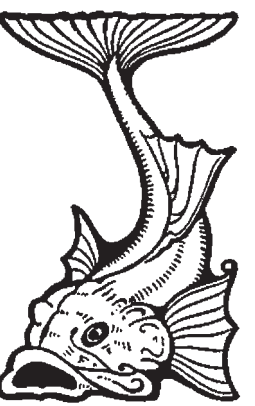


# Race *to the* Bottom *of the* Sea



LINDSAY EAGAR



WALKER
BOOKS

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*For my editor, Kaylan,*
*the wind in my sails*



With its astounding monopoly on the earth's surface – some 80 per cent of blue – and its collection of our most beautiful, bizarre flora and fauna, it's a wonder we don't rename our planet Ocean.

– *Exploring an Underwater Fairyland* by Dr and Dr Quail






*Two scoops of mashed fish guts. Four gallons of blood. Mix together in a barrel, then pour into the ocean.*

The recipe in Fidelia Quail's observation book was for chum, and at eleven years old, she could recite it by heart.

This smelly pink slick took to the waves, spreading half a mile in the seawater. Sharks in the bay would take it as the perfect invitation to swim past the research boat, the ancient brown-and-beige refashioned trawler appropriately named the *Platypus*.

Measure the regulars, tag the newcomers, and hopefully find out which ravenous shark had been munching through entire schools of halibut … Fidelia's favourite days were shark days.

A spray of seawater hit her face, rinsing off the homemade sunblock she'd just applied to her fair skin and peppering her square-framed glasses with briny speckles. She smeared another layer of the sea slug

slime-based mixture over her face, then wiped the lenses on the hem of her pinafore and quickly replaced them; without her glasses, she was as good as blind.

One time she'd dropped her glasses during a routine reef check. In the underwater haze, she'd reached out to find them and accidentally grabbed the snout of an ill-tempered gator fish.

"Holy hammerhead," she muttered now, catching sight of the bib of her once-white pinafore. It was an abstract masterpiece of pink and brown splotches: faded bloodstains, the juice of fish innards, a spot of engine oil, and other fluids from various sea creatures.

An entire summer of research, displayed in a collage on her clothes.

Leaning over the port side, she dumped a sticky scoop of chum into the water. "Calling all sharks! I made chum with tuna, your favourite. Come and get it!"

A frozen mackerel stared at her from inside an icy cooler. She looped a rope through its gill and threw it overboard as extra incentive. Now the sharks could have hors d'oeuvres and dessert, if only they'd hurry up. Right now the sky was striped in the fuzzy, lazy blues of late afternoon, but once the Undertow hit, all would be grey.

Arborley Sea's frigid waters teemed with sharks, large and small, during the summer months. Schools of fleshy white cod bred and swam in a ring around Arborley Island, drawing the hungry predators in. Usually checking the sharks' tags was easier than milking a sea snake,

but today, she couldn't tempt the sharks with any of the usual bait.

Fidelia knew the culprit – the Undertow. It always gave the marine life a bit of stage fright.

She tapped the Hydro-Scanner. The silver circular radar detector was a Fidelia original; the university didn't have an accurate fish-finding device, so Fidelia had built one herself last spring.

Fidelia had taken her invention to the patent office on the mainland, but the clerks hadn't even been subtle when they rejected it. "A child's contraption," they called it, right to her face. "We're not in the business of patenting homemade doodads. This is nothing more than a toy for bored schoolgirls who like to play at science."

*Play at science* … as if Fidelia's whole life were nothing more than a tea party.

Ridiculous. She couldn't help being eleven years old, could she? Child or not, her Hydro-Scanner had never missed a fish.

Its red needle quivered, swept across the screen, then dropped. Not a fish in the vicinity – not so much as a sea horse. Fidelia gave the Hydro-Scanner a dirty look, then pushed the sleeves of her dove-grey frock above her scabby elbows.

She moved the mackerel line to the starboard side and looked down into the water. The chum spun and frothed in the chop, making salty, fish-flavoured bubbles.

"Hurry your gills up," she called to the sharks.

*Before the Undertow hits,* she added silently. Hands curled around the *Platypus*'s railing, her eyes peeled the surface for any telltale dorsal fins, or boils in the water, or strange blue shadows.

But she was alone.

Until the radio buzzed.

"Quail? Quail, do you copy?" Her mum's chipper voice crackled on the speaker.

"Quail here," Fidelia said. "Any sharks in sight?"

"Nothing from our position," her mum answered.

"Not nothing!" her dad said. "The mermaid's wineglass is blooming. Steer us a bit closer there, dear. See if you can snag a bouquet to take home." Mermaid's wineglass, a marine plant with delicate green tops shaped like little cups, would be displayed not in a floral vase on the mantel but in the terrarium on the Quails' dining-room table.

Fidelia's parents were the internationally acclaimed biologists Dr and Dr Quail. They were currently hovering fifty feet below the *Platypus* in the miniature aqua-blue research submarine, the *Egg* (another Fidelia creation).

Arthur Quail was a marine botanist, easily excited by the colourful flora of the watery deep, and Ida was a gill-, fang-, and fur-loving marine zoologist. Fidelia, their only loin fruit, was the perfect blend of both – with a knack for inventing that was entirely her own.

The *Platypus* rode a wave high, then bounced down with a thwack.

"How's topside?" Fidelia's mother asked.

"Nothing yet – oh, wait! Stand by." Fidelia tracked a flurry of bubbles through the blood-slicked water. Bubbles could mean sharks.

But a party of seagulls landed in the water and picked at the chum.

Birds wouldn't land if they sensed sharks nearby. "False alarm," Fidelia sighed.

"How close is the storm?" Ida Quail asked.

Fidelia wiped a smear of sweat from her neck. "Oh, we have … a while." Luckily, her parents were down in the *Egg* and couldn't see the swirl of black clouds inking the otherwise pastel horizon. Dr and Dr Quail would be zooming to the docks if they knew how dark the sky had dimmed.

But it was the last day of September, the last day of summer. The last day to tag sharks. Their last chance to collect data before the Undertow left them stuck on the island for the long, cold winter. Nothing to do except write up their summer notes and wait for the Undertow madness to end.

Fidelia wanted to make sure they used every last available second before they were landlocked.

"Maybe I should put out another mackerel?" Fidelia asked. "Or take the *Platypus* farther out to sea?"

"Relax," her father said jovially. "Let the chum do its job."

Fidelia begrudgingly sat on the *Platypus*'s bench and

leaned back, stretching her legs. She was shaped like a broomstick, tall and thin, which made for knee cramps and back pain aboard the puny, fourteen-foot trawler. On especially long days like this one, when they left the house before dawn and worked in the bay until suppertime, she felt like a sardine in a tin.

"Ten more minutes," her mum said. "Then we reel everything in."

"But we haven't tagged a single shark!" Fidelia said. "We haven't done our final fin count for the university. And we still don't know who's been eating the halibut—"

"Fidelia," her mother said, as tenderly as she could through the radio. "We've knocked on their door. All we can do now is wait."

Fidelia pulled a wrinkly issue of *Adventures in Science Engineering* from her bag. "I know," she grumbled.

"Plus, think of all the data we *did* gather this summer," Ida said. "Two new subspecies of red seaweed! The crab migration! The puffin dives! Remember?"

As if Fidelia could forget. All the beautiful things she'd seen in the last three months wove together in a tapestry in her mind – the vivid purple of marine ferns in the seabeds of Bleu Island, where they spent a blissful three days diving off cliffs into clear water. The scarlet of thorny oyster shells in the eastern lagoons – an unplanned detour on their way back from Canquillas. The shocking yellow of a ribbon eel's tail from their week in the tropics. The dusty white of glaciers up north.

And the shades of home, of Arborley Bay – the olive green of the algae covering the rocks on the shore; the soft pink of the stingrays; the dappled brown wings of Arborley ducks as they waddled along the docks. Yes, it had been quite the busy summer.

"If you're worried about our grant renewal," her mother said, "don't be. We've had a spectacular year."

"It's not that," Fidelia said. Dr and Dr Quail's contributions to the scientific community more than guaranteed a long, industrious future of study. The university would approve any funding they required, for any project they wanted to undertake.

She watched the blue water break white against the boat. "It's our last day together," she said. "Us and them. I just wanted it to be special."

"I know they're your favourite," her mother said, and even with fifty feet of seawater between them, Fidelia could feel her mother's beaming approval.

Yes, sharks were Fidelia's favourites.

Their bodies – marvels of evolutionary design. Some the glorious, elongated silhouette with perfectly cut fins and glossed skin. Some the flattened, ornate, ray-like carpets of the sea floor, masters of disguise. Some only the size of a human finger, but with eyes large and dark as blackberries. A variation for every ecosystem.

Their grace – the way they cruised through the water, stoic and effortless.

Their danger.

Sometimes in bed, when the clouds blew over the face of the moon and the light in her room was muted, Fidelia would remember the first time she'd seen a great white shark breach the surface to feed on a sea lion. From the hidden depths came the shark, launching its thousand-pound body up and out of the water in a flash, with the still-wriggling sea lion powerless in its jaws. Then it disappeared as quickly as it arrived, the only evidence of the attack a smear of oily blood, crimson against the wake.

Fidelia would think of that moment and grin, and shiver, and pull her bedsheets up over her head, grateful to be a clumsy, clomping land animal.

How could sharks not be her favourite?

The radio crackled.

"Come in." Fidelia switched the radio on and off. "Come in, Mum and Dad. Do you copy?"

*Hum, hum, click.* The *Egg*'s reception always got spotty past descents of fifty feet.

Fidelia took her seat and flipped through her gazette, *Adventures in Science Engineering* – the premiere publication for scientific advancements and inventions. She scanned the pages advertising helmet vales and hemp ropes. "New! New! New!" boasted an ad. "Double-barrelled flank tube allows for collection and transport of two specimens at once!"

She rolled her eyes.

Fidelia had made her own double-barrelled flank

tube … when she was six. The flank tubes she was currently experimenting with had multiple interchangeable compartments, with space for a dozen samples at a time. *Adventures in Science Engineering*, the periodical was called – and yet, Fidelia was always an adventure ahead.

The water was flat, steady, empty. Where were those sharks?

She tucked the gazette in her bag and opened her observation book – a simple red leather notebook that went everywhere with her. Her parents had wisely taught her, "Always be armed with something to write with", and she followed this philosophy like it was law.

Uncapping her pen, she jotted down:

*30 September*
*First day of autumn storms. Last day of shark season. Starting tomorrow, they'll swim to warmer waters until springtime. I won't see them for months. I hate winter. I always miss my sharks – Bluetail, Gumbo, Prudence, Spotty … even Bluntnose, the old grouch.*

The end of summer on Arborley Island meant nautilus shells washing among the pebbles of Stony Beach. Sea sponges in the cold-water reefs turning blue. The arrival of firefly squids in moonlit October evenings.

But it also meant the Undertow.

And, of course, the end of summer meant the end of sharks.

The sleek sharks left Arborley Sea in big-fanged fleets, chasing their last bites of rubbery cod before escaping to the tropics for winter's cold stretch. The final day of shark season was as celebrated in the Quail family as any other holiday, albeit a bittersweet one. The end of summer was always a goodbye.

This year alone Fidelia had seen a hundred sharks at least – jumping makos, beady-eyed lemons, twitchy blues, matronly nurses scrounging the bay floor for shellfish. They'd even glimpsed a whale shark, that rare leviathan, a gentle giant passing serenely through a red cloud of krill.

Eleven years of studying sharks with her parents, and the sight of these creatures still made her gooey. Scared and quiet and fizzing with joy, right under her ribs.

In her observation book, she wrote:

> *Some shark's been gobbling all the halibut. The fishermen have complained about holes being chewed through their nets, all their halibut chomped to bones. Our locals here just eat cod and mussels – so we must have an out-of-towner. Mum was hoping we'd get a glimpse of the visitor before the Undertow hits, but here it is, the eleventh hour, and not a fin in sight.*

Something burst from the sea depths – a common white surf clam, sent up from the *Egg*. Fidelia reached down with her forever-long arms, plucked the clam from

the water, and held it in a stream of sunlight.

The clam yawned its shell open. Inside, right on its fat pink tongue, was a scroll of paper. Fidelia giggled at the soggy cartoon her father had scribbled, depicting all three Quails devouring a tureen of soup. "Shipwreck Stew at the Book and Bottle for dinner?" was written beneath the picture.

This was the standard Quail-to-Quail message delivery system – inserting notes into clams – and it was a symbiotic win-win. Just like the birds that eat ticks off rhinos, or the bees that pollinate flowers, the clam brought the message from sea bottom to surface, and so Fidelia let it photosynthesize the algae that grew on its tongue before she dropped it back into the steely blue fathoms.

Fidelia laid the cartoon flat on the railing to dry. Shipwreck Stew, yum. Her tummy rumbled.

Or was that thunder?

If the Undertow was close enough to hear, it was definitely time to dock, sharks or no sharks.

"*Platypus* to *Egg*, come in. The clouds are growling at us. We better head to shore. Do you copy?" She held the radio receiver with one hand and grabbed the mop with the other, cleaning a few splatters of fish blood from the deck of the trawler.

The radio fizzled. "Fidel—" (*static, click*) "*Platypus*—" (*click, click, static*) "go ahead and dock her—" (*hum, static, hum*) "meet us at the Book and Bottle—" (*hum,*

*static, click*). With a pop, the speaker dissolved into silence. Fidelia turned the radio off – the system probably needed to cool down. Not a problem. She had brought the *Platypus* to harbour alone dozens of time.

Shrimp, garlic, cubes of buttery lobster, a few cockles in clear broth with bay leaves and saffron… A nice hot bowl of Shipwreck Stew would be a fair consolation for her long, fruitless – sharkless – day.

No. Not fruitless. That wouldn't be fair to the hagfish they'd found, tying itself into knots. Or to the translucent ghost crabs, patrolling the sea floor. Or to the kaleidoscope of seaweed clippings Dr Quail had collected for his samples.

But the sharks were the big hitters, and they hadn't bothered to show up.

Yes, Shipwreck Stew to drown her sorrows in and a couple of baguettes. That's what she needed. Maybe even a trip to her favourite sweet shop, BonBon Voyage, for a choco-glomp and a plum-milk float.

Mmm, chocolate…

More seagulls came. They plopped their ragged-feathered selves in the chum and plucked out chunks of rotting fish to gulp down their beaks.

"Shoo! Shoo!" Fidelia waved her arms. "Get out of here, you sea rats." Two gulls bobbed their heads, peering at her, but she wasn't threatening enough for them to abandon their stolen meal.

She went back to mopping. Behind the wall of dark

clouds, the sun shifted, pulsing its peachy-white rays across the water. The *Platypus* held still. Everything was quiet.

Too quiet.

The seagulls were beelining it back to the island, leaving ripple rings in the water. Suddenly the mackerel line spun out and cast itself to maximum length, the spool of rope smoking with the speed.

Fidelia dropped the mop with a clatter.

The Hydro-Scanner pinged, red needle bouncing.

She glanced at the water and squealed. Shipwreck Stew would have to wait.

*Fish,* the Hydro-Scanner announced. Big fish.

Shark.




A dark blue shadow cruised along the side of the *Platypus*. The mackerel line tugged down into the sea, then snapped clean off.

The triangular fin of a shark sliced through the water. Fidelia reached for her Track-Gaff – a one-motion, trigger-and-release tagging pole that sank tags into even the slipperiest of sharks. She loaded a tag into its chamber and held it over the water.

"Oh, my sea stars!" she whispered. This definitely wasn't one of their regulars. He was twenty feet long at least – when the creature aligned himself with the *Platypus*, his nose jutted out past the propellers.

Fidelia's chest bristled, a thousand itty-bitty sting-rays swimming and flapping their wings, all at once. She had hoped this day would be special – now it was quickly rivalling the most exciting day of her life.

The shark made another rotation around the boat. A jagged scar wrapped around his dorsal fin, a constellation of pink-white tissue. The sight made her burn with rage.

She had seen these battle scars on loads of creatures. Cause of injury? Barbed fishing lines. They were illegal here in Arborley, but the law didn't extend to other parts of the world. Greedy industrial fishermen spread these death traps around the tropical seas as if the sharks were monsters, deserving only of slaughter. They were lucky this beast got untangled; he was big enough to take any standard-size fishing boat down with him, if he was angry enough.

He swam back and forth, too far out for Fidelia to nab with the Track-Gaff. She took her binoculars out of her bag – just a refashioned pair of Ida Quail's old copper opera glasses, but they gave Fidelia the perfect close-up view.

The shark's skin faded from a polished, pearly black on top to a dappled grey underbelly. She studied his jawline, his pectoral fins, counted his gills (five of them, standard for sharks in the Lamniformes order). His wide, sweeping tail curved like a sickle – this creature was built for speed and power. His teeth were long, thick triangles, so she knew he ate seals and dolphins and other critters with plenty of fat.

"Hey!" she cried suddenly. "You're the one who's been eating all the halibut!" How many dozens of fish did it take to satisfy a shark this size? No wonder there'd been such a dip in the halibut population this year.

Less halibut in the bay had led to an increase in sculpin (halibut's dietary staple), which led to a decrease

in sea grass (*sculpin*'s dietary staple). Such was the way of the sea – a delicate ecosystem, every pairing of predator and prey carefully balanced. To lose one or the other meant the whole biological orchestra jangled out of tune.

Fidelia tapped her chin as she thought. She knew the records of documented sharks backwards and forwards, knew all two hundred species by sight, silhouette, and scientific name. But she'd never read about a shark like this.

"You are gorgeous," she said to the mystery shark. "The question is, what are you, exactly? You have mako teeth, and a great white's tail. But you're too big to be a hybrid."

She pictured the Drs Quail's view – fifty feet beneath the surface, the *Egg* puttering among the clawed reefs, and the shark looming above them, ragged teeth poking from his snout like crooked rows of ivory headstones, his creamy belly glowing in the darkness.

Fidelia put her binoculars back in her bag and snapped the radio on.

"Mum, Dad, come in! Are you seeing this?" Her hands were shaking.

"Seeing what?" Her mother's reply was calm. "We just dipped down to pick some mermaid's wineglass, and—"

"Starboard side!" Fidelia burst. "Quick!"

"All right, we're moving!" Arthur Quail grunted as he cranked the *Egg*'s helm. Sometimes salt water

gummed the wheel – a quirk of the submarine Fidelia was still working out.

The shark busied himself with the mackerel Fidelia had offered, nonchalantly chewing until it was shredded to fleshy ribbons.

"Do you see him?" Fidelia impatiently transmitted.

A moment of static, and then – "We see him! We see him!" Ida Quail was so giddy, the radio couldn't transfer the highest pitches of her squeals.

"What a monster," Arthur Quail said. "A beautiful, beautiful monster."

"It's him! Our halibut thief – it's got to be," Fidelia said. "Did you see his teeth?"

"How could we miss them?" her father said. "They're as big as my good jam knife!"

"So, what are we looking at here? A hybrid? Or is this just an oversized great white, trolling the world for spare halibut?" Fidelia waited for Ida's expertise, but there was only silence. "Mum? Are you there?"

"I think," Ida said, each word reverent, "we're looking at a new species."

A new species. Fidelia's goose bumps were the size of mosquito bites. "I can't believe it! It's been ages since we found a new species—"

"We?" her mother echoed through the radio. "Oh, no. No, darling. This is your discovery."

The *Platypus* bobbed. Fidelia was stunned, the radio clenched in one hand. "But—"

"Your mother's right," Arthur piped in. "You know the rule. He who spots it, gots it. Or she, as the case may be – and that's you."

A new species… Her own discovery… If she tagged this shark, the Track-Gaff would be splashed on the next cover of *Adventures in Science Engineering*. She'd patent all her gadgets, and then every wonder in the ocean would be explored with a Fidelia Quail invention.

Maybe she'd even win a Gilded Iguana.

The shark cut through the water like a razor blade – still too far out to tag, but he was circling closer, getting curious.

A Gilded Iguana… It was the most prestigious award a biologist could win, an honour bestowed only on those who discovered something great. Someone who left a mark.

Her parents each had one, both of them displayed on a shelf in their parlour – the first things Fidelia saw every morning on her way down to breakfast.

*If I tag him, I get to name him,* she thought, her head light with glee. Ida had an entire collection of molluscs named after her favourite sweets. Arthur once thought he was clever when he gave a trumpet-shaped plant its *nom de plume*: tootweed.

Now, at least, it would be Fidelia's turn.

The shark rotated again, zipping past the length of the *Platypus* – just a casual swim for the two-ton beast.

What should she name him?

*Carcharhinus arborleyan*? Roughly translated, it meant "sharp-toothed Arborley shark".

No, his official title for the books should use her own name. That way there would be no doubt that she was the one who discovered him.

*Lamnidae fidelius*? "Fidelia's fish of prey?"

She'd pin down an official name in time. For now, he needed a nickname.

The white foam splashed against the shark's mottled, grizzled skin as he cruised around the trawler, mouth gaping, those gargantuan teeth just bright-white blurs in the water.

*Grizzle.*

"That's what I'll call you, until I can think of something better," she said. "Grizzle." The name suited him. He gave her a sharky grin and rolled past, her reflection gleaming in his round black eye, her pointy features furrowed in concentration.

"Did you tag him?" Ida asked on the radio.

Fidelia tightened her grip on the Track-Gaff. "Not yet." Not yet, no – but she was ready to sink the tag into his fin. Ready to make her mark.

"He's all yours." The radio blared Ida's final, supportive words before the whole system dissolved into fuzzy static again: "Go get him."

*All mine.*

Fidelia set her jaw, squinting past the sun's mirrored rays and into the water.

The *Platypus* levelled in the chop. Grizzle flipped around and barrelled toward her. She leaned over, determination flushing through her like a fever. This was her chance.

Just a little closer.

A burst of wind shook the *Platypus* just as Fidelia clicked. The tag missed the fin and sank into the watery blue.

"Son of a squid!" she exploded, then regrouped with a deep breath. No worries – she had plenty of tags with her. She reloaded her Track-Gaff and waited.

*Come on, Grizzle. Come on back.*

Another salty breeze blasted her cheeks like a smack from an open palm. The afternoon's peaceful, sorbet-coloured clouds were completely gone; the sky had darkened to charcoal. Seawater swirled around the *Platypus*, tossing it like a bath toy.

Then someone turned on the rain.

Fidelia tried to plant her boots on the slippery deck, but the *Platypus* was just a cradle, violently rocked in the waves. She grasped the railing, the trawler whipping her to and fro like a rag doll.

It was here.

The Undertow was a shift in the ocean's current, a result of the hot summer air leaving the island and colliding with the incoming cold weather front. Its chaos had earned itself a catchphrase – "During the Undertow, anything can happen." Whirlpools appeared

out of nowhere and tore ships to splinters. Schools of cod flopped onto fishing boats, surrendering without a fight. Forests of kelp uprooted themselves from the sea floor and floundered ashore.

Anything could happen, yes. But the Undertow's speciality was destruction.

The wind screamed. Grizzle, spooked by the madness, dove down.

"Wait, Grizzle!" Fidelia managed to stay upright, her beanpole shadow spearing the last of the shark before he slapped his tail into the stern of the *Platypus*, then disappeared.

She hesitated, raindrops freckling her glasses. She should warn her parents that the storm was here, close enough to feel. And she needed to get the *Platypus* into the harbour before the Undertow turned it into driftwood. But she hadn't put a tag in Grizzle's fin.

It was 30 September – the massive shark would likely be migrating to the tropics tonight with the rest of his fishy cohorts, to spend the winter where it was nice and warm. If she didn't tag him now, right now, he might be lost for ever, free game for someone else to discover. A lesser scientist. Or, even worse, just a person. A citizen.

She pictured a third Gilded Iguana on the shelf between her parents' awards – hers a particularly shiny gold, especially when the sun crept through the garden window and hit the letters on the plaque: *Fidelia Aurora Quail, Scientist.*

She had to tag that shark.

Even as the storm wailed around her, she opened the cooler and roped another mackerel, her mind whirring at top speed.

Should she break out the diving suit?

The suit was standard, professionally made diving equipment – a canvas suit lined with rubber, which clamped into a twelve-bolt helmet – and all three Quails hated using it. The so-called watertight seal was unreliable – every other dive, their helmets came up sloshing with seawater. Corselets, the pieces that connected the helmet to the suit, rusted and broke constantly.

And it was the most advanced diving technology available.

Inflating the canvas suit took a good twenty minutes, which she didn't have. But maybe she could skip the inflation and just head underwater with a saggy suit? If Grizzle wouldn't come up to her, she would swim down to him.

She fiddled with the door to the hatch.

*If only the Water-Eater was ready,* she thought.

But before she could get the diving helmet and begin improvising, a wave curled over her, tall enough to cast the entire *Platypus* in shade.

"Here we go," she muttered, and held on to the rail tightly as the water succumbed to gravity and fell.

Hair, glasses, dress, stockings, boots – all soaked. Miraculously, the boat managed to stay afloat, but a

spray of seawater burst through the slats of the *Platypus*'s port side.

A leak!

Forget the diving suit – the whole boat was about to head underwater.

She radioed the *Egg* between tidal-wave splashes – no answer, just static.

Submarines, for the most part, fared just fine in ocean storms. So she wasn't worried about her parents. They would be safe.

*But,* a voice in her mind nagged, *they're in a submarine built by an eleven-year-old. A child's contraption, the patent office would call it.*

Again, she called the *Egg*. Again, static.

Her parents were probably already on the dock – shivering and worrying and wondering where their brainy daughter was.

She could feel the *Platypus* grow heavier and heavier as it filled with water. Grizzle's tail must have split a hole clear through the wood.

Just then, all the bait lines went slack. For a moment, the sea levelled. The waves had blended the chum like a milkshake – now it sank straight down, the blood diluted, fish guts reduced to pinkish-brown grains. The nibbled mackerel's head floated, a single silver eye staring up at the storm.

The *Platypus* was leaking, yes – but even worse, Grizzle was gone. Her chance was gone.

With blistered hands and a scowl that would startle a stonefish, she flipped on the *Platypus*'s propellers and prepped the vessel for transport.

The back of the trawler dragged below the surface as she flashed to shore, a trail of icy white foam behind her. Her adrenaline dissipated from her body in waves, leaving her exhausted and aching – she hadn't eaten in hours. She'd bring in the boat and get dinner with her parents. She'd regroup, make a new Track-Gaff in the workshop. Tomorrow morning, if the skies had improved, she'd tar the split boards on the *Platypus*, and together the three Quails would sail back out to find the shark, and she'd slip a tag in his fin.

Her first discovery.

She snorted at her own gumption – or at her desperation. Did she really think Grizzle would stick around for the first chill of winter? Did she really think the storm would cooperate for one more day of open-water fieldwork?

But then again, in the Undertow, anything could happen.