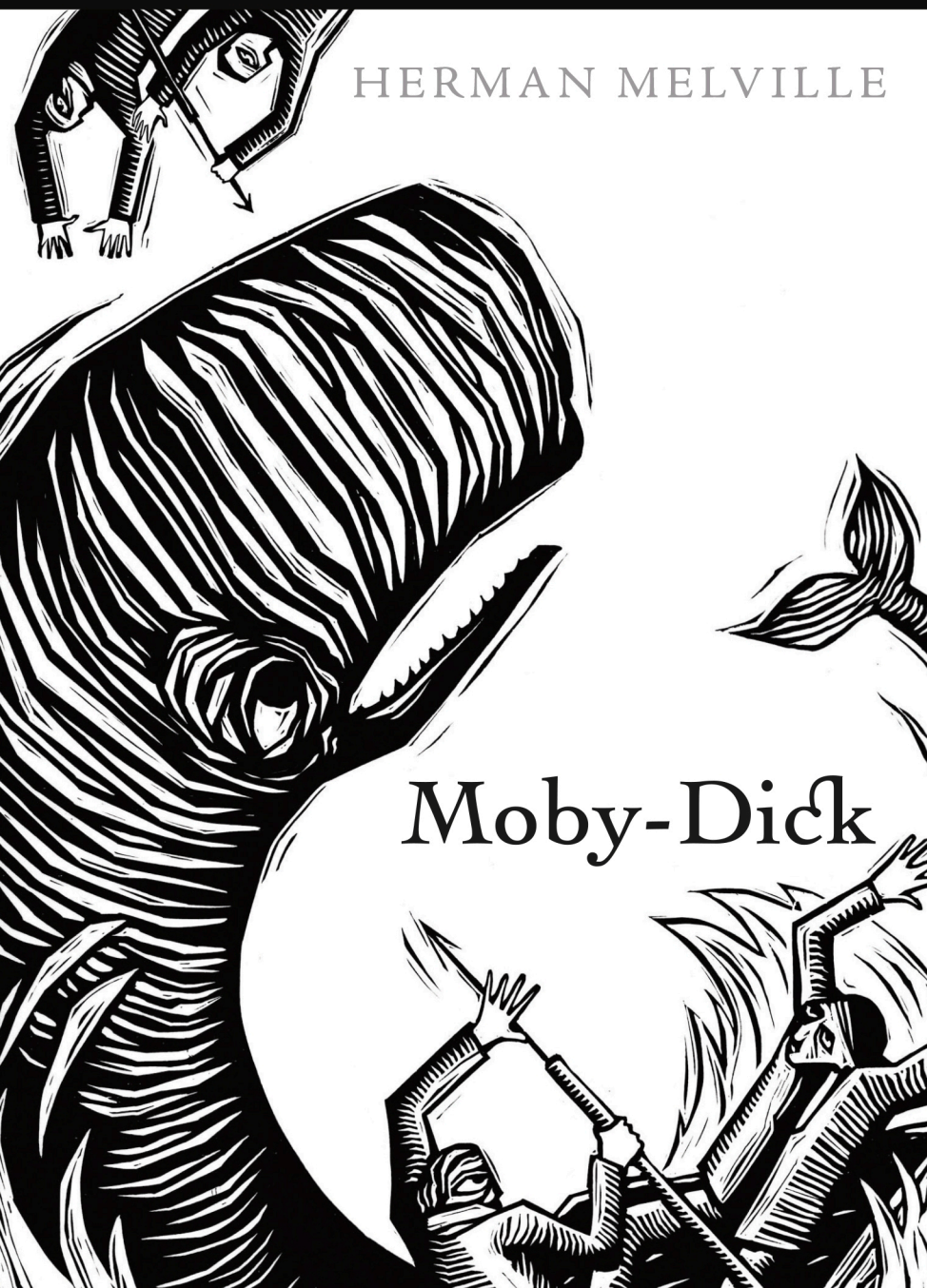


Penguin



Readers

HERMAN MELVILLE



Moby-Dick

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CHAPTER ONE

Call me Ishmael

Call me Ishmael. It isn't my real name. It's the name of a man in the **Bible** who survived a terrible event. That's why I feel that I can share his name while I tell you my story.

One day, a few years ago, I decided to go to sea. It's what I have always done when I find myself getting worried about life. There's nothing surprising about this, for I think that most men, at some time, want to go to sea. Now, I don't mean that I go to sea as a passenger, because to be a passenger you need to have money, and I don't have any. To explain more, let me tell you that I don't ever go to sea as a captain, or an officer, or even a cook. This is because I couldn't command a ship, and I certainly couldn't spend time cooking meals for other people, though I enjoy eating them, of course. When I go to sea, I usually go as an ordinary sailor on **merchant ships**, but what was different this time was that I decided to go on a **whaling ship**. I can't say why this was exactly, but maybe it was because I am interested in the mysterious lives of those huge animals, and the wild and distant seas where they live.

So, I packed my old bag and started my journey to Cape Horn, and the Pacific Ocean. I first of all had to travel from New York to New Bedford, and then to Nantucket. Although many whaling ships sail from New Bedford, Nantucket was the first American whaling port, so I wanted to sail from there. But when I arrived in New Bedford on a Saturday night in

December, I was disappointed to learn that the ship, the *Moss*, which goes to Nantucket, had already sailed, and that I couldn't reach the island until Monday. Now, having to spend a night, a day, and another night in New Bedford before I could take the ship to Nantucket, I realized that I needed somewhere to eat and sleep. It was a dark night, freezing cold and miserable. I knew no one in the town, and I only had a few coins in my pocket, so I set out to find somewhere cheap to sleep. After passing several lively-looking inns which looked far too expensive for me, I found, not far from the docks, The Spouter Inn. The inn was a little wooden house, standing on a cold corner where the wind whistled. A faded wooden sign showed the inn's name, and beneath it was written the landlord's name, Peter Coffin. Many people have the surname 'Coffin' in this part of the country, but it seemed **ominous** to me to be named after a box you're put in after you die. However, the inn looked old and poor and I thought that here was the perfect, cheap place for me to stay.

As I went through the entrance, I noticed that the inside of the inn was very dark. Gradually, I realized that a huge dark shape on one wall was a picture of a whaling ship with broken masts in a sea with waves as high as mountains. An enormous whale had jumped right out of the water and was about to land on the masts. On the opposite wall, there was a large number of old whaling tools, including some **lances** and dangerous-looking broken **harpoons**. A number of young seamen were sitting around an old wooden table. I walked past them under the huge **arch** of a whale's jawbone to reach the bar, where a little old man sold glasses of cheap alcohol.

“Do you have a room for me?” I asked him.

“I’m sorry,” he replied. “The inn is full. I don’t have a room in the place.” Then he put his hand on his forehead, and thought for a moment. “I suppose you’re going whaling,” he said, “so you won’t mind sharing a **harpooneer’s** bed, then. You’ll have to get used to that kind of thing.”

I told him that I never liked to sleep two in a bed. However, if the harpooneer was a good man, I would rather share his bed than wander around a strange town on such a freezing cold night.

“I thought so,” said Peter Coffin, for it was the landlord who I was speaking to. “All right—take a seat. You’ll want some supper? It’ll be ready very soon.”

At last, four or five of us were called into another room—it was as cold as Iceland, with no fire at all—to eat a good big meal of meat and potatoes.

“Landlord,” I whispered, “which one is the harpooneer?”

“Oh, he’s not here,” he replied. “The harpooneer is a big, dark-skinned man who eats nothing but meat! He’ll be back before long.”

I was starting to feel a bit worried about the dark-skinned harpooneer, and decided that I wanted to see him before I shared his bed. After supper, we went back into the bar and I decided to spend the rest of the evening watching the other men and waiting for the harpooneer. Soon, there was a great noise outside. “That’s the *Grampus’s* **crew**,” cried the landlord. “I saw her this morning—they’re back after a four-year **voyage**. Hurrah! Now we can get all their news from the **South Seas**!”

The door came open, and a wild group of sailors entered in huge, warm coats, with their heads wrapped in woolen scarves, and ice in their beards. Soon they all had drinks, and as they drank more and more, they became noisier and noisier. It was getting late now and there was still no sign of my harpooneer. "Landlord!" I said, "what sort of man is this harpooneer? Does he always stay out so late? It's nearly midnight."

The landlord laughed and I felt that he was laughing at something I didn't understand. "No," he answered, "generally he's an early bird—early to bed and early to rise. But tonight, I don't know why he's late, unless he can't sell his head."

"Can't sell his head!" I cried angrily. "What kind of story are you telling me, Landlord?"

"It's true," replied Peter Coffin. "He's lately arrived from the South Seas and he brought a lot of those New Zealand heads with him. People love to buy those dried heads, you know. He's sold them all but one."

I was more worried now—what kind of man was my harpooneer? Was he a **cannibal**? But the landlord was still speaking. "Come now, it's late, you'd better go to bed," he said. "Here, I'll give you a candle."

But I stood there uncertainly. Peter Coffin said, "Look here, he probably won't come back tonight—he must be sleeping somewhere else. Come with me."

I thought for a couple more minutes, then let him lead me upstairs to a small, cold room where there was an enormous bed. "There," said the landlord, putting the candle on an old **sea-chest**. "Make yourself comfortable now, and good night."

CHAPTER TWO

The harpooneer

As Peter Coffin's footsteps disappeared back down the stairs, I looked around the room. There was no furniture except the bed and the old sea-chest, and there were a few things which had to belong to the harpooneer. There was a folded **hammock** and a large, soft seaman's bag which no doubt held everything the harpooneer possessed. Above the fireplace there was a small piece of mirror, and by the bed there stood a tall **harpoon**.

After looking round the room, I took off my coat and trousers, then blew out the candle, and quickly jumped into bed because the room was so cold. A while later, I was nearly asleep when I heard the sound of footsteps, and saw a bit of light under the door. "This must be the harpooneer at last," I thought. "I'll lie here, and won't speak unless he speaks to me."

Holding a lamp in one hand, and his terrible New Zealand head in the other, the stranger entered the room without looking toward the bed. He pulled the seaman's bag open and pushed the horrible head down inside it. When he had done that, he turned around, and what a shock I got! What a face! It looked yellow and dark purple, and I realized that its dark parts were all **tattoos**. I had never seen a man from the South Sea islands, but I knew that they had tattoos, and decided that this man must be a South Sea island cannibal. He looked very strange to me, but then I thought, "It's only his outside, isn't it? A man can be honest in any sort of skin."

Then he took off his hat—a new, tall, black hat—and I realized that he had no hair except for a small piece above his forehead. I am not a coward, but I felt afraid of the strange man, so afraid that I could not speak to him.

He started to get undressed and I saw that his whole body was covered with the same dark, square tattoos as his face. Then I saw him go to his jacket, which he had hung over a chair, and pull a little statue of a person and a piece of ship's biscuit out of a pocket. He put the statue in the fireplace, and laid the biscuit in front of it, making strange noises. It seemed as if the statue was a god and he was praying to it. I was feeling more and more uncomfortable. Then the stranger took a **tomahawk pipe** from his bag, lit it from the lamp, and started to smoke. The next moment, he put out the lamp, and this cannibal, with his tomahawk pipe between his teeth, jumped into bed with me. I could not help it and shouted out. "Stay where you are, keep quiet, and let me get up and light the lamp again." But I quickly realized from his replies that he did not understand me.

"Who—you?" he said. "You not speak me. I kill you." And the lighted pipe began moving wildly around in the dark. "Tell me who you be," he said.

"Landlord! Peter Coffin!" I shouted. "Landlord! Save me!"

Hot **tobacco ash** was falling all around me, so I thought that soon the bed would be on fire. But then the landlord came into the room with a candle in his hand. Jumping from the bed, I ran to him.

"Don't be afraid now," said he, smiling at me with great amusement. "Queequeg would never hurt anyone."