

Riel Nason



**Waiting
Under
Water**

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Chapter 1

Days since summer vacation started: 26

Days until The Point of No Return: 47

I'm making sea glass.

It's here on our beach, way back behind my house, waiting under the water like a rainbow broken into bits. What I mean is, when the tide goes out, it will be almost the same as when the rain stops — then you'll see the colours left on the shore, bright and shining in the sun.

My glass is red and dark blue, green, amethyst and amber, white and turquoise. It's parts of vases and plates and bowls that I bought at yard sales and smashed with a hammer (yes, it was fun). My best friend, Willa, gave me what was left of her piggy bank after she broke it to get the money out. Plus, I have the pieces of what used to be my grandmother's favourite pink candy dish. Thanks to her twenty-pound orange cat, Mr. McPuff. One day he swung

his huge fluffy tail like a baseball bat and hit a home run with the dish, right off her kitchen table.

I keep my glass in a giant sack made of ten window screens all attached and sewn end to end. Dad helped me put it together. There are small rocks and sand in with it, and the whole contraption lies flat, anchored in place right below the tide line.

Really, I'm not making the sea glass, the ocean is. The waves do the work. Mother Nature is the big boss and I'm just the project manager, checking in on things now and then. The Bay of Fundy has the highest tides in the whole world, and they keep moving the glass around, pushing and pulling it, tumbling and swirling it, over and over. The screens let the water and sand go in and out but keep my rainbow from getting lost. The sharp edges of the glass rub against sand and rocks and get smoother, the teeniest bit at a time. Pointy, jagged parts become rounded. Dangerous shards turn into polished gems.

Of course it takes a while. The regular sea glass people find around here and on beaches all over the world is usually at least ten or twenty years old, maybe more. But when I first started the project four years ago, when I was eight, I didn't know how long I'd have to wait. I thought maybe the sea glass

would be ready for the Science Fair in grade five. Then maybe grade six. Except it wasn't and that was fine. It's not something that can be sped up or rushed; the time it takes is the time it takes.

Dad says my patience is very mature and that I'm an "old soul." I didn't know what it meant when I was younger. So he explained that it was as if the soul or spirit inside me already had some worldly experience, and that I could be pretty relaxed about everything this time through because I'd lived a life before. I thought it sounded so awesome and special, like part of me was recycled — and recycling and reusing is so crazy important for the earth. Dad says I can calmly go with the flow — like the flow of the water, in and out. Think about it: the tide never forgets what it's doing. It doesn't worry about how long it's taking, or try to speed up.

But time mostly goes slow for kids anyway. I never believed the old ladies who would smile at me in the grocery store and then say to Mom (like it was some legally required statement I heard it so much), "Oh, enjoy it while you can, they grow up so fast." Years passing by wasn't a big deal. I didn't consider it.

Or at least not until two months ago. That's when Dad called Mom and my brother, Jacob, and me into

the dining room for a family meeting and made the big announcement that would lead to The Point of No Return. Now I track time. All the time, all of the time. Sometimes I count up, adding days together, but more often I subtract. I count down, think of what's been used. Ten, nine, eight. Deep breath. I like to know what's gone and how much I have left. I'm not sure if it helps me feel any better about the whole situation or not.

But here on our beach is the best place to forget everything for a while and only think of how beautiful it is. I've come down to the shore my whole life. In our living room there's a framed picture of my tiny baby footprints in this sand. Along the beach there are patches of grey and almost-purplish rocks shaped like perfect ovals. Some are speckled with white dots, so they look like petrified eggs laid by a prehistoric bird. As I walk the waves come in, swell and crash, then ripple and froth to my feet. I love listening to the water.

I'm taking the really, really long way back home, walking a giant loop. I go from our beach down to the public beach. It's busy this afternoon, like always. You can tell who the tourists are. They have a lot of stuff with them — towels and blankets and umbrellas and shade tents and folding chairs.

They usually have big red or blue coolers of food and drinks. At the shore they freak out as if the water is made of just-melted ice cubes. Then when they leave they take a few of the egg-shaped rocks with them. The rocks make big bulges in the bottom of their beach bags.

I also see two men I don't recognize as any of the 474 people who live in our village of St. David's, and who really don't look like tourists either. First of all, they're both wearing jeans, which are definitely not beach clothes. Pants are pretty tricky to swim in. Their shirts are matching green golf shirts with white trim on the collars and sleeves. One of them is writing things down on a clipboard. The other has two different fancy cameras hanging across his chest. That guy is pointing, marking out the edges of a certain area of the beach like he's trying to imagine something there. They talk and nod to each other as I get closer.

"Or down by those caves might work. As long as it's big enough and not too shadowy to shoot," one says as I'm walking by.

The other man nods. "It would be fine for just the two of them, and I bet Anne would love it. You know Phil doesn't care as long as she's happy. But once the guests arrive . . ." He stops talking and

seems to think for a bit. “Well, maybe, if we figure there’s enough room for everyone. We’ll go see. We definitely want to make it a day to remember.”

They must be planning for a wedding. There have been lots here. It’s more proof of how special and perfect this stretch of beach is. I hope the bride chooses near the sea caves. I would. You know, hypothetically. (I haven’t even decided if I’ll ever get married, let alone any time soon.) They aren’t scary deep caves, just scooped out areas of the reddish cliffs. It’s like a giant scraped away bits here and there with his fingernails, then pushed his thumb in hard a couple of places. Actually, the waves made the caves by *eroding* bits of the rock and you can only see them all at low tide. But everyone from around here knows enough to take the tide into consideration when they’re planning any event near the water. Anne might be the vice-principal’s daughter, who I know is getting married this summer.

I go across the public parking lot. At the edge there’s a little ice cream stand that looks like a lighthouse. It’s called Frosty Point Light Cool Cones and Treatery (long name, I know). The building is white with freshly painted red trim.

I start to walk down the main street. Most of the

houses in St. David's are more than a hundred years old. Lots of them are big too, with gables and turrets and plenty of gingerbread-house icing decoration along the roof. A couple have little porches up high, outside an attic window. Those are called "widow's walks" and were made so wives could see way out onto the ocean and watch for their husbands' ships to return home from their dangerous journeys.

I go by a white church with a tall steeple and then past another smaller one that isn't a church at all anymore but has been changed into a coffee shop and craft gallery.

Along the sidewalk are giant flowerpots in front of every other telephone pole. They have big bunches of red and white geraniums and pretty periwinkle-blue flowers that hang down. When I go by the tiny brick building that's both the post office and village hall, there are more flowers in a bed out front. Dark orange marigolds planted in the shape of a lobster seem to have popped up overnight.

The school has a brand new bright yellow New Brunswick flag (the other one was really faded), even though students are out for the summer. And "Fran's Fish and Hips," which is what everyone calls it because the "C" falls off at least once a summer and Fran and friends never seem to be in

any hurry to replace it, is “Fran’s Fish and Chips” again. Good as new.

All the little improvements are St. David’s way of looking its best for the visitors who come in July and August, like the tourists I just saw at the beach. We’re not a big, rockin’, must-see destination where people come and stay for days at a time. There are plenty of other seaside places like that — with double-page spreads in the New Brunswick guidebook advertising their fancy food festivals, big outdoor concerts or nationally known sandcastle-building contests.

People stop here for an afternoon, maybe a picnic, a quick swim, an ice cream, a browse in our two craft shops and galleries, a quick stroll down this street. Not much exciting happens here, which is fine with me. (Although I certainly wouldn’t object if something did.) St. David’s is keeping calm, cool and collected. And having my own personal backyard beach to hang out on any time I want is awesome.

When I’m almost home, I notice one more late-breaking village improvement. Except maybe I shouldn’t call it that since I know for sure it’s not on the usual St. David’s summer to-do list. In fact, I’ve never seen it done before and Jacob always joked

it would be a sign of the Apocalypse if it ever took place. Across the street a man is taking down old Mrs. Wright's Christmas lights. Yes, it is summer and, yes, I said Christmas lights. They've been up permanently for years and years and years — probably since before I was born. They used to circle every window and the front door, then go along the porch and roof. Now the cords are all criss-crossed, saggy and dangling so the white house looks like a big dot-to-dot drawing a kindergartener did a messy job on.

As I walk through my front yard I can tell that the man up the ladder is Bobby McIsaac, who works for the village. (He's basically the one-man St. David's Parks and Recreation department.) I don't get it. I wonder what the deal is?

Then, since I'm not paying attention to where I am going, I bang right into something on my lawn. It's a "For Sale" sign. I hurt my shoulder bumping into the post and then the hanging sign swings forward and back and spans me on the butt. Owwww. Great. I look around but I don't think Bobby or anyone else saw it happen. The sign is another new thing, a change, but it is unequivocally not — in no way ever — an improvement.

And I know all about the what and when and why

of it even though I wish I didn't. It also has nothing to do with anyone except our family.

I feel a twitch in my throat and I make a loud "Hummph" sound that I can't control. "Hummph. Hummph." It's not a hiccup though. I take a long deep breath in through my nose and blow it out slowly through my mouth. Again. And again.

"Hummph."

Jacob was right. For Sale Sign of the Apocalypse indeed.