



Flight from Eden

The Eden Chronicles: Book One



Kathryn A. Graham

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Book One of the Eden Chronicles

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Dedication

A number of years ago, I was privileged to meet a very remarkable man. Zach was a man of razor intellect and an acid tongue. We did not become friends immediately.

Zach had been a professional soldier for most of his life, eventually achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. In civilian life, he had been a police officer and a private investigator. Although I had also spent a number of years in the U.S. military, and was by no means a pacifist, Zach's violent and very final approach to problem solving appalled me, until I saw that he was perfectly willing to place his own body in harm's way to achieve any objective he considered worthy.

We never once disagreed on the definition of a worthy objective. That realization gave birth to respect, and we eventually became friends.

Over the years, some of the storms our friendship has weathered have given me the germ of an idea, an idea that has eventually grown to encompass the relationship between two of my characters in *Flight From Eden*.

I am saddened to report that, for a terrible two years, Zach fought a different sort of battle, against a silent, invisible and most implacable enemy. There was no glory for the victor; there were no medals given for heroism. Success was measured only by another day of life. I was deeply awed by the way he fought this enemy called cancer with all of his courage, his will and his strength.

It sometimes requires more courage to live than to die.

Zach lost his last fight late in 1991. He will be missed.

This novel is respectfully dedicated to one of the few genuine heroes I have ever known – a scholar, a warrior... and a man.

Kathryn A. Graham

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I want to offer my warmest thanks to my business partner and best friend, John G. Tarsikes, Jr.

Without him, this novel would never have been finished or published. When things looked darkest, he got behind me and pushed.

I will not forget.

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And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden, thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Genesis 2:16-17

*For it is written, I will destroy
the wisdom of the wise, and will
bring to nothing the understanding
of the prudent.*

Corinthians 1:19

ONE

In the near future:

"Have you heard the news?"

Kris jumped at the sound of another voice, then pushed herself up from the floor of the hangar, brushing the dirt off her jeans. "Enough. Mostly second hand."

She ducked under the wing of her Cessna and walked toward her visitor. When she saw him flinch at the sight of the tears on her cheeks, she brushed at them self-consciously. "I'm okay," she assured him. "It wasn't entirely unexpected."

Dennis shook his head. "You obviously haven't heard the latest. You set one foot on any city street and you'll be picked up by National Security. Your face is all over the video."

She was startled by his harsh tone, but shook her head in bafflement. "My face? What in God's name for?"

"Use your head, goddamn it! 'God's name' is exactly right! You've never joined the church. You're an astrophysicist, which is now a proscribed profession. Even worse, you teach. They can't afford to let you run around loose, and you know it."

Kris felt the blood drain away from her face. National Security's methods for obtaining confessions were too well known. "I guess I should have expected that. Hell- maybe I did, but I didn't want to believe it." She looked at her friend with concern. "You've never joined the church either. You teach. And as I understand the current doctrine, computer specialists aren't well loved just now either. You're in the same danger. Why did you come here?"

Dennis sighed and shook his head. "It's not quite the same. According to the video, those who practice my profession are subject to arrest, yes. But I'm not wanted by name, as I don't exactly move in your exalted circles. As for your second question, would you have warned me?"

She smiled. "Of course."

"Kris, you haven't got much time. What are you going to do?"

Kristen Garrick, Ph.D.—formerly a full professor of Astrophysics at Stanford University—suddenly looked very tired and ten years older than her twenty-eight years. After a moment, she pushed fingers through her short hair, shoving an unruly blonde lock away from her face. "Try to get out of the country, I guess." After a moment, she laughed. "Contrary to student speculation, I never ran drugs in this thing, but I've heard how it's done often enough. It can't be too difficult to get a Cessna across the border."

Dennis nodded. "It's a little harder than it sounds, but it can be done. If that's what you want, I'll do all I can to help. But I hope you'll decide to stay."

Kris looked at him in honest surprise. "I don't want to leave. But what choice do I have? I can't work. I can't teach. I can't even move without being arrested. What good can I possibly do here?"

Dennis hesitated for moment, caught off guard, and stared at the hangar floor. When he looked up again, his eyes were troubled. "I'm taking one hell of a risk, Kris—betraying a confidence that isn't mine to betray. But I have to tell you this much. You will be able to work. There is a chance you can do more good here than you ever will anywhere else. It's an idea so crazy that I wonder sometimes if I'm going completely mad. But we—my friends and I—have absolutely no chance without your skills."

Kris stared at him, her blue eyes wide on his face, then began to laugh. "My skills? Dennis, you're playing me like a fish on a hook. Shameless, my friend."

He gave her an innocent look, and she laughed even harder. "First," she accused him, "you tell me I can work in spite of the ban, and you are one of the few who could ever understand what that means to me. Then you go on to tell me that I'm desperately needed for something utterly mad and daring—"

Dennis laughed also and held up a hand. "Okay, I confess. I knew it would hook you. But I'm not lying, Kris. Every word I just said was the absolute truth."

"So give me the rest of it."

He shook his head. "I... can't. Not here and now. There are others involved that you must meet, and—"

She held up a hand in a gesture of surrender. "Okay, fair enough. If you can arrange it without getting either of us arrested, I'll meet these

others and hear you out. That's all I can promise."

Dennis shook his head, looking very distressed. "It's not that simple," he admitted. "If you meet them, and learn what we plan to do, then decide that you won't or can't commit to this project—" His voice trailed off into miserable silence.

"Then I become a danger to you? Yes, I can see that." She thought for a moment, chewing on a knuckle as she wavered between choices. "Dennis, it would appear that I have a decision to make, and I don't have a lot to go on. Let me ask you a general sort of question."

Dennis nodded. "If I can answer, I will."

"You and I have been friends for six years, since I started working on my doctorate. We've worked together, fought college politics together—even studied together on occasion. You have never lied to me, and I've always known you to be honorable in your dealings with others. So divorce yourself from what you want for a moment and think about what you know of me. If I knew the whole story you have to tell, would I want to do as you ask? Don't answer too quickly. Our friendship may rest on your answer."

He frowned, looking troubled. "I don't know. There are so many factors involved..." He took a deep breath, making his decision. "I think you would. I know I would, in your place."

"That's all I can ask. Thank you."

"Kris, before you decide, I also have to tell you that what we intend is hideously dangerous. Not just to your life, either. Death is not the worst thing that can happen to you if you come with me."

Kris nodded. "I'd already guessed that. There have been some ugly rumors about our gentle brethren in National Security."

He grimaced. "You don't know the half of it."

"I'd guessed that, too."

The silence grew very long. Kris turned away from Dennis, pacing the length of the hangar and eyeing her little airplane fondly. "You know, I think I will miss flying most of all."

Dennis grinned at her. "Not if you come with me, you won't."

Kris jerked around suddenly, staring at him with wide blue eyes. "I must be some kind of a brain dead twit," she whispered. "I won't miss flying? Not if I come with you?" A laugh welled up from deep inside her, born of genuine humor and hope where there had been none. "Old friend, you stepped on yourself that time. Just what is it you've got up that wicked sleeve of yours?"

Dennis looked very uncomfortable, but he didn't say anything.

"It's true I'm not at my best right now," Kris admitted. "It never even occurred to me to wonder why a leading computer and robotics expert who flies his own plane every chance he gets would so desperately need an astrophysicist who also happens to be a pilot. Dear God, Dennis, did you think me too stupid to add two and two?"

His mouth tightened, and his expression became grim and closed as he watched her work it out. He waited in tense silence for her next words.

Kris Garrick drew herself up to her full five feet, still grinning at her friend and colleague. "You can relax, Dr. Alderman. I'm in. All the way."

*Behold, all they that were incensed
against thee shall be ashamed
and confounded: they shall be as
nothing; and they that strive with
thee shall perish.*

Isaiah 41:11

TWO

Three months later:

Kris Garrick was terrified. This was madness! She fought against the urge to pull her people back from that damned compound and find a hiding place somewhere, the urge to give up this whole insane plan of theirs and wait for something else to happen.

Kris said nothing, of course. She'd known she wouldn't. She could hear the clicking of the wire cutters as Alex sliced a hole for them through the compound fence. The January wind was bitter, even in Houston, and she shivered in miserable silence as she waited for the word to move.

Dennis Alderman was worried, too. He'd already disabled the alarm circuits in the fence that was being cut, and like Kris, he had nothing to do until they could enter the compound. Now he eyed her with some considerable concern.

Dennis had never been able to explain his fondness for Kris. She had always lived in a world of theory, a world of the mind, that he did not understand. In spite of his own impressive academic credentials, Dennis was a very practical and worldly man. He had not been happy in the world of academia, and he found himself grateful that his flirtation with it had ended. Dennis had always known Kris was different, but what he saw in her pallor now turned his guts to water. If she should fold on them here, they'd need one hell of a lot of luck just to get out of this place alive.

"You okay?" he asked her sharply.

Kris started at the sound of his whisper and forced a smile for him. "Yeah," she lied. "Just cold."

The last strand was severed, and Dennis nodded at her. "Showtime. Let's go."

Kris picked up her weapon, a very serviceable Uzi, and slipped

through the gap in the fence, keeping to the shadows as she ran toward the building. She crouched there, breathing heavily, and waited for Dennis to join her. Six others slipped through behind them, one at a time, spreading out.

When Dennis arrived, he and Kris crept along the side of the building and peered around the corner. A solitary guard was blowing on his cold hands just outside the main entrance. They pulled back. "Shit," Kris whispered.

Dennis grimaced. "We discussed this," he whispered. "This job is going to take hours. We can't take the chance that he might get free to give a warning."

Kris swallowed and tried to get a grip on herself. Her favorite hobby made her the ideal choice for what had to come next, but she couldn't make herself accept it. Nausea made her swallow again. "I do know what has to be done," she whispered. "But I've never

"... I don't think I can--"

Dennis nodded. He'd expected this, in spite of her cheerful assurances during the planning phase. "I'll do it. Give me your knife."

She reached down and drew a Gerber Mark II from a boot sheath and passed it to him, hilt first. "Are you sure?" she faltered. "No other way?"

His eyes were grim, but his whisper was gentle. "No other way. Sorry. Wait here until you see me move—and hang onto this. It will just get in my way." He passed her his own Uzi and slipped away from her.

Kris watched him move from shadow to shadow. She didn't want to watch, but she couldn't tear her eyes away. "Christ—" she whispered.

Kris jumped out of her skin when she felt a hand on her shoulder, but she nodded when she recognized the older man beside her.

"Couldn't do it?" he asked in a whisper.

Kris shook her head mutely.

Dr. Alex Morton, Professor of Mechanical Engineering, formerly of CalTech, smiled a little sadly. "Not your specialty. But you will learn. We all will." He shifted his weight and took her upper arm in his left hand. "Better get ready to move. Alderman is almost in position."

Kris turned back to watch. She saw Dennis leap from the shadows behind the guard and stifle any outcry with his left hand as his right plunged the dagger into the guard's throat to sever the jugular and windpipe in a single, savage twist. The guard was still struggling when Morton started around the corner, pulling Kris along beside him. Other black-clad figures converged on them from all over the compound.

By the time Kris reached Dennis, the guard was on the ground. Dennis was still cleaning her knife on the dead man's uniform. He reversed it and passed it to her with the loose end of the guard's shirt to avoid staining the blade with the blood on his gloves. Kris managed to persuade her stomach to stay where it was, but she couldn't summon more than a curt nod for Dennis as she took the knife and returned it to its sheath. She passed him his Uzi, and he slung it over his right shoulder.

"Your show," Morton whispered to Dennis. "Can you get us inside without alerting every cop from here to Austin?"

Dennis looked up at the doors and smiled. "This is the new building. The security systems are all handled by the computer." He laughed briefly, under his breath. "Idiots! Should only take a few moments." He stripped off his bloody gloves and shoved them into his belt, then pulled on a thin pair of surgical gloves for the more delicate job ahead of him. Morton, Frazier and Kris began to change their gloves as well. Dennis reached behind himself and freed a small toolkit from his belt. He went to work on the card key mechanism.

The few moments of waiting that followed gave Kris an opportunity to regain her composure. When the big doors swung open and everyone began to crowd into the corridor inside, she took charge again, tolling men off on her fingers. "Larry, Tim and Fred, you search the building for other guards. You know what to do if you find anyone, but remember that firearms are a last resort. Jerry, you stay with us and watch our backs—we're going to be rather busy. Alex, Frazier, Dennis and I need to find terminals. Alex, you are responsible for marking all files pertaining to relevant engineering problems, particularly all preliminary designs for the NERVA reactor. I will locate and mark the orbital mechanics files and all pertinent guidance data. Frazier, I want you to locate and mark all vendor lists we can use later, but use some judgment. I could care less who supplied the toilet paper when this was a going concern. Dennis, I want you to confirm that the building alarm is, in fact, disabled. I trust you, but we can't afford to take chances. Then get us past the network security so the rest of us can get to work. Last, I want you to download all files we mark to data cassette as rapidly as possible. We have about seven hours before the next shift change, and I'd like to be well clear at least an hour before that."

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. "All of you, please remember that if any shots are fired, this mission is aborted, and it's every man for himself. Questions?" She glanced around herself. "Okay then. Good luck. Let's move." She set off at a rapid trot toward the stairwell behind the elevators, the others close on her heels.

Alex Morton looked at Dennis and smiled as they hurried after her. "She'll be okay now," he whispered.

Dennis nodded. He wasn't even breathing heavily, and he lied without changing expression. "I never doubted that for a moment, Dr. Morton."

It was nearly three hours of hard work later when Kris looked up from her terminal. "That's it for me," she told the others with an air of satisfaction. "I'm going to chase down a water fountain." She pushed herself to her feet and walked out into the corridor. Jerry Lansing was keeping watch outside the door. "Notice a drinking fountain around here?" she asked him.

"Yeah," he told her and pointed toward the end of the corridor. "Around the corner to your right."

"Thanks. Be right back."

Lansing frowned at her retreating figure. Something about her appearance wasn't quite right, but he couldn't put his finger on it. He thought for a moment, then stuck his head into the room she had just left. Her Uzi was propped against the side of the desk where she had been working.

"Alderman!" he hissed and nodded toward the weapon.

Dennis looked up from his terminal and followed Lansing's stare, spotting the Uzi at once. His chair flew back as he jumped to his feet. "Get after her!" he snapped.

Lansing took off at a dead run.



The corridor Kris had entered in search of a water fountain was the short stretch found on all floors in many office buildings perpendicular to the elevators. It contained nothing but a water fountain, restrooms and a grubby janitor's closet. Unfortunately, this also meant that it had received little more than a cursory search hours before—a search that had missed one young guard suffering from a disturbance of the bowels due to some incautious indulgence in that variety of cheap Mexican fare known as "Tex-Mex." The youngster had literally been caught with his pants down.

Although the guard was in possession of his sidearm, he was wise enough to realize that he could do little against the force that had occupied the building. He had made the janitor's closet his temporary headquarters, leaving the door cracked in the hope that he might hear when

the situation changed. It also gave him a clear view of the water fountain across the hall.

Kris bent to drink from the fountain. She was seized from behind in a painful, if somewhat clumsy, grip. "One move, one sound," she heard her attacker whisper, "and you are one dead lady."

Kris froze, her knees threatening to buckle. She was released and shoved a couple of feet away to face her assailant. He was a young kid in an ill-fitting security uniform, wide-eyed with fright, and he was holding a revolver that looked from her end like the business end of a naval cannon. Worse, from her point of view—his hand was shaking. He gestured with the gun. "Move. That way."

To her surprise, Kris found herself assessing her situation in a very cold and detached manner. To proceed in the direction indicated, toward the janitor's closet, she would have to pass the guard. There wasn't room in the small corridor for him to move more than a meter or so away from her as she passed. She considered her options, and decided her best odds were in favor of an attempt. She kept her hands in full view as she turned a little to pass him, then she brought her right foot up in a blinding display of speed to strip the gun from his hand—and, quite by accident, break one of the small bones in the wrist as she did so.

He never even had time to scream. He was still drawing his first shocked gasp when Kris came off the floor to hit him with a jumping side kick to his head. The only sound was a sort of wet smack from the impact, then the sound of the guard hitting the floor. Kris landed lightly and silently on her feet, perfectly balanced and ready for anything, saw her assailant was no longer moving, then collapsed beside him.

When Jerry reached her, her right boot was sitting on the floor beside her. She was rubbing her foot with both hands and using language that made him grin. "You okay, doc'?" he demanded.

She nodded. "Just a bruise, I think. He didn't hurt me. But has he signaled anyone?"

Jerry shook his head. "No radio. I don't think so. Is he dead?"

Kris shook her head. "Just out for the count."

"Let's see, shall we?" Jerry knelt beside the guard and took a closer look at his head. Hardened as he was, he shuddered at what he saw of the temple. "You underestimate yourself," he said dryly. "Caved his skull right in. It's paper thin at the temple anyway." He heard her retch behind him, and turned. "Sorry. But don't sweat it. I'd have had to do him, anyway. Alderman's orders were to leave no witnesses." He got an arm under her and helped her to her feet, handing her the boot. He sup-

ported her as she limped back up the corridor.

Her shivering had come back, full force, and she couldn't control it.

Fortunately, Kris had finished her portion of the task at hand. Dennis kept an eye on her while he waited for the files to download, and his heart went out to her. Sheer misery was written all over her.

Two hours later, when the team piled into two cars for their getaway, Dennis saw that Kris was still shivering. The four who had accomplished the computer theft were in the same car, as they had a common destination. Frazier was driving, with Dennis and Alex on either side of Kris in the back seat. Dennis pulled Kris close to him and rubbed her arms and shoulders in an attempt to impart some warmth to her. Alex noticed what Dennis was doing and took a good look at Kris, recognizing the symptoms of shock. Without a word, he leaned closer to help.

Their immediate destination was a safe house belonging to a member of their organization who was out of town. Many years before, during the U.S./Soviet cold war, a previous owner of the old house had installed a cellar as a fallout shelter, and cellars were not common in that part of the country. Enough years had passed that none of the present neighbors even knew the cellar existed.

Dennis helped Kris out of the car in the garage. "I think we can take a little time to clean up," he decided. "Alex, would you bring us a change of clothes from our bags downstairs? Frazier, you look around and see if Fred keeps a liquor stash anywhere on the premises. You two take the back bathroom. Kris and I will use the master bath. Let's move fast—we shouldn't waste any time getting buttoned up downstairs."

Frazier grinned, but one look at Alderman's eyes froze his teasing retort.

Dennis steered Kris toward the master bath. She didn't say anything, but she was docile enough to limp along in the direction he indicated. Dennis stripped off his own clothing, but Kris did not—or could not—undress herself. Without a word, Dennis shoved her, fully clothed, into a hot shower and began to turn her slowly under the water. When he felt some of the rigidity leave her muscles, he stripped her clothes off, throwing them out of the tub. His touch remained as impersonal as a doctor's.

Dennis sighed with heartfelt relief when Kris reached for a washcloth and began to scrub the lamp black from her face. Alex stuck his head in a moment later, leaving a change of clothes for each of them.

When they climbed out of the shower, Dennis saw Kris patting herself dry and shook his head. He took the towel from her hands and rubbed her down vigorously, leaving her skin red all over. "Now get dressed,"

he told her.

She obeyed, pulling on the warm tracksuit that Alex had left for her. "Dennis?" she ventured quietly.

He looked at her.

"I can't do this. I nearly got us all killed back there."

"This is pointless, Kris."

"You don't understand," she pleaded. "You all expect me to have every answer. I don't. If I try to keep this up, a lot of people are going to die."

Dennis shook his head at her, affectionate exasperation in his eyes. "Idiot. You don't have a choice. None of us do. Now quit moaning about what you can't change, and let's take a look at your sore foot."

Kris sat on the commode seat, and Dennis knelt to take her foot in his hands. He turned it back and forth and prodded it, ignoring her gasp of pain. "Nasty bruise, but that's all. You'll live."

"That's not supposed to happen," she told him with a faint trace of humor. "Boards, bricks—we aren't supposed to feel them."

Dennis grinned at her. "That's what they teach you. Actually, you just aren't supposed to feel them at the time."

Kris laughed, losing most of her tension. "Oh, I felt it all right."

Dennis met her eyes, his expression very serious. "You okay now? Ready to face the others?"

She nodded silently.

They gathered up their soiled clothes and removed all trace of their presence from the upper house, then descended to join Morton and Frazier in the cellar.