

and, some would say, quite mysterious. He's an excellent sailor and certainly the best harpooner I've ever seen. But he can be moody and bad-tempered; which is understandable, given the suffering he's endured. I doubt you'll meet him before the ship sets sail; he hasn't been feeling too well and is at home, resting."

I thanked the man for his time and made my way back to the inn. I was quite curious to meet this Captain Ahab; I found his story to be both sad and exciting. I could hardly wait to tell Queequeg my news.

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The next day, Queequeg and I returned to the *Pegud*, where the harpooner's salary was determined and the relevant papers were signed. We left the ship in a jolly mood, talking excitedly about the journey that lay ahead, when we suddenly ran into a strange man. He was dressed in a faded jacket and torn trousers, and his face was marked with smallpox scars. "Are you travelling on that ship?" he asked, waving a thick finger at the *Pegud*.

"Yes," I answered. "Why?"

"Have you met the captain yet?"

"No," I replied.

"Ahab is a dangerous man, a dangerous man, I tell you. He's obsessed and his obsession has driven him mad! You shouldn't travel on his ship..."

"Obsessed?" I repeated. "With what?"

"The whale! The whale!" shouted the man.

Queequeg and I exchanged glances. "Look here, sir," I said, "I don't know what you're talking about and, frankly, I don't care either. Please step aside and let us be on our way."

The man shook his head. "Don't say I didn't warn you!" he shouted after us.

Queequeg and I walked on, and the strange man was quickly forgotten.

The *Pegud* was scheduled to set sail on Christmas Day. Queequeg and I woke up at 6 o'clock that morning and rapidly made our way to the harbour. It was still dark, and the ship was almost hidden from

