

CHAPTER ONE

Imagine a second Garden of Eden, planted atop the remains of the first. Imagine a new Adam, created by the descendants of the old; only this time without the burden of Original Sin. Not just intelligent: Compassionate. Tolerant. Unselfish. Peaceful. Loving.

In the early morning light, the lofty words of Dr. Graves made me laugh to myself as Darwin hunkered naked among the vegetables in our back yard. Darwin, the new Adam. He looked like an ordinary chimp to me. Except his shrimpy chimp body was topped by an oversized, oddly-shaped head. A head stuffed with brains.

To see him puttering around with his peas and melons, you'd think he didn't have a care in the world. But we both knew different. There was a storm brewing, and it was about to dump a load of crap on all of us. On me, on my parents, on Dr. Graves, and most especially, on Darwin.

Because one thing Dr. Graves hadn't thought about when he created his new, improved version of Adam, was how the descendants of the original Adam would like it. The anger. The resentment. The insults.

But hell, it was Darwin who insisted on going to school with regular kids. He was the one who engineered the whole thing.

I sat on a bench in my pajamas watching him as he plucked a caterpillar off a tomato plant. It wriggled and twisted in his fingers. He looked it over for a couple seconds, then he popped it into his mouth and chewed it up. Turning to me, his elastic lips pulled back, showing off an acre of pink gums. He'd left the head of the bug sticking out through the gap between his front teeth.

"Nice," I said to him.

He hooted his laugh, then spit out the head.

"Why didn't you finish it?"

He wrinkled his nose and stuck out his tongue.

"Bitter, huh? What does the rest taste like, popcorn?"

Darwin shot me an amused look.

My mom pushed the back door open. Those tension lines around her mouth were getting deeper. She worked at the lab with Dr. Graves, where they were still studying Darwin's progress.

"Come on, kids, time to get ready for school. Darwin, wash your hands and brush your teeth. Scott, we're running late, so help him get dressed."

Yeah, yeah. I got up and followed him inside. Darwin. Named after Charles Darwin, of course. Only our Darwin was way more famous.

I helped him with his blue jeans, which he wore with fancy suspenders, and a sweatshirt that had "Front" printed on the front, and on the back, a picture of some old classical music composer named Bach. I'd given it to him for his last birthday. He laughed his ass off when he figured it out. Today, just to be silly, he put it on with Bach in front and Front in back.

He sat on the bed as I helped him with his shoes. It wasn't easy.

Darwin's chimpanzee toes bend and grasp almost like hands, with the big toe more like an opposable thumb. So not only do his shoes have to be the right size and shape to make room for those toes, they have to be extra stiff to give him proper support. The kids in school call them his clown shoes. Darwin hates them.

Dressed, he strapped on the gizmo that had made him famous: his voice-synthesizer. His fingers moved over the keyboard and words came out of a speaker: "Popcorn. Good one."

"Glad you liked it."

"You should try some. Mealy bugs are salty. Juicy. Yum."

"I'll pass."

My mom was waiting in the hall. "What's this about popcorn?"

"Nothing, Mommy," said Darwin, twiddling his synth to give him a baby voice. He got this googly-eyed expression as he lip-sync'ed along with the speaker. A real charmer, that Darwin.

"Scott Enright, are you still in your pajamas? Let's go! And Darwin, brush your teeth!"

"Yeth, Mommy," lisped Darwin.

"Brush 'em good, bug-breath," I added.

Darwin answered me with an upraised middle finger, held where Mom wouldn't see it.

I found my black denims and a black tee-shirt: my usual garb. I had two medium-sized hoop earrings in one ear, and a stud in the other. Flaunting my Eighth Grade freedom to express myself. When I finished brushing my hair, which I keep long, I leaned close to the mirror over my dresser and fingered my upper lip. Some dark fuzz was sprouting there. Very slowly.

"Want some of mine?"

Darwin stood smirking in the doorway of my bedroom. He still had flecks of toothpaste at the fuzzy corners of his mouth.

"No thanks. I'm not into the hairy forehead look."

Ignoring my wisecrack, his fingers did a quick tap-dance on his keyboard. "I had a dream. I was being chased by a bunch of girls who wanted to kiss me."

"Oh, a nightmare, huh?"

"It was scary." He grinned his huge chimp grin.

"You're just too popular for your own good."

Her followed me down to the kitchen.

My mom was banging away at her laptop, probably writing some letter to the editor in defense of Darwin, so we got our own breakfast. Cereal and milk for me, and Darwin grabbed some fruit. He took his vitamins with his juice, then settled down to eat.

"Mom?" I waited a minute. "Helloo-oo?"

She ignored me. Not an uncommon event around here. Half the time it's like I'm invisible.

I rinsed my bowl and spoon. She goes postal if you just leave it in the sink.

I turned to her again. "You think you can give it a rest and make our sandwiches?"

"Shh!" She frowned at the screen and her fingers tapped angrily at her keyboard. She had dark hair, with a few streaks of gray. She wasn't the type who would color it, though. She was slender and intense and okay-looking, but not what you'd call pretty. She was too serious for that.

After a few minutes, Darwin gave it a shot. His approach was the opposite of mine. He never made wiseass remarks to her. Plus he used that childish lisp that makes her melt every time she hears it. "Mommy, did you make our luncheth?"

She looked up and broke into a sweet smile. "I'll do it right now."

See how well it works?

My dad had left for his office early. He used to drive us to school, but that stopped some time ago. "You and Darwin are old enough to walk. Besides, you need the exercise." It's not enough that he gets out of doing something, he has to lecture us like it's our fault.

Mom gave us our bags and went to the sink to clean up.

Darwin put on a zipper jacket and his San Francisco Giants baseball cap, we took our packs and went out the front door.

But then I stopped short and Darwin bumped into me. We'd had visitors during the night. A couple of Easter bunnies had egged our house. Broken eggshells and dried yellow eggstuff stuck to the door and all over the porch and the steps.

"Oh, great," I said. "Omelets." Then I called out, "Mom!"

She came to the door, wiping her hands on a dish towel. When she saw the mess, an angry, defiant look settled on her face. She didn't say a word. After a few seconds, she turned away and went back inside.

Darwin sniffed at a yellow stain on the door and looked up at me, the wrinkles around his eyes deepening in sadness. We all knew what this was about. He reached up and took my hand and we went down to the corner to wait for our friends.

He looked pretty unhappy. I swiveled his cap around backwards and tickled him until he grinned. I told him, "Sometimes people can be such animals."

He turned sad again. Adjusting his voice-thing to reflect his mood, he typed, "You're wrong, Scott. Animals don't do things like this."

He had a point.

Chuck Spetter and Jessica Humboldt met us halfway down the block.

Chuck's sandy hair lay limp across his wide forehead as usual, and his broad cheeks were flushed. I could tell he was all pumped about something.

"Did you see the Giants game last night?" Chuck was into all the local teams.

I shook my head. Baseball. Darwin took Jessica's hand and waddled along next to her.

"The other team had this no-hitter going, right into the Ninth!" His pointy little buck-teeth flashed at me. "The pitcher already struck out eleven guys. Then old J.R. steps up."

I was half-listening as he went on with the play-by-play.

Darwin and Jessica bent over to check out some pink flowers. Darwin picked one and took a bite of its petals. Then he offered it to Jessica.

"No! And I shouldn't have to remind you it's not nice to pick people's flowers. You've gotten in trouble for that before."

"Sorry," said Darwin. But he didn't look sorry as he munched on the rest of the flower.

Chuck poked me. "Listen, they've got this new game at the Arcade. Jets of Doom. For two

players. It's got lasers, missiles, decoys-- Harbison says it has really neat graphics. You want to go there tomorrow after school and try it out?"

I shrugged. "Maybe." For some reason I couldn't concentrate on what he was saying.

We turned into the school playground. Immediately, there was a stir of attention.

"Hey Darwin!"

"Look, here comes Darwin and his girlfriend Jessie."

"Which one's the monkey?"

The usual teasing. But lately, it was getting meaner. Darwin noticed it, too. I was worried about the little guy. Some of my fellow-Eighth Graders can be pretty rough.

I turned in my History assignment and kept my head down for the rest of the period, my mind wandering in a thousand different directions. I was lucky. Mrs. Swanson never called on me. But I wasn't so lucky in English.

I was staring out the window, thinking about what I'd like to do to the buttheads who egged our house when I heard my name being called.

"Don't you agree, Enright?"

I blinked. Mr. Foresman had snuck close and now he loomed over me. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the kids around me watching and smirking.

I wasn't about to let him get to me. "Whatever you say, Mr. Foresman," I said like I didn't give a crap, which I didn't, actually.

There were hoots of laughter.

"Very good. Class, Mr. Enright agrees that it's very difficult to follow the lecture when you're staring out the window and daydreaming about video games."

I turned red. I could hear the blood sloshing in my ears.

"Maybe we ought to get Darwin in here. I understand he's a bit more attentive than his-- brother," added Mr. Foresman.

I fought down a flare of rage. After the laughter died down, he went back to the lesson and I went back to thoughts of revenge. This time featuring Foresman in a major role. Just before period ended, he reminded us about our big term paper.

"It must be a minimum of twenty pages, and it can be on any subject your little minds come up with-- as long as it's of sufficient interest to hold my attention, and that of a classroom full of squirming, nose-picking MTV-addicts." He smiled coldly around the room. "Therefore, 'What I Did On My Summer Vacation' will not be acceptable, unless you spent your summer trekking through Nepal in search of Shangri-La."

No problem: I already had my subject picked out.

At last, lunch period came. I went outside and met up with Chuck and John Harbison. We sat on a bench and ate, while about a hundred Third and Fourth Graders ran past us squealing in those high-pitched voices of theirs. Harbison made a sour face. "I can't wait 'til we graduate."

Chuck snorted his assent. We all hated being in a school that had K through Eighth. When

they closed our Middle School, we got stuck with all these little brats.

I stuffed what was left of my sandwich and apple back in my lunchbag, balled it up and lobbed it into the trashcan: nothing but net. Harbison bounced his off the rim and in. Spetter missed the can completely. "Nice shot," I jeered.

"Eat me," retorted Chuck.

Across the schoolyard, some kind of trouble was brewing. A knot of yelling kids had formed by the drinking fountain. In the middle was Jason Jackson.

We headed over. Some of the younger kids were yelling at him.

"Jackson, you're sick!"

"What a retard!"

Jackson was reaching into a shopping bag and handing out shiny disks. The only kids taking any were his doper buddies.

"Hey Enright-- I got something for ya!" He tossed me one. On the back was a pin. On the front was a slogan: "Darwin's Gotta Go!" I showed it to Chuck and John.

Chuck swore.

Then I saw Jackson was wearing about a dozen of them, and a few of his buddies were pinning them to their belt loops. He must have been put up to this by his bitch of a mother. She was president of the Darwin's Gotta Go Committee. They had quite a few members. Including some of our teachers. Bunch of busybodies. I hated them.

I tossed the button into the trash and the three of us wandered across the yard to the other side, where the slides and swings were. Darwin had attracted a crowd of his own. He was showing off by climbing the chains all the way up and walking along the skinny pipe at the top of the swing set. A bunch of other kids were watching.

"Cool!" said Harbison.

But I didn't like it. I yelled up to him, "Hey, Dar, you better get down." He ignored me. I called him again, but he just went on with his stunts. He'd gotten in trouble once before for showing off like this. A kid fell and broke his arm trying to imitate him. That caused a huge stink.

Ms. Greer came over to see what was going on. "Darwin, please stop that. Right now."

He swung down and came to her feet. "Yes, Ms. Greer." A sly sparkle lit his eye. I poked my buddies and started away.

"Scott?"

I stopped. Ms. Greer looked concerned. I'd had her for English and Science a couple years ago. She was younger than my mom and nice looking. Her daughter Holly was in my math class.

"Would you walk with me?" she asked.

Chuck and John backed away. Ms. Greer and I moved along the fence. She turned to me. "How's your writing coming along? Have you kept it up?"

I looked through the fence at the houses across the street. Bitter feelings welled up in me.

"I really enjoyed the stories you wrote in my class," she said. "You have a talent for writing, Scottie. I hope you're not letting it go to waste."

I scuffed my shoe along the bottom rail. Go away, I kept on thinking.

She waited until I looked up at her. "I hear your grades have been slipping. Is that true?"
Slipping? More like falling off a cliff.

"Are you having problems? Here, or at home? Because we have counselors you could talk to. Or if you'd rather, you can talk to me." She smiled.

Even though I used to like her, I kept my mouth shut. I never found talking with adults did any good. Usually the opposite. She squeezed my shoulder and moved on.

After computer class, school ended. I walked Darwin back home and let him in. Mom was at work at the lab. She'd left me a note. "If you make a mess, clean it up. Make sure you do your homework before you play any video games. And I'd appreciate it if you would straighten up your room for a change instead of leaving it for me to do." The usual blah-blah-blah.

Darwin took a bowl of cereal and an apple. "Aren't you eating with me?" he asked.

"I'm not hungry."

He sat at the table with his snack. Because of his weird thumb, his grip on the spoon was clumsy and milk was dribbling down into the fur on his chin. He could barely reach up to the table.

"Why don't you use the booster seat, bucko?"

He ignored me.

I went to my room, dropped my books and flopped onto the bed. I didn't feel like watching TV. I thought about Ms. Greer. Maybe I should have said something to her. My grades sucked. I wasn't sure what the problem was, though. Like my dad said, maybe it's just a phase I'm going through. Puberty. Hormones. Girls. When it comes to making excuses, Dad's a champ.

CHAPTER TWO

I lay on my bed thinking about my essay assignment from Mr. Foresman. Old Foreskin, the kids called him. His meaty nose looked the part. I had to laugh. Once upon a time I thought he might be okay. But he'd been on my case for most of the semester. Doing a good job on this essay was my one chance of pulling my grade up. If I got a good enough grade in English, it would pull up my whole Eighth Grade average. Not graduating from this pit would be a disaster.

I found my pack and pulled out a pen and three-ring binder. When it comes to stories, all English teachers give you the same advice: write about what you know. Well, this was a story I'd lived. It was a story I had to tell sooner or later. This seemed like the perfect opportunity. With a little shrug, I pulled my notebook close and gripped my pen. Let's see. What should I call it? A tiny smile lifted one corner of my lips. I knew just the right title. I dove in.

The House Of Darwin, by Scott Enright, Age 14, Eighth Grade

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, an article appeared in People Magazine. It was a cheerful account, illustrated with posed photographs of Darwin at home. By then, his fame had spread all across the planet. Besides describing his astonishing gifts, the reporters wrote a story about the family he lives with. My mother, who works in the lab where Darwin was born. My father, a psychologist who sometimes consults on Darwin's development. And me, Darwin's "big brother." It painted a happy picture of the ideal home. But there's more to the story than appeared in the magazine. In this paper, I'll try to give the straight poop about life in the House of Darwin.

I read over my words. Not bad, for a start. But how do I get into the main story? I leaned back and shut my eyes. I thought about what my life was like before Darwin. That was seven years ago. A whole lifetime. Scenes began to flood my memory.

MY LIFE BEFORE DARWIN

Picture a four year old kid, bright beyond his years, and about as happy as any kid could be.

My parents were amazing back then. I was their only child, and they turned me into a full-time occupation. Or maybe I was their hobby, I don't know. They took me to plays, movies, baseball games, the circus, and especially the symphony. Back then, everyone thought Mozart stimulated brain growth in kids. My parents wanted to give me every advantage. They read stories to me just about every day. They bought me fancy toys and computer games, and anything I clamored for, as long as it was educational. They were very proud of me when I learned to read in pre-school. Whenever we had company, they would show me off and brag about the latest things I'd learned to do. And even though they both had jobs, my mom arranged hers so she could work at home in the afternoons. So she was always able to take care of my needs or just take a break and play with

me. I was basically spoiled rotten.

My life then was just about perfect. None of my other friends had so much of their parents' time and attention. For instance, instead of them planting me in front of the TV to watch some mindless cartoon show, we had all these games we would play. Checkers, Bingo, some word-games. My favorite was our Sign Game. This was a way of communicating using hand signals instead of speech. My mom taught me the Signs so long ago I don't even remember the first time. During the Sign Game, the rule was, no talking. I was very good at it. I could Sign just about anything, and by the time I was six I had learned to finger-spell any words that had no Signs, even if my spelling back then was weak. We would practice most days for at least an hour. My dad knew the Signs, too. It was like our family's secret code. When we were out at the mall or other crowded places, we would Sign if we didn't want other people to know what we were saying. It was something we shared that nobody else knew about. It made us special as a family. I really loved it.

Until one day I saw a couple of men on a bus using signs. Our Signs. I didn't get it. How could these strangers know our secret code? My mom had to break the news to me about American Sign Language, developed for the deaf, and used by millions of people. It was weird. For the first time in my life, I felt betrayed, lied to. Why hadn't they just told me the truth?

I would find out later that they had their reasons.

MY BIG SURPRISE

It was on one of our many trips to the zoo, while we were standing in front of the chimpanzee exhibit that my mom turned to me and asked me how I'd like to have a chimpanzee come home and live with us. A chimpanzee all our own.

I was thrilled. I could hardly believe she meant it. I looked over the seven or eight chimps inside the arena and picked one I thought I'd like.

My dad laughed and told me we already had ours picked out. A special chimp. He told me he and my mom would have to spend a lot of time with him. Teach him proper manners and make sure he was gentle and didn't mess up the house.

Then I made the connection. They were bringing home a laboratory chimpanzee as part of their work. The lab where my mom worked was filled with animals.

The more I thought it over, the more excited I grew. This was real! Now I was really getting into it. Can teach him tricks? I asked.

My dad said I could, but I had to do it their way. He said there's a right way and a wrong way to raise a baby-- whether it's a human baby or a chimp baby.

I knew what he meant by that all right. Compared to the moms and dads of my friends, I knew my folks were unusual. They had their own special way of bringing up a kid. They believed in reasoning. But I had to wonder: How could you reason with a chimpanzee?

Staring at the chimps running around the habitat, I wondered if he'd be living in a cage. I asked if I could name him.

My mom said he already had a name. It was Darwin.

I put down my pen and was startled to see how late it was. This had taken me longer than I thought it would. Not that I'd had to do a lot of scratching out and rewriting. It was more that sifting through my memories was a lot more painful than I'd expected. I decided to call it a day.

CHAPTER THREE

"I hate cookies in cellophane," I said as I ripped open a bag of Oreos.

My mom banged away at her laptop.

"Did you know the Egyptians used it to preserve the pharaohs?" I asked her.

No response.

"I saw on TV that cellophane causes cancer," I announced.

My mom ignored me. What else is new?

"Why don't we ever have home-baked cookies?" I finally yapped.

"Cookies sound good," said my dad, who was sitting at the table with a newspaper. "I can't remember the last time you rattled them pots and pans--"

"I do the best I can, Phillip," she snapped. "You know I have my hands full with The Darwin Project. Giving Darwin all those tests-- intelligence, aptitude, psychological; tracking down all the relevant journals, keeping up with published papers, trying to find valid comparisons, keeping track of his skill sets--"

I mentally shook my head. Mom and Dad talking about Darwin's "skill sets" and his socialization and so on. I loved all their scientific gobbledygook. Except it was Darwin they were talking about, not some lab rat. It was all so dehumanizing. --Wait a minute. *Dehumanizing*? Did I use that word in reference to Darwin? I almost broke into giggles.

"If you like home-baked cookies so damn much, why don't *you* bake some? Both of you."

"Yes, dear," replied my dad, but with an ironic twinkle in his eye. Then he asked her,

"How is your report coming, anyway?"

"Great. We just got the results back from the Robinson General Aptitude Series."

"And?" He put down the newspaper and waited for her to go on.

"Darwin scored in the ninety-seventh percentile!"

He whistled. "Really!"

I peeled an orange and broke it into segments. "Is that a big whoop?"

She turned on me. "Yes it is, Mister Smartmouth. It means Darwin is more intelligent than ninety seven out of one hundred kids at his grade level. In fact, his reading and understanding is at the 10th Grade level. In some areas, even higher."

Knowing Darwin, that didn't seem such a big deal. Even now he was doing his homework. I ate a chunk of orange.

Dad said, "Jim Graves must be pleased."

"He is, he is." Mom seemed distracted.

"Is there a problem?"

She ruffled her hair. She does that when she's nervous. "Oh, he's been distracted lately. He was talking to someone from University Funding. The conversation upset him. Nothing specific was said, but Jim told me he was getting some strange vibes."

"Strange how?"

She shook her head. "He wouldn't elaborate. He said the trouble with a private university

is that it depends on wealthy contributors, who don't like controversy."

"Just what the Darwin's Gotta Go Committee is stirring up again. I thought all that was behind us." He scratched his beard. I noticed some streaks of gray in the brown.

My mom went to the counter, gathered up the orange peelings and threw them into the garbage. "It makes me so mad. Why can't they leave Darwin alone? He's not doing any harm."

With a sardonic glance at me, Dad said, "Maybe they're upset because Darwin's pulling better grades than their own offspring."

"When is the hearing, anyway?" I interjected, before she could make the connection and start yapping at me about my grades.

"In just a couple weeks," she sighed. "Bernie Miller wants another meeting."

Bernie the attorney. "What happens if we lose?" I asked.

"We'd have to take Darwin out of Red Oaks."

My dad said, "Would that be so bad? We could hire tutors to educate him. There's enough money in the grant for that."

She gave him a dark look. "You know he thrives on human contact. Taking him out of school would be a terrible blow to him emotionally. You know how fragile he is. --Besides, there's a principle at stake here."

My dad looked at her with an amused expression. "A principle. You'll have to explain that one to me."

"The principle that any individual, no matter what his origin, is entitled to equal treatment before the law."

"Miriam, that principle is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution," my dad pointed out.

"I wish you'd stop acting so smug. You know what I'm talking about. Non-human individuals."

His eyebrows rose. "As in Martians? Newly-arrived members of the Galactic Empire? Hive beings from the planet Termite?"

This was getting good.

"No, Smarty Senior. Intelligent beings that may someday emerge from experiments of the kind that produced Darwin." She gave him one of her Significant Looks.

"Oh. Right." He shrugged and turned back to the newspaper.

I decided to go do my homework before she focused her attention on me.

In math class the next day, I was struggling through a problem when I noticed Holly Greer looking in my direction. She's a babe, and smart too. A deadly combination, in my opinion. She hardly ever talks to anyone. She acts like nobody at Red Oaks School is good enough for her. Now that I think about it, she may be right.

Let's see. Two X plus four equals twelve. I stared at the numbers. Am I supposed to take four away from one side and add it to the other, or take it away from both sides? I couldn't remember. I chewed my pencil. I wished they'd let us use calculators in class.

A half hour dragged by as I worked my way down the page. I was sure I'd gotten at least

half of them wrong. My mind wandered and I found myself doodling in the margins of the work sheet. Finally the bell rang and I gathered my junk and headed out.

"Scott?"

I turned. It was Holly. "Oh! Hi."

"I wanted to talk to you. Could you walk me to my next class?"

We moved down the hall in silence for a minute, then she turned to me. I'd never noticed how blue her eyes were. Her skin was creamy and perfect. Plus she has these full, soft lips. They were moving.

"What?" I asked. Duh!

"I said, I am having such a fight with my mom."

I almost laughed. Moms. "Yeah? What about?"

She walked silently beside me for a moment. Then she blurted, "We used to get along fine, and I've always thought she was a good person. But I hate what she's doing."

"What's she doing? Cybersex?" I instantly regretted that. Me and my smart mouth.

Fortunately, Holly ignored my stupid attempt at humor. "She just joined the Darwin's Gotta Go Committee!"

That shocked me. I'd thought the only ones on the committee were the petrified old dinosaurs. I didn't know what to say.

"It just makes me furious to know my mom is working with those horrible people. And I can't argue with her about it anymore. If I so much as mention Darwin's name, she'll ground me for a month." She flipped her blonde hair off her face defiantly.

"I wonder why she joined," I said. "He hasn't done anything lately to cause trouble."

"He never causes trouble," she insisted.

That wasn't exactly true. But for some reason, I didn't feel like contradicting her.

"I feel so bad for Darwin," she said. "He's so cute and harmless, I can't believe anyone would want him out of school."

"Don't worry," I said, acting cool. "They won't win. But come on, do you honestly think Darwin is cute?"

She thought about it for a few seconds. "Welllll-- not as cute as you! --Bye."

She headed off down the hall. At the corner, she turned and saw me still gawking at her. She waved, and I waved back. How could I have thought she was stuck up? And how come I'm having trouble catching my breath?