

Kingsport Chronicle
704 Howard St.
Kingsport, Mass.

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My Dearest Nephew,

I have received your letter dated 19th Aug. and I am overjoyed to learn that you have recovered from your terrible ordeal — my heart is gladdened by your renewed vigor and mental clarity. What a horrible business! As a newsman of no small experience, I assure you that I have also borne witness to unforgettable sights, and I am reluctant to report that such experiences impress their mark upon our sensibilities in a regrettably lasting fashion. It is the price we pay for our noble pursuit — I would pay it again many times over, for the evils of this world must be uprooted, and that which is hidden must be exposed to the uncompromising light of truth, &c.

I read sympathetically of your invalid frustrations, and of your desire to begin work anew. But before you leap to the conclusion that I about to renew my perpetual offer, fear not! No — it is with a more specific idea, or story, in my mind that I write this letter.

As you know, Kingsport now fancies itself among the ranks of Nantucket and New Bedford, in that our industry of whaling has fastened itself upon the Leviathan of Commerce as sure as a harpoon flung from the hand of Father Neptune himself. No less than twenty-and-one whaling vessels claim Kingsport Harbour as their home-away-from-home; and I use this strange idiom in the knowledge that the true home of the whaleman is not in port, but prowling the oceans for that most oily and lucrative fish, the Parmaceti. Indeed, I say twenty-and-one ships, but that number has likely increased by the time you read this — Like the Hydra of old, for each figurehead laid low by Leviathan or his shieldmaidens Ice & Storm, two more appear in its place, carrying to the oceans the adventurous sons of Kingsport.

But enough with my poesy; I shall now touch upon the point! On 15th Aug., one such whaleship returned overflowing with sperm, making her masters ever more oleaginous with that greater lubricant — that which greases all machines and interactions in this life — Wealth. Named the Quiddity, she counts Sleet, Baker & Blood as her agents, and is captained by one Jeremiah Joab, a man well-suited to his Biblical namesakes. While this occasion is not newsworthy in itself, three events in connexion have hooked my journalist's eye.

The first involves the ship's second mate, one Elijah Watts. A sturdy man I am told, who has oft sailed with Captain Joab and his crew, poor Mr Watts now resides at St Erasmus, our local sanitarium for aged and infirm mariners. He shall soon be relocated to the new lunatic asylum near Arkham — in truth, the kind souls at St. Elmo have been unable to ease his raving tantrums. For raving he is, raving mad I fear, and no one has diagnosed the cause! It is said he "embraced lunacy" during a tempest off Cape Horn — reduced to shouting imprecations at his fellow officers, accusing them of, and I quote — "dark deeds!" The man then fell into catatonia and silence.

The subject of madness also informs my second point, which touches upon Mr Watts' master and commander. Those who greeted the homecoming of the Quiddity were astonished to find that Captain Joab had returned less of a man — so to speak — than the one who shipped out in September '41. In the place of his right leg was an ivory pole — a false leg hacked from whalebone — a replacement for a limb dismasted by a whale in the Pacific Ocean. And more, word around the docks — as sailors would have it, the scuttlebutt — indicates that Joab was profoundly affected by his loss. During the time of his second mate's intemperance, Joab himself was rumored to be raving in his cabin! Perhaps this madness is a contagion? Or the guilt of some "dark deeds?"

The final incident is, I admit, of a rather Gothic character, and was confided to me by a man named Liam Teague, a fellow employed by Oliver Money penny — Kingsport's answer for P.T. Barnum — to operate the magic lantern at his museum. Although Mr Teague admitted to having indulged in the Hibernian fondness for strong drink, he was willing to swear that the things he witnessed were no mere phantasies seen "through a glass, darkly" — I mean to say, the bottom of a bottle. According to Mr Teague, a black coach arrived at the

Tuttle Docks at the ungodly hour of three in the morning — what Mr Teague was doing at that hour is best left unsaid, but it's no small coincidence the docks are adjacent an infamous disorderly house. Whence upon the coach's arrival, several "black casks" were unloaded from the Quiddity by furtive figures. Intrigued, the Irishman followed the coach, and was surprised to discover its final destination was — no dockside warehouse — no smuggler's den — but the Congregational Church upon Central Hill! Having a superstitious nature, Mr Teague recalled certain eldritch tales about Central Hill, and no doubt fearing the sudden appearance of Old Mother Cawches to lay claim to his eyeballs, our intrepid adventurer "high-tailed" back to his lodgings.

As you may well imagine, these events have excited my curiosity, and I performed a small piece of investigation — I am not so ancient to have forgotten the feel of cobblestones beneath my boots! Apparently the Quiddity has gained no small reputation as being a cursed ship — cursed, perhaps, but lucrative, as the "Quid" always returns with more than her fair share of oil. But cursed indeed, having on previous voyages lost the crew of an entire whaleboat — suffered wreckage on a cannibal-infested island — and in the days when Joab was chief mate, lost her master during a hurricanoe!

Perhaps you have already surmised my intentions, my dear nephew? Having been informed by your own hand that you desire a reunion with the sea, and are interested in this manner of commerce — What say you to a whaling voyage? Verily, I know the labor is punishing hard, and I know the Quiddity is considered a godless vessel. But this opportunity meets every requirement that you yourself set forth.

If there is indeed a concealed motive in the activities of Sleet, Baker & Blood — the legal face of the illustrious Tuttle Dynasty — I would guarantee an exclusive exposé, one that would make the journalistic rounds from Baltimore to Boston. Ever since the horrible tale of the Essex, the pursuit of Leviathan remains fixed in the public imagination. Naturally, I realize the perils of such a voyage, whether by hazards natural to the sperm whale fishery, or through the ill-starred plagues that bedevil the benighted Quiddity. Indeed, I fear your dear mother would faint if she knew of my suggestion! I am afraid my own resources are "stretched too thin" to pursue this myself, and if you decline, the story shall pass to the sea with the departure of the Quiddity at the end of October — as surely lost as Joab's leg in the belly of the whale!

And before you — justifiably — quail at the prospect of three years at sea, rest assured, I fully expect you to "jump ship" at a suitable port — once you have obtained the Truth, of course! I am to understand this is the custom of seamen, and were you to leave the Quiddity after a period of several months, it would not be considered desertion. Why not take the opportunity to explore the Sandwich Islands — and perhaps write that book you have been fancying? And after that — You know a situation awaits you at the Chronicle; you need only ask.

*Your Dearest Uncle,
—Graham Blaine, esq.*