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Sara Perkins

Staff

Kat Porcello

Bhargavi Korapali

Ann Kuan

Janiel Santos

Jenna Miller

Advisor: Susan Payne

Cover Art by Angelica Cisneros



Beach Art

Kathleen Porcella

Jenna Miller





Brianna Britton

Average, Everyday, Ordinary...

Chapter One: Aerolass

By Grey Patterson

A breathless moment hangs in the air before the first screams begin to rise from the street level. The people on the thirtieth floor are still too stunned to react. Even after 9/11, who really expects a terrorist attack? To the man falling out of what was moments ago a plate-glass window, everything seemed peaceful. He found after a moment's introspection that he didn't mind the upcoming finality as much as he'd expected to. There's something wrong with the world when death is a happier alternative than taxes... he thought to himself.

At the fifteenth floor, he closed his eyes.

At the tenth, he suddenly found himself moving horizontally, and far less vertically. He had time to gasp "wha-" before the air was driven from his lungs by a brief impact with another piece of plate glass, a slightly longer impact with what appeared to be a table, and then a final impact with a very dilapidated carpet.

Wheezing, he looked up. This isn't happening, right? People don't really wear that kind of thing, do they? Standing over him in an obnoxiously bright shade of yellow was a young girl. The yellow was made worse by the addition of red and blue trim. In the background, sirens and screams were replacing the street noise. From above came a smattering of gunfire. The costumed woman made a perfect swan dive out of the window and then, contrary to anything Newton may have had to say about the matter, drifted upwards.

The man, sitting up, coughed up a mouthful of blood in a slightly less verdant shade than the girl's costume had borne. He picked up one of the fluttering scraps of paper around him. "What the hell kind of superhero leaves a business card?"

Twenty-one floors above, the room has gone silent. Five men with AK-74s stood in positions providing cover from the bank of elevators in one wall, aiming their rifles at the remaining ten people who were lying prone on the floor.

Three more men were walking through the room. It was large, an open-floor design, although, prior to the prodigious use of the Kalashnikovs, there had been a few more frosted-glass walls. Locating what appeared to be a central computer, the men set to work. Quick, economic motions soon had a laptop connected to the larger machine, and several windows opened, displaying the phrase 'downloading...' repetitively.

Unfortunately for the budding superheroine, the men with guns were well trained, and specifically keeping an eye out for approaching aircraft. To wit, she was spotted before she was able to safely land. One of the men swung his weapon around and began firing.

The girl responded rapidly, waving her left hand towards the men in the room. Traceries of pale yellow wrapped around her fingertips, and then a surge of wind blasted the remnants of the glass out of the window frame. The armed men ducked to avoid the razor-sharp shards of glass.

The men gathered around the computers ducked down. One of them waved authoritatively at the other two, who crawled around, using desks as cover, to get a better angle.

The girl, too, had been moving. She had now gained her footing, be it unstrategically placed in the middle of the room. She executed a perfect arabesque, lines of yellow light following her smoothly-moving hands. Flickers of red moved through the yellow glow being emitted, and the air in the room began to heat rapidly. Two of the gunmen in quick succession swore fluently before dropping weapons that were already beginning to glow red-hot.

The girl spun artfully, managing to duck a stream of bullets emitted from a man who had previously been behind an oak desk. Her fingers moved, weaving a pattern of light, and curls of wind reached out, delicately picked the man off the ground, and then violently smashed him against the brushed-metal doors of the elevator.

"Everything has to go wrong at once," muttered the last gunman standing. "Boss, we got a chopper coming from this si-" he was cut off by a force-five gale to the face. The man was nearly blasted out of the window.

At the computer, the final man grimaced. Without looking, he reached up and tapped out the word 'panic' on the laptop. The windows on its' screen all disappeared, to be replaced by an error message. The man knew what it would say, and also knew that it was a fake – the kind of people who would charge in to stop an attack like this had something about them, some quirk of the personality, that made them believe every bit of flair for the dramatic. The machine would finish downloading everything from the server, and then use a built-in cellular modem to upload the data to the organization that had paid for the attack. And the 'heroes' would be none the wiser, happy to think that they'd saved the day.

He rolled out from under the desk, stood, sprinted towards the girl. He pulled out his rifle and began firing blindly. The girl reacted, smooth motions telling the leader that they had been drilled into her by much training, dropping to her knees and whipping both hands towards the gunman. Air hit him with such force that he felt several bones break.

The girl stood, taking in the devastated room. The hostages stood slowly, dusting themselves off, checking their surroundings, as if unable to believe anything that had just happened. Most of it was fairly unbelievable. The leader of the gunmen, lying on the ground where he had landed, was far more stubborn than the heroine had accounted for. He had tenaciously hung onto consciousness, refusing to let himself fade to blackness. He slowly reached into a pocket placed low on his leg, breathing not changing even with the spikes of pain that told him several of his ribs were broken. He pulled out a metallic cylinder, and then began to squeeze it. After a moment's resistance, it broke.

The man allowed himself a smile. Mission complete.

Around the room, the gunmen, collectively unconscious, began to spasm. The air in the room, cleared of the smell of gunpowder by the wind coming through the numerous broken windows, took on an acrid smell.

There was a sudden rush of wind, and then a blinding pulse of white. The last thing the superheroine saw as she collapsed to the ground, vision fading to void, was a helicopter apparently appearing out of nowhere, and a man stepping out of it.

“Diehl to Command. Smells like a chem lab in here. Quick look around, the girl was one of mine. The soldiers, though... from the looks of the failsafes they were wearing, they were HunTech people. Gotta wonder how much they pay if they're willing to wear their own personal acid-bomb...”

The man in charge pointed around, directing the foot soldiers that had followed him off the helicopter. “Clean up their remains, and start talking to local law enforcement. Explain that this is above their heads, use the Interpol cover. You two, mind-wipe duty. You, with me. Golovanov's Spiral Containment.”

The man in charge and one of the three wearing a white uniform with purple trim stood on either side of the unconscious heroine. Lifting their hands, a look of fierce concentration came over them. Slowly at first, and then accelerating, lines of light in four colors began to spread from their hands. A cool blue, the same pale yellow the girl had used, a soft green, and finally a brighter variant of the tracers of red that had made an earlier appearance. The light traced a spiraling pattern around the girl, finally wrapping her in a mesh cocoon. Both men dropped their hands, the light disconnecting from them. It remained around the girl.

Behind them, the other two men in white-and-purple uniforms were walking around the room, stooping for a moment over each of the victims of the attack. Purple light glowed around their hands, taking a darker tinge and a more organic shape than the previous uses. After a minute, they had completed their rounds and helped the commander get the superheroine into the helicopter that was hovering in place beside the building.

Several soldiers in nondescript black armor were still walking around the room, beams of red tracing questing lines around anything of interest. Finally, they finished collecting the evidence they needed, and boarded the aircraft.

The helicopter pulled away from the building, rose higher, and accelerated away. After a minute of flight, it suddenly changed course, and then became invisible to any conventional form of tracking.

A day later, the young girl woke up. Looking around, the first thing she saw was a glass of water. She grabbed it, drank greedily, and then spat to clear the taste of cotton from her mouth.

Taking a moment to gather herself, she looked around at her surroundings. A white room, no features save the bed she had woken up in, the small end table the glass had been set on, and- another table, this one with two chairs in it. The man she had seen before was sitting in one of the chairs. Her mouth went dry again. Standing, she noticed a slight motion to the room, as if she was aboard a ship.

He smiled at her. "Now, dear, you aren't in trouble." He frowned for a moment. "Okay, I hope you aren't in trouble, but I'm really not in any position to promise that. My commanding officer will be quite unhappy if it turns out you've been breaking the laws we enforce. So I'm going to have to ask you a few questions. Sit down, please."

Confused by his kindly tone of voice, she slowly pulled out the empty chair and sat. The man leaned forward, rested his chin on steepled hands. "Now, dear, if you could tell me just where you learned to be a spellcaster?"

(For more, go to <http://grey280.wordpress.com/2012/04/27/average-everyday-ordinary-chapter-one-aerolass/>)



Enlightenment
By Nathan Ratalaky



Brianna Britton



Duck

Duck

Goose?



Kathleen Porcello

Venice



Jenna Miller

Three Minds

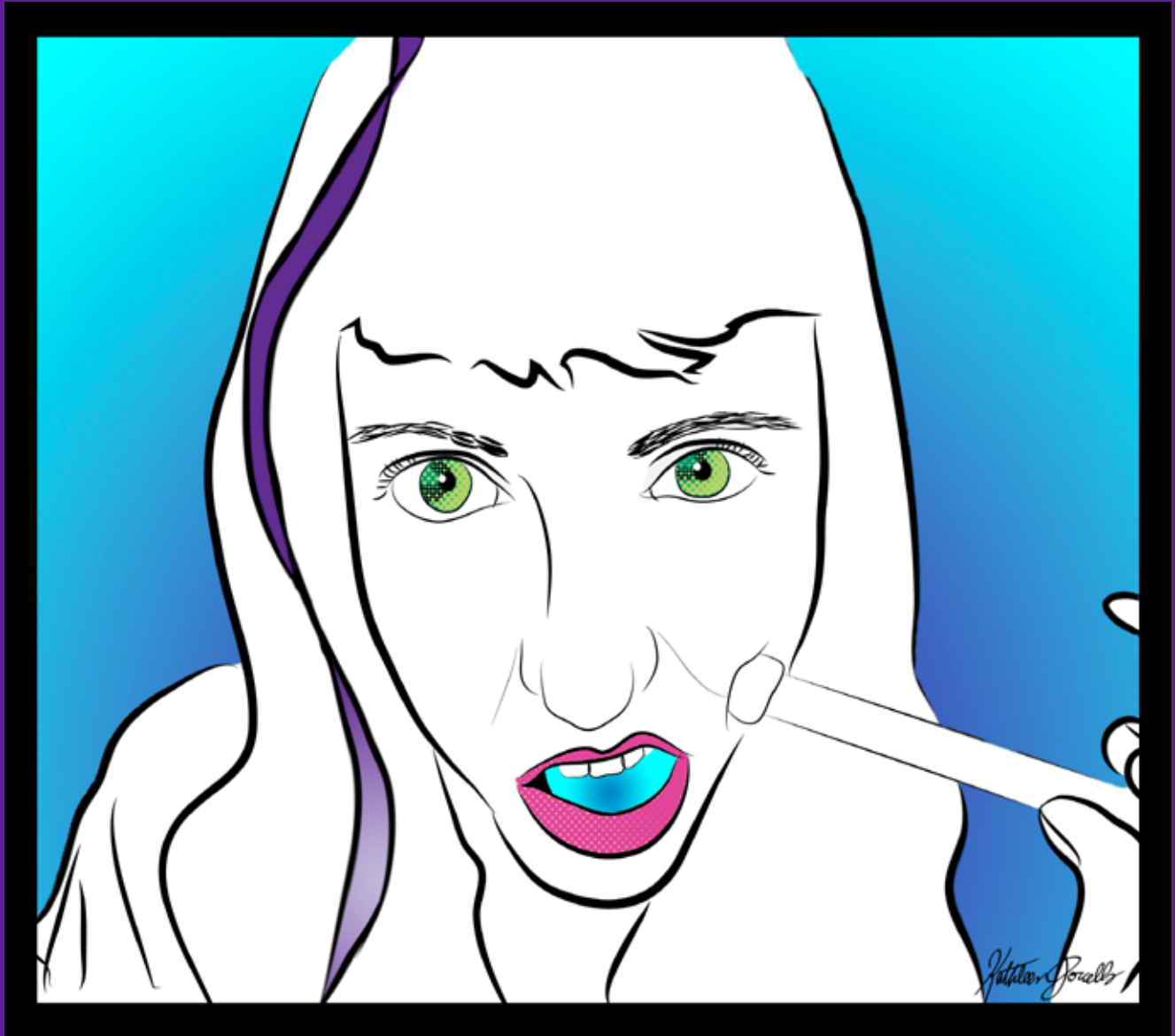


By Alex Ponce

Jenna Miller



Kit-Kats 4-Ever!



Kathleen Porcello