

Chapter 7

Strange Secrets on Board

Hundreds of savages were on our heels as we raced to the dinghy. Stones and arrows fell all around us as we jumped in and began rowing. Luckily, there were no canoes on shore in which the savages could follow us!

We reached the *Nautilus* safely, and I hurried below to find Captain Nemo. He was in the lounge, playing the magnificent organ.

"Ah, it's you, Professor," he said, looking up. "How was your hunting expedition?"

"We were attacked by savages!" I cried.

Captain Nemo didn't seem surprised.

“Anywhere you set foot on land, Professor, you will find savages—here, as well as in your part of the world.”

“But what if they come out to attack us?”

Captain Nemo began playing again as he calmly answered, “Even if all the savages on New Guinea came out to attack us, the *Nautilus* would have nothing to fear.”

Feeling a little more assured by the captain’s words, I went to my cabin to rest.

At six the next morning, I went up to the platform and looked towards the shore. The sea was filled with dugout canoes and hundreds of savages paddling towards the ship.

I ran below to warn Captain Nemo. I knocked at his cabin door and rushed in.

“You are disturbing me,” said Captain Nemo as he sat at his work table with piles of papers in front of him. “But I imagine you have some serious reason for doing so.”

“Very serious sir,” I said. “We’re being

attacked by hundreds of savages!"

"Oh?" said the captain calmly. "Then all we need do is close the hatches. See, I press this button and it's done. Surely, Professor, you can't think that these gentlemen could damage our hull with their arrows when the cannon balls from your warship could not even dent it."

Then he returned to his work and I to my cabin. All day and all night I could hear the savages walking about on the platform, letting out bloodcurdling yells.

At 2:30 the next afternoon, Captain Nemo came into the lounge and announced that the tide had risen and freed us from the reef. We would renew our air supply and set off.

"But what about the savages?" I asked. "Won't they come below when you open the hatch?"

"Monsieur Aronnax, no one can get down that hatch if I do not want them to. But of

course, you don't understand. Come with me!"

I followed the captain along the gangway to the ladder leading up to the hatch. We stood looking up as the hatch sprang open. Immediately, twenty horrible faces glared down at us. One of the savages grabbed onto the ladder to start down, but he was thrown back by some strange force. He ran off cursing and jumping about wildly.

Ten more savages tried grabbing the ladder and ran off screaming the same way.

I realized then that this was not just a plain iron ladder. It was an electrically charged one! And anybody touching it against the captain's wishes would get a powerful shock. No wonder they ran off screaming!

And so the *Nautilus*, free of savages and freed from the reef, began moving once again.

Two weeks later, we were in the Indian Ocean, six hundred miles west of Australia.

One morning when we surfaced for air, I went up on the platform. The first mate was there scanning the horizon as he did every morning. Suddenly, he called down the hatch in an excited voice. Almost instantly, Captain Nemo appeared on deck. He began looking at something on the horizon through his telescope.

I put my own telescope to my eye, but before I had the chance to focus the lens, it was abruptly snatched out of my hands.

I turned around and saw Captain Nemo standing before me. His eyes were flashing angrily, his body was rigid, and his fists were clenched. But he wasn't looking at me. He was gazing at something on the horizon.

After several minutes, his usual calm returned and he spoke. "Monsieur Aronnax, I must lock you and your companions in the cell for a while."

"Can you tell me why?" I asked, puzzled.

“No, Monsieur, I cannot!”

Five minutes later, Ned, Conseil, and I found ourselves locked in the cell where we had spent our first night on board. Our lunch was brought in, and since we had nothing else to do, we ate. Ned and Conseil ate well, but I only picked at my food. I was much too confused to think of eating!

No sooner had Ned and Conseil finished their meal than they put their heads down on the table and fell into a deep sleep. I felt my brain become drowsy, but I tried hard to keep my eyes open. A painful thought suddenly crossed my mind—some sort of sleeping powder had been mixed with our food! Locking us in this cell wasn't enough to keep us from knowing Captain Nemo's secrets. We had to be put to sleep too!

My eyelids closed like lead weights. I fell into a deathlike sleep filled with wild terrifying dreams!

Chapter 8

The Coral Cemetery

The next morning I awoke to find myself back in my cabin. My door was unlocked, and I assumed I was no longer a prisoner. So I gathered up my scientific notes and went into the lounge to work on them.

I saw nothing of Captain Nemo until he entered the lounge later in the afternoon. His red eyes showed that he had not slept at all the night before, and his whole face had a look of sadness on it—a look I had never seen there before.

After pacing back and forth for several

minutes, he came over to me and asked, "Are you a doctor, Monsieur Aronnax?"

"Why yes!" I answered in surprise. "I practiced for several years before starting my work at the Paris Museum."

"Well then, would you mind treating one of my men?"

"Certainly!" I answered and followed him to a cabin in the crew's quarters.

There, stretched out on a bed was a man of about forty, with a strong rugged face. His head was wrapped in bloodstained bandages. I removed the bandages and examined the wound. It was horrible! The skull had been smashed by some hard instrument and part of the brain was exposed. The blood had already clotted and turned to a dark red. The man's breathing was very slow, his pulse was weak, and his arms and legs were cold. I realized that death was near.

There was nothing I could do for him

except to put a fresh bandage on his head. But I couldn't help but wonder if there was some connection between this wounded crewman and the mysterious events of the night before!

When I asked Captain Nemo how the man was wounded, he answered me very sharply. "That is no business of yours! I'm only concerned with his chances."

"He'll be dead in two hours," I said.

Captain Nemo clenched his fists and his eyes filled with tears. How strange to see this man cry! I never believed he could.

I didn't see Captain Nemo again until the next morning. I had started to ask him about the dying man when he broke in, inviting the three of us to go on another underwater excursion with him. Ned and Conseil were so eager to say yes that I had no further chance to speak to the captain.

Within half an hour we were all in our

diving suits, stepping out on the ocean floor. Captain Nemo led the way and a dozen crew members followed behind us.

A gentle slope led us ninety feet below the surface, where I got my first glimpse of the coral kingdom.

Coral is the skeleton of a tiny, jellylike sea animal called a polyp. These polyps live in colonies, and their skeletons slowly build one upon the other, sometimes forming reefs and islands.

Here, the coral formed a stone forest beneath the sea. Thick shrubs and trees made of this rocklike coral were covered with thousands of colorful flowerlike polyps. I reached out to pick one of these living flowers, but as my hand drew near, an alarm seemed to spread through the entire colony. The white blossoms darted inside their red cases and vanished from sight. The flowering shrub turned into a bumpy, stony tree.

We continued heading downhill until we reached a depth of a thousand feet. Here, the coral formed stone trees connected to each other by beautifully colored vines. Beneath our feet, smaller varieties of coral formed a carpet of flowers that shone like dazzling jewels!

In the middle of this magnificent garden was a circular clearing. Mounds of sand were piled up in several places around a large coral cross. These mounds had definitely been formed by the hands of man, not by the sea.

Captain Nemo stopped at this clearing, and his crew formed a half circle around him. At a sign from their captain, two crewmen stepped forward and began digging a long hole. When they were finished, four other men approached the hole carrying a long white bundle on their shoulders.

Suddenly I understood! Captain Nemo and his men had come to bury their shipmate in

their own private cemetery on the ocean floor.

As soon as the body was placed in its grave and covered over, Captain Nemo and his men knelt down to pray. Ned, Conseil, and I knelt too.

After several minutes with our heads bowed, the funeral procession started back to the *Nautilus*.

Once we were on board, Captain Nemo explained that the wounded man had died during the night. "We have buried him in our peaceful cemetery," he said. "The coral will now seal his grave forever!"

"At least there, Captain, your dead can sleep quietly, beyond the reach of sharks."

"Yes," Captain Nemo replied bitterly, "beyond the reach of sharks and men!"

Chapter 9

Pearls and Sharks!

February began and we were almost half-way through the Indian Ocean, approaching the island of Ceylon at the tip of the Indian peninsula. I was in the lounge one morning reading a book about Ceylon when Captain Nemo joined me.

“Ceylon is famous for its pearl fisheries,” he said. “Would you like to visit one of them?”

“I certainly would, Captain,” I replied.

“Fine! The fishing season does not begin until March, so we will not see any fishermen, but you will enjoy it just the same.”

"How do these fishermen bring up the pearl oysters?" I asked.

"Their methods are quite primitive, I'm afraid. The divers go down about forty feet while attached to their boats by a rope. A heavy stone gripped between their feet holds them down as they gather the oysters."

"But how long can these divers stay down without any kind of diving suit or air?"

"Not too long," answered the captain. "Some manage to stay down about a minute, but when these poor creatures return to the surface, blood is usually pouring out of their ears and noses from the pressure of the water. That is, *if* they come up. For there is always the danger of sharks in these waters!"

"Sharks!" I exclaimed. "Will we be facing sharks?"

"It's quite possible, Professor! But you'll find shark hunting very interesting too."

Once Captain Nemo left the room, I broke

out into a cold sweat. Sharks! I wiped my forehead and picked up my book on Ceylon again. I tried to concentrate on the words, but between every line, I kept seeing the terrifying wide-open jaws of sharks!

Just then, Ned and Conseil burst in.

“We have received a pleasant invitation from that captain of yours!” exclaimed Ned.

“Oh?” I said. “So you know...”

“Yes,” answered Conseil, “the captain has invited us to visit the magnificent pearl fisheries of Ceylon.”

“Did he tell you anything else?” I asked.

“Only that it will be very interesting,” said Conseil.

I realized that Captain Nemo had not told them about the sharks. Should I?... But at that moment, Conseil asked me how oysters made pearls, and I was grateful for the chance to take my mind off sharks for a while. So I began my lesson on pearls.

"The oyster is a small sea animal with two shells covering its soft flesh. Sometimes a tiny sea creature or a grain of sand finds its way inside these two shells and rubs against the oyster's flesh. To protect itself, the oyster forms a hard covering over this object. Layer upon layer of this covering is built up over a period of years, and a shark is formed."

"A shark?" cried Ned.

"Did I say shark? I meant pearl, of course!"

"Does an oyster ever contain more than one pearl?" asked Conseil.

"Yes, my boy. Some oysters have contained several sharks."

"You mean pearls!" exclaimed Conseil.

"Yes, of course, pearls! By the way, are you gentlemen afraid of sharks?"

"Me?" answered Ned. "A longtime harpooner? It's part of my job to laugh at them!"

"I'm not talking about harpooning them from the deck of a ship," I explained.

"You mean we're going to..." But Ned couldn't finish his question.

"That's right," I said, "underwater! And what about you, Conseil?"

"If Monsieur is willing to face sharks, then his faithful servant will face them too."

The next morning we sat in silence as the crew rowed the dinghy towards the oyster beds. We were about three miles from shore when Captain Nemo gave the order to drop anchor. As we were putting on our diving suits, Captain Nemo handed me a steel knife.

"This will be more useful to you down there than a gun!" he said.

Ned and Conseil had knives too. In addition, Ned carried an enormous harpoon!

The crew helped us over the side of the dinghy, and we followed Captain Nemo along the ocean floor. Pearl oysters by the millions clung to rocks all around us. We were all anxious to begin filling our sacks with these

treasures that just might contain pearls.

Just then, Captain Nemo motioned for us to squat down behind a rock. He pointed to a spot about fifteen feet away where a shadowy figure with a stone between his feet was descending to the ocean floor.

It was a diver, probably an Indian, come in search of pearls before the regular harvest time. We watched him dive several times, drop to his knees, fill his sack with oysters, then swim up to his boat.

Suddenly, while he was in the midst of tearing an oyster from the rock to which it was attached, a look of terror came over his face. When I saw a gigantic shadow appear above him, I understood his terror. A huge shark was heading towards him with its jaws wide open!

I was frozen to the spot where I crouched. As the shark headed in for the kill, the Indian jumped to one side and avoided its jaws.

But the shark's powerful tail struck him on the chest and knocked him flat on the ocean floor.

Then, just as the shark was getting ready to cut the Indian in two, Captain Nemo jumped up. With his knife raised, he headed straight for the monster, ready to fight it hand to hand.

The shark, seeing another possible victim, turned to attack the captain. When it was just inches away, Captain Nemo stepped to the side and buried his knife in the animal's belly. Blood poured from the wound and the sea turned red.

But the shark still had some fight left in it. The brave captain clutched one of its fins and plunged his knife into the creature's belly again and again. But he couldn't seem to strike its heart and kill it.

Then suddenly, the creature pushed its enormous weight against the captain and

knocked him to the ground. The shark's jaws opened, ready to cut the captain in two. But at that instant, Ned leaped forward and hurled his harpoon. The shark thrashed about with terrifying fury, then it was still. Ned had struck its heart!

Captain Nemo got up immediately and went over to the Indian. He took him in his arms and swam up to the surface with him.

The three of us followed them up to the fisherman's boat. Captain Nemo gave the man artificial respiration, and he soon opened his eyes. How surprised he must have been to see four helmets bending over him! But he must have been even more surprised when Captain Nemo put a bag of pearls into his trembling hands. Where had his luck come from?

We then left the puzzled Indian and made our way back to the dinghy.

The moment Captain Nemo's helmet was

removed, he turned to Ned and said, "Thank you for saving my life, Mr. Land."

As the dinghy sped back to the *Nautilus*, we saw the dead body of the shark floating on the surface. It was well over twenty-five feet long, and its huge mouth, with six rows of teeth, took up one-third of its body!

Within minutes, a dozen other sharks appeared and began fighting over the flesh of the dead shark.

Back on board the *Nautilus*, I felt the need to tell Captain Nemo how much I admired his courage and his deep concern for another human being.

When he answered, it was in a trembling voice. "This Indian lives in a land where his people are abused by others. His kind of people are the ones I shall help till the day I die!"