



CHAPTER 2

THE CLINIC

The only explanation was that I had a memory problem. This kind of thing could happen to me all the time for all I knew.

I rooted around in my desk drawers, looking for evidence of my condition. Some letter from a doctor or instructions I'd written to myself. But there was nothing like that. In fact, I could remember every little detail about everything I saw.

There was a batch of stickers from the World Cup before last. I remembered swapping spares in class, and completing every country except

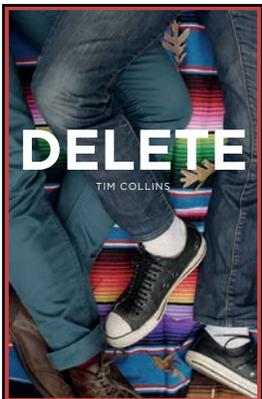
Uruguay, Greece and South Korea. There was a birthday card from my great aunt Debbie with an Amazon gift card I'd never used. There was the key to a bike lock I'd got rid of years ago. I'd thrown the lock away but couldn't bring myself to get rid of the key.

So much for my theory about memory problems. I could recall every tiny detail about my life except who Adam was and why we were in a picture together.

There was a scrap of paper in my top drawer with 'Sat 2.30 LC' scrawled on it in my handwriting. I wondered if it had something to do with Adam. But no matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't remember anything about the message.

I was scared to go out the next day, but I needed to do something. I was going crazy sitting in my room and thinking about it all.

I walked through the park, down North Street, and turned right into Station Road. I was nervous





CHAPTER 5

LITTLE BEAR GREAT BEAR

Jaz

We can laugh about it now but, at the time, it wasn't funny. The woman next door saw Dex climbing out of my window and thought he was a burglar. Of course, when he told the police that he'd been visiting me, they only knocked on the door to check with Mum and Dad. Then all hell broke loose!

'He did not have permission to be in my house. Arrest him!' Dad said to the policewoman. 'He was trespassing.'

I was crying. 'No, Dad, please!'

'He broke into our house. That is a criminal offense,' Dad shouted.

'He didn't break in,' I said.

Dad was even angrier at that. 'You let him in? How dare you go behind my back, Jasmine!'

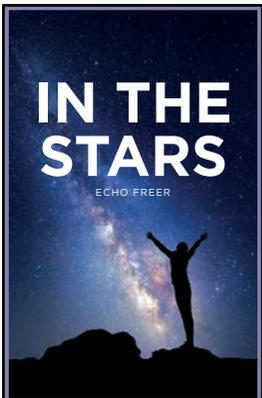
Mum was trying to calm him down, but Dad was like a raging bull.

I turned to my brother. 'Tell him, Shay – please.'

Shay told the policewoman what had happened, but Dad was still fuming.

'I've told you, Jasmine, I will not allow you to see boys until you've finished school. I don't want your life to be ruined like Suki's was.'

I looked at him and shook my head. 'You don't get it, do you Dad? Suki's life wasn't ruined. She has a son – a beautiful, gorgeous little boy – your





CHAPTER 2

A PRIVATE ZOO

Robyn spun round and gasped in surprise. Beautiful, almond-shaped, honey-brown eyes were fixed on her. ‘Oh!’

The girl was about her age, with smooth dark skin and hair that shone like black silk. And when she smiled, she had the most perfect white teeth ever.

‘Hello,’ she said. Her voice was soft.

Robyn felt tingly inside. ‘H... hello.’

‘I am Sheena, the keeper. Who are you?’

She had the same accent as her mother, and Robyn felt totally tongue-tied. The girl was tall, slim and perfect. And that silky, purring voice sent shivers through her body. ‘Er, I’m Robyn. My uncle....’

The girl, Sheena, bent down to stroke Fudge. ‘Who is this?’

‘Um... Fudge....’ Fudge had rolled on to her back. ‘Oh! That’s odd. She usually jumps up at everyone.’

Still crouched, Sheena smiled up at Robyn, making her tummy do a double flip.

‘I like your dog. She is sweet.’

‘Yes... yes she is. Look, I’m sorry we’ve barged in....’

Sheena stood upright. She was inches taller than Robyn. Her smile seemed full of love. ‘What does your uncle want?’

head of each queue waited for a green light, the signal for them to show their data-cards.

After 20 minutes, Caleb was second in line. In front of him was a Quaslon, a three-tusked creature in red robes. The Quaslon turned, gave Caleb a nod. It breathed out the red smoke that its race used as a greeting.

Caleb coughed, brushing the smoke away. 'Light's on, Tusky,' he snapped, nodding. The Quaslon, giving up on social niceties, shuffled forward.

'*Modify*,' said a mocking voice in Caleb's head. He shook his head. No. Not here. Not yet.

A few minutes later, it was Caleb's turn. He strode forward, slid his card into the reader on desk four. The officer, a young woman with a bald head and polished white skin, gave him a brisk smile.

'Good day, Citizen. Sorry for your wait.'

'Fine. I'm in no hurry.'

Tiny scan-drones buzzed around the metallic bag that was Caleb's only luggage. As the officer read his documents, her perfect eyebrows shot up a few centimetres.

'I see you have some... history, Citizen.'

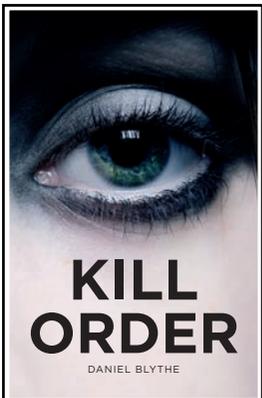
Caleb scowled, folded his arms. 'Problem?'

'We'll see,' she said. Her twelve long, white fingers moved over her invisible keypad. 'Lift the tracker for me, please....'

Caleb sighed. He lifted the square of plastic, revealing his blank eye socket. 'Gonna ask me how I lost it?'

'Not interested,' she said, scanning his face with a handheld device. 'Just checking for hidden weaponry.... All right. You can put it down.'

'I heard Station Zero didn't ask questions,' Caleb said. He snapped the eye-shield back on.



she can't drive me to college. I have to get the bus. That means getting up half an hour early. Ugh.

11 January

Mum saw her doctor. He gave her antibiotics and took blood. They'll test it and tell her what's wrong next week. She'll probably be better by the time they tell her what was wrong. The bus was horrible. It was raining and the bus smelled like a wet dog. I had to sit in my classes with wet feet. Spare socks and trainers are going to college with me tomorrow just in case.

13 January

I felt guilty last night when I realised I hadn't written anything in the diary. Am I addicted to my diary already?

14 January

Today was rubbish.

That is all.

15 January

I should say why yesterday was rubbish. We're changing tutor for maths. Miss Afzal got promoted. Pity. I like her. Mum said I should just focus on my exams.

16 January

Mum's was a weird mood today. She was really grumpy and bad-tempered. She was late home from work tonight. It must have been a tough day.

22 January

I haven't written in the diary for nearly a week. Mum told me why she was so down. She got the results of her blood tests. She has cancer. She told me it's nothing to worry about. She said there's treatment she can get. She's going to be fine. She said so.

23 January

Why am I even looking at this diary? Being with Mum is more important.

**LAST
YEAR**

IAIN McLAUGHLIN





CHAPTER 5
SETH'S STORY

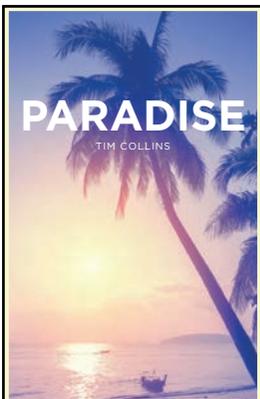
'I was chosen for the scheme too,' said Seth. 'Except I didn't have the good sense to run away before the men with guns arrived. I trusted my parents and they trusted The Switch Corporation. They tried to change their minds when the men threatened to shoot me, but by then it was too late.'

'I'm angry with my parents, but I don't really blame them. Dad was in a lot of debt, and they were told the body swap would only last three months.'

'As I'm sure you've worked out, The Switch Corporation are lying when they say their body swaps are temporary. They strap you into the machine in their headquarters, connect you to someone on New Prospect and transfer your mind into their body. And that's it. They never bring you back. The person you swap with learns enough about you to pretend to be you when the summer's over. The parents think they've got their children back, but they haven't really.'

'They told me I'd swap bodies with a young man in the banking industry. Instead, I ended up in the body of a frail old man. They do the same to everyone. Weak old people pay The Switch Corporation hundreds of thousands of credits to swap bodies with someone fitter and younger. They get 50 or 60 more years of life.'

'When my mind was in this ancient body they took me to a hospital. They said it was just for a few days so I could recover, but weeks went by and they showed no sign of letting me out. They'





CHAPTER 3

ORLANDO

The rest of the morning's lessons were much the same. Most of the teachers had been briefed on Raven's boy/girl status. Some were better at handling it than others.

'Hey, new kid,' said Mr Lilley in PE 'Do you want to play rugby or hockey? Your choice.'

'I was pretty good at hockey at my old school,' said Raven.

'Well, that doesn't tell us anything,' Saskia whispered loudly. 'Boys and girls both play hockey.'

'Girls can play rugby too,' said Mr Lilley.

'Yeah but Raven is far too beautiful to be a rugby player,' Saskia said, glancing at Jammo – who was the school's rugby captain – and smirking.

It turned out Raven was a superb player: lithe, fast, and deft with the ball.

'What is wrong with you girls today?' Mr Lilley yelled at half-time. 'None of you are concentrating on the game.'

Raven was the problem, of course. Half of the class was entranced by this gorgeous creature. The other half was jealous. Everyone wanted to know more.

*

At lunchtime, Kat stopped being invisible. It started when Raven walked across the dining room and sank down in the seat next to hers.





CHAPTER 2

THE GIRL

Elias felt his heart race as his parents stepped inside the kitchen. They stood in front of him, their eyes twinkling. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ his mother said. ‘We just need to tell you about something.’

‘About what?’ Elias whispered, backing off.

‘About this.’ With a hard snap of his neck, his father shook his jaw – and Elias let out a scream as he saw the jaw lengthen.

A pair of gleaming incisors slipped between his father’s lips. His mother’s teeth were even sharper and longer.

Elias stumbled back, appalled. ‘What... what are you?’ he gasped.

‘What are *you*, I think you should be asking,’ came the answer from his father. ‘You share our bloodline, after all.’

‘I’m not... not... not like that,’ Elias murmured, barely able to breathe.

‘And yet you wanted to eat this human heart off a dirty kitchen floor, didn’t you?’ his mother said. She reached down to pick the heart up.

Elias closed his eyes, tried to ignore the craving he felt as he stared at the heart.

‘Ask your questions,’ said his father. ‘By the way, we don’t have capes, in case you’re wondering.’ He and his wife smiled at one another.

Elias pointed shakily at their teeth.

‘Oh, these?’ muttered his father. ‘We only expose our blood teeth for feeding – or killing humans.’

