

chapter one

One hundred and thirty feet doesn't sound like much. If you're walking.

You'd think twice if you were climbing that far. It's about twelve stories high. Nothing fun about clinging to the side of a building one hundred and thirty feet off the ground.

But what about the other direction? Underground or in shark-infested water.

In your mind, turn that twelve-story building upside down. Picture how far

underwater the tip of the building would reach. Then think of going the entire distance straight down, where every cubic foot of water above you weighs over sixty pounds.

That's where I was headed at ten o'clock on a hot Thursday morning in August. Diving to a shipwreck, buried twelve stories underwater. It felt like the weight of the water was squeezing the light out of the sky. It was getting darker and darker by the second.

I was six miles offshore in the warm ocean water south of Key West in Florida. I had already swum twenty feet down. There was a thin nylon line on my weight belt. It was snapped to a thicker cable that dropped from the boat above. The thick line ended in a heavy anchor. Being hooked to this line made it easy to go straight down in the Gulf Stream.

Normally, I wouldn't use a guideline. I'd drift down from farther back and let the stream just take me. But this was a work dive, not a fun dive.

At thirty feet deep, I tilted my head to look up at the surface. The shadow of the *GypSea*—my uncle's dive boat—was a long black shape, like a fat cigar floating above me.

Far below me was another boat. This one, though, was much larger than the *GypSea*. It was also in much worse shape, since shipwrecks don't float or move very fast.

The shipwreck was an old US Air Force missile-tracking ship. It was almost the length of two football fields. There was no cool story about it sinking in a storm or anything like that. The ship had been cleaned up and then sunk on purpose. It was done to make a reef, a nice hiding place for fish and other undersea animals. It was also done so that tourists could scuba dive and explore it.

Tourists were part of my job. In fact, I was diving down to the wreck so I could hide a toy treasure chest for them. It was my idea. Business had not been good for a

while. More people would hire my uncle's boat for dives, I thought, if we set up a treasure hunt for them.

The toy treasure chest I carried was not much bigger than a football. Inside it was a hundred-dollar bill wrapped in plastic to make it waterproof. The first diver to find it would keep the money.

I kicked my fins and swam down another ten feet. Slowly.

I don't like to hurry when I scuba dive. I also check and double-check everything. All the time. There is a saying in this sport: *There are old divers and there are bold divers, but there are no old bold divers.* In other words, not only can mistakes kill you, chances are they *will* kill you.

I dropped another ten feet. I was down to fifty feet. I had reached the top of the sunken ship. Fingers of steel reached up for me like a skeleton.

I stopped and hit a button to pump some air from my tank into special pockets built into my vest. I did this because as you go deeper, the weight of the water makes

it harder to swim. By adding air to my vest, I was able to make myself lighter.

As I swam, I turned my head and watched for sharks. Especially hammerheads. Around Key West, they can be as long as a car. But much more dangerous. Cars just need gasoline for fuel. Sharks need meat and blood. Even though attacks are rare, I didn't want to be a quick fill-up for a shark.

I saw no sharks. There were plenty of smaller fish. Although I knew they were very colorful, they all looked bluish gray. Even clear water soaks up colors. After fifty feet, reds and oranges and yellows are gone. The blues disappear after sixty feet.

I only know the colors go away because that's what other people tell me. In my own little weird world, colors stay with me everywhere. For instance, for me, Wednesdays are light blue. And whenever I hear the national anthem, I taste chocolate. Some people with my condition taste chocolate when they hear a Beethoven violin concerto. Some will hear a certain sound and get a

tickling feeling. Or they'll feel something tickle them and hear a certain sound.

It's called *synesthesia*. When two senses are linked together. I know that sounds weird. That's why nobody knows I have it. Not even my mom. I don't want anyone to know I'm a freak.

At seventy feet deep, I still had another sixty feet to go to get to the bottom of the ship. There were elevator shafts and chambers and rooms long since stripped of equipment.

I checked the dial on my air tank. It showed full. I had only been in the water for fifteen minutes. Above me, in the *GypSea*, a guy named Judd Warner was waiting for me to return. He had just been hired by my uncle a couple of weeks earlier. Judd expected me back in half an hour.

I slipped inside the structure and kept going lower.

At eighty feet, I stopped to plug my nose through my dive mask. I swallowed hard and popped my ears, something I had

been doing all the way down. It helps keep your eardrums from exploding.

At 130 feet, I finally found a great cubby hole deep inside the immense steel structure to hide the treasure chest in, and I began to rise again.

As I was going out of the cubby hole, a small fish brushed against my left elbow. Bright red filled my vision. I didn't panic. I knew about that spot on my elbow. Behind my right knee, there's a patch of skin that makes me see green whenever I rub it.

Yeah. Like I said, weird. But I've learned to live with it.

And I liked being alive.

Which was why I was always so careful when I went diving.

So what happened fifteen minutes later on my way up was a total shock.

At ninety-three feet, still inside the ship, something ripped my mouthpiece away from my face. And the water around me exploded.

chapter two

For a couple of seconds, I bucked and danced at the end of my line. I was like a rag doll shaken by a giant.

Was it a great white shark, twisting and turning me from side to side, like a bulldog with a rat in its jaws?

I couldn't see what was happening. It was dark, and air bubbles kept exploding around my face mask.

Don't panic! I told myself. *Don't panic!*

I tried to think it through. I didn't feel razor-sharp teeth cutting through my wet suit. So it wasn't a shark.

Don't panic. Don't panic.

I was still attached to the main cable that was my guideline. Without it, the force of the exploding water would have fired me in different directions like a pinball bouncing off flippers. If that had happened inside this ship, I'd already have broken arms or legs.

Don't panic. Don't panic.

With both hands, I grabbed for my mouthpiece. The rubber tube was like a live snake. It twisted and turned in the water, trying to get away from me.

I finally figured it out.

A pressure valve must have broken. Air in tanks is pressurized at about 3,000 pounds per square inch. A valve lets the air out slowly when you breathe. With a valve broken, this air was shooting out from the tank through the mouthpiece. In a hurry.

I was losing so much air and losing it so hard that the force of it was shaking my entire body.

I finally got my hands around the mouthpiece tube. I pulled the mouthpiece toward me.

I needed air!

There was no way I could get the mouthpiece back into place. The air was shooting out too hard. It would have been like turning on a garden hose and putting the end into my mouth and holding all the water. And trying to breathe air from the exploding bubbles would have been like trying to sip water from a fire hose.

My lungs screamed for air. But all I'd gulp into my lungs would be water.

With ninety-three feet to get to the surface.