

Ahab's Wife, or, the Star-Gazer Study Guide

Ahab's Wife, or, the Star-Gazer by Sena Jeter Naslund

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Plot Summary

Ahab's Wife by Sena Jeter Maslund is the story of a woman named Una whose life was dominated by the sea from an early age. She disguises herself as a boy and runs away to sea to work as a cabin boy and has many adventures. She watches her husband, Captain Ahab, go into madness after losing his leg to the whale Moby Dick. After his death, she makes a life for herself. Ahab's Wife is Una's story of the life she lived and how she found peace and fulfillment.

Una was born and raised in Kentucky, where she lived until she clashed too much with her father over religion. Fearing for Una's life, her mother sends her to live with her aunt and uncle on Nantucket Island. Una adjusts to life on the island where her only companion is her young cousin Frannie. When Una is sixteen, two sailors, Giles and Kit, come to the island to install a new light in the lighthouse.

Una is infatuated with both men. When she is sent to New Bedford to meet her mother, she makes plans to meet Kit and Giles. She follows them and learns what boat they will be sailing on. When she is notified that her mother won't be coming, she disguises herself as a man and hires on as a cabin boy on the same boat that Kit and Giles work on. They are at sea for over a month before Kit and Giles discover she is aboard. When the ship, the Sussex, is sunk by a whale, the three are in a small boat with ten others. They have to resort to cannibalism to survive and they are the only three survivors.

Giles dies when he falls overboard on the rescue boat and Kit begins to sink into madness. When he asks Una to marry him she accepts, and the marriage is performed by Captain Ahab on board the Pequod. Kit's mental condition does not improve when they return to Nantucket. When he is imprisoned for exposing himself in public, the Indians help him to escape. He leaves Nantucket and heads to Canada or the West.

Una learns from Captain Ahab that Kit will not be returning and she soon marries him. While he is away at sea, she travels to her mother's in Kentucky for the birth of her baby. Her mother dies in an accident and her baby dies, so she returns to Nantucket. She has her son, Justice, while Ahab is away for his second voyage of their marriage. He returns without his leg, which he lost to a great white whale known as Moby Dick. He is consumed with seeking revenge against the whale and does not return from the third voyage.

Una meets various people who become her friends. She moves from Nantucket to Siasconset to be near Mary Starbuck and her son. Both of their husbands are killed on the Pequod. Una does not attain closure until she meets Ishmael, who was the only survivor of the last voyage of the Pequod. Eventually, they live together and have a daughter named Felicity. Una finally finds the peace and fulfillment that she has been looking for in life.



Chapters 1-11

Chapters 1-11 Summary

Ahab's Wife by Sena Jeter Maslund is the story of a woman named Una whose life was dominated by the sea from an early age. She disguises herself as a boy and runs away to sea to work as a cabin boy and has many adventures. She watches her husband, Captain Ahab, go into madness after losing his leg to the whale Moby Dick. After his death, she makes a life for herself. Ahab's life is Una's story of the life she lived and how she found peace and fulfillment.

Una recalls her childhood and how her father, who had always been kind to her, becomes violent and eventually takes his own life. Una, who becomes pregnant by her husband Ahab, spends the pregnancy in Kentucky with her mother. When she begins labor, her mother goes for the doctor. While she is gone, a group of men, looking for an escaped slave woman come and search the house. A woman named Susan delivers her baby, a boy, named Liberty.

In chapter two, Susan and Una bury the baby, who lived only a day. Una's mother has died when her carriage overturned while she was going for the doctor. Una hides Susan, the woman the men were looking for. Susan is the escaped slave.

In chapter three, Una gives Susan clothing and food and helps her escape across the river. Una has a son by Ahab after she returns to Nantucket.

Chapter four has Una back in Nantucket. Ahab is home from his sea voyage. He loses his leg during his second voyage. Ahab is Una's second husband.

Chapter five explains how Una's father becomes violent and clashes with Una over religion. Una's mother Bertha decides to send her to live at the New Bedford Lighthouse with her aunt and uncle.

In chapter six, Bertha and Una leave home. They travel on a steamboat where they see the posters advertising rewards for runaway slaves.

In chapter seven, the steamboat reaches Cincinnati, and in chapter eight, they arrive at the lighthouse. Una meets her four-year-old cousin, Frannie, Aunt Agatha and Uncle Jonathan.

In chapter nine, Bertha spends a week on the island, helping Una to adjust. Una wants her mother to stay on the island but she leaves on the scheduled day.

In chapter ten, Una adjusts to life on the island. The Lighthouse has been named Giant by Frannie. Letters arrive from his mother and father saying how much they miss her. Una describes the lighthouse in terms of the five senses. She and Frannie refer to the lighthouse as if it is a person.



Chapter eleven reveals that Una is influenced by the views of Aunt Agatha, especially her pacificism. After her second summer on the island, Una begins to educate Frannie. Una doesn't explore the lighthouse until the second winter but declines to climb to the top with her uncle.

Chapters 1-11 Analysis

Una's father has very strict religious beliefs and tries to force them on Una. She does not accept his beliefs and is rather vocal about it. This leads to frequent clashes between them. Bertha fears for her daughter's life and takes her to the New Bedford Lighthouse to live with her sister. Both Aunt Agatha and Uncle Jonathan are quite liberal in their views towards religion and education. They do not force any beliefs on Una but allow her to form her own views.

The beginning of the book reveals that Ahab is not Una's only husband. She is married before and after Ahab.



Chapters 12 - 21

Chapters 12 - 21 Summary

Various boats come to the island at different times bringing mail and supplies. Una's parents come to visit when she is fourteen years of age. Her father still expects her to live according to scripture. The families meet in New Bedford and the first thing Ulysses does is to find an acceptable church. The two families spend a week touring the sights of New Bedford. Una climbs to the top of the lighthouse when she returns to the island. She knows she is free.

In chapter twelve, Agatha and Jonathan take the girls to Boston on vacation. They see the sights and the girls learn how city folk live. When they return to the island, Frannie becomes ill with smallpox and Una prays to the lighthouse.

In chapter fourteen, Una meets Kit Sparrow and Giles Bonewright, two of the men who come to the island to prepare for the installation of the new lighthouse light. Kit and Giles are both sailors. In chapter fifteen, they spend several days on the island. One night during a storm, Una awakens and finds Kit in the lighthouse. As they talk, Giles joins them.

In chapter sixteen, Una, who is partly blinded by a lightning bolt at the top of the lighthouse, recovers. Both Kit and Giles come to talk to her and read to her.

In chapter seventeen, Giles is leaving and promises to write to Una. He will probably not be with the crew that installs the light. The men say goodbye and leave.

In chapter eighteen, Aunt Agatha and Una go on a picnic. Aunt Agatha tells Una that she is pregnant and explains the facts of life to her. The next day she tells Frannie about the baby.

Kit returns to the island with the crew in chapter nineteen. Una's mother is also expecting a child. Giles applies to Harvard but is not accepted. He tells Una that he wants to sail the Atlantic and not be a member of the merchant marine. A second letter from Bertha rings news that Una's father hanged himself. Bertha will come to the island to have her baby.

In chapter twenty, Kit takes Una for a walk. They discuss the new light. The next day, in chapter twenty-one, they all help to load Kit's boat, the Petrel. Kit tells Una that he has a friend named Charlotte who is special to him but not as special as she is. Una likes both men.



Chapters 12 - 21 Analysis

Una's visit with her parents results in her freedom from her past bonds. She understands that there is a world out there and that she is free to choose what it is that she wants to do. This is what she realizes when she climbs to the top of the lighthouse.

Kit and Giles are the first two men that Una has known in her teens. She is learning to explore relationships and her own feelings and she likes both of them equally. Aunt Agatha is a little suspicious of Kit, but Uncle Jonathan sees nothing wrong in Una going for walks with him.



Chapters 22-33

Chapters 22-33 Summary

Una thinks about both Kit and Giles. At this point she prefers Giles, but he is going away to sea. Una invites both men to meet her mother when she arrives on September 11. Una will travel alone and her aunt and uncle feel she is old enough at sixteen.

Una is in New Bedford in chapter twenty-three. She is shown to her room at the Sea Fancy Inn by Rebekkah Swain. Rebekkah, who is from India, tells her story to Una of how she came to New Bedford. When the proprietor leaves, Una waits for her mother and Kit and Giles.

In chapter twenty-four, Giles and Kit are across the street at the Spouter Inn. Una skips breakfast to follow the two men, who she spotted from the window. She follows them to the whaling ship Sussex, where they leave their bags. When she returns to the Sea Fancy, there is a letter from her mother saying she had a miscarriage and has returned home.

In chapter twenty-five, Una dresses in men's clothing. She writes her mother that she returned to the island and she writes her aunt that she returned to Kentucky and secures a position as cabin boy on the Sussex.

The Sussex sails the next day after breakfast in chapter twenty-six. Una uses the name Ulysses Spenser. The captain, Clifford Fry, has her and his young son Chester, walk around the deck for exercise, and then she goes to the galley to work with the cook.

In chapter twenty-seven, Una works with the cook. She tries wine for the first time and learns that Chester's mother died giving birth to him. Harry, the cook, tells her the story of Captain Coffin, who took his wife on a voyage. They shipwrecked and they and the crew live for years on an island with only rats to eat for meat.

In chapter twenty-eight, neither Chester nor Una can sleep so they go on deck and pretend they are whaling.

Chapter twenty-nine has Harry telling Una the story of Captain Morrell, whose crew was killed by cannibals. Harry shows her the library he has.

In chapter thirty, Una eats her meals with the Captain and Chester and does not meet the rest of the crew. Captain Fry talks of Ahab and the Pequod, his ship.

In chapter thirty-one, Captain Fry says Una must learn to climb the rigging. Chester lends her his pea coat which is too big for him. Una hasn't seen Kit or Giles but is happy with her life at sea during the first month.



In chapter thirty-two, the Sussex spots a whale off the coast of Brazil. Una sees Kit as the whaling boats are being lowered. When they are lading off the oil, Kit recognizes her.

In chapter thirty-three, Kit and Una go up on deck to talk. Una says she is happy with her life at sea and doesn't ever want to return to her old life. She finds that Kit and Giles are no longer friends.

Chapters 22-33 Analysis

Una is sixteen when she first meets Kit and Giles, and she is infatuated with both of them. She is upset when her mother does not appear in New Bedford and decides that she does not want to return to her old life on the island. Since she secures a position on the Sussex after following Kit and Giles to the boat, it appears that she is trying to follow them. There is a world out there that she wants to see. She likes her new life on the Sussex and avoids both Kit and Giles, but it is Kit who recognizes her when they meet.



Chapters 34-45

Chapters 34-45 Summary

Giles tutors Chester for an hour each day. After the experience with the whale, Una feels a need for Giles and Kit. Giles finally recognizes her.

In chapter thirty-five, there is a storm that night. The captain is on deck so Kit and Giles come to the Captain's stateroom, where Una sleeps with Chester. From there, they go to the blubber room with the food and wine Una took from the kitchen.

Chapter thirty-six has the Sussex sailing through storms. Una is cold and wet like everyone else. Captain Fry ties her to him so she doesn't fall overboard, and then takes her below to Chester. Two men are lost at sea and the ship is damaged, but they make it to the South Pacific.

Another whale is spotted in chapter thirty-seven. The black whale is huge and knocks the men out of the whale boats. The whale attacks the Sussex and Harry is killed. The surviving crew lowers themselves to the water in boats as the Sussex sinks.

In chapter thirty-eight, the boats head in the direction of Chile. The boat with Una, Chester, Giles, Kit, Captain Fry and eight others is separated from the other boats during the night.

In chapter thirty-nine, the boat continues toward Chile. Giles and Una talk about the stars. In chapter forty, the group shares the last biscuit.

In chapter forty-one, Una and Kit talk about the goats on the island. Their fear grows. Four days later, in chapter forty-two, they run out of water. In chapter forty-three they draw a name to determine who to kill for food. Chester's name is drawn but Captain Fry bills himself instead. In chapter forty-four, they eat. Una is aware of sucking blood.

In chapter forty-five, they spot a ship, the Alba Albatross, and are rescued. They are in a makeshift sick bay and tended to by a woman, Sallie Swain, the wife of the captain. Sallie discovers that Una is a woman. Una recovers faster than Giles and Kit.

Chapters 34-45 Analysis

Una renews her friendship with Kit and Giles. She now feels a need for their friendship since she is away from her family. The three are among the survivors when the Sussex is destroyed by a whale. They float in a boat with ten others. When they run out of food and water, they draw the name of one to be killed. When Chester's name is drawn, Captain Fry kills himself to save his son. They survive by eating human flesh until they are rescued by the Alba Albatross. While recuperating, Una has a lot of time to think.

She realizes how they have survived but also that they did survive, and that is the most important thing.



Chapters 46-57

Chapters 46-57 Summary

Una compares herself, Giles, and Kit to a knotted string as she tats with Sallie. They are loyal together against the world. In chapter forty-seven, she wonders if the string is too short for interweaving.

In chapter forty-eight, the ship is headed toward Spain. Giles and Kit are well enough to walk around. Giles and Una talk about climbing the topsail and feeling like birds. That night, in chapter forty-nine, Una feels sick and goes to ask Sallie for medicine, but hearing Sallie with her husband, the captain, she walks away.

It is raining in chapter fifty. They bathe in the puddles on the boat and catch the rain water to drink in cups. They wash their clothes in the rain. Giles, Kit and Una are the only survivors from their boat. They meet a boat headed to New Bedford and Una sends letters to her family. The three talks about the decision they made to live. Una says they made the right decision. The next day Giles climbs the rigging and falls into the sea.

In chapter fifty-one, the men look for Giles but don't find him. Una wakes Kit and tells him about Giles. She undresses and remains with Kit.

Chapter fifty-two describes the brief funeral service held for Giles. The next morning, in chapter fifty-three, one of the boys is helping clean Kit, who befouled himself. He enters a period of dementia and melancholy. Sallie says that all they can do is try to keep him safe. He asks Una to marry him and she says yes.

In chapter fifty-four, the Albatross meets the Pequod which is sailing to Nantucket. Kit and Una transfer to the Pequod and are married by Ahab.

In chapter fifty-five, Ahab gives his quarters to the newlyweds. That night, Kit sleeps in the hammock and Una sleeps on the pallet, but he comes to her in the middle of the night. After two weeks, Kit throws her out of the room and she sits outside. He is having another fit of madness and they lock him in the room.

In chapter fifty-six, the crew moves Kit to the hurricane house three days later. Una tells Ahab that the madness came upon Kit when they were shipwrecked.

Ahab notes in his journal, in chapter fifty-seven, that there is something of himself in Una.

Chapters 46-57 Analysis

Kit, Giles and Una are bonded together by their experience at sea. They are the only survivors and they are affected by the experience of cannibalism, but they slowly



recover aboard the Albatross. They had made the decision to survive. Giles' death is more than Kit can bear. He slips into intermittent madness. In spite of this, Una decides to marry him and take him back to Nantucket on the Pequod. His intermittent spells continue and they have to lock him up.



Chapters 58-69

Chapters 58-69 Summary

Both Kit and Una feel guilty for their survival based on cannibalism.

Chapter fifty-nine finds Una talking to Mr. Starbuck. He has been away from his wife and son for two years and invites her to visit his family in Nantucket. When she asks him to suggest a place where she and Kit can live, he says Mr. Sparrow will probably live in the madhouse.

In chapter sixty, Una overhears Ahab talking to one of the crew. He is happy that Una is aboard.

In chapter sixty-one, Una writes to her aunt and uncle telling them about her marriage and how they are en route to Nantucket. She tells them of Kit's illness and Giles' death.

In chapter sixty-two, Una thinks about Starbuck's wife and child and thinks that she would like to have a child, and in chapter sixty-three, she thinks about sewing. She would rather earn a living in Nantucket by sewing than by baking. Ahab interrupts her thoughts by saying they are bringing Kit to the cabin since he has been injured. Una tends to his injuries. He is lucid and they talk before he falls asleep. The crew is chasing a whale and captures it. The Pequod is in an area of icebergs and Una offers to be the lookout for icebergs.

In chapter sixty-four, Ahab is impressed with Una. He is liking her more and more, and Una stands watch in chapter sixty-five while the crew harvests the whale oil. When she returns to Kit, he says he wants to talk to Giles. She tells him to talk to her instead and tells him about being on watch for icebergs. She assures him that they are safe.

In chapter sixty-six, the Pequod is three days from Nantucket. Kit is running around the ship naked, telling them to cut off his member for oil and save the whale. They have to restrain him.

In chapter sixty-seven, Ahab sends Starbuck to look for Una. They find her crying in the hold. Starbuck talks to Ahab as he is making tea for Una in chapter sixty-eight. Ahab says he will keep Kit in an inebriated condition until they reach Nantucket.

In chapter sixty-nine, Ahab brings the tea to Una, who is now staying in Starbuck's cabin. He tells her that Mary Starbuck will be a good friend to her in Nantucket. Una tells Ahab that Kit regrets their marriage.



Chapters 58-69 Analysis

Una's marriage to Kit is not going well because of his bouts of madness. Una thinks of Mary Starbuck and her child and thinks that she would like a child, but it is becoming obvious that she will not have a normal marriage to Kit. He has to be restrained many times. In the meantime, Ahab is becoming more attracted to Una, and she is aware of it. He tries to comfort her about her situation with Kit.



Chapters 70-80

Chapters 70-80 Summary

Una stays away from Kit for the next three days. She is invited to dinner at the captain's table their last night at sea. The men tell her about Nantucket. After dinner, Ahab asks her to walk on deck with him. Una compares Ahab to her father. In the middle of the night, she goes to Ahab's cabin to be with Kit.

In chapter seventy-one, the Pequod arrives at Nantucket. Ahab says Kit will receive pay for work performed while at sea. Kit and Una walk the streets of Nantucket. Kit introduces Una as his wife. They meet Charlotte, who is now married to Mr. Hussey, owner of the Try Pots Tavern. They dine together and Kit seems normal. They are invited to stay at the Hussey's. That night Kit makes love to her from behind and calls her Giles.

The next morning, in chapter seventy-two, one of the crew from the Pequod is at the Try Pots for breakfast. Kit does not want to see them so they go out for a walk.

In chapter seventy-three, Una tends to Kit through the fall. By Christmas, Charlotte and Una decide that he is not improving. Kit and Una walk around town on Christmas day. Kit is arrested for publicly urinating on a pump and exposing himself. Una runs home and is soothed by Charlotte.

Kit is still in the gaol several days later in chapter seventy-four. Una tells Charlotte the story of how she worked as a cabin boy on the Sussex and how they survived after the shipwreck. Charlotte says their secret is safe with her.

In chapter seventy-five, Una visits Kit in the gaol. She finds that he is gone. The Indians arranged for his transport to Canada. Una does not tell the gaoler or judge about Canada but promises to keep Kit at home when he returns.

In chapter seventy-six, Una walks home alone in the dark. She gets lost in the darkness and ends up by the mill. Lost in the dark, she wanders around in a panic. A man takes her hand and leads her back to the road, then disappears. That night as she lay in bed, she realizes it was Captain Ahab.

Una is sick and in bed for several days in chapter seventy-seven. She tells Charlotte about Kit. When working in the tavern, the gaoler tells Una that Kit stole a boat that was found empty. Una begins to work mending clothes.

In chapter seventy-eight, Una begins to attend the Universalist church. This helps her achieve peace. She sees Captain Ahab and the gaoler Isaac Starbuck at the church and talks with both of them after the service.



In chapter seventy-nine, Ahab tells Una that the Pequod is sailing the next day. He has learned from the Indians that Kit is alive and traveling north or possible west. Kit sends a message that he will never return. After delivering her mending, she writes letters to her aunt and mother saying that she is coming home.

In chapter eighty, Isaac Starbuck is killed in a fire in town. Una sees his body covered with a cloth. After leaving the fire, Una goes to the church where she finds Ahab talking.

Chapters 70-80 Analysis

Una meets and becomes friends with Charlotte in this section. Charlotte, an old girlfriend of Kit, marries Mr. Hussey when she believes that Kit is killed at sea. Kit and Una live with the Husseys and Charlotte helps Una care for Kit until he disappears. Charlotte is sensible and faces reality and goes on with her life, not matter what happens. Her sensibility and attitude are a good influence on Una. After Kit's disappearance, she finds work for Una doing mending for Mrs. Macy.

When Ahab tells Una that Kit will not return, Una bathes and freshens up at Mrs. Macy's when she delivers her mending. She now accepts the fact that Kit will not return and that she has a life to live without him. It is obvious that she and Ahab are interested in each other.



Chapters 81-90

Chapters 81-90 Summary

In the church, Ahab is professing his love for Una, and in chapter eighty-two, Una walks up to him and they talk. They leave the church and talk to the Pequod. Ahab in his powers as captain nullifies Una's marriage to Kit and declares her to be his wife. They leave the ship and walk to Ahab's house. The big house has no furniture except for the bedroom, and he tells her to furnish it as she wants. They spend the night there.

In chapter eighty-three, Ahab and Una watch the dawn from the cupola room. He has left money with the judge for Una's use. They both hope that she will be with child and she says she may visit her family in his absence.

Ahab departs in chapter eighty-four. Una watches the ship sail from the cupola. When she leaves the house, she meets Isaac Starbuck, who she thought was dead. She visits the judge to discuss the provisions that Ahab has made and tells him that Kit is dead.

Una visits Mrs. Macy in chapter eighty-five and tells her of the marriage. Una shops for fabrics and then returns home to find a note inviting her for lunch with the judge. He accompanies her to Boston to shop for furniture. They are gone for three weeks. While there, Una meets and attends a salon by Margaret Fuller.

The furniture arrives in chapter eighty-six. Charlotte arrives as the furniture is being moved in. She believes that Kit is dead and is very upset. Una says that she thinks she is pregnant and also that she will help the Husseys relocate their tavern to town where business will be better. Mrs. Sheffield, the sister of Mrs. Macy is hired as the housekeeper.

In chapter eighty-seven, Una travels to the island to visit her family. She misses Ahab. Mr. Hussey wants Una to be a silent partner in the new tavern. When she arrives at the island, she finds that her relatives have moved to the Great Lakes region. She then sails to New Bedford.

In chapter eighty-eight, Una stays at the Sea Fancy. She tells Rebekkah that she is married to Ahab and pregnant.

In chapter eighty-nine, Una arrives at her mothers in Kentucky. She plans to stay until after the baby is born.

It is winter in chapter ninety. The first snow fall occurs. Una's labor pains begin. Bertha tells Una she will go to fetch the doctor.



Chapters 81-90 Analysis

Both Ahab and Una know that Kit is still alive when they marry. They do not bother with the formality of divorce either. This forces Una to lie to Charlotte and the judge. Kit said he would never return and she does not stop to think of what would happen if he did return.

Una now has a new life with a husband that has enough money for her to do whatever she wants. She loves Ahab and misses him and is pleased to be carrying his child.



Chapters 91- 100

Chapters 91- 100 Summary

The beginning of the book relates how Bertha is killed and Una's baby dies after one day of life. Susan, the escaped slave, helps her and stays with her until she is better.

In chapter ninety-two, Susan says she doesn't know what state she was born in. Susan has a deep belief in God and tells her story the night before she crosses the Ohio River to freedom.

Una stops to check the root cellar for supplies on her way back to the house in chapter ninety-three. Thieves have taken most of the supplies. Una calculates how to stretch the remaining supplies until spring when she can travel to Nantucket. She spends the time reading and thinking.

In chapter ninety-four, one of the bounty hunters returns. He says he bought a donkey with the bounty money and produces the silver thimble that Una had sewn into Susan's coat. He tells her how Susan paid him and he let her go. The man has a wife and family in Indiana and offers to take her to Cincinnati via donkey. He is a dwarf.

In chapter ninety-five, Una sorts through her belongings deciding what she will take on the donkey. The man's name is David and he is known to the neighbor Roger Pack. They wait for a thaw before leaving and Una decides to authorize Roger to see the farm and ship her belongings to Nantucket.

In chapter ninety-six, Una and David begin traveling. As the weather warmed, they would sleep outside next to a fire. They talk of many things while they travel. When they arrive at the ferry, they say their goodbyes. Una has purchased the silver thimble from David before they parted.

Una arrives in Nantucket in chapter ninety-seven. Mrs. Macy answers the door and tells her that she married the captain of the Petrel. Mrs. Sheffield has married Mr. Hussey. Charlotte received a letter from Kit Sparrow and disappeared. Three months later, the judge receives a letter from Charlotte saying to give Mr. Hussey a divorce since she will not be returning. The judge, Austin Lord, arrives and says that he declared Kit legally dead. Una is happy to be home.

In chapter ninety-eight, Ahab's friends Captains Peleg and Bildad come to deliver letters to Una. They leave and Una begins to read the letters. He is looking forward to his return to Nantucket and tells of their success in hunting whales.

In chapter ninety-nine, Una climbs to the cupola twice a day to look for the Pequod. She frequently has the judge and other friends over for dinner. The judge introduces her to the Mitchell family.



In chapter one hundred, Una meets Maria Mitchell and finds she only wears silk dresses because cotton is the result of slave labor. The two women like each other.

Chapters 91- 100 Analysis

This section of the book tells of Una's life after the birth of her baby. She does not have an easy time of it, but she manages to return safely to Nantucket. She finds some surprises when she arrives. Charlotte received a letter from Kit Sparrow and disappears. The judge, who had declared Kit Sparrow legally dead, gives Mr. Hussey a divorce so he can marry Mrs. Sheffield. The judge and Ahab both did things their own way regarding the disappearance of Kit Sparrow. Now that others know that Kit is still alive, Una wonders about the legitimacy of her marriage to Ahab and any children they have. She tells the details to the judge and he tells her not to worry. Una was never concerned as long as everyone thought that Kit was dead.



Chapters 101 - 110

Chapters 101 - 110 Summary

Maria Mitchell lives in a small house on Vestal Street. They have an interest in astronomy and have an observatory on the roof. Una returns home and goes to the cupola to write a letter to Margaret. When she finishes, she sees the Pequod in the sea approaching the harbor.

Chapter 102 finds Ahab anxious to be home to see Una and the child. He knows they will have another.

In chapter 103, Una goes to meet the ship even though it is pouring rain. She meets Mary Starbuck at the dock and invites them to Heather's Moor but Mary says Starbuck will want to see their son. Una panics and tells Mary to tell Ahab to meet her at home and to tell him the baby died and runs off. Then she runs back to the dock to Ahab.

In chapter 104, Mrs. Macy-Maynard has a meal waiting for them. The story jumps to Ahab's return from his next voyage. They have a son, Justice, who is four years old. Ahab is carried on a stretcher, having lost his leg to a whale.

Una becomes pregnant with Justice after Ahab's first homecoming. They spend their time together and go on many picnics. Ahab rents a boat and takes her to the waters near the lighthouse. He tells her of his travels.

In chapter 105, Ahab leaves on a voyage. Una is pregnant. Maria comes over that night and she and Una go to see Halley's Comet. The next morning, in chapter 106, Maria arrives with letters from Frannie and Aunt Agatha. Frannie talks about her four-year-old brother Butch. She has heard that Kit is out West and wants to go and look for him.

Chapter 107 presents Aunt Agatha's letter. Aunt Agatha is still angry over Una's disappearance. She was hurt by the way Una treated them but wants her to write.

Una writes back in chapter 108 and begs their forgiveness. She says Frannie can come to Nantucket when she is sixteen.

In chapter 109, Una travels to visit Margaret. She walks through the woods to Mr. Emerson's house in Concord where Margaret is visiting him along with Mr. Alcott and Mr. Hawthorne. She meets a man leaving the house who had a dispute with Margaret. Margaret has also left and is not at her Boston home, so Una returns to Nantucket.

Una spends Christmas with the Unitarians in chapter 110.



Chapters 101 - 110 Analysis

Una is happy that Ahab is back, even if it is only for a short time. They spend a lot of time together and she is pregnant again by the time he leaves for another voyage. The pregnant Una again travels when Ahab is gone, this time to see Margaret Fuller.

Una finally communicates with Frannie and Aunt Agatha. She had written them several letters but received no reply. Aunt Agatha has been angry at the way Una treated them when she ran off, lying to both her and her mother. She wouldn't allow Frannie to write because Agatha felt Una couldn't be trusted after what she did.



Chapters 111 - 120

Chapters 111 - 120 Summary

Una decides to visit Mary Starbuck. Since it has snowed, she dresses warmly for the long walk. As she climbs the hill, she wonders if the child she is carrying will die as the last one did.

In chapter 112, Una's child is delivered by Mrs. Maynard in April. She names the boy Justice and she watches him grow as she waits for Ahab to return.

In chapter 113, Ahab returns after a four year absence with a leg missing. The leg has not properly healed and the various ivory legs cause bleeding. Ahab tells Justice how his leg is in the stomach of the white whale called Moby Dick.

In chapter 114, Ahab stays in the birthing room so his moans don't bother Justice and the others. He talks about madness and death.

In chapter 115, they use sea water to try to toughen the stump so Ahab can use an ivory leg. He falls on the rocks and is brought home with the stump bleeding, ten days before the Pequod is to sail. Una wants him to delay the sailing but Ahab is bent on revenge on the whale.

The Pequod prepares to sail on Christmas Eve in chapter 116. Ahab boards the boat then and spends the night there. The men board the next day in chapter 117. Una walks to the dock several times to see the ship.

In chapter 118, Justice spends his time in the cupola waiting for his father's return even though Una tells him it will be years. Una begins to use the room for sewing to be with him. When the ship Jeroboam arrives, one of the men is preaching about a great white whale called Moby Dick. He prophesies that Ahab will be killed by the whale. Una is afraid for her husband.

In chapter 119, Captain Mayhew comes to visit Una. They discuss Ahab's pursuit of the whale. Una explains the concept of revenge to Justice and then reads Ahab's letter to him.

In chapter 120, Captain Mayhew arrives with Justice and tells her about his investment in Pennsylvania oil. Una talks to the judge about it but he says it is not a good investment. Justice spends a lot of time at the dock talking to people and learning what he can.



Chapters 111 - 120 Analysis

Justice is born without any problems. Una dotes on the child and is anxious for Ahab to see the boy. When he does return, she learns how he lost his leg to Moby Dick. He is in pain the entire time of his stay at home, but he is bent on revenge and refuses to delay his next sailing. Una is worried about Ahab and his obsessive desire for revenge. She fears that it will destroy him.



Chapters 121 - 130

Chapters 121 - 130 Summary

Una receives a letter from Susan. She'd been by Una's Kentucky house and left the letter there hoping it would be sent to her. Susan tells the story of her escape and the people that helped.

In chapter 122, Ahab writes of the mishaps they are having at sea. Justice comes home with Captain Boomer of the Samud. Enderby lost his arm to Moby Dick. He met Ahab at sea and tells Una the story.

In chapter 123, Elijah, the ship deck preacher, approaches Justice at the dock and tells him his father will never come back. A family friend, Aunt Charity, shoves Elijah into the water and he drowns. After this, Justice would sit in the cupola for hours, watching the sea. The judge spends time with the boy and gives him candies. Mary Starbuck and her son come to visit. Mary suggests that Una rent a cabin in Siasconset for the summer so Justice could be in a different environment.

In chapter 124, Una likes Siasconset and decides to buy property there. When they arrive back at Heather's Manor, she tells Mrs. Maynard of her decision to move to Siasconset, called Sconset. She decides not to see the Nantucket house because Ahab loves it, and she orders new furniture for the new house. The judge comes to visit and says he will miss having them across the street.

Una awakens the next morning in chapter 125 and explores her neighbor's garden.

In chapter 126, Una still watches the sea for the arrival of the Pequod. She keeps thinking that Ahab is gone. She stares at the stars and thinks of sailing from star to star.

In chapter 127, Una sleeps on the roof. She is master of her own house now and she finds peace.

In chapter 128, Una wonders if Justice will one day go to sea. She feels that Ahab loves her and Justice even though he chose to go to sea to find the whale.

In chapter 129, Justice and Una walk by the seashore. She watches as he plays and then they go and meet their new neighbor. The man is a woodcarver who has a shed full of figures. When they arrive home, Mary and her son Jim are waiting. The women talk while the boys play. Both fear that their husbands will not return from this voyage.

In chapter 130, Una has problems sleeping again and is up on the roof. Austin Lord and Mrs. Maynard visit weekly. One night Justice joins her on the roof and says that he sometimes feels that his father won't return.



Chapters 121 - 130 Analysis

Ahab left on his voyage bent on seeking revenge on Moby Dick. Elijah prophesies that Ahab will not return from the voyage and this bothers Una and Justice. Mary Starbuck's suggestion that she move to Siasconset is a good one because it gets both Una and Justice out of Nantucket. She hopes that a different environment will be healthier for both. Even though Una is happy at Siasconset, both she and Mary feel that their husbands won't return.



Chapters 131 - 140

Chapters 131 - 140 Summary

Una, Mary and the boys watch the arrival of the Delight. They take turns watching for the arrival of the Pequod. Una goes to see the captain and he tells her of the mishap at sea that killed several men. Ahab was more interested in the fate of the white whale. Una knows that Ahab is still alive and goes to tell Maria of the visit. They are giving a dog to Justice. When she goes to see Mrs. Maynard, she learns another captain has said the Pequod was attacked by a whale and sunk. Captain Bildad confirms the story.

In chapter 132, Una has the Mitchells come out to view the meteor shower. They spend the night on the beach watching the meteors.

In chapter 133, Una, Mary and the boys recover from their losses. They attend the spring sheep shearing. Jim and Justice stuff the bags with the sheared wool. Una meets the minister's mother who knew Ahab when he was a child. She tells Una how Ahab was cursed by an Indian woman when he broke his promise to catch a fish for her.

Chapter 134 presents a letters from Margaret Fuller. She is in Europe and writing articles for Horace Greeley's Tribune.

Chapter 135 presents a letter from David Poland. He writes of an escaped slave who paid him for his freedom as Susan did. The escaped slave settled in New Bedford.

Una writes a letter to her family in chapter 136. She tells them of Ahab's death and that she is living in Siasconset. She sends the letter and a gift of one thousand dollars in gold to them via David Poland. She also asks that they allow Frannie to come and live with her.

Chapter 137 presents another letter from Margaret Fuller. There is a war in Europe and she is working as a hospital volunteer. She is in Rome and having a child with a soldier named Ossoli.

In chapter 138, Una and Justice are invited to stay at Austin Lord's house to await the arrival of Frannie. Mary and Jim are also invited.

Chapter 139 presents a note from Mrs. Maynard telling Una of the preparations the judge has made for their visit. Mrs. Maynard believes the judge wants to marry Una and cautions her against marriage.

In chapter 140, Una prepares for the journey to Nantucket. She sees no reason to marry the judge since she is happy with her situation.



Chapters 131 - 140 Analysis

Una is haunted by the prophecies of Elijah and worries about Ahab. She knows that he is obsessed with the idea of revenge. She and Justice talk to all of the captains and seamen for news of Ahab. When she and Mary learn of their husbands' deaths, they are there to support one another and share their grief. They both adjust to their new circumstances and get on with their lives.



Chapters 141 - 150

Chapters 141 - 150 Summary

Frannie and David arrive. On the second evening, the judge has a grand dinner, which many people attend. They tell Isaac Starbuck of the need for a lighthouse keeper in Sankaty and urge him to take the position. The next evening they attend a meeting presenting speeches by former slaves. The speakers are Frederick Douglas and William Lloyd Garrison. Una's neighbor, Robben Avalon, is at the meeting. He has just returned from Europe. Back in Siasconset, Una visits her neighbor to view his sculptures.

In chapter 142, Frannie moves to the judge's house in Nantucket. She then moves to the lighthouse at Sankaty to care for Isaac's children. She becomes pregnant and has a daughter named Liberty. The child wanders into the sea as a toddler and drowns. Frannie leaves the lighthouse and moves back to the judge's house. Soon she goes to work for Frederick Douglas. Jim and Justice begin to talk of going to sea.

In chapter 143, Mary marries Isaac and moves to the lighthouse.

In chapter 144, the judge comes to visit along with David Poland. Robben carves a statue of David. David keeps a sketch of the sculpture and gives the wooden statue to Una.

Robben and Una talk in chapter 145. Una tells him she has taken up writing. They are becoming close friends now that Mary is gone.

In chapter 146, Robben and Una visit daily. She often writes while he sculpts. Robben talks about him and the judge being soul mates. Una is shaken.

In chapter 147, Una thinks of her conversation with Robben. He wants her to be his friend forever but he is soul mates with the judge.

In chapter 148, Una notices the judge's horse at Robben's. There is an apple pie on her table. Robben is an excellent baker. When she goes outside, she notices that the town is on fire. The judge tells her that both of their homes have been destroyed and that he is going to live with Robben.

In chapter 149, Una thinks of the financial ramifications of the losses due to the fire. She is still financially comfortable. Lord resigns his judgeship and maintains a vegetable garden on Una's property. Una fishes with the boys and they are self sufficient in food production.

In chapter 150, there is a party in Nantucket in October 1847. The town has been rebuilt. A man tells a story of a near mutiny on a ship and its encounter with a great



while whale. Una recognizes the man as a sailor on the Alba Albatross. His name is Ishmael and he was on the Pequod's last voyage. He is the only survivor.

Chapters 141 - 150 Analysis

There are many changes in Una's life in this section. Frannie comes to live with her, then lives at the lighthouse with Isaac and his children and has his baby, who drowns in the sea. Frannie then moves to Nantucket and becomes involved with Douglas and his abolition movement. Mary then marries Isaac and moves to Sankaty and Una grows closer to her neighbor Robben. Robben then becomes soul mates with Austin Lord. Una's life falls into a new pattern as Austin Lord comes to live with Robben after the fire. Lord grows vegetables and Una teaches the boys to boat and fish. She is happy and content.



Chapters 151 - 157 and Epilogue

Chapters 151 - 157 and Epilogue Summary

Maria interrupts Ishmael and Una to say that she thinks she has discovered a new comet. They all got to the roof to view the comet.

In chapter 152, a woman Una meets named Phoebe Folger and the Mitchells minus Maria and her father all accompany Una back to Siasconset. Una tells Phoebe about Ishmael and how she has the chance to learn of the last moments on the Pequod.

In chapter 153, Una enjoys the week with Phoebe and the Mitchells. When she visits Robben, she finds that Ishmael is visiting. Instead of going in, she goes to work in the garden. The men join her and she learns that Ishmael's real name is David Pollack.

In chapter 154, Una feels lonely after all of the visitors leave. Robben and Austin have decided to visit Italy and Greece and want to take Justice and Jim with. When Una learns that Justice has made arrangement to sail on the Jerobam, she consents to the European trip with Robben and Austin. Lord also tells Una that her investments are making her wealthy. Robben says that he rented his house to Ishmael so they will be neighbors.

Ishmael and Una have a picnic on the beach in chapter 155. After they swim, he recites letters from Ahab and Starbuck and what they would have said to their wives if they had lived.

Chapter 156 presents a letter from Susan. She has just returned from retracing her journey to freedom. She is married and has a daughter named Liberty. Una begins to look for the Thousand Oaks plantation mentioned in the letter.

In chapter 157, Una sits on the roof at night and thinks of her friends and family. She is upset about Susan being a slave again. Ishmael joins her.

The Epilogue reveals that Una and Ishmael never legally marry. They have a daughter named Felicity. They are both writers and Una runs a school for former slave women called First School. Justice and Jim attend school in Nantucket. Una is content and at home.

Chapters 151 - 157 and Epilogue Analysis

There are more changes in Una's life that she adapts to. She finally finds the peace she has been seeking all of her life, even though she doesn't formally marry Ishmael. They live as man and wife and have a daughter. They both write and Una runs a school for former slave women. She finds the self-fulfillment that she has always sought.



Characters

Una Spenser

Una Spenser was born in Kentucky. She had loving parents until she was twelve years of age and her father became violent. They clashed over religion. The violence became so bad that her mother sent her to live with her aunt and uncle at their New Bedford lighthouse. When she is sixteen, both her aunt and mother become pregnant. Her father kills himself. Una dresses as a man and secures a job as cabin boy on the whaling ship *Sussex*. She uses her father's name of Ulysses Spenser. Giles and Kit, two men she met on the island, work on the ship. The *Sussex* is sunk by a whale and Una, Kit, Giles and ten others are adrift in the whale boat. When they run out of food and water, they resort to cannibalism. Una, Giles and Kit are the only three survivors. After Giles' death, she marries Kit, who goes mad. She brings him back to Nantucket on Captain Ahab's boat. Kit disappears when the Indians arrange for his transport to Canada. Una remains living with the Husseys, helping out in the tavern and doing mending work. When Kit sends word, via Ahab, that he will not return, Una marries Ahab, who sails on the *Pequod* the next day. She now has a totally different life with a big house and money for whatever she wants. While Ahab is at sea, she travels to Kentucky to have her baby. Her son Liberty dies after one day. She returns to Nantucket and she and Ahab have a son named Justice. After Ahab loses his leg and returns to the sea, she and Justice move to Siasconset to be by Mary Starbuck and her son. She stays in Siasconset after Ahab's death and eventually meets Ishmael, a sailor who was on the last voyage of the *Pequod*. She does not formally marry him but they live as man and wife and have a daughter named Felicity. They both become writers and she opens a school for former slave women.

Kit Sparrow

Kit Sparrow is a sailor who was born on Nantucket. He first meets Una when she is sixteen and he and Giles arrive at the island. His mother, Hester, is a baker, who filled in for his father who went to visit his parents in England. When his father returns, his mother develops an affliction of the mind and is sent to live on a sheep farm, where she dies. Kit, along with Giles, works on the whaling boat *Sussex*. Una follows them to the boat and secures a position as a cabin boy. Kit and Giles recognize her on the boat. When the *Sussex* is abandoned after a whale attack, Kit is in the smaller boat along with Una, Giles and ten others. When they run out of food and water, they resort to cannibalism to survive. Kit, along with Giles and Una, are the only survivors rescued by the *Alba Albatross*. When Giles falls into the sea and is lost, Kit suffers from melancholia and dementia. Kit marries Una aboard the *Pequod*, with Captain Ahab performing the ceremony. His spells of melancholia and dementia continue, and after two weeks he ejects Una from the room. The crew finds him eating paper and lock him into the stateroom. After three days, they move him to the hurricane house, figuring he will go completely mad if they leave him below deck and then to the hurricane room. He is kept



restrained until they reach Nantucket. In Nantucket, they live in the spare room of Charlotte and Mr. Hussey aboard the Try Pots tavern. Kit is still afflicted with his mental illness and is arrested on Christmas Day for exposing himself in public. The Indians help him escape from the gaol and transport him to Canada. He is last heard of heading for the West.

Ahab

Ahab is a sea captain and the husband of Una. He is her second husband and is five years older than she is. Ahab is in his fifties when he meets Una. He performs the ceremony for her marriage to Kit and brings them back to Nantucket. When Kit disappears, Ahab marries Una and they have a son Justice. On his second voyage, his leg is lost to the great white whale Moby Dick. He is obsessed with killing the whale and dies at sea in the effort.

Charlotte Hussey

Charlotte Hussey lives in Nantucket and is an old girlfriend of Kit's. When she believes that Kit was killed at sea, she marries Mr. Hussey and helps run the Try Pots Tavern. Kit and Una live with the Husseys when they return to Nantucket, and Charlotte and Una become good friends. When Charlotte receives a letter from Kit Sparrow, she disappears from Nantucket.

Frannie

Frannie is the daughter of Aunt Agatha and Uncle Jonathan. She is Una's cousin and was Una's closest friend on the island. After leaving the lighthouse island, Frannie and her family move to a Great Lakes lighthouse. After Ahab's death, Frannie comes to live with Una, and then lives with Isaac at the Sankaty lighthouse and has a daughter by him. When the child drowns, she moves to Nantucket and works with Frederick Douglas.

Austin Lord

Austin Lord is the judge who lives across the street from Ahab's house. He is left in charge of Una's finances when Ahab is away, and the two become good friends. He moves in with Robben at Siasconset, and they take Jim and Justice to Europe with them. They remain Una's neighbor.

Bertha Spenser

Bertha Spenser is the wife of Ulysses and the mother of Una. She sends her daughter to live with her sister at the lighthouse and remains in Kentucky. Una arrives to await the



birth of her baby. Bertha is killed in a carriage accident on her way to call for the doctor when Una is ready to deliver.

Mary Starbuck

Mary Starbuck is the wife of one of Ahab's crew members. She becomes a good friend of Una's after Ahab loses his leg and suggests that Una and Justice move to Siasconset in the house next door to her. They mourn the loss of their husbands together. Mary eventually marries Isaac and moves to the Sankaty lighthouse.

Justice

Justice is the son of Ahab and Una. He and Jim are sent to Europe with Robben and Austin when they make plans to work on a whaling ship. When he returns, Justice attends school in Nantucket.

Aunt Agatha

Aunt Agatha is the sister of Bertha. She is married to Jonathan and has a young daughter named Frannie. She agrees to take in her niece Una when Bertha is afraid that Ulysses will kill her. The family eventually moves from the Nantucket lighthouse to a lighthouse on the Great Lakes.



Objects/Places

Kentucky

Kentucky is a southern state in the United States where Una's mother lives.

Nantucket

Nantucket is an island located south of Cape Cod off the coast of Massachusetts.

New Bedford

New Bedford is a city located in the southern part of Massachusetts.

The New Bedford Lighthouse

The New Bedford Lighthouse is located on an island off the coast of Massachusetts.

Sussex

The Sussex is a whaling boat that Giles, Kit and Una work on until it is destroyed by a whale.

Pequod

Pequod is the sailing vessel of Captain Ahab.

Try Pots Tavern

Try Pots Tavern is located in Nantucket and run by the Husseys, who allow Kit and Una to live there when they first return to Nantucket.

Heather's Moor

Heather's Moor is the name of the house that Ahab and Una own in Nantucket.

Siasconset

Siasconset is a town on the eastern side of Nantucket Island.

Sankaty Lighthouse

Sankaty Lighthouse is located on the eastern side of Nantucket Island, near Siasconset.



Themes

Quest for Adventure

The quest for adventure is a major theme of the book. Many of the book's characters seek adventure. Una certainly falls into this category since she disguises herself as a boy and runs away to sea at the age of sixteen. She not only wants to be near Giles and Kit, but she also wants the adventure of being at sea. She wants freedom. Once she is free of the domination of her father, she goes to the top of the lighthouse and looks out. There is a world out there and Una knows that it is hers. She wants the experience of living and working on the whaling boat just as Kit and Giles do. Once she is in Nantucket after surviving the voyage, she is still adventuresome. She is never afraid to do things on her own or to travel. Una travels to Kentucky when she is pregnant. She returns to Nantucket with the help of David Poland by traveling to the ferry on the back of his donkey. She travels to Concord and gets lost on the path of the home of Mr. Emerson when she wants to visit Margaret. On her visit to the judge's house, she gets lost on her way home in the dark, and Ahab finds her and guides her to the road. She is lucky that there are good people there to help her in each situation. After Austin Lord moves in with Robben, Una teaches him and Justice to fish and boat. She takes them out on the ocean alone. She is not afraid to do this. Most of the men around her also have this desire for adventure since they sail on whaling boats, yet she does not encourage her son to do so.

Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are another theme of the book. Both Mary and Una accept the fact that their husbands are sailors and that they are gone for long periods of time. They do not worry about them. They just wait for them to return. This changes after Ahab loses his leg to a great white whale, known as Moby Dick, in the Sea of Japan. The leg does not heal properly and Ahab is in constant pain and consumed with seeking revenge on the whale. He is not ready physically to go to sea on that last voyage and refuses to delay the trip. Ahab wants to find and kill the whale that has maimed him and he won't listen to Una, who doesn't want him to sail. Una does not have a good feeling about the voyage. A rabble rousing preacher named Elijah tells her and a crowd that Ahab will be killed. Una is shaken up by the prophecy but keeps it to herself until Elijah accosts Justice and tells him the same prophecy. Both Justice and Una experience a great deal of anxiety because of this. Justice is constantly going to the docks and talking to sailors for news of his father. It helps settle Una's nerves to hear that Ahab is still alive because she is still very nervous about this voyage. Una finally follows Mary Starbuck's advice and moves to Siasconset for a change of environment for her and Justice. She finds that Mary also has a bad feeling about this voyage and doesn't think that their husbands will be returning. They finally receive the news of their deaths, confirming their fears.



Relationships

Relationships are another theme of the book. Una has a variety of different kinds of relationships with different people. For the most part, the relationships she forms with different people are lasting. She and others keep in touch. Una only knows the escaped slave Susan for a very short time, but Susan writes her occasionally and Una tries to find her for years. David Poland, who helps her travel from her mother's Kentucky home to the ferry, becomes a trusted friend who is also always there to help her. Her relationship with Austin Lord begins as a business relationship. Ahab has the judge, who lives across the street from Heather's Moor, handle Una's money and business affairs. He quickly becomes a trusted friend of hers. He introduces her to Maria Mitchell and she becomes friends with the entire family. Austin Lord always provides a home for her, Justice and Frannie whenever they are in Nantucket. Her neighbor in Siasconset, Robben, becomes a good friend of hers and confides to her the nature of his relationship with Austin Lord. Mary Starbuck, the wife of one of Ahab's crew, is also a good friend and talks her into moving to Siasconset to get Justice away from Nantucket for a while. This proved to be a better environment for all of them. The people that Una forms relationships with become more than just friends; they become family members, in a way. The friendships are lasting over time and miles.



Style

Point of View

Ahab's Wife is written in the first person point of view with the narrator being Una, who is the main character. Una is basically telling the story of her life from the time she was a child in Kentucky until she lives in Siasconset with Ishmael. The story is told from Una's perspective. She tells of the people she meets and the experiences she has. Una tells of the events as they happen. The limitation of the first person point of view is that the knowledge of the reader is confined to the knowledge of the narrator and this is the case with Ahab's Wife. The reader has no knowledge of events that occur outside the presence of the main character. The reader learns of what happens when she learns. But this is really not a shortcoming of the book. Una provides whatever information and details that the reader needs and this is sufficient to provide the reader with the necessary information. It also adds an element of realism to the novel since it is Una that is telling her own story. The use of the first person makes it easier for then reader to identify with Una and her experiences.

Setting

There are numerous places that provide a setting for the action of the novel. Una was raised in Kentucky and returns to her mother's cabin to have her first baby. She moves to the island lighthouse when she is twelve and there are various scenes on the island. New Bedford is the nearest city and they travel there several times. It is from New Bedford that Una joins the crew of the Sussex and goes to sea. The Sussex provides a setting for the action until the ship is sunk. The characters survive in smaller boats until they are rescued by the Alba Abatross. This is where Giles dies and Kit begins to slip into madness. Captain Ahab's ship, the Pequod, is where Una meets Ahab, who performs the marriage ceremony for her and Kit. Nantucket Island is where Una lives after the Pequod returns. She and Kit live at the Try Pots Tavern located on the outskirts of the city. When she marries Ahab, she moves to his house, Heather's Moor, which is located across the street from the judge's house. Siasconset is located on the eastern coast of the island where Una and Justice move to. This is also where the Sankaty Lighthouse is located.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel and the meaning of the terms are appropriate to the nature of the novel and the time period in which it occurs. The language of the book is easy to read and understand. There are no hidden meanings to any of the terms. There is some symbolism such as the lighthouse, but it is readily explained by the author where it occurs, such as the lighthouse representing a father to Una. When her own father says he was wrong in his view and domination, Una views the lighthouse differently. She



climbs to the top, looks out at the world and knows she is free. Some of the language of the novel is written in the vernacular of the Quakers. This is true of any dialogue with Ahab, but it does not slow the reading in any way. There are some terms that pertain to the ship and whaling but these are explained and are not difficult to understand. The Quaker vernacular and the sea terms add to the realism of the characters and the novel. For the most part, the writing style is easy to understand and read which adds to the enjoyment of reading the novel.

Structure

The structure of the novel is a little fussy. There are 157 chapters that tell the story of the novel, plus an Epilogue that tells of Una's life after she meets Ishmael. These chapters range from two or three sentences to thirteen pages. The chapters are titled and numbered. It seems that some of the shorter chapters could have been combined without detracting from the story.

There is a Table of Contents showing the chapter numbers, titles and pages. There are illustrations throughout the novel and there is a list showing the page numbers at the beginning of the book. There is also a section entitled Extracts which provides several pages of quotes from Moby Dick and other sources.

There is an acknowledgments section at the end of the book in which the author mentions the names of people who were significant in her writing of the novel. There is also a paragraph titled About the Author.

In spite of the number of chapters, the structure of the book and the style of writing add to the readability of the novel.



Quotes

"Captain Ahab was neither my first husband nor my last."
Chap. 1, p. 1

"As I climbed, I was anxious that the door at the top might be too much for my strength, but it yielded to me. And then! The glory of the sky! Light and air all about me! The earth and the enormous sea at my feet. 'Mine!' I shouted and flung open my arms to embrace it."
Chap. 12, p. 59

"For my mother and my aunt, the thought of babies revitalized their beings. And yet, I did not just want babies, or men who went to sea. I wanted something for myself."
Chap. 22, p. 124

"I would not marry anyone anytime anywhere. I would sail as a man and live ashore as a woman. I would do just as I pleased. So long as I hurt no other being, why not do exactly as I pleased?"
Chap. 36, p. 204

"I was not mad, yet Kit's madness seemed woven into me. His steadfastness, his devotion, sang through his pain of our great loss. How could I ease Kit's pain? My own I could scarcely face."
Chap. 53, p. 249

"I could sew on Nantucket as well as anywhere! Yes, I preferred that to baking for then one's work was consumed in a flash, but needlework was something that might last."
Chap. 63, p. 268

"Charlotte, Charlotte the healer. Perhaps Kit should have married her. Perhaps she had health and passion far beyond my own to offer. And her loyalty. She had shamed me there. Yet, Kit had chosen me - had married his guilt. When I thought of Kit, hope died quickly."
Chap. 70, p. 326

"'Here,' Ahab said, 'what I did join together, I now put asunder.' What he said was beautiful and true, to me. His voice was quiet and humble as rain. 'And here I wed Una and take her for my bride.'"
Chap. 82, p. 360

"As I lay on the bed, I thought he had wanted her instead of me. A bitter tear squeezed from each eye. Kit could have sent for me. But I was married now, and I would not have wanted to leave Ahab or my home to live with Kit among the Indians. But Charlotte chose it. I was sure she had. Then let her choose it, and let him choose her!"
Chap. 97, p. 444



"Sometimes I fear I have stolen my happiness from the gods, for my life with you is beyond my due."

Chap. 104, p. 478

"But here's Nantucket' - he waved the vial again drawn from his pocket - 'though Moby Dick send me to the ocean floor, I shall triumph - remember that - for I shall be buried in Nantucket soil.'"

Chap. 115, p. 512

"But is he gone? I online know that I can no longer wait, looking out for him. Still I stand and face the dark."

Chap. 126, p. 556

"Ahab alive! And still pursuing the white whale! Closing, perhaps, on the whale! Ahab possibly alive! But what was the sequel?"

Chap. 131, p. 576

"Yet from the beginning and in all my long future with Robben, I felt, oddly, that despite my reticence he, like Captain Ahab, thoroughly knew me. He knew me artistically, intuitively, without a factual history - the contours of my shape. He knew who I was, without the clutter of details. And, so I discovered, I knew him intuitively, too, or at least knew what seemed his essence."

Chap. 141, p. 608

"I shall call Ishmael, point toward the Sankaty headland, then read aloud this last writing, believing that he will like my own wind-flung confetti - words streaming from my hand. Each day and forever, by the ticking of the mantel clock and by the dark wheeling of the cosmos, we have given time a home."

Epilogue, p. 666

Topics for Discussion

How does Una come to live on the island with the lighthouse? What problems did she have with her father?

How does Una develop a love of the sea? Why is it unusual for a young woman to be so adventurous?

What are the circumstances of Una's marriage to Kit? Why does Una say that Kit married his own guilt when he married her?

How does Una come to marry Ahab? Why are there questions about the legitimacy of the marriage and any offspring?

How does Ahab lose his leg? Why does he insist on returning to the sea and whaling?

How does Una finally find peace and fulfillment in her life?

Why are Una and Mary so worried about their husbands on their last voyage? What factors contribute to the anxiety?