

The Harpooneer

A lone Harpooneer sat on a small dinghy in a still ocean. The water was a deep void of blue, as if the color had been mixed with darkness itself. The water was, however, completely still. Not a single wave rolled across the water; there were no tides or currents, and there was no movement. The ocean sat still. The Harpooner sat in the middle of the dinghy and whetted his harpoon ceaselessly. He wore a navy blue cloak, covering every discernible feature of his body. Yet he was nothing if not distinctive, as beneath the hood of his cloak, there sat two bright white eyes piercing through the veil of darkness covering his face, just as the sun breaks through the night. There was no sun in the sky; however, there was no movement of the clouds, and the sea was dark. Some might even say it appeared stormy, and yet no rain fell, and nothing moved. The ocean was not the only thing that was still; however, the world itself was still. The only sound for thousands of miles likely was the persistent scraping sound of the Harpooneer whetting his harpoon in order to slay the nothing that surrounded him.

Yet he was surrounded by nothing for no longer, and a whale breached through the water in the distance, interrupting the rhythmic sound of the harpoon being sharpened to an imperceptible point. The Harpooneer stood up in his dinghy. Every single motion of his body was deliberate, definite, and set in stone. There was not a single unnecessary movement and not a single wasted millisecond. He stood firm, his perfectly sharpened harpoon resting still at his side; he had been waiting for this. It was not long before a second whale breached the surface: at least double the size of the last. The waves rocked the boat back and forth, yet the Harpooner's balance was unfailing. Another whale breached, then another, then another, exponentially faster,

and each one twice as big as the last. The dinghy shook viciously as the whales grew closer, still accelerating in frequency, yet the Harpooneer balanced himself as if he stood on solid ground, unwavering. The whales continued to breach, each one faster, larger, and more terrifying than the last. Finally, the onslaught abruptly ceased. The waves continued to bash the boat viciously as if attempting to swallow the dinghy and the Harpooneer whole. The Harpooneer, unaffected, stood still in spite of it, and the water vibrated below him. His nerves trembled, and his hair stood on end. A whale was moments away from swallowing him and his dinghy whole. The whale broke the surface of the water, its teeth the size of skyscrapers, its throat a nigh-bottomless abyss of endless darkness. The Harpooneer and his dinghy are swallowed whole, consumed without exception by the colossal beast of gluttony embodied.

The Harpooneer fell down the whale's throat for a long while, clinging to his boat with all his strength so as not to lose it on the way down. He fell for hours more into the endless pit that engulfed him. The walls were not visible, and The Harpooneer fell into nothing but darkness. After a long while, days perhaps, he and his dinghy finally reached the bottom before splashing violently into a sea of blood with a dark black “sky” hanging over it. He was inside the great beast, and just as he expected, its insides were colossal beyond comprehension. Words don’t do justice to the size of an animal that makes a human seem like a speck of bacteria in comparison.

The currents pulled the dinghy at a moderate pace in one direction. As a matter of fact, the entire body of water had been moving in one direction. The Harpooneer drifted along for a short while; there were no winds, and the entire place smelled putrid and nauseating, as if it were one giant corpse rotting away: an analogy that likely wasn’t too far from the truth. Eventually, an island came into view, yet it wasn’t composed of grass and trees—instead, nerves and meat. There was a small structure on the island, built from what appeared to be a variety of bones and

layering thin pinkish flaps of skin as a sort of roof. The Harpooneer landed his boat on the island, the meat crunching and bleeding as his ship made landfall, and he walked upon the flesh island.

Before he had a chance to do anything, a man emerged from the house. He was naked and fat, and his hair bloodstained and long. The man shouted at him, “You!” he screamed as if seeing a ghost. “The whale has swallowed you as it did me.” The Harpooneer remained silent and gripped his harpoon tightly. The old man quickly noticed the Harpooneer's demeanor and shifted his in accordance with it. “You don’t wield that Harpoon for your safety, do you?” The Harpooneer didn’t move an inch. “It is sharpened to kill.” The old man no longer appeared comfortable in the slightest, and he seemed as if he had come to a horrid epiphany.

A mix of terror and chagrin infested his face, contorting it in a tumult of emotions. “I was once like you, you know?” The old man said, clearly nervous in the face of the Harpooneer. “I once tried to kill the whale, and well, you can see how that turned out.” Beads of sweat dripped down his face. He spoke again, fearful, “I know how this will end. You won’t-” Suddenly, terror grips the old man, and his face instantly changes from one of discomfort to one of terror beyond comprehension. The Harpooneer, uncaring, interjected, “I don’t care.” He took a step forward before elaborating. “I don’t care what you think about what I’m doing.” The old man steeled his nerves before speaking, clearly in preparation for something. “I can’t let you continue, I... I just can’t, please, listen to me.” The old man took a step back. The Harpooneer responded carelessly, “Go back to that house, bring me some food, and I’ll be on my way. I don’t want to linger.”

The old man reflected on something for a moment before making a look of resignation on his face. “Let’s just get this over with,” said the old man forebodingly before disappearing into his house. The Harpooneer stood outside the house, waiting. After a short while, he stepped forward to check on the man, but not two seconds passed before the door to the abode flung

open, and the old man flew towards the Harpooneer, a blood-soaked and dulled harpoon gripped tightly between his hands. The Harpooneer parried the blow and struck back, slicing the wind in front of him. It surely would have cleaved the old man in two through sheer force, yet the old man was nowhere to be seen. The Harpooneer swiftly turned to look behind him, only to see the harpoon of the old man inches away from his face, primed to kill him. Yet seconds before the spear pierced his skin, the old man stopped and dropped to the ground, gripping his heart, terror etched onto his face; he looked up to face the Harpooneer. "I'm so sorry that I couldn't-" The old man was interrupted for the second time since their meeting, this time with a finely sharpened harpoon piercing his skull. His body fell limp, and he hit the floor.

The Harpooneer found it regrettable that the old man had to die. After all, he was no murderer and did not revel in the deaths of others. The old man now sat like a rag doll, motionless on the floor, a truly sorry state of affairs. The only thing the Harpooneer pursued was the death of the whale. It was the only being worthy of his hate, of his torrential rage. It was the only being who deserved to die, and those who got in the way of the crash course between the two were simply fools at the wrong place at the wrong time. The Harpooneer found that there was nothing to do but move on, and so he did, tossing the corpse of the old man into the ocean of blood within the whale's stomach before watching it slowly sink to the bottom, becoming one with the gore that surrounded it. He then walked across the flesh island and into the house once inhabited by the old man. It was a mess, yet within it, he managed to find some cooked meat, no doubt cut from the island itself. There was nothing else of note besides a small cot fashioned from bone with what appeared to be a worn-out cloak serving as a mattress. It looked anything but comfortable. After that, the Harpooneer set out, leaving the island behind and riding the unnatural tide of the whale's insides. As he sailed, he came across many islands eerily similar to

the first, yet all were empty and decaying. People had no doubt colonized this whale: tens or perhaps hundreds of them. The Harpooneer pitied them for a moment. How horrible it must've been to be trapped with no chance of escape from such a vicious beast. He would rather die than befall such a fate, which is why he would undoubtedly slay the whale and emerge victorious from its corpse.

After a day or so of sailing, the Harpooneer came to a giant, indescribably large wall of flesh and what appeared to be a passage in the side of it. He disembarked his boat and ventured into the passage within the wall of the whale's insides. The ground inside coursed with veins, and the ground shook with the beat of a heart. This was surely the path that would lead him to the heart of the whale, the heart he wished to impale with all of his might. The Harpooneer walked in darkness, his harpoon the only thing allowing him to keep his bearings. The heartbeat grew louder and louder, yet it couldn't drown out his thoughts. The Harpooneer felt more anticipation at this moment than he had in his entire life. Oh, how he wished to slay that whale- to rend its flesh, to stop its heart. This whale, which hated all living creatures and lived in spite of life itself, would relish in killing it, in making the whale's gargantuan heartbeat for the last time. His grip on his harpoon tightened in obsessive fervor. His life had led to this very moment; he had killed and clawed and slaved away for this moment, this moment where he would kill the whale, where he would kill the most hateful being, the most dreadful monster, the most disgusting form of life. His heartbeat grew to match that of the whales; they beat together, yet one would stop. Finally, he came to an opening in the passage, an illuminated room, almost reminiscent of an amphitheater, in its center, suspended by pillars of flesh, a glowing, beating heart. The Harpooneer couldn't bring himself to do anything but laugh. He laughed and laughed and laughed. He screamed at the whale, "I WILL FINALLY KILL YOU, WHALE!" He thrust

his harpoon feverishly into the air, "I WILL KILL YOU AND END YOUR HATRED!" The Harpooneer shouted until his lungs felt like they would explode. Eventually, he deemed the time right and, with all of his hate-conjured strength, leaped into the air and thrust his perfectly whetted harpoon into the whale, with every single instinct being to kill it. The Harpoon pierced the heart when suddenly, the Harpooneer felt his heart palpitate in his chest. He ignored it and shoved the harpoon deeper. Black fluid gushed from the wound. The Harpooneer's heart beat irregularly again. This time, it felt as if his heart would detonate inside his chest. He lost grip of his harpoon and fell from the elevated heart onto the fleshy ground below, clutching his heart. A torrential fury of thoughts coursed through the Harpooneer's head, yet all of them were silenced instantly by the sound of rushing tides; the Harpooneer shut his eyes tight and gripped his heart, now throbbing with unimaginable pain. When he opened his eyes mere moments later, the Harpooneer found that the pain in his chest had vanished, and he was lying on a small dinghy on a foggy ocean with water as black as ink. On the boat was a man wearing a white cloak, obscuring all of his features with the exception of two navy blue eyes piercing through the darkness underneath his hood. "You are awake, hateful one." said the creature, unmoving in its stance. The Harpooneer panicked and reached for his harpoon before realizing its absence. "There can be no violence he-" The creature was interrupted by a punch reaching its head, yet the punch simply passed through the creature, whose entire head dissolved like dispersed mist before reappearing again, unharmed. The Creature shrugged. "I don't want to do it this way, but you never learn," the creature said before flicking its wrist at the Harpooneer. The Harpooneer felt his bones give in, and he fell limp to the ground. He could only move his head. "What is this? Where am I? Who are you?" The Harpooneer said with a mix of rage and confusion in his voice. "A man of many questions- some things never change," The creature said despondently,

“unfortunately for you, I am here to answer none of them.” The creature took a few steps over to the Harpooneer before squatting down next to him and putting his hand over his heart. “I am only here to show you the error of your ways, as I likely have a thousand times before.” In an instant, everything went black, and the Harpooneer found himself under the water, yet he wasn’t drowning. As a matter of fact, he wasn’t there at all and was simply a spectator through the eyes of another.

He found himself, or whatever he had become, swimming briskly through a pitch-black abyss of water. There was nothing to see or do, and no other creatures remotely near. Suddenly, the Harpooneer heard a voice echo through his head, yet no words were discernible. All he heard were sobs, and all he heard was a creature sobbing for hours upon hours upon hours. After a long while, the Harpooneer began to sob as well, and the two beings, unknown to each other, sobbed together. Things continued like this for quite a while until, eventually, the Harpooneer found himself back on the deck of the dinghy. The fog had lessened, and the water was darker. He could see something at the bottom, yet he was unsure what it was. The creature was still there, and it spoke to him calmly, “Do you know what you have seen?” The Harpooneer thought for a moment yet had nothing to say.

The creature seemed to realize this and spoke before he could say a single word, “I see, that is... unfortunate, to say the least.” The creature stepped towards him again, “You will see more. I earnestly wish for you to realize, yet I doubt it.” The Harpooneer stepped back. “Wait, Stop. I don’t want to see more. Send me back to the whale. Let me kill it.” The creature took another step and spoke, this time in a much more frustrated voice, “I cannot do that. If I send you back now, then your heart will explode, and you will die, and that cannot happen if you are to fulfill your role.” The Harpooneer stopped in his tracks, “I’ll die?”

Yet no answer was given to him, as in an instant, he found himself back underwater, spectating through the eyes of another once again. There was no constant sobbing or sadness this time. There was no sound at all, actually. In its place, however, was a profound hunger that felt as if it got exponentially worse with every second. The Harpooneer wanted nothing more than to feast, to devour, to consume. Yet he couldn't, and so he and the creature, like before, suffered together. He was hungry, so very hungry, so viciously hungry, it defied all reason, yet he couldn't eat and could not possibly satiate his hunger. He felt as if he would be hungry forever, yet in an instant, he found himself back on the dinghy for the 3rd time, the fog almost completely clear now, and the waters clear enough to make out humanoid shapes at the bottom. He thought of the whale and just how close he was to slaying it, to put an end to its life. In frustration at whatever it was this creature was doing to him, he screamed at it, still sitting quietly on the boat. "Just what is this, putting me underwater with some creature and making me sad and hungry for no reason? What is the point of this? Do you just aim to waste my time? Do you have some purpose in keeping me from killing that whale once and for all? For ending all the evil that the beast is responsible for?"

The creature hardly needed to think before responding. "Selfish... you are always so selfish. There is one creature of pure evil before me, and it is you. You are evil, you are the one filled with hatred, and you are at fault. Do you think this is a waste of time? Fine, I'll forgo the rest of this, for I know now that you are hopeless." In an instant, the fog dissipated, and the sun was visible again in the sky. The Harpooneer shifted his gaze to the water, now as clear as the sky. Within the sea was not just one, but thousands of corpses of people wearing identical clothing to that of the Harpooneer, all with ropes tied to their legs preventing them from surfacing. The creature grabbed the Harpooneer by his cloak and pulled him close, "You wish to

see the fruits of your labor? You wish to see the evil whale whom you pursue?" The creature removed his hood, only to reveal the face of a whale. "You will pay the price for ignorant hatred as thousands before you have!" The creature screamed, filled with vitriol and frustration. It lifted the Harpooneer with one hand and threw him down into the corpse-filled water, and within it, he sank.

He sank down and down and down, and as he sank, he heard nothing but sobbing and felt nothing but hunger, yet not a hunger for food or any feasible concept, but a hunger for belonging, for an existence with meaning to define it. The Harpooneer was, in fact, not in an ocean, and he was not sinking into seawater. Instead, he was sinking into tears, the tears of the whale, the whale which was so hungry, so sad, and so hated that it cried a sea of tears. It was then that he realized the creature whose eyes he had been seeing the world through, the creature who had felt such suffering. The whale, whose heart he believed to be composed of so much hate, felt nothing but sadness. He sank into an ocean of sadness, sadness enough to drown a man, sadness enough to sail across, sadness enough to keep his body consumed. Eventually, the Harpooneer reached the bottom of the ocean and found that the ropes preventing his body from surfacing were held in place by his harpoon, stabbed into the ground, trapping him in place. His urge to kill that whale, his constant whetting of the harpoon, had served to do nothing but trap him. In that moment and that moment only, for the first time in his life, more than anything, the Harpooneer wanted nothing more than to atone for his sins, his transgressions, and the long list of misdeeds he had committed throughout his life, all in the name of killing a creature that wanted nothing more than to die.

The Harpooneer cried and cried until, eventually, it all went dark, at the bottom of a sea of tears. There were tears of both the whale he lamented and himself, who he had come to lament

just as much, if not more. Eventually, the Harpooneer opened his eyes and found himself on an island of flesh, an island of flesh that bore an uncanny resemblance to the one inhabited by the old man. He attempted to get up and move, but his heart throbbed in his chest. Something was wrong, and he very quickly realized that he was unable to make swift movements without his heart exploding with pain. This pain was the price he paid for stabbing the whale so thoroughly, so fervently, so filled with rage. He had done nothing but harm himself, and he was left with a permanent reminder of it, a constant pain that would banish him from ever brandishing a weapon effectively again. The worst part of all, he was trapped here with no possible method of escaping. At his feet lay his harpoon, still stained with the black blood that had sprayed from the whale when he pierced its heart.

In an instant, the Harpooneer realized the permanence of his predicament. The second he did so, the familiar glow of his piercing white eyes ceased to illuminate the night. In the darkness of the eternal night within the whale, he lowered his hood. In the reflection of his harpoon, he saw something he never thought he would see: a human, a human who was looking pensively into his reflection, tears streaming down his face, tears of atonement.

The Harpooneer spent a long while on the island, and eventually, he grew used to his surroundings. He felt peaceful, a feeling he had never felt beforehand. His rage and desire to kill the whale left him, and he grew old and happy until, eventually, A man in a navy blue cloak with bright white eyes visited him, and he instantly knew what would soon transpire: his peace would soon end. He attempted to tell him the error of his ways, to educate him on the misfortune that was yet to befall him, yet the second he began to get the point across, his heart came to a standstill, and he remembered the man sailing on the sea of tears and the bodies tied to the bottom. In that instant, he felt an unknowable presence come over him, a presence that

wordlessly communicated that if he were to utter a single sentence of the predestined fate that would befall the man who he knew to be himself, then he would suffer a fate magnitudes worse than death. So, he said nothing and, in the end, decided to fight his hardest to kill the man, to spare him from the fate that he would be met with. To spare the man whom he knew to be himself. And so he fought, brandishing a weapon against another for the first time in what must've been decades uncountable. He came within inches of victory, yet moments before his harpoon pierced his foe, his heart pulsed violently and felt as if it would be ripped from his chest if he made another move. He found himself looking up into the eyes that he knew to have worn himself long ago, eyes that were filled with undeterred hate and rage, and in the few seconds he had left, he felt the need to apologize. He needed to apologize for being unable to stop himself from going down this path, to apologize for the hatred and pain that he and all iterations of himself had brought upon the whale and themselves, and most importantly, to apologize for every single cog in the cycle of hate and pain that he felt partially responsible for. Yet his apology was cut short by the rage of the man before him, and before he even began to speak, the Harpooner, as all things do, died. Yet he knew himself to be redeemed, to be forgiven, and just as the life left his eyes, he found himself back on a dinghy, back to sailing on a sea of tears, covered in fog and with water black as ink. He knew the role he was to fill, and so he sailed, waiting, waiting in solemn mourning for both the whale and for himself, for it was an evident fact to him now that the two were the same, beings of sadness and hate, forever tethered together by the waves, crashing fervently with emotion as the cycle begins anew.