



CHAPTER 1

CALL 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."

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?"

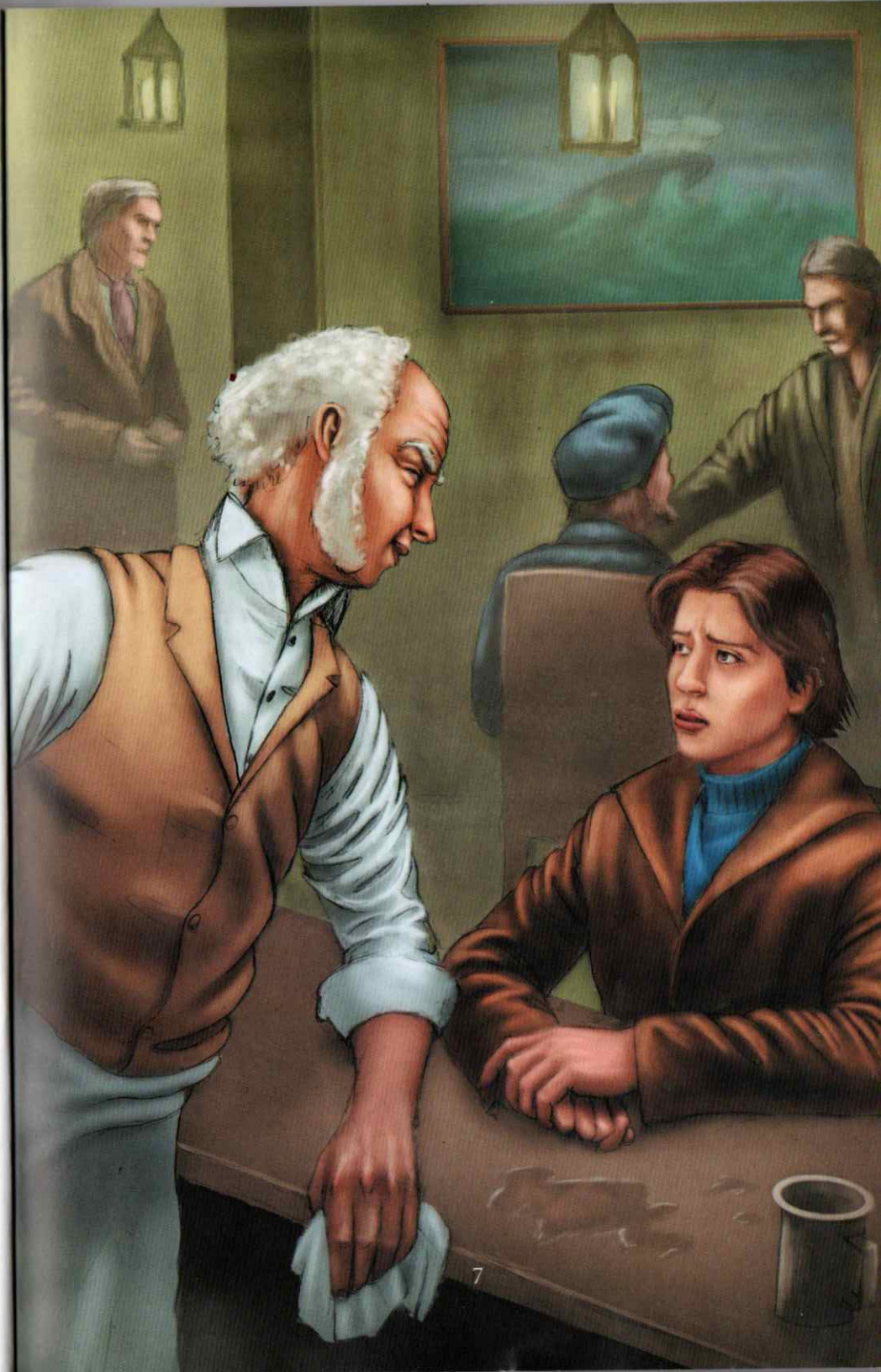
"The harpooner has just returned from New Zealand, where he collected some human heads," the landlord explained. "He's managed to sell all of them, except one. He has to sell it tonight; it wouldn't be right to try to sell a human head on Sunday morning when people are going to church..."

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



covered in large black squares which I assumed were tattoos. He was bald except for a few strands of hair which were twisted up on his forehead.

I had never seen a more terrifying-looking man in my life and had he not been standing between me and the door, I would have run out of there as fast as my legs could carry me. The harpooner changed into his nightwear, blew out the candle and climbed into his bed.

My heart was beating so loudly, I could hear it beating in my ears. I decided I couldn't share a room with a madman after all, and I jumped out of bed and ran to the door. Of course, it was pitch black in the room, and I tripped over the harpooner's bag.

The harpooner sat up in surprise. "Who's there?" he shouted.

"Please don't hurt me!" I cried. "Landlord! Mr Coffin! Someone save me, please!"

The landlord heard my screams and burst through the door a moment later, dressed in a nightgown and carrying a lamp.

"Don't be afraid," said the landlord, as he helped me to my feet. "Queequeg won't harm a hair on your head."

"Are you sure about that?" I said.

The landlord laughed. "Queequeg, young Ishmael here will be sharing your room with you tonight, is that all right?"

Queequeg was silent for a moment. "That's fine," he grunted.

"Good," said the landlord. "I'll see you both in the morning. Good night." With that, the landlord walked out of the room and closed the door.

"Don't worry, young man, I won't hurt you," said Queequeg.

I nodded and climbed back into my bed. Feeling strangely reassured, I fell asleep almost immediately.

The next morning, Queequeg and I woke up early and made our way to the dining room. I had the opportunity to meet some of the other guests at the inn; they were all whalers: carpenters, blacksmiths and harpooners. Some had only recently returned from a voyage; others were making plans to leave again. We enjoyed a breakfast of coffee and hot rolls, while Queequeg dined on large pieces of steak



which looked barely cooked.

Once we'd eaten, Queequeg lit his pipe and made his way to the lounge room, and I decided to go for a stroll. I returned to the inn after lunch and found the harpooner sitting in front of the fireplace, polishing a small wooden figure. Not wanting to spend the rest of the day by myself, I pulled up a chair and sat down beside him.

"Are we going to share a room again tonight?" asked Queequeg, without looking up.

"Yes," I said.

"In that case, we are brothers," he said, extending a hand to shake mine.

I smiled and shook his hand. We spent the rest of the day talking and getting to know one another better. Queequeg told me that he was a native of the South Pacific island of Rokovoko. His father had been the king of his tribe and Queequeg was next in line to take his place. But young Queequeg wanted adventure, so, one day, he hid on

board a whaling ship that had anchored briefly at his island. Queequeg managed to persuade the angry captain to keep him on board and teach him the business of whaling. In no time at all, Queequeg became an expert harpooner, known for his skill and accuracy.

"I want to see more of the world," he said. "That's why I'm here. I want to go on a whaling trip."

"Really?" I asked with delight. "I am also going to Nantucket to find a whaling ship."

"We'll go together," said Queequeg and smiled broadly. "After all, we are brothers now."

After supper, we returned to our room and Queequeg gave me thirty silver dollars, half his fortune. Of course, I told him I couldn't take it, but he wouldn't listen to me. In his culture, he said, it was customary to share one's belongings with one's family members.

I felt extremely touched by Queequeg's kindness and generosity; it felt good to make a new friend.



CHAPTER 1

Comprehension

1 Decide if the following sentences are True or False. Write T or F in the boxes.

- Ishmael arrived in New Bedford in order to take part in the whaling business.
- At first, Ishmael was afraid of Queequeg.
- Queequeg was collecting real human heads.
- When Ishmael jumped out of bed, the harpooner attacked him.
- Ishmael and Queequeg decided to go on a whaling trip together.

2 Choose a, b or c to complete the following sentences.

- Ishmael spent the night in New Bedford because
 - he changed his mind about the trip.
 - he had no money for the ferry.
 - the ferry left without him.
- Ishmael had to share a room with Queequeg because
 - there were no rooms left in the inn.
 - he couldn't afford a whole room.
 - he wanted to meet the harpooner.
- Queequeg had just returned from
 - New Zealand.
 - Rokovoko.
 - Manhattan.
- Queequeg reassured Ishmael that he wouldn't
 - steal from him.
 - make fun of him.
 - hurt him.
- Queequeg gave Ishmael
 - all his belongings.
 - a small wooden figure.
 - half of his money.

Vocabulary

3 Complete the following sentences with the correct form of the words in the box.

harpooners grunt blacksmith landlord pitch light

- When I asked him about my wallet, he didn't answer, he just _____ behind his newspaper.
- _____ use spears with long ropes in order to hunt whales.
- It was _____ black in the cave and we didn't have a torch, so we couldn't see anything.
- It is a comfortable, brightly _____ room with nice furniture and a big window.
- The _____ made horseshoes out of iron.
- Fortunately the _____ let them have the house at a low rent.

4 Find the words or phrases in Chapter 1 which mean the same as:

- smiled widely _____ (page 6)
- something you can pay for _____ (page 5)
- the fat of sea animals _____ (page 4)
- looking at something or someone for a long time _____ (page 5)
- a group of people with the same race, beliefs and language _____ (page 10)
- everything a man has in his possession _____ (page 11)
- ate hungrily without properly chewing the food _____ (page 6)
- without really wanting to _____ (page 6)

Follow-up activities

5 Discuss.

- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of going on a whaling trip? Would you be able to spend time at sea?
- What do you know about whaling? How popular is it today?
- Would you ever share a room with a stranger if you had to?
- Whales are large sea animals which are endangered. What other endangered species do you know of? Why is it important to protect them?
- Do you think that the harpooner is a trustworthy person after all? What do you think will happen next?

6 Imagine that you are Peter Coffin, the owner of the inn. Write a page in your diary about Ishmael's first night at the inn and his meeting with Queequeg. (120-140 words)