

Chapter One



THE LEGEND IS ANCIENT.

Thirty-five hundred years ago the sea swallowed a rich and powerful island. It dragged it down to the bottom with everyone and everything in it. All of it disappeared in a single day, without a trace. Now everyone wonders if it ever really existed. The thing is, people have never stopped talking about it. That doesn't make sense. Why would people talk about something for so long if it never existed? So I figured it probably did. Then I thought, well . . . maybe I could find it.

I woke with a seagull on my stomach. When he saw me open my eyes he hopped from foot to foot and glared at me.

“What do you want, Seaweed?”

Hollie was on the bed too. He was chewing the rubber handle of a hammer into tiny soggy pieces. He must have been at it for hours. *This*, this feathered and furry pair, was my crew — a dog and a seagull. It had been a long winter in the boathouse and they were anxious to go to sea.

So was I.

I fed the crew and hurried downstairs. There, suspended in the air like a whale lifted out of an aquarium, was my submarine. Two days earlier, we had sprayed the final coat of a sophisticated, slippery paint that was supposed to reduce drag and make the sub five-percent faster through the water. Ziegfried, master inventor and junkyard genius, was right about ninety-nine percent of the time. His latest obsession — to make the sub faster — had kept us hard at work all winter long. We had installed a bigger, more powerful diesel engine, more industrial batteries and a new propeller with aggressive torque. Now, with this shiny new blue-black coat of paint, and the dolphin-like nose that Ziegfried had welded to the front, the sub looked more like a sea mammal than a submarine. Today, just a few days after my fifteenth birthday, it would finally go back in the water. I was almost too excited.

But I had to tether that excitement. Nine times out of ten Ziegfried would find something else to test, and the re-launch would be set back once again. I had to calm the butterflies in my stomach and just hope it wouldn't happen today.

There were voices outside. Two doors slammed on the truck — Ziegfried, and my grandfather. When the ocean had frozen over in December, and the fishing boats were up on planks, my grandfather surprised us by coming out to the boathouse. He just showed up one day, without asking what he could do, and got busy. Pretty soon we didn't know how we had ever gotten along without him. More than once I witnessed Ziegfried, one of the biggest and strongest men in all of Newfoundland, reach over an impossibly sealed jar of glue to my grandfather, a much smaller man, but with larger hands, and he twisted off the top as if it were a toy. He handed the jar back and Ziegfried took it graciously. My grandfather never uttered a word when we were working. Ziegfried talked constantly, mumbling to himself mostly, as if he were thinking out loud. But the two men worked side by side harmoniously. And I was their assistant, running for tools, filing the edges of metal cuts, holding lights, making tea. Once the sub was back in the water, all of that would change. Then, I was the captain.

But I wasn't the captain yet. When they came inside, my grandfather immediately frowned at me, because I had just woken up and he was such an early riser. But I had learned that his frowns were not nearly as serious as they looked. In fact, I was beginning to understand that his severe bearing — looking so disapproving all the time — had nothing to do with me. That was just the way he was. I was used to sleeping in because I was nocturnal on the sub. So was the crew. My grandfather quickly scanned the boardwalk around the

sub. Fortunately, I had remembered to sweep it clear before going to bed. He frowned again anyway. Ziegfried reached over and put his hand on one of the cables holding the sub up in the air and stared at the water beneath it. He took a deep breath and sighed. It was a sigh that spoke volumes. I imitated him exactly and waited anxiously to hear the words that came from his mouth.

“Well . . . I suppose . . .”

He paused. I held my breath.

“I suppose . . .”

“There’s a storm coming,” warned my grandfather.

Of the few times my grandfather chose to speak, I wished this hadn’t been one of them.

“They didn’t mention a storm on the radio,” Ziegfried said respectfully.

“All the same,” snapped my grandfather.

Ziegfried sighed again. The decision was his. As much as he respected my grandfather, he wouldn’t be swayed by a fisherman’s superstitious way of predicting the weather.

“I suppose she is ready for a run at sea. Why don’t you sail her to Sheba’s island? That’ll take you two or three days. I can drive to the coast in the truck, take a boat over with supplies for the big voyage and meet you there. Then you can tell me how she’s handling and whether she’s ready for the journey. What do you say?”

I felt like yelling with excitement but didn’t. I was standing in a boathouse with two of the most cautious people you were ever likely to meet in Newfoundland.

“That seems like a pretty good idea to me,” I said, as calmly as possible. “Then, when we meet up at Sheba’s, I can tell you how she’s handling.”

I knew that was just what he had said, but I was too excited to think of anything else to say.

We lowered the sub into the water and unleashed it from the cables. The newly painted hull glistened like a black jelly-bean. It was beautiful. I climbed inside, then heard a pitiful bark from the boardwalk, so I went back out, picked up Hollie and carried him in. Seaweed followed immediately, tapping his beak on the portal before dropping inside like a chimney sweep, as was his custom.

My sub was twenty feet long and eight feet high on the outside, with the portal jutting up another three feet. Inside was a different story. Standing up straight in the soft cedar and pine interior, I had barely two inches to spare. I used to have four, but had grown. With my arms outstretched I could just barely touch both walls with my fingertips. The oval shape of the hull, minus the wood and insulation, the mechanics beneath the floor and above the ceiling, plus the compartments in the stern, left me with an interior space a little short of fourteen feet by six. It was more than enough in which to stretch out but I had to duck my head in the bow and stern. Standing directly beneath the portal gave me a lot of extra headroom and the *feeling* of more space, which was particularly welcome when we were submerged for long periods of time. I also found a way to fit a bar across the inside of the portal to do chin-ups, and was pretty good at

them now. And sometimes I would just hang there and swing.

Although we had replaced the engine and added new batteries, they were housed in separate, watertight compartments in the stern, and so the main area of the sub remained more or less the same as before. The stationary bike was still in the center, my hanging cot behind, and the control panel with sonar and radar screens in front. The periscope hung on the starboard side of the control panel. I had to turn sideways to pass it. The observation window, in the floor of the bow, was also the same, except that Hollie's beloved blanket, rather frayed at the edges, had been replaced by a lovely quilt my grandmother had knitted especially for him. Well, that didn't fly. Hollie picked up the new blanket in his teeth, carried it dutifully to the stern and dropped it in front of the door to the engine compartment, where his litter-box was kept. Then he whined at me until I went back into the loft, found his old blanket in a box and brought it back. He pawed it into a proper sleeping berth and plopped down on it. Seaweed settled on his usual spot on the opposite side of the observation window — sitting very still, like the Buddha — and watched the little dog fuss.

It didn't take long to load up for a three-day sail. I was ready in less than an hour. But Ziegfried felt the need to climb inside and go through a checklist with me. Inside the sub he had to crouch like a giant inside a bus.

"When you're at sea, Al, make sighting tests of your wake, will you? I want to know if any of the changes we've made