

Mike Danford Adventure Series #1

SUBMARINE SPY

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For Al Erickson -
who never shied away from
having an adventure
with me!

CHAPTER ONE

A STRANGE SIGHT

Mike Danford wiped the sweat from his forehead as the afternoon sun baked his broad shoulders. Icy saltwater washed across his bare feet. Flying chips of barnacle stung his skin as he continued hammering at the oily pilings.

Mike loved working at Seacrest Marina. Even now, when he had to chip barnacles off the elevator used to lift boats out of the water and up into the storage building above. It's the perfect way to earn extra money during spring vacation, he thought.

"Mike! Look out!" The sudden shout from high overhead stopped Mike in mid swing. "Runaway boat!" For a second he hesitated, wondering if this was a joke. Standing on the elevator he couldn't see the boat inside the building above. But then he heard the wheels of the boat dolly thundering like a freight train and knew he only had seconds to act.

Mike saw the bow of the runaway boat break through the safety gate fifty feet over his head, sending splintered wood in every direction. He spun around to the open side of the platform and dove headfirst into the icy waters of Admiralty Sound, praying the boat would miss him. As he plunged deep below the surface, the cold water stabbed at Mike's skin like needles. His eyes stung from the salt in the water, but he forced himself to keep them open. Pushing against the green water, his powerful arms and legs stroked and kicked. But he had moved only a few feet before he heard, and then felt, the thirty foot cabin cruiser crash through the floor of the elevator he had been standing on moments before. The impact created a great wave of seawater that picked Mike up and tossed him through the air like a piece of driftwood. When he splashed down again he was looking up at the bottom of the boat.

The cruiser paused, standing straight up for a split second, then began falling directly toward Mike. His heart pounding, he kicked wildly, but could only watch as the towering vessel fell, its twin brass propellers threatening to slice him to pieces.

For an instant, Mike saw something strange on the bottom of the boat. He didn't know what it was, but it didn't look like anything he had ever seen. Seconds later the white fiberglass hull smashed into the water only inches from his head.

The force of the impact sent Mike flying on a second wall of water. He

tried to swim to safety but the power of the wave grabbed him like the hand of a giant and flung him toward the gas dock. In the next moment everything went black as he slammed headfirst into a piling.

"Mike! Can you hear me?" The voice seemed to echo from the far end of a tunnel as Mike struggled to wake up. Slowly, he began opening his eyes, blinking rapidly as the harsh sunlight flooded in. Finally he realized he was lying on the cold, wet wood of the marina gas dock. A blanket covered his shivering body as several people huddled around. One of the faces staring down at him was saying something.

"Mike. It's Josh. Are you okay?"

As the fog cleared, Mike looked at the frightened face through blurry eyes. He finally recognized it to be his best friend, Josh Roberts.

"Josh?" he said slowly, "What are you doing here?"

Josh broke into a wide grin at the sound of his friend's voice. "Oh, I had nothing better to do so I thought I'd come down and watch you sleeping on the job."

Mike raised up on his elbows and looked at the crowd that had gathered. He mentally checked each part of his body and decided that, except for the awful pain at the back of his head, he was more-or-less okay. "Very funny, Joshua. Why don't you be useful and help me up."

Before Josh could reply, another voice interrupted. "Whoa there, young fella, you just stay put."

The voice was that of Captain Washington from the fire department, who was pushing through the crowd. "We'll just have a look at you before you go running off." Just then an aid car, its lights flashing, pulled up behind the captain's car.

Even without his booming voice, Captain Washington would be a hard man to refuse. His six-foot frame, big muscles, and firm jaw left little doubt who was in charge.

"Honest, Cap, I'm really okay," Mike pleaded.

The dark brown skin of the captain's forehead wrinkled into a concerned frown. "How about you let us be the judge of that?"

Mike resigned himself to his fate as the Emergency Medical Technicians started poking and prodding his body. The crowd began moving off, and Josh sat on the railing of the dock, enjoying his friend's predicament.

"Your name, please," a young firefighter asked, filling out a form.

"Mike Danford...er...Michael James Danford."

"Age?"

"Seventeen."

"Height and weight?"

"Five foot eleven, a hundred-sixty pounds."

"Hair color is light brown . . . what color are your eyes?" the firefighter asked.

"Why do you need to know . . . oh, never mind. They're green."

The questions and exam seemed endless. Finally, Captain Washington stood, removing a stethoscope from his ears. "Well, there are no broken bones and it doesn't look like you have a concussion. You do have a nasty bump on the head, though. I'd suggest you have a doctor take a look at it."

"Thanks Cap, I'll do that."

The Captain turned to Josh. "You'd best get your friend here home and into some dry clothes."

"Sure thing, Cap," Josh replied. He jumped down from the railing and extended a long, muscular arm to Mike. "Come on, water boy, time to get you beached."

It was only then that Mike noticed that Josh's clothes were also dripping. "How come *you're* all wet?" he asked his friend.

Josh gave him a grin and said, "How do you think you got out of the water?"

Mike looked at his friend and rescuer and said, "Thanks Josh. I owe you one."

"I know," Josh grinned back.

With Josh's help, Mike stood up, holding onto the railing to steady himself. Then he reached in his pocket and pulled out a couple of soggy watermelon-flavored Jolly Ranchers. "Want one?" he asked Josh seriously. Josh gave him a sick look. "There's nothing wrong with these," Mike said. To prove his point, he unwrapped one and popped it in his mouth. "Just a little salty," he reported. Josh just shook his head in disgust.

As they climbed the ramp from the dock up to the parking lot, Mike and Josh looked over at the scene of the accident. A crew of men were moving a crane into position on the dock to raise the boat that had almost crushed Mike. The sight of the smashed elevator sent a chill up Mike's spine. I could have been killed, he thought with a shiver.

"How'd it happen, anyway?" Josh asked.

"I don't know," Mike answered, slurping around the Jolly Rancher. "I was working down on the elevator and just heard someone yell something about a runaway boat." He paused for a moment, sucking on the candy, staring at the scene below. Then he forced himself to stop shivering and decided to lighten the mood. He grinned at Josh and said, "The next thing I knew I was looking into your ugly face!"

"Very funny. You must still be delirious."

Josh was slightly taller and bigger than Mike, with darker brown hair. The two had been best friends since the second grade.

The police arrived and talked to Mike for a few minutes, then the boys climbed into Josh's red '67 Mustang and drove the three blocks up the hill to the Danford house. After hot showers and changes of clothes -- Josh always seemed to have at least half his clothes at Mike's house -- Mike got a couple cans of pop and joined his friend in the family room. The rest of the afternoon was spent telling and re-telling the story to Mike's parents, his two sisters, and the many friends that stopped by.

The only other interruption in the afternoon was a quick trip to the doctor. "Really, Mom, I'm okay," Mike had pleaded.

"That's for the doctor to decide," was her firm answer. "If I can have my appendix removed by a cook in a little shack on top of a mountain in Nepal, you can have a bump on the head looked at by a doctor in Seacrest."

Mike sighed and resigned himself to his fate, but made Josh go along with him.

"Did that really happen to your mom?" Josh whispered to his friend, always amazed at her stories.

Mike nodded. "One of the other climbers did the surgery while a doctor told him what to do over the radio." Mike's mother was a freelance writer who sold articles to magazines around the world. Before settling down to raise her family, she had traveled all over, met dozens of interesting people, and been on many hair-raising adventures.

"No concussion, and no serious injury," the doctor reported an hour later. Mike smiled and let out a relieved sigh.

"Can't you operate, just to be sure?" Josh said from across the chrome-and-white treatment room.

"Afraid not," the doctor laughed. "But if it'll make you feel better, I'm giving Mike a tetanus shot, just in case."

Josh grinned and Mike moaned, but took the shot without complaint.

That night the boat accident was at the top of the news and on the front page of the paper and internet sites. The small town of Seacrest wasn't big enough to have its own newspaper or television, but reporters from the nearby big cities had flocked to the scene. By the time they got there, though, the boat was gone and Mike had already left.

"Oh no!" Mike groaned as the TV news showed a picture of him from the previous year's school annual. "I look like I just woke up!" Although Mike was obviously younger in the picture, he had the same straight hair pushed back across his eyes, and the same tanned skin. The photographer had snapped the

picture at just the wrong second, though, and Mike's eyes were half closed.

"Don't worry," Josh laughed, "everyone will just think you were hit by the boat and feel sorry for you."

Later, the Danfords and Josh had just sat down to dinner when there was a knock at the door. Mike answered it.

"Mike! Are you all right?"

It was his boss, Jordan Washington, Captain Washington's son, and owner of the marina. Though he was as tall as his father, Jordan had a much thinner build.

"Sure, Jordan. It's just a little bump on the head." Mike waved for his boss to come in.

"I was up in Conroy all day meeting with some people. Dad called me on my cell phone and told me about the accident. I can't believe this could happen!"

"Well, I'm okay, but the boat probably isn't," Mike said.

"No, it's not," Jordan answered, relaxing a little now that he saw Mike was fine. "I talked to Jake before coming over here and he said it was totaled." Jake Burton was another worker at the marina. "It's the owner's own fault, though. The boat belongs to that weird guy, Elmer Baker."

"Isn't that the guy who won't let anyone near his boat?" Josh asked.

"That's right," Jordan replied. "That's what caused the accident. He was trying to move the boat out of its compartment by himself and lost control of it."

The marina stored boats on three floors. Each boat had its own space, but some people paid extra for a compartment they could lock. When a boat owner wanted to go for a cruise, their boat would be taken out of its space, moved over to the elevator platform at the end of the building, and lowered into the water.

Mr. Danford, a wise-looking man in his early forties, spoke up. "Why won't this man let anyone near his boat, Jordan?"

"No one knows, Ben. He keeps it locked up and moves it himself on a special dolly. That is, he did before tonight. From now on we have a new policy at Seacrest Marina: only employees move boats!"

"Good decision," Mr. Danford said, looking at Mike.

"You'd think the man would at least come over and apologize for almost killing our son!" Mrs. Danford said. "Well anyway, it's over now. We'd better have dinner before it gets cold. You'll join us, won't you, Jordan?"

"Oh, no thanks Laura, I've got to get down to the marina and survey the damage." With that, Jordan said his goodbyes and left.

The boat accident was all they talked about during dinner. Mike's head

still hurt but he was feeling much better. Afterward, Mike couldn't stand being locked up in the house anymore, so he and Josh took a walk in the warm spring air. Eventually they ended up at Seacrest's waterfront.

The town of Seacrest sat at the edge of Admiralty Sound. Protected from the ocean by a peninsula, Admiralty Sound was usually calm. Seacrest itself was also very quiet, except for the summer tourist season when people would flock there to boat, fish, sail, scuba dive and sun themselves on the beach. Small shops and restaurants lined the main road along the water. The rest of the town was made up of tree-lined streets and attractive homes on the steep hillside overlooking the Sound.

Mike and Josh walked to the marina and sat on the pier railing. Looking down toward the water they saw workmen repairing the damaged elevator under powerful floodlights. A cool breeze carried the smells of Admiralty Sound across the dock. Sucking on a strawberry-flavored Jolly Rancher, Mike took a deep breath and said, "I love the smell of salt water!"

Josh turned to him with a grin. "I know," he said. "You tell me that every time we come down here."

Mike pretended to be mad and knocked Josh off the railing. The two were having a friendly wrestling match when Jake Burton, a crusty old sea veteran, walked up and interrupted. After asking about Mike's health, the conversation turned to the salvage of the boat.

"It were just plain loony," Jake drawled. A lifetime resident of Seacrest, Jake's wind-worn face had seen sixty years of boats enter and leave the tiny cove. Running a crooked hand through his pure white crewcut, Jake looked perplexed.

"You hadn't even been yanked out'o the water before that Elmer Baker feller was on his cell phone callin' fer a crane. Twern't twenty minutes before the monster got here and Baker had his own divers going after the boat. Then he made us all leave before his crew brought the thing up. I tell ya it's just plain spooky."

"I wonder what he's trying to hide," Josh said. When Mike didn't answer, Josh looked over and saw him staring into space. "Uh oh, I've seen that look before."

Still lost in thought, Mike ignored his friend. "Jake, after the police interviewed everyone else, did they talk to Baker?"

"Well now, that's another strange thing," Jake replied. "Soon as ole Baker caught sight of them police cars he high-tailed it outta there. I never did see if the police cornered him. Didn't much matter, though. Everyone said it were just an ac-see-dent."

Mike suddenly jumped down from the railing. "Well, thanks Jake. I guess

we'll high-tail it outta here ourselves," he said quickly. Grabbing Josh firmly by the arm and ignoring his objections, Mike dragged Josh off the pier toward the street.

"Uh, see you later Jake," Josh yelled over his shoulder. Then softly to Mike, "What's the matter with you? Did that blow on the head soften your brain?"

Away from the other people now, Mike stopped and looked at Josh. "Just the opposite, my brain finally started working! I didn't remember it until just now when Jake was talking about the boat . . ."

"Remember what? What are you talking about?"

"Something I saw just before I was knocked out."

Mike tried to continue but his words were drowned out by the high-pitched scream of a revved-up engine. Both boys looked up the street in the direction of the noise. Headed straight at them at full throttle was a sleek black motorcycle!