

Middle reader fiction  
www.peachtree-online.com

*Day after day, Hugh looks for signs of German spies.  
It seems like a harmless way to spend time...at least at first.*

*"...a tautly woven story that blends an intriguing mystery  
with historical significance." —Booklist*

*"Deftly written, this story manages to braid real history  
with a fictional mystery, creating a tension that builds  
from beginning to end." —Kirkus Reviews*

*"An enjoyable historical novel." —School Library Journal*

- ❖ 2005 Agatha Awards Nominee
- ❖ 2006–2007 Great Stone Face Book Award Nominee (NH)
- ❖ 2007–2008 Volunteer State Book Awards Master List (TN)
- ❖ 2007–2008 Mark Twain Award Preliminary List (MO)

ISBN 13: 978-1-56145-484-6  
ISBN 10: 1-56145-484-2

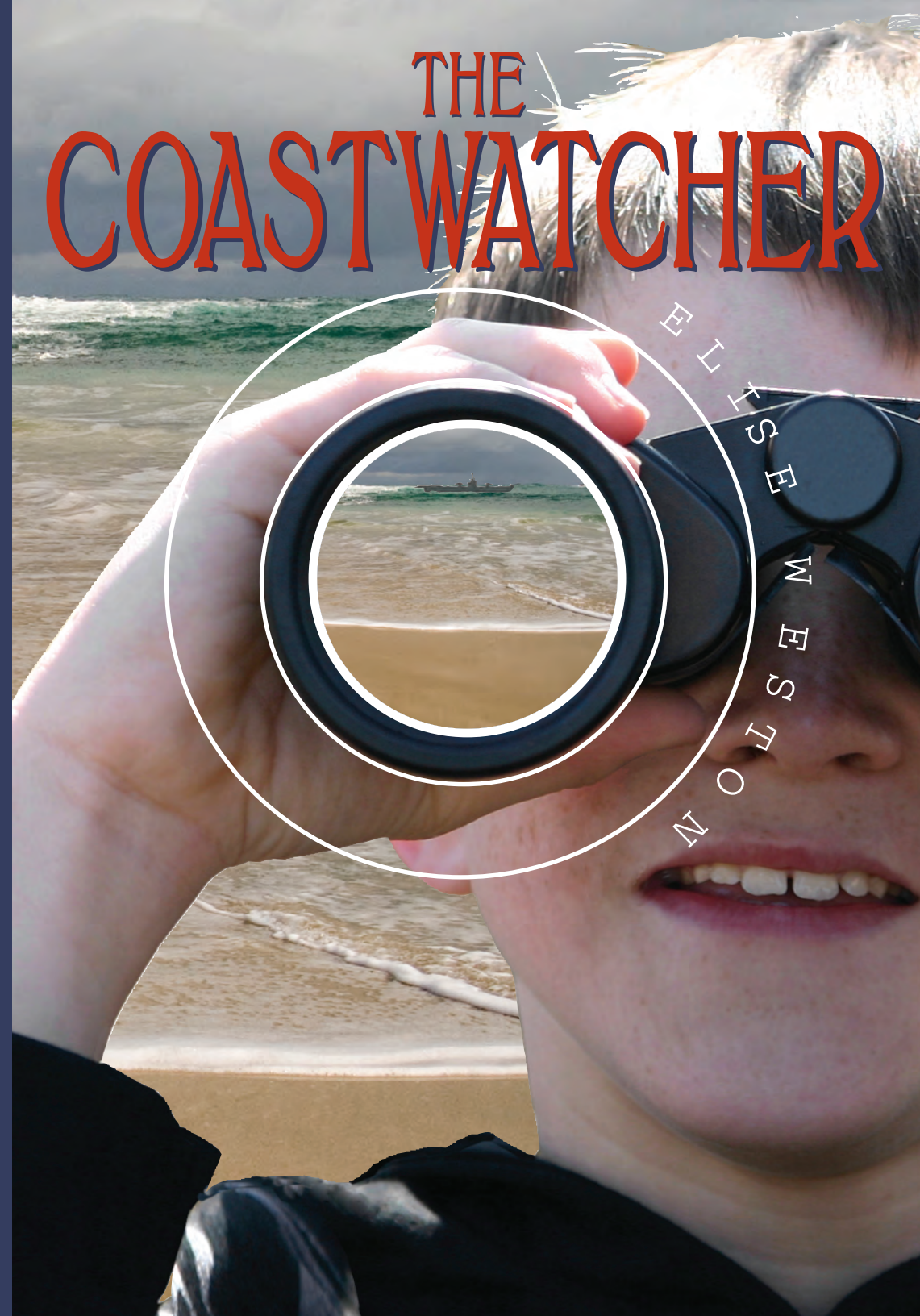


WESTON

THE COASTWATCHER



# THE COASTWATCHER



WESTON  
PUBLISHING

# THE COASTWATCHER

# THE COASTWATCHER

*Elise Weston*





Published by  
PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS  
1700 Chattahoochee Avenue  
Atlanta, Georgia 30318-2112

*www.peachtree-online.com*

Text © 2005 by Elise Weston  
Jacket illustration © 2005 by Denny Bond

First trade paperback edition published in 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover design by Loraine M. Joyner  
Book design by Melanie McMahon Ives

Photo credits: p. 126, German U-boat, courtesy of the National Archives; p. 128, German POWs, courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard; p. 129, Defense at Sea poster, by permission of the Library of Virginia; pp. 130–131, family photos courtesy of the author

Manufactured in United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 (hardcover)  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (trade paperback)

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Weston, Elise.

The coastwatcher / by Elise Weston.-- 1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: While eleven-year-old Hugh, his family, and his cousin Tom are spending the summer of 1943 on the South Carolina shore to escape the polio epidemic, Hugh uncovers clues that point to a German plot to sabotage a nearby naval base.

ISBN 13: 978-1-56145-350-4 / ISBN 10: 1-56145-350-1 (hardcover)

ISBN 13: 978-1-56145-484-6 / ISBN 10: 1-56145-484-2 (trade paperback)

1. World War, 1939-1945--South Carolina--Juvenile fiction. [1. World War, 1939-1945--United States--Fiction. 2. Family life--South Carolina--Fiction. 3. South Carolina--History--1865--Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7+

[Fic]--dc22

2005010816

*For Bill,  
and for my brother Jay  
—E. W.*

*Special thanks to Fritz Hamer, Curator of History,  
the South Carolina State Museum; Hugh M. James Jr.;  
Major General Perry M. Smith; Cathy Fishman,  
Laurie Myers, Sherri Rivers, and Nancy Benjamin;  
and to my editor, the patient and gentle Vicky Holifield.*

# Chapter One

*August 1943*

**A**t first it was just a speck out in the ocean. A porpoise's fin, or maybe a piece of driftwood. No, it was moving along too fast, too straight, on a course parallel with the beach. He could just make out the tiny wake splashing along behind it.

He took the binoculars away and rubbed his eyes. When he looked back, it—the thing—was still out there, and coming closer all the time. Suddenly he was all goose bumps, even out here in the broiling hot sun.

The sea oats behind him rustled, and he jumped. Jiggs, his cocker spaniel, nosed something in the sand, scratched himself, and flopped down. "Jiggs," he whispered as the thing out in the ocean passed right in front of them. "It's a periscope! I know it is!"

"Hugh!" his mother called from the front porch. "Hugh! Time to come in!"

*Not yet, Mama.*

Sweat trickled down his face. His eyes were burning, but he kept them glued to the black speck out in the ocean. Now it was hardly moving at all.

Jiggs got up and shook himself, peppering the boy with sand. "Thanks," Hugh muttered. He closed his eyes to rest them for just a second, and when he looked back through the binoculars, the periscope—that's what it was, it *had* to be—was gone. His heart thumped. He adjusted the binoculars and swept the horizon, all the way down to the south end of the island and back. Nothing. Not even a seagull. Just empty sea and empty sky.

"Hugh! Right this minute!"

He sat up. "All right!" he yelled. "I'm coming!"

As he came down the boardwalk from the beach, Mama called from the top of the porch steps, "Aren't you overdoing it? You've been out there with those binoculars for almost two hours."

He shrugged and started up the steps.

"Oh, no, you don't," she said. "Go wash off that sand."

"Mama—"

"Go."

He sighed, handed her the binoculars, and headed for the shower under the house. The house was built up high off the ground so the breezes could "circulate." Not much was circulating on this hot day, so the cold water felt extra good, especially around his eyes where the binoculars had rubbed the skin raw.

When he came shivering up onto the porch, Mama was waiting with a towel. "What did you see today, Mr. Coastwatcher? A German submarine?"

He caught his breath. But when he looked up at her, she was smiling, shaking her head a little bit. Teasing him.

She wrapped the towel around him and gave him a hug. "Hurry up," she said, and went inside.

Hugh looked back out at the ocean. Nothing there. Wait—there was the osprey, the one that lived back in the marsh, hovering low over the water, hunting for its supper.

"Hugh!"

He scanned the ocean one last time. *Something* was out there, even if he couldn't see it right now. And whatever it was would be a secret. His secret.

\* \* \*

From his place at the supper table Hugh could see Abram fishing out in the creek. Behind the old man the sun was setting, turning the marsh gold and silhouetting Abram so he seemed blacker than he already was. He was standing in the middle of his boat, poling it along. Looking for flounder.

"There's Abram," Hugh said, but nobody heard him. They were talking about polio again. Hugh wished they'd shut up.

"A boy in our neighborhood got it," Tom was saying. "We all had to be quarantined." Tom was Hugh and Sally's first cousin from Atlanta.

"Gosh, how did you stand it?" Sally said. Her tone of voice made being quarantined sound wonderful.

Ever since Tom arrived two days ago, Sally had been acting stupid. Tom was thirteen, a year older than Sally and a little more than two years older than Hugh, but he tried to

act like he was about twenty. He thought he was *so* great just because his father was in the Navy and getting ready to ship out from Norfolk, Virginia. Tom was staying with them until his mother—Mama’s sister Ellen—got back from seeing his father off. His cousin was supposed to be at camp in North Carolina, but it had been canceled because of the polio epidemic. Tom’s older brother Joe was staying with a friend in Atlanta.

Hugh hated hearing about polio. He and Sally and their mother had been here at the beach all summer to get away from it. There’d already been about a dozen cases in Charleston. Not long ago he’d read a story in *TIME* magazine about some doctors who thought flies might be the carriers of polio. They’d mashed up a bunch of flies and fed them to monkeys to see if the monkeys got polio. It sounded horrible—how would those doctors like it if they had to eat flies? And then got polio?

“Mostly the quarantine was boring,” Tom was saying. “We couldn’t go swimming or to the movies or anything.”

“Did the boy die?” Sally said.

“No, but he can’t walk,” Tom said.

Hugh felt like putting his hands over his ears. He looked back out at the marsh. “Abram got a flounder,” he said. But nobody else even looked.

## Chapter Two

Hugh lay in the dark, listening for the sound of his father’s car. Earlier, Daddy had called from his law office in Charleston to say he was on his way. He hadn’t been to the beach in almost a month. Gas was rationed, and it took a whole tank to drive the seventy miles from Charleston and back. Daddy always got there late because you weren’t allowed to go over thirty-five miles per hour. Lots of things were different because of the war.

Even though Hugh had only been nine years old at the time, he remembered clear as anything the day the war began for the United States—Sunday, December 7, 1941. It was in the afternoon. They were all in the living room, at home in Charleston. Daddy and Mama were listening to a concert of classical music on the radio, and he and Sally were lying on the floor, playing Parcheesi. Jiggs was a little puppy then. He’d just sat down in the middle of the Parcheesi board, scattering the pieces everywhere. Hugh and Sally were laughing when suddenly the music on the radio stopped.

"We interrupt this program for a bulletin," an announcer said really fast. "Japanese warplanes are bombing the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii." Hugh caught his breath. His father was leaning forward in his chair, his fists clenched.

"We'll be in it now!" Daddy shouted.

The next day, President Roosevelt went before Congress and asked that war be declared on the Japanese Empire. He said that Sunday, December 7, 1941, was a date that would "live in infamy." Four days later, Germany and Italy, Japan's allies, declared war on the United States.

In his speech, the President had said that the United States was in "grave danger," and in the days after Pearl Harbor that danger seemed very real, even in Charleston. People jumped at loud noises—the wail of an ambulance siren, a car backfiring. On the radio, Mrs. Roosevelt told parents how to make a "game" of possible bombing raids. When a child heard a loud explosion he was to say "Boooooom!" This was supposed to keep the child from being frightened if there was a real bombing.

"Oh, *really*," Mama said when she heard about Mrs. Roosevelt's game. Daddy laughed, but Hugh thought it might be a pretty good idea. He tried yelling "Boom!" at the top of his lungs one night during a thunderstorm. It worked—sort of. Except that Sally came flying into his room, hollering, "Are you crazy, Hugh?"

After the United States entered the war, it seemed as if just about every man in the country was joining up. The recruiting stations were open seven days a week, day and night. Daddy tried to enlist in the Navy and then the Army and then the Marines. But none of them would take him

because he was deaf in one ear from getting hit by a baseball when he was a teenager.

As a last resort Daddy tried the Coast Guard. When he came back to the house that afternoon, he slung his hat across the room. It skidded across a table and almost knocked over a lamp. Jiggs yelped.

"Jack!" Mama gave him a dirty look.

"Sorry." He sank down into his favorite armchair. "The Coast Guard didn't want me, either." He sat there for a few minutes, and then suddenly he started laughing. "I talked with an old man there," he said, "an eighty-one year old who'd been a major in the Spanish-American War. Charged up San Juan Hill with Teddy Roosevelt. He was trying to enlist today, too. If they'd taken *him*, I don't think I could have stood it." He laughed again, but Hugh knew how disappointed he was. Most of his father's friends were already in uniform.

Daddy ended up in Civil Defense. All he had for a uniform was an armband with a triangle on it with the letters CD inside. His main job was to go around after dark and check to see that people's blackout curtains were pulled. The government had ordered people to put up blackout curtains so that if enemy airplanes flew over, the pilots couldn't see any lights down below. Those curtains were a pain sometimes. They were extra heavy to block out the light, which was okay in the winter. But in the summer, when they also blocked any breezes, they made it stifling.

Now the lamp on Hugh's bedside table was turned off and the curtains were open, but there wasn't much breeze. Overhead the big ceiling fan was thumping away. Hugh could barely hear the waves breaking out on the beach. He



closed his eyes, and again he saw that little black speck out in the ocean with the white wake splashing along behind. The periscope. Maybe he'd tell Daddy about it. *He* wouldn't laugh.

Then he must have gone to sleep, because he didn't hear the car. The next thing he knew, his father was leaning down to give him a good-night kiss. "Daddy," Hugh said, only half awake. "I saw something today. Out in the ocean."

Daddy turned his good ear toward Hugh. "What's that, son?"

"I saw something through my binoculars." He hesitated a moment, then blurted it out. "It was a periscope, Daddy, I'm sure it was. And it was in pretty close."

"A periscope, huh? Are you sure it wasn't a—"

"Daddy, it was a periscope."

"Well, tell me if you see it again," Daddy said, stifling a yawn. "I've got to go to bed. I'm beat."

As his father walked into their bedroom across the hall, Hugh heard Mama say, "Is he still awake?"

"I'm afraid I woke him up," Daddy said. "He told me he'd seen a periscope today. Does that mean he's still coast-watching?"

"Every day. Sally gave it up long ago. Said it was too hot and too boring."

"Who knows, Hugh might just see something."

"I certainly hope not," Mama said.

Hugh sighed and put his hands behind his head. He lay listening to the katydids and the sound of the waves and the ceiling fan going *thunk-a-thunk-a-thunk*.

## Chapter Three

The next morning Hugh went crabbing with Abram. All around the boat the green marsh spread out, the creek winding and winding through the long grass like a shiny blue ribbon. Mullet jumped, long-legged herons fished in the shallows, and crabs scuttled around near the banks of the creek, just waiting to be caught.

And right then a crab tugged at Hugh's line. "Get it, Hugh!" Abram whispered.

Inch by inch Hugh pulled up the line. "It's a big one, Abram," he said softly. "Look at the way it's pulling."

"Just pull him steady, Hugh, you'll get him. Yessir, yessir, Hughboy, you going to get him." Abram had caught thousands of crabs, but each new one seemed more exciting to him than the last.

Pulling this one in was taking forever, but then there it was, just below the surface, the green-brown back, the big blue claws. In a lightning-fast swoop Abram reached down with the net and scooped up the crab.

"That's the king of the day, Hugh," Abram said. "Oh, fine!" He reached into the net and grabbed the crab by its

back flippers. “What you got in your big old claw, Mr. Crab?” He pried a tattered package out of the crab’s red-tipped claw and sat staring at it, shaking his head. “Look here. Looks like old Mr. Crab smokes cigarettes.” He handed the package to Hugh. “What’s this? Ain’t no Lucky Strikes.”

Hugh stared at the limp package in his outstretched hand. It couldn’t have been in the water very long, because the two cigarettes in it were still whole. He’d never seen the brand before, red and black writing on a white background. There was something familiar about the heavy, crooked black letters...something he’d seen at the movies on *March of Time*, the newsreel that came on before the feature. He caught his breath, and for the first time that day he thought about the periscope. He eased the damp package into his shirt pocket. “Abram,” he said, “I think it’s time for me to go in.”

\* \* \*

Mama made them all rest for an hour every day after lunch, even Tom. It was because of the polio—she didn’t want them to get “overtired.” When Hugh got up to his room after lunch, he took the cigarette package off the windowsill where it had been drying and wrapped it up in some Kleenex. Then he slipped it into his scrapbook between two pages of photographs from *LIFE* magazine of captured U-boats—German submarines.

He’d been working on the scrapbook for a year and a half now. On the front he’d drawn a big American flag. Inside were photographs and articles he’d cut out of magazines

and newspapers. The first section was called “The Allies.” It had pictures of the Allied leaders: President Roosevelt of the United States, Winston Churchill of Great Britain, and Joseph Stalin of Russia. After that Hugh had included photos of Allied military commanders like General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz and Great Britain’s General Montgomery. The next section had pictures of The Enemy—Hitler and Tojo and Mussolini. In the back he had pasted articles about airplanes and tanks and ships and artillery. Sometimes he got in trouble because he cut things out before Mama and Daddy had a chance to read them. He had shoe boxes full of clippings.

He closed the scrapbook and stood staring out the window, itching to get back out on the beach.

“Time’s up!” Mama called. “Siesta’s over.”

Hugh flew down the stairs, grabbed the binoculars off the hat rack by the front door, and dashed outside. He threw himself down on a sand dune and scanned the shoreline. Two shrimp boats on their way in, a flock of noisy gulls trailing in their wake, a lone black Labrador retriever moseying down the beach. That was it. He made two more sweeps of the ocean with his binoculars. Nothing. He wiped the sweat from around his eyes and rested his chin on his folded arms. By now he’d learned to be patient.

It had been a lot different last summer. In the first seven months of 1942, German U-boats had sunk several hundred Allied ships just off the Atlantic coast, from up in Newfoundland all the way down to Florida. President Roosevelt called the U-boats “the rattlesnakes of the Atlantic.” There had been a terrifying incident down in Georgia when two oil tankers were torpedoed off St. Simons

Island. The force of the explosions had shattered window panes as far as eighteen miles inland. Local people had gone out in boats to help rescue some of the sailors, but nineteen of them had died. On some beaches, the Coast Guard had organized horse patrols to help keep a lookout.

That June, as soon as they got to the beach when school was out, Sally and Hugh had started coastwatching. They'd kept watch every day, taking turns with the binoculars, but they'd never seen anything suspicious. Now, a year later, Sally had lost interest. Not Hugh. Things were much quieter along the Atlantic coast, but who knew? Something might happen.

Something was happening now. That thing he'd seen yesterday was a periscope. It had to be! He wriggled farther down into the sand. Next to him, Jiggs sighed. In a little while the dog got up, shook himself, and trotted off.

Two hours later, Hugh gave up, too, and headed back toward the house. Tom and Sally were sitting on the front steps, Jiggs lying at their feet. When Hugh came trudging up the steps, Sally looked over at Tom and laughed. "Here comes the coastwatcher," she said. Tom glanced up, then went back to reading *LIFE* magazine.

It was pretty amazing how much Sally and Tom looked alike—both blond, blue-eyed, and muscular. They looked more like brother and sister than Sally and Hugh did. Hugh was more like Daddy, with dark hair and eyes. And skinny.

Sally was strong as a mule. She could outrun most of the boys in her class. When Sally and Hugh were younger, one of her favorite tricks had been to sit on him and twist his arm behind his back. But he had a secret weapon—he was smart. He'd figured out pretty quick how to stay one step

ahead of Sally. And they'd gotten along fine all summer—until Tom came.

Hugh sat down on the step next to Sally and brushed the sand off his legs.

"What are coastwatchers, anyway?" Tom said.

"Oh, that's just something Hugh made up," Sally said.

"I did not!" Hugh shouted. "That's a big lie, and you know it!" He looked over at Tom. "You really don't know?"

Tom shrugged. "No. I can guess—somebody who watches what's happening on the coast. Is there more to it than that?"

"We got the idea from hearing about the coastwatchers out in the Pacific, on those islands," Hugh said. "People like missionaries and coconut planters and traders. They provide intelligence about the enemy—what Japanese ships might be doing, that sort of thing."

"Yeah," Sally said. "They have special short-wave radios and secret codes and all. Hugh eats up that kind of stuff."

"Hey, Hugh," Tom said. "How about teaching me your secret code?" He was grinning.

Sally laughed. Hugh could have smacked her. Last summer she had been just as excited about coastwatching as he was. He got up and went inside, slamming the door behind him. He avoided Tom and Sally for the rest of the afternoon. Right after supper he excused himself and went to his room.

\* \* \*

Something woke Hugh up. A mosquito, or Jiggs down at the end of the bed, scratching a flea. He knew it had to be after

midnight because the house was so quiet. Maybe he was just thirsty.

He went into the bathroom, pulled the blackout curtains shut, and turned on the light. He was starting to fill a glass with water when he noticed Tom's shaving kit lying on top of the wicker clothes hamper. It was the first time he'd seen it. It looked almost exactly like Daddy's, leather with a zipper, except Tom's was brand-new, and it had initials on it in gold—TMF, III.

Hugh carefully unzipped the kit. There wasn't much in it—a toothbrush, toothpaste, a hairbrush. He pulled the kit open wider and saw a razor. There was no blade in it, and the little package of blades in the kit was unopened. He picked up the razor and pretended to give his cheek a couple of swipes. Then he put it back. The only other thing in the kit was a jar of Mum deodorant. He gave his underarm a little sniff. A little salty, maybe, but not bad. Still, he put a tiny dab of Mum under each arm, just for kicks. Then he zipped the kit back up and finished filling the water glass. He turned off the light, went back to his room, and stood at the window, sipping his water and looking out to sea.

The moon was out. It was nearly full. The tide was high, the waves crashing against the beach. Things were white on black, like in a photograph negative. There was just a little breeze—the sea oats were barely moving.

The moon went behind a cloud just for a moment, but then the cloud moved and Hugh saw a little flash of light out in the water.

## Chapter Four

**H**ugh held his breath. Something was out there. Something moving sideways. And it was in close. Even without binoculars Hugh could see the rippling white wake on the moonlit sea. He felt the hair rise on the back of his neck.

He went to his door and stood there for a moment listening, his heart beating fast. All he heard was the thumping of the fan overhead and Jiggs scratching himself. He took a deep breath and then he slipped downstairs, Jiggs jingling along behind him. He grabbed the binoculars and went out on the porch. Standing at the top of the steps, he gazed out toward the water.

The thing was still out there, moving very slowly now. He could see something black sticking up out of the water just ahead of the wake. He stepped back into the shadows.

Suddenly Hugh was shivering. He hurried back inside. From halfway up the stairs he heard Jiggs barking outside. "Shoot!" he muttered.

He went back down and let Jiggs in. Then he ran softly upstairs to his parents' room and eased their door open.

Daddy was lying on his back, his arm over his eyes, snoring a little.

"Daddy!" Hugh whispered.

His father groaned and started to roll over. Hugh shook his arm. "Daddy! Please wake up!"

Daddy sighed. "What is it, son? A nightmare?" He patted Hugh's back. "Go on back to bed. You'll be fine—"

"Daddy! It's the sub! The one I told you about!" He was trying to whisper, but it wasn't working. "It's out there—you have to see—please get up! Hurry!"

"Oh, Hugh..." It was Mama.

"Now you've waked your mother," Daddy said, but he pushed the sheet back and sat up.

Hugh rushed over to the window. "Hurry!"

His father seemed to be taking forever. By the time he got to the window, Hugh was looking wildly up and down the beach for the periscope. It was gone.

"Where is it, Hugh?" Daddy said. "I don't see a thing."

"It's gone now...but it was out there, I know it was!" Tears were stinging his eyes.

"Hugh." In the moonlight Hugh could see his father shaking his head.

"It *was* out there," he said again. "I saw it."

"You must have been dreaming," Daddy said. He took Hugh by his shoulders and walked him back to his room. "Get some sleep," he said. He pulled the sheet up and kissed Hugh on the forehead. "God bless."

Just before the door to their room closed Hugh heard his

mother say, "Maybe you'd better have a talk with Hugh while you're here. He's obsessed with all this war stuff. When he's not lying on a sand dune staring through those binoculars, he's shut up in his room fooling with that scrapbook."

Hugh sighed. After a few minutes he got out of bed and went back to the window. He stood there a long time, hoping to see the sub again. But all he saw was the moonlight on the water. And then some clouds drifted in front of the moon, and everything was dark.