

Moby Dick III

We sailed on, occasionally meeting other ships. When he had the chance, Ahab asked other captains if they'd sighted the white whale. No one had until we met an English captain with only one arm. In place of the other was a long sperm whale bone.

"Hast seen the white whale?" asked Ahab, as soon as he'd boarded the English ship.

"See you this?" The English captain showed his bone arm. "The white whale was the cause, last season. We had him harpooned, but this old grandfather whale, with the white tail and hump, came snapping at the boat in two with flukes. I clung to the line, but the harpoon caught me and the barb ripped my arm off."

"Didst thou cross the white whale's wake again?"

"Twice."

"But could not fasten?"

"Didn't want to try. Ain't one limb enough? He's best let alone. Don't you think so?"

"How long since thou saw him last? Which way heading?"

"Why ... east, I think."

But as Ahab struggled back to the ship's boat, hampered by his whalebone leg, the English captain whispered to Fedallah, "Is your captain mad?"

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The rolling waves and days went by. One night, in the mid-watch, the old man suddenly thrust out his face, fiercely snuffing up the sea air. He declared a whale must be near. Soon all the watch could smell the peculiar

odor of a sperm whale. At daybreak, the mastheads were manned, and all hands called on deck.

Ahab had us haul up the rigging. “There she blows! There she blows! A hump like a snowhill! It’s Moby Dick!”

Fired by the cry, we rushed to the rigging to see the famous whale they’d been pursuing for so long. The whale was about a mile ahead. Every roll of the sea revealed his high sparkling hump, his silent spout jetted into the air.

“And did none of ye see it before?” cried Ahab, hailing the perched men round him.

“I saw him just when you did, and I cried out,” said Tashtego.

“Not the same instant! No!” said Ahab. “Fate reserved the doubloon for *me*. I only. None of ye could have raised the white whale first. There she blows! There she blows! Stand by three boats. Mr. Starbuck, stay on board and keep the ship. **Helm** there! Luff a point! All ready the boats there? Lower me, Mr Starbuck!” He slid through the air to the deck.

Soon the three boats were dropped. The paddles plied with rippling swiftness, Ahab heading the onset. A pale death-glimmer lit up Fedallah’s sunken eyes. A hideous motion gnawed his mouth.

Slowly we neared the foe. The ocean was like a noon-meadow, so serenely it spread. The breathless hunters came so near their prey they could see his dazzling hump in a ring of greenish foam. Bright bubbles rose and danced by his side. A gentle joyousness, a mildness even in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Then the **forepart** of him slowly rose from the water. His whole body arched through the air. The grand god revealed himself and went out of sight. White sea fowls lingered over the ripples that he left.

With the paddles down, the sheets of their sails adrift, the three boats floated, awaiting Moby Dick’s reappearance.

“An hour,” said Ahab, standing rooted in the boat’s **stern**. He gazed towards the dim blue spaces to **leeward**. Then his eyes swept the watery circle left by the whale. The breeze freshened; the sea began to swell.

“The birds! The birds!” cried Tashtego.

The white birds were now all flying to Ahab’s boat, wheeling round and round it with joyous expectant cries.

Ahab peered into the depths. He saw a white spot no bigger than a weasel. It came up fast, growing larger as it rose. Ahab saw two long crooked rows of white glistening teeth. It was Moby Dick’s open mouth and jaw. His vast, shadowed bulk blended with the blue of the sea. The glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open tomb. Ahab swept the steering oar sideways, whirling the boat aside. He called Fedallah to change places with him, seizing the harpoon himself. He was ready in the **bows**.

Moby Dick instantly moved sideways, and shot his head upwards beneath the boat.

He had the bows in his mouth. A tooth caught in a rowlock. The pearl-white inside of his jaw was within six inches of Ahab’s head. The whale shook the wooden boat like a mildly cruel cat her mouse. Fedallah gazed, and crossed his arms. The crew tumbled back into the stern.

Ahab seized the whale’s jaw in his naked hands. He wildly strove to wrench it from its grip. The jaw slipped from him. The gunwales bent in and snapped.

Moby Dick bit the craft completely in two. The crew at the stern-end clung to the gunwales as the craft drooped. The boat spilled Ahab out, and he fell the flat-faced upon the sea.

Moby Dick lay at a little distance from his prey, thrusting his white head up and down in the waves. Then he swam round and round the wrecked crew. The splintered boat seemed to madden him. Ahab’s head looked like a tossed bubble which the least shock might burst. Fedallah eyed him mildly from the broken stern. The other boats dared not pull in to strike, for fear it would make the whale attack the castaways or Ahab.

The Pequod sailed into the circle, parting the whale from its victim. Ahab was dragged into Stubb’s boat. The castaway crew were picked up.

Ahab lay prostrate for a moment. Then he halfway rose. “The harpoon. Help me, man. I wish to stand. So, so. I see him! What a leaping spout! Hands off from me! Out oars!”

But the whale was swimming away too fast for the boats to follow. As soon as the boats were swung aboard, the Pequod gave chase. Sometimes Ahab himself was up at the masthead, watching for Moby Dick's glittering spout. Sometimes he paced the deck below, unrelenting.

It grew dark. "Can't see the spout now - too dark," cried a voice from the air.

"How heading when last seen?"

"As before sir - straight to leeward."

"Good, he will travel slower now that it's night."

Ahab went over to the doubloon nailed to the mainmast. "Men, this gold is mine. I earned it. But I'll leave it here until the white whale is dead. Whoever raised him on the day he shall be killed, this gold is that man's." And so saying, he slouched his hat, and stood on deck until dawn.

"D'ye see him?" cried Ahab to the mastheads a daybreak when he'd allowed a little space for the light to spread.

"See nothing, sir."

The ship tore on, leaving a wake like a ploughshare turning up a level field.

"There she blows! - she blows! - she blows! Right ahead!"

"Aye, aye," cried Stubb. "I knew it - ye can't escape. Oh whale! The mad fiend himself is after ye!"

Stubb spoke for almost all the crew. The hand of fate had snatched their souls. They were one man, not thirty. They were all directed to that final goal which Ahab, their one lord, did point to. They clung to **spars**, shading their eyes from the vivid sunlight, seeking through the infinite blueness for the thing that might destroy them.

Suddenly, less than a mile ahead, Moby Dick burst into view. The great whale breached, booming his entire bulk into the pure air amidst a mountain of dazzling foam.

"There she breaches! There she breaches!"

“Breach your last to the sun, Moby Dick!” cried Ahab. “Thy hour and thy harpoon are at hand! The boats! Stand by!”

The men slid to the deck like shooting stars.

“Lower away!” Mr. Starbuck, the ship is thine!”

As if to strike terror into the boats crews, Moby Dick turned and came for them. Ahab was ready to take the whale head-and-head - that is, pull his boat straight into the whale’s forehead.

Moby Dick churned himself into furious speed, rushing among the boats with open jaws and lashing tail, heedless of the **irons** darted at him from every boat.

For a while the boats eluded him, sometimes only by a plank’s breadth. Now a line from every boat was made fast to Moby Dick, warping the boats towards him. Bristling with barbs and points, the whale flashed up to the bows of Ahab's boat, dragging the boats of Stubb and Flask toward his **flukes**. The two boats dashed together like rolling husks on a surf-beaten beach.

The whale dived.

Ahab's boat suddenly shot from the sea as if drawn up to heaven by invisible wires. The white whale dashed his broad head against its bottom, and sent it, turning over and over, into the air. It fell gunwale downwards. Ahab and his men struggled from under, like seals from a sea-side cave. The whale swam away, trailing after him and tangled lines.

When the crew, bruised and shaken, were back on the Pequod, Ahab stood leaning on Starbuck. His bone leg had been snapped in two.

“Give me a cane to lean on! Up helm! Pile on the sail again! Where is Fedallah? By heaven, it cannot be! Where is he? Missing?”

“He was caught in the tangles of your line,” said Stubb, “I saw him dragged under.”

“My line? Gone? My death-knell rings in it! Quick! All hands on the ringing!”

“Great God! Show thyself for an instant!” cried Starbuck. “Never, never wilt thou capture him, old man. In Jesus’ name no more of this devil’s madness! Shall we be towed by Moby Dick to hell? Blasphemy to hunt him more!”

“Fool! Ahab is forever Ahab, man. This whole act is decreed by Fate. I act under orders.”

When dusk descended, the whale was still in sight. On the third day we gave chase again, while the carpenter made Ahab a wooden leg. Ahab brooded on the loss of Fedallah as the ship rushed after Moby Dick.

At noon the Pequod caught up with the whale.

“Starbuck!”

“Sir?”

“For the third time my soul’s ship starts upon this voyage, Starbuck.”

“Oh, my captain, go not! Go not!”

“Lower away,” cried Ahab, tossing the mate’s arm from him. “Stand by the crew!”

As soon as the remaining boats pushed from the ship, sharks rose and snapped at the oar blades. The white whale sounded. The boats waited until he rose again. Suddenly the waters swelled in broad circles, then heaved up. A low rumbling sound was heard. Trailing ropes and harpoons, a vast form shot lengthwise from the sea. Shrouded in a veil of mist, it hovered in the rainbowed air, then fell back into the deep.

The boats darted forward to attack. Once more Moby Dick flailed the mates’ boats apart. The whale’s flanks showed as he shot past. There, lashed by harpoon lines, was the half-torn body of Fedallah, his distended eyes turned full upon Ahab.

The harpoon dropped from Ahab’s hand.

The whale swam away, intent on pursuing his own straight path across the sea.

“Ahab!” cried Starbuck from the ship. “It’s not too late to stop! See! Moby Dick seeks thee not! It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!”

Only Ahab's boat was left. The wrecked boats were being hoisted aboard the Pequod. Tashtego, Queequeg, and Daggoo watched from the rigging. The solitary boat glided over the waves, attended by snapping sharks. Ahab steered through the mist from Moby Dick's spout right up to his **flank**. The whale seemed strangely oblivious. Ahab darted his fierce iron, and his fiercer curse, into the hated whale. The harpoon sank to the socket,

Moby Dick writhed, and **canted** the boat over. Ahab clung to the gunwale. "Oars! Oars! Burst in upon him!"

The whale wheeled round, and saw the black hull of the Pequod. Seemingly, he saw in it the cause of all his persecutions. He bore down on the ship.

Ahab staggered. "Dash on, my men. Will ye not save my ship?"

Moby Dick's solid white forehead **smote** the Pequod's starboard bow. Men and timbers reeled. Waters poured through the breach.

From the boat, Ahab darted his harpoon. The stricken whale flew forward. The harpoon line caught in its groove. Ahab stooped to clear it. The line caught him round the neck. He was shot out of the boat. Before the crew knew, he was gone.

The tranced crew stood still. Then they turned. The ship? Great God, where was the ship? Through the mists they saw her phantom, only the uppermost masts out of water. There, fixed by faith or fate, the pagan harpooners still maintained their sinking lookouts on the sea. Soon the water circled over the head of the Indian at the mainmast. An arm and a hammer hovered, attempting to nail the ship's flag to a sinking spar, until, his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, Tashtego went down with Ahab's ship. The ship, like Satan, would not sink to hell until she had dragged a living part of heaven with her.

The great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.

AND I ALONE SURVIVED TO TELL THE TALE

The End