

Again, I glance at my wristwatch, the only reliable measure of time in this submerged world. Day and night are indistinguishable under the water. I try again to submit to my weariness. I tip the flask for a mouthful of rum and stuff it into my pocket with the flashlight and letter. My eyelids droop, yielding to the blissful beginning stage of sleep when—

A shock wave rips through the sub.

*What the bloody hell?*

The boat convulses as I wobble to my feet, hard pressed to rise, unsure how to react. I crash to the ground, landing on my side with a thud. The pain in my hip spreads like a raging fire down my leg.

What happened? An explosion? Caused by what—a contact mine?

*Get up. Do something.*

Water floods into the vessel's nose, causing the sub to plunge into a rapid dive. The aft section rears up and hurls me against the bulkhead door. The agony from the impact steals my breath, and I struggle to remain conscious. The lights flicker and die. Ready to yield to my own demise, to embrace the permanent slide into darkness, I'm called back by a nerve-shattering jerk.

*We've hit bottom.*

The boat is now an inescapable tomb. In the background, a hissing pipe wakens me again to a grim reality. The submarine is dead in the water, and soon we all will be too.

“Ahh!” a seaman shouts. “Me leg.”

“Mary, Mother of God, help me,” another pleads.

Through the dark corners, desperate moans fill the foul air. Tepid seawater collects on the floor and begins to rise. By a sheer act of will, I gather my wits and check my pocket. The miniature flashlight and the rum are where I placed them prior to the blast. I click on the light. It still works.

Woozy, I fight through the shock and peruse the eerie space. The ray is too thin, but I wade through the water with deliberate steps anyway. As fortune would have it, I locate a sub torch floating nearby.

The stronger beam from the lamp reveals the devastation around me. A dozen mangled bodies, men who an hour ago laughed, played cards, discussed politics and war, and spoke of their women back home and in the ports they'd visited.

Will this be my fate, to join these poor souls as they rest for eternity in a steel casket under the sea? It would be better to die a quick death than to experience the drowning or suffocation that awaits. Something warm and wet trickles down my neck. I reach a hand back and return it covered with blood. A gash somewhere on my head? There's no time to waste searching for it.

“Oi, mates. Can anyone hear me?”

Silence.

I aim the beam at the bulkhead door, which seals this section from the invading water at the blast site. This buys precious minutes, but the portal creaks under the immense pressure. Streams seep through the rubber seal, rising in the engine room bilges. Time is short, and soon the flood will occupy the last empty spaces—my lungs and those of the three crew members who’ve survived. Assuming the men on the other side of the engine room door were either killed by the blast or have drowned by now.

Before he was shot down, Edward talked about his fascination with surrealism. Paintings with unnerving, illogical scenes. Strange characters emerging from everyday objects. “The product of an overactive, confused mind,” I’d responded, mocking him. But the scene in front of me changes my perspective.

Standing amongst the dead, still very much alive, I imagine myself as a vital organ in the body of an expired creature. A healthy heart circulating new blood throughout a steel frame, as I resurrect mariners into ghosts who will live forever on the seafloor. Now *this* is surreal.

*Concentrate, Oliver. Gain control.*