



orca sports

Dead in the Water

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chapter one

The sky and the sea were almost the same shade of gray, and I wasn't sure which was wetter. Spray from the waves flew into the cockpit, cold and salty, and rain pelted down viciously from above. I shivered and gripped the wheel more tightly. Across the cockpit, the others were a blur of brightly colored Gore-Tex. I couldn't see a thing through my glasses.

The bow of the boat lifted on a huge wave and plunged down, landing with a

shuddering crash. It felt like hitting cement. At least cement would be dry, I thought, as a sheet of icy water slapped the side of my head. My shoulders ached from hanging on to the wheel as ten tons of speeding fiberglass fought against me, trying to turn into the wind. We were heeled way over to one side, the starboard rail almost buried in the water. The sails needed to be adjusted, but no one was volunteering. I gritted my teeth and tried to ignore the queasiness in my stomach. If I threw up now, the others would never let me live it down.

Then Patrick yelled, “Man overboard!”

My heart leapt into my throat, and my stomach felt like I’d swallowed a chunk of ice. Who was it? I squinted through my rain-splattered lenses. The blur of Gore-Tex turned into Olivia and Blair. Joey was missing.

We all sprang into motion. Olivia grabbed the man-overboard pole and threw it into the water. Its weighted bottom and float would hold it upright, and the bright orange flag flying six feet above the water would be a lot easier to spot than a person’s head.

I swallowed nervously. Joey's head. Olivia stood behind me at the stern, holding onto the rigging for balance and pointing at the flag. I couldn't see Joey. I couldn't see anything at all in the water. Just steep gray waves and blowing spray.

"Don't take your eyes off that flag and don't stop pointing," Patrick shouted to Olivia. His voice was almost drowned out by the wind. I tried frantically to remember the man-overboard procedure. I'm not stupid, but my brain sort of freezes up under pressure.

"Get the boat on a beam reach," Olivia hissed into my ear.

"Olivia! Do your own job and let Simon do his." Patrick sounded annoyed, but I could have kissed her. Not that she'd be likely to let me.

Beam reach. I quickly twisted the wheel around, and the boat turned slowly to the right. Now the wind was coming at us sideways, or to use the correct sailing term, over our port beam. Instantly the boat flattened out to a more reasonable angle, the noise of the wind subsided to a muffled howl, and my brain started working better.

I glanced over my shoulder. Behind us, the flag was barely visible, its urgent orange hidden in the troughs between the waves. I hoped Joey hadn't been knocked out when he fell overboard. I hoped he'd swum to that pole and was just waiting for us to come back for him. My instincts were screaming at me to turn around and head back toward the flag before we lost sight of it, but I knew I couldn't do it. If I tried to head back now, we'd pass right by Joey without getting close enough to help him. *Jeopardy's* turning circle under sail was huge. I needed to give us some sea room to maneuver.

Blair and Patrick were on either side of me, ready to adjust the sheets—the ropes that control the sails—as soon as I gave the order. Now all I had to do was bring *Jeopardy* close enough to that orange flag. I wished someone else—anyone else—was at the helm for this. What if I messed up? What if Joey drowned? I had no idea if I'd gone far enough. I glanced behind me again. I couldn't see the flag at all now, just an endless jagged seascape of heaving gray water. I gripped the wheel

harder, twisted it to port and took a deep breath. “Coming about!”

As *Jeopardy*’s bow swung slowly through the wind, the jib sail started to flap slightly. Quickly, Blair released the jib sheets and let the wind push the sail across to the other side. Patrick braced himself against the boat’s motion, wrapped the port-side sheets around the winch and began cranking it in as fast as he could, his broad shoulders moving back and forth with the effort. We were now on a starboard tack and heading back toward that orange flag.

Now the big rescue was up to me, Simon Drake, five foot six and 120 pounds soaking wet. Which I was.

And I couldn’t see the flag. Couldn’t see a darn thing. I looked at Olivia for help. She shrugged, but she was still pointing, so I just kept heading in the direction where she’d last been able to see the flag. Patrick was right, I thought. Without a man-overboard pole, you’d never find a lost crew member. Not a chance. I imagined myself struggling in that cold water, mouth and eyes burning

with salt, fighting for breath and seeing the boat sailing away, leaving me behind. I shuddered. Goose walking over your grave, my grandmother would have said.

I hoped not.

Suddenly the man-overboard pole appeared, riding a wave and flashing its orange flag against the rolling gray. My heart sped up. Blair sprinted up to the bow, ready for the rescue. We were flying along, the sails taut.

Closer, closer. I caught my breath. Too close. We were headed straight for the flag and unless...

“Heads up!” Patrick yelled. “Turn into the wind and ease the sheets to slow down!”

Too late. *Jeopardy* plowed straight into the orange flag and it disappeared under the water. I couldn't believe it. I was shaking so bad I could hardly grip the wheel. I hadn't seen Joey, but if he was holding that flag... I thought I might be sick.

“Nice one!” Blair yelled, a look of disgust on his face.

Patrick shook his head in mock sorrow. “Lucky it was a drill. If that had been a real

person in the water, you'd just have killed him."

"Or her," Olivia put in. She sounded irritated, as usual.

I stared at them. Nothing was making sense. "Real person? But what about Joey?"

Then Joey's head popped up in the companionway hatch, a big grin on his face. "Did I miss something? I was just taking a dump. Man, that toilet stinks."

"Simon thought you'd gone overboard," Blair shouted. Everyone started to laugh. Even Olivia, who I didn't think knew how.

The boat gave a sickening lurch. I leaned over the rail to puke and tried to remember exactly what had made me think this sailing course would be a good idea.