



Chapter One

Light Show

“Hey Mike, can you see me?” seventeen-year-old Mike Danford heard over his radio headset as he looked down at the boat five-hundred feet below.

“You’re just a speck on a bigger speck,” Mike told his best friend Josh Roberts.

Mike had won the parasailing trip in a charity raffle. Now here he was, on a bright sunny day, flying over Admiralty Sound hanging from a special parachute being towed by a powerful boat far below.

“This is spectacular!” Mike said into the radio. To his left he could see his hometown of Seacrest and the marina where he worked. In the distance to his right were the Tillicum Mountains on the peninsula. And all around him in the water below were sailboats, powerboats, and kayakers enjoying a day on the water.

“*I’m waving at you!*” Josh’s voice came over the radio. Looking between his feet at the white speck of the boat below Mike could see the a smaller speck waving.

“I see you!” Mike said into the radio. He didn’t have to shout since it was almost silent, except for the breeze passing his ears. *It’s so peaceful up here,* Mike thought.

In the next moment there was a bright flash of red light and a jolt. Mike began to spin wildly as he hung from the parasail, the horizon flipping from above him to below him as he was whipped around. In horror he realized that the tow line had snapped and he was being swept away in the wind.

Mike looked up desperately at the canopy of the parasail – it seemed he had absolutely no control over it. As he plunged

downward toward the water he saw that the parasail had ripped open and was barely slowing his fall.

"Mike! Mike!" he heard Josh's voice shouting over the radio, but Mike had no time to answer. He was careening sideways over the boats and kayaks as he fell from the sky at a steep angle. He knew he had only seconds to act.

A hundred feet above the water Mike flew over a large cabin cruiser and saw something strange. Another boat blurred by, then three kayaks whose occupants were looking up at him and screaming. Mike sped past another couple boats, the water seeming to come at him like a freight train at high speed. He knew that hitting the surface would be like hitting a concrete sidewalk, but nothing he tried slowed his fall.

Ahead and below he saw a father and three small children in a rubber raft. He was headed straight for them and knew a collision would be deadly for them. With all his might he yanked on the only rope he could reach. The sail bent slightly and pushed him to his left, clear of the raft. The loose ropes and ripped nylon of the chute wrapped around Mike's legs as he spun out of control. A moment later he slammed into something and everything went black.

"Mike! Mike Danford! Can you hear me? It's Captain Washington."

Mike knew he should answer, if for no other reason than Captain Washington was three times his size and three decades his senior. But it felt so good to sleep, and he didn't think he could open his eyes even if he wanted to.

"Mike! You have to wake up now!"

The commanding voice of the fire chief penetrated farther into Mike's brain and he finally decided that, yes, maybe he should open his eyes. As he did, he saw the concerned face of Captain Leland Washington looking down at him.

"Mike, we really have to quit meeting like this," the Captain said, referring to the time Mike had been hit by a falling boat. Then his face broke into a grin. It was at that same moment Mike felt sharp pains and dull aches all over his body.

“I agree,” Mike said, holding his head in both hands. He tasted saltwater in his mouth, then realized he was soaking wet. “I need to change,” he said groggily, and started to get up.

“Just lie still, Mike. You probably have a concussion. We’re gonna take you to the emergency room and have you checked out.”

Mike tried to sit up. “No, no,” he protested. “I’m okay . . .”

Captain Washington gently held Mike down. “I think we’ll just let a doctor decide that.”

Paramedics arrived and started taking Mike’s vital signs – blood pressure, temperature, heart rate. They checked his eyes and confirmed that a trip to the hospital would be necessary. Just before they loaded Mike on a stretcher, a Coast Guard boat pulled up to the dock, and behind it the parasailing tow boat. Josh and Mike’s parents jumped out of the latter and ran to Mike.

“Mike! Are you okay?” Josh yelled as he pushed aside the paramedics and dropped to his knees beside his friend. Right behind him Mike’s parents crowded in.

“Yeah, I’m okay. What happened?”

“The tow line broke,” Josh answered, out of breath. “The parasail got all wrapped up in the loose line so it only slowed your fall a little, instead of gliding. You slammed into the mast of a sailboat and fell in the water.”

“The people in the sailboat pulled you out and brought you to the dock,” Mrs. Danford said.

“Which is where I came in,” Captain Washington boomed, and pushed the others aside, “and the paramedics need to finish their job. You’ll all have to talk to him at the hospital.”

“I guess that goes for me, too,” a young female voice said. The others turned to see a woman in her mid-twenties wearing a blue Coast Guard uniform and cap. “I’m Bosun’s Mate Second Class Tegland. I’ll be investigating this accident.”

“Yes, I’m afraid you’ll have to talk to him at the hospital,” Captain Washington said, even as the paramedics loaded Mike onto the stretcher and into the ambulance. “I believe he has a bad concussion.”

“Can I go with him?” Josh asked.

One of the paramedics said, "Sorry, only family can ride."

Captain Washington held up his hand and said, "It's okay, Josh is Mike's brother."

Everyone knew this wasn't technically true, but Captain Washington had been at the scene of the accident that had killed Josh's father many years before. He knew that Josh had been almost a part of the Danford family since then, and had been on many adventures with them.

The paramedic nodded, Josh jumped into the ambulance, and Mike's dad said, "We'll meet you at the hospital."

Two hours later the Danfords were huddled around Mike's bed in the ER, where Mike had been examined and scanned from head to toe. "No broken bones, no serious internal damage," the doctor reported, "only bumps and bruises. Except for his head. Mike has a moderate to serious concussion, and will need to stay here overnight for observation. After that, he'll have to take it easy for at least three weeks, but I believe he'll be fine."

Josh, relieved, flopped into an arm chair and said, "Great. When's dinner?"

Everyone laughed. Josh's appetite was famous all over school, and across most of Seacrest.

"I'll settle for a watermelon Jolly Rancher," Mike said. "The salt water left an awful taste in my mouth!"

Josh held up a bag of the candy. "Way ahead of you."

By the time Mike had been moved to a regular hospital room, word of the accident had spread across social media. His sisters Amy and Katie arrived and were glad to see him alive. He'd also received dozens of texts from friends, including their friend Sanjay who was on a trip. Jessica Kingston, a girl Mike liked who was on vacation with her family, called too.

But everyone could tell Mike was dazed and exhausted from the experience and it was decided most of them should leave. "I'm staying with him tonight," Josh said, and they all knew better than to argue with him. "As am I," Ben Danford said.

"Then we girls will go home and leave you to rest, Mike," Mrs. Danford said, giving him a kiss on the cheek. "And I'm sorry that

your prize almost killed you!”

Mike laughed even though it hurt. “That’s okay, Mom. This is certainly a raffle prize I’ll never forget!”

As the three women left, there was a knock at the door and the young woman Coast Guard investigator entered carrying a briefcase. “Excuse me, Mike, is it okay if I ask you some questions now?”

Mike was a little embarrassed to have her see him in his hospital gown, but said, “Sure, come on in. You’re . . . Bosun something?”

“Bosun’s Mate Second Class Tegland,” she said. “But you can call me Kaylee. Now, Mr. Danford --”

“Were you in charge of that forty-five?” Mike interrupted.

“You know about Coast Guard boats?”

Mike shrugged. “I work at the marina. And I own a submarine.”

“What’s a ‘forty-five?’” Josh asked.

“A type of Coast Guard patrol boat that’s forty-five feet long,” Kaylee said. “I’m not in charge, but second in command. My B-M-One gave me the lead on this investigation to give me experience. So, Mr. Danford --”

“You can call me Mike.”

“Okay, Mike. Tell me what happened out there.” Kaylee sat and pulled out a computer and started typing.

Mike shrugged. “Not much, really. I was flying along normally, and it was just amazing! It was quiet, and I could see forever. The last thing I remember is seeing Josh waving on the boat below, then I have a vague memory of waking up on the dock and seeing you and thinking what a big boat you came in.”

“So no memory of the incident at all?”

“No ma’am. Kaylee.”

“Did you ever feel like the crew of the tow boat didn’t know what they were doing, or wasn’t being very careful in their work?”

“No, not at all. They seemed totally professional.” She asked Mike’s dad and Josh the same question and got the same answer.

“Okay, that’s about it then,” Kaylee said as she stood. “We’ve impounded the boat for our investigation and we’ll keep you

advised. I guess there's really not much else you can tell me, but if you think of something, please call." She handed Mike her business card. As she left she said, "Hope you feel better soon!"

Kaylee had only been gone a few minutes when the captain of the tow boat and the owner of the parasailing company came in. Both apologized, and were glad to see that Mike wasn't more seriously injured.

When they had gone, Josh brought his phone over to Mike. "It's already all over the web," he said. Mike watched as Josh played five different videos of himself falling from the sky, all posted by people on the beach and in nearby boats.

"Ouch," Mike said, each time he saw himself slam into the mast of the sailboat. The videos also showed up on all the news channels that night.

Dinner was brought in to Mike, but his Dad and Josh had to take turns going to the cafeteria to eat. While his dad was gone Mike picked at his food but didn't really feel like eating.

"Want me to spoon feed you?" Josh asked.

Mike smiled. "No, I'm just not very hungry."

"Are you worried that this wasn't an accident? That it was a deliberate act and you're in mortal danger from somebody out to get you?"

Mike's stared at his friend in surprise.

"Why do you think your dad and I are both staying with you tonight?" Josh asked. "We talked about it while you were getting your MRI scan. It's not like that kind of stuff has never happened to us before."

Mike's whole body seemed to relax and he laid back against the pillows. "I was afraid to say anything. I was afraid you'd all laugh at me again."

Josh knew that his friend was talking about previous adventures they'd had, when evil people were out to hurt Mike. Sometimes not even Josh believed him until it was almost too late.

"Not this time," Josh said. "You can go to sleep and not worry. Your dad and I won't let anyone come near you. Except when the nurse comes to wake you every hour."

"What!"

Josh shrugged. “You have a concussion. That’s what they do to make sure you’re just sleeping and not drifting off into the land of the dead.”

“Who’s going to the land of the dead?” Mike’s dad asked as he re-entered the room.

“Me, if they keep waking me up all night,” Mike said.

An older-looking nurse came in the room to check Mike’s vital signs. “E. Santoni” Josh saw on her name tag. “What’s the ‘E’ for?” he asked.

“Esther,” said the nurse. “Like in the Bible.”

“Are you the one that’s going to wake Mike up all night?”

The nurse laughed. “Only until midnight when my shift ends.” Seeing the look on Mike’s face she said, “Sorry, but it’s standard procedure with a concussion. I’ll try to be as gentle as I can.”

“I won’t mind at all,” Mike said, “as long as you wake Josh at the same time.”

Josh groaned.

Ben Danford could see that his son was getting tired so suggested they pray together, then get some sleep. Mike didn’t argue and, after Josh had prayed for Mike’s safety and recovery, they turned the lights down low. Josh stretched out as best he could in a chair between the door and the bed, and Mr. Danford took the couch on the other side.

As promised, nurse Santoni came in at ten o’clock and gently shook Mike. Josh was awake as soon as the door opened, and he saw that Mike’s dad was also alert.

“Mike. Mike,” the nurse said. “I need you to wake up, Mike.”

“Hramphglaksf.”

Nurse Santoni smiled. “I need you to say something that makes sense, Mike.”

Mike’s eyes fluttered open and he mumbled, “I wanna go back to sleep.”

The nurse smiled again and said, “That’s it. That’s what I needed to hear.” She covered Mike back up and left the room. Mike was instantly asleep, but Josh and Mike’s dad took a little longer.

At eleven, and again at midnight, they went through the same

routine, and Josh thought this might be a very long night indeed. “I’m going home now,” the nurse said. “I’ll see you tomorrow if you’re still here.”

Mike nodded and he and Josh were instantly asleep again.

It felt to Josh like it was only five minutes later that the night nurse came in. He watched through blurry eyes and a foggy mind as she shook Mike awake. “Mike, I have your meds for you,” she said. “Mike, I need you to wake up now.”

The new nurse was much younger than Esther, with dark brown hair. Mike woke half-way and mumbled.

“I need you to take your meds, dear,” the nurse said. She held out a glass of water and a little cup containing four pills.

Mike didn’t actually say anything, but took the cup, leaned his head back, and began tipping the pills toward his mouth.

In a flash Josh came fully awake and leaped out of his chair and toward the bed. “Stop!” he yelled as he flew through the air, aiming for the pills in Mike’s hand.