

Paper Boat

By: Melinda Wagner

I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm so sorry."

He knew no one could hear him. But he said the words anyway.

Ryder stood on the shore, facing the water. The coming wave was not visible, not yet. But he could feel it. And there was no way he could stop it.

The letter in his hands trembled in the breeze. He had written the letter this morning. He hoped his brother would find it, if he did not survive today. If he did survive... well, he would decide then whether or not to let his brother read it.

In spite of the town's proximity to the sea, a tsunami was not a common occurrence. Naturally occurring tsunamis were even rarer. But this one wasn't natural.

He hoped the people in the town had listened to his warning. He was going to try to stop the wave, of course. He could do no less. But alone, there really wasn't much he could do.

He fiddled with the letter in his hands. He didn't have to look at it to know he had folded it into a paper boat. He always did that when he was nervous. His brother always laughed at him for it. Rolling his eyes, he tucked the letter into his back pocket before he could cause any more damage to it.

Now he could see the wave on the horizon. It sped toward the shore, mindless and yet seeming as though it was bent on destruction.

He raised both hands, palms toward the wave. He was a Suinam. Water flowed, or didn't, in his invisible control as though it was contained in glass or wood. He would protect the people of this town, or die trying.

The wave came closer, closer. If he was having any effect on it at all it was minimal. He closed his eyes. He could feel the energy leaving his hands and flowing through the air toward the water. But the energy trapped in the water cancelled his out completely.

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He had no time to turn and run. He wouldn't have even if he had time. With a roar like a gale of wind, the wave swept him up as though he were nothing more than a young tree. With nothing to hold on to, he was pulled under the surface, spun and twisted around until he had no idea which way was up.

He saw the piece of driftwood coming. He grabbed at it, hoping it would eventually drift up to the surface and take him with it. Instead, it slipped through his grasp and slammed against the side of his head.

When he came to, he was lying in a small stream. No, he realized after a moment. He was on a gravel path, but it was still covered in three or four inches of water. As he sat up, something floated away from him. The letter. He grabbed it, just before it bumped into a pair of shoes.

His gaze drifted up from the shoes, to wet jeans, a green jacket, and finally landed on his brother's face.

"Liam!" He jumped up, tripped, and landed in his brother's fierce hug.

"Are you okay?" Liam touched Ryder's temple. "You're bleeding."

Ryder ignored the question. "I'm sorry," he breathed. "I'm so sorry... I tried to stop it, but I couldn't..."

"It's okay," Liam said.

Ryder shook his head against his brother's chest. "No. It's not. I couldn't stop it."

"Listen to me." Liam pushed Ryder an arms' length away, holding both his shoulders.

"The townspeople are fine. They all got to safety in time, thanks to you."

Ryder took a deep breath and let it out with a shudder. But he nodded.

Liam turned Ryder and put one arm around his shoulder. "Come on."

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Ryder let his brother guide him back to what was left of the town. As they walked, he crushed the paper boat and stuffed it into his pocket. Maybe one day he could tell Liam. But not today.

Today, he couldn't tell his brother that he was the one who had created the wave.