

Chapter Twenty

Suddenly there were lots of people who arrived in big white vans with satellites on top. People got quite excited in school when we found out that these were TV people.

We watched them through the bars of the playground gate. They had large black cameras perched on their shoulders like parrots. The newsreaders looked serious and worried one minute, when the camera was in front of them, and then laughed and smoked cigarettes the next. Some of them even came over and started filming the outside of our school.

I ran away to the other side of the playground when they did that and went to find Gaia. She was not hanging around the cameras either. She was sitting under the sunflowers picking up tiny little stones from the ground.

I sat beside her.

'Gaia, last night—' I started, but then I stopped myself. I didn't really want to tell her that I hadn't listened to her, but I had to tell someone about what I had seen.

'Last night, I saw what happened.'

'What do you mean?'

'I saw what happened to those policemen.'

'From your window?'

'No, I was there. I was standing next to them when it happened.'

Gaia lifted her head and looked me straight in the eye.

'I'd forgotten to get milk so I went really quickly to get some and then I was running past the policemen and they started falling over. One after the other. Just like they were falling asleep or something. I ran away when they started doing it. I didn't know that they were dying, I didn't know. They looked like they were just falling asleep.'

'Did they look like they were in pain?' Gaia asked.

'No, not really. They just fell down. It happened pretty quickly.'

Gaia didn't say anything. It looked like she was thinking it through.

'What do you think made them die?' I asked her.

'I've no idea,' she said. 'I still think it's to do with the fallen buildings, though. The policemen were right by one of them, weren't they?'

'Yes, the same one as those other two men. But they were standing just in front of it.'

'Have you looked out of your window recently? Have you seen how the buildings are falling?'

'What do you mean?'

'There's a pattern,' Gaia said.

She reached into her pocket and brought out a folded-up piece of paper and handed it to me.

It was a drawing but it took me a moment to realize it was a map. A map of where we lived. There was a drawing of Gaia's tower and my block and our school. Then there were lots of red dots which had numbers next to them. They roughly made a circle shape. In the middle of the circle was a star that was labelled *Pub – The George*, which had a number one written next to it.

'I've been filling it in each night. The red dots are the fallen buildings. And the numbers show the day they fell in. It's how many days have

passed since that first pub fell down. Can you see how it's spreading outwards? The number twos and threes are close to the pub and then the nines and tens are on the outside.'

'What's this one here?' I pointed to a red dot that looked like it had a one and a two next to it.

'That's twelve. Twelve days after. It looks like the buildings which have been missed out are falling now.'

'And these are our blocks,' I said, pointing to the two wobbly drawings of our towers, one with a capital G above it and the other with a capital A.

'Yes,' Gaia said.

'They're so close to the other fallen buildings.' Our towers were right next to buildings which had fallen five days after the pub collapsed. 'It ... it ... could be us next.'

'Yes. Exactly,' Gaia said.

'Have you shown this to anyone?' I said.

Gaia shrugged.

'I wonder if the police have realized this is happening,' I said.

'I'm sure they know,' Gaia said. 'Maybe they're hiding it from us so we don't all panic.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, I was talking to Mum about it last night and she wants us to pack up and leave now.'

'Leave?' My voice sounded sharp and shaky all at the same time. 'Where would you go?'

'She wants to go to my aunt's. She lives in Brighton. My mum said we should get out while we can.'

'Brighton? Where's that?'

'It's south. Down by the sea. I went there once when I was little.'

'Are you going then?'

'My dad doesn't want us to go.'

'Oh. So are you going to stay?'

'I guess so. Dad usually gets his own way. Has your mum spoken to you about it?'

'No. I'm not sure how much she knows about what's going on, to be honest. I guess I'm staying too. Here you go,' I said, handing back the map.

'You can have it, if you like. We can both fill it in. You can give it back to me tomorrow.'

'OK,' I said and I put the map in my pocket.

Neither of us could have known that we would not see each other tomorrow. Or the day after that. Or the day after that.

The very next day, they closed our school.