

Fen closed the cupboard door and had a last scan round to make sure she had everything. She was about to leave but stopped short, distracted... tempted. She could not resist a final check on the object she had been hiding for the last six months or so. Sal and his stupid meeting would just have to wait. She peered down the corridor to ensure no-one was near and then got down on her hands and knees to remove the piece of skirting board near her bed. Reaching in, she gently patted the now familiar surface of the object hidden therein. Its smooth contours felt pleasantly cool to the touch and she enjoyed again the sharpness of its clean edges as she ran her hand along the top and round one side. She still had no clear idea what it was but her instinct had already told her that it was not a natural product. Neither did it feel or look man-made; a real enigma which was why she was always so drawn to it.

She stretched in a little further and curled her fingers around the far edge, gaining the purchase she needed to slide it out and through the hole. It was heavy – heavier than she remembered when she had first found it. She seldom did this, not daring to risk her secret being unveiled, but for some reason today she felt a strong need to run her eyes over it, to hold it, feel it, somehow be part of it, if she could.

She pulled slightly back to better appreciate its beauty and uniformity. It was about the size of a shoe box and not a perfect cuboid by any means, although it did look like the block might somehow have been deliberately hewn to this shape. The random chips and scratches showed wear but its texture was glass-like, opaque and made of a smooth material she had not come across previously.

Her senses were fully alert now, anticipating what might happen next. It did not take long. The block began to pulse subtly. Faint tinges of yellows changed to shades of oranges, then red, before settling back into yellow once more. She leant forward and touched it again, holding the palm of her hand flat against the surface. On each silent beat, she felt a slight

vibration run through her fingers and up her arm. It became more pronounced as it took her through the darker colours before easing her back down to calmness once more in the lighter shades. The crescendo built, time and time again. She felt she was somehow being tempted to go on a journey, only to be gently eased back and returned to normality before she could truly discover what lay at the end. It had treated her like this before.

‘No!’ she heard herself say. ‘No!’ Her show of impatience seemed to work as she felt a change this time. The darker colours stayed and the vibrations became more intense, slightly painful and unpleasant. Her first inclination was to fight it, to make it stop and allow the light and relative calmness to return. But if she did that she would never find out what it was. So she held on... and on... until....

... Her brain was suddenly filled with a myriad of images and experiences. Screams, flames, explosions, faces, so many familiar faces, alien landscapes, buildings. It was a whirlwind of sensory overload. The images were interspersed with fragments of stories, relationships, feelings of love and betrayal, anger, disappointment. It was overwhelming. Her head ached with the sheer force of events and then, suddenly, it stopped.

And she was by a lake...