

## TWO WAVE HOLD-DOWN

by MARA WOLFORD

**I get my kid off to school and I hit it** straight down to the beach. As I rock up, Rob runs up the sand breathless. He has already broken a leash, swum one kilometre after his board and run another kay up the sand. He runs straight to his backpack and rummages for a second leash. At the same moment, Sylvain rocks up. “So am I on it?” I ask. “You’re on it. No current,” Rob replies. “How big?” “Big. Ya got the 8’6”, right? You’re good.” “Yeah...”

Rob and I share a tumultuous past, so I question his motives sometimes. I look to Sylvain, who nods in agreement, and realise I share a tumultuous past with him as well. I wonder what they both ultimately wish for me, but I will take their advice at face value today.

Of course they don’t wait for me, but run off down the sand as I gear up. The boats aren’t running, which should have been a sign of what I was in for. I throw my lycra on, zinc up my mug and run down the sand after them, the 8’6” weighing heavily under my arm. I run along the jetty and jump into the channel that sucks out underneath the temple. All the gigantic sea snakes live in the crannies of the cliff underneath the temple. Disrupted by the enormous swell, they are slip-sliding around in the channel.

I spot Sylvain out on the left at Elevators and start paddling straight towards him. “Go wide! Go around! Even further!” he yells, in French. I paddle wide as an eight foot set

hauls through a spot typically designated for beginners on softops. The poor Saffa dude who followed me out on a 6’10” clearly doesn’t speak French. We don’t see him again.

I get out to the left and nab two into the channel. I really hate surfing backside, and I see a few guys on the right at Elevators, not even at the top, which must be in another realm at this moment. I see them grab a few good ones and boy, can they surf.

I head across the peak from the left to the right, smile at the guys as I approach. They smile back. At that very moment, out the back I see something so huge approaching from the Straight of Lombok that I’m not sure I have a name for it, but I suddenly don’t want to be there anymore. At all.

I look at the guys, motion with my head, and paddle straight in to nab the next six-foot reef-banger that passes through. I know they have no idea what I’m on about. I can tell as I watch them paddle a few metres out, as if that can save us now. They are pro surfers, but I’ve never seen them out here before. They don’t know what’s coming.

Nusa Dua is the most exposed point on Bali, a direct overture to the Indian Ocean. Just beyond the reef lies a two kilometre drop-off that leads straight to the edge of the Indonesian throughflow, the body of water connecting the Indian Ocean with the Pacific, and one of the largest tidal flows in the world. Want to watch the universe spin around you? Sit out there for a decade or

two. You are guaranteed to cop it at one point or another. Poseidon insists.

I grab an inside six-footer and flee. The thing smashes onto the chopping block and I kick the tail up, thinking I’m home free. I look out the back and see the set smash down. I see boards fly in the foam. I know they are swimming now. I place my board perpendicular to the oncoming wall of foam and dive. Not too deep and not to shallow, there’s a trick to it.

The set rolls over me, and as it does, it pushes me down from two metres to six metres. A vortex sucking me to the bottom of the sea. I know better than to fight. I start counting. One-one-thousand...

I had a discussion with Shane Dorian in the airport in Medan a few years back. We’re childhood friends. When I got smashed, I count to comfort myself, knowing that I can passively sit at the bottom of a pool a long time, and if I remain passive, shit should eventually sort itself out without too much intervention on my behalf. Shane doesn’t count, he just bloody bulls through it, because he can. Shane has brute strength, but as a woman, I depend upon logic.

There’s no tension on my leash, but it hasn’t snapped. I open my eyes to see the board fluttering alongside me, six metres under. I don’t know what to make of that. I reach nineteen-one-thousand. It’s a 21-second interval swell, so I know the next bitch is bound to be right on top of me. Just then I feel the implosion and look up to see

the next wave roll over me. I realise how utterly alone I am.

The second wave snares my board and drags me to the surface. I gasp, but there is no panic. All I know is that I want the hell outta there ASAP, the down current still tugging at my legs. The next wall of whitewater swallows me up and dumps me onto the reef, where I stand and look for the others. They have already been swept 300 metres down the reef. They are swimming strong after their boards, out of danger. As if I could do anything at all for them if they were in trouble.

I paddle the long haul across the tranquil lagoon. Rob and Sylvain follow, as everyone has been washed in. “I fucking did a two-wave hold-down,” I tell them. “No way, really? You okay?” they ask. “Yeah.”

I rinse off, get in my car and drive to work, spreading compost and curating plants under the equatorial sun. Later I make dinner for my kid, put him to bed and lie staring at the ceiling all night long. Shell-shocked, it’s only then that the terror strikes.

The next morning, I melt the wax off my beautiful custom 8’6” Rawson in the sun, polish it to a shine, wrap it in painter’s plastic and put it away. Most likely forever.

A few months later, up on Nias, the same crew of pros pulls in to lace a few needles. “That was fucking you!” they say. “That was a two-wave hold-down. We saw that!”

I guess I wasn’t completely alone in my dread.

