

JANICE GREENE



ESCAPE from EARTH

**PAGETURNERS®**

# Chapter 1

I take pride in the fact that I'm smart about people. With one look, I can tell whether a person is going to be cool or a jerk. Take my father, for example. His droopy eyes and mouth tell you that the guy's a loser, a quitter. It was obvious that he was the type to leave his family. My mom should have seen it coming.

So when I first met my college roommate, I was really disappointed. His name was Darryl. He had beady little eyes and thin lips. I thought he was self-centered and sneaky. And probably a creep. But that wasn't even half the story.

Darryl stood at the door to our student apartment. He had a gym bag in one hand.

And a large backpack was slung over one shoulder. He brought the bag inside and set it down.

“Here. Let me help you with that backpack,” I said.

“No!” he shouted.

“Okay, okay.” I backed off.

“My name is Darryl,” he said.

“I’m Nick.” I reached out to shake his hand, but he just looked at me.

“I’m glad to be with you. You are a safe person,” he finally said.

A safe person? What an odd thing to say.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

“Russia,” he said.

“You’re a long way from home. Is Darryl your real name?” I asked.

“You wouldn’t be able to pronounce my real name,” he said. Then he smiled at me. “I am glad we are going to the same university.”

I’d like it better if I had another

roommate. But then I thought about my mom. “Give people a chance,” she says. So I asked him if he wanted to get something to eat. But Darryl said he wasn’t hungry. That was fine with me.

Earlier that day, I’d met a nice guy named Mike. We’re both studying computer animation. Maybe I’d run into him.

That night I had a weird dream. Darryl had this strange contraption. It was made up of wires and tubes. He was speaking into it, using some strange language. It didn’t sound like Russian to me.



It was the next morning. Darryl was gone before I woke up. He must have had an early class. I was thinking how nice it was to have the place to myself. That’s when there was a knock on the door. It was a girl. The first thing that caught my eye was her long, bronzed legs. She also had a wide forehead,

which I associate with being honest. Her eyes were a deep, warm brown. I knew she was someone special.

“I’m Kara,” she said. “I’m from the apartment building across the way. Would you mind if I came in for a few minutes? I need to borrow your window.”

“The window?” I asked as she came in and walked past me. “Sure. Come right on in,” I said sarcastically.

She set down a bag full of tools. “I’m just going to drill a hole in the wall of the building outside your window. Is that okay? I’m setting up a clothesline,” she said.

“Is that allowed?” I asked.

“Sure,” she said. “It’s part of living green. The school encourages students to line-dry their clothes rather than use an excess of energy.”

I wasn’t sure I believed her. “You’re not from around here, are you?” I asked.

“No. I’m from Arizona,” she said.  
“Why?”

“That explains your nice tan, plus the fact that you’re totally insane.” I laughed. “I can’t imagine putting up a clothesline in the foggiest city in the country. It’ll take your clothes a month to dry. But what the heck. It’s still a great idea.”

“Why would you say that if you don’t think it’ll work?” she asked.

“Because without the clothesline, you never would have knocked on my door. And now we can get to know each other.”

“Wow! You don’t waste any time,” she said with a smile. She had a great smile.

Kara showed me how the clothesline device worked. There were two plastic casings that held either end of a cable. A casing would be mounted to the building outside each of our windows. First we mounted the casing on my side.

“Now I just have to do the same thing on my side,” she said.

“How are you going to get the cable from one building to the other?”

“I’ll hold one end and toss the other end to you,” she said. “The buildings aren’t that far apart. It’s only about fifteen feet.”

“Have you got a good arm? It’s three stories down if you miss,” I said.

“I won’t miss,” she said confidently. Then she went to her apartment.

A few minutes later, I saw her open her window and wave. “Ready?” she called out.

“Ready,” I said.

Then she tossed her end of the cable, and it sailed through my window. In fact, it landed right in my hands. “Perfect,” I called out to her.

“Of course,” she said. Then she came back to my apartment.

“Now, that’s a clothesline,” I said. “We should celebrate. Let’s see. I have bottled

water and ...” I looked around. “And granola bars,” I said as I grabbed a box off the kitchen table.

“Don’t you have some studying to do?” Kara asked with a grin.

“Yeah. But it can wait,” I said. “Right now I want to know everything about you. Your major. What you like to do for fun. And most important, why you came all the way to San Francisco for school.”

At that moment Darryl came in. When he saw Kara there, he looked alarmed. Then he turned to me. “She must leave here. She is not a safe person,” he said in a low voice.

“Are you out of your mind?” I said.

“Excuse me?” Kara said to Darryl.

“Please,” Darryl insisted. He looked like he was about to panic.

“Take it easy,” I told him. “Maybe you’re the one who needs to leave.” What a jerk. I was going to throw him out. But when I grabbed his shoulder, a shock ran through

my fingers and up my arm. “Ow!” I yelled.

“What did he do?” Kara asked.

Darryl gave me a pitiful, pleading look. In a few moments the pain had faded from my hand and arm. I stared at him, wondering if I’d imagined the shock. “Let’s get out of here,” I said to Kara.

We went to her apartment.

“Why did you let that guy push you around?” Kara asked.

“I felt sorry for him,” I said.

“I think he might be unstable,” Kara said. “You should think about getting a new roommate.”

“Maybe I should give him a chance,” I said. “I don’t really know him yet.”

She leaned closer to me. “If you wait, he might do something even crazier,” she said.

“You might be right,” I said.

By the time I got back to my apartment, I’d decided to take Kara’s advice. I would call student housing and ask for another

roommate. But Darryl seemed to be reading my mind. I hadn't been there five minutes when he begged me to let him stay.

"I'm sorry to make you miserable," he said. "But please don't make me go. I will have to be leaving soon anyway."

He looked so anxious and sad that I felt myself giving in. "Really? Why?" I asked.

"I have family problems," he said. He stood up and grabbed his backpack. "I have to go now. I'll see you later."

It was nice having the place to myself all morning. I called Kara and asked her if she wanted to hang out tomorrow. She was such a cool girl. I knew we'd have a lot of fun together.

I was just starting my homework when there was a knock on the door. There were two serious-looking guys in suits. They looked like brothers.

"We're campus security," one of them said. "We're looking for Darryl."

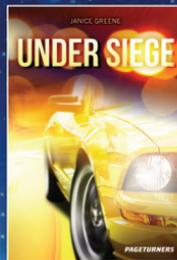
While he was talking, the other guy went over to Darryl's bag. "One of the professors is missing some important papers," he said. "They're in a black backpack. Have you seen anything like that around here?"

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# ESCAPE from EARTH

Nick's new college roommate, Darryl, needs some help. At first glance, Nick thinks he's a real dork. And what's with the briefcase? But Darryl's problem is literally "out of this world." If his enemies catch up with him, his race is doomed!

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JANET LORIMER

# FLASHBACK



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# Chapter 1

Holly Achison put down the binoculars and rubbed her eyes. How great it would be to take a nap. Ten minutes was all she needed. But it was impossible to relax, crouched down in a dusty cornfield. Worst of all, bugs and spiders were everywhere. She shuddered at the thought. At least she had a bottle of water with her.

Some spy she was. But that's just what she was doing. She'd left the motel early that morning to keep an eye on Joe Stevens.

Suddenly she felt something hard pressing against her back.

"Don't move," a man's voice said.

Holly froze. Her heart was pounding.

"What's your name?" the man asked.

“Holly Achison,” she said. “I can explain what—”

“Shut up!” the man said. “Now get up slowly.”

When Holly stood and turned to look, she saw Joe Stevens. It was the man she was supposed to be spying on. He waved a pair of wire cutters in the air.

“What the—” Holly started to say.

“You thought it was a gun? I guess I scared you,” he said. “It serves you right.”

Holly glanced over her shoulder. She was looking at the spot where she thought Joe had been. Odd. There was the figure of a man near the fence. Or rather, what looked like a man’s figure.

“It’s a scarecrow,” Joe said, as if he were reading her thoughts. “It *was* me you first saw. I was repairing the fence. But then I spotted you. So I decided to use the scarecrow as a decoy. It threw you off, didn’t it?”

“It sure did,” Holly said, forcing a smile.

Holly could have strangled the man. Unfortunately she needed his help.

“I first saw you a week ago,” he said. “And ever since you’ve been following me. What do you want?”

“It’s a long story,” Holly said.

“Just give me the short version,” Joe said.

“It’s about what happened to you three years ago,” Holly said. “I need to talk to you about it.”

“I knew it! You’re a reporter,” he said. “You people in the media are all the same. You only cover one side of a story. None of you care about getting the facts right.”

“Look, I know you—”

“Freeze! Put your hands in the air.”

The voice startled Joe and Holly. They quickly turned to see who was there. A man wearing a uniform and dark glasses stood just a few feet away. He looked like a security guard.

“This is private property,” he said. “You people are trespassing.”

“I’m sorry,” Holly said. “I didn’t know.”

The guard raised his rifle and aimed it at Holly and Joe.

“This is a research facility. The work going on here is top secret.”

In a cornfield? That was odd.

“I have strict orders to shoot trespassers on sight,” he said. He was now looking down the barrel of the gun.

## Chapter 2

Holly stepped to one side, out of the line of fire. But the guard shifted his aim. “I told you—”

At that moment Joe lunged forward and knocked the man to the ground. The rifle flew out of his hand. As he started to get up, Joe jabbed the wire cutters into the man’s arm. He cried out in pain and fell backward.

“Get the gun!” Joe shouted to Holly.

Holly ran up and grabbed the rifle, then quickly backed away. Joe got to his feet, pulling the guard up with him.

“Put the gun down, and I’ll forget this ever happened,” the guard said. “Otherwise, you’re going to regret it.”

“Be quiet,” Holly said. Then she turned to Joe. “Now what?”

“I’m going to tie him up,” Joe said. He pulled some wire out of his pocket.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” she asked. “We’re in enough trouble as it is.”

“There’s no time to argue,” he said. “This guy’s the type who shoots first and asks questions later. Besides, I’m only tying him up. Sooner or later someone will come looking for him. At least we’ll get out of here alive.”

The guard’s hands were now tied behind his back. Joe took the rifle from Holly and threw it as far as he could into the cornfield. Then he headed toward the road.

“Wait for me!” Holly called out.

Joe walked faster. “Go away!” he yelled over his shoulder.

“Who owns that cornfield?” Holly asked as she ran after Joe. “Is there really a research company there?”

Joe didn't answer. Holly followed him onto his property and over to the scarecrow. A silly smile and big brown eyes had been painted on its face.

Holly thought she would try to break the tension with a joke. "Now I see how I was fooled. The scarecrow looks a lot like you."

Joe couldn't help but smile. But then he got serious again. "He does his job. Why don't you go somewhere else and do yours?"

"Look, I *am* a reporter. But that's not why I'm here," Holly said.

"Oh sure," Joe said. He picked up the scarecrow and tossed it into the back of his pickup. "How did you get here? Did you walk from town?" he asked.

"My car is parked down the road," she said.

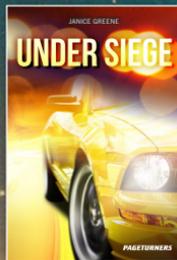
Joe took the wire cutters out of his pocket and put them into his toolbox. "There's no telling what that guard will do once he gets loose. I'm pretty sure that

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# FLASHBACK

Dozens of people disappeared for weeks at a time from a deserted mountain road only to reappear dazed and confused. Joe saw something that no one was supposed to see. His memory has been erased. But now it's all coming back to him—and he's in mortal danger!

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