

“Stern all!” exclaimed the mate, as, upon turning his head, he saw the distended jaws of a large sperm whale close to the head of the boat, threatening it with instant destruction. “Stern all, for your lives!”

*Wharton the Whale-Killer*

So be cheery, my lads, let your hearts never fail,  
While the bold harpooneer is striking the whale!

*Nantucket Song*

Oh, the rare old whale, mid storm and gale  
In his ocean home will be  
A giant in might, where might is right,  
And king of the boundless sea.

*Whale Song*

## I

### LOOMINGS

CALL ME ISHMAEL. Some years ago – never mind how long precisely – having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet, and especially whenever my hypos\* get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off – then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword;\* I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes,\* belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs – commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterwards. Its extreme downtown is the Battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlear’s Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northwards. What do you see? Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles, some seated upon the pier heads, some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China, some