

**Deep Six the Opals  
or  
We Will Mutiny**

**One of the Master Stories  
upon which  
High-Stakes Test Questions  
are Based**

**Here is a tale I have written for children. It is coded as it would be in high-stakes standardized essay tests. See other documents for examples.**

## **Part One: In Which We Learn That There are Opals Somewhere Down There, and Some of Why.**

**1.1** Forty-five years a whalin', and it was time to stay home. One more voyage for Captain Amos Chase and his wife, around trip from New Bedford to Australia, and back again (see log and map). But on the last leg they stopped dead mid-ocean, at the mercy of the wind and the sea. The only power crewmen had was their work, enough of them stopping it, that was. A mutiny had been brewing, and now the crew had actually left their posts and faced the Captain, more frightened than he (for this was far from his first). But it wasn't for the usual reasons - horrible living conditions, harsh punishments. No, this was over a small cask, no bigger than their heads, whose fearsome, evil contents, they believed, doomed them to a watery grave. Throw this cask overboard or we will take over the ship

and do it ourselves! To live would be worth risking many lashings for, many days tied to the mast.

1.2 The Captain knew the men would rise up if they knew what he had, so he had hid the cask among his own personal items, which, with his almost absolute power were so off limits as to be laughable that a crewman would snoop. But the crew had somehow learned of its contents and word of the dreadful news spread so fast that there was no stopping it until it swelled to this inevitable moment of truth. And they were a strong enough force to do it.

1.3 Chase did not give in to the mutineers terms easily. For the cask held his future -- he had sunk all his retirement savings into its contents, and would have little more to live on should they be jettisoned. He had purchased with them the most valuable thing he knew: Australian black opals, only found in its mines, and so rare in America that they were worth more than [diamonds]. Many of the crew believed that opals were evil and would curse the voyage causing some terrible disaster. So great

was the force of their terror and outrage that the Captain had no choice. With all watching over the side, he dropped the cask. Well made, it floated for a while, and the crew refused to take back their stations until it up-ended and sank, as if a tiny boat giving up the ghost. And once it sank, they all knew it was sunk forever, for no one there, nothing there, ever came to the surface again. And only they did they take position, and wait for what he had in store.

## **Part Two: In Which A Whaling Child Tells her Children and their Children, Who Tell Their Own**

2.1 Chase's daughter, Annie, was not on this voyage, although she's lived on his ships from birth to age fifteen. So, she had never seen these opals -- but they loomed large and luminous all the same. She knew her parents had come home to more toil and less security than 45 years should have provided, no matter that whalers' profits were slight. To her, opals were the opposite of evil, but, rather, a place of good harbor that beckoned all the more

because they would never fulfill their purpose. So her children, and her three little grandchildren Anne and Janet and Betty heard many a bed-time story about this treasure - as close as their bedsides and yet so far away. And they imagined, as children do, that this must have been as far from land as it is possible to be, as deep in the ocean as it is possible to get, and that is what they told their children.

2.2 Anne and Janet and Betty told of the lost treasure to their little children, to Janet and Tony and Susan and Ellen, to Tom and Amy, to Ben and Andy (great grandchildren of Annie, all). Among them, Amy, the reteller of this tale for you, was in the habit of imagining what a whaling child might have imagined. What could Annie know about these opals that entranced her land-lubber listeners? She wasn't there for the sinking of the cask, but sinking was in her bones, behind every thought and dream while on the water. So much was sinking in her that she refused to ever float again once put ashore at fifteen - no float, no sink. She wasn't there for the mining, for the choosing, for the selection of the cask, for nestling into its fleece those

extraordinary gems, but seeking treasure was in her eyes and her ears and her nose and her throat - a treasure in oil, stripped from the most gigantic of all living things, stripped and boiled and barreled into its own casks, the accruing of which was all it was about after all.

[opalescence] So much was treasure in her that she told only of the opals and never of the oil. She spoke always of gems that mutate as they turn into the light, always of the mutiny that lost them to her forever, but never of the whales mutilated, as death was their purpose, and light and life was hers.

### **Part Three: In Which the a Whaling Great-Grandchild Imagines What a Whaling Child Would Know**

3.1 Amy vowed to honor Annie's opals. to bring them back to land, to make something every little child would delight to run its fingers through, would want, with all the grand longing of a child, to keep forever. And so she did. Over the course of years and years, she called them back as

Annie had, as Annie would have understood them, as a child she understood that time. She made opals as a child would imagine them, a whaling child.

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