



Chapter 22: The Pavement's the Limit

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Part of 10,000 Dawns

“Graelyn Scythes, what do you call this?” She couldn’t look her mother in the eye. “I didn’t have my eggs frozen so I could have a child who got a B-. Your siblings all did so much better than you when they were your age. What do you have to say for yourself?”

“It was boring” she wanted to say. She wanted to say that she had no interest in the book, and that she really couldn’t have cared less if Ivana had managed to win the great Horse Race that the Czar was throwing. The book didn’t tell her anything about the horse—it was supposedly so important, but they didn’t tell her anything she was wondering about it. What did it eat? What was it genetically predisposed to? Presumably it had been bred for racing, or at the very least was displaying desirable traits for horse races beyond her jockey’s spunky resolve to win the race. But none of it was in the book. Graelyn’s mind had drifted off reading it, and she’d found herself reading about horse biology rather than reading the book itself. Still, she finished it. It was just so hard to keep it in her brain. But that wasn’t what she said.

“I’ll try better mom.”

“You’d better, I don’t tolerate worthless people in this house. You’re either someone, or you’re nothing in this world and I’m not going to support you if you’re going to be a parasite on my back.”

She curled up alone in her room that night like she always did, setting her glasses on the table beside her bed. She wished at that moment that she could be in another family, like the kind she heard about at school from her friends. She didn’t even have a stuffed animal anymore, she’d had a Giraffe she’d named Attenborough, but her Mom had said she was too old for it now. She was too old for everything maybe. Sitting up, she slid her skinny legs off the bed, and walked over to the window, which she popped open with a snap. It was a cold night in Moscow, and the air chilled her almost instantly, Goosebumps springing up on her arms and legs like hives. She didn’t flinch, and slid her legs out the window. She was eight years old, and she was already sick of this, sick of people, sick of her parents. Her head was throbbing with expectations, and she wondered if it would be worth it if she kept going. She’d seen someone jump out of a tall building before, her father had tried to shield her eyes as the man cracked on the pavement, but she saw through his fingers. The way he burst open was fascinating, she’d seen drawings of the insides of people, but never really seen the insides. It hadn’t really occurred to her that that much of a person’s mass was vital fluids before, and she felt silly for not comprehending that fact before that moment. Graelyn was high enough she would burst as well—the window in her room wasn’t even supposed to open the way she was doing it, one of the benefits of studying too much was she could already recode the simple drivers in the window machinery. Not child safe anymore. The wind was picking up, and she felt herself batted about by it, ready to pick her up and carry her away from here. She tried to remember the last time she’d been hugged, or been told she did a good job by her parents, and she couldn’t. “Not everyone gets a trophy,” she remembered her mother say, “that breeds weakness.” She imagined a trophy below her, and her body getting speared on it as she fell. “Got a trophy after all!” she’d tell her mother, though that would be impossible because the time it would take her mother to get down to the ground from where they lived in the skyscraper would be long enough she’d certainly be dead in that scenario.

Graelyn felt the wind waft her, and felt her lip quiver. She felt like she was about to cry.

Ironically, that was what did it, the fear of looking weak by crying was what made her finally let go and slide out of her window.

She fell.

She fell.

She

Fell.

And it suddenly struck her that this was the worst decision she had ever made.

She realized that all of her problems, everything with her family, were temporary. Sure, they'd have custody of her for years and years, but that would end, and then they wouldn't have control of her anymore, she could cut them out of her life like a tumor. No one could tell her what to do, she would be alone, just the way she needed to be. No one to let her down, no one to fail her or demean her. She would be a lone standout against the mess of the world. She'd fix it.

Or, she would, if she hadn't jumped out of her window.

She was going to die, and nothing she could do could change that, she was totally helpless.

Falling.

And then, she wasn't. She felt an impact, but a light one, and she bounced up a bit, before falling back down into the net. It was hard to get her balance, but she sat up, trying to take in her blurry surroundings, as a light shone on her face.

"It's a girl Pavel, and a young one at that."

"I could have sworn the woman on floor 59 was going to call it quits any day now. Damn."

"You made the bet." A security platform hovered over, and she reached out to them as they came by. A woman in black security armor lifted her up under the armpits, and set her down in the vehicle.

"Jesus, what makes a girl like you jump out the window?"

"She probably fell somehow, tried to get a better view or something."

"No, I jumped." She confirmed.

"Darn stupid thing to do, what do you think you're doing? Your daddy beat you or something?" She shook her head no.

"When did the nets get added?"

"Not too long ago, some guy jumped and bust on the pavement a few months ago and we got them installed for insurance reasons." Of course her inspiration was her undoing.

"So come on kid, why'd you jump?" Graelyn shrugged, "I thought there was no one I could count on, no one worthwhile in the whole world."

"And now?"

Graelyn smiled, "there is definitely someone worthwhile I can count on."

Well that happened. Gosh. Tune in next week, as we get out of Graelyn's memories, and back to the danger on Triton...

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<http://www.jameswylder.com/home/the-great-10000-dawns-bonus-story-contest-round-2>