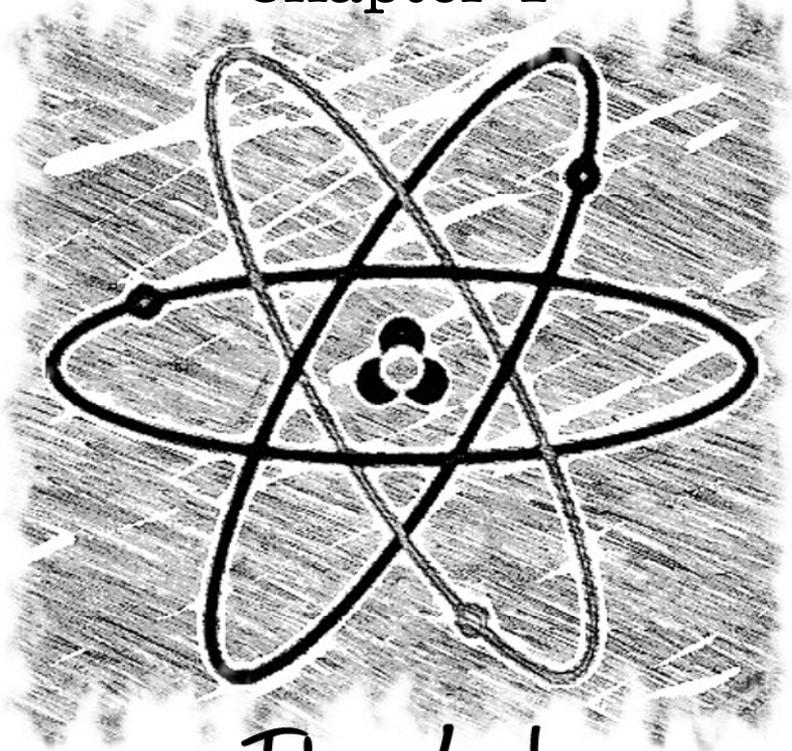


Chapter 1



The Lab

Elle Crane had no idea what was happening. She was surprised when her mom's assistant, Candace, arrived to take her to gymnastics instead of her mother. Elle's mom always took her to gymnastics practice. Mrs. Crane especially loved to watch Elle work on her balance beam routine. But today was different. No mom. Candace stayed and watched the whole practice. Then during the ride home, Candace

refused to explain why her mother had not followed their usual routine.

When they arrived home, Candace said something about seeing her and her sister first thing in the morning. She explained that she would be taking them to school, and left. Elle knew that something was up. Her family followed absolute routines, and this was not the routine.

Once in the house, Elle quickly realized that her mom was already home and was in the den with her dad. The door to the den was closed. It was rarely closed. She could hear her parents having a very loud discussion. And to top it off, her older sister, Leah was upstairs in her bedroom crying hysterically.

Elle sat down in the middle of the living room floor and began petting their cat, Dottie. She strained to hear what her parents were discussing and tried to ignore the sobs coming from her sister's bedroom.

"Well, Dottie, what do you think Leah's done this time?" Elle asked her cat as she stroked its calico fur. She figured that whatever was going on must have been caused by Leah. Why else would her sister be sobbing and her parents be having such a heated discussion?

Suddenly the door to the den opened. Elle's parents walked toward the living room. "Oh, hi honey, you're home. How was the gymnastics practice?" asked her mother casually, as if nothing unusual was happening.

“Fine. What’s going on? What’s wrong with Leah?” asked Elle.

“Everything’s fine. We have some news to share with you. We’ve already told Leah, and she’s a bit upset right now,” her father answered.

“Come on into the den, we have something to show you,” said her mom. Elle and her dad followed into the den. This time the door was left opened. Elle could still hear her sister crying.

On the desk sat a row of six containers. Each held a small, green and white leafy plant. Elle recognized the containers as being similar to the experiments she’d seen in her mother’s office at the Lab.

“So, what’s going on? Why’s Leah so upset?” asked Elle as soon as she walked into the den with her parents.

“I’ve been offered this wonderful opportunity to continue my experiments on ocean water conversions,” explained her mother.

“Awesome,” interrupted Elle. “But why’s Leah upstairs crying?”

“Well, that’s the thing. The Lab wants me to continue my experiments abroad,” continued Dr. Christine Crane.

“Abroad? Like you mean not in the United States?” asked Elle.

“That’s right sweetheart. At different times, I will be using the Lab’s testing facilities in several different world locations over the next several years,” finished her mom with a look of concern as she waited for Elle’s reaction.

“Mom, that’s so cool! When do we leave?”

“Well, that’s the thing,” explained her mother, “there is no we going, just me.”

Elle now knew why Leah was crying. She felt tears swelling in her own eyes. “But Mom, you can’t go without us. Who’ll take care of everything?”

“Your dad will be staying home with you girls.”

“Really, Mom? Dad?” questioned Elle with disbelief.

“Hey, I’m right here you know,” pointed out Elle’s dad.

“Sorry, Dad. But you know...”

“I know. I know. You have super mom for a mother. But I can do this. We can do this. This first time will only be four weeks or so,” assured Mike Crane.

Elle looked at her mom. “Honey, it’ll be fine. I know that you girls can do this with your dad. And, Candace will be there to help out at times. I’ll be home in no time,” promised her mom.

“Where are you going?” asked Elle.

“Remember a couple of years ago when I did those ocean water experiments off the coast of Grand Bahama Island? I’m going back to that same area for just a few weeks.”

“But Mom, we went last time. Why can’t we go this time?” pleaded Elle.

“Just some new rules at the Lab. You girls will be fine with your dad. I’ll Skype with you every day. Now I’d better go talk to Leah again,”

sighed Chris Crane as she left the room.

Elle looked over at her dad. He gave her a weak smile and followed after her mother.

Staying home with just dad? thought Elle. Nope. Just wasn't going to happen. She loved her dad, but he was a bit forgetful and eccentric at times. She was certain that they would be accompanying her mother. She didn't know how, but she knew they would. And besides, Elle had no intentions of letting her mother go to the Bahamas without her and Leah. She loved the Bahamas.

It was at that moment that she decided that *Mission: Bahamas* was underway. She needed to go upstairs and get Leah to stop crying so the two of them could develop their plan.