



## MOBY DICK: PART I

### CAST

<b>NARRATOR</b>	<i>Older Ishmael Narrating</i>
<b>ISHMAEL</b>	<i>A Wandering Sailor</i>
<b>COFFIN</b>	<i>Innkeeper</i>
<b>QUEEQUEG</b>	<i>South Seas Islander Harpooner</i>
<b>MAPPLE</b>	<i>Renowned Reverend</i>

**NARRATOR:** Call me Ishmael. Some years ago, having little or no money, I thought I would sail about and see the oceans of the world. Whenever it's a damp, drizzly November in my soul, whenever I find myself pausing before coffin warehouses and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet—whenever I feel like throwing myself on my own sword—then I know it's high time to get to sea as soon as I can. I quietly take to ship.

Choose any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down to water. There's a magic in water that draws all men away

from the land, leads them over the hills, down creeks and streams and rivers to the sea. The sea, where each man as in a mirror, finds himself.

And so it was that I duly arrived at the town of New Bedford on a dark and dismal night late in the year 1841. Since I knew no one in the town, it soon became a matter of concern where I was to eat and sleep. With halting steps I paced the streets and passed the sign of *The Crossed Harpoons* inn.

**ISHMAEL:** Hmm. Looks too jolly—and, therefore, too expensive.

**NARRATOR:** Moving on, I saw a swinging sign over a door with a white, tall straight jet of misty spray painted on it. These words were written underneath:

**ISHMAEL:** The Spouter Inn: Landlord, Peter Coffin. Looks dim and miserable enough for me to afford. I'll give it a try.

**NARRATOR:** Inside there was an old man behind the bar, selling sailors distilments and death. Around the bar were the jaws of a whale, and the man standing within them seemed to be Jonah himself.

**COFFIN:** What brings ye here tonight, lad? I am Peter Coffin, the landlord.

**ISHMAEL:** I'm headed to sea.

**COFFIN:** As a passenger?

**ISHMAEL:** No, I have never gone as a passenger. I go as a sailor—mainly because they pay me for my trouble! They never pay passengers a single penny that I ever heard of. Am I right? *(laughs)* Yes, to go as a passenger at sea, you need a money purse.

And a purse is but a rag unless you have something in it.

**NARRATOR:** The innkeeper stared at me blankly—not amused by my words at all.

**COFFIN:** I assume there is something in *your* purse. We only take *paying* customers here.

**NARRATOR:** I placed several pieces of silver upon the bar. The innkeeper looked them over closely.

**ISHMAEL:** There is quite a difference between paying and being paid. And you, sir, have proved my point.

**COFFIN:** Ye going whaling?

**ISHMAEL:** That is my intention.

**COFFIN:** Ye ever been whaling before, boy?

**ISHMAEL:** No. I've only been to sea as a merchant sailor.

**COFFIN:** Then why go whaling now?

**ISHMAEL:** I guess only God can answer that question.

**NARRATOR:** I did not tell the landlord but chief among my motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself, a mysterious monster who roused all my curiosity.

**COFFIN:** Look ye there.

**NARRATOR:** On the wall hung a very large oil painting so thoroughly besmoked

that its subject could be discerned only by systematic study. It was a half-foundered ship and an exasperated whale, trying to spring clean over the craft, in the act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads.

**ISHMAEL:** (*nervously*) Can whales do that?

**COFFIN:** Why, bless me, whales can do anything! A whale can jump up like an earthquake and come down on you like a mountain! A whale can stove in the ribs of the biggest ships, swallow whole crews, and pick its teeth with the oars. Mind ye, lad, if God ever wanted to be a fish he'd be a whale. Believe that! He'd be a whale.

**NARRATOR:** I shuddered at the power of the great Leviathan.

**ISHMAEL:** Landlord, how about my bed?

**COFFIN:** Ye ain't got no objections to sharing a harpooneer's blanket, do ye?

**ISHMAEL:** What do you mean? I have to sleep two in a bed?

**COFFIN:** It's either share half of another man's blanket or sleep here on one of these benches.

**NARRATOR:** Now it was the innkeeper's turn to smile. I did not like the prospect of sleeping on a bench any more than sharing a bed. I spied a man sitting in the corner—eating his dinner of dumplings with his harpoon by his side.

**ISHMAEL:** Is that the harpooneer whose bed I'm sharing?

**COFFIN:** (*chuckling*) No, yer harpooneer is a dark-complexioned chap. He don't eat no dumplings neither. He eats nothing but steaks, and he likes 'em rare.

**ISHMAEL:** Then which one is he? I'd like to see the man before I agree to sharing a bed with him.

**COFFIN:** He ain't here. Tonight he's off peddling. He went to sell his head.

**ISHMAEL:** Sell his head?

**COFFIN:** I'm as shocked as ye are. I told him he couldn't sell it here. The New Bedford market's overstocked.

**ISHMAEL:** With what?

**COFFIN:** Heads, of course!

**ISHMAEL:** (*angrily*) Now listen here! I'm either beginning to think this harpooneer is a madman—or you are!

**COFFIN:** Be easy! Be easy! This here harpooneer I have been tellin' you about has just arrived from the South Seas, where he bought up a lot of embalmed New Zealand heads. He's sold all of them but one. He's out trying to sell the last one tonight 'cause tomorrow's Sunday. And it wouldn't do to be selling human heads about the streets when folks is a-going to churches, now would it?

**ISHMAEL:** I guess not. Well, that clears up this mystery, but I'm not sure I want to spend the night with a man who peddles shrunken heads.

**COFFIN:** He pays his bills at least. He may be out all night—ye never know. Come! It's getting dreadful late. Ye had better be turning flukes. It's a nice bed. My wife and me slept in that same bed the night we were spliced. (*chuckling*) There's plenty of room for two to kick about in it.

**ISHMAEL:** Fine.

**NARRATOR:** The landlord ushered me into a small room, cold as a clam. The room was furnished with a bed, almost big enough for four harpooneers to sleep abreast.

**COFFIN:** There! Make yerself comfortable now! Good night to ye.

**ISHMAEL:** (*sigh*) This adventure is off to a strange start.

**NARRATOR:** I made no more ado and jumped out of my pantaloons and boots and tumbled into bed.

**ISHMAEL:** (*grumbling*) Either this mattress is stuffed with corncobs or broken crockery!

**NARRATOR:** I rolled about a good deal and could not sleep for a long time. At last I had just slid off into a light doze when I heard heavy footfalls in the hallway. (*heavy footsteps*) A glimmer of light came into the room from under the door.

**ISHMAEL:** (*grumbling*) That must be the harpooneer! The infernal head-peddler. The last thing I want from a bedmate is a bunch of chit-chat.

**NARRATOR:** As the harpooneer entered, I lay perfectly still in the darkness and resolved not to say a word till spoken to.

**ISHMAEL:** *(to himself)* The last thing I want from a bedmate is a bunch of chit-chat.

**NARRATOR:** Holding a light in one hand and a shrunken head in the other, the stranger entered the room. When I beheld him, I felt like crying out in fright. The harpooneer was a dark man, his body covered up and down with tattoos. He removed the top hat he was wearing, and I saw there was no hair on his head except for a small scalp-knot twisted up on top of his crown. If he had not been between me and the door, I would have bolted for my life.

The savage stooped to dig in his bag. He pulled forth a black, hunchbacked statue. Then setting it up, he made an offering of a biscuit to this idol. Then to my shock, he pulled a tomahawk from his bag.

**ISHMAEL:** *(to himself, in fright)* My head will be the next he sells!

**NARRATOR:** But the harpooneer put the handle of the tomahawk to his lips and lit the other with fire. Smoke appeared from the contraption.

I had remained so quiet during all this, I did not know how to break the spell. This savage was sure to discover me when he came into the bed. I was plotting a way to escape, when the savage, with unexpected speed, blew out his candle and sprung toward the bed with the tomahawk still between his teeth.

**ISHMAEL:** *(cry of fright)* Ah!

**QUEEQUEG:** *(cry of shock)* Ah!

**NARRATOR:** The savage seized me in his grip.

**QUEEQUEG:** Who the Devil you be? If you no speak, I kill you!

**ISHMAEL:** *(yelling)* Landlord! Landlord!

**NARRATOR:** At that moment the landlord came into the room, holding his sides in laughter.

**COFFIN:** *(laughing)* Hee! Hee! Hee! How is that for a joke?

**NARRATOR:** Leaping out from the bed, I ran up to him.

**ISHMAEL:** What are you trying to do? Kill me?

**COFFIN:** *(laughing)* Don't be afraid now! Queequeg here wouldn't harm a hair of yer head.

**ISHMAEL:** Stop your grinning! Why didn't you tell me that my bedmate was a cannibal?

**COFFIN:** I thought you knowed it. Didn't I tell ye that he was a-peddling heads around town? It's not the kind of business that Christian men partake in, now is it? Now, I say you both best be turning flukes and go to sleep. *(to Queequeg)* Queequeg, look here! This man sleep here tonight. You savvy?

**NARRATOR:** The savage was still reclining and smoking in the bed. He seemed unconcerned by all of this.

**QUEEQUEG:** Me savvy.

**NARRATOR:** He threw down the sheets and motioned for me to get in.

**QUEEQUEG:** You get in.

**ISHMAEL:** Uhhh. Perhaps I better take you up on that bench you offered me earlier.

**COFFIN:** Queequeg is harmless.

**ISHMAEL:** At least tell him to stash that tomahawk-pipe of his. I don't want to be burnt up in my bed.

**NARRATOR:** The landlord communicated this to Queequeg, who grunted, put out his pipe, and rolled over. Then the landlord departed. Queequeg was already snoring. I stared at my empty side of the bed.

**ISHMAEL:** *(to himself)* He's a human being just as I am. *(sigh)* Oh well. Better to sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian.

**NARRATOR:** I turned in and never slept better in my life.

My awakening was quite a different story. In the morning I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You would have almost thought I was his wife.

**ISHMAEL:** Queequeg!

**NARRATOR:** His only answer was a snore. *(sound of snoring)*

**ISHMAEL:** Queequeg! Queequeg, wake!

**NARRATOR:** Queequeg drew back his arm, sat up, and shook himself all over like a dog just from the water. He rubbed his eyes as if he did not altogether remember how I came to be there.

**QUEEQUEG:** Hmmm. Morning?

**NARRATOR:** Without another word he hopped out of bed. He was tall and powerfully built—as all harpooners had to be. I watched curiously as he put on his top hat and his waistcoat. It was mesmerizing to watch this savage conduct himself. In his first show of modesty, he looked at me shyly and then crawled under the bed to put on his boots. Rising again, he began to wash and lather his face for a shave.

**ISHMAEL:** *(to himself)* This savage has a good understanding of civilized manners. I wonder what he will use for a razor.

**NARRATOR:** Then I found my answer. Queequeg took up his harpoon from the corner of the bed, unsheathed the blade, and began scraping it across his cheeks.

**ISHMAEL:** Makes sense.

**QUEEQUEG:** Now Queequeg eat. You eat, too?

**NARRATOR:** We went downstairs, and breakfast was no less strange than the night had been. I offered Queequeg some coffee and hot rolls, but he grunted.

**QUEEQUEG:** *(grunting)* No. Eat meat only.

**NARRATOR:** The savage applied his undivided attention to beefsteaks, done rare—the blood pooling in his breakfast

plate. When he had finished his steaks, Queequeg utilized his harpoon to spear more steaks from across the table. The other sailors were forced to duck underneath his razor-sharp reach.

**ISHMAEL:** Does all this meat ever ail your stomach?

**QUEEQUEG:** No. Queequeg only feel ill one time. Eat too much.

**ISHMAEL:** Too many steaks?

**QUEEQUEG:** Too much flesh of enemies. I kill and eat too many. Give me many stomach pains.

**ISHMAEL:** Ah, I see.

**NARRATOR:** Finally, Peter Coffin dared to show his face at our table. I was none too happy with the old innkeeper.

**COFFIN:** Morning! I beg yer pardon for having a bit of fun with ye last night. But I see ye survived it! (*laugh*) Ye'll be off to find a ship now, I reckon. But before ye go, I will give ye a bit of advice. Here in New Bedford there stands a whaleman's chapel, and few fishermen fail to make a Sunday visit there before they put to sea.

**ISHMAEL:** Thank you—for that at least.

**NARRATOR:** I left Queequeg behind, still poking down bloody mouthfuls of breakfast. I set out to explore New Bedford. The town itself was impressive—filled with mansions and well-dressed ladies. Whale oil had brought New Bedford wealth. I also marveled at all the different types of people I saw there—men of all colors, from all over

the world.

Finally I happened upon the chapel that Coffin had mentioned to me. Entering, I found a small scattered congregation of sailors and sailors' wives and widows. There these silent islands of men and women sat steadfastly eyeing several marble tablets masoned onto the walls. They chronicled the deaths of sailors at the hands of whales and the sea.

Standing near the back of the chapel, I regarded those marble tablets and read the dismal fates of the whalemens who had gone before me.

**ISHMAEL:** (*reading*) John Talbot, lost overboard. Robert Long, pulled out to sea by a whale. Ezekiel Hardy, killed by a sperm whale off the coast of Japan. Hmmm. Pleasant tidings. Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine.

**NARRATOR:** Yet somehow this idea cheered me.

**ISHMAEL:** (*to himself*) This physical body is but the lees of my better being. Take my body if you wish. It is not me.

**NARRATOR:** As I seated myself in a pew, I bumped into a man sitting there.

**ISHMAEL:** Excuse me, sir. (*in shock*) Queequeg!

**NARRATOR:** There was the savage seated next to me, clutching his top hat in his hands. But I had no more time to question him as to what a heathen was doing in church when the arrival of the reverend, Father Mapple, drew our attention.

Father Mapple was a robust man, dressed like a ship's captain. In fact, he had

been a sailor and a harpooneer in his youth, but for many years past had dedicated his life to the ministry. For the first time I noticed that the lofty pulpit was crafted to look like the prow of a ship, and in spite of its height, had no stairs. Instead a rope ladder, like those used in mounting a ship from a boat at sea, hung down the side. Father Mapple cast a look upward and then with sailor-like dexterity, hand over hand, climbed the ladder to take command of his ship. Once he had reached the heights, he pulled the ladder up after him and faced his congregation.

**MAPPLE:** And God prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. Shipmates, the sin of Jonah was in his disobedience of the command of God. He found it a hard command. And it was, for all the things that God would have us do are hard. If we would obey God, we must disobey ourselves.

**NARRATOR:** The words of Father Mapple poured out of him like the storm that Jonah faced as he fled from God. And when he described the great fish, the Leviathan of the deep that swallowed up Jonah, the congregation felt itself swallowed up by his powerful words.

**MAPPLE:** And Jonah cries unto the Lord, out of the fish's belly. But he doesn't weep and wail. He feels his punishment is just. He leaves deliverance to God. And even out of the belly of hell, God heard him when he cried. And God spoke unto the whale, and from the shuddering cold and blackness of the deep, the whale breached into the sun and vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. And then Jonah did the Almighty's bidding.

And what was that, shipmates? To preach the truth in the face of falsehood!

**NARRATOR:** I was so mesmerized by Father Mapple's sermon that when the sermon had ended, I noticed for the first time that Queequeg had already left the church. Returning to the Spouter Inn from the chapel, I found the savage in our room quite alone. He was holding his little, black idol close up to his face and with a jack-knife gently whittling away at its nose. He was humming to himself in his heathenish way.

**ISHMAEL:** A good service, huh, Queequeg?

**QUEEQUEG:** Hmmm.

**NARRATOR:** Queequeg put away the idol and took up a large book he had there. Placing it on his lap he began to count the pages.

**QUEEQUEG:** Forty-eight...forty-nine...fifty. (*happily*) Ah!

**NARRATOR:** When he reached fifty pages, he stopped for a moment and then began counting again.

**QUEEQUEG:** One...two...

**NARRATOR:** He reached fifty two more times, and each time seemed more excited than the last.

**ISHMAEL:** You cannot count past fifty, can you?

**QUEEQUEG:** No, but three time I count fifty. Many pages. Many.

**NARRATOR:** I smiled at him. You cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple, honest heart. I seated myself next to him.

**QUEEQUEG:** You know words?

**ISHMAEL:** Yeah.

**QUEEQUEG:** I know picture. This whale. You speak words.

**ISHMAEL:** (*reading*) The heart of a whale is larger than the pipe of the waterworks at London Bridge. The water in that pipe is not so thick or fast as the blood pumping from the heart of the whale.

**QUEEQUEG:** True! True! Thank you.

**ISHMAEL:** Queequeg, who are you? Where are you from?

**QUEEQUEG:** My father king...high chief. My uncle high priest in islands. West south far away. Kokovoko.

**NARRATOR:** Queequeg's island home is not down on any map. True places never are.

**QUEEQUEG:** But I want to go and see Christian lands. Ship come by island. I take canoe. I sail. I swim. I climb rope. I hide. Ship take me far. Many years. See all world. Kill many whales. (*thoughtfully*) Never go home though. I sure my Father dead now.

**ISHMAEL:** That means you would be king there now?

**QUEEQUEG:** This Queequeg's king-stick now.

**NARRATOR:** He held up his harpoon—indicating that it was the only scepter he would ever bear.

**ISHMAEL:** What is next for you, Queequeg?

**QUEEQUEG:** Sail on ship. You?

**ISHMAEL:** Tomorrow I hope to sign aboard any ship in search of whales.

**QUEEQUEG:** I sign too. Your boat my boat. I eat same food. We sail on same waters. We kill same whale. We friends!

**NARRATOR:** I smiled.

**ISHMAEL:** Fine! I guess I can try a pagan friend...since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy.

**NARRATOR:** Queequeg produced his pouch and tomahawk and quietly offered me a puff. And then we sat exchanging puffs from that wild pipe of his and keeping it regularly passing between us. When our smoke was over, he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were married—meaning, in his country's phrase, that we were bosom friends. He would gladly die for me, if need should be.

In our country this sudden flame of friendship would have seemed far too premature, a thing to be much distrusted. But in a simple savage like Queequeg, those old rules did not apply.

**QUEEQUEG:** Here. I give you gift.

**NARRATOR:** After supper, Queequeg gave me the gift of one of his embalmed heads.

**ISHMAEL:** (*hesitantly*) Why thank you. You shouldn't have.

**NARRATOR:** Then from his tobacco wallet Queequeg drew out thirty dollars in silver and spread it on the table. Then he divided it into equal portions and pushed one of them toward me.

**QUEEQUEG:** This be yours.

**ISHMAEL:** No, Queequeg! I couldn't! Let me give you some of mine then!

**NARRATOR:** He silenced me by pouring the silver coins into my pocket. I let them stay. I stared at Queequeg realizing that this simple savage had restored my faith in humanity.

He soon began his evening prayers, pulling out the little, black idol once again.

**QUEEQUEG:** You pray, too.

**NARRATOR:** Being a Christian, at first I started to object. But then I thought again.

**ISHMAEL:** (*to himself*) Is it not written "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"?

**NARRATOR:** So I joined Queequeg in his prayers. You see, in order to be a good Christian, I had to temporarily turn pagan.

Afterward we turned in—the cozy, loving pair that we were. In our shared bed we made plans to sail to the island of Nantucket as soon as possible.

**ISHMAEL:** New Bedford might be the new whaling capital of the world, but it all began on the island of Nantucket. That is where we should sail from!

**NARRATOR:** Queequeg nodded his consent, and we went to sleep, perfectly content in our heart's honeymoon.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

---

1. The opening line says, "Call me Ishmael." What does *call* imply in this sentence?
2. Do you agree with Ishmael, does water have a mystical quality about it?
3. How would you describe Ishmael's personality?
4. What lesson does Ishmael learn about friendship?
5. Ishmael and Queequeg's sudden friendship reflects the real-life bonds forged among whalers. Being away from their families for years at a time and constantly risking their lives caused these men to form intense friendships. Why do you think these friendships were so important to whalers?
6. **Allusion:** In the Bible Ishmael is the son of Abraham. Abraham sends Ishmael and Ishmael's mother out to wander in the desert; therefore, the name Ishmael implies someone who is a wanderer. Does this name fit the character Ishmael? Explain.
7. **Theme:** What is the theme of Father Mapple's sermon? What importance do you think it will have on the events of the story?
8. **Theme:** Based on the way Herman Melville presents Queequeg in *Moby Dick*, what was he trying to say about

“civilized” and “savage” people?  
Explain.

9. **Connect:** Have you ever formed a close friendship with someone who was drastically different from you? Explain. If not, why do you think this is so?