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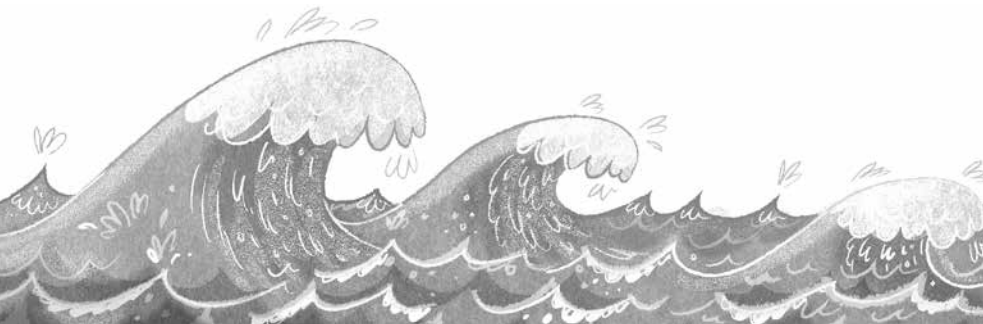

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BEFORE WE GO

You never know what a person is truly made of, or who they truly are, until they are tested – at least that's what my dad thinks.

Usually, I tend to think the exact opposite of my dad – but that's more out of habit than accuracy. And having had quite a bit of time apart, what with him being at home in Singapore and me being marooned on an island somewhere in the Pacific, I can probably admit that I *might* have had a bit of an attitude problem.

I wish I could tell him that I didn't really disagree with him about *everything*, and while he was always *very* wrong about his aftershave being *subtle*, he was always bang on the mark about me.

I wasn't the best I could be.

You see, now I know what I'm made of because I *have* been tested – if you don't believe me, *you* try being stung by **Julian Jehoshaphat**. Julian, by the way, is a jellyfish with a personal vendetta against me and, despite our history, I think I'll miss him when we leave here.

But being serious for a moment, because I can do that now, I've been tested in ways that are bigger even than Julian.

Ways that have forced me to look inside myself.

I've seen and done – and also eaten – things that I never thought I would. And I think, after everything I've been through, I might be a better person.

I'm sad that my dad might never know that.

I think he might even be proud.

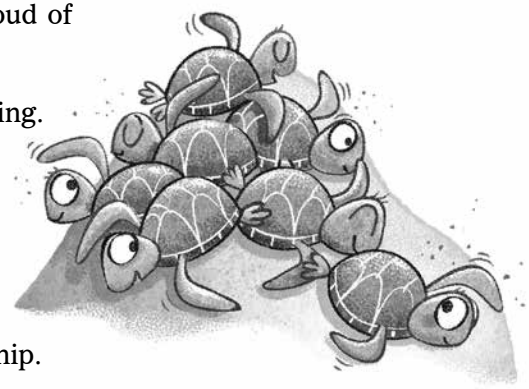
I guess I'm proud.

Lina has forced me to say I am so often that I think I've actually started to believe it.

Last night for example.

We – that's me, Lina, and my other best friend and castaway, Étienne – sat round the campfire and did one of Lina's enforced bonding exercises.

When we first started these I found them uber-awkward, but now…how can I describe them? They make you catch the good and sometimes it can be the tiniest thing that keeps you going. Last night we looked out at the black horizon and we spoke about how we were proud of each other.



Proud for still surviving.

Proud that we saved Tarquin's teeny turtle babies. All one hundred odd of them.

Proud of our friendship.

And, as far as Lina is concerned, we are proud that no one has let the fire die out.

This isn't strictly true. Étienne and I have had a few minor issues, but we've kept them quiet because Lina *really* has a thing about the fire. That **Lord of the Flies** book is to blame. It's a story about a load of kids who were stuck on a desert island like us. Things did not go well for them AT ALL, which Lina blames on them for letting the fire go out. As a result, she's been fixated on keeping ours burning at all times. Étienne and I decided it's best if she doesn't know that we have, on occasion, forgotten about it.

In the spirit of catching the good, I want to tell you that things here haven't been as bleak as William Golding – the guy who wrote **Lord of the Flies** – made out. We've done much better than the kids in his story. We

didn't turn into total savages, and nobody has made any truly heartfelt attempts at killing anybody else. I think that should be noted down if we don't make it.

Because today we face another test. We are going to leave this island and hope we find our way home.

But, in case we *don't* find our way home, I've documented how we ended up as castaways and what we've done since we arrived on the island. It's also a guide of sorts. There are tips based on what I've learned about survival. And there's also a lot about what I've learned about myself and the person I want to be.

So here is the story of **the Spectacular Survival of Sebastian Sunrise** (and Lina and Étienne too).

Don't tell them I put them in brackets. It's not that they aren't equally important, they're the most **spectacular** bit really, but I was going for the whole alliterative title thing.

SURVIVAL TIP #1

MAKE A TEAM WITH THE BEST KIND OF PEOPLE

I suppose I should start with the events that led up to our **Spectacular Shipwrecking**. The reason I was anywhere near a deserted island in the Pacific Ocean can be traced back to Lina Lim's aggressive sales techniques. There's this competition our school runs at the end of the year to raise the most money for **Climate Avengers**. The top fundraising team is awarded a place on the **Climate Avengers** Summer Camp on Tonga, an island in the Pacific. **Climate Avengers** is an environmental project where you learn how to protect the planet. You learn about the ecosystems on the island and get to see all sorts of cool animals, like dolphins and turtles, and help them by collecting rubbish from the ocean. While I was keen to see a turtle, the rubbish

collection part didn't fill me with joy to be honest.

Granted it's not your regular school trip, but I don't go to a regular school. I go to Beaufort International School, in Singapore. Like a lot of things, I didn't really appreciate it before I became a castaway.

Beaufort International is different from most schools – kids come from all over the world and learn to become Global Citizens – I'm still not completely sure what one of those is, although having lived on a remote and deserted island for months might make me one of the best Global Citizens Beaufort's ever had. Go figure.

Alone, I didn't stand a chance of winning the fundraising competition, but I teamed up selling cookies with Lina Lim and Étienne Stark, and Lina Lim, as I said, has some pretty fierce sales techniques. Étienne also sold a ton of boxes because his mum works at the university, and it turns out students love cookies. We are the only Year Sevens to ever win.

Étienne has been in Singapore since he was five, but Lina and I only moved there at the start of secondary school. My first run-in with Lina was when she ploughed right over the top of me in swimming training. Outraged, I whipped up my goggles and shouted at her, but she didn't apologize.

Instead she smiled and said, "You swim like a donkey!"

and splashed off. We then spent the rest of the session trying to kick each other or drag each other back by the foot to get in front. I honestly don't know how we went from that to being best friends.

Lina's mum comes from America and her dad comes from Singapore. She'd lived in America her whole life but moved for her parents' work. They started a company out here – don't ask me what they do because Lina explained it once and I didn't understand a word.

Lina is probably a better swimmer than me – not that I'd ever admit that to her face – she loves reading and has so many fluffy key rings attached to her school bag I'm surprised she can lift it.

She has a very strong sense of right and wrong – when it comes to what other people are doing. This can be a little tedious because she is always saying stuff like, "Sebastian, have you considered the consequences before you do that?" If I was busy considering consequences all the time would those ducks from the outdoor market ever have been saved from ending their lives in a pancake?

Exactly.

Étienne Stark has a French mother and a Scottish father and an accent all of his own. He is the smallest kid in our year, has terrible eyesight and feet that are WAY too big for his body. He reckons he's going to grow into them

any day now and we'll all be sorry when he suddenly shoots up to seven feet tall. Meanwhile, he spends a lot of time tripping over and asking me to get stuff off high shelves. He reminds me a bit of one of those tarsier monkeys with the big goggly eyes that are cute but a little alarming looking.

Étienne has faith. He told me that the first time I met him, right after he'd kissed me on both cheeks then laughed at my confused expression. To be honest, I didn't imagine I'd be spending much time with Étienne, but we kept getting paired up with each other because our surnames both begin with S and, without even noticing, we just ended up merging together.

Étienne says we became friends because he feels compelled to help me. I think it's really because of my **spectacularly** magnetic personality.

As you'll have figured out, my name is Sebastian Sunrise. My dad is British and a Vice Admiral in the Royal Navy, which he tells me is pretty important, and I don't like to talk about my mum. I think my dad's job has made him have very exacting standards. Or maybe he's always been like that and that's why he's so good at his job. Either way, I'd say his parenting style leans heavily on his naval background. He says things like, "Get that room shipshape, Sebastian!" or "You don't have to like it, you just have to

do it!" and when I'm running late, which is often, "Time and tide waits for no man, Sebastian."

The thing about my dad's exacting standards is that I figured out pretty early on that I was never going to meet them, so I guess I stopped trying.

I am average-sized and unremarkable to look at, apart from the fact that I have a condition called heterochromia, which means absolutely nothing unless you're a Pacific Ocean smuggler pirate – which I will come to later. But basically, I have one blue eye, which I must get from Mum, and one green eye, which must come from Dad.

Oh, and I guess you wouldn't describe me as a model student. See, after bagging myself a place through the biscuit-based endeavours of my friends, it looked like it was touch and go as to whether I was even going to be allowed to go to Tonga. Let's just say that I've had an eventful year at school and my report wasn't what you might call *glowing*.

Alongside a lot of pretty poor grades, my teacher, Mr Gravina wrote, "The problem with Sebastian is that he just doesn't think and, as a result, disaster and trouble have become his closest and most constant companions."

"That's not a very nice thing to say about Lina and Étienne," I said to Dad, trying to laugh it off, but to be honest the report had got to me. I stomped up to my room

and immediately took to my computer to search for lawyers to sue Mr G for slander. Turns out good lawyers don't come cheap and the ones that work on a no-win-no-fee basis were neither forthcoming nor professional when I spoke to them about my case.

As it happened, Dad wasn't really on board with my idea of suing the school either. He told me I had to take responsibility for my mistakes. There'd been a few – an accidental fire in the school conservation area; the time I'd unintentionally locked the PE teacher in the store cupboard; the time I'd poured plaster of Paris down the sink in the art room. It had hardened and ruined the whole of the Art and DT block's plumbing. I suppose if I had secured the services of a lawyer, they'd have had a job on their hands.

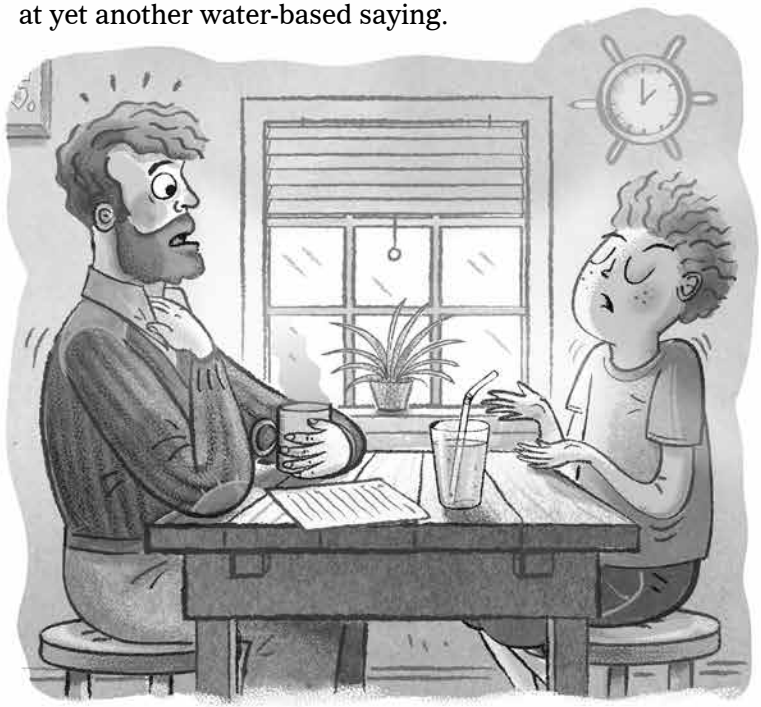
Anyway, the night of the *bad school report*, Dad had called me away from my internet lawyer search and said, "Sit down, Sebastian," in a voice that was bordering on a shout. And I did sit, because when my dad says to do something, you do it. I think he sometimes forgets that I'm his kid and not a member of his crew.

He cleared his throat and straightened his collar. Dad looks like he's wearing a uniform even when he isn't. You know those guys you see in films where they have a wardrobe full of the exact same shirts, trousers and shoes?

Yeah, he's one of those – white shirt, navy jumper, chinos – it's all he wears when he's "off duty".

He placed the report on the table. "You just seem all at sea – wild, even. I'm worried that the course you're steering is the wrong one."

I said, "I'm fine," but made no effort to hide my irritation at yet another water-based saying.



"I'm here to help you, Sebastian, but it is up to you to find your own way. To navigate your own waters."

I groaned inwardly. Or maybe it was outwardly because he said, "Stop groaning and listen. I don't recognize you

any more. I don't know, you seem…*lost*. I know your mother leaving—"

"It's nothing to do with her," I snapped, but now I realize I was probably wrong about that.

My mum and dad have been separated for just over a year. They'd always had problems, but I think the move to Singapore was what finally did it for them. I overheard them arguing about it. Mum didn't want to go. Dad said we didn't have to move. She said he should, but without her – that a separation was what she wanted.

When it all happened, they'd given me a choice of who to live with. Mum's the kind of woman who will give you a Twix and a Fanta for breakfast and wake you up in the middle of the night to drive fifty miles to try out a new restaurant. Dad is the kind of person who will shout at someone about dental health and for being irresponsible for keeping a kid up on a school night.

I'd chosen Mum. I guess because I thought she was the fun one. But it turned out she didn't choose me. She wanted to go off and try to make it as an actress in America. Apparently she'd been close to success, before she'd had me.

She held my face in her hands, kissed my cheeks and said, "Your father can give you what I can't, Sebastian." I told her that wasn't true, what I wanted was the latest VR

gaming console, but neither of them had been forthcoming with that. Then she'd said, "Your father needs you." Which puzzles me to this day. I have literally zero clue what my dad needs me for. He's a grown man. He can pretty much do everything for himself. Except for squeezing through the garage window when we accidentally lock ourselves out, but I can't believe she'd leave me behind just for that.

But that's what she said. And then she left, and I ended up with Dad anyway.

Dad and I stood on the doorstep, our whole house packed up in boxes ready to be shipped off to Singapore. He had his arms crossed behind his back, showing absolutely no emotion as Mum, in floods of tears and making promises to visit every holiday, got in a taxi and drove away. He just nodded at her as she closed the car door. Once she had rounded the corner I was feeling very upset and very confused and very angry, but then I turned to Dad and I thought he looked like someone who was trying to hold all those emotions in too. Which you'd think might have made me feel a degree of empathy for him. But it annoyed me. He shouldn't have let her go.

He said, "This isn't your fault, Sebastian. Your mother does love you."

Had I thought it was my fault? I think I'd blamed him – his exacting standards. Maybe he made Mum feel like

a failure too. But I guess part of me believed there must be something about me she didn't like for her to leave me behind.

"Things are complicated…she is complicated…she had a very difficult childhood and…" He stopped, his face suddenly etched with pain. "I don't know if I'm saying too much. I wish I could help you make sense of this."

To me, it sounded like he was scrabbling around for excuses.

So it became just us, and we are very different people, and I had no idea how that was going to work.

Dad said, "We'll be okay. Two lads together, hey?"

I didn't answer.

"I know you wanted to be with your mother," he continued, "but this will be fine. Good, even."

I realized then he must have felt like the consolation prize. So, I said, "Dad, I might have chosen Mum, but you came an incredibly close second. Maybe if you worked on being a little less strict and a bit more fun—"

He cut me off before I could finish, saying, "It doesn't matter who you chose, Sebastian. Because I choose you."

I think I should have said something back. But I didn't.

So, we were both sitting in the kitchen, the report on the

table and my chances of becoming a **Climate Avenger** looking pretty slim.

"Please can I go?" I said.

Dad rubbed the bridge of his nose and suddenly looked very tired. "With comments like this I just don't think I can let you. This year has not been smooth sailing."

"I'm sorry!" I said. "Things just happen to me. I don't do them on purpose. I really want to go. I really want to have the opportunity to do something good."

To be honest, my reasons for going on the trip were not completely altruistic, unlike Étienne and Lina, who were very motivated to save the planet. I just didn't fancy staying at home over the summer holidays without them – and with only my dad and the housekeeper for company.

Dad told me to go upstairs to my room so he could think. I reckoned there was no way the trip was happening, so I started to plot ways to get myself there without him knowing.

Luckily, I didn't have to hide in the drum of a washing machine, which is, according to the internet, one of Singapore's top exports to Tonga. When he called me back down to deliver his verdict he said, "Maybe a bit of hard graft and being part of a team that's working for a good cause is just the thing you need." Then he added, "Besides, you earned your place selling those cookies."

I'd only sold six boxes, but I still punched the air and said, "Get in!" which by the look on Dad's face was too much, considering the situation.

He sighed and said, "Promise me you'll stay out of trouble and not do anything stupid. Make me proud of you, son. Make yourself proud."

I said, "I promise." But only because that's what you do to get what you want.

On the way to get our flight, I told Lina and Étienne how close I'd come to not being allowed on the trip and I complained about the injustice of Mr Gravina's harsh words. Lina wasn't having any of it. She held up her hand to stop me from talking and told me that she thought that maybe Mr Gravina did have a point and that I should take on board what both my dad and my teacher were saying – that maybe I did need to think more.

But I didn't want to take any of that on board. So, I didn't.

Which is possibly why, less than thirty-six hours later, I had already broken the promise I'd made to my dad about not doing anything stupid. And it's probably also why Lina, Étienne and I were bobbing about very lost and very wet and very cold, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, wondering what had happened to the others.

SURVIVAL TIP #2

IT'S BEST NOT TO CHALLENGE PEOPLE YOU HAVE ZERO HOPE OF BEATING

That first morning at **Climate Avenger Camp**, we had an orientation meeting given by the camp leader, an Australian guy called Beecham. His bleach-blond hair, which looked like fishing rope, was bundled up on his head and held back with a blue bandana. He had deeply tanned and weathered skin that looked like biltong and a massive tattoo of a turtle on his back, which made me think he must be a really big fan of turtles.

We'd arrived in Tonga late the night before and, as it had been dark, we hadn't been able to see much of our surroundings. We'd unpacked our backpacks, gone straight to bed and fallen asleep to the sound of the lapping ocean. It had taken me a little while to drift off. I was *very* happy to be away from home. To have the