Chapter 18
The Devilfish

FOR SOME DAYS the Nautilus kept veering away from the American coast. It obviously didn’t want to frequent the waves of the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean Sea. Yet there was no shortage of water under its keel, since the average depth of these seas is 1,800 meters; but these waterways, strewn with islands and plowed by steamers, probably didn’t agree with Captain Nemo.

On April 16 we raised Martinique and Guadalupe from a distance of about thirty miles. For one instant I could see their lofty peaks.

The Canadian was quite disheartened, having counted on putting his plans into execution in the gulf, either by reaching shore or by pulling alongside one of the many boats plying a coastal trade from one island to another. An escape attempt would have been quite feasible, assuming Ned Land managed to seize the skiff without the captain’s knowledge. But in midocean it was unthinkable.

The Canadian, Conseil, and I had a pretty long conversation on this subject. For six months we had been prisoners aboard the Nautilus. We had fared 17,000 leagues, and as Ned Land put it, there was no end in sight. So he made me a proposition I hadn’t anticipated. We were to ask Captain Nemo this question straight out: did the captain mean to keep us on board his vessel permanently?
This measure was distasteful to me. To my mind it would lead nowhere. We could hope for nothing from the Nautilus’s commander but could depend only on ourselves. Besides, for some time now the man had been gloomier, more withdrawn, less sociable. He seemed to be avoiding me. I encountered him only at rare intervals. He used to take pleasure in explaining the underwater wonders to me; now he left me to my research and no longer entered the lounge.

What changes had come over him? From what cause? I had no reason to blame myself. Was our presence on board perhaps a burden to him? Even so, I cherished no hopes that the man would set us free.

So I begged Ned to let me think about it before taking action. If this measure proved fruitless, it could arouse the captain’s suspicions, make our circumstances even more arduous, and jeopardize the Canadian’s plans. I might add that I could hardly use our state of health as an argument. Except for that grueling ordeal under the Ice Bank at the South Pole, we had never felt better, neither Ned, Conseil, nor I. The nutritious food, life–giving air, regular routine, and uniform temperature kept illness at bay; and for a man who didn’t miss his past existence on land, for a Captain Nemo who was at home here, who went where he wished, who took paths mysterious to others if not himself in attaining his ends, I could understand such a life. But we ourselves hadn’t severed all ties with humanity. For my part, I didn’t want my new and unusual research to be buried with my bones. I had now earned the right to pen the definitive book on the sea, and sooner or later I wanted that book to see the light of day.

There once more, through the panels opening into these Caribbean waters ten meters below the surface of the waves, I found so many fascinating exhibits to describe in my daily notes! Among other zoophytes there were Portuguese men–of–war known by the name Physalia pelagica, like big, oblong bladders with a pearly sheen, spreading their membranes to the wind, letting their blue tentacles drift like silken threads; to the eye delightful jellyfish, to the touch actual nettles that ooze a corrosive liquid. Among the articulate worms one and a half meters long, furnished with a pink proboscis, equipped with 1,700 organs of locomotion, snaking through the waters, and as they went, throwing off every gleam in the solar spectrum. From the fish branch there were manta rays, enormous cartilaginous fish ten feet long and weighing 600 pounds, their pectoral fin triangular, their midback slightly arched, their eyes attached to the edges of the face at the front of the head; they floated like wreckage from a ship, sometimes fastening onto our windows like opaque shutters. There were American triggerfish for which nature has ground only black and white pigments, feather–shaped gobies that were long and plump with yellow fins and jutting jaws, sixteen–decimeter mackerel with short, sharp teeth, covered with small scales, and related to the albacore species. Next came swarms of red mullet corseted in gold stripes from head to tail, their shining fins all aquiver, genuine masterpieces of jewelry, formerly sacred to the goddess Diana, much in demand by rich Romans, and about which the old saying goes: “He who catches them doesn’t eat them!” Finally, adorned with emerald ribbons and dressed in velvet and silk, golden angelfish passed before our eyes like courtiers in the paintings of Veronese; spurred gilthead stole by with their swift thoracic fins; thread herring fifteen inches long were wrapped in their phosphorescent glimmers; gray mullet thrashed the sea with their big fleshy tails; red salmon seemed to mow the waves with their slicing pectorals; and silver moonfish, worthy of their name, rose on the horizon of the waters like the whitish reflections of many moons.

How many other marvelous new specimens I still could have observed if, little by little, the Nautilus hadn’t settled to the lower strata! Its slanting fins drew it to depths of 2,000 and 3,500 meters. There animal life was represented by nothing more than sea lilies, starfish, delightful crinoids with bell–shaped
heads like little chalices on straight stems, top–shell snails, blood–red tooth shells, and fissurella snails, a large species of coastal mollusk.

By April 20 we had risen to an average level of 1,500 meters. The nearest land was the island group of the Bahamas, scattered like a batch of cobblestones over the surface of the water. There high underwater cliffs reared up, straight walls made of craggy chunks arranged like big stone foundations, among which there gaped black caves so deep our electric rays couldn’t light them to the far ends.

These rocks were hung with huge weeds, immense sea tangle, gigantic fucus—a genuine trellis of water plants fit for a world of giants.

In discussing these colossal plants, Conseil, Ned, and I were naturally led into mentioning the sea’s gigantic animals. The former were obviously meant to feed the latter. However, through the windows of our almost motionless Nautilus, I could see nothing among these long filaments other than the chief articulates of the division Brachyura: long–legged spider crabs, violet crabs, and sponge crabs unique to the waters of the Caribbean.

It was about eleven o’clock when Ned Land drew my attention to a fearsome commotion out in this huge seaweed.

“Well,” I said, “these are real devilfish caverns, and I wouldn’t be surprised to see some of those monsters hereabouts.”

“What!” Conseil put in. “Squid, ordinary squid from the class Cephalopoda?”

“No,” I said, “devilfish of large dimensions. But friend Land is no doubt mistaken, because I don’t see a thing.”

“That’s regrettable,” Conseil answered. “I’d like to come face to face with one of those devilfish I’ve heard so much about, which can drag ships down into the depths. Those beasts go by the name of krake—”

“Fake is more like it,” the Canadian replied sarcastically.

“Krakens!” Conseil shot back, finishing his word without wincing at his companion’s witticism.

“Nobody will ever make me believe,” Ned Land said, “that such animals exist.”

“Why not?” Conseil replied. “We sincerely believed in Master’s narwhale.”

“We were wrong, Conseil.”

“No doubt, but there are others with no doubts who believe to this day!”

“Probably, Conseil. But as for me, I’m bound and determined not to accept the existence of any such monster till I’ve dissected it with my own two hands.”

“Yet,” Conseil asked me, “doesn’t Master believe in gigantic devilfish?”
“Yikes! Who in Hades ever believed in them?” the Canadian exclaimed.

“Many people, Ned my friend,” I said.

“No fishermen. Scientists maybe!”

“Pardon me, Ned. Fishermen and scientists!”

“Why, I to whom you speak,” Conseil said with the world’s straightest face, “I recall perfectly seeing a large boat dragged under the waves by the arms of a cephalopod.”

“You saw that?” the Canadian asked.

“Yes, Ned.”

“With your own two eyes?”

“With my own two eyes.”

“Where, may I ask?”

“In Saint–Malo,” Conseil returned unflappably.

“In the harbor?” Ned Land said sarcastically.

“No, in a church,” Conseil replied.

“In a church!” the Canadian exclaimed.

“Yes, Ned my friend. It had a picture that portrayed the devilfish in question.”

“Oh good!” Ned Land exclaimed with a burst of laughter. “Mr. Conseil put one over on me!”

“Actually he’s right,” I said. “I’ve heard about that picture. But the subject it portrays is taken from a legend, and you know how to rate legends in matters of natural history! Besides, when it’s an issue of monsters, the human imagination always tends to run wild. People not only claimed these devilfish could drag ships under, but a certain Olaus Magnus tells of a cephalopod a mile long that looked more like an island than an animal. There’s also the story of how the Bishop of Trondheim set up an altar one day on an immense rock. After he finished saying mass, this rock started moving and went back into the sea. The rock was a devilfish.”

“And that’s everything we know?” the Canadian asked.

“No,” I replied, “another bishop, Pontoppidan of Bergen, also tells of a devilfish so large a whole cavalry regiment could maneuver on it.”

“They sure did go on, those oldtime bishops!” Ned Land said.
“Finally, the naturalists of antiquity mention some monsters with mouths as big as a gulf, which were too huge to get through the Strait of Gibraltar.”

“Good work, men!” the Canadian put in.

“But in all these stories, is there any truth?” Conseil asked.

“None at all, my friends, at least in those that go beyond the bounds of credibility and fly off into fable or legend. Yet for the imaginings of these storytellers there had to be, if not a cause, at least an excuse. It can’t be denied that some species of squid and other devilfish are quite large, though still smaller than cetaceans. Aristotle put the dimensions of one squid at five cubits, or 3.1 meters. Our fishermen frequently see specimens over 1.8 meters long. The museums in Trieste and Montpellier have preserved some devilfish carcasses measuring two meters. Besides, according to the calculations of naturalists, one of these animals only six feet long would have tentacles as long as twenty–seven. Which is enough to make a fearsome monster.”

“Does anybody fish for ’em nowadays?” the Canadian asked.

“If they don’t fish for them, sailors at least sight them. A friend of mine, Captain Paul Bos of Le Havre, has often sworn to me that he encountered one of these monsters of colossal size in the seas of the East Indies. But the most astonishing event, which proves that these gigantic animals undeniably exist, took place a few years ago in 1861.”

“What event was that?” Ned Land asked.

“Just this. In 1861, to the northeast of Tenerife and fairly near the latitude where we are right now, the crew of the gunboat Alecto spotted a monstrous squid swimming in their waters. Commander Bouguer approached the animal and attacked it with blows from harpoons and blasts from rifles, but without much success because bullets and harpoons crossed its soft flesh as if it were semiliquid jelly. After several fruitless attempts, the crew managed to slip a noose around the mollusk’s body. This noose slid as far as the caudal fins and came to a halt. Then they tried to haul the monster on board, but its weight was so considerable that when they tugged on the rope, the animal parted company with its tail; and deprived of this adornment, it disappeared beneath the waters.”

“Finally, an actual event,” Ned Land said.

“An indisputable event, my gallant Ned. Accordingly, people have proposed naming this devilfish Bouguer’s Squid.”

“And how long was it?” the Canadian asked.

“Didn’t it measure about six meters?” said Conseil, who was stationed at the window and examining anew the crevices in the cliff.

“Precisely,” I replied.

“Wasn’t its head,” Conseil went on, “crowned by eight tentacles that quivered in the water like a nest of snakes?”
“Precisely.”

“Weren’t its eyes prominently placed and considerably enlarged?”

“Yes, Conseil.”

“And wasn’t its mouth a real parrot’s beak but of fearsome size?”

“Correct, Conseil.”

“Well, with all due respect to Master,” Conseil replied serenely, “if this isn’t Bouguer’s Squid, it’s at least one of his close relatives!”

I stared at Conseil. Ned Land rushed to the window.

“What an awful animal!” he exclaimed.

I stared in my turn and couldn’t keep back a movement of revulsion. Before my eyes there quivered a horrible monster worthy of a place among the most farfetched teratological legends.

It was a squid of colossal dimensions, fully eight meters long. It was traveling backward with tremendous speed in the same direction as the Nautilus. It gazed with enormous, staring eyes that were tinted sea green. Its eight arms (or more accurately, feet) were rooted in its head, which has earned these animals the name cephalopod; its arms stretched a distance twice the length of its body and were writhing like the serpentine hair of the Furies. You could plainly see its 250 suckers, arranged over the inner sides of its tentacles and shaped like semispheric capsules. Sometimes these suckers fastened onto the lounge window by creating vacuums against it. The monster’s mouth—a beak made of horn and shaped like that of a parrot—opened and closed vertically. Its tongue, also of horn substance and armed with several rows of sharp teeth, would flicker out from between these genuine shears. What a freak of nature! A bird’s beak on a mollusk! Its body was spindle–shaped and swollen in the middle, a fleshy mass that must have weighed 20,000 to 25,000 kilograms. Its unstable color would change with tremendous speed as the animal grew irritated, passing successively from bluish gray to reddish brown. What was irritating this mollusk? No doubt the presence of the Nautilus, even more fearsome than itself, and which it couldn’t grip with its mandibles or the suckers on its arms. And yet what monsters these devilfish are, what vitality our Creator has given them, what vigor in their movements, thanks to their owning a triple heart!

Sheer chance had placed us in the presence of this squid, and I didn’t want to lose this opportunity to meticulously study such a cephalopod specimen. I overcame the horror that its appearance inspired in me, picked up a pencil, and began to sketch it.

“Perhaps this is the same as the Alecto’s,” Conseil said.

“Can’t be,” the Canadian replied, “because this one’s complete while the other one lost its tail!”

“That doesn’t necessarily follow,” I said. “The arms and tails of these animals grow back through regeneration, and in seven years the tail on Bouguer’s Squid has surely had time to sprout again.”
“Anyhow,” Ned shot back, “if it isn’t this fellow, maybe it’s one of those!”

Indeed, other devilfish had appeared at the starboard window. I counted seven of them. They provided the Nautilus with an escort, and I could hear their beaks gnashing on the sheet–iron hull. We couldn’t have asked for a more devoted following.

I continued sketching. These monsters kept pace in our waters with such precision, they seemed to be standing still, and I could have traced their outlines in miniature on the window. But we were moving at a moderate speed.

All at once the Nautilus stopped. A jolt made it tremble through its entire framework.

“Did we strike bottom?” I asked.

“In any event we’re already clear,” the Canadian replied, “because we’re afloat.”

The Nautilus was certainly afloat, but it was no longer in motion. The blades of its propeller weren’t churning the waves. A minute passed. Followed by his chief officer, Captain Nemo entered the lounge.

I hadn’t seen him for a good while. He looked gloomy to me. Without speaking to us, without even seeing us perhaps, he went to the panel, stared at the devilfish, and said a few words to his chief officer.

The latter went out. Soon the panels closed. The ceiling lit up.

I went over to the captain.

“An unusual assortment of devilfish,” I told him, as carefree as a collector in front of an aquarium.

“Correct, Mr. Naturalist,” he answered me, “and we’re going to fight them at close quarters.”

I gaped at the captain. I thought my hearing had gone bad.

“At close quarters?” I repeated.

“Yes, sir. Our propeller is jammed. I think the horn–covered mandibles of one of these squid are entangled in the blades. That’s why we aren’t moving.”

“And what are you going to do?”

“Rise to the surface and slaughter the vermin.”

“A difficult undertaking.”

“Correct. Our electric bullets are ineffective against such soft flesh, where they don’t meet enough resistance to go off. But we’ll attack the beasts with axes.”

“And harpoons, sir,” the Canadian said, “if you don’t turn down my help.”
“I accept it, Mr. Land.”

“We’ll go with you,” I said. And we followed Captain Nemo, heading to the central companionway.

There some ten men were standing by for the assault, armed with boarding axes. Conseil and I picked up two more axes. Ned Land seized a harpoon.

By then the Nautilus had returned to the surface of the waves. Stationed on the top steps, one of the seamen undid the bolts of the hatch. But he had scarcely unscrewed the nuts when the hatch flew up with tremendous violence, obviously pulled open by the suckers on a devilfish’s arm.

Instantly one of those long arms glided like a snake into the opening, and twenty others were quivering above. With a sweep of the ax, Captain Nemo chopped off this fearsome tentacle, which slid writhing down the steps.

Just as we were crowding each other to reach the platform, two more arms lashed the air, swooped on the seaman stationed in front of Captain Nemo, and carried the fellow away with irresistible violence.

Captain Nemo gave a shout and leaped outside. We rushed after him.

What a scene! Seized by the tentacle and glued to its suckers, the unfortunate man was swinging in the air at the mercy of this enormous appendage. He gasped, he choked, he yelled: “Help! Help!” These words, pronounced in French, left me deeply stunned! So I had a fellow countryman on board, perhaps several! I’ll hear his harrowing plea the rest of my life!

The poor fellow was done for. Who could tear him from such a powerful grip? Even so, Captain Nemo rushed at the devilfish and with a sweep of the ax hewed one more of its arms. His chief officer struggled furiously with other monsters crawling up the Nautilus’s sides. The crew battled with flailing axes. The Canadian, Conseil, and I sank our weapons into these fleshy masses. An intense, musky odor filled the air. It was horrible.

For an instant I thought the poor man entwined by the devilfish might be torn loose from its powerful suction. Seven arms out of eight had been chopped off. Brandishing its victim like a feather, one lone tentacle was writhing in the air. But just as Captain Nemo and his chief officer rushed at it, the animal shot off a spout of blackish liquid, secreted by a pouch located in its abdomen. It blinded us. When this cloud had dispersed, the squid was gone, and so was my poor fellow countryman!

What rage then drove us against these monsters! We lost all self-control. Ten or twelve devilfish had overrun the Nautilus’s platform and sides. We piled helter–skelter into the thick of these sawed–off snakes, which darted over the platform amid waves of blood and sepia ink. It seemed as if these viscous tentacles grew back like the many heads of Hydra. At every thrust Ned Land’s harpoon would plunge into a squid’s sea–green eye and burst it. But my daring companion was suddenly toppled by the tentacles of a monster he could not avoid.

Oh, my heart nearly exploded with excitement and horror! The squid’s fearsome beak was wide open over Ned Land. The poor man was about to be cut in half. I ran to his rescue. But Captain Nemo got there first. His ax disappeared between the two enormous mandibles, and the Canadian, miraculously saved, stood and plunged his harpoon all the way into the devilfish’s triple heart.
“Tit for tat,” Captain Nemo told the Canadian. “I owed it to myself!”

Ned bowed without answering him.

This struggle had lasted a quarter of an hour. Defeated, mutilated, battered to death, the monsters finally yielded to us and disappeared beneath the waves.

Red with blood, motionless by the beacon, Captain Nemo stared at the sea that had swallowed one of his companions, and large tears streamed from his eyes.

Chapter 19

The Gulf Stream

THIS DREADFUL SCENE on April 20 none of us will ever be able to forget. I wrote it up in a state of intense excitement. Later I reviewed my narrative. I read it to Conseil and the Canadian. They found it accurate in detail but deficient in impact. To convey such sights, it would take the pen of our most famous poet, Victor Hugo, author of The Toilers of the Sea.

As I said, Captain Nemo wept while staring at the waves. His grief was immense. This was the second companion he had lost since we had come aboard. And what a way to die! Smashed, strangled, crushed by the fearsome arms of a devilfish, ground between its iron mandibles, this friend would never rest with his companions in the placid waters of their coral cemetery!

As for me, what had harrowed my heart in the thick of this struggle was the despairing yell given by this unfortunate man. Forgetting his regulation language, this poor Frenchman had reverted to speaking his own mother tongue to fling out one supreme plea! Among the Nautilus’s crew, allied body and soul with Captain Nemo and likewise fleeing from human contact, I had found a fellow countryman! Was he the only representative of France in this mysterious alliance, obviously made up of individuals from different nationalities? This was just one more of those insoluble problems that kept welling up in my mind!

Captain Nemo reentered his stateroom, and I saw no more of him for a good while. But how sad, despairing, and irresolute he must have felt, to judge from this ship whose soul he was, which reflected his every mood! The Nautilus no longer kept to a fixed heading. It drifted back and forth, riding with the waves like a corpse. Its propeller had been disentangled but was barely put to use. It was navigating at random. It couldn’t tear itself away from the setting of this last struggle, from this sea that had devoured one of its own!

Ten days went by in this way. It was only on May 1 that the Nautilus openly resumed its northbound course, after raising the Bahamas at the mouth of Old Bahama Channel. We then went with the current of the sea’s greatest river, which has its own banks, fish, and temperature. I mean the Gulf Stream.

It is indeed a river that runs independently through the middle of the Atlantic, its waters never mixing with the ocean’s waters. It’s a salty river, saltier than the sea surrounding it. Its average depth is 3,000 feet, its average width sixty miles. In certain localities its current moves at a speed of four kilometers per hour. The unchanging volume of its waters is greater than that of all the world’s rivers combined.
As discovered by Commander Maury, the true source of the Gulf Stream, its starting point, if you prefer, is located in the Bay of Biscay. There its waters, still weak in temperature and color, begin to form. It goes down south, skirts equatorial Africa, warms its waves in the rays of the Torrid Zone, crosses the Atlantic, reaches Cape São Roque on the coast of Brazil, and forks into two branches, one going to the Caribbean Sea for further saturation with heat particles. Then, entrusted with restoring the balance between hot and cold temperatures and with mixing tropical and northern waters, the Gulf Stream begins to play its stabilizing role. Attaining a white heat in the Gulf of Mexico, it heads north up the American coast, advances as far as Newfoundland, swerves away under the thrust of a cold current from the Davis Strait, and resumes its ocean course by going along a great circle of the earth on a rhumb line; it then divides into two arms near the 43rd parallel; one, helped by the northeast trade winds, returns to the Bay of Biscay and the Azores; the other washes the shores of Ireland and Norway with lukewarm water, goes beyond Spitzbergen, where its temperature falls to 4° centigrade, and fashions the open sea at the pole.

It was on this oceanic river that the Nautilus was then navigating. Leaving Old Bahama Channel, which is fourteen leagues wide by 350 meters deep, the Gulf Stream moves at the rate of eight kilometers per hour. Its speed steadily decreases as it advances northward, and we must pray that this steadiness continues, because, as experts agree, if its speed and direction were to change, the climates of Europe would undergo disturbances whose consequences are incalculable.

Near noon I was on the platform with Conseil. I shared with him the relevant details on the Gulf Stream. When my explanation was over, I invited him to dip his hands into its current.

Conseil did so, and he was quite astonished to experience no sensation of either hot or cold.

“That comes,” I told him, “from the water temperature of the Gulf Stream, which, as it leaves the Gulf of Mexico, is barely different from your blood temperature. This Gulf Stream is a huge heat generator that enables the coasts of Europe to be decked in eternal greenery. And if Commander Maury is correct, were one to harness the full warmth of this current, it would supply enough heat to keep molten a river of iron solder as big as the Amazon or the Missouri.”

Just then the Gulf Stream’s speed was 2.25 meters per second. So distinct is its current from the surrounding sea, its confined waters stand out against the ocean and operate on a different level from the colder waters. Murky as well, and very rich in saline material, their pure indigo contrasts with the green waves surrounding them. Moreover, their line of demarcation is so clear that abreast of the Carolinas, the Nautilus’s spur cut the waves of the Gulf Stream while its propeller was still churning those belonging to the ocean.

This current swept along with it a whole host of moving creatures. Argonauts, so common in the Mediterranean, voyaged here in schools of large numbers. Among cartilaginous fish, the most remarkable were rays whose ultra slender tails made up nearly a third of the body, which was shaped like a huge diamond twenty–five feet long; then little one–meter sharks, the head large, the snout short and rounded, the teeth sharp and arranged in several rows, the body seemingly covered with scales.

Among bony fish, I noted grizzled wrasse unique to these seas, deep–water gilthead whose iris has a fiery gleam, one–meter croakers whose large mouths bristle with small teeth and which let out thin cries, black rudderfish like those I’ve already discussed, blue dorados accented with gold and silver, rainbow–hued parrotfish that can rival the loveliest tropical birds in coloring, banded blennies with
triangular heads, bluish flounder without scales, toadfish covered with a crosswise yellow band in the shape of a Τ, swarms of little freckled gobies stippled with brown spots, lungfish with silver heads and yellow tails, various specimens of salmon, mullet with slim figures and a softly glowing radiance that Lacépède dedicated to the memory of his wife, and finally the American cavalla, a handsome fish decorated by every honorary order, bedizened with their every ribbon, frequenting the shores of this great nation where ribbons and orders are held in such low esteem.

I might add that during the night, the Gulf Stream’s phosphorescent waters rivaled the electric glow of our beacon, especially in the stormy weather that frequently threatened us.

On May 8, while abreast of North Carolina, we were across from Cape Hatteras once more. There the Gulf Stream is seventy-five miles wide and 210 meters deep. The Nautilus continued to wander at random. Seemingly, all supervision had been jettisoned. Under these conditions I admit that we could easily have gotten away. In fact, the populous shores offered ready refuge everywhere. The sea was plowed continuously by the many steamers providing service between the Gulf of Mexico and New York or Boston, and it was crossed night and day by little schooners engaged in coastal trade over various points on the American shore. We could hope to be picked up. So it was a promising opportunity, despite the thirty miles that separated the Nautilus from these Union coasts.

But one distressing circumstance totally thwarted the Canadian’s plans. The weather was thoroughly foul. We were approaching waterways where storms are commonplace, the very homeland of tornadoes and cyclones specifically engendered by the Gulf Stream’s current. To face a frequently raging sea in a frail skiff was a race to certain disaster. Ned Land conceded this himself. So he champed at the bit, in the grip of an intense homesickness that could be cured only by our escape.

“Sir,” he told me that day, “it’s got to stop. I want to get to the bottom of this. Your Nemo’s veering away from shore and heading up north. But believe you me, I had my fill at the South Pole and I’m not going with him to the North Pole.”

“What can we do, Ned, since it isn’t feasible to escape right now?”

“I keep coming back to my idea. We’ve got to talk to the captain. When we were in your own country’s seas, you didn’t say a word. Now that we’re in mine, I intend to speak up. Before a few days are out, I figure the Nautilus will lie abreast of Nova Scotia, and from there to Newfoundland is the mouth of a large gulf, and the St. Lawrence empties into that gulf, and the St. Lawrence is my own river, the river running by Quebec, my hometown—and when I think about all this, my gorge rises and my hair stands on end! Honestly, sir, I’d rather jump overboard! I can’t stay here any longer! I’m suffocating!”

The Canadian was obviously at the end of his patience. His vigorous nature couldn’t adapt to this protracted imprisonment. His facial appearance was changing by the day. His moods grew gloomier and gloomier. I had a sense of what he was suffering because I also was gripped by homesickness. Nearly seven months had gone by without our having any news from shore. Moreover, Captain Nemo’s reclusiveness, his changed disposition, and especially his total silence since the battle with the devilfish all made me see things in a different light. I no longer felt the enthusiasm of our first days on board. You needed to be Flemish like Conseil to accept these circumstances, living in a habitat designed for cetaceans and other denizens of the deep. Truly, if that gallant lad had owned gills instead of lungs, I think he would have made an outstanding fish!
“Well, sir?” Ned Land went on, seeing that I hadn’t replied.

“Well, Ned, you want me to ask Captain Nemo what he intends to do with us?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Even though he has already made that clear?”

“Yes. I want it settled once and for all. Speak just for me, strictly on my behalf, if you want.”

“But I rarely encounter him. He positively avoids me.”

“All the more reason you should go look him up.”

“I’ll confer with him, Ned.”

“When?” the Canadian asked insistently.

“When I encounter him.”

“Professor Aronnax, would you like me to go find him myself?”

“No, let me do it. Tomorrow—”


“So be it. I’ll see him today,” I answered the Canadian, who, if he took action himself, would certainly have ruined everything.

I was left to myself. His request granted, I decided to dispose of it immediately. I like things over and done with.

I reentered my stateroom. From there I could hear movements inside Captain Nemo’s quarters. I couldn’t pass up this chance for an encounter. I knocked on his door. I received no reply. I knocked again, then tried the knob. The door opened.

I entered. The captain was there. He was bending over his worktable and hadn’t heard me. Determined not to leave without questioning him, I drew closer. He looked up sharply, with a frowning brow, and said in a pretty stern tone:

“Oh, it’s you! What do you want?”

“To speak with you, Captain.”

“But I’m busy, sir, I’m at work. I give you the freedom to enjoy your privacy, can’t I have the same for myself?”

This reception was less than encouraging. But I was determined to give as good as I got.
“Sir,” I said coolly, “I need to speak with you on a matter that simply can’t wait.”

“Whatever could that be, sir?” he replied sarcastically. “Have you made some discovery that has escaped me? Has the sea yielded up some novel secret to you?”

We were miles apart. But before I could reply, he showed me a manuscript open on the table and told me in a more serious tone:

“Here, Professor Aronnax, is a manuscript written in several languages. It contains a summary of my research under the sea, and God willing, it won’t perish with me. Signed with my name, complete with my life story, this manuscript will be enclosed in a small, unsinkable contrivance. The last surviving man on the Nautilus will throw this contrivance into the sea, and it will go wherever the waves carry it.”

The man’s name! His life story written by himself! So the secret of his existence might someday be unveiled? But just then I saw this announcement only as a lead–in to my topic.

“Captain,” I replied, “I’m all praise for this idea you’re putting into effect. The fruits of your research must not be lost. But the methods you’re using strike me as primitive. Who knows where the winds will take that contrivance, into whose hands it may fall? Can’t you find something better? Can’t you or one of your men—”

“Never, sir,” the captain said, swiftly interrupting me.

“But my companions and I would be willing to safeguard this manuscript, and if you give us back our freedom—”

“Your freedom!” Captain Nemo put in, standing up.

“Yes, sir, and that’s the subject on which I wanted to confer with you. For seven months we’ve been aboard your vessel, and I ask you today, in the name of my companions as well as myself, if you intend to keep us here forever.”

“Professor Aronnax,” Captain Nemo said, “I’ll answer you today just as I did seven months ago: whomever boards the Nautilus must never leave it.”

“What you’re inflicting on us is outright slavery!”

“Call it anything you like.”

“But every slave has the right to recover his freedom! By any worthwhile, available means!”

“Who has denied you that right?” Captain Nemo replied. “Did I ever try to bind you with your word of honor?”

The captain stared at me, crossing his arms.

“Sir,” I told him, “to take up this subject a second time would be distasteful to both of us. So let’s finish what we’ve started. I repeat: it isn’t just for myself that I raise this issue. To me, research is a relief, a
potent diversion, an enticement, a passion that can make me forget everything else. Like you, I’m a man neglected and unknown, living in the faint hope that someday I can pass on to future generations the fruits of my labors—figuratively speaking, by means of some contrivance left to the luck of winds and waves. In short, I can admire you and comfortably go with you while playing a role I only partly understand; but I still catch glimpses of other aspects of your life that are surrounded by involvements and secrets that, alone on board, my companions and I can’t share. And even when our hearts could beat with yours, moved by some of your griefs or stirred by your deeds of courage and genius, we’ve had to stifle even the slightest token of that sympathy that arises at the sight of something fine and good, whether it comes from friend or enemy. All right then! It’s this feeling of being alien to your deepest concerns that makes our situation unacceptable, impossible, even impossible for me but especially for Ned Land. Every man, by virtue of his very humanity, deserves fair treatment. Have you considered how a love of freedom and hatred of slavery could lead to plans of vengeance in a temperament like the Canadian’s, what he might think, attempt, endeavor . . . ?”

I fell silent. Captain Nemo stood up.

“Ned Land can think, attempt, or endeavor anything he wants, what difference is it to me? I didn’t go looking for him! I don’t keep him on board for my pleasure! As for you, Professor Aronnax, you’re a man able to understand anything, even silence. I have nothing more to say to you. Let this first time you’ve come to discuss this subject also be the last, because a second time I won’t even listen.”

I withdrew. From that day forward our position was very strained. I reported this conversation to my two companions.

“Now we know,” Ned said, “that we can’t expect a thing from this man. The Nautilus is nearing Long Island. We’ll escape, no matter what the weather.”

But the skies became more and more threatening. There were conspicuous signs of a hurricane on the way. The atmosphere was turning white and milky. Slender sheaves of cirrus clouds were followed on the horizon by layers of nimbocumulus. Other low clouds fled swiftly. The sea grew towering, inflated by long swells. Every bird had disappeared except a few petrels, friends of the storms. The barometer fell significantly, indicating a tremendous tension in the surrounding haze. The mixture in our stormglass decomposed under the influence of the electricity charging the air. A struggle of the elements was approaching.

The storm burst during the daytime of May 13, just as the Nautilus was cruising abreast of Long Island, a few miles from the narrows to Upper New York Bay. I’m able to describe this struggle of the elements because Captain Nemo didn’t flee into the ocean depths; instead, from some inexplicable whim, he decided to brave it out on the surface.

The wind was blowing from the southwest, initially a stiff breeze, in other words, with a speed of fifteen meters per second, which built to twenty-five meters near three o’clock in the afternoon. This is the figure for major storms.

Unshaken by these squalls, Captain Nemo stationed himself on the platform. He was lashed around the waist to withstand the monstrous breakers foaming over the deck. I hoisted and attached myself to the same place, dividing my wonderment between the storm and this incomparable man who faced it head-on.
The raging sea was swept with huge tattered clouds drenched by the waves. I saw no more of the small intervening billows that form in the troughs of the big crests. Just long, soot–colored undulations with crests so compact they didn’t foam. They kept growing taller. They were spurring each other on. The Nautilus, sometimes lying on its side, sometimes standing on end like a mast, rolled and pitched frightfully.

Near five o’clock a torrential rain fell, but it lulled neither wind nor sea. The hurricane was unleashed at a speed of forty–five meters per second, hence almost forty leagues per hour. Under these conditions houses topple, roof tiles puncture doors, iron railings snap in two, and twenty–four–pounder cannons relocate. And yet in the midst of this turmoil, the Nautilus lived up to that saying of an expert engineer: “A well–constructed hull can defy any sea!” This submersible was no resisting rock that waves could demolish; it was a steel spindle, obediently in motion, without rigging or masting, and able to brave their fury with impunity.

Meanwhile I was carefully examining these unleashed breakers. They measured up to fifteen meters in height over a length of 150 to 175 meters, and the speed of their propagation (half that of the wind) was fifteen meters per second. Their volume and power increased with the depth of the waters. I then understood the role played by these waves, which trap air in their flanks and release it in the depths of the sea where its oxygen brings life. Their utmost pressure—it has been calculated—can build to 3,000 kilograms on every square foot of surface they strike. It was such waves in the Hebrides that repositioned a stone block weighing 84,000 pounds. It was their relatives in the tidal wave on December 23, 1854, that toppled part of the Japanese city of Tokyo, then went that same day at 700 kilometers per hour to break on the beaches of America.

After nightfall the storm grew in intensity. As in the 1860 cyclone on Réunion Island, the barometer fell to 710 millimeters. At the close of day, I saw a big ship passing on the horizon, struggling painfully. It lay to at half steam in an effort to hold steady on the waves. It must have been a steamer on one of those lines out of New York to Liverpool or Le Havre. It soon vanished into the shadows.

At ten o’clock in the evening, the skies caught on fire. The air was streaked with violent flashes of lightning. I couldn’t stand this brightness, but Captain Nemo stared straight at it, as if to inhale the spirit of the storm. A dreadful noise filled the air, a complicated noise made up of the roar of crashing breakers, the howl of the wind, claps of thunder. The wind shifted to every point of the horizon, and the cyclone left the east to return there after passing through north, west, and south, moving in the opposite direction of revolving storms in the southern hemisphere.

Oh, that Gulf Stream! It truly lives up to its nickname, the Lord of Storms! All by itself it creates these fearsome cyclones through the difference in temperature between its currents and the superimposed layers of air.

The rain was followed by a downpour of fire. Droplets of water changed into exploding tufts. You would have thought Captain Nemo was courting a death worthy of himself, seeking to be struck by lightning. In one hideous pitching movement, the Nautilus reared its steel spur into the air like a lightning rod, and I saw long sparks shoot down it.

Shattered, at the end of my strength, I slid flat on my belly to the hatch. I opened it and went below to the lounge. By then the storm had reached its maximum intensity. It was impossible to stand upright.
inside the Nautilus.

Captain Nemo reentered near midnight. I could hear the ballast tanks filling little by little, and the Nautilus sank gently beneath the surface of the waves.

Through the lounge’s open windows, I saw large, frightened fish passing like phantoms in the fiery waters. Some were struck by lightning right before my eyes!

The Nautilus kept descending. I thought it would find calm again at fifteen meters down. No. The upper strata were too violently agitated. It needed to sink to fifty meters, searching for a resting place in the bowels of the sea.

But once there, what tranquility we found, what silence, what peace all around us! Who would have known that a dreadful hurricane was then unleashed on the surface of this ocean?

Chapter 20

In Latitude 47° 24′ and Longitude 17° 28′

In the aftermath of this storm, we were thrown back to the east. Away went any hope of escaping to the landing places of New York or the St. Lawrence. In despair, poor Ned went into seclusion like Captain Nemo. Conseil and I no longer left each other.

As I said, the Nautilus veered to the east. To be more accurate, I should have said to the northeast. Sometimes on the surface of the waves, sometimes beneath them, the ship wandered for days amid these mists so feared by navigators. These are caused chiefly by melting ice, which keeps the air extremely damp. How many ships have perished in these waterways as they tried to get directions from the hazy lights on the coast! How many casualties have been caused by these opaque mists! How many collisions have occurred with these reefs, where the breaking surf is covered by the noise of the wind! How many vessels have rammed each other, despite their running lights, despite the warnings given by their bosun’s pipes and alarm bells!

So the floor of this sea had the appearance of a battlefield where every ship defeated by the ocean still lay, some already old and encrusted, others newer and reflecting our beacon light on their ironwork and copper undersides. Among these vessels, how many went down with all hands, with their crews and hosts of immigrants, at these trouble spots so prominent in the statistics: Cape Race, St. Paul Island, the Strait of Belle Isle, the St. Lawrence estuary! And in only a few years, how many victims have been furnished to the obituary notices by the Royal Mail, Inman, and Montreal lines; by vessels named the Solway, the Isis, the Paramatta, the Hungarian, the Canadian, the Anglo–Saxon, the Humboldt, and the United States, all run aground; by the Arctic and the Lyonais, sunk in collisions; by the President, the Pacific, and the City of Glasgow, lost for reasons unknown; in the midst of their gloomy rubble, the Nautilus navigated as if passing the dead in review!

By May 15 we were off the southern tip of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. These banks are the result of marine sedimentation, an extensive accumulation of organic waste brought either from the equator by the Gulf Stream’s current, or from the North Pole by the countercurrent of cold water that skirts the American coast. Here, too, erratically drifting chunks collect from the ice breakup. Here a
huge boneyard forms from fish, mollusks, and zoophytes dying over it by the billions.

The sea is of no great depth at the Grand Banks. A few hundred fathoms at best. But to the south there is a deep, suddenly occurring depression, a 3,000–meter pit. Here the Gulf Stream widens. Its waters come to full bloom. It loses its speed and temperature, but it turns into a sea.

Among the fish that the Nautilus startled on its way, I’ll mention a one–meter lumpfish, blackish on top with orange on the belly and rare among its brethren in that it practices monogamy, a good–sized eelpout, a type of emerald moray whose flavor is excellent, wolffish with big eyes in a head somewhat resembling a canine’s, viviparous blennies whose eggs hatch inside their bodies like those of snakes, bloated gobio (or black gudgeon) measuring two decimeters, grenadiers with long tails and gleaming with a silvery glow, speedy fish venturing far from their High Arctic seas.

Our nets also hauled in a bold, daring, vigorous, and muscular fish armed with prickles on its head and stings on its fins, a real scorpion measuring two to three meters, the ruthless enemy of cod, blennies, and salmon; it was the bullhead of the northerly seas, a fish with red fins and a brown body covered with nodules. The Nautilus’s fishermen had some trouble getting a grip on this animal, which, thanks to the formation of its gill covers, can protect its respiratory organs from any parching contact with the air and can live out of water for a good while.

And I’ll mention—for the record—some little banded blennies that follow ships into the northernmost seas, sharp–snouted carp exclusive to the north Atlantic, scorpionfish, and lastly the gadoid family, chiefly the cod species, which I detected in their waters of choice over these inexhaustible Grand Banks.

Because Newfoundland is simply an underwater peak, you could call these cod mountain fish. While the Nautilus was clearing a path through their tight ranks, Conseil couldn’t refrain from making this comment:

“Mercy, look at these cod!” he said. “Why, I thought cod were flat, like dab or sole!”

“Innocent boy!” I exclaimed. “Cod are flat only at the grocery store, where they’re cut open and spread out on display. But in the water they’re like mullet, spindle–shaped and perfectly built for speed.”


“Bah! My friend, there’d be many more without their enemies, scorpionfish and human beings! Do you know how many eggs have been counted in a single female?”

“I’ll go all out,” Conseil replied. “500,000.”

“11,000,000, my friend.”

“11,000,000! I refuse to accept that until I count them myself.”

“So count them, Conseil. But it would be less work to believe me. Besides, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Americans, Danes, and Norwegians catch these cod by the thousands. They’re eaten in prodigious quantities, and without the astonishing fertility of these fish, the seas would soon be depopulated of them. Accordingly, in England and America alone, 5,000 ships manned by 75,000 seamen go after cod.
Each ship brings back an average catch of 4,400 fish, making 22,000,000. Off the coast of Norway, the total is the same.”

“Fine,” Conseil replied, “I’ll take Master’s word for it. I won’t count them.”

“Count what?”

“Those 11,000,000 eggs. But I’ll make one comment.”

“What’s that?”

“If all their eggs hatched, just four codfish could feed England, America, and Norway.”

As we skimmed the depths of the Grand Banks, I could see perfectly those long fishing lines, each armed with 200 hooks, that every boat dangled by the dozens. The lower end of each line dragged the bottom by means of a small grappling iron, and at the surface it was secured to the buoy–rope of a cork float. The Nautilus had to maneuver shrewdly in the midst of this underwater spiderweb.

But the ship didn’t stay long in these heavily traveled waterways. It went up to about latitude 42°. This brought it abreast of St. John’s in Newfoundland and Heart’s Content, where the Atlantic Cable reaches its end point.

Instead of continuing north, the Nautilus took an easterly heading, as if to go along this plateau on which the telegraph cable rests, where multiple soundings have given the contours of the terrain with the utmost accuracy.

It was on May 17, about 500 miles from Heart’s Content and 2,800 meters down, that I spotted this cable lying on the seafloor. Conseil, whom I hadn’t alerted, mistook it at first for a gigantic sea snake and was gearing up to classify it in his best manner. But I enlightened the fine lad and let him down gently by giving him various details on the laying of this cable.

The first cable was put down during the years 1857–1858; but after transmitting about 400 telegrams, it went dead. In 1863 engineers built a new cable that measured 3,400 kilometers, weighed 4,500 metric tons, and was shipped aboard the Great Eastern. This attempt also failed.

Now then, on May 25 while submerged to a depth of 3,836 meters, the Nautilus lay in precisely the locality where this second cable suffered the rupture that ruined the undertaking. It happened 638 miles from the coast of Ireland. At around two o’clock in the afternoon, all contact with Europe broke off. The electricians on board decided to cut the cable before fishing it up, and by eleven o’clock that evening they had retrieved the damaged part. They repaired the joint and its splice; then the cable was resubmerged. But a few days later it snapped again and couldn’t be recovered from the ocean depths.

These Americans refused to give up. The daring Cyrus Field, who had risked his whole fortune to promote this undertaking, called for a new bond issue. It sold out immediately. Another cable was put down under better conditions. Its sheaves of conducting wire were insulated within a gutta–percha covering, which was protected by a padding of textile material enclosed in a metal sheath. The Great Eastern put back to sea on July 13, 1866.
The operation proceeded apace. Yet there was one hitch. As they gradually unrolled this third cable, the electricians observed on several occasions that someone had recently driven nails into it, trying to damage its core. Captain Anderson, his officers, and the engineers put their heads together, then posted a warning that if the culprit were detected, he would be thrown overboard without a trial. After that, these villainous attempts were not repeated.

By July 23 the Great Eastern was lying no farther than 800 kilometers from Newfoundland when it received telegraphed news from Ireland of an armistice signed between Prussia and Austria after the Battle of Sadova. Through the mists on the 27th, it sighted the port of Heart’s Content. The undertaking had ended happily, and in its first dispatch, young America addressed old Europe with these wise words so rarely understood: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will.”

I didn’t expect to find this electric cable in mint condition, as it looked on leaving its place of manufacture. The long snake was covered with seashell rubble and bristling with foraminifera; a crust of caked gravel protected it from any mollusks that might bore into it. It rested serenely, sheltered from the sea’s motions, under a pressure favorable to the transmission of that electric spark that goes from America to Europe in 32/100 of a second. This cable will no doubt last indefinitely because, as observers note, its gutta–percha casing is improved by a stay in salt water.

Besides, on this well-chosen plateau, the cable never lies at depths that could cause a break. The Nautilus followed it to its lowest reaches, located 4,431 meters down, and even there it rested without any stress or strain. Then we returned to the locality where the 1863 accident had taken place.

There the ocean floor formed a valley 120 kilometers wide, into which you could fit Mt. Blanc without its summit poking above the surface of the waves. This valley is closed off to the east by a sheer wall 2,000 meters high. We arrived there on May 28, and the Nautilus lay no farther than 150 kilometers from Ireland.

Would Captain Nemo head up north and beach us on the British Isles? No. Much to my surprise, he went back down south and returned to European seas. As we swung around the Emerald Isle, I spotted Cape Clear for an instant, plus the lighthouse on Fastnet Rock that guides all those thousands of ships setting out from Glasgow or Liverpool.

An important question then popped into my head. Would the Nautilus dare to tackle the English Channel? Ned Land (who promptly reappeared after we hugged shore) never stopped questioning me. What could I answer him? Captain Nemo remained invisible. After giving the Canadian a glimpse of American shores, was he about to show me the coast of France?

But the Nautilus kept gravitating southward. On May 30, in sight of Land’s End, it passed between the lowermost tip of England and the Scilly Islands, which it left behind to starboard.

If it was going to enter the English Channel, it clearly needed to head east. It did not.

All day long on May 31, the Nautilus swept around the sea in a series of circles that had me deeply puzzled. It seemed to be searching for a locality that it had some trouble finding. At noon Captain Nemo himself came to take our bearings. He didn’t address a word to me. He looked gloomier than ever. What was filling him with such sadness? Was it our proximity to these European shores? Was he reliving his memories of that country he had left behind? If so, what did he feel? Remorse or regret? For a good
while these thoughts occupied my mind, and I had a hunch that fate would soon give away the captain’s secrets.

The next day, June 1, the Nautilus kept to the same tack. It was obviously trying to locate some precise spot in the ocean. Just as on the day before, Captain Nemo came to take the altitude of the sun. The sea was smooth, the skies clear. Eight miles to the east, a big steamship was visible on the horizon line. No flag was flapping from the gaff of its fore–and–aft sail, and I couldn’t tell its nationality.

A few minutes before the sun passed its zenith, Captain Nemo raised his sextant and took his sights with the utmost precision. The absolute calm of the waves facilitated this operation. The Nautilus lay motionless, neither rolling nor pitching.

I was on the platform just then. After determining our position, the captain pronounced only these words:

“It’s right here!”

He went down the hatch. Had he seen that vessel change course and seemingly head toward us? I’m unable to say.

I returned to the lounge. The hatch closed, and I heard water hissing in the ballast tanks. The Nautilus began to sink on a vertical line, because its propeller was in check and no longer furnished any forward motion.

Some minutes later it stopped at a depth of 833 meters and came to rest on the seafloor.

The ceiling lights in the lounge then went out, the panels opened, and through the windows I saw, for a half–mile radius, the sea brightly lit by the beacon’s rays.

I looked to port and saw nothing but the immenseness of these tranquil waters.

To starboard, a prominent bulge on the sea bottom caught my attention. You would have thought it was some ruin enshrouded in a crust of whitened seashells, as if under a mantle of snow. Carefully examining this mass, I could identify the swollen outlines of a ship shorn of its masts, which must have sunk bow first. This casualty certainly dated from some far–off time. To be so caked with the limestone of these waters, this wreckage must have spent many a year on the ocean floor.

What ship was this? Why had the Nautilus come to visit its grave? Was it something other than a maritime accident that had dragged this craft under the waters?

I wasn’t sure what to think, but next to me I heard Captain Nemo’s voice slowly say:

“Originally this ship was christened the Marseillais. It carried seventy–four cannons and was launched in 1762. On August 13, 1778, commanded by La Poype–Vertrieux, it fought valiantly against the Preston. On July 4, 1779, as a member of the squadron under Admiral d’Estaing, it assisted in the capture of the island of Grenada. On September 5, 1781, under the Count de Grasse, it took part in the Battle of Chesapeake Bay. In 1794 the new Republic of France changed the name of this ship. On April 16 of that same year, it joined the squadron at Brest under Rear Admiral Villaret de Joyeuse, who was
entrusted with escorting a convoy of wheat coming from America under the command of Admiral Van Stabel. In this second year of the French Revolutionary Calendar, on the 11th and 12th days in the Month of Pasture, this squadron fought an encounter with English vessels. Sir, today is June 1, 1868, or the 13th day in the Month of Pasture. Seventy-four years ago to the day, at this very spot in latitude 47° 24′ and longitude 17° 28′, this ship sank after a heroic battle; its three masts gone, water in its hold, a third of its crew out of action, it preferred to go to the bottom with its 356 seamen rather than surrender; and with its flag nailed up on the afterdeck, it disappeared beneath the waves to shouts of ‘Long live the Republic!’"

“This is the Avenger!” I exclaimed.

“Yes, sir! The Avenger! A splendid name!” Captain Nemo murmured, crossing his arms.

**Chapter 21**

**A Mass Execution**

THE WAY HE SAID THIS, the unexpectedness of this scene, first the biography of this patriotic ship, then the excitement with which this eccentric individual pronounced these last words—the name Avenger whose significance could not escape me—all this, taken together, had a profound impact on my mind. My eyes never left the captain. Hands outstretched toward the sea, he contemplated the proud wreck with blazing eyes. Perhaps I would never learn who he was, where he came from or where he was heading, but more and more I could see a distinction between the man and the scientist. It was no ordinary misanthropy that kept Captain Nemo and his companions sequestered inside the Nautilus’s plating, but a hate so monstrous or so sublime that the passing years could never weaken it.

Did this hate also hunger for vengeance? Time would soon tell.

Meanwhile the Nautilus rose slowly to the surface of the sea, and I watched the Avenger’s murky shape disappearing little by little. Soon a gentle rolling told me that we were afloat in the open air.

Just then a hollow explosion was audible. I looked at the captain. The captain did not stir.

“Captain?” I said.

He didn’t reply.

I left him and climbed onto the platform. Conseil and the Canadian were already there.

“What caused that explosion?” I asked.


I stared in the direction of the ship I had spotted. It was heading toward the Nautilus, and you could tell it had put on steam. Six miles separated it from us.

“What sort of craft is it, Ned?”
“From its rigging and its low masts,” the Canadian replied, “I bet it’s a warship. Here’s hoping it pulls up and sinks this damned Nautilus!”

“Ned my friend,” Conseil replied, “what harm could it do the Nautilus? Will it attack us under the waves? Will it cannonade us at the bottom of the sea?”

“Tell me, Ned,” I asked, “can you make out the nationality of that craft?”

Creasing his brow, lowering his lids, and puckering the corners of his eyes, the Canadian focused the full power of his gaze on the ship for a short while.

“No, sir,” he replied. “I can’t make out what nation it’s from. It’s flying no flag. But I’ll swear it’s a warship, because there’s a long pennant streaming from the peak of its mainmast.”

For a quarter of an hour, we continued to watch the craft bearing down on us. But it was inconceivable to me that it had discovered the Nautilus at such a distance, still less that it knew what this underwater machine really was.

Soon the Canadian announced that the craft was a big battleship, a double–decker ironclad complete with ram. Dark, dense smoke burst from its two funnels. Its furled sails merged with the lines of its yardarms. The gaff of its fore–and–aft sail flew no flag. Its distance still kept us from distinguishing the colors of its pennant, which was fluttering like a thin ribbon.

It was coming on fast. If Captain Nemo let it approach, a chance for salvation might be available to us.

“Sir,” Ned Land told me, “if that boat gets within a mile of us, I’m jumping overboard, and I suggest you follow suit.”

I didn’t reply to the Canadian’s proposition but kept watching the ship, which was looming larger on the horizon. Whether it was English, French, American, or Russian, it would surely welcome us aboard if we could just get to it.

“Master may recall,” Conseil then said, “that we have some experience with swimming. He can rely on me to tow him to that vessel, if he’s agreeable to going with our friend Ned.”

Before I could reply, white smoke streamed from the battleship’s bow. Then, a few seconds later, the waters splashed astern of the Nautilus, disturbed by the fall of a heavy object. Soon after, an explosion struck my ears.

“What’s this? They’re firing at us!” I exclaimed.

“Good lads!” the Canadian muttered.

“That means they don’t see us as castaways clinging to some wreckage!”

“With all due respect to Master—gracious!” Conseil put in, shaking off the water that had sprayed over him from another shell. “With all due respect to master, they’ve discovered the narwhale and they’re cannonading the same.”
“But it must be clear to them,” I exclaimed, “that they’re dealing with human beings.”

“Maybe that’s why!” Ned Land replied, staring hard at me.

The full truth dawned on me. Undoubtedly people now knew where they stood on the existence of this so-called monster. Undoubtedly the latter’s encounter with the Abraham Lincoln, when the Canadian hit it with his harpoon, had led Commander Farragut to recognize the narwhale as actually an underwater boat, more dangerous than any unearthly cetacean!

Yes, this had to be the case, and undoubtedly they were now chasing this dreadful engine of destruction on every sea!

Dreadful indeed, if, as we could assume, Captain Nemo had been using the Nautilus in works of vengeance! That night in the middle of the Indian Ocean, when he imprisoned us in the cell, hadn’t he attacked some ship? That man now buried in the coral cemetery, wasn’t he the victim of some collision caused by the Nautilus? Yes, I repeat: this had to be the case. One part of Captain Nemo’s secret life had been unveiled. And now, even though his identity was still unknown, at least the nations allied against him knew they were no longer hunting some fairy-tale monster, but a man who had sworn an implacable hate toward them!

This whole fearsome sequence of events appeared in my mind’s eye. Instead of encountering friends on this approaching ship, we would find only pitiless enemies.

Meanwhile shells fell around us in increasing numbers. Some, meeting the liquid surface, would ricochet and vanish into the sea at considerable distances. But none of them reached the Nautilus.

By then the ironclad was no more than three miles off. Despite its violent cannonade, Captain Nemo hadn’t appeared on the platform. And yet if one of those conical shells had scored a routine hit on the Nautilus’s hull, it could have been fatal to him.

The Canadian then told me:

“Sir, we’ve got to do everything we can to get out of this jam! Let’s signal them! Damnation! Maybe they’ll realize we’re decent people!”

Ned Land pulled out his handkerchief to wave it in the air. But he had barely unfolded it when he was felled by an iron fist, and despite his great strength, he tumbled to the deck.

“Scum!” the captain shouted. “Do you want to be nailed to the Nautilus’s spur before it charges that ship?”

Dreadful to hear, Captain Nemo was even more dreadful to see. His face was pale from some spasm of his heart, which must have stopped beating for an instant. His pupils were hideously contracted. His voice was no longer speaking, it was bellowing. Bending from the waist, he shook the Canadian by the shoulders.

Then, dropping Ned and turning to the battleship, whose shells were showering around him:
“O ship of an accursed nation, you know who I am!” he shouted in his powerful voice. “And I don’t need your colors to recognize you! Look! I’ll show you mine!”

And in the bow of the platform, Captain Nemo unfurled a black flag, like the one he had left planted at the South Pole.

Just then a shell hit the Nautilus’s hull obliquely, failed to breach it, ricocheted near the captain, and vanished into the sea.

Captain Nemo shrugged his shoulders. Then, addressing me:

“Go below!” he told me in a curt tone. “You and your companions, go below!”

“Sir,” I exclaimed, “are you going to attack this ship?”

“Sir, I’m going to sink it.”

“You wouldn’t!”

“I will,” Captain Nemo replied icily. “You’re ill-advised to pass judgment on me, sir. Fate has shown you what you weren’t meant to see. The attack has come. Our reply will be dreadful. Get back inside!”

“From what country is that ship?”

“You don’t know? Fine, so much the better! At least its nationality will remain a secret to you. Go below!”

The Canadian, Conseil, and I could only obey. Some fifteen of the Nautilus’s seamen surrounded their captain and stared with a feeling of implacable hate at the ship bearing down on them. You could feel the same spirit of vengeance enkindling their every soul.

I went below just as another projectile scraped the Nautilus’s hull, and I heard the captain exclaim:

“Shoot, you demented vessel! Shower your futile shells! You won’t escape the Nautilus’s spur! But this isn’t the place where you’ll perish! I don’t want your wreckage mingling with that of the Avenger!”

I repaired to my stateroom. The captain and his chief officer stayed on the platform. The propeller was set in motion. The Nautilus swiftly retreated, putting us outside the range of the vessel’s shells. But the chase continued, and Captain Nemo was content to keep his distance.

Near four o’clock in the afternoon, unable to control the impatience and uneasiness devouring me, I went back to the central companionway. The hatch was open. I ventured onto the platform. The captain was still strolling there, his steps agitated. He stared at the ship, which stayed to his leeward five or six miles off. He was circling it like a wild beast, drawing it eastward, letting it chase after him. Yet he didn’t attack. Was he, perhaps, still undecided?

I tried to intervene one last time. But I had barely queried Captain Nemo when the latter silenced me:
“I’m the law, I’m the tribunal! I’m the oppressed, and there are my oppressors! Thanks to them, I’ve witnessed the destruction of everything I loved, cherished, and venerated—homeland, wife, children, father, and mother! There lies everything I hate! Not another word out of you!”

I took a last look at the battleship, which was putting on steam. Then I rejoined Ned and Conseil.

“We’ll escape!” I exclaimed.

“Good,” Ned put in. “Where’s that ship from?”

“I’ve no idea. But wherever it’s from, it will sink before nightfall. In any event, it’s better to perish with it than be accomplices in some act of revenge whose merits we can’t gauge.”


Night fell. A profound silence reigned on board. The compass indicated that the Nautilus hadn’t changed direction. I could hear the beat of its propeller, churning the waves with steady speed. Staying on the surface of the water, it rolled gently, sometimes to one side, sometimes to the other.

My companions and I had decided to escape as soon as the vessel came close enough for us to be heard—or seen, because the moon would wax full in three days and was shining brightly. Once we were aboard that ship, if we couldn’t ward off the blow that threatened it, at least we could do everything that circumstances permitted. Several times I thought the Nautilus was about to attack. But it was content to let its adversary approach, and then it would quickly resume its retreating ways.

Part of the night passed without incident. We kept watch for an opportunity to take action. We talked little, being too keyed up. Ned Land was all for jumping overboard. I forced him to wait. As I saw it, the Nautilus would attack the double–decker on the surface of the waves, and then it would be not only possible but easy to escape.

At three o’clock in the morning, full of uneasiness, I climbed onto the platform. Captain Nemo hadn’t left it. He stood in the bow next to his flag, which a mild breeze was unfurling above his head. His eyes never left that vessel. The extraordinary intensity of his gaze seemed to attract it, beguile it, and draw it more surely than if he had it in tow!

The moon then passed its zenith. Jupiter was rising in the east. In the midst of this placid natural setting, sky and ocean competed with each other in tranquility, and the sea offered the orb of night the loveliest mirror ever to reflect its image.

And when I compared this deep calm of the elements with all the fury seething inside the plating of this barely perceptible Nautilus, I shivered all over.

The vessel was two miles off. It drew nearer, always moving toward the phosphorescent glow that signaled the Nautilus’s presence. I saw its green and red running lights, plus the white lantern hanging from the large stay of its foremast. Hazy flickerings were reflected on its rigging and indicated that its furnaces were pushed to the limit. Showers of sparks and cinders of flaming coal escaped from its funnels, spangling the air with stars.
I stood there until six o’clock in the morning, Captain Nemo never seeming to notice me. The vessel lay a mile and a half off, and with the first glimmers of daylight, it resumed its cannonade. The time couldn’t be far away when the Nautilus would attack its adversary, and my companions and I would leave forever this man I dared not judge.

I was about to go below to alert them, when the chief officer climbed onto the platform. Several seamen were with him. Captain Nemo didn’t see them, or didn’t want to see them. They carried out certain procedures that, on the Nautilus, you could call “clearing the decks for action.” They were quite simple. The manropes that formed a handrail around the platform were lowered. Likewise the pilothouse and the beacon housing were withdrawn into the hull until they lay exactly flush with it. The surface of this long sheet–iron cigar no longer offered a single protrusion that could hamper its maneuvers.

I returned to the lounge. The Nautilus still emerged above the surface. A few morning gleams infiltrated the liquid strata. Beneath the undulations of the billows, the windows were enlivened by the blushing of the rising sun. That dreadful day of June 2 had dawned.

At seven o’clock the log told me that the Nautilus had reduced speed. I realized that it was letting the warship approach. Moreover, the explosions grew more intensely audible. Shells furrowed the water around us, drilling through it with an odd hissing sound.

“My friends,” I said, “it’s time. Let’s shake hands, and may God be with us!”

Ned Land was determined, Conseil calm, I myself nervous and barely in control.

We went into the library. Just as I pushed open the door leading to the well of the central companionway, I heard the hatch close sharply overhead.

The Canadian leaped up the steps, but I stopped him. A well–known hissing told me that water was entering the ship’s ballast tanks. Indeed, in a few moments the Nautilus had submerged some meters below the surface of the waves.

I understood this maneuver. It was too late to take action. The Nautilus wasn’t going to strike the double–decker where it was clad in impenetrable iron armor, but below its waterline, where the metal carapace no longer protected its planking.

We were prisoners once more, unwilling spectators at the performance of this gruesome drama. But we barely had time to think. Taking refuge in my stateroom, we stared at each other without pronouncing a word. My mind was in a total daze. My mental processes came to a dead stop. I hovered in that painful state that predominates during the period of anticipation before some frightful explosion. I waited, I listened, I lived only through my sense of hearing!

Meanwhile the Nautilus’s speed had increased appreciably. So it was gathering momentum. Its entire hull was vibrating.

Suddenly I let out a yell. There had been a collision, but it was comparatively mild. I could feel the penetrating force of the steel spur. I could hear scratchings and scrapings. Carried away with its driving power, the Nautilus had passed through the vessel’s mass like a sailmaker’s needle through canvas!
I couldn’t hold still. Frantic, going insane, I leaped out of my stateroom and rushed into the lounge.

Captain Nemo was there. Mute, gloomy, implacable, he was staring through the port panel.

An enormous mass was sinking beneath the waters, and the Nautilus, missing none of its death throes, was descending into the depths with it. Ten meters away, I could see its gaping hull, into which water was rushing with a sound of thunder, then its double rows of cannons and railings. Its deck was covered with dark, quivering shadows.

The water was rising. Those poor men leaped up into the shrouds, clung to the masts, writhed beneath the waters. It was a human anthill that an invading sea had caught by surprise!

Paralyzed, rigid with anguish, my hair standing on end, my eyes popping out of my head, short of breath, suffocating, speechless, I stared—I too! I was glued to the window by an irresistible allure!

The enormous vessel settled slowly. Following it down, the Nautilus kept watch on its every movement. Suddenly there was an eruption. The air compressed inside the craft sent its decks flying, as if the powder stores had been ignited. The thrust of the waters was so great, the Nautilus swerved away.

The poor ship then sank more swiftly. Its mastheads appeared, laden with victims, then its crosstrees bending under clusters of men, finally the peak of its mainmast. Then the dark mass disappeared, and with it a crew of corpses dragged under by fearsome eddies. . . .

I turned to Captain Nemo. This dreadful executioner, this true archangel of hate, was still staring. When it was all over, Captain Nemo headed to the door of his stateroom, opened it, and entered. I followed him with my eyes.

On the rear paneling, beneath the portraits of his heroes, I saw the portrait of a still–youthful woman with two little children. Captain Nemo stared at them for a few moments, stretched out his arms to them, sank to his knees, and melted into sobs.

Chapter 22

The Last Words of Captain Nemo

THE PANELS CLOSED over this frightful view, but the lights didn’t go on in the lounge. Inside the Nautilus all was gloom and silence. It left this place of devastation with prodigious speed, 100 feet beneath the waters. Where was it going? North or south? Where would the man flee after this horrible act of revenge?

I reentered my stateroom, where Ned and Conseil were waiting silently. Captain Nemo filled me with insurmountable horror. Whatever he had once suffered at the hands of humanity, he had no right to mete out such punishment. He had made me, if not an accomplice, at least an eyewitness to his vengeance! Even this was intolerable.

At eleven o’clock the electric lights came back on. I went into the lounge. It was deserted. I consulted the various instruments. The Nautilus was fleeing northward at a speed of twenty–five miles per hour,
sometimes on the surface of the sea, sometimes thirty feet beneath it.

After our position had been marked on the chart, I saw that we were passing into the mouth of the English Channel, that our heading would take us to the northernmost seas with incomparable speed.

I could barely glimpse the swift passing of longnose sharks, hammerhead sharks, spotted dogfish that frequent these waters, big eagle rays, swarms of seahorse looking like knights on a chessboard, eels quivering like fireworks serpents, armies of crab that fled obliquely by crossing their pincers over their carapaces, finally schools of porpoise that held contests of speed with the Nautilus. But by this point observing, studying, and classifying were out of the question.

By evening we had cleared 200 leagues up the Atlantic. Shadows gathered and gloom overran the sea until the moon came up.

I repaired to my stateroom. I couldn’t sleep. I was assaulted by nightmares. That horrible scene of destruction kept repeating in my mind’s eye.

From that day forward, who knows where the Nautilus took us in the north Atlantic basin? Always at incalculable speed! Always amid the High Arctic mists! Did it call at the capes of Spitzbergen or the shores of Novaya Zemlya? Did it visit such uncharted seas as the White Sea, the Kara Sea, the Gulf of Ob, the Lyakhov Islands, or those unknown beaches on the Siberian coast? I’m unable to say. I lost track of the passing hours. Time was in abeyance on the ship’s clocks. As happens in the polar regions, it seemed that night and day no longer followed their normal sequence. I felt myself being drawn into that strange domain where the overwrought imagination of Edgar Allan Poe was at home. Like his fabled Arthur Gordon Pym, I expected any moment to see that “shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men,” thrown across the cataract that protects the outskirts of the pole!

I estimate—but perhaps I’m mistaken—that the Nautilus’s haphazard course continued for fifteen or twenty days, and I’m not sure how long this would have gone on without the catastrophe that ended our voyage. As for Captain Nemo, he was no longer in the picture. As for his chief officer, the same applied. Not one crewman was visible for a single instant. The Nautilus cruised beneath the waters almost continuously. When it rose briefly to the surface to renew our air, the hatches opened and closed as if automated. No more positions were reported on the world map. I didn’t know where we were.

I’ll also mention that the Canadian, at the end of his strength and patience, made no further appearances. Conseil couldn’t coax a single word out of him and feared that, in a fit of delirium while under the sway of a ghastly homesickness, Ned would kill himself. So he kept a devoted watch on his friend every instant.

You can appreciate that under these conditions, our situation had become untenable.

One morning—whose date I’m unable to specify—I was slumbering near the first hours of daylight, a painful, sickly slumber. Waking up, I saw Ned Land leaning over me, and I heard him tell me in a low voice:

“We’re going to escape!”
I sat up.

“When?” I asked.

“Tonight. There doesn’t seem to be any supervision left on the Nautilus. You’d think a total daze was reigning on board. Will you be ready, sir?”

“Yes. Where are we?”

“In sight of land. I saw it through the mists just this morning, twenty miles to the east.”

“What land is it?”

“I’ve no idea, but whatever it is, there we’ll take refuge.”

“Yes, Ned! We’ll escape tonight even if the sea swallows us up!”

“The sea’s rough, the wind’s blowing hard, but a twenty-mile run in the Nautilus’s nimble longboat doesn’t scare me. Unknown to the crew, I’ve stowed some food and flasks of water inside.”

“I’m with you.”

“What’s more,” the Canadian added, “if they catch me, I’ll defend myself, I’ll fight to the death.”

“Then we’ll die together, Ned my friend.”

My mind was made up. The Canadian left me. I went out on the platform, where I could barely stand upright against the jolts of the billows. The skies were threatening, but land lay inside those dense mists, and we had to escape. Not a single day, or even a single hour, could we afford to lose.

I returned to the lounge, dreading yet desiring an encounter with Captain Nemo, wanting yet not wanting to see him. What would I say to him? How could I hide the involuntary horror he inspired in me? No! It was best not to meet him face to face! Best to try and forget him! And yet . . . !

How long that day seemed, the last I would spend aboard the Nautilus! I was left to myself. Ned Land and Conseil avoided speaking to me, afraid they would give themselves away.

At six o’clock I ate supper, but I had no appetite. Despite my revulsion, I forced it down, wanting to keep my strength up.

At 6:30 Ned Land entered my stateroom. He told me:

“We won’t see each other again before we go. At ten o’clock the moon won’t be up yet. We’ll take advantage of the darkness. Come to the skiff. Conseil and I will be inside waiting for you.”

The Canadian left without giving me time to answer him.

I wanted to verify the Nautilus’s heading. I made my way to the lounge. We were racing north–northeast
with frightful speed, fifty meters down.

I took one last look at the natural wonders and artistic treasures amassed in the museum, this unrivaled collection doomed to perish someday in the depths of the seas, together with its curator. I wanted to establish one supreme impression in my mind. I stayed there an hour, basking in the aura of the ceiling lights, passing in review the treasures shining in their glass cases. Then I returned to my stateroom.

There I dressed in sturdy seafaring clothes. I gathered my notes and packed them tenderly about my person. My heart was pounding mightily. I couldn’t curb its pulsations. My anxiety and agitation would certainly have given me away if Captain Nemo had seen me.

What was he doing just then? I listened at the door to his stateroom. I heard the sound of footsteps. Captain Nemo was inside. He hadn’t gone to bed. With his every movement I imagined he would appear and ask me why I wanted to escape! I felt in a perpetual state of alarm. My imagination magnified this sensation. The feeling became so acute, I wondered whether it wouldn’t be better to enter the captain’s stateroom, dare him face to face, brave it out with word and deed!

It was an insane idea. Fortunately I controlled myself and stretched out on the bed to soothe my bodily agitation. My nerves calmed a little, but with my brain so aroused, I did a swift review of my whole existence aboard the Nautilus, every pleasant or unpleasant incident that had crossed my path since I went overboard from the Abraham Lincoln: the underwater hunting trip, the Torres Strait, our running aground, the savages of Papua, the coral cemetery, the Suez passageway, the island of Santorini, the Cretan diver, the Bay of Vigo, Atlantis, the Ice Bank, the South Pole, our imprisonment in the ice, the battle with the devilfish, the storm in the Gulf Stream, the Avenger, and that horrible scene of the vessel sinking with its crew . . . ! All these events passed before my eyes like backdrops unrolling upstage in a theater. In this strange setting Captain Nemo then grew fantastically. His features were accentuated, taking on superhuman proportions. He was no longer my equal, he was the Man of the Waters, the Spirit of the Seas.

By then it was 9:30. I held my head in both hands to keep it from bursting. I closed my eyes. I no longer wanted to think. A half hour still to wait! A half hour of nightmares that could drive me insane!

Just then I heard indistinct chords from the organ, melancholy harmonies from some undefinable hymn, actual pleadings from a soul trying to sever its earthly ties. I listened with all my senses at once, barely breathing, immersed like Captain Nemo in this musical trance that was drawing him beyond the bounds of this world.

Then a sudden thought terrified me. Captain Nemo had left his stateroom. He was in the same lounge I had to cross in order to escape. There I would encounter him one last time. He would see me, perhaps speak to me! One gesture from him could obliterate me, a single word shackle me to his vessel!

Even so, ten o’clock was about to strike. It was time to leave my stateroom and rejoin my companions.

I dared not hesitate, even if Captain Nemo stood before me. I opened the door cautiously, but as it swung on its hinges, it seemed to make a frightful noise. This noise existed, perhaps, only in my imagination!

I crept forward through the Nautilus’s dark gangways, pausing after each step to curb the pounding of
my heart.

I arrived at the corner door of the lounge. I opened it gently. The lounge was plunged in profound darkness. Chords from the organ were reverberating faintly. Captain Nemo was there. He didn’t see me. Even in broad daylight I doubt that he would have noticed me, so completely was he immersed in his trance.

I inched over the carpet, avoiding the tiniest bump whose noise might give me away. It took me five minutes to reach the door at the far end, which led into the library.

I was about to open it when a gasp from Captain Nemo nailed me to the spot. I realized that he was standing up. I even got a glimpse of him because some rays of light from the library had filtered into the lounge. He was coming toward me, arms crossed, silent, not walking but gliding like a ghost. His chest was heaving, swelling with sobs. And I heard him murmur these words, the last of his to reach my ears:

“O almighty God! Enough! Enough!”

Was it a vow of repentance that had just escaped from this man’s conscience . . . ?

Frantic, I rushed into the library. I climbed the central companionway, and going along the upper gangway, I arrived at the skiff. I went through the opening that had already given access to my two companions.

“Let’s go, let’s go!” I exclaimed.

“Right away!” the Canadian replied.

First, Ned Land closed and bolted the opening cut into the Nautilus’s sheet iron, using the monkey wrench he had with him. After likewise closing the opening in the skiff, the Canadian began to unscrew the nuts still bolting us to the underwater boat.

Suddenly a noise from the ship’s interior became audible. Voices were answering each other hurriedly. What was it? Had they spotted our escape? I felt Ned Land sliding a dagger into my hand.

“Yes,” I muttered, “we know how to die!”

The Canadian paused in his work. But one word twenty times repeated, one dreadful word, told me the reason for the agitation spreading aboard the Nautilus. We weren’t the cause of the crew’s concern.

“Maelstrom! Maelstrom!” they were shouting.

The Maelstrom! Could a more frightening name have rung in our ears under more frightening circumstances? Were we lying in the dangerous waterways off the Norwegian coast? Was the Nautilus being dragged into this whirlpool just as the skiff was about to detach from its plating?

As you know, at the turn of the tide, the waters confined between the Faroe and Lofoten Islands rush out with irresistible violence. They form a vortex from which no ship has ever been able to escape. Monstrous waves race together from every point of the horizon. They form a whirlpool aptly called “the
“ocean’s navel,” whose attracting power extends a distance of fifteen kilometers. It can suck down not only ships but whales, and even polar bears from the northernmost regions.

This was where the Nautilus had been sent accidentally—or perhaps deliberately—by its captain. It was sweeping around in a spiral whose radius kept growing smaller and smaller. The skiff, still attached to the ship’s plating, was likewise carried around at dizzying speed. I could feel us whirling. I was experiencing that accompanying nausea that follows such continuous spinning motions. We were in dread, in the last stages of sheer horror, our blood frozen in our veins, our nerves numb, drenched in cold sweat as if from the throes of dying! And what a noise around our frail skiff! What roars echoing from several miles away! What crashes from the waters breaking against sharp rocks on the seafloor, where the hardest objects are smashed, where tree trunks are worn down and worked into “a shaggy fur,” as Norwegians express it!

What a predicament! We were rocking frightfully. The Nautilus defended itself like a human being. Its steel muscles were cracking. Sometimes it stood on end, the three of us along with it!

“We’ve got to hold on tight,” Ned said, “and screw the nuts down again! If we can stay attached to the Nautilus, we can still make it . . . !”

He hadn’t finished speaking when a cracking sound occurred. The nuts gave way, and ripped out of its socket, the skiff was hurled like a stone from a sling into the midst of the vortex.

My head struck against an iron timber, and with this violent shock I lost consciousness.

Chapter 23

Conclusion

WE COME TO the conclusion of this voyage under the seas. What happened that night, how the skiff escaped from the Maelstrom’s fearsome eddies, how Ned Land, Conseil, and I got out of that whirlpool, I’m unable to say. But when I regained consciousness, I was lying in a fisherman’s hut on one of the Lofoten Islands. My two companions, safe and sound, were at my bedside clasping my hands. We embraced each other heartily.

Just now we can’t even dream of returning to France. Travel between upper Norway and the south is limited. So I have to wait for the arrival of a steamboat that provides bimonthly service from North Cape.

So it is here, among these gallant people who have taken us in, that I’m reviewing my narrative of these adventures. It is accurate. Not a fact has been omitted, not a detail has been exaggerated. It’s the faithful record of this inconceivable expedition into an element now beyond human reach, but where progress will someday make great inroads.

Will anyone believe me? I don’t know. Ultimately it’s unimportant. What I can now assert is that I’ve earned the right to speak of these seas, beneath which in less than ten months, I’ve cleared 20,000 leagues in this underwater tour of the world that has shown me so many wonders across the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the southernmost and northernmost seas!
But what happened to the Nautilus? Did it withstand the Maelstrom’s clutches? Is Captain Nemo alive? Is he still under the ocean pursuing his frightful program of revenge, or did he stop after that latest mass execution? Will the waves someday deliver that manuscript that contains his full life story? Will I finally learn the man’s name? Will the nationality of the stricken warship tell us the nationality of Captain Nemo?

I hope so. I likewise hope that his powerful submersible has defeated the sea inside its most dreadful whirlpool, that the Nautilus has survived where so many ships have perished! If this is the case and Captain Nemo still inhabits the ocean—his adopted country—may the hate be appeased in that fierce heart! May the contemplation of so many wonders extinguish the spirit of vengeance in him! May the executioner pass away, and the scientist continue his peaceful exploration of the seas! If his destiny is strange, it’s also sublime. Haven’t I encompassed it myself? Didn’t I lead ten months of this otherworldly existence? Thus to that question asked 6,000 years ago in the Book of Ecclesiastes—”Who can fathom the soundless depths?”—two men out of all humanity have now earned the right to reply. Captain Nemo and I.

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Trailer 20000 Leagues on Disney Video

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