

Tides

Mara Oudenes-Cruz Ramos

Sun, sand and waves, three words that summarize what life is like at Sea Glass Beach. The normally quiet village is hosting a surfing festival with the biggest names and brands in the sport. The Kalani siblings; a lawyer and an instructor, and their friends; an investor and a librarian, are surrounded by new visitors, unexpected situations and a tide of emotions as they find themselves as amateur contestants in the world of professional surfing.

Tides by Mara Oudenes-Cruz Ramos

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*To my dear friends and fellow writers
Mary Neupane, Tarnya Iorns and Stephanie Wright
for reading my drafts, reassuring me that I'm doing the right thing,
falling in love with my characters and picking up
the pieces on the cloudy days.*

tide

/tʌɪd/

noun: tide; plural noun: tides

1. The alternate rising and falling of the sea, usually twice each lunar day in a particular place, due to the attraction of the moon and the sun.

1. Siblings

LUNA

Today will be a good day, a different day. I can feel it. There is a nice breeze, perfect for good waves, and even though it's only eight in the morning, the sun burns bright and hot. I park my car behind our store and look at the back seat. My little nephew Beau has fallen asleep in his car seat.

I live together with my two brothers and Beau. On Saturdays, the guys get up at five in the morning to catch some waves, and I bring my nephew with me to the store. Beau is two and a half years old. He thinks that he is a big boy, but for me he is just a little baby. I guess he will always be, no matter how old he gets. I love him like if he was my own son.

I grab my bags and open the door to unbuckle him from his seat. The sun shines on his face and he lets out a wail. I'm used to it by now. Beau is incredibly grumpy in the mornings, and is not amused when his auntie wakes him up to go to the store.

"Come on sweetie. You can lay down again when we are inside," I say softly while taking him out, and carrying him around the building towards the store entrance.

I open the door and start turning on the lights inside. We have made a cozy and safe corner for our little boy in the storage area with a bed, a TV, plenty of books and toys. Not that we can really keep him contained. Beau loves to play around the store and likes to charm the hell out of the customers, especially the female ones. Really good for the business I must admit.

I lay him down on the bed, where he rolls on his side and keeps sleeping. I hope he gives me a full hour of peace before he wakes up again. I look at him while he sleeps. He is such a beautiful little boy that has lost so much without knowing it. He looks a lot like his dad, my younger brother Dax, but he is wicked and cheeky like my older brother Skye. He has curly blonde hair like my brother and hazel eyes like his mom Natalie had.

Natalie died in a surfing accident when Beau was about three months old. Her body was thrown by a heavy underwater current against the reef. She got fatal injuries in her skull, and her column was broken in many places. Even though she was a very experienced surfer and advanced swimmer, it appears that she made the mistake of miscalculating the direction of the tide. It was a very stormy day and it took her straight to the reef. It took Dax a good year after her accident before he started surfing again.

I finish turning on the lights in the store and the displays. Our store, *Kalani*, is named after our surname and is located on a busy boulevard in front of the Sea Glass Beach. We sell all sorts of gear and apparel to practice surfing. Skye and our friend Kay Hale give surfing lessons to many of our customers.

Dad tried to begin this business right after he got married to my mom. Both of them were just out of high school back then. My mom did some secretarial courses and worked as a waitress, while my dad started selling wax and repairing boards for the visitors of the beach. He had a very small hut to service his clients. My brothers and I kind of grew in this wild and adventurous environment. The store grew, not without plenty of hardship, and became what it is today. It has changed location throughout the years, but I really love where we are now at the end of the boulevard.

My father, Asher Kalani, is an awesome surfer, just like his sons. Everybody loves to be around him. His father, my grandpa Joseph, was this big and jolly Hawaiian that taught him to love the waves. I

still miss my grandpa a lot. We used to sit by the docks, and he would tell me stories and share his candy bars with me. A couple of years ago, a bit before Beau was born, my father had a heart attack. His doctor recommended him to take it easy, and let me and Skye run the store and the surfing school. His stubborn head finally agreed, not before giving us a fight. He even stopped talking to us for a couple of days. Eventually, he moved to the mountains where he now teaches snowboarding and runs a bed and breakfast. He will never change.

Our parents divorced when I was seven years old, but we are very close with both of them. Our mom remarried at a later stage to a very lovely Spanish guy, but they didn't have kids of their own. I guess we were such a handful when we were younger, that she didn't want any more children. Our dad just dated and enjoyed life, but didn't remarry.

I open the front door wider to welcome the salty breeze into the store, and see the three figures sitting in the sand. Their boards are standing next to them and I feel happy and proud. I can recognize that Dax is sitting in the middle, as he is the tallest of the three, and he is flanked by Skye and Kay. The reason why they come so early on Saturdays, is to enjoy the water when there is nobody around. If there is something a surfer dislikes, is a crowded sea.

I move the display of sunscreen outside, our best selling product, and then walk back to the counter to start up the computer and payment system. The baby monitor next to the register is still silent, so Beau is thankfully still sleeping. I check on a couple of emails that we received from suppliers and forward them to Dax. Then I check on the appointments for today. Skye and Kay are booked solid and there is also a waiting list in case of a cancellation. I start up the music system, with of course the cheesiest surfing themed songs as the visitors love that. Me secretly as well.

"Not that shitty music again," Skye complains, coming in the store.

"Get your damn sandy feet out of the store. You are also dripping water everywhere," I reply, glaring at him.

We have changing rooms with bathrooms and showers right next to the store for the people that take the surfing lessons, but Skye almost never uses them. I don't know how he likes walking around sandy and sticky from the sea water.

"Well, get ready to shovel buckets full of sand, because I have seven lessons today. The first one starting in half an hour. It will be stupid to shower and change between each of them. Can you change the damn music? It is too early for that,"

My brother Skye and I are eternally arguing. Thirty one years old, bad tempered, eternal bachelor, and the guy that all the ladies in the boulevard drool over. Well, some guys as well to be honest. I guess he is sort of a good looking guy; muscular, with tanned skin, brown sun kissed hair parted on the side and green eyes, which normally are shaded by sunglasses. Skye leans on the counter and browses a supplier catalog. I really wish he would go and take a shower. His fishy scent is not a pleasant thing so early in the morning.

I hear laughter outside and see Dax and Kay coming in. Kay takes a peek around the store to see if Joan is in. Joan works for us on the weekends and studies during the week. The ultimate beach honey with a heart of gold, and Kay has a high school boy crush on her. Kay is very handsome and people adore him. Unlike Skye, who can be a rude ass half of the time, he is kind and sweet, sometimes even naive. He has black hair styled in a quiff, slanted caramel eyes and thick lips, and of course, he is as tanned as Skye. His father owns one of the restaurants here at the boulevard. Besides being a surfing instructor, Kay is a librarian during the week at the city university.

"What's so funny?" I ask, looking at them. They have at least showered and changed clothes.

"A kook that put hair wax on the board, and kept wondering why he kept falling the whole time," Dax answers with a giggle.

A kook is a surfer wannabe, we see way too many of them around here sometimes. Skye hates them, but Kay and Dax find them very amusing.

Dax is quite a complex guy. He can be juvenile and stupid in the weekend when he is around here. Whenever he sees a pretty girl, he can't help but stare and behave like if he is 15 years old. During the week, he is a respectable commercial lawyer at the head office of a chain of shopping malls. My little brother is 28 years old. His skin is not as tanned as Skye's, as he spends a good part of his time indoors in an office. His blonde messy curls are parted in the middle and reach the collar of his T-shirt. When he goes to the office he just slicks his hair back to look presentable. He has really pretty blue eyes. Skye says that Dax is the son of the milkman as nobody in the family has blue eyes. Me? I look just like Skye, but my skin is lighter as I also spend plenty of time inside the store or in my workshop at the back.

"Papa? Boy wake," says Beau, coming from the back while rubbing his eyes. Beau can't say his name properly, and since he started talking refers to himself as Boy so the name has stuck.

"Hey Boy! Little man, are you ready to go home?" Dax says while lifting him and kissing his cheek. Beau just nods and buries his face in his dad's neck.

"He didn't have breakfast at all. I left some wraps ready for you in the oven, just heat them for a couple of minutes. There is some fruit salad in a container in the fridge," I say to my brother.

"Thanks Luna. I will see you at home this afternoon," Dax says, kissing my cheek.

I wave goodbye to them, and look at the two guys in front of me that are eating the breakfast wraps that I made for them. Well, what is left of the first ones. All I see on the counter are pieces of empty aluminum foil. They eat like hungry wolves as they spend a great deal of energy while in the water. I always need to make sure that I have stuff around for Skye to snack on, otherwise he gets as grumpy as Beau.

Kay reads a magazine while Skye checks on the appointments for the day. He opens the little fridge that I have under the counter, and chugs down a bottle of juice without stopping to breathe. Skye is a pig.

"No way... no fucking way... did you know about this?" Kay exclaims in a surprised voice while turning the magazine towards us.

In the magazine, there is a full page ad for a surfing competition right here at this beach. I heard some rumors a couple of months ago. I even found it odd that big shot surfing companies wanted to come to this village, but never heard of anything concrete happening afterwards. I thought it was all forgotten. Now in front of us in print is the "Sea Glass Beach Surfing Festival" that will happen in ten weeks.

"Even Blue Smith is coming! Dude we need to sign up! It is a team competition, just like when we were in school. Do you remember those times Skye? How much fun we had?"

"I don't know. I haven't done competition in years and this is in only ten weeks. I don't think that is enough time to train," my brother says in a voice full of doubt, rubbing his neck in an anxious gesture.

"Dude, are you crazy? You give surfing lessons the whole week! You train every day and I have seen what you can do out there!"

"Okay, let's sign up. If we lose, at least we will have fun doing it," he says with a big grin.

If Dax signs up, then team Kalani will be back!

2. Grommet

DYLAN

I really hope that this is the place that I'm looking for. I didn't really write down any instructions on how to get here. Everybody just kept saying follow the road down to the sea, and you will arrive inevitably to the beach. I dislike navigation systems as the electronic voices irritate the hell out of me.

I moved recently to the west side of Sea Glass Beach, but I have not really taken the time to explore the whole place. Whenever I need something, I just head to the city which is just half an hour away. I'm trying to push myself to experience new things, and that is why I've booked this surfing lesson.

After the last turn on the road, it opens into a wide two way street, and I see the big and colorful signs welcoming me to the beach. The area in front of it looks like a boulevard and at least there is a big parking lot. After parking my car, I take the place in. It seems that I'm mistaken about this village. This is a very modern place and by the look at the directory at the entrance, it has much more than I anticipated. I need to find a store called Kalani and go straight to the counter.

I walk down the stairs as it is a two-storey area and I assume that the place I need is straight at the beach. I see that the boulevard is a very long line of buildings filled with establishments and with a wooden boardwalk. There are beachwear stores, restaurants, souvenir stores, there is even a radio station at the beginning of it, with their music blasting towards the beach area.

I always thought that places like this were meant to rest and relax, but for what I can see it is just a big beach party. It is close to eleven in the morning and the place is bustling with activity. They are

announcing some sort of surfing festival through the speakers, and the DJ seems very excited about a person called Blue Smith. There is the scent of fried fish in the air, and people walk around with bags of fries, yards of beer hanging from their necks, melting ice cream cones and some sort of curly pastry dusted with sugar. I need to make sure to find out where that one comes from as it smells amazing.

I keep walking on and in the middle of the beach area, I see white sails. As I get closer I see a bar in the middle surrounded by glass tables and chairs, beach beds and lounging sofas full with tanned people in swimsuits. There is even a small swimming pool where people are sitting just soaking their legs, as it is not big enough to swim properly. The more I walk around, the more out of place I feel. I should have at least worn shorts and sandals instead of jeans and sneakers, but I don't own those kinds of clothes. I was amused that I actually had something in my closet that was not a business suit, training clothes or pajamas. Anyway, my body is so pale at the moment that people should be grateful that I'm covered.

I look at my reflection in the windows, and at least I'm starting to look like a regular human being. My hair has grown back and it is a darker blonde than it used to be, and I have eyebrows again. It is funny how you don't even pay attention to your own eyebrows until you lose them.

I come from a busy city where I had my own e-commerce solutions business. People were amazed that at a young age, I had achieved what it takes other people a lifetime. I was only 32 years old at the peak of my career. When I got ill two years ago, I decided to sell my company for a fortune and enjoy my life, or the rest of what I had left of it. To my good luck, I healed, but the doctors recommended me to get out of the city and move to a place with a slower tempo. I'm not sure Sea Glass Beach counts as a slow tempo place, but I'm still curious.

I see a bunch of scattered surf boards at the end of the boulevard, so I must be getting closer. There is a big sign with beautiful hand painted art that says SURFING LESSONS with an arrow to a store. I see that I have arrived at my destination.

Heading inside, I see an impressive and colorful assortment of surfing boards. I head to the counter in the middle, where there is a beautiful blonde girl on the phone. She is the image of a model for a beach commercial. Golden skin and her straight hair is sun bleached. She looks at me with a smile and lifts her finger, asking for a moment. Her eyes are gray.

"Yup... that one... in large... I know. I know they run small, otherwise it would have been a medium... The black and white one... When can you get it delivered?... Great! I will let our customer know. Thanks," I hear her saying while I look around the store, then she hangs up the phone. "Hello! Good morning. What can I help you with?" she says with a bright smile.

"I'm here for a surfing lesson. My name is Dylan Harris," I say and she looks at the screen.

"Yup, got you here. I see you pre-paid it already so that is settled. Skye must be ending soon with the previous lesson. You can change into your swimsuit in the dressing room here next to the store. Here is the key for room number two. Inside there is a small safe for valuables, just pick your own four digit code after you close it. Don't forget to lock the room and tie the key to your wrist,"

"Oh... I... I'm sorry... I didn't know that I had to bring a swimsuit," I say, feeling my cheeks turning warm.

"Oh, that is not a problem," she says, waving her hand as if the issue is not important. "I have some spares. You must be about a medium, right?" she says, taking a bin out with folded swimsuits and I nod.

She hands me a pair of blue shorts with orange and white flowers on them. Quite different to what I would pick for myself, but I'm willing to try new stuff.

"Remember to take off your underwear, as I assume that you didn't bring a spare of that one either," she says with a teasing smile.

"And I assume that you don't have spares of those, right?" I say laughing.

"You are right Dylan. Hey, I'm Joan by the way," she says, offering a hand and I shake it.

"Nice to meet you Joan. Well, I will go ahead and get changed,"

I get into the changing room and put on the swim shorts. They are not half bad. I place all my valuables in the safe and lock the room. As I walk back to the store, I hear a deep voice ranting and what almost sounds like growls.

"There are people that are unskilled, but she was just fucking dumb! That is what she was Joan. I hate it when Luna books these kind of people for me. Why didn't she give her to Kay?" I hear a male voice say.

"Aw, come on Skye, it couldn't have been that bad. Plus is not like Luna knows in advance how the person is going to behave. You can't blame your sister about this," I hear Joan saying.

"You should have seen her. She giggled at everything that I asked her to do and didn't listen. She must have been more than forty years old and was behaving like a teen. Not an attractive behavior at all. She never made it to stand on the board in the water, and was starting to become a hazard to the other surfers. She wiped out so many times,

even sitting! How on earth is that possible?" he says with a lot of frustration in his voice.

The man in question has his head on his arms on the counter, while Joan caresses his hair soothingly. Joan smiles at me when she sees me.

"Skye, your eleven o'clock is here,"

The man turns to look at me with bright green eyes. He lets out a big sigh.

"Oh God! Joan, give me a rash guard for him and a 50, no make it 70," he says, taking a second look at me.

I don't know what the 50 or the 70 mean, but at least I have an idea of what a rash guard can be. I see Joan taking a shirt with long sleeves from behind the counter and a bottle. He takes the shirt and throws it at me.

"Put that on, and smear this on your face, neck and legs," he says, handing me the bottle, that now I see is sunscreen with SPF 70.

I do as I'm told and walk behind him towards a small shed in the beach area.

"What's your name?" he says suddenly.

"Dylan,"

"Nice to meet you Dylan. I'm Skye Kalani. I think we are off to a good start as normally people whine, complain and ask why I make them wear a rash guard and sunscreen,"

"Well, I'm awfully pale. I guess that is the reason," I say, almost to myself, but he smiles.

"I take skin cancer risk very seriously as I'm the whole day under the sun. You have indeed pale skin so you have a higher risk. Have you ever done this? Surfing, I mean,"

"Joan had to give me this swimsuit. What do you think?" I say, pointing at my shorts while grimacing and he laughs.

"They are called baggies. I thought I recognized them. Do you live around here?"

"I moved here about two weeks ago. I live on the west side of the village,"

"That is great! There are beautiful beach cottages in that area. So it means that we will probably see you around here often,"

"That is if I don't drown or do something stupid today. I'm a decent swimmer, but I hope that I don't disappoint you. I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I kind of heard about your previous student," I say as he hands me a surf board.

"Yeah, that was a disaster," he says with a chuckle. "You have the right attitude already. We will begin with some safety instructions and basic movements in the sand, and then will move to the water. Before we begin, do you have any medical conditions?"

"I had cancer last year, leukemia, but according to the doctors I'm fine now,"

Skye freezes while grabbing another board, and looks at me with an open mouth and wide eyes. I hope this is not an impediment to do the lesson.

"Is everything alright?" I say, feeling a bit nervous. There is something in his eyes that I don't understand.

"I understand what you are going through. I got leukemia when I was eighteen years old. I'm also a survivor,"

Now is my turn to look at Skye with wide eyes. If there are any adjectives to describe him, they are healthy and strong. He has a wide back and is muscled. Even though we are about the same height, I look quite small next to him. Of course, I lost a lot of weight during my chemo treatment, and I have gained plenty of weight back, but I'm not at my original weight yet.

"I don't know what to say Skye," I say, looking at the ground.

"Well, I'd say let's enjoy our time and feel happy that we are alive,"

3. Not Interested

SKYE

Pride, that is exactly what I feel right now. Dylan has managed to catch three waves and stand on the board. He is a natural at this and has the patience to wait for a good wave. He also has a strong paddle skill which is important. Practice and confidence are just what he needs to stay standing longer on the board before wiping.

If only all my students were like him. He listens, doesn't assume anything and asks questions to make sure that he understood the instructions correctly. He also seems to be enjoying himself, which is really important when doing anything. I catch a small wave myself from the line-up and end up at the whitewater on the shore. Dylan is sitting on the sand panting a bit and has a big smile.

"This is better than going to the gym. This has been the workout of my life. I'm sore all over," he says with a chuckle while rubbing his arms.

"You think you hurt now? Wait until tomorrow," I say, laughing while sitting next to him.

We just sit there in the sand in comfortable silence, just watching the waves break.

"I thought I was going to find it scary. You always see those photos with the surfers in front of basically a giant wall of water behind them," he says, breaking the silence.

"It can be like that, just not here in this section of the beach in front of us. See, if you walk past the radio station at the beginning of the boulevard, that is where the quiet beach is. The sea there is quite flat

and the sand area is very wide, so it is great for families with small kids that want to have some fun in the water but be safe. You can walk quite far into the water and it just reaches your knees at the most. This area in front of the boulevard has a good beach break. The waves are good enough to teach basics, practice maneuvers or just ride for pleasure. You see there to our left behind the dunes? That is The Reef. That area has an underwater rocky point that makes heavies that are off the hook,"

"Heavies off the hook?" he says, looking at me with a confused face.

I start laughing. I realize how comfortable I feel around Dylan, that I even talk to him in surfing slang just like I do with Kay and Dax.

"It means that the waves are large, very good in size and shape. We are lucky enough to get gas chambers in that area from time to time. Those are the air tunnels that you can ride inside. Some people also call them tubes or barrels," I say, moving my hands to show him how the wave rolls over.

"I have seen pictures of those indeed. That must be quite an experience," he says, looking at the reef in the distance.

"It is, indeed," I say, feeling nostalgic and sad at the memories. I loved going to The Reef, but after what happened to Natalie, I don't dare to go there by myself or bring anybody with me.

"Well Skye, thanks. This was an amazing experience. I never thought that I would be able to do this. You are a really good instructor," says Dylan, standing up.

"Hey, I'm having my lunch break now. Would you like to go and grab a bite here upstairs at Hibiscus?"

"Sure," he says, looking at me and smiling.

We head back to the store after bringing the boards back to the shed. I grab my bag from my car and hit the showers. Normally, I would just grab something along the boulevard, but I'm in a really good mood for having a proper meal. As I come back inside the store from getting clean, Luna looks at me with wide eyes.

"You showered!" she says with surprise.

"Yeah, so?" I say with a shrug.

"You never do. Where is she?" says my sister, looking around.

"What do you mean by 'where is she'?" I say, feeling irritated.

"Okay Skye, I'm ready," says Dylan, coming inside the store. His rash guard and baggies are neatly folded in his hands.

"A guy?" says my sister, lifting an eyebrow.

"Fuck you Luna! Come on Dylan," I bark at her while Dylan leaves the clothes on the counter. He looks from me to Luna and back with wide eyes.

I love my sister. I really do, more than I let it show. People even think that we are twins as we look so much alike. We are even born in the same year, just ten months apart. The problem is that we irritate the hell out of each other very often. I know that I'm the laughing stock at the boulevard as some guys have hit on me, and I'm not gay. It is flattering that both guys and girls find me attractive, but I just happen to like girls.

"Hey, I'm sorry if I'm causing you any trouble. I can just leave," says Dylan, matching my quick walking pace.

"Don't mind my sister. She enjoys making fun of me," I say, realizing that I'm almost at a jog so I slow my pace down.

"I'm afraid that I don't understand," he says, looking back at the store and then back at me.

"I have got hit on by several dudes here at the beach. She finds that hysterical as I'm not gay," I say, stopping to look at him.

"Oh," he says, blushing and looking at the ground.

"Oh, what?"

"I... I'm sorry Skye... I misunderstood your kindness for interest," he says softly.

"You into dudes?" I say, lowering my voice and he nods. He then looks at the water, feeling clearly embarrassed.

"Hey dude. It doesn't matter, we can still be friends. I can even hook you up with some of my admirers," I say, putting a hand on his shoulder.

He looks at the hand on his shoulder and then at me with those ice blue eyes, that still have a hint of the suffering that comes with being treated for cancer. There is much more to this guy than his preferences, and I really see myself becoming good friends with him.

"You don't mind that I'm gay and you want to be my friend?"

"Of course not, why should I mind? You are a great guy that happens to like dudes. It's no big deal. I still would like to hang out with you and be friends,"

We walk up the stairs, and as we arrive to Hibiscus, Jaxon Hale comes to greet us. Jax is just the 50 year old version of Kay, with very short black hair that is starting to show a hint of gray on the sides, the same slanted caramel eyes and tanned skin. My father says that he is an awesome surfer, but I have never seen him in the water. If you ask him, he just says that he had his moment of glory, and is time for the new kids to take his place.

"Jax, this is Dylan. He is new to Sea Glass, and has a great future ahead as a surfer. Rode three waves on his first lesson,"

"Impressive! All I hear are protests about people wiping out and kooks. Is nice to hear a good story for a change," he says, shaking Dylan's hand with his big one.

"Jax is the father of Kay, my best friend and weekend surfing instructor,"

"And don't forget librarian, my Kay loves his books," he says, showing pride for his son.

"Indeed. Jax, can you hit us with a sampler? I want to show Dylan here how awesome your food is. Unless you are not adventurous," I say, looking at Dylan.

"Oh no, I eat everything. I won't mind trying a bit of everything,"

We take our seats at the terrace overlooking the beach, and sip on the cold sodas that Jax brings us. Dylan still has the embarrassed look on his face.

"Spit it out Dylan. What is bothering you?" I say, reclining from my chair.

"I still find it hard to tell people that I'm gay. My parents, well, mostly my father, disowned me some years ago. They came into a restaurant, and saw me kissing with my boyfriend back then. Most people just treat me differently after they learn about it,"

"Bogus. What happened with your boyfriend?"

"He left me soon after I got diagnosed with leukemia. Proved to be a shitty boyfriend then. Seems that only my money was important to him,"

"That guy is a douchebag and you deserve better. So how come you have money?"

"Two years ago, I had my own company and sold it for a really big sum. Now I just live from the return on the investments that I make, and try to enjoy life to the fullest. I've got a second chance at life and I want to make the most out of it. So you also got cancer when you were younger. How was that for you?"

"Well, I had just graduated from high school. I was training really hard to compete in some surfing festivals. There were people from the association that would attend, and I had big hopes of becoming part of the tour and travel the world. You know, to be one of the dudes in the magazines photographed in front of a bomb wave, and to get an amazing sponsorship deal. That was until my brother found me on the floor of my bedroom after fainting, and I was brought to the hospital. I had some symptoms for a while, but I thought it was due to the heavy training. The blood tests confirmed that I had leukemia that was still at an early stage, and they started treating me immediately. I got chemo and radiation therapy. I even got direct blood transfusions from my sister Luna, because I got anemic. A year

of hell, nausea and pain, and feeling tired all the time, but I have been in remission ever since,"

"What about your surfing career?"

"Well, I'm a surfing instructor at the beach. That says enough. What about you? How did you find out that you were ill?"

"I was feeling very tired, and people were just telling me that I was working too much. I went to the doctor for a routine check-up, and he found out there was something wrong with my blood. I was more affected from the break up and the sale of the company than the actual treatment. I didn't have radiation, just chemotherapy. I got very thin because I couldn't stomach food and I think the most traumatic thing was losing my hair. I had very light blonde hair and it is now darker,"

"I can relate. Kay and Dax shaved their heads to support me. The things your friends do for you," I say with a shrug.

He smiles at me in understanding and our food arrives. Jax outdid himself, there are potato cakes, fish tacos, mini hamburgers and my favorite, corn dogs with spicy sweet curry sauce. We eat happily, and for once I'm glad that Luna booked a lesson for my new friend.

4. Lawyer in the Water

DAX

Nothing out of the ordinary here. I'm looking at the emails that Luna forwarded to me this morning. Three new suppliers, one for beach sandals and two for wet suits. Funny to think that my father started Kalani basically in a hut selling wax and repairing boards. We have at the moment the biggest retail space on the boulevard, plus the income that Skye generates with the surfing lessons.

You would think that on the weekend I can relax and stop being a lawyer, but then I just become the lawyer for my family and friends. People will run every single contract through me, whether it is to get a new supplier for the store, or if they made a good deal on their personal mobile phone agreement.

My phone buzzes on the dining table and I see a message from Kay. As I open it, I see a picture of an ad about the "Sea Glass Beach Surfing Festival". I can't read what it says in the small print. I get another message with just a couple of words.

"U in? K,"

I don't know what to answer. I don't spend as much time in the water as he and my brother do, so I'm not sure if I have good enough skills to compete. I call him back and he answers on the first ring.

"This is just off the hook Dax! You have to join us! It is a team competition! We really need to do this!" his voice blasts over my speakerphone.

"I don't know Kay. I'm really rusty for a competition, plus I have a day job," I say, unsure if I can really pull this off.

"Are you kidding me? Nobody does snaps like you!"

I let out a deep breath. I can indeed do nice quick turns on top of the waves and I'm a decent tube rider. Still, I'm not sure how my skills could match the other competitors.

"What about Skye?"

"Your bro is in. You know that he can do aerial maneuvers and those crazy turns. If I practice hard, I might get the hang five under control like Papa Jaxon used to do. This is my chance to make my dad and my grandpa proud," he says and I can imagine his dreamy smile.

Kay always tells us stories about his grandfather impressing the ladies by putting five toes over the nose of his board. Kay is very proud of his Samoan heritage and his family accomplishments. He even has the same tattoo on his shoulder that his father and grandfather have.

"Where is this anyway? I saw the picture, but I couldn't read the small letters,"

"Here at The Reef. Where else? The bone yard at the beach is not big enough to hold many people and well, the rest is flat. It is a two week non-mobile event Dax. We are locals and it gives us an advantage. We really know that part of the beach,"

"I don't know Kay. I'm not sure if going back there is a good idea," I say, feeling very hesitant about joining on this.

"Oh, I'm sorry man. Is not that I forgot, is just that I didn't think of it," he says in a sad voice.

It has been a while since I have been there, more than two years to be exact. That is the place where we lost my Natalie after all.

After Boy was born, Natalie wanted to get back in shape and we all spent a good time practicing on the beach. It started to become a bit tedious, and we all were in the need of some challenges. There was a very strong current on the day that we went to The Reef, and we were all having so much fun. Boy was three months old and was at the store with Luna. My sister knows plenty about surfing, but doesn't like to practice it at all.

We should have known that there was something out of the ordinary on that day. Well, the warning was there, the 'meatball'. The yellow flag with a black circle indicating hazardous conditions was displayed, and we still ignored it. There was a strong wind and the sky was gray. We were being blown out, and the loose sand on the beach would lash at our bare legs with the gusts. It was a bit chilly, so we were all wearing rash guards.

We paddled out to reach the safer part of the ocean for the line-up, but could barely get past the breaking surf. That should have been our hint to call it quits and move to the break in front of the boulevard, but instead we saw it as a test of our abilities. I admit that we live for the adrenaline and sometimes don't think about the risks.

Natalie picked to ride a wave that made her fall off the board almost immediately. She got sucked in circles along the lip of the wave, and the motion of the water brought her to the reef. She was shaken underwater, and then her body slammed repeatedly against the rocks. I was already on shore and saw something odd happening after she fell. I was waiting for her to come above water, but she didn't. I tried to swim there, but it was almost impossible to reach the area where she was. I could see her board floating close by the rocks and kept yelling at her to grab it. Of course, she couldn't do that. She was dead already. My muscles were very tired, and I also got sucked in by the

current and thrown against the rocks, breaking my arm and getting many cuts in the process.

Kay grabbed his phone and alerted the emergency services. The people that were running in the dunes, ran back to the beach area to bring the lifeguards. Skye walked barefoot on the reef wall to try to reach me. I was holding on to the rocks with my good arm, but I was losing strength by the minute. He managed to get down and pull me out. I could see my wife's lifeless body floating ahead. The leash was stuck between the rocks and it was tied to her ankle. I grabbed on to Skye and cried hysterically. My brother held me tight, and I could feel his own body shaking from his own sobs. Skye and Natalie were best friends, and he was the one that introduced us.

Minutes later, the lifeguard boat reached the area where we were, and the lifeguards managed to get Natalie out of the water. I got brought to the hospital together with Skye, as he also had several cuts on his legs and feet that needed stitches. He also had a big bruise on his hip that needed treatment. We were told later on that evening that Natalie had a fracture in her skull and a broken column. There would have been zero chances that my girl would have made it okay from this situation. The whole community of Sea Glass Beach attended her funeral. Many people knew her, as Natalie was an airbrush artist and had made custom designs for surfing boards.

I look at my son, engaged in playing with his building blocks. So unaware of everything that happened on that day. He has never realized that he doesn't have a mom, as Luna takes care of him and gives him the attention that he needs. My kid has lost a parent already. Is it worth risking my life for a competition?

"Kay, I need to think of Boy," I say, looking at his little figure hunched over his toys.

"Dax, I understand man. I really do, and I know that Boy is your priority. It is okay if you don't want to join, but just think about this. That day at The Reef it was just a bunch of us. No organization, no first aid close by available, no lifeguards. This is a big event with international competitors, we will not be allowed in the water if the conditions are not right,"

"How international are these competitors?" I ask. I can't help that I'm a curious person.

"It is organized by Oceancrush. Even Blue Smith is coming, and he has competed all around the world. They won't risk losing him,"

"Wow, Blue Smith, this is huge then. Well, I guess I could always ask Skye to train with me before going to work. I need my time to relax and to be with my kid in the evening,"

"I can do it too before heading to the library," he says with enthusiasm. Kay spends so much time in the water that it's a miracle that he hasn't grown fins.

"Okay, then I'm in,"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! I'm so stoked dude! So damn happy! We need to meet with the three of us and figure out how we are going to do this. I guess Kalani and Hibiscus can sponsor us, and then we need to pick some clothes and our boards..."

"And don't you think that we need to sign up first?" I say, interrupting his happy rant.

"And that is why you are the lawyer. You think of the details. Ah well, you know everything about us. I will send you the website and