

## CHAPTER TWO: THE DEPARTURE

**A**utumn was about to call her sister Ruby to request a ride for Olivia to Shady Grove, when just then, Olivia remembered something of vital importance. “Wait!” she exclaimed.

Autumn was startled by her niece’s excitement. “Um... Okay. What is it?”

“I forgot something, and I’ll be right back!” Olivia dropped her shimmering pink ballet bag and ran out of the kitchen, going step-by-step up the stairs as fast as her little legs could carry her, all the way to her bedroom, with her little blonde pigtails bouncing to-and-fro along the way, where she looked around frantically for a very important item. “Not in the toy bin... not on the bookshelf... where could he be?” she thought out loud, carelessly rummaging through her things. She looked under the bed, but it wasn’t there; she looked in her closet, but it wasn’t there either. She ran out of her room and looked first at the bathroom on her right. *It’s obviously not in there...* she thought. She then looked at the door to her parents’ room straight ahead. *And I wouldn’t have left it in there...* Lastly, she looked down the hallway on her left, which lead to the family storage room. *So it’s got to be in there!*

Olivia ran down the hall and delved straightaway into the storage room, which was packed full of large quantities of “things” that the family (and the house) had acquired over the past hundred years. These family possessions had been all neatly stored away, packed into nice little boxes, which were stacked evenly, one upon another.

After briefly scanning the room, she caught sight of what she was looking for: her green blanket, that she’d had since the day she was born and came home from the hospital. It was resting in a crumpled heap atop a stack of boxes full of nicknacks, with one tiny point of a corner overhanging the side of the stack of boxes. She remembered having tossed it up there

to keep it away from her pesky younger cousin, Sophia, who had made a game of sneaking it away from her whenever the opportunity arose.

Now because the blanket was so important to Olivia, not taking it to dance camp was simply out of the question. “The world might literally end if I go to camp without it,” she whispered to herself. “I won’t be able to sleep at night!” Although it was just a small plush blanket—not even big enough to cover herself in bed—it was one of the most important things in the world for the young girl to have when she was away from home. But unfortunately, the boxes upon which the green blanket rested were stacked just out of arm’s reach, even using her tip toes and fully extended fingertips. *How did it even get up there?* she thought, surprised by her own carelessness. *I simply must learn to be more careful about where I leave my stuff!*

“Olivia! Hurry up!” Autumn called to her from downstairs. Olivia began to panic; she knew that she simply could not go to Shady Grove without the green blanket. Just then she had an idea—one which she thought was surely a brilliant one. She hurriedly stacked two of the smaller boxes together, one on top of the other, and stepped up to her newly elevated platform. By standing on the edge of her tiptoes—a talent she had learned in her ballet class—she was able to just barely reach the silky edge of the blanket.

Her aunt hollered again, “Olivia! We need to call Ruby now, or you’re going to be late to camp!”

“I got it!” Olivia shouted. “And not a moment too soon!” Unfortunately, although her form was perfect, her balance was not. She fell, and along with her came the boxes that had been stacked together. Upon landing, several of the boxes burst open, and her family’s nicknacks of various shapes and sizes spilled out everywhere across the hardwood floor.

“Oh, no—look at this mess!” Olivia exclaimed. She could faintly hear Autumn open the doorway to the stairs, which meant that her aunt was coming up to check on her; so she started frantically picking up the nicknacks by the handful, and indiscriminately shoveling them back into whatever box she could find.

“Have to hurry... have to hurry...” she mumbled to herself.

Now, although being late to camp would not have been the end of the world, Olivia was much more concerned about the possibility of her mother finding out that her belongings had been so carelessly strewn about. She could hear her aunt’s footsteps coming up the

stairs, step by panic inducing step. *Have to hurry! Come on, come on!* she thought. At last, Olivia finished placing the last nicknack into the last open box right when Autumn entered the room. Although the boxes themselves were not in perfect order, at least there was no mess on the floor, and Autumn was none the wiser.

“Olivia,” her aunt said, peering into the room, “You’ve got to be careful in here.” Autumn had indeed noticed that something here was out of order, but because Olivia had done such a quick job of cleaning up the spilled boxes, she couldn’t exactly say what seemed out of place. “I remember when I was your age, playing around in this room—your mom always told me that there were important things in these boxes that needed to be treated carefully.”

Olivia felt uneasy about her aunt’s words, especially as she noticed one last nicknack sitting near the doorway by Autumn’s foot. There was nothing remarkable about it; it was just a small blue box, about the size of a baseball, but perfectly square. It was covered in dust, as if it had been stored away for many years—decades, perhaps—and having been neither seen nor touched once during this whole time. But for some reason, she just couldn’t take her eyes off of it for more than a few moments.

“What are you looking for, anyway?” Autumn asked.

“My green blanket,” Olivia replied.

“Do you really need it?”

“Autumn!” she said indignantly. “I always take my green blanket with me when I leave home. You know I can’t go to camp without it!”

Autumn stared silently at her for a moment, then sighed. “Well, it looks like you have it now—come on, kid, let’s go downstairs and call Ruby.”

Olivia nodded, and ran out of the storage room. As she passed through the doorway and into the hall, she reached down and made a sneaky grab for the cube and wrapped it up safe in her blanket. She followed Autumn down the hall, then the stairs, and into the kitchen, preparing to make the phone call; but what happened next was certainly unexpected.

Without warning, the house began to shake. At first it was just a low rumbling, but it quickly developed into a more violent quake. The shaking had gotten so much worse over the next few moments that books began to fall off shelves, and a few glasses had fallen off the kitchen counter, shattering on the floor. When the first of the family pictures began

falling off of the walls, Olivia and Autumn both shouted in perfect unison, “It’s an earthquake!”

Now, Olivia had never lived through an earthquake before, and the only one Autumn had been through had happened in the middle of the night, while she was asleep, so this was proving to be an alarming situation for them both.

“What do we do?” Olivia asked.

“Get beneath a door frame!” Autumn shouted, having remembered some sort of safety training from school. While the two girls scurried around the house, looking for a good door frame to stand under, they failed to realize that the shaking had gotten so bad, that the house was actually beginning to float off the ground, levitating a couple feet into the air. Now, the door frame that Olivia had decided to stand underneath happened to be the front door to Continental Avenue. It briefly crossed her mind to run outside of the house, but she was so frightened when she saw that the house was now floating, that she lost grip on the door frame, and fell back into the kitchen. Even more surprising to Olivia was that the front door slammed itself tightly closed, and locked itself, as if by an unseen force.

Olivia noticed that when she fell, the nicknack she had so neatly tucked away had fallen out of her blanket, and slid across the floor. The little blue box was no longer dull and dusty, but glowing brightly, and was warm to the touch. The house continued to float, and the higher it floated, the less violently it shook.

Olivia—the girl who was scared of so many things—was certainly now terrified. She looked out the kitchen window, and could see her tiny little hometown of Midtown growing smaller and smaller as the house sailed higher and higher. “This is terrible!” she exclaimed. “Go down, house—go down!” she shouted. She even jumped a couple of times, hoping that her feet stomping on the floor would help push the house back down. But the house simply refused; instead, it flew higher and faster with each passing second. She looked back down at the street through the window, and this time all the houses and buildings appeared to be nothing more than small specks on the countryside. Olivia watched the light blue sky transition into solid black, and she realized that her house had taken her into outer space.

She ran into the kitchen, where Autumn was still faithfully clutching on to the door frame for dear life, with her fingers clenched so tightly that her knuckles had turned white.

“Autumn!” Olivia shouted at her shell-shocked aunt.

“Oh!” Autumn exclaimed, cracking open one of her tightly shut eyelids. “Is it over?” she asked.

Olivia wasn’t sure how to respond. “I think,” she muttered, still trying to make sense of it all, “I think we’re in space.”

“That’s not funny, Liv!” Autumn exclaimed.

“Well maybe you should look out the window!” Olivia replied as she began to cry, no longer able to contain her fear.

Autumn slowly unclenched her fingers from their grip on the door frame, and walked into the living room to peer outside the window. Where she was expecting to see a front yard and a white picket fence, she instead saw just what her niece had described: nothing. There was blackness as far as the eye could see, with randomly placed stars dotting the otherwise empty scenery.

“This can’t be happening!” Autumn shouted at the window. Autumn turned to look at Olivia with complete shock on her face. “It just isn’t possible!”

Autumn saw that Olivia’s little face had grown stark white, and that she was pointing straight out the window. “Um...” her niece said with concern.

Autumn turned back to the window, and saw—much to her horror—an immense gray, round object floating past the house. “What in the—it can’t be!”

“It’s the moon!” they both shouted.

The house then began hurtling through space faster and faster—so fast, in fact, that in just a few minutes neither the Earth nor the moon could even be seen. “Come back, earth! Come, back moon!” Olivia shouted at the window.

“They can’t hear you,” Autumn said, holding her head in her hands in disbelief. Both girls were confused and discouraged by this chain of events—not to mention terrified. How was the house flying in space? And why was it flying so far away from earth? Would they ever see their family again?

*Most importantly, Olivia thought to herself, will I miss dance camp?*