

# PART 1

## ACROSS THE ATLANTIC



# 1

## The Tower

The red-brick hall was streaked with sunbeams, shimmering down through the water and illuminating the faces of beasts and men and gods. In the flooded gallery the silence was deep, just the whisper of the waves above and the soft shifting of silt and sediment on the flagstone floor.

Joe had visited many such places in recent weeks, drowned museums and sunken palaces, vast and old and elegant. He wished he'd been able to see them before the Wall broke and the water came, when these halls were full of sound and people. London had been a living city then, one of the last in the world. Now it was just like everywhere else, flooded and broken and washed away.

But there was still beauty here, if you looked at it the right way. The walls of the gallery were almost bare,

stripped clean by the first salvage crews to pick through the flooded city. But a few paintings still hung in place, waterlogged beneath cracked panes of glass. Figures and landscapes bled into one another; painted eyes leaked colourful tears as drop by drop the sea absorbed them.

Shouldering his pack, Joe kicked through an empty window and angled up towards the surface. He could see the outline of the skiff overhead, a black oval surrounded by floating flotsam, the crust of rubbish and loose soil and plant matter that covered the still, brackish water inside the Wall. He broke through, spitting out his mouthpiece and taking a lungful of fresh air.

Kara sat up in the boat, rubbing her eyes and sweeping back her lank yellow hair. Joe swam towards her, objects bobbing in his face – a blue teacup, a wad of matted paper, a lump of earth with grass still clinging to it. He pushed them aside, taking hold of Kara's outstretched hand and climbing over the skiff's wooden gunwale.

"Having a nice snooze?" he asked, sipping from a bottle of chemically filtered water to wash the salty taste from his mouth. "Dreaming about how wonderful I am and how much you lurve me?"

Kara raised an eyebrow. "I was just catching up. I didn't sleep much last night."

Joe snorted. "I know. You kicked me six times." They

didn't really need to share a bed any more – they had their own place now, with two whole rooms. But they still did it, mostly out of habit. “Are you worrying about something?”

“I'm fine,” Kara said, a little too quickly. “You were taking your time so I dozed off. What's so fascinating down there anyway?”

Joe looked up at the sheer face of the museum, the high brick wall throwing the skiff into shadow. He shrugged. “It's just an interesting place. A bit old and spooky, but I like it.”

Kara got to her feet. “This whole City's old and spooky. And I don't like it at all.”

She stood in the prow, gazing out over the filthy, encrusted water. Buildings jutted from the brine, concrete towers and church spires and chimney-topped terraces, all silent and shadowy under the shifting sky. There was no sign of any other boats or salvage teams, but that was hardly unusual. The first days following the Flood had been a free-for-all, the rescue efforts hampered by a mad scramble as looters and City refugees came in and grabbed whatever they could. But in recent months, order had been restored – the new authorities had locked London down, and now the only ones allowed to dive inside the Wall were those with an official licence and a

signed permit. Both of which Joe had, largely because the person the Shanties had chosen as their new prime minister happened to be his old schoolteacher, Miss Ella King.

“Well, we're not here on a sightseeing trip,” Kara said, turning back. “Come on, let's see what you've got.”

Joe opened his backpack, tipping out the objects he'd been sent to find – four metal sculptures, misshapen and abstract, with appendages sticking from them almost like arms.

“What are they supposed to be?” Kara asked, wrinkling her nose. “They just look like more junk.”

Joe crouched, studying the bronze blobs. “I think they're sort of cool. Like, I don't know, like thoughts or something. Ideas you haven't quite finished having.”

Kara rolled her eyes. “Whatever. I just don't see why our buyer would pay so much for them.”

“Maybe she thinks they're cool too. Not everything's about money.” Joe squinted up at her. “How much will this bring us up to, anyway? Have we saved enough for Canada?”

That had been Joe's dream for as long as he could remember – to escape the hectic floating slum they called the Shanties to a place of trees and mountains and peace and quiet.

“Not quite,” Kara said without looking at him. “Soon, though.”

“Maybe we should’ve gone with Nate,” Joe mused. “It might have been fun to see where the Mariners live.” The Ark *Neptune* had set sail the day before, under orders from the Mariner High Council to return to its home port of Frisco, thousands of miles away on the far coast of America. Their friend Nate had wanted them to come along, but Kara had flat-out refused.

“Fun?” she snorted now. “I’ve had enough of those floating loonies to last a lifetime. I know, I know, they’re not all bad. But I still don’t think I’m ready for a whole city full of them.”

“It’s just that you said we could leave the Shanties,” Joe complained. “But we still haven’t.”

“We’ll go when the time’s right,” Kara snapped. “Stop pestering me about it.”

Joe felt a quiver of unease. Kara had always had a quick temper, if someone deserved it. But recently it seemed like she was annoyed at everyone, even Joe. He supposed it had something to do with growing up; Kara was sixteen now and he’d heard people got in funny moods at that age. Joe was still only eleven, or at least that was his best guess. His parents were the only ones who’d know for sure, and he hadn’t seen them in quite a lot of years.

“Hey, that’s weird,” Kara said suddenly. “D’you think they’re meant to be up there?”

She was gesturing across the water, between the towers to the concrete Wall on the horizon. The Wall was a perfect oval, a smooth, sheer-sided bowl enclosing the entire City. Once it had kept out the rising water but now there was a huge crack in it, a ragged cleft where the bomb placed by the Mariner terrorist Redeye had torn out the foundations. It was towards this gap that Kara was pointing, and as Joe shielded his eyes he saw dark figures up there, scaling the shattered stone.

“Maybe it’s a construction crew,” he mused. “Maybe Miss Ella’s finally found someone mad enough to try and patch it up.”

“Maybe,” Kara said doubtfully. “But I don’t see their boat. And what’s that noise?”

Joe held his breath and listened. Beneath the lap of the waves he could hear a steady drone, growing in volume. “Sounds like a motor. A jetski or something.”

“There!” Kara said, grabbing his arm. “Look!”

Facing them was a wide expanse of open water with just a few scattered buildings poking through. This had once been the path of the River Thames, Joe knew, though it had been paved over even before the Wall went up. Now along the ancient watercourse something was

moving – not a boat or a jetski but a sort of bulge below the surface, travelling under its own power. It was flanked by two similar shapes, something trailing behind them in the water.

“I think Nate told me about these,” Joe recalled. “The Mariners call them DPVs, diver propulsion vehicles. It’s a sort of propeller that you hang on to and it pulls you through the water.”

“Perfect if you don’t want to be seen,” Kara pointed out.

“You think they’re looters?” Joe asked. “Maybe we should go back and tell someone.”

“Looters with Mariner tech?” Kara wondered dubiously. “And they look like they know exactly where they’re going.”

Joe traced the vehicles’ path, looking east along the Thames. “London Bridge is that way,” he said. “And the Bank of England, but there’s no money left in it.” Since he’d started salvaging inside the Wall he’d become fascinated by the old city; even the names seemed to have a strange kind of magic. “And there’s St Paul’s, the Tower of London, the Monument, but it’s all been picked c—”

“Wait, go back,” Kara said. “Did you say the Tower? Isn’t that where they’ve been keeping—”

“John Cortez,” Joe finished, looking at her in horror. The Mariner captain had masterminded the attack on London in which thousands had died; Kara and Joe had very nearly been among them. His imprisonment in the Tower had been a symbolic act – he had all but destroyed this great city, now he languished in its most infamous jail.

“Nate always said Cortez had friends,” Kara said. “A whole network of supporters, right across the globe. What if they’ve come to bust him out?”

Joe reached for the skiff’s outboard motor. “We have to go back. We have to tell someone and—”

“And risk them getting away?” Kara asked. “Not on your life. Start her up, quiet as you can.”

Joe thought about protesting but he knew it was pointless. Once Kara got an idea in her head she’d see it through, whatever the consequences. He tugged the starter cable and the engine rattled, kicking out wisps of grey smoke.

“What if they’ve got guns?” he asked, steering along the stone face of the gallery.

“We’ll just follow them for now,” Kara said. “See what they’re up to, then decide what to do.”

Refuse stacked against the bow as they moved into the sunlight, weaving through the line of buildings that would once have marked the south bank of the river.

But as they passed over the submerged span of London Bridge and scanned the open water beyond, Joe realised that the divers had vanished.

Kara gestured and he cut the engine. “Where did they go?” she whispered. “D’you think they saw us?”

“I don’t know,” Joe said. “But look, there’s the Tower up ahead.”

The medieval prison rose from the water, a sturdy square of grey stone ringed with crenellated battlements. Its corner turrets were topped with pale domes, tattered flags fluttering in the breeze. The outer wall was almost entirely submerged, just the top few feet rising from the waves.

“What if you’re wrong?” Joe asked. “What if they’re just ordinary looters? They might not be going there at all.”

“Then we’ll tell the guards and they can report it,” Kara said. “But either way we—”

A loud *crack* sounded and something struck the boat, splinters flying from the gunwale. Kara dropped, pulling Joe down as a second bullet punched right through the hull, embedding itself in the starboard side. Water began to gulp through the hole.

“They shot at us!” Joe said. “I told you they would.”

“Clever you,” Kara muttered as they peered over the

side of the skiff.

The divers were some distance away, clinging to the upper branches of a leafless, sunken tree. The tallest of the three held a rifle and was loading more bullets into the chamber. One of the others gestured but the tall one ignored them, taking aim. Joe and Kara ducked as the shot passed inches overhead, thudding into a nearby building.

Then they heard motors whine as the divers dropped back into the water, activating their propellers and curving towards the Tower. Kara yanked the starter cable and the engine rumbled as she steered in pursuit.

“You’re crazy,” Joe protested. “Those shots were meant to scare us off!”

“They didn’t work,” Kara said through gritted teeth.

“But we’re sinking.” The water was past Joe’s ankles and still pouring in. “We’ll never make it.”

“So we’ll go as far as we can then swim,” Kara said. “But I won’t let them free him. I just won’t.”

Water splashed over the prow as the skiff picked up speed and Joe scanned the passing refuse for something to bail out with. He grabbed a plastic bowl, but it had so many holes in it that it barely made a difference.

“Look,” Kara said, pointing. The three figures were climbing on to the Tower’s curtain wall, wearing blue-

black wetsuits with hoods and built-in breath masks. Even from this distance Joe could see they were Mariner-made. “We’re coming after you,” Kara growled. “Just you w—”

The skiff tipped suddenly, water gushing over the port side. Joe snatched for his pack as the boat flipped, but he was too late to save the bronze sculptures. They sank rapidly into the black depths.

“So much for getting paid,” he grumbled and Kara smiled sadly, treading water.

“I’m sorry, Joe. But this is more important.”

They swam in the direction of the Tower, through a bobbing archipelago of metal cans and plastic containers. At last they reached the battlements and Joe pulled himself up, stopping to catch his breath. But Kara didn’t pause, hurrying along a stone walkway towards a small, steel-roofed guard tower. Joe picked himself up and followed.

The door stood open and Kara gestured for him to stay back, peering inside. Then she beckoned to him. The guardroom was low and dark, the walls made of rough, ancient granite. But it was empty, a door on the far side standing wide.

“Where is everyone?” she asked. “Shouldn’t there be someone on duty?”

“Maybe the Mariners paid them off,” Joe whispered. “Or, you know, killed them.”

They followed another short walkway, pushing through an arched wooden door into the main Tower. For a brief moment Joe thought the high-ceilinged room was crowded with people, all standing in silence. Then he saw that they were only dummies, plastic figures sealed in glass cases, wearing plush robes and frilly dresses and suits of steel armour. Another casket was stacked with swords and pikes and battleaxes, and Kara eyed them keenly as they passed. But to Joe’s relief she left them alone, exiting the room into a long stone corridor.

Now they could hear something up ahead – a sustained hiss, like escaping steam. Kara slowed and Joe huddled behind her, creeping towards an opening at the end of the hall. Light danced on the walls and suddenly he recognised the sound for what it was: the whine of a cutting torch.

They peered into a small, enclosed antechamber. The torch was being operated by two of the wetsuited Mariners, crouching by a steel door and attempting to shear through the padlock. The third stood a little way back, the cowl of his wetsuit pulled back to reveal a shaved head and a broad, tattooed neck.

“I told you,” Kara whispered to Joe, her words almost drowned by the noise of the torch. “They’re trying to free Cortez. We have to stop them.”

“Wait,” Joe said. “That guy’s twice your size – you can’t—”

But Kara was already moving, keeping low as she ducked into the room. She crossed the floor in two bounds, grabbing the standing Mariner around the waist and using her weight to drag him off his feet. He landed hard and Kara straddled him, shoving him flat on his back before he could cry out. His rifle skittered away and Joe ran to grab it, hugging it to his chest. The other Mariners hadn’t even glanced back – the torch was too loud and they were engrossed in their task.

Kara pinned the fallen Mariner, taking hold of his arms. But he was a big man, and strong; he broke loose and swung at her, splitting her lip. Kara’s face flushed with anger as she shifted her weight, driving her fist into the man’s stomach. He let out a wheezing cry but Kara hit him again, smashing his cheek, drawing blood. Then she bent double, wrapping both hands around the big man’s throat and squeezing as hard as she could.

“I won’t let you take him!” she hissed. “Cortez has to pay for what he—”

“Kara!” a voice cried. “Stop!”

The noise of the torch had ceased and the other Mariners had turned to see what was happening. One jumped to his feet, tugging back the hood of his wetsuit

to reveal a pale face, stricken with horror.

“Nate!” Kara breathed, letting go of her victim. “What are you...? Why are you...?”

The Mariner boy held up both hands as he stepped closer. His companion put down the cutting torch and reached to her waist, tugging out a small pistol and training it on Kara.

“Nate, who are these ... children?” she demanded, her eyes flicking to the rifle in Joe’s hands. Quickly he placed it on the floor and stepped away.

“It’s Kara and Joe,” Nate said. “The ones who... The ones I...” He looked at Kara with pleading eyes. “Just let the big guy go, I promise I can explain.”

The tattooed Mariner lay prone, red bubbles breaking on his lips. Kara glared at him then she got to her feet, facing Nate. “Go on, then,” she said. “Explain to me why you’re trying to free John Cortez.”

“We’re not freeing him,” Nate insisted. “It’s not like that. We’re just taking him away.”

“Away?” Kara asked. “Away where?”

“To the *Neptune* first,” Nate said. “Then back to Frisco. He needs to answer for what he’s done.”

“That’s why he’s in here!” Kara objected. “He’s going to be tried and punished.”

“But he’s not safe,” Nate insisted. “I mean, he’s not



secure. As we've literally just proved. My aunt Sedna can explain it better than I can – if you come with us to the *Neptune* she'll convince you that—”

“No!” Kara shouted. “I'm not going anywhere with you, and neither is Cortez.”

“Friends, please. You mustn't fight over me.”

Joe looked up, his heart thumping. The cell door was swinging open, the lock dropping in pieces to the stone floor. John Cortez had grown painfully thin since they last saw him, his ice-blue eyes sunken into his narrow, watchful face. Between his fingers were ragged flaps of skin, the remains of the webbing he'd had surgically attached to his hands.

“Don't move,” the closest Mariner said, turning her pistol on Cortez. “Not one step.”

“But what is all this?” he asked. “I thought you'd come to kill me, but then you started yelling at each other.”

“They've come to take you home,” Kara said spitefully. “To a nice little cell back in Mariner country, where you'll be warm and cosy and—”

“It's not like that,” Nate snapped. “You don't know what you're talking about, Kara. We're taking him, it's been agreed.”

“Agreed by who?” Kara demanded. “I didn't agree.”

“You're right.” Cortez smiled at her. “I'm perfectly

fine where I am.”

“Shut up!” Nate and Kara snapped simultaneously, then the boy shook his head.

“Look, there's two choices,” Nate said. “You can either put up a fight and lose, and watch us take him. Or you can come with us and, I promise, my aunt will tell you exactly what's going on.”

“I think he's right,” Joe put in, bracing himself for Kara's anger. “I mean, they've got guns and we haven't. But we should go along and find out what it's all about. Shouldn't we?”

Kara seethed silently, grinding her teeth. “Fine,” she said. “But it had better be good.”