

## CHAPTER I

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THE EYE stared at me. I hated that symbol. Mr. Beasley said it represented wisdom, but I didn't believe him. I wanted to rip the poster off the wall.

My biology teacher's voice brought me back to reality. "Shale, are you ready to begin?"

I stood and approached the podium, nervously stroking my long brown hair. My legs jiggled like the apps on my iPhone in wiggle mode. I glanced over at Chumana and Judd, my two opponents in the debate, and steadied my voice. "I want to assure you, we did not arrive here in UFOs or evolve from lower life forms. In fact, an all-knowing God created us in his image, as recounted in the first book of the Bible."

I clicked on the first slide from the PowerPoint presentation showing the fresco painting of *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo.

Mr. Beasley interrupted. "Shale, this isn't a religion class. We've spent six weeks studying evolution. I expect your arguments to be based on scientific fact, not religious references."

"Yes, sir. May I continue?"

He waved his pen. "It's your grade."

The class snickered.

"As I said, the Bible says we're the only creatures created in God's image."

"Does she believe this stuff?" a student muttered.

I bit my lip. Seconds passed. Maybe it would be better to faint and not finish. Somehow, I found my voice. "What does it mean to be created in the image of God?"

"It means we're all gods," Judd joked.

The room erupted in laughter.

Chumana rolled her eyes. "Everybody except Shale Snyder."

The comments hurt, but I continued. "We are unique in the universe. God did not even create angels in his own image."

"That's a relief," another student said.

A hot flash soaked my neck in perspiration.

"Have there been changes in animals? Yes, but God wrote those adaptations into the DNA. Species can change within the genetic code, but they can't evolve into a new species. Besides, most mutations don't help animals to survive."

Mr. Beasley interrupted me again. "Name one scientist who agrees with you."

"You can order Dr. Hugh Ross's book from Amazon, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy*."

Mr. Beasley was nonplussed, but then a snarky smile covered his lips. "If there was a God who created everything, would you agree that evolution improved upon his creation?"

"Oohs" and "ahhs" filled the room. I glanced at Chumana and Judd as they jotted down notes. They would defend their positions when I finished.

Too many students appeared bored. Apathy seemed to be a common denominator when it came to God. I ignored Mr. Beasley's question and continued with my prepared speech.

"I don't believe it's ethical to perform genetic experiments combining species or to

attempt to create a perfect human—or any new animal.”

“And stop medical advancement that could lead to a cure for cancer and other diseases?” a boy interrupted. “My father is dying and you want me to believe in a God who would rather let him die than find a cure? DNA research can lead to cures.”

Applause erupted.

I countered his statement. “But do humans possess the heart of God? Are we intelligent enough that we can alter the genetic code only for good and not evil?”

Mr. Beasley stood. “Shale, you were to present arguments against evolution, not champion your religious beliefs. Because your statements are offensive to students in this class, I must ask you to stop your presentation and take a seat.”

My face and neck felt on fire as I stumbled from the podium. I dropped one of my cards. I started to pick it up, but Mr. Beasley reached it first. He handed me the card and whispered, “Nice try, Shale, but God has no place in the scientific community. Superstition and science don’t mix.”

I returned to my seat. Rachel smiled reassuringly. “Good job.”

I appreciated her praise, but Mr. Beasley’s opinion was the only one that mattered. He’d probably give me a failing grade, and I’d have to retake the class to graduate.

I glanced out the window. Dark, menacing clouds hinted at a brewing storm.

Mr. Beasley pointed his pen at Judd. “The podium is yours.”

Judd stood. As he leaned on the podium shuffling his papers, several girls ogled him. His dark, clear complexion, curly hair, and deep-set eyes made him a prize catch, but he had nothing on Daniel Sperling, my friend from the seventh dimension. If only he were here and could rescue me from this sea of ridicule.

Judd exuded confidence. “Evolution has been accepted as scientific theory by reputable scientists for the past hundred years, since Charles Darwin published his famous thesis on animal selection. We are evolving as humans.

“Sometime in the not-too-distant future, we will possess the necessary knowledge to create a perfect human. There will be no more death or disease.

“The goal of the New World is to create a civilization ruled by a one-world government where the fittest survive.”

Judd paused to let his words sink in. He wagged his pencil. “Even now, we are on the threshold of opening a door to the future where we can take the best of each species and create a new one.”

He chuckled. “Imagine the woman of your dreams, perfectly shaped, who can hear like a wolf and see like an eagle—who wouldn’t want the perfect woman?”

Whistles and catcalls shot up around the room. Others clapped approvingly.

“Once humans have evolved beyond imperfection, we will no longer be limited. In fact, we will become as gods.”

Judd was on an unstoppable roll, and students embraced every word he uttered. He clicked on the PowerPoint wildly, and photographs of unusual animals popped up on the screen.

“Scientists at CERN are hoping to recreate the beginning of the universe with the Large Hadron Collider in France and Switzerland—even open doors to other dimensions. God has put no limits on our abilities. The Age of Aquarius has dawned, and the New World promises the utopia for which we all long, etched in our DNA through evolutionary processes.”

A photograph of a strange creature appeared on the screen labeled “Statue of Lord Shiva at CERN.” I quickly jotted down the caption to learn more about it later.

“We have much to look forward to as scientists discover new ways to create computers to think like humans. Soon we will be able to grow animals in test tubes that mimic human-like qualities. These robots will be programmed to perform the mundane tasks of day-to-day living, allowing humans to enjoy a more fulfilling life.”

Students stood and cheered.

After several minutes, Mr. Beasley stood. “Thank you, Judd, for that outstanding presentation. We all need hope for a better tomorrow.”

He glanced at Chumana. She was the only redheaded girl in the class, and her hot-tempered personality matched it. I didn’t know how I had survived sharing an apartment with her when my mother and I first moved to Atlanta.

Who did she hate more, God or me? What crazy story would she present today? I hoped it wouldn’t include her latest obsession with UFOs.

