

PROLOGUE

The sun is already starting to dip beneath the horizon as I reach the beach. It's high tide. I'm cutting it fine.

Second thoughts? No way. After everything that's happened, I need this.

Before I can change my mind I wrap the leash round my ankle and charge into the sea, holding the board in front of me like a shield. Splashing my way through the white water, I take a deep breath and hurl myself into the ocean.

Resurfacing, I gasp in shock as the cold hits me. I shake the water from my hair and start paddling my way out across a golden pathway of light towards the red ball of the sun. As I duck-dive under the waves all the bad stuff starts to recede. By the time I've made it out back and am sitting up, my mind is clear. *Magic.*

I wait for the first decent wave, see one worth paddling for, then realise I'm too late and let it go. There will be more. Suddenly I have all the time in the world.

Before long my patience is rewarded and I spot a set of waves coming. As it gets closer I let the first one go, and the second, then get ready for the third. This is it. A good one.

I stand up and start to move across the wave, feeling its strength beneath me. I try out some turns and to my delight they work until, over-excited, I twist too fast and tumble in head first. No matter. I paddle out for more. This is it – the best feeling in the world!

My next wave is a mistake. It's too steep. I take off but nosedive, banging my head on the sand. I'm held under by the power of the wave and taste sudden, sharp fear. It feels like someone's standing on my back, pinning me down; it can only be seconds but feels like a lifetime.

As soon as I swim back to the surface all fear is gone. Grabbing my board I head out again, hoping the next one will be better.

I sit back and wait. My head's killing me but it's worth it. I am alone with the ocean. I am free.

Another wave comes. A really good one. I catch it this time and, "Whoa!" For the first time in my life I'm carving it! Twisting and turning, I keep going, edging my way to the back of the board. I'm doing it, I'm in control! Until finally, inevitably, the wave opens up and pushes me out.

I pull away, exhilarated, triumphant, drained, and sink slowly into the sea.

That was it. The perfect wave.

The sun has gone leaving a brilliant red line but I can still see clearly. The waves call to me and I can't resist them.

Just one more . . .

I paddle back out and sit waiting patiently. Time ceases to exist. I feel calm, at peace with the world, all tension and conflict gone. Before my eyes the incredible red, pink and orange-streaked sky melts into the horizon, blending with the oily blue-black sea to form a glorious explosion of colour like a huge abstract painting. I am lost in the wonder of it all.

Suddenly I want to share this moment with the person closest to me in the world, but I can't. A sense of loss pierces me, as sharp as a knife wound.

The ocean is flat now. There are no more waves.

I shiver. I'm beginning to get cold and tired.

Time to head in.

As I turn round to face the shore I realise to my surprise how far I have drifted out. An offshore breeze has whipped itself up and Porthzellan Cove is almost invisible beneath a bank of solid grey cloud. I strike out for shore, paddling strongly against the wind. It shouldn't take me long.

After a while I stop paddling and lift my head to check where I am. *What?* I am stunned to see that I am even further out now, almost to the headland. *How did that happen?* I sit upright on my board, confused. True, the wind has picked up, but I've managed worse. And then I understand.

The tide has turned. *How stupid am I?* It's taking me out. In the short time I've been sat up I've moved beyond the headland.

Quickly I lie back down on the board and start to power my arms furiously through the water. I call on all my

reserves of strength, every muscle in my body fired by my determination to get back to safety. *I'm stronger than I look, I can do this.*

But when at last I pause for breath, I can feel the wind has intensified and the sea has got rougher. And even before I lift my head to peer through the darkness, I can tell that I have left the rocky shelter of Porthzellan Cove far behind and am adrift in the open sea.

Too late I realise something else.

Nobody knows where I am.