

ORPHANS OF THE TIDE
ETERNITY
ENGINE

STRUAN MURRAY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MANUEL ŠUMBERAC

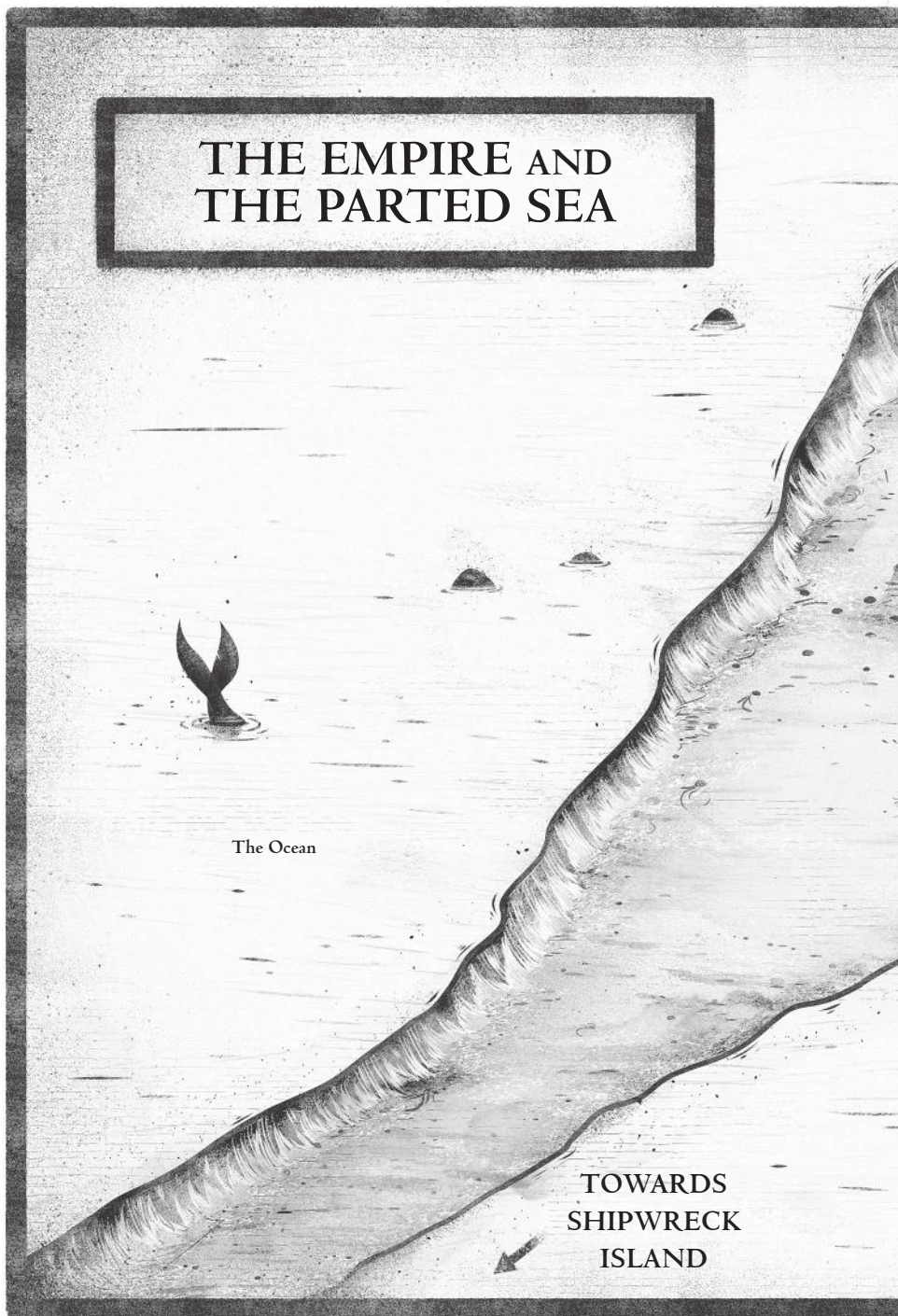


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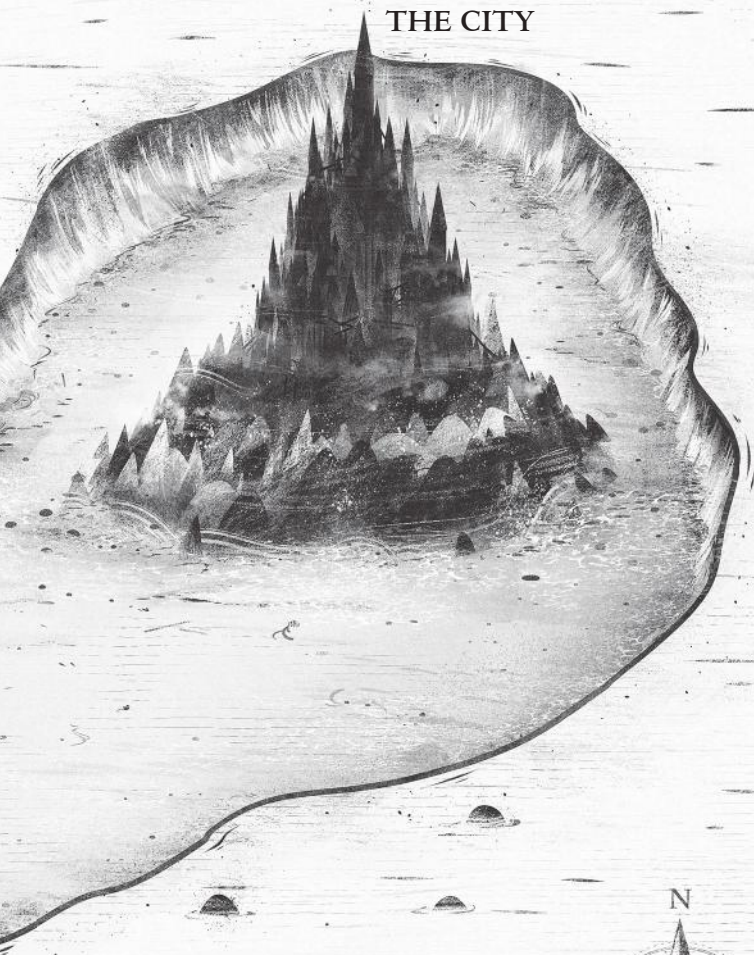
THE EMPIRE AND THE PARTED SEA

The Ocean

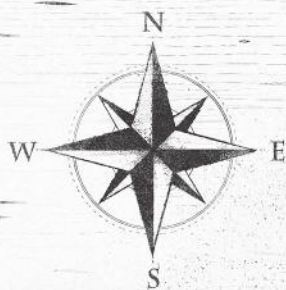
TOWARDS
SHIPWRECK
ISLAND



THE CITY



The Ocean



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For Anbara

Denizens of the Drowned World

From the Last City of Humankind:

Eleanor ‘Ellie’ Lancaster, inventor and forty-sixth Vessel to the Enemy.

Anna Stonewall, self-appointed leader of the Orphanage Street orphans.

James Castion, former Inquisitor and retired whale lord.

Killian Hargrath, renowned Inquisitor and future saint.

Anthony Vanahaugh, High Inquisitor, leader of the Inquisition and the City Council.

Nathaniel Archer, elected leader of the Guild of Whale Lords.

Finn Lancaster, brother of Ellie (*deceased*).

Hannah Lancaster, famed inventor and mother to Ellie and Finn (*deceased*).

Altimus Ashenholme, scholar and inventor, mentor to Hannah Lancaster, father of Kate (*presumed deceased*).

Claude Hestermeyer, scholar and forty-fifth Vessel to the Enemy (*deceased*).

Peter Lambeth, scholar (*deceased*).

Lily Fry, best friend of Ibnet.

Benjamin Ibnet, best friend of Fry.

From Shipwreck Island:

Kate, twenty-first ruler of Shipwreck Island and presumed Vessel to the God of Life.

The Seven Sentinels, silent sworn protectors of the Queen.

Anitha Hassar, general of the Queen's army.

Loren Alexander, disgraced nobleman.

Leila, whale rider and first ruler of Shipwreck Island (*deceased*).

Thea, twentieth ruler of Shipwreck Island and mother of Kate (*deceased*).

Viola Altdor, sailor and revolutionary.

Oscar Molworth, innkeeper of the Royal 'Vile' Oak inn, lover of oranges, self-proclaimed master of everything.

The Gods:

The God of the Sea, currently manifesting as a boy called Seth.

The God of Life, also known as the God-Bird. Assumed to be residing in Kate, actual whereabouts unclear.

The Great Enemy of Humankind, also known as ‘the God Who Drowned the Gods’ and ‘the Abomination’. Currently residing in Ellie Lancaster.



The Last City

The orphans were wading across the rooftops, the ocean up past their ankles, when a whale burst from the sea.

‘Ooh,’ they sighed, as it rolled over in mid-air, shedding a blanket of seawater, then crashed into the waves with the clap of a gunshot.

‘It got me!’ Ibnet shrieked with delight, drenched from head to toe. ‘Anna, look, it got me! Isn’t that supposed to be good luck?’

‘It’s bad luck, idiot,’ said Fry, punching his arm. ‘You’ll be dead within the year.’

‘It got *you* too,’ said Ibnet. ‘And it’s *not* bad luck, is it, Anna?’

Anna crouched at the edge of the rooftop, inspecting the vast ring of foam left by the whale. The other orphans

crowded round her, clutching their sacks of trinkets. Children came to the Flats to forage among the ocean's offerings: debris washed on to the rooftops at high tide. They dreamed of uncovering relics from before the world had drowned – swords and crowns and chests of rubies. Mostly they found oyster shells and fish heads, and shards of crockery that they later claimed were bits of human skull.

The water rippled and a dark mound of welts and barnacles emerged, then sprayed a jet of water high into the air. Anna swallowed. The last time she'd seen a humpback whale, her life had changed forever. She held her breath, wondering if it was a sign.

'*Anna*,' Ibnet whined.

'It's good luck, Ibnet!' Anna snapped, turning to the orphans. 'Ian, stop scratching at that rash. Edward, I told you before – don't put those in your mouth.' She did a quick headcount. 'Where's Fry?'

'Here,' said Fry, studying a second group of children further along the rooftops, who were throwing them evil looks. 'Why are they watching us when there's a *whale* right there?'

'Just ignore them,' said Anna.

'*Orphans!*' The cry was hurled like a clod of dirt. 'Did you call that whale here? Is the Enemy gonna climb out of it again?'

A tall, handsome boy stalked towards Anna, the other

children splashing after him, wrinkling their noses as they eyed the orphans, like they might be infectious.

‘Orphans aren’t allowed on the Flats,’ said the boy. ‘They don’t deserve treasure.’

Anna sloshed through the silty water to meet him head-on, glaring from between two muddy lengths of wet ginger hair. She felt no anger, or fear. She had faced far worse.

‘You had the Vessel living with you,’ said the boy. ‘Ellie Lancaster.’ The children behind him shivered at the name. ‘I bet you’re still keeping her hidden, aren’t you? Her and the God Who Drowned the Gods.’

Anna held his gaze for five seconds. The boy blinked.

‘Ellie Lancaster is dead,’ said Anna. It hurt to say the words. She was the only person in the City who knew they weren’t true, but still, it was unlikely she would ever see her best friend again.

The boy shrugged. ‘The Enemy’s not, though. What if it’s living in one of you now? I bet it feels right at home in a horrid, smelly orphan.’

‘It takes the Enemy ten *years* or more to return after its Vessel dies,’ said Fry, but the tall boy ignored her. He pointed at Ibnet, who was nervously scratching his nose.

‘That one’s got a funny look about him. I think we should give him to the Inquisitors, just to be sure.’

Anna sprang forward, kicking the boy’s leg out from under him, roaring as she flung him down into the muddy

water. She grabbed his arm and twisted it behind his back, and he squealed as Anna glared round at the other children, daring them to come near. ‘If any of you lay a finger on my orphans,’ she told them, ‘you’ll *wish* the Enemy had got to you instead of me.’

They backed away, huddling together in fear. Anna released the boy and he scurried off, cradling his arm.

‘Um . . . are you okay, Anna?’ Fry asked.

‘I’m fine,’ Anna snapped, breathing heavily. ‘Alice, your shoelace is undone. Kieran, watch you don’t fall in that gap.’

‘Are you sure you’re all right?’ said Ibnet, peering into Anna’s eyes. ‘You almost ripped that boy’s arm off. He wasn’t actually going to hurt us.’

‘I’m not taking that chance. Did you remember to rub that Ointment of Eliza on your —’

‘Yes, Anna,’ Ibnet said, rolling his eyes. ‘Every morning, like the doctor said. I’m not stupid.’

He and Fry shared a weary look.

‘What?’ said Anna flatly. ‘What does that look mean?’

‘You never used to be like this,’ said Fry. ‘Worried about us all the time.’

‘It’s really annoying,’ said Ibnet.

‘And you’re not looking after *yourself*, either,’ said Fry, lifting a wet lock off Anna’s forehead. ‘This is the first time your hair’s been washed in weeks.’

Anna just stared out to sea, aware of Fry and Ibnet watching her. The silence was broken by a rush of water

and the throaty singing of sailors as a mighty whaling ship pulled along the Revival Waterfront, sails fluttering. A broad man stood at the wheel, smiling at the children with a large set of emerald-studded teeth. He had a necklace of pearls round his neck, and perched on his head was a stuffed octopus, tied beneath his chin by two of its tentacles.

‘That’s Lord Russ!’ cried Ibnet.

‘Don’t be stupid – it’s Lord Abermoth,’ said Fry.

The ship drew near the Flats, and Lord Abermoth tossed a handful of coins to the orphans, who squealed and splashed through the water to grab them.

‘Wait, he’s not going to kill that whale, is he?’ said Ibnet, wrestling Fry over a coin.

‘Of course he is,’ said Fry, her arm locked round Ibnet’s neck. ‘He’s a whale lord.’

‘But . . . it’s beautiful?’

‘It’s food.’

Anna recognized some of the younger sailors clambering the rigging, including Dimitri. When she was eleven, Anna had given him a daisy, plucked fresh from the orphanage garden, along with five poems she’d written. The poems had somehow found their way back to the orphanage, and for weeks the other orphans had sung the verses back to her in squeaky falsettos, until she’d stolen the dice from all the board games in the games room, ransoming them back in exchange for their sworn silence.

‘You still owe me that arm-wrestle!’ Anna yelled at Dimitri, running to keep up with the ship. ‘If you win, I’ll give you a fresh trout. I’m really good at gutting them now.’

‘I’ve got bigger fish to catch!’ Dimitri yelled back.

‘Whales aren’t fish, idiot.’

‘Figure of speech, idiot,’ said Dimitri, with a smile. He reached into his pocket and threw a red apple down to her. Anna caught it in one hand, hurriedly picking mud from her hair with the other.

‘Oh, I see,’ said Fry, raising an eyebrow. ‘*Now* you care about your appearance.’

‘Shut up,’ said Anna, as she did another headcount. ‘Twelve,’ she said, her chest tightening. ‘Where’s Ibnet?’

He was standing in the shadow of St Edmund’s Causeway – a stretch of buildings overhead – staring up at a tall figure in a dark coat. ‘Ibnet!’ Anna cried, sloshing through the water. ‘Get away from him!’

She grabbed Ibnet and pulled him roughly behind her back.

‘I wasn’t doing anything!’ he complained. ‘You’re hurting my arm!’

A large, sad-eyed man was shuffling down the steps from the causeway, leaning heavily on a cane made from a narwhal tusk. He had dark brown skin, a patchy greying beard, and was staring at the ground. His once-red coat had faded, and lost most of its buttons along the way.

‘Go,’ Anna told Ibnet, nudging him towards the others. She glared up at the man. ‘If you take one more step, I’m gonna shove that narwhal tusk right up –’

‘I only want to talk,’ Castion wheezed, massaging his throat as if he’d forgotten how to speak.

‘I don’t care what you want,’ said Anna. ‘You tried to kill Ellie.’

‘She was the Vessel,’ said Castion, with a strained grimace.

Anna clenched her fists. ‘So? *You* made the Enemy get strong inside her. You’re the reason she’s gone.’

‘I thought I was doing the right thing.’

‘The right thing?’ Anna yelled. ‘You made everything worse. Three *years* she had the Enemy under control. She was doing fine! Then you and the Inquisition started chasing her, forcing her to ask for its help. That’s what happened to Claude Hestermeyer too, which you’d know if you’d bothered to read his diary.’

‘I have read it,’ said Castion. ‘I don’t have much else to do these days besides read. And you’re right. I did make things worse.’

Anna blinked. She hadn’t expected this. ‘Um, well . . . yeah, you did.’ She paused. ‘Idiot.’

‘She was my best friend’s daughter, and I loved her like my own child. Hestermeyer was like a brother to me. They’re both dead now, and it’s my fault.’

Anna rolled her eyes. ‘If you’re trying to make me feel sorry for you, it’s not going to work.’

She glanced over her shoulder to check on the orphans. There was a rattle of metal as Castion took three unsteady steps down the stairway on a leg and foot made of corroded brass. He held his cane out to Anna.

‘What’s that for?’

‘You said if I took another step you would put this . . . Well, I’m sure your description was going to be very colourful. Here you are.’

‘Don’t try to be funny. It doesn’t suit you.’ Anna sniffed. ‘You smell like wet dog and whisky. Have you lost all your money?’

Castion shrugged. ‘No, I’m very rich. I sold my ships, my warehouses, my whole whaling business. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. I’d like to make a donation to the orphanage.’

Anna crossed her arms. ‘You think that’s going to help with your guilt, do you? After what *you* did?’

‘Please –’ Castion began.

‘No! You don’t get to feel better. You *should* feel bad.’

‘So you don’t want my donation?’

‘Obviously I do. But I don’t want you to feel any better because of it.’ She shot another glance at the orphans.

‘Is something the matter?’

‘What are you talking about?’ snapped Anna.

‘You keep looking back at the others.’

‘Someone has to take care of them.’

Castion frowned. ‘They seem to be managing fine.’

‘*Now* they are. But the world is full of horrible men like you. I need to watch the orphans all the time, so I don’t miss anything.’

Castion studied her awhile.

‘Stop looking at me like that,’ said Anna. ‘What are you talking to me for, anyway? Matron Stileman runs the orphanage. Give *her* the donation.’

Castion nodded, opened his mouth to speak, then closed it. He attempted a bow, but had to steady himself with his cane. ‘Good day, Ms Stonewall.’

He hobbled back up the steps and, despite herself, Anna felt a pang of pity. A year ago, he’d been a dashing, daring whale lord, the most beloved person in the City. Now he looked like an old man.

But that doesn’t change what he did to Ellie, Anna thought, thrusting her pity aside.

Behind her, she heard one of the orphans cry out. She spun round, her heart thudding. Ibnet was pointing out to sea.

No, he was pointing *at* the sea.

It was roiling and swirling like in a storm, though the skies were calm. Shoals of fish darted and scattered in fright. Waves battered fiercely against the waterfront, and the orphans clutched each other in terror.

‘All right, you lot!’ Anna bellowed, fighting to keep the fear from her voice. ‘Out of the water *now*!’

They obeyed instantly, abandoning their bundles of

trinkets and splashing across the Flats. Anna rushed to help them, grabbing Milo, the smallest orphan, and swinging him on to her back. By the time they'd reached the street she'd done three more headcounts.

She turned round, and her breath caught in her throat.

The rooftops of the Flats were no longer covered in water, and neither were the smashed windows and mossy brickwork of the buildings beneath. The tide was lower than Anna had ever seen it, and was lowering further.

'What's happening?' said Ibnet.

It was as if someone had pulled a plug at the bottom of the ocean: the sea was draining away, buildings bursting forth from the waves, churches and clocktowers entangled with seaweed and encrusted with oysters, tasting air for the first time in seven centuries.

The children covered their ears as a sharp spire punched up through the hull of Lord Abermoth's ship, bursting out of the top deck and into the rigging. For a moment, the ship was held aloft, skewered like a crab on a fishing spear. Sailors grabbed ropes and hurled themselves overboard; only there was no longer a sea to jump into, and they landed heavily on newly exposed rooftops, groaning and crying out for help. Anna gasped as she saw Dimitri leap from the deck, seizing hold of a weathervane. Lord Abermoth clung to the spire itself, his octopus hat falling down over his eyes as his ship splintered against the cobbled streets below.

'The sea,' Fry whispered. 'The sea is gone.'



‘It’s not gone,’ said Ibnet. ‘Look, it’s out there.’ He pointed east to where a massive wall of churning water was still retreating, carrying with it the humpback whale.

Anna glanced down, but her legs wobbled and she stepped back from the edge. Without the sea, she was suddenly standing on top of a mountain. The City was now ten times as tall as it had been before, a labyrinth of muddy streets and broken rooftops carpeted with seashells. It might have been even taller: swirling mists made it impossible to see where the City ended and the seabed began.

‘How . . .?’ Ibnet mumbled.

Anna thought of the whale and shivered. She knew of one person who might have been able to part the seas, but had no idea why he would. Without the ocean, the City would starve. Others seemed to have realized that too, because in the streets high above people were screaming.

Anna looked along the waterfront and saw that the seas were now parted all the way to the horizon, creating a valley that ran south from the City. The same direction Ellie and Seth had travelled months ago.

Anna rubbed at an ache in her chest. ‘Ellie,’ she whispered.

She turned to the orphans, who were watching her for answers. ‘All right, everyone stay *right* here. Fry and Ibnet, you’re in charge.’

Anna raced along the waterfront to catch up with Castion, who was gaping in disbelief at the newly unveiled buildings below.

‘You,’ she said. ‘That donation money. You’re to spend it on bread and vegetables for the orphanage. Cos I reckon food’s about to get really expensive.’

Castion stared at her, confused. ‘The . . . the sea?’

‘And another thing: you’re going to pay for armed men to stand guard day and night, to make sure none of the orphans get hurt.’

‘I . . . of course,’ said Castion. ‘I’ll do that myself if I have to.’

‘No you won’t. Listen: if you could do it again, would you still have tried to kill Ellie? Or would you have tried to save her?’

Castion touched a silver ring on his finger, emblazoned with the icon of a spanner: Ellie’s mother’s personal symbol. ‘I would have tried to save her. I . . . would have died to save her.’

‘Great,’ said Anna. ‘After you’ve hired the guards, meet me at Ellie’s workshop. I’ll have a go at fixing your leg.’

‘There’s no point.’

‘Yes, there is. I need you to be able to keep up with me.’

Castion frowned. ‘Keep up with you? Where?’

Anna scrutinized Castion’s face. ‘You mean it – you’d die for her?’

‘Yes. Anna . . . what’s going on?’

Anna gazed south, and took a deep breath.

‘Ellie’s still alive,’ she said, ‘and we’re going to find her.’



The Spirit Realm

Whenever she closed her eyes, she was falling. Rooftops rushed up to meet her, the surface of the Ark speeding by in a grey blur. She screamed at the island below as she realized she was going to die. She was not a Vessel, or a god, and soon she'd be nothing at all.

Then the howling winds grew quiet, and everything slowed. The rooftops stopped rising; the Ark stilled beside her. She hovered in mid-air, and then, when she blinked, she was on her back, atop the Ark again.

And there, somehow, was Ellie, staring at her in horror.

Kate shook her head to banish the image, then stepped inside the carriage.

The boy was sitting cross-legged on the floor, eyes closed. He was always sat on the floor. She had given him a comfortable bed with lots of cushions, but the sheets lay

unruffled. The carriage creaked in a slow rhythm and, outside, Kate could hear the clip-clop of horses' hooves, the trundle of wheels driving through mud, and the relentless tread of a thousand boots.

'I've brought your lunch,' she said.

The boy said nothing.

Kate sat down, placing the tray between them. 'It's goat-neck stew. And for dessert – honey-glazed pears that my chef makes. You really should try them.'

His breathing was slow and deep. When he breathed in, blue mists gathered across his skin like storm clouds. When he breathed out they scattered, swirling to nothing.

'What's that, Seth?' she said. 'You'd like *me* to have a pear? Why, thank you – you're very kind.'

Kate stabbed one with a fork, lifting it to her mouth and biting deeply, dripping juice down her chin. She usually ate her meals formally with her War Council, and it made a refreshing change not to have to worry about her make-up running.

'I've had a lovely day, thanks for asking,' she said. 'This morning I practised my swordplay for an hour, then rode up and down through the army. I think it's important for the soldiers to see me as often as possible, to give them confidence. Apparently there are whispers the Enemy's City might be better defended than we thought.' She took another bite of pear, speaking with her mouth full. 'But what is the City without its ships? They'll surrender the

moment we arrive, without a drop of blood being spilled. Then the Enemy's City will be mine. Though I suppose it will need a new name. I was toying with "the Royal City". Like it?'

She swallowed. 'Why, thank you, Seth. I think it's perfect too. I do so enjoy our chats.'

Kate rocked back and forth, humming to herself and relishing the opportunity to just *be*, and not have to focus on keeping her back straight, and keeping her voice deep, and keeping all attention fixed on her.

'By the way, I have good news!' she announced, sitting up on her knees. 'Well, and bad news, I'm afraid. Though the news that's good for you is bad for me, and the news that's bad for you is good for me. Viola escaped from prison.'

Seth's steady breathing stopped abruptly.

'That's *your* good news,' she explained. 'I don't know how, but she broke out of the palace. A messenger arrived from Shipwreck Island this morning. I think Viola must have come this way too, because a horse vanished from the camp last night. She's probably hoping to find Ellie, or warn the Enemy's City that I'm coming. But the *other* good news – well, the good news for me, anyway – is that she'll soon be caught. I've dispatched two Sentinels.'

Seth's left eye opened.

'Now, they *may* recapture her without a struggle, of course – they are expert warriors. But Viola's got such a temper – she might fight back. She might get hurt.'

Seth's right eye opened.

Kate smiled. 'Hello, Seth.'

'Why do you keep coming to talk to me?' he said. His voice was a dry whisper.

'Someone's got to check on you.' Kate shrugged. 'You are keeping us all alive, after all. If you die, we all die.'

'Leave Viola alone, or I will drown us all.'

Kate laughed. 'That's a rubbish threat. Viola would die too, if you brought the sea back. And Ellie, wherever she is – all alone out there, probably planning something foolish, knowing her. Besides, I don't think you really want to let *anyone* else drown. After what you did before . . .'

Seth's eyes stared into her, large and blue and unfathomable. Kate grinned, spilling more pear juice down her chin. 'You caused the Drowning.'

Seth's lips tightened, and in the distance Kate thought she heard the walls of ocean rumbling.

'If I lose control,' he said, 'the sea will crash back together, smashing into Shipwreck Island and the City and everything in between. *Everyone* will die. It's very stupid trying to upset me.'

His voice was brittle and boyish, but Kate thought she could hear another voice just beneath it, deeper and much more ancient.

'But you knew that already, didn't you?' she said. 'Back on Shipwreck Island, after I lent Ellie Leila's diary, all of a sudden you were completely miserable. That's . . . a lot to

take in, isn't it? You raised the seas and drowned the whole world. What was that even like?'

Seth calmly held her gaze. 'I don't know. It was seven hundred years ago. All I remember are the cries the people made as they drowned. I can still hear their voices in the sea. Why don't you tell me what it's like? You must remember all the terrible things you've done.'

Kate rolled her eyes. 'You're as overdramatic as Ellie. Look, I know forcing you to part the sea wasn't a nice thing to do, but it's necessary. The evil of the Enemy's City must be stopped.'

'You don't care about that,' said Seth. 'You just want everyone to think you're a Vessel. Even though you're not.'

Kate speared another pear and flung it at Seth's face. His expression didn't change, even as the juice dripped down his cheek. He wore a solemn, disappointed look.

'Ellie told me,' he said. 'I'm sorry about what happened to your mum. Back on Shipwreck Island, the sailors always talked about how kind she was. She sounded like everything a good queen is supposed to be. I wish she was here now.'

Kate's lip curled, and she wanted to throw another pear at him, or maybe even the fork.

'So do I,' she said. 'She was the best ruler Shipwreck Island ever had. And then my father killed her. So thanks for reminding me of that, Seth.' She forced a smile. 'You're a cruel, bitter creature.'

Seth leaned forward, his face still dripping pear juice. 'Then why do you keep coming to speak to me?'

Kate frowned, at a loss for an answer. Why *did* she keep dressing up in servant's clothes and sneaking in here, only to be insulted or ignored? She shivered. 'Nobody here talks to me . . . like a person. Like Ellie did.'

'Well then, maybe you shouldn't have tortured her and forced her to run away.'

'I didn't torture her!' Kate protested.

'You had one of your Sentinels twist her broken arm!'

'It wasn't broken! It was mended by then,' Kate said, even though she hadn't known that at the time. 'I . . . look . . . I've been doing some thinking. Ellie's the Enemy's Vessel, right?'

Seth's eyelids flickered slightly.

'She told me,' said Kate. 'Well, actually, she showed me. She used the Enemy's power.'

Seth sat up straight, looking at Kate in horror.

'No! No, she didn't.' He shook his head vehemently. 'She wouldn't have.'

'I . . . I fell off the Ark, and she stopped me from falling.'

Seth clutched his head in his hands. 'Wh . . . what's the matter?' Kate asked.

Seth's face contorted, and he looked suddenly less like a sombre statue and more like an angry boy.

'If Ellie used the Enemy's power, that means the Enemy has power of its own now. It means it will start trying to

weaken her again. And all to save *your* worthless life!’ he spat. He slumped forward, glaring at the floor, his brow furrowed. ‘After all she went through, defeating the Enemy, escaping the Inquisition . . .’

‘Wait. If Ellie uses the Enemy’s powers . . . it will hurt her?’

‘It will *destroy* her, and manifest a body of its own.’

Kate played with her hands, feeling a fish hook tug at her chest. ‘I . . . I almost tried to – Well, I wasn’t *actually* going to, but . . .’

‘What?’

‘I thought, maybe, that if I could become the Enemy’s Vessel, I would finally have the power I need to be Queen. The power to protect my people.’

Seth stood up. His clenched fists trembled, and the blue mists on his skin swirled in agitation. In the far distance, the walls of seawater roared.

‘You tried to kill her,’ he said, his own voice drowned beneath an ancient, terrible whisper.

‘No!’ said Kate, staring up at him. ‘Well, not really. We fought, but I wasn’t *actually* going to kill her. And if this performance is supposed to intimidate me it’s not working. Sit down.’

Seth didn’t move.

‘It’s going to be *fine*,’ said Kate. ‘Ellie will be fine. There’s a place near the Enemy’s City, where my father took my mother. A place where he was able to remove the

God of Life from inside her, so she was no longer a Vessel. When I find it, I'll be able to get the God of Life back – only it has the power to destroy the Enemy. And, once I control the City, I'll destroy the Inquisition too.'

Seth glared at her. 'You'll be just as bad as they are.'

'Of course I won't,' Kate snorted. 'The Inquisition is *evil*. They sound like a whole bunch of Loren Alexanders – wicked men who'll do anything for power. Seth, I promise – I'll get rid of the Inquisition and the Enemy. Then the City will love me just as much as my own people do.'

Seth looked at her for a long moment. His expression softened, and he nodded. 'And then, when you've destroyed all those who might ever stand against you, and brought peace to the City and Shipwreck Island, then you and Ellie can be friends again.'

Kate nodded eagerly. 'Yes, exactly!'

'And she'll listen to you, and treat you like a friend. A person, not a queen.'

'Yes!' said Kate, smiling broadly.

Seth smiled too. 'That will never happen.'

Kate's chest twisted.

'Ellie will never be your friend again,' said Seth, his smile curling to a snarl. 'Because you're a cruel, evil person who only cares about power. Because you will *always* be afraid that someone is going to take it away from you. You're not a Queen. You're a *monster*.'

Kate stared at him for many long seconds. ‘You’d think we’d be better friends, then,’ she said softly.

Seth sat back down, crossing his legs and closing his eyes.

‘What are you doing?’ Kate said. ‘Why do you spend all your time pretending you’re asleep?’

‘To avoid talking to you,’ said Seth. ‘And because I’m looking for someone.’

‘With your eyes closed?’

‘It’s complicated,’ he muttered.

‘Well, we have plenty of time until we arrive at the City. And who knows? Maybe I can help.’

Seth gave a weary sigh. ‘After I drowned the world, my mind was split into pieces. That’s why I can’t remember exactly what happened. That’s why I can’t remember . . . anything. The pieces of my mind are scattered across time, held by my past selves. If I can find them, I should be able to get my memories back.’

Kate nodded thoughtfully, and Seth raised an eyebrow. ‘That makes sense to you?’

‘Sort of. My mother was a Vessel, remember? She was able to speak to the past Vessels of the God of Life, who live in the spirit realm.’

‘The spirit realm?’ Seth blinked. ‘What’s that?’

Kate frowned. It felt strange to have to explain to an actual god what the spirit realm was. ‘It’s the home of the gods. It’s where their spirits go when they leave our

world – when their manifest form dies, or if their Vessel dies before they can manifest. All the power of the gods comes from the spirit realm. It's –' Kate took a breath, and felt a single tear tracing a hot path down her cheek. 'It's where my mother's soul would have gone when she died. If not for my father.'

Seth was watching her carefully. For the first time there was no hatred in his eyes. 'What does it look like?'

Kate shrugged. 'I haven't seen it, I'm not a Vessel,' she said bitterly. 'But my mother would tell me stories about it sometimes, when she put me to bed. She said it's a vast golden land of rolling fields, and tranquil seas, and gleaming palaces. A place where the gods and their Vessels live together. A land of peace, and warmth, and kindness.'

Kate fell quiet, and neither of them spoke. Seth's eyes were on hers, but she could tell that he was really stepping through the world she'd painted for him. He took a slow breath, then smiled.

'You're a god, Seth. Even while you have a manifest body, you should be able to cast your mind into the spirit realm. Perhaps you'll find your other selves and your memories in there. Though I don't know why you'd *want* to remember such terrible things.'

Seth's smile faltered. 'Ellie encouraged me to remember who I am, but I didn't want to. Because remembering those things was painful. But keeping it all buried is just as bad.' He swallowed. 'Maybe worse. I feel like half a person.'

Kate fiddled with her sleeve. ‘Well, if I had the choice to forget the bad things that happened to me, I know what I’d do.’

Seth fell silent, and for the first time his body did not seem to recoil from her presence. He ran his finger round the edge of his bowl of stew.

‘Kate, please don’t attack the City. People will die.’

She shook her head. ‘I told you – the City will surrender before it comes to that.’

‘But you don’t *have* to go to war.’

‘Yes, I do,’ said Kate. ‘The City is too dangerous to be left alone. The Inquisition is too dangerous. And if I control both the City and Shipwreck Island, just think what I’ll be able to do. I’ll be the Queen of all Humankind, Seth. I’ll create a new world for us, a *better* world, free of evil men like Loren and my father. A world of peace, and warmth, and kindness.’

Seth closed his eyes tight. ‘So you’ll hunt down evil, will you? Destroy anyone who might upset your perfect world?’

Kate nodded eagerly. ‘Yes, exactly!’

‘Anyone who might be your . . . enemy?’

Kate snarled and climbed to her feet, kicking Seth’s bowl and spraying his face with brown globs of stew. ‘I am *not* a monster. I’m doing what I must, to protect my people. To protect everyone. And I will not be judged by the very creature who drowned this entire world!’

Kate staggered as the carriage jerked to a sudden stop and the massive gold-armoured form of Anitha Hassar, the general of her army, stepped inside, standing to attention by the door.

‘Your Majesty,’ she said. ‘There’s something you should see.’

Kate nodded, and Anitha clicked her fingers. There was a patter of light footsteps as all eight handmaidens rushed inside, forming a tight circle round Kate. She straightened up, holding her breath as brushes daubed cold make-up on her face, as combs tugged painfully at her hair, as a silver crown was pushed tightly against her scalp.

She threw Seth a final, hateful look, then stepped out of the carriage. There was a rattle of armour as rank upon rank of soldiers fell to their knees in a wave, an unbroken line of discipline that vanished back into the mists towards the south.

‘PRAISE HER!’ they cried, in a single deafening voice.

Kate stared north, squinting to see through the swirling haze. She felt a lump lodge in her throat, like a hard little apple.

Something sat on the horizon. A dark beast waiting beyond the veil of mist. She could only just make out its jagged edges, and its peak she couldn’t see at all. It was taller even than the roaring walls of water that churned to

the east and west. A mountain of sharp spires. A man-made monstrosity.

She tried to keep her face calm, knowing that her army was watching her. She clenched her fists, threw back her shoulders, and bared her teeth.

‘My City,’ she said.