Theresa Hughes

Word Count: 972

Stealing Gravity

I had been stealing gravity since I was seven. I didn’t know then that eight years later I would be the main supplier of illegal gravity tech. But here I was, running down the metallic corridor from the enforcers, ten pounds of stolen tech inside my swinging bag. I wasn’t going to let the artificial gravity bog me down.

The new shipment of updated gravity technology had practically been an advertised free-for-all. What did they expect from me?

“Boy, stop!” they yelled, growing impatient with the chase.

I grinned. I reached down to my belt and pulled out a small, pear shaped device, tossing it behind me. There was a moment of anticipation before the grav-flash went off, causing a temporary gravity shift from the one-fourth Earth gravity on Numera Space Station to about two times Earth's gravity. The enforcers were pulled to the ground as I rounded a corner ahead of them, escaping capture yet again.

I decided I was safe enough about halfway to my bunk. By the time I got back, I had calmed down enough to breath regularly. I closed the door behind me, waiting for the tell-tale click of the lock before dumping the stolen contents of my bag on the metal table.

“What did you do?”

I jumped and spun around, noticing for the first time the figure standing behind me.

“Marsh,” I said to the older boy. “I didn’t notice you there.” Marsh was my older brother, but he had never approved of my illegal activities. We had ended up parting ways a few years ago.

“You don’t even know, do you?” Marsh said, stepping forward. The light from the single bulb illuminated his face.

“Know what?” I responded. I could read it on his face: something was very wrong.

“You killed him.”

I shifted my footing. The grav-flash hadn’t been strong enough to injure anyone, let alone kill. “Who?”

“The maintenance man,” Marsh said. My brain buzzed, as I began putting the pieces together. “He was on the outside of the hull when your gravity-flash went off. He was too close and his own gravity tech short circuited. The grav-flash threw off his measurements—you know they can do that if they’re on different frequencies. He ended up floating away. They can’t even reel him in because his line was also broken by the flash.”

My heart was pounding as if I was running from the enforcers again. “Can’t someone go get him?”

Marsh slammed his hands on the table. “Not when someone has *stolen* all the gravity tech.”

I stared at my stash. I had only taken it all this time because I knew they would be getting a much larger shipment in a few days. They could do without. “I didn’t mean to—”

“You never *mean* to, Tegan. *No one* ever means to. But that’s how life works.” Marsh grew uncharacteristically quiet. “Sometimes there are consequences to your actions.”

I glanced around my tiny space before frantically shoving the stolen contents back into the bag and swinging it over my shoulder.

“What are you doing now?” Marsh’s tone was filled with warning. I wondered if my brother had already figured out my plan, but I didn’t reply. Instead, I pulled down the heavy door handle, waiting for it to unlock before rushing out.

I made my way down the corridor, past the dining area and farming level. I headed three levels up the first staircase to my right and came out on the maintenance ring. It circled the entertainment dome located a floor below.

Being a gravity tech genius, as I often referred to myself while I was going on my reconnaissance and acquiring missions, I knew this floor better than perhaps even the living corridors I was holed up in. The airlock was only a two minute walk from here. But I was on the clock. The maintenance worker had only so much air.

“Tegan, wait up!”

I didn’t turn around. I hadn’t realized Marsh was still following me, but perhaps that would be a good thing.

I reached the airlock, out of breath and exhausted. There was a crowd of people by the exterior window, watching as the maintenance man floated away.

One of the women was crying hysterically, calling out for her “Jacob.” I quickly surveyed the scene and realized one important detail: no one was in a spacesuit. Why would they be? They couldn’t use it without gravity tech to bring them back and keep them grounded. I hadn’t realized how little they had.

I pulled a suit off the wall and shoved my foot into the boot.

Marsh flew around the corner, wheezing. “What are you thinking?”

“Help me put this on.”

The crowd of people had finally noticed the odd boy in their midst pulling on a space suit. Most just stared at me in confusion.

With Marsh’s help, I pulled the suit up to my shoulders. I nodded to my bag and Marsh handed it to me. I dug through the tech, pulling out a stabilizer, a gravity generator, and a pair of gravity magnets to pull the man in. I synchronized them to the same frequency before belting the stabilizer around my waist and placing the gravity generator on my foot.

“Wait,” Marsh said, pausing with the helmet piece in his hands. “You do realize that if you do this, you’ll be giving up all your tech?” he whispered. “Everyone knows it was stolen. One of these people probably already called the enforcers. You still have time to run now, but if you go out there, you’re giving up your freedom.” He hesitated before adding, “I don’t want to see my brother locked up.”

I took a deep breath, glancing at the previously hysterical women who was now looking at me with a sense of hope. I faced Marsh. “I’m sorry,” I said. I turned to the rest of the crowd. “Clear the airlock. I’m going out.”