

Ghosts and Diamonds

Age16 (5/77)

The open sea lies just to my right as I drive along the blacktopped road to the wharf. My Jaguar XJ6 purrs softly as I sit with the air conditioning on, reading the headlines out of one eye. I'm doing about 60. I slow up and turn off the smooth road onto a coarse gravel roadway leading down to the wooden pier. Parking my car alongside a clump of ragged weeds, I walk to the wood; my briefcase and overcoat in my hand. As I walk looking at the bluish water, I review the day's events. I am a medical doctor specializing in diving medicine. Today I started with treating a barracuda bite; saw broken arms and feet, and a pneumothorax. It was a tiring day.

At the end of the pier a small rectangular float is tied. Facing deep water lies a compact submarine 14 feet in length. Crossing the water with a jump, I land on the float. I put my case down and bend my head back with a sigh. My hand reaches up and massages the back of my neck. I look out at the sea. Westwards, the bronze sun is making its way home. Its radiance falls on the waves caressing them, bring warmth.

To the east the waves lay calm for no gust of wind blows tonight. I pick up my briefcase and walk to the sub. Gliding back the convex shaped glass reveals the interior: a low sleek-cut chair with a control panel in front. Behind this are two more chairs connected by a tiny storage cabinet in the middle. Bending down, I throw my things into the back seats and climb into the compact submarine. The glass hatch slides forward with a push of a button and connects with the aluminum locks, making a watertight seal.

A little stuffy inside - I turn on the oxygen vents and carbon dioxide scrubber. A low hum from the fan tells me everything is working. My hand slides down the panel as I check each system making sure all are functional. I double check the "wet-dry" sub switch - wouldn't want to get my overcoat wet!

With a turn of a small silver key, the sub comes to life as the two thrusters on each side start to spin. I am rocking in my little sub. Everything is in order as I prepare to descend. The ballast system is operated by two hand valves: one for filling and one for blowing. I give the filling valve a short turn to let the seawater come in easy. This allows me to watch the blue sky and orange sun disappear slowly, as I descend into the watery depths.

I drop down twenty feet to admire the beautiful coloration. The water is a dark blue with myriads of tiny metallic bubbles shimmering where the sun's rays still invade the forever moving liquid.

I push the throttle forward, forcing the thrusters faster, thus moving me along on my journey. I am on my way. Opening the filling valve more, the sub drops faster. I look out of my window, trying to see the bottom. Suddenly, it appears, and my eyes are instantly focused onto the rocky terrain, which is actually five yards under me. The sound of compressed air whirling through pipes tells me the blowing valve is responding. I level off at 85 feet, 3 feet from the bottom. The low hum returns as I glide along the bottom at a steady four knots, observing sights that few men have seen.

Two hundred yards from the pier, the rocky floor slopes downward and changes to a white sandy bottom. Here few rocks are seen. The sub moves over the sand occasionally rubbing against the floor, slowing me down. A quick turn of the valve compensates for this, and I am soon on my way.

The temperature of the coastal waters for June is a beautiful 85 degrees. This allows all kinds of organisms to grow. My sub passes many mounds in the sands, revealing the hideouts of many crustaceans. A horseshoe crab is crawling slowly along. Suddenly it catches sight of me and wriggles into the sand, leaving only the top of his shell showing. He will sit tight; only his book gills are moving, until I leave his domain.

Again the bottom is changing. The sand slopes sharply down as I pass over a small underwater canyon. It is a fracture zone about 30 feet deep, its bottom being 125 feet from the surface. I cross it moving slowly, allowing me to stare at its exquisiteness. Attached to its vertical cliffs are the corals and

sea fans, which dance back and forth as the bottom currents rush through the open canyon. The multi-colored tubeworms spread their feathery appendages reaching out, searching for their microscopic meal. As the sub continues on its way, I try to glance back at the underwater Eden, but fail to recognize the fine details. My view is blurred by a large school of sunfish, which swims through the water and quickly dashes down into the canyon looking for prey.

Now that the canyon is gone, the sand shifts its position upwards and out of the valley. The tanks are blown and the sub rises onto a large plateau. In the distance, about 300 yards, is my destiny. I go along the bottom observing the ripples in the sand caused by the constant movement of the waves high above me on the silvery surface. One can tell that the sun is now setting even down this deep. The light blue rays that accompany daylight have disappeared completely. One hundred and fifteen feet down, the surroundings are now quite eerie.

My thoughts are sharply interrupted for I can clearly see my destination. Rising high out of the sand, an underwater complex lies in front. With all its beauty, it is my home in the sea.

I pilot the sub over the house admiring its design. Just three years ago, it was only a fantasy I had. To build a house underwater and have a family live in it was considered absurd. Finally, they gave me a chance and let me test my design. Now, years later, my family and I inhabit the place, while we study the marine surroundings. A smile comes to me as I pass the large dome shaped complex, for I can see the dark silhouettes of my kids waving at me.

I prepare to dock the sub. The aquamarine-colored dome is raised up 20 feet from the seafloor. This allows the subs to enter and exit. I fill the tanks and the sub drops down. The thrusters have been shut off to let me glide right under the dome to the dockage. Once I am under the dome in the far corner, I just blow the tanks and rise into the sub dock.

I am under the dome. The powerful yellow lights shine down like through the water airport landing lights. I follow the strong beams. Twenty yards in front of the sub on the seafloor lies a large concrete block. Red lights gleam at each corner. As I reach the block I cut all power and blow the tanks slowly. The sub rises, picking up speed. Hitting the surface, it splashes water onto the dockage area. Turning on the thrusters, I steer the little sub into it's own slip. As the power is released, the sub nudges the fiberglass walls and comes to a stop. The glass hatch is opened and I step up onto the deck feeling not quite as tense as I did when the trip started,

Climbing up the all-glass steps, I pause and turn to look at our fleet of submarines. At the top of the staircase is a blue finished sliding door. As I walk off the stairs onto the plush carpet, the two doors slide apart, and I get into the elevator. In seconds I am on the middle level. My wife and kids are there to greet me. I walk with them through the hall to the large living room and sit down on the circular sofa facing the windows. My wife walks over to the bar and while discussing her day makes a stiff drink. I sip it letting it relax my worn body. The kids have gone upstairs to get ready for dinner. A few minutes later, my wife and I ascend the spiral stairs to the upper level where the kitchen, dining room and other rooms are.

By the time we had finished dinner, the water had turned a dark gray. All that can be seen is the soft glow of the bioluminescent animals that are swimming around in the still hours of the night. The kids are in bed watching television and my wife is sound asleep. I just lie back looking through the window. Not much can be seen. The outer lights have been switched off so that the animals will not be afraid to swim past. It is mysterious because even though it is dark in here, the outside is still quite light. The moon high above us is bringing the deep light. On the surface, the water is black with thousands of glittering diamonds radiating between each wave. Deep down,

there are no glittering diamonds. Only a ghostly look that reminds one of a sunken graveyard. Looking out my window, I can see no fish. Only the shadows are here - the ghostly shadows. I close my eyes now and think not of the ghosts or the diamonds, but of the days to come. Tomorrow will bring the weekend and there will be much to do. We will all leave the dome and venture out to explore new places with our subs. We will play with the porpoises, which we keep as our pets. Like so many times before, they will come to us, and we will ride them, and train them. We will learn a great deal from them so that one day many families will be able to live under the oceans and enjoy the freedom we have. But now I grow sleepy. I open my eyes and look out the window. A large shark swims past the dome whipping its crescent shaped tail from side to side. I reach up and turn on the exterior lamps. The shark becomes alarmed and darts off into space leaving his cleaning fish to chase after him.

I am smiling as the lights go out and I settle down to sleep. For some reason, I do not know why, but I don't try to find the newer. I am quite happy with what I have...

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