

## Chapter 10

### An Undersea Tunnel

Once Ceylon was behind us, the *Nautilus* steered due west across the Arabian Sea. When Ned saw our course on the map, he exclaimed, "Professor, we're heading right into the Red Sea. And the Red Sea is a dead end! Perhaps, one day when the Suez Canal is finished, we'll be able to reach the Mediterranean through it, but the canal is still under construction!"

"Then where do you think Captain Nemo is heading?" I asked.

"Who knows where?" answered Ned with a

shrug. "All I know is we've been prisoners here for three months. It's got to end!"

"Ned," I said calmly, "this is not yet the time to think of escape. Perhaps when we get closer to European waters . . ."

But Ned didn't let me finish. He left the room, muttering, "A man can't go on like this, living without his freedom."

I looked at the map again. Why *was* Captain Nemo taking us into the Red Sea when there was no way out but the way we had come in? I had no answers, so I simply made good use of my time observing the sea through the crystal-clear waters.

I saw marvelous shrubs of dazzling coral and huge rocks covered with a green fur of seaweed. How many new types of colorful fish, flowers and plants appeared before me!

At noon on February 9, we were cruising on the surface when Captain Nemo came up to the platform. "Well, Professor," he said,

“how are you enjoying the wonders of the Red Sea?”

“The *Nautilus* is a remarkable boat for such a study,” I replied. “It certainly is centuries ahead of its time. What a pity that such a secret will one day die with its inventor!”

Captain Nemo gave me an icy stare but said nothing. I thought it best to change the subject, so I asked him if he had ever been in the Red Sea before.

“Yes, Monsieur,” he replied, “all the way up to the northern end where the Suez Canal is being built.”

“And will the *Nautilus* be able to use the canal once it’s finished?” I asked.

“I’m afraid I cannot risk having the *Nautilus* seen. However, the canal will be very useful to the rest of the world by connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and then to the Indian Ocean. Your countryman,

Monsieur deLesseps, who is building the canal, is an amazing man! People laughed at him and stood in the way of this project, but his genius finally won!”

“Yes, Captain, I agree. But I still don’t understand why *we* have entered the Red Sea.”

“To reach the Mediterranean, of course, Professor, which we shall do the day after tomorrow.”

“But to reach the Mediterranean, we must *go around* the entire continent of Africa! That can’t be done in two days, not even by the *Nautilus*.”

“Who said we were going *around* Africa?” asked the captain, smiling.

“Well, unless the *Nautilus* can sail over dry land. . . .”

“Or under it, Professor?”

“Under it?” I cried in amazement.

“Yes,” replied the captain calmly. “What Monsieur deLesseps is doing on the land at

Suez—digging a passage—nature has already done below the ocean floor!”

“You mean there’s an underground passage at Suez?” I gasped.

“Yes,” said the captain. “I call it the Arabian Tunnel. You see, Monsieur Aronnax, the land at Suez is covered with sand. But this sand is only one hundred fifty feet deep. Below it is a layer of solid rock. In this rock, nature has made the tunnel.”

“I can hardly believe my ears, Captain. How did you ever discover this tunnel?”

“On my early trips in this area, I noticed that the Red Sea and the Mediterranean contained identical types of fish. This made me wonder if perhaps there was some passage between the two seas for the fish to get through. If such a passage did exist, the water would have to flow from the Red Sea into the Mediterranean because the water level is higher in the Red Sea. So I searched

for this passage, found it, and traveled through it. And very soon, Professor, you too will travel through my Arabian Tunnel!”

When I told Ned and Conseil about this tunnel, Ned laughed. “I never heard of an underwater tunnel connecting two seas,” he said, “but right now, I’ll believe anything that would take us into the Mediterranean and closer to civilization. For then, we might have the chance to escape!”

On the evening of February 11, the *Nautilus* approached the Gulf of Suez. We were cruising on the surface, and I could see clearly the high mountain known in biblical times as Mount Sinai. It was there that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments!

Captain Nemo informed me that we were close to the mouth of the tunnel and the *Nautilus* was preparing to dive.

“The tunnel is difficult to enter,” he said, “so I stay at the helm throughout that part of

the voyage. Perhaps, Monsieur Aronnax, you would like to watch from the helmsman's compartment as I steer through the tunnel."

"I would be very honored," I answered.

We entered a compartment about six feet square. Through the thick glass I saw high walls only a few feet from either side of us. Captain Nemo didn't take his eyes off these walls for an instant.

Soon I heard a strange rumbling sound. It was the sound of water rushing down the sloping tunnel from one sea into the other. This current sent the *Nautilus* shooting forward at an unbelievable rate of speed. For twenty minutes, my heart beat excitedly as the narrow walls of the tunnel sped by.

Then we gradually slowed down. Captain Nemo finally turned to me and said, "Professor, the Mediterranean!"

## Chapter 11

### Through the Mediterranean

When the *Nautilus* surfaced the next morning, I rushed up to the platform for my first look at the Mediterranean. Ned and Conseil listened as I described our trip through the tunnel.

“Okay, I’m impressed, Professor,” said Ned. “But now that we’re in the Mediterranean, it’s time for us to have a little chat.”

I knew what Ned wanted to chat about—escaping! I realized how badly he wanted his freedom, but the scientist in me wanted to stay on board the *Nautilus*. I had almost



finished rewriting my book on underwater life, and I was doing it in the middle of the very places I was describing! Where would I ever find another chance to see these wonders of the ocean again?

"I'm sure we'll get an opportunity to escape," I said. "Why not wait till we're nearer to France or England or America?"

"But we're near civilized countries right now," said Ned. "We may not get the chance later!"

"I guess you're right," I admitted with a sigh. "But the opportunity must be a good one. If our first attempt doesn't succeed, we won't get a second one. Captain Nemo will see to that!"

"The best time will be some dark night when the *Nautilus* gets near the coast of Europe," said Ned.

"I don't think you can count on Captain Nemo getting close to any coast," I said. "You

know how he feels about dry land.”

Events of the next few days proved how true my words were. We cruised underwater far from any shore most of the time. Was it because Captain Nemo suspected what we might do? Or did he simply want to stay out of sight of the many ships that sailed the Mediterranean?

Our first afternoon in the Mediterranean, we were in the general area of the island of Crete. Just before leaving America, I had read about an uprising by the Cretans against their cruel Turkish rulers. But being at sea all these months, I had no way of knowing how this uprising turned out.

Captain Nemo spent most of the day pacing back and forth in the lounge where I was writing. Towards evening, the panels, which had been closed all day, were suddenly opened. I busied myself studying the fish, but Captain Nemo seemed to be looking beyond

them. For what? At what? I had no idea!

Suddenly, from among the schools of fish came an unexpected sight! A diver swam up to the window and pressed his face against the glass. Was the man drowning?

To my complete amazement, Captain Nemo waved to him. The diver waved back, then immediately swam up to the surface.

“Don’t worry, Professor,” said the captain. “That’s Nicholas. They call him ‘The Fish.’ He’s a well-known diver throughout the Greek Islands. I know him well.”

So Captain Nemo had not broken all ties with the world after all! Why then had he...? But my thoughts were interrupted by a noise behind me. I turned and saw Captain Nemo opening a large chest. My eyes were dazzled by the hundreds of bars of gold inside the chest. Millions of dollars worth of gold! Where had it come from? And what was Captain Nemo going to do with it?

I stood dumbfounded as four crewmen entered and began pushing the heavy chest out of the lounge. Soon, I heard some pulleys in the companionway lifting the chest up to the hatch. Then the Nautilus surfaced.

Captain Nemo turned to me, said good night, and left the room.

The next day, we sped underwater through the Mediterranean at an unbelievable rate of speed—300 miles per hour! Trying to surface the dinghy and escape at that speed would have been suicide. So Ned's plans had to wait.

What little I saw of the Mediterranean's depths shocked me. Instead of the beauties of nature, I gazed at horrifying scenes of shipwrecks. Raging storms and dangerous reefs had been sending ships to their watery graves in this sea ever since ancient times.

That night, we left the grim Mediterranean behind us and entered the Atlantic Ocean.

## Chapter 12

### Captain Nemo's Treasure

When we surfaced for air the following morning, we were in the Atlantic about twelve miles off the coast of Spain.

Ned cornered me alone on the platform and whispered, "Our opportunity has come! Tonight at nine, we'll escape! You are to wait in the library until you get my signal."

"But the sea is quite rough," I said, hoping desperately to change his mind.

"I know," said Ned, "but that's the risk we'll have to take. For all we know, by tomorrow, the *Nautilus* might be hundreds of miles out

to sea. Till tonight, Professor!"

With that, Ned left. What could I have said? He was right! There was no doubt about that. Captain Nemo would never let us go willingly. And this was a good opportunity, so close to shore.

I spent the rest of the day pacing in my cabin. I ate very little when the steward brought in my meals. My heart beat rapidly as the clock ticked away the hours. Suddenly, when it struck eight, I realized I had to get ready.

I dressed myself warmly in my sealskin coat, otter-skin cap, and sea boots. My notes were safely tucked inside my coat and I was ready.

At a few minutes before nine, I tiptoed through the lounge and into the library. I waited near the door leading to the gangway. Where was Ned's signal?

Suddenly, I heard the propeller stop and

felt a slight bump. The *Nautilus* had come to rest on the ocean floor. I became uneasy. What had gone wrong? There was no signal from Ned, and I wondered if he. . . .

Just then, the door opened and Captain Nemo entered. He asked me to follow him into the lounge. My legs were weak and my hands trembled as I obeyed him. Had he discovered our plan? Where were Ned and Conseil? What was he about to do with me?

The darkness in the lounge hid my fears from the captain. I was grateful for that. He led me to the panels and quickly opened them. The sea was lit up all around us, revealing a graveyard of old wrecked ships.

Several members of the crew in their diving suits were walking among the wrecks, lifting open chests, and scooping up objects from the ocean floor. I looked closer and discovered that these objects were coins, jewels, and bars of gold and silver!

One after another, the crewmen brought their treasures back to the *Nautilus*, then returned to the ocean floor for more.

“Professor,” said Captain Nemo, “you seem stunned! Perhaps I can explain. We are now at Vigo Bay on the western coast of Spain. Back in 1702, a fierce battle was fought here between the English and the Spanish. Ships belonging to the Spanish king were returning from South America filled with treasures for him. But when the battle turned in favor of the English, the admiral of the Spanish fleet refused to let all the treasures fall into enemy hands. So he set fire to all twenty-three of his ships and let them sink to the ocean floor, taking all their treasures with them.”

“And since you have found them, Captain, these treasures now belong to you?”

“Yes, Monsieur. I have picked up what other men have lost, not only here in Vigo



Bay, but at thousands of other shipwrecks around the world. Now do you understand, Professor, how I came to be a billionaire?"

"But this wealth belongs to other men, to other countries!" I protested.

"Do you think I use this wealth for myself, Professor?" he snapped angrily. "What makes you think I don't make good use of it? Don't you think I know that people are suffering on earth, poor people to be helped, victims to be avenged? Don't you think I . . ."

Captain Nemo stopped. Perhaps he regretted talking so freely. But his outburst was enough to convince me that he was truly a man with feelings for others—a man who helped suffering and enslaved people all over the world!

And then I understood where those gold bars were headed when they were unloaded near the island of Crete! It was to help the Cretans fight for their freedom!