

CHAPTER ONE

Sidney Gets Checked!

Da Vinci Academy for the Gifted and Talented is one of those schools that's always getting experimented on. This year's major experiment was what Mrs. Maxwell, our principal (and a good lady), called the Independent Learning Project. Any kid who wanted to get extra AP credit could pick a subject, learn it on his or her own, and get the credit. The catch was that you had to convince a teacher that you really had something going on to begin the project and, after you learned whatever it was you had volunteered for, that you knew the subject well enough to deserve the extra credit. It sounded like too much work to me.

"But you will think about it, won't you, Alexander?" Mrs. Maxwell asked me.

"Yes, ma'am."

I was going to think about it, but if I could get out of it I knew I would. Anyway, a lot of kids were all gaga over the program (that's why they're at Da Vinci), and there were kids walking around school all day talking about how they were going to learn everything from Plant Biology to String Theory. It actually tired me out just hearing them.

We had basketball practice after school, and when I got home Mom was on the floor, stretching. I hoped it didn't mean she hadn't made anything for supper.

"You got a phone call," she said, reaching over to touch the heels of her hands to her toes.

"What are we having for supper?"

"I thought we could order out for Chinese food," Mom said. "Something to go along with my new job. There's a salad in the fridge if you need something right now."

"You're going to work in a Chinese restaurant?"

"Marc got me a television spot," Mom said. "They're hiring me on the strength of my demo. I don't even have to audition."

"What are you going to be doing?" I had to ask because I liked Mom working on television but I didn't want her doing underwear commercials or anything else that was sexy.