Overboard

by Raley Howard

The fall was so unexpected Cory couldn't even close his eyes, feet sliding right off the upper deck of the yacht. He grasped frantically at Ryan standing next to him, but only succeeded in dragging him down too.

The water was a brick wall as he smashed into it. Frigid cold; all his limbs went numb the second he submerged. Even his brain seemed to halt at that crucial moment when he should have started pushing himself upwards. Luckily, the current forced his head up to air, clearing his head. He gasped deep to fill his screaming lungs, but a wave rushed over, splashing salt water down his throat and making him gag. Feeling in his limbs was gradually returning and he frantically started kicking and paddling his way to the boat. But the strong current held him back, and every time he tried to draw a breath a wave washed over his face, leaving him sputtering. Then, as if by a miracle, arms wrapped around him and began dragging him through the water. Suddenly many hands were on him, hoisting him up onto the safety of the boat.

The hard deck under his back assured him it was okay to breathe, but there was so much water in his lungs there wasn't any room for air. As if sensing his dilemma, someone started pushing fervently on his chest, until all at once his stomach and lungs turned and all the water he had taken in spewed out of his mouth with such intensity he had to roll over, pitching and pitching until he'd coughed it all out.

His throat burned and his lungs screamed and the air he sucked in hurt but it felt so good. As his breathing settled, he became aware of sounds around him, worried voices asking if he was okay. He started to say yes but all that came out was a croak and the effort sent him into another coughing fit. Arms on him again and he was hefted off the floor, a towel wrapped around him as he was plopped into a chair. Someone was drying his hair with a towel and Ryan crouched in front of him, saying something. His friend was dripping and he started to offer the towel, but Ryan pushed it back against him.

His teeth were chattering and the towel was warm and, now that his heart had stopped trying to burst out of his chest, exhaustion was setting in. He just meant to close his eyes for a few seconds but someone was patting his face and it was really annoying. He tried to swat the offending hand away but it started slapping harder. "Cory, hey, you can't sleep right now!"

He peeled his eyes open. "What?" He croaked, voice still weak and raspy.

"Hey, can you hear me?" Ryan asked. "The paramedics are gonna meet us at the dock, but you have to stay awake until then, okay?"

66

He nodded even as his eyelids slid down, and this time not even smacking was enough to open them.

"We're almost there, alright? Just a little bit longer."

The world rocked as the boat stopped sharply. Lots of feet pounding down the dock and then surrounding him, arms on him, feeling his face, shining lights in his eyes. He was briefly aware of being carried, and then all the energy left his body like a shock and he knew no more.

67