

CHAPTER 11: GRAVITY

They hovered twenty miles off the coast, over the Atlantic, and about fifty feet above the water. Jane led the way, flying with one arm forward as always, a mental trick Doc taught her when he first took her from the farm. She hoped to eventually not need it, and certainly understood her powers were not dependent upon pointing a fist in the direction she wanted to fly, but it helped her concentrate and, she had to admit, it did make her appear more heroic.

Jane, while not vain, didn't mind looking heroic when she flew.

Billy performed the usual routine, that effortless drifting flight surrounded by the blue-white light generated by his symbiotic alien companion. Jane was a bit jealous, it came so easily to him, like having a built in copilot with "Dude" coaching him at all times. But she also realized that Billy was more dependent on the alien than he wanted to be, and Jane was already more self-reliant than him, and that provided fine consolation.

Watching Emily "fly" was even greater consolation.

Emily flew only in the sense that she remained airborne; this flight resembled more of a high altitude tumble through the air. She spun and drifted, yet was bizarrely able to keep pace with the others. To say it was a graceless endeavor would be an understatement. Rather, it was like watching someone in a particularly awkward freefall that never ended.

Finally, Jane put on the breaks; all three of them halted in mid-

air. Emily stopped moving forward, but it took her a moment or two to cease drifting and spinning in place. Even then, she still moved awkwardly, pin-wheeling her arms when she started to tilt one way and the other. That ridiculous scarf had become entangled around her face during the journey and she yanked it away to reveal her absurd pair of steampunk goggles.

"You're a menace," Billy said.

He laughed, but it wasn't a mean laugh.

Jane had assumed Billy would act more like a bully, but he'd developed a fondness for Emily, and treated her kindly even when they traded verbal barbs. It was the only reason she invited him along on Emily's training flights because, in reality, Billy had little advice to offer.

"I'm not a menace. I'm the least menacing thing out here. I'm like a reject from the *Cirque de Molière*," she said.

"Soleil," said Billy.

"Gesundheit," said Emily.

"Emily," Jane said. "How do you fly?"

"Badly."

"No. I mean, what are you doing, internally, to make yourself fly? Do you do anything specific? Focus on anything?"

"Pixie dust. I think about pixie dust."

"Stop it," Jane said. "I'm serious."

"I . . ." Emily said. Then she started listing to the left. Slowly, but distractingly, with that long scarf flowing straight down. "Crap."

"Let me help —"

"No, I got me, I got myself," Emily said.

Using the doggie paddle, Emily nearly corrected her slow descent to the left, but she overcompensated, causing her feet to rise up in the back. She bent at the waist; this did nothing to help, and then she twisted her body into a T shape.

"Downward facing dog. Plank pose . . . Name another."

Billy moved to help her, but Emily pointed at him threateningly.

"Back off, Billy Case. I said I got this."

He waved her off, laughing again.

"And for the record, I think of a bubble," Emily said.

Matthew Phillion

"A bubble?" Jane said.

"Ya. I imagine a bubble of float surrounding me, and that's how I fly."

"A bubble of float. Do you ever listen to yourself?"

"Fight me, Billy Case," Emily said. "A bubble. Okay? I picture it and then I float in that bubble."

Jane reached out to help Emily right herself up, drifting beside her easily and grabbing hold of her shoulder. The moment she got close though, she felt her stomach drop, like on a rollercoaster.

And then suddenly it was Jane who was freefalling.

Spinning, arms flailing, brain not locking onto whatever faculties were required to get herself airborne again. Every rotation showed the Atlantic Ocean rushing up towards her, black and angry. In the back of her mind she knew it wouldn't hurt — I've been punched through a building, this is only water, calm down — but something about her sudden loss of up and down made her heart race. C'mon Jane, she thought, would you "up, up and away" already . . .

Then there was a bright light beside her, a strong grip around her wrist and she was no longer falling. Billy had a hold of her, slowing her descent.

"What are you doing?" he asked. There was, unexpectedly, real concern in his voice. "You're not doing your arm thing! Do your arm thing!"

"My arm thing?" Jane said. Then: "Oh, right."

And she pulled herself from Billy's grasp and started skyward again, toward the still pin wheeling Emily.

"What the hell was that?" Billy asked. He kept pace with her, neither of them at top speed. They wanted a moment to talk before they got within earshot of Emily.

"She thinks of a bubble," Jane said.

"A bubble of float."

"A bubble of anti-gravity," she said. "I've got an idea."

She parked herself mid-air facing Emily. Billy caught up and stopped beside her. Then strayed back a bit, watching. He seemed very glad to let Jane take the lead.

"A bubble?" Jane said.

"That's what I said. Did the fall have an adverse effect on your short term memory?"

"How big is it, Em?"

Emily shrugged.

"Five, six . . . eight-something feet wide. A big bubble. I fit in it."

"Think about a smaller one."

"Like four feet?"

"Little. A little bubble of light that you can hold in your center of gravity." Jane made a shape with her hands, like cupping a baseball. Like cupping a heart. "Think about a little ball of light in the center of you. That's the thing that carries you."

"Wasn't aware we were in yoga class," Emily said.

"You were the one practicing downward facing dog a minute ago."

"Now I'm doing 'really doubtful superhuman,'" said Emily.

"Just do it."

"Or else?"

"Or else I'll set your scarf on fire with my brain."

"Okay. I'll try."

Emily squinted, closed then opened her eyes, then rolled them at Jane, and then squinted again. She dropped a full foot and a half in elevation but stopped immediately, as if catching on a seatbelt. Then she was upright.

"Move around a little," Jane said.

"One thing at a time, Xena Warrior Princess."

But Emily complied, scooting a few feet in either direction, then drifting vertically.

"How does it feel?"

"Well I'm not seasick. Is that a good sign?"

"You're also right-side up," said Jane.

"Depends on your definition of right."

Billy looked at Jane.

She returned his glance.

"Guess there's one last thing to try out," Billy said. "Catch me if I fall?"

"Stop flirting with Thunder Girl and get it over with Billy Case,"

Matthew Phillion

Emily said.

"Thunder Girl?" Billy and Jane asked simultaneously.

"Whatever. Do it."

Billy drifted up right next to Emily and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Hey look. No hands!"

Billy gave Emily a playful shove.

She squinted at him.

"Bubble."

Billy dropped out of the sky like a rock.

Jane and Emily exchanged glances.

"I can't make more than one," Emily said. "You probably should save him."

And Jane did.