

## CHAPTER 1: THE RETURN OF SUMMER

### *Meeting for the first time . . . again*

They were nervous. They weren't sure why they were so nervous, but they were. In fact, they were so nervous they could feel their heartbeats speeding up.

Twelve-year-old Blaine Sassafras and his twin sister, Tracey, sat on a short old and rusty metal file cabinet down in their Uncle Cecil's messy and muddled basement. Their uncle had called them to let them know he was on his way home and that he had someone with him he wanted Blaine and Tracey to meet.

"Man, I'm nervous!" Blaine exclaimed. "Why am I so nervous? It's not like we don't know her."

Tracey exhaled and nodded. "I'm nervous too, Blaine. Maybe it's because we sorta-kinda don't know her anymore. I mean, not really. Or do we?"



The Sassafras twins didn't know what to think. They had met the person that was soon to be walking through the basement door with their uncle multiple times, but as far as that person recalled, she had never met the twins before. And this fact was downright confusing to the twelve-year-olds.

The twins began mulling over the events that had brought them to this place. About a month ago, Blaine and Tracey had finished up their school year. They had both gotten straight A's—well almost. They had both gotten A's in every subject except science. They had failed that subject. And because of that, their parents had sent them to their Uncle Cecil's house for the summer instead of their desired summer destination: Camp Zip Fire, where all their friends were now.

As Cecil was a pseudo-famous research scientist, the plan was for him to immerse the children in science all summer long. Immerse them he had, but it was not the boring punishment the twins had expected. Uncle Cecil had exposed them to a world of scientific adventures that were beyond their wildest dreams. The adventures they had lived through were much better than anything they could have experienced at Camp Zip Fire!

Uncle Cecil, along with his prairie dog lab assistant, President Lincoln, had invented invisible zip lines that could be ridden at the speed of light to any destination on the planet. When Uncle Cecil had first proposed invisible zip-line travel, the twins had scoffed at the lunacy of the idea. But now, only a month in, Blaine and Tracey Sassafras were one hundred percent believing, science-loving, adventure-seeking, invisible-zip-line-riding experts. They had been to over thirty different locations around the world! The twists and turns of the learning had been altogether fulfilling. Their knowledge of science had increased, and so had their level of maturity and their tenacity.

At all of the worldwide locations, a local expert would help them study the prescribed scientific topics. Out of all the

cool and amazing science-loving people they had met, Summer Beach was the twin's favorite. They had first run into her in her underground lab in Alaska while studying zoology. Summer had the enthusiasm and vigor of a classroom full of excited children, and her overflowing joy was infectious.

While studying anatomy, the Sassafras had gotten the opportunity to zip down to her lab again. This time, they had been chased by robot squirrels, but Summer had helped them escape. On their third leg, Summer had used the invisible zip lines to meet the twins in Paris to share a few different botanical topics. Then, just a few days ago, while studying earth science, Blaine and Tracey had zipped to Alaska again. Instead of visiting the lab, they had a blast joining the "Paintball Jamboree" with Summer and some of her friends.

However, the twins' last meeting with Summer Beach had been heartbreaking. Yesterday, right here in Uncle Cecil's neighborhood, Blaine and Tracey had victoriously returned after successfully completing the subject of earth science. To their surprise, they had seen Summer walking down the sidewalk. When they approached her, they saw she was not at all herself. The female scientist's expression was joyless and blank. She couldn't remember anything, including her own name.

After seeing his old classmate in that state, Cecil had quickly concluded that Summer Beach's memory had been wiped clean. Luckily, Cecil and Summer had previously worked together on an experimental project where they had transferred the contents of their brains into metal canisters in hopes that they could literally share their thoughts with others. Cecil had been fairly certain that the canister with the contents of Summer's memories was somewhere in the basement. The only problem was that Cecil Sassafras had one of the most disorganized basement labs in the entire world.

To their immense joy, after hours of painstakingly going

through the heaps and piles in the basement, the two Sassafras children found the sought-after canister. It had been lodged in the far back corner of an old file cabinet—the one that Blaine and Tracey were sitting on at this very moment.

The Sassafrases didn't know how or why Summer's memory had been erased. They had their suspicions. The twins strongly suspected it to be the work of the Man With No Eyebrows. He was the tenacious and mysterious villain who had followed Blaine and Tracey all over the world trying to thwart their science learning.

Right now, however, the twins were not thinking about him. Right now, they were nervous and excited, thinking about meeting Summer Beach for the sixth time, but sort of for the first time.

Summer was staying next door with a kind old lady named Mrs. Pascapali. When the twins had found the canister, Cecil had rushed next door to give his old friend her memory back. Blaine and Tracey had waited patiently in the basement at 1104 North Pecan Street, hoping and praying that whatever procedure was happening over at 1106 was going well.

Their uncle had called and told them in excitement that the transfer of her memory from the canister had been a complete success. However, the memories the canister contained did not include anything that had happened this summer. So, in effect, it was like Summer Beach had never met Blaine and Tracey.

Blaine nervously wrung his hands. Tracey tapped her toes at a fast pace. How was this introduction going to go? Would Summer still be sort of flat and blank? Or would she be like her old self?

The twins perked up. They could now hear footsteps on the other side of the basement door. All at once, the door swung open, and a woman with frizzy blonde hair and white lab coat burst through the frame. It was Summer, and she was squealing. The scientist ran down the stairs with outstretched arms, hit the ground, did a cartwheel, and then giddily sprang toward the

twelve-year-olds.

“Blaine and Tracey Sassafras!” she happily bubbled through a wide smile. “It is so nice to finally meet you two! Your uncle has told me so much about you little cuties!”

Summer wrapped her arms around both twins, pulled them from their seats on the file cabinet, and swept them up into a laughing happy jumping dancing hug from which neither of the children could have escaped, even if they had wanted to, which they didn't.

“Oh, hooray, hooray, hooray,” the scientist giggled. “There is so much for us to talk about, learn, and catch up on! I know you've met me, but I've never met you, and I am so looking forward to getting to know you pumpkins all over again!”

The Sassafras twins both smiled. Summer Beach was definitely herself again.

More footsteps could be heard at the basement door. The twins looked just in time to see their crazy Uncle Cecil come tumbling down the staircase. They weren't sure if his downward movement was intentional or accidental, but regardless, the redheaded scientist landed firmly on his feet. Just like Summer, he bounded over toward the twins with outstretched arms, but Cecil stopped just short of joining the dance hug.

“Train! Blaisey! We did it! We got Summer her memory back! Isn't it just fabulerrific?? She's totally herself again! Now you three can get reacquainted and everything can keep moving forward! Or, to be more precise: quickly backwards then back forward and beyond! Isn't that terrifitabulous news?”

It is terrific, Blaine thought.

Yes, it is fabulous, Tracey silently agreed.

The twins were both happy and relieved that their favorite local expert was okay. They were both brimming over with excitement about starting the adventures of a new science subject.

Summer eventually let the twins out of the hug, but she didn't completely let go of them. She held one of each of their hands and looked at them like she had known them forever, which she kind of had and kind of hadn't.

"So, tell me how it works," she said with sparkling eyes. "Tell me how you use invisible zip lines to study science!"

"You mean you don't know how the zip lines work?" Tracey asked in disbelief.

"Nope, I sure don't," Summer smiled. "My current memory bank ends right at the point where your study . . . oh my, I mean . . . uh, studious . . . yes, studious, uncle told me about the idea. But I don't know all the ins and outs of how it works."

The twins looked at Uncle Cecil. His face showed that he had no idea Summer had a little crush on him. He nodded his head and made a gesture imploring them to proceed with the explanation of how the zip lines worked.

Being the older sibling by five minutes and fourteen seconds, Blaine jumped in first. "All you need to travel on the invisible zip lines is a harness and a specially designed three-ringed carabiner. The first ring on the carabiner is for longitude coordinates, the second ring is for latitude coordinates, and the third locks the carabiner securely to the lines."

"Along with the carabiners, we both have smart phones," Tracey continued. "We also have an app on our phones called the LINLOC app, which is short for 'Line Locations.' It gives us the longitude and latitude coordinates for each location, along with the topics that we are supposed to study."

"Plus, it gives us the name of a local expert who will help us study those topics," Blaine chimed in.

Tracey nodded and smiled. "You have been our local expert four times," she said to Summer.

The female scientist put her hand over her mouth in

amazement. “I have? Am I good at it?”

“We think you are the best,” the twins said in unison.

“Oh, my, how kind of you two.” Summer giggled.

Tracey laughed, also, and then continued explaining. “We also have another very important app on our phones called the SCIDAT app, which stands for ‘Scientific Data.’ We use this application to text in everything we have learned about each topic. After we are finished, we push send and all that data arrives electronically at Uncle Cecil’s data screen, which is right over there.”

Tracey pointed to the other side of the basement where a screen was fixed to the wall, just above a cluttered computer desk. “That way, Uncle Cecil can keep track of everything we are learning.”

“We have to send pictures, too,” Blaine added. “So, our smartphones have high resolution cameras, as well as a couple more apps that can help us with the needed images. One is the archive app, which has a huge library of scientific pictures that we can flip through and choose one to send. The second is the microscope app, which you uploaded for us in your lab in Alaska. It can magnify an image up to a million times.”

Summer again put her hand over her mouth and giggled. Instead of being weirded out by the fact that she had interactions with the twins she didn’t remember, she seemed to think it was fun to learn about the invisible zip lines all over again.

“The zip lines are designed to land us as close to our local experts as possible without being detected,” Tracey shared. “We are supposed to keep their existence a secret. The only people that know about them are you, a few of your friends in Alaska, Uncle Cecil, President Lincoln, us, and quite possibly the entire Swiss Secret Service.”

“And the Man With No Eyebrows,” Blaine blurted out.

“The Man With No Eyebrows?” Summer asked.

Blaine nodded. “Yep, he is this man that doesn’t have any eyebrows. He is always showing up at our locations around the world.”

“How does he do that?” the female scientist asked, somewhat alarmed. “Does he travel on the zip lines too?”

“We think so.” Tracey nodded gravely. “We think he has his own specially designed three-ringed carabiner, and that somehow he is able to see all our LINLOC coordinates. He just keeps appearing at different locations trying to stop us from learning about science.”

Suddenly, Tracey stopped. Her face looked like a light bulb had just been turned on in her brain. “Hey, that reminds me about—”

“What? The Taser app?” Blaine exclaimed.

Tracey shook her head “no,” but before she could respond Summer asked, “The Taser app?”

“Oh, yes, the Taser app!” Blaine smiled. “Uncle Cecil and President Lincoln added this app to our phones so we can protect ourselves against the Man With No Eyebrows if he shows up and threatens us.”

Tracey made a mental note to tell Uncle Cecil about the thing she had almost said before she was interrupted by her brother.

Blaine paused to throw up one eyebrow and nod his head slightly in a borderline cocky way. “But so far he hasn’t been able to stop us. We have now made it successfully through four subjects: zoology, anatomy, botany, and earth science.”

### *On to Geology*

“Every time we are finished, we zip back here to Uncle Cecil’s basement at 1104 North Pecan Street, where we get a customized review from Linc Dawg Productions about what we have already