

STORY SO FAR: *It's 1972. Ed Goddard, having stolen a money bag, parachutes from an airplane. On the ground, looking up, is Jamie. Also on the ground, watching Jamie, is Gillian.*

## CHAPTER SIX

### What Falls from the Sky

Goddard, falling, felt his heart pounding, each beat marking the seconds of his drop. Arms spread wide, legs behind, he held the money bag out in one hand, as if he were lying on the air. When he reached the end of the required safety count, he yanked the release cord with his free hand. A jolt, along with a whipping sound, told him that the parachute had pulled free. A second later it blew completely out, filling with air. With a jerk, he was dangling midair, floating downward, the parachute above him like a huge white mushroom.



Jamie loved these storm clouds. They reached as high as he had ever seen them, as if they were holding up the sky. They were skyscrapers. No—castles. No—magic mountains. To the south the clouds were white aliens from the planet Mercury. From the north they were the dark beasts of Jupiter. In the center were splinters of lightning, the fire snakes of Mars. Jamie turned south again. An airplane, sharp-pointed and silver, cut through the clouds—a silver spear from Saturn.

Jamie blinked: something seemed to drop from the plane. He watched, puzzled, trying to decide what it was. Then he saw—a parachute. A man was dropping out of the sky.



Gillian peeked over the stone wall, her eyes intent on Jamie.



Jamie searched for the airplane, but it was vanishing quickly. He swung back to stare at the parachute. It was still dropping. The person—it seemed to be a man—was holding out an arm. From his hand dangled some sort of bag or bundle. Excited, Jamie dashed toward the spot where he thought the man might land.



Gillian, her eyes fixed on Jamie, was caught off guard by his sudden running away. Wondering where he was going, she turned to see if someone had come. When she saw no one, she shifted back to where Jamie had been standing. He had vanished! Certain he had seen her, that she had bungled things again, Gillian squatted and hid behind a tree. After a moment she looked out cautiously. Jamie was nowhere in sight. Puzzled, wondering where he had gone, she came out from behind the tree.



Goddard, feeling the fingers of his right hand grow numb from the rushing wind, switched the bag to his left hand. Only then did he bend over to see where he was headed. The countryside stretched out like the map he had studied for so long. The area directly below seemed deserted, looking like nothing more than an empty, hilly spot with a few farmhouses. Its immensity took him by surprise. He was uncertain where he was. Even so, he was sure that once on the ground he could easily find his location by walking to the first road or town. *Everything*, he insisted to himself, *was working perfectly*.

Pushed by a burst of wind, Goddard looked around. Storm clouds were bearing in on him. *Nothing to worry about*, he told himself. The storm might carry him some distance, and perhaps, if the winds were really strong, he might be pulled about on the ground. *A bit of bad luck*, he thought, *nothing more*. Anyway, the bad weather would make it even more unlikely that anyone would see him drop.

The ground seemed to rush up toward him faster and faster. His left hand gripped the bag loosely, letting it swing. The main thing, he told himself, was that no one see him.



Jamie, wanting to be close enough to greet the man from the sky, raced down the far side of the hill. He was trying to figure out just where the parachutist would come down, but he was still too far away. And the man was dropping fast, slipping farther into the distance.

“Hey!” Jamie shouted, running as fast as he could and lifting his hands as he went.



Shocked by the sound of a voice, Goddard jerked his head about. As he did, the money bag, held by his weaker hand, started to slip from his fingers. He tried to snatch at it, only to get caught up in the parachute lines. The bag dropped. Goddard lunged for it—but it was gone, falling like a rock. Horrified, he looked down to see where it was going. That’s when he caught sight of Jamie.



Jamie saw something drop. As he was wondering what it was, a great thunderclap made him turn. The storm was all but overhead. He looked back to the falling man, who was sinking behind the far side of a hill, out of sight. Jamie began to run in that direction.



The storm winds were blowing Goddard down and away fast, even as the earth seemed to be leaping up. *Never mind the kid!* he told himself, keeping his eyes on the

ground below so as to avoid hitting trees and rocks. A few feet from landing, he shook his legs, loosening his muscles. Even so, he struck the ground very hard, landing mostly on one leg. The parachute, caught by the wind, began to drag. Goddard pulled the release catch. The lines ripped away. Staggering to his feet, he dove for the lines, clutched them, and began to haul them in. With a last hugging motion, he crushed the parachute into a ball against his chest.

He had landed safely. But the money was gone. And some kid had seen him. That meant only one thing: he had to find that kid.

*(To be continued.)*

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