

Prologue

Boston 1851

Hannah closed the book, laid her head back against her chair, and let her tears flow. So the stories she heard over the years were true. The man called Ishmael was not just telling a tall tale in this account, nor did he bear a grudge despite his own torment. She had met him when he came to Nantucket, rescued by the whale ship *Rachel* all those years ago. The islanders had gathered at the Congregational church to hear him tell of the *Pequod's* last days, and his story seemed credible. But of Ahab's final moments he had not spoken, perhaps because he was in a church, or perhaps because he wished to spare her and her son the agony she now felt.

She had long known it must be true. But just as she tried to deny herself all claims to happiness after becoming a widow, she tried to deny the monstrous evil her husband committed on his last, fatal voyage.

Now, in the privacy of her bedroom, her tears poured forth in racking sobs. Had she done all she could to save him? Was it her fault he could not be kept from his fateful course? And if her love and devotion could not save him, why couldn't their darling son's sweet charms or his very existence give Ahab cause to abandon his vengeful quest?

A strong, gentle hand touched her shoulder. "Hannah, I told you this book could not bring you peace. Come, my dear. I cannot bear to see your grief renewed this way."

Her gentle second husband pulled her up into his strong arms where she sobbed until no more tears came. At last he lifted her face and brushed her cheek with a hand roughened by years at sea, and she gazed up into gray eyes filled with compassion. Only he knew, only he understood her suffering. And only he could give her comfort.

“Oh, David, how can I bear it? How can I live with this awful truth? Ahab, poor Ahab. He’s truly lost. Now I know beyond all doubt he is in perdition, separated from God forever.”

She laid her head against David’s great, broad chest and felt his deep sigh. He had respected Ahab and had protected her and her son long before marrying her. Despite his strong Christian principles, David supported her deception when she changed her last name to avoid public censure for Ahab’s deeds. But did it pain him to see her grieve her lost love?

“Forgive me.” Hannah wiped her tears with his handkerchief. “I love you so much. Please don’t think ...”

He touched her lips with his finger. “Shh. I understand. We have both suffered great loss. Remember when I returned from my last whaling voyage? Instead of being greeted by my dear Eliza and little Lizzie, I found they had been dead for nearly six years. It was almost more than I could bear.”

“Yes, I know, and I don’t dismiss your grief. But think of the difference. When I sat beside their deathbeds, I saw only peace and faith in God reflected in their eyes. I saw their souls depart into eternal happiness. One day you’ll be reunited. But Ahab—” She held up the book recounting his demise. “Ahab died cursing God, spewing out hatred, and rejecting to his last breath the grace our Lord extended toward him even in the final moments of his life. And for days before that, poor, good Mr. Starbuck did all he could to urge him to salvation.”

“As did you, dear one. You bear no fault for Ahab’s decision. You must relinquish this guilt. No one can bear such a burden. I do not expect you to forget him, but God, in his great mercy, has granted us a new life together. Think of your son and pray that he will make a wiser choice than his father.”

She lifted the volume. “I do think of Timothy, and I know he must never see this book.”

David considered her words for a moment. “Mmm. Not now, of

course. But when he's older, he is certain to encounter someone who has read or heard the story. Perhaps it would be best to prepare him."

A short, mirthless laugh escaped her. "But surely by then, some new tragedy will have enthralled the seafaring world, and he can reflect on his father's sins in solitude."

"We must pray that will be so. But listen, Deborah is stirring." He walked over to the elegant wooden cradle where their infant daughter slept, and his face glowed. "How beautiful she is, and so sweet tempered. So like her mother." He turned to Hannah, gave her a tender smile, and reached out his arms. "Put away your sorrow, my dear one, and rejoice in this new life God has given us."

Hannah came to snuggle in his embrace. "I never should have read the book." She shuddered involuntarily. "Or at least not so soon after Deborah's birth. Mattie tells me many other women she has helped with birthing feel sadness for several weeks, even months, no matter how happy they are to have their baby."

David bent down and placed a kiss behind her ear. "What shall I say to cheer you?"

His deep murmur sent a pleasant shiver down her spine, and she leaned against him. He was right. She must choose to be thankful for all God had done for them and within them.

"You always know just what to say ... and do." She lifted her face to receive his gentle kiss. As more pleasant feelings began to flood her, she permitted herself a last wistful thought about Ahab's fatal choices. She would never forget him, but now she could honestly admit to herself that the dear one who now held her in his arms was by far the better man to raise her son. And, oh, how she did love this David Lazarus.

The sudden noise of pounding fists reverberated through their bedroom door.

"Mother, may we come in?" Timothy's muted voice accompanied the sound.

“Movver, me come in?” his little brother’s voice echoed.

Tiny Deborah stirred once more and began to whimper.

David chuckled, and Hannah’s laughter dispelled the last of her dismal mood.

“Shall we never have any privacy?” He released her, strode across the room to admit the boys, and stopped to tuck her book into a bureau drawer before opening the door.

“Probably not.” She gave him a merry smile.

Ten-year-old Timothy jogged in and dumped two-year-old Matthew from his back onto their parents’ bed. Matthew squealed and bounced up to leap off. Timothy and David both lunged to catch him before he hit the floor, but David, laughing heartily, caught him and tossed him nearly to the ceiling. The towheaded toddler squealed once more and begged to be tossed again.

Hannah gasped at the near-accident, and then laughed too, for she was learning to cope with the frights her sons gave her. Deborah chimed into the chaos with a cry signaling that dinner must no longer be delayed. In response, a familiar ache in Hannah’s full breasts reminded her that she needed her daughter as much as the six-week-old infant needed her.

“Take your high jinks outside, please. Deborah is hungry.”

“No, Mother, let us stay.” Dark-haired Timothy gave her a winsome smile. “We won’t look.”

Matthew clambered onto the arm of Hannah’s chair as she opened the front of her morning dress and prepared to nurse. “Deebee,” he cooed.

“Come, boys, let’s leave your mother and sister in peace.” David started to gather the two, but Matthew resisted with a little whine.

Timothy appealed to Hannah with his dark eyes. “I want to hear more about our trip.”

Moved as always by her eldest son’s pleas, Hannah bent her head in acquiescence while David tilted his in mock consternation.

“So much for discipline.”

Timothy lifted his chin, and his upper lip arched in a triumphant smirk that made her heart twist. How like his father he was. He plopped down onto the window seat and folded up his legs. “Are we really going this time? I mean, will we really get on a ship and sail to England? No changing our minds *this time*?”

“Lord willing, we will.” David sat on Hannah’s delicate fainting couch, his large frame looking out of place.

Another, darker Ahab look darted across Timothy’s face, and Hannah winced. Deborah whimpered at her breast, and Hannah took a deep, calming breath so the baby would not be disturbed. How could she forget all that Ahab had done when his son wore his face and had his black hair and deep, dark eyes? When that son often seemed to resent his stepfather’s trust in God?

“Why can’t we just get on a ship and go?” Timothy’s expression lost its glower, but he still appeared cross.

“But, my darling, aren’t you being foolish?” said Hannah. “If we, you and I, had gone to Europe several years ago when we first planned, we would not have Prince Albert’s great new exhibition to see in London. Nor would we have your little brother and sister to take with us.” She glanced at David and then back at her oldest child. “Nor would we have ...”

Timothy leapt from his perch and ran to throw his arms around David. “I’m sorry, Laz. I’m glad you are going with us.” He giggled boyishly. “No. I’m glad you are taking us. Mother would probably get us lost in the Sahara Desert or something.”

Hannah permitted his teasing without protest, but one of his words stung. How she wished Timothy would address David as Papa or Father. But when they had married three years before, she and David gave him permission to choose the name he liked the most. With memories of his own father lingering, he chose Laz. Yet she harbored a hope that one day he would change his mind.

As for the trip abroad, his impatience was directly her fault. All his life, in fact, all *her* life, she had longed to travel abroad and never stopped talking about it. Not until she married David and observed the depths of his faith could she join him in praying “Not my will, but thine be done” in matters both large and small. Small matters such as asking for a sunny day for a picnic. Large matters such as a trip to Europe or even more important, the regular voyages of his ship, the *Hannah Rose*.

David. Her mighty Viking. If only Timothy could understand how bold, how courageous this man was, he would not be so slow to adopt his faith or to accept him as father. For years, David had sailed to Norfolk, Virginia, to import cotton to Massachusetts mills where it was spun into fabric for sale around the globe. But another cargo reflected David’s true courage. With each cotton shipment came another, far more precious cargo: men, women, and children delivered to freedom from slavery in the South.

Hannah could see Timothy suspected something. But just as he had kept the secret of his father’s name, he kept quiet about the covert activities in their home and the townhouse adjoining it. He rarely even hinted to her that anything might be out of the ordinary, as though by instinct he knew it was a matter of life and death.

But one day, in the not-so-distant future, her bright young son would learn the whole truth. As soon as their little family returned from their trip abroad, David would take Timothy on his first voyage to Norfolk as his cabin boy. He would learn the true purpose for the trips and be subjected to the same discipline as any other sailor. Then there would be no thought of how David might be related to him, for favoritism had no place at sea.

With much fear but a persistent, growing faith, Hannah would loosen her maternal grasp on her eldest child, trusting David and God to bring him to manhood.

Chapter One



Spring 1857

Timothy Jacobs stood on the topgallant crosstrees high above the deck of the *Hannah Rose*, his heart pounding with excitement as he breathed in the salty Atlantic air. The sixteen-year-old loved his turn in the “crow’s nest” and often lingered after his watch was over, dreaming of the day he would have his own command. Today, however, he remained aloft for another reason. For the first time in eleven years, he would set foot on Nantucket, the island of his birth, and he wanted to be the first on the ship to see the small, windblown bit of land.

The ship could stay berthed in the whaling port for only a few hours, for it must hasten home to Boston to deliver its fragile cargo to safety. But Laz had said the time had come for Timothy to visit his birthplace, if only for a short while.

Impatience surged through him, and then a twinge of guilt. Good manners required him to visit his relatives before doing anything else, but he saw them often enough during their annual visits to Boston. Fortunately, they lived in the house where Timothy had been born. He could complete his family duty while he toured the house, seeking memories of the father whom Timothy had last seen when he was only three years old.

“What news?” shouted Laz from the deck far below.

“Nothing yet, Captain.” Timothy gave him a quick salute.

At sea, his stepfather received the respect due a superior officer.

On land, Timothy honored him as a good friend. Even with three children of his own, Laz never showed favoritism. Laz and Mother even depended on Timothy to be like a third parent to his younger half siblings, and he loved the little tadpoles every bit as much as if they shared the same father. Timothy never resented Mother's love for her second husband, for Laz had deeply respected her first one, Captain Ahab, Timothy's father.

Often, as Timothy grew up, Laz told him the story of how Captain Ahab once saved his life. When he had been a young whaling captain with his first command, Laz had unknowingly shipped with a mutinous crew. When their two ships gammed in the South Pacific, Ahab had seen what the green Lazarus had not and promptly hired away the treacherous first mate. After Ahab's ship, the *Pequod*, sailed off, a young Christian boy revealed the plans for the thwarted mutiny, and Laz had forever felt gratitude and respect for Ahab's kindness and wisdom.

Laz seemed to understand Timothy's need to know of his father's good deeds. All of his life, in the seafaring community where they lived, he had heard whispers of the "infamous" Ahab and his lost ship. Even if no such hints existed, the fact that Mother changed their last name from Ahab to Jacobs bespoke some sort of disgrace. But Timothy remembered a strong, dark giant who had taught him how to tie sailors' knots, playfully scowled at him at the supper table, and carried him about Nantucket on his shoulders.

And so it was with excitement—and a measure of trepidation—that Timothy stared across the Atlantic waters, searching for the island he had viewed only from afar in the five years he had sailed the Norfolk route with Laz.

Timothy sent an appreciative glance down to his stepfather, who now stood at the ship's helm, his eyes on the vast ocean before him. No other captain would take a side trip like this just to fulfill a third mate's lifelong wish.

This was the best time to do it, Laz had said as they sailed out of Norfolk. None of the five rescued slaves hidden in the hold of the *Hannah Rose* was a child or infant who might cry out as the ship docked in Nantucket Harbor, thereby alerting authorities of the ship's illegal cargo. Quaker Nantucket had never permitted slavery on its shores, but these days many off-islanders lived there, some of whom might agree with the nation's fugitive slave laws, which Congress recently had made stronger. Such scoundrels could and would expose the ship's clandestine activity and perhaps arrest the entire crew. As captain, Laz would pay the highest price, perhaps being imprisoned for many years.

Therefore, they could stay only a short time in Nantucket, and Timothy planned to make the most of it. Gazing once again across the waters, he felt his heart jolt with excitement.

"Land ho!"

Jemima Starbuck stood in the windswept Nantucket graveyard and brushed the dried dirt from the tall black pillar, shaking her head in sorrow over the chinks gouged from it. Why did Isaiah keep doing this? What satisfaction did her older brother receive from battering this marble memorial to the man whom he blamed for killing their father? Now that Mother was gone, Isaiah blamed Captain Ahab for her death too, for Mary Starbuck had never stopped grieving the death of her lifelong love, who had been first mate on the *Pequod's* final voyage.

Isaiah was not the only person who continued to show contempt for the dead captain. Island lore kept alive the story of how Ahab had never followed rules or customs, how he had pursued a certain white whale, seeking revenge against it for biting off his leg, and how he refused the pleas of Jemima's gentle father to return to the business of harvesting oil from the thousands of other, more placid whales that surrounded them in the vast Pacific waters. Finally, the

worst of all in Nantucket's way of thinking, how he failed to assist the captain of the *Rachel* in searching for his young son, lost to the white whale Ahab had stirred to fury. Then just a few years ago, the only survivor of that great whale's deadly wrath against the *Pequod* had written a book recounting the tragic events some had thought to be only rumors. Now everyone knew them to be true.

Jemima could not bring herself to read the book by the one who called himself Ishmael. Isaiah had read it last year, sharing with her the parts that described their father's brave last days. But, while she loved hearing of Papa's courage, the story only renewed the rage Isaiah had felt since childhood. In frustration, he often came to the Nantucket graveyard where the captain's widow had long ago erected a memorial. There, he cursed the captain and battered his monument, as though by striking the shiny stone and slathering it with mud, he himself could punish the guilty man. Why must he be so foolish?

Was it not enough that Ishmael recounted Ahab's awful end? That the mad captain died cursing God? That he was eternally lost? But then, until Isaiah became a Christian, he would never be able to comprehend the importance of forgiving—or his own need to be forgiven. Every day, she prayed for her beloved brother, pleading with her merciful heavenly Father to bring Isaiah to salvation.

A strong breeze blew Jemima's long blond hair across her face, and she wished for her bonnet to hold it back. Mother would be shocked at how often her daughter neglected to cover her head upon leaving home. That neglect really must stop or people might think her mother failed to raise her daughter properly.

Reminded of her dear one, Jemima glanced across the road toward the Quaker graveyard where Mother lay buried in an unmarked grave. Although Jemima accepted many Quaker views, she did not embrace them all. Because the Society of Friends regarded grave markers or adornments as prideful, she could not

place bright, fragrant bouquets of flowers on the grave as they did on gravestones over here. She and her mother had shared a love of flowers, and Jemima's sorrow might have eased if she could put some there. But, denied that comfort, she contented herself with cleaning away the evidence of her brother's futile rage toward a long-lost sinner. Through this simple task, she found healing for her own grieving heart.

Most of the dirt was gone now, except for traces caked into the carving. Her fingers covered with a worn linen handkerchief, Jemima traced the letters, reading each word softly to herself:

This Monument Erected in Memory of
Captain Ahab
of Nantucket, Aged 58 Years,
Who Perished with His Ship, the *Pequod*,
In the South Pacific Ocean
November 27, 1845.
All Hands Lost Save One.
Committed to Merciful God
By His Loving Wife and Son.

Despite all that he had done, his family had loved this man. Jemima's eyes grew misty as she considered their loss.

"What are you doing?"

A stern, masculine voice jolted Jemima from her reverie. She turned and looked up into the stormy black eyes of a tall young man.

"Oh! Oh, you startled me." She brushed away her tears with the back of her hand.

His angry expression dissolved, replaced by one of surprise.

"Forgive me." He bent forward with a well-executed bow, and when he straightened, the storm had disappeared. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

For a moment, Jemima could not breathe. Then fire seemed to rise up from her heart to the top of her head, burning her face on the way. Who was this handsome youth? She could recognize every person who lived on Nantucket Island, and she had never laid eyes on him. But what were these strange feelings racing through her? Not fear. No, not at all. The only word she could think of was awe, for he was the finest-looking young man she had ever seen.

They stood silently for a moment, gazing at each other. Then he glanced behind her and cleared his throat.

“Did you know him?” He nodded toward the monument.

She giggled, and her face flamed again. “I was just a baby when he died.”

He winced, shook his head slightly, and gave her a sad smile. “Of course. Foolish question.”

“Oh, no. Not foolish at all. Many people say I look older than I am.”

He chuckled. “I’ve always had that problem as well. Too tall.”

“Oh, I would not say *too* tall.” No, not too tall at all. What fine figure of a man—nearing perfection!

He smiled his appreciation of her remark and then turned his gaze once more to the monument.

She glanced at it too and then back at him. “Did you?”

“Did I ... oh, did I know him?”

“Yes.” She gave him an encouraging smile.

He stared at her for a moment, and she could see he was considering his answer.

“What were you doing before?” He jerked his head toward the stone. “I mean, when I walked up, you were doing something to it. What were you doing?”

Jemima pursed her lips for a moment. She would not reveal her brother’s actions.

“Dirt had collected in the letters. I was trying to clean it out.”

Her words seemed to move him. He turned away, cleared his throat, and rubbed the back of his neck before turning back.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

She breathed out a sob. Was this Captain Ahab’s son, listed here on the monument, of whom her mother sometimes had spoken?

“Timothy?”

He gave her a brief nod, and his dark brow furrowed. “But who are you?”

“Jemima!” At that moment, Isaiah raced into the graveyard where they stood. He threw his arm protectively around her and glared up at the much taller youth. “What do you want with my sister, you son of a madman?”

Timothy stepped back, his tanned face suddenly pale. “Isaiah?”

“Isaiah,” cried Jemima. “What a cruel thing for you to say. Oh, Timothy, I’m so sorry—”

“No!” shouted Isaiah, moving away from her toward Timothy. “Never apologize to this sort. Never apologize for me. As for you, you son of Ahab, what makes you think you can show your face on this island? Do you think people here don’t remember what your father did?”

Timothy’s face grew stormy once again, and his stance showed him ready for whatever came.

“Oh, Isaiah,” said Jemima, “Timothy was your very first friend in this world. Mother told me. How can you blame him for what his father did? It wasn’t his fault.”

“The sins of the fathers shall be visited on their children unto the third and fourth generation,” Isaiah growled. “And just in case God forgets to do his job, I plan to see it gets done.”

She gasped, looking at Timothy to see his reaction to her brother’s blasphemous words. To her sorrow, she saw only an arrogant sneer on his handsome, elegant face. But what could she expect in response to her brother’s attack?

"I did not come here to cause trouble." Timothy leveled an unflinching glare at Isaiah, and his hands clenched at his sides. "I suggest you leave quietly, and I will forget we ever met."

"You think you're going to drop anchor here and give orders?" Isaiah took a step toward Timothy.

"Isaiah." Jemima grasped his arm. "Please take me home."

He stared at her as if she were a stranger and then gave her a curt nod. "Come, Jemima. The smell of this place sickens me." He pulled her down the path toward the graveyard entrance.

Jemima glanced over her shoulder, and her heart ached to see the handsome young man kneeling on the ground and sobbing like a small child against his father's memorial.

Once Isaiah and Jemima entered their tiny, two-room home, Isaiah slammed the door as hard as he dared. If he slammed it too hard, as he had after Mother died, the hinges might break and they would have the expense of replacing them again. He and Jemima could not afford another new set of hinges or even to pay the blacksmith to repair broken ones. Like their poverty, sometimes the walls of this dark shack seemed like a prison.

While Jemima retreated to her room, probably to read her Bible and pray for him, Isaiah flung himself down on the fragile wooden chair in front of his desk, the only thing he owned that had once belonged to his father. Somehow, when Mother had sold their large house on Orange Street ten years before, she managed to keep the simple but elegant oak secretary. The tall desk was their sole memorial of their father, other than a few books in the bookcase that sat atop it.

Mother had lived in poverty all but a few years of her life, and now he felt powerless to prevent Jemima's suffering the same fate. They had been charity cases, unable to hold up their heads among the proud people of Nantucket. Even when he had gone to sea as a cabin

boy, his payment had been too low to provide much support. And though he had performed admirably as a whaler—far beyond his years, Captain Chase had said—Mother had suffered too much in his absence, fearing to lose him as she had Father.

But Isaiah's most compelling reason he could not return to the sea was the waning whale oil trade in Nantucket. These days, few ships from the island sailed around the Horn to the Pacific whaling grounds, and many more capable men than he were quick to seize all the available berths on those ships. He stayed home, therefore, and became a man-of-all-work for women whose husbands lived more at sea than on land; but at sixteen, he lacked enough experience to do all the necessary jobs, so few people hired him.

With Mother gone, he could return to whaling or perhaps sign aboard a merchant vessel, but then who would take care of Jemima? She was not quite fourteen, and he would not permit her to go into service as a live-in maid for their wealthier Starbuck relatives. He felt sufficiently shamed that his pretty, kindhearted sister had performed day work for several old, retired captains, two of whom had aggressively proposed marriage to her, frightening the child out of her wits. That was when Isaiah had put his foot down. She could be a clerk in Mrs. Lyons' dry goods store over on Petticoat Row, where good Mr. Lyons could keep a protective eye on her, but she would no longer clean any home other than her own.

That Ahab fellow—what audacity he had to come back to Nantucket. Obviously he had never been in want of anything. Fine clothes and shiny black boots so new they barely had a dent or scuff. His mother probably never sewed for other people late into the night just to put food on the table. Probably went from one rich husband to another, never missing a meal. Probably threw away her dresses if they got a little tear and ordered a new pair of shoes twice a year, maybe even more often.

Then young Ahab stands there by that marble abomination and

grieves his father's death. Did he not comprehend that to grieve him was to condone his murders?

Forgive, Mother had always said. *Forgive*, echoed Jemima. But even if he could forgive what Captain Ahab did to Father and to Isaiah himself, how could he forgive the hardship and pain he had caused in the lives of his kindhearted mother and sister?

A vague memory flitted into his thoughts—a merry, dark-haired playfellow wrestling and giggling with him as little boys do. With the memory, a tender, nostalgic twinge arced over his heart, unable to gain entry. For Isaiah Starbuck had hardened his soul to the gentle spirit of his sister and her God.

How would he provide for Jemima? What choices did he have? Continue his feeble efforts as a man-of-all-work or seek something else? His father's distant cousin, Matthew Starbuck, had mentioned the availability of an appointment to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. Such appointments were hard to come by, and despite his excellent marks in school, Isaiah doubted that, with all the worthy candidates in Massachusetts, he could be chosen. Such luck never came his way. But even if it did, he could not accept, for he would never desert Jemima.