



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea · Episode 35 / 46 · B1–B2 · 00

Whales and Sperm Whales

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OVERVIEW

Summary

Whales and Sperm Whales — chapter 35 of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, told in clear English for language learners.

Transcript

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Chapter Thirty-Five — Whales and Sperm Whales

The Nautilus kept moving south. I thought that near Cape Horn Captain Nemo would turn west into the Pacific. But he did not. He went on toward the far south. Was he going to the pole? That seemed like madness.

Ned Land was unhappy. He no longer talked about escape. He was quiet, and I could see anger burning inside him. When he met the Captain, his eyes flashed. I was afraid he might do something rash.

On the 14th of March, Ned and Conseil came to my room. Ned asked me a simple question: "How many men are on board the Nautilus?"

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe ten men are enough to run it. But the ship may also be a hiding place for people who have cut all ties with the world, like the Captain."

Conseil found a clever way to guess. He knew the size of the ship and how much air a person breathes. We knew the Nautilus must rise to the surface once a day for fresh air. From this we worked out that the ship held enough air for 625 men for one day. That was far more than the number of people we had seen.

Later that morning, on the surface, we met a group of whales. Ned grew excited. He had been a whale hunter, and he ached to chase them. "If only I were on a whaling ship!" he said. But he was stuck on the Nautilus, and it made him angry.

Conseil said, "Why not ask the Captain for permission?" At once Ned went to find him. Soon both came up to the platform.

"They are southern whales," said Captain Nemo. "A whole fleet of hunters would grow rich here."

"May I chase them?" asked Ned.

"Why?" said the Captain. "Only to kill? These are gentle, harmless animals. Hunters have already killed so many that whole seas are empty. I will not join in such cruel sport. Leave the poor whales alone. They have enough enemies already." He was right. Greedy hunters may one day kill the very last whale in the sea.

Ned turned away, cross. But then the Captain pointed at some dark shapes far off.

"Do you see those points, eight miles away?" he said. "Those are sperm whales. They are cruel, dangerous animals, all mouth and teeth. They hunt in groups of two or three hundred. The world would be better without them."

Ned turned back at once. These sperm whales were coming to attack the gentle whales. There was just time to help. The Nautilus would use its steel point like a great harpoon.

The Nautilus dived. Conseil, Ned, and I stood at the window. Captain Nemo went to the pilot's cage to steer. Our speed grew fast. The battle had already begun when we arrived. The Nautilus threw itself at the sperm whales like a giant spear. It drove through them and cut them in two. It turned and dived and came up again, striking one after another. What a terrible fight! The sea churned and roared.

For one hour the Nautilus destroyed the cruel sperm whales. Sometimes ten or twelve of them clung to the ship,

trying to crush it with their weight. But the Nautilus carried them off and shook them free. At last the group broke apart. When we rose to the surface, the sea was full of torn bodies. A few frightened sperm whales fled toward the horizon. The water was red with blood for miles.

Captain Nemo joined us. "Well, Master Land?"

"It was a terrible sight," said Ned, calmer now. "But I am a hunter, not a butcher. This was a slaughter."

"It was the killing of harmful animals," said the Captain. "The Nautilus is not a butcher's knife."

"I still like my harpoon better," said Ned.

Nearby lay a dead whale the sperm whales had killed before we could save it. Its body was full of bite marks. From one torn fin still hung a baby whale it could not protect. Captain Nemo steered close. Two of his men climbed onto the body and drew out its milk, two or three tons of it. The Captain gave me a warm cup. At first I did not want to drink it, but it tasted just like cow's milk. As butter or cheese it would be a nice change in our food.

After that day Ned's anger toward the Captain grew stronger. I knew I had to watch him closely.

Audio, timed transcript, and companions online:

<https://alexlearns.com/english/twenty-thousand-leagues/chapter-35/>

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