

I made my way to the dining room and sat down at the table with four or five other sailors. Without delay, Coffin brought us a meal consisting of very generous portions of meat, potatoes and dumplings. The food was absolutely delicious and I quickly devoured every last bite.

"Say, Mr Coffin," I said as the landlord cleared away my plate, "is the harpooner here?"

Coffin chuckled. "No, he won't be back till much later. He's out selling his head."

"His head?" I exclaimed. "What on earth do you mean?"

"The harpooner has just returned from New Zealand, where he collected some human heads," the landlord explained. "He's managed to sell all of them, except one. He has to sell it tonight; it wouldn't be right to try to sell a human head on Sunday morning when people are going to church..."

I could hardly believe my ears. "Mr Coffin, are you mad?" I shouted. "Are you really planning to put me in a room with some savage who's out selling human heads?"

Coffin grinned. "Calm down, young man. The heads are made of wax... I think. I assure you that the harpooner poses no threat to you. Anyway, it's almost midnight and I doubt he'll be returning to the inn tonight. Let me show you to your room; I'm sure you'd like to get some sleep."

Reluctantly, I followed the landlord up the staircase to a small room at the end of a narrow passageway. The room contained a table, chair and two beds. I noticed a bag of clothing on the floor, which I assumed belonged to my room-mate. The landlord wished me good night and I put on my nightwear and went to sleep.

I was awakened an hour or so later by the sound of the door opening. The harpooner had returned. I decided to remain perfectly still and not say a word until my room-mate noticed me. The harpooner was a huge man, holding a candle in one hand and a scarily lifelike head in the other. I watched him as he placed the candle on the floor and opened a large canvas bag from which he removed an axe and a wallet. Then, he put the head in the bag and closed it. The light from the candle was weak and I could only just see his face: his skin appeared to be yellowish-purple in colour and his cheeks were

