Whale Watching

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Whale Watching

by FallLover

Summary

Ash and Eiji are on vacation in New York and go whale watching.

Notes

This was originally published on Archive of Our Own, inspired in part by the anniversary anime Mappa art.

See the end of the work for more notes

“If you don’t get up to eat something, Ash, you’ll miss breakfast entirely.”

Ash blinked his eyes open to sunshine and Eiji’s smiling face as the older boy leaned over him, already dressed in a cream t-shirt and pale brown pants. He had a stripped t-shirt wrapped around his neck like a scarf, and looked like he was ready to go out on the town to get his photograph taken. He’d clearly gotten up a while ago, while Ash was still in bed and in his pajamas, feeling grody.

Ash just gazed up at that smiling face, wishing he could look at it forever. There were so many things he wanted to say, and none of them felt right, ever. But at least being around Eiji was enough.

After a moment, Eiji frowned and asked, “Are you not feeling well? Do you want to cancel today?” He looked worried.

Ash snorted and then sat up in his hotel bed before scratching his head. “Of course not. You want to see whales, we’re going to see whales!”

Eiji grinned before saying, “Yeah! You hungry?”

“Mmm,” Ash replied before Eiji ran off to get something to eat, too far out of reach for Ash to grab. Unless he got up and moved.

Ash considered that, tempted. He could just imagine walking up to Eiji’s unguarded back hugging him tight, pulling him back to the beds… It wasn’t like they’d done all that much in their time together… but of course, Ash wanted more. He was afraid to push. Men had taken from him all his life, and he refused to do that to Eiji.

Eiji brought over a steaming coffee mug and a plate with a large sandwich, smiling warmly, as if he liked helping sleepy American teenagers get up in the morning.

Ash wondered just where he’d lucked out to end up with this.

“There was an article in the paper,” Eiji said as Ash took the mug. “Apparently some tourists saw a whale shark! Isn’t that amazing?!”

Ash smiled and nodded, which encouraged Eiji to keep chatting. Ash didn’t want him to stop. Ever.

It was still early in the morning and the sky was a bit muggy with gray clouds when they left the hotel to head to the ferry at the southern end of Manhattan. They walked a bit, taking in the fresh air, which Eiji seemed to never get tired of, despite their long vacation, before finally going underground to the subway. The trains were largely empty at that time in the middle of the week, and they got seats together and watched as the car filled up with different people heading to their own destinations. Businesspeople, cleaners, people likely working at restaurants, students, other tourists… The car was tight and loud in no time.

Eiji scrunched up to Ash to make room for someone next to him, and Ash fought the instinctive urge to move away, to avoid being grabbed or pulled by unwanted fingers.

“Sorry,” Eiji said, clearly feeling bad.

“It’s okay,” Ash replied, glad the car was too crowded to make Eiji back away.

Eiji smiled nervously, and they stayed quiet while the car traveled through station after station, carrying them south.

The escalator up was broken, and they walked up a lot of stairs to finally get into the open air of the harbor. Vendors were offering hot food and drinks, and guides were directing people to the boat for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. But Ash led him to their destination, reaching out to tug on Eiji’s sleeve whenever the older boy got distracted.

They were early when they got to the meeting point and had their tickets scanned, and waited by the edge of the dock. Eiji looked at the water and studied the Statue of Liberty in the distance. They weren’t all that close, but she was quite clear and large as it was.

“I still can’t believe you haven’t gone whale watching before,” Ash said. “You live on an island, too.”

“I was always busy with school,” Eiji insisted as he gazed at the harbor with a smile. He had a camera around his neck, but wasn’t using it, seemingly content to take in the sights. “Or training. I went to a zoo with some friends, once. But… that was all.” There was a distant look in his eyes, almost resentful. Or sad.

Ash again wondered at the life this amazing boy had lived apart from him. One so full of privilege that had given him so much of the world and such a sunny disposition and confidence, but also sometimes made him distant in moments he thought no one was watching him.

“Just don’t jump over to the whales,” Ash joked as he stood at the railing with Eiji. He didn’t want this to be a bad day, after all.

Eiji scowled and said, “I wouldn’t do that!”

Ash gave him a skeptical side-eye, and Eiji playfully shoved him.

They were eventually let onto the boat, which wasn’t too badly crowded, so they could wander all three decks as they pleased, making sure to avoid the crew. They had their pick of chairs, but Eiji preferred to stand, letting the wind pick at his short, dark hair as the boat picked up speed and propelled them away from dock. The engine was loud and it was still a bit too chilly for the morning, but the sun was growing brighter and kept them from being too cold.

Ash tucked back some of his blonde bangs and leaned on the metal railing, watching the city grow farther away.

Eiji had his camera out still, but focused on the water, grinning as he looked around, clearly hoping to spot the animals.

Ash leaned in and said, “Don’t stress yourself out. Everyone’ll shout for it.”

“I thought you said you’d never done this before?” Eiji asked, finally looking at him with those bright eyes of his.

“I haven’t,” Ash replied as he glanced at the water. “But I was out by the harbor once and there was a sighting, and everyone was shouting about it. The whale was gone by the time I could get through to try to see.” He shrugged. “But there are fewer people on the boat, so.”

“We’ll definitely see something,” Eiji said, determined. “The tour said they *always* see something.”

Because they want people to pay them, Ash thought, though he kept it to himself. This was what Eiji wanted to do, and Ash wasn’t going to disappoint the guy. They’d go to a nice lunch or something if nothing happened. “You hungry? I saw you eying that hot dog display on our way in.”

Eiji shook his head. “Maybe later!”

“There!” someone cried from their right. “I saw something!”

Ash and Eiji turned to where people were pointing, and then looked out at the water.

“Ahh!” Eiji said. “Ash, can you see?!” He pointed frantically, though Ash didn’t need the aid.

Out in the dark water, something large and dark popped out briefly. It was large and moving faster than some piece of debris. Almost after it sank, a large flipper popped out of the water partially before sinking lower.

“That was a whale!” Eiji said, clearly shocked and delighted.

“Part of one, anyway,” Ash said.

“There’s more!” Eiji said, while others took up the cry.

Either the same one or another popped out briefly from the water, showing some of its dark flipper before sinking below the surface again. But another appeared shortly after it, in a different place. Water splashed around it. Plumes of spray shot into the air.

“We’re so far,” Eiji said, awed. “They must be *huge*.”

Ash nodded, glad they were on the boat and not out in the water. They watched for a while as the whales swam about, and Ash noticed another boat circling the area, too.

Ash snorted and said, “I guess others have spotted them.” He imagined the guides all knew each other’s routes, trying to make the most money.

“I hope they don’t scare the whales away,” Eiji said, staring rapturously rather than reaching for his camera.

“Aren’t you going to take pictures?” Ash asked.

“I wouldn’t get a good shot,” Eiji replied, still staring at the water. “I just want to watch without missing anything.”

“We’re not going to see much up here,” Ash said as he looked back at the water.

“Ash…” Then Eiji gasped.

Ash was also staring in shock, as one whale leapt into the air, fully leaving the water. It was huge, dark, and spun like it didn’t have a care in the world and gravity didn’t matter before landing back in the blue below with a large splash.

“It flew,” Ash said, shocked. He’d seen pictures of whales doing such things, and a few videos once he and Eiji were looking for tickets, but it was different in person.

He remembered the first time he’d seen Eiji pole vault. It had seemed miraculous that a human could do such a thing. And it still was. And here was something even larger, reaching for the sky, even though it didn’t seem designed to. Even though its home was in the sea.

“Oh, there’s a baby!” Eiji said as a smaller whale leapt. “That’s so cute!”

Even they know it’s worth it to fight for what you want, Ash thought as they watched the show, while the guide on the speakers talked about pods of humpback whales and their behavior.

“Let’s take a selfie,” Eiji said as he pulled Ash over so they could turn their backs to the railing.

“We might not get the whales,” Ash cautioned as he moved closer and Eiji maneuvered the camera around.

“They’re moving a lot,” Eiji said, “it’s okay. Smile.” He grinned at the camera, and Ash mimicked him.

The camera clicked a few times, and Eiji pulled away so he could turn back to look at the whales. It was the only picture he’d taken.

Ash wondered if this had been a good idea, after all. Wouldn’t Eiji take more pictures, otherwise?

Eiji looked back at Ash and asked, “Are you having fun?”

Yeah, Ash thought, *because you’re here with me.* But he was afraid to say that aloud. What if Eiji pulled away? What if something bad happened? Anything could, Ash knew that well enough.

When Ash didn't reply, Eiji still smiled and said, "Thank you for doing this with me, even if it's not the most exciting."

Ash smiled then, glad Eiji wasn't upset. "It's plenty exciting. I'm glad we got to see them."

Eiji looked out to the whales and said, "I didn't just want to see the whales. I uh…" He looked embarrassed. "I wanted to do this with *you*."

"Get up early and crane our necks in the wind to see some giant mammals?" Ash asked with a grin as he felt his heart race.

Eiji laughed and said, "Yeah! They're so big and we're so small. And yet we share the same world, even if we can't touch." He grinned at the whales. "They don't know what planes or borders are. Or differences in language. They just swim together where they need to." He smiled again as he said, "I wish… Ah."

"That you didn't have to go back to Japan?" Ash asked, understanding a little of what Eiji was getting at. It waited at the end of all this. A sad conclusion to everything they were doing.

"That you coming with me would be easy," Eiji said. "But even outside that, I know you don't want to." Eiji's expression was sad. "So I'm going to enjoy every moment with you I have."

Ash's heart hurt. "Eiji…" He saw Eiji's hand on the railing, and then reached out to grasp it, making Eiji look at Ash in surprise.

If something that big can leap into the air, Ash thought. *I can reach this far.* He met Eiji's gaze. "I *want* to go where you are. I want…" He grimaced. "I want to see more of the world with you."

"Ash…" Eiji said, longingly. He turned his hand around so they were clasping each other's fingers. "You—"

Ash leaned forward so their faces were almost touching, and saw the surprise in Eiji's face.

No, I shouldn't, Ash thought. *It's just a bunch of whales.* He was letting the early morning and moment get away with him.

But then Eiji moved forward and pressed his lips to Ash's. It was a clumsy, quick kiss, but it was *definitely* a kiss.

Ash's eyes widened in shock, and when Eiji pulled away, they both stared at each other.

Other passengers shouted and cheered around them as more whales appeared. No one was paying attention to them at all.

Eiji's face was burning red. "Ash…"

Ash leaned in and quickly kissed him again, this time with a bit more determination. It didn't last long, but he wanted to be clear how he felt, too. And this time, when he pulled back, he

smiled.

Eiji looked surprised, but happy. There was a bright look of longing on his face.

Ash squeezed Eiji’s hand before saying, “We’re missing the show.”

Eiji slowly nodded and turned back to the whales. But he squeezed Ash’s hand tightly, not letting Ash move away.

End Notes

You can in fact go whale watching in New York.

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