

This Is A Book

1. This is page one. It is white. It is very white. It is too white. How white it is!
My name is Donald J. Adam. You can call me Don. Everybody calls me Don. I am the author of this book.

“Don, I need you”, Solveig said. “You must write a book. Can you write a book in English?”

“Yes, I can”, I said.

I work for Solveig. She is my publisher. She is Swedish. Her eyes are blue, but her hair is brown. Dark brown. She is beautiful.

“This will be a very simple book”, Solveig said. “For people who do not know English.”

“Very funny”, I said. “A book in English for people who do not know English! What next? Cameras for the blind? Radios for the deaf?”

“You can do it, Don. You are a genius!”

“Please repeat that...”, I asked her.

“You’re a genius.” She laughed.

“I love you. Okay, I’ll do it.”

“A very simple book. Few words. Short sentences. Five words in a sentence. It will be easy for you.”

I sit at my table. The paper is white. The paper is very white. It is not easy. What shall I write?

Few words, short sentences... What words? What sentences?

This sentence is short. This sentence has five words. This sentence also has five words. No, it has six. This sentence has six words. No, wrong again.

I cannot go on like this. I must find a story. How do writers find stories? They drink whisky. I don’t like whisky. I shall go out and walk. Ideas come when I walk.

A first success: page one is not white anymore.

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2. This is only page two.

“One hundred pages will be enough”, Solveig said.

Ninety-nine white pages. I must find a story. A good story.

I am walking in the street. I want to find a story. I try to find a story. I look in front of me. I look right. I look left. I look behind me. I must think about my story, but I can't. I think about Solveig. I love her.

I must not love Solveig. She is married. Her husband works in a bank. She has two children. Twins. Twin girls, Sigrid and Ingrid. They come to the office on wednesdays. I never know who is Sigrid and who is Ingrid.

I am not married. I am single. Young and innocent. If I cannot marry Solveig, I shall never marry.

I cannot marry Solveig. I cannot find a story. I want to kill myself. I shall buy a pistol. No, this is not a good idea: to buy a pistol, you need a permit. No permit, no pistol.

Pills. Sleeping pills. A pleasant way to die. Peaceful. But I do not like pills. I am not sick. I am never sick. Why take pills?

I shall jump into the river. I fill my pockets with stones, then I jump. This will ruin my new shoes.

I am looking at the river. The water is black. No, it is not black. It is grey, and very dirty. It must be cold. I shall not jump into the river now. Better wait for summer.

What is this? A bottle. It floats on the grey water. The tide brings this bottle from the sea. There is a message inside the bottle. How romantic!

I jump into the river. I want that bottle. I am very curious. What does the message say? I catch the bottle. I swim to the shore. I am a very good swimmer. I could never drown. My new shoes are ruined.

My clothes are wet. I go home to change them.

“One hundred pages, five thousand dollars”, Solveig said. This means fifty dollars for one page. I have already earned one hundred dollars. I can buy another pair of shoes.

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3. I have an idea. Not for a story. For Sigrid and Ingrid. Ear-rings! Sigrid would have ear-rings, Ingrid would have no ear-rings. No more mistakes. What if Ingrid is jealous? Sigrid could have one ear-ring, and Ingrid two. Or Sigrid gold ear-rings, and Ingrid silver.

I call Solveig on the phone.

“Hello, is this Solveig? This is Donald. I have had an idea.”

“For your book?”

“No, for Sigrid and Ingrid. Sigrid would have one gold ear-ring, and Ingrid two silver ones. No more mistakes.”

“Nobody makes mistakes except you. They are very different from one another. I’ll tell you something: Sigrid has longer hair. So now you can recognize them.”

“Do you know what? I have found a bottle with a message.”

“In the supermarket? A new kind of advertising?”

“No, in the river. I jumped and ruined my new shoes.”

“What does the message say?”

“I do not know.”

“Can’t you open the bottle?”

“I don’t have a corkscrew. I never drink wine.”

“Well, break it!”

“I do not want to. It is a nice bottle. It would make a lovely lamp. I’ll go and buy a corkscrew.”

“That’s a good idea. Go ahead.”

“Okay. Goodbye, then. See you later, alligator.”

“In a while, crocodile.”

Solveig likes stupid jokes and puns. Her husband, the banker, is not very funny. She would be happier with me. So now I can recognize Ingrid from Sigrid. Ingrid has longer hair. Or is it Sigrid?

I have already written one hundred and fifty dollars worth. A few more lines should do it. I’ll buy a new pen. This one does not write very well. I can’t be a literary genius if my pen doesn’t write well. I’ve got an old typewriter. Can’t use it anymore. Too old. Half dead. I must type this novel before I give it to Solveig. A second-hand electric typewriter is not very expensive. With a good typewriter, anybody can write novels.

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4. Stupid reader. Why don't you know English? "Few words, short sentences..." This is very difficult. Easy for you, difficult for me. What words do you know? Dog, cat, chair, table. The dog eats the cat. The chair jumps on the table. The table drinks a Coca-Cola. The dog buys a Cadillac.

Very interesting. "The Nobel Prize for literature has just been awarded to Donald J. Adam, the well-known genius, the author of this marvelous novel: The Dog And The Table."

I bought a corkscrew. How does it work? The salesman showed me, but I didn't understand very well. When you open a bottle, you must be careful. The cork must not be broken and fall into the wine.

What wine? There is no wine. If I break the cork, it does not matter. Some people can put a tiny boat inside a bottle. It is a lot of work. It takes a long time. It is very useful.

The message is short. It says: "Help!"

And also 15W17S. It is signed Emmeline J. Adam.

What an incredible coincidence! Emmeline J. Adam, the grandmother of my cousin... No, let's try again. Emmeline J. Adam, the cousin of my grandmother, sends a message in a bottle. And who finds it? Not some person in Zambia or Uruguay, not some child who builds sandcastles on the beach here, but precisely the grandson of her cousin! Amazing. Outrageous. Wild. Crazy. Strange. But true!

Shall I solve the great mystery? Shall I be the one? She wrote all these detective novels. Then, last year, she disappeared suddenly. "The lady vanishes...", the newspapers said. Scotland Yard could not find her. Achille Navet, her famous detective friend, could not find her either. "A typical Emmeline J. Adam enigma", the newspapers said. "She wanted to end her life in the style of her novels."

These mysterious numbers indicate where she is. Fifteen degrees west of Greenwich, seventeen degrees south of the Equator. I look at the map. Fifteen west and seventeen south is very blue. As blue as the Atlantic Ocean. There is no island in the vicinity. Is she sailing a boat? Prisoner in a millionaire's yacht? Drifting on a raft?

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5. I must find her. I shall not say anything about this to anybody. Five thousand journalists are ready to charter boats and planes and helicopters. They would reach Fifteen west – Seventeen south before me.

I shall pretend that I want to cross the Atlantic Ocean. All alone on a sailboat.

The phone rings. It is Solveig.

“How’s the book coming along?” she asks.

“I have decided to write it at sea.”

“That’s a good idea. A cruise in the Carribean sea or something?”

“No, I want to cross the Atlantic Ocean on a sailboat.”

“Are you sure that you can write on a sailboat?”

“Don’t worry, the book will be ready on time.”

Solveig does not believe me. But what can she say? A genius cannot be controlled. You must trust him. And hope that things will turn out all right.

To locate Fifteen and Seventeen, I need a compass, a sextant, a gyroscope, a stopwatch, a radio, and of course a boat. I must also buy a portable stove, one hundred pounds of rice, freeze-dried vegetables and meat, and adequate supplies of suntan lotion. Where shall I find the money for all this?

The phone rings. It is Solveig again.

“I have discussed your project with my husband. He finds it very interesting. His bank can lend you some money.”

“That’s very nice of them.”

“They would be your sponsor. This means that your boat must be named after the bank.”

“Of course. I should only be careful not to sink. People do not like it when a bank sinks.”

“Do not forget to take a life jacket with you. Are you an experienced sailor? I am a little worried about you.”

This means that she loves me. My star is rising, while the stinking banker’s is sinking. She’ll divorce him and marry me. As soon as I come back a hero for rescuing the lost Emmeline!”

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6. This is written at sea, with waterproof ink on waterproof paper. Although my skin is also waterproof, I feel wet through and through. That the Ocean is wet does not surprise me. But this must be the rainy season: there seems to be as much water above my head as under my feet.

I wonder how old Noah kept his shirt dry. Maybe he killed some animal and skinned it and made himself a nice raincoat. Why not? For instance, a male buffalo whose female was pregnant. I hope this weather does not last forty days.

The sextant salesman did not tell me what to do when there are no sun and stars. They should invent sea lanes with road signs. "To the Azores, two thousand miles... For the Bermuda triangle, turn left at the third buoy... Do not pass on right..."

My radio has too many knobs and dials. I just can't find the BBC. I get Belgrade and Beijing quite easily, but I do not like their programs.

How many miles to the Equator? Have I crossed the Tropic of Cancer yet? Am I perhaps approaching the South Pole?

I can already imagine the headlines: "Lost at sea. One year after Emmeline J. Adam, her grandnephew, the famous writer Donald J. Adam, has disappeared in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean..." Poor Solveig: she will have to spend the rest of her life with her stupid banker.

The first bottle I uncorked in my life has killed me!

What is very unpleasant in this situation is that I soon won't be able to eat a decent breakfast anymore. Going round and round depletes my stockpile of muffins and scones and orange marmalade. Lately, I have decided to put two spoonfuls of tea in the teapot instead of three.

When you run out of food at sea, you're supposed to eat the other persons on board as soon as they die of hunger. You can also kill them before *you* die of hunger. Not being able to eat anybody is one of the drawbacks of solitary navigation.

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[...]

7. When I finished my last jar of marmalade, I grew desperate. There were still some wooden crates which I hadn't opened. I might find some orange marmalade in one of them, I thought. Instead, I found a radio-compass, which I didn't even remember buying.

I am sure that I would have understood the first paragraph of the five hundred pages of instructions if I had not been interrupted after one hour or so of hard work.

"Ahoy there", a voice shouted.

I discovered a tiny sailboat, with a very old Chinaman in it.

"I want to be the first very old Chinaman to sail around the world all by himself", he said.

He was very surprised when I told him that I listened to Radio Beijing. As hard as he tried, he couldn't get Radio Beijing on his radio. He received The Voice Of America quite clearly, but he hated it.

We exchanged our radios.

He explained to me how the radio-compass works. Actually, he set my gyroscope and my automatic rudder so that I should arrive at Fifteen and Seventeen in exactly three days.

"Why do you want to go there?" he asked. "Anything special about the landscape? Want to take pictures?"

"I have been invited by a couple of friends. Dolphins! Ha, ha, ha..."

He was nice. He gave me some food. No scones or orange marmalade, but bamboo shoots and dry mushrooms and soy sauce.

"I've got too much", he said. "Very old Chinamen eat little".

He was very thin. Bones and hair, no meat. He wanted to know why my boat bears an Italian name.

"It's the name of a bank", I explained. "My sponsor."

He did not understand the word sponsor. His boat was called Red Dawn.

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8. Mr Chang, that's the name of the very old Chinaman, told me a very old Chinese story.

"Once upon a time, the King of the Ocean and his court lived in a beautiful palace at the bottom of the sea. It was built with shells and coral and pearls and mother-of-pearl and sea-weed. This King was a very powerful Dragon, who controlled the ebb and flow of the tide. All the creatures of the sea respected him and feared him and obeyed him.

"But he was not happy, because he felt quite lonely in his underwater palace. One of his retainers, a wise old crab, told him that he needed a wife. 'I know where I can find a lovely young dragon princess', said the old crab.

"The King thought that it was a very clever idea. He was eager to see the lovely princess. When the old crab, some weeks later, brought her to him, he immediately fell in love with her. The wedding ceremony was magnificent. All the inhabitants of the Ocean, from the smallest shrimp to the biggest whale, came to wish the bride and bridegroom a long and prosperous life.

"But the happiness of the young couple did not last long. The Queen fell ill. A famous tuna fish doctor was called, but he could not cure her. Every day she grew worse. The King was sad and worried. He was also angry at the doctor for not curing her.

"The poor tuna fish was afraid of the Dragon King's anger. He did not dare admit that the Queen's illness was too much for him. 'If the King knew how powerless I am, he would chop my head right away', he thought. 'I must find something'.

This very old Chinaman was a good story teller. When he spoke of the Dragon King, he looked like a dragon himself. Then he looked like a wise old crab. Then like an authentic tuna fish doctor.

"Your Majesty", the doctor said, 'I know a medicine which could save the Queen. But it cannot be found in the Ocean.'

'What kind of medicine is that?'

'It is the liver of a live monkey.'

'There is no way we could get the liver of a live monkey', the King said. 'Monkeys live on land, and we live underwater.'

"The wise old crab retainer had listened to the conversation.

'I know an island where many monkeys dwell. The armor fish, who is very strong and can walk on land, could certainly catch one.'

"The armor fish was called. He was not very enthusiastic when he heard what was requested of him. 'I've never caught any monkey', he said. 'I wouldn't know how to proceed.'

"The wise old crab gave him precise and detailed instructions, and told him where the island was. 'If you remember that you're working for the Dragon King, you just cannot fail', he said.

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“So the armor fish swam to the monkey island. He landed on the shore and looked around. At a distance of a few hundred paces, he saw a tree with a monkey on it. He walked slowly toward the tree. The armor fish looked more or less like a tortoise, with eight legs and a very hard shell.

‘Hello, Mr Monkey’, he said. ‘How are you today?’

‘I am fine. What a strange beast you are. I’ve never seen the like of you. What do they call you?’

‘I am an armor fish. I work in the palace of the Dragon King, at the bottom of the sea. Have you ever visited it?’

‘Never. But I have heard about it. It is supposed to be quite beautiful.’

‘Nobody can imagine how beautiful it is. You really must see it to believe it. Pearls... coral... mother-of-pearl... sea-weed...’

‘You don’t say! I wish I could see it.’

‘It so happens that I must return there right now. Why don’t you come with me?’

‘Are you serious? I can’t even swim!’

‘I’ll tell you what’, the armor fish said. ‘I could carry you on my back. I am quite strong, and my shell is very hard, so it would be an easy task for me.’

“The monkey was so impressed with the armor fish’s description of the palace that he accepted his risky proposition.

‘Please don’t go too fast’, he begged him before they started.

‘If you sit real still, you can’t fall, the armor fish said.’

“After swimming about half way to the palace with the monkey on his back, the armor fish was stricken by a sudden doubt. Had the monkey brought his liver with him?

‘I want to ask you something, Mr Monkey’, he said. ‘Have you got a liver with you?’

“What a strange question, the monkey thought.

‘A liver? What do you need a liver for?’ he asked the armor fish.

‘I cannot tell you, but it is very important. You’ll find out when we come to the palace.’

“The monkey was beginning to find the whole business quite suspicious. But he felt sure that, because of the stupidity of the armor fish, he could find a way out.

‘The fact is’, he said, ‘that I’ve got several livers, but I’ve left them on the island. When I jump from tree to tree, I usually leave them on the ground because they’re so heavy. If only you had told me that you needed a liver... How important is it to you? We could go back to the island, of course.’

“The armor fish was tired, since the monkey, even without his livers, was extremely heavy. He was very unhappy that he had to go back to the island, but what else could he do?

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‘We must go back’, he said. ‘If we don’t bring a liver to the palace, the Dragon Queen will die...’

‘I thought it was something of the sort’, the monkey said. ‘I shall be happy to give one of my livers for the great Dragon Queen. You should really have told me about it right away.’

‘I was afraid that you wouldn’t have come with me if I had told you that we needed your liver’.

‘Of course, as soon as they landed on the shore, the monkey flew to the nearest tree. He then laughed and made faces at the poor armor fish.

‘What does it mean? Are you not coming back with me? Where is the liver you promised?’

‘Come and get it! Ha ha ha!’

‘The armor fish saw in a flash that he had been deceived and that he had bungled his mission through sheer stupidity. He dived into the sea and swam slowly toward the Dragon King’s palace. He was so sad that he could not stop crying.

‘Meanwhile the King, the tuna fish doctor, the wise old crab and the rest of the court were waiting for the return of the envoy. As soon as he was sighted in the distance, everybody rejoiced, and prepared to thank him for his troubles.

‘But when he told his story, nobody rejoiced anymore. The Dragon King, in his anger, provoked a terrible storm. He asked his guards to punish the armor fish in proportion to his crime: they were to pull all the bones from his living body and to beat him with big sticks.

‘Please don’t, oh please Your Majesty, forgive me’, the poor armor fish cried in vain.

‘The guards pulled out his bones and beat him to a pulp, then threw him out of the palace into the raging sea. From this day on, his name was changed from armor fish to jelly fish. If you meet one of his grandchildren in the sea or on a shore, you can see how boneless they still are.’

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9. So here I am: fifteen degrees of longitude west of Greenwich, seventeen degrees south of the Equator.

What did I expect? I don't know. There is nothing here but waves and wavelets and clouds and sky and me.

I could drop an anchor and wait a few days to see if anything happens. I can imagine the old lady jumping from an airplane and opening a parachute just above me. "You're a good lad, Donald J., she would say. You've found the message and you've understood it and you've made it here. I shall write a new will in your favor. And also, from now on, you will replace Achille Navet in my novels..."

But what shall I do if she doesn't come? Now that I have sailed so far, I could as well go to Brazil and brush up my samba. I can already hear the drums and the maracas...

Wait a minute... I do hear a faint rumble... Where does it come from? Could there be a band aboard a yellow submarine or something? I put my ear to the water to hear the strange noise better. My boat tilts. I fall into the water.

I am lucky that I left my new shoes at home. I notice something strange: the water is very warm. The only explanation I can come with is some kind of underwater volcano. Detectives and journalists and all kinds of people have been looking for Emmeline ever since she vanished, but nobody thought she might be hidden inside an underwater volcano.

In this kind of adventure, anything can happen. At least, that's what Emmeline J. Adam pretends in her books. Having read them all, I was careful to insure myself against any surprise. For instance, I brought a full case of diving equipment, in case I needed to investigate this case under the surface of the sea.

I dive again into the hot water. This time, I wear goggles and even oxygen bottles on my back. I do not see much, but I hear the rumble quite clearly now. All I have to do is swim toward it.

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10. At first I see a glittering surface in the distance. I swim closer to get a better look. It is a wall, made of millions of luminous pearls. A coral gate opens silently in front of me. Beyond it rises an incredible water palace. Instead of bricks and tiles, empty shells of various shapes; instead of marble floors and walls, mother-of-pearl everywhere. From enormous machines and generators come the rumble and the heat.

What inhabitant of the aquatic realm could have built such a crazy dwelling? I can hardly believe my own eyes. Or is this long-lost Atlantis, maybe?

“Grandmother, Grandmother, where are you?”, I shout. “It’s me, Donald J. I’ve found your message. Are you here?”

I’ve always called her Grandmother. My real grandmother, her cousin, died before I was born. Killed by her butler. It was Achille Navet’s first great case. Emmeline described it in full detail in her first best-seller, “The butler and the butter”.

Here she comes. Good old Emmeline. She swims quite gracefully for a person who celebrated her eightieth birthday several years ago. I am somewhat surprised to see that she doesn’t seem to need oxygen. Of course, if she has lived here for one full year, her lungs may have adapted themselves to the peculiar environment.

“How a’l you, Donald J.?” she asks.

Water can’t be expected to transmit sounds like air. Emmeline’s voice has a new, strange but not unpleasant, gurgling quality. I must strain my ears to understand her. The old dear looks queer, too. What with the pressure and the humidity and the salty diet, it is not surprising that she does not resemble her old self.

“Your eyes have become so big, Grandmother”, I tell her.

“All the bette’l to see you in this gloom, my dea’l”, she says.

“And your ears seem to have disappeared altogether.”

“All the bette’l to hea’l you unde’lwate’l, my dea’l.”

“But tell me, Grandmother, why have your teeth grown so? If I remember well, you didn’t even have that many of them...”

“All the bette’l to...”

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11. The fact that I just wrote the number eleven means that I have already completed ten pages. Actually, page eight was longer than the others, because the very old Chinaman was very talkative, so I had to tape several sheets together. Anyway, I have fulfilled more than a tenth of my contract. I have earned at least five hundred dollars already.

The important thing is that I have found a good story, so I can blacken ninety more pages without suffering too much. I'll call Solveig and tell her how smoothly the whole enterprise is moving forward.

I read the ten pages to her on the phone.

"Do you really love me", she asks, "or is it just a trick for your book?"

"You know the answer to that question. I am sure that the way I look at you has betrayed my feelings long ago."

"Not at all. I thought that it was the way you looked at all women. I am quite flattered. No literary genius has ever loved me before. Being loved by a banker is much less romantic. I must say that being married to one does present certain advantages."

"I bet they don't send you nasty letters when you overdraw your bank account."

"And also, I don't stand in line at the counter... But tell me, Donald, is this strange grandmother going to eat you?"

"I don't really know. At first, I thought she could be some kind of disguised dolphin. Clever beasts, you know. They can whistle a meaningful tune, and they don't mistake Piraeus for a man. But then, a dolphin would never eat me, so maybe I'm stuck."

"Why don't you make it a whale? Jonas and Pinnochio have shown the way."

"No whale could pass for my grandmother."

"I guess you're right. What about a shark?"

"Are you crazy? I don't want to be eaten by a shark. I'm shaking like a leaf at the very thought. You shouldn't have suggested that. I'm going to have horrible nightmares, I'm sure."

"I'm sorry, Don. Are you going to bed already?"

"All alone, alas... When I am stuck with a narrative, I often find ideas in my sleep. I always keep a notebook near my bed in case genius strikes at midnight."

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12. Well, it happened again. A dream solved my problem. All my novels have been written this way. The characters and the plot always come from my subconscious mind while my conscious one is turned off. It has happened so many times that I have learnt to transcribe my dreams without even fully waking up. I use a notebook with a spiral binding. When my dream is over, I seize my notebook and pencil in the dark. I hold the pencil between my thumb and forefinger. My third and fourth fingers follow the top of the page so that my line can be straight. My little finger moves down along the spiral binding after each line is completed. In this way, I can cover a full page with more or less straight lines. In the morning, I discover words on the page, but usually I don't remember waking up and writing them.

So this morning, I found the following words in my notebook: *Grandmother is really dolphin. Dolphin is really creature from another planet. Gobbles people and takes their shape and appearance. Wants to dominate Earth. Can be found out because of gurgling voice.*

The dolphin gobbles and gurgles. What a clever plot, I thought when I read my notebook. The opinion I have of my subconscious mind rises to new heights.

I am looking at myself in the mirror and thinking of my future Nobel Prize (and also, incidentally, shaving) when the telephone rings.

It is Solveig. Hearing her voice moves my mood from happiness to bliss.

"Hello, Don, is it you?"

"Hello, Solveig, I love you. How are you this morning?"

"Don, something awful has happened. You must come right away... Oh, Don!"

"What happened?"

"One of the twins has been kidnapped during the night. Someone must have possessed a key to our apartment. I didn't hear anything."

"Okay, I'm coming. I'll be there in ten minutes."

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13. Solveig's eyes are red. Her voice is hoarse.

"What shall I tell my husband?" she asks.

"Where is he?"

"He is travelling for the bank. He must be in Germany right now. Or in Italy."

"Now Solveig, please tell me exactly what happened."

"I woke up and she was gone."

"Who was gone?"

"What do you mean, who was gone? My daughter, of course."

"Yes, but which one?"

"Oh oh... (*she bursts into tears*). I don't even know."

"I thought you could distinguish them easily."

"How can I compare the length of their hair when one of them is missing? Oh oh..."

"You can ask the remaining one who she is. Where is she?"

"You're right, I should have asked her. I was so distracted that I just forgot. She's with a neighbor. I thought it would be safer for her."

"Did you call the Police?"

"The voice said not to."

"What voice?"

"On the phone. It said some very strange things. It said: 'Tell him to stop or else...'"

"Tell him to stop or else?"

"Yes. So I asked: 'Tell who? Stop what?' The answer didn't make sense."

"What did it answer?"

"It said: 'Tell Don'. It said: 'Stop writing.'"

"Me? That I should stop writing? Why should I stop writing? Did it say anything else?"

"It said: 'Don't call the Police.' It said something about the little girl being okay, but I couldn't hear it very well. You know, it sounded as if it called from a great distance."

"Maybe the person muffled the sound with a scarf or something, in order not to be recognized."

"It didn't really sound muffled. I wish I could describe it precisely to you. It sounded as if it came from some distant planet over several satellite relays. It had a synthesized quality."

"A synthesized quality? You mean, like the artificial voice of a computer?"

"Yes, that's right. And also, now and then, it sort of gurgled..."

"Did you say: gurgled?"

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14. Solveig is resting her head on my shoulder and crying softly. I hoped to hold her in my arms some day, but I didn't know it would be in such tragic circumstances.

"Oh, Don, what are we going to do?" she asks.

"Well, I can stop writing, but I can't stop dreaming. You see, after our phone call last night, I dreamed about this dolphin grandmother. I discovered that she was not a real dolphin, but a creature from another planet. Obviously, I hit something big."

"Are you serious? My daughter has been kidnapped by creatures from another planet?"

"They must have learnt instantly that I found them out in my dream. Some kind of extra-sensory perception. Mind waves. Maybe the dream itself was put into my head by one of their galactic enemies. So they retaliated by kidnapping your daughter."

"Why didn't they kidnap you instead? Why my daughter?"

"That's a good question. I don't know, really. I guess I'm protected by the people who sent me the dream. Of course, 'people' may not be an appropriate word."

"The whole thing is incredible. So where is my daughter? In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean somewhere?"

"I hope not. Tell you what: I'll go and ask Achille Navet to help us."

"Achille Navet? Your grandmother's famous detective? How could he help us? Is he not just a character in novels?"

"Indeed he is, but she based him on a real detective, whose name and address she gave me before she disappeared."

"So she knew something might happen to her. Did she say: 'If something happens to me, go to him?'"

"Not at all. She said: 'If something happens to me don't go to him, but if something happens to you, go to him!'"

"She was a clever old lady, it seems to me. So are you going to Brussels?"

"The book character was Belgian. The real guy isn't. His name isn't Achille Navet either. I'm going to Rome."

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15. A narrow street near the Spanish Steps. The famous detective lives in a building which seems to have flown in from some past era on the wings of a time machine. Even the smell in the staircase has an antique rankness. My grandmother's friend is not at home. His lodger, a lady who may have known Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci (at least, she is as stooped and wrinkled as if she had known them), says something which I don't understand.

I don't know why all these foreigners refuse to speak English. As soon as this book is finished, they'll be able to learn the language of Shakespeare and Dickens.

"I shall send you a copy, Old Lady!" I tell the lodger.

She has found a taxi and gives instructions in gibberish to the driver. We move across the city and over the river and reach Saint Peter square, which I recognize because I've seen it so many times on television. Then the taxi drives straight into Vatican City.

I'm not really surprised. Emmeline has always associated with the strangest people. Will the world-famous Achille Navet turn out to be a Swiss guard? An Archbishop? The Pope himself?

One of the guards leads me along a richly decorated hallway to a tiny room, the door of which bears an inscription in Italian with a (truthful or not) translation into English: 'The Pope's Private Eye. Miracles investigated. Devils exorcised. Lost Saints traced.'

The person inside seems to be a priest in traditional garb. Achille Navet may have disguised himself once more, of course.

"Mr Adam?" he asks. "Emmeline has told me you would come here. The old girl knew everything in advance. She was clever. Devilishly clever, if I may say so. I miss her, I really do. I loved solving these crazy cases she invented for me. Where is she now? She brought some excitement into my life. Investigating miracles and tracing forgotten Saints is quite boring."

"What about exorcising Devils?"

"That's more fun, but it does not happen often."

"Are you a real priest?"

"Of course. Do you want to confess anything to me?"

This Is A Book

16. [...]

17. There is a tiny door behind his desk. I hadn't even noticed it. I follow him along a very dark and dank and damp passage, with flights of stairs going down every now and then.

I am glad that I am not a victim of the Holy Inquisition and that the prisons described by Piranese do not exist anymore.

After hours, or so it seems to me, we see a greenish glimmer in the distance and reach a kind of gigantic cellar. The lights take a greenish hue because they are reflected by an olympic-size swimming pool.

"This is the Pope's private pool", Achille Navet says. "He swims half a mile every morning before breakfast. We had never had such an athletic Pope."

"Wasn't he badly injured by that Turk? Can he still swim?"

"You bet he can. You see, this pool has healing properties..."

"You mean, holy water or something?"

"It is guaranteed to contain no less than five percent Lourdes water. Special tanks come directly from Lourdes by lorry every Tuesday."

I have a faint but very definite feeling that some readers are unhappy because I am joking about holy matters. My message to them is short and simple: Go to Hell!

What do they think they are? Daring to criticize a literary genius! If they don't like this novel, why don't they write one themselves? They can learn English by reading the Gospels, for all I care...

This raises the whole question of censorship, and I think that I must state my views as clearly as possible on that subject. To begin with, there is no...

I'll talk about censorship some other time. Right now, something strange is happening: the water in the Pope's swimming pool seems to be struck with a sudden panic. It jumps and fizzles and whirls, like the Red Sea before it parted in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*.

The water does part, or rather is parted by a long dark beast, which I mistake at first for a whale.

"The Pope's private submarine", Achille Navet says.

On its tail are engraved the following words, which I can read distinctly: "By Appointment to His Holiness The Pope, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Submarine Manufacturers".

This Is A Book

18. “There’s a hidden underground canal between the pool and the river”, Achille Navet says. “It was discovered by accident, I think. Built by the Romans, probably, as an aqueduct or sewer.”

“Or maybe catacombs full of skulls and ribs and shinbones... My grandmother would have loved it. She was always looking for places where you can get rid of bodies.”

“How to dispose of the body! That question fascinated her, and gave me numerous headaches, believe me.”

We crawl into the small submarine. It has to be small, otherwise it couldn’t pop up in the middle of a swimming pool, be it of olympic size. Let’s say it is one hundred feet long, which makes it smaller than your regular nuclear submarine, but bigger than most buses.

“This mission is so secret that we don’t even take a crew”, Achille Navet says. “I’ll drive the thing myself. This way, we’ll have some elbow room. You know what? I’ll let you have the Pope’s cabin!”

The Pope’s cabin is much bigger than the others. There’s room in it not only for a tiny bed or rather cot, but also for a tiny desk. When you want to write at the desk, you sit on the bed. Actually, you can’t really stand in the cabin; thus you don’t become tired or get varicose veins in your legs.

The other cabins don’t have beds, but only hammocks. I have never slept in a hammock. I have heard it said that some people find hammocks very comfortable, but, as I haven’t met one of these people face to face, I find it hard to believe. One thing I know: I am glad to sleep in the Pope’s own bed.

The kitchen and bathrooms seem to have been designed for a crew of dwarves. The Pope, of course, stays in his private cabin; the dwarves bring him food and take away his chamber pot.

While I am bracing myself for a journey which would be difficult even if I wasn’t as claustrophobic as I am, Achille Navet closes the latch and locks us in.

“The hard part of it is that I can’t smoke my pipe”, he says.

He heads for the control room. My anxiety is somewhat relieved when I see that he handles the various instruments, switches and levers like an old submarine hand.

[...]

This Is A Book

19. My first sea voyage was more comfortable. The main reason, of course, is that it was imaginary, so I didn't suffer from seasickness. The cabin, it is true, was smaller than the Pope's, but the sailboat didn't roll like the submarine.

Sailboats roll when there is no wind. Otherwise, they lean nicely to one side and stay there. I thought that a submarine didn't roll underwater, and was quite surprised to discover that it does. Besides, we didn't remain underwater for a very long time. As soon as we reached the sea, we floated on the waves like a regular boat.

"We're much slower underwater", Achille Navet says, "and burn more fuel, so we'll dive only when it's absolutely necessary."

It doesn't make much difference to me, since I am as sick in the sea as on the sea. What I don't like is that you can't vomit overboard underwater. More often than not, the Pope's chamber pot comes in handy.

At times, Achille Navet's carefulness seems excessive to me. He dives underwater whenever he sees another boat, an airplane, an island, the Rock of Gibraltar, the shadow of a cloud.

I said something stupid, which I intended as a joke:

"If you're afraid to be seen, you should never come to the surface, since the spy satellites can photograph a mole on your nose."

"There's no mole on my nose", he says. "Hell, I hadn't given a thought to all these bloody satellites. You're right, I guess. Let's duck."

So now we're locked up for good in our tin can; cut from the outside world altogether. We can't listen to Radio Vatican anymore. Is it day or night? I must trust my watch for the answer. I hope it won't stop. It is one of these mock Cartier from Taiwan. Not only does it cost twenty times less than the real thing, but it has a much more precise Japanese quartz movement.

Japanese cars or televisions or watches never break down. So whenever something goes wrong in this yellow submarine, Achille Navet suspects foul play by Evil forces.

"*They've jinxed our automatic gyroscope*", he says. "I'll try an exorcism."

The gyroscope refuses to be exorcised, so we bob to the surface where we can get an old-fashioned sextant reading. Achille Navet is so busy locating the magnetic North Pole that he doesn't see a tiny sailboat approaching us.

"Ahoy there", a voice shouts.

This Is A Book

20. “Chang!”, I say.

“God bless you”, Achille Navet says.

He knows perfectly well that I didn’t sneeze, but he can’t help showing off his popish sense of humor.

“It’s my friend Mr Chang”, I explain.

“Me not youl fliend”, the little old Chinaman says. “Me nevel seen you. And my name not Chang, but Wang!”

“Oh, I’m sorry... Anybody can make a mistake, I guess. I had met a Mr Chang in a dream, you see, and he looked remarkably like you... He sailed around the world on a boat called Red Spring, or something...”

“Led Sling communist name. Me Chinaman ffrom Taiwan. My boat named Misty Livel.”

“Mister Libel?”, Achille Navet asks.

“Mystic Label?”, I ask.

“Misty Livel”, Mr Wang repeats.

We both look at his boat’s prow, which bears the name “Misty River”.

“Mystic Libel was better”, Achille Navet says.

“You make sextant leading all wlong”, the Chinaman remarks.

“Why don’t you show me how to do it?”, Achille Navet suggests.

“Sule, give it to me”, Mr Chang says. I don’t know why he wants us to call him Wang. He is Chang all right. He doesn’t trust Achille Navet, that’s why he gave a false name.

The Irish priest-detective doesn’t trust the Chinaman either.

“Did you notice that his pronunciation is somewhat faulty?”, he asks me sotto voce while the little man is busy with the sextant.

“I could hardly fail to notice it.”

“Wouldn’t you say he gurgles, sort of? I’ll try to exorcise him.”

“Are you crazy? Mr Chang is no dolphin. Why don’t you try to exorcise the gyroscope some more? Your talent would be better employed, I think.”

“You seem to be very intent on protecting this slant-eyed centenarian. I wonder whether something fishy hasn’t taken possession of you too.”

“Actually, I have never been exorcised in my whole life. Does it hurt?”

This Is A Book

21. I have completed twenty pages. I could rejoice and boast and take a break and call Solveig. But I don't want to lose any time. I'm anxious to know what happens in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

This is a turning point in my story. I must decide whether Wang is Chang or Wang.

If Wang is Chang, there are two possibilities. Either he knows me or not. It could be that I dreamed about him and made him a character in my book without his knowledge. Then, when I called him by his name, he was surprised and thought it wise to deny it.

Or I could suppose that while I dreamed about him, he dreamed about me. When dolphins from another planet begin to speak and kidnap little girls, anything can happen. So maybe he knew that I knew him as Chang, but he didn't want Achille Navet to know.

However, I can't discount the hypothesis that Wang is Wang, and knows nothing about the Chang in my dream. It would make the story less interesting, though.

What I would like to do is discuss the Dragon King and the armor fish and the monkey with the Chinaman. I can imagine what he would say: "This no Chinese stoly, this Japanese stoly..." Where would I stand then? Is Chang bluffing again because he wants me to believe he is Wang? Can Wang be a real Chinaman if he has never heard of the Dragon King?

While I was lost in these complex thoughts, things were happening in mid-Atlantic. A sudden noise startled me: "Why the Devil..." Achille Navet shouted. I could see that Mystic Libel was sailing away.

"The little punk has stolen our sextant", the Pope's private detective complained.

"What happened?" I asked him.

"When I tried to exorcise the Chink, he became angry and bolted. Obviously, he knew I had found him out. I mean, the creature in him knew I has found it out. I can tell you it was no inexperienced young Demon, but an old wizened one. Perhaps Beelzebub himself! Let's follow the boat and have some fun. Ha ha, I have a good mind to put a little torpedo into it..."

"You're crazy. Beelzebub indeed! You must have scared the little guy to death with your antics."

"Just the regular exorcisms out of the book..."

"No Chinaman likes to be exorcised. And what was this about torpedoes? Does the Pope's submarine have torpedoes?"

"Well... Hmm... That is, I was joking, of course."

"Of course."

This Is A Book

22. The sailboat vanished into the mist, which was to be expected considering its name; so the crazy skipper of the Pope's private submarine didn't have a chance to test his torpedoes.

Wang wasn't Chang after all. Meeting him didn't add anything to this story, really. The whole episode is like a loose thread in an otherwise nicely woven fabric. I hope the readers will forgive me. I just can't help it. I wanted Wang to be Chang and to play a leading role in my novel, but my inspiration took the better of me and decided that he would leave us stranded in the middle of the Ocean without a sextant.

"Our case isn't really hopeless", Navet said. "We can start the gyroscope again."

"So what's the big problem?"

"The gyroscope stopped between our starting point and here, so we can't get an absolute reading. But if only we knew where we were, we could start it again from there and still find your Atlantis."

"Let me think... If we get Greenwich time on our radio and compare it to the solar time at sunrise or sunset, we can know our longitude. If we measure the elevation of the sun above the horizon at noon, we can know our latitude. We can make a rough sextant with a cardboard, can't we?"

"Implementing your plan would mean staying here, without moving, for at least two days. I hate to leave the little girl in the hands of these dolphins for two more days..."

"Dolphins have no hands, you know."

Precisely as I was stating this obvious truth, a dolphin jumped over the waves in front of us. It certainly had no hands, but I had a strange feeling that it was beckoning us. It was as if it whistled directly into my head. I understood clearly what it said: "Follow me, fellows" (or something). Navet didn't hear anything. He wouldn't believe me at first, but he could see that I wasn't kidding.

"And why not?" he said. "It may even be your confounded Chinaman, come back under another guise. He'll take us to their leader all right."

The dolphin was fast. From time to time, it slowed down and waited for us. According to my companion, who read it on the gyroscope, our clever guide moved along a perfect orthodromia.

"If it trusted only its magnetic instinct or brain compass or whatever, it would follow a loxodromia", Achille Navet said.

(I'll have to ask Solveig to check this loxodromia and orthodromia stuff with some professional sailor. I wonder what it means.)

This Is A Book

23. Well, after a while the dolphin stopped. We didn't expect our sleek guide to lead us around the world, anyway. Where are we? Is this Seventeen and Fifteen again? I look around to see if I recognize the place, but the waves just have their ordinary wavy appearance, which doesn't help much.

Actually, I am very bad at recognizing places and people. I know that some neighbors complained to my landlady about me. I am very rude, they whine; never say Hello to them when I meet them in the street in front of our apartment house. But in fact, I don't recognize them when I see them; that's why I don't say Hello. Also, I never know whether I have already seen an old film or not. This is a useful foible: I can enjoy a film several times as if it was new to me.

So what would you have done? We dove, of course. The palace was there, with its pearls and coral and mother-of-pearl and sea-weed. Since I had already seen it once, I wasn't surprised at all.

Achille Navet also tried, very hard, not to be surprised. He probably thinks that if he keeps cool in all circumstances, people will mistake him for a gentleman, or compare him to Sherlock Holmes. But the splendor around us was too much for him.

"Oh!" he said. Then: "Ha!" and "Wow!" and "Damn!" and "Gee!"

We parked our vehicle in the garage of the underwater palace. Dressed in our best wet suits, we proceeded to the main hall, where several dolphins disguised as human beings were waiting for us.

"Welcome to Atlantis", one of them said. "Our Queen wants to meet you."

"Wait a minute, you cod-liver-oil Devil!" Achille Navet shouted.

Although I was looking in fascination at the creatures from another Galaxy, I could see in the corner of my eye that the popish jerk was gesticulating like a teenager at his first dance party.

I suddenly understood what it meant: he was trying to exorcise the dolphins.

"Will you stop this foolishness!", I ordered.

But it was too late. A dolphin which still looked like a dolphin (the one we had followed, I think) gobbled the famous Achille Navet and seemed to *become* him. He then joined the other human-looking dolphins and they swam away, while the palace became strangely fuzzy and disappeared altogether.

I was left alone on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, near the Pope's own private submarine.

This Is A Book

24. This is a ridiculous situation, I thought. I don't even know whether it is safer to go back into the submarine or to swim to the surface of the ocean and float there until Chang or Wang or whoever passes by.

I can't even drive a car, so how could I drive a submarine?

What an imagination! I mean, neither my grandmother nor Alfred Hitchcock ever put a hero in such a scary spot. The question is, of course: How shall I get myself out of it?

The best thing to do is to take a good night's sleep, and see what's written on my spiral notebook in the morning. So after stepping into the submarine, closing the hatch, pumping the water out of the flooding chamber, taking off my wet suit, cooking some frozen green peas in the microwave oven, eating a double serving of strawberry ice-cream, I go to sleep in the Pope's own bed as peacefully as a newborn baby.

I hoped that the dolphins would whistle into my dreams a way out of this mess. But when I wake up, I discover that the page of my notebook is quite blank.

I drift into the control room. This place reminds me of the Space Shuttle. I mean, I imagine that the control room of the Space Shuttle looks like this. The guys who pilot these modern machines have been trained for years... The only apparatus I understand is the small computer, because Achille Navet has shown me how to play games with it, as a way to relieve the boredom of a long sea-journey.

It can play checkers and chess and backgammon and blackjack. And also, so-called Adventure Games, with dungeons and dragons and hidden treasures. When you make a mistake in an Adventure Game, you reach a dead-end and must retrace your steps to the last turning-point of faulty decision. Sometimes, you discover your mistake too late and the dragon gobbles you. "You're dead", the computer then says. You've got to start the game all over again.

In real life, you can't start again when you're dead. So I'd better be real careful.

Funny how this plot resembles an Adventure Game. Achille Navet made a fatal mistake, but I can get a second chance if I find a way to retrace my steps.

At least he isn't here to bother me when I play with the computer. He was always interrupting me because he kept asking the electronic wizard what to do next with the submarine.

This Is A Book

25. What do I do next? I ask the computer what to do next, of course. If Achille Navet did it, I'll do it too.

This takes some fumbling at first. The electronic idiot misunderstands the simplest questions. When I ask him: "How do I get out of this mess?", he answers: "To get out of submarine, put on wet suit, then open inside hatch, etc."

It means that I must be more precise. "How do I start the Submarine?" seems easy enough, but the dumb silicon chips don't understand even that. "How start what?" they ask. After trying How start Vessel, Ship, U-boat, Thing, Pope's Tin can, and various other misses, I find that the right question is: "How start Engine?"

The mock brain tells me how to, and here we go.

I've done a very clever thing: I've put the gyroscope on the right track by tuning it to Fifteen and Seventeen. So now it will give absolute readings and take me back to the Vatican, where the story began to turn sour.

Actually, this submarine should know its way home like any faithful horse or dog or pigeon. All I've got to tell the computer is: "Go find your Master", and it will compute the shortest orthodromic way to wherever the Pope resides.

They say that homing pigeons have got a biological compass inside their tiny head. If the compass fails, they can take a reading of their position with their biological sextant. But nobody has postulated a biological gyroscope yet. It could exist, though, with all these spinning electrons inside the billions of atoms and molecules of our brain.

If I found a biological gyroscope, I would stand a good chance of getting a Nobel Prize in physics or medicine. I wonder whether Nobel Prizes in physics or medicine are not easier to get than in literature.

This trip wasn't a complete failure. I've learnt that the dolphins from outer space call their underwater palace Atlantis, and that they have a Queen. If this Atlantis is the one mentioned by Plato, it means that these extra-terrestrial beings have been on Earth, or visited Earth, for several thousand years.

But why did they start their public relations campaign toward earthlings only now?

This Is A Book

[...]

26. This voyage is even more boring than the first one. I miss Achille Navet and his antics, and spend a lot of time with the only other intelligent mind in the boat: the computer's.

I have moved ahead some in the main Adventure Game. I have solved the riddle of the path in the forest and the old woman gave me the magic flute. The entrance to the pyramid was well hidden, but I had lots of time and eventually I found it. Now I'm inside the pyramid, in front of a door, and I know that behind that door is the secret chamber with the treasure. I've tried all the other doors in the room, fallen in traps, met dragons and snakes, and died quite a few times.

Achille Navet had given me a clue before he vanished: I must carry the vase from the left pillar to the right pillar. It is an enormous vase, and I can't carry it unless I drop all my goods except my life pills. That is, I can carry it down from the left pillar, but I haven't found a way to raise it onto the right one. If I drop the life pills, I can carry the vase for a few seconds, but it crushes me under its weight and I die.

I'm supposed to have a native servant in this adventure. I'm sure he could help me to carry the vase, but so far he hasn't answered my summons.

I'd be glad to have a native servant, or just anybody, in this submarine. I'd be glad to have life pills, too, and the possibility to start again when I die. In fact, I'd rather be a character in a computer Adventure Game than in a novel.

Now and then, the submarine seizes control of the computer and interrupts my game. "Strong Headwind Big Waves Recommend Diving", it says. "Okay, Man, let's", I answer. I can say anything as long as I include words like Okay, All right, Yes, or No, Don't, Can't. The microprocessors won't take: "Do as you like, Baby" for an answer.

Although I look frequently through the portholes, I don't see any dolphin. Sometimes, through the periscope, I see a tanker or an aircraft carrier or some sailboat racing across the Ocean. The submarine is programmed to dive as soon as another boat is spotted. If I want to breathe on the deck, I must disconnect this program, otherwise the submarine could dive without me.

The program was disconnected when we met Chang a.k.a. Wang. I wonder where he is now. Is it possible that he really didn't know the story of the Dragon King and the Monkey and the Jellyfish?

This Is A Book

27. Who is waiting for me when the submarine slowly emerges in the Pope's own private swimming pool? Achille Navet, of course.

I am not surprised at all. He probably swam here directly, with his brand new dolphin swiftness. I know what his speech is going to sound like.

"Welcome back", he says, "to Vatican City. We knew you'd make it. The false me didn't fool you."

I notice that he avoids the letter r altogether. A clever ploy to hide his gurgling. What's this about a false me?

"Do you mean to say that the guy I traveled with wasn't you?"

"Obviously he wasn't, since I stayed in Vatican City all the time. He was one of these dolphins."

"He did turn into a dolphin in the end, but he didn't look like one in the beginning. How do I know that he was a false you? Maybe he was a true you, I mean a true him, and you are a false you or him or whatever. I'm all mixed up. Anyway, you could be a dolphin yourself, couldn't you?"

"I could, but I am not."

"Then why do you avoid the letter r? Could you tell me the months when to eat oysters?"

"Well, Septembel and Octobel and Novembel and Decembel and Janualy and Feblually and Malch and Aplil. I do find it difficult to plonounce this lettell, but it plecisely ploves that I am the leal me. The false me copied evelything about me, except this defect, because he didn't want you to suspect him."

"So you want me to believe that the guy who didn't speak like a dolphin was one, whereas the guy who does speak like a dolphin isn't. This is the kind of paradox which my grandmother used to relish."

"Plecisely. Youl glandmothel's famous passion fol paladoxes ploves that she was no oldinaly human being."

"You mean, she was one of them from the beginning? The great Emmeline J. Adam a dolphin? I'm trying to remember whether she gurgled at all when she spoke... Maybe you're right. She was a strange old lady indeed. The next thing you're going to tell me is that she is the Queen of Atlantis whom the dolphins mentioned!"

"Plecisely."

This Is A Book

28. The new Achille Navet wanted to enter the submarine, put the engine into rear shift and go back to Fifteen Seventeen right away. He seems to be as crazy as his late twin.

“Gimme a break, Man”, I said. “I haven’t even washed properly for three weeks. Is there a decent bathtub somewhere around this joint?”

“You could use the Pope’s own private bathroom. He’s in Bostwana until next Monday.”

I can’t write anything about my bath in the Pope’s own private bathroom in this book, because I have sold the story to the Daily Mail. They insisted on owning exclusive rights worldwide. Solveig acted as my agent, and received twenty-five percent of the take.

One thing I can reveal is that the whole episode was quite short, because Achille Navet II kept banging on the door.

“Please hully up, Mistel Adam”, he said. “The kidnapped child is clying fol its mothel.”

I couldn’t even dry my head properly. The Pope must have taken his hair dryer with him to Bostwana. I hope I don’t catch a cold. When I’ve got a cold, my claustrophobia increases.

Before getting lost at sea again, I called Solveig on the Pope’s own private phone.

“My husband is in Rome”, she said. “You should go to the Bank and see him.”

“I don’t have time, really. I’m looking for Atlantis, you know.”

“Atlantis? Plato’s Atlantis?”

“Don’t ask me whose Atlantis. Some kind of underwater kingdom, anyway.”

“Speaking of underwater kingdom, do you remember this Chinese story you included in your book?”

“Of course I remember. The Dragon King and the Jellyfish and the Monkey. What about it?”

“Are you sure it’s Chinese?”

“Well, actually, it may be Japanese.”

“I’ve got news for you: it’s a Jewish folk tale. We’re publishing an anthology of Jewish folklore which includes this story. The King is called Leviathan, otherwise it’s quite similar to your version.”

“This may be a new trick of the dolphins. They’re damn clever.”

This Is A Book

29. In fact, this queer coincidence can be explained without any dolphin at all. The original story is probably neither Jewish nor Japanese but Indian. Monkeys do play a prominent role in Indian mythology. The story drifted from India to China and Japan with Buddhism, and to the Middle East with the troops of Alexander the Great.

Tracing such a tale through epochs and countries could tell us a lot about ancient civilizations and history. It would be an interesting subject for a thesis or a big fat book published by some University Press. It wouldn't lead to a Nobel Prize, though, because they don't give Nobel Prizes in ethnology or history, which is somewhat unfair when you think about it.

It could also be, of course, that the dolphins were already active three thousand years ago. Plato heard about their kingdom and called it Atlantis, Jonas described a mysterious underwater power to the Jews and called it Leviathan, some Japanese fishermen saw a Dragon King and his palace.

The Japanese fishermen can't have seen the palace at Fifteen and Seventeen. Maybe there are other palaces. Maybe the palace can be moved from one place to another: I did see it vanish altogether.

Although I don't really trust Achille Navet the second, I don't think that it makes any difference whether I discuss the vanishing palace with him or not. He probably knows more about it than I do. He is a perfect pilot, and heads straight toward our destination without even consulting the computer, as if some sixth sense guided him.

The monotony of our trip is relieved by our meeting the famous flying Chinaman, who answers alternatively to the names of Chang and Wang. It's Chang again this time.

"I couldn't give my true name last time", he says. "Couldn't trust this man who was with you."

"But he is with me again. Do you trust him now?"

"Not same same man. Now trust."

At least Achille Achille doesn't try to exorcise poor Mr Chang.

"Do you know a story about a Dragon King and a Jellyfish and a Monkey?", I ask him.

"When King angry, he pulls bones out of pool fool's body!"

A terrible idea suddenly strikes me: that's precisely what happened to Achille Navet number one.

This Is A Book

[...]

30. Something is wrong with my typewriter. I wonder whether this happens often to the Duke of Edinburgh. The stubborn machine refuses to type a consonant.

Chinamen and dorphins can't pronounce r, but now I am deprived of what I used instead of r. Precisery, what stand between k and m. I can turn the dorphins' trick on its head and repace this missing retter with r, untir someone from Orivetti comes and repairs the broody typewriter.

To return to my narrative.

This second submarine trip was a bit of a strain on my nerves, because I kept trying to discover Navet's true identity. Was he indeed Navet, or was he a dorphin pretending to be Navet?

For instance, I didn't know how to interpret his skirr (this double r stands for twice the other retter) at computer games. He found the path in the forest and the magic frute right away, and avoided the various dragons inside the pyramid as if he rearry had a sixth sense. Maybe he retained the memories of Navet number one, who knew his way through the game because we had spent so much time on it. Or he was the true Navet and simpry demonstrated the interrigece which had made him the most famous detective this side of Sherrock Hormes. It could arso be that, to a dorphin's superbrain, these computer Adventure Games are as easy as two prus two is four.

However, I was astonished when he opened the secret door without so much as a wink, entered the treasure chamber and seized the sacred knife. It was very easy. He just...

No, I'd better not. You joyous taxpayers wourd be angry if I gave away the answer and ruined your own game.

So he drove the submarine without ever asking the computer for advice, and reached Fifteen and Seventeen without any detour or misshap. We dove, put on our wet suits, etc.

The parace was there again with the corar, the mother-of-pearr, the sea-weeds. I had seen it vanish with my own eyes. How was that possibre? Was it an irrusion? Some kind of horographic decoy, produced with raser beams? I tried to touch the warrs, to check whether they were as sorid as they rooked, but a strong invisibre force kept me from approaching them.

This same strange force kept me from rooking at Navet, who swam swiftry at my side. Did he breathe oxygen from his bottre or not?

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31. And now, another retter prays truant. A vower easy to spot because of a dot. To repace yt, y wyrr do nycery, and why not?

The person from Oryvetty was supposed to come yesterday. How annoyng that they never come when they say they come! They wourdn't keep the Duke waytyng, but he ys the onry exceptyon to the rure.

"The Queen ys waytyng for you", a dorphyn sayd.

Some other dorphyns danced a ryttre aquatyc barret on Haender's Water Musyc, whych theyr fryends whystred yn the background.

"Ys the Queen my grandmother?", Y asked one of them.

He shrugged hys shourders, or so yt seemed to me. As everybody knows, dorphyns don't have shourders, whych means that my mynd wasn't very crear. Thys dorphyn's strange face remynded me of someone. Y stared at hys armond-shaped eyes, and suddenry Y recognyzed hym: Chang the Wang!

So hys bones have been purred out of hys body and now he ys a shape, a shadow, an optycar irrusion... Ys thys to be my destyny too? The transformatyon myght have yts preasant syde: Y wourd perhaps become more or res ymmortar, and swym around the Grobe wyth the other dorphyns.

Arthouh Y courdn't touch the parace, Y tryed to touch my own body and veryfy that yt was styrr made of soryd matter. But even thys was apparentry ympossybre.

Achirre Navet seemed to be okay, but the oxygen, Y thynk yt must have been the oxygen, was makyng me very dzyzy. Warkyng strayght taxed my strength to the utmost. Or maybe yt was because of the two myssyng retters. Theyr absence weakened me and dymynyshed the sharpness of my senses. Y courdn't see the corar and the mother-of-pearr and the seaweed anymore, as yf the parace had receded yn the dystance. But Y dyd see the Queen. Crose enough to be stunned by her syght, because she was... she was...

Y must have dropped my ryfe pyrrs somewhere, because Y fert that the remaynyn retters were oozyng away and that my mynd was becomyn a totar brank.

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[...]

39. I woke up in my bed at home. A woman was there, and it took me a few minutes to recognize Solveig. There was also a man, whom I didn't know.

"I repaired your typewriter", he said.

How did I come back home? Was the whole episode a mere dream? Who let in the Olivetti man?

"These electric portables are not very strong", he went on. "They're okay as long as you just want to type your mail, but you shouldn't type for more than an hour at a time."

"What if I write a lot of mail, say twenty letters a day?"

"Now you can use all twenty-six letters. The l and the i had jammed, and then some others. At least a third of the alphabet was out of order. Are you a professional writer?"

"My name is Donald J. Adam. I am quite famous; I mean, in some circles. But I can't write novels with only two thirds of the alphabet, or even with only twenty-four letters."

"Well, don't worry anymore. See: abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz. Able Abe caught a fresh cod. Jim licked Mick. If you want to rest, take a quick nap. The bee buzzes in the box: it's alive."

Is this a secret message? What does a cod stand for in the dolphins' code? Who's Jim? Where's this buzzing box? This Olivetti guy must be a colleague of Achille Navet and Achille Navet: a Vatican sleuth or undercover exorciser or whatever.

"Has the Pope come back from Botswana?" I asked him.

"How should I know? What are you talking about? Is the man sick?"

"He just woke up after several days of coma", Solveig said. "You can't expect him to make sense right away. Being able to use his typewriter will help him recover faster."

"But please tell him to take it easy. If he works too much, letters will jam again."

"That's what the doctor also says. His mind snapped under excessive stress, it seems."

"One hour at a time is all right."

"He just won't stop, you know. Once he is in the mood, he'll go on and on. Most writers are like that. They're so terrified of writer's block that they'll cover pages just to hedge against lack of inspiration."

"Tell him that the tiny machine is fragile."

I sense that some readers are complaining about the logic of my tale. Was I working on my faulty typewriter at home or at sea? If I was at sea, why did the Olivetti man go to my home? My answer to them is that this book is just a string

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of whimsical sentences for people who want to learn English without too much pain. If they want an airtight plot, let them read *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

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40. The horrible fellow went away, and I was left alone with Solveig. I looked at her, but I couldn't see her well, as if there was something wrong with my eyes. Her features were blurred, and I felt that I had better not try to touch her. Obviously, I had been through something (but what?) which had operated changes within my sense of perception, not to say anything about my sense of balance.

"How did I come back here?" I asked Solveig.

"My husband brought you."

"Your husband? What's he got to do with this story?"

"He found you in Rome. That is, some priests in the Vatican found you. They wanted to take a swim in the Pope's swimming pool, since the Pope was in Belize, and there you were."

"In the Pope's swimming pool? In the submarine? What about the detective?"

"Please keep quiet, Don. The doctor said you must not talk too much. My husband said nothing about a submarine and a detective. You were lying in a rubber raft, unconscious. Nobody could understand how you had reached the Pope's swimming pool without being seen by the Swiss guards, especially with a rubber raft on your back. What was the point in paddling around the Pope's pool, anyway? The Vatican doctors thought you were crazy, but they had to admit that you had done at least one very clever thing."

"What was that?"

"Well, you found my daughter! All the Police in Europe had been looking for her in vain."

"I thought you didn't want to tell the police."

"After a while, I had to, since you had disappeared at sea. I was afraid my husband would notice her absence. Whenever he called, I asked the remaining twin to play her sister on the phone, but I couldn't expect him to stay in Rome forever."

"Do you know who is who, now?"

"The strangest thing is that I don't. The twin who remained at home changed her mind about her name every other day. 'I'm Ingrid', she'd say and then, 'I'm Sigrid'. The twin who came back liked this game, so now whenever one says 'I'm Ingrid', the other one says 'I'm Sigrid', and I can't distinguish them anymore."

"That is very strange indeed. But tell me one thing: where did I find her?"

"*You* tell me. She was in the rubber raft with you."

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41. “So what did your husband say when he learned that I was cruising with his daughter in the Pope’s swimming pool?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why don’t you ask him? I would like to ask him a few questions myself, actually, about a certain detective.”

“We can’t ask him anything. He’s gone.”

“Back to Rome? Germany? The man seems to be travelling all the time.”

“He’s gone for good. He’s in the middle of the sea somewhere.”

“In the middle of... Oh my God... Don’t tell me he’s looking for Fifteen and Seventeen too...”

“Oh no, this has nothing to do with your story. You see, there was trouble at his bank. Didn’t you read the papers?... I’m being silly: of course you didn’t. Anyway, his boss hanged himself under a London bridge, and the Vatican bank was involved, and there was a secret account in Zurich and a Holding company in Luxembourg. It seems that a private investigator working for the Vatican...”

“I think I know the man.”

“... found a bunch of companies set up by the Vatican’s bank and by my husband’s in Panama or someplace. The subsidiary of my husband’s bank in Peru lent money to the companies in Panama, and these companies tried to get control of the main Italian evening paper for a mysterious group of people...”

“...who had a queer speech defect.”

“Neither the papers nor my husband mentioned a speech defect. You’re letting yourself be carried away by your story.”

“I guess you’re right. So they didn’t have a speech defect...”

“Maybe they had. How should I know? Anyway, my husband told me that things were getting hot for him in various countries in Europe and South America. He hasn’t done anything wrong, of course, but maybe he knows too much about some deals. Just before his boss hanged himself, or was hanged, in London, my husband borrowed his yacht and sailed toward an unknown destination. He said that the people who kidnapped our daughter were obviously after him, but that if he disappeared they would have to let us alone. He seemed to admire you for finding her, and told me to trust you absolutely.”

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42. So Solveig trusts me absolutely. But do I trust her?

Since my mysterious return from mid-Atlantic in a comatose state, my relationship with reality has altered. What happened? What role did Solveig's husband play? How did her daughter jump into my rubber raft? Is Solveig hiding anything from me?

I look at her, but I still can't see her well. It is a question of focus, really. I can't seem to focus properly on her. The Olivetti repairman was much sharper, for instance.

What's really very strange is that now I can distinguish the two twins (who came with their mother on the following day), whereas Solveig can't anymore. The one who was with me in the rubber raft is sharp; the other one is fuzzy. The Police asked the sharp one about the kidnapping; Solveig asked her; I asked her. She says that she doesn't remember.

But when I watch her, I see a kind of power about her, and I feel that she knows more than she says.

I wonder what happened to Achille the second. I guess he returned to his natural dolphin state. Is the little girl a dolphin? That would explain how she got into the rubber raft. When I ask her where the submarine is, she pretends not to understand, but I see a mischievous light in her eyes.

I am sure that if I could remember what the Queen of Atlantis looked like, I would understand a lot of things about this story. Has anybody found a remedy against amnesia? I don't even remember the features of the Achille Navets or Mr Chang. If my life depended on my drawing a rough picture of the coral palace, I could not do it.

The dolphins must have erased part of my memory. This proves how advanced their science is. They probably control everything on this planet, including Italian evening papers. They do need me, though, for some odd reason, or they wouldn't have tried to bring me to their Queen thrice. Is it because I am Emmeline J. Adam's grandnephew? I wish I was strong enough to see their Queen face to face rather than faint in front of her. I should practice Yoga and relaxation, I think. But I am not sure that you can breathe like a yogi out of an oxygen bottle.

For a start, I should try to control my nerves when I look at Solveig, in order to focus precisely on her.

Did the Queen look like her? I stare at Solveig and dig into my memory for a picture of the Queen. Through a small opening in the cloudy sky of my brain, I get a sudden glimpse of... a familiar face... yes... but...

I faint again.

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43. There's a problem with this story. In an Adventure Game, you follow a path and come to a cul-de-sac and retrace your steps and start again and again and again. But you can't do that in a novel because the reader will refuse to read the same story again and again and again.

I once knew a girl in New York City, named Cathy Caine, who had seen *Gone with the Wind* thirteen times. What was really amazing is that she cried every time.

Beethoven wrote thirty-three variations on a single theme given by Diabelli, so I could try to describe thirty-three different trips to Fifteen and Seventeen. It is true, alas, that most people prefer disco music to Beethoven's *Diabelli Veränderungen*.

Just once more, all right? I do want to see that Queen, not to mention Chang and my grandmother and the various Achille Navets who swim at the bottom of the Ocean.

I am sure that the little girl saw the Queen, or at least learned something vital, wherever she was. When I look into her eyes, I feel that things hidden since the beginning of time have been revealed to her. I long for this enlightenment; I know that as a genius I deserve it more than anybody else.

Solveig is unhappy about her daughter's return. She says that she has lost her personality and become a clone of her sister. She hates not being able to distinguish them. Since I seem to know which one was kidnapped, Solveig wants me to take her along to Fifteen and Seventeen and find a way to transform her into her former self.

I buy a tiny wet suit and tiny goggles and oxygen bottles. I can't charter a submarine, of course, and still don't know how to sail a boat. I did it only once, and besides it was a dream.

With the kid in tow, I go to the docks every day and try to convince skippers to take us along.

"Her father was involved in the famous Bank scandal", I tell them. "He is hiding at sea somewhere. Poor Singrid (I can't call her anything else) would like to find him. Do you sail to Bermudas or Canaries or Asuncion, by any chance?"

What we do is quite similar to hitch-hiking. I guess we could call it hitch-sailing.

Supertankers can't go through the Suez canal. To reach the Persian Gulf, they sail around Africa. One of them accepts to drop us at Fifteen and Seventeen.

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[...]

45. This could have been a case for Achille Navet: *The Vanishing Tanker*.

Ships do disappear sometimes, and Lloyd's of London looks for them in Panama, where after a facelift and a change of name they try to begin a new life. But the "Shell Explorer" was never found. The crew did reach Panama, I guess, by way of Senegal and Brazil, and *they* had facelifts and changed names rather than face the Lloyd's detectives.

They abandoned ship a few days after we left the Canaries. A fire had started in the engine room, and in their panic they simply jumped into the life-rafts without giving us a thought. The readers who want to know what went through their heads are referred to Conrad's *Lord Jim*.

This happened in the middle of the night. When Singrid and I woke up, we discovered that we were alone. Smoke was still coming out of the engine room, but the fire itself had died peacefully. We explored the Explorer and found that it could as well have been named the Exploder: the tanks were full of explosives and arms, which were to be sold, as some letters we read indicated, to Mozambique rebels.

The explosive cargo explained the haste of the crew as well as its later reluctance to talk to Lloyd's. Using empty tankers to smuggle arms must be very lucrative, but if you don't deliver the goods, you're in trouble. Your clients suspect you of trying to double-cross them, and they're somewhat tougher than Lloyd's.

Anyway, there I was again, in a ludicrous mid-Atlantic situation.

"Don't worry", Singrid said, "I'll help you."

Sure. The people who pilot these behemoths spend months training on mock-ups and simulators. You don't maneuver a twelve-hundred-foot five-hundred-thousand-ton monster like a Volkswagen. Also, the fire has apparently destroyed a few carburetors or whatever.

There is a computer in the control room, but it doesn't look like the Pope's.

The engines have stopped, and we are drifting, and this isn't the best way to reach Fifteen and Seventeen.

I try to obey Singrid and not worry, lest she worry herself, but I'm afraid we're in a dreadful mess. I mean, I've put her in a mess. I feel awfully guilty.

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46. “Ahoy thele!” a familiar voice shouts.

There’s a loop in this program? I always come back to the same spot, whatever the beginning. My grandmother’s plots were less clumsy, not to say anything about Alfred Hitchcock’s movies.

But then, I am delighted to see Chang again. Just when we need him, really.

Singrid doesn’t seem to be surprised by his sudden appearance, and actually I’m not surprised that she’s not surprised. She knows more than she shows. Smart kid.

“Hello Boss”, Chang says as he climbs aboard.

He heads right away toward the engine room, although there’s no more smoke to signal it as the source of our troubles.

“Small pblem”, he says. “Easy solve. Gimme sclewdlivel.”

I stare at him blankly.

“He wants a screwdriver”, Singrid says.

Kids have a knack with foreign languages, that’s a well-known fact. With Singrid acting as an interpreter, I am able to hand Chang the [*note to the reader: you can skip this list unless you want to repair a supertanker*] bolts, adze, handdrill, wrench, monkey-wrench, box-spanner, plane, file, crow-bar, pliers, pincers and soldering iron which he requests.

Now and then, I get a strange feeling that Singrid understands Chang too well. I look at her from the corner of my eye when they are talking behind my back. Is he perhaps obeying her? Whom was he addressing when he said “Hello Boss”?

Easy solve will take days, obviously. It would have been simpler to sail to Fifteen and Seventeen in Chang’s sailboat.

“Bettel to lepail this tankel”, the Chinaman or Chinese dolphin or whatever says. Captain gone so now belong to you and me. Gleast value. Sell guns to Mozambique Goveinment, fight guelillas.”

So he seems to be a communist Chinese again. I’m sure he remembers the story of the armor fish quite well now.

“What about the Dragon King?” I ask him.

“What about a Dlagon Queen?” he jokes.

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47. When we reached Fifteen and Seventeen, Chang gave us his sailboat, which we had towed all along.

“I take alms to Mozambique”, he said. “See you next time”.

We took our wet suits, and some food to supplement the soy and bamboo shoots which the Red Dawn contained. That Singrid swam very gracefully didn't surprise me at all. Solveig had told me several times that her twins studied water ballet.

My standing with the dolphins must have improved since last time. Hundreds of them were singing and dancing for us in front of the underwater palace.

From the main palace door, my grandmother beckons to me.

“Come in, Donald J.” she says. “We hope you're ready this time.”

I remember Little Nemo, who had such a hard time reaching the Princess of Slumberland. Every time he got close, he woke up and found it had been a dream.

Of course, once you've found your Princess or Queen, you sometimes get stuck in strange situations. If she's two thousand years old like the *She* of H. Rider Haggard, or only two hundred like the girl in *Lost Horizons*, you suddenly feel like a baby in diapers.

Shall I want to return to Civilization after tasting the pleasures of Atlantis and maybe being offered immortality? I can already imagine myself swimming along the Gulf Stream and visiting the atolls in the Pacific Ocean and exploring the Northwest Passage.

Is there another secret passage? These dolphins probably go back to their home planet from time to time.

I guess that Singrid will become a tiny dolphin, and that her father has already lost his hair and traded his hands for fins. We'll then find a way to bring in Solveig and her other daughter.

What I want to know is whether the Pope is one of them. It would be interesting to reconsider History and track the interventions of Atlantis. Who was Jesus? Did Joan of Arc hallucinate? Who discovered America? I'm sure my grandmother will explain everything to me.

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48. Well, she did explain everything.

What the famous Big Bang was all about. How the gravitational force came into action, and the strong interaction and the weak interaction, then the electromagnetic force. How hydrogen begat helium and the other elements. Where the Earth came from and why the sun was a good star to gravitate around. How the oceans receded and the landmass broke into several continents. What trick was necessary for life to appear. Why two sexes were needed. How Evolution was speeded at times. Why dinosaurs disappeared. How apes began to talk and think. Why Atlantis had to remain discreetly underwater while human beings thought they invented Civilization themselves.

She explained to me why people fall in love and have children. How sometimes twins are born. Why twins have telepathic powers and why their own mother can't distinguish Ingrid from Sigrid.

When she was done, she ordered me never to repeat what she had told me. She also explained why it was important that I repeat nothing.

"But Grandmother", I asked her, "what shall I tell the readers of my book? An author must reveal everything he knows before the end of a novel. At least, you've always done it."

"Why, Donald J., I don't see what troubles you. You can use your imagination, can't you? Just tell them that the butler did it, or something."

The dolphins must have thought that this was a particularly good joke, because they all burst into laughter, inasmuch as dolphins can do such a thing.

One nice young she-dolphin even drew me into their dance. It was the first time I danced with a wet suit, with oxygen bottle, and with a she-dolphin.

I wonder whether these extra-terrestrial dolphins have sex like real dolphins. I don't know what dolphin sexuality is like, anyway. I try to imagine myself marrying my dance partner instead of Solveig. Of course, my dance partner may be Solveig herself, or Solveig's husband, or Queen Victoria. Or even the butler.

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49. And then came the climax of this adventure. I saw the Queen of Atlantis. I had already seen her once, and actually the memory of that first encounter returned to me suddenly, so that I wasn't surprised at discovering who she was.

I am not allowed to print her name, but I can reveal that this tale follows the usual patterns and conventions. That is, the mysterious Queen belongs to the group of characters described so far.

This gives you frantic guessers the following choice: my grandmother, Solveig, either twin, Solveig's husband, either Navet, the Pope, either Chang, the Olivetti repairman, the old lodger near the Spanish steps, Wang, the armor fish, the doctor, and, last but not least, the strangest of all the characters, i.e. myself.

I did not faint this time. I felt a great joy when I understood, in a flash, the meaning of life.

The Queen made a very interesting proposition to me, which I was in no position to refuse. So I said Goodbye to her and went up to the surface of the ocean, where Chang's sailboat was waiting for me faithfully.

Singrid could not come for obvious reasons (obvious to me, I mean), so that I had to sail home by myself. Some of the dolphins swam in front of the boat all the way to the English Channel, which I would never have found otherwise, as I still don't know how to use a sextant.

Solveig cried when I told her that Singrid would not return for a while. But her sister was very happy to have twice more room and own twice more toys. When one asks her her name, she answers sometimes Ingrid and sometimes Sigrid; everybody calls her Singrid.

The scandal of the Italian bank is quite big now. Most of the commentators in the press put the blame on Solveig's husband, who, having vanished, makes a very convenient scapegoat. But someone in the Vatican must know better: Solveig receives a monthly check from the Pope's own bank account.

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50. This is a very awkward situation: I know how to explain the mysteries which have accumulated so far, but I've promised not to. This means that writing fifty more pages may prove extremely difficult. I'll call Solveig and ask her advice.

"I must find a way to alleviate the readers' frustration", I tell her. "I can't keep them on a hook for fifty more pages."

"Now that you mention those fifty pages", she says, "there's something I forgot to tell you... You don't have to write fifty more pages. You've already written one hundred and filled your contract."

"Are you serious, or do you want me to stop for some unmentionable reason?"

"I'm extremely serious. You see, you've always typed single-space, with very little margin, so that one of your pages becomes two of our printed ones. You can write the word 'end' and take a vacation on Asuncion Island."

"You must be kidding! I just can't let down my readers this way. A novelist has a moral commitment toward his or her public. He or she must finish off any dangling plot before closing shop. I'll tell them that you're the Queen or something..."

"Me the Queen? That's preposterous. They won't believe you!"

"I'm sure that I can find a logical explanation."

"Okay, go ahead, but you only have one page left."

"I guess that it wouldn't suffice, really. Then I know what I'll do: I'll write a sequel."

"Now you talk sense. A sequel is a sound proposition. Businesswise, I mean. I'll ask my boss whether he can afford a second contract with you."

"I can write a whole series of books for people who want to learn English. We don't have to stop at two."

"Take it easy. One at a time is the right way to do it. Besides, you've promised your friend the Queen, whoever she is, not to reveal anything to anyone. This is quite a handicap if you intend to stretch this adventure to the size of *Remembrance of Things Past*."

"I'll find a way. I'm a genius, after all. Actually, I've already thought of a very promising plot..."

"Hey, you can't stop in midsentence like this! My feminine curiosity is aroused now. You must tell me more about this plot."

"You'll have to read the sequel."