



Stuck

"Come on, Meghan! It's not that bad! Just close your eyes." I try to sound encouraging. I also try to squash the laugh that threatens to escape in a snort-spray that would make my good friend furious.

"I can't close my eyes and come down a ladder at the same time!" Meghan wails.

"It's only five steps!"

"Hayley, I will *break my neck!*"

And that's when I do let loose with a little snort. I can't help it. The way she says "break my neck" sounds just like a clucking chicken. You know, "Bok-bok-bok!" Her bangs are dyed a brilliant yellow, which contrasts with the natural peach of her red hair, which only adds to the chicken effect.

Meghan glares at me. “It isn’t funny! I’m stuck! I’ll be stuck up here forever!”

“Meg, you’re, like, four feet off the floor. It’s not like you’re at the top of the Empire State Building!”

Laser Beam Death Ray — that’s the look she gives me. Maybe I should have been more sympathetic, but she’s just stuck at the top of a bookstore ladder. Seriously. I think my toilet is farther off the ground than this ladder is, but she’s clinging to a shelf of self-help titles as if it’s the side of a cliff.

“The Empire State Building doesn’t bother me,” Meghan says. “Short heights are worse for me than tall ones.”

“Why did you go up that ladder in the first place?”

“I was looking for cookbooks for *you!*” She holds up a hot-pink book titled *Cupcake Carnival*. “You could at least be grateful!”

“I am,” I tell her, which is true. It was sweet of her to try to get me the book. My mom and grandmother run a tea shop, and I do a lot of the baking. Cupcakes are kind of my thing. “Thanks for putting your life in danger for me.”

“So what are you going to do about it?” Meghan demands.

“Well, if you’re going to be stuck up there forever, I guess I could bring you sandwiches.”

Meghan holds up the book as if she might hurl it at my head, but there is laughter in her hazel eyes. That's the thing about Meghan Markerson — she has a really good sense of humor. She can definitely appreciate when she's being a lunatic. Not that it stops her. "So that's it?" she demands. "No dramatic rescue?"

I sigh and look around the store. We're in Crow's Nest, the best — and only — used bookstore in downtown Northampton. The woman behind the counter is as thin as my dental floss and has long gray hair. It is unlikely that she would be able to lift Meghan off the ladder. It's clearly up to me to make something happen. "Oh, all right," I say, starting up the ladder.

"What are you doing?" Meghan demands.

"Piggybacking you out of here," I tell her.

Meghan looks horrified.

I turn my back to her. "Just hop on," I say. "You can close your eyes."

"You'll drop me!"

"I'm incredibly strong."

"No, you aren't! You're extremely feeble! Besides, I wouldn't even let the Hulk carry me off this ladder!"