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A Tale of A Whale or A Whale of a Tale

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"My bones, they still ache and those nightmares are ... "

Cover Page Footnote

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A TALE OF A WHALE **or** **A WHALE OF A TALE**

"My bones, they still ache and those nightmares are . . ."

"Let's start from the beginning," Reporter Joe caustically interrupted.

Jonathan continued. "Well, we were about ten leagues off the coast of Punta Arenas when we sighted a fairly large school of whales. It was my first voyage aboard a whaler and the prospect of catching whales loomed invitingly before me despite the delicate relationship that existed between my stomach and the sea. The whales had already sensed the impending danger and before the 'Handsome Henry' had lowered the whale boats, the huge whales were sedulously submerging into the open sea."

"I take it you were in one of the boats," interjected Reporter Joe with a look of amazement on his face, probably stemming from the incongruity of the speaker's appearance and the speaker's fluency.

"I was in the lead boat along with four sailors and two harpooners. The boat was quickly manoeuvred so as to allow the latter to test their art. The first harpoon fell short of its mark due to a slight snag in the coil of rope which connected the harpoon to the stern of the ship. The second try, however, hit the flank of the animal just as he was submerging, and as the whale reappeared on the surface, a wide wound revealed itself in his side. The shaft of the harpoon had plunged in angularly, yet deeply, and streams of blood were flowing from the mammal. Violently he plunged into the sea, again and again, each time hoping to rid himself of the tempestuous shaft.

"The whale's last plunge was in our direction, a fact which multiplied my nervousness and appeared to cause some uneasiness at the bow of the boat. The rope attached to the harpoon showed the animal to be just below our port side. A loud crash accompanied my next excited observation and I found myself at the mercy of an open sea and a wounded frenzied whale.

"I looked about to get my bearings when I skidded across a soft slippery surface, a bloody surface."

At this point Jonathan stopped, wiped his forehead in his sleeve and nervously lit a cigarette with the aid of Reporter Joe's match and comparatively steady hand.

"I was sliding," proceeded Jonathan, "I thought I was sliding for minutes when teeth and gums appeared on my right side.

"Desperately I tried to avoid my oncoming fate. My kicking and turning proved useless, for a big-ribbed canopy of light-pink and white was descending over me. I was being drawn downward, feet first. I felt a sharp pain in my side, which I was soon to forget when the

horrible thought finally struck me. I was being swallowed by a whale!"

Reporter Joe tried in vain to interject another question but by this time Jonathan was so engrossed in his own tale that he seemed unaware of any reality other than the whale.

"Lower and lower I was being drawn, not drawn but sucked in, rubbed in, squeezed in, by the Fates. An intense wall of flesh surrounded me. A strange pressure tried to pull the skin from my bones, rip the flesh from my ribs and loose a hideous pain throughout my writhing torso.

"As quickly as I had felt the pressure, it stopped, and my head plopped into a sac much larger than myself and completely devoid of light. The air was close and uncomfortable, yet breathing was not impossible. I felt above me with my right arm and my hand touched numerous fish, some of which were alive. Gradually I became aware of an intense reek which so completely nauseated me that I vomited profusely. This didn't aid my wretched state.

"Sometime after this, I felt a violent pain in my head. Breathing became increasingly difficult and my fleshy confines surged with a hell-like heat. My fever turned to the chills and I shivered terrifically.

"Just as I had gradually become aware of the stench of my living prison, I soon realized that the sheer silence which surrounded me was to be my funeral march. The thought of dying there tormented me. Then came more heat, more cold, more silence, more nausea, and finally, unconsciousness."

Reporter Joe hadn't written a word for the last few minutes. So intrigued was he by this horrendous account that he was in a state of awe.

"Whiskey trickling down my throat was my next recollection. Looking up, I vaguely saw a face staring down at me. Gradually I became aware of my surroundings. It wasn't until the Captain appeared in the doorway that I could be sure. His first ejaculation proved that I wasn't in heaven and they never serve whiskey in hell. I was alive!"

Awaken from his trance, Reporter Joe inquired as to how Jonathan was saved.

"The Captain told me about that. They had seen the whale's jaws envelop my body and had given me up for lost. Later that same day, the body of a dead whale was spotted floating on the water. Lacking a full haul, the 'Handsome Henry' took it aboard and proceeded to remove its blubber. When they had finished, it occurred to one of the sailors that this might be the whale that swallowed me earlier. They decided it would do no harm to cut open the intestines and find out.

"As they cut into the stomach, to their amazement, the outline of a human body appeared through the membranes. With the utmost

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care, they uncovered my body, unconscious but still alive, as this testimony bears proof."

Asked Reporter Joe, "Has this incident affected your life in any way?"

Jonathan scratched his white head of hair, more in a gesture of amazement at the naivete of the question than an indication of an inability to answer it. "Well," answered Jonathan with an air reflecting his attitude, "I was once a normal, healthy resident of the seaside town of Kennebunk, Maine. I am now a land-lovin' vegetarian who exhibits claustrophobic tendencies at times and who lives in Bodken, Nevada, a city 500 miles from the nearest waterhole."

Reporter Joe smiled at the last response and watched Jonathan wipe a layer of sweat from his brow. Jonathan told the story with such a degree of sincerity that Reporter Joe found it hard to disbelieve him. Pondered Reporter Joe, "Jonathan . . . Jonah . . . not much difference . . . nah . . . but Bridie . . . a whale! . . . not a chance . . . besides what would the club think . . . nah."

Reporter Joe arose from the bunk and pounded on the padded door for the guards to let him out. Jonathan stayed. Jonathan proceeded to carve a jar which he would put into a glass boat.

"AND THE LORD SPAKE UNTO THE FISH AND IT
VOMITED OUT JONAH UPON DRY LAND."

RICHARD OSTERMAN '59

Man stood once
Yet went to his knees
Willingly enough.
Hands became feet
Feet hands
Brain and buttocks
On a level.

Poor fools we
Wait for eternity,
Live to die to live
Mistakenly.

In time and space
We wait to find
Our heaven
Or our hell
Blessed now
Damned now.

R. MOORE '57