

JNJ
INVESTIGATION
SERVICE

A JNJ INVESTIGATION SERVICE
STORY

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Synopsis:

Three High school boy's paths collided when they are witnesses to a subway murder. When things take an unexpected turn in the investigation, their path's meet again. The boys decided to join forces and solve the case. They must face the opposition of the murderer and the police department in pursuit of justice. Their investigation takes them inside the Oakley Police Department, the Atlanta subway, and into the depths of an abandoned building. As they begin to unravel the origins of the crime, the boys soon rediscover theirs in an epic tale of suspense, courage, faith, and love.

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Chapter 1: A Death in Darkness

The final call was given for the subway car to 9th street. Business men gathered their essentials, women their belongings, and a teenager his backpack. His name was Jordan. He glanced at his watch, threw back his messy, black hair, and dashed to the train. His backpack bounced loosely against his body. When he was inside, he grabbed a dangling handle from the ceiling to support himself. On the opposite side of him was Jason, quietly reading the comics from a newspaper. Jason didn't usually read the paper, but did appreciate the comic section when he got a chance. A voice instructed its passengers to seat themselves for the ride, and relayed the travel time and a warm greeting from their company. As the doors closed, a man slipped between them and found his place in a seat next to Jordan. Nathan's attire would have heavily clashed with the majority had it not been early in the morning when many white collar workers took the subway. Nathan's button up dress shirt and complementary pants fit right in with several other men.

Jordan looked around and noticed Nathan. He tried to strike up a conversation when something else caught his eye. If it weren't for his name tag, Jordan would have thought this man were peculiar to the suited men next to Nathan. It was then that Jordan noticed a slight tremor in the man's left hand. He was sitting with his back to the dividing door between the subway cars and on his lap lied a briefcase. It was rectangular and had a four-digit pad lock. In its center was a capital "E". Jordan tried to make eye contact with the man, but found that he couldn't. However, eye contact found its way to Jordan. Startled by each other's inquisitiveness, Jordan looked at his watch and Nathan slouched over his phone.

Meanwhile Jason found the subway car much more interesting than his comics. He smiled at an older woman and greeted the man next to him. He looked to the other side of him to do the same but only saw a window. Jason noticed a spark in one of the lights in the subway tunnel. He strained to look back at what become of it, but they had sped past it. As Jason turned into a more comfortable position, he sighted another light reciprocate the previous by sparking, then shattering its glass capsule. Jason's peripheral vision drew his gaze back into the subway car where the light above him flickered. As Jason watched the hypnotizing spectacle, Jordan and Nathan noticed the light above Jason. The commotion inside the light began to represent itself with a high pitch scream that grew louder and louder. Several others looked about as all three boys stared at the light. Some people adjusted their ties or unnecessarily coughed to ignore the awkward gazes of the three spectators. Just when they thought the light was going to blow it stopped, as did the boy's attention to it. That's when they all saw each other.

"I was expecting something more," Jason joked.

“It most certainly was out of the ordinary,” Jordan responded.

“Should we alert someone about their janky lights?” Nathan asked.

While Jason laughed at the word janky, Jordan got up out of his seat to find an attendant. As he searched, he remembered the man with the shaky hand. Jordan didn’t believe the coincidence to be that at all, believing the man must have had something to do with it. Suspecting something amiss, Jordan found the man and opened his mouth only to find a lack of words when his eye sight went dark. A unison exclamation rang out as Jordan realized it wasn’t just him who was now unable to see. A storm of thoughts and a rush of adrenaline filled Jordan as he lunged at the man only to come up short when he heard a gunshot. He yanked his head around to the opposite side of the train, then back to the man. Jordan was bumped repeatedly by other blind men and women who had risen from their seats aimlessly seeking safety. Jordan tried to master his emotions, but could not find how when what dictates his sense of control was temporarily disabled. He couldn’t see. Man’s stability on earth also worked against him when the subway car’s brakes slowly but dramatically brought their subway car to a halt, sending Jordan to the ground along with many others. The sound of screams, brakes, and people all were combined into one large chaos.

When the subway came to a stop, so did much of the pandemonium. Back up lights dimly lit the room enough where Jordan could regain his footing. Nathan was next to Jordan, who had also made an attempt at the man with the shaky hand. When they found him, they noticed he was in as much shock as every other individual and by far had no clue on what happened.

Nathan looked at Jordan.

“He couldn’t have fired the shot.”

Jordan somewhat acknowledge this point as both of them turned around to where Jason had been sitting. He had fallen from his seat, lying with his legs stretched out and torso angled incongruously on top of a bleeding man. Out of the three of them, Jason was in the most shock, but managed to give a disastrous verdict as he felt the man’s pulse.

“He’s dead.”

Chapter 2: An Introduction to The Three

Jordan took another sip of his soda. It wasn't nearly as satisfying as he wanted it to be. The carbonation had died out, much like his enjoyment of the basketball party. Jordan Philip was the superstar of a 5A team that marched into the state playoffs and won. He returned to school and was the hottest topic at the lunch table. Now he sat on a Laverty's, wooden stool, watching his friends attempt conversations with girls that didn't involve alternative motives. This made him laugh, which ignited his enjoyment level.

"Hey Jordan, come outside and teach these nubes how to play some real b-ball!"

Jordan ignored his comment, hoping that he didn't care enough to say it twice. A tap on the shoulder was yet another disappointment to Jordan.

"Did you hear me bro?" asked Josh, the team's starting center.

"I did. I'm not feeling up to it."

Out of all of Jordan's basketball teammates, Josh was the only one that consistently thought of others. His thought dictated his action as he pulled up a twin stool next to Jordan's.

"What's up man?"

Jordan looked around the room. There were so many things happening with so much detail, but all Jordan saw was an emptiness that resided in each individual.

"What is the point of these parties," asked Jordan.

"To have fun obviously," Josh said.

"Having fun is not bad though. Fun makes us happy," Jordan reasoned aloud.

"I'm not sure where you are going with this Jordan."

"If fun is not bad, then why do I feel guilty for trying to have it? Every day I wake up trying to find what is going to be fun, because that makes me happy. The thing is after following that agenda to a T, I feel

not only robotic, but pointless. This lifestyle has revealed to me that there is something in life I'm missing. There's another agenda, and it's way better than the one I'm currently living by."

Josh smiled. Jordan scoffed at his friend's reaction.

"Sounds like you need religion my friend."

Jordan depressingly sipped his drink and sat it down.

"Maybe I do."

Jordan left his stool and got in his car. He sat motionless, looking ahead toward the illuminated street. He wondered why this feeling had come upon him. Why couldn't he continue to live the lie? After all it was pretty enjoyable. Jordan concluded that this feeling wasn't an accident and wanted an answer to it. That investigative side was always a gift of his. Identifying a problem and finding the solution. Jordan made a choice that day. He got out a piece of scratch paper and wrote down the following question, all with the goal to sufficiently answer it,

"What will give satisfaction and purpose to my life?"

A gentle voice forced Jordan from his thoughts. It was a cop. Jordan looked at the wall with Letters that read, "Oakley Police Department". He knew that he was being called back for a series of questions in regards to the murder he had witnessed hours before.

"We'll see you in here sir," she said.

"Thank you."

He entered the room to find two officers who could have been copied and pasted from a detective clothing catalog. Jordan hoped he could find the answer to his question in there, but knew that was wishful thinking.

Jason Haverkamp sat in the police station as he awaited his call. He too had drifted into thought.

With a calligraphy pen in hand, Jason sat on a school bench. He was drawing a fireman saving a woman from a burning office building. While the picture seemed to tell a basic story, it spoke volumes to

Jason's desires. He wanted to be that fireman. A fireman who believed in a cause and fought for it. The idea made Jason smile and passionately pick up his drawing pace. His concentration was so intense that it took three honks from his grandma to get his attention.

"Jason, earth to Jason!"

Jason didn't even turn around to hear whom the sarcastic comment had come from. He knew it was his legal guardian, Norma Haverkamp. Jason felt the urge to laugh as he slid into her car out of pure love for her.

"Greetings from *The Brave New World*, where we clone people and make them hearing impaired," Jason teased.

"Now that's a reason! How long did it take you to think of that one?"

"I've been saving it for you since I finished the book in study hall," Jason answered.

The word "hall" seemed to act like a que because instantly Norma took her foot off the brake and moved it onto the gas. She checked her surroundings as she turned onto the paved road. It wasn't until this was completed that she continued her conversation.

"Now you aren't letting that book influence your worldview are you?"

Jason had been raised to be a Christian ever since his grandparents took legal custody of him. His grandma was religious about instilling the Christian religion in her son. She had an understanding of the Bible that most preachers would beg to have, and kill to speak it as well as she. Through this, Jason had made God his God, and not his grandmas. It's this that influenced his words.

"Of course not. Instead I study the ideas presented through a biblical worldview and then draw conclusions," Jason explained with several hand motions.

"That's my boy," Norma said with pride.

Jason had planned to start off his conversation on a positive note in order to get on Norma's good side. Jason had recently applied for an internship with the local police force and was accepted. However, Norma respected the police force but detested the idea of her son working for it. If one were to be frank about

the situation, one might say Norma was about as protective as a lion with the understanding of money and had five cubs worth five million each. This is how Jason described her to his grandpa, who frowned upon such metaphors, adding the cubs would be more like ten million each. None the less, Jason attempted to persuade her for the fifth time.

“Norma, I got accepted for an internship on the police force.”

Thankfully there were no dramatic “break stomps” or shock-induced heart attacks at the sound of these words. This was all thanks to a red light they had been stopped at.

“Jason Haverkamp, what did I say about the police force!”

“Sorry I forgot your file entitled ‘Mom’s anti-police thesis’, do you want...”

“I’m being serious!”

Jason whispered “the short version” under the guise of his breath and Norma’s voice. He was safe from that remark.

“Jason,” his grandma said sympathetically. “I know that you are interested in this line of service, but I’m responsible for your safety. I know that God has a plan for you outside of the police force.”

“But you tell me to follow my passions and that God has given us special talents that fit according to jobs he has designed us for. How come that doesn’t apply here?”

“Jason you have so many talents and that’s why you should continue to explore different areas of interest. The police force is just too dangerous for you to be a part of.”

Jason wanted to continue the debate but Norma said no. He didn’t want to be defiant, but he did want to be on the police force. Later that night Jason decided to reexamine his desires. Jason wanted to make a difference in the world. He wanted to help people. He knew that he could do this with the power of God behind him. However, he doubted himself and limited his talents to one occupation.

“Jason, please report to room 12,” a voice said through an intercom.

Jason had butterflies in his stomach walking through the hallways as he admired all the images of heroic individuals and their acts. He had been in the waiting room before, but never beyond the secretary desk. Despite the trauma of lying next to death, Jason was too optimistic to let his first police station tour be bogged down by a murder. It was this optimism that encouraged Jason multiple times to spin into the room and shout out a catch phrase. It was common sense that made him calmly enter the room.

Meanwhile Nathan Stone leaned against a wall with his arms crossed. Still in pain from a separate incident, Nathan Stone grabbed his jaw and gently joggled it around. He was in pain, but not solely on account of the murder.

Failure was not an option. Countless hours of intensity, frustration, reexamination, and eventual success were. Nathan Stone was on the verge of creating a gas engine. Nathan always had a passion for technology and a desire to understand it. He built his first pulley system at age five with spare parts, resurrected an Xbox at age 15, and was currently testing his limits outside his comfort zone. To prepare, Nathan had done months of research and referred to professionals. Despite this, the project had been an upward climb and was now reaching its climax.

Like an awkward joke that kills a light mood, Roger pushed the garage door open as if he were competing in a contest for loudest door slammer, disturbing Nathan's quite mood. Nathan, startled by the noise after hours of just his thoughts, hit his head on the carbonator and slid out from under the hydraulics.

"What Roger!"

Roger held his hand up as a peace offering.

"Didn't mean to startle you little bro. I just thought you would want to know that some of your friends are treating themselves to our pool."

Nathan curled his chest and circled his knees with his arms.

"Who is it this time?"

"This time?!?" Roger exclaimed. You mean this is not the first time?"

Nathan smirked, looked at the sink and walked its direction. He proceeded to talk to Roger but in a physical mSopher that suggested he were by himself.

“Since you went off to the military, I’ve become really popular. Oh and by me I mean this,” Nathan said as he brushed his finger through a stack of money. “Since you left people have been flocking to me to hang out at *my* pool, go out and use *my* money, give me a hug to reach into my back pocket and steal *my* buck.

Nathan paused and Roger saw it as an opportunity.

“You know, when I was in high school, people started coming up to me for the same reason. Sure people were talking to me, but I wasn’t popular, the money was.”

Nathan registered with those words, once again recognizing his brother’s presence physically.

“So I made a choice,” Roger continued. “I chose to not give them what they wanted. If they asked for money I would recommend a place to work, if they wanted to hangout I said let’s meet at the “Lord’s Diner”. I tried to get them to think outside themselves and realize that I wasn’t to be taken advantage of. Eventually those people went away, and those that remained to say high or tell me what time they would be at the Lord’s diner became my friends. There is a difference between being nice and being a pushover. You need to show those kids that you’re as sturdy as a stone wall.”

“I just want to have a legitimate friend.”

“Then go outside and find him.”

Nathan didn’t look up to his brother just because he was older, he did so because he cared. Nathan composed himself and walked to the pool. His friends had also helped themselves to some beer, and apparently weren’t shy about it either.

“Nathan, my man!” one man said stumbling forward.

Nathan ignored him and walked up to the pack leader Bob. Bob was an exception among this bunch of friend fakers, because he outwardly hated Nathan and would only invite himself to these events to spite him.

“You guys need to go.”

Bob stepped up to intimidate Nathan. He didn’t intimidate him as much as he masked Nathan’s much smaller shadow as the sun began its descendant.

“No, were fine, we were just getting to the champagne.”

Bob turned to leave when Nathan grabbed his arm. This sent a shock wave of silence through the entire party. If hearts beats could be heard by ear, Nathan’s would have sounded like a procession of drummers rapidly beating their instruments. Nathan had never dared to challenge Bob verbally, let alone physically. Bob was surprised to as he turned back around with a laugh.

“Is this your attempt at comedy,” Bob mocked.

As if inspired by David himself, Nathan stood his ground against his giant.

“Leave now Bob, I have had enough of you and your group.” Nathan slowly stared at each friend. “None of you are my friends, but you know that already. I’m telling you so you know that I know.”

People began exiting the pool hesitantly, some because they felt bad and others because they wanted to see the impending fight between Bob and Nathan. Nathan watched them leave while holding on to Bob’s arm. In this moment Bob saw his opportunity and punched Nathan square on the side of his face, sending him head first into the pool. Nathan heard inaudible noise above and assumed it was laughter and a triumphal speech from Bob. Nathan didn’t care though as he floated to the surface facing the bottom of the pool.

Nathan finished massaging his jaw just as an officer rounded the corner looking at a sheet of paper which Nathan believed to be the witness list. Nathan pushed off the wall with his hands tucked behind his back to level his feet with the ground and walked toward the officer.

All three boys left confident that they had given a correct testimony. What they were not confident in was the police’s interest in the crime. They seemed to lackadaisical, and more than an experienced officer should. All three found sleep to be impossible, especially Jordan who knew that something was amiss in the murder case.

Chapter 3: A Providential Meeting

A restless time in bed led to an upward climb for Jordan. He awoke to his twin brothers shouting at the TV screen as if it were responsible for their squad medic being shot down. Jordan only laughed, relating to the emotion Battle Cry 3 evoked in himself. He rolled over to the side of his bed, slipping his feet into his slippers, and got dressed indisposed. As he brushed his teeth, Jordan quizzed himself on the events that had occurred two weeks prior. Before he knew it, he was talking aloud.

“Lights start to flicker, then they go out. When the lights turn on, I’m on the floor, and... that guy...”

Jordan waved his arms vaguely, as if repeated motion would trigger his memory.

“Jason,” Jordan remarked with a charismatic wisp in his voice. Jordan contorted his face, surprised at the noise he’d produced. He cleared his throat and continued.

“Jason laid next to the dead body.”

It had never occurred to Jordan that Jason could have been the one responsible. The police didn’t either, electing to talk with Jason for the least amount of time. After all the police had already talked with him on multiple occasions in regards to his police application. Despite the murderer running free, Jordan was bothered most by the victim. Out of all the men in the subway car, he seemed like the most stereotypical good guy. He carried a casual church going look that permeated the most judgmental mind with thoughts of respect and comfort. His stance wasn’t threatening yet relaxed. His smile was genuine, even if it split unevenly on the right side of his face. Why did a man like this have to die?

Jordan checked his phone to see if the police station had called him back. They hadn’t, so Jordan decided to force them to talk with them the best way he knew how, face to face. He had coincidentally walked by his brothers, who were commanding their player to point a gun at an enemies’ head.

“I guess that’s another way of doing it,” Jordan joked. “it might be the only way to get them to talk to me.”

Jordan glanced at the police station hours to provide some justification to his trip, and walked up to the secretary desk.

“Hello mam I would like to speak to chief Vickers.”

“What your name?”

“Jordan Philip.”

Miss Mia let her papers fall back onto her clip board and placed her glasses on top of them. Jordan couldn't tell if her glasses were to act as a paper weight or to dramatize her following lecture to which Jordan knew the main point.

“You're the guy who called my office fifteen times in two weeks!”

“So you must be the woman who ignored all fifteen calls,” Jordan countered, extending a hand that somehow didn't give off the welcoming vibe it was designed to. “It's *great* to meet you.”

Out of the corner of Jordan's eye was Mr. Vickers who was intently studying a file.

“Chief Vickers!” Jordan shouted.

The chief casually looked up. It wasn't the shout that startled him, but when he noticed it was Jordan he displayed a mixed spasm of anger and surprise. Without hesitation he walked back into his room. Jordan meanwhile helped himself back behind the waiting room and made his way to chief Vickers.

“So you knew about my phone calls too?”

Chief Vickers knew he couldn't ignore him and felt that arresting him was too much. After all he had a reputation to keep.

“I had no idea,” he responded with an unusual sincerity in his voice. However, Vickers never attended an acting school and his unfamiliarity overpowered his attempt at a lie.

“Anyway, I would like to further discuss the murder case,” Jordan said.

Mr. Vickers grabbed another stack of papers and proceeded to the hallway. Jordan kept pace. He seemed to be holding a conversation with himself as Vickers engaged in side conversations and work. From

an ignorant perspective, one my think Jordan was Vickers secretary by the amount of attention and interest Vickers showed in him.

“We know the man’s identity, that he was shot when the lights went out and before the emergency brake was pulled by the train operator. We are still searching for the suspect.”

“What was the man’s name,” Jordan asked as he reached into his back pocket to pull out a notebook.

“Seeing as it will be announced a few hours from now, I don’t mind telling you. It’s Adriel Seymour.”

“Fantastic. Now is there a reason that you have not disclosed this information to the public yet? After all it’s been two weeks.”

“The family wanted to keep his identity a secret. They didn’t want any superficial compassion from strangers. At least that’s how they put it.”

“Another question,” Jordan asked as they transitioned into the kitchen. “Now according to my notes, there were only twenty people in the train. So why is it that with limited space and people, you have no leads on the murder?”

Mr. Vickers clearly did not appreciate the comment, electing to deprive himself of a much need coffee boost in order to address Jordan. Jordan could sense he had touched a nerve, or at least rattled the officer.

“Are you questioning my ability to conduct this investigation?”

“No sir, in fact this has never been about you but the case. I’m asking questions that need answers that’s all.”

“Hhmm.”

“Tell you what Jordan, I’m going to go work like *you* want me to and *you* can leave right now before I get annoyed,” Mr. Vickers said returning to his office.

“Why in such a mood Vickers? This is the first time we’ve talked.”

“That may be true, but I’ve already had two conversations with the like of you.”

Jordan was intrigued, and felt a great reveal was upon him as chief Vickers opened his door to reveal both Jason and Nathan sitting in two identical blue chairs.

“Hey it’s that... uh... one guy Nathan,” Jason exclaimed. “Julius right?”

“No it’s Jordan.”

“You started out well with the J at least,” Nathan mocked with an accompanying hand gesture.

“They’ve been bothering me all day with similar questions,” Vickers said giving them a final glance.

Jordan noticed that Jason was handcuffed.

“You handcuffed them, they didn’t commit any crime,” Jordan protested with a surprising amount of judgement in his voice. Jordan thought as much but held his composure.

Before Vickers could answer, Jason spoke up.

“Actually that’s my fault. See I figured that just like with those Chinese finger traps, there was some trick to getting out of handcuffs so I slapped those babies on and found that not only is that not true, but if you try to remove them smashing them with a coffee table the table breaks in half.”

Nathan held up the sole surviving leg in the incident and with his other hand reached into his wallet and pulled out a \$50, placing it gently on Vickers’ desk with a several loving taps.

“It said \$50 on the price tag.”

Before chief Vickers could amount a verbal assault on the three boys, Jordan relived some of Vickers’ stress with the most pleasurable words he had heard all day.

“I think we’ll be leaving now.”

Vickers watched all three boys leave his building intently through his window, with the focus of a parched owl. Jordan, Jason and Nathan walked to Jordan’s pick up to free Jason from his bonds. The sound of

metal clashed with the cracked asphalt. Jason rubbed his wrists, relieved to have the freedom of his hands back.

“Thanks Jordan.”

He nodded, glancing back at the police station. He knew there was something going on and that Nathan and Jason were just as curious as he was. He wanted to pick their brains and see their view on the situation.

“How about we grab some lunch,” Jordan suggested.

“Oh I know the perfect place,” Jason said.

Jordan and Nathan were both pleased with his choice, seeing as they defined perfect by a quiet place with great food. Jason concurred, yet also had a greater appreciation for the restaurant. It was a special place that he and his grandma would visit regularly, more often in the morning. He could identify every smell, providing a detailed and often humorous story about them. His favorite among these was the time he and his grandma ordered some coffee and noticed the summer theme decorations around them. These featured surf boards, pictures of the ocean, and the iconic coconut. This led his grandma, who had ordered coconut milk in her coffee, to ask a deep or perhaps philosophical question, at least in her mind.

“What animal does coconut milk come from,” Jason laughed, recalling the story.

Jordan laughed and Nathan smiled.

They talked about general things, things that people who did not know each other would talk about. They discovered that all three of them went to the same school. They found movies, games, locations, and more that all enjoyed. The conversation went from consistent questions to opinions and cleverly inserted movie quotes. This brought about laughs and segway’s to other conversations, departing from awkward silences and forced enjoyment. Before they could recognize it, all three were enjoying themselves.

“So do you guys go to church?” Jason asked.

“I do,” Nathan said.

“Nope. What religion are you?” Jordan enquired.

“I’m a Christian,” Nathan answered.

“Me to. So Jordan, what do you think about religion?”

“I don’t really know I’ve never lived by any religion.”

“Not to be argumentative Jordan, but we all live by some moral code and have certain ethics. They have to be directed by something so I would say you do have one, just not one based on a book that was written hundreds of years ago,” Jason said.

“I never thought of it that way,” Jordan said.

“There is always a god involved in any religion. Who do you think god is?”

Jordan laughed to distract from the heavy traffic going on in his mind. He was looking for the right answer, but felt it wouldn’t be right.

“I honestly don’t know.”

“Okay, well, I would challenge you to answer that question and then let me know. I would love to tell you about the God I know and how he completely changed my life. It’s been so good since that day,” Jason said.

Jordan liked what he was hearing from Jason but didn’t know how to approach the conversation. He felt like he was talking to someone from a different world in a different language. He was uncomfortable yet relaxed at the same time. Jason had a certain serenity about him that was enticing to Jordan. He knew that it had to born out of his faith and was eager to look into it more once he was more prepared.

“So Jordan, I assume you wanted to take us to lunch because you were curious as to why we were at the police station,” Nathan transitioned.

“Yes, umm, so why were you guys there?” Jordan started.

Nathan leaned forward and positioned his elbows on the table. Jason slid his away, and redirected himself toward Nathan.

“It all started when I was interviewed by chief Vickers the day of the murder. It wasn’t anything specific, but I could tell that Vickers could have cared less about it. I think that Vickers knows more or is involved more in this case than he wants to let on.”

“When I had finished talking with him, I went outside to call my grandma and give her an update,” Jason added.

Jordan and Nathan “mmed” in unison, recalling their mothers petrified and worried faces, their dad’s glassy eyes. It took all three boys time to adjust to what they had seen. Death was not a normal part of their life. The closest they had been to it was looking upon a relative lying in their coffin. Of course, they were much more mature to the idea of death, and that helped, but no one can be completely prepared for the first time they stare at death’s course. The way a body gradually fades into nothing more than a capsule that harnessed the human being. The graphic way in which life’s most precious gift is taken was disturbing. How could it not be to one who valued life at its highest point? A whirlwind of emotions filled Jordan and Nathan’s minds, but before they could succumb to its trance, they took a sip of water to divert their sense back to a much more physical realm.

“So the toad was in the driver’s seat and I said don’t let him drive he looks like one of those drivers with toad rage,” Jason joked.

“Wait what,” Nathan asked with his face so scrunched up it looked like someone had toyed with his cheeks.

“There was a point to your tale,” Jordan said to redirect the conversation.

“Oh yes. So after I finished talking with my grandma, I overheard officer Vickers talking on his cell phone and...” Jason leaned into the table, his voice sinking to a low murmur. “He was really distraught, his pacing included. Anyway, I heard him say he was going to have to call his x-wife because he knew he would be calling her.” Jason leaned in further, defying what Jordan believed to be the weight capacity of the table. “I think Vickers knew the victim, and it wasn’t a good relationship to be frank.”

Jordan hadn’t made the connection, but could clearly see the lines that completed the picture. Nathan too felt a light bulb ignite in his head, showing it in a smile.

“If Vickers knew the victim, he could be withholding who murdered him,” Jordan concluded. “That’s the first angle we should take.”

“What are you talking about Jordan, we aren’t the police, even though we applied and got accepted for an internship which we had to turn down,” Jason said dejectedly.

“We,” Nathan said recalling a previous facial expression.

Jordan had spoken as if he had expressed his complete desires, then remembered that night. He had not been content with his life. The popularity, the stardom, all seemed superfluous to fulfilling his calling in life. Sure they were nice to have, but to him they had been a distraction to what he really should have been doing. He chose to privatize this, but told Nathan and Jason the following.

“When I see problems, I like to fix them. That’s who I am. When I look at you guys, I see that same characteristic. Now whether we like it or not we are witnesses to a murder. Now everything would be honky dory if the police had caught the suspect, but they haven’t. They have had almost three weeks and they only had twenty suspects to pull from. Not to degrade the challenges of a policeman, but I think that this case requires attention from a pure group. By that I mean that the police are tangled up in this to make the right call, so they need someone who is nowhere near the not. It needs us.”

“Are you saying we go to the FBI,” Nathan asked.

Jordan shook his head. What he was about to say was absurd, but to him it felt satisfyingly right.

“No, we need to investigate it ourselves. We’re going to find Adriel Seymour’s killer.”

That night Jordan sat at his desk with his laptop once he had field questions left and right from his new friends. Their banter played in the back of his mind. It was meddlesome at the moment because Jordan was focused on his screen. He was reading about the subway murder. He stayed up as long as he could, but eventually fell asleep, head pressed against his key board.

Suddenly he was whisked away from his room by a sharp wind. His bare feet gripped a dry, uneven ground. He stumbled at noon as if he were in twilight. He groped for the wall. His hand clapped against the brick. His fingers reached for his eyes like someone who reaches into a darkened well. He felt nothing, for nothing was the only thing present. He had no eyes. Darkness was before him and behind him. His heart played a Sibelius symphony and his mind twirled violently. He moaned like a bear and as often as a dove. *Am I dead? He thought.* He felt the urge to find help, so he put one foot forward. His movement was stubborn and unnatural. He hoped to find salvation, but salvation was far from him.

He awoke. His head rocked, back arched, arms intensified. He inhaled more air than was healthy. His eyes reacted as his nose would against an atrocious smell. He patted his face until his fingers met his eyes. He could feel his two, round, liquid filled, organs. His chest lowered. He turned to his right where he saw his sticky note from earlier. It read “what will give satisfaction and purpose to my life.” Light from the computer screen warmed Jordan’s face. The screen read, “Man dies on subway to Atlanta.” Jordan clicked his mouse four times and went to bed.

Chapter 4: A Call to Action

Another week passed. It was finals week before Christmas break. There hadn't been any snow, but all the signs of it were present. The refreshingly brisk air entertained students who teased each other with the idea of smoking. The sky maintained a dark gray like that of chimney smoke. The changes in the weather beckoned zealously organized people to rearrange closets, moving summer clothes to the back and jackets to the front.

Meanwhile, Jordan was not only trying to convince himself to study for finals, but convince Nathan and Jason of his crusade. He had called them several times. Nathan argued that it was illegal and not the place of high school students. Jason concurred and so did his grandmother. Jordan was frustrated. He knew something had to be done. To him, it seemed like he was being called to action, but he never thought by whom. He thought this was an answer to his prayers, again to an unknown unknown, about his desire for purpose. He saw the potential good in the horrible situation and suspected Nathan and Jason did to. Yet something was holding them back, something that weighed much more heavily than their "telephoned reasons" told. It wasn't until yesterday that all three decided to begin the crusade.

It was a Friday evening in Jordan's household. His father engaged in a video conference with his superiors as he did every Friday evening. Mrs. Philip worked hard in the kitchen, whipping mash potatoes in a bowl while intently listening to a friend's burdens. The whole scene resembled a Doctor Phil episode combined with the daily life of a mother. Connor and Cody helped set the table after much debate over the correct location of the fork and shape of the napkin. Jordan came down to do the same, but abruptly stopped when he read the heading of a news report on TV.

"Subway murder case really a suicide," Jordan exclaimed. His eyes did a double take, his hand reaching for the remote. The news report cut to an edited video of Chiefs Vickers' update.

"After much deliberation and a thorough study of the facts, we are beginning to approach the crime with the viewpoint that the victim did in fact commit suicide..."

"What are you saying bogus jack weed! That's not right at all," Jordan lividly shouted. Anger rippled down his entire body, his forehead turning a hazy red. He could not believe any of Vickers words, because he knew by experience that Adriel Seymour did not kill himself. If the police department was not going to provide justice, Jordan was going to get it himself. As if his anger had contracted his muscles, Jordan awkwardly thumped his way to his cell phone to call Jason and Nathan.

Connor and Cody watched their brother walk off. They had unfortunately misdirected Jordan's outburst at them, believing that the napkin was not supposed to be shaped into a sideways triangle.

"See I was right," Cody said.

"Okay fine. I didn't think it was that big of a deal though," Connor answered.

"Hello this is Nathan."

"Turn the TV to chSophel 3," Jordan instructed.

Jordan listened through the phone to the replay of chief Vickers podium speech. He tried to get a read on Nathan's reaction, but found it difficult. When it went to commercial, Jordan continued to talk.

"So?"

"This has to be some kind of joke right," Nathan said.

"I'm afraid not Nathan."

Nathan didn't speak, allowing his muffled breathing to be the only sound heard. This changed things in his mind. It was one thing believing that the case was running slow due to a personal conflict with chief Vickers and the victim, but accusing an innocent man of killing himself was enough for Nathan to consider Jordan's crusade.

"What do we do Jordan?" he finally asked.

"We need to meet. Let me call Jason first and I'll get back to you," Jordan responded.

Jordan didn't waste time asking Jason to watch the news clip. Once he had explained the situation to Jason, he too felt a change about Jordan's proposition. For him, he always wanted to help people as a policeman, what held him back was his grandmother and the belief that he wouldn't be good at it. At the heart of it, it wasn't the fear of failure that scared him, but the criticism and displeasure from those he cared about. Yet this feeling of justice and what was right trumped his personal distastes, resulting in him planning a time and date for them to meet.

“Tomorrow at 6:00, my place,” Jordan instructed to Nathan after hanging up with Jason.

Jordan helped his mom place the food on the table. She had worked hard to prepare one of Jordan’s favorite meals. It was comfort food, very savory to the taste buds. Chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans slowly cooked in a crockpot with black forest ham, and a fresh diner roll. Jordan almost felt guilty for not doing something for his mother in return. None the less, he was glad to make sure none of the food went to waste.

“Cody and Connor, why are the napkins shaped like birds,” Mrs. Philip asked.

Jordan took a moment away from his chicken to look at the intricately shaped napkins. He hadn’t seen birds made from paper that were this impressive, even when considering origami.

“I told you that wasn’t right either!” Cody said.

“Well the triangles were not right either, and they are already square, I was running out of shapes,” Connor explained.

“Next time, make them triangular like I taught you,” Mrs. Philp said.

Connor was perturbed, finding the whole situation quite queer.

“Jordan told me I was a jack weed when I made them that way, so...”

“What!” Jordan laughed through a full mouth of mashed potatoes.

Connor recalled that the TV was faced toward the dining room where Jordan was watching the news and that his insults were not meant for him, but whomever was on the TV.

“Oh, never mind.”

Tomorrow came quickly for Jordan. He was highly anticipating moving forward with his plan to investigate Adriel Seymour’s death. Having to wait for his friends gave him time to think about some of the issues they would face. A lack of authority, resources, and opportunities were the general concerns, but the more Jordan thought about them the more discouraged he was, so he chose to take each issue one at a time. This meant he was unwillingly to give up before things had even started. As Jordan walked to the front door

from his car, he looked up toward the washed, blue sky that seemed to have returned from summer. It brought him joy and took his mind off his concerns. New trepidations were quickly added when Jordan stumbled into a business meeting of his fathers. They had set up in the dining room, where Jordan had planned to conduct his own meeting. Jordan scoffed and looked at his dad who returned an innocent smile. When Jordan continued his disappointed look, Mr. Philip paused his meeting to talk with Jordan.

“What’s up son?”

“Remember yesterday when we were at the table and I asked you if I could use this space for my friends and I? I was talking about today,” Jordan said.

Gliding his teeth over one another and with a thumb on his chin that was everything thoughtful, Mr. Philip stood uncomfortably and looked around the house to find an alternative room for his business meeting to continue. He snapped his fingers together once he thought of something.

“Jordan you know the shed we have outback right?”

“The shed dad, seriously?!?”

“Hear me out. We’ve installed an air conditioning system and electricity in there, and I can help you grab some lawn chairs...”

His father made the shed sound more like a home than storage facility. None the less, Jordan nodded his head in agreement.

“Don’t worry about the chairs dad, I’ll take care of it.”

“Thank you, son.”

“Sure.”

Jordan was dubious about the chairs and didn’t have time to get them by the time Jason and Nathan arrived.

“Welcome guys, follow me,” Jordan said waving them in.

He led them to the back yard. They didn't have any lights back there so Jordan used his phone to enlighten their path. There was a click, then the sound of the door resisting to open as the bottom fraught against the grass. Jordan illuminated his way to a string dangling in the center of the room and pulled down on it. A small window was in the back that was way overdue for a wash. There was a riding mower to the right and a table lined with outdoor equipment to the left. Each tool was purposely placed next to an accompanying mate. Jordan rested on the table, Jason swung his leg around the lawn mower and leaned forward as Nathan dusted off a stool that had been lost in the darkness of the shed. Before things could get awkward, Jordan spoke up.

"Before we even begin I want to know that you guys are 100% sure you want to do this."

Nathan answered with a quick yes and Jason followed. It went much better than Jordan thought it would.

"Okay so... what do we know thus far about the case?" Jordan asked.

"We know the who, the what, the when," Jason answered.

Jordan looked around the room and found a dust-veiled white board. He picked it up and pulled a marker that was magnetized to the edge. The more Jordan talked, the more he felt like a teacher.

"We have Adriel Seymour. He was *murdered* on the subway train leaving from Broadmoor going to 9th street at 7:08 a.m. However, we don't know who murdered him, why he or she did, and how they did other than by shooting a gun," Jordan said as he walked down memory lane. "What else do we know?"

"We know the lead investigator Chief Vickers knows the victim and is trying to keep that a secret," Jason said.

"That could mean he is somehow involved in the crime," Nathan added.

Jordan wrote the word crime on the white board. He then drew an arrow from that to the name Adriel. Returning to crime, Jordan drew another arrow to the newly written Vickers. It created a triangle, when Jordan made a zig zagged line between Vickers and Adriel. He capped the marker then tapped it against the line that looked like a rough sketch of a mountain line.

"I say we begin with this angle given what we know."

Nathan couldn't keep himself from pointing out the problem even though he knew he would probably become the bad guy in doing so.

"How are we going to investigate that? We don't have profiles and access to the things the police do."

Jordan sighed and repositioned himself on the table. His words came out gruffly.

"We are going to get access to them by going into the evidence and file rooms of the police station."

"We can't break into a police station! It's against the law!" Nathan protested.

"Let me ask you, if the police are trying to cover this up do you think Adriel will get justice? No! We live in a town of 500 people. How else are we going to call for help? The FBI? I'm a millionaire if they even acknowledge an email. Point is we don't have a choice because we know the truth. We must promote it and stop those that try to cover it up."

"Nathan I feel weird about it to. It does not seem right to go against authorities. However, the point that made me agree with Jordan is simply who the ultimate authority is," Jason said. Jordan's ears perked up and his shoulders leveled out. Jason continued. "God placed those in government, local law enforcement included, over us to protect peace and our ways of life. So if the institution does not do that, we must do something about it and given our situation this feels like our only option."

"Okay, so when we break into the police station, how will we have gotten that far," Nathan asked.

"We'll need a key card, a layout of the place, but most importantly a distraction," Jordan said alluding to Jason. His ability to speak about anything and for such long periods of time would prove useful.

"I got you fam," Jason announced pounding his chest and pointing to Jordan.

"What will we be looking for," Nathan continued.

"Anything that was involved in the crime," Jordan answered opening his arms wide to emphasize his point. "I don't know what all that would include."

“So Jason, since you’ve been in the police station a lot, would it be fair to say you know the lay out,” Nathan asked.

“Absolutely.”

Nathan got up from his relic of a stool and grasped both sides of the white board, setting it on top of a flat surface. He motioned at Jordan who tossed him the marker.

“Draw it out for us.”

Jason could have blushed from the feeling he got when Nathan indirectly complimented his artistic skills. Almost every time he brought of drawing he was ridiculed. He liked how open he could be with Jordan and Nathan.

For the remainder of time, they plSophed all the details. This included how they would get in and out of the evidence room without being seen. Jason suggested wearing checkered raiment to blend into the 80’s wallpaper. They quickly decided against this though for a list of reasons. The conversation revealed that Nathan’s dad owned a weapons manufacturing company; Stone Incorporated. Nathan said that he would get to tinker with different prototypes and even have a say in the drawing room. Nathan swiped through his phone’s gallery to show them what he claimed would allow them to access the evidence room with as much ease as making ice.

“This device can scan a key card lock and then program a blank key to open the door.”

“Bring that boi!” Jason said contorting his wrist and hand to a downward angle directly at Nathan.

“Does that hurt?” Nathan asked wryly.

“Yes but the epic impact it has upon its victims is most worth it,” Jason teased lowering his hand.

This served as an ending for their meeting. They were all jittery from the excitement of the plan. Similes protruded keenly allowing for heartier laughs to fill the dark-veiled sky along with the infrequent hoot of an owl. Jordan said his goodbyes and went inside. Nathan was about ready to leave when Jason ran up.

“Hey man, I’m sorry I have to ask, but I don’t have enough gas for the car ride home and I don’t have any cash. Can you spot me some?”

Nathan visually copied and pasted Bob's head onto Jason's. He recalled the fight at the pool, and the source of most of his problems; money. He hesitated for the longest time trying to determine the right move. He didn't want another friend who was just going to appreciate him for his money.

"Sorry man I don't have any either," Nathan said sorrowfully. He did have money, but didn't want to give it away along with a friend.

He braced for the harsh, verbal impact that he had grown so accustomed to. No money meant no friends. To his surprise, Jason wasn't one of those friends. He didn't assume the worst, or question that a rich kid didn't have money with him.

"That's okay man. I'll give my grandmother a call to see if she can get me."

Jason jogged back to his car as Nathan stood dumfounded. He felt even worse for lying and then being treated kindly. He had a poor feeling inside like someone had heaped burning coals on his heart. He searched his car console for his money and pulled out a \$20.

"Hey Jason hold up! I was looking around in my car and found this," Nathan said as he shoved it into his hand.

"Whoa, that's a lot of money to misplace," Jason said still negligent to Nathan's lie.

"Yep I know I'll be more careful next time."

"I'm just messing with you. Thanks a lot Nathan."

Jason reached out for a bro hug. Nathan could feel the sincerity as both collided.

"I'll get you back tomorrow," Jason said as his voice drifted softly into the air.

Nathan had a quiet ride home. His upbeat mood normally was shown through blasting and grooving to the music from his car, yet this time was an exception. His quietness was born out of tranquil peace and deep thought that he hadn't experienced before. For the first time he knew what it felt like to have friends.

Chapter 5: A Closed Door and an Opened Gate

There plans began with a late breakfast the following day. Jason remembered from his police station visits that few people visited the station from 1:00-3:30. They figured this would be the best opportunity to gain access to the evidence room. Jordan and Jason ate their muffins as Nathan explained his gadgets, divulging even the most intricate details. After breakfast, Jason insisted upon stopping by the Donut Shop, describing how they would assist him in his distraction.

“You’re really betting on stereotypes being accurate right now,” Jordan pointed out.

“Please, who doesn’t like donuts?” Jason asked.

Jordan pulled his truck into a neighborhood directly behind the police station. He slung his bag over his shoulder and crouched down as he ran up to a brick wall that boxed a large trash can. Nathan had followed him there and pulled out his phone.

Jason picked up his phone with a box of donuts in hand.

“Remember we’ll need at least 15 minutes,” Nathan said with great urgency.

“I’ll get you as much time as you need,” Jason assured as he inhaled the blended combination of the chocolate and peanut butter glaze. “The donuts are just the beginning.”

Jordan tapped Nathan on the shoulder as he plugged one end of a wire into his phone and the other into his ear.

“Just the beginning?”

“I don’t know what he means.”

“Let’s just hope he doesn’t get arrested then,” Jordan said with a cool smile.

Miss Mia sat at the front desk and barely lifted an eyebrow when Jason walked in. She rested her chin on her vertically placed arm and with a much adjusted temperament spoke.

“What can I do for you Jason?”

I recently went by the donut shop,” Jason said drawing his gaze toward the donuts, hoping she would do the same. When she refused, Jason clasped his hands and let out a deoxygenated breath.

“I personally feel bad for the trouble I’ve caused you several times, and...”

“Are you referring to the time you asked me how my grandchildren were doing or the time you turned my tax form into a trashketball...”

Jason raced her for the next word and came up short behind her path of disturbed dust.

“I was all most late in paying it by the way.”

Jason had already apologized and felt no remorse as of now, but figured this could help distract her from noticing Jordan and Jason approaching the back door on video.

“First of all I told you that you look very similar to a woman with grandchildren...”

“Oh so I look like a grandma?”

Jason was lost in the definition of words and their implications. He tried to speak, but sounded more like a radio with a bad antenna.

“Yes in that you have similar facial features and no in your age.”

“Good answer,” Miss Mia superficially teased.

Meanwhile Nathan and Jordan had snuck past an officer who was on a smoke break, weaved through a congregation of police cars and one prisoner transfer vehicle, all the while remaining undetected.

“Okay Nathan, time to try out your gizmo,” Jordan exclaimed.

“It’s called a...”

“To be continued for when we aren’t in danger of being tied inside that prisoner truck,” Jordan interrupted while grabbing at the device.

“Okay okay, chill. I got it,” Nathan reassured.

Nathan stacked the contrivance on top of the pad lock then eased it down over it. He pressed several buttons and then allowed it to process the code. It was surprisingly quite, however Jordan and Nathan cringed and surveyed their surroundings like a combatant in no man’s land whenever the device locked in part of the code. Nathan put his ear to the device, then opened the door.

“We’re in.”

Jason’s voiced bounced around the walls to where Nathan and Jordan were sneaking about. They couldn’t make out what he was saying however loud it was. Chief Vickers walked out of his office along with all the staff to attend to the commotion in the entry way. Vickers eyes widened like to moons rapidly changing solar phases and choked on his coffee, setting it down as the hot beverage eddied in the Styrofoam cup.

“What are you doing here?”

“Chief Vickers, I was just telling Miss Mia here how sorry I felt about our last encounter and wanted to make up for it by giving you another head ace, this time by a sweet and delightful sugar rush,” Jason said as he removed the cover on the box.

Several officers moved to get a better look at the delicacies as Vickers stood as plain as a gray, stone wall.

“We’re on duty, we don’t need any extra sugar.”

Jason held the cover open a little while longer to further entice them and allow Jordan and Nathan more time, but Vickers motioned his inferiors back to their work, much to their dismay. Jason quickly sat the box down.

“Can I tell you all a joke?”

“No thank you,” Vickers responded distancing himself even further.

“An optimist says glass half full, the pessimist says half empty. A mother observes the two and ask them both why they aren’t using a coster,” Jason said.

“That wasn’t funny,” Vickers said over the minimal laughter of several officers.

Jason was beginning to panic. He couldn’t even think what would happen if Jordan and Nathan got caught. It didn’t help that all he pictured was the movie *Shutter Island*. Jason thought of every scenario as one officer began signing a slip that was to keep track of who entered the evidence room.

“Everybody don’t move it’s a skunk!!”

Jordan and Nathan had almost forgotten the perils of their situation as they evolved from their hunched backs and thoughtful steps to upright lumbar and casual walking. Each step closer to the evidence room felt like they were time traveling back twenty years. Parts of the wallpaper were exposed revealing a much more appealing white back drop. What was left of it reminded Jordan of his aunt’s house. A brief flight of stairs led them to a wood door and window laden with steel wire. Nathan repeated the same process as he did with the previous door. One defined click meant they were in.

There were three shelves that stretched to the back of the room. Each one was encumbered with boxes; each box with several layers of dust. One pale light tried its hardest to illuminate the whole room, but failed to reach the corners where even more boxes towered on top of each other.

“Where do we even begin,” Nathan asked dumbfounded.

Jordan removed the most convenient box and began to search its contents. He ran his finger through the papers until he got to a tab. Those he read thoroughly, then like someone who had more questions turned to the next one until he had gone through the whole box.

“Did you find it,” Nathan questioned.

“No, but I wasn’t expecting to. The boxes are organized by month and year. Five years total.” Jordan pointed to the box he had marauded. “Those are the case reports.” He walked to the next shelf in line. “I’m guessing that these boxes are the evidence and correctly correspond with the case reports.”

Nathan stroked his chin, taken back by Jordan’s ambition. He leaned against the unmentioned shelf, wondering if Jordan could explain what was inside it.

“And this one?”

Jordan fazed everything out as his mental lights highlighted it. He noticed that some boxes were dressed in dust, while others were much cleaner. It was not nearly as full as the other shelves and the absent spots showed signs of wear. The lids on some boxes were lopsided from objects that pushed one side up, yet others rested one top with ease. There seemed to be no consistence between the boxes.

“Those must be unsolved cases.”

Nathan zealously cracked open the box to reveal a white, red criss-crossed pattern with bold black letters that read “unresolved”.

“How did you know?”

“There were several obvious features from which I deduced from, the most helpful being this sign that read “unresolved cases,” Jordan said holding it at eye level.

“Noice,” Nathan laughed.

“It’s not over here,” an officer reported.

Jason had convinced the entire staff that there was a skunk somewhere in the office. Miss Mia found enough courage to climb off the top of her desk and Vickers steadied his hand on his gun. Jason leaned under a desk not expecting to see anything but carpet, and reported the same as the officer.

“Where did you last see it,” Chief Vickers asked with the same seriousness as he had when dealing with any case.

Jason couldn’t help himself from agitating Miss Mia more than he had already. He didn’t dislike her, but found that the more agitated she was the more amusing it was for him.

“Right were Miss Mia was seated,” Jason answered.

Miss Mia jerked her body away from the table.

“We got to find the nasty creature before he destroys the place! Keep looking,” Vickers instructed.

Jason found a corner far off from the crime scene where he could wade out the wild goose chase. He nonchalantly plopped down on a sofa. It took him several maneuvers to get comfortable because the cushions were lopsided. He beat the cushion at his feet to remove the lump, then froze. His face clinched and a drop of sweat that had miraculously produced on his forehead fell to the ground. He slowly elevated the cushion and inadvertently did the same to his heart rhythm. There was no mistaking the lump now.

“There’s a real skunk in here,” Jason screamed.

“As opposed to what, an imaginary one,” Vickers lampooned running toward Jason.

Jason nearly shouted yes as he had never seen a skunk by Miss Mia’s desk, only making it up as a distraction.

“Grab the tranquilizers!”

Before the officers could fulfill their chief’s orders, the skunk raised himself, directing his weapon of mass destruction at Jason and Vickers.

“Oh cra...”

Nathan nearly threw his box, filled with a rusted crow-bar, sky high when screams shocked their ears. Jordan jolted and nearly punctured his kidney with Adriel Seymour’s murder weapon.

“What was that!”

“What did Nathan do to Miss Mia,” Nathan asked.

“I think that newly created alto octave was Jason,” Jordan said.

Jason had unexpectedly reached a pitch that rivaled a hyena, and carried it for so long it seemed he was breathing simultaneously.

“Should we run while we have the chance?”

“The code word for evacuation was a pun centered around donuts remember,” Jordan reminded. “We still have not found the connection between Adriel and chief Vickers and we are not leaving until we do. Now look through that box!”

They had taken pictures and jotted down notes over all the evidence so they could study them in further detail when they were back in the security of their homes. The trip was nearly a bust, until Nathan opened the last box.

“Jordan, it’s Adriel’s cellphone!” Nathan exclaimed tapping his inquisitive friend on the shoulder. “It’s password protected by a drawing algorithm.

“Blast!”

“Hold on, I might be able crack it with the tools I brought.”

Nathan plugged a wire into the charge port of the phone. The end of the wire went into the top of his device. His fingers danced on the tablet until there was accepting beep. Green code filled the screen and filtered up like a movie curtain being drawn. Jordan continued to search through the evidence until he pulled out a blood stained note encapsulated in an evidence bag. On it was written an address. “1489 south English street”. Jordan wrote down the address then rushed over to Nathan.

“How’s it coming?”

“It’s getting there.”

“Nathan I know you can crack this, but in how much time?”

Before he could answer, Nathan pulled the wire from the phone and tossed it to Jordan.

“In a few seconds.”

“Well it was more like 5 minutes because you were working on it before I said...”

“Okay okay you’re hilarious,” Nathan jested. “Go to his contacts.”

“Nothing there.”

“Try his voicemail.”

“Again nothing.”

They continued to search the social parts of his phone which proved to be a very short road. He had no social media and few contacts. His gallery was the fullest app, containing pictures of family and friends. One was of Adriel suspended from a tower splaying a gaunt piece of metal from a building. A video was taken of him doing this. They saw a reoccurring face of a woman who they believed to be his girlfriend. She was blonde and showed formal attire in every picture with a fitting restaurant in the background. Adriel seemed happy in each picture.

“Let’s check his outgoing calls,” Jordan suggested.

Adriel’s calls did not seem out of the ordinary, but the timing of one caught Jordan’s eye.

“Look at this number Nathan and tell me what is significant about it.”

Nathan said nothing until he thoroughly studied the number.

“It does not say who he was calling but the time of it was fifteen minutes before he was murdered on the subway car,” Nathan exclaimed. “Do you think he knew he was in danger?”

“That’s what I’m thinking,” Jordan answered.

Before they could revel in their findings, they heard a door unlock and footsteps fall behind the squeaky hinges of the door.

“Did you hear Jason’s code word?” Nathan asked, panic spewing with every word.

“No. We got to put this stuff back and get out of here none the less.”

Jason and Chief Vickers waited outside despondently as the remaining officers who hadn’t been showered by the skunk attempted to purge the front office of its smell. They no longer had to worry about the skunk, who ran between the two and out the main door after they had unintentionally ignited its vehemence and suffered its results.

“Well this is unfortunate,” Jason declared.

“Really! I hadn’t seen it that way,” Vickers shot back.

“Two men went back into the supply unit to grab the water hose,” Miss Mia said as she walked around the corner of the building.

“Wait, that room is right next to the evidence room right,” Jason nearly screamed.

“Yes,” Vickers said turning his attention to Miss Mia.

Jason had no choice but to warn his friends. He sprinted inside and grabbed the box of donuts. He went up to an officer who had sported a pair of goggles and a close pin over his nose.

“Do you want a donut sir!” Jason shouted as loud as the infected air would let him.

The officer just stared at him a moment, and left without a word saying yet said all he needed to.

“I guess that means you do-nut want a donut?” Jason shouted again.

“You are supposed to be waiting outside,” she said through a plugged nose. With those words, Miss Mia grabbed his shoulder and spun Jason around.

Jordan and Nathan had put the last splayed box where they had found when they heard Jason’s pun.

“Okay that’s the code word if Jason ever came up with one,” Nathan said.

The officers who had been sent to find the hose approached the evidence room walking down the disco era hallway. Jordan threw his box on the shelf and he and Nathan hurled themselves by the wall. Jordan immediately felt what the box must had, thinking twice before he abused his body like that again.

“Hey is this door unlocked,” one officer asked as his voice fell at the feet of the evidence room.

“You forgot to lock it!” Jordan said in an injured tone.

Nathan crawled to the door with the looks and speed of a spider and grabbed the door handle, pushing up on it. The officer on the other side tried to push down and found that he couldn't.

"Nope, we're all good."

Nathan crawled back to Jordan who put the last of his things in his back pack.

"You good?" Nathan asked.

"Yep, I just hit my elbow on the way down," Jordan replied.

When the officers were out of sight, Nathan slowly pushed the door open while rising to his feet. Jordan followed in similar fashion until he collided with Nathan who had planted himself as firmly as a tree when he saw a shadow scale the wall on their right.

"Go the other way," Jordan whispered while forcefully pushing Nathan backward.

They power-walked the whole way and constantly checked around them like they were driving. They were surprised that they did not encounter the entire fleet, only having to duck into a room once or twice. It didn't take them long to figure out the lack of activity in the building as they each pinched their noses. They pushed forward through a semi-clear green vapor, Jordan holding his arm which grasped his nose shut and Nathan emphasizing his arms through his gait. Nathan plowed forward, but Jordan stopped by Vickers office and peered through the window.

"Come on Jordan!"

Jordan took a picture and caught up to Nathan who waited by the door. They didn't exchange words until they were safe behind the brick wall encompassing the trash can.

"Where did that smell come from," Nathan asked.

Before he could throw out a hypothesis, the savage stench they had escaped rekindled with their nose hairs. They picked their stuff up, getting ready to bolt the opposite direction when Jason peeked around the corner.

"Oh good you made it," Jason said with a sigh of relief.

“What was...”

“Guys take a look at this,” Jordan said without looking up from his phone.

Jason wrapped around both of them and saw Jordan using filters to clear up an image.

“While you were pulling off the most extravagant distraction, Nathan and I found a picture of Adriel with a woman. Then I saw the same woman with her arms happily wrapped around Vickers in a picture,” Jordan said zooming in on the photo. “Is this woman Vickers’ wife?”

Jason cupped the top half of his phone to darken the image. He said nothing for several seconds, which felt like hours to Jordan.

“That’s not his wife, it’s his sister.”

“That means Adriel’s girlfriend is Vickers’ sister,” Nathan concluded as Jordan nodded in agreement.

“So how does that help us?” Jason asked still missing a piece or two from the picture.

“We also found that Adriel called someone right before he died. We think now that it was either Vickers or his sister,” Nathan informed.

Jordan pulled up another picture and showed it to them.

“Look at the time when this picture was taken and compare it to today’s date,” Jordan instructed.

“There is about a seven-month gap,” Nathan said.

“Seems like a long time for a happy couple who loved taking pictures to not take one,” Jason said with an implied conclusion.

“So they aren’t dating now. They broke up. Maybe their break up wasn’t peaceable,” Nathan said.

“Do you think Vickers’ killed him,” Jason asked.

“Yes.”

“I don’t,” Jason said. “I think Vickers’ sister killed him.”

“What do you think Jordan?”

“We’re running on assumptions here, but there are enough facts here to go forward to Vickers.” He looked at Nathan. “I’m not saying you’re wrong, but let’s tell Vickers the story that makes his sister out to be the murder. I want to see how he reacts.”

“I’m all for this, but can we do it another day? My current status is somewhat egregious,” Jason said as he presented his current state with his hands. He reeked of skunk, was soaking wet, and had one pant leg at his knee.

“Agreed,” Jordan and Nathan concurred simultaneously about Jason’s condition.

They waited a full day, which they thought was enough time for Vickers to recover, and rang the doorbell of his home.

“I swear I’m going to have to get a restraining order for you three,” Vickers said as if he was already utterly defeated in an attempt to get rid of them.

“If you let us in and explain ourselves, this will be the last time,” Nathan assured.

Vickers nodded with a spark of hope on his face. They entered into his living room and found a spot and his sofa. Vickers sat on his throne with the TV remote at finger length.

“What can I do for you guys?”

Jordan pulled out a picture in his backpack of Vickers sister and Adriel Seymour and slid it across a table separating the two of them.

“I believe this case is much more personal than you wanted everybody to believe. The question is why.”

Vickers blood retreated from his face as if someone had pulled a plug from the drain, revealing a pale and horrified expression.

“Where did you get this?”

“I don’t believe that matters right now. We came to you first so you could explain yourself. A man was murdered who dated your sister and you covered up your relation to him. From our perspective, that sounds like you or your sister murdered him,” Jordan said.

“I know it looks bad, but believe me neither me nor my sister killed that man.”

“Then why cover up your relation? You should have been taken off the case because of your relation to the victim,” Jason said.

“You’re right Jason, but if I had told of my relation, I would have never been elected chief and most certainly never become a cop.”

“We want to believe you, but for us to do that, you have to tell us your story,” Jordan responded.

Vickers leaned back and vigorously rubbed his eyes.

“Adriel and Sasha started dating five years ago,” Vickers began. “Things were great for both of them. Steady jobs, good social lives. Then Adriel was let go from his job. That’s when things started heading south for both of them. The expensive lifestyle they both enjoyed was no longer affordable which frustrated my sister and that negatively affected Adriel. They got into verbal fights and eventually he moved out from her apartment. She hadn’t seen him in a week until she came home from work and he was sitting on her couch with a few empty beer bottles. Things got intense and they ended with him screaming at her while showing her to the floor. He slammed the door on his way out. She called me shortly after. It wasn’t the first time she called me about their troubles, but that most recent event boiled my blood. I knew he liked to hang out at a pub downtown so I went down there one night. I found him outside in an alley. All I intended was to firmly tell him to stay away from my sister. Things went according to plan, but he had had too much to drink that night. He kept insulting me and pushing me back. Then he threatened me. That I didn’t mind, until his threats were no longer directed at me but Sasha. That’s when I punched square in the face, and a brawl ensued after. At that time, I was a candidate for chief of police. If they knew I had gotten into a fight, they would have rejected my resume and fired me from my job. I couldn’t let that happen. So I left him there, with a nose bleed and

hopefully a permeant reminder to stay away. I hadn't even heard the name until I was called in about a shooting in the subway."

"You don't really believe he killed himself do you," Jason inquired.

"It seems like the most probable case."

"Except for the gun," Jordan reminded.

"Yes that is true, but we have several theories on it. He could have unintentionally thrown it out the window from the sudden break of the subway. After all, one of the windows as broken.

"Except that he was not depressed to the point of suicide," Jordan said with a firm tone.

"The guy was constantly drinking, of course he was," Vickers argued.

"No, the Adriel Seymour we saw had cleaned up his act. He was well dressed, I liked his crisp blue tie that reminded me of a spotless ocean. He even smiled back at me when I told him hello. No he wasn't depressed, he was normal, even stood with high shoulders," Jason countered.

"You know it had to be murder," Jordan insisted.

"How could it have been?"

Jordan drew his focus toward Nathan and glanced down at his notes. He didn't have an answer for that, but knew there was one. The best thing to do was ask questions.

"Okay so you didn't let people know you were related because it would have damaged your career. But why have you been unable to find a suspect yet?" Jordan asked.

"First because we thought it impossible for it to have been murder. There was no reason, opportunity or ability to murder Adriel Seymour. No one had a gun, there were no witnesses to the murder itself. It's like the gun wasn't there the whole time."

"Suicide does not seem any more likely," Nathan said.

“What about the lights? Moments before the murder the lights started to explode,” Jordan said to redirect the conversation back to specifics of the case.

“We discovered that there was a power surge that caused the lights to explode. It was completely unrelated.”

“Do you think he would have shot himself in the light in front of all those people?” Jason asked.

“I... I don’t know,” Vickers stuttered.

He by this point was beyond distraught. He was still pale but showed some color had been restored to his face. His hair was entangled in itself from stressed hands. His head relied solely upon his arm to hold itself up.

“I’ve been asking myself if I’ve messed up this case because I was too worried about myself. I could have missed something, or misinterpreted something we did find.” Vickers swiped across the bottom of his nose. “But there is simply not enough evidence to prove it was murder and the case has been going on long enough. I’ve got a stack of other work that needs my attention, so I’m sorry gentlemen, but the case is closed.”

All three boys felt their hearts nose dive into their stomach, disturbing them greatly. They looked at each other for answers and only found blank sheets with lines that were ready to be filled in. Jordan felt an urge from his submerged heart to rise above the defeated atmosphere. A call to lead his friends and a fallen hero to the truth.

“Chief Vickers, if there is any chance that Adriel was murdered, it has to be investigated,” Jordan started out.

“We’ve investigated it and found nothing,” Vickers protested through a stuffed nose.

“Not to insult unnecessarily, but your judgement could have affected the case. It needs to be looked at from a party that won’t be effected by the people involved. Let Nathan, Jason and I investigate it more.”

“Let us help,” Jason added rising from the sofa.

“We want the truth,” Nathan said.

“We want justice for all,” Jordan declared now risen with his friends.

Vickers admired them, something he thought he would never do, and gazed, as if into their souls. Driven by their sincerity, he nodded his head.

“If I let you do this, know that it could become very dangerous for you all and while I’m allowing you to investigate, you aren’t above the law. If you break it, I’ll arrest you.” He leaned over to a draw and tugged a file out of a folder. “This is all we have on the case. Under no circumstance is anyone but your three sets of eyes going to see this understood?”

All three nodded.

“Now you three are acting as hired consultants, so anything you find you report back to me.”

“Thank you Vickers,” Jordan said.

“Thank me by not only fixing my mistake, but restoring justice to this case.”

Nathan shut the door and meet his friends at the foot of the stairs out in the fresh dark air.

“Dang that got emotional,” Jason said through a laugh. “But I finally got on the police force! I’m finally able to pursue my dream!”

Jason was overjoyed that this opportunity was given to him. He had struggled with finding himself and honoring God and his grandma at the same time. This chance felt very much orchestrated by a thoughtful director, and Jason wasn’t going to blow it. His only worried was how he would explain it to his grandmother.

Nathan gave Jason a pat on the back followed by Jordan’s. All felt excited by their new responsibility.

“Where do we start,” Nathan asked.

“We need to go back to where this started. We’re going back to the subway,” Jordan announced.

Jordan quietly closed his bedroom door so as to not wake anyone up. He kicked off his shoes and curled up on bed. After a moment, he climbed out of bed feeling foolish for forgetting to brush his teeth. He couldn’t help it. He was so excited about the new opportunity in his life. Jordan watched the motions of his

toothbrush through the mirror above his sink. His eyes began to blur and his surroundings began to change. Jordan revisited an all too familiar dream.

Jordan inched his way with one hand pressed against the wall. He had no idea where he was going, but he knew he had been going too long. His throat was irritated by its constant use. Jordan walked in silence until he heard and felt a thud. Jordan reached his hands out. He clasped onto a walking stick. It was nearly as weak as Jordan and as rough as tree bark. Jordan grabbed it with both hands and began to walk with its help. It lightened his load, and he smiled for the first time. He felt he was going toward the light. Little did he realize that he continued his journey in the darkness.

Chapter 6: Darkness on the Edge of the Subway

Before they ventured into the subway and its tunnel, they decided to meet back at Jordan's house for lunch and research. The Philip family was eating lunch when they arrived, so they ate in the shed, which was becoming a regular hangout spot. Jason relaxed, lobbing marshmallows into the air and landing them in his mouth. Nathan typed on his vogueish laptop, that he was testing for his father's company, seeking out information with a clock-work voice beckoning him for answers.

"Here! This says that the subway that was involved in the murder has been taken off the tracks and set aside." He scrolled to the bottom. "It does not say where it is being kept."

"I'm thinking it is still down there, but on an exclusive track that they pull malfunctioning subway carts off onto for repair," Jordan guessed aloud.

"Jason are our backpacks ready to go?"

Jason had been captivated by his childish activity and forgotten to pack any of the supplies they needed.

"I got the marshmallows," Jason declared.

"Great. Now pack the flashlights," Jordan instructed.

They decided to take their bikes to the train station because it was nearby. It was the quickest way into the city from Oakley, Georgia. Individuals would leave behind their town for work and shopping in the city of Atlanta. Oakley was populated with suburbs and green fields that shimmered whenever a gust of wind sped between each individual blade. In the heart of Oakley there was a sufficient amount of restaurants, stores, and activities. For those that desired more however, Atlanta was just a subway ride away. Jordan and Jason preferred the outdoors and waking up to fresh, untouched air compared to the skyscrapers and the noise of entrepreneurship. Nathan's house stood within a mile of the city border, thus he learned to appreciate both environments.

They descended a wide flight of stairs and faced a billboard with transportation information.

"We were in tunnel 5, heading for Atlanta, Georgia," Nathan said.

“Is it active?”

“Yes.”

“We will have to check it out, but first we need to find the subway cart,” Jordan said while walking where his gut led him. He yanked on a door handle. It was locked. “Do you have that master key device Nathan?”

“Guys! We don’t have to sneak around anymore. Chief Vickers has given us permission to investigate. All we need to do is ask and we shall receive,” Jason said.

A friendly face waited the three boys as Jason led them across the concrete floor.

“Hello mam. My name is Jason and these son mi amigos.” The lady behind the counter read a paper Jason had given her as he continued to talk. “We have special permission as hired consultants for the Oakley police department to have full access to the subway cart that was involved in Adriel Seymour’s’ murder. Can you please direct us that way?”

“I thought it was suicide?”

“We are covering all our bases.”

“Very well.”

She skimmed the paper again, handed it back, and led them to a door that took several minutes to get to.

Nathan smirked.

“Looks like your gut was a little off Jordan.”

“No comeback,” Jordan said with a smile.

The room was well lit, revealing details about the subway that they hadn’t noticed before. There was amateur graphity strewn across one side of the subway. Only words with vague to no meaning were splashed on with paint, some referencing sexual undertones. Inside the subway, yellow and ribbon and number stands

were strategically placed on anything that could hold it in place. Jason noticed then shuttered at the blood stain at the end of the subway. On the opposite end, glass was encompassed by a plastic fortress, above it lied a remainder of a window. Jordan recalled Chief Vickers' note of the broken window. There were other tiny splotches of blood from people who had been injured from the chaos.

"Let's get to work," Nathan said.

"Okay. So our theory is that Adriel Gonzalez was shot there, from someone that was inside the subway car," Jordan read out of some of his notes. "Jason go over to where Adriel was standing."

Nathan caught on to Jordan's idea and placed himself where Jason stood. Jordan walked backward, with every prurient step, while keeping his focus on Jason. Once his back felt the wall, he side stepped to the right where shards of glass remained. His thumb rose vertical as his pointer finger fell horizontal and together they rocketed upward following a charismatic, mouth produced gun shot.

"So that's where the shot was fired?"

"That's what I'm thinking."

"Explain?"

"Nathan, remember the guy with the shaky hand? When we lunged for the guy in the dark I heard a distinct yet very discreet gunshot noise right around this area."

"I didn't hear anything," Nathan said.

"Neither did I," Jason added.

"Why wouldn't you? See I think this gives us a clue into this murder. Even through all the noise of the train and people, we should have heard a gunshot, but only I did and that is because I was close to it."

"The murder must have been using a silencer," Jason concluded.

"That's a good thought, but according to this police layout, nobody was in that area," Nathan announced with dismay as he showed Jordan the notes Vickers had given them. On the sheet was a layout of

the train with the names of different people scribbled on where people were during the crime. The closest name to where the gun shot originated was Jordan.

“Fair enough, but people could have lied or even moved from their original spots,” Jordan said walking to where Jason was. He stood on the Jordan’s far left.

“According to this report, Adriel was shot through the heart.” Jason robotically put his foot in front of him and followed with his other one, counting each step aloud, until he made it to Adriel’s seat. “That’s 30 feet. Jordan you said you heard the shot when it was already dark correct? Jordan nodded. “So to hit Adriel in the heart, 30 feet away, on a bumpy subway, and with zero vision is nothing short of a miracle, well it wasn’t a good thing, but bad, which makes me wonder can there be good and bad miracles or...”

“Jason, your point?”

“Right. I don’t think it was luck that directed that shot. He must have had some help,” Jason said.

“Whether that help is high tech or natural skill, he couldn’t have made that shot without help,” Jordan concurred.

“According to the report, the police found nothing out of the ordinary on the subway,” Nathan said. “But I think we should do a search of our own. If there is anything we know for sure, this murderer is crafty.”

For the next ten minutes, they felt under seats, checked luggage compartments, checked for loose flooring, and attempted to pry open the door that separated subway cars.

“No sign of anything here,” Nathan reported in a muffled tone from under a bench.

“Same here,” Jason said as his voice fell from above a luggage compartment.

Jordan superficially huffed, not expecting to find anything but appeared perplexed.

“Let’s look at the pictures of the evidence,” Jordan said.

Again for a measure of time they scSophed each picture for a unique object, but all they found were bloody clothes, most of them being Jason’s, and other anti-violent things.

“Now what?”

“That broken window has me puzzled. First, I never heard it break. Second, nobody remembers how it was broken other than a few people saying they bumped into windows when the lights went out. But that shouldn’t have caused the window to break. It must have been broken with intention, for a purpose...Jason can you do a calculation for me?”

“Sure bro.”

“First how fast do subways cars go?”

Jason slapped on his thinking face then defaulted to google for answers.

“Subways rarely go over 30 mph, and that’s how fast we were going until we hit the brakes,” Jason alleged.

“And we were about five minutes into our trip when the lights went out completely, then about seven minutes when I heard the gun shot. Let’s say that’s when the window was broken. How far along would we have been in the tunnel when the window was shattered?”

Jason conferenced with his paper, pen, and calculator. He rarely used his calculator, until he converted the kilometers to miles.

“We were about 3.5 miles into our journey,” Jason answered.

“Alright boys let’s hop to it. We have a lot of ground to cover.”

“We’re going to walk through the subway tunnels aren’t we?” Nathan asked with the answer in his voice.

“Yep.”

“Wait before we go, I have these hats,” Nathan said.

They were camo-colored, traditional ball caps with three miniature bulbs that slightly protruded from the front end of the cap. A click of a button located under the right half of the cap turned their white light on.

“Nathan, you have the coolest gadgets ever!” Jason exclaimed.

“Well actually I just bought those a Dick Sporting Goods, but I’ll take the complement,” Nathan jested.

Fortunately for them, the tunnel had a side walk and railing that spSophed for miles. This was installed because electricians and plumbers needed consistent access to the tunnel for maintenance. The subway lights were working and were much brighter than before. They walked with flashlights in hand, occasionally stopping when something caught their eye. Nathan checked his phone to tell them how far they had traveled in the subway as it counted each step and calculated it into miles. Despite the lights, the tunnel was filled with a gloomy darkness. The tunnel ahead was a clear, thick black like that of a chalkboard that had recently been wiped down by a wet washcloth. A subway’s headlights would occasionally pierce through it, signaling in the guy’s minds to cup their ears and face the wall. Speed was deterred by darkness and cautious step through the maze of brick wall. They were in there for so long, Jason thought his eye sight would never return to normal, afraid that he would forever see through a bat’s perspective. The clock struck 4, then the second hand bopped for twenty more cycles before Nathan announced they had reached their destination.

“Okay, the shattered window was facing the railing side where we are standing so if the murderer threw anything it would be in this area,” Jordan announced.

Without having to put as much effort in as before, they searched up and down the walk way again to come up short.

“Hey Jason is this not one of the lights that went out,” Jordan asked pointing above him where the carcass of a tube shaped bulb clung to the wall by its metal cage.

“Looks like that one has not been replaced yet,” Jason observed.

“I want to take a look at that, hoist me up dudes,” Nathan commanded when nearly on top of Jason.

Jason fortified the base and Jordan the center leaving Nathan to rest on top of the human tower.

“Ya’ll are heavy you know that,” Jason said.

“This tower seems doomed to fail just like the tower of Babel was,” Jordan teased.

“Wait you know about the Tower of Babel?” Jason said ecstatically.

“I do.”

“Last we talked, I didn’t think you were a fan of the Bible?”

“I never had anything against it, I never even thought about it until recently. I’ve just listened to a few sermons online.”

“What did you think?”

“I’m not sure, but like anything worth finding, it takes persistence and lots of thought.”

“Hey it’s not a solo investigation either, if you have any questions let me know.”

“I have one,” Nathan said. “Can the base of our tower quit babbling and stand a little sturdier,” Nathan pleaded from a very uncomfortable height.

“Oh sorry sure thing bro.”

Nathan inspected the wiring with the tips of his fingers and by short intervals of time. He picked up pieces of glass with his two prominent members and decisively placed them like someone in a game of chess. He gathered what was salvageable from the light, put them in an indigo cloth then zipped a side pocket of his backpack where they found their final resting spot for the day.

“Carry me over to one of the working ones please.”

Jason’s every step followed a heavy grunt. Jordan did his best to lighten his load by pushing up on Nathan’s thighs while Nathan scaled the walls with his hands until he nearly collided with a protuberant brick. Nathan unscrewed the cage then hesitated.

“Guys whatever you do, don’t move.”

“Okay so whatever refers to literally nothing,” Jason said pronouncing the t with a ch sound.

The words barely left Jason’s mouth when the light above them fell dead with a crack.

“Is everyone okay,” Nathan asked.

“Surprisingly yes,” Jordan said looking down at Jason.

Getting down proved a much easier task when they found a pole for Nathan to descended instead of two sets of shoulders.

“What did you find? Jordan asked with a curious suspense.

“The broken bulb...”

“Which one?” Jason pointed out.

“The one I didn’t break,” Nathan continued. “That one had a much smaller wattage capacity than the one I broke. So much smaller in fact that it should have never been installed because it was just waiting to blow up. Whoever the electrician was made a serious mistake.”

“Or a very intentional one,” Jordan thought aloud.

“Dude that right. What if the electrician intentionally rigged the lights so they would go out?” Jason asked with an inflated enthusiasm.

“That’s possible, but it would be very difficult to determine when they would go,” Nathan said.

“Maybe his goal wasn’t necessarily to burn out those lights, but cause the whole electrical system to crash.”

“That could be true Jordan. Enough electricity going through the correct amount of inefficient bulbs could have been the cause of the subway lights going out. According to the report this whole tunnel and its trains are connected to the same power reserve,” Nathan informed.

“Okay, based on that, I would venture to say that the lights and the murder are no coincidence like chief Vickers said. The guy that murdered Adriel must have rigged the lights,” Jordan said confidently.

“Then we find out who installed them and we have our murderer!” Nathan exclaimed.

“That would be nice, but this is all circumstantial. See I learned that from my police studies,” Jason declared emphatically pointing to himself with flashlight in hand.

“Wait what was that? Jason shine your light that direction again,” Jordan commanded.

The second wave of light again reflected off something that had caught Jordan’s eye. It had Jason too who had moved the light back and steadied it on a pair of crushed glasses.

“It seems everything we’ve found has been damaged,” Jason noticed.

These are some thick glasses, and what’s this wiring,” Nathan asked.

“Could be a chain for the glasses that you wear around your neck,” Jason suggested.

“Let’s take it with us.”

“Hey if you boys are down here you need to come with me right now!” a booming voice stormed the tunnel. “You can’t be back here!”

Jason punched Jordan in the arm much to his alarm and annoyance.

“I thought we were allowed back!” Jason whispered feverishly.

Jordan whispered back his defense. “I never said that, but we needed to come back here. We found out a lot of key information.”

The officers light came closer. The boys were still concealed by the darkness that was provided by the two broken lights. They quickly shut off their hat lights.

“What do we do?” Jason panicked still in a whisper.

“Let’s hop the rail and take the tracks until we get by him,” Jordan suggested lunging between the two parallel bars.

“Remember, the tracks aren’t electric except for the third rail so don’t touch that one,” Nathan reminded them.

Jason looked down and began stepping further onto the track. He side stepped and with each one counted aloud.

“One rail, two rail, okay I’m good,” Jason said.

Nathan jerked Jason before his hovering foot touched the ground, pulling a loose string even further from its stitching in the process.

“What was that for!”

“I said watch out for the third railing.”

“I did! Did you not hear me counting aloud!”

“He didn’t mean literally the third rail, he meant the actual third rail. You know the one with electricity running through it,” Jordan said.

“What, a third rail is a metaphor for an issue that would be detrimental to someone in politics to tackle,” Jason answered back.

“What!” Jordan and Nathan hissed through and effort to remain quiet.

“You know some might say social security is the third rail, or I might say choosing which Pizza joint to sponsor would be the third rail. I mean you’ve got Pizza Hut, Papa Johns, Papa Murphys…”

“Where in a subway station though.”

“I thought you meant the third rail, like when you count, was the bad one.”

Jordan was disconnected from the conversation enough to notice light peering around the corner. It wasn’t the officer but a subway! Jordan grabbed them by the shoulder which abruptly ended their debate in undertone.

“Guys we need to move now!”

Both the subway and the officer were approaching them from the same side. This was also the same side they needed to be on.

“We got to run toward the subway and get to the railing!”

The situation they found themselves couldn't have been worse. Running between a sharp, rusty railing and another with the electrical current of a hundred eels into a ferocious subway train was their best option. The subway's short branching headlights didn't reach them, but was gaining. Each of them chSopheled every fact about running they could think of to help them propel forward. They forced all their strength into their foot pads and leapt with each step while the other leg was already winding up. There was a narrow gap between the officer and the subway that was closing rapidly and was the only chance for Jordan, Jason, and Nathan. They couldn't even hear themselves gasp for air amidst the subway's roaring engine that had engulfed the tunnel. Jordan tossed his backpack onto the sidewalk after Jason and Nathan. With as much force as their legs could muster, they jumped onto the railing. Jason hung by one hand until Jordan grasped the other and, what would have been a hurl if he were a football, heaved Jason onto the side walk. Nathan swung his foot around the railing just the subway passed them. The subway faded off around the corner while they rivaled a possum's ability to play dead. They let out one simultaneous gasp once they felt safe again.

“We're not dead,” Jason laughed hysterically while on his side. “Thank you Lord!”

“Amen,” Nathan added.

“Come on, that officer is still here. We need to get out of here,” Jordan said.

Despite their emotional sprint into the arms of death, as Jason put it, all found it much easier to meet up the next day and continue examining the case then be at home and try to act normal around their parents, who still did not know of their investigation.

“What is it Jordan?”

“You said it was urgent.”

“Remember our theory about the lights? I first called the subway station and asked what company they used for the repairs. They said Franklin's Electricity so I called them and they said a man named Steve Mosby repaired the lights.”

“Boom, we have our killer,” Nathan said with pumped fists in the air.

“That’s what I was thinking, but before I rushed into anything I wanted to check my sources. Posing as someone from the subway station, I called Steve and asked him some general questions about the repairs.” Jordan’s stomach churned so he sat down. “At first he said he didn’t know what I was talking about so I pried more. He eventually told me that he was with his sick grandfather in the hospital all day. I eventually called the hospital to confirm it. “He told me someone else had taken the job that day...”

Nathan and Jason were dead silent, pasty pale, and in shock. Jordan hadn’t spoken, but he didn’t need to.

“Who was it?”

“Adriel Seymour.”

Chapter 7: Who Is Adriel Seymour?

“Why would Adriel put bulbs in that he knew would burn out, on the subway tunnel that he was on and later killed?” Nathan asked.

“This case is proving much more complex than I thought,” Jason said with a hand on his forehead.

Jordan had no answer or some minute detail he had noticed and could share. He was without answers and it troubled him. Jordan walked over to the white board that hardly showed any white between the blue and green markings and writings.

“This whole time we’ve been looking for evidence of a murderer, and the one lead we had for him turned out to be the victim.” Jordan held an eraser and before Jason could protest, Adriel’s name was no longer under the category “victim”, but a newly written “unknown”. “We need to start from the beginning with this guy. At this point I don’t know who he is so anything is on my table.”

“Let’s get started.”

Despite being determined to solve the case; they were deflated as much as a busted bike tire. They drew out old files and evidence with the same defeat as someone who has to pull out a clean plate from the dishwasher only to scrub excess food from its surface. They wrote up new theories and cut out new paths to take, but nothing they were confident in. Jason heard his phone vibrate.

“Hello?”

“Jason where are you?”

“Oh hey grandma,” Jason said secluding himself in a corner. “I’m at Jordan’s house.”

“Well I need you to come home, you have that interview tomorrow for our local grocery store.”

Jason had forgotten and purposely so. He had told her repeatedly he was not interested, but his grandmother insisted on him finding a steady and safe job. Jason had been debating to tell her what he had been doing in his free time, but didn’t want to lose his opportunity.

“Norma, I need to tell you something and I don’t want to do it over the phone. I’ll be home tonight and we can talk then.”

“Okay be safe. I love you.”

“Love you to,” Jason said while his gut clenched up. A heavy burden was on him and he knew the key to the baggage’s lock was telling his grandmother the truth.

“You good Jason?” Nathan asked slightly concerned.

“Oh yes, totally.”

“First thing tomorrow, Jason call Vickers’ sister and ask if we can speak with her. Nathan check more into the business that Adriel worked for and I’ll continue to study the evidence we have here. We can meet up tomorrow morning with what we’ve got,” Jordan instructed.

There were several kinds of pop, a gallon of milk, and a hole punched cartoon of grapes in Nathan’s refrigerator. He couldn’t sleep that night because something was keeping him up. His big secret forbade him drift off into a utopian state. He tried to wager with it, saying it was for his families own good, but it remained silent, only presenting itself when least expected. Nathan decided to work on the pair of glasses he had found in the subway cart knowing he wouldn’t be able to fall asleep until the sugar in his two cans of pop were absorbed into his blood stream. Before he could dive in he heard footsteps above.

“Dad?”

There was no answer, only more footsteps not minding the noise they created.

“Hello?” Nathan asked.

He was relieved when Roger, his brother, walked in with a untucked dress shirt and loosened tie that passed well below his belt line.

“Dad,” Nathan exclaimed as he gave him a hug.

“I thought you weren’t getting back until tomorrow?”

“I was able to wrap up the meeting faster than anticipated. I was not expecting any greeting though,” Roger said considering the time.

“Yay, I couldn’t sleep,” Nathan said.

“Something on your mind?”

“You could say that.”

“Nate, I know I have been busy with my job along with dad and mom, but I want you to know we’re always here for you. We’re always a phone call away, so don’t hesitate. But seeing as we are face to face, do you want to talk?”

Nathan absolutely wanted to talk, but knew it would be the end of their investigation so he fought back every urge to tell his brother until he knew he could keep his mouth shut about it.

“I appreciate that man, but maybe another time. I’m kind of busy at the moment.

Roger nodded.

“Clearly,” he said as he started to notice Nathan’s project.

“Oh... yes... that’s something I’ve been working on. I’m trying to create lens that alternate between near and far sightedness,” Nathan explained. He felt his secret pain his heart as the words rolled off his lips.

“Nate, I don’t mean to discourage you, but that would be nearly impossible for several reasons.”

“You’re right, I was just curious.”

“Not only that, but you’ve created something interiorly different. Are you sure that’s what you were trying to create?”

“What do you mean,” Nathan asked now standing by Roger’s shoulder both anxious and curious.

“Let me show you.”

Roger's fingers twirled in different directions and with each moment the glasses became more whole. It took some other materials to make it work, but with Nathan's help, it was complete. Roger slipped them over Nathan's ears, then clicked something on top of the glasses and finally turned out the lights.

"See?"

Nathan grinned with darkened lens on that made him look like a carton villain featured in a Saturday morning cartoon.

"Exactly."

The Boys meet up the following morning, wearing winter coats and gloves. The forecast called for snow, and signs of it were agreeing with its prediction. Jordan was picking out which clouds had the potential for snow from ones that were just white-gray pillows on a black canopy when Nathan arrived followed by Jason.

"Can we meet inside for this meeting," Jason asked through chattering teeth.

"Don't worry the shed has a heater in it," Jordan said beckoning them inside.

They all took their assigned seats, Jason sitting correctly on the lawn mower chair for the first time, facing each other in a circular shape. Jason pulled out some marshmallows stuffed one in his mouth.

"Boy you are going to get sick from eating all those," Nathan jested.

"It's okay I've built up a tolerance. I can eat as many as I want," Jason said popping one more in his mouth as the other slid down his throat.

"Okay Jason what do you have?"

"I spoke with Miss. Vickers and she said we could meet her at Von Muar because she is going on an all-day shopping spree. I unfortunately could not find a more common ground to meet on." Jason said whining with each word. "Good gravy biscuits," he uttered.

"Shopping! Oh dear Neptune!" Nathan exclaimed.

“And it’s women shopping, sweet Christmas,” Jordan added.

They paused, glancing at each other an unusual amount of times.

“Did we all just use our curse replacements just now,” Jason said.

“By Jove we did,” Nathan teased.

“I guess none of us like shopping that much,” Jason joked.

“True that Jason. Okay, so what about you Nathan,” Jordan said to redirect the conversation. He couldn’t help but laugh and appreciate it for a moment however.

Nathan walked up to the white board and began writing with a fresh red pen.

“Adriel Seymour worked at Earlenbaugh Construction as an electrician. However, he lost his job due to budget costs. He was not given his final check either and never found a career. He did end up working at Franklin Electricity.”

“Anything in his personal life that might help us?”

“Nope, Vickers already told us about his marital issues,” Nathan said.

“What about this company he worked at,” Jason asked.

“It’s your basic construction company. They work entirely with big companies. The smallest building they constructed was Italian Bakery. Good calzones,” Nathan reported. “They constructed most of the big buildings we see in Atlanta and are the largest construction company in Georgia.”

“I honestly don’t have anything,” Jordan confessed. “I went through the evidence and couldn’t come up with anything. Here’s our problem; we have no motive for someone to kill Adriel. He was a nice guy who had a rough patch in his life, but seemed to make it out okay until he was murdered on the subway.”

“We also don’t have a clear understanding as to how he was killed,” Jason added.

“Maybe so, but this will help. You know those glasses we found in the subway? They aren’t any ordinary pair...” Nathan said running to the taunt string hanging down in the middle of the room. “Someone put them on and press on the top bar between the glass lenses.”

Nathan pulled the string, the lights went out, Jason tapped the bar on top where he felt a button and pressed down. Jordan and Nathan looked around blindly while Jason reveled in his unexpected delight.

“Holy moly!”

Jordan eagerly awaited what Jason, who slowly removed the glasses, had to say while Nathan stood triumphantly.

“What did you see?”

Jason looked over to Jordan. “Everything dude. These are night vision goggles.”

“That’s how the murderer was able to shoot Adriel!”

“Take a look at the frame of the glasses. These are strong enough to withstand a lot of wear and tear, but when we found them they were shattered. Something big or strong must of hit them,” Nathan pointed out.

“Let’s do a quick test,” Jordan said leading them outside.

Jordan disappeared around his gate. He waited for the garage door the slowly open up, then scurried inside. Jordan rested a latter on the smooth cement surface in front of the shed. With the goggles and a pair of sunglasses in hand, he climbed to the top. Jordan put the goggles in his back pocket, then chucked the sunglasses onto the cement below. The result was a pair of busted and lens-less glasses.

“Jordan where did you get those?” Jason asked.

“They were on the storage ben in the shed,” Jordan answered.

“Those were mine!” Jason exclaimed falling to his knees and cradling what was left of his glasses.

“Oh, that was a mistake,” Jordan said. “Um, sorry dude.”

“Don’t get mad Jason, it’s just a pair if sunglasses,” he muttered to himself several times as he returned to Nathan side.

Nathan, who had caught on to Jordan idea, was eager to text the goggles.

“Throw them down!”

Jordan did the same thing to the goggles, but got a much more different result. They were completely intact. There was only a faint scratch that was only visible in the right light.

“These goggles were thrown out the subway window, but something else must have fallen on top of them for them to be broken as they were,” Jordan concluded.

“The murder weapon,” Nathan said.

“Could be.”

“Yet this raises so many more questions,” Nathan reminded.

Had Jason not set an alarm on his phone, he would have been swept off into a whirlwind of theories.

“Hey guys if we don’t want to miss our one opportunity to be talking clothes racks, we better get going to Von Maur,” Jason announced.

Jason and Nathan waited by Jordan’s car while they waited for their friend. Jordan opened the garage door and gingerly walked his bike, ducking under the garage door.

“There’s two more bikes if you want to ride.”

“No.”

“Why not. We are just going to ride down and check the next subway.”

Nathan and Jason decked their heads like an aggressive goose and gestured wildly.

“Let’s take my car,” Jordan said.

Chapter 8: A Crime of Fashion

The drive up was fueled by marshmallows, endless albums of music ranging from Billy Joel to Dropkick Murphys, and the newly created octave from Jason that rattled even a passing driver whose windows were down. As they drove, their surroundings began to drastically change. Bushy trees changed to breathtaking skyscrapers. Plains of smooth grass were ripped up and replaced with even smoother pavement. The further they drove, the more lanes forked out from their own. One road soon became many roads with many twists and turns. They overlapped each other, forming sophisticated crossings patterns that would be a sight to behold from an airplane. It was one of these roads that took them all the way to an exit which brought them to the front door of Van Maur.

They waited at the door for Mrs. Vickers to show up. Jason had not asked for a description because of the photograph they still had with them. Five minutes late, Mrs. Vickers strutted in, early on her time, switching her shoulder strap from one to the other. She was dressed in a yellow dress and swaddled in a light, grey cardigan. She wore complimentary shoes and necklace whose jewels were blinding in the right light. A vast leather purse hung from her side, rounding off at her thigh. Before a word could be said she was off into the depths of the store. The three followed her to the end of the store where a sign read women's shoes.

"Excuse me mam, are you Mrs. Vickers," Jason asked rhetorically.

"That's Sophe Vickers." She paused. "Oh you must be here for my animal fashion blog."

"I'm afraid not."

"My cooking top idea?"

"Sounds original," Jason teased with little sarcasm.

"My animal rescue blog?"

"You did say *animal* fashion blog correct?"

"Yes, but it's the ones no one cares about."

Jordan stepped up before Jason could lecture her about his animal beliefs.

“I’m Jordan, and this is Nathan and Jason. We are here to speak to you about your ex-husband.”

“Oh you’re those guys. Here hold these,” she said dropping a box of shoes into Jordan’s outstretched hand. He juggled it for some time before he firmly grasped it with both hands.

“Is this a bad time?” Nathan asked as nicely as he could.

“Oh totally. Just as long as you can keep up. Follow me.”

She was off once again into another part of the store that she navigated so naturally it was like she designed the layout. She took several detours, which stopped the boys gruffly in their path, to hold up a shirt and through it on one of three walking clothes racks. The latest clothing had completely covered Nathan face. He mumbled something inaudible, which was for everyone’s betterment.

“She didn’t even try these on,” Jason whispered to Jordan.

“Remember, she did this,” Jordan demonstrated his most over the top impression of Sophe. It drew several gazes, none of them were Sophe’s.

Between all this, they asked her many questions about her relationship with Adriel. They made note that it all matched up with what Chief Vickers said. They also noted that her attitude was much different than what they were expecting. She was very selfish and focused only on herself. Before Nathan could say anything more, Jason suggested it was her way of coping with Adriel’s death. Nathan immediately softened up after that.

“Sophe, did Adriel like his job?”

“He did most of the time. There was one time in his life where he came home every day stressed. He told me it had to do with the main guys of the business. Something about a disagreement.”

“What was that disagreement?”

“I don’t remember.”

“How long ago was it?”

“About five years ago.”

“Did that happen around the time he was fired?”

“Hmmm, no. He was fired two years after that.”

“Because of financial cuts,” Nathan added.

“That’s what the papers said, but Adriel didn’t act like that was the reason.”

“What were his reasons?” Jordan asked.

For the first time they had been in the store, she put down the newest piece of clothing, and looked at them. She went from uncouth to very concerned, leaning on the edge of fragile.

“When Adriel was laid off, he changed. He was distant, but always kind to me. He would leave early morning and come back late at night. He said he was at his friend’s house or looking for work. I was concerned, and he became annoyed by that. Our relationship became tense. After weeks of pressings him for answers, and told me something very obscure...” She began to tear up.

“Sasha if you could tell us what he said, that would help us a lot,” Jordan gently urged.

“He said he was working on something big and that when he was finished we would be rich and happy. He never said what it was, only that he was bringing justice to those who deserved it.” She paused again. “He told me he was going to have to leave me for a while so he could accomplish his task. That’s when I decided to break up. He tried to argue with me, but things only got worse.”

“Are the police aware of this,” Nathan asked.

“My brother new about Adriel’s claims as soon as he said them, but he thought they were the ramblings of a drunk man. Plus, he found no connection to Adriel’s murder and his comments.”

“I’m so sorry Sasha. You’ve been very helpful. Thank you for your time,” Jordan said.

They placed the clothes on a conveniently placed cart, and began to walk out the door when Jason walked in front of them.

“Guys, she needs some help. How about we stay with her until she is done shopping?”

Nathan, whose opinions of Sophe were on a roller coaster with as many bumps as a static wave, was indifferent to her now. He nodded.

“She does need someone to talk to and just be there for her. Her talking about the past really helped unlock the woman we thought she was.”

Jordan looked at the time, then over several coat racks to where Sasha was trying on more clothes. He hadn’t even thought of doing that, but instantly felt what his friends said was right. He envied that he was so careless not to think of it.

“Okay, let’s do it.”

They spent 2 more hours trying to be a friend to Sasha instead of investigators. They would occasionally begin to think about the case until one of them would kindly bump the other. The further they went into the afternoon, the more Sasha opened up and was pleasant to talk to. The guys stayed even during check out, helping the cashier rummage through the mountain of raiment that had collected over hours of shopping.

“Before we go, I have one more question. You said that Adriel spent a lot of time with a friend. What is his name?”

“Obadiah Shore. If you want to talk to him I could give you his number.”

“An address would be better,” Jordan said, then kicked himself for his apprehensive remark. “We like to talk in person.”

Sophe didn’t think much of it, writing it down without hesitation on a card that Nathan slipped into his pocket. After this, they said their goodbyes and even received an apology from Sophe. Refreshed and ready to return to the case, the guys brain stormed in Jordan’s car.

“Where to now?” Nathan asked.

“I could go for some food. Let’s head for downtown,” Jason suggested.

“Food can wait. We have a suspect talk to,” Jordan said.

“What are you thinking Jordan?” Jason asked no longer worried about the the queasy growls of his stomach.

“You heard Sophe say that Adriel was working on something big with this guy named Obadiah. If anyone knows what “it” is it’s him.”

“Do you think he killed Adriel?”

“The thought crossed my mind,” Jordan answered.

“Hear that Jason? When we talk with this guy choose your words carefully,” Nathan warned with sarcasm.

“Hey, choose I words my carefully,” Jason teased in a voice that mimicked Yoda’s.

The ride up was brief but filled with many man made spectacles. Jordan flipped on his windshield whippers as snow began to descend between the glass towers from the brooding clouds above. He parked several houses away from Obadiah’s house, which lied on the edge of downtown, noticing that no lights or cars were present.

“No one is home,” Jason said.

“That’s okay we’ll just have a look around,” Jordan answered.

“Okay hold up, we can’t just break into a house. Where do we draw the line,” Nathan protested at the steps of the back door.

Before Jordan or Jason could responded a chilling cry burst out from the house. A woman continued to scream mildly as the sound of furniture fell to the floor. The three boys began shouting out to her, to which they received no response. Jason wrenched at the door knob while Nathan looked for something to unlock the door. Jordan took several steps back, gathered as much strength as he could, and sprinted at the door. The

hinges snapped, wood cracked, as Jordan fell into the house on top of the door. He quickly rose to his feet as the three of them rushed toward the dying sounds of a woman in distress.

The hallway was dark. The only visibility was provided by a window whose rays enlightened the dark, brown floor. The three guys ran to the end of it, then took a sharp turn through the kitchen and into the living room. They stood still, no longer concerned, but relieved. There was a girl who had been kidnapped and furniture broken to pieces, but on the set of a movie that was playing on a TV. Jordan found the remote and turned down the volume.

“I can’t believe we feel for this,” Nathan shouted.

“This guy has surround sound throughout this whole room. Very high quality,” Jason added.

“We need to get out of here before an alarm goes off or he comes home,” Nathan urged.

“Hold on Nathan, we are in here so any harm we could have done has already been. If there was an alarm it would have gone off already. Plus, I have a hunch that requires some snooping around into Obadiah’s life, because he wouldn’t be honest about it anyway,” Jordan said.

“Okay, but let’s be careful and not damage any more of his things.”

The decided to split up so they could efficiently investigate. Jordan ventured into another hallway, Jason retraced their steps, checking even the frig for evidence or what Jordan would call a snack, Nathan remained in the living room. Nathan found Obadiah’s desk calendar. It had several job interviews scheduled, meetings with friends, but one thing stood out to Jordan. At the top of the calendar was a business card for a psychiatrist. Before he could look anymore, Jordan was the first to call out to his friends when he found a door that lead to the basement.

The basement was cold and unfinished. There was rolled up carpet standing upright against a wall. The ceiling was popcorn and close to Jason’s head. There was a fan in the corner that was currently not in use. Despite the shabby decor, there was an office desk with a computer on it. Another desk connected at the end of the previous one. It was covered with tools and had a tool rack hanging from its adjacent wall. On the next wall was a blue print for a building. Each found their area of expertise; Jason looked for the on switch of the computer, Nathan inspected the tools and equipment, and Jordan combed through papers.

“Hey guys, these papers all have to do with Earlenbaugh construction,” Jordan revealed.

“Obadiah and Adriel must have worked together there. Maybe that’s where they met,” Jason proposed. “Computer is still loading so no update yet.”

“Usually I can tell what is being made by its tools, but I am totally lost,” Nathan reported.

“What do you mean,” Jordan asked now at his side.

“I was expecting to find things used to create night vision goggles or an EMP device, but none of these things would be used for that. In other words, nothing very suspicious here.”

“Keep looking. We know he and Adriel spent a lot of time here. If the big thing they were working on was here, I know it eventually found its way to this table,” Jordan said.

“Hmm, all his files have to do with Earlenbaugh construction.” Jason clicked on video. It was an interview between Oakley’s investigative reporter and the owner of the company, George Earlenbaugh.

“Hello, this is Mariah Song reporting...”

Jason skipped into the video where the owner started to speak.

“Our layoffs were very unfortunate, but necessary for the viability of the company.”

“There are some who say that is wasn’t. That is was very unexpected. I have some...”

“Let’s get to another question, “George sternly said almost in a whisper.

Jordan was ecstatic. He was rapidly putting together the puzzle, just like someone how had found where the odd piece went, allowing all the others to easily be placed. Jordan grabbed the mouse from Jason and paused the video.

“Guys I think I got it. I need to call Vickers but start looking for a black brief case. Nathan I’m talking about the one we saw in the subway.”

“The one the guy with the shaky hand was holding?”

“Yes.”

“You think he is involved?”

Jordan couldn't answer. He dialed Vickers's number, pressing each number hard enough to leave a perspiring finger print. Back in Oakley, Miss Mia's face drowned in sorrow as she read the caller id. He did all he could to ease her suffering by requesting to speak to Vickers without a citizenly welcome or “how are you doing.”

“Jordan, what can I do for you,” Vickers asked from behind his busy desk.

“I had a few questions for you if you don't mind.”

“Shoot.”

“As you know Adriel called your sister minutes before he was killed. He said he wanted to reconnect with her once *this* was done. He was going to get his job back and save hundreds of lives. He never specified what he meant by that. Do you know?”

“No. We thought it was his suicide note. He was a believer in the afterlife and some weird stuff,” Vickers said.

“Hmm, okay. Second question; has anyone reported anything missing from the crime?”

“Several claims have been filed, but most of the stuff is being kept as evidence.”

“Was there a brief case missing. A black one with a Capital e on it?”

“I'll check,” Vickers said as he searched a file cabinet and removed an envelope.

A handful of things were on the list, but to Vickers' surprise and Jordan's jubilation, black brief case stood out like a sore thumb among them.

“Yes there was a report about a brief case with that description. We don't have it in evidence. What have you boys stumbled upon?”

“Sorry Vickers I have to go. I'll call you back,” Jordan said rapidly.

Nathan and Jason were intently searching every square inch of the basement. Jordan's pleasure skyrocketed when he heard Jason shout that he had found it. Nathan plowed the tools off the table to make room for the brief case.

"It has a pad lock," Jason said.

"No time for that," Jordan said with pliers in hand.

He squeezed the handles of the pliers, his hands turning milk white. The lock remained.

"There has to be some clue around here," Nathan said.

Jordan stood in place. He began to rewind his thoughts, then fast-forward. *Numbers, numbers, where have I seen numbers?* Suddenly he remembered.

"I got it. Nathan remember the address that we found in evidence? It was a four-digit combination."

"That's got to be it!"

Jordan flicked his fingers up and down to arrive at the combination "1489". They heard a click and the lock gave way. Jordan fingered the lock out of place then opened the case. Inside were blue prints of an Earlenbaugh Building. However, there were edits in pen and notes written down. They assumed they were Obadiah's. The notes explained different weak points in the building's structure, along with an assessment. They saw many words, but one sentence stood out: "The buildings integrity is too weak to be legally used and therefore must be torn down".

"So the code to the brief case was the address to a building? And in this brief case are the blue prints to this very same building?" Jason asked. "There is definitely something up with it."

"Hey there's a list here of everyone who was let go when Adriel was," Nathan said. "There's only ten people on here, and Obadiah is one of them."

"What's wrong with that," Jason asked.

"If they let people go for financial reasons, they wouldn't let only 10 go. They would hardly save any money that way," Nathan explained.

“Jordan, what are you thinking,” Jason asked.

Jordan took a moment to order things in his mind and choose the right words.

“Adriel and Obadiah both worked at Earlenbaugh Construction. They both were fired at the same time and then started meeting each other regularly to work on something big. This basement is filled with information about Earlenbaugh Construction, including a building that was deemed unusable. Guys I think we have been looking at this case all wrong. Adriel was not a victim, but an accomplice. The two of them were working on some kind of revenge for getting laid off, and as Nathan pointed out, they got laid off for some other reason that the company has been trying to hide. We know Adriel wired the lights to go out. When they went off, Obadiah must have grabbed the brief case, shot Adriel, then thrown the murder weapon and case out the window. He knew nobody would be in the subway and could retrieve them easily.”

“But I don’t remember Obadiah being on the subway cart. If he was interviewed, Vickers would have made the connection,” Jason challenged.

“In all the confusion, he must have slipped out,” Jordan answered.

“Okay, but why would Obadiah kill him? They were partners working on the same project with the same goal; to get revenge on Earlenbaugh construction. He had no reason to kill him,” Nathan pleaded for an answer.

“There’s more going on than meets the eye,” Jordan finally said.

There was the sound of a car pulling into the drive. The car alarm squeaked, followed by the door lock turning away from its hole. The three guys froze.

“It’s Obadiah,” Jason whispered.

“We need to get out of here now,” Jordan said.

“Hello? Who’s in my house?” he demanded.

“How did he know we were here? Jason asked more terrified than before.

“The door upstairs! Nathan said.

They remained planted to the ground, listening to every creek and movement that would reveal Obadiah’s location. Obadiah saw the broken door in his kitchen. The gaping hole in his wall let in an icy breeze that cooled the room. Obadiah continued to ask similar questions as he carefully pulled open a drawer with a handgun inside. He pushed the butt of the round into the hilt of the gun and cocked it.

“Is there another way out? Nathan asked.

“I checked the entire basement and the only way out is up,” Jason informed very forlornly.

“Okay we either make a break for it when we hear him go upstairs or we wait and hide until he comes down here. When he is in one of the other rooms we make a break for it. I have a plan if he comes down here.” Jordan instructed.

Nathan and Jason preferred Obadiah go upstairs. Obadiah knew that his most valuable possessions were down stairs and went down there first, much to their chagrin. Jordan let something slip under his breath that was better left unknown. Obadiah smiled when he saw the lights on at the end of the stairs.

“I don’t know who you are or how much you know, but I know why you are here. The fact you are in my basement is proof of that. I also know that you won’t be able to stop me either, because you’ll be dead.”

“Sounds like a guy who could murder someone,” Jason said.

“How can you be joking right now,” Jordan asked.

“It helps me cope with my impending doom,” Jason shrieked when he saw Obadiah’s feet land on the basement floor.

“You know, I thought I was extremely careful to make sure this never caught up to me, well not until the end,” Obadiah said. “You must be some smart cops, although cops don’t hide, so you must be someone else. How about you come out so I don’t have to wonder anymore.”

Obadiah whipped around when he heard someone cough from inside a closet. Obadiah’s smile, which had never left him, spread even wider.

“Well I guess that’s the next best thing to coming out,” he teased. “Tell me who are you?” He pulled the door open and stared. There was no one in there. There were cleaning supplies and a cubby attached to the inside the door. Inside it was a phone. Before he could react, Obadiah felt a sharp pain on his head and a push on his back. He fell right into the mop and flipped over its bucket. Jason grabbed his phone, Nathan threw a hard covered book across the room, and Jordan locked the door shut. Then all three darted up the stairs and out the only remaining door. Jordan slammed the gas and drove off sporadically looking over his head for the next several miles.

“I can’t believe that just happened,” Jason said with an elevated voice.

“That guy is insane. He was talking like this stuff was normal for him,” Nathan added.

“Dude we solved the case! We need to tell Vickers to come arrest Obadiah,” Jason exclaimed.

“I’m not convinced this is over. Both of them were working toward some ultimate end and we’ve yet to see that,” Jordan said.

“Wasn’t the subway it? They stole the plans for the building so Earlenbaugh couldn’t make it or claim the rights to it,” Jason said.

“The files were a blue print for a building they had already made. The date read 2010. I think there is something else going on and we need to find out what it is,” Jordan said.

Obadiah awoke with a sore body and broken mop. He felt around in the darkness for his gun then blew off the handle. He worriedly rummaged through all that the guys had gone through, fearing they had discovered too much. They had seen every file except one, and it was the most important one. His smile split in all directions. He looked at the the blue prints in the brief case. He pulled out the last page.

“All the owners and investors in Earlenbaugh Construction will get exactly what they deserve after all.”

Chapter 10: Facing Our Blindness

The ride home took much less time than the drive up. Jordan would occasionally hit the brakes when he saw a sign. He naturally picked up speed again whenever he thought of Obadiah's sinister face. The eyes of an individual that seemed to have a cleft that peeked into his heart and mind. His eyes blinked but did so more like an inerrant twitch. His words rolled right off the tongue without any emotional after taste. He was only two faced; one a blank and resting and the other a stomach churning smile that made one think he knew something awful that no one else did. The stoutness of a man would be greatly challenged if not decayed from his intense stare. The three boys rehearsed their theories, but only so they could forget his face. While they did not appreciate it at the time, they had developed an explanation for the murder case. Evidence was lacking, but they hoped Chief Vickers would be able to help with that.

By the time they arrived home, the boys felt themselves again as if the security of their hometown had blocked off any trailing memories of Obadiah. They planned to meet up the following day to shift their focus onto Obadiah's big plan for Earlenbaugh Construction. Before they could meet, Chief Vickers called them in to the Oakley Police Station. Chief Vickers walked in as if his relationship with them had never gone past the skunk incident.

"Vickers we're glad you called us in. We know who killed Adriel Seymour," Jordan explained.

"Really? Go ahead and tell me."

Each of them took their turn explaining the relationship between Adriel and Obadiah, what their plans were, how something happened to cause Obadiah to shoot Adriel, and that there was revenge planned for Earlenbaugh construction. They filled in the gaps that Vickers immediately pointed out.

"We know that both of them were working on revenge for getting let go, but we don't know for sure what it involves. We think it might be taking the rights of a Earlenbaugh building. That would cost them millions," Jordan explained.

"If it were something that significant, Earlenbaugh would have contacted the police. Also we never interrogated Obadiah because he wasn't on the subway."

"He must have slipped out. It was definitely him," Jason explained.

"How can you be sure?"

For fear of Vickers being able to read their reactions, they choose not to look at each other but hope one of them would be able to correctly answer that question. This failed however, because an elongated gap of silence was telling as well.

“I know how,” Vickers said. “I have a friend in Atlanta who works at a paper company. We met this morning for coffee. We talked about sports, family, friends, and neighbors. He told me that one of his neighbor’s house was broken into. The back door was caved in, but nothing was stolen. It looks like whoever broke in was just looking around for answers. My friend went to check on the guy. He was okay, just had an unexplained headache. He never called the police because he didn’t want all the attention and paper work. I was curious who the neighbor was and you know what he said?”

The three guys maintained their silence, hoping by some miracle that it wasn’t who they knew it was. Jason however couldn’t help himself.

“His name is Jeff,” he mumbled with his head tilted slightly, speaking as if the bottom and top of his teeth were stuck together with a thick molasses.

“What did you say?” Vickers asked.

“You know, el jefe?”

“No, his name was...”

“Dora right? Cause your friend’s name was boots.”

“Jason, just give it up he knows,” Nathan said.

“His name was Obadiah,” Jordan answered.

Vickers nodded. “I thought I asked you guys to investigate without breaking the law. Could you imagine the kind of trouble all of us would have gotten into if he saw you? If he called the police!”

“You don’t understand we heard a woman scream so we tried to save her,” Nathan said.

“Did you?”

“No. It was just the television.”

“Hm. Let me guess it was that Deborah TV show. Don’t think I didn’t catch your references Jason.”

“It’s actually…”

“Vickers were sorry for what happened. But a lot of good came out of it. We were able to put most of the puzzle together because of what we found down there. Please at least talk to Obadiah. We know he is planning something,” Jordan urged.

“Let’s make one thing clear. I trust you boys and admire your courage and desire for justice. I’ll go with several of my officers to speak to Obadiah.”

“Yes!” the three shouted with high fives.

“I wasn’t done,” Vickers interrupted. “I mean what I said, but it was a mistake to secretly hire high school boys with no criminal justice background to look into such a dangerous case. You could have been killed or injured. I bet you haven’t even told your parents yet. I’m sorry guys but you can no longer investigate.”

Their jubilation was vanished from the room like a vastly inflated balloon being popped with a needle. Nathan’s heart sank. He couldn’t bear the thought of ending this journey. Jason felt stuck. How could he keep moving on that his only way of transportation had been taken? Jordan felt sick to his stomach. It churned more when he found himself somewhere he didn’t want to be.

Jordan had quickened his pace with the help of his walking stick. He had felt good about where he was going. Then he heard a crack in the tattered wood. It snapped in two. Jagged pieces of wood shot in all directions. Jordan fell forward. His face brushed against the floor brutally. His neck sprang backward. He couldn’t move. He was helpless. He cried for help, but none came.

Jordan returned to reality and to the continued argumentation from his friends.

“But we are so close. You can’t let us get this close and not finish it,” Jason argued.

“I understand that. I should have never let it get this far. I’m sorry guys, but if I see you anywhere near the case, I’ll have to arrest you.

“This is absurd,” Nathan said holding none of his verbal wrath back.

Vickers was full of understanding. He continued to speak calmly to them. “Guys go home and enjoy high school and your family. Live for yourself. It’s what you should be doing.”

One by one, the guys left the police station and drove back to Jordan’s place. The car ride home wreaked of pain. They knew that they need to stop Obadiah themselves or he wouldn’t be. They didn’t talk much, only enough to agree that they would continue to investigate until everything was resolved. Jordan wrote on a regularly used notebook while Nathan toyed with the pair of glasses they found in the subway tunnel.

“I’m going to head home guys, but before I do we need to talk about our parents.”

“Our parents? They can’t find out,” Jordan said thrusting his stiff chair backward along the wood flooring.

“Have you told them,” Nathan asked suspiciously.

“I’m going to.”

“Wait are you serious?”

“Do you want to ruin our investigation,” Nathan exclaimed.

“No, I want to be honest though with the ones I love.”

“We are, we just aren’t telling them what we have been doing and they don’t ask. My dad’s too busy to listen anyway,” Nathan said.

“You are still lying because you are withholding the truth. Guys, we agree what we are doing is right, correct?”

“Of course Jason, we started this crusade because an innocent man was being framed in a wrongful way. We had to do something since we knew the truth,” Jordan explained.

“If what we are doing is right, then why do we have to hide it?”

“Our parents wouldn’t understand, they would stop us immediately,” Nathan answered.

“They might and as much as I don’t want to stop, maybe we should.”

Nathan tossed his glasses against the table then nearly jumped to his feet.

“Stop! We just started!”

“Jason there is a murderer running free and you want to give up. There is no way,” Jordan protested. “If you want to ease your conscience, look at this signed paper from the chief of police that has granted us permission to investigate.”

“Okay good we aren’t breaking the law. But we are still lying to our parents and God tells us that is a sin,” Jason argued.

Jordan scoffed and abruptly turned toward the table and rested against it. Nathan glared at Jason and stood his ground.

“We’re lying for a good reason,” Nathan said.

“Are we? If what we are doing is right and legal, what do we have to hide?”

Nathan couldn’t with good conscience show his anger toward Jason because he realized he was right. He crossed his arms and looked to the ground as if the solutions were written there on a note card. The room was silent with thought.

“Jason you’re right,” Jordan said holding a bible in the air above his back. “I recently read the ten commandments, and the fifth command says honor thy father and mother. I know we can all agree lying to our parents does not honor them. We need to tell them.”

“And if they say we can’t continue?”

“We don’t,” Jason said sympathetically toward Nathan whose head had sunk low.

“You are right guys. Sorry I chose not to believe it earlier,” Nathan said.

The lack of progress in the case had deflated them, but now they were hollowed out like an empty turtle shell. It appeared that the end was eminent, and it shook the room. Jason could sense that there was something that needed to be said, and he knew that God had revealed truth to him to share with his friends.

“Guys, I would like to confess something about all of us. We have been putting our identity in this case. I know I have. Ever since I could remember I wanted to serve in the police force. I felt I had been given talents that would suit me best in that field so I dedicated myself to become the best officer I could. When I felt qualified I applied to the police force. I never accepted because my grandmother didn’t want me to. Yet I was so determined to be a part of the police force because I thought I couldn’t do anything outside of it. I thought this was the only way I could serve God, but I’m beginning to realize that is wrong. God can use me in anyway, and I should not narrow my abilities down to just my desires. Being on this case has turned from helping someone in need to fulfilling my desires. It has been making me feel good to be a part of this. I’m not saying that is wrong, but when I start becoming the focus, it messes up God’s intentions for me. There is so much God has for me and you outside of this investigation, and I need to tell my grandmother I’m ready to answer those callings and about what we have been doing. If she says yes great, if not we need to trust that justice will be carried out some other way.”

All eyes turned to Nathan when he roughly delivered several words.

“Jason I think you’re right. I too have made this case the base of my purpose. I’ve been longing for as long as I can remember to have legitimate friends. I’ve grown up being a rich kid, and that’s led to fake friends who just want my money. When I met you guys, you didn’t care how much money was in my wallet, only how much I was willing to bring justice to Adriel Seymour. You are true friends. I also got to use my technological abilities and be recognized for it. It felt good, so when we even brought up the idea that we should stop, I panicked. This had been such a ride I didn’t want it to end. Having fun is not wrong, but that shouldn’t be my focus. So I’m going to tell my parents to and hope for the best.”

“Awesome man. Since we are all just opening up do you have anything to say Jordan?” Jason asked.

“Can I ask the preacher brothers something,” Jordan asked.

“Sure man.”

“What’s the right answer to what our purpose and identity? What I mean is I’ve been searching my whole life and I’ve never been able to find it. You know, get that feeling that it’s right. I rolled with the idea that seeking pleasure for yourself was right, it made me happy. But after recycling through that same process year after year, it felt empty. So I thought instead of helping myself, help others. When we were in the police station after the subway incident, I saw my chance to find some answers. If I could help find this murderer and help the victim’s family, I would be fulfilling my purpose and creating my identity. However, that didn’t work either. I still felt incomplete, like there was something missing. If focusing on myself wasn’t right and focusing on others wasn’t right, what was right? You guys have shown me through the way you talk and act that our focus can’t be earth. It has to be directed above. It has to be on God. It is he who provides the answers. Our identity can’t be created, only given. Our purpose can’t be made up; it must be commanded to us. I’m sorry I put my trust in a crime, instead of God.”

Jason dabbed what he could of his joy induced tears and rubbed his knees relentlessly until they were uncomfortably warm. Nathan held his composure by biting his lip enough to leave a temporary mark. Jordan not only mirrored his friends, but was a combined mess between the two. He felt ashamed of his ignorance, but suddenly calm when his friends surrounded him with a blanket of compassion.

“Jordan, do you want to find your purpose and identity right now?”

“I do.”

“Well, you were hot on its track,” Nathan teased as Jason took the bible from Jordan’s hand.

Jordan eased the door shut so as not to wake his parents, but found that wasn’t necessary when he saw his dad with a book in hand that worked more like a prop than source of attention. His mom sat concernedly on the edge of her chair.

“Another late night?” Mr. Philip asked.

“Yep,” Jordan sighed.

“Can I ask you something Jordan?” Mrs. Philip asked.

“Of course.”

“This investigation of yours is not getting into anything illegal is it?”

“Uhh, how did you know about it,” Jordan asked flabbergasted.

“I got curious when you kept meeting in the shed so I took a look and found your white board and a box of papers. I called Chief Vickers today who apologized and made sure I knew what his intentions were. He said you were given information about the case and were working up a hypothesis.”

“That’s true, but we did go to the subway cart and the tunnel to gather evidence,” Jordan said much more comfortably now that he knew his father’s reaction.

“You aren’t talking to suspects or visiting dangerous places?”

“That’s all relative, but we are being careful. We haven’t talked to any bad guys, dad.”

“Okay, as long as you do everything by the law and Vickers I’m okay with it.” Mr. Philip said.

“Me too.”

“Thanks dad and mom. I’m glad you’re okay with it. I’ve been struggling with-holding information from you and mom. I’m sorry I did. Will you please forgive me?” Jordan confessed.

Mr. Philip rocked back in his chair with widen eyes, Mrs. Philip continued to stare into the transformed eyes of her son.

“You’re sorry and want forgiveness? Uhm, yes, of course. How have the other guy’s folks handled it?”

Jordan wryly laughed and was nervous again.

“They haven’t told their parents.”

“Next time they come over, they will or you’re done with this project. Understood?”

“Yes sir,” Jordan said.

“Sir? Jordan have you been feeling okay this week?”

“Yay, I’ve just been doing some reading and it’s changed my outlook on how I should treat you guys. If I really love you and mom, I should respect you. That’s all,” Jordan said giving his dad a sideways hug then walking off to bed.

“I want to read that book,” Mr. Philip teased aloud toward his wife.

Jason tapped his knuckles, revealing the hollow nature of the door. His grandmother called him in a sleepy voice. Jason sat at her feet and held her hand. They shared guilty glances. Norma finally spoke.

“Jason, why did you cancel your interview? His grandmother asked.

“There was a time where I thought that the only thing for me was serving in law enforcement. I felt anything outside of that wouldn’t be right for me. That’s why I cancelled the interview.”

His grandmother stared at him with loving eyes.

“And what do you think in the present?”

“I realize any job can glorify God and I should be open to his calling, wherever it takes me.”

“I came to that same conclusion today.”

“What do you mean?”

“Jason I always will want to protect you. But I realize that God can only truly do that. Any job you believe he is calling you too I will support you in.”

“Even if it’s the police department?”

“Yes.”

“Well, let me explain what I mean...”

“Okay, I love you too. Bye,” Nathan said as he placed the phone into its upright charger.

“So, what did my and dad have to say? Roger asked.

“Not much. They said they didn’t have the time or ability to process any of it and that we would talk more later.”

Roger coupled a smirk with a head nod.

“Do you want to know what I think?” Roger asked.

“I couldn’t hurt, or could it,” Nathan joked somberly.

“When you serve in the military, you follow strict rules and one philosophy. If you break those rules, there are severe consequences. The reason being is when we break those rules, we comprise our mission. What’s your mission Nate?

“Is this rhetorical?”

“Yes, but it’s good for you to be able to express your feelings in words.”

“As Christians, it is to serve God and enjoy him forever.”

“God is a God of love and justice. Do we serve him when we produce justice or when we let injustice abound unchecked?”

“I would say we serve him when we deliver justice.”

“Rules are put in place so we don’t compromise our mission. Our mission is different from the worlds so they won’t always align. If you honor God with your actions, then I can’t find anything wrong with you seeking justice for someone’s death.”

“Does that mean I can break laws as long as I do it for the right reason?”

“Hey, don’t exploit my teaching Nate. You should still go through proper chSophels, which I thought you did.”

“We did, but now we aren’t allowed to work the case.”

“That’s really hard, I’m sorry. Just remember, God is in control. He will ultimately deliver it to those who deserve it. And if we are lucky, he’ll use us to accomplish that goal.”

“You’re right, thanks Roger.”

Chapter 11: All Things Come Full Circle

Christmas was arriving closer with each rise and set of the sun. Cold weather continued its war path through the small town of Oakley. Kids went outside to find creative ways to entertain themselves with snow while some older kids shoveled snow out of drive ways. Jordan, Jason and Nathan decided to meet up to shovel several drive ways and hangout afterward. It was the first time they had meet with the first topic of discussion being the Adriel murder case. Since their enlightenment, each of them found that they weren't as worried about the case anymore. Their curiosity would never die, but they felt a sudden peace and trust that Vickers would make things right, which was ultimately their hope.

"Hello Mrs. Rastisin, we are here to shovel your drive way. We'll let you know when we are done," Jordan informed her between the glass door.

The task ahead was demanding. The drive created an L shape, each end leading into a different road. There was a one spot that was covered by an overhang. Small flurries of snow blew inside, but were nothing compared to everything else. Each of the guys brought a shovel. Jason had brought a dirt shovel since he had nothing else. They decided to form an assembly line at the far right corner of the drive. Jordan stabbed his shovel into the compacted snow and plowed forward to the other side. When he had made it across, Jason traversed the same ground as Jordan, taking another layer of snow with him, while Jordan proceeded back toward Nathan on a new path. Nathan followed up Jason and they continued this until the first half was complete.

"Pretty good work so far," Jordan said enjoying their work.

"Agreed. Let's take a break under the breezeway," Nathan suggested.

Jordan removed another layer of clothing and sat down along with his other partially disrobed friends. They asked how each of their parents took to them investigating Adriel's murder. They were surprised when they all shared similar reactions. Jason attributed this to God. He believed that God showed their parents what their true intent was and that their means were justified by the end. Nathan and Jordan agreed.

"Has anyone talked to Vickers about the case," Nathan asked.

"I called him a few days ago. He said they went to his house and couldn't find him. They did find some of the things we did, but not all of it. They suspect that we scared him so bad, he fled along with whatever information he had. Either way, he's on the run and won't be able to fulfill his plans," Jason reported.

"That's good to hear. I hope they catch him though," Jordan said.

After a refreshing drink of water, they finished the other half of the road. Several more houses awaited them and all were finished before evening. Jordan pulled into his driveway to find his twin brothers scooping the driveway. Jordan could tell they were tired physically and mentally. He could tell because he felt and saw what that looked like. However, he went back to his car, grabbed his shovel, and joined his invigorated brothers until the job was done.

“Hey you guys want to play some video games inside?” Jordan asked.

“Wait, you don’t have some party or investigation to run off to?” Cody asked.

“That’s right. I’m here to do whatever you feel up to.”

Corner and Cody grinned at each other, then rambled on about an endless list that ranged from eating a bowl of sugar to teeping the house of Cody’s latest crush. Later that night Jordan had time to himself, after they had gone for ice-cream. He used that time to think about something he had been intentionally trying to avoid, but couldn’t help himself now that he knew Obadiah was missing.

“I know that if I investigate I’ll never stop. I need to trust the police to do their job,” Jordan told himself.

No matter how many times he told himself this, the battle was one sided. He wanted to help and felt God wanted him too as well. He got up and grabbed his boots. The night sky reflected beautifully off the sea foam snow. The snow crackled under his feet, massaging them with each step. Jordan pulled out the evidence they had from the case, and sprawled them along a table.

“Okay, where are you Obadiah?”

Nathan and Jason walked into the shed with coats and pjs on.

“We thought you might be in here,” Nathan said.

“Talking about the case today really started us thinking again, and we couldn’t stop,” Jason explained.

“Me too.”

The boys stood eager to start, but unwilling to face the elephant in the room; they were bSophed from investigating.

“Roger told me something that really stuck. Ultimately, God will deliver justice and if we are lucky enough he might use us to accomplish that goal. I say we look through the evidence and if we find anything, we tell chief Vickers.”

“I agree,” Jason said emphatically.

“Then let’s get started,” Jordan said.

Jordan stared at Adriel’s picture for some time. Then he went back to the beginning. Adriel and Obadiah both were fired from a company. Both thought it wasn’t fair. However, Jordan didn’t know why they were fired, only that the company didn’t want people to know. Both of them wanted revenge, and set up an elaborate plan to steal information on a Earlenbaugh Building. Adriel rewired the lights so they would go out on the train. Obadiah used his night vision goggles, stole the brief case during the commotion and through it out the window. But something went wrong. Obadiah killed Adriel. Jordan did not know why. He suspected that they had some disagreement over their plans for revenge. Jordan wrote Obadiah and Adriel’s names on the white board and began a comparison.

“Adriel was a good man. He loved his girlfriend and his job. Something terrible must have happened for him to enter the state he was in. He doesn’t seem like a guy who would murder someone. But Obadiah most certainly could. Why would he join forces with him then? Their game plan must not have been murder.”

“We found blueprints for a building and we think its address was written on that piece of note paper we found in evidence. My guess is that they were going to steal the information and the rights to it and sell them to someone else as their revenge,” Nathan thought aloud.

“Okay let’s run with that. That seems like something Adriel would do. But Obadiah must have proposed something much different. Enough to disagree, enough to get him killed. What was the new plan?”

“Maybe he wanted to murder someone in the company?” Jason said.

“Were there any signs of that,” Jordan asked.

“Could be, but why go through the entire plan to steal the blue prints. The blue prints are the key. If only we had them still,” Jordan said.

“We do boi. Before we ran out like prepubescent girls, I emailed all of Obadiah’s information to my email. I made sure he couldn’t trace any of that though,” Jason said.

“Pull them up then Jason,” Jordan said ecstatically.

Jason accessed them via his phone. He looked at each file, until he found the blue prints. There were blue and red markings everywhere. There were other markings that seemed very individualized, a language created only for them to understand.

“What do all these markings mean,” Jason asked.

“I’m not sure,” Jordan said.

“Huh, that’s weird.”

“What is Nathan?”

“It says here they used a steel support for most of the building, along with the base. They used 5*10 support beams as the vertical base and 5*10 horizontal. If they use as many as they have here, I would estimate that this building could hold 1,000 people.”

“And?”

“The estimated total is twice that much. If they got that many people in there it could collapse.”

“Seriously? That’s a huge mistake for a company to look over. Maybe they didn’t,” Jason said.

“There are several other issues I see. They are mostly short cuts to viable conditions. They would work just fine for a while, but in the right conditions they would fail,” Nathan said. “For example, in the right fire, the metal and installation would melt and collapse. A lot of these conditions don’t a line with construction standards.”

“Earlenbaugh was trying to take short cuts to save money. Adriel must have installed the lights with Obadiah and must have noticed this. Sophe said that Adriel was troubled several years before this. They must have gone to the company and told them, and the company must have threatened them. However, the damaged had been done. The building was abandoned. But years later, they must have tried to reopen the building and when they stepped in they were fired,” Jordan explained.

“They didn’t steal the plans to sell them, but to use them,” Jordan said.

“That means that the building was there revenge,” Jason said.

Jason pull up the name of the building address and see what comes up,” Nathan said.

“This has to be the same building as in the blue prints. According to this, it has never been used before.”

“Pull up any recent news based on our web search.”

“Oh no. According to Forbes, Earlenbaugh is meeting with potential buyers for the building this Thursday.”

“What is today?”

“Wednesday night.”

Jordan got up and strode back and forth, removing a hair with each stroke of his hand. Jason and Nathan a waited anxiously for him to speak.

“Guy’s, Obadiah is not missing. He’s hiding. His revenge is taking place Thursday when the owners and investors meet in the building,” Jordan said.

“Guys wait, there is still an important question. What is his revenge?” Nathan asked.

They decided to look through the emails again. Jordan’s eyes widened in unison with his disturbingly loud gasp of air.

“Call Vickers right now. Tell him to meet us at the address,” Jordan said running out the door shed.

“Wait Jordan, we don’t know what you know,” Nathan reminded.

Jordan returned and slapped the phone on the table.

“He’s planning to blow up the building with all those people inside.”

Chapter 12: Fireworks

“He’s not answering,” Jason reported.

“Then call the police,” Nathan said.

“And I’ll get the car started,” Jordan added.

“Jordan we can’t...”

“People’s lives are on the line. You said yourself that if we are lucky enough, God may use us to accomplish his goal. I say we just got an invitation.”

“You heard the man. Let’s go!” Jason exclaimed, pushing past them with the phone still in hand.

Jordan’s car rumbled, as if the car cared that it was awakened from a deep slumber, and peeled out of the driveway. Jordan remembered the snow and ice then slowed down as much as he could. Nathan pulled up directions while Jason left several voicemails on Vickers phone.

The phone rang longer than Jason wanted it to, but eventually noise was heard on the other end followed by the standard 911 introduction.

“My name is Jason Haverkamp. I have reason to believe that there is a potential bomb threat at 1489 south English street in Atlanta Georgia. You need to send police there now. The man who planted them may still be there,” Jason reported.

He continued a long conversation with the woman, who demanded more details. Jason continued to explain while Nathan and Jordan talked in the front seats.

“How do you know he was going to bomb the building?” Nathan asked.

Jordan tossed him his phone without moving any part of his body except his wrist. Nathan scrolled through the document. His fears worsened.

“This guy bought several packs of c4. It’s not enough to blow up part up the building but not bring the whole thing down.”

“So he must be targeting only where the owners and investors will be,” Jordan said.

“I wasn’t done. This guy has twenty gallons of jet fuel. He is not trying to blow up the building. He is trying to burn it down, and he will be able to with jet fuel. It can literally melt steel.”

“This guy is exposing the buildings weaknesses in some ironic way,” Jason said.

“If he is successful, it will look like a regular fire accident. No one will be the wiser.”

“Except us,” Jordan said reaching fifteen miles over the speed limit.

Jason sat up between the two seats of the car. “The police are going to send several squad cars, but they don’t really believe me. We need to get there now,” Jason reported.

Jordan pulled in front of the building and behind several cop cars that just arrived there. The guys got out of their cars to meet them.

“Are you the ones that called this in,” one officer asked them.

“Yes sir. The man’s name is Obadiah Shore. He means to burn the building down,” Jordan told them.

“We found a car parked around back. We’ll go check it out. You guys remain here understood?”

The officers took to their formations and entered the building.

“We aren’t going to wait here are we?” Jason asked.

“No.”

“If Obadiah was going to burn the building down, he wouldn’t be inside the place without an escape route,” Jordan commented.

“I don’t think Obadiah is in the building. He bought a long distance transmitter. He could be several blocks away and blow this thing to smithereens,” Nathan explained.

“That doesn’t sound like Obadiah though. This guy has gone through extreme measures to get his revenge. He wouldn’t risk having the owners escape the fire. He must be in a nearby building from where he can watch it go down.”

“It’s got to be that one guys. It’s abandoned too and has windows pointed at the south side of the building,” Jason said.

The building was across the street from *The Green Dragon Casino*. Even in the veil of night, one could distinguish its rural features. Green vines had pirouetted up the brittle brick with a shade of red like that of lava rocks. The doors were thick and x’ed out by gray chains. Jason observed the not locks had been tampered with. They rounded around when they found a latter that sat just below a colossal stack of outside stairs. Jordan ran out from the building and found that one of the windows was shattered.

“Hope no one is afraid of heights,” Jason joked.

“I thought you were,” Nathan teased.

Nathan, the bravest in the midst of high altitudes, held the latter steady until he himself climb up it onto the stair case. It was rapid, repeated motion until they reached the broken window. Nathan batted the remaining shards of glass away with the pipe they thought Obadiah used to break it. The room was capacious despite there being twenty some desks and plaster columns supporting the floor above. Unfortunately, there were no signs of Obadiah anywhere.

“He must be higher up. He would have no vantage point from here, but I see windows on the casino that are higher up,” Jordan said.

“Hold up guys. Before we go any further, we need to have something to defend ourselves. This guy is not going to let us stop him without a fight,” Jason suggested while holding a box of tacks he found on the floor.

“Agreed.”

Jordan found a window washing pole that still had a soggy sponge at the tip. Nathan meanwhile pulled from a cabinet blue handled scissors that were near the indoor stairs.

“Hey guys look they have a salad bar up here,” Jason said pointing to the sign above.

“That’s the Spanish word for exit wise guy,” Jordan jested.

“I really wish I could honestly say I knew that.”

With each premeditated step they neared the next floor with hands gliding along the railing, the other hand crushing their weapons with intensity and suspense. Jordan peaked around the corner and saw Obadiah nervously pacing up and down between two windows. Jordan saw a desk that lied in between two pillars. He motioned for his friends to follow him. As they crawled, they heard Obadiah rambling to himself. Once behind the desk, those non-sense phrases sound like a dialogue between two people.

“Who is he talking to?” Jason asked.

“Himself,” Nathan answered.

They could tell that Obadiah was not well. Along with his nervous chattering, he looked like a man who recently saw a ghost while giving a blood transfusion. All three boys cringed when they saw the long distance transmitter in his shaky hand. Jason’s stare went to the right. He saw the end of a bag on top of the desk. He quietly pulled it off.

“Holy Moly, this guy has some physiological issues. He suffers from extreme depression,” Jason said while reading from a bottle of medication.

“Problem is, this canister is full and it expired 2 months ago,” Nathan reported.

“Guys, maybe he isn’t as crazy as we thought he was.” Jason said.

“What are you getting at?” Nathan asked.

“I think he is feeling guilty for killing Adriel,” Jason explained. “He may even be considering his actions now.”

“What should we do?”

“You said so yourself that Obadiah is hurting. We should try and reason with him,” Nathan said.

Jason stood to his feet and calmly approached Adriel. “Adriel it’s okay don’t be afraid.”

Jordan and Nathan stood to as if they were being controlled involuntarily by Jason's movement. Despite all efforts to not startle him, Obadiah stammered backwards and incidentally showed what had always been in his other hand.

"Watch out!" Jason screamed as he dove for safety.

The bullet flew high, taking down a ceiling tile on its way out. Jason scrambled behind a pillar as did Jordan and Nathan. Obadiah regained his balance and steadied his gun.

"What was that Jason!" Nathan yelled. "We're trying to stop a murder not tell Mary she is going to be pregnant with Jesus!"

"Give it up Adriel! We know about the subway heist and how you killed your partner. The police are combing the casino for your bombs. It's over," Nathan shouted from behind a pillar.

Obadiah no longer felt the fear he had moments ago. This was because he realized who he was talking to. Slowly, he began walking toward them.

"So you are the kids that broke into my house. I must say I'm very impressed that you were able to expose Adriel's and I's plot."

"That's just it Adriel, we know that you didn't have the same plan. We know that the two of you agreed to steal the blue prints, but for different purposes. Adriel wasn't going to use them to blow up the building, or even sell them. He was going to bring them into the police, that's why he called Vickers minutes before his death. He was trying to uncover the scandal and make things right. But you had different plans didn't you? You wanted more than justice, you wanted revenge. You wanted them to suffer for their sins in some ironic way. But Adriel found out about your anterior plans, so you killed him on the subway. Is that not right?" Jordan said.

"It is true. I didn't want to kill Adriel but I had no choice."

He fired a shot at Jordan's location. The bullet grazed through it and missed Jordan's head. Jordan curled up even more than he was.

"Thing is; all we have is this life, boys. We should make the best of it. I made a good life, until it was ruined by Earlenbaugh Construction. See I was fired because I found out about the construction scandal, but

that's not what they told me or the office. They said I was fired because I was mentally unstable. They made a fool of me in front of my friends and family. I couldn't find another job because of it. I had to suffer years of doctors trying to fix something in me that wasn't there. I'm not sick, I'm not depressed. I see the world for what it truly is; our one shot to be happy. My happiness was taken away from me, so naturally I want to take it back and when I see the burning flesh and hear the petrified screams of those that wronged me, I'll be happy again. The debt they owed me will be paid in full, now that I'll be able to dispose of you three as well!"

All three guys heard him cock his gun, and felt the impending barrage of bullets that were to come. Each of them darted across the room where a steel slate stood on its side. Obadiah screamed as he fired off his entire round. The guys stayed close to the ground. They could feel the wind divide and collide against them as the bullets shredded everything in their path. Each of them slid feet first and then partially dove behind their unintentional shield. Obadiah held his gun straight and continued his turtle pace through a maze of desks.

"What do we do!" Jason whispered.

"This guy is nuts. There is no way of reasoning with him," Nathan said.

"Surely the police heard the gun shots. They'll be here any minute," Jordan said hoping this would provide all of them with some comfort.

"We can't just wait here. He's walking over here as we speak and I dropped my scissors," Nathan reported with dismay.

"Guys, I think I can persuade him," Jason said.

Jordan grabbed his shoulder and threw him back down. "You better not be thinking of pulling of your best angel impersonation like you did last time."

"No guys, trust me."

"Obadiah, do you want to be happy?" Jason asked.

Obadiah stopped dead in his tracks and lowered his gun. "Of course, I'm pretty sure I just said that."

Jason felt something stir inside him that beckoned him to face his enemy. Jordan and Nathan could not believe what their friend was doing.

“Then can I tell you how you can find it?”

Strangely, Obadiah no longer seemed as threatening as he once had. His weapon became as intimidating as a water gun. Obadiah was calm as a night ocean.

“Why are you trying to help when I know what the answer is?”

“Because Obadiah, a man doesn’t have to kill people to find happiness. A truly happy man does not let bad things in his life steal his joy. But you have Obadiah, but why have you? Maybe it’s because you never were really happy.”

What all three would later attribute to God’s providence continued to work in the twenty second floor of an abandoned paper office. Jordan and Nathan peeked around the corner and saw the face of a man that they never thought could exist. They rose to their feet and joined Jason.

“I’ve been happy before when I had my wife, kids and job. But it was taken from me.”

“So your happiness was your family and job?” Nathan asked now understanding his friend’s discovery.

“It always has been.”

“But clearly you don’t have them anymore, so that’s why your unhappy. Is it not unfortunate that we live in a world that can take away that happiness?”

“You’re darn right it is, and those that take it away deserve to die!” Obadiah shouted with a wimpy shrill in his voice and tear in his eye.

“I agree Obadiah. But do you not see that you are one of those people that is taking that happiness away? From Adriel and his friends? You are just the same as the ones you hate.”

Obadiah gripped his gun and pointed it at Jason. “Don’t you accuse me of being the same thing. They took my happiness first; I’m just getting it back!”

Jordan stepped in front of his friends with hands of peace raised. “Obadiah, I understand what you are saying. My whole life I sought after the same thing as you. I would do anything that made me feel good. I found happiness in things of this world. But I’ve come to realize that that idea is a lie. It is a trick that the ultimate happiness thief plays on each and every one of us. Family and friends bring us happiness, but they are also doomed to disappoint and hurt us at some point. If we rely solely upon them, we are bound to lose our joy just like you did. See the man you ultimately want justice against is Satan. He is the one who separated us from pure happiness. I’ve learned that the only man who can help bridge that gap is Jesus. He can help you be happy. All you have to do is ask him. Do you understand?” Jordan said.

The gun shuddered in his hand as tears flowed out like a river. His breathing stagnated then speed up in a continuous cycle.

“I’m so confused. I...” he looked out the window and saw the owners and investors of Earlenbaugh Construction waiting outside their casino with police. The trigger rested firmly in his hand, his thumb hovered above the red button.

All three guys noticed this and eased toward him. “Obadiah please, we want to help you. Give us the trigger,” Jason begged.

Nathan meanwhile began sneaking around Obadiah, Jordan came to Obadiah’s side, and Jason continued to talk patiently with his foe.

“I don’t know what to believe. I’ve lived by my code for so long it seems set in stone.”

“That’s a normal assumption, but you know murdering all those people is wrong,” Jason said.

Obadiah continued to stare outside at all the people that wronged him. He remembered the smirks and jokes that came at his expense when he was fired and told he was insane. His blood boiled from the furnace of hate that roared even more now that his memories added more coal to the fire. His blood continued to boil as Jordan and Nathan inched closer. Suddenly, something snapped inside of him. He had succumbed to his desires. Jason almost passed out from the fear of seeing his demonic smile plaster his face. His smile took full shape and he began to laugh. His laugh shook all three boy’s hearts and entangled their feet. Obadiah turned to Jason.

“It may be wrong, but I’ll have peace afterward,” Obadiah whispered as he pressed down on the trigger.

Chapter 13: Men Behind the Curtain

Jason nearly dislocated his shoulder from the sudden speed of his arm as he grabbed Obadiah's arm and held him thumb from pressing the detonator. Jordan came in and held his arm back and twisted him around. Nathan came in and pried at Obadiah's fingers. They wrestled relentlessly and in pure desperation. Obadiah jumped back and smashed Jordan against the window. Jordan's weight began to crack the glass. He quickly leaned back on top of Obadiah and they all fell to the ground. Nathan came face to face with the now

enraged face of Obadiah whose scream went right through his ear canal and into his soul. Nathan head butted him then grabbed the detonator as Jordan and Jason flipped Obadiah off Nathan and held him down with a firm foot planted on his back. Nathan slowly came to his feet, breathing heavily.

“Do you have the Trigger?” Jordan asked.

“Yes.”

Obadiah continued to battle and gave Jordan and Jason a hard time. They were relieved when they heard and saw police come up the stairs. Soon Obadiah and the weapon were secured. Everything seemed to slow down for Jason, Nathan, and Jordan. Cops attended their needs, but they could hardly focus on them. Eventually they brushed them aside and looked out the window to see the Casino still standing and very individual safe. Jason felt a strong embrace from behind. Soon Nathan and Jordan did to. It was chief Vickers.

“Are you guys okay?”

“We’re fine,” Jason reassured.

“When I got your text I called the police station here and told them what you said. By the sound of it you had already called them. I can’t believe you boys!” Vickers said as he again embraced them for a lack of anything else to say.

Jason, Nathan, and Jordan came out through the front doors that had been forced open. The morning sun torched their eyes until they could adjust. Jason saw the damage done to the door then saw a battering ram.

“Whoa, did you guys use that on the door?”

Vickers just smiled as he led them to his car. Jordan saw all the Earlenbaugh members in an active swarm. They were buzzing about what had taken place. Jordan noticed one of them had a shaky hand, then he realized that was the man on the subway with the brief case.

“Hold on Vickers, we haven’t caught all the bad guys yet.”

Vickers had learned that persuasion didn’t work on him and thus followed him for reasons beside curiosity. Jordan couldn’t help but be frank and a little angary with those involved in the cover up.

“Well, you must be our heroes,” one man said.

“Thank you for saving our lives.”

“Your welcome, but your lives aren’t the only ones will be saving today,” Jordan said. “Jason care to clarify?”

“What do you mean.”

Jason pulled up his phone and began showing them the blue prints. Nathan stood, arms crossed.

“We know that you built this building as cheap as possible so you could make more money off of it. We also know that it is structurally unsound. When Adriel Seymour approached you about the issue, instead of tearing it down or making repairs, you tried to cover up its flaws. But then Obadiah came to you about the same issues. You knew that if anyone else found out about it, you would lose millions. So you fired Obadiah and Adriel, claiming it was budgetary. Then you made the necessary fixes to sell the building,” Jason said.

“But you never considered the consequences of your actions. You didn’t realize that Obadiah was struggling with depression. You didn’t realize, that without a job he wasn’t able to provide for his family. Because of that, they left him. You didn’t know that if he lost his family, he would lose himself,” Jordan said. “He chose to take revenge on you buying killing you and destroying your precious building. However, Adriel chose to get justice. He was going to steal you plans and deliver them to the authorities so they would demolish your building and bring you to court.”

“We know that some of these people are interested buyers that you were trying to trick,” Nathan added. “You guys cared about making a buck more than human life. You should be ashamed.”

Several officers completed a circle around the very disturbed owners.

“Sirs, we are going to need you to come with us for further questioning,” an officer said ushering them toward his police car.

“You can’t believe these boys. They have no evidence.”

Jason removed a flash drive from his pocket.

“You’ll find all the evidence you’ll need in this flash drive along with a thorough inspection of the building,” Jason said.

“Take them down to the station for further questioning,” Vickers ordered.

The officers handcuffed the building owners and began questioning the interested buyers. Vickers fielded questions before he could ask his own.

“How did you come up with all of that?”

“We’ll have plenty of time to explain it at IHOP,” Jason said pushing Vickers into the driver’s seat.

“IHOP?” Jordan asked.

“They have really good burgers.”

Vickers had a lot of work ahead of him, but he decided to start with the personal side. He called his sister to explain everything along with Adriel’s family. A funeral had been delayed under the circumstance of his death, but was now in full swing three days after hearing the news. Jason, Nathan, and Jordan attended that day. The casket was closed, but they went over there anyway before the service.

“We’re sorry we thought ill of you Adriel. Our ignorance led us astray. We’re glad we got to see the real side of you. You were a good man who was concerned with others well-being. I hope God worked in your heart friend and that you are receiving the joy and happiness of Heaven,” Nathan said with a weak but thoughtful hand on Adriel’s coffin.

“That was great man,” Jason said.

“That was some genuine thought coming from Mr. Anti-feelings,” Jordan jested.

“Ha-ha, very funny,” Nathan shot back.

Sophie came up behind them in a messy condition. She was in complete black, including her eye liner that was oozing down from her eyelashes. All three boys gave her a hug and consoled her. She hugged them back in their embrace.

Jordan, Jason, and Nathan were busy for a while to say the least. Christmas break came and went, without and lack of recognition for Jesus' birth, and the school was buzzing about its three heroes. They received all kinds of attention that they kindly revived but later brushed off knowing it wouldn't last.

Immediately after school, each had to give full reports to both the Oakley and Atlanta Police Departments. They had to explain to their parents what happened, which after many tears and questions, understood and were proud of their kids. The news covered the Earlenbaugh Scandal 24/7. In what a week aloud, every knowing member of the cover up was set to appear in court. The evidence was high enough that no amount of money could save them.

Each of the boys watched the news with their families the following Saturday. Nathan was in arm's length of his brother, mother, and father for the first time that he could remember. His father had chosen to take some time off to be with family more. His main reason was realizing his son could have died, and he didn't want to waste his life pursuing a job over his family. Jason enjoyed quality jokes and time with his grandparents. Jason's grandmother was the most upset by recent events, but came to realize her son's talents for the job. Hearing that her son stood in the shadow of death by speaking to Obadiah made her realize this was her son's god given ability and she didn't want to stand in the way of it. Jordan finally got the chance to tell his parents about Jesus and how he had transformed his life. They were very open to what he had to say. That Sunday, they all went to church with Jason and Nathan, who coincidentally went to the same church.

Of course, the three boys were recognized for the bravery and determination via social media and the news. They even filled a small segment on national news. They conducted a brief interview that was shown across multiple stations. The boys couldn't help but enjoy their new found fame, but as Jason liked to remind them and Nathan and Jordan liked to hear, God deserves the credit and that they shouldn't put their faith in fame.

They also decided to write Obadiah a letter. They offered to meet with him to talk. They didn't hear back from him, but continued to pray none the less.

Chapter 14: Origins of Jordan, Nathan, and Jason (JNJ)

It had been several weeks since the case. The guys mostly just relaxed for their Christmas break. It gave them time to think ahead, to what they were going to do now. They knew Vickers wouldn't allow them to investigate anymore, so what was next? They weren't sure, but they also were concerned about because they gave their worries to God and God answered.

The next day, they got a call from Vickers to come into the office. The last of the interviews was with Vickers and his trusted assistant. The guys waited in the interrogation room, the same one Jordan had been in when Adriel was murdered.

“This is odd, we are back where it all began,” Jason observed.

“Vickers I thought we already explained everything to you,” Nathan asked.

“You did, but I’m going to need it to be more official, with written statements and all.”

Each of them had practically memorized their lines and their cues and thus the report went much more quickly than it had with other people.

“Great thank you guys. Now I have something else to talk to you about.”

“We paid you back for the broken table, and helped clean up the skunk smell, well I didn’t because I probably would have splattered my chunks...”

“It has nothing to do with that bro,” Jordan teased.

“And gross dude,” Nathan added.

Vickers handed them a thick packet of papers. It didn’t take long for Jordan to figure out what they were, but let Vickers explain it anyway.

“This is a contract stating the the Oakley Police Department would like to hire each of you as official police consultants. You would be called on for jobs and would be able to investigate as an official member of the police force. Now I’ve contacted your parents and each of them gave their thumbs up. So what do you think?”

Between the three of them, there was enough happiness to fill the whole room. There grins stretched so wide it hurt and all they could do is hardily laugh. They gave pats on the back and side comments. Vickers waited anxiously for a response. In one loud and unison exclamation that rocked Vickers ears, they exclaimed...

“Where do we sign?”

The nail drove deeper into the cedar wood with each clang of the hammer. Jason pulled a gray nail from his mouth and nailed it to the right of the other. He leaned back to critique his work. He titled his head one way and then another. The lettering on the sign was dirty. The dirt rubbed off from lathering it with spit.

As he descended the latter, Jordan and Nathan looked on the newly renovated shed, topped with a brand new sign.

“Looks good my dude,” Nathan said.

“JNJ Investigation Service. It’s got a nice ring to it,” Jordan said in agreement.

“It’s a start. You know I actually thought that a better name would be the terrific three service, but that seemed kind of...”

Jason words began to fade from Jordan ears. Jordan felt a painful sensation on his chin and neck. He was suddenly blind again. He laid prostrate on the ground in the gloom of the day. His arms were limp, his legs stuck under each other. He felt for his walking stick, but couldn’t find it. All he could do was cry for help.

“I think you dropped something,” a voice said.

Jordan was startled. The gentle voice had come upon him like a rushing stream. The voice slipped his arms underneath Jordan’s armpits and lifted him to his feet. Jordan’s legs found new strength, his arms new endurance.

“Thank you. I dropped my walking stick but I don’t...”

“I didn’t mean that son. I meant your eyes.”

The gentle voice lofted Jordan’s wrist into his own hand. Jordan felt two circular objects roll in his hand.

“Sir, I never had eyes to begin with,” Jordan contested politely.

“It may have seemed like that, but that’s because you lost them the moment you got here.”

“How can I lose something that I never had?” Jordan asked.

“I see many people miss out on things they never have possessed. It’s because they never decided to look,” the gentle voice answered. “Would you care to look?”

“Yes please.”

The gentle voice eased Jordan’s head back. Jordan felt a transformation as the gentle voice added the eye’s to Jordan’s head. When he was finished, he leaned his head forward. Jordan opened his eyes, then immediately shut them. A light radiated like the sun. It took Jordan time to adjust to his surroundings. When he did he was in awe. The voice wasn’t a distant entity, but a person. He was dressed in glorious armor that spoke fear into those that saw him. His helmet had a mow hawk that split the helmet down the middle. Its feathers were arrayed with color. His breastplate was cut out like that of a washboard. The fibers that bound it were nit tightly with one another. He carried a sword of gold on his left hip that extended to his armor clad legs and feet.

“Hello their friend,” the gentle man said.

Jordan hadn’t even acknowledged his face. It was indescribable, but familiar at the same time. It was loving, but stern. It was strong, but gentle. It was authoritative, but accepting. It was the perfect blend of contradiction and perfection. Jordan couldn’t speak, but was moved unexpectedly by his emotions.

“Hello father. Thank you for saving me.”

The man rested his arm on Jordan. He felt as if he should look away, but he couldn’t. His eyes were glued, but he wanted them that way.

“You are welcome. Do you see this place around you?”

Jordan looked around. All he saw was darkness and gloom. The walking stick he had once used was shriveled, and diseased. While these things disgusted Jordan, he wasn’t afraid.

“Yes. It’s awful. I don’t want to be here any longer.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Most people like it here. I understand there are parts that seem very appealing, evening that walking stick made you smile.”

“You knew about that?”

“Of course I did. I’ve had my eye on you since you got here. I had been waiting for the right time to come help you.”

“Why not when I first got here?”

“You didn’t want me here remember? I came as soon as you called out. Where I’m going to take you is a place that is only accessible by those that want to be there. Now that you do, we can go there.”

“I would love nothing more,” Jordan said.

The gentle man smiled. Jordan reflected his beaming face. The gentle man took him by the hand and led him away from the place of gloom.

“Jordan! Earth to Jordan!” Nathan cried.

“What. Oh sorry guys I got caught up in my thoughts,” Jordan said wiping a tear away.

“Do you think we should order in Chinese or Burgers?” Jason asked.

“You don’t in order burgers, you pick up burgers. Although I wonder why that is the case,” Nathan wondered legitimately.

“We should start our own burger delivery service! We could call it “The Terrific Three”!” Jason exclaimed.

Both boys noticed a lack of Jordan’s snarky remarks and turned to look for him. He stood there smiling. He seemed to almost glow.

“You okay?” Jason asked.

The gentle man’s face resonated in Jordan’s mind. He could feel the tenderness, taste the sweetness, hear the beauty, smell the aroma, and see the greatness of that man. Jordan said...

“I’m better than I’ve ever been before.”

The End

