



# **Chapter 23: Jump.**

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Part of 10,000 Dawns

WeN-D came down in front of them, boarding ramp extended. It didn't take long to get all three of them aboard the VanWinkle, even with Graelyn's ankle, and Heinrich was pleased to see the two communist dogs were on board as well ("I took the liberty of luring them through the airlocks with a ration pack, I hope you don't mind." "Not at all WeN-D!") the ship took off, and in the distance the orb rose off the surface of the moon, a huge lump on its side wrapped in its tendrils.

Graelyn looked out at Arch, as he floated up into the sky, and towards a new blue glow in the sky. "It opened another tear." June cursed as she slid into a seat in the cabin. "This isn't good, its going to get away, with a whole bunch of data on us," she then uttered a long string of curse words.

"We've got to follow it."

"We can't go through the tear! We've got no idea how its traveled through, and its only a little bigger than a person, this is a pretty large ship." That was true. There wasn't really any way she could logically argue against that.

"We should still try to get all the data we can, do a fly by as close as you can to when it goes through the portal."

"Portal?"

"Whatever, we're inventing this jargon essentially."

"WeN-D can we chart a path to fly by its exit safely?"

"Absolutely!" She said chipperly.

Heinrich and June stripped off their gloves and helmets, but Graelyn kept hers on. They didn't comment on it, she stared out the view pane absently, deep in thought, her spacesuit looking like a huge anachronism in the spaceship that had been an antique when it was sewn together by machine. The ship got closer to the light, and Graelyn slipped out of the cabin. As it pulled by, she opened up the airlock.

"Graelyn what are you doing?"

"Seal the airlock don't let her do what she's thinking of!"

Graelyn pressed the emergency released button, flipped open the panel that emerged, and pulled the lever. "Graelyn do not do this!" Graelyn had only been able to count on herself, but arch has done what he had knowing full well he could die. Graelyn was about to inhale when the airlock door blew open, and she shot out with far more force than she'd been prepared for. The force of the air impacted her belly and she threw up into her helmet as she spun wildly, her arms flailing helplessly in the blackness of space. Then she was in a mess of blue and white, and then there was nothing.

She woke up. Her face was in a smelly mess of her own puke, but she hadn't suffocated. She couldn't have—the suit could put oxygen straight into her bloodstream even if she was choking, that's right. Instinctively she reached for the release catch on the neck of the suit—but realized that might not be a good idea. Shifting so that she could see her surroundings without getting vomit over even more of her, she saw she was in a grassy field. Wind blew gently through the blades, and she could see the field rolled down into a small grove of trees. She undid the helmet, and pulled it off, letting the sick slop out. She breathed in deeply, and rubbed her face into the grass- real grass not anything artificial. Black earth rubbed up against her nose. She spread her arms out and tried to sink into the soil, but without much luck.

"Excuse me, are you a spacewoman?" Graelyn's eyes shot up, and she pushed her aching body up from the soil. In front of her was a girl with short red hair, wearing glasses slightly too big for her head she'd slowly grow into. The knees on her dress were dirty, and she could probably do with blowing her nose, but the really apparent thing about her was the bloody scalpel in her left hand. Grae stared at it, the slightly dry blood dull against the sunlight.

"Miss?" Grae looked back at the girl.

"What's your name?"

"Graelie." She said pleasantly, as though she wasn't holding a bloody scalpel.

"That's funny." Said Graelyn. She wasn't stupid, the hair color threw her off, but she knew. She looked

back up at herself.

“And have you been dissecting roadkill again today?”

“How did you know that?”

“Like you guessed, I’m from space. You have to be smart to be in space.” The girl nodded. Graelyn remembered this conversation. She remembered the woman in the spacesuit, she’d thought she’d made it up at this point in her life, one of those playtimes as a child that just feels real though its make believe. But here she was. Strangely, or maybe with the utmost obligation, she knew what she had to say next.

“Would you mind if I came and looked?” Graelie looked at her, and bit her lip, then seemed to make a decision and nod. She reached down to Graelyn, and pulled to “help” Graelyn up, though it was really more for show, as Graelyn still actually had to do all the work, and her body still felt like it had been hit by a missile of pressure. In her head she struggled to work out why she had been hit by the pressure like that—it must have been something to do with the tear changing the space around it, she knew the holes led to different times and places, sometimes different dimensions. Maybe laws from one reality seeped over into this one? Or the two sets of laws clashed? It was all hypothetical. Whatever happened, she was woozy, and her mouth still tasted like vomit. Graelie led her to a dead deer, its eyes were already getting eaten away and it smelled, but that hadn’t stopped the girl from already having made a few incisions. The flesh had been carefully cut away, and the ribcage opened. A few organs had been nearly removed and placed on individual piles of leaves. Graelyn was impressed with herself, but was also struck for the first time with how unnatural this would seem to anyone else. She had been such a lonely child. Unable to keep friends for very long, and spending most of her time by herself. That she spent her time slicing up animals in the woods could only have stuck people as creepy—as a sign she was a danger to the other kids. She didn’t like to think of herself that way, she didn’t like to imagine that there was something wrong with her, but as tiny Graelie began to remove the deer’s lungs, she knew that maybe the whispers she heard about herself were right. There was something wrong with her. Her parents should have sent her away somewhere else. Somewhere far away where she’d do no harm to anyone. What if she was capable of what they thought she was? What if she was broken? Graelie turned to her, and she didn’t realize she had shed a tear.

“Are you...”

“Listen to me Graelie, no matter what anyone says to you, you’re the one in control of your life. People are going to tell you things. They’re going to say that you’re...” She looked away from herself, from the scalpel still dripping deer blood. “That you’re a monster. But they don’t understand you. They don’t know that you’re just.... Different. You’ll want to be what they say you are. You’ll want to... Cross any line to get what you want. But I believe in you. And I.... Look I don’t say this, I never say this, but I love you. You’re the only person I do love. Maybe the only one I can. I don’t want to believe that, but it might be true. Don’t give up on yourself. You’re the only one who can manage that. You...” She trailed off. In the distance, she saw a whiteish metal orb perched perfectly on a hill. “I have to go. Don’t forget what I said.” She stumbled up.

*I fell.*

*And as I fell I thought to myself, “Who am I going to be when I hit the ground?” Will I be a corpse? A victim? A cripple? Will I get up and rage against everything that threw me off of this?*

*Then I realized, whoever I chose to be, I will be myself.*

*I will still be Graelyn. Whoever she is.*

*And I chose to be someone I wouldn’t want to fall again.*

She ran towards the orb. Her legs ached, her belly burned, her lungs felt like they were being cut out of her body. She heard a voice yell “Arch! Arch!” as she ran and she barely realized it was coming out of her own mouth. The orb shook, and she sprinted harder at it. A blue swirl began to form around it, and she cursed and screamed as it disappeared into it as her legs gave out beneath her, the ripples of the tear bludgeoning her exposed face. “Arch...” She muttered. She crawled, grabbing the grass and the dirt, ripping up the gentle earth she’d savored, and pulled herself into the tear.

*And I chose to be someone I wouldn't want to fall again.*

***Will Graelyn save Arch? Where are they off to next? Come back next week to find out!***

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