals, drunks, and fresh-faced kids just off the farm. It's easy to guess whose habits, after four years at sea, rubbed off on whom.

The only thing that kept such an enterprise together was the unspeakable danger that these men faced and the financial rewards of making it through alive. The largest whales in the world--blue whales--weigh 190 tons and measure up to 100 feet long. They have hearts as big as oil drums; the males have penises nine feet long. When scared, the first thing they do is thrash the water with their flukes. Enraged whales have been known to rush headlong at three-masted ships and sink them; the chase boats that put out after whales were light, fast, and no more than 30 feet long.

Harpooned whales often bolted at such speed that the rope would catch fire as it ran out through the chocks. A coil in the line could yank a man's arm off or pull him overboard. Sometimes the whale would sound and then come up through the bottom of the boat at full speed. A slack line was always a bad sign; the men could do little but peer anxiously into the depths and try to see from what angle their death would come. Inexperienced whalers were known to jump right out of the boat at the first sight of a whale. Others, intoxicated by terror, whaled until they grew old or were killed.

Four in the morning, the air soft as silk. I'm speeding along the dark roads in a rented jeep, slowing down just enough to survive the speed bumps. The northern part of Bequia is almost completely uninhabited, steep, scrub-choked valleys running up to cliffs of black volcanic rock. Shark Bay, Park Bay, Brute Point, Bullet. Between the headlands are white-sand beaches backed by cow pastures and coconut groves. Land crabs rustle through the dead vegetation, and enormous spiders spindle up tree trunks. The road passes a smoldering garbage dump, climbs the island's central ridge, and then curves into Port Elizabeth. The only signs

of life at this hour are a few dockworkers loading a rusted inter-island cargo ship under floodlights. The road claws up a hill and then crests the ridge above Lowerbay--Lowby, as it's called--and starts down toward Friendship.

A dry wind is blowing through the darkness, and the surf against Semples Cay and St. Hilaire Point can be heard a mile away. I pull off the road near Ollivierre's house and feel my way down a steep set of cement stairs to the water's edge. The surf smashes white against the outer reefs; everything else is the blue-black of the tropics just before dawn. The whalers arrive ten minutes later, as promised, moving single-file down the beach. They stow their gear without a word and put their shoulders to the gunwales of the *Why Ask*; she rolls heavily over four cinnamon-wood logs and slips into the sea. The wind has abated enough to sail to the preferred lookout on Mustique; otherwise we'd have to make do with the hill above Ollivierre's.

Within minutes they're under way: Captain Dan at the tiller, Ollivierre up front, and Biddy Adams, Eustace, Arnold Hazell, and Kingsley Stowe amidships. They pull at the 18-foot oars, plunging into the surf. Once clear of the reef they step the mast, cinch the shrouds, becket the sprit and boom. They scramble to work within the awkward confines of the boat as Ollivierre barks orders from the bow.

The *Why Ask* is heartbreakingly graceful under sail, as much a creature of the sea as the animals she's designed to kill. She was built on the beach with the horizon as a level and Ollivierre's memory as a plan. Boatwrights have used such phrases as "lightly borne" and "sweet-sheared and buoyant" to describe whaleboats of the last century, and they apply equally to the *Why Ask*.



The boat quickly makes the crossing to Mustique, where the crew spends half the day on a hilltop overlooking the channel. With an older whaler named Harold Corea stationed above Ollivierre's house with a walkie-talkie, they have doubled the sweep of ocean they can observe. In addition they often get tips from fishermen, pilots, or people who just happen to look out their window at the right moment. These people are always rewarded with whale meat if the chase is successful.

In the early days, between 1880 and 1920, there were nine shore-whaling stations throughout the Grenadines, including six on Bequia, and together they surveyed hundreds of square miles of ocean. They'd catch perhaps

15 whales in a good year, a tremendous boon to the local economy. In 1920, 20 percent of the adult male population of Bequia was employed in the whaling industry.

Five years later all that changed; a Norwegian factory ship set up operation off Grenada and annihilated the humpback population within a year and a half. Almost no whales were caught by islanders between 1925 and 1948, and none at all were caught for eight years after that. The whaling stations folded one by one, and by the 1950s only the Ollivierre family was left. Today the humpback population has recovered slightly--the IWC now considers the species "vulnerable" rather than "endangered"--but sightings off Bequia are still rare. Last year the crew put out after a whale only once; so far this season they have yet to see a spout.

The boat returns from Mustique in the afternoon with nothing to report. The crew shrugs it off: Waiting is as much a part of whaling as throwing the harpoon.

On those lucky occasions when Ollivierre spots a whale from Mustique, he fixes its position in his mind, sails to the spot, and waits. If there's no wind, the crew is at the oars, pulling hard against oarlocks that have been lined with fabric to keep them quiet. Humpbacks generally dive for ten or 15 minutes and then come up for air; each time they do, Ollivierre works the boat in closer. The harpoon, protected by a wooden sheath, rests in a scooped-out section of the foredeck called the clumsy cleat; when the harpoon is removed, it fits the curve of Ollivierre's thigh perfectly.

The harpoon is heavy and brutally simple. A thick cinnamon-wood shaft has been dressed with an ax and pounded into the socket of a throwing iron. The head itself is made of brass and has been ground down to the edge of a skinning knife; it is mounted on a pivot and secured by a thin wooden shear pin driven through a hole. Upon impaling the whale, the pin breaks, allowing the head to toggle open at 90 degrees, catching deep in the flesh of the whale. It's a design that hasn't changed in 150 years. The harpoon is attached to a nine-fathom nylon tether, which in turn is tied--"bent," as Ollivierre says--to the manila mainline, which is 150 fathoms long. The line passes through a notch in the bow, runs the length of the boat, takes two wraps around the loggerhead, and is coiled carefully into a wooden tub. The loggerhead is a hefty wooden block that provides enough friction to keep the whale from running out the entire tub of rope. When a whale is pulling the line, Eustace scoops seawater over the side and fills the tub--otherwise the friction will set the loggerhead on fire. Meanwhile, Ollivierre takes his position in the bow, delivering orders to Captain Dan in a low, harsh voice. Above all they must stay clear of the tail: It's powerful enough to launch a humpback clear out of the water and could obliterate the boat in a second. Ollivierre's leg is braced against the

clumsy cleat, and the other men are wide-eyed at the gunwales, the rank smell of whale-vapor in their faces. The harpoon has been rid of its sheath, and Ollivierre holds it aloft as if his body has been drawn like a bow, right hand cupping the butt end, left hand supporting it like some kind of offering. You don't throw a harpoon; you drive it, unloading it downward with all your weight and strength the moment before your boat beaches itself--"wood to blackskin"--atop the whale.

"De whale make no sound at all when you hit it. It just lash de tail and it gone," says Ollivierre. "Dan let go of everything an put his two hands on de rope. De whale have to take de rope from him; he have to hold it down."

A struck whale gives a few good thrashes with its tail and then tries to flee. It is a moment of consummate chaos: the line screaming out through the bow chock, the crew trying to lower the mast, the helmsman bending the line around the smoking loggerhead. Some men freeze, and others achieve ultimate clarity. "After we harpoon it, that frightness, that cowardness go from me," says Harold Corea, who at 63 is one of the oldest members of the crew. "It all go away; I become brave, I get brave."

Brave or not, things can go very wrong. Around 1970--Ollivierre doesn't remember exactly when--a whale smacked the boat with a fluke, staving in the side and knocking Ollivierre out cold. When he came to, he realized that the rope had grabbed him and turned his leg into a loggerhead. It sawed down to bone in an instant, cauterizing the arteries as it went, and nearly ripped his hand in half. Ollivierre refused to cut the rope because he didn't want the whale to get away, but finally the barnacle-encrusted fluke severed it for him. The boat returned to shore, and Ollivierre walked up the beach unassisted, his tibia showing and his foot as heavy as cement. Two men on the beach fainted at the sight.

There is no such thing as an uneventful whale hunt; by definition it's either a disaster or almost one. As soon as the harpoon is fast in the whale, the crew drops the mast and Dan tightens up on the loggerhead to force the whale to tow the boat through the water, foredeck awash, men crammed into the stern, a 20-knot wake spreading out behind. Too much speed and the boat will go under; too much slack and the whale will run out the line. (There is one account of a blue whale that towed a 90-foot twin-screw chaser boat, its engines going full-bore astern, for 50 miles before tiring.) Every time the whale lets up, the crewmen put their hands on the line and start hauling it back in. The idea is to get close enough for Ollivierre to use either a hand lance or a 45-pound bomb gun, whose design dates back to the 1870s. It fires a shotgun shell screwed to a six-inch brass tube filled with powder that's ignited by a ten-second fuse. Ollivierre packs his own explosives and uses them with tremendous

discretion.

The alternative to the gun is a light lance with a rounded head that doesn't catch inside the whale; standing in the bow, Ollivierre thrusts again and again until he finds the heart. "De whole thing is dangerous, but de going in and de killing of it is de most dangerous," he says. He's been known to leap onto the back of the whale and sit with his legs wrapped around the harpoon, stabbing. Sometimes the whale sounds, and Ollivierre goes down with it; if it goes too deep, he lets go and the crew pulls him back to the boat. When his lance has found the heart, dark arterial blood spouts out the blowhole. The huge animal stops thrashing, and its long white flippers splay outward. Two men go over the side with a rope and harpoon the head to tie up the mouth; otherwise water will fill the innards and the whale will sink.

As dangerous as it is, only one Bequian has ever lost his life in a whaleboat: a harpooner named Dixon Durham, who was beheaded by a whale's flukes in 1885. So cleanly was he slapped from the boat that no one else on board was even touched. The closest Ollivierre has come to being Bequia's second statistic was in 1992, when the line caught on a midship thwart and pulled his boat under. He and his crew were miles from Bequia, and no one was following them; Ollivierre knew that, without the boat, they would all drown. He grabbed the bow and was carried down into the quiet green depths. Equipment was rising up all around him: oars, ropes, wooden tubs. He hung on to the bow and clawed desperately for the knife at his belt. By some miracle the rope broke, and the whole mess--boat, harpoons, and harpooner--floated back up into the world.

Ollivierre found his VHF radio floating among the wreckage and called for help. Several days later, some fishermen in Guyana heard a terrible slapping on the mudflats outside their village and went to investigate. They found Ollivierre's whale stranded on the beach, beating the world with her flippers as she died.

The next day, Ollivierre, Hazell, and Corea are back up at the lookout, keeping an eye on the sea. Corea, who was partially crippled by an ocean wave at age 19, is one of the last of the old whalers. Hazell is the future of Bequia whaling, if there is such a thing. They sit on the hilltop all morning without seeing a sign. No one knows where the whales are. A late migration? A different route? Are there just no more whales?

After a couple of hours Ollivierre is ready to call it quits for the day. If anyone sees a spout, they can just run over to his house and tell him. More than anything he just seems weary--he's whaled for 37 years and fished up until a few years ago. Enough is enough. He says good-bye and walks slowly down the hill. Corea watches him go and scours the channel

one more time.

Hazell squats on a rock in the shade with half his life still ahead of him. He is neither old nor young, a man caught between worlds, between generations. Down the hill is a scarred old man who's trying to teach him everything he knows; across the ocean is a council of nations playing tug-of-war with a 27-foot sailboat. Hazell would try to reconcile the two, if it were possible, but it's not. And so he's left with one simple task: to visualize what it will be like to face his first whale.

A long winter swell will be running. The sunlight will catch the spray like diamonds. He'll be in the bow with his thigh against the foredeck and the harpoon held high. The past and the future will fall away, until there are no politics, no boycotts, no journalists. There will be just one man with an ancient weapon and his heart in his throat.

Sebastian Junger's book The Storm will be published next fall by W. W. Norton.

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