

December 10, 2025

Dear Mr. Kraus,

I first picked up your novel *Whalefall* sometime last year after scouring internet forums for fiction books about marine biology. The weird (and, frankly, bone-chilling) premise of a scuba diver being accidentally swallowed by a sperm whale quickly caught my eye. I immediately placed it on hold at my local library, and spent the next week refreshing my account page with bated breath. After what felt like far too long, I got the notification of its arrival and picked it up the same day.

I had been expecting a horror story, something scientific and visceral that tapped into the inherent human fear of being prey. And it *was* scary. But as I tore through it over the course of a couple school days, I wasn't really scared—I was sad. *Whalefall* isn't just a book about its main character, Jay Gardener, being eaten by a whale while trying to recover his father's remains. It's a book about loss, about the incomprehensibility of grief, and about what it takes to move on.

That's not to say it isn't also both intelligent and terrifying, because it is. Everything is thoroughly researched, and the first few chapters explain the intricacies of scuba technology well enough that I, a person with no diving experience, immediately understood just how dire things were when they started to go wrong. The chapter headings that showed how much air Jay had left in his tank combined with thorough descriptions of the inside of a sperm whale kept me on the edge of my seat the whole time. What originally drew me to your book was my love for marine science, and it undoubtedly delivered. Though, that wasn't all it delivered.

When I lost my mother six years ago, I felt like I was going to die, too. I had no tears, no words, nothing except this raw, gaping hole in my ribs where she used to be. Even now, trying to write about it falls short. Her death was unexpected, and I spent most of the COVID lockdown a sick little shell who spent her time listening to music and laying flat-backed on the kitchen floor when the summer heat became too much to bear. I turned to the world around me for help, but the books I read, the shows I watched, none of them felt right. They were caricatures, picturesque ideals of what grieving should look like. Five years later, I read *Whalefall*, and

something in me clicked. When you wrote, “There is no fighting when there is no way to win”, when all Jay Gardener could do after losing his father was run, I suddenly had the words I’d been searching for for years. It was the first piece of media I consumed since my mother’s death that truly managed to describe how it feels to lose someone. I remember sitting alone in my mom’s bedroom as I wept my way through the ending. I kept having to set the book down and just *breathe*, sick to my stomach with both anxiety and uncomfortable truth. In the eighteen months since, I’ve probably reread *Whalefall* two or three times. Even as I write this letter, the hardcopy I ended up buying for myself to annotate sits at my side like a security blanket.

Attempting to explain this to the people around me made me feel a little crazy. I remember reading paragraphs aloud to my friends, trying to get them to understand, and quickly coming to the realization that it was a futile effort. It’s just one of those things you have to live through in order to comprehend. Grief is a whale swallowing you whole, a force that is unknowing and uncaring and impossibly larger than you. Grief is the crushing weight of an apex predator’s stomach. Grief is the open ocean, stretched out blue as far as the eye can see. And how easy it is to see that and give up! To be trapped in the belly of the beast, hopelessness bearing down from all sides. A problem too big to fix, too big to even process, but still you must move forward.

Still, you must prevail.

When it comes to writing a letter to my favorite book, there was never any question on which one I would choose. I don’t know if you’ve ever lost a parent, or if you even intended this metaphor when you wrote *Whalefall*, but thank you. Thank you for proving that comfort can be found in what some might consider strange places. Thank you for showing me I’m not alone.

Sincerely,  
Georgena Weaver