

Chapter One



I never dreamed of being an outlaw.

Growing up in Dark Cove, a tiny fishing village in northern Newfoundland, I dreamed of far away places and exciting adventures. My grandfather thought differently. He told me I'd be a fisherman when I grew up, just like everybody else.

"What do you do exactly?" I asked.

"Well . . . we get up early," he said. "That's the first thing. And we have fish for breakfast. That's always a good idea. Then we go down to the wharf and start the motors and check the oil and discuss the weather and decide where to fish that day."

“And then?”

“And then we go out and fish.”

“How long do you fish?”

“All day. Then we come back, put the fish in the ice house, hang up the nets, clean up the boats and go home.”

“And then?”

“Then we have supper. Usually fish. Sometimes fish cakes. Once in a while your grandmother makes a great fish stew.”

“Then what do you do?”

“We sit around the kitchen and talk about the day.”

“Like what?”

“Oh . . . the weather, the sea, how many fish we caught that day.”

“And the next day?”

“The next day’s the same.”

“And the next?”

“The same. It’s pretty much always the same. You’ll see soon enough. Don’t worry, you’ll make a good fisherman. It’s in your blood.”

All night I tossed and turned. In the morning I went to see my grandfather.

“I don’t want to be a fisherman,” I said.

“What? Of course you do. It’s in your blood.”

“I don’t think it’s in my blood. I can’t feel it.”

My grandfather laughed.

“It’s not something you can feel. It just is.”

“But I feel something else in my blood.”

“Do you now? What’s that?”

“I think I am an explorer.”

“An *explorer*?”

“Yes.”

“Gee, I think everything is pretty much explored already.”

“Really?”

“I think so.”

“The whole world?”

“Yup, I think so. Except maybe the ocean.”

I went down to the beach and skipped some rocks and stared at the ocean. It didn’t make sense to be an explorer if everything had already been explored. But surely there were jungles never seen before. And deserts. Surely there were mountains no one had climbed and plains no one had crossed and islands no one had set foot upon.

Surely there were creatures no one had ever seen — like three-legged beasts and seven-legged bugs. After all, if a snake had one leg, a monkey two, a dog four, a starfish five, a ladybug six and an octopus eight, why wouldn’t there be creatures with three and seven legs? I mean, there were birds that swam under water, fish that flew, pigs that lived underground and frogs that lived in trees. Who could say that everything had been discovered? Besides, my grandfather was only a fisherman, not an explorer. Perhaps only an explorer could believe in things not yet found.

I climbed the hill, crossed the woods and passed the junkyard. It was owned by Ziegfried, an angry man, twice the size of the biggest fisherman. It was said he was so mean he couldn't even keep a junkyard dog — they were too afraid of him. I always wondered how he stayed in business if he was so mean. But the junkyard was a treasure-hunter's paradise. I could stare at it through a hole in the fence for hours.

I wandered over to the fence to take a peek. There, in the midst of piles of junk, I saw something that would change my life. I couldn't see the whole of it, just one corner, but it was round, smooth, black and beautiful. A submarine! A small one. I twisted my head to get a better look. I moved to another crack in the fence but it wasn't any better. In desperation I pulled the board back and forth, until it came away from the fence altogether. Now I could see, but there were still piles of junk in the way. I poked my head through and looked around. It was dead silent. Not a soul in sight. I squeezed through the fence and crept across the junkyard towards the submarine.

"Halt!" boomed a voice. "Or I'll blow you to smithereens!"

I froze.

"Please don't shoot me!"

I turned my head just enough to see that the gun Ziegfried was holding was actually a broom.

"What the heck are you doing?" he yelled. "This is private property. Get out quick or I'll blow you to smithereens!"

"I'm sorry," I said. "I just wanted to take a closer look at the submarine."

"Submarine? What submarine? There's no submarine here, boy. You must be dreaming. Now, hit the road!"

I started towards the fence. Turning, I pointed to the submarine.

"*That* submarine."

He looked over.

"What? That? That's no submarine. That's just an old oil tank. Boy, you've got some imagination. Hah!"

I stared at the tank. It had looked so much like a submarine. I climbed out through the fence, but my imagination got the better of me and I stuck my head back in.

"What would it take to turn it into a submarine?"

"What? Turn that old tank into a submarine?"

Ziegfried made the strangest face. His brow tightened, his eyes narrowed and his mouth twisted to one side as his brain went to work. He began to list off things it would take.

"Well . . . a motor, for starters. Maybe a light diesel engine."

"Like a boat engine?"

"No . . . too noisy and heavy. A submarine has to be quiet."

I nodded, though I really had no idea.

"Then . . . a keel, rudder, stabilizing fins, portal, propeller. Ai yi yi."

He rubbed his forehead.

“Let’s see . . . batteries, sonar system, depth gauges, insulation, air compressors, sleeping quarters, heating, air-conditioning. Heavens . . . !”

He stared at the tank feverishly while his mind continued to count what was needed.

I stepped back in.

“How long would it take?”

“What?”

The question broke his concentration, and he had to start all over again.

“Oh. Let’s see . . .”

There was a long pause. And then, “Three years. Maybe four.”

“Three years!”

My heart sank. I would be fifteen then. It seemed like a lifetime. Who could wait so long?

“Or longer,” he said. “It depends.”

“On what?”

“On many things.”

I suddenly realized how foolish I had been. I had thought an old tank was a submarine, or could become one in just a few months. It was the first time I realized I had been completely unrealistic. Nothing had ever made me feel so much like a child before. Now I had to wonder about my other beliefs. Were they unrealistic too? Should I just accept becoming a fisherman like my grandfather? Before I could think about it too much, Ziegfried said something wonderful.

“Well . . . I need to put some things down on paper. You’d better come back tomorrow.”

“Come back tomorrow?”

He nodded and walked away, deep in thought.

I couldn’t believe it. I climbed back through the fence. Suddenly something occurred to me. I stuck my head inside again.

“My name is Alfred.”

“Ziegfried.”

“I can’t pay you anything,” I yelled.

Without turning around, he yelled back, “I can’t pay you anything either.”