

WHEN MOM  
LEFT THE UNIVERSE  
**SAVE THE MULTIVERSE BOOK 1**



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BRYAN DAVIS

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*When Mom Left the Universe*

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# Chapter 1

## A Doorway

Eddie sat at his desk and leaned toward the computer screen, staring at the AI version of his father. “Dad, it’s now been seventy-five days since Mom vanished. Some of the signals coming through

the rift aren't random anymore. I'm pretty sure I'm hearing voices from other Earths."

Near the wall, the Resonance Reader buzzed behind him. Lights flashed around the tall glass door at the front of the closet-sized capsule, probably just ambient noise. No voices this time.

Onscreen, the AI Dad, wearing jeans, flannel shirt, and a familiar gentle smile, tilted his head. "So, Gilbert was right. The multiverse is real. How many copies have you found?"

"At least three," Eddie said, "but maybe thousands are out there."

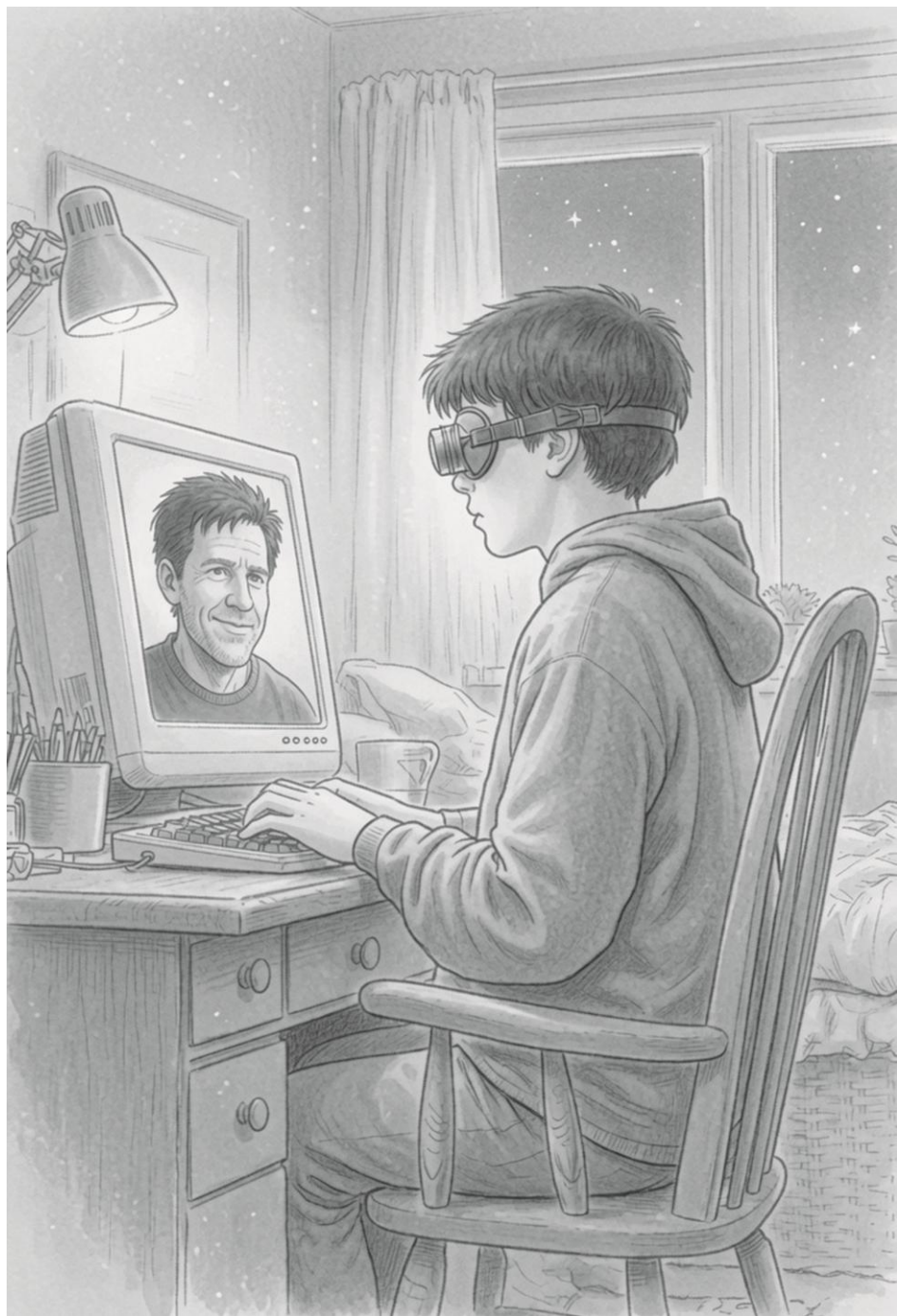
"And your mom might be on one of them."

Eddie's throat tightened, forcing him to whisper, "When the voices started, I think I heard her calling for help."

Dad's eyes widened. "Now that's a huge development.

What's your next step?"

"I should probably—"



“Eddie.” Samantha walked into the room, wearing pink bunny slippers, a baggy T-shirt, and candy-striped pajama bottoms, her shoulder-length brown hair in disarray. “It’s past midnight. Why are you up so late? And why are your safety goggles still on? If you had feathers, you’d look like a steampunk owl.”

“Oh. Right.” He pulled the goggles off and set them on his desk. “I wouldn’t be able to sleep if I didn’t talk to Dad about my discoveries.”

Samantha yawned. “Dad won’t mind if you wait till morning. His AI bot is super patient. And if you don’t stop working so hard to find Mom, you’ll go crazy.”

Eddie drummed his fingers on the desk. “I know, but I have to talk to someone. I got amazing new data that shows—”

“I know. I heard you from my bedroom. Except just now when you were whispering.” Samantha huffed one of her pretend sighs and crossed her arms. “If I let you tell me all about your *amazing* new data, promise you’ll go to bed?”

Eddie met her eyes—worried but steady. She sounded so much wiser than most twelve-year-olds, like she had stepped into Mom’s shoes, acting like the mother they no longer had. “Yeah. I promise.” He turned the computer monitor off. “If you’re sure you don’t mind.”

She offered a friendly smirk. “Eddie, I’ve been listening to your theories nearly every day since Dad died, and my ears aren’t broken yet.” She sat on his bed. “Go ahead. Spill it. I’m listening.”

“Better if I show you.” Eddie stepped over to the Resonance Reader and tapped on a screen embedded in a side panel. “I guess you heard that I’m getting signals from copies of Earth.”

Samantha nodded. “Yep. Heard that. Voices from outer space. But that’s not worth losing sleep over.”

“It *is* worth it. Some of the data I got today is exactly the same as what Gilbert saved when Mom disappeared. I think I tuned in to the portal channel she must have gone through. And one of the voices sounded like Mom’s.”

Samantha’s eyebrows shot up. “Whoa! I didn’t hear that part! Is it still tuned to that channel?”

“Locked in.”

“What did Mom say?”

“I think she said, ‘A fire is coming.’ Too warped to be sure, but I can’t shake it. It echoes over and over in my mind.”

Samantha whistled. “No wonder you can’t sleep. This is the hugest news since the invention of chocolate ice cream. And now *I* won’t be able to sleep. Can we do something about it tonight?”

“We can figure out if it’s possible to transport someone through the portal.”

“A person?” Samantha blew a raspberry with her lips. “No way. Too dangerous. The voice might’ve been your imagination. For all we know, Mom got atomized, zapped into a gazillion glittering glimmers. At least that’s how Gilbert described it.”

“But he said the glimmers might have been resonance artifacts, not Mom’s atoms.”

“I remember.” She pointed at the device’s door. “But we’re not setting foot into that zapper until we’re sure it’s safe. And what happens if it works and you find yourself in another world? How will you get back? And what if you transport to a deep-space vacuum? You’d implode into a shriveled flatworm. Deader than a smashed bug on a windshield. The kind with yellow blood that the wipers just smear across the glass.”

Eddie stared at her for a long moment. “I have more to tell you.”

“What?” She furrowed her brow. “Have you been holding out on me, Eddie?”

“Sort of.” He flipped a lever on the frame of the Resonance Reader and slid out a self-contained unit that included the embedded screen. “I made this part portable. Once I enter the settings to transport somewhere, I can put this in a backpack and take it with me when I enter the door.” He slid the unit back in place. “Then I can use it to come home.”

Samantha leaped off the bed and glared at him nearly nose to nose from her one-inch shorter height. “Were you thinking about leaving without me? Tell me the truth. You know you can’t lie to me.”

He dared not break eye contact. “Actually, no.”

She drew back, blinking. “No?”

Eddie shook his head. “We’ve been a team forever. We lost our dad, then our mom, and now all we have left is Gilbert. I mean, he’s great, letting us live in his house, but he’s ... well ...”

“Goofy?” Samantha offered.

“Eccentric. A genius, but still eccentric. Anyway, now that I have the channel where I think Mom went, I can test it for safety. If it passes the test, we can go together, that is, if you’re not too scared.”

“Too scared?” She shook a finger at him. “That might’ve worked when I was four and you were seven, like when you asked if I was too scared to eat a worm, but not anymore. Just tell me how you’re going to make sure it’s safe, and then I’ll decide.”

“Sure. But just remember, we both ate a worm.” Eddie pulled the portable unit out again and set it on the floor. “Our home device is already set to the right channel, and the portable one’s locked on home.”

Samantha leaned closer. “Okay ... Go on.”

“I just push one button on each, place the portable inside the big machine, and wait fifteen seconds. Then, flash! It jumps through the portal. Three minutes later, it jumps back.”

“So, when we see it here again,” she said slowly, “we’ll know the gadget can survive. But not necessarily people. If it goes to a place without oxygen, it will be fine, but people would turn into prune heads.”

“That’s why ...” Eddie stepped over to his terrarium, picked up his gecko, and set it on top of the unit. “How’s that?”

Samantha nearly shrieked. “What? You can’t send Jeepers Creepers! He might die!”

“NASA sent monkeys and dogs into space to test their rockets for safety. Why not a gecko?”

“Because we’re not cruel! I know he’s your gecko, but you can’t risk—”

The overhead bedroom light turned on. “Oh, baloney, blather, and balderdash.” Gilbert burst in, wearing full khaki safari gear, a hat perched on his bald head like he was ready to wrestle crocodiles, and an empty backpack hanging from his shoulder. “No need to risk the life of a poor innocent gecko.” He picked up Jeepers Creepers, handed him to Eddie, and set the portable unit into his backpack. “I hope to return shortly.” He pressed the appropriate buttons, walked into the Resonance Reader, and closed the door. “Countdown.” The glass enclosure muffled his voice. “Ten ... nine ... eight ...”

“Gilbert!” Eddie shouted. “You can’t risk your life! That’s insane!”

“Five ... four ... three ...”

“Eddie!” Samantha squealed. “Can’t you stop him?”

“No. The portable unit is controlling the home base and itself at the same time.”

“Zero.” Lights flashed within the capsule. Gilbert faded, then seemed to explode into a splash of sparks. Seconds later, everything inside the machine fell dark.

Silence enveloped the room as Eddie and Samantha stared at the empty chamber. After several seconds, Samantha squeaked, “How long before it’s programmed to come back?”

“The timer was set for three minutes.” Eddie put Jeepers Creepers into the terrarium and glanced at the desk clock—12:42 a.m. “Maybe twenty seconds less than that now.”

Samantha swallowed hard. “I don’t know if I can stand waiting that long. It’ll be like waiting for a rotten egg to hatch.”

“Rotten eggs don’t hatch.”

“I know.”

Eddie glanced at the desk clock again—12:43 a.m. His goggles still lay next to the clock. No use mentioning to Samantha that Gilbert had forgotten to put them on. She would just worry more. “I’m guessing two minutes.”

“I’ll be back.” Samantha ran out of the room, leaving Eddie to stare at the Resonance Reader alone.

Soon, Samantha ran in, now dressed in jeans, a longsleeved tunic, and sneakers, her hair tied in a ponytail. She stood at Eddie’s side and held his hand. “I wanted to be ready when Gilbert shows up. We might be the next travelers.”

He gently compressed her hand. “Good thinking.”

The clock changed to 12:45. The Resonance Reader buzzed. Lights flashed inside again. When they faded, the backpack sat on the floor of the enclosure

with the portable device visible through the open top flap, but Gilbert was nowhere in sight.

Eddie lunged for the glass door and set a palm against it. “Gilbert!”

Samantha grabbed his arm, her fingers trembling. “Eddie? What happened?”

Silent and alone, the backpack sat there. A thin wisp of smoke curling up from its strap. Gilbert was gone.