

Museum Mystery

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Chapter 1

Out of Focus

Tick, tick, tick. Ella sat at her desk and stared at the clock on the classroom wall. It was Friday afternoon, and the air in the classroom was *stifling*. She couldn't wait for the clock to show 3 pm, so that she could go home and jump into the refreshing cool water of the spa pool with her brothers.

Around her, all Ella's classmates were silently reading their library books. At the front of the room, her teacher, Mr Snell, was reading his library book. At least, that's what Ella *thought* he was doing, but he seemed to know she *wasn't* concentrating, because he suddenly looked up at her and raised an eyebrow. It was his silent way of asking her to focus.



Ella looked down at the graphic novel lying open on her desk. RED (Read Every Day) had been going for fifteen minutes, and she hadn't even read one page. It was always the same – she just couldn't focus. Whenever she looked at words on a page, her mind would start thinking of a million different things. Like what her pet rabbit had been doing at home all day, or who she was going to invite to her birthday sleepover. Sometimes she thought about how much she loved dance class. Sometimes she just thought about the Moon and the stars, and if a spaceship would ever visit Earth.

It was the same whenever she had to write something, or give a presentation to the class. No matter how hard she tried, she just *couldn't* make her brain stay still long enough to focus on what she wanted to say, or write, or read.

Ella turned the next page in her book loudly, so that Mr Snell would hear it and think she was reading. Then she kept her head down until ten more minutes had passed and Mr Snell announced RED was over for the day.

“Take out your tablets, please,” he said, “and open your writing folder. In it, you’ll find the conservation report you wrote on a native animal, and you’ll see that I’ve made some comments.”

Mr Snell looked at Ella's friend Kenji. "Have you *actually* helped to put tags on saltwater crocodiles, Kenji?" asked Mr Snell, raising his eyebrows in disbelief. "A report is generally considered to be a piece of *non-fiction* writing!"

Kenji laughed. So did everyone else. But Ella wasn't laughing when she looked at the comments Mr Snell had made on her report. They were the same as always: "Good effort on the few paragraphs, Ella, but the report isn't finished. Try to focus, so that you don't run out of time."

But before Ella had time to feel too sorry for herself, Mr Snell said he had something exciting to tell the class. He asked them to turn off their tablets and listen carefully.

"In two weeks' time, we'll be going on a school camp," he said.

There was a rumble of excitement, and everyone began whispering to each other.

"This year, we're not going to be in tents, or even anywhere rural. We're going on a city camp and will stay at School Lodge in Harford."



Harford was just over an hour away. Most families only went there if they wanted to buy something special, or to see a show. Mr Snell continued. "Each morning, we'll be going to the museum to learn about how they research and build their displays."

"Palaeontology displays?" asked Ella's friend Daisy, who wanted to be an archaeologist someday.

"I'm not sure if there will be dinosaur exhibits at the museum or not," replied Mr Snell. "I guess we'll find out."

"What are we going to do in the afternoons?" asked Ella.

"From Monday to Thursday, we'll be doing a different activity each day," said Mr Snell. "On Friday, we'll spend all day at the museum. So far, our afternoon activities include the city hydro pool, an indoor rock-climbing centre and a historic railway park. I'll know more next week."

Before anyone could ask another question, the end-of-school bell rang loudly in the corridor outside the classroom, and Mr Snell began collecting the class's tablets.

"Have a good weekend, everyone!" he said, as the class filed out of the door.

Chapter 2

Snap!

As Ella walked home from school, she felt so excited about the city camp that she forgot all about Mr Snell's comments on her animal report, and about not being able to focus at RED time. And as soon as she heard her brothers splashing about in the spa, all she could think about was hopping into the cool water!

She was just about to call out to them to leave some water in the pool when she spotted Nan's car parked outside the house.

"I didn't know you were coming to visit!" said Ella, as she ran inside and found Nan sitting at the kitchen table, talking to Mum.

Nan gave Ella an affectionate hug. "I didn't know either!" she said. "But it's university holidays, and I thought, why not surprise you all!"

Ella's nan was a physics professor at the university, three hours' drive away, and Ella would sometimes go to her place for a break in the school holidays.

"How was class today?" Mum asked Ella.

"We're going on camp!" replied Ella. "To Harford!"

"Oh," said Nan, "a city camp! That's different."

Ella told Mum and Nan everything Mr Snell had said.



“And how was RED?” asked Mum.

Ella pulled a chair back from the table and collapsed into it, dramatically. “Same as always,” she complained.

Mum passed Ella a glass of lemon water. “Next month, we’re going to see the learning specialist your teacher recommended,” she reminded her. “Mr Snell thinks she can help.”

Ella sighed. “I *hope* so. We have to do so much reading and writing on our own this year, rather than in groups. It’s so hard to focus on silent reading and report writing! I don’t think my brain works like everyone else’s.”

“Snap!” said Nan, looking at Ella. “I was just the same. I could never focus on my reading and writing when I was at school, and I also found it difficult to concentrate when someone was explaining something to me. When I look back, I don’t think there was very much I *could* focus on!”

Ella nodded. “That’s *exactly* what it’s like for me!” she said.

“I must have been quite imaginative, though,” added Nan, “because my mind would wander in all sorts of rather interesting directions.”

“But you’re a university professor, Nan,” said Ella. “So you must have been brilliant at schoolwork.”