

Chapter 16

The Attack of the Squid

Once we were safely in the waters of the Atlantic, everyone seemed to relax. That is, everyone except Captain Nemo. In the month that had passed since our escape from the Great Ice Barrier, he had left me totally alone in my studies and no longer came into the lounge to explain the wonders of the sea.

Towards the end of April, we were cruising below the surface of the Atlantic near the Bahama Islands. Through the windows, I saw the huge underwater cliffs that formed the base of this island group. These cliffs were hollowed out with deep caves where monstrous

squid made their homes.

Suddenly, the *Nautilus* stopped. A blow made the ship tremble violently. Ned, Conseil, and I rushed to the window, then froze!

There, before our eyes wriggled a terrible monster—a giant squid twenty-five feet long. The eight long snakelike tentacles coming out of its head were twisting about furiously. Suckers on the inside of each tentacle had fastened themselves to the window.

The monster's mouth—a horny beak—opened and closed rapidly. Its long body, with a bump in the middle, formed a huge fleshy mass which weighed at least 50,000 pounds!

Soon, several other squid appeared and swam all around the *Nautilus*, grinding their beaks against her steel hull.

Just then, Captain Nemo entered the lounge and closed the panels. He looked worried.

“Is something wrong, Captain?” I asked.

“Yes, Professor,” he said, “one of these squid has his horned beak caught in our propeller and we can’t move.”

“What can you do?” I asked.

“Surface the ship and wipe them out! But our bullets have no effect on their soft flesh, so we have to fight them hand to hand with axes!”

“And with a harpoon, Captain,” added Ned.

We left the lounge and joined the crew in the companionway. Captain Nemo gave everyone an axe. Then he popped the hatch.

Within seconds, a long tentacle slid down the opening towards us. Captain Nemo raised his axe and cut the wriggling arm in two.

As we made our way up the ladder, two other tentacles grabbed the sailor in front of the captain and pulled him out. Captain Nemo let out a cry and rushed up the ladder. The poor man was being clutched by the tentacles and waved about in the air. He was

choking, but he managed to shout, "Help! Help!"

I was stunned to hear these words screamed out in French. So I did have a fellow countryman on board after all! And in his moment of death, he had forgotten the strange speech he had used on board. He had gasped his dying words in his native language!

But the poor man was done for. Nothing could save him from such a powerful grip. Nevertheless, Captain Nemo hurled himself at the squid and, with repeated blows of his axe, cut off seven of its tentacles. But just as he rushed at the eighth—the one crushing the sailor—the squid let out a spray of black ink. We were all blinded by it for several moments. When the spray cleared, the squid had disappeared, and with it, the unfortunate sailor!

Meanwhile, we were attacking the rest of

the squid as they climbed up the sides of the ship. We chopped tentacles all around us amid sprays of blood and black ink.

Ned kept plunging his harpoon into the seagreen eyes of these monsters. But suddenly, he was knocked over by a tentacle from behind. The squid's huge mouth opened over Ned and was about to cut him in two when Captain Nemo raced over and buried his axe between the squid's enormous jaws. Ned jumped up and plunged his harpoon deep into the creature's triple heart!

"I owed you this!" Captain Nemo called to Ned. "A squid for a shark!"

Ned bowed his head without answering.

By now, all the wounded or dead squid had disappeared into the sea.

Captain Nemo, covered with ink and blood, stood on the platform looking at the sea which had swallowed up one of his men. Tears ran down his cheeks.

Chapter 17

Captain Nemo's Revenge

After the bloody battle with the squid, I came to realize that I could no longer stay on board the *Nautilus*. But I had to try one last time to see if Captain Nemo would let us leave willingly.

I found him in his cabin bent over his work table writing. He frowned as I entered.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "I'm busy working."

"Monsieur," I said calmly, "I have to talk to you about something which cannot wait."

"Monsieur Aronnax, what I am doing cannot

wait either! This book I am writing contains all my studies on the sea. With God's help, it will not die with me. The book is signed with my real name and tells the story of my life and work. It will be sealed in a small unsinkable box and will be thrown into the sea by the last man to survive on the *Nautilus* when her end comes."

"Captain, I agree that your studies must not be lost. But who knows where the currents will take the box? Perhaps I could keep this book for you if you gave us our freedom."

"Monsieur Aronnax," cried the captain, "I will say now what I said seven months ago. Whoever enters the *Nautilus* never leaves it! Now get out of here and never speak to me of this again!"

When I reported the captain's words to my two friends, we all agreed that escape was now urgent! We were only a few miles off the coast of New York. What better chance could

we hope for!

But just before dark, a hurricane hit New York. Rain was beating down in torrents, and winds were gusting up to 100 miles per hour. It would be suicide to risk an escape in a sea with fifty-foot-high waves!

The storm drove us far out into the North Atlantic. We were all in a state of despair as the *Nautilus* headed east across the ocean.

By June 1, we were three hundred miles from the coast of Ireland, cruising on the surface. I was in the lounge reading when I heard a dull explosion outside the ship.

I rushed up on deck and found Ned and Conseil already there.

"They're firing at us!" cried Ned as he pointed at a ship six miles away. "It looks like a warship, and I hope it comes and sinks this cursed *Nautilus*!"

Just then, another shell hit the water.

"Why are they firing at us?" I cried. "We

didn't attack them fir...." Then suddenly, everything became clear!

Commander Farragut probably had reported to the world that the narwhal was really a submarine. And warships were now searching every ocean for this terrible ship.

I finally had to admit that Captain Nemo was really using the *Nautilus* for revenge! He was attacking the ships of the world regardless of their country. And that night he locked us in the cell and drugged us, it was probably to keep us from seeing an attack! And the sailor now buried in the coral cemetery was probably wounded in a collision!

There was no other explanation. Part of Captain Nemo's mysterious life was becoming clear. But so much was still unexplained!

"Perhaps we can signal them," said Ned. "Then maybe they'll understand we're friends."

He took out his handkerchief to wave in

the air. But no sooner had he unfolded it than his arm was struck by a fist of iron.

“You fool!” cried Captain Nemo. “Do you want me to nail you to the spur of the *Nautilus* before we ram that ship? Go below, immediately! All of you!”

“Captain,” I protested, “are you really going to attack this ship?”

Captain Nemo’s face was twisted with rage as he replied, “Monsieur, I am going to *sink* it! They have attacked me, but my attack will be even more terrible. They shall all die! They are the killers and I am the victim. Because of them, I lost everything I ever loved—my country, my wife, my children, my father, my mother! I saw them all die! Everything I hate is there! Now shut your mouth and go below!”

We raced down to my cabin. Once the door was closed, I gasped, “We must escape! He’s gone mad! We must try to warn that ship!”

“Then let us prepare to leave as soon as it is dark!” said Ned.

Night came, but our opportunity to escape did not. Captain Nemo stayed on deck until dawn, when the warship’s cannons began firing again.

Then Captain Nemo gave the order to dive. I realized that he was planning to ram the warship from below where it was not protected by heavy steel plates.

“My friends,” I said to Ned and Conseil, “this terrible day of June 2 is beginning. May God save us!”

The *Nautilus*’ speed increased to the point where its entire hull trembled. Suddenly I felt a blow, then heard the steel spur pushing into something with scraping sounds. The *Nautilus* had gone right through the hull of the warship like a needle going through a piece of cloth!

I couldn’t stand it any longer. I rushed into

the lounge, half out of my mind. Captain Nemo was standing there, silently gazing out of the window.

The huge warship was sinking below the surface, and the *Nautilus* was following it down to watch its death struggle. Sailors were climbing up the masts trying to save themselves, but their bodies finally floated free as the sea pulled them down.

I was frozen with horror and unable to catch my breath!

When the ship hit the ocean floor, Captain Nemo turned away. He opened the door to his cabin and went inside.

Through the open door, I saw him go over to a portrait of a young woman and two small children. He gazed at it for several minutes, then clutched it to his chest. With the portrait still in his hands, he sank to his knees and burst into deep sobs!

Chapter 18

Escape!

The *Nautilus* continued on its way as if nothing had happened. But my feelings of horror towards Captain Nemo stayed with me. No matter how much he had suffered at the hands of his fellow men, he had no right to punish them the way he had.

I no longer saw the captain at all. We stayed underwater for the next twenty days, surfacing only to renew our air supply. Our position was no longer marked on the map, so I had no idea where we were.

One morning, I awoke to find Ned leaning

over me. In a low voice, he said, "Our chance has come! I went up on deck when we surfaced and made out some land about twenty miles to the east. Meet us at the dinghy at ten tonight!"

"I'll be there, Ned," I replied.

The rest of that day seemed to last forever. I didn't dare leave my cabin for fear of meeting Captain Nemo and having him see the horror I felt for him.

But at seven o'clock, I went to the lounge to take one last look at the wonders of nature and art collected there. I felt a stab of regret that these treasures would one day be destroyed at the bottom of the sea along with the man who had gathered them.

Then I returned to my cabin and dressed in my thick sea clothes. I gathered up my notes and tucked them carefully inside my jacket. My heart was beating fast, and I was unable to control my nerves.

I tried to stretch out on my bed and relax. All the events of the past ten months on board the *Nautilus* passed before my eyes: the disappearance of the *Abraham Lincoln*, the underwater hunting expeditions, running aground at Torres Strait, the attack by the cannibals of New Guinea, the coral cemetery, the tunnel beneath Suez, the diver and the gold bars at Crete, the treasure at Vigo Bay, the lost continent of Atlantis, the Great Ice Barrier, the South Pole, the digging out of the ice tunnel, the fight with the squid, and the attack on the warship, watching it sink with all hands . . .

Before I knew it, it was almost ten o'clock. I opened my door and crept down the gangway towards the lounge. Soft, sad music was coming from the organ. Captain Nemo was in there and I had to pass him to get out!

I crept across the darkened room without being noticed. Just as I reached the door to

the library, Captain Nemo struck one resounding chord on the organ and cried out in the darkness the last words I ever heard from him. "Almighty God! Enough! Enough!"

Was he finally regretting...? I didn't have time to think now. I rushed through the library, into the companionway, and up into the dinghy.

Ned and Conseil bolted the hatches behind me. Then, just as Ned started to loosen the bolts holding the dinghy to the submarine, we heard voices talking excitedly inside the *Nautilus*.

Had someone discovered our escape? Were they looking for us?...No! One word that the crew kept repeating over and over told me what was causing all the excitement.

"The Maelstrom! The Maelstrom!"

The Maelstrom! Could a more frightening word reach the ears of any sailor? The Maelstrom, off the coast of Norway, was the most

violent whirlpool in the world! No ship had ever escaped its raging current! Was the *Nautilus* about to be dragged down into its depths just as we were escaping?

Had the *Nautilus* been caught up in the Maelstrom by accident? Or was this some plan of Captain Nemo's? . . . I had no more time to think. The *Nautilus* started spinning around and around in smaller and smaller circles. And the dinghy, still attached to her hull, was carried along with her at an incredible speed. We were terrified! Our blood stopped circulating! Our nerves were numb! We were at death's door!

"We have to screw the bolts back down," gasped Ned. "It's our only chance. . . ."

But before he could finish, we heard a loud crack. The bolts had broken! The dinghy was torn from the ship and thrown into the middle of the whirlpool like a stone hurled from a slingshot!

My head hit the side of the iron dinghy and I lost consciousness.

What happened that night, how we escaped the whirlpool and survived, neither Ned, nor Conseil, nor I can ever say.

When I came to, I was lying in a fisherman's cottage on one of the islands off the coast of Norway. My two friends tearfully embraced me the moment I opened my eyes.

Thus ended the voyage which took us 60,000 miles, or 20,000 leagues, under the sea. Will people believe me? . . . I do not know. But for ten months, I had traveled under the oceans of the world and gazed at their many wonders.

What became of the *Nautilus*? Did it escape the Maelstrom? Is Captain Nemo still alive? If so, has he finished with his terrible revenge? Will the seas one day wash up the book containing his life story? Will I ever find out his real name?

I hope so. I also hope that the *Nautilus* survived in that terrible whirlpool where so many other ships were wrecked.

If it has, and if Captain Nemo still lives in the ocean, then I hope with all my heart that his hatred for the world has come to an end. I hope that he is peacefully exploring the seas and will one day share his vast scientific knowledge with the whole human race!