



TRUE HAUNTINGS

DEADLY
DISASTERS





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DINAH WILLIAMS



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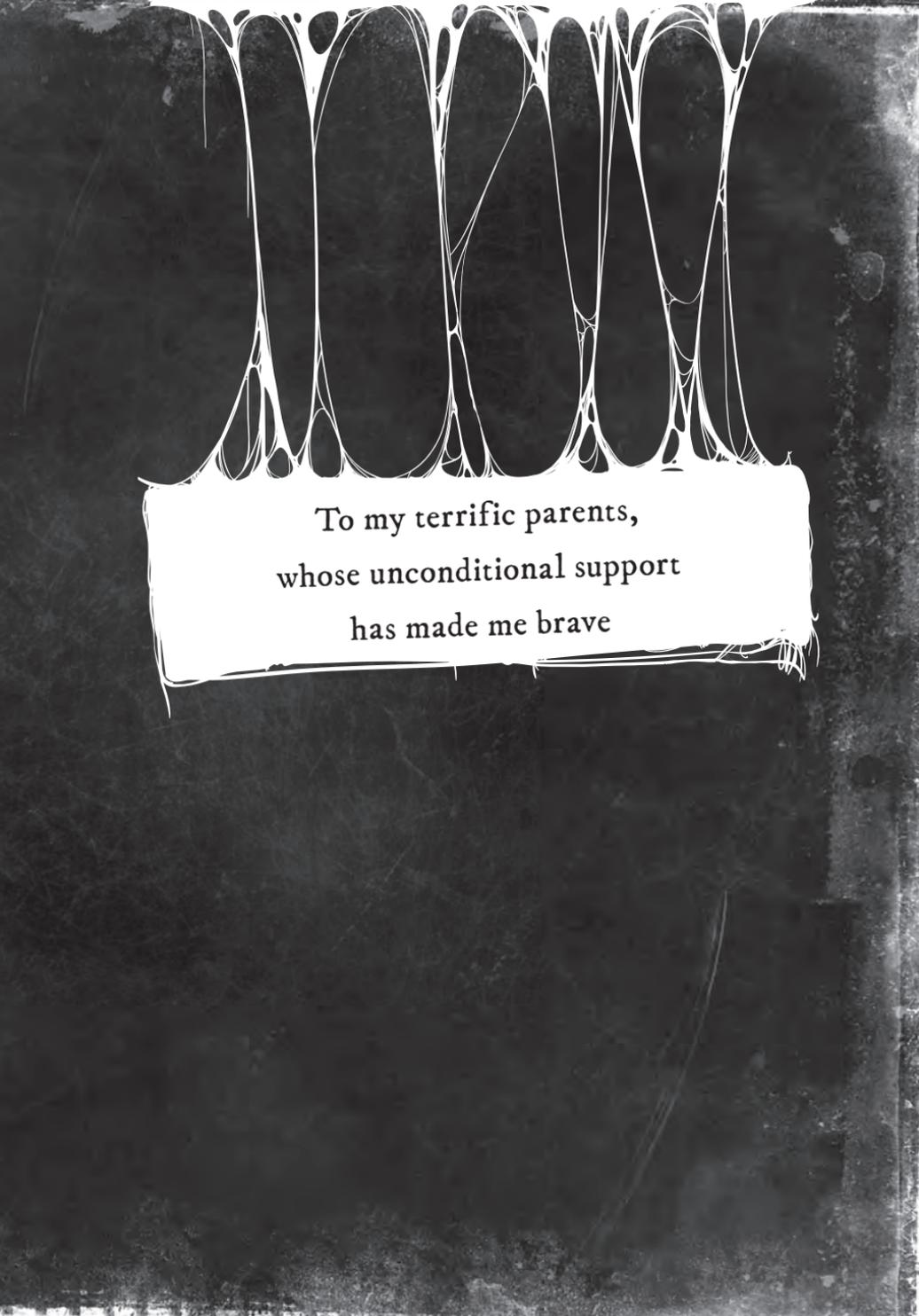
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To my terrific parents,
whose unconditional support
has made me brave

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“HAVE I DIED?”

2011 EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI, JAPAN

The history of the Japanese port city of Ishinomaki was fairly uneventful—no big fires, no bombing during World War II, no significant damage from earthquakes. The last major disaster had been a tsunami in 869 AD, which killed more than a thousand people but happened so long ago it feels like ancient history.

That changed on March 11, 2011. At 2:46 in the afternoon, the ground began to shake. While earthquakes are fairly common in Japan, this one was huge, lasting nearly ten minutes. Warnings went out across the country that a tsunami was coming. Residents were told to leave immediately and get to higher ground. But so many of these warnings had been sent out over the years that people didn't panic.

They should have—a wave of death was heading their way.

The Japanese word “tsunami” refers to a huge sea wave caused by an earthquake or other undersea disturbance. As the wave moves inland from the sea, it builds to greater heights as the depth of the ocean decreases.

Less than a half hour later, Ishinomaki was engulfed by a massive tsunami, which flattened the town. Nearly 6,000 people were killed by the towering wave and 29,000 lost their homes. Those who survived were devastated by the damage and mourned the loss of family, friends, and neighbors.

As crushed buildings and other debris were removed from the streets and electricity was restored, the taxi services began to get some strange calls. Drivers would pick up passengers, only to have them vanish during the ride.

In one instance, a driver picked up a woman who asked to go to an area totally destroyed during the tsunami. He told her there was nothing left there to visit. “Have I died?”

she asked him. When he turned to look at her, the back seat of his taxi was empty.



The island of Japan is located above underground plates that shift and collide, causing earthquakes to happen fairly often. However, the one that occurred in 2011 was anything but ordinary. Registered at 9.0 on the Richter scale, which measures the strength of earthquakes, it was the largest in Japan's history and the fourth largest in recorded history. This massive quake off the east coast was so strong it actually moved the entire country four feet closer to the United States.

While the quake was terrible, the tsunami that came less than an hour later was worse. More than 120 feet tall in places, the wave swept in from the sea and destroyed everything in its wake for nearly six miles inland.

The tsunami battered nearly 217 miles of the Pacific coast of Japan, wiping out sources for electricity, gas, and clean water. One reporter said that the wave “was mixed with mud, with ships and cars smashing toward wooden houses, dragging those into rice fields, and basically bashing them into pieces.”



Ryo Kanouya was inside his house when the tsunami struck. He told *National Geographic* that he thought he was going to drown when the water reached his ceiling.



The tsunami bursting into the city of Miyako.

“The next moment I heard [a] cracking sound made by my home’s destruction . . . I was drained from my house into the soup of seawater, cars, houses, and everything the tsunami carried. To my surprise, I was able to reach the surface . . . Luckily a drawer for clothes came floating toward me and I climbed onto it.”

Ryo and the drawer were being sucked out into the ocean with the receding wave. When he floated by a tree, Ryo held on to the branches. He stayed in the tree until the water went back out and he could climb down.