

Ishmael and Ahab Mon Amour

by

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DESCRIPTION

Hell for Ahab and Ishamel has nothing to do with a whale.

CHARACTERS

- WHALE
- AHAB
- ISHMAEL

* * * * *

A vicious storm lashing the sea.

Lung-ripping labored breathing.

Crash of a body in sea-soaked clothes.

AHAB in the WHALE.

WHALE is dressed in a Tom Wolfe-style white suit.

Strapped to AHAB's right calf—or perhaps his left—are two pieces of ivory-colored wood: AHAB's peg leg. Though he doesn't have to move as if he has one.

Whale songs, but wrenched and distorted, gradually morph into WHALE's opening words.

Constant murmur of sea-sounds, gut rumbles, etc. throughout.

WHALE

Ahab. Ahab. Ahab. Ahab.

WHALE watches the unconscious figure: nothing.

WHALE

Ahab. I have—unfortunate for you—maybe—can't tell—anyway, I have decided to keep you alive. So you might as well come talk to me.

AHAB arrives at consciousness, sees WHALE, acts as any recently swallowed megalomaniac would act inside a whale.

WHALE

Oh, Ahab, shut up. Really. Just shut up. Stop it.

AHAB

I should be killing you—hacking you—

WHALE gives AHAB a nasty good kick.

WHALE

(sighing with regret)

What are you saying, you slagging maggotish lump of curdled undergut? You like that? I like that.

(winds up)

You gleeking fen-sucked hedgepig—

And another.

WHALE

You rancid bum-shucked unsorted scumpool—

And another. And another.

WHALE

—of wasted piss-shots and congealed lardpops.

And another for good or bad measure—but WHALE is not done with him—face right in his face.

WHALE

You tried, gutless puking remnant, twice to kill me—and then kept searching for ways to try and try and try again—but now enough—enough!

(pleased with himself)

That went well. Good.

There is more than enough understanding between them.

So— AHAB

So— WHALE

So then do it— AHAB

So then do it— WHALE
(mocking)

—finish it— AHAB

Finish it— WHALE
(mocking)

Smash— AHAB

Smash— WHALE

—the life out of [me]— AHAB

WHALE grabs AHAB.

WHALE
Blah blah blah—boo hoo hoo—you think “smash” would make a difference to me?

WHALE moves AHAB around like a ventriloquist’s dummy.

WHALE
A tortured Ahab will always be much more interesting—entertaining—than an Ahab carcass. Come on, now do this.

AHAB

Suck yourself, scut-punk—

WHALE pops him one.

AHAB

Do what I tell you to do.

AHAB speaks as a ventriloquist dummy while WHALE mouths the words.

AHAB

“A tortured Ahab can give back something to the community—
people can piss on him or laugh at him and thus relieve
themselves of the psychic burden of their own meaningless
lives—”

WHALE pushes AHAB away.

WHALE

Besides, why gift you with something you clearly don't deserve:
closure or peace or amnesia or oblivion or extra credit or a
biological leg to stand on—

WHALE kicks AHAB, but half-heartedly—perhaps even does a tap-dance routine on his back.

WHALE

You always thought, in that curdling cesspit brain of yours, that
you were gunning for me—searching me out, knotting up the
ocean's latitudes to lure me, anger me to the surface—and yet—
and yet, mate—I knew, I knew—I know you—I was waiting—you
know nothing in the light of what I know, the universes that I make!

WHALE leans down to whisper to AHAB.

WHALE

Is that a little bit, well, much? Even though it's true? After all, I am
the god you made me out to be—that's what this is all about.

AHAB rolls on his back, laughs.

AHAB

So, great white pizzle-licker, you have me—you certainly have me—I'm sure you have swallowed some "seamen" in your time, but none like me—so why not finish off the business? Why do you stomach me?

WHALE

The joke makes some jokes.

AHAB

And here's another: I'm having a whale of time here.

WHALE turns away from AHAB, and in a flash AHAB is off the floor and gunning for WHALE, but WHALE easily avoids the charge and slams AHAB to the floor. AHAB goes at him again and again during the next lines, as he did in real life, but each time WHALE bests him.

AHAB

The little girl's teacher said it was impossible for a whale to swallow a human because its throat was very small. The little girl said, "A whale swallowed Jonah." The teacher repeated her point. The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah." The teacher asked, "What if Jonah went to hell?" "Then you can ask him," she replied.

They rest.

WHALE

"So, great white pizzle-licker, you have me." And what is it that I have in having you?

AHAB

Indigestion?

WHALE

All right, you asked for it after avoiding it: Explain all this to me—

AHAB

Explain?

WHALE

Explain yourself to me.

AHAB

No one can explain himself—like trying to see the back of your own eyeballs. And always the explanations are boring. And wrong. And boring. And wrong.

WHALE

I ate your leg—yes?—doesn't that at least prompt you to—give you a little dig in the side?

AHAB

At least it was only my leg you ate—yes? Some things you can't carve a substitute for out of ivory—

WHALE

A codpiece joke from the piece of cod—

AHAB

I know, fishy—look, all this one-up banter is intriguing—not really—though I have to admit that conversating with a god—is that really [what]—is you a god? Or just an intestinal hallucination, my very own rumbleguts, my rotgut dream?

WHALE

You miss the point of why you're here.

AHAB

That being?

WHALE

Guilt, of course.

AHAB

Guilt?

WHALE

Uh-huh.

AHAB

Guilt?

WHALE

Not, obviously, the kind that paints the lily—

AHAB
Guilt? For what?

WHALE
For crimes, of course—

AHAB
For what?

WHALE
Crimes—crimes—depredations, indifferences, sacrificing people
as lambs—you know, that sort of [thing]—

AHAB
Just stop—

WHALE
Telling the tr[uth?]

AHAB
As I was saying!

WHALE
You weren't saying any[thing]—

AHAB
—jabbering with this thing which stands before me that spiked me
to much madness in my life has its intrigue—

AHAB now begins to walk as if his peg leg were a real peg leg.

AHAB
—and the spooky cellar-like environs of your gut make for the kind
of concentrated tête-à-tête that one could only wish for in such a
philosophical quest as savage as—mine—as noble—as unique—
but—this is not—this is not— Guilt? Guilt?

WHALE
Ah—

AHAB
What?

WHALE

Look at how you're walking—back on that Pequod deck, aren't you, nailing coins into masts, "thar she blows!", your peg-leg dicking each man's soul and ego, prompting them to great lathers of muscular stupidity—and in the end all of them go down—glub glub glub—so that you can be—

WHALE falls silent.

AHAB

What?

WHALE

How would you finish my unfinished thought?

AHAB shakes out his peg-leg—he has to shake it very hard to get the leg to stop being a peg-leg.

AHAB

All? Down? All?

WHALE

All but one.

AHAB finally has his leg back.

WHALE

(with mock affection)

So, how would you finish this unfinished thought, you slugging maggotish lump of curdled undergut?

Sounds of a great storm lashing the sea.

WHALE

You want a noble hell for yourself? Not this limp-cocked one of your oh-so-vaunted ego, but one that cuts you open for truth, the way you flense blubber off a whale? Do you?

AHAB

I have always wanted that.

WHALE

Then do this: go practice forgiveness.

On the— AHAB

On the one. WHALE

AHAB ponders.

Do it. AHAB

WHALE spits out AHAB. Darkness. The great storm continues.

* * * * *

And continues.

Crash of a body in sea-soaked clothes: AHAB

A body's labored breathing: ISHMAEL

ISHMAEL in the gutter and looking the part. Strapped to this right calf—or perhaps his left—are two pieces of ivory-colored wood. Around his neck is a noose.

AHAB stares at ISHMAEL. And stares.

Ishmael. Ishmael. AHAB

ISHMAEL jerks awake, reacts.

You. You. ISHMAEL

Ishmael, you're in a rough way. AHAB

ISHMAEL crawls away from AHAB.

I saw you—go— ISHMAEL

ISHMAEL rises, walks with a peg-leg.

ISHMAEL

—taken—ahhh God!—you are just a—not real—not real—

AHAB

Your leg—

ISHMAEL

—leave me—alone—you, in here, all the time—all the time—I
have looked into—and seen—and the teacher asked, “What if
Jonah went to hell?” “Then you can ask him,” she replied—oh I
have asked—I have been asking—

AHAB

Your leg—

ISHMAEL

Grim about the mouth—damp drizzly November in my soul—why
did it start—how did it [start]—I have these—dreams—I have
these—worms—these—worms—these—

AHAB

Your leg—

ISHMAEL circles AHAB, staring at him, then bursts into laughter as he pulls the noose tight.

ISHMAEL

The last thing I saw of you—aaakkk!—hog-tied to the whale!—
aaakkk!—noosed to the carcass—aaakkk!—going down down
down!—wiped off the face of the [earth]—aaakkk! aaakkk! aaakkk!
aaakkk!—you the peg-legged shit wiped away by apocalypse and
leaving us the hell alone!

ISHMAEL climbs on AHAB's back, moves as he speaks.

ISHMAEL

I floated on a coffin spit up to the surface from the Pequod's
guts—I floated for days—

(whispering in his ear)
—days days days days—float float float float—even the sharks
wouldn't touch such damaged meat as mine, the sea-hawks
gagged when they saw such rot clinging to dead pieces of the
forested earth—

ISHMAEL rolls off AHAB's back.

ISHMAEL

—death lifting me back to be dined on by the wickedness of my
own heart, gnawed on by rat-toothed gut-eels with your name
scorched across their grinless lips—and I sang to keep the
demons in check and I sang so as to keep my voice and I sang to
forget I had ever remembered anything and I sang to remember
everything that threatened to forget me and—

ISHMAEL slides into a shanty/work song, perhaps even mimes pulling a rope on the refrain.

ISHMAEL

My clothes are all in pawn
Go down you blood red roses, go down
And it's mighty draughty around Cape Horn
Go down you blood red roses, go down
Oh, you pinks and posies
Go down you blood red roses, go down

For the tune, go to <http://artofmanliness.com/sea-shanty-old-blood-roses/>

ISHMAEL stops.

ISHMAEL

Why have you come back?

AHAB

I have been in the whale.

ISHMAEL

And those from around here, you blowhard, call me daft—
“Ishmael's turned to fishmeal” or “Ish went down with the fish”
(though a whale's not a fish I keep telling them!) or “Ishmay-smell”
for my gutter-ripe bouquet—oh, I see the humor's lost on you, so
then, what? is your story that Moby Dick spit you out after
conversing with you?

AHAB

Yes.

ISHMAEL

Yes? You're—

AHAB

What else would explain it?

(mimes a noose)

“Aaakkk! aaakkk! aaakkk! aaakkk!” the last time you saw me, remember? By all physics I should be crushed, seafood, wiped away.

ISHMAEL's mind cannot hold these thoughts.

AHAB

You should take that from around your neck—let me—

ISHMAEL

I can't—

AHAB

Please—

ISHMAEL

I can't!—it's my link, my umbilical!—you're here to take me again, aren't you, steal—what is left—of—I will not go to sea again!

By the time ISHMAEL finishes his words, he is upon AHAB, grabbing him from behind around the throat. AHAB puts up no resistance to ISHMAEL's attempt to kill him. Instead, he lets ISHMAEL bear him down to his hands and knees so that ISHMAEL is on AHAB's back.

AHAB

(hoarsely)

Float, goddamn you, float! Float! Float!

Sea sounds. Something comes over ISHMAEL that stops him.

AHAB

Float! I have come to be your coffin! Float! No harm comes to you.
Float! You are not alone!

And ISHMAEL does. Peace enters.

ISHMAEL rolls off AHAB's back, walks away. AHAB rises.

So that's what—	ISHMAEL
	AHAB
The gist of it, yes.	
	ISHMAEL
And why—	
	AHAB
Yes.	
	ISHMAEL
What next?	
	AHAB
Who knows? Do you care?	
	ISHMAEL (surprised)
I actually do. Care.	
	AHAB
Then—all right.	
	ISHMAEL
I am still not well.	
	AHAB
Who is?	
	ISHMAEL
Do I hear a “but”? I need to hear a [but]—	
	AHAB
But.	
	ISHMAEL
Go on—	

AHAB

You were rescued. I. Then through me, you. Rescued. Then through us—

ISHMAEL stops him.

ISHMAEL

That is as far as I can go at this moment.

ISHMAEL sings as he takes off the noose.

ISHMAEL

Oh, you pinks and posies
Go down you blood red roses, go down.

I am still not well. Grim about the mouth—damp drizzly November
in my soul—

AHAB

But—

ISHMAEL

But—

(shrugs)

—all right.

ISHMAEL unknots the noose and AHAB undoes the wood on ISHMAEL's leg as lights go to black amid whale songs.