

CHAPTER 11

Gym was great; Alex loved playing all sorts of sports on the beach. The problem was the showers after the gym lessons. He always kept his back to the shower wall to cover his chest scars with soap as quickly as possible. He was showered and dressed within minutes.

He looked at himself in the mirror. He was letting his hair grow a little longer now, mostly in the front, like Tyler's. Above all, he had to fit in with the skater guys.

Suddenly he could hear the door being locked behind him.

"Miller!" Alex got really nervous!

It was Brian!

"Alex, I know you were the one who helped me out of the firecracker situation. I've been thinking a lot about it, and it had to be you. I just wanted to say thanks," Brian said.

"Don't worry about it," Alex answered without a smile. He couldn't have Brian thinking he was soft. "You didn't do it, so there was no reason for you to get the *blame*. But don't think this makes us friends or anything."

"Of course not," Brian said, as they both walked out. "I don't want any skate friends."

"Fine by me. So hey, when you're not beating people up, what do you do for fun?"

"I ride my *four-wheeler* through the woods," Brian smiled.

"Oh, yeah? I used to do that," Alex smiled back. "A friend of mine had one that could race at eighty miles an hour. He broke

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*blame*, responsibility  
*four-wheeler*, motorbike with four wheels

both of his arms though. He looked like a cactus with his casts on."

Brian laughed. "I've got one that races too. I've never broken my arms, but I've come pretty close – I've *flipped* it a couple of times. You can come over and try to break your arms sometime if you want."

Alex smiled. "Yeah, that would be cool."

As they got into the hallway with the rest of the students, Brian was back to being tough. "Of course we're still not friends."

"Of course not," Alex agreed!

On Monday afternoon Alex, Tim, Nate, and Tyler went to the pizza restaurant to talk to Alex's mom. It was good timing as Sonya had just finished serving one of the guests.

"Hey, boys. What are you up to this afternoon?"

"Mom, can you take us to the junkyard sometime? We've finished everything, but we still need to get the rails."

"I'm not working on Saturdays, so I think I'll be ok for Saturday morning," Sonya said. She was happy to see Alex with a nice group of friends.

"Thank you, Mrs. Mil-ler," Tyler was kind of singing in his "Mr. Nice Guy" voice.

Tuesday morning, at the coffee shop. Lankford was drinking his

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*cast*, plaster protection for a broken bone  
*to flip*, to turn upside down



usual cup of coffee. This morning he walked to his car with his coffee and his newspaper under his left arm. His right hand was always free to *grab* his gun if he had to. Lankford had already got into his seat and closed his door when he noticed his *rear view mirror* was *pointing upwards* so that he could not see the back seat. Almost immediately, he felt the gun in the back of his neck.

5 “Start the car and drive your normal route. I need to talk to you,” Aaron *demand*ed in a low voice. “Keep both hands on the steering wheel.”

10 “Listen, now! It would be a very bad idea to jump out and signal someone for help. If you do, I’ll have to visit your lovely wife and two children as well. I’ve been watching you for a couple of months,” Aaron said. “I feel like I know you very well. By the way, I think it’s really sweet the way your wife makes you a lunch pack every day.”

15 They were driving towards the FBI office.

“So let’s talk,” said Lankford, he could hardly breathe.

“I need Danny Torbert’s address. See? Nothing too *tricky*.”

20 “I haven’t had contact with them in over a year! They only contact me if they need me. I have no idea where they are,” Lankford said.

“Tell me how to contact them.” Aaron’s voice was still quiet. “Give me phone numbers, e-mails, passwords, or anything you’ve set up to *communicate* with them.”

25 Silence.

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to *grab*, to reach for quickly

*rear view mirror* [ˈmɪrə], mirror in car for seeing behind

to *point upwards*, to point up in the air

to *demand* [dɪˈmɑːnd], to want

*tricky*, not easy

to *communicate* [kəˈmjuːnɪkeɪt], to talk or write to someone



“Oh, come on,” Aaron said. “I’ve had *hackers* working on this since we found you. They’ll soon get the information anyway, but I’m in a hurry, you see. Help me out and you will live. If not, the hackers will find the information anyway, and then you will have died for nothing. Save us all some trouble. Save yourself.”

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*hacker*, computer criminal