

A New Freedom

Call me Ishmael. A few years ago, with no money in my wallet and nothing interesting to do on shore, I thought I would sail around a little on the watery part of the world. There is something mystical about being on the water, free of the land. I had been to sea many times before, but never to hunt whales. I don't know why, but this just seemed what I had to do this time. I would find a whaling ship and see if I could join the crew. The thrill of hunting the huge monster of the ocean and sailing the distant seas began to fill my mind. This was going to be exciting!

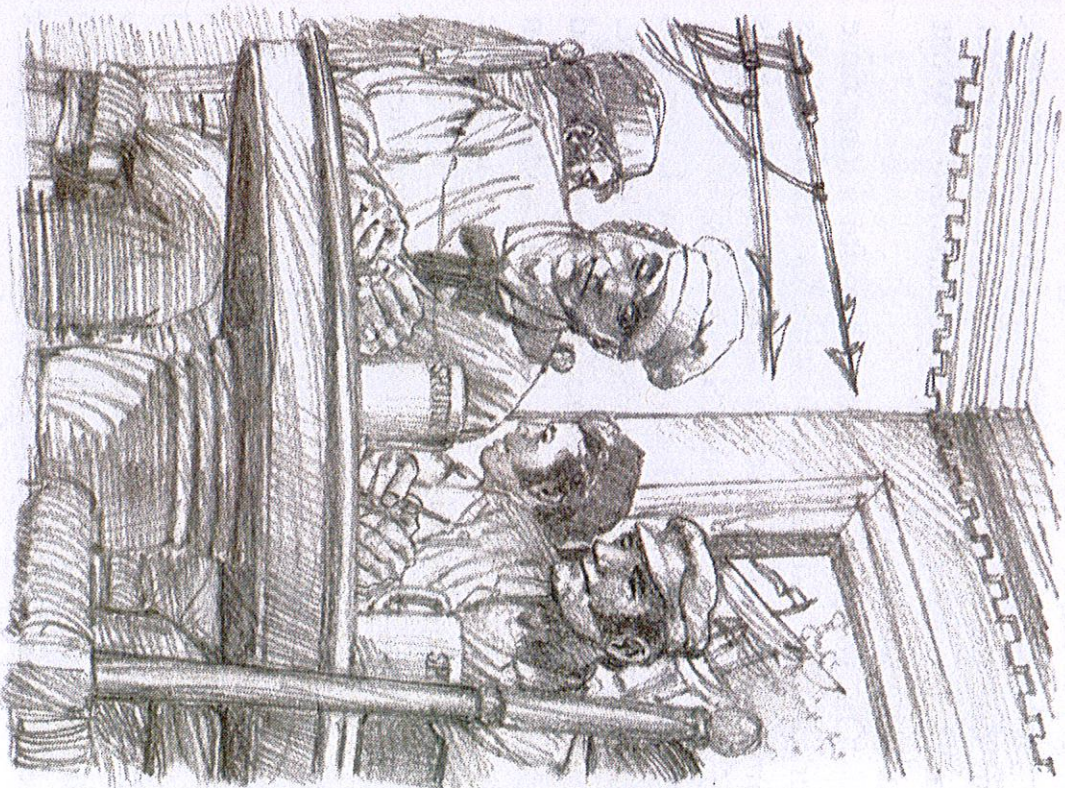
So, on a cold December morning, I stuffed a

shirt or two into an old suitcase and left my home for New Bedford, Massachusetts. From there I could take a ferry to Nantucket where I would get on a whaling ship.

I arrived in New Bedford on a cold, wet night. I could smell the ocean's salty air as I walked the New Bedford streets in search of a bed for the night. As I neared the waterfront, I saw a sign swinging in the wind that read *The Spouter Inn* – Peter Coffin. I liked the name of the place since I would be looking for whale spouts at sea. The owner's last name gave me a little shiver up my spine, but I would worry about that later. I went inside.

On one wall hung a painting of a huge whale about to attack a sinking ship. On another wall I saw a collection of old, rusted whaling spears, called harpoons, which are used to kill the giant fish. There were sailors sitting around carving things from the bones and teeth of whales.

Mr. Coffin told me he had no empty beds. "But wait," he said, "you can share a bed with a harpooner. If you are goin' whalin' you best get used to that sort of thing." I told him I never liked to sleep two to a bed. But I was too cold and





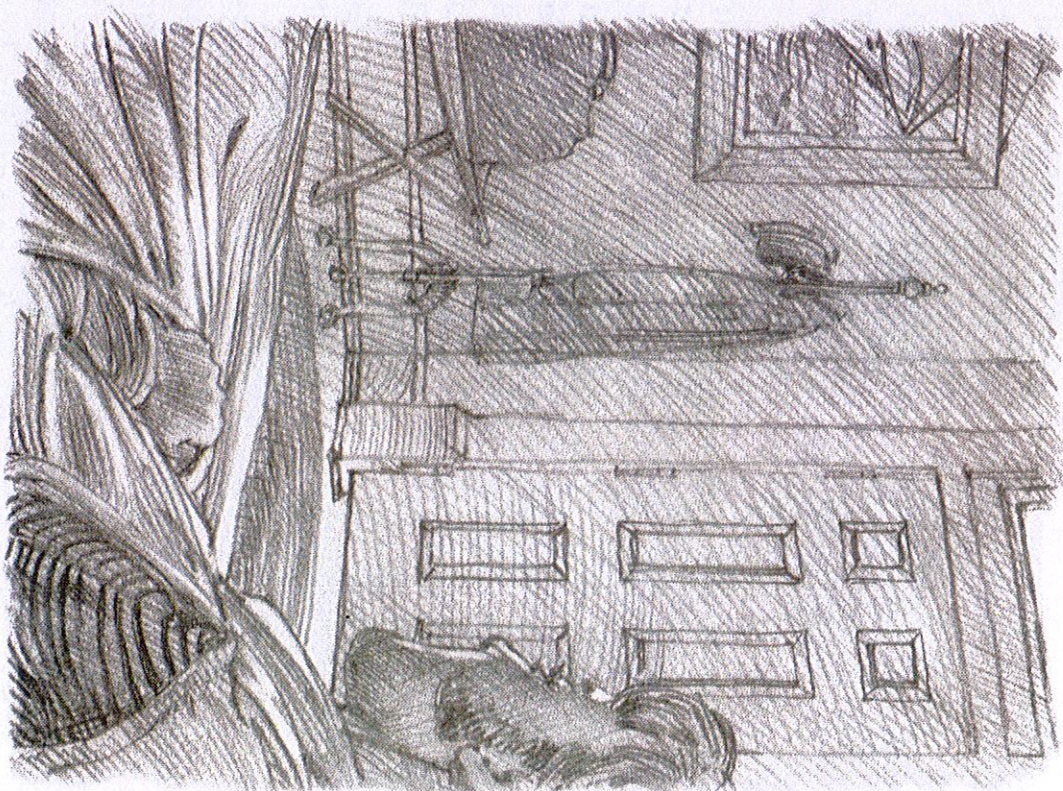
hungry to argue. I said I would give it a try.

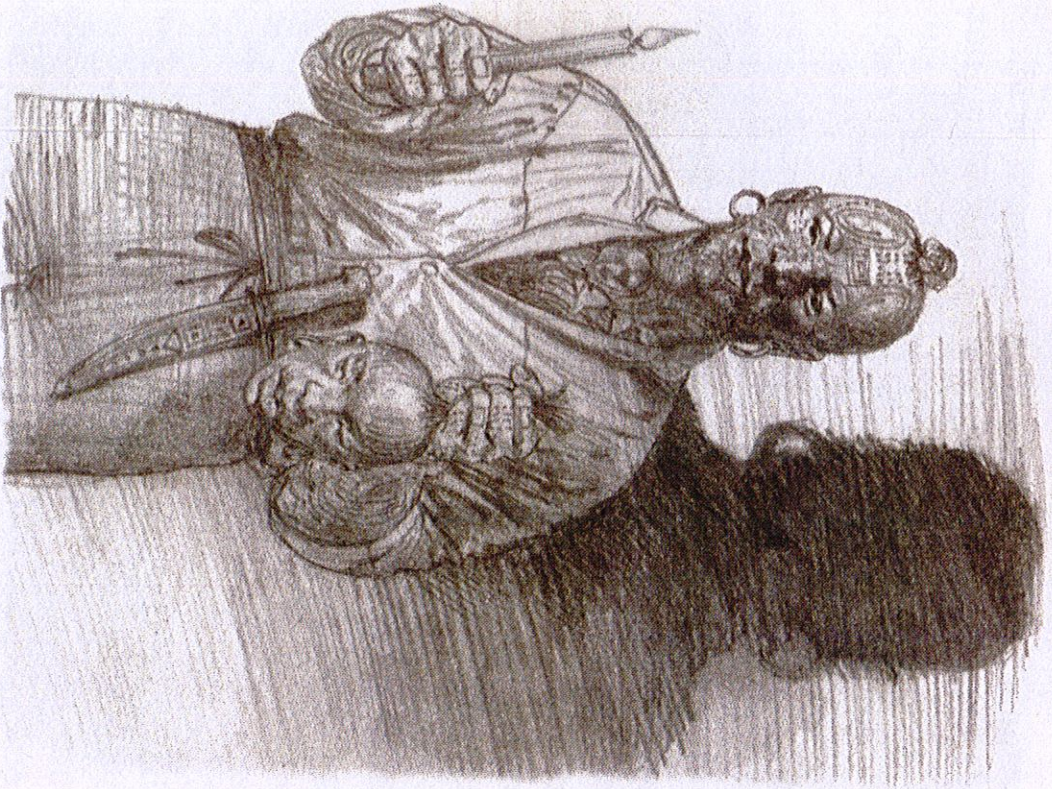
At last, a good hot supper of meat, potatoes, and dumplings was served. "When will I meet this harpooner?" I asked the landlord. "What time does he go to bed?"

"Oh, you won't be seein' him for a long time yet, lad," Coffin said with a grin. "He's somewhere in town sellin' those shrunken heads he picks up in the South Sea islands."

Shrunken heads? I thought. Now I was too afraid to go to bed and too tired to stay awake. Finally, the landlord calmed me down a little and showed me to my room. Placing a candle on an old sea chest next to the bed, he wished me sweet dreams and left.

All I could think about was this harpooner and what sort of a night it was going to be. Gathering enough courage to get into bed, I put myself in God's care for the night. Whether that mattress was stuffed with corn cobs or broken dishes, I don't know, but I rolled and tossed a lot and could not sleep for a long time. I had finally slipped off into a light doze when I heard some heavy footsteps in the hall. A ray of light came into the room from under the door.





I lay perfectly still, waiting to see what would happen. The stranger entered the room, holding a light in one hand and a terrible shrunken head in the other. Good heavens! What a sight! His face was a dark purplish-yellow color, and there were tattoos all over his face and body. His hair was tied up in a knot on top of his head.

After he placed his candle on the floor, he pulled something out of a big bag in the corner of the room. It looked like a tomahawk! I was scared, but I tried to lie still and remember that a man who is ugly on the outside can still be good on the inside. Just as I had begun to calm down a little, this huge, dark savage took a wooden black doll from within his coat. Then he lit a small fire from some wood chips and began praying a strange prayer. Finally, he blew out his candle and jumped into bed. I screamed out in fear!

“Who-ee debel you?” the dark stranger asked.

“Speakee to me! You no speakee—I killee!”

“Save me! Save me, landlord!” I shouted.
“Please help me!”

I heard some footsteps in the hall. When the landlord came into the room, I leaped from my bed and ran up to him.

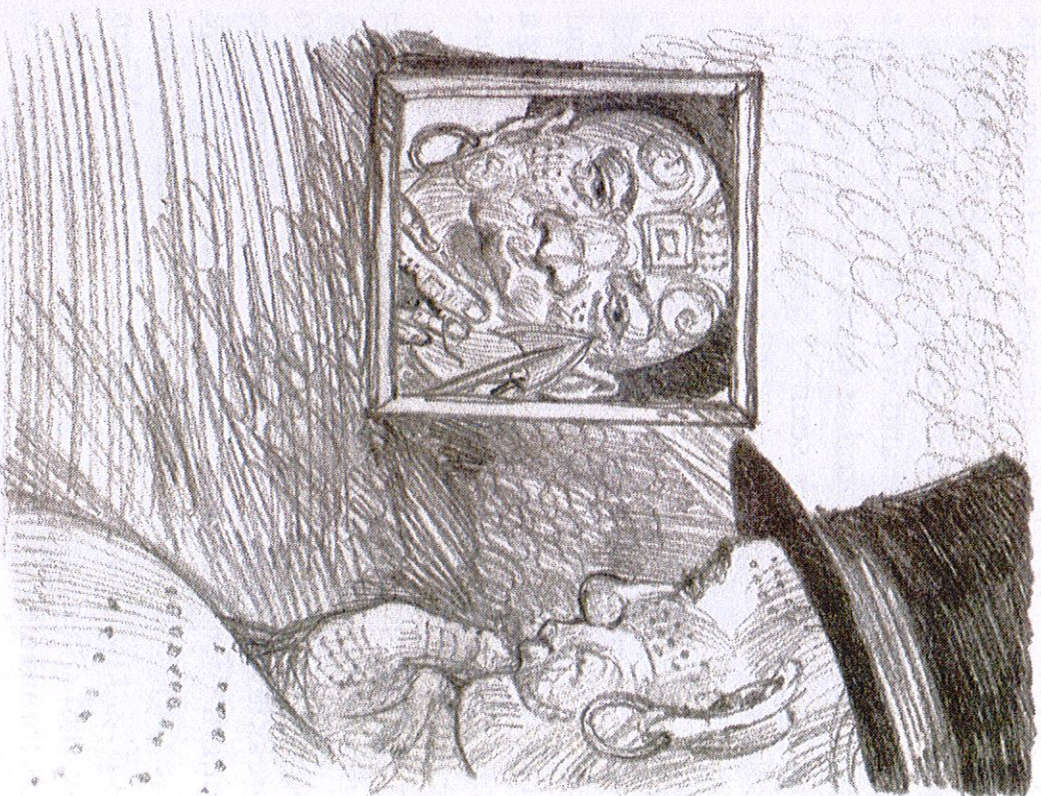


"Don't be afraid," he said, grinning at me. "Queequeg here wouldn't harm a hair on your head."

The landlord spoke to Queequeg, telling him we were going to "sleep" together, and everything would be fine. And he was right. Queequeg climbed quietly into bed. He no longer seemed so strange. Maybe he had been as afraid of me as I of him. He was peaceful and calm now as he drifted off to sleep. I rolled over and never slept better in my life.

The sun was just coming up when I awoke the next morning. Queequeg was snoring loudly. I looked at the colorful tattoos that covered his body. What an odd sight the first thing in the morning! I shook him gently, for I could not get out of bed until he awoke and moved—no luck. "Queequeg!"—more snores. Here I was, trapped next to a savage with a tomahawk at his side! "Queequeg, Queequeg, wake up!"

At last, with some grunts and groans, he got up, put on a tall hat and boots, and then began to wash and shave. But where was his razor? That was soon answered when he picked up his harpoon. Moving to a bit of mirror against the wall, he began to scrape (or should I say *harpoon*?) his cheeks. How sharp that harpoon must be!

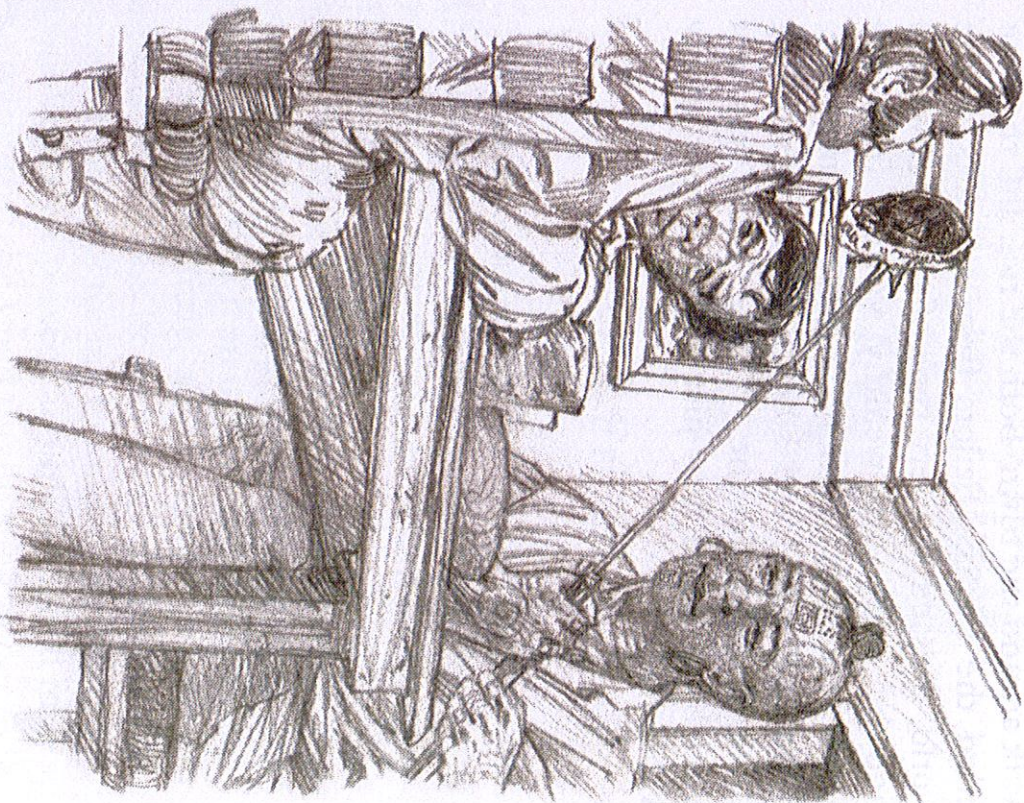




After his shaving and bathing were complete, Queequeg finished dressing. Holding his harpoon before him as though he were leading a band, he proudly marched out of the room.

I quickly dressed and went downstairs to get some breakfast. Seated at the table were people such as I had never seen. There were whaling sailors of all kinds. I could see the effects of sun and salt-sea air on their tanned, cracked faces. They were a shaggy lot. There were chief mates, second mates, third mates, sea carpenters, barrel makers, blacksmiths, harpooners, cooks, and common deckhands. I joined the group just as a loud "Grub ho!" from the landlord told me that breakfast was on its way.

Queequeg sat at the head of the table, cool as an icicle. His manners were a bit strange, however. He had brought his harpoon to breakfast and began using it to reach across the length of the table to spear the beefsteaks. He ate none of the hot rolls, nor did he drink the hot coffee. He ate only the rarest of the steak. When he had enough, he sat back to relax and smoke his tomahawk, which to my surprise turned out to be his pipe.





When breakfast was over, I decided to take a walk around the town. Both the rich and the poor filled the streets. Sailors from all parts of the world, dressed in every type of clothing, walked side by side with wealthy visitors from the nearby states of Vermont and New Hampshire. It was a Sunday, and I heard a preacher telling about Jonah and the Whale. That was not what I wanted to hear just before I went on my whale hunt!



A New Friend

When I returned to *The Spouter Inn*, I found Queequeg alone, quietly humming a tune and whittling the face of the wooden doll he called Yojo. I watched him for a while. There was a kindness in his eyes which must have come from inside his soul. He had a proud look. I thought that he must be a man of honesty and courage.

We talked a little, and I offered to help him understand a book he had taken off the shelf. He seemed thankful for my kindness and offered me a smoke. As we passed the pipe back and forth in the warmth of the small fire burning in our room, a change took place in our hearts. When our