

CHAPTER 4

Setting Sail

As we boarded the *Pequod*, Captain Peleg stopped us. "Ye hadn't told me Queequeg was a cannibal," he said in a shocked voice. "We don't allow any pagans unless they're converted. Do ye have Queequeg's papers to show he is a Christian?"

"He's a member of the First Congregational Church," I said.

"Ye mean the one run by Deacon Coleman? I pass it every Sunday and never once seen him. Are ye trying to put one over on me?"

"Listen," I said, "he's a born member and a

deacon himself.”

“Come on, now,” said the captain. “What church are ye talking about?”

Feeling myself pushed, I said, “The great First Congregational Church of the World—the church that you and I and every mother’s son worships in. We all belong to that church. We may have a few small differences, but in the one grand belief in God, we all join hands.”

“I never heard a better sermon,” said Peleg. “Maybe ye ought to ship as a missionary. But tell me, has your friend Quohog ever stuck a fish?”

Queequeg understood the question and took it as a test. He jumped onto the bulwarks and from there onto the bow of one of the hanging boats. Raising his harpoon, he called out, “Cap’n, you see him small-ee drop tar on water dere? Well, s’pose-ee him one whale eye. Well, den! “

Taking sharp aim, Queequeg darted the

harpoon and struck the shiny tar spot out of sight.

“Now,” said Queequeg matter-of-factly as he hauled in the line, “s’pose-ee him whale eye. Dat whale dead.”

It didn’t take Peleg long to sign him on. Instead of writing his name, Queequeg copied a sign he had tattooed on his arm.

We had just left the *Pequod* and were ambling along the street when we were stopped by a stranger. He was shabbily dressed and had a badly pockmarked face.

“Shipmates, have ye signed on that ship?” he asked, his finger pointing to the *Pequod* like a fixed bayonet.

“Yes,” I said. “We have just signed the papers.”

“Anything in those papers about your *souls*?”

“About our *what*?” I asked in amazement.

“Well, maybe ye haven’t got any,” said the

stranger. "But *he's* got enough to make up for the lack in other chaps, he does... Old Thunder."

"Who's Old Thunder?" I asked.

"Captain Ahab, of course. What do ye know about him?"

Although the bedraggled stranger's mind seemed to have slipped a bit, I answered him. "He knows his whaling and he's a good captain."

"Both true—but what about the other things?... Oh well, never mind. Your names are on the papers already. Some sailors or other must go with him, I guess. God pity 'em. Good morning, and the heavens bless ye."

"You can't fool us," I said. "It's easy to look like you have a secret."

"Mornin' to ye. Mornin'," he said as he turned to go.

"Come on, Queequeg. Let's leave this crazy man. But tell us your name, will you,

stranger?"

"Elijah," he answered.

Queequeg and I walked away, both agreeing that the ragged old sailor was a phony. But that name Elijah made me think. The Elijah in the Bible had been a prophet who had warned of bad things to come.

We waited a few days while the *Pequod* was being loaded with all the supplies needed for a three-year voyage. I kept asking for Captain Ahab, but always got the same answer—he was better and would be coming on board soon. When we received word that we'd be setting sail, I still hadn't met him. I felt uneasy about spending three years serving a captain I'd never seen.

It was about six in the morning when Queequeg and I arrived at the wharf. I thought I saw some sailors running in front of us, but I couldn't be sure in the morning mist.

"Stop!" called a voice, and we each felt a

hand on our shoulder. It was Elijah.

“Ye ain’t goin’ aboard?” he asked.

“We are, but it’s no concern of yours,” I answered.

“Did ye see some men goin’ toward the ship just now?” he asked.

“Yes, but it was too dim to make out who they were,” I said.

“Very dim, very dim. Well, see if ye can find ’em now. . . . Mornin’ to ye. Shan’t see ye again, I guess. . . .” With those final cracked words, he left.

The *Pequod* hoisted anchor and set sail under Captain Peleg. When we were out of the bay and on the ocean, a small sailboat came to take him back to the shore. Queequeg and I still hadn’t set eyes on Captain Ahab, but we got to know the other members of the crew.

Starbuck, the Chief Mate, was a thin, steady man who seemed to me brave, but in a practical way. Having lost his father and his

brother at sea, Starbuck was not a man to take foolish risks.

The Second Mate was Stubb, an easygoing, fearless man, and a continual smoker. You'd as soon expect to see his face without his nose, as to see it without his little black pipe.

Flask was the Third Mate. This short, stubby sailor seemed to be out hunting whales just for the fun of it. The long voyage around Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America was only a jolly joke to him.

Each of these three mates commanded one of the *Pequod's* small whaling boats, and each had his own harpooner. Chief Mate Starbuck had chosen Queequeg; Tashtego, a Massachusetts Indian, worked with Stubb, the Second Mate; and Daggoo, a gigantic African, was Flask's harpooner.

With the three mates taking turn at command, nothing was seen of Captain Ahab. Then, a few days after we'd left Nantucket, I

came on deck at the call of the afternoon watch. With a sudden shiver, I saw... *him*.

Standing there so grimly, Captain Ahab reminded me of a bronze statue, tall and broad of form. A thin white scar threaded its way out from his gray hair and continued right down his face and neck till it disappeared inside his clothing. That scar looked like the line in a great tree which had been struck by lightning, but was still alive... and branded. One of his legs was ivory, made from the smooth bone of a whale's jaw.

How could he stand so firmly on that ivory leg with the ship rocking as it was, I wondered. Then I saw the explanation. A half-inch hole had been drilled on each side of the officers' quarter-deck. His bone leg fit in that hole, keeping him erect as he stared silently out beyond the ship's ever-pitching prow.

Captain Ahab seemed to be troubled by some mighty woe.

CHAPTER 5

“Death to Moby Dick!”

As our ship moved southward and we hit warmer weather, Captain Ahab came on deck more often, either to stand with his leg anchored in the hole or to sit on a stool fixed the same way. He'd often pace the deck unsteadily. Sometimes the restless pounding of his leg upon the wooden deck at night would keep us awake.

When Stubb half-jokingly asked him to cover the ivory the next night he felt like pacing the deck, Ahab turned on him.

“Down, dog, and to thy kennel!” he shouted. Stubb was speechless for a moment. “I am

not used to being spoken to in that way, sir. I do not like it, sir," he said.

"Then be called ten times a donkey and be gone, or I'll clear the world of thee!" Ahab advanced toward him threateningly.

Stubb retreated, muttering to the men as he walked by, "I don't know whether to strike him or pray for him. Is he mad? And what can be on his mind that lets him stay in bed only three hours a day? And even then he doesn't sleep. The steward says his bed's always ruffled and his pillow's hot as a baked brick. He's full of riddles, that one."

One morning after breakfast, Ahab's steady step was heard as usual. The dents made by his ivory leg on the deck looked deeper than usual, as if his nervous steps that morning left deeper marks. His forehead, too, was lined, as if one constant thought had kept him always awake.

All day long he paced the deck. Suddenly,

near the close of day, he stopped by the bulwarks and commanded Starbuck to send everybody aft. The mate was surprised at this strange order for the crew to gather at the rear of the ship.

Ahab continued to pace, unmindful of our curious whispering. Finally, he cried out, "What do ye do when ye see a whale, men?"

"Sing out for him!" came the answer.

"Good! And what do ye do next, men?"

"Lower away and go after him!"

"And what tune do ye row to, men?"

"A Dead Whale or a Stove Boat!"

Ahab's face grew happier and more approving with every shout. Then he took out a bright coin and called for a hammer.

"Look ye. D'ye see this Spanish ounce of gold? Whosoever of ye sights a white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw... whosoever of ye sights that white-headed whale with three holes punctured in

his starboard fluke. . . look ye, whosoever of ye sights that same white whale, he shall have this gold ounce, my boys!”

“Hurrah, hurrah!” the seamen shouted as Ahab nailed the gold coin to the mast.

“It’s a white whale, I say,” continued Ahab. “Look sharp for white water. If ye see but a bubble, sing out.”

All this time Tashtego, Daggoo, and Queequeg had been looking on with more interest and more surprise than the rest of the crew. At the mention of the wrinkled brow and crooked jaw they had started, as if each were touched by some past memory.

“Captain Ahab,” said Tashtego, “that white whale must be the one called Moby Dick.”

“Aye. Do ye know the white whale then, Tash?”

“Does he move his tail from side to side before he goes down?” asked Tashtego.

“And has he an odd spout and is he mighty

quick, Captain Ahab?" asked Daggoo.

"And he have two, three iron in him hide too, Captain," cried Queequeg. "All twiske-tee, like so." And Queequeg circled his hand round and round. "Like so. . . ."

"Corkscrew!" cried Ahab. "Aye, Queequeg, the harpoons lie all twisted in him. Aye, Daggoo, his spout is a big one. Aye, Tashtego, and he moves his tail from side to side. . . he fan-tails before going down. Death and devils! Men, it *is* Moby Dick ye have seen—Moby Dick, Moby Dick!"

"Captain Ahab," said Starbuck, "was it not Moby Dick that took off thy leg?"

"Aye, it was that cursed White Whale who gave me this dead stump I stand on now. And I'll chase him round the Cape of Good Hope and round Cape Horn and round the flames of Hell before I give up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men, to chase that White Whale over all sides of the earth until he spouts black

blood and rolls over! What say ye, men? Are ye brave enough to join hands in it now?"

"Aye, aye!" shouted the harpooners and seamen.

"God bless ye, men," Ahab half-sobbed, half-shouted. "Steward, go draw some rum for the men." Then seeing Starbuck standing silently, Ahab asked, "Why do ye look so glum, Starbuck? Won't ye chase Moby Dick?"

"I am game for his crooked jaw and for the jaws of Death too, if it comes from the *whaling* business we follow. But I came here to hunt whales, not for my captain's revenge!"

Starbuck, alone, opposed the captain, but of course he would not rebel. "God save me! God save us all!" he murmured softly.

Ahab ordered a big pewter drinking mug filled with rum. "Drink and pass!" he cried, handing it to the nearest seaman. "Long swallows, men. 'Tis hot as Satan's hoof. . . . Well done, almost drained. Steward, refill!"

Next, he called for the three mates to come forth. "Cross your lances that I may revive a noble custom of my fisherman fathers," he said, gripping the three irons at their crossed center. He gazed deeply from Starbuck to Stubb and from Stubb to Flask, as if to fire them with his own fiery enthusiasm. The mates looked away from his strong, mystic stare.

"Down with your lances." Then Ahab turned to Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo. "And now, my three valiant harpooners, detach the poles from your weapons, men."

Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo slipped off the iron tips of their harpoons and turned them upside down, with the hollow openings facing up.

Filling them like goblets, Ahab ordered, "Drink, ye harpooners. Drink and swear—Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!"