

NEW DAWN

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CHAPTER 1

EDEN

Eden Boone kicked the front door so hard it slammed into the wall, taking a chunk out of the plaster. She threw her school bag down on the floor of the hall and sat heavily on the stairs.

“I’m not going back to that vile place, Dad!” she shouted.

Her voice echoed up two flights of stairs in the old Victorian terrace, and there was no reply. Eden scowled, swung round on the banister and yelled up the stairs again.

“Dad! Did you hear me?”

Only then did Eden notice the note under the fruit bowl, written in blue ink. She picked it up, peered at it.

WORKING LATE AT THE LAB.
ALL-NIGHTER. ONTO SOMETHING BIG.
TEA IN MICROWAVE. SEE YOU
TOMORROW. LOVE DAD XX

Eden sighed, put the letter down. “Not even a text,” she said out loud.

It was normal to get this kind of note from her father. He was a Professor of Physics at the University, and always busy. She had hoped tonight would be different, though. He had promised her a film and curry night, just the two of them. These evenings were important, all the more so now Mum had gone.

Also, after Eden’s rubbish day, she’d been hoping to do twenty minutes of moaning in the kitchen. Stuff about not having the right shorts for stupid hockey, and Miss Bancroft picking on her again.

About what cows Courtney and Katie were being, and about how disgusting the lunch had been today. Basically, what a waste of time school was.

She stomped into the kitchen, checked out the plastic dish in the microwave. She wrinkled her nose at the lemony aroma. Thai green curry with pilau rice. Could be worse, she thought.

She flicked the TV on, watching BBC News 24 half-heartedly.

“— *growing crisis in the Middle East,*” said the newsreader’s voice, over pictures of tanks rolling along a desert road. “*The UN Emergency Council is still in session, uncertain as to how to deal with this turn of events. The President has said that in twenty-four hours, the Western world could face the horror of nuclear blackmail — unless the Geneva Conference produces the desired result.*”

That didn’t sound good, thought Eden. Mind

you, it was always the same, wasn't it? Someone was always fighting someone, somewhere. It usually all got sorted out.

As she closed the microwave door, she saw the two dark-suited men reflected in it. She turned around and screamed.

Eden grabbed for the kitchen knife and held it out in front of her, trying not to tremble as her heart thudded.

“What the hell?” she snapped. “Who are you? What do you want?”

The two men were seated calmly at the kitchen table. They were both bald, dressed in crisp, dark suits and mirror-shades. One was tall and thin, the other short and burly.

“Eden Boone?” said the taller man. His voice was cold, harsh.

She swung the knife round, narrowing her eyes. “Who wants to know? What the hell are you

doing in my house, weirdos?”

The men gave a slow smile, together, and both flipped ID cards at her. “Special Services, Miss Boone,” said the shorter man. “We need you to come with us.”

She folded her arms, planted her feet firmly on the kitchen floor. “Says who?”

They stood up, and the tall man spoke again. “Your father,” he replied.

Eden felt her body tingle, and unfolded her arms, her heart beating faster. “And?” she said. “Did he... say anything?”

The two men looked at one another. The taller man spoke.

“*Avocado*,” he said.

*

Thirty minutes later, after a silent drive into

the countryside during which both the men refused to answer questions, Eden was led across some scrubby wasteland towards a single, lonely warehouse.

The tall man punched a keypad on the side to open a door and they walked into its vast, cold emptiness. Eden heard their footsteps echoing on the cold stone. She could smell rust and decay.

Eden was seething with anger. But she knew her dad was in trouble and needed her because the two special agents – or whatever they were – had done something unexpected.

They had used the code word.

The word Eden and her father, Darius, had once agreed would be their special word. To show that whoever had come with a message was telling the truth.

Avocado.

They entered a lift which began to drop at a frightening rate. Just ten seconds later, the lift opened and Eden gasped.

The room was the size of a football stadium, smelling of hot metal and full of bustling activity. Beeping its horn, a fork-lift truck sped past her, carrying crates of equipment. White-coated scientists stood at a curved bank of controls, and behind them a flat wall of screens flickered with numbers. The space was filled with the babble of voices, the tap of keyboards and the click and whirr of equipment.

Eden craned her neck to look around her, amazed that somewhere like this could exist below ground, unseen.

“What the hell is this place?” Eden said aloud. She looked around for the dark-suited men, but they had gone.

“Well, you wanted to see where I worked,” said a voice behind her.

Eden's eyes opened wide in delight. "Dad!"

Professor Darius Boone's bearded face broke into a toothy smile as he opened his arms to hug his daughter.

She pulled back from him, staring at him and then looking around the giant warehouse again. "But I thought you worked in a lab at the University? I'm confused."

"Well..." Professor Boone put his hands in the pockets of his white coat and nodded, "it is a lab of sorts. And it's not far from the University..." He tapped the side of his nose. "Eden, my friends the Agents brought you here because there's something you need to see. Come on."

He took his daughter's arm and led her up onto one of the metal walkways which ran around the vast space.

Holding a small remote-control, Professor Boone operated the giant bank of screens.

A square image got bigger and bigger until Eden could see it showed a beautiful, green meadow. The picture scrolled to the right and she saw jagged white cliffs, sapphire-blue seas and white spray. It all looked unreal.

“What’s that?” she asked. “*Where* is it?”

“That,” said Professor Boone, “is Earth. It’s Earth – as it no longer is, but should be. Before humanity came along and spoiled it all. Before oil-fields, and before coal-mines, and before the ice-caps started to melt.”

“What... actual pictures of it?” She did not believe him.

“No. It’s a mock-up. CGI. But it’s a clever 3-D model. Every pixel is based on energy readings we’ve had through the time hole we call the Gateway.” When he turned back towards her, he had a gleam in his brown eyes, something she had not seen before. It frightened her. “This has been my passion, Eden. Why do you think I

gave you that name? The Garden of Eden... a paradise we can have here on Earth.”

Eden pulled a face. “Dad, you don’t believe all that religious stuff!”

“Not religious, Eden.” He tutted, wagged a finger. “Nothing supernatural. It’s real. A parallel Earth, like our own but without the footprints of the human race. This project has been tracking it for twenty years.”

“He’s right, you know,” said a smooth voice. A blonde, sharp-suited woman came over and shook Eden’s hand. “Hello, Eden. Annie Moston. Government envoy.”

Eden shook the woman’s hand warily. She wasn’t sure she liked her narrow face and sharp green eyes. “So you’re in charge?”

Annie Moston beamed. “It’s a partnership between the government and two universities.”

Her face suddenly became serious. “Eden, what you and your team are about to do will literally save the world. I want you to know how very, very grateful we are.”

Eden looked from her dad to Annie Moston and back again, wondering if she was going mad now, or if this was all a joke. “Save the world?” she snorted. “I think you’ve got the wrong girl. I can’t even win on Call of Duty.”

Annie Moston gave her a cold, knowing smile. “Eden,” she said, “you’re about to become a pioneer. One of the most important people in history. You, and three chosen... friends, are going to travel through the Gateway to the parallel world – and find out what’s happened to our survey team.”

Eden looked from Annie to her dad, and grinned. “This is a joke, right?” she said. “Why me?”

She thought her father's eyes looked sad, worried for a moment. Then he looked over at Annie Moston.

The woman gave a smug smile. "Preparations begin immediately," she said. "Briefing in one hour."