

The Nautilus Legacy

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For Bari. “She believes in me.”

PREFACE

As Jules Verne wrote *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, his intention was to make Captain Nemo's nationality Polish and the country which he hated Russia. Due to his publisher's concerns about possible international repercussions (which today might be considered a form of political correctness), Verne removed any specifics about Nemo's origins. When the captain's full story was finally told in *The Mysterious Island*, Verne revealed him to be Indian and the nation of his wrath as Great Britain—a more acceptable explanation in a less enlightened era.

This work, a sequel to both novels, restores Verne's original vision for his most famous character.

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Papa disappeared on May 10th, 1864. I last saw him when the remaining loyal villagers smuggled him in through the servant's entrance of our Warsaw home.

"Only for a moment," he told us.

"Where are you going this time?" Mother asked.

"Back to the mountains. We have a hideout in the Sudetes, and we're working on a new strategy."

"Take us with you!" Tania pleaded.

"Too dangerous. I can't stay here, either. They're hunting for me."

"They've broken in twice during the last month," said Mother.

"My aim is to get out of the country and head west. If I get to England, I'll do everything possible to bring you out."

I hugged him and said, "Be careful, Papa. I want to see you again."

"You will, Tadeusz. No matter what the Russians say or what you may hear, know that our fight is not over. I want you to pray for me every day."

"I will, I promise."

He hugged us. Then he took Mother aside for a

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few moments. I couldn't hear what they said before they kissed.

He turned to Monique, our governess, and squeezed her hands. "Take good care of them. They're all I have left."

She forced a smile. "I will, sir. You can rely on me."

"Goodbye, everyone. I love you always."

With that, he vanished.

Less than half an hour later, the Russians returned.

They kicked open the door to the study where we gathered. The first two times they searched the house with half a dozen men. This time they brought at least twenty.

Four of them surrounded us. Others charged through the servants' quarters and upstairs. The sickening, "Wham! Wham!" of doors breaking open made Mother cry.

We heard a loud commotion and screaming from my grandparents' room, followed by several shots. Grandpapa always swore he would die defending his home against the tsar's forces.

The officer in charge snarled at Mother, "Where is he?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. We haven't seen him in weeks."

"Lies!" He slapped her. "He came here earlier this evening. Where is he hiding?"

Tania ran up and started hitting him. "Leave Mommy alone!"

Kicking her away, the officer aimed his pistol and shot her point blank. She tumbled back like a rag doll.

Mother screamed, "Nooo!" and rushed to her. Wailing, she picked up her bleeding body and cradled it.

I still feel numb when I replay her death. To this day, I don't understand why they shot an innocent child. I know why Papa hated the Russians. Barbarians!

The one in command sneered at Mother. "Tell me where your husband is, or I will also kill your son!"

She kept on crying and said nothing.

One of the soldiers pointed his rifle at Monique. She started babbling in French and held her head without even appearing to comprehend.

The others finished searching the house and began leaving. A sergeant stopped and spoke to the officer. "Nothing."

The man tore Mother away from Tania. "Where is your husband? Tell me!"

We heard a shot in the distance. Most of the troops immediately cleared out of the house. A minute later came more shots, then silence.

We figured it had to be Papa. In shock, I looked at Mother.

Tears streamed down her cheeks. She glanced at me and nodded, motioning toward the casement window.

I knew she cared more about my survival than her own. Maybe she thought Papa was dead and she might as well die with him. I'll never know for sure.

Only two soldiers remained in the room. One of them watched Monique as she covered her ears and sat down on the sofa with a look of total bewilderment. As I tried to move to the window behind me, Mother struck the commander in the back with a heavy vase.

Falling forward, he dropped his pistol, which discharged when it hit the floor.

I felt a strange burning pain in my left shoulder. Then soldiers appeared everywhere, firing their guns.

Losing my balance, I crashed through the window. Shards of glass rained down, and my head tingled as I hit the grass. Mother shrieked, and I could feel blood all over me. Then I blacked out.

* * *

When I regained consciousness, I noticed I was in a bed and heard people speaking French. Monique slowly

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came into focus.

“Welcome to Paris,” she said with a smile.

“What am I doing here?”

She kissed my forehead. “We’ll talk later. Rest easy.”

A hundred questions filled my mind, along with the pain in my body. I wished to speak, yet I could only think about how much I hurt. I wanted to know about my parents. Was it all a horrible dream?

No. I knew something awful happened, but I couldn’t remember much. One morning Monique told me the whole story.

“They shot you twice. And you nearly sliced your head open when you fell into the window.”

“How did I get here?”

“That is quite a tale. I believed you were dead, and so did the soldiers. They weren’t interested in shooting a poor old woman who offered no resistance and only spoke French.” She winked. “They pushed me out of the house and set it on fire. The man they killed wasn’t your father, so they marched off to search for him.

“I stood on the lawn, weeping like a baby. Here this wonderful woman and her two children lay murdered before me. Thinking I could at least try to arrange a decent burial for you, I picked you up and started walking away. Then I noticed you breathing! I told God if He let you live, I would spend the rest of my life caring for you. I said, ‘His parents have been so good to me, let me pay them back by helping him.’”

As she wiped away tears, parts of that terrible night came back to me. My mother and sister were dead. Papa might be, too. I began sobbing. Why was *I* still alive? What would I do now?

She continued her narrative. “Dr. Crizowicz kept you from bleeding to death. He stitched up your scalp, fought an infection in your shoulder where the bullet passed through, and brought your high fever down. We

hid in his house a few days, but I would not rest until I got you to Paris. I *knew* you would be safe here. When we reached Prussia, I sent a telegram to Madame Helena Duquesne, a sweet friend of many years. She provided a carriage to meet us at the border and promised you would get the best possible care. So here you are.”

“What about the Prussian border guards?”

“I still had my French papers with me. I convinced them you were my son and said a horse trampled you. I told them my husband was dead and I needed to return to France to my family there.” She gave me a pat on the foot. “I did whatever I could to save you.”

I reached out and embraced her. At that moment, I became the son she never had.

And I knew the answers to all my questions, save one: what really happened to Papa?

* * *

I was born Tadeusz Wyzinski on November 3, 1853. My childhood memories are faded, but I remember a home filled with joy. Until the revolution, life seemed ideal. Being the son of a count definitely had its advantages.

Although we were wealthy, Papa never allowed us to look down on anybody. “Beneath our clothes,” he once told me, “we are all human.” He always cared about other Poles. “Conditions under the Russians are very poor for most people,” he said, “and we need to remember our blessings.”

School began when I turned six. Papa made certain I learned plenty of science, literature, and history. I idolized him so. He could do no wrong in my eyes. He was a religious man and insisted I develop a faith in God—something I am glad I did.

I loved learning, but my appetite for knowledge paled in comparison to his. Despite his insistence on a rigorous education, I think he wanted me to be happy

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above all. I wonder how he would react if he knew the extent to which I became like him.

A myriad of people, most a faint remembrance now, played essential parts in my upbringing: teachers, priests, family friends, and of course, Monique. Originally from Paris, she was in her fifties, the widow of a Polish colonel. A jolly, plump, red-cheeked lady, she exhibited unending optimism, unwavering energy, and unconditional love. She helped raise us, as she had no children of her own. Whenever Mother and Papa welcomed guests, she would entertain us, make certain we behaved like proper Polish children, and tell funny bedtime stories.

Our family spent many holidays together, occasionally traveling in Western Europe. Monique sometimes took a holiday herself to see friends back in the French capital.

An engineer by training, Papa would make some of my toys. Together, we built simple boats out of paper, wood, and paint—my favorite thing to do. How I loved spending time with him. Unfortunately, there never seemed to be enough.

* * *

Children don't expect their lives to fall apart, so the 1863 rebellion caught me by surprise. One more tragic attempt to throw out our Russian conquerors, it began on January 22nd.

Nothing was ever the same again. We were people in an occupied territory fighting our occupiers. Skirmishes erupted on city streets as well as in the hillsides.

Papa would be away for weeks, so we never knew how he was, or even if he was still alive. He aided the Polish Reds with his considerable financial resources and his own body. Five times he came back wounded. He often fought on the ever-shifting front lines and led an October ambush outside Lodz. Fighting beside farmers, craftsmen, and landowners, he always seemed to defy death.

When things went badly for the Reds, he tried to rally the people to continue on. While he was home recovering or planning the next stage of the struggle, I sometimes overheard views I never heard him utter before. “Russia is beyond an enemy with whom we must battle, Marisa. It is a monstrous evil, and I hate it with every fibre of my being. I would die a contented man if I could put a bullet in that bastard Alexander’s skull!”

Comments like these always frightened me, but the changes in him terrified Mother. As time went on, she retreated to her private study more often, especially in his absence. Monique would tell us she felt tired, but I knew it was depression about the war.

Diplomacy failed to win any concessions from Tsar Alexander II. Papa called him “a foul tyrant and a reprehensible excuse for a man. His death could not be more warranted for what he has done to our nation!”

The other European powers never answered Poland’s pleas for support. “Arrogant hypocrites,” Papa said. “They speak from both sides of their mouths and pay lip service to the ideals of democracy.”

He saw his dreams dying. Mother, too, could only watch helplessly as their vision of a strong, independent nation collapsed in ruin. “Quit the revolution,” she once begged him. “At least make a future for your family if you can’t make one for your country!”

During the yearlong struggle, the Russians caught and executed some rebel leaders. Others died in the vicious fighting. A severe snowstorm in early December brought hostilities to a standstill and gave Papa time to return home.

Then one of our most important conversations took place. We sat and watched the blizzard outside, and he tried to explain what the war was all about and why his young son’s world turned upside down. Both blazing fire and deep sorrow filled his eyes.

“Papa, why do you have to fight? Why can’t

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things be like they were when Mother was happy?”

“All people were created to live free. Yet across the globe, unjust rulers have enslaved the bodies of their fellow men. Nations build empires for vain glory. Some, like Russia, are in the hands of greedy, power-mad despots who will do anything to hold what they’ve stolen. We tried to give Poles back their right to freedom, and all we meet is armed oppression. I hate the killing. But we must strike down that which oppresses us. Should we not do whatever we can to remove the yoke that chains any man anywhere?”

“If you learn nothing else from the revolution, learn this: people can never reach their potential unless they are free. And for Poland to be liberated, we must do it alone. The Europeans won’t help for fear of offending Alexander. He wants to obliterate us and blot out the name and heritage of Poland. That cannot happen. One day, if it takes a thousand years, we will have our freedom.” He started to cry as he hugged me. “It is our birthright!”

I watched his vulnerability unmasked in his tears—a man surrounded by a nation which believed, yet utterly alone. His dream, his ambition, and his pride all collided with the reality of his revolution’s failure. The rebellion would go on and more men would die, but the battle for independence could never succeed. I think he knew it, but he had to continue the struggle. He just had to.

By February 1864, the Reds’ movement lay in total disarray, and only the most fanatical, like Papa, continued to resist. The Russians controlled the cities, leaving isolated pockets of resistance in rural and southern mountain areas.

When I saw him, he looked thin and ill. An old man, even in his forties. “We have little food and no warm clothing.”

I asked him, begged him, to return home for

good. "Please, Papa. Please come back. Let's go to France. We'll be together again like we used to."

"I can't. Russian agents would find me. And I must fight for what is right, even if I'm the only one left. That way my life will have meant something."

His words hurt. I didn't care about his noble cause. I wanted my father home, and I wanted him the way he was before the war. I didn't know you could not turn back time.

The misbegotten revolt ended in April, when the real terror began. Once the Russians gained total control, they hunted all surviving rebels. The peasants tried their best to hide men on the lam, but it did little good. Atrocities occurred frequently.

Alexander upped the ante by putting a bounty on the heads of the most wanted men. Papa's name was infamous, and we feared someone might betray or kill him soon. I had no idea our family would pay the price for his resistance until the terrible night of May 10th.

Over the years, I never encountered one person who saw him after that. I could only assume he was dead.

* * *

When the hospital released me in mid-June, Monique and I lived with the Duquesnes. Monsieur Henri made a small fortune as an industrialist, and Madame Helena held an important place in Paris' social structure. They had two sons.

In spite of my background and Eastern European looks, they accepted me. It is impossible to recount every kindness shown to me. They let us stay for several months while I recuperated. Furthermore, they enrolled me in a private academy, helped Monique get her widow's pension, and aided us in purchasing a small home. No doubt, Mme. Duquesne's social circle contained the right contacts. Their lawyer even persuaded the courts to make me a ward in Monique's custody.

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As 1865 began, Monique commented on how I matured. In a year, I went from being a nobleman's son to an orphan near death to school in France with a loving guardian.

My schoolmate, Bertrand Sommaire, became my best friend. We studied and played together, and as we matured, our conversations drifted from pranks to politics and history. The more we learned, the more we had to talk about.

As teenagers, we sought out books on philosophy and political economy, as well as essays on freedom and government. We devoured Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes, Descartes, Smith, and the works of Thomas Jefferson. Bertrand even bragged that his grandfather met the former American president during his days as ambassador to France.

Other friends often joined in our learned discussions, and sometimes we would play sports and engage in a political debate simultaneously. I imagine we discussed many of the same things Papa and his companions did in their day. Of course, we always made time for pretty girls. Bertrand had a way with them that I can best describe as the gift of charm.

I was an excellent student, and I am sure Papa would have been proud. Monique never failed to encourage me and appreciate my success. Mme. Duquesne told me she once met my father during his youthful European travels. His intellect impressed her, and she said I surely took after him in that regard.

* * *

I turned sixteen in November of 1869. Next year I would graduate, so I started thinking seriously about what I would study in university. Shortly before Christmas, Bertrand and I visited the Duquesnes.

M. Duquesne sat in his drawing room reading a new volume as we passed through, and he stopped us to talk. "You boys might find this book interesting. The

author is a professor from the Paris Museum of Natural History. He tells a remarkable story of some madman who held him and two companions prisoner on a marvelous submarine boat for several months before they escaped.”

We burst out laughing. How absurd!

“It is fiction, right, sir?” Bertrand asked.

“No, every word is true. It’s the talk of the town in all circles. Even people in England and America are discussing it.”

“I’ve read a little about submarines. No such fancy craft with a crew of pirates exists,” I scoffed. “It’s not possible. The technology is too primitive.”

M. Duquesne said, “Our scientific and political communities do not share your youthful skepticism. I know men who have met Professor Arronax, and they are certain he is not crazy.”

“But a large submarine?” I countered. “The American Confederacy had limited success in their War of Secession with an eight-man boat. And it sank.”

He smiled. “Well, someone has apparently outdone them by quite a distance. Even if you will not concede its existence, you must concede its possibility. One of you could someday build an even more complex craft, with the right education.”

“Not me,” answered Bertrand. “I will study medicine and become a doctor.”

M. Duquesne looked at me. “Perhaps you, Tadeusz? Monique tells me you are starting to read books on engineering.”

“I’m interested in practical machines, not fantasy.”

“Why not consider it? You could study nautical or mechanical engineering.”

Well, I did think about what he said. The idea of using my education to make something daring intrigued me. I wanted to learn more about each field of engineering before making my decision, but I realized then it would be my subject of study. Just like Papa.

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When Bertrand and I discussed political issues, the conversations often turned to Poland. I told him as much as I knew of Papa's views and added my own opinions, but at that time, I did not have Papa's passion.

Bertrand believed in the absolute freedom of the individual to shape his destiny. To him, government's purpose was to secure and protect a man's right to live however he wanted. "Everything one does from the time he becomes sentient until he dies is his own choice."

"Your philosophy leaves little room for God," I chided. "Surely, in all you observe, you must see the Creator's fingerprints."

"I might agree with a deist like Jefferson, but nothing beyond. You know, few of this country's great thinkers would agree with you. But because you are my friend, I respect your beliefs and have no desire to turn you from them."

"Spoken like a true believer in free will," I said with a laugh.

I shared Papa's conviction that people must be free. But I did not agree with Bertrand's *laissez-faire* extension of it. "I feel we have a responsibility to make sure our neighbor is free, not just ourselves. Nations *should* oppose tyranny and oppression in fellow nations."

Bertrand countered, "If everyone concerned themselves with living their own lives, no one would have the time or inclination to oppress others or meddle in their affairs."

We had many such lively talks. I never could get him to concede that his philosophy was unworkably utopian since we live in a world of unjust governments.

One day he asked me, "Do you think Poland will ever be again?"

Instinctively, I wanted to take Papa's stand and say, "Not unless there is a successful revolution," but I paused before answering. "Only if the European

governments will it to happen. Something would have to force Russia and Prussia to give up the territory.”

“Something like a war, perhaps? History proves the end of a conflict to be the most frequent reshaper of national boundaries. A few years ago, Austria lost Venetia to Italy in the Austro-Prussian War.”

“I would not ask countries to go to war simply to carve out a new Poland.”

“After two failed rebellions this century, what else could work?”

“Perhaps a new Enlightenment can sweep the continent—a political one where corrupt regimes inevitably fall, and people yearning for freedom can effect change.”

“What if they have no power to do so?”

“Then those who are able must give them that power.”

“You, *mon amie*, are an interventionist.”

“I suppose I am,” I conceded. “It isn’t just Poland’s independence I’d like to see. I wish all men could be as free as you and I are. I wish there was someone big enough to stand up to the tyrants and make them see their folly.”

“How about that God of yours? If he can part the Red Sea, he can make Bismarck and Alexander listen to Him.”

“You’re teasing. I’m talking about a person. Or a nation. If you want me to admit I don’t have all the answers, then I admit it. I only know what I want to see happen—what is right.”

My friend sat back, shook his head, and said, “I have the feeling you will someday be an important man. I don’t know in what way, but I am sure you’ll make a mark on this world.”