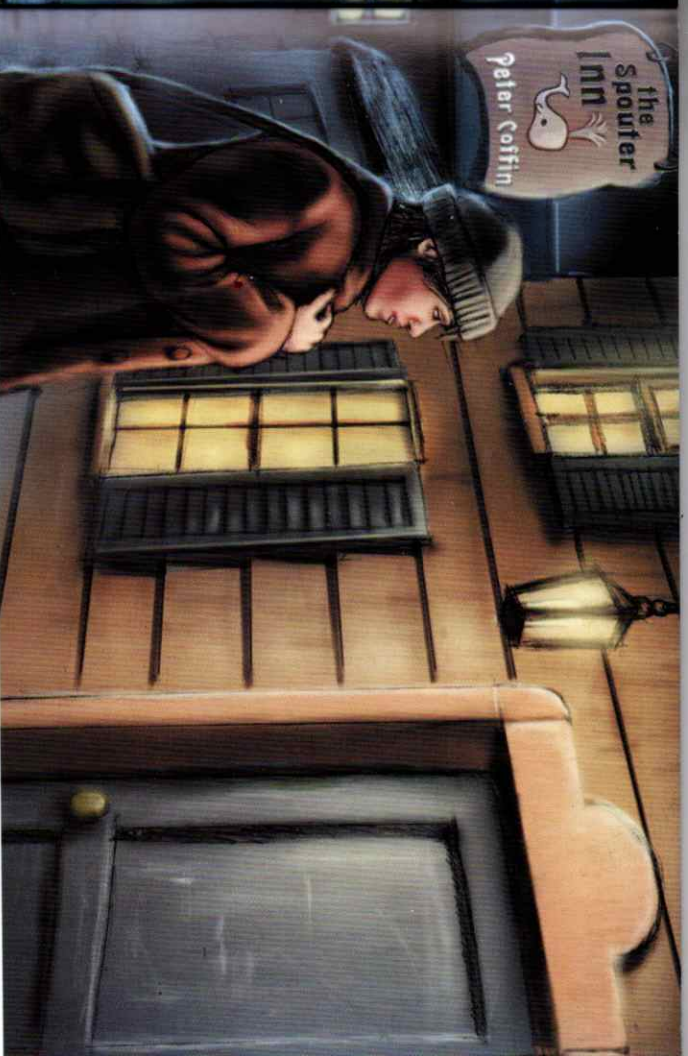




## CHAPTER 1

**C**ALL ME ISHMAEL. I AM A SAILOR, AND MY HAPPIEST DAYS HAVE been spent at sea. I have had many exciting adventures in the 'watery part of the world', as I like to call it, but none as thrilling and terrifying as the search for Moby Dick. Yes, I was part of the attempt to kill the cunning white whale and this is my story...

I left Manhattan and arrived in New Bedford, Massachusetts, on a Saturday evening in December, 1851. My plan was to catch a ferry from New Bedford to Nantucket so that I could join the crew of a Nantucket whaling ship. The Nantucket whaling business was a growing industry at that time, with hundreds of ships leaving American shores each year to hunt and kill sperm whales for their oil. The oil, which was extracted from the whale's fat, or blubber, was used for lighting oil lamps and making candles, and was considered particularly valuable. I had always been fascinated by the beauty and greatness of whales; they lived in wild and distant seas, and I knew that whale-hunting would provide me with the opportunity to explore exotic, far-away places.



Unfortunately, I missed the ferry to Nantucket and discovered, to my disappointment, that the next ferry was scheduled to leave on Monday. With only a few cents in my pocket, I was forced to search for some very cheap accommodation. I made my way through the dark, bitterly cold streets of New Bedford, gazing into the candlelit windows of various inns, until I found one that looked affordable. The swinging sign above the door read: *The Spouter-Inn*; the owner's name, Peter Coffin, was painted in white underneath.

I walked into the inn and found it full of sailors who were chatting merrily. After a brief search, I located the landlord and told him I wished to rent a room.

"No rooms left, I'm afraid," said Coffin. "But there is one bed left... would you mind sharing a room with a harpooner?"

I did mind, in fact, I minded very much. But the landlord insisted that the harpooner was a decent fellow, and managed to persuade me that sharing a room with a perfect stranger was a much better option than spending the night out in the cold.

"All right," I said. "I suppose I have no choice."

"Good," said Coffin. "Take a seat in the dining room and I'll bring you some dinner."