AHAB MEETS NEMO

The enraged Leviathan repeatedly rammed the whaling ship until it was but a splintered wreck and began to sink. Then the monstrous beast beat the surviving sailors with its gigantic fluke as they floated helplessly in the water, or crushed them in its massive jaws, until all were dead. Such was its anger and fury at the men who had tried to kill it.

The whale was Moby Dick, and the three-masted whaling ship was the Pequod, out of Nantucket, under the command of a certain Captain Ahab. For three years – through the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific oceans – Ahab had pursued the water-borne demon which had taken his left leg in a previous battle. The captain had whipped his crew into a kind of possessed, blood-lust frenzy with his own sheer monomaniacal will and cunning. They had relentlessly chased the whale across many latitudes and longitudes. But the final showdown now saw Moby Dick as the victor. The immense grayish-white mammal was wrinkled and scarred and riddled with now rusting harpoons and rotting cords from its decades-long battle with humans, including Ahab. Yet still it lived and could fight. This unique bull spermaceti moved alone under the waters of the world, a seemingly unstoppable king among princes. He was now -- in the Year of Our Lord 1867 -- a dreaded yet living legend.

But there was a sole human survivor from this deadly confrontation: Captain Ahab himself. He had hauled his exhausted body -- seconds before slipping into unconsciousness -- onto a newly-made wooden ship’s coffin, as it floated placidly in the water. Moby Dick, unaware, triumphantly swam away.

About twenty minutes passed when a swirling mass of churning water and enormous bubbles broke through the warm South Pacific waves. Suddenly, a large, metallic water craft rose to the surface. It was cylindrical in shape -- 200’ in length, by 40’ wide and 12’ high. Its bow was tapered to a rounded point, and its stern had three maneuvering fins with huge twin propellers under the water line. Both the port and starboard sides of the vessel had a large 6’ diameter viewing porthole about 25’ forward from the central command tower. A waist-high metal railing encircled the perimeter of the ship's flat deck.

A secreted hatch hissed opened and four uniformed men in navy blue tunics emerged. They quickly released a metallic rowboat with its attendant oars and rowed to rescue the unconscious survivor still clinging to the floating coffin.

The rescued man was dressed in all black with a white blouse. He was sturdily built, a good 6’ tall, weighing about 200 pounds. His torso and head were square-shaped. His hands were large and calloused. He had dark grey hair and a dark grey chin beard, in the Quaker style. Surprisingly, he had a wide line of snow white hair which began at the top of his scalp, then morphed into a scar descending the length of his left cheek, before finally turning snow white again as the line traversed his beard. And he had an unusual ivory-white bone fashioned from a whale's jaw as a substitute for a missing leg. He was breathing deeply, his barrel-chest rising and falling, so it seemed likely he would survive.

Once aboard the submersible ship, Captain Ahab was taken to the ship’s surgeon and examined. “This one has the heart of an ox,” the surgeon proclaimed, “so he’ll be fine with lots of bed rest, some hot food, and plenty of liquids.”

Another more impressively uniformed man with a full dark beard peered intently past the surgeon’s shoulder at the rescued survivor. “Let me know when he wakes up. I need to question him. And I want to know if he truly is who I suspect he is,” the man commanded.

“Yes, Captain Nemo,” the surgeon replied.

Nemo walked to the nearest communication tube and ordered the helmsman to continue on course. “Keep that whale in sight,” he added. "Don't lose him." Then he flipped a nearby switch. “Attention all hands: We’ll cruise on the surface for the remaining hours of daylight. Keep an eye out for any pirates or warships. All crew will rotate top side as pre-arranged for fresh air, sunshine, and exercise. That is all.”

By nightfall, Captain Ahab had regained consciousness and was able to talk. Captain Nemo was summoned to Ahab’s bedside by the ship’s French surgeon, Marchon.

“Where in damnation am I, and what happened to my crew and my ship?” Ahab growled. “Did we kill that devil Moby Dick?” Then he noticed he was naked under his blanket. “Where are my clothes? And who the hell are you?”

“All of your questions will be answered in good time. You are safely aboard my underwater ship, the Nautilus, and you are my guest. My name is Captain Nemo. I have fresh clothing set aside for you to wear. After you dress, we will be going in to dinner and have a long talk. And may I presume that I have the honor of addressing Captain Ahab?” Nemo replied cordially, smiling slightly.

“Aye, Ahab I am. I have heard rumors of someone sinister called Captain Nemo, if you be he. And did you say we are aboard an ‘underwater’ ship, like a submarine?” Ahab asked with raised eyebrows.

“Just meet me in the Grand Salon in ten minutes, Captain,” Nemo advised. “There we will eat and talk.”

Upon arrival in the Grand Salon, Ahab was amazed at the plush velvet furniture, Oriental-carpeted floor, various oil paintings from famous Masters hung on the walls, and gleaming brass fixtures and railings. The spacious room also boasted chandelier lighting, vast walnut book shelves, teak and mahogany paneling, tasteful silk draperies, and even a large pipe organ. The dinner -- well served at a large, oblong table with linens, china, crystal, and silverware -- was worthy of a gourmet. “Our cook, Francois, consistently does a wonderful job,” Nemo noted with pride. They enjoyed a bottle of vintage Chardonnay with a rich fish chowder, a baked tuna casserole, oysters on the half-shell, warm bread rolls, and a fresh fruit compote. “The Nautilus has a fine wine cellar, and we stop when necessary at deserted or native islands for items such as fresh water, bananas, coconuts, mangos, breadfruit, and papayas,” he explained. “Other food items and stores we buy covertly at major sea ports around the world.” Ahab declined an after dinner cognac, as did Nemo. And neither man used tobacco.

“Now, to answer your most pressing questions, Captain. I must regretfully inform you that your ship and crew are all lost. My ship witnessed your battle with that ferocious whale from a mile away beneath the waves, using my viewing periscope. You fought valiantly. You even leapt on the monster’s flank when it breeched, and stabbed it repeatedly with a harpoon. Then you were briefly tangled in some harpoon ropes and was pulled under. I thought you would be drowned. But then the beast must have shaken you loose, for you resurfaced and slowly swam to some flotsam from your ship. You clung to it and fell unconscious. We picked you up soon afterwards.”

“And the whale? What about the whale? What about that devil, Moby Dick?” Ahab demanded. Coldly, he seemed to care little about the loss of either his thirty crewmen or the Pequod.

“As we speak, Captain, we are in steady pursuit of your prey. Although I am loathe to kill any creature of the deep unless it be for food, in your case I am convinced that Moby Dick was and still is a menace to the high seas and must be destroyed. And you, sir, shall have the honor of killing this dreaded Leviathan. It was he that took your leg, did he not?” Nemo queried. “His death at your hand may finally free your soul from its obsession, if all the stories I have heard about you are indeed true.”

“Aye, ‘tis true, Captain. My stump still pains me daily where he bit my left leg off. But how will his death be accomplished?” Ahab asked. “Yours is not a whaling vessel. I see no harpoons, or oil-rendering vats. I smell no stink from putrid blubber.”

“Tomorrow, I will give you a complete tour of the Nautilus and introduce you to my excellent crew. And I will show you the Electric Cannon in the bow and how it works. That, Captain, is how Moby Dick will finally die,” Nemo explained. “You see, my entire ship is powered by electricity. Over the years I have perfected the secret of unlimited free energy. The Nautilus can actually convert ordinary seawater into electricity. I call my discovery the Neptune Effect,” Nemo revealed. Ahab continued to give Nemo his full attention.

“You are probably curious about exactly who I am and how all of this came about,” Nemo swept his hand around the Grand Salon in gesture. The two captains were standing now. Like Ahab, Nemo was 6’ tall, but was younger and slimmer, at 170 pounds. He had also replaced his captain's cap with a formal dark purple turban for their dinner together, which matched well with his crisp, navy blue, gold trimmed uniform and his full dark beard.

“I was born in India in 1835, so I am 32 years old now,” he began. "I was the son of a royal Raja. I was educated in both the physical and natural sciences at three universities in Europe. I can speak English, French, German, and Latin. My library here on board has more than 800 volumes, and I enjoy playing the organ and collecting art. My real name is Prince Dakkar, but I chose the name Nemo because it translates as ‘no one,’ meaning my prior life is of no consequence to anyone, least of all to myself. My parents and my entire family – a wife and three children -- were killed during the Indian Rebellion against the British ten years ago, in 1857. Since then, I have sworn revenge against all Colonial Powers, particularly against British Imperialism. I rail against the subjugation of any native peoples through war, conquest, or oppression. I despise the entire concept of war. I, and my dedicated crew of twenty, have devoted our lives to sinking any warships we encounter, regardless of flag or country of origin. We use underwater mines to sink enemy vessels: magnetic ones on iron hulled ships, and floating ones on wooden-hulled ships. Our Electric Cannon then kills the surviving sailors, if any, in the water. The recently concluded American Civil War was a particularly busy and dangerous time for us, as we sank dozens of both Union and Confederate frigates, as well as privateers smuggling arms and munitions. You see, the Nautilus is a outlaw ship, Captain Ahab. I am a wanted man with a rich bounty on my head. We aboard my ship are both hunters and the hunted. We survive only through stealth. Here, on and under the Earth's oceans, I am free to dispense retribution and justice as I see fit. Our finances come from ancient shipwrecks resting on the sea beds in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, and the Straits of Malacca. We gather gold and silver ingots, coins, goblets, precious religious objects, and jewels – selling or trading those finds for items we cannot manufacture or garner ourselves. I can tell you, the amount of sunken treasure to be collected in the oceans is virtually inexhaustible. It might also interest you to know that the Nautilus was built in separate sections, by separate builders in different countries, then completely assembled in secret in a hidden bay on a deserted island in the Indian Ocean. She is capable of doing 35 knots submerged, and can cruise somewhat faster on the surface. And she can go as deep as 170 fathoms.”

Ahab was genuinely impressed. “But the rumors regarding you on land, Captain Nemo, is that you are no less than a cruel murderer. It is said that you prey on innocent sailors by sending their hapless vessels to the bottom, completely unprovoked,” he remarked.

“Damn such rumors!” Nemo responded with a flash of unexpected anger. “There is no other way for civilization to survive unless war can be utterly eliminated. Don’t you see? If some men must die and some ships must be sunk, then so be it, if it ultimately saves millions of innocent lives. Those men and their ships are trained to kill – nothing more! They deserve their watery fate. I have no remorse and no shame, nor does my crew.” Nemo’s deep blue eyes bored unflinchingly into Ahab’s deep brown eyes, which were set under thick dark eyebrows.

“Aye, I can appreciate your rage then, Captain, as I too am possessed by a singular vision of death and atonement. Perhaps we are both headed to Hell in the end…” Ahab mused. "I have vowed to chase Moby Dick to Perdition's Gate if need be, until he spouts black blood."

“If there is a God, perhaps he will judge me mercifully by my true intentions,” Nemo continued. “As for you, Ahab, I believe that tomorrow we can eliminate your burden and place you firmly on the path of righteous salvation and redemption,” he smiled. “Now, tell me more about yourself, my friend,” Nemo urged.

“Well,” Ahab began, “no one has asked me that question for a long, long time. Let’s see…I was born on April 7, 1809. I’m 58. My mother named me. She went insane and died when I was but 12 months old. My full name is Ahab Mapple. My father, Cyrus, was killed by a huge white whale in 1820, when it struck and sank the whaling ship Essex. I was but a lad of 11 back on Nantucket when I first heard the news. The whale had to be Moby Dick, so you see I have another reason to eternally pledge the death of the brute. Of the twenty men aboard the Essex, fifteen survived its sinking some 2000 miles off the west coast of South America, ironically not far from where we are now. For 95 days they suffered. Seven died and their remains were consumed by the other eight. Finally, those poor souls staggered ashore in Chile, more skeletons than living men.” Ahab paused, briefly looked afar, then resumed. “I myself first took to sea at age 18, so I have been whaling now for 40 years. I have been on land but a handful of months during all that time. I have some basic education, but nowhere near the quality of yours. Three years ago I left Nantucket on the Pequod to chase Moby Dick. I had finally married -- to a woman 30 years my junior named Faith -- but left the following morning after my wedding night, to pursue my quest at sea. Over the many years I had compiled detailed charts of all the migration routes of every kind of whale in the Seven Seas, and I ascertained where my loathsome nemesis would likely be found at any given month.”

“I would be obliged if you made copies of those whaling charts for me, Captain, as it would aid in our ongoing underwater research," Nemo interrupted. "Plus, I would like to know something. Is it true that you once spat in a silver Communion chalice at a church service in Valparaiso? And that a bolt of lightning struck your head during a storm at sea and gave you your distinctive scar?"

“Aye, I did, and I would spit in such again!” Ahab replied. “And I would likewise spit in Satan's own face, given the chance...I am my own man! Although I was raised a Quaker as a youth by my relatives, God has given me no solace in this life. I fear not His wrath. I was indeed struck by lightning once and yet lived. So I would strike the sun itself if it opposed me!” His eyes burned with hatred. "A soothsayer aboard the Pequod predicted that only hemp rope could kill me. Because I was somehow untangled from the ropes that trapped me during my recent watery struggle with Moby Dick, I daresay I have once again cheated death! Curiously, I have a cousin, Father Enoch Mapple, who was once a whaler but then turned preacher. He stands at the Whalemen’s Chapel in New Bedford. He loves to retell the story of Jonah from the Bible, so I’ve been told. So you see, there is a strange mix of whales and religion, eh? Lastly, I have a son that I have never seen, back in Nantucket. His name is Silas. Faith must have conceived on our wedding night three years ago. Another whaling ship -- the Rachel -- relayed the news recently to me off the Cape of Good Hope.”

With both men satisfied that they knew a fair amount of information about the other, they decided to retire for the evening. Nemo gave his night watch crew their orders, then retreated to his private quarters. His room was somewhat spartan, consisting simply of his bed, some nautical instruments arrayed on a small table, a plain wooden chair, and a modest shelf with some books and a tintype of his deceased wife and children. The room had the subtle, pleasing scent of sandalwood.

The following morning, Ahab was immediately keen to know if Moby Dick was still in sight. Nemo reassured him, that yes, his enormous foe was zig-zagging a casual course roughly a mile ahead of the Nautilus. After breakfast, Nemo then introduced Ahab to his crew. It was an international assembly, comprised of many nationalities and different races, ranging from ages 24 to 55. Each man – other than the ship’s surgeon and ship’s cook -- was an accredited expert in either the physical or natural sciences and was also a specialized mechanic. Although none of the crew were family men, their physical needs were periodically met with the comforts of native women on the various welcoming remote islands that the Nautilus traded with. Ahab noticed that each crewman wore a smart navy blue uniform with a prominent gold letter “N” – for “Nautilus” -- embroidered on their left breast pocket.

Captain Nemo then proceeded to give Ahab a thorough tour of his amazing ship. The Nautilus was designed largely on two levels, connected by metal staircases and equipped with waterproof sealing doors. They visited the impressive science laboratory, the chart room, the treasure room, the crew's quarters, the diving room, the galley, and several storage areas. "We have 750 gallons of fresh water on board when fully supplied." Nemo explained. Ahab seemed most interested in the engine room, however. Its massive dynamo and generators hummed smoothly as the craft slipped through the water, currently at a depth of 17 fathoms and a speed of 15 knots. Nemo went on to explain how the electric air compression ballast tanks help raise and lower the craft, and precisely how the Neptune Effect produced electrical energy from seawater. Next, Ahab was shown the two 6' diameter side viewing ports, where he beheld schools of colorful tropical fishes swimming by. "Remarkable...simply remarkable," he murmured. He was likewise thrilled when permitted a look out of the ship's periscope when the Nautilus briefly rose to its necessary viewing depth. He was surprised, then pleased to see Moby Dick's occasional spouting breaths just a mile ahead!

"Come, let's fulfill your destiny now with my Electric Cannon," Nemo announced, leading the way to the bow of the ship. There, an impressive array of elaborate equipment and thick wiring was housed, with various levers, gauges, and control switches. "We will approach the brute slowly, then prime the Cannon. When you are ready, I will announce to the crew to stand clear of any metal aboard ship, particularly the inside hull. Then you will throw this red switch. The Nautilus will briefly go dark, shutter a bit, then the Cannon will emit a quick blast of over one million volts. Moby Dick and any living creature within a one-mile radius of our ship will be instantly, fatally electrocuted. Your revenge, Captain Ahab, is but moments away. Look out the small forward viewing port at your nemesis, there!" Nemo indicated.

Ahab gazed with cold hate one last time at the thing which both killed his own father and stole his own limb. But Moby Dick surprised everyone by suddenly turning about. He now swam directly towards the Nautilus in an aggressive posture of attack! Nemo instantly powered up the Electric Cannon and shouted the 'stand clear' order to his crew. "Get ready, Ahab, he's coming up fast!" Nemo warned. "Fire before it's too late!"

Ahab stood firm with cool determination, his large right hand on the red firing lever handle. "I want him to look me in my eyes and know that it was me and none other who finally defeated him," Ahab swore aloud.

Moby Dick was but 150 feet away from the bow of the Nautilus when he slightly turned his massive, grayish-white head. The eyes of the mythic bull sperm whale and Ahab's locked briefly in an ageless, cosmic death gaze. Ahab then leaned calmly forward and pulled the red firing handle back hard.

A blinding pulse of white electrical energy blasted through the water as the Nautilus briefly shuttered and went dark, then resumed its stability and onboard lighting. Moby Dick froze in stunned shock, then spun round and round slowly, inert, and sank down into the black ocean depths until he was seen no more. The titanic duel between man and beast was finished at last.

That evening after dinner, Nemo sat with Ahab in his quarters, and outlined the route that the Nautilus was going to take for the next nine months. They would provision at several South Pacific islands, then proceed north to the Sandwich Islands and veer west to the Japans. From there it was south to the Philippines and then Indonesia. The ship would then travel west again to the Seychelles, where they would stop at the nearby secret island bay ("Our home port," Nemo called it) where the Nautilus was constructed. There the submarine would undergo its annual overhaul for a full month and attend to any pressing repairs. Next, Nemo wanted Ahab to experience an underwater tunnel that he had discovered which connected the Red Sea with the Mediterranean. After exiting the Straits of Gibraltar, they would then show Ahab the fabled sunken city of Atlantis, which was located near the Azores. Then it was east on to the Florida Keys, where Nemo would have Ahab don underwater diving gear equipped with a special breathing apparatus. There, he would help Nemo and his crew retrieve sunken treasure from a doomed Spanish galleon that went down during a storm in 1586. The diving suits only worked safely in waters less than 15 fathoms deep, Nemo explained.

"Near the end of our nine months, Ahab, we will be just off the coast of Nantucket, your home. You have until then to decide if you will stay with us forever or leave us permanently," Nemo offered.

As the weeks passed, Ahab was gradually changing into a new man. He was more relaxed and friendly and conversational with both Nemo and the rest of the crew, all of whom grew to respect his vast knowledge of the seas. He would even permit a smile or a laugh under the right circumstances. Meanwhile, as Nemo had requested, Ahab made duplicate charts of the detailed whaling routes from around the world that he had committed to memory. He carefully read several books from the ship's library and was eager to discuss them at mealtimes. He helped with general cleaning as an ordinary seaman, and volunteered on shore expeditions when the Nautilus stopped for fresh water and provisions. But Ahab always declined to get off at night and sneak ashore with the crew when the submarine arrived at big city ports such as Hong Kong or Manila or Jakarta to trade gold for needed goods. With his unique facial scar and whalebone leg, he just felt he would be too conspicuous.

The days at sea went by. On fair weather days with no other ships in sight and calm winds, the Nautilus sailed atop the waves and the rotated crew enjoyed fresh air, sunshine, and vigorous exercise. On stormy days, they were completely safe cruising smoothly underwater. Twice, they spotted a different 120-gun British man-o-war. One even chased them and fired upon them, but the Nautilus easily slipped away unscathed. At other times, various whaling ships or merchant clippers were noticed, but the submarine kept itself unseen, watching the transits only through its periscope.

In the harbor at Havana one night, Nemo directed his crew to float a dozen explosive mines towards a fleet of French warships. Thus Ahab saw for himself the awful destruction and death that the Captain was still bound to dispense. "Your ghost is excised, my friend, but mine is for life," Nemo remarked the following morning. "My duty to my conscience and to humanity is unending, until the day when war and imperialism are finally swept off the face of the earth," he explained. "One day, all men must and will be free."

Later, traveling up the coast of the American Carolinas, Ahab let it be known that he wished to be let out at Nantucket.

"In my heart, I had hoped that would be your choice, my friend. It is right to reunite yourself with your wife and son, and to live out your days in peace. We will all miss you, Ahab," Nemo proclaimed. "Truly."

When the time of farewell came several days later, the Nautilus approached the south shore of Nantucket Island in the dead of night and cut its engines. Ahab was dressed again in the original clothing he had been rescued in.

"Here we must say our good-byes," Nemo announced, with his entire crew gathered around in the Grand Salon. "My men will row you to land. But first I have three gifts for you, Captain. The first is a new artificial leg. Please remove your old whalebone and we'll see how it suits you." The leg looked life-like, having been carved out of oak and was painted flesh color. "My craftsmen even included a moveable knee hinge for when you sit," Nemo explained. Ahab removed the leather bindings of his whalebone and strapped the new leg onto his stump. It was a good fit. Ahab beamed with pleasure as he stood and walked about a bit with confidence. "Aye, 'tis a wonder, boys. I be thanking all of you for your kindness!" he gushed. "And feel free to throw that old bone overboard."

Next, Nemo produced a large, heavy sack of gold coins. "Here, my friend...this will more than pay back the owners of the Pequod for the loss of their whaler and its cargo. And there is enough left over here to keep you and your family in solid comfort for the rest of your days." Ahab was dumbstruck with gratitude at this latest surprise. "I can never repay your generosity, Captain Nemo. All I can say is, thank you."

"And finally, Ahab, I would like to present you with a medal with my family motto on it." Attached to a red and blue striped ribbon was a shiny brass medallion inscribed with a large letter "N." Beneath it were the words: "Mobilis in Mobili." Nemo explained that it translated as "moving within the moving element," much as the Nautilus itself thus navigated through the never resting ocean currents of the world.

Ahab was visibly moved at this concluding presentation. He shook hands with each crew member, then grasped Nemo's hand with both of his own and looked him in the eye. "I'll never forget you, my friend," Ahab pledged. "Nor I you," Nemo replied. The Captain then turned and barked, "Helmsman, set course for Newfoundland, and maintain 35 knots!"

Under a crescent moon and starry skies, the metallic rowboat of the Nautilus deposited Ahab on flat and sandy Nantucket Island. He turned and watched the launch return to the submarine and waited until the Nautilus submerged again beneath the grey North Atlantic. Then he trudged carefully home in the dark, clutching his precious gifts.

When his wife, Faith, answered the door of their saltbox house on Orange Street, she gasped as she held her lantern up closer to peer into Ahab's face. "Is it really you, my husband?" she pleaded. "And you have a new leg?"

"Aye, wife, 'tis me. My quest is finished and the white whale is destroyed. I'm home for good, and I promise you I will never voyage the seas again. How are you, Faith, and how is our son?" Placing his heavy sack of coins and Nemo's medallion on a nearby table, Ahab embraced his loyal wife with love and tenderness.

The next twenty-one years of Ahab's life were filled with fulfillment and happiness, such as he had never known. His son, Silas, had grown into a fine young man, and later, he studied law at Yale in New Haven. There, he married a minister's daughter and gave Ahab and Faith three robust grandchildren.

One day, a writer named Herman Melville stopped by Ahab's house, wanting to hear his life story. He returned on three successive evenings, listening carefully and taking copious notes. "I have enough here to write quite a novel someday, Captain, with your permission," Melville admitted. "I also intend on writing to my friend, Jules Verne, in Paris. He would likewise be fascinated with your tale."

Meanwhile, the whaling industry had collapsed on Nantucket, with whale oil being replaced with cheaper kerosene distilled from plentiful petroleum. The fortunes made on hunting whales evaporated, the once-proud, 'envy of the world' whaling fleet vanished, and Nantucket became a neglected backwater.

One day, Ahab felt drawn to visit his cousin, Enoch, the preacher in New Bedford. He took a ferry the thirty miles to the Cape Cod mainland, then boarded a steam train for the first time. He went directly to the old Whalemen's Chapel and asked to see Father Mapple.

The two old men talked about all the years they had been apart. "You are indeed a new man, Ahab, just like Jonah when the Great Fish vomited him out on dry land after his nightmarish ordeal in its belly. You are truly reborn, praise God!" Enoch exclaimed.

Ahab listened humbly, then asked, "Enoch, do you think God will forgive me for my blindness towards humanity, for my blasphemy, and for my all-consuming hatred against a dumb brute that acted only on its instinct for self-preservation? My pride and arrogance alone caused the lives of the entire crew of the Pequod," Ahab admitted. Fully realizing his appalling failings, he wept openly for the first time in his life.

"The Almighty forgives the worst of our transgressions, and has since the beginning of time...and He will continue to forgive us until the end of time, Cousin Ahab, " Enoch counseled. "Just give Him your burden and open your heart."

In 1889, Faith took ill with influenza and died at age 60. Ahab was now 90, and her death devastated him. His own health was declining as well. He suffered from bouts of pneumonia, rheumatism, bowel troubles, and fainting spells. He was simply worn out. His remaining hair and chin beard had turned all white. He spent his time thinking about the past, and he wondered now and then if Captain Nemo was still alive. Gradually, however, Ahab fell into black depression and despair. He dreamed about the faces of the dead crew of the Pequod -- Stubbs. Ishmael. Starbuck. Queequeg, his master harpooner, whose coffin had saved Ahab's life as flotsam. Even little Pip, the cabin boy, and the others. But as for Moby Dick, Ahab thought of him not at all.

The following year, when Ahab had turned 91 on April 7th and was in horrible physical and mental anguish, he wrote with shaking hand an apology farewell letter to his son, then added his Last Will and Testament, bequeathing all of his property and remaining wealth to Silas. Then he determinedly fashioned a firm noose out of rope and -- asking God's forgiveness one final time -- hung himself from a rafter in his house.

He took no notice that it was a hemp rope, for he had long forgotten the old soothsayer's prophecy.

And Ahab had never learned of the news that one month earlier, the Nautilus had been rumored sunk with all hands by a British warship near the Seychelles...

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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