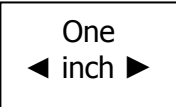
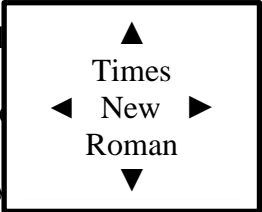


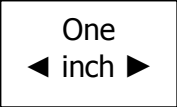
Chapter One



It was a dark and stormy night. You better not never tell nobody but God. It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. Happy families are all alike, but every family is unhappy in its own way. It was a bright cold day in April, and the sun shone, not from having been behind a cloud for the last 141 days, but from having been hidden by a veil of tarnished glass for a longer time. If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is the name of the town where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me.



Call me Ishmael. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. Somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember, a gentleman lived not long ago, one of those who has a lance and ancient shield on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing. He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.



The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting. Of all the things that drive men to sea, the most common disaster, I've come to learn, is women. When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he

