

# Chapter 1

## Without Warning

Jack sat in the fourth row staring blankly out of the third floor window of his high school. His Science teacher rambled on about something Jack had very little interest in. He hardly ever paid attention anyway.

The school was big and tiring. By the time Jack got to his last class, he was too tired to listen anymore. It was a Christian school, which was good because sometimes Jack definitely felt like he needed some help.

Jack sported jeans, a black sweatshirt, and a red t-shirt underneath. He had short, black hair and grayish-blue eyes. Staring out the window, he could see birds flying and the school's flag blowing in what little wind there was. He wished he could be outside. The clock on the wall said 45 more minutes.

Jack twiddled his thumbs anxiously now, almost willing the bell to ring. He tried to find something to pass the time, but all he had was his football – and he felt fairly sure that Mr. Samuels would not approve of him throwing the ball around in class.

Jack glanced back out the window. The next thing he knew, the bell rang. He snatched up his book bag and headed for the door – then realized the bell did not signal the end of class. It was an announcement.

“Teachers...” the principal's voice boomed, “there is an unidentified group of people headed for the front entrance. Please keep your students inside the classroom until I have identified this group.” The school was located in a very rough section of the city, and the security system monitoring all the entrances was setup to catch would-be intruders.

Several minutes passed. Eventually, Mr. Samuels decided to continue the lesson. The principal never came back onto the intercom, and the tension in the classroom got heavier and heavier. Mr. Samuels appeared to grow uneasy. Without being noticed, Jack leaned over to his best friend Sean to express his uneasiness.

“What do you think is going on?” Jack whispered.

“I don't know,” Sean replied, shaking his blonde hair from his eyes. “Maybe it's...”

The bell rang once again, followed immediately by the principal's voice.

“Teachers – evacuate!” These were the only two words that came out of the speaker hanging on the classroom wall. Jack could tell that the principal was almost out of breath. It was not a good sign.

Mr. Samuels reacted quickly.

“C’mon! You heard the announcement! Let’s go! Get up!” he said, hustling them along. Students from all the classrooms invaded the hallway. Above the noise and clamor, Jack could hear yelling distinctly coming from the school office and lobby. He really wanted to know what was going on down there, but Mr. Samuels would not have it. It was almost like the Science teacher knew what was going on, and wanted to protect his students.

Jack stopped in the middle of the hallway for an instant, then tried to make his way against the flow of students. Mr. Samuels stopped him.

“No, Jack – you’ve got to get out of the school!”

Jack hesitated with the decision, but turned and quickly caught up with Sean and the rest of his classmates as they headed down the hallway toward the stairwell. That’s when the gunshots rang out from the opposite end of the hallway. Until that moment, no one knew why they’d been asked to evacuate their classrooms – but now the reason was clear.

Where students were once laughing about the interruption to the school day, panic erupted. Jack felt an intense rush of adrenaline – and he was even more anxious to get outside. He stayed by Sean’s side, and they were joined by another couple as they made their way down the crowded hallway and into the stairwell. Then the unthinkable happened.

Jack glanced at the bottom of the stairs and watched in terror as an unfamiliar figure wearing a black armband stopped some of the fleeing students and screamed “Do you believe in God?” The face of the intruder was covered by a strange-looking device which Jack instantly recognized as a gas mask. It meant the intruders not only had guns but also intended to use some kind of toxic gas in the building.

Thinking quickly, Jack grabbed Sean’s arm and pulled him back up the stairs away from the danger. The other couple noticed the two best friends reversing direction and decided to follow. Hoping that none of the intruders had seen their escape, the four quickly found an unlocked door on the second floor and rushed inside the darkened room.

Jack was running on instinct now. He quickly locked the door and prayed they would not be found. The couple ran immediately to the windows chattering nervously while looking for some way of escape. Sean fell to his knees as if the wind had been knocked out of him. They were all dazed and breathing heavily...and praying they could somehow get to the outside.

**To be continued...**