

**AIN'T
NO
WAVE
POOL**

JK Starling is a dentist and a writer, born on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria and now living in New Zealand, where she has spent nearly three decades. She balances her passion for story telling with her lifelong commitment to caring for people in her surgery, all while staying close to the ocean which continues to shape her. JK has two adult daughters and lives with her partner and their springer spaniel. This is her first novel.

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J K STARLING



SALTWIND
HOUSE
PUBLISHING

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to real events is purely coincidental.

Published 2026 by



ISBN 978-0-473-77803-3 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-0-473-77802-6 (EPub)

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COPYPRESS

Printed by CopyPress, Nelson, New Zealand.

{REALNZBOOKS}

Distributed by Real NZ Books, Nelson, New Zealand.

www.copypress.co.nz

*For anyone who's been knocked under and
fought their way back to the surface.*

For those who know the ocean can break you and save you.

*For every young person who thinks they
must carry it all alone. You don't.*

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

Some waves are huge, phenomenal; you have to wait all your life for them. Some are tiny; you sneeze, and they're gone. Some are worth trying—you feel the tickle of winning deep in your gut, right from the start. Others keep you on your toes, make you second-guess your decisions, stretch you to breaking point, and then you lose all in a glimpse. Some waves are fast, breathtaking, some are sluggish and slow, need massive persistence, before you can get it just right.

THIS LITTLE GAME here was a winner from the start. Tyler pulled at the joint and passed it on, his eyes fixed on the player across the old kitchen table.

“Are you ready?” he spoke sphinx-faced and waved away a puff of smoke. The bloke nodded. Tyler took a moment of intense pleasure to stare at all three players for a few seconds. The silence in the room was interrupted only by Fat Freddie’s Drop softly crooning from the small portable speaker. Finally, Tyler turned his cards around, one by one. “Full house,” he announced, suppressing a snort of laughter.

A loud concoction of shouts and cursing followed. The three guys reluctantly pushed the piles of cash towards him, making sure they didn’t leave a swear word of their vocabulary unused.

“Mate, I told you to be careful here, this little piggy knows the game,” beamed Tyler.

“You sure do, you wiped us out, bro.” The guy across the table scratched his head with both hands.

“Nah, nah, I know you suckers, you’ll be back at this table in no time flat. You love it.” Tyler laughed and gathered the cash. “What?”

One of the guys pointed silently behind Tyler's back.

"What?" He turned around, only to meet his nana's furious dark eyes. She was standing at the door, mouth pursed and chin trembling. *Oh, I know that look. Well, at least Bud is happy to see her.* The dog was all over the silver-haired woman, wagging his tail and trying to get her attention.

"Hmm, hi, Nan."

"Oh, shit!" someone chuckled.

"Your shift's finished a bit early, aye?" Tyler kept it casual.

"My shift finished just on time, Tyler Davis. Just on time to find you and your stoned mates playing poker under *my* roof again," yelled Mona Davis, and slammed her wrinkled little hand on the table.

"Take it easy, Nan." He wondered when the 'I bust my butt for you' speech was coming.

"Take it easy? You're telling me to take it easy? What's this? A private casino or something? While I bust my backside to do night shifts, you do this?" She waved a few cards in his face.

The three other guys had gotten up and were silently making their way to the door. They waved to him and slipped off quickly, one by one.

Mona didn't even dignify them with a look. She was standing next to him, fist on the table, and her eyes on his.

"See you next week, dudes."

As he heard the front door shut, he looked back at his grandmother, changed his expression to sheepish remorse and blinked a few times. He knew exactly how to handle her.

"Nan, it's nothing really. You're getting worked up for nothing." Tyler stood up. There she was, underneath his chin, his precious grandma, so small and so cross.

"Am I?" she asked.

If it had been a few years ago, she probably would've given him one over the ears, but he was way too old now.

What the hell? Nana swiftly reached into his back pocket and pulled out a thick stack of twenty-dollar bills.

“What is this? Are you playing for money again or just simply stealing? Huh?” she shouted.

“I won that fair and square,” he said.

“Don’t you bullshit me. There’s nothing fair about you, boy. I didn’t bring you up to be this kind of a young man.” She threw the cash on the table and sighed. “I’ll deal with you in the morning. I’m too tired now.” She turned around abruptly and left the pot-reeking room. *Forgot to yell about the smoking.*

Tyler stared at the door for a few seconds. *Oh, well, she’ll get over it. There’s bigger fish to fry.*

He went to his bedroom and felt about the dog’s bed. The zip opened smoothly. There were about a dozen pre-weighed packets of weed, a bag of ‘cookies’, and some more cash neatly hidden inside the lining. Tyler placed the stack of twenty-dollar notes with the other ones, picked two packets of weed out, and closed the zip. Bud sniffed and pushed his snout into his bed.

“I know it’s your bed, yes, I know, good boy. There, there.” Tyler cuddled his faithful accomplice and kissed the dog’s forehead.

It was one-thirty in the morning, and he had to get across town quickly to do his last delivery for tonight. The client on the Shore always bought in bulk. Judging by the text he’d just sent him he’d run out at a party. Tyler put on his black jacket, grabbed his keys and phone and bent over Bud to rub the dog gently on the head one more time. Bud tickled his hand with his tongue in return.

“You stay home, right? Look after Nana, okay?” And he dashed out.

The drizzle kept messing up the windshield of his old Subaru, and he had to peer hard in the darkness. Waiting for this one usually didn’t take long. It was chilly even inside the car. He pulled his hood over and wiped a little patch of the steamed window.

The street was on a hill overlooking the city. The Sky Tower caught the eye first. It flushed purple tonight. Lights from the soaring CBD

buildings and fluorescent ads illuminated hundreds of boats and yachts in the marina. *Man, people in this city have money to burn.* The Harbour Bridge traffic appeared to be the only motion at this time of night.

Wet Auckland winters bored Tyler to death. He couldn't wait to feel the summer sun on his skin again, go to the beach, squint at the glittering water, catch a few waves, feel free and happy. He yawned and looked back at the house. At least there was plenty of business. *Where the hell is this fucker?*

The posh house behind the huge front lawn was fully lit. Tyler could hear some muffled party rhythm coming from the house. At last, the front door opened. A tall man rushed towards the mailbox and looked around. It was his client. As soon as he saw Tyler flash his lights, he ran towards the car.

"Hey, over here, mate." Tyler rolled down the window.

"Hiya. Thanks a lot, man. Great service. Here." The client passed some rolled-up notes through the window. Tyler counted the money and passed the package.

"Cheers." The man scampered back to the house.

"Choice, mate, see ya," grinned back Tyler. *Not bad, you scored some solid fast buck tonight.*

Loud shouting interrupted Tyler's celebratory moment.

"Get lost, you idiot," shouted a brunette with long legs in boots, a skimpy skirt and a tight white top to someone who Tyler couldn't see inside the house. The girl wobbled down the path and stopped by the front hedge just metres away from his car. She looked back towards the porch, but there was no trace of the 'idiot'. She threw up in the bush, struggling to keep her balance, wiped her mouth with her hand and hiccupped loudly. *Nice.*

Another cute-looking chick with lighter hair and a short dress emerged from the open front door carrying what looked like handbags and coats.

"Hey, you okay? My goodness, here is a tissue. Let's go," pleaded the blonde.

“I’m fine,” slurred her mate and hiccupped again.

“You’re not. C’mon! It’s late and we’d better go.” The blonde girl looked back at the house.

Tyler was eager to close the window and start the car when a third figure appeared at the door.

“Hey, look who’s leaving early.” A puny white dude with a cat’s voice approached the girls.

“It’s late. We have to go home,” the sober girl said.

The guy ignored her, grabbed the other girl by the elbow and meowed, “Listen, gorgeous, you’re not going anywhere. You haven’t repaid me yet,” he grinned.

“Don’t touch me. I don’t owe you anything. You’re a pathetic, infantile, self-obsessed m-m-maniac,” hissed back the dark-haired chick.

Wow! The guy slapped her over the face hard, and she fell away on the muddy grass like a puppet.

“My God!” her friend dropped all she was carrying and reached to grab her. “What are you doing, Mason? Please, leave her alone,” she cried.

“Shut your mouth, you silly bitch.” He turned to the blonde and kicked her as she was crouching over her drunk friend. She dropped to her knees.

Tyler’s hesitation lasted a second.

“Hey, asshole,” Tyler was out of his car. “Why don’t you leave ‘em alone, aye?”

“Who the fuck are you?” the guy turned around, stunned.

Really irritating voice. “It don’t matter. Leave ‘em alone,” Tyler told him quietly.

The guy pushed his shoulder. “Piss off, it’s none of your business, dumb arse.”

Now, that was the wrong call. Tyler pushed him back in the chest full force and dropped him straight on his back. The guy groaned, tried to turn around and stand up, but a hard kick planted him on the ground again. Tyler grabbed him by his belt, lifted him up, and slapped him.

The guy fell again, splashing some mud around and looked at him in a panic.

“Stop it, please. I’m leaving, bro. Here, I’m gone.” The guy dragged himself towards the house.

“I’m not your bro, you fucking asshole.”

Tyler adjusted his belt and double-checked his knife. *Looks like it won’t be needed.* He spat on the ground and rubbed his hands together. His knuckles itched to beat the scumbag to a pulp, but he had no time for this now.

“Oh gosh, thank you, thank you so much,” whimpered the blonde girl. Both knees in the mud, hands on her lap, she looked petrified and helpless, like a little kid.

“You ‘right?” he asked her.

She nodded.

“Let’s get your friend up.” Tyler pulled the other girl’s arm over his shoulder and helped her off the ground. The mixed smell of alcohol, vomit and perfume hit him straight away. *Charming.* She moaned, holding the side of her head.

“My car’s over there.” The sober girl pointed across the road. “Thank you again. You were amazing, totally amazing.”

“You should stay away from idiots like him,” said Tyler. *Yeah, how do girls like you end up with losers like this one?*

The three of them hurried to an aged silver Golf, and Tyler dropped the half-gone brunette on the passenger seat while her friend started the engine.

“Go, go before the douchebag calls his mates. Bye.” Tyler shut the door and hurried to his car. He drove off in the misty night just in time to see the guy in front of the open door with three other men behind him.

Shit, I hope the client didn’t see me, otherwise there will be no more game here. He sped off to the deserted Northwestern Motorway.