



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea · Episode 08 / 46 · B1–B2 · 00

Mobilis in Mobili

Mobilis in Mobili

OVERVIEW

Summary

Mobilis in Mobili — chapter 8 of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, told in clear English for language learners.

Transcript

Mobilis in Mobili

Chapter Eight — Mobilis in Mobili

It all happened in a flash. The masked men bundled us down an iron ladder, a door clanged shut behind us, and we were left alone in total darkness — so black that I could not see my own hand in front of my face.

Ned Land was furious. "Charming hosts!" he growled. "They practically kidnap us — next they will probably eat us. Well, the first one who tries it will have my knife to deal with."

"Easy, Ned," said Conseil calmly. "Don't start shouting before anyone has hurt us. We are not finished yet."

"Not quite," Ned grumbled, "but close."

To keep him from doing anything rash, I suggested we explore instead. Feeling around in the dark, I found iron walls, a wooden table, and a few stools — a small room, about twenty feet by ten, with a soft mat on the floor. No windows. No door that I could find.

Then, all at once, the room flooded with brilliant white light. It poured from a glowing globe in the ceiling — the very same electric light we had seen shining around the "monster." At last we could see. But we still had no idea who had captured us, or where we were being taken.

Soon we heard bolts sliding, and the door opened. Two men came in.

The first was short and powerfully built. The second was tall, pale, and calm, with a broad forehead and dark, steady eyes set unusually far apart — eyes that looked as if they could see straight through the deepest water. He had the bearing of a man used to being obeyed. This, clearly, was the captain.

He studied the three of us in silence, then turned and spoke to his companion in a language I had never heard — soft, musical, and utterly strange.

When they looked at me as though expecting an answer, I told them our story in French: who we were, and how we had ended up in the sea. The tall man listened politely, with great attention... yet showed no sign of understanding a single word.

So I tried again in English. Then I had Ned try, in his best English. Then Conseil tried German. Finally I dug up what little Latin I remembered from school. Nothing. Four languages, and not one flicker of understanding. At last the two men murmured to each other and left, and the door shut behind them.

Ned exploded. "The nerve of it! We speak to them in French, English, German, and Latin — and not one has the manners to answer!"

"Getting angry will not help," I told him.

"But Professor — are we simply going to starve in this iron cage?"

"Don't give up hope, Ned. We have been in worse spots. Let us wait a little before deciding what sort of people these are."

"I have already decided," Ned snapped. "They are rascals."

I could not help smiling. The truth was, I could not place them at all — not English, not French, not German. Something about them made me think of warmer, southern countries, but beyond that I could only guess.

Just then the door opened again. A silent servant brought us clothes made of a fabric I did not recognize, and we gladly changed into them. Then he set the table with three places.

"Now we are talking," said Conseil.

"Hah," muttered Ned. "And what do you suppose they eat down here? Shark fillet? Sea-turtle liver?"

But when the covered dishes arrived, the food was wonderful — many kinds of fish, beautifully cooked, some so unusual I could not even tell what they were. There was fresh water to drink, though no bread and no wine, which did not please Ned one bit. Whoever these people were, they were plainly no savages.

Then I noticed something on the silverware. Every spoon, fork, knife, and plate was engraved with the same little design: a letter N, and above it a motto in Latin —

MOBILIS IN MOBILI

It meant something like "moving within the moving sea" — free to roam inside the ever-changing water. And that single letter, N, was surely the first initial of the mysterious captain who ruled this world beneath the waves. But what was his name? I had no idea.

We were far too hungry to puzzle over it for long. We ate until we were full — none of us had eaten in fifteen hours — and then a heavy drowsiness crept over us. Ned and Conseil stretched out on the soft carpet and were soon fast asleep.

But I lay awake. My mind raced with questions. Where were we? What strange power drove this machine? I could feel — or imagined I could feel — the submarine sinking deeper and deeper into the sea. At last, worn out, my thoughts blurred, and I too fell into a deep sleep.

Audio, timed transcript, and companions online:

<https://alexlearns.com/english/twenty-thousand-leagues/chapter-08/>

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