

# Sophia and Ahab

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This is a story I've told time and time again, but not to you or anyone I know. Just to myself. I have written and rewritten it more times than I can count and have decided that now is the time to share it. So here it goes...

A few years ago, there was a young woman named Sophia. She had just finished high school and was ready to start her new college life, but she could not afford rent on her own and instead needed to stay with her grandfather Ahab, a retired professor at the university she wanted to attend. He was too old to take care of himself anymore, so they had a simple arrangement: she would take care of chores around the house and would be given a room in exchange.

After returning home from freshman orientation, she decided to start dinner early. While in the kitchen looking for ingredients, she raised her voice for Ahab to hear, "Grampa, would you like anything in particular for dinner?"

No response. She shrugged, thinking he was napping in the bedroom and began pulling out some pasta and tomatoes to make some Italian food. She again called out, "I'll be making Spaghetti, that OK?"

Again, there was no response, so she began preparing everything. After everything was ready, she checked the master bedroom to see if Ahab was there. He was not.

Confused, she began looking all over, but couldn't find him. She then checked the driveway to make sure his car was still there. After a few more minutes of increasingly frantic searching, she found a door that was slightly ajar. Before that moment, she had never opened the door and simply assumed that it was closet or a pantry of some sort.

When she opened it, she was greeted by a rather steep flight of stairs.

“Grampa!” She called again, “Are you up there?”

Again, no response, but her curiosity got the better of her. At the top of the stairs, there was yet another door, but it was closed this time. She knocked, “Grampa, are you in there?”

“Ah.” She heard a gruff, but familiar voice, “Yeah. Come in.”

When she opened the door, she found a large library, with the walls completely filled with a huge number of books of all different shapes and sizes. On the far side of the room was a large window looking out onto a tumultuous sky illuminating two tall chairs with an end-table in-between, where a cold, stained cup of coffee rested. The chairs were facing away from Sophia, so she couldn’t quite see Ahab, but knew he was sitting in one of them.

She took a step forward and inspected the nearest shelf, which was about shoulder-height. It was filled with titles she had never seen before:

- The Essence Series
- The Arcane Algorithm Archive
- Sufficiently Advanced Technology

She mindlessly pulled out a book at random before walking to the chairs, only to find Ahab gazing at the sky with a stern expression. She then said, “Hey Grampa, I didn’t know you liked reading so much.”

He looked up and took a deep breath before again looking towards the window, “Yeah. I used to read a bit when my eyesight was better.”

Sophia laughed a bit and took the open chair before inspecting the book in her hands. It was a simple black book and the spine read, *A Patchwork Quilt*. Outside of the title, there was nothing else on the cover. Curious, Sophia asked, “Wait. Who wrote this? There is no author information.”

Ahab again sighed. “I did, in a way. I kinda wrote all of these.”

Shocked, Sophia looked around. There must have been hundreds of books, maybe even thousands. “Wait. You wrote all of these? That’s incredible.”

“It’s not what you think. Open it.” He looked over and tapped the book in Sophia’s hand.

She did so, only to find every page blank. After a few seconds, she said, “I don’t understand.”

“These books are all of my failed creations. Ideas I had throughout the years but never finished, some of them I never even started. Now I’m too

old to work on any of them.” With that, Ahab again began staring into space.

Sophia didn’t say anything either for a while, but instead stood and began inspecting the titles. She then put her book back before saying, “I guess the reason there is no author information is because they haven’t technically been written yet?”

“Yeah.” Ahab said. Sophia could not see him from behind the chair, but could hear the defeat in his voice. “I tried. I really did. I wrote for years and years, but never published a single thing. Something more important always came up. Now, these stories will die with me.”

Again Sophia did not respond immediately, but instead knelt down to one of the bottom rows of books and felt the spine of one entitled, *Inanimate*. Like before, it was a solid color without any indicating marks except for the title. She then pulled it out and thumped it against her palm before saying, “How about you tell me about one of them over dinner. C’mon, let’s go eat. I’ll grab a pen.”

*This is the story of Sophia and Ahab told through their writing.*

yo yo yo



## Chapter 2

# Space Junk

SOPHIA

I was born in a relatively poor fishing village at the start of Earth's Inter-galactic Era. Space flight had just been properly commercialized and hordes of people were migrating to Mars to terraform it, but that wasn't for people like us. We could barely afford electricity every month, let alone a computer. For us, space travel was light years away. Even so, while I was learning to follow the ocean currents, I would dream of eventually manning another ship – one that sailed the stars instead of the sea.

My father was a grumpy old sailor with a pork belly and peg leg. He knew the slough<sup>1</sup> we lived on better than anyone else and was out on the water from dawn to dusk. When I returned from school every afternoon, I would hear the familiar gurgling of the boat's engine and see him waving from the dock to pick me up. We would then find ourselves bobbing around on our skiff for hours, just the two of us. He would cast the net, I would pull it in. That was life. Simple, but still somewhat satisfying. We didn't make much money, but we made it work.

After a few years of unremarkable days, my father and I became rather close. We would talk to each other about everything and became each other's confidants, so to speak. Admittedly, I was so young at the time that I didn't have much to talk about, so I would often just listen to my father for hours on end. For many children, this might sound like a nightmare, but I enjoyed it. I was the only kid my age in the village and my father was the only adult who was willing to talk to me like a real person.

After a particularly grueling and stormy day, we found ourselves out

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<sup>1</sup>A: Great wordplay, but I don't know if people know slough is pronounced "slew."

rather late. At some point, the rain subsided and clouds vanished, unveiling a clear sky filled with stars. After pulling in the net and dumping some fish, my father took a deep breath and said, "I think that's that. We hit our quota." But instead of heading back to shore, he turned off all the lights and set the boat adrift.

Confused, I said, "We might want to get home soon. I have school work to do."

"Schoolwork, eh?" Even in the darkness, I saw his silhouette sit and remove his cap. "School never taught me to sail. It never taught me to fish. Everything I learned, I learned by *\*doing\**!" I had heard this rant many times before and also decided to sit down for the rest of it, but he stopped there and looked to me for a moment before asking, "So... what do you want to do with your life?"

In that moment, I knew the answer. I wanted to soar through space like the astronauts I heard about in school, but I knew no matter how hard I tried, I would never get there. So I lied, "I don't know, really. I like fishing, I guess."

"But you don't *\*love\** it. Neither do I. It's a living, but just barely. It worked for my dad and his dad and his dad. It's all we've ever known." He sighed, sounding defeated. "Look... How old are you now? 16, right?"

"Yeah"

"16..." He chuckled to himself and paused again. "I spoke to your teacher. She says you are already past her regular high school curriculum and there isn't much left to teach you. Why are you still going to school?"

I was quiet for a full minute, watching the sky as my eyes adjusted to the light. At the time, I remember analyzing each star as it came into view, wondering if it was actually a satellite or spacecraft instead. Eventually, I said, "I don't know. I like learning about what other people can do besides fishing, you know?"

He laughed, "Sounds like you actually hate fishing, then!"

"Honestly, I don't mind this." I motioned to the stars and sea. "This is nice."

"Sure, but it's a poor man's work." He then looked to me, "Now I'll ask ya again. Is there anything you really want to do?"

At that moment, we saw a bright light across the water, launching upwards towards the sky until fizzling out into one of the stars. It was another launch. Another ship had made it to space. I pointed to it and said, "That. That's what I want to do."

"Alright." My father nodded, and revved the engine. "Let's go."



We didn't say anything to each other for the rest of the evening, but when I woke the next morning, my father was gone and so was the boat. There was a note on the kitchen table:

I made you breakfast.

I spoke to your teacher and got us a library pass. There's a computer there with your name on it.

Don't worry about the fish. They won't miss ya!

Study hard.

— Dad

For the next two years, I spent every day in the library, learning everything I could about aerospace, knowing that my father was working overtime to support me. At the time, my teacher would occasionally stop by and recommend a few books to me, several of which were already at the collegiate level, but otherwise, I was completely alone with nothing but the clock to keep me company. Every now and again, I would find my eyes drifting out the window while my mind wandered back to the sea, but the constant ticking would wake me back up to keep me from wasting time. At 18, I passed the qualification exams and got a scholarship to an astronautical program at a local university.

GOODBYES Leaving my village was bittersweet.

"Well, at least you got a scholarship so I don't have to pay your way."

"Love you too, Dad."

TECH AT UNIVERSITY That was when I realized how little I knew about the world.

MEETING SKIPPER

At 24, I was a pilot.

After getting my license, a number of recruiters spoke to me. Some needed travel to Mars. Some to Venus. But there was one listing in particular that caught my eye. It was a bit more local.

See, ever since Sputnik, humans have had a nasty habit of treating space as a dumping ground, creating a huge cluster of space junk orbiting the Earth. The truth is that pilots do not need to do anything for most of their journey. AI can launch, fly, and land almost every spacecraft without any problem; however, due to the huge amount of space debris, there is a "no AI zone" right outside of Earth's atmosphere where pilots must be in complete control. This region of space is by far the most challenging to traverse and is why most people fear becoming an astronaut to begin with.

Well, it turns out there was a listing to clean up around Earth's orbit. It didn't pay as well as other positions and was in one of the most treacherous regions of space, but the company promised to provide a space craft to all employees after five years of work. That was an opportunity I couldn't pass up and is how I found myself navigating gravitational currents while fishing junk from space.

It was perfect. Just like old times.

Whenever I passed our old village, I would wave to my father, hoping that he knew that one of the many stars was his daughter.

# Chapter 3

## Meddlings

LEIOS

Arbitrary paragraph to use as an example to show how to use the note-  
block type

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