

# Chapter 3

## Pieces of the Puzzle

As soon as Jack landed on the second floor ledge, he grabbed for anything that would keep him from falling. It was a good thing the second floor window was open because it allowed him to grab the inside of the window frame and pull himself into the classroom.

Suddenly, the thought occurred to him that the second floor classroom might be monitored by the invaders. He instinctively crouched low to the floor and surveyed the room. It was nothing but empty rows of chairs and a teacher's desk. The strange words on the wall told him this was the Foreign Languages classroom.

Jack stuck his head back out the window and motioned to Sean – who was waiting nervously for his turn to climb down the makeshift cord. This time Jack was there to help guide his friend into the second floor window.

“I am NOT doing that again!” Sean gasped.

“We couldn't even if we wanted to...” Jack replied. Having no way to retrieve them, the boys had to leave the sweatshirts hanging from the third floor window. Both boys were wearing t-shirts – and Jack's was a bright red. There was a good chance the invaders would notice the third floor window. If that didn't happen, they might notice Jack's red t-shirt.

Jack once again opened the door just a crack and checked the hallway outside the classroom. The hallway seemed clear, and the boys crept out and made their way down the hall toward the stairwell.

As they neared one of the main hallway intersections, Jack could hear what seemed like two strange voices just around the corner. He quickly pulled Sean into a dark classroom.

“What are...” Sean protested.

“Sshhhhh!” Jack whispered, covering Sean's mouth with his hand. The two boys waited in the darkness as the strange voices got closer and closer. They waited uneasily for the invaders to pass. As they did, Jack got his first look at the masked figures.

Judging by their size alone, both invaders appeared to be much older than high school age. They were dressed partially in military camouflage – but mostly like their clothing had been pieced together at a yard sale. Jack also noticed that these two were not carrying guns – but they were not without weapons. Each man had at least four or five grenades attached to his belt.

After the two masked men disappeared down the opposite end of the hallway, Jack and Sean could breathe again. They did not know when the next patrol would pass this way again.

“We need to split up!” Jack whispered.

“Wha...” Sean grimaced. “You’ve got to be kidding ... after what we just saw?!”

“You heard what Mr. Samuels said,” Jack explained. “There’s a better chance of one of us getting out if we split up.” He paused. “You go down the stairs to the rear lobby ... and I’ll go to the flagpole.”

“I don’t know...” Sean began, but Jack had already disappeared down the hallway. Sean decided to creep slowly toward the stairs. Then he carefully crept down the stairs, one step at a time, listening intently for any movement in any direction. When he reached the bottom of the stairs, he pressed his back against the wall and poked his head out into the rear lobby.

Sean scanned the lobby and noticed there were very few places to hide. It seemed like a vast open space – and it was not something he wanted to face at that moment.

Meanwhile, Jack slowly made his way toward the flagpole on the front side of the school. He faced a long hallway with darkened classrooms on either side. Some of the doors were open, and others were closed. Jack wondered if he’d come face to face with an invader with each careful step.

As he neared another main intersection of hallways, Jack could hear what sounded like a male voice and female crying. He quickly pressed up against the wall and listened in to the conversation.

“Do you believe in God?” the male voice demanded.

“Please d-d-don’t hurt me...” replied the girl between sobs, and Jack recognized her voice almost immediately. It was Ashley – the girl he’d met earlier in the third floor classroom.

“Do you believe in God?” the male said again, this time even more irritated.

“Just take her to the gym!” said a second male voice. “She’s not answering!”

Jack listened as the two invaders dragged Ashley away. If they were taking her to the gymnasium, they’d have to go down the stairs at the other end of the hall – and that’s where he’d just left Sean.

Jack would have to act quickly if he was going to help Sean.

**To be continued...**