

Chapter 2

Into the Darkness

“Sssshhh!” Jack hissed to his companions, with all of his senses trained on the hallway just outside the classroom door. He could hear one of the Raiders walking down the hallway – and he was sure the nervous chattering could be heard throughout the entire school. They waited in silence for what seemed like an eternity, but nothing happened.

Jack felt a hand on his shoulder and spun around to see Mr. Samuels – the teacher who had instructed him to leave the building.

“Where’d you come from?” Jack asked rather excitedly.

“Calm down...” Mr. Samuels began. “I’ve been hiding out here...trying to get reception on my cell phone.”

“No success?” Jack asked. Before Mr. Samuels could answer, Jack began pacing back and forth nervously.

“None at all...”

“The exit doors will be guarded...the windows will probably be blocked...the stairways will be patrolled...the elevators inoperable...” Jack muttered to himself.

“Listen...” Mr. Samuels continued in a whisper, “we’ve all got to calm down!” He noticed the younger couple standing by the window, but didn’t quite recognize their faces. “You two aren’t in my classes...what are your names?”

“I’m Ashley...” the girl responded.

“I’m Aaron...” the boy said nervously.

“The flagpole!!” Jack shouted.

“Be quiet...” Sean whispered. He had taken Jack’s place at the classroom door, listening intently for anyone walking down the hallway.

“What about the flagpole?” asked Mr. Samuels.

“The flagpole stands very close the school building,” Jack continued. “If we can get down to the second floor, we might be able to climb through a window and slide down the pole.”

“Are you insane?” Ashley complained. “I’m afraid of heights...”

“You got a better idea?” Sean interrupted.

“Let’s just take this one step at a time,” said Mr. Samuels. “The flagpole might be the only way out of here...”

“Then all we need is a way down to the second floor...” Jack added.

There was a moment of silence as each member of the small group thought about the various ways of getting to the floor below.

“I think we can climb down the outside of the building...” Sean exclaimed.

“What!? No way!” Ashley refused to even think about it.

“I’m talking about from one window ledge to another...”

“Look...she’s already said she’s afraid of heights!” Aaron interrupted.

There was another awkward pause.

“Maybe we should have two groups...” Mr. Samuels spoke. “If we split into two groups, that increases the chances someone will be able to get help.” The students in the room stared in disbelief at the teacher.

“You’re not serious...” Sean interrupted the silence.

“I’ll stay here and try to get a signal on my cell phone,” Mr. Samuels answered. The small group exchanged arguments back and forth about the plan, but Mr. Samuels would have it no other way.

Jack opened the classroom door only a thin crack. He carefully surveyed the hallway then signaled that it appeared safe for everyone to exit the classroom. The four students split into two groups – Ashley and Aaron went one way down the hall ... Jack and Sean went the other.

“Where are we going?” Sean asked quietly.

“We’ve got to find a window on this side of the building,” Jack replied hastily. His answers were quick and harsh, most likely from the rush of adrenaline. The pair searched a few rooms on the back side of the building before happening upon one window that was partially hidden by a group of tall trees.

Jack slowly pushed open the window, careful to not make any noise that might call attention to what the boys were doing. Every sound seemed to echo through the building. He leaned out the window to check the distance between floors.

“What is it, Jack? What do you see?”

“This is the place!” Jack whispered excitedly. “The second floor window is open. We just need to find a way down there...”

Jack moved and allowed Sean to take a look out the window. The second floor looked to be quite a distance down – and neither of them liked the

prospect of falling more than two stories by some accident. Suddenly, Jack had an idea.

“Take off your sweatshirt!” he said.

“What?”

“Take off your sweatshirt!” Jack repeated.

They’d been best friends forever, and Sean rarely questioned Jack’s ideas – no matter how ridiculous they sounded. Sean pulled off his sweatshirt and handed it to Jack. He noticed that Jack had also removed his own sweatshirt, and was now hurriedly tying them together into some kind of a cord.

“You think that’s going to hold?” Sean asked.

“We’ll find out...”

Jack hooked the hood of Sean’s sweatshirt to the lock on the window, then slowly climbed out the window and lowered himself down – carefully hanging onto the sleeves of his sweatshirt. His feet had very little grip, and he had to rely mostly on arm strength. He lowered himself as far as he could, but his feet did not reach the ledge on the second floor.

Having no strength in his arms to pull himself back up, Jack looked down, took a deep breath, aimed his feet as much toward the ledge as he could, and let go ... taking a leap of faith to the ledge below.

To be continued...