THE WAVE

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CHAPTER 9

While I mow the lawn and whipper-snip the edges, I tell myself that if the cops knew I'd done it, they would have said so. 'They're just fishing,' I say out loud.

As I hide my empty spray can in the back corner of the shed, I see that Dad's hammer with the red handle is missing. 'Ed!' I yell in frustration. Dad left his tools to me. I made Ralph's new kennel with them and I'll use them one day when I build my own home. But Ed seems to think he can take them whenever he wants, and Mum lets him.

I look out the shed door. Ed's bike has gone. Good riddance.

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I'm sweaty and covered in grass clippings, so I have a shower before work. I close my eyes and let the water rain down on my head. I imagine all the stuff that's happened today washing off and running down the drain. I can only do this when Mum's out. If she's around and I'm in the shower for more than two minutes, she raps on the door and yells something about how precious water is.

When I finally get out, my phone's ringing up in my bedroom. I wrap a towel around my waist and walk, dripping, down the hall. It won't be Billy. We only ever text. It's either Aunty Jo – Dad's sister, who calls every couple of weeks – or it's Mum. Mum! I forgot to text her when I got home from the beach.

I climb the steep stairs to my room and pick up my phone just as it stops ringing. Three missed calls from Mum and a text: *Call me now!* She's such a worrier.

Hi Mum! I text. *Had a good surf.* I decide not to mention I got out of the water because it felt strange. I don't tell her about the cops' visit either. Or the awful new neighbour kid. *Cooked a big brekky.* That always makes her happy. *Did the mowing. See you tomoz. Max. X*

In my messy wardrobe, I find a pair of board shorts and my work T-shirt. It reads *Birin Island Surf School* in bright orange letters. I hate teaching tourists but it pays twenty dollars an hour.

My bedroom is small but I love it. Dad built it onto the house when I was four. Actually, he started it when I was four and finished it when I was seven. He was not what you'd call a fast worker. Sir Kevin Landlord never minded that Dad added bits onto the house. Ed says that should have been a sign that Kevin knew it would be knocked down one day.

Through the long, low window beside my bed, I can see into the place next door. The giant blow-up flamingo is floating in the plunge pool but there's no sign of the girl or her family.

My phone rings. It's Mum again.

'Max, thank god I got you,' she says. Her voice is high-pitched and tight, and she's tripping over her words. 'Are you at home?'

'Yeah,' I say, my skin prickling. *What's going on?* 'I texted you. Sorry I –'

She cuts me off. 'Listen carefully. You know those earthquakes that have been happening? There was another one out at sea this morning and it made a wave. A tsunami.'

'Tsunami?' I say, the word floating in the air, not making sense. Tsu. Nam. I.

'It's going to hit the coast, including Birin Island,' she says. 'You need to get out of there. Now.'

CHAPTER 10

'What?' I hurry to the window on the other side of my room, even though I can't see the sea from here. This sounds like something out of a film, not something that happens here. 'Mum, where did you hear this? Are you just worrying about how bad it *might* get?'

'I'm not exaggerating,' she says firmly. 'It's going to be big. I just tried to call Ed but he's not answering.' She normally stays calm in emergencies, but I can hear the panic roiling in her voice. 'Go see if he's in his garage. Keep me on the phone.'

'I don't think he's there,' I say.

'Go! Now!'

I hurry downstairs. Outside, I look around for a sign that other people have heard about this

supposed tsunami. But there's just the hum of a distant mower and Ralph, flopped in the shade under the verandah.

I want to get a look at the ocean, but our cottage is four streets back from the beach and all I can see are trees – and the huge house next door.

'You and Ed have to get off the island,' says Mum. 'Drive to the mainland. Go to Etsuko and Phil's house in the hills. Don't stop to take anything. Just your phone and Ralph.'

'What about you?' I ask as I reach Ed's garage. 'Your hospital's near the beach.'

'We're evacuating now.'

A car drives by, music drifting from the open window. If there really is a wave coming, shouldn't there be police sirens or something?

I look in Ed's window. His place is empty, a washed-up coffee cup and plate on the drainer, the bed a tangle of sheets. 'Ed's not here,' I say. 'I don't know where he is.'

Mum takes a shaky breath. 'Okay. Let me think … Here's what you're going to do. Ride your bike to the Singhs' place.' Priya Singh is a doctor who works with Mum. 'Priya's at home,' Mum continues. 'I know because she just texted me. I'll call her as soon as we hang up. Go with them. You'll need a car to get off the island – and to get to higher ground in time.'

Someone is calling her name in the background. They sound really freaked out.

'How long 'til the wave gets here?' I ask.

'They're saying an hour and a half.' She takes a shaky breath. 'Even if I left now, I wouldn't get to you in time.' Someone calls her name again. She says, 'Go to the Singhs' place *now!* Do you promise me?'

'I promise.'

'Go now!'

'Okay.'

'I love you. And I'll talk to you soon.'

'Love you too, Mum,' I say and end the call. My phone pings. In blaring capital letters, the message reads: TSUNAMI ALERT FOR THE COAST IN YOUR AREA: GOLD COAST, FELLS HEADS AND BARRON BAY. MOVE TO HIGHER GROUND IMMEDIATELY. EXPECT STRONG CURRENTS AND WAVES. FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS FROM LOCAL EMERGENCY SERVICES.

Into my mind flashes an image of the giant blue wave in that famous Japanese painting and a cold, scared feeling slices through me. This is real.