

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EYE OF THE STORM

Autumn was too stunned to comply with his demand. She stood with her arms rigidly locked in place, still confused as to what was going on.

“Listen—I know this is a frightening situation,” the man said, motioning his hands in a calming manner. “Now I assure you, there is a rational explanation; but first, I need you to give me the dagger.”

With each passing moment, Autumn could feel the house being slowly torn apart under the intense pressure of the black hole’s pull. She snapped back to reality at the man’s last few words, and she realized that if she wanted to get out of this situation alive, she might just have to trust this stranger. But it had also occurred to her, that within the last hour alone, she had already seen two seemingly minute trinkets which possessed incredible powers: a blue box which could cause a house to fly, and a gray stone which housed a fully grown man inside of it. Who was to say what the dagger could do, let alone what it could do in someone else’s hands? This doubt and skepticism got the better of Autumn. “You can’t have it!” she shouted back defiantly. She positioned her feet in a defensive stance, and held the dagger up with an outstretched arm in front of her body, pointing the tip of the dagger toward the man.

“I’m trying to help you—” the man began to say, but was quickly interrupted by Autumn.

“If you want to help, then get us out of here!”

“Alright,” the man replied calmly. Within a split second, he had drawn out some sort of gun from within his coat pocket, and began firing directly at Autumn.

“ZHEEEEEER!” the gun sounded, as it began to discharge blasts of purple energy. “ZHEEEEEER! ZHEEEEEER!” He fired it a couple more times.

Autumn pulled back in a defensive motion, with Olivia still hiding behind her. With the energy discharges from the man's gun coming directly at her, Autumn expected that this would be the end of her short, teenage life; but then she saw these energy discharges dissipate as soon as they came near to her, as if she and Olivia were being protected by some sort of unseen shield, leaving them completely unharmed. Autumn's dagger was now warm to the touch, and she could see that the strange letters and symbols surrounding the blade were now brightly shining, with waves of energy encircling not only the dagger, but her hand that held it as well.

"What are you doing!" Autumn shouted at the man, confused by his actions, and glad that she had not trusted him with her new found weapon. She again raised her arm to point the dagger at him.

"My dear girl, this ship is running out of power," the man replied. "If you want to escape the black hole, you're going to have to give it a little boost."

"And... how do I do that?"

"Now that the Eye of the Storm is filled with energy, you must simply touch it to the ship's control panel. The ship will do the rest."

"The control panel? Where's that?"

"I believe she's holding it," he said, pointing at the shaking little Olivia, still hiding behind her aunt's lower half.

Autumn turned to see a terrified Olivia, trembling with fear, holding on to the blue box for dear life. "Let's give this a try, kid."

Olivia was too frightened to speak, but not too frightened to help her aunt save the day. She took one of her hands off of the little blue box, and Autumn touched the box with the tip of her dagger. Visible sparks of energy could be seen pulsing out from the dagger, and become absorbed into the box, changing it from a dull and lifeless hue to a bright, glowing, and vibrant blue.

"Energy... levels... raising..." the box sputtered out. "Energy fully restored. Shall we continue our ascent to Plottum?"

"Yes—take us to Plottum!" Olivia shouted. "Anywhere but here!"

"Ascent to Plottum has been resumed."

The girls looked out the window with great anticipation. No sooner had Olivia given the command than they immediately felt the house begin at last to resist the insatiable pull of the black hole. Now it has been said that nothing can escape the gravitational pull of a black hole, and that even light itself is pulled in to its darkness; but whoever said this has clearly never flown in a house ship, such as this one.

The unknown force that powered Olivia's house ship began to intensify from a low rumble into a violent and intensely loud quake, as the house shook harder than she had ever felt it shake before.

"It feels like the house is tearing itself apart!" the terrified little Olivia shouted.

"Be calm, young girl," the man responded. "A vessel of this power cannot be destroyed by something as insignificant as a black hole."

Slowly but surely, the house broke free from the intense pull that had beckoned the girls into the black hole of galactic darkness.

Once the house was a safe distance away, Olivia sat down on the hard kitchen floor, and sighed with relief, feeling both terrified and accomplished that she had just survived her first encounter with a black hole.

"Okay—what's going on here?" Autumn asked the man indignantly.

"Well we appear to be in space," he responded, peering out the kitchen window.

"I know that already!" Autumn snarled back. "Who are you, and more importantly, why did you shoot your gun at us?"

"My name is—" the man began to say, but was interrupted by Autumn.

"More important than that, how did this house start flying in space? And more important than that, how do we get home?"

"Oh, I know who you are!" the man exclaimed, snapping his fingers a few times, and disregarding her questions. "This is all making sense now. You're 'the Fierce,'" he said confidently to Autumn. "And that must make you the 'the Brave,'" he said, turning to Olivia. "At least, you will be. Or maybe it's that you already were... I can hardly get it straight sometimes."

"You're not making any sense!" Autumn said, continuing to snarl.

"My deepest apologies," the man said, getting a hold of himself. "Allow me to introduce myself, and answer your questions, one-by-one. First, I am called the Bravery Stone. It's not a

proper name, but it's what I do. I bring courage to those in need; nothing more, nothing less. Second, I did not shoot at you, I shot at the dagger. 'Why,' you ask? Because—despite its appearance—it's not a weapon, but a tool. The Eye of the Storm absorbs, stores, and converts energy into any usable form. Third, as for this 'house,' to the best of my knowledge, I have never been on board this ship before..." The man who had identified himself as the Bravery Stone paused for a moment as he looked around the house, then continued speaking, "Yet its technology is not foreign to me. And fourth, I cannot get you home. Only she can," he said, pointing toward Olivia. "Because only she has the ability to fly this ship."

Autumn closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead for a moment while she tried to work through the strange ideas the man was sharing. "Why did you call us such names? My name is Autumn. I'm not exactly 'fierce,' and this kid's Olivia, and she is not 'brave' at all."

"Hey!" Olivia objected.

"I'm just sayin'."

"You certainly are 'the Fierce.' This much is clear," Bravery responded with a slight smile, "But I will call you 'Autumn' if you prefer. As for her, have no doubt about it—she will be 'the Brave.'"

"How can I be brave?" Olivia asked. "I'm Olivia the 'fraidy cat!'"

"Who gave you that name?" Bravery asked, surprised.

"I did, because I'm afraid of everything!" Olivia said.

"Oh, well that is terrible news then..."

"Why is that so terrible?"

"If it was someone else who gave you that name, then it would be quite a simple problem to fix—you could have perhaps called fire down from the heavens to consume them, right?"

Olivia didn't exactly know how to respond. "Well, not really..."

"Oh, of course, you could have simply caused the earth on which they stood to open its mouth, and devour them whole. You could do that, right?"

Olivia laughed at how ridiculous his questions were becoming. "No, of course not!"

"No matter—I suppose you could have simply ignored them, and that probably would have sufficed. But there's a problem, dear Olivia, with that deplorable name was given to you by yourself. You see—because you gave it to yourself, it's a name you're now stuck, which

means that no matter how hard you try not to, you simply have to be afraid. Unless, of course, you prove to yourself that you can, in fact, be brave.”

Olivia thought about it for a second, but was too focused on just wanting to go home. “Only I have the ability to fly this ship...” she mumbled, imitating the words of the Bravery Stone. So, turning to the blue box, she commanded it with confidence, “I want you to take us home.” Olivia held the blue box cautiously, being careful to hold it steady, so that a slight bump of her wrist did not accidentally send her house careening off course into another black hole—or worse.

“Do you wish to cancel our ascent to Plottum?”

“That isn’t even a place!” Olivia exclaimed, again growing frustrated at the box. “I just want to know if you can get us to planet earth, to Washington state, in America!”

The box remained silent for a moment, as if thinking about how to respond to the question. Then, after a long pause, it simply said, “No.”

“What do you mean ‘no?’ You got us all the way out here! Why can’t you get us home?”

“Because my navigational programming appears to be rather incomplete.”

“So you’re telling me that you don’t know where we are, and that you can’t get us home?”

“Yes.”

Olivia slumped down, sad at the thought of never seeing planet earth again.

“What does it mean by ‘incomplete?’” Autumn asked. “How can someone turn a house into a space ship but not program it with some kind of map, or even a homing beacon?”

“As I said before, I am not familiar with this ship,” Bravery said calmly. “But I do know this: your arrival here was not by accident. Now one question, if I may, ask it.”

“Well you answered all my questions, so I guess it’s fair for you to have a few of your own.” Autumn replied.

“What year is it?” he asked with an inquisitive but serious look upon his face.

“Excuse me? Are you seriously asking me what year it is at a time like this?”

“Dear girl,” Bravery responded with a smile, “I have been waiting in your attic for a *very* long time.”

“It’s not an attic, it’s a junk room.” Olivia interjected.

“Either way, I have been asleep for many years. It was not until you placed me in your pocket that I woke up, and realized what was going on.”

“Who put you there?” asked Autumn.

“I cannot say for certain. I only know that I have passed through many hands before being laid to rest in your ‘junk room.’ Now please, dear girl; what year is it?”

“It’s September 19th!” Olivia responded, proud that she could answer a question in a grown-up conversation.

“September... 19th?” Bravery mumbled as he went deep in thought. “That’s in earth time, isn’t it?”

“Well of course it is,” Olivia replied.

Bravery thought about it for a moment, working through several mathematical computations in his head. “Then there’s no time to waste.”

“What do you mean ‘no time to waste?’” asked Autumn.

“My knowledge of earth years is not perfect; but if my calculations are correct, then you have an appointment that you’re nearly late for.”

“You’re right about that!” Olivia shouted, remembering her upcoming stay at dance camp. Autumn was skeptical that this is what Bravery had in mind, but she decided to hold her tongue for the time being.

“Now if you’ll excuse me,” Bravery said as his body began to vanish. “I’ll be in your pocket if you need me again. Remember, dear girl, so long as you have me in your pocket, you can be brave; and indeed, you will be brave. That is to say,” the man added as he vanished into a cloud of gray mist, “You must be brave.” The stone then flew back into Olivia’s little hand. She placed it securely in her pocket, and somehow, felt comforted in the knowledge that if she was ever again in a dire situation, that she could call upon her new friend whenever she needed him.

Determined not to give into despair, Olivia thought long and hard, looking out every window of the house to figure out which way she had come from. *The problem is*, she thought to herself, *You just can’t get your bearings in space... But I think it was this way... Or was it that way?* After a few moments of careful consideration, she picked a direction she thought was right. “Here goes nothing!”

“There goes everything...” Autumn mumbled to herself, less than thrilled that their entire chance of getting home was placed solely in the hands of her ten year old niece.

Olivia, clutching the blue box tightly in her hands, then thrust her arms out in the direction she wanted to go; and sure enough, the house ship flew with amazing speed in the direction she indicated.

Unfortunately, it was not the direction of Earth.