

# CHAPTER 1

Kayla stood just inside the side door of the deli by the Garrison train station. She was transfixed by the image on the old plasma TV playing above the counter. What she was seeing there left her speechless, too stunned to alert Mfumbe.

She stared up in total shock at the image of a face on the screen. It was one she knew better than any other — her own face.

This girl was Kayla — but not. She was meticulously groomed, from her sleek blond hairstyle down to the silver manicured nails. She wore a full face of tasteful makeup. She twinkled with sincerity.

Mfumbe was walking from the back of the store, coming toward her fast. His jacket pockets bulged with the things he'd stolen. A warning flash in his dark eyes told her they had to get out quickly.

“Hey! You there! Stop!” the man behind the counter shouted. “What’s in your pockets?”

They raced out the side door, sliding and stumbling down a steep bank of rocks and dirt. The man was right behind them.

They scrambled onto the old railroad tracks, the ones closest to the Hudson River. “I’m calling

the cops!” the man shouted from atop the embankment as they raced down the tracks, leaping over broken ties that had come loose and rolled to the center. The new BulleTrain lines were at their side.

A bag of chips fell from Mfumbe’s pocket. They both stooped to grab it. Who knew when they’d have a chance to get food again?

“Come on! Come on!” Mfumbe urged her, stuffing the bag in his pocket. He took her hand as they continued to run, and she had to increase her speed to keep up. If they got caught, it was all over.

When they finally felt reasonably sure that no one was after them, they slowed to a walk. The October day was still pleasant and sunny. The trees around them and on the far shore of the river were ablaze with autumn color. Kayla told Mfumbe about what she’d seen on the TV.

“It was someone who *looked* like you?” he asked.

“No! It *was* me! I was talking about my old neighbor, Gene Drake. I’ve told you how he learned what information was in the bar code, and how it banged him out so bad he tried to destroy the tattooing laser. The Global-1 security cops shot him before he could. Only now they’ve twisted the story so that it sounds like *he* was the one shooting people. I was on the TV, telling everyone that I love my bar code tattoo.”

She stretched out her right arm and gazed down at her wrist. There was no bar code tattoo there.

“I know it sounds crazy,” she said. “But I saw it.”

The Global-1 BulleTrain appeared — streaking along the magnetic track at breathtaking speed, its engine a high-pitched whisper — and was gone again in an instant. Mfumbe wiped his face of dirt and smiled, amused at the look of dismay on Kayla’s face as she spit out the grime the train had sprayed.

She smiled back into his eyes, seeing herself as she must look to him — a disheveled, thinly muscular seventeen-year-old with straight light-brown chin-length hair, a wide mouth pulled into a frown, and railroad filth all over her face.

Looking back at him, she was aware of how much he’d changed over their last few months together. The black hair that he’d always kept so neatly short was now long and wild with curls. His brown skin had slowly deepened in color from all the time they’d spent outdoors in the mountains.

He reached into the pocket of his torn jeans and pulled out half a stick of peppermint gum and handed it to her. Peppermint gum was his special cure for all the trouble in the world. He’d given her some the first day they’d met, a little over a year ago. When he handed her the wrapped sweetness, it was more than gum — it was his way of reminding her of his love. It always worked its intended magic, every time.

*Where did you get this?* she asked, speaking from her mind directly to his mind as she turned the treasured gum in her hand.