

# Chapter 4

## Fistful of Decisions

Jack knew he had to do something. The masked invader was dragging Ashley to the gymnasium, and Sean’s hiding place was directly in the path to his destination. If Jack didn’t do something, there would be two more people captured.

Knowing he would feel guilty if he allowed all this to happen, Jack crept noiselessly down the hallway, keeping a constant eye on the two men dragging Ashley away. He was desperately hoping for some kind of rescue idea to come to him.

Ashley was no longer screaming. She was now so scared that she could barely utter a sound. This was only making her captor’s job easier.

Jack knew time was running out. The invaders were now only a few short feet away from the stairwell – a few steps away from discovering Sean. The only thing he could think of was creating some kind of diversion.

He silently opened one of the classroom doors, slammed it shut, then quickly dashed out of sight. The masked man stopped in his tracks and turned to look in Jack’s direction. Since Ashley’s hands and feet had been tied, he felt confident enough to leave her and carefully backtrack to check out the disturbance.

Meanwhile, Jack had quickly slipped through a few connected rooms. The classrooms on this hallway were his home turf – so he knew all the shortcuts. He re-entered the hallway within a few feet from Ashley, and carefully checked down the hallway to make sure the masked man was nowhere in sight.

“Ashley!” Jack whispered.

The stunned female turned her head, and Jack could see the tears streaming down her face. When she finally recognized him, Jack noticed a slight smile on her face.

“Jack!” she whispered back.

“Ssshhhhh!! Listen...” Jack began untying her hands and feet. “You need to get out of here. I need you to go down those stairs,” he nodded toward the stairwell beside them, “and tell Sean that they’re keeping the students in the gym.” Jack glanced back down the hallway. “Can you do that for me?”

Ashley nodded as Jack finished untying her hands.

“Go...quickly!” Jack gently pushed her towards the doorway, and Ashley disappeared down the stairwell almost immediately.

He once again glanced down the hallway, and nearly gasped at seeing the figure of the masked man making his way back toward where Ashley had been. Jack rolled into the darkened classroom and hurriedly backtracked through his shortcut. In less than a minute, he and the masked invader had once again traded places.

The roar of anger echoed back through the hallway – and Jack knew the invader had discovered Ashley was not where he’d left her. In normal circumstances, Jack might be celebrating this little victory, but there was no time for that now. He started back toward the flagpole.

In another part of the school, Sean had managed to keep hidden from patrols. He’d seen only three raiders since moving down to the first floor. He carefully moved toward the glass doors that led to freedom. He managed to make it to within a few feet of these doors when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Sean!”

He jerked around to see who had stopped him, and noticed a friendly face. It was Ashley.

“Don’t scare me like that!” he shot back.

“Jack wanted me to tell you they’re holding the students in the gym...”

“You saw Jack?”

“Yeah...” she began. “He saved me from a raider!”

“He’s all right, then?”

“He’s sneaking around the second floor...” Ashley paused. “Sean, what are you going to do?”

Sean stared at the glass doors that were only a few feet away. Within seconds, they could get out of the building and make their way to safety – and that would be the end of it. Then he pictured some of the faces of his friends, other students who were held captive or worse. Sean gritted his teeth at the thought.

“I’m going to help them!” he whispered.

“You’re sure?” she asked.

“Absolutely!”

“Then I’m going, too...” Ashley volunteered.

Sean and Ashley headed for the gym being very careful not to be seen. For some reason, there were no patrols in the hallways. While this made it easier for the pair to get to the gym, it also gave Sean a very uneasy feeling.

All the doors to the gymnasium had been propped open, and Sean could see most of the students were sitting on the floor. Most of them looked to be tied up – some with duct tape, and others with some kind of cord. There seemed to be only three raiders patrolling the entire gym, but all three were huddled at the far end.

Sean slowly crawled through the doorway to the nearest students. He untied them, being careful to not attract attention. Many of the students around them helped to shield Sean from the view of the raiders. One by one, Sean untied as many prisoners as he could.

Back on the second floor, Jack crept down the hallway toward the classroom he knew would overlook the flagpole. Suddenly, he heard what seemed like a mass of voices coming down the hallway in front of him.

Jack focused his eyes through the darkness and recognized a number of masked figures angrily making their way toward him. He searched for a classroom to quickly duck into, but this time it was several feet away. He dashed forward clearly visible to the oncoming mob – and reached out for the doorknob.

**To be continued...**