

An extract from 'America' for you to read

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Twenty three

I was pulled rudely awake on Thursday morning by the phone ringing. Being a super girl means I don't spend several minutes actually waking up and getting in my right mind, I was awake and concentrating within a second or so. So was Saskia.

"Who is it, Twin?"

"Hm. Number's familiar but no name. Hang on while I answer it." I did this - to get rather a shock.

"Good morning, Saskia," said a small voice down the phone, "It's Saskia Chandler here."

I think I was struck dumb for several seconds. The Saskia at the other end of the phone laughed at me. "Yes, it's you - me - whatever." I was receiving a phone call from myself!

It didn't take me long to pull myself together. There'd be a loop or shift in time or other explanation. It was just a bit of a surprise at first. I rallied.

"Hello, me. What's going on? Where are you - or should that be where am I?"

"Back in England. Need you to come back, go back, and fix something."

"Why didn't Voice just tell us what it needs?" asked Saskia, obviously listening using her super hearing.

The Saskia on the other end of the phone heard what she said quite plainly, the Saskia here with me having jumped out of her bed and come to join me sitting on mine.

"I woke you up, didn't I?"

"Mm. The phone ringing."

"Voice can't wake you if you're asleep, or at least it *can*, but apparently you wouldn't like it. Easier for me to ring you."

"So that's why the number was familiar," I laughed, "It's *mine*."

"Twin. Enough messing already," said Saskia. "Might be an emergency."

"Shouldn't matter," I said. "If we have to travel in time, we have to be there at the right time - wherever 'there' is. Speaking of which, original question still stands, me, what's going on."

"Ah. Right. In the early hours of this morning, this morning over here, not over there, you'll get a phone call from Ops at Five. Obviously, they have no idea you aren't in England at the moment."

Saskia giggled. "What you mean is that we aren't in England *yet*."

I could almost see the Saskias at the far end of the phone call grinning. "That's the one. Anyway, not going to give you any more details, you might as well follow the script. When we've done on the phone, call Voice and ask to be moved. It should already know where to and how far back in time."

"Then you're going to be moved to here and take up where we're about to leave off?"

"Yep."

"Ok. Sounds like a plan. I'd say see you later but I think that'd be a bit silly. Just go for it, yes?"

"Yep. Good plan. Bye, me."

“Bye.” I pressed ‘end’ on the phone.

“No point going back to sleep, Twin,” said Saskia. “May as well call Voice. Voice? You there? What’s going on?”

Time slowed to a stop, although it was difficult to tell in the quiet of the period around dawn. A giveaway was the stationary second hand on Saskia’s little bedside alarm clock. I heard Voice, in my head as usual. “I am here.”

“What’s with the phone call? Why can’t you just wake us up?”

“For me to do that requires a procedure you would find distasteful. The effect would be similar to what you term a ‘nightmare’. There would even be the possibility of you emitting a scream.”

“Hm,” I said, “Give me a phone call every time. I told me that you already know where and when?”

“Yes. I will translate you to a point in the air above the building known as ‘MI5’. It will be three thirty local time in England.”

“No more details?”

“Only that your intervention is essential.”

“Saving the world again?” grinned Saskia. The grin faded somewhat as Voice replied.

“Yes. You will be required to prevent a significant disaster. Translation will occur when you collapse the suspension.” And voice was gone.

We were still suspended outside time, still in the motel room in Burlington. “MI5 plus a huge disaster. Not a natural one, I don’t think,” said Saskia. “Wonder what it is.”

Despite the potential seriousness of the situation I couldn’t help myself. “Know a way to find out.”

“Ok, ok. Collapse the suspension and go see,” said Saskia in mock-exasperation. Then she grinned as she decided we shouldn’t be suspended any more.

The motel room in Vermont vanished. Instead of sitting on a bed, we were floating in mid-air in the pre-dawn light above London. Quickly I changed, from the shorts and T shirt I’d worn to sleep in, to my little super costume. Naturally this was accompanied by a change from Saskia to Kyra. As I watched I saw Saskia do the same, Katya in her case, of course. I couldn’t tell anyway. As Kyra and Katya we look absolutely identical. Even I couldn’t tell us apart - and I’m Kyra!

“What now, Twin?”

“We wait for a phone ...”

At that precise second the MI5 phone, away somewhere in the cosmic cupboard, began to ring in my head. I grinned as I changed to be holding it, whereupon it began to ring audibly. I pressed ‘accept call’ and pushed it under my hair to reach my ear. I knew that wouldn’t stop Saskia hearing what it had to say as well.

“Good morning. Kyra here. What can we do for you so early.”

“Sorry it’s so early.”

“Don’t worry, we don’t sleep.” Not technically a fib, Kyra and Katya *didn’t* sleep, Saskia and Saskia did all the sleeping. But the other end were speaking.

“Got a bit of a problem. Can you come ...”

I gave him no time to finish, but interrupted him with, “We’ll be with you in twenty seconds.” I could hear him spluttering as I ended the call.

“Come on, Twin. Used up a couple of seconds already,” grinned Saskia as she dived down through the air towards the roof of Thames House a few hundred metres below us.

Landing gently on our feet amongst the aircon stacks and chimneys, we quickly made our way to the door to the steps leading down. Within the twenty seconds specified we were outside the glass door to the Ops room. Garry Sinclair was inside to let us in.

“So what’s going on that you need us before the crack of dawn?” grinned Saskia.

Nobody else joined her grin. I was beginning to get a bad feeling. “*Voice said a disaster, remember?*” I whispered at her.

The answer wasn’t long in arriving. “There’s a military transport plane inbound. It’s over the South of France at the moment. It’s being controlled by members of a group of terrorists affiliated to Al-Qaeda.”

“Oops,” said Saskia. “That’s not good. What’s it carrying?”

“We think it’s the remains of the nuclear material that was going to be used for bombs before we flattened the factory - with your help, if you remember.”

“Ah. The high-level pictures,” I said. “But why bring it here? What do they hope to gain?”

“Remember the attacks on New York and the Pentagon a few years ago?”

“Oh no!” said Saskia. “They’re going to use the plane as a missile?”

“Yes. That’s the idea.”

“What’s the target?” I asked. “London?”

“No. In many ways we wish it was,” said Garry. Saskia looked at him a bit oddly. He went on, “No. The target is the Dungeness B nuclear power station.”

“But what good will that do,” said Saskia, looking perplexed. “That’s on the south coast, ruddy miles from anywhere. It won’t explode, anyway.”

I was putting two and two together - and getting way more than four. “Doesn’t have to. A large enough impact will breach the containment. That, together with the stuff the plane is already carrying, will spread radioactive material over an area from Hastings to Folkstone. You’ll get a huge nuclear plume of radioactive dust and gas.” Then another thought. “Which way is the wind today?”

“That’s the real killer,” Garry replied. “It’s from the South East.”

“Oh, no,” I said. “That’ll carry the plume over most of Kent and on over London.”

“But that’ll make most of that area uninhabitable,” said Saskia. “And you’ll not evacuate everybody in time.”

“So now you see the problem,” said Garry, “Is there anything you can do?”

“Why don’t you just shoot it down?” asked Saskia. “You can do it over the sea so it doesn’t hit anything important.”

“They can’t, Twin,” I said before Garry could open his mouth. “That’ll just disperse the nuclear stuff, whatever it is. At the height the plane will be flying, that’d be nearly as bad as the ground impact.”

“Oh. Hadn’t thought.”

I’d thought, I had another question. “How d’you know about the plane in the first place?”

This time Garry managed a word in edgeways. “Intel from Six. They infiltrated the cell that’s organising it. This is the result. We even know what it’s carrying. Nuclear waste mainly, from power stations and other facilities.”

“There can’t be all that much,” I said, “The shielding takes up most of the space.”

Garry spoke quietly. “There isn’t much shielding. The stuff is just in metal crates. That’s another reason we’ve not contemplated shooting it down.”

“But the men in with it,” said Saskia, “They’ll probably be getting a lethal dose of radiation!”

I put my hand on her arm and spoke as quietly as Garry. "Twin? They don't expect to survive the impact with the power station. Radiation poisoning is the last thing on their minds."

Saskia rallied. "Needs to be on ours. If we succeed and the plane doesn't hit the building, then the men will need hospitalisation."

"Good point," said Garry. "We're on it." He waved a hand at some of the men listening to us. A couple of them rushed off and began to make phone calls.

Garry looked - hopeful - I suppose is the word. "So you reckon you can stop it?"

"We'll give it a try," I said, "What kind of plane is it?"

"A Boeing C17 Loadmaster. Great big thing."

I thought for a moment. "Is that the big American one with a load ramp at the back, like a Hercules?"

"Yes, that's the one."

"Right. We can get into it without too much damage."

"Just bust our way in, Twin."

"Yeah, but if we trash something important as we do, it might make it difficult to fly. A hole in the fuselage won't help the aerodynamics either."

"Could use super vision before we make a hole."

"No need. Prise open the rear cargo doors a bit and we're inside."

"Oh. Good plan. What then?"

"Just round 'em up. Probably get shot at a bit."

"Oh, goody! Haven't been shot at for ages."

"Not quite true. You were shot at yesterday, remember?"

"Yeah. But they weren't shooting at me."

"Ok. Point taken."

This exchange in a combination of super quiet whispers and telepathy had only taken a second or so. The men around us hadn't noticed a pause.

"Can you tell us where it is at the moment? Latitude and longitude, so we can find it."

"Why not just ask what city it's over, Twin?"

"Then we'd have to navigate to that city. This way we can go directly to it."

"Ok. Your way sound good."

One of the chaps was soon back with the information we needed for Bertie, the GPS unit. Armed with that, we left Ops at the run and returned to the roof to launch ourselves into the air. High above the capital, I pushed the figures into Bertie. It thought about it for a second or so, then said 'meep' and pointed out which way we should go. We went.

Within a few seconds we were much higher and going *much* faster. We didn't come equipped with speedometers but we knew we were going at several times the speed of sound, arms stretched out in front of us, heads tucked in to make ourselves as streamlined as possible. This wasn't to minimise the effect the air had on *us*, but rather to minimise the effect *we* had on the air. The more streamlined we were, the less blast wave we sent in front of us - which also explained why we needed to be much higher.

The height we were travelling at meant that when we stopped to find the plane, we knew it'd be below us - quite a long way below us. Enhanced super vision spotted the plane in short order.

"Is that it d'you think, Twin?"

"Mm. Seems to be. Got the right number of engines at least. Need to be lower."

Saskia grinned and did an up and over dive towards the ground far below. I followed her - straight down at almost the speed of sound. I grinned like Saskia as I thought about how we'd make a very large crater if we didn't stop before we reached ground level.

We stopped in plenty of time - to find a Jumbo Jet ambling along at a pedestrian few hundred miles an hour. Not our C17 at all.

"What now, Twin. That's not it."

"Hm. Where we are is where it *was*. It's closer to England by now."

"Tell Bertie to take us to - oh - Hastings. That'll be near enough. If we stay under the speed of sound we can stay down here."

The fact that 'down here' was around ten thousand metres above the ground made no real difference. Bertie said thataway, so thataway we went.

About five minutes flying at just below the speed of sound saw us catch up with the C17 transport. It was off to the side a bit but easily spotted with super vision. We curved round in the air to come alongside it.

From a position underneath, where we couldn't be seen out of any windows and such, I swept my x-ray vision up and down the length of the inside of the plane. Apparently so did Saskia.

"Twin! There's practically no shielding at all! Nothing blocks my x-ray vision."

I let my super vision expand beyond visible light and even the x-rays I'd been using to see inside the plane. Once I let myself see the very short gamma rays, the whole plane lit up like a searchlight!

"Got a big problem, Twin. Can't put this plane down any old where. At least not for long."

"Let's get inside the thing and see what's what. I spotted five men. Two are flying it, there's one more in the cockpit, and two in the main body."

"Yeah. That's what I get as well," I agreed. "Let's see what we can do about getting inside."

Up near the underside of the tail, we could plainly see where the rear ramp closed against the rest of the plane.

"Problem, Twin."

"*Another* one?"

"Can't get a finger into that little crack. Door closes too neatly."

"Oh, that's not a problem," I said. I put my hands flat on the surface of the door, pushed inwards, and curled my fingers round. The skin of the huge door put up very little resistance. My fingers just pushed holes in the metal. Curling them round meant I now had a good hold on the door. I pulled.

Now there was resistance. I pulled harder, then harder still. The metal was beginning to deform under my hand but eventually something broke with a loud 'clonk'. Now the door began to open downwards towards me. There was still something pulling it closed again, but I easily opened it far enough for Saskia to fly through the gap and into the plane.

Now she held it open for me by simply pressing one hand on the inside of the door and using the other to push up against the rest of the fuselage. I joined her inside. She let go of the door and it closed again with an audible groan. Perhaps I'd broken it quite a lot. Still, never mind.

Saskia wasn't minding either. She had a grin on her face, caused by the fact that one of the men was shooting at her with a handgun of some kind. That grin got even wider as the second man joined the first, this time with a large machine gun.

Being shot at with a machine gun is good fun - at least if you're an invulnerable super girl like Saskia and me. Bullets were bouncing everywhere. Problem with that is ricochets. Bullets bounce off us as if off a steel sheet. Get too close to the gunman and he can end up getting hurt by stuff bouncing off us and back at him.

"Time to start dodging, Twin."

"You're no fun, you are," said Saskia, but she obediently began to move from side to side at super speed.

The super speed weaving about means we aren't in one place long enough to be aimed at. Two gunmen, one each. Within a couple of seconds we were standing beside the men. I reached out for the handgun my man was holding. I was much stronger than he was, so I took it off him easily. I showed him it in my hand, then slowly closed my hand into a fist. The gun became a squashed, mangled mess. There was a bang as at least one of the bullets still in the gun exploded in my hand - with no effect on me at all.

I dropped the useless weapon to the deck as Saskia held out her captive for me to hold. I'd had hold of my man by his collar, holding him just off the ground. Now I did the same to Saskia's man. I had two men held at arm's length.

"Hold 'em still, Twin. Back to back could be good."

I obliged. With both men back to back, Saskia used the roll of duct tape she made appear to stick the two men together. They looked like Egyptian mummies and weren't going anywhere.

Now for the cockpit. "Up the stairs at the front."

"Blimey, Twin. Ruddy thing's immense. It even has a loo, look."

"This is no time to visit the loo. Come on." I let myself float quickly up the steps. I must have just - appeared - in the cockpit. Good thing I did. There was a nice man with a gun taking aim at me. I was far too close to avoid any bullets, and thus any ricochets, but that didn't really matter anyway. My arm shot out and my hand was round the gun before the man could finish taking aim. He did manage one shot, but I simply caught the bullet in my free hand. I grinned at him as I held up the squashed bullet between my first finger and thumb.

More duct tape fastened terrorist number three to one of the spare chairs at the side, behind the pilots. Now it was their turn anyway. The co-pilot we left taped up where he was but the pilot was yanked out of his seat and secured to the second side seat.

But we'd taken too long. There was a 'bong' sound from the instrument panel - and the plane began to dive at the ground!

Twenty four

“Twin! Look! You can see the power station! They must have programmed the autopilot to home on it as if it’s an airport.”

“They’d have had to take control at the last minute, but we need to do something quickly.” I thought for a moment. If we’d had more time and been able to watch the men actually fly the plane, then either Saskia or I could have ‘learned’ how to control it - but that was *so* not going to happen! Only one other option.

“Right. Outside. Trash the engines and carry the ruddy thing.”

“Trash?”

“Fuel lines. Look with x-ray vision, shove hand into engine and squash. Come ON!”

I flung myself headfirst down the cockpit stairs. No time to mess with the rear doors, it’d have to be the crew front access door. I grabbed the handle and heaved. The in-flight interlocks were never designed to stand up to a super girl in a hurry. There were a series of clonks and screeches - and I was holding a door no longer attached to a plane. I chucked it out into the slipstream and dived after it.

I emerged already under the wing. It took a fraction of a second to be alongside one of the engines. Super vision located the relevant pipe carrying whatever the engine used for fuel. I pushed my hand through the outer skin of the engine, through all the gubbins in the way, and squashed the pipe flat between finger and thumb. The engine obliged by cutting out almost at once.

I could hear the engine noise decreasing as Saskia was obviously dealing with the engines on her side. I turned my attention to engine number two on my side and gave it the same treatment as engine number one. For just a moment there was the sound of just one engine, then that coughed and died - and the plane began to fall out of the sky!

“Under the wings and push UP,” I called out to Saskia.

Saskia and I are easily capable of lifting a piddling little transport plane, but we *had* left it rather late. The highest building at Dungeness has mobile phone aerial masts on it - or at least it had - before we wiped them off with the underside of the C17. Cutting it fine was NOT the word!