The Shape of the Tide

Extended synopsis • Naria Khan

Tamsin Kedge is bargaining for the salvage job that would pay her rent when a ferryman is caught under Nacre's regatta pier. Ten still seconds in salt water let her change into a cuttlefish. She finds the rope around his ankle, changes back and cuts him free. The floodgate breaks moments later, wrecking the store she shares with her partner, Jory. When the Harbor Board suggests an unauthorized dive caused the failure, independent engineer Ilan Saye asks what she felt underwater. The pressure came from inside the gate.

Tamsin remembers Ilan's signature on the recommendation that emptied Bell Quay five years ago. Her father left his best shears hanging by the window because the family had been told they could return. Ilan knows now what he should have told them then. Two days after the evacuation, the Board removed the promise of repairs. He objected privately but kept his job and accepted a promotion.

A missing maintenance record and a gauge worker's notebook help Tamsin and Ilan establish that someone changed the markings on the basin gauge. The false readings make the basin look emptier than it is. When the spring tide fills it, the Board plans to send the excess through streets it considers cleared, although people still live there. Before the two become lovers, Ilan gives Tamsin the old records, including his promotion letter. She takes him to supper with her father, who has questions of his own.

At half past six the next morning, Ilan learns which occupied streets will take the overflow first. He writes the warning, then sets it aside. He wants to go to Tamsin with an alternative, so he sends a vague note and goes to measure Merchants' Square. When the ferry crew asks whether to hold the boat, Tamsin trusts him and lets it go. By the

time a clerk sends her the route, the water is too low for the ramp. An older woman has to be pushed to shelter in a barrow. Tamsin asks Ilan to stay away from the barge and makes sure the workers will get future reports directly.

At the hearing Ilan admits what he withheld both times. His independent signing license is suspended, though he can still work under supervision. The district authorizes the old gates to share the flood. To free them from the central drive, Tamsin must reach a submerged bell as a cuttlefish and work the pin loose with human hands. She insists on a saltwater refuge and the right to turn back. When Captain Renn orders fresh water into the passage, her sense of direction fails. The watchers signal her back, and the refuge gets her out alive.

Keeping the refuge clear and waiting for the next dive cost the city storage space. Ilan shows the shopkeepers where the water will reach, the tenants get out, and the district clears the square to receive the flood. With the wash shut and the salt levels tested, Tamsin chooses to go again. She frees the pin, and the keepers divide the flow. Shops are damaged, and the owners’ claims remain open.

Tamsin and Jory buy a workshop together. Ilan returns to supervised engineering. When he gets an offer of eight weeks inland, he takes it straight to Tamsin, although he hasn’t worked out how often he can come home. This time they get to decide together. They move in above the workshop, and six months after the flood they board a ferry as passengers.