

To Ward's Questions!

By Adam Stark

## Chapter One: Uncommon Baggage

Do you wanna know the one nice thing about the Midwest? You do not have to travel far for vacations. Take it from me, I am a retired goldshield detective. My name? Ward Kennedy. These are very interesting times. We are just on the brink of realizing that an infamous serial killer held in our local prison, has certainly made his way out, and the timing could not be more scarce. This is just before vacation time for all of us. We all pack our bags we all head to basically the same group of lakes for fishing for the weekend over the Fourth of July. Mosquitoes are bad but I'll tell you one thing, a serial killer is likely worse. Being retired wasn't exactly the best thing that ever happened to me. It was like I was just becoming a professional at my job and then I had to stop... forever. Does anyone else know what this is like? Try spending the majority of your life solving crimes for people that are halfway thankful and halfway decent to then having to stop doing it permanently and barely being able to help yourself. I decided to do something that I rather hate doing: watch the live news coverage of the serial killers escape. I shouldn't even dignify this Satanist by using his name but for the record his name is Curtis Fashingbauer. I'm clicking through the channels and the TV is telling me some very interesting details about this escape. The news anchors are blaring on and on about how he somehow escaped the prison. He managed to steal a vehicle and started driving miles and miles away, seemingly without a trace. But the newest details that have emerged are very interesting as well. It tells us something that should be a beacon of hope: our sheriff that we all know and love so well here is the one in hot pursuit. He is a very well-known sheriff around the town. A lot of people have respect for him. He's very fair, he's got a good head on his shoulders. I haven't seen him since the last police auction a few months ago. Now naturally I would be trying to think like law-enforcement and how would I deal with the situation of a serial killer having escaped right around vacation time. I mean what exactly would be the plan? Put up blockades on every major street? Put up a bunch of wanted posters and rewards for collecting the bounty? Hire every informant from here to Madagascar to keep an eye out? The thought of this is actually killing me on the inside. These people in my city are a wonderful bunch. Families, kids, very successful, very well mannered, caring, athletic, diverse, everything you could possibly wish for as a place to live in. I live in a neighborhood that actually does remind you of the good old days. These people don't deserve this! This psychopath needs to be caught and chewed up by the jaws of justice! But hell at the end of the day what was I supposed to do about it? I'm retired remember! I don't exist it's like I'm in purgatory. And even if I wasn't, who would listen.

I started walking around the neighborhood and talking to all the neighbors. I didn't hear anything from them that I didn't already know from the news. They had nothing but questions, very similar to my own. I went with my instinct which had served me well 75% of the time. I went to go see my man Justin Brown! He was a very good kid at the time I met him I was very impressed because according to statistics: he should be a very bad person! But he is far from it. He's the kind of kid that

teachers would tell you is going to grow up and be a bad person. But as I said before they were all very wrong and very far off. We have a special kind of friendship, I used him as an informant. He made one brutal mistake that could've landed him in prison and I happen to let it slide. He beat the hog shit out of a rapist, I pretended that it never happened and nobody ever asked any questions. Do I feel guilty for this? Not even slightly. Justin did not do the legal thing, he did the right thing. From then on we had a very close friendship. It is very good to see him again, peaking out of the corner with his street basketball team. "Ay what's good Wardy Ward!" Justin Shouted as he gave me a high five. "Can't say that there's anything good going on... but it's nice to see you how are you doing my friend?" I said. He passed the ball over to his team and sat on a bench with me. "Man... bro... this is some bullshit on T.V. you know what I mean? What you think? I mean honestly?" I held in my laughter and explained my position: "Well this definitely throws a wrench into a lot of people's vacation plans! What I want to know is if nobody can find this guy, is he hiding or is he just gonna keep on traveling? What in the world would be the smart thing to do if you actually escaped from a prison?" Justin went straight to the point as I hoped he would: " i'm not buying any of the shit on T.V. anyway! You already know they're not gonna give us the facts they lie about everything all the time, why start telling the truth now? I can't believe people still watch the shit and think they're getting truthful information, or credible information with no evidence or proof! These creatures on T.V. don't even let people think for themselves they tell you exactly what they want you to believe and expect you to do it! So let me get this straight, the serial killer guy happens to escape the prison which for ONE is extremely hard to believe on its face... and he manages to steal a car and make it out of the gate and everything?! How does somebody manage that? No wait excuse me how does an inmate IN A PRISON manage that? It's not like there was a car waiting for him on the outside with a driver! No seriously I'm getting pissed off I call bullshit on this whole damn thing! Something like this cannot just happen I don't believe it! Not for a second! How are you going to steal a car on prison grounds and even make it within ONE MILE before being stopped?! To me that is something that could not possibly happen so there's no way we are being told all of the information. Instead these THINGS on T.V. are just going to say what they need to say to get their ratings up!" I just kept nodding and nodding up and down. I pointed to him and said: "I knew you would be the first and the fastest one to figure that out! Now for inside information, the one thing I will say is there's no way that this killer is going to try and cross the state boundaries. He would never be able to do that successfully so that's what the scary thing about this situation is to me. Is he hiding around here? Is somebody providing a hideout for him? If I ever run into Curtis he's going to be dead! He's not making it back to prison! He'll be grinded up into mince meat and flushed down the toilet!" Justin got a little anxious. He looked back at his team for a moment. He whispered to me: "That would be one way to take care of the problem... But NO listen screw that I do not wanna see you get in trouble ending up where he was at! Don't make it personal, even though it's how we all feel. You saved my life, I want you to do what God put your crazy ass here for! Feel me? You'd be the best bet at catching this fucking freak! Forget ya retirement for awhile bro." I gave him a handshake and said: "It's my new obligation to try that's for sure. Your hired by the way, or should I say rehired. Under the table, no one else knows this. Let me know if you get wind of anything out of the ordinary, call anytime. Well I'll get out of your hair... How's your mother doing young man?" He quietly answered: "The chemo ain't doing what the docs counted on, gonna try some other shit I guess... she told me to tell you thanks for the flowers." On that note I walked away. A conversation with Justin is exactly what I needed.

Heading over to the local pub I was eager to learn any new information. I don't do any drinking, I just love to listen to people that do. Finally after three appetizers I got to hear something exciting: a press conference. It was the sheriff telling us all about his pursuit. He said that he failed to capture him but he got a good 'make and model' of the vehicle. He was very distraught in this press conference, even though if I was him I'd be looking at it differently. He said he managed to shoot out part of the back window and the left rear tail light before losing the trail. From the facial expressions and wording, it appeared that he was very upset with himself. That honestly confused me because to me, it would seem as if he was the only one who did anything USEFUL! Does the guilt of losing the killer's trail extinguish the fact he was the only one close to capturing him? Maybe that's just me but I don't think it makes any sense, I was proud of that sheriff I wanted to shake his hand again. Everybody else in the pub was in a horrible mood, and I mean on edge! It was like nobody wanted to talk about it... but everybody ended up doing what? Talking about it! The people I talked to who didn't know me and my background were saying that the sheriff would've been the best man for the job. It may seem hard to believe but the people in my city have a lot of respect for the sheriff. He's just another local to us. He delivers bad news to people, he goes to court on people's behalf free of charge, he honors students at graduations, he holds the police auctions and donates to charities ect. So with that being said, nobody I've talk to was mad at the Sheriff, but it did appear that the sheriff was very mad at himself. This might not be the best time, but I don't think I'm going to get a lot of fishing done this upcoming Fourth of July weekend...

## Chapter 2: Mister Managed

Just a few weeks away now until the big Fourth of July weekend. Nothing but apprehension and paranoia I tell you. If these were normal circumstances, these families I live amongst would be busy packing their gear for fishing at one of the big lakes here. With all that being said, you would not believe what I'm about to tell you. My next-door neighbor's family has disappeared! They are the Andersons, I know them pretty well. They are nowhere in sight and I rang the doorbell and there's no answer. I immediately reported this to the police department. The guys there took all of my information in, but they questioned why I was so positive that there was foul play. At the end of the phone call they were trying to tell me that it's very likely they were just going up to the lake... as many families do at this time. I wasn't buying it and I told them that I know Mr. Anderson. He had no plans of going there this year. We bitched and complained about money together not that long ago! And the last straw for me was why would he go all the way to the damn lake when he sold his boat? None of this added up, none of this made any sense. All I can do now is hope that law enforcement would do their jobs and discover where they are. I went around asking the other neighbors if they heard anything suspicious. No real useful data to go by. Okay I'll admit it, I may have shoved my expired badge in a few people's faces... I was hoping to hear at least something or at least a hint of a trail. A family disappears and there is absolutely no trace, not to mention the worst possible timing.

I spent all afternoon reading over the case files on Curtis's method's. It was painstakingly awful to read through. I'm not sure if that was the worst part or the part about just simply sitting and waiting and pretending to be patient. I just sat there as if some miracle was going to happen and someone was

just going to give me an answer. After reading about the 12th murder case file I got a message from Justin! I didn't even read the message I immediately picked up my phone and called him. He picked up and shouted: "Yo some ill shit going down, cameras are here and everything!" So I demanded: "Like what? And where?" He starts rambling: "A few blocks away from my crib there is a bunch of cameras out here with a bunch of people asking questions. There's crime scene tape in front of the house but there doesn't appear to be anything wrong with the house on the outside. There is enough media attention in these parts that I figured I'd have to let you know bout' this shit." I started nodding my head as if he could see me for some reason. I calmly replied: "Thanks chief I'll be watching, keep up the good work." So I kept the news on the T.V. to see if anything would finally come up. What I began to see was something very strange. It was indeed about that house that Justin was referring to. They were talking about a missing persons report and these folks that haven't been home or heard from. The news reporter said something about their employer had been concerned because they had not shown up for work which was out of character. This was very puzzling to me because what I was seeing on T.V. here is what I felt I should've been seeing for the Anderson's (my next-door neighbors.) I kept glancing at the case files while I would peak up at the news once in awhile. Eventually I heard one more useful piece of information: no bodies were discovered in the house. All I can keep on thinking about is what could this mean? So nobody is dead but everybody is missing?! I wish I knew where Mr. Anderson worked so that maybe I could help figure that part out...

Weeks went by just feeling numb, I didn't find anything out that I wanted to know. After not hearing anything for weeks, I did my own investigating. I went and peaked inside of the Anderson's mailbox. It was full and it even had a note in it about the mailbox being too full. I went to the local post office and I did some questioning. I pulled out my badge and I demanded to know if they had put their mail on hold. They had not heard anything from them! So now at this time I had to go to the police department and let them know that this report I filed must've been ignored! I checked myself in and I walked right back into the room I needed to go. Boy was I relieved, right away I saw Sheriff Montgomery! I spoke firmly to him saying: "Sheriff... I am concerned about the Anderson's, I filed a missing person's report a few weeks ago and I haven't heard anything. They haven't come home or anything sir..." The sheriff's face turned from pleasant to utter sadness. He reached out to give me a handshake and he began to tell me: "Yes that is definitely a grave concern, nothing new to report. But are we positive that they might not have just gone to the lake?" I interjected: "You see that's just the thing sir, I extremely doubt that. I know him pretty well and not only were we both complaining about not having money for this summer, but he SOLD his boat!" The sheriff put his arm around me and fiercely proclaimed: "I am so sorry, this must be frightening. I am going to do everything in my power to figure out what is going on with them!" Just then some man who I feel was a detective bumps into the sheriff and whispers to him... I couldn't make out what he said. Something about "Wards got a right to know?" Then suddenly before I could say anything the sheriff pulls me aside. He softly tells me the real deal: "Here's the rub, and your not going to like it Ward. There has been three other cases of missing families... these ones we had withheld from making the news. I hate to break this to you, but theres a reason that those three families have had more investigating. It's because in those cases we've actually had results, already. Our hands are tied and we are very busy. I know that's the last thing that you wanted to hear, but that is simply the truth. We are hoping to go by the evidence we have found in those cases." I shook his hand, ducked down my head, and I walked outside. This was starting to become

a nightmare. I could not possibly fathom how so many families could be missing all at the same time of an escaped serial killer fugitive! I simply felt guilty asking anymore questions to law enforcement knowing that they had been busy with other tragedies. To be perfectly honest, I am under the assumption that all of these events are related. Is that wrong of me? Is that illogical of me to think in that way?

Nightfall came and I decided I'm going to take action. I decided to think like a criminal... I put on all of my protective gear and masks. Everything from gloves to glasses, hair bags to sweat catchers. I got all geared up to hopefully leave no trace evidence behind, and I headed next door. I walked around their yard to see if there was anything suspicious. Nothing was broken, no window was open, no door was out of place. I had a key of my own to get into his house. Mr. Anderson hid it for me in the bottom of the grill on his deck. He used to leave that there for me so I could take care of his dogs back in the day. They passed away a few years back, 2 basset hounds. I made my way through the entrance and I looked around very carefully. I took my light and I followed every single pathway that I could find. I was astounded that I did not come up with anything. I made my way upstairs and I looked around the bedrooms carefully. I looked to see if there had been anything down the drains or in the trash cans. Nothing! There wasn't any appearance of any missing flooring or chipped paint. I was just about to give up and then finally I caught wind of something useful. I looked through his wife's shelf and I could not believe what I saw! Literally every single piece of jewelry was missing. Based on the markings on the bottom of the shelf it had been forcibly removed. This is not a case of 'oh she just decided to take all of her jewelry with her somewhere' because you could still see the bottom scrapings that were broken off of this glass case. Whoever was here had to have broken it off to get everything out and left no jewelry behind. So I can at least prove one thing, burglary had been taken place! I was looking around all of the family's personal effects and none of them were damaged. So I was trying to figure out if this could've been a personal motive. I didn't think so but that wasn't the most troubling part. The thing that began to concern me was my new theory. Who is doing this?! This does not match the serial killer's M.O. by a long shot! He would've left a huge mess all over the entire house. Not only that he liked to group the victims together in the same room, drag their carcasses if necessary! There wasn't any blood that I could find in this house. It was robbed pretty cleanly and there is no proof of any violence. To say that I am stunned would be an understatement. I tip toed my way out his house. I snuck back into my own house and burned all of my clothes in the fireplace. I was just sad sitting here thinking 'wow I already know more about the Anderson's case then law-enforcement does' which is nuts. Do you want to know the weird feeling about all of this? Ideally I should be feeling like I am going way above and beyond. Like this is not of my business and I have no right to conduct my own investigation. But to tell you how I feel in the pit of my soul, I feel like I am doing the right thing.

I didn't sleep long before the phone rang. I could not believe what the hell I was hearing! It was Justin he called me and he was screaming hysterically! He hollers: "I SEEN HIM! I'M FOLLOWING THE SON OF A BITCH!" I through my blankets off of me and screamed back: "Justin you are doing WHAT? Who are you following what is the meaning of this?!" He scarily screeches out: "THE KILLER I SPOTTED HIS ASS! HE LEFT THIS HOUSE HE BROKE INTO AND I'M CHASING HIM!" My entire body froze... Is Justin trying to tell me that he found our culprit?! I grabbed my gun and my keys and jumped off my porch to

my car. I aggressively started telling Justin: "Disengage! DO NOT PURSUE! I repeat, Justin, DO NOT PURSUE!" He cut me off and yelled in the phone: "HE ON 34th AND SUNRISE AVE! HURRY! I AIN'T LETTIN' EM' GET AWAY!" I tried to yell back at Justin but he hung up the phone. I was pounding on the steering wheel and trying to drive as fast as I could. I immediately called the police and told them where to go to. I was hoping that by me knowing some of the police codes that they use over their radios it would save time. I was rushing as fast as I possibly could. I ran a couple of stoplights. I got to the street he was describing and I didn't see anything at first. There was no cars parked, there was no people walking, there was no yards with people outside or anything. Finally I saw a bunch of flashing lights. I was hoping that this was for a GOOD reason. I went up to the police and immediately started demanding answers. They told me to step back. I showed them my retired badge and claimed that I was the one who called it in. An officer on the scene approached me commanding: "Sir will you follow me please. We heard your call now I need to look at this. Right over here, take a good look." I slammed my keys against the concrete and dropped to my knees... it was Justin. He is dead. I spent a long time crying out of control. Eventually I was able to stand up and I was so dehydrated I attempted to talk. I uttered out the words: "Officer, this is Justin Brown. He used to be an informant of mine." One of the investigators came over to me. She started asking: "Well what is your relation to the victim? I am pretty sure I got this all figured out." I turned ninety degrees and glared at her to say: "He used to be an informant of mine and he is a good friend. What exactly is that supposed to mean!" I really hated her tone. She scolded me and started explaining: "He took lead to the chest. He's definitely got to be linked in this. Some gang banging warfare gone wrong or the money wasn't split evenly to their liking. You see, I'm starting to realize that he could be one of these house invaders that we've been looking for." I was furious... I was fuming mad... I held in my anger when I spoke because I knew they wouldn't take me serious if I started shouting up to the high heavens. I sternly told her: "No, he was pursuing the suspect, he witnessed a burglary, he called me and I told him not to pursue... He didn't listen to me and he kept following your guy! And another thing, he is not in some filthy gang! He doesn't have any weapons!" She tried hard not to blink or pull out her notepad and pretend to write something. She tells me: "I'm sorry for your loss, but I've got a job to do here. I need to work this at all angles. How would I be any good to anyone if I just assumed that he was NOT an accomplice here who was betrayed? And no offense but to think that your friend was really that 'gung ho' about fighting crime when he was supposedly unarmed. I'm going to look around more, my officer will take all of your statements... excuse me..." So she got out of my face and then I decided to give all of my statements. But that wasn't the end of the story. I knew what I had to do to clear Justin's name. Luckily for him I have a special modified phone that records any and all activities and conversations. I brought it over to police headquarters and all of the conversation was copied and documented into evidence during the fatal pursuit. The timestamps all matched up with the timing of his death via the medical examiner. I was happy I could clear his name. It was bad enough that he had died, it would've been even worse to see him go in vain. I was walking out of the building and I could not believe who I encountered... that investigator. She put her hands up as if she was trying to stop me and she started to speak: "Look, I was just trying to do my job, I'm so sor..." I interrupted her: "Oh that's what you were doing? You were doing your job? While he was doing what? According to you he was a gang banger right? Look lady he has more of a heart than you will EVER have! And save that goddamn apology for HIS MOTHER!" I walked out of that room with my head feeling slightly higher. The sheriff met me at the top of the stairs and walked with me out of the building. He patted me on the back and said: "I'm sorry about your loss Ward, he was a good kid... he will really be missed in the community." I appreciated what he was telling me but for some reason I couldn't get those words out.

My brain instantly switched back to business mode. I glanced over to the Sheriff and asked: "Karl, did you find any evidence or anything about who he was chasing down that road? He said he witnessed him and chased him giving us a window of opportunity..." The sheriff replied: "The timing was sort of, almost perfect if only we had boots on the scene I'm afraid. Better your bottom dollar it's Curtis? My ears are filled with hearing that theory." I rapidly responded saying: "Oh no no no! That's not possible because Curtis never used guns. The investigator told me that Justin God bless his soul took some lead to the chest. And not one of them rounds fired missed! Shot and landed without missing. Curtis couldn't have learned how to do that so quick after escaping prison I wouldn't think..." The sheriff lowered his voice and said: "Now Ward, you don't really think that do you? Don't get me wrong I'm not eliminating that theory. Or any theory for that matter. I'm just going to wherever my men and women lead me to with their clues." I put my head down in despair. I whispered out toward the sheriff: "I just can not believe it Karl... he was right there in front of Justin. Justin gave us a shot to find something. That son of a bitch whoever he is was right there leaving a house he was invading..." He just started shaking my hand. He graciously told me: "Now's not the time for that Ward, go be with his family, they're gonna need moral support. We are working on all leads, you know you'll hear from me as soon as we got something." I couldn't think of what to say as he started walking so I just spastically got out the words: "Alrighty take care thank ya much." I headed over to Justin's mother at the hospital. This investigation is all over the place. More questions than answers. I've already lost track of how many families have gone missing since Curtis's escape!

### Chapter 3: Fall Low

I don't know what you people think, but do you think routine plans work very well for a detective? If it does then it certainly has failed in this instance. More and more families are disappearing and I don't seem to be finding any answers. By THIS point in this spree, I would've thought I would've seen a press conference. Not only have I not seen that but another very important thing is missing: a massive search. Normally you would see these on T.V. when there's missing people. A community rallies together and they all search areas for dead bodies. Not only that, but also a reward put up for aiding in the discovery of missing people. Yet not one of these things have happened! NOT ONE! This begs the question, what the hell is going on?! At night I strolled by the houses that I know have missing families and I would search their mailbox's. Their mailboxes were stuffed! Why would they keep their mail going if there's not enough room for it? Over a long period of time, at that? This was not adding up to me at all! I made my way over to police headquarters. I managed to convince Sheriff Montgomery and his detective to have lunch with me. I started off the discussion: "Gentlemen, if I may I would like to provide my expertise. I'm fairly convinced that the timing of Curtis's escape is connected with the missing families. HOWEVER, he does not know how to use a gun! So therefore he must be working with somebody. Maybe that someone helped him escape prison? I don't know, but it is an angle worth checking out!" The Sheriff motions his hand over to the detective and introduces him: "Ward this is Detective Corbin." We shook hands and I stared at him waiting to hear him speak. He lowered his voice and said: "Pleasure to meet you sir. Now you do know that most information is classified... I am merely entertaining this as a favor for a good friend. Now that being said, there is nothing wrong with your argument... I just can't say that it is within reason. You see so far only two of these families have any red

flags popping up. And I am not going to comment any further about that.” I held in my anger so tightly, I thought I was about to start on fire! I found a way to softly continue talking: “Okay may I at least ask you this, has there been any other break-ins in that area? Because Justin God bless his soul was convinced that this was a break-in next to the house that he was around at. So unless there’s been a lot of break-ins in that area, then I have no reason to think it wasn’t connected.” The sheriff says nothing and Detective Corbin speaks up: “No sir. These neighborhoods have had it very lucky when it comes to burglaries. That, I will share with you in confidence that it doesn’t leave this table.” I tried to get my words out before he could take a bite of his dinner again: “So do you think there is a connection? Can we get a press conference on this? I would volunteer to lead a search for bodies I have great references.” Detective Corbin looked at me like I was a newborn baby... like he didn’t know one word I was saying to him. He hastily replied: “Ward... I’m telling you! We would do that if there was more information to go on. We do not have solid evidence of anything. These things can’t just happen because of a hunch, unfortunately.” I looked at both men back and forth and exclaimed forcefully: “Then, WHAT... IS... YOUR... THEORY!” The sheriff put his hand over to stop the detective from answering. He told me: “Ward... we are doing this for you as a courtesy, we’re your friends here. No need to be upset with us. Hell, I’m upset with us! Pardon my language. I wish we had all of the answers! We just... well we can’t technically do much when we have no evidence, no factual basis to go off of with the majority of these families. Understand with no evidence, I’m still assuming that these families are at the lake already. It IS that time of year, you know? We are scared too but that’s not enough to be a cause for alarm my friend.” Detective Corbin chimes in: “We do need a press conference, I’m with you! I just want to get some good clues on it first so I know for sure. I need to know that Curtis actually did something before releasing that to the public. Trust me, when I’m ready with that evidence I’ll publicly hit him where it hurts with the press!” I tried to look like I was agreeing with them. The truth is, I was shocked. I was perplexed. To just shoo away a theory by saying that these people went to go fucking fishing just pisses me off! If they would just simply search the Anderson’s home next door to me, they would know what I know! I couldn’t believe that they had no ‘evidence to go by’ yet! However, I am not going to turn them into my enemy. I continue the remainder of lunch talking to them about stupid sports.

I arranged a search party with volunteers. I know this wasn’t exactly ‘cooperating’ with authorities. I didn’t care much, I knew what I had to do. We searched for miles around the vacant woods and on the beach. We didn’t turn up anything significant. I did notice that there was a lot of boats still on the docks. Maybe there isn’t anything significant about that at all, but it was worth mentioning. Anything at THIS point is worth just mentioning! I even had part of my search team search the old lighthouse on the lake. It’s so old and rustic and rotting away. I could throw a golf ball at it and probably make a hole. There was a lot of barriers inside anyways because it became a hazard. The weird thing is, this search did not put my mind at ease. It actually only made it worse. Now I am forced to consider the fact that maybe the bodies are beyond the city limits. I still cannot fathom how this is all happening!

I thought of another strategy, I headed over to police headquarters as fast as I could. I wanted to speak to Sheriff Montgomery but he was unavailable. I spoke to some other officers and they offered to help me. I asked them who was the neighborhood watch in each of the neighborhoods where the



families were taken. One officer went back and made a quick call to the sheriff. He was nice enough to pass on the information and let me know. Interestingly, two neighborhoods where families are now missing, those males were their neighborhood's neighborhood watch! I went to go canvas both of those neighborhoods and ask the neighbors if any of them would step up. I had to use some intimidation, I didn't want to but I felt as though I needed to get results FAST. I gave every known neighborhood watch my personal contact information. I wanted the odds to be in my favor so that I could do something.

A few days had passed and it felt like an entire war was fought. The length of time is an eternity when you are in despair. I noticed that there was another police auction today, I didn't want to go. I am going to go because this is a good excuse for me to meet up with the sheriff in a friendly environment. That way it doesn't seem like business. This was the shortest police auction that I have seen in years. It was like a ghost town, barely anyone showed up compared to normal. The frightening mood was felt in the air by everybody. By the end of the auction I only ended up buying some merch and some calendars for the P.D. Barely any food was served unlike normal. Was I the only one who still had an appetite? Nobody really wanted to talk either. This was the strangest police auction I've ever attended. It felt like going to the bar with a bunch of strangers in a foreign country. Anyways, when I finally ran into Sheriff Montgomery afterwards we spoke briefly. He thanked me for the neighborhood watch's I established. I actually figured he would be mad at me. It took me awhile to realize that those neighborhood watch's had my personal information... as I wish... but they must not of told that to the police. They must've viewed it as if I was doing them a favor only. After he thanked me he let me know another family has gone missing! He was reluctant to tell me, but it was someone who was suppose to be here. The Hornwalt Family! This was a shock because Mr. Hornwalt never missed a police auction! He's always one of the highest bidders. I was lucky to have the sheriff squeeze that information out for me.

It's been a few days of mischief. Nothing new has come to my attention. I've been sick and unable to think clearly. I have this horrible cough and this horrible fever that will not go away. Puking is one thing, but I can handle that. It is the God-awful, inability to fall asleep that's killing me. When I'm sick, the only thing I feel like doing, is sleeping. So imagine a world where all you wanna do is sleep because you were dizzy and feeling like you're heads on fire, but you can't! This is my nightmare, allow me to explain. I lay down, I close my eyes, I try and relax and sleep... but every couple of seconds I have to cough or swallow. It never ends, it does not take a break. I will literally lay down in the dark for the entire eight hours of time that I'm supposed to be sleeping. Nothing works! And I seriously do mean NOTHING! I take cough medicine, I take nighttime cold medicine, and they don't help me sleep! My throat is aching in severe pain so I can't help but concentrate on THAT! Plus I cough and swallow air every few seconds! There's no way to actually sleep! Sure I can keep my eyes shut for eight hours straight, but I'm STILL AWAKE! There's nothing better to do with my time except study study study. Looking over my old cases, seeing how I was able to help justice prevail before. In other words perform miracles. The aspect about this case that bothers me is- oh wait I shouldn't call it my case. I forgot I'm retired. I'm old, what do I know!? It's someone else's case, it's just mine unofficially. Anyways, I'm bothered by the fact that these disappearances aren't sloppy. Curtis was a sloppy killer, he moved the bodies together into the same room to create an audience for himself, a spectacle of his slaying. While these disappearances were clean! And I've already mentioned that he never used a gun, so who shot

Justin? I can't stop replaying the audio from my last phone call with him on the trail. This case is so fucking screwed up! I have never ever in my career, been without some kind of solid lead. This is the cleanest crime I've ever heard of, and in my own town! Not being able to sleep from being sick has helped me study a shit ton though. I thought of a plan and waited until the morning to head over to police headquarters.

That night I had a very horrible time sleeping. When I finally arrived at the police headquarters I pulled into the parking lot and tried to sleep for two hours in my car. I was hoping I would have better odds of sleeping in there because I had no luck in my own bed. I made my way into the building and I've got a meeting with Sheriff Montgomery and Detective Corbin. The meeting started off as expected, I asked detective Corbin something that he didn't want to answer. I inquired saying: "Has there been any new leads? Any new findings?" He cleared his throat and reluctantly told me: "We do not have the authority to release that information, it is classified. I hope that is not all that you called this meeting for, no offense." These words infuriated me! I knew everything that was at stake though, so I did not let it get to me and used my better judgment. I very calmly decided to tell them: "I've got a plan. It has proven effective over my career. We need to set up a bunch of 'sting' houses where we operate by watching them secretly and we can try and catch him in the act. We split up in teams, we have cameras on the inside of the houses, and boots on the ground hidden in plain sight." Detective Corbin looked very unimpressed as he spewed out the words: "Look sir, that costs money, we don't have a budget for something like that. It's not the idea that I'm against, it's just, we need to be financially realistic here!" I pulled out a folder for the element of surprise. It's a bunch of paperwork from my bank. I aggressively told them: "You got your donor right here! I'm taking out some of my retirement money. I wouldn't suggest this plan if it hadn't worked out for me several times. You still have the state borders on lockdown so we HAVE to lure him out here!" Detective Corbin looked like he was about to respond until the sheriff spoke up saying: "You know what, whatever you pay I will match it with the auction money that I have shares in. Detective, it's worth a shot. Now let's figure out a good surveillance area for each 'hot' zone. Two men per parked car, one hidden camera for every entrance in our houses we select. Ward you can ride with me, but I will not allow you to bring any weapons." I shook my head in agreement. I was astonished, and very pleased with the sheriffs donation. Detective Corbin chimes in: "Okay men, we're really doing this? Huh? Okay I will start up the paperwork. We are going ALL in! At least ten and a half hour shifts during dark hours or we'd be wasting our resources. See you guys tonight, Ward I'll be on channel 7 on the radio if you need me." For once I can actually say the word 'wow' in a good way. I am very happy to see that my plan is going to start.

The sun was setting and here I am sitting in the car with the sheriff. We have so many radios I'm surprised I can even move my thumbs. There is a laptop filled with surveillance images from all of the sting houses that we've bugged. We even have houses that look very rich with boats on the driveways. You wouldn't want to touch that boat though, inside contains armed men ready for cracking skulls. The radio chatter was pretty quiet. Nobody saw anything suspicious for at least three and a half hours. Sheriff Montgomery looked over at me and asked a question: "Well whats your worst case besides this one?" I couldn't help but laugh and say: "Well do you mean solved or unsolved?" The sheriff chuckles and he asks: "Why, solved of course!" I Took a moment to think, and I realized it was an obvious choice.

I slowly told him: "The infamous Jeremiah Haas. He had killed so many people, it was outrageous. I had a full proof plan set up to capture him, and it was supposed to be a 'no brainer.' I knew exactly who he was. You see, he had two things that made him very distinct. For one, he carried around an ancient artifact that goes all the way back to the ancient pyramids. It is EXTREMELY rare. We all knew that he had it, because he used to draw an outline around the artifact on the victims' dead bodies. He was a true to life Satanist and Zionist. I know that sounds ridiculous, but he really did carry around a rare ancient artifact with him to the crime scenes! The other thing that made him distinct, he had suffered from a fire outbreak in a building. We were so close to capturing him right then and there, but we failed. We knew that the fire had damaged him enough that it had to of changed his appearance. In the end, not to get ahead of myself, but the fire damage actually helped him. Just by looking at him, you would think all that the fire damage did was affect his face. He looked like he had an old man's face but he was still in his twenties! This made it very hard to figure out which man would be him in a given area. I knew another thing about him that helped me capture him. He was obsessed with going to gun ranges and showing off against all of the other shooters. I got permission from the judge to implement a new security measure at all of the gun ranges. To provide an x-ray screening for every customer that comes in. The only difference was, anyone with this ancient artifact I would be allowed to arrest and question with the warrant. Thank God for that judge. Otherwise imagine what would've happened if we tried to forcibly arrest an old looking man! That damn rare artifact was all that we needed for probable cause." The sheriff keeps nodding his head and whispers: "Yes! I remember that case, like 11 years ago or something." I quickly acknowledged him and continued on saying: "Yes correct! Anyways, this should've been an easy capture with no bloodshed. I do not know exactly what went wrong. Look, all I can say is this... once the artifact popped up on the x-ray screen shit hit the fan! Somehow he took out a gun and shot three of my men, two of them died. I am still perplexed. This was a supposed to be very very easy, non-complicated arrest! I absolutely hate how my intuition served me well, enough to actually capture him as I hoped; but ultimately cost some good men their lives somehow! I'm telling you man, I knew exactly what I was doing! I knew exactly where to set up my traps to get him." The sheriff glances over at me and says: "Yup. And you wonder why that's haunted Tony ever since." My mind just about exploded when he said that!

I didn't have the slightest idea what the hell he was talking about. I turned my entire body over to face him. I demanded saying: "Tony... from Forensics? He feels haunted?! What?" The sheriff looks at me in shock and says: "Yes of course, you know he transferred right after that. Said he was guilty, he couldn't take it anymore." I was perplexed, once again! Tony told me he went to Forensics because he dad always wanted him to! It's almost like I had some sort of epiphany. I HAD to find out more about this. It wasn't going to happen soon, we still had six more hours to go this shift.

Sunrise came and the sheriff dropped me off home. I told him goodbye and that I would see him tonight. I walked all the way up my stairs and into my house. Once I saw the sheriffs car leave I got into my car. I had to go retrieve some old files of mine. I made some terrifying discoveries... Tony's dad had records that he passed away so long ago... that Tony was only two years old! So he had to be lying about him saying that his dad told him to go into forensics. On top of that I got some concrete answers. I was no longer haunted by the Haas serial killer case that killed two good men of mine. I was feeling

bittersweet to find out that I didn't do anything wrong in that arrest. I can NOT say the same thing for Tony! He was supposed to be the undercover officer behind the desk ready to grab the suspect before he could fire anything! One of the men that got shot was an undercover who walking around with customers. He was only shot by pure coincidence I just discovered. So that greasy piece of shit abandoned his post that day! I'm so pissed off right now. I took so much heat for those men dying and come to find out I wasn't even the blame. I'm going to visit Tony, and he owes me BIG TIME!

#### Chapter 4: In, Dig, Go!

Another shift of staking out the neighborhoods with no success. I promise you that we were all extremely well hidden. As expected, I was praying for a miracle. Once I got out of the car, I pretended to go inside my house once again. Once the sheriff drove away, I took a trip of my own. I made my way over to the forensics lab. I used my expired badge to show someone at the door to get my way inside. I immediately went up to Tony and I told him we needed to speak. So I told him: "Tony! I know what you did at the gun range! Let's have a chat!" He looked at me with an expression of disgust. He walked over to the corner and crossed his arms. He leaned his head to the side and said: "What the hell is this about Kennedy?" I started pacing back and forth as I was explaining: "You know Tony... I always wondered what went wrong that day. It has bothered me for years. Why did my boys get clipped? I mean, I don't know about your organizing skills, but I am DAMN good at my job. What happened to you that day that lead you HERE!" He slammed his fist on the counter and screamed: "WHAT! What is the meaning of this bullshit! Dammit Kennedy, I told you long before it was my father's wish for me to go into forensics! He had references for me! And yeah I felt guilty too, so what? SO WHAT! All the more reason for me to leave don't you think?" I decided to stop pacing back and forth. I looked at him straight on and exposed my gun holster. I argued to him saying: "The father? Which one? The one that's been dead since you were TWO! Oh yeah boy, I'm on to you! Now let's make this easy, nice and smooth. I just have one question, why weren't YOU the one to grab him the moment his artifact popped up on the X-Ray screen? I strategically put you there for a reason! No don't turn around! Answer me so I can have a tiny bit of peace in my life!" Tony was sweating so badly he pulled off his lab coat. He took a moment to relax. Finally he confessed: "Kennedy, I left because I didn't have a vest on... Your so called sharp plan was exhausting! I was standing there DAY AFTER DAY behind that screen with a damn vest on! A small guy like ME with a big ass vest! After about the sixth day I was fed up with being in pain! When that killer showed up I was feeling naked without the vest... are you happy now? ARE YOU HAPPY! I'M A COWARD! I'm not built for police work! I was made to do lab work! I scored very high on my exams! I should've been-" I furiously interrupted him shouting: "OKAY! I've heard enough! I know you abandoned your post! Let's talk business now Tony. Do you want this to get out? Or will you help me out here?" Tony was on the verge of tears. He quietly whimpered out the words: "What do you want from me for shit's sake? Dammit Ward!" I pulled out my handy notepad and my favorite pen. I quietly asked him: "Justin Brown, I want to know what caliber bullet killed him." Tony put his left hand on his hand and starts walking over to his computer. He scarcely tells me: "Here you go. It's from an antique gun, kinda rare to be honest. Please will you go now, doing this shit freaks me out I don't want to get in trouble..." I wrote it down and demanded: "Tony, don't stop there, was there a shell casing recovered at the scene!" Tony turned around from his computer and angrily shouted: "No dammit there wasn't a shell casing

picked up!" I grabbed him by the collar and said: "Really! How do I know your not lying to me!?" He snarled and screamed: "Look yourself! It's on the mother fucking report! Here! Jesus!" I kept my grip on him, and looked on Justin's report... he was telling the truth. I let go of him and asked: "Good, now one last thing and we are done here. Give me the registration records for everyone who's a possible owner of that exact gun." Tony was about to say something it looked like, but he couldn't. He sat at his computer for about ten minutes as I watched his every move. He printed out the paper that I needed- a detailed list! I put in under my coat and whispered: "Tony, for the record, this conversation NEVER happened understand? Maybe one day I can forgive you..." I walked out of there casually with a fake smile.

Looking over the records, there was fifty-eight possible owners. Curtis was NOT one of them. I was able to narrow the list down by a realistically close enough proximity to our town. A lot of them were very old people so there was reasonable doubt on their part. Five members of the police force have or have had this particular gun, which didn't surprise me. A lot of people around here are avid gun collectors. Hell, the number is even smaller considering I've seen this gun sold at some police auctions here before! So they'd merely be an owner temporarily until it was sold! Wow this became a dead-end fast. I'm not sure where to look next. I certainly hope our next few stakeouts provide us with a lucky break!

Sitting in the hidden car with the sheriff, he probably hates me right now. I've been coughing every few minutes like clockwork. I've been coughing like it's my job! And as if that job had mandatory overtime! I hate being sick. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a man walking with a hoodie on. His hood was up too, which struck me as odd since it's extremely dark outside. I couldn't see him very well, but he was walking around the neighborhood. As he got smaller and smaller from walking farther away from us, the sheriff and I kept our eyes on him. I was getting really excited, he walked up toward a house's entrance in a hurry! My mind was racing! Was this our guy? Or one of them?! I was eagerly waiting for the sheriff to give the hidden boys in blue the signal! He made it right up to the front step and he twitched his hand with something on it. I wish I could see better and more clearly. My first thought was it was a tool to use for a break in! What was it? Oh this is interesting, now he turned to his side... I'm trying to think about what could he be looking for? A window instead of a door? Well, my excited went to shit... literally. You'll never guess what happened. He was holding a leash and a bag and he picked up poop on the grass by that person's house. I don't know how I never noticed the little dog was with him the whole time. The other observers watched him walk to a house and use a key to get him and his dog inside. He was no longer considered a suspect, understandably. The sheriff must've been able to see better than me. He wasn't phased at all by this. I was too embarrassed to tell him what went through my mind. I still had my notes hidden in my coat. They just have to search me for weapons before I participate in the stakeouts each night. I had a hunch, so I tried something. I didn't want to appear to be asking too many questions, so I had a plan. Slowly over the week of stakeouts, I would talk to a different officer from a different watch area before we drove out to start. I asked each of them differently about who's house it was that had been broken into with a family that vanished. THAT way, it wouldn't seem like in a single day I just went crazy and asked too many questions. Instead, I asked a different officer everyday, so it wouldn't seem nosey. My only hope is that they wouldn't catch on. I never asked the

sheriff because he already told me some and he put up his own money to help the sting operation. I had all of the known families' names hidden in my notes now.

Day twelve of stakeouts, nothing! When I say nothing, I mean nothing unless you want to include: me coughing, silence, blinking, breathing, and more coughing! I felt like I wasted a fortune of money on this! This plan was a pretty good one I strongly believed. Everyone's cooperation was on point too! At the end of today, the twelfth day of the sting operation, it was a failure. The sheriff had all of us come back to police headquarters. He looked so sad, well to be honest we all did. He gave us a speech: "Ladies and gentlemen, this goes without saying. Thank you so much for your cooperation. We gave it our best shot everyone. I'd also like to give a special thank you to the retired, and honorable Gold-shield Detective Ward Kennedy. He put up his own money to help fund this operation. Now again, I think it goes without saying, but on behalf of the police department here: thank you for your help and your dedication to this great city. One day Justice will be served, and when it does, we won't forget about your contribution. Unfortunately, as some of you may have guessed, we cannot afford to continue this sting operation. Just got the word from upstairs... I am so sorry." Every officer began giving me handshakes and kind words for my help. I appreciated it, but on the inside I felt dead and hopeless. I simply told everyone the obvious: "Anytime, just let me know if there is anything else that I can do. I will do whatever it may possibly take!" Some of them offered me a drink, I turned them down because I had more work to do unbeknownst to them!

I am extremely relieved that my house was paid off years ago, because I'm about to be in debt... I called a meeting. A very expensive meeting! I hired some old private investigators. They all came in and sat down at my kitchen table with their briefcases. "Gentlemen, I need your business. It needs to be one hundred percent off the record with any and all findings you report to me. Any objections, you may leave now with half of your deposit... Good! Great, I am glad to see that we are all still in business. Raise your hand if you have access to restricted records." One man raised his hand and said: "Some, I can't promise anything..." I pointed to him and told him: "Cool! Your job is to tell me what connections these people have in common. Here's the list. They all live in my city here, and all of them including their families have gone missing. I want to know what they have in common! I don't care how insignificant it may seem, I want to know it all!" He grabbed my list and gave me a card with the code words to contact him with. I shook his hand and he headed out. I continued speaking to the others: "Next, who can give me access to police scanner radios? Raise your hand please. Okay two of you, between you both, who can type at least one hundred words per minute to give me updates in a timely manner? Wow both of you okay! Lastly, do either of you have the police codes memorized for this county? So that it can be quickly translated to me? Oh okay you sir are officially hired as well." He hands me his card with his access information and leaves. I ask the rest of the group one more question: "Okay finally, which of you can dedicate six hours a night watching my street for intruders? I'm NOT asking you to act on them, just to contact me in the event of such a thing to happen?" The other men apologize and head out with half of their deposits... I've just about drained all of my retirement money. I'm hopeful that it was well worth it!

I put together a poster-board with lists and pictures of all of the missing families. Next to that, a list of people who have the antique gun that killed Justin registered as a possible owner. Next to THAT now I have a list of inconsistencies that don't match with Curtis's known methods. I leave a ton of room under each picture for new discoveries to be written. Every night I hide this poster-board in my safe. Well, I've found one thing: another dead-end in this investigation... None of my private investigators have had anything to report to me. I spent a good lump sum on a new security system for my house. Something about this case just has me paranoid! Want to learn a good trick when you have a dead-end? Consider the timeline of events. What started this whole thing? The prison escape did JUST that. I dressed in my most expensive clothing and put on a nice toupee. Cannot believe I'm about to say this, time to go to prison!

I arrived at the prison with a bunch of bullshit application papers. I had to write up a bunch of stuff to make it seem like I was looking for an investment. I was somebody who was looking like they were ready to invest in some prison stock... my God what am I up to. I went up to the desk and introduced my fake self: "Morning! I'm looking to buy some stock! Who do I see?" The man at the desk looked up at me to say: "One moment..." He left me standing around for about three minutes. A nice dressed-up lady came out to introduce herself with a handshake. She excitedly said: "Hey! Would you like a tour?" I exaggeratedly replied: "Why yes that would be delightful!" I followed her down a hallway. She instructed me while pointing to everything she mentioned saying: "On here please place all of your items and remove your external clothing including your shoes. Any jewelry and electronic devices will need to go here as well, please!" I placed everything on the security counter except for my toupee. She made me fill out my name on a visitor's clipboard, I used my fake investor's name. I walked through the metal detectors and passed their security test. She grabbed my belongings and handed them to me. She decided to introduce herself: "My name is Yolanda! Before we begin the tour, is there anything here you might be uncomfortable with? Would you like to avoid going down by the inmates pods?" I pulled out a C.M.O.H. (Congressional Medal Of Honor) pendant attached to a necklace. I fake chuckled and told her: "These boys don't scare me, I've been locked up in worse places!" For the record, that was my father's, NOT mine. I don't have even half of the guts that he had. I just wanted to make a statement to help my charade work. She smiled at me and said: "OH! My oh my! Thank you for your service! It's a honor sir! My father was in the Airforce, he was an E9! Well alrighty I will show you around!" So she takes me around the cafeteria for inmates, the showers for inmates, the counseling offices for inmates, the laundry room for inmates, the church for inmates, the yard for inmates, ect. I let her talk my ear off for about an hour. I pretended as if I was very interested. I wanted to establish trust with her. Finally I decided to calmly pop the question: "I am so impressed, no wonder this place was highly recommended by my partners at my law firm! I can't believe there was an escape here?!" I said this after having a very good back and forth conversation for a long time. Why? I was hoping that I could establish enough trust to make her answer my question without me directly asking it! It's a trick I've used as a detective my whole career. She was apologetic and worried that I was scared to invest a lot of money into their stock. She fell right into my trap... she tried to appease me saying: "Oh that has been dealt with severely! The footage showed us what mistakes were made when-" I had a gut feeling that I had a chance at learning some classified information so I pressured her! I interrupted her passively saying: "Mistakes?!" She blinked her eyes three times in row and told me: "Well, but you see they learned from them! He escaped through the front desk area because that's where there was only one camera at the time so we

missed out on how exactly it happened. But what really did it was the unfortunate timing, the visitors area is right next to that front desk spot. Whoever registered as a visitor somehow didn't make it inside but DID make it in far enough to open the door there, which he ran through. You see now we have many more cameras and a two door multi-coded lock system in place to prevent any more escapes. The luck I tell ya! If it wasn't for that exact timing it would've been just another normal day!" I was starting to become VERY intrigued! I wish I could see the visitor's log for that day. I knew that would be a suicide mission though. No chance I could pull that off. At least now I can confirm that someone did help participate in Curtis's escape. I wanted to just leave and add more to my notes but that would be suspicious. I humored her and followed her so she could show me one of the walls of camera monitors. I left the prison with a fake promise that I would be giving them a business call. I updated my notes with the confirmed suspicion that Curtis's escape was not completed by his sorry self. Well, another example of an answer that just brings out more questions! I hate that it always ends up being like this! Why can't I solve ONE of these complicated riddles and it just be helpful ONLY! But nope, instead now I find out that someone had some seriously impeccable timing... they came to the prison as a visitor and was going in the visitor's area but ran out at the last moment instead?! And the stupid front desk area has one camera which was of no help! That's ridiculous, astonishing. Plus that area is in front of the damn parking lot so the mysterious visitor lead Curtis right to a vehicle... Woah, I just had a thought. Maybe since the security footage couldn't show them much, maybe it's simple. By which I mean, maybe the visitor 'looked' innocent. What if the site of a non-inmate running away from an inmate in prison clothes doesn't look suspicious because... why wouldn't YOU run? If that was you, you'd run away right? Or is that what it was supposed to LOOK like? I wrote a side note about my thoughts on that. I want to say this is yet one more dead end, but it feels more like two dead ends. I added those notes to my poster-board about the case and locked it up in my safe before bed.

## Chapter 5: To Ward's Questions!

I don't know if anyone knows what it's like to be this desperate. So desperately depending on something to give. I've tried everything I can think of, but there is technically only SO much I can do. I hate to say it but, maybe I am not the one meant to solve this. So, as I am sitting here in my thoughts, I get a ring! It's one of my investigators! I quickly say: "What have you got?" And he replies: "Got some chatter about a possible house break in! Another officer said they were on the way to check it out but they think it's a prank. I'm texting you the location, sir." I grabbed my coat and put on some shoes. I was exhilarated! And I decided not to leave empty-handed, I left fully loaded instead. I started driving before I even received the text message. Finally my phone went off and I pulled over to look at the location. I was heading in somewhat the right direction, but I corrected my pathway. I was feeling very excited for once. I'm trying to think positive as I go about this crusade. The thing is, one thing I need to give myself credit for might seem obvious, but still. It's worth noting... I have advantages that other people would not have if they were as invested in this case as me. As they say you've got to count your blessings. Then again, if I think about this negatively, this could just be another dead-end. I'm just going to try and shut up until I arrive...



I finally reach the location and I turn my lights off before I turned around the corner. It was so dark out and half of the street lights weren't even working. I heard some commotion as I walked over to the house, cautiously. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot a family getting into a police car. I walk up to investigate what's going on. I lie and embellish by saying: "I heard some noise, what's going on? How can I help!" To my surprise it's none other than Sheriff Montgomery! He turns and looks at me as he walks to the driver's side door. He shouts at me: "Ward! What are you doing? You need to get out of here! They've been attacked! I called for backup, don't get yourself killed!" He hopped in his police car to turn on the lights, siren, and drive fast as hell. I watched him drive away and I wondered why he would avoid the highway? It didn't make any sense to me if he wanted to keep them safe. He was seriously heading in a very unexpected direction. I decided to take out my gun and head inside their house. I quickly pulled my badge out and wore the necklace on the outside of my outfit. Just in case the officers came when I was still around. I entered the house and I was looking around to see if there was anybody. I turned every corner with my gun pointed out. I was very trigger ready, looking for blood. I decided to take a look on the back porch. I ran into the backyard and took a look around all the trees. There was no forcible damage in the fenced backyard side, and none in the back windows. So I went back inside and put my gun away. I decided to look around the rooms more carefully and I didn't see anything too obvious. I did find a door that I did not see earlier and I decided to go to it. I freaked out and just about screamed when I heard a loud noise inside. Seriously what the hell is in there! I opened it up and found a giant dog! It barked at me and charge at me! So I slammed the door going into another room. It jumped at the door a few times. Then I looked over at the window and I saw the dog running away. I strongly considered almost throwing my hat in confusion and anger. If that family was leaving, why would they leave their dog behind? It's not like they could just forget that they have a damn dog. If the dog was charging at me, why didn't they charge at whoever broke in this house? I ran upstairs and I looked in the common burglary hot spots. Once again I found a very clean robbery of jewelry with little to no damage in the surrounding area. CLEAN! Again, another house robbery that was clean as can be! No blood anywhere, but then again I saw the family alive outside getting into the sheriff's police car. This STILL did not match how Curtis operated! At this point, I didn't know what else to do and I panicked. I ran back outside and got into my car. I made a phone call to my investigator operating the police scanner feeds. It rang just one time and he answered: "Yes what do you need sir?" I had trouble getting my words out. I squeamishly replied: "After our last communication, did ANYONE else talk about either a break in, or a request for backup!? I don't care how vague, did you hear anything of the sort?" He didn't even take a moment to think and he said: "No. nothing. Want me to contact you if anything comes up?" I quickly told him: "Yes, no matter how vague I want to hear it right away." I drove home feeling absolutely defeated. I can't believe I let someone's dog run away. I mean it was for my own safety, but still.

I arrived home and locked all of my entrances. I also made sure my security systems were up and running. I messaged my other investigator about the new family that was just taken in by the sheriff. I told him to add that to his list of lost families, and see what these people have in common. After a few more hours, I contacted my investigator on the police scanner feeds. To my utter disbelief, he told me that NO ONE called for any backup! This is completely unreasonable! To not call for backup when a family is attacked AT HOME, is folly! I am now forced to consider... the sheriff as a prime suspect. This was not where I wanted my investigating to end up. Now it's not impossible to believe that the

sheriff didn't just forget to call for backup... somehow... but I am very worried about what I just witnessed. I need to talk to him as soon as literally possible! I will wait until morning and go to police headquarters with a hefty load of questions for him!

When I woke up, I got a message from one of my investigators. There was no additional chatter on the police feeds. Figures... so I went over to my car and started it. I decided to leave my gun hidden inside of it. I just arrived and parked close to the entrance. As I began walking up the stairs, my phone was going off like crazy. It was my investigator with the list of families. I was so eager to talk to the sheriff that I didn't want to answer the phone. I was just about to pull the door open and head inside, but then something hit me. If my investigator has something crucial for me to know, that I could use it as ammo. So, as much as I wanted to just hurry up and go see the sheriff, I decided to take the call. I pressed my answer button and quietly said: "What you got?" He said something that you should never tell someone who's anxious and in a hurry... he asks me: "It's some interesting stuff, do you have a few minutes?" I wanted to chuck my phone at the nearest pothole. I pretended that I wasn't angry and I started pacing back and forth outside. I told him: "Yeah I do, is it concrete stuff? Oh never mind just tell me what you found out...please." So he clears his throat and says: "Well, let me put it to you like this. There's a few little things that connect SOME of the families. In other words, things that up to three or four of the fathers in the families have in common. But, you wouldn't really find the connections significant. Just some basic common things like being sports coaches for kids, using the same bank, or having kids in the same elementary or junior high school. NOW, for the big whammy! And again, I'm going to remind you before I say this. I had to use illegal means of finding this out. I had to use accounts on the internet that I've paid for under false identities to do illegal background searches. I feel like reminding you of this because I do not want to get in trouble for what I'm about to tell you. No offense sir but... understood? We understand each other right?" I held in my frustration and replied: "Yes, why of course. And does this connection include the name I JUST gave you?" He took a deep breath. He told me: "Yes, now alright here it goes. All of the father's in this list you gave me make regular attendances to your local police auctions. They are the highest bidders by far! No one else at these auctions even come close by comparison. Well there you have it. Every other connection is something small, and only includes a few of them on the list. This police auction bidders attendance though... that's thorough." I had more words being yelled inside of my brain than I had enough time for to say on the phone. I told him 'thank you so much' and hung up the phone. Was this my moment of clarity? This made me feel like the sheriff was the culprit! I had to confront him with this new bombshell! Like, I'm thinking about this, how would Curtis know that all these people are the highest bidders at police auctions here? There's just a very tiny minuscule chance that he randomly kidnapped all these people who all happened to be connected! He couldn't have known THAT much about these families! As I walked through the building, I acted as if nothing was new in my world. I didn't want to intimidate anyone, until the moment I see Sheriff Karl Montgomery's face and call a meeting. Did I just say meeting? I meant interrogation dammit! As I made it to the desk I saw Detective Corbin. I speed walked over to him and said: "Morning sir! May I please speak to the sheriff?" He looked at me with a puzzled look on his face. He pointed to the T.V. and said: "He's on the news Ward, he's not in today. Take a look, it looks like your intuition was on the right track." I turned around and walked up to the T.V. screen. I see another surprise unraveling. It's a good thing I'm not prone to heart attacks because I've seen too many surprises in this case! It's the sheriff finally holding a press conference! He's addressing all of the families! He's even mentioning them by

name and going as far as to say they are missing and considered in danger. He is asking if anyone knows anything about their whereabouts to please contact immediately. So... now he's finally doing a press conference? NOW he's finally going public? I've been telling him to do this for HOW long? At first when I told him he should do this, all I heard was him saying not to worry about it because those families could be fishing at the damn lake! Then the reasoning was that only some families had some evidence turned up that was considered concerning! Oh and I noticed that the family that I saw get in his car last night was not one of the families he mentioned in the press conference! Seriously what the hell is going on? Could he have shot Justin? He was one of the registered gun owners of that antique gun! Dammit I really don't want to go there with it... but I'm furious right now! I can't hold still, my nerves are so bad they're percolating. Another thing that bothered the ever-loving hog shit out of me, is where did he take that family last night? He drove in a strange direction if you ask me. Why avoid the highway! It's the fastest way to get to the police and to the hospitals, so why go for a scenic route for God's sake! I walked back over to Detective Corbin to give him my card: "Sir, can I call if I need something? I won't bother you, I will only call if it's absolutely urgent!" His eyes looked far to the side and then back towards me. He said: "Ugh, sure! Okay here you go. Is everything okay Ward?" I deflected the question but still tried to appease him: "Yeah, I'm just worried after seeing that press conference. I mean I can't believe tomorrow is the Fourth Of July already. It's so sad to see families missing on the holiday." I was happy to have his number now. I was ready to jump through that T.V. screen and talk to the sheriff! I had to find another time and place I guess. I wish I had a warrant for his arrest in my hand or something...

Ah yes it's Independence Day. What better time to wake up than the Fourth hour on the Fourth Of July. Another horrible night of little to no sleep. I just kept on thinking about something specific, something that stuck out to me... where the hell was the sheriff driving to with that family in it?! It bothers me so much. Well I knew I couldn't go see him now. I decided to fix myself a burger with avocado spread. Maybe just maybe that could put me to sleep. Worth a shot anyway. When I woke up again I started getting dressed as you'd expect. I went to turn off my T.V. that I accidentally left on all night. I could hear it from the other side of the wall. I glanced over at the screen and just about shit my boxers... my world changed forever AGAIN! It was a breaking news story about hostages! They were being held for ransom money! The news anchor starting playing the video of the hostages all tied up, scary. They had ropes and tape everywhere, over their mouths, hands, backs ect. I wanted to just believe this wasn't related... but I knew better. The news anchor started listing the families last names. I just noticed children were tied up too! Then, just at the same moment I thought my eyes were playing a trick on me... I saw the sheriff! HE is tied up too! And the news anchor mentioned him by name as one of the hostages! He looked beat up, even with the tape covering up a lot of his face. The news anchor started reading off a note for the demands. He said that it was Curtis Fashingbauer who wanted money by the time the clock timer runs out. It was to be transferred to some unknown foreign bank account. I couldn't believe this was happening on the Fourth Of July today of all days! I took out my phone to contact Detective Corbin. It rang for a long time and went to voicemail. I kept watching the news while I grabbed my keys. It was about a warning to not interfere or attempt to free any hostages or they will die no matter what the timer is at. It is completely unknown where the hostages are being held at. I felt useless and awful. Here I was about to reprimand the sheriff who helped me so much, and now his life is in danger. He has kids, a family, and he could be dead soon! I pressed rewind on the remote to see the hostages again, I noticed my neighbors the Andersons. Good lord I thought that background looked

familiar... where in the world could that be?! I knew that it had to be within this state because the borders were protected by security checkpoints. Curtis would be caught by them, no doubt in my mind. So where are these hostages? Why does that place look familiar? Am I imagining things? Am I optimistically tricking myself to believe that I know where they are? I don't know what to think anymore. As I was saying those words in my head, my phone rang. I answered before even looking at the caller I.D. shouting: "Hello!" Thank the Lord it was Detective Corbin! He said: "You called, what's going on? I'm very busy you know... have you seen the news?" I tried to make my point fast and yelled: "Where was Sheriff Montgomery seen last? Beside his press conference?" Detective Corbin hung up and my front door was knocked on at the same time. It was lined up with police! I opened the door and said: "What's going on here? What's the meaning of this? Come on in you fellas know I have nothing to hide." Detective Corbin waved a search warrant in my face. I loudly exclaimed for everyone to hear: "Hey! You don't even need a warrant! I don't hide anything! All of you come on in! What do you need from me!" One Officer asked me to show him my hands and take off my shirt. I took it off and they inspected me. I didn't have any marks or anything. I have a feeling they suspected that I did something to the sheriff! Did the sheriff talk to some people last night? I know one thing, he sure didn't say it over the police radio if he did. They began looking through my house, which is annoying. However, I'd rather them do it because I have nothing to hide at all and I'd prefer having my name cleared of any nonsense. All of my case notes were hidden inside a hidden safe too. I walked over with Detective Corbin to my security setup. I whistled and yelled at everyone: "Attention! I don't know what this is all about! But I can show you all my security footage. Look here on my screens, dated and time-stamped. I can show you when I got home last, til me still being here now. And these images from my security cameras on every entrance are backed up by G.P.S. Satellites! I'm not telling you all this just for my alibi for whatever this is about, but because I have nothing to hide! I'm on your side, always have been!" They took another hour to search my property. They took copies of my security tapes as well. I went to beg Detective Corbin to speak to me before leaving. I poked his shoulder and pleaded: "Detective Corbin! Wait please..." He looked distraught and said: "I apologize Ward, just following orders." I violently shook my head and told him: "Never mind all of that! I don't care! Now where was the sheriff seen last? I saw that he's with the other families that went missing!" Detective Corbin cleared his throat. He waited to think about how to say his next words. He said: "Look I really can't discuss that with you. I'm truly sorry." I walked with him to his car shouting: "Wait! Please hold up! I'm trying to tell you, that... I've seen that place before! I swear it! Does that place where the hostages are look familiar?! If Curtis did it then you know it's within the state! C'mon please tell me if you've ever found a body or searched somewhere at a crime scene that looks like that?" He sat down in his driver's seat and looked at the ground. He told me: "Sorry, I don't have much experience with searches, not like you. You have my number, just remember I can't discuss this case or give you details about it. Bye now." I took my fingers off of his car and walked back inside my house. A neighbor ran up to me before I could get inside. He looked familiar too, that struck me as odd... I asked him: "Hi can I help you?" He caught his breath and asked me: "I saw the police are you okay?" I told him: "It's a long story but I'm fine. I'm a retired detective and I offered my advice." He looked annoyed and he said: "Huh what? I know who you are, you don't remember me? I just wanted to see if you were okay Mr. Kennedy." I was really confused once again... he looked familiar, why couldn't I remember him? He told me: "You organized the body search. I was one of your volunteers! Anyways I just wanted to make sure that you were alright with all of the commotion of cops. Take care Mr. Kennedy!" He started to run and continue his jog down the street. He was right though, that was how I knew he looked familiar. We did that body search together that I organized. We looked

along the water, through the trees and at the old lighthouse. HOLY SHIT! That's it! That's the place that it looks like in the hostages video! It's that old decaying lighthouse! I need to tell Detective Corbin right away! I called him while I got into my car. He answers saying 'hello' and I put my phone on speakerphone. In a panicky fashion I told him: "I know where the hostages are! That place on the camera footage on the news, it's the old lighthouse! I recognized it!" He angrily replied: "What? No way that thing isn't even open! It hasn't been open to the public in years!" I yelled back at him saying: "No it is though trust me! You can still get inside there, there's just some tape keeping people out of it! I was in there doing one of my body searches but I never made it all the way down because it's hazardous to walk through!" He sighed and said: "Oh, okay but you really are sure about this?!" I told him that very millisecond: "Absolutely! I'm positive!" He began to instruct me: "Okay, I will let them know, do not go near there! Remember Curtis is watching and he will kill the hostages if he sees someone interfering." I was about to break my window with anger. I screamed at my phone to him shouting: "So your just going to do nothing about this! I'm going in then these people need to be saved!" He yelled back at me: "If I see you there I will have no choice but to arrest you! STAND DOWN! Ward, lives are at stake!" I hung up the phone, I knew I would beat him there since I had a head start. He was likely still on his way to the station.

The sun was setting as I arrived at the old rickety lighthouse. I could hear loud music and see the restaurant by the boat docks was busy as hell. I slowly walked over toward the lighthouse's entrance as sneaky as I could. I saw someone running away going in the direction of the beach. I was frustrated because I couldn't tell what direction they were coming from. I slowly took every footstep carefully down the beat up stairs. I stepped over all of the old caution tape that's been there for a long time. I kept on thinking about what that timer was at to kill the hostages. I wondered if any money was being prepared to transfer? There was a ladder that was shaking that I had to climb down. Finally I heard a bunch of groaning noises. I made my way inside the room with the hostages. I carefully put my head into the entrance and looked in both directions. People in there were crying and slanting their heads to the side toward the wall with a window in front of them. I could see that there was some sort of light in the distance. I couldn't believe that this area was fully submerged in the water. I crawled really low and made my way over to the back. One guy I took the tape off of was spiraling with tears and squealed out saying: "Careful! Don't let him see us in the window or he will come back here and kill us! If he sees any of us have our tape off of our mouth's, he will come here and kill us all! You NEED to be careful!" So I backed up and said: "Now no one panic, I'm here to rescue you guys, but we need to do this carefully to not alert Curtis... wait... Sheriff Montgomery? Where are you? Karl! KARL!" I couldn't see him! What is going on! All of the sudden I look towards the other side of the hostages group and it's the family I saw last night! They are tied up too, but away from the rest of them! No wonder I didn't see them on camera! The one guy with his tape off in the back said: "Hey! He's the one who did this to us! He tied us up!" I just became dizzy with shock. I responded: "WHAT! But he was tied up with you? I saw him? Wait what?" The guy put his head behind the hostage's back in front of him to cover him up from the window's view. He said: "The sheriff put us all here man! He then turned on a camera on a stand and pretended to tie himself up! He's the one trying to kill us!" I put my head down and against the wall out of sight. I wondered if it was HIM I just saw running outside toward the beach. I also began to think that the strange direction he drove the family last night was to take them HERE! I loudly whispered back to that guy: "Hey did someone here physically harm him? His face looked bruised up?" The guy put his

head down again and said: "No man, I have no idea..." I thought that I better call Detective Corbin and let him know since he's suppose to be right by here. I couldn't complete a phone call, there wasn't any damn phone service down here! I saw this pile of junk so I shuffled through the items. I happened to find an old scope used for tourists to go sight-seeing from up high on this lighthouse. I grabbed it and crawled over to the window. I put it up by the corner and looked through it. I told everyone out loud behind me what I was seeing. I don't know why exactly I just felt horrible since they were tied up and couldn't speak or move. I felt even worse knowing that they could die. I started telling them: "Well, I see a submarine in the distance... that's what that light is! I can see on the side of it there's some markings that say 'Mark 14' on it." After I said that one of the hostages was trying to yell through his tape on his mouth. I crawled over to him and pulled the tape off. I told him: "Keep your head behind the hostage in front of you! Now what's going on?" At the moment I smelled urine coming from one of the kids. I didn't say anything about it and kept my full attention on the guy I just took the tape off of. He frantically tells me: "MARK 14! Those are torpedos! There going to blow us up to smithereens!" I put my index finger over my mouth and scolded him saying: "STOP! That isn't helping! Now how do you know those are torpedos?" He looks at me and says: "Nineteen years in the Navy! I know my gear very well! Those ones can easily penetrate these walls and kill us... there cheap though they have flaws." I opened up my eyes very big and ask him: "Flaws? Like what? Nows the time to spit that shit out!" He tells me: "If they get struck on the side hard enough, it's contact pistol can jam and it's firing pen cannot withstand the shock causing a malfunction and it can prematurely explode." I wanted to say I had a plan, but I didn't. I was upset and I was anxious as hell. I decided to just ask: "Well what would have to strike it? Like, I couldn't swim over there and just punch it, right?" He got upset with me and said: "Heavens NO! Of course not, no one can hit hard underwater!" I hit the floor with my hand and said: "I know but I have to do something! What's something hard enough to work?" He told me: "If only I was rich like my ex wife, she took my X700 Series boat with the automated anchor drop. That thing can drop an anchor and you can control its speed while watching it with a waterproof camera. I'd love to smack that torpedo with it..." I walked towards the ladder and said: "Okay... listen people, I will return, I need to figure this out. Do not show yourselves if your tape is off, it's not worth the risk!" I carefully went up that shakey ladder. I made my way right next to the entrance and decided not to actually leave. I thought if it was being watched then they could fire the torpedo if they thought the hostages were escaping. I found a signal on my stupid phone! I called Detective Corbin, he answered and said: "I see your car, where are you?!" I took a deep breath and said: "STOP! Detective Corbin, you need to listen to me very carefully! Listen up, here's the details: all of the hostages are at the bottom of the lighthouse submerged underwater, alive but tied up. There is also one more additional family off to the side away from the camera's view from the news earlier! There is a submarine in the distance under the water that is activated and armed. I know this because one of the hostages is a Navy veteran and he told me that the markings on the side of the submarine are torpedos. The hostages all told me that the sheriff is the one responsible... he also planted himself as a hostage in the camera, but he is not actually a hostage! Now listen, there is a chance we can stop the submarine, what time do we have left before the money is demanded to be transferred by?" He grunted in frustration and said: "We have thirty more minutes! And I will determine who's guilty here, far as I'm concerned, this is all here-say!" I needed his help SO desperately that I didn't even argue with him. I told him: "You know what, fine. Believe whatever you want... but you know what we have a life or death situation here, and I need YOUR help! Now you do realize why this is being done today on the Fourth Of July in a half hour right?!" He's silent for a few seconds and he says: "Ugh. No, why? Tell me." I told him in a very serious tone of voice: "Because in exactly twenty-five

minutes, the fireworks show is going to be begin! As it does every Fourth Of July here at the same exact time! Those loud fireworks will mask and hide the sounds of any explosions! Plus there's no lights on outside by this part of the water so any waves would be unnoticed! It's the perfect crime, he gets to kill a bunch of people or become rich and nobody knows where the bodies are because they're deep underwater and BURNT TO A CRISP! The sheriff uses his badge to stage a house break-in and he pretends that he happens to be there to rescue them! All of these hostages are connected! Look it up yourself later, all the dad's in these families are the highest bidders at our police auctions! They are the regular attendees as well! And he takes them hostage at an old abandoned lighthouse with half of it under the water! I saw him do this last night! I was going to arrest that son of a bitch myself yesterday!" Detective Corbin yells at me through the phone: "OKAY! Just shut up! I don't have time for this! I get it your guilty, well deal with that later, what was I suppose to do to help here?" I took a few breaths and replied: "Okay your right just listen up, the Navy Vet' told me those torpedos are cheap and can be compromised. Before I even get to that, do you or anyone on the force own an X700 Series boat?" Detective Corbin tells me: "No but why? What about that boat?" I told him: "Okay look I have a plan, but you aren't going to like it. That type of expensive boat has a remote controlled anchor that can be operated. It has a camera that follows it underwater so if THAT could be used to hit the side of the torpedo, it will deactivate and become a dud! He said that these types of torpedos are notoriously flawed!" Detective Corbin could barely get his words out when he answered me: "You want... you, want me to... HIT, a torpedo? Well..." I had to chime in before he worried more and I said: "Time is of the essence, look I know what you need to do. I would do it but I'm afraid if I leave here and I'm spotted the hostages will be fired at by the submarine. Now you just need to hurry over to that restaurant on the boat docks, use your badge and start yelling at the people inside. Demand them to fess up which of them owns the X700 Series boat on the dock! Tell them it's smoking or something and they need to attend to it! Then when they reveal themselves, take their keys, get over the sub, use that camera and hit the torpedo on the side!" I heard loud footsteps in the background of the phone and he said: "Okay... son of a-" and he hung up the phone. I set my timer on my phone to coincide with the approximate time left before the hostages would die. I once again very carefully head down the crappy ladder to the hostages. I had to get low as possible and army crawl over to them. I began to break the news to them: "Listen up! I've got a man on the outside helping us. We can't prematurely evacuate or we could get shot by the submarine. I have the timer on my phone for when the authorities are supposed to have the money ready to transfer by before... well you know, before they, attack you guys... I don't know what to say. Just please listen, I know it's hard, kids listen to me too. This is serious, I'm here to save you! But, in order to do that, we MUST stick to the plan! So check this out, I am going to take off all of your ropes that are keeping you people restrained, except for the tapes over your mouths. Only reason is because that would be pretty easy to notice since your all facing the window. NOW, when I break off the restraints, don't get up, don't move, don't you dare! Do not even scratch your head if it itches! By doing that you can put all of us in grave danger. I will free you folks, then go back up this ladder because I need a signal on my phone to hear from my partner. So with that being said, one last thing to know: When the timer shows it's almost up... I'm going to say let's evacuate anyway... it's worth the risk at that point. Okay now I'm going to crawl around and start freeing you guys one by one, remember DO NOT GET UP!" So they all stared at me looking frightened and terrified. I managed to break up the ropes on the grown male hostages and some of them got their arms twisted up in pain. I knew they wanted to scream but didn't... Once I got the kids freed, the one Navy Veteran hostage cried and pleaded with me. He emotionally asked me: "Please sir! Take the kids... they don't deserve this! They've got their whole lives

ahead of them. I couldn't go on without my little angels anyway..." I had to try and defuse this emotional outbreak. I never had a chance to even start though because the kids were crying out of control. I panicked and I thought, do I go up the ladder as planned, or do I try and talk to them? Decisions to make here... I crawled over to them and carefully took off their tape over their mouths. First thing I said was 'Shhhhh!' And they looked at the floor crying. One little boy looked at me and I honestly couldn't find it in me to just leave him there crying... my heart was broken. Over the years of my career I've seen way too many kids cry when they'd lose a parent to a senseless murder. I decided to ask him something: "Hey little soldier, who is your hero? Do you have a favorite?" He talked very quietly and I think he had a speech impediment. He said something about an army superhero comic book guy, whom I had no clue about. So I asked the boy: "Oh cool, you know what's cool I was an army guy too. What did your superhero do when he needed help?" I felt bad about lying, I wasn't an army veteran. I just talked to him pretending as if I was my father. I could barely understand him but I could make out some of it. The little boy said something about his superhero fights alone and has no one to talk to. For some reason I thought about something that my mother would say. I told the boy: "Hey now that's not true, I bet I know someone that he talked to. I believe he talked to God! Do you ever talk to God? Do you know any prayers?" The little girl sitting next to the boy said: "I know a prayer army guy! My mommy says it when we go to our church. It's a green church with a big bell on it." I put my hands together and began to pray. The kids all said the Lord's prayer. It was truly a beautiful moment amidst the chaos going on... It reminded me about how guilty I've felt for years avoiding church. I whispered to the kids: "Great job, I know your mommies and daddies are very proud of you great kids. Now I'm going to put your tapes back on but just for a little bit, okay? Now remember don't move, I will let everyone know what to do, I promise!" So I put the tape back over their mouths. I had to crawl up that wiggly ladder for the umpteenth time. I sneakily speed-walked over to the entrance area and remained inside of the lighthouse. I was hoping my phone would just light up like a firework and tell me to evacuate. I decided to open up my phone and look at the timer. It is scary... it's a sight for sore eyes, and reading it became a sound for sore ears... we had less than five minutes! I could hear the fireworks going nuts outside. I was so mad. I can't even say that I was proud of myself for my intuition serving me well! I was actually mad at myself for being right about this case. I couldn't believe how perfect of a crime this was... I had to consider what brought me here with these circumstances. Was it luck? Was it my instincts? Was it my training? I don't know but I can't help but just get on my knees and pray for the first time in years. I had to tell God that I'm sorry. I was sorry for not going to church every week. I was sorry that I used his name in vein and I don't even understand why I did. There's tons of other words I can use to express anger! And I told him in my prayer that I am sorry I lost faith... Seeing so many dead bodies and families ruined actually ruined me as well. I couldn't understand why so many good kind-hearted families were being murdered by people for little to no reason! I should've been reminding myself that God does exist in my opinion. How else could this planet be where it is located? Earth is dependent on the Sun, but too close to it and it would be destroyed by the heat. If Earth was too far away it wouldn't receive the nutrients that the sun provides... so it exists exactly far enough and close enough away to have life be able to exist! And then of course the classic question: what came first, the chicken or the egg? Well really a supernatural force such as God would have to create one of them, they had to start somewhere! Same logic with human beings. Plus all of these books that have writings in them and books for Satan worshipers that go back in time just as long ago... I should know, I've put enough Satanic people in prison! Pardon me for rambling, can I just have my moment? I'm honestly scared that I'll end up in Hell! What is Hell anyway? Is it a fiery tomb? Or is Hell different for every individual? Is it where there's the



feeling of getting physical pain that doesn't ease up and it never ends continuously? Is it watching people you love on Earth suffer tremendously and you can't do anything about it? I know I need to stop, people don't want to hear about my fears or my faith, just my story. That was me telling God in my strange way that I betrayed him, but I was truly sorry. I needed to get that off of my chest. As I was doing that I was about to look at the timer again and my phone rang when I looked at the screen! It was Detective Corbin! He didn't even let me speak he just shouted: "I am whacking at it with everything that I've got! The anchor is knocking against it with all of it's might! There's no time, he may be on to us! GET THE HOSTAGES OUT!" I closed my phone and ran as fast as I could! I got to the ladder and slid down it very fast. It burned my hands very badly but I focused on the mission. I yelled: "GO! GET UP THE LADDER AND GET OUT OF HERE NOW!" I started picking up the kids and helping them skip a few steps on the ladder. Everyone pulled off their tape over their mouths. They were climbing as fast as they could it seemed. That damn ladder was squeaking very loudly with every step! I kept lightly pushing people up the ladder. Mr. Anderson, my neighbor, looked at me and said: "God bless you!" I quickly uttered out: "God bless you too!" I took that old scope and looked toward the submarine. I looked at my phone and I saw that there was still about one minute left. OH NO! I saw something strange moving with bubbles... the torpedo! It made it out of the submarine! It was heading toward us and then I saw a big beam of light! It prematurely exploded! Then another explosion happened right after that one further away! It must've made another torpedo react and it ignited! That submarine was broken up in all directions! I couldn't believe my eyes! Then I saw the anchor moving very fast. That meant that Detective Corbin was driving the boat away! I turned around and started climbing up the ladder. I got up to the second highest spot and I felt my entire body painfully stretch! The ladder broke off! My necklace with my retired badge got caught on the top metal piece of the ladder. It was cutting into my neck, it hurts so bad AH I just want to scream! I put my phone on the ledge above me to free my hand so I could use all of my fingers. I began trying to do a pull-up maneuver to get myself up there. I felt the entire platform tilting backwards and sinking deeper into the water! I am not giving up! I saw a figure... someone is approaching! It's dark and impossible to see details about their appearance. I screamed while my neck started to bleed from the pain and strain: "HELP I'M TRAPPED OVER HERE! HELP PLEASE I'LL DO ANYTHING!" They were moving pretty fast towards me, could that have anything to do with platform being tilted towards my position? All I can say is this was truly remarkable. You won't believe me when I tell you... it's Curtis... he is dead...

It was the last thing Retired Gold-Shield Detective Ward Kennedy saw. It was a horrific means of closure to his case. Curtis was dead for a long time and his body was hidden in the old lighthouse. When the platform broke and the bottom portion of the lighthouse started sinking to the bottom, gravity pulled his corpse down as well. The necklace with Ward's badge attached broke just a moment before Curtis's corpse would've physically impacted him. Ward fell into the water and some heavy metal pieces knocked him unconscious. Those pieces also held him underneath causing him to drown... His phone would've come in handy to prove his good and honest intentions. But unfortunately, Curtis's leg hit Ward's phone and knocked it into the water destroying it. All of the hostages were saved and free now thanks to Ward with the help from other people along the way. Scuba divers eventually recovered Ward's body and pieces of the submarine as well. Physical evidence was scarce. Ward had a funeral that was one for the ages. Every family that was a hostage came to his funereal. The Mayor, who wasn't afraid to ruffle feathers politically, made a bold statement and called him a hero and buried Ward with a

key to the city. It was a big honor. The kids who were hostages all sang, it made everyone cry. Justin's mother also showed up, in a wheelchair. Her cancer was painful as you can imagine, but she swore she wouldn't miss Ward's recognition of life for the world, as she put it. The touchy subject became quite a shock to those families that Ward saved, was he innocent? Was he guilty? The families' testimonies weren't admissible in court due to what the defense called 'shock' and they claimed that it could've been an act. That's right, an act... people were outraged because they knew better. The defense seriously wanted the court to consider that Ward was in on the kidnapping and was just playing as 'eyes on the prize' supposedly. Yes, people's lives are considered prizes to people that make too much money. So the defense in court used the footage of the sheriff as a hostage as evidence. Once again, the real hostages could clear that up in a heartbeat. But they weren't allowed to testify, period. It was all they had to say, that the sheriff really did fight to kill Curtis who supposedly was demanding the money for the hostages. You might wonder why Ward's security cameras at home weren't being used to clear his name? After all, they can provide exact times for whenever Ward left or entered his house... well it was an unlucky situation. The footage was password protected, and only Ward knew that password. So it couldn't be submitted into evidence. The people involved knew better, but Detective Corbin stayed out of it as much as he could. After all, he was getting paid handsomely! One new detective who shall remain anonymous, made a pretty good discovery. He figured out that a certain Forensics figure has an old connection with Ward. He wrote him a letter about the case in court to drag Ward's name down in the mud. Tony read this letter, and did some detective work of his own. He threatened to give the police department a giant lawsuit if they didn't PROVE that they handed over all of their evidence to Forensics from cold cases. To be fair, the police department didn't know that Sheriff Karl Montgomery had a little hiding spot. What was in there? Why don't I let Tony do the talking as he addresses the court.. he said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I've heard a lot of slander going towards Detective Kennedy. A man who just passed away. Haven't heard much to say about Sheriff Montgomery who recently passed? Why? Could it be that, he was just really good at hiding things? Well I don't care in the slightest, here's what the evidence says... SHELL CASING THAT WAS NEVER TURNED IN! Think back and remember a cold case. Right after all of these families starting becoming kidnapped. Justin Brown was shot and murdered! I was told by a SWORN affidavit that there was no shell casing recovered from the crime scene. NOT. A. SINGLE. ONE... I was told. Well here it was hiding in the police department's evidence area the whole time. Oh and, it matches the rare antique gun that was used to shoot and kill Justin, an innocent beloved citizen of our community... but also the sheriff was a registered owner of this gun! Now there are others in this state, but the partial fingerprint match to the sheriff pretty much seals the deal! HE is the fraud here! I'm finished here, the defense can take their lies and their salaries and shove it!" The courthouse erupted into a frenzy. The judge had gave up on using the hammer to quiet down the courtroom and the bailiffs had to use other means. The sheriff couldn't be proven to be the driver of the submarine conclusively, but he was the only one beyond a reasonable doubt. Why? Oh that's because Tony has a wonderful lawyer in the family, and he called upon Detective Corbin to be sworn in under oath. But that isn't the end of this quarrel, guess who came home to visit? Curtis's body came to shore eventually. The medical examiner discovered that Curtis had been killed as long ago as... you guessed it. As soon as he escaped. That pretty much sealed the dead sheriffs fate. Good riddance to both of them. Two things that bothered the families, where was their jewelry? It was obviously stolen but where was it stashed? Possibly the old lighthouse which a good portion of that structure sank when it was destroyed. Or could it possibly have been in the submarine which is now destroyed? Secondly, where was the car that was used for Curtis's prison escape? Rumors were going around that it was a vehicle from the impound lot.

The sheriff knew how to manipulate the prison's visitor program and get Curtis out. They made a deal together to break Curtis out of prison and take hostages for money. All the while, the sheriff played innocent. In reality, the sheriff killed Curtis and stored his body in the old lighthouse. He pretended to be a hostage for the camera, but why was his face bruised up? Well that last family he convinced to take, their dog was fierce. Too bad it was dark outside or Ward may have caught on even faster. The sheriff was planning on using Curtis as a patsy. Even though he was dead, he could play innocent if he was caught during the hostage/money scheme by saying he was doing what Curtis told him to do because of 'threats' used. Tony made his way over to Ward's grave. He got down on his knees and began to cry. He told Ward: "I hope now... you can finally forgive me. I'm truly sorry my friend." Lastly, who was that anonymous detective who wrote that letter? Were they really a detective or self proclaimed to be one? Depending on if YOU are a good detective, you may be able to figure it out! The End