

Senior Nonfiction
Adrian House, St. John's
The Look (an excerpt)

I slowly swam away from the capelin and towards where I'd last seen the humpbacks. I didn't want to intrude upon them, and kept in mind the advice of a friend who'd said to let the whales come to you, if they want to. Suddenly I saw a flash of white, about 50m away, and so I stopped. Floating on the surface and looking downwards, I could feel my heart racing, and hear only the hollow sound of my breath in my snorkel, "hoo, ha," as I tried to remain as calm as I could. I stayed there for about a minute, two minutes maybe, immobile, patiently waiting. And then I saw the tip of an enormous mouth glide into view. The whale was directly below me.

Growing up in Newfoundland I had seen whales many times, had even worked for a summer as a guide on a whale watching boat, and seen them from a kayak. Nothing could have prepared me for the experience of a fully grown adult humpback swimming directly underneath my body. She moved slowly, and now her whole mouth and head were in view, now the dorsal fins. She was like a gigantic bird, gliding through the ocean without effort, and close, about 15 feet or so below me. I was terrified, exhilarated, profoundly moved. Feeling tiny and vulnerable, I stayed immobile, looking down. I was fully aware that she could have easily surfaced and snuffed me out, this little creature floating there helplessly. It was like a large bus had just driven beneath me, such was her size. Somehow, I didn't feel out of place. I felt like I needed to be there, though 'I' had somehow disappeared along with any words. Left over were just feelings, sensations.