



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea · Episode 25 / 46 · B1–B2 · 00

A Question About Sharks

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OVERVIEW

Summary

A Question About Sharks — chapter 25 of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, told in clear English for language learners.

Transcript

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Chapter Twenty-Five — A Question About Sharks

One noon the Nautilus rose to the surface, and there, eight miles to the west, I saw a line of blue mountains rising from the sea. It was the island of Ceylon, famous across the whole world for its pearls.

Captain Nemo came up beside me and glanced at his map. "The pearl beds of Ceylon, Professor," he said. "Would you like to visit one?"

"Very much, Captain."

"Easily done. We will reach the Gulf of Manaar by nightfall." He turned to go, then paused. "By the way — you are not afraid of sharks, are you?"

"Sharks?" I said.

The word caught in my throat.

"We are quite used to them," said the captain lightly. "You will be too, in time. We will be armed, of course. Until tomorrow, then — early." And off he went, as calmly as if he had invited me for a stroll in the park.

Sharks. I wiped a cold drop of sweat from my forehead. Hunting otters on the sea floor was one thing. But walking along the bottom of the ocean, where a shark might appear at any moment — that was quite another.

Just then Ned and Conseil came in, cheerful as could be. They had been invited too, though they did not yet know what waited for them.

"Sir," said Conseil, "would you tell us something about pearls? What is a pearl, exactly?"

"Sit down, my friends," I said, glad of the distraction, "and I will tell you."

They settled onto a couch. "A pearl," I began, "is one of the loveliest things the sea makes. Poets call it a tear of the ocean. But it begins with something very small and ordinary. A tiny grain of sand slips inside an oyster's shell and troubles it. To soothe the itch, the oyster wraps the grain in a smooth, shining coat — and then another, and another, year after year, layer upon layer, until a round, glowing pearl has formed. The fishermen bring the oysters up, and inside a lucky one they may find a treasure."

"And are there many pearls in one oyster?" asked Conseil.

"Sometimes a great many. Why, one oyster was said to hold a hundred and fifty sharks—"

"A hundred and fifty sharks!" cried Ned.

"Pearls!" I said quickly. "A hundred and fifty pearls. Sharks in an oyster — what nonsense!" And we all laughed.

But the laughter did not last, for Ned wanted to talk about the very thing I was trying to forget.

"So we are really going down among the sharks, are we?" said the harpooner, his eyes bright. "In the water — not up in a boat?"

"In the water," I admitted.

"Ha! Give me a good harpoon and I will manage. Nasty brutes, though — they roll onto their backs to bite you, and quick as that—" Ned snapped his teeth together, and my blood ran cold.

"And you, Conseil?" I asked. "What do you make of all this?"

"May I be honest, sir?"

"Please."

"If you mean to face the sharks," said Conseil simply, "then I do not see why your faithful servant should not face them right beside you."

I looked at my two brave friends and felt a little better. Tomorrow, sharks or no sharks, we would go down together to the pearl beds of Ceylon.

Audio, timed transcript, and companions online:

<https://alexlearns.com/english/twenty-thousand-leagues/chapter-25/>

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