

Conception

Chapter 1

1.1 Bathtub

Eva turned off the tap when the heat of the water started to become uncomfortable. The bath salt had yielded a mountain of bubbles and the scent of cinnamon, her favorite, filled the air. A subtle jazz tune sounded on the background; it was a little too loud now that the water had stopped running, but she didn't dare operate the remote control in the bathtub, afraid to drop it and cause a short circuit.

The bath slowly cooled to the right temperature. Eva slid under water until her ears were beneath the surface and the music became a distant humming. She blew bubbles and then held her breath, resisting the urge to inhale through her nose. When the pressure on her chest became urgent, she sat back up and took a deep, refreshing breath.

She laid her head back and closed her eyes. She had never been one for meditating, but by thinking of relaxing things she tried to clear her head of worries. Caribbean beaches. Being back in the womb. Floating on clouds. There, that did it. Total relaxation.

Then the phone rang, its sound ripping apart the tranquility that Eva had carefully constructed in her mind. She should have told the house to keep the volume down, but Ceska would be coming home from a trip to her parents tomorrow and Eva didn't want to sleep through any message she sent. She checked the number of the caller that was shown on the screen on the wall in front of her and indeed, it was Ceska. She told the house to answer the call and picked up with:

"Good evening, beautiful. How was the trip?"

But Ceska's answer was drowned in panicked screams in the background.

"I'm still on the plane", Ceska's voice forced itself to the forefront of the noise. She was crying. The two of them having been together for years, Eva could tell instantly. She immediately sat upright, the water gushing over the edge of the bath.

"Are you ok?", she asked as the adrenaline started pumping.

The other side of the line was silent for a while, except for the screams and noise. Then, faintly, Ceska's voice said "Yes. No. I don't know".

"What is happening?"

Again, the reply took its time.

"We're in the plane".

Eva already knew that and she struggled to maintain her patience.

"We took off from Stuttgart", came another snippet of information. Stuttgart was where Ceska's parents lived. Even with traffic, it was only a two-hour drive to Heidelberg, where they had met when Eva was doing a PhD there. Ceska was finishing her MSc. at that time and although she had lived on campus she had gone to see her parents every weekend. Since they had moved to Costa Rica she still tried to visit her parents in Stuttgart two or three times a year.

"We are flying over The Netherlands right now."

Eva had to suppress the need to urge Ceska on.

"It's disappearing, Eva. It's disappearing." Eva could hear fresh tears in Ceska's voice, but before Eva could ask what she meant with 'disappearing', the line went

dead. Eva immediately tried calling her back, but Ceska didn't answer. She called the emergency number and gave the operator what little information she had, meanwhile getting out of the bath, drying and dressing her self. She went to the living room, where she tried to reach the airline to see if she could find out what was happening. They didn't pick up, so she tried again and in the meantime she turned on the wall to see if there was any news. She had to wait for ten minutes for the first reports to come in and what she saw was astounding.

1.2 Bigger wave

The first video was that of a surveillance camera attached to a high building next to a stadium. It was probably used for crowd control, as it was far too high to recognize faces, even if it had a high resolution. The camera recorded a full stadium watching a match. It had no sound, but Eva could imagine the cheering of what must have been tens of thousands of sport fans.

This was an extra news report, so she knew something would happen, but it wasn't immediately clear what was about to go wrong. She searched the audience and then focused on the ongoing match. She didn't notice the wave coming, so she was just as surprised as those present when the stadium wall budged and then quickly collapsed inwards, yielding to the wave that must have been tens of meters high. The force of the water swept away the seats and the people and added them to the pile of debris that was pushed forward by the water. The wave washed over the playing field and continued to crash into the other side of the stadium. Again, the wall held for a few seconds before it, too, collapsed. The wave rushed on as if it hadn't had any opposition, but it had destroyed an entire stadium and probably had taken only a few seconds to kill half the people in it. Many more would drown within the next few minutes; Eva could still see some of them struggling to keep their heads above the water. Only a few people actually managed to climb on top of large pieces of debris. From the viewpoint of the camera they looked like ants that scrambled out of a flushed anthill. The wave crashed into the tower on which the camera had been mounted and you could see it shake, but the building held.

Then the second wave came on top of the first wave, drowning everything that had survived so far. It was difficult to estimate its height but assuming that the camera was fifty or sixty meters above ground the second wave easily reached forty meters. Again, the water battered the tower. Sprays of water splattered up just in front of the camera and smudged its image. The third wave smacked directly into the camera and it suddenly turned black.

"This footage comes from the city of Utrecht, in the center of the Netherlands, but reports are coming in from Brussels, Bonn and Hannover. The tsunami seems to have devastated a large part of Europe and is still spreading."

The screen switched to different images showing the same destruction in other cities. This went on for several minutes and all the while the narrator accompanied the footage with facts that were given to him on the spot. *"It seems that the water has wiped away the European government and has taken tens of millions of lives. I..."*, the reporter had done a good job in staying objective, but now realized the impact of what he was saying. He started crying, but still kept on reporting the information that came in. *"We have a simulation of how far the tsunami may probably reach and... I am sorry but I cannot..."*

The screen switched to a map of Europe and a blue area expanded from the North Sea inwards, swallowing The Netherlands and Belgium, then invading France and Germany. Norway, Denmark and the United Kingdom disappeared as the blue advance slowed down and came to a halt in the middle of France and Germany. Further inwards, the Baltic States, Finland and Sweden were affected as well. The highlands of Scotland remained as a beacon in the sea.

As the simulation was repeated, you could hear the reporter sobbing in the background. *"It is unclear what caused the tsunami. There has been seismic activity in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, but no evidence of a volcanic eruption was reported. And what has happened is only half of the story: another tsunami is heading towards America and will make landfall in four hours. Because of the distance the impact is predicted to be smaller than in Europe but still authorities have started evacuating people from the coastal areas."*

Suddenly Eva realized that maybe she was in danger herself. Even a tsunami that large should not reach Santa Cruz, where she and Ceska had lived for four years now, but still she ran upstairs and filled a backpack with essential clothes and food, mostly canned vegetables. She strapped on the backpack and made sure the buckles were closed tightly so she could not be separated from it. Then she went back downstairs and continued to watch the news.

1.3 A day to remember

It was one of those days you would always remember. It had been late in the evening by the time Ceska had called, but Eva found that she was too worried to sleep so she watched the news until the tsunami hit America at roughly 3 AM. It took ten minutes for the images to come in but when they did it was even worse than the devastation in Europe. Years of Hollywood movies had painted a clear, although not by definition realistic, image of cities like New York and Boston being struck by disaster. To suddenly see them being flooded was even more astonishing than seeing the waves hit some anonymous stadium. The fact that in New York skyscrapers were still sticking out of the water gave her a clear idea of exactly how much water there was.

Because of the evacuations there were less casualties in America, but of course not everyone had gotten away in time. The TV showed icon after icon being battered by water: the Statue Of Liberty, the Empire State Building, the Trump Tower. When a strip along the coast of up to 50 mile had vanished beneath the waves, the TV showed reruns of those shocking videos. By the time Eva had seen them three times she was finally starting to get sleepy and went to bed.

The next morning, more of the aftermath was shown. When Eva had gone to bed, the death estimate had been at 80 million. Now it was over 100 million and the giant flood was still progressing. That wasn't even counting the casualties in Africa and South America, where a similar thing must have happened.

The US government in Washington was gone as well as the entire city of New York. The waves had washed clean the Caribbean, and had eaten a chunk out of Florida. Luckily for Eva, the Caribbean islands had slowed down the waves to such an extent that they had hardly reached Costa Rica. Only a few hundred miles southwest the Panama Canal was no canal any more: the tsunami had broken through to the Pacific Ocean.

Eva spent the morning looking at the news again, meanwhile answering phone calls from worried people: her mother, her sister and her friends. Everyone had heard about the possibility that this had been caused by an earthquake so they all wanted to know her expert opinion as a seismologist. She spent most of the morning explaining to people what could have happened. Her mother, in Spain, was the closest to the disaster area: although most of Spain had not been affected, a large part of Portugal had been overrun, not as bad as what she had seen on the news, but enough to cause a panic.

There were very few days like these, where you knew life would never be the same again. Within 24 hours a large part of the western world had been wiped away, both the European and the American Government had been obliterated and the countries that had not directly been affected had to deal with millions of refugees from areas that had been flooded but not completely swallowed. As if that wasn't enough, Europe's economy had been shattered, with major ports like Antwerp and Rotterdam gone. And the bad thing was that without knowing what caused this there was no telling what part of the world would be next. But those thoughts did not occur to Eva until later. The person she loved most in the world had barely escaped the disaster and was now up in the air far, far away. As soon as she would have held Ceska really close, she would have the peace of mind to think about the consequences of all that was happening.

1.4 Landed

She had dozed off when the phone rang again. It was Ceska, so she picked up immediately with "Where are you?"

"Eva!", came the answer. "I love you. I just spent hours in a plane, afraid that I would never be able to say that to you again." She started crying and Eva said "I love you too" and then tried to calm her with soothing words. It took five minutes before she could get anything meaningful out of Ceska.

"When will you arrive in Costa Rica?", she asked.

"I don't... I don't know. Have you talked to my parents?"

Eva had not thought about Ceska's parents. According to the latest reports, Stuttgart was safe for now, but only barely. The water must have almost reached them. "No, I haven't", she said. Even before she had finished her sentence, Ceska interrupted her. "Please call them. My battery is almost dead"

"I will, call me when..." But the connection was already cut.

Eva dreaded having to call Ceska's parents, but she did. Especially Ceska's mother still regarded Eva as 'that woman that turned her daughter lesbian'. Ceska's father was more open, but still they only went there for special occasions such as Christmas, weddings and funerals.

"Ja?", a voice picked up. The German language sounded surly to Eva's ears to begin with but took on a whole new level when Ceska's mother spoke it. Eva's parents-in-law still had an old-fashioned land-line connection and no caller identification. The voice did not sound panicked, so Eva could have hung up immediately, having checked that Ceska's parents were alright, but she didn't.

Apparently she hesitated too long, because Ceska's mother asked "Franzeska?"

"No, it's Eva"

Ceska's mother audibly switched to mangled English, as Eva's German was not good enough to have a normal conversation. Eva could hear the disappointment when Ceska's mother said: "I thought es war Franzeska. Ist sie okay?"

"She is in America, she should be fine", Eva replied. "She asked me to check up on you."

"We are safe", Ceska's mother said. "The water stopped just short of Stuttgart. There is some minor flooding here, but nothing more than ankle-high. We do not have flood, but Franzeska's vater ist busy with dragging some of the furniture upstairs, im Falle a new wave comes."

Her English was heavy-accented and interwoven with German words, but even though neither English nor German was Eva's native language she understood.

"Tell Franzeska to call me as soon as she can", her mother-in-law said and then she hung up.

Chapter 2

2.1 Seismic activity

Eva kept her backpack on when traveling to the airport. No one knew if there would be a second wave and she didn't want to be surprised by water when sitting in a bus or train. Ceska would not land for a few hours, but with the whole country in turmoil Eva didn't dare say how long traveling to the nearest airport would take by public transport. Eva had never bothered to get a driver's license because she didn't need it for work and didn't want to spend her money on a car when she could think of better uses for it.

Luckily, the bus was on time. She took it to the nearest train station, which was an hour and a half away. The train was emptier than usual. Apparently other people that had seen the news too were now too alarmed to leave their houses. Eva always enjoyed long train rides because they gave you the opportunity to sit back and relax. But as soon as she sat down, her phone rang and she had to go to the balcony to not disturb the other passengers.

A voice said "Eva?" and she immediately recognized Erica, her boss; she worked at the Costa Rica Meteorology and Seismology Institute. Erica was a woman in her early fifties that brought self-baked cookies to work and was always very interested but, frankly, shouldn't be in charge of anything other than baking those cookies.

"Hi, Erica", Eva replied.

"Do you have a few moments?"

"I am on the train", Eva said. "So if it's personal I better call you back later".

"It's not personal", Erica assured her. "I am sorry to bother you with this today, but I got a call from the ministry of Environmental Affairs."

"Yes"

"Did you see the news?"

"I did. Ceska was in Germany when it happened, so I watched it closely."

"Is she okay?" Ceska and Erica had met once and had immediately taken a liking to each other. There was little not to like about Erica, as long as she wasn't your boss. They were both of German descent and although Erica wasn't born there, her German was good enough for the two of them to go off chattering in gutturals.

"Yes, she was already in the air when the wave hit. I am actually on my way to pick her up from the airport."

"Ahh, good. Well, the reason I am calling is that what happened obviously raised quite some concerns. In fact, the PanAmerican Council has organized a meeting for all experts on this side of the ocean. The minister called me to ask who our experts on earthquakes are and, well, that is you."

Eva should have been flattered to be called the best but frankly she was the *only* expert on earthquakes in the country.

"So what do you want me to do? It will take time to analyze any data our sensors have picked up."

"No need for that. They want you to go to Ottawa."

"When?"

"Now. I have booked a plane for you that leaves tonight. But if you're already heading for the airport then I can see if I can transfer that booking to an earlier flight. Let me text you the details..."

"But...", Eva objected. This was not what she had had in mind. She just wanted to give Ceska a hug and go home together. Plus she had a backpack full of cans with her. There was no way she was going to Ottawa today, no matter how good it was career-wise.

"Okay", she heard herself say. "I will arrive in three hours, so tonight is fine". It was four in the afternoon, so then she would still have some time with Ceska. "Have you also booked a hotel?"

"Of course. You're staying in a luxury, 5-star hotel. The minister told me to not spare any expenses. You're booked for the entire week."

"The entire week!", Eva exclaimed. "How long is this going to take?"

"I don't know. If you'll be there for longer, then of course it will be paid."

Longer? Eva was hoping to be there for only a day or two. But again, she heard herself say: "Okay, please send me the details of the flight. Anything you want me to say when I'm there?"

"No, just listen and try to contribute. It's not often that I get the funds to send you to a 5-star hotel."

"I will let you know when I arrived. Talk to you later."

2.2 Safely back

Eva recognized Ceska at a distance. The glass wall that separated the new arrivals from the other visitors was dirty from thousands of snot-nosed children that had stood pressed against it. But Ceska's gait was so unmistakable that Eva felt her spirit rise even before she could see Ceska's face. While visiting her parents she had apparently had a haircut because the beautiful auburn waves of hair that echoed Eva's own had been reduced to a subtle shoulder-long style. She had dyed it, for there was now a touch of red in her hair. Eva needed a few seconds to get used to it and then decided she liked it.

From a distance, Ceska did not appear to be relieved to be home. Streaks of mascara revealed that she had been crying and she anxiously glanced around to see if she could spot Eva. Her single piece of luggage was one of the first to arrive: a brown leather bag with a pink ribbon tied around the handhold. When Ceska exited the arrivals hall Eva ran towards the door, threw her arms around her other half and held Ceska as if she would never let her go again. Ceska returned the hug and they stood like that for minutes, not caring about what the other people that were there to welcome loved ones would think. Then, before they let go they kissed. It was a long, passionate kiss that they would normally not have shared in public, but at that moment they didn't care.

When they pulled apart, Ceska's mascara was on Eva's cheek. Only now Eva noticed that they were both crying. Ceska took Eva's face in her hands and said: "I love you and I will never leave you again."

That triggered a pang of guilt but Eva returned the gesture and said: "I love you too. Listen. I wish I could stay with you, but I have to leave for Ottawa."

"When?"

"Tonight. I cannot come home with you, my plane leaves in three hours. I am so sorry, but..."

Luckily, Ceska interrupted her. "I'm coming with you"

Eva shook her head and said: "No, honey, you can't. I don't know if they'll pay for you, and..."

"Don't be ridiculous. You know money is not an issue." With a large heritage from her grandfather, Ceska could afford a private jet.

"But you must be tired and...", Eva tried, but Ceska resolutely shook her head.

"No. I mean yes, I am tired, but I'm not going to let you go alone. I have everything I need for travel already with me."

"In dire need of laundry", Eva noticed.

"So we get them cleaned in Ottawa! Don't be such a drag, Eva, let's go together!"

Eva couldn't think of any arguments why Ceska shouldn't come, and she would be thrilled to have her big love around, so she shrugged and admitted: "Okay, let's see if there are still tickets left." She picked up Ceska's bag and pointed to the airline desks. "That way"

Ceska followed and said: "I think there will be. People are afraid to travel: the plane was half-empty on the way here."

Eva disagreed: "That'll only last a few days, by then people will feel safe again. In fact, I think it's safer to be in the air than to be on the ground."

"Not if you're not sure whether there will still be a place to land when you arrive." Eva could not imagine the stress that Ceska had gone through and to be honest she wasn't looking forward to board an airplane. But at least they would be together this time.

2.3 A strange trip

There had been little to worry about. It was a completely normal flight, apart from the fact that Eva had never flown business class before. Getting a second ticket for Ceska had not been a problem, and they were even able to sit next to each other.

The food, Eva's main objection to traveling by air, wasn't that much better in business class, although they had more choice. But the extra leg space was something she could get used to. Both she and Ceska were almost one-eighty: tall for women and enough to have complaints about airplane seats.

The flight was a little over thirteen hours and although she usually preferred to enjoy the entertainment, this time she decided to try to get some sleep. The time difference was only two hours, so jetlag would not be a problem, but Eva had no clue what she was supposed to be doing in Ottawa once she got there and how rested she ought to be. Erica had told her nothing more than that she was going to meet seismologists from all over America and there was little doubt about what the topic would be. Eva had asked Erica what had happened, but all she could tell was how high the waves had been and how devastating their force.

On the airport not a single television screen had shown any footage of the disaster, presumably not to frighten people. But of course everyone was watching on his or her phone or tablet. Everywhere Eva had heard stories about the devastating tsunami, how it had claimed millions of lives and how it was the biggest natural disaster ever recorded in human history. CNN kept repeating facts about tsunami's, half of them incorrect even though so-called 'experts' convincingly delivered them. But no one said anything about what had caused the tsunami. There had not been a large earthquake, because the sensors in Eva's

lab would have picked it up days ago. So what could have caused this disaster? The thought kept her busy until they had landed.

2.4 Uncharted territory

On their arrival in Ottawa they joined a queue towards a serious-looking immigration officer. She knew those people were only doing their job, but although she did not have anything to hide she was always a bit scared by them. Part of her always wanted to say "What do you mean 'why are you coming to the US'? Can't you see I'm a terrorist?", just to see what would happen. But the curiosity would probably cost her a fine, a cavity search and a lot of embarrassment, so she always kept herself in check and politely answered the questions.

This time it was different. Both she and Ceska were led through a side-door by a man that wore an airline uniform, but in such a way that it screamed 'FBI' or whatever the secret service was called in Canada. No one checked their passports or searched their luggage, even though Eva's backpack must have looked suspicious with cans pushing against the fabric. "Your suitcases will be brought directly to your hotel", the FBI-guy assured them.

After five minutes of walking through abandoned hallways they finally re-emerged in daylight. A woman about their age standing in front of a limousine welcomed them into Canada and invited them to take place in the car with a gesture that was both friendly and authoritative at the same time. The driver got out of the car and opened the door for them. It was all happening very fast, but Eva got in nonetheless. She felt so rushed that she did not even consider objecting, but even if this had been an abduction, she could have done little about it.

The woman did not introduce herself by name. She merely stated that she was tasked to make sure that Eva didn't have to go through customs because 'time was of the essence'. Yet the woman did not seem hurried at all and Eva would have asked why time was so important if she had expected the woman to give her an honest answer. As they left the airport, the woman gave them facts about Ottawa and although it sounded like the typical story a native would give to a tourist, the woman interspersed her story with questions that were innocent, but that nonetheless gave Eva the impression that she was very subtly being interrogated. Questions like 'Have you ever been here before?' and 'What places of interest were you planning to visit while you're here' would have been harmless had they come from a normal tourist guide, but had a deeper purpose coming from this woman. It also occurred to Eva that any normal tourist trip would have taken them past the Parliament, but they went straight to the building of the Geological Society of Canada, a stately building a bit outside of the city. Eva had been there once, about two years ago, and she still recognized the landscape.

While they were driving, Eva tried to get information from their guide about what they were supposed to do there, but clearly this woman did not know any detail herself. Instead of just saying so, she evaded any question with vague answers, subtle changes of the subject and suddenly pointing at features of the landscape outside.

When they arrived at the estate of the GSC, the enormous lawn that surrounded the main building was filled with black cars and Eva concluded that they were one of the last people to arrive. They parked at the back of the house and Eva and Ceska waited for the doors to unlock so they could get out. But the woman that was escorting them said: "I am afraid that miss Schneider cannot come with you. I will bring her directly to your hotel." Eva and Ceska looked at each other, not happy to be separated like that in a foreign country. But Eva trusted that nothing would happen to Ceska and a look from Ceska said 'I'll be okay', so Eva gave her a hug and said "Sorry". Ceska kissed her and said "What for? I'll enjoy myself. Shall I take your backpack with me? It's not like you're going to have a need for an emergency stack of canned vegetables in there."

"Yes, please", Eva laughed, only now remembering that she had carried that silly backpack around all that time. The images of the unprecedented natural disaster in Europe had faded somewhat and she felt relatively safe here, at least from any imminent flood.

Eva's door unlocked with a click and she got out of the car, blowing Ceska a kiss before the door slammed shut by itself. The car quickly pulled away, leaving Eva all alone in the company of a man dressed in a meticulously black suit, radiating an image that was somewhere between that of a butler and that of secret agent. The man watched her with a strange stare that gave her the feeling that she was both a fragile old woman and a dangerous criminal at the same time. "This way, ma'am," he said, as he laid a hand on her back and guided her towards the stairs that led to the manor's entrance. Again, the gesture was somewhere between caring and compelling. Together, they climbed the marble stairs and after he had opened a heavy wooden door, he invited her in. She stepped past him, but he didn't follow. When the doors closed behind her, she was alone in a large entrance hall.

Chapter 3

3.1 A concentration of brains

The entrance hall could have easily housed a thousand people. To Eva, this was an enormous waste of space, but for the Canadians this was probably a prime government building for which no expenses had been spared. Like everything in the northern part of America the building was probably big just for the sake of being big. It was a trait that often led to architecture that was an advertisement for waste but that, Eva had to admit, sometimes led to beautiful buildings.

Marble pillars lined the walls in the direction of a large golden door in the far wall. They were probably completely redundant for the structural integrity of the building but although they were a bit cliché, they did succeed in giving the hall a Mediterranean feeling.

Eva followed a green carpet that cut a path between the rows of pillars and that ended in front of the exaggeratedly lush door. It reminded her of the grandeur of some cathedrals she had seen and she half expected it to hide pews and an altar. But when the door opened seemingly out of itself, what she saw was a huge circular conference room, much like the one in which the UN had its meetings. At the bottom of the room tables stood in a circular pattern, and from that circle outwards, luxurious benches rose toward the walls in the style of an arena. Approximately fifteen people were sitting around the conference table and about the same number sat on the higher benches, observing the meeting. All of them turned their heads and observed Eva as she came in. A wave of stage fright washed over her, but there was no turning back so Eva just kept on walking. She recognized some of the people in the audience: all presidents, including the president of the United States. That didn't really help for the stage fright, but she made it to her chair, the only one at the conference table that was still unoccupied, in one piece.

She sat down and the chairman of the meeting welcomed her. Eva immediately recognized him, even though she had met him only a few times at international meetings: professor Dobrowski was the most respected expert in her field. He had been the head of a large research group at Princeton University until his pension two years ago. He was now the chairman of the UN Climate Council and one of the most prominent opponents of climate control. In South America, climate control was regarded as one of the excesses of capitalism, but in the US the professor was one of the few that spoke out against it.

Eva recognized most other people around the table and acknowledged them with a nod. Each of them were renowned experts in her field and although Eva knew that she should consider herself an expert by now as well, this company made her feel small.

"Welcome, dr. Valdez. Now that everyone is here, let's begin. We cannot afford to waste time on formalities, so I am assuming that you all know each other. We are here today to discuss the events in the Atlantic Ocean. Let us first look at the facts: a large mass of water was displaced, and we are here to figure out what caused it and how to prevent it in the future. The enormous refugee problem is a political one and will not be discussed here. Is that clear?"

Everyone nodded and professor Dobrowski continued:

"Good. Now we will all agree that an earthquake is the most obvious explanation for the phenomenon that we have all witnessed, and our sensors did indeed pick up a series of major seismic events but the usual presages weren't there. No small earthquakes, no warming of the ocean to indicate underwater volcanoes, no dead fish. Is that right?"

He stared down every participant of the meeting for a few seconds to confirm that this was correct.

3.2 Imminent problems

"What is the status of the warning buoys?" someone asked. Professor Dobrowski pressed a button and in the middle of the circle in which they were sitting a holographic projection switched on. The projection showed a map of the earth with dots indicating tsunami warning buoys. There was a concentration of dots that followed the American and European coastlines and a few scattered buoys in the middle of the ocean, where it was more difficult to properly anchor them.

"This is before the tsunami", professor Dobrowski explained. Then he pushed a button and all the dots in the middle of the ocean disappeared. Those things were held down at a fixed position on the ocean floor by an enormous weight, so Eva knew that an unimaginable force had been necessary to dislodge them. The dots near the coastlines remained, but the fact that they were now far from shore only pointed out the size of the area that had been flooded.

"At this moment we are completely blind to anything that is happening in the Atlantic", the professor explained. "The only data that we can rely on is the data that was collected during the tsunami. Waves were reported of over 100 meters high, which explains why the buoys anchor lines have snapped."

"I was wondering one thing", Eva dared interrupt him. Fifteen faces turned into her direction and she felt herself blushing.

"Yes?" the professor wanted to know.

"This may be a dumb question...", Eva started.

"There are no dumb questions here, dr. Valdez. We are all at a loss, so any insights you have to offer are more than welcome."

"I..", Eva stuttered. "I saw some of the live footage of the tsunami when I was still at home, and I noticed that the waves came in rapid succession. I have never seen a tsunami behave like that. How can we explain that?"

"We have noticed the same thing and I think", another researcher tried, "that the only conclusion we can make is that there whatever happened was not a normal earthquake, which would produce wave that are much farther apart. My team is already working on simulations of this phenomenon."

"If this was not an earthquake then how do you explain the seismic activity?", Eva tried to clarify.

"We have no explanation yet", her colleague said. "A meteor strike is the most obvious cause of the tsunami, but we contacted NASA and they didn't pick up any flying object large enough to survive the atmosphere. I guess the only way to know for sure is to go take a look."

3.3 Helicopter ride

Eva had been in a helicopter before. She had flown over the North Pole, she had flown over rain forest where natives had harmlessly fired arrows at her. But she

had not flown over open sea before. She had never felt so vulnerable, knowing that when the helicopter crashed here, there would be no means to stay alive within a thousand miles.

You could argue that it was no different than being on a transatlantic flight, but flying at over thirty thousand feet, the sea was just a distant threat. Now that they were sometimes flying no more than a few meters above the waves that were the aftermath of the tsunami the water seemed so overpowering that Eva held on to her seat with white knuckles.

According to the map on her phone they had almost arrived at what was known as the 'Atlantic ridge', a shallow ridge that stretched like a spine across the Atlantic Ocean. It remained below sea level and then widened and rose to form the Azores, eight hundred kilometers to the west of what only a few days ago had been continental Portugal. On her screen, their position was given by a blinking red dot that seemed to crawl over an underground of blue. A green dot on the map near them should have been the island Corvo, but there was nothing to be seen.

Then one of her colleagues in the front of the helicopter pointed at something in the distance and everyone was starting to talk at once. Or, rather, everyone started to shout at once, because in the noise made by the rotating blades it was difficult to make yourself understood otherwise. Eva tried to see what her colleague was pointing at, but she was sitting in the back of the helicopter so people were blocking her view. All she understood from people's shouts was 'Ridge' and 'No Wonder'.

Everyone stood up and gathered around the monitor of the sonar equipment they had brought. Eva heard the pilot say something about remaining in their seats with their safety belts on, but no one seemed to listen. Suddenly, people quieted down as the first images of the ocean floor started to come in. The sonar equipment in their midst projected a 3D holographic image above a black surface, so they all got a clear impression of the ocean floor.

"Oh, my god", whispered the colleague that operated the sonar.

"What? What?" Several people shouted at the same time.

"This looks like...", he had to think of an example that would make it clear for all of them. "...like a scene from 'Alien'."

"'Alien'?" Someone asked. "Are you suggesting that a UFO..."

"No, no," the operator hastened to explain. "'Alien'. The classic movie. It's as if something tore itself from the earth. There is a funnel leading from the ocean bottom that..." He stopped talking for a second while he concentrated on the data that was coming in. "Hmm, this is strange."

"What is?"

"You would expect an event like to leave a massive volcanic site. But the funnel seems to be filled with air. We are now flying over its centre..."

Now that they had come this close, what her colleagues had already seen finally came into Eva's view. At first she saw a ring-shaped mountain ridge that reached so high that the helicopter had to climb to avoid it. It was difficult to judge the size of the ridge because they only saw a small section of it, but Eva estimated that it had a diameter of over a hundred miles. It must have been over five hundred feet high and only when the helicopter hung above the rim she saw the sheer size of it. The mountain ridge protruded from the ocean in a manner that indeed suggested that something broke free of the earth here. Almost

immediately they started calling this 'the exit wound', and that was the name that eventually made it into the history books. Just outside the ridge, the water was in turmoil with several whirlpools fighting for domination. Inside, there was the darkness of a hole in the earth the size of which dwarfed the largest sinkhole she had ever seen.

Eva couldn't imagine the ripple that the displacement of such huge amounts of rock had sent through the water. Suddenly it dawned on her: of course NASA hadn't seen any object approaching earth, but they should be able to provide them with at least an image of whatever had escaped earth.