

Finding the Truth

By : lovehater525600

Jeffery Hal is a boy who has experienced it all in just a few weeks. He is now being held for the murder of his best friend, while in actuality he could be the only one that could find out the truth. Sam Richards is just a normal officer that has gotten involved in a tangled web of lies, blackmail and secrets. This is the first part of the story of a small town that faces corruption by a small group of individuals that when combined form a team of unstoppable killers that work like clockwork making sure that the town is under control. While shrouded in mystery they are brought to the surface through the exploits of a murdered teen.

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Prologue

How did this happen? Iâ€™m sitting here in a jail cell charged for conspiracy to murder my best friend. The truth is I was framed by the actual murderer, so they could just go and commit another crime. I think I know who it is, but the police, my parents, the teachers; even my friends wonâ€™t believe me.

If youâ€™re reading this I should probably introduce myself. My name is Jeff Hal. I currently reside in the New York State Maximum Security Juvenile Hall for Boys. I used to live with my parents just outside of New York City, but that all changed after my best friend disappeared and was then found murdered. His name you may be asking was Frank Cahill, and man do I miss him. I am currently writing this with the little pen and paper supplied to me to recount my version of what happened, the truth not what everybody else believes.

â€” Richards where is that report about the Cahill case.â€” I hear my boss yelling at me from across the station. My name is Sam Richards, Officer Sam Richards. I was assigned to the Cahill murder case and from what I saw I canâ€™t understand what happened. Iâ€™m filling out a report about it, but I donâ€™t think I have the whole story.

I donâ€™t think the poor Hal boy did this, but itâ€™s all the clues seem to lead back to him. I can feel my boss breathing down my neck. He hates murder cases, but this one is different from the rest. It seems like from the evidence that thereâ€™s more to the story than there seems. I mean that kid had connections to everybody, and had resources most people can only dream of. Whether Mr. Saunders likes it or not Iâ€™m going to find out the truth.

The news seems to be my only pleasure. Those idiots will believe anything that you tell them. That boy deserved what we did to him, and more. His friend is locked up now, and now nobody knows the truth about what my team and I did. It was so easy to just kill that little problem, yet I still need what is mine back.

That boy knew too much about the team. He had loose lips and now he wonâ€™t be telling anybody our secrets. After the trial it will be safe to go after the documents. I just have to convince the team that it is best if we donâ€™t try anything. I will protect all of those secrets with my life. I will kill anybody to keep them from finding out the truth.

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Chapter one, Jeff

We had been searching for him non-stop for two weeks. The one of last times I saw Frank we were walking home from school. In days before he went missing, he had been acting kind of weird, but I didn't notice that much. He had always been a little bit of an oddball, not many friends, kept to himself most of the time, but was very smart and that was ultimately his downfall.

“ I am telling you that pop quiz was bogus. Mrs. Davis has it out for me.” I had said as we neared our houses, next door from each other.

“ Please that quiz was easy. It's History how can you not get it?” he said jokingly.

“ Not everybody is a genius like you, Frank. I swear my mom would kill me if she found out I was failing.”

“ Your mom is nice, don't worry she never checks your grades online. Hey is that Marcus coming out of the old Johnson place.”

“ How do you know about what my mom looks at on her computer, and yea he's moving in why?”

“ Please, I have my ways of finding out how people act or what they do.” He said sinisterly
“ It will be nice having that idiot Marcus nearby, did you know he's dating a guy from the city?” he said with a smirk.

“ He's not gay last time I check he was dating Gail.” I said deafeningly

“ Hey Marcus glad New York passed that law for gay couples to get married don't you.” He shouted across the street.

“ Dued you don't do that. You're not even sure he is gay. I mean where didâ

“ He basically told me and he deserves it for what he does to the underclassmen. Come on you know I never tell people where I get my information from, it's safe that way.” He said as we walked into his house.

We went straight to his room like we did every Friday. Usually we did homework, played video games, talked about girls, and other guy stuff until his parents came home. His room always confused me it was so clean, yet anytime you moved something he would jump like you discovered his porn collection.

On this particular day we didn't have homework and I had convinced him that he should have some people over for a party. It was his 16 birthday two days before hand, but he refused to have parties, even though his parents, well his mom, liked it when he had people over. I had become like another son to her after her separation. Frank never talked about it, but I could tell it bothered him. And his mom had set aside snacks and some cash for food, and promised that she wouldn't leave her room while the party was going on.

“ Would you please go to the store with me, I haven't had a party sense I was like 10.” He said in desperation. This was one of the few times he seemed completely normal to me.

“ Sure. Let's get going I still have to take a shower.” And we started walking to the nearest grocery store. The town was just a small suburb near New York City, and everybody knew everybody.

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On the way we discussed the guest list. I heard mostly normal people I had expected. He had a very small group of friends, but he always fit in well in most groups if he tried. A few of the names seemed odd. A few people that I had no idea Frank even knew about. I never questioned him because he always seemed to have a plan, and good ones at that. One time he got us inside an into a rated R movie, without paying, and free popcorn and drinks. He seemed to know everybody.

â Gosh, your mom is awesome. I donâ t see why you donâ t have more parties, your house was tailor made for them. And your mom is such a great cook.â

â I donâ t trust a lot of people, you know that.â

â Then why do you trust me so much?â

â We had the exact same schedule freshmen year. We were either going to become good friends or those awkward people that donâ t talk to each other for no reason.â

â Ya, so Cheryl is coming to the party. You like her, she likes you. I donâ t see why you havenâ t asked her out. Youâ re like the best friend ever; you would be a great boyfriend.â

â Love messes with peopleâ s heads. Sheâ s a nice girl and I wouldnâ t want her to get caught up with a guy like me.â

â Boy, I havenâ t seen your get one late assignment, not one dentition, and you get straight Aâ s. Youâ re about as bad as a goldfish.â

â Listen Iâ m going back to my house, Iâ m going to take a shower, clean up, get dressed, and put out the food. What time are you going to be there?â

â 6:45 party starts at 7, first person other than me will arrive approximately 7:02, probably a girl because they show up for the fun. I have heard your brilliant plan and itâ s probably going to come true exactly like you say.â

â Hey, my plans have gotten you tons of fun memories. Iâ ll see you later then. Bye.â

â Bye.â

If I wouldâ ve known that that was one of the last byes I ever said to him I wouldnâ t have taken it for granted.

Chapter 2, Jeff

The party was unusual to say the least. Frank was always kind of awkward in social gatherings; he always seemed to be on high alert. I got to his house at 6:45 just as he planned only when walked into his house I couldnâ t find him. I shouted out his name only to hear a soft shush come from his room. I walked in and he had the blinds closed and he was peering through a small opening with his long blonde hair getting in the way of his view.

â What are youâ

â Shhh!â he said quietly almost as if he didnâ t want to be heard. â Ok, sorry I thought I saw something outside.â

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â What?â

â Nothing, Iâ ll be out in a minute Iâ ve got to get changed, but will you put the music on, my laptop is on the coffee table.â

I left the room, but out of the corner of my eye I see him go back to the window, but I ignored it. As I got to his laptop it lit up, he had gotten an email. I knew that he valued his privacy, I respected that. I go to close out of his email as I notice the email was from somebody I didnâ t know, Carla Tracy. I just look at the first line which I could only make out â you pain. I want back what is mineâ , before Frank sneaks up behind me taking his laptop.

â What do you think youâ re doing?â

â I was going to turn on the music, but then your email popped up. I swear I didnâ t see anything.â

â Thatâ s fine, donâ t let it happen again. People will be coming soon so we just hang out until then.â

Just as he predicted the first person to show up was Cheryl at exactly 7:02. The whole seemed to go by in one fun blur. I talked to a lot of people, and everybody on the guest list seemed to show up. Frank seemed to disappear and reappear all throughout the night. Just as she promised, Frankâ s mom hid away in her room. After a while I found Frank and Cheryl together, and couldnâ t be separated for the rest of the night. I thought it was good he seemed to be a social butterfly at this party. I found him talking to everybody and Cheryl close by.

As I came out of the bathroom I found Frank in his room arguing over the phone with somebody. I went to ask who, but then my girlfriend, Ronda, found me and I didnâ t have a chance to ask who he was talking to. After Cheryl left Frank seemed to disappear again, but this time I found him arguing with our friend Mike.

â Itâ s not fair, Mike you just canâ t keep them in dark while you go and ruin your life.â

â Whatâ s not fair is the fact that you went and snooped around my emails. I can run away wherever I want to itâ s my choice.â

â You will get yourself killed out there by yourself.â

â I wonâ t be by myself Iâ ve got friends in the city.â

â Mike, you canâ t just run away when things get hard. Stay and we can talk about it.â

â My mind is made up, and if you try to tell anybody I will leave sooner than planned.â

â If you must go take this, you know when you will need It.â he hands him a discrete, folded sheet of paper.

â Thanks, and this isnâ t goodbye. I will be back in a couple days.â

â Call me so I know youâ re ok.â

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â Ok mother.â

I slipped into a closet as they started walking towards the door. I couldn't believe it. Frank had just shown a real human emotion for somebody. I was concerned though; where was Mike going, what had Frank handed him, was Frank talking to people like this every time he had disappeared. My thought was cut short as I heard Frank telling me to come out of the closet. He had a way of always knowing things; you could never play a prank or joke on him.

The rest of the night went off without a hitch. Frank was at my side the rest of the night, and as the crowd thinned things got more relaxed. Eventually it was just Frank and I with a few friends. At that point we knew that nobody was going home. Parents were called, Frank's mother was asked if it was ok if they stayed the night. And for the rest of the night it was just a guy's night. Video games, talking about and texting girls, eating, listening to music, on the internet with the laptops people brought.

The last I knew Frank and I were the only ones awake. We were both night owls, but I swear Frank could run a marathon with only an hour of sleep. I clocked out around 3, and Frank was still on a laptop. I figured he was writing, that's what he wanted to do, and he showed me some of his pieces and they were good. For once I was really happy for him. Other than a few things I saw, all night he had been a social butterfly. Just the fact that he had friends over was amazing.

The next morning came and the guys left until it was just Frank, his mom, and me with a pile of dirty dishes from breakfast, and a mess from the party. I helped them clean up because I was like part of the family, and I even stayed and hung out until like noon. Frank's mom had left for some trip she was taking with her sister, and Frank was watching t.v. when I left. I was to come over again around 5 to stay the night with him because his mom was gone, and well I was looking forward to maybe getting some answers.

That was the last night I saw him. From the 5 hours I was gone Frank seemed to be replaced by his evil twin. I had seen a few cars in driveway, but I didn't think a thing. After his dad left, whenever his mom was gone his dad checked in on him and got some of his stuff. I figured that's what had Frank so tense. He was happy to see me, but distant all night.

I went to get on his laptop to find some strange program running, and a new password I couldn't break. He snapped on me for even touching his laptop and insisted that it just had a virus and the program was taking care of it. After a while some guys and girls came over, which was surprising because Frank almost never had other people come over. But then I noticed Cheryl and things made sense. He had probably asked her out.

We played some basketball and made some pizza. It just seemed so normal. That should have been the first sign that something was wrong. Frank had never really wanted to be the way he was that night. Eventually things died down and it was just Frank, Cheryl and I. I decided to give them some privacy. I ended up going to his room and watching t.v. for an hour. I didn't hear Cheryl leave, or any noise at all.

â You player, what is it with you and Cheryl?â

â I took your advice; I'm living life to its fullest.â

â I never told you to do any of this, but it has been really fun. Back before I met you it was like this all the time, but I would rather be friends with you than have this life back. Now I have both and I'm glad to see you happy.â

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â Well we donâ t know when our time will be up so you have to live the good life while you can.â

â Would you mind me asking you a couple questions?â

â Mikeâ s parents are getting divorced. Heâ s running away into the city and I was trying to convince him not to.â

â OK, you knew that one, what wasâ

â It was the name of a guy I know in town just in case he runs into trouble.â

â Youâ ve just got all the answers donâ t you?â

â Itâ s what I do.â He said with a grin that I could tell he knew exactly what was on my mind. He had the ability to read people like no other. You couldnâ t hide anything from him, because he always knew a lie. But you never knew about him because he had a really good poker face.

â Listen, Iâ ve got some stuff to do in the city tomorrow. I got a call yesterday and my dadâ s divorce lawyer wants to talk to me. And he came by today and he wants me to live with him.â

â Dued, you canâ t leave. What about Cheryl and me. Is this why your acting like this because your leaving?â

â You know me better than that. Of course Iâ m not leaving to go live with my dad and his girlfriend. Iâ m over 14 and the law says I get to pick who I live with. I could never leave you man.â

â Good, Iâ m hungry.â

â Letâ s sleep in the living room the kitchen is right there, and we have the big screen T.V. with the cable box.â

â Ok, but I get the big sofa.â

â Deal, but Iâ ve got to get to sleep soon. If Iâ m going to trick a lawyer in the morning I want to be well rested.â

It was a good night. His mom came back around 9 the next morning and I left. An hour after that I saw a car from yesterday pull in driveway and Frank get in. I started to get worried when I went over to see if he was home at 10. His mom was still up; I could tell she had been crying. I walked into the door and she immediately grabs me and hugs me tight.

â Please tell me youâ ve seen Frank.â

â Not sense he left with his dad to go see the divorce lawyer this morning.â

â What divorce lawyer, he told me he was going to Mikeâ s house and that was who picked him up.â

â He told me that his dadâ s divorce lawyer wanted to talk to him in town, thatâ s impossible I just got off the phone with Mike fifteen minutes ago and Frank wasnâ t there.â

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“Please call his phone; I’m going to call his dad. If he doesn’t answer start calling his friends. See if you can at least find somebody who has seen him today.”

The next 3 hours had been the worst of my life. I couldn’t get him to pick up; his parents had been calling everybody trying to find anybody that had seen him. Nobody knew where he was. At midnight we put in the missing persons report to the police. I never stopped trying to find him that night. His parents had actually slept in the same house. I doubt they slept at all. I finally passed out at the sunrise, just praying Frank had been looking at it also. I knew that the police would start searching for him that morning. I didn’t go to school after I woke up I kept searching for him. After school that day everybody searched for him everywhere we could think. At 9 we stopped. I saw Cheryl and she had been crying hard. I went to sleep that night, not knowing that in the morning everything would change.

Chapter 3, Sam

The report was filed at midnight. In this little town a missing person’s report was about the only thing we got, other than domestic disturbances. I figured the kid just snuck out without his mom knowing and he forgot to leave a note. Because he had been missing for less than 24 hours we couldn’t do a search, but all the officers on patrol were told to keep an eye out for him. A white male, with blonde hair, blue eyes, about 5 feet 8 inches, street clothes, no discernible blemishes on the skin, about 130 pounds. What I didn’t expect is that the kid never came back that night.

After taking the report I got some sleep at home. In this quiet little town nothing was too big in crime. The morning came and he still hadn’t showed up, he wasn’t in school and finally at 10 that morning 24 hours had passed and the police could start searching. It wasn’t uncommon that we had a few volunteers helping us look for a missing person, but when they heard who was missing the whole town damn near searched.

“Ok people, these are maps of the town and surrounding areas. Each of your teams will be assigned a 1 mile by 1 mile grid to be searched throughout the day. If anybody finds any traces of the kid immediately report it to the officer on duty. It is most likely I had heard this dozens if not hundreds of times. It was standard procedure for Sheriff Johnson to say this the first day of searching. It was rare searching went beyond a few hours.”

My search team was assigned the northeast corner of the woods. It was a pretty common place to find missing people, kid especially. If they got in trouble or a storm rolled through there was an old cabin nobody had lived in for years, but it was kept up by a family. In my search team there was maybe ten people. All of them were around 20, fresh out of high school, but there was one kid. He had said his name was Jeff Hal and was the missing person’s best friend. Eventually the day was over, but there was no progress made. Even with the whole town looking for this kid the last 3 hours nobody found anything. There would be a call made into the city asking to put out an alert for the kid just in case he ran to the city.

What had me bothered was the fact that everybody seemed so concerned, yet relieved that this kid was gone. I overheard a few conversations between people talking about how snooty this kid was.

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“ I swear I couldn’t call a person with him around because he always heard the entire conversation.” One tall woman said with dark hair and skin.

“ He always knew what was going on. I could tell somebody something over email and by the end of the day he knew,” said one man who looked as if he hasn’t gotten his hands dirty in his life.

“ I think he had informants everywhere, but nobody knew that they were telling him all the secrets they heard,” said a kid no older than 14 who had helped us after school.

“ In a way I’m glad he’s gone for a day, I can sleep without worrying that he was around,” said the women

“ That’s the exact reason I want to find him, you have no idea what he is telling people right now,” said the man.

“ People this isn’t social hour I would like to find this boy today,” I said sternly. Although I heard the conversation I didn’t think anything of it. I was like that kid when I was young. I could tell he would be the kind of guy I hung around with. There were easy ways explain how he got the information. One tactic I used was bluffing. Telling somebody you know something then waiting for them to tell you.

A call was put into the city later that night. They would start looking for him there, but they only had 48 hours to look before the case was dropped. This kid had gotten into a black SUV and fallen off the face of the earth in one day. His parents had looked horrible. They were running themselves ragged looking for him.

As I walked into the station that morning I heard the sheriff on the phone with somebody. The sheriff was hard to get along with because he had a low tolerance for people. He was arguing with the person on the other end about getting back some laptop. I had learned that when the sheriff is talking to somebody not to ask questions. “ Loose lips sink ships, and lying lips ruin lives,” had been his motto. I had this feeling that everything had been connected in a way.

Searching resumed at 8 that morning, and ended 6 that night. Unlike the day before somebody had found something that could lead us to the kid. It was the clothes he was described wearing the day he went missing. They had been carelessly thrown into a creek. There were small trace amounts of blood, assumed to be the boy’s. It was expected to find these eventually. It had been raining and if he was in the wilderness he would be drenched and wanted to get a fresh dry pair of clothes. His mother had said that the only things missing from his room were an extra set of clothes, shoes, his personal laptop, and some food and cash he had stashed.

This sounded like he had planned to run away for a long time. Local store owners were told to inform the police if he had come in, searching for food, or had small amounts of food stolen. With his limited amount of supplies he would have to start breaking into places to get more, or come home. The only thing missing from my theory was motive. According to friend his life had taken an upswing just before he disappeared.

Day three drew to a close without anything other than a few food wrappers found. His clothes were sent away to be tested for the blood. The town would be back to normal in the morning. As much as they wanted him found the whole town couldn’t shut down to find a kid. From that point on the search would get harder. Only the police and a few volunteers would be searching for him. There had been no reports from the city that Frank had shown up there. It was almost like the kid didn’t want to be found.

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Chapter 4, Sam

State laws allowed two weeks of searching before the case was dropped. In those two weeks I had learned more his family than I wanted to. I was assigned to monitor the house and phone at night, and with the mother being the care giver she is she took me in and treated me like family.

From what I had learned Frank had been a special case. He was very intelligent and could be sneaky at times. I was allowed to stay in his room. He had to of been OCD because everything was well kept and symmetrical. His school laptop neatly placed on his desk next to a pad of paper and notebooks. His clothes were color coordinated divided into street clothes, dress clothes, and coats. His selves lined with dozens of books and pictures of who I assumed to be his friends.

His mother said that he liked to keep to himself and didn't talk much to anybody outside his close circle of friends. She was worried he had trouble fitting in, but after he befriended Jeff she was more than happy to welcome him into their small family. His father and she had been separated for 4 months after Frank found out about his dad's girlfriend. He didn't talk about what or how he found out, but he did say that he received an anonymous tip.

As the two weeks came to a close his mother had plead that we keep searching.

â This is my little boy, please officer Richards. Iâ m begging you.â

â I can put in a request to extend the investigation, but if it is going to be accepted more evidence must be found and the reasoning behind it must be logical.â I said with a tone of disappointment.

â Logical whatâ s that supposed to mean.â

â If there were a reason, like he was the only person with a key to a store, or was the only person that fixed the schoolâ s laptops, anything that set him apart the chances of the case being extended would be more likely.â

â He is my boy and you have been staying in his room. Isnâ t that enough of a reason.â

â I am truly sorry maâ am, but itâ s up to serif Johnson now, didnâ t he live near here for years?â

â Yes, but he wasnâ t to found of Frank or us at all.â

â I will be spending all of the time I can spare looking for Frank maâ am, and I am sure with all of the help we received the first three days of the search that there will be plenty of volunteers looking for him.â

â Can I ask you a question?â

â Of course, I think that weâ ve gotten close these two weeks.â

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â Yes we have, but the reason they drop the case after two weeks is because he is presumed dead after that, do you really think my boy is dead?â

â As an officer I have to say yes, but from a personal standpoint, no. from what you have told me Frank isnâ t a normal 16 year old and can probably survive longer than normal people. If you ask me that string of strange break ins could be him.â

â That is what I was thinking, but I didnâ t know if anybody had the same theory. Why wouldnâ t he just come home instead of breaking into peopleâ s houses?â

â I donâ t know but I have to get going and file a report about todayâ s findings.â

â What did you find?â

â Nothing really, a few candy bar wrappers that couldâ ve been left by some litterbugs, and a few dollars that could be his.â

I walked out the door regretting the fact that I couldnâ t tell her more good news. I donâ t know what happened but Frank Cahill had fallen off of earth, and now weâ re grasping on straws trying to convince ourselves he is still alive.

Thatâ s when I heard the gunshot. It was rare to hear a gun inside town. I could tell that it had been vainly silenced, but it was still audible to many. I saw a figure dressed completely in black run down the street. Just as I was about to run after them I heard the muffled plea for help. About thirty feet away near the door of the Halâ s house laid Frank, the life bleeding out of him. Jeff was next to him trying to keep him still while he tried calling 911. I immediately ran towards them, but I wasnâ t the only person to hear the gun. It wasnâ t long before the whole street was nearing them. I tried keeping him alive until the ambulance arrived, but he was bleeding out fast. He had been shot once in lower abdomen, but stabbed multiple times in the legs and arms. Just as his mother got to him he uttered his last words. â Mom I love you, Jeff take care of her, make sure he gets what he deserves for this.â It was muddled with coughs of blood. No doubt he had probably taken a few injuries to the chest.

At 10:42 that night Frank Cahill was proclaimed dead at New York City Memorial Hospital. He died because of wounds to the lower abdomen, arms, legs, and upper chest. Three broken ribs were found upon examination the cause, being hit by a blunt object several times in days prior to the other wounds. The last days of his life are still shrouded in mystery and a thick layer of questions that most likely would never have answers. The funeral was scheduled two days after he was found. During those two days extensive examination of the body was performed. I was assigned to the investigation, which was scheduled to start the day following the funeral. I didnâ t know what to expect or what happened, but I did know that I owed it to his family to find out what had really happened.

Chapter 5, ?

It was so easy. I had been following him in and out town for days. I had no idea why he wasnâ t going for help. I didnâ t know if the wounds on his chest were from someone on the team, or somebody else. I was the one assigned to be the one to kill him.

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I took the shot as I saw him going to his friend's house, no doubt to either get help or pass of the documents. But now I have the laptop and that is all that matters. I think I will go to his funeral, people won't expect a mourner to be the one that fired the shot. I will fit right in; from the emails of his that I read, I know that there's going to be tons of people there that nobody will expect.

Frank had connections and a mind that we could have used. His programing was flawless and until we got a hold of it loyal to him only. When he found out the truth about our little group I offered him the chance to join us. He had been a free agent only concerned with himself and that made him powerful. The secrets in this town keep people together. Not only did he know too much, but he also knew how to expose us.

I got the call from Number One the day before the hit took place. He had fallen off of our surveillance, he knew he was being watched, he just didn't know it was us. I had still taken part in the search to keep him close. In fact I saw him a few times, but didn't say anything. In their cold raspy voice I heard Number One tell me that Frank had been back in town and needed to be taken care of.

I stole his laptop and now I'm standing out here in the dark, waiting for someone to pick it up. I will be kept informed on what is going on through our secure emails, texts, and phone calls. There out of the corner of my eye, movement on the street. The time 1:05 AM, the curfew didn't let kids under 18 out past midnight, and most of the adults out past then where drinking. The guy on the street was wearing our uniform, black hoodie with the hood blocking the face, black gloves, black T-shirt, dark jeans, dark shoes, and probably black socks. It was our color, the color of night where we could go unnoticed, and spy without anybody knowing.

“You bring the package?” it was a male voice and hushed to the point nobody could ever hear it.

“Yes, I hand him the bag. You're the technology expert do you think we can track the files?”

“Yes, it will take time but even if he handed them off to a friend we can track them.”

He faded into the darkness and I start to quickly walk home in the shadows. I had taken this route many times. It had no police patrol on it and mostly ran behind houses that I could hide in. I had to make sure my shirt and tie where ready; I have a funeral to attend in the morning.

Chapter 6, Jeff

Seeing my best friend in a pile on my front porch was the worst thing I ever saw. I had heard the knock and then the gunshot. I had been one of the last people to see him alive. I wanted to ask so many questions, but he faded into nothingness before I could. I had so many questions that went unasked. I saw the hoodie run down the opposite side of the street, but didn't think anything of it, many people would go out for night runs.

Officer Richards kept the crowd controlled until the ambulance got there. In the days after he died my parents let me stay home, but I didn't eat or sleep or do homework. I mostly spent time at Frank's

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house mourning the loss with my other mom. I was asked to speak, so I spent my time in Frank's room wishing that I had his way with words. I tried writing what I wanted to say, but it always ended up in a list of questions I wanted to ask him. Where were you, who picked you up that day, is this what that phone call was about, why didn't you text me I would've helped you, who killed you, who gave you those broken ribs, why were you going to my house, and tons more.

As to be expected many people came to the house to give their condolences. The food they brought was great, but I just wanted to see Frank walk up the driveway. People who I thought were Frank's enemies came. Marcus, David Boxichello (he and Frank fought every time they saw each other), Carlene Townsburg (she and Frank always fought over his looks), Daniel Gustina (he and Frank had been good friends, I don't know why they stopped talking, Christina White (she and Frank were mortal enemies), and tons more.

â Wow everybody loves you as soon as you're goneâ I said as I closed the door on Mrs. Johnston.

â I just wish people would have cared this much while he was here. I have had maybe twenty people ask to speak tomorrow.â Said his mom in a bittersweet voice she had adapted from hours of crying.

â Are they going to, what did you tell them?â

â Yes, I told them to keep it brief, I just want people to remember him in a good way. What about you are you still going to speak?â

â Yea, I guess. I don't have his way of words and its hard talking about him like this, at least when he was missing we still had hope that he would come back.â

â I understand completely, I'm going to go to bed, tomorrow is going to be the hardest day I've had in a long time. Your welcome to stay as late as you want, just make sure your parents know.â

â Actually I think I'm going to leave.â

â Jeff, I was going to wait until tomorrow, but I think you need this now.â She starts walking towards his room, â Because he was a minor all of his property belongs to me to distribute as I see fit. I would like you to have his notebooks and laptop after the police find it. He always talked about how he only wanted you to see his writings and I think it's the perfect time. Maybe you will get inspired by some of this.â

â Thank you so much. I wanted something to remember him by but I didn't want to ask. This is so nice I could never.â

â Yes, if they stay here they will just collect dust. With you at least maybe you could find some closure. And remember just because he's gone doesn't mean my door is closed to you.â She said as she handed me a stack of notebooks filled with his writing.

â I can't thank you enough for this. I want to get home and hopefully figure out what I want to say tomorrow, and maybe get some sleep.â

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I didn't sleep that night. While the notebooks were filled with his poems and short stories, they were filled with what was really going on in his mind. He had told me that he writes what he feels, which makes it dangerous. When I read a story about a little boy without a father it made me think that Frank felt abandoned.

What caught my eye and raised my suspicion was one of the longer short stories that described a secret group of people. They would target people with high social standing and tore them down. They worked like clockwork spying on people and using technology against people. Everything about the story, even the characters seemed too real. The main character was a person who was just trying to make friends and would listen to people talk to him and pick up their secrets. One day he stumbles upon the group and is targeted because of the amount of secrets he knew. Story had been a work in progress and ended with the main character trying to find a way to outrun the group and expose them.

Along with the books was his journal. The last that I had heard before Frank went missing, was that the only complete copy of his journal and works was on his now missing laptop. I knew what I had to do. At some point the officers would want these back to investigate, so I had to spend all of my time copying these on to a secure place. If I had enough time I could maybe even help them out. I knew Frank and now I had some small portal into his mind that I could use to maybe retrace his footsteps. First things first, I had to write what I was going to say in the morning. It took me a long time in fact by the time that I realized I had fallen asleep at my desk, just minutes after I was done writing, it was time for me to put on that stupid tie and those shiny dress shoes and put my best friend six feet under.

Chapter 7, Jeff

Looking in the mirror that morning I remembered the one thing Frank and I would have never seen eye to eye on, dress clothes. I despised them and thought they were cruel and unusual punishment. Frank on the other hand didn't mind them; some may say liked dressing up. He said that he liked it when people looked sharp and at their best. Looking in the mirror I couldn't help but think of him. He never had trouble tying a tie, and for me it was like a foreign language. Finally after ten minutes of trying and a half hour of getting ready I looked in the mirror to see my usual faded jeans, American eagle V-neck, Nikes, and messy hair replaced by tailored black dress pants, white button down with a black tie, shiny black dress shoes with socks up to my calf, and nicely combed salt and pepper hair. If he would have seen me several jokes about me joining the dark side would surely follow.

I checked my laptop, the night before I had discovered that Frank might have left some messages in his writing. If I am correct he wrote what he felt and so if I read between the lines enough I may be able to at least help with the investigation. I had typed the ones that popped out the most and saved them on my laptop, so I could have a copy if the cops took the notebooks away. My laptop seemed to have been acting strangely slow. I couldn't afford buying my own laptop, but the school provided all students in high school with a laptop for their use, so I could always get the tech people at the school to fix it.

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“ Jeff, were going to leave in about 15 minutes. Do you have everything you need?” said my mother as she walked into my room.

“ Let’s see, note card with what I want to talk about on them, check, mourning face, check, a desire to not want to go because it would mean leaving my best friend forever, check, and a leash choking me, check. Yep it’s all here.”

“ I know this is going to be hard for you, and I wanted to let you know that if you ever need to talk to anybody about this your father and I are here for you.” She said softly, my mother was always able to comfort me.

“ Actually there is something that’s bothering me.”

“ What?”

“ It feels like a small child is choking me when I breath.” I said with a joking tone

“ Ok, we can fix that after the service.”

The service was very touching to most; to me it was a pile of bull crap. I sat in a pew towards the front near the casket. Frank’s mother had reserved it for his close friends. Cheryl sat to my left, Mike to my right, and I was surrounded by his other friends I barely knew. Frank was never a holy man but did believe in God. To quote him “ I love God with a passion, his fan club is who I can’t stand.” All the readings and songs seemed to fit him well though.

Towards the end people spoke. I was to speak last, by the time there wasn’t a dry eye in the place. Most of the people who spoke were being fake and hardly knew him. I heard all kinds of speeches from “ When I met Frank I knew he was the kind of person I would like to have a drink with,” to “ At first it was hard to get along with him, but he grew on me,” or “ Frank never had a mean thing to say to anybody,” or my favorite “ The first time I met Frank he was immediately welcoming and talkative.” Most of the people I knew were just people that barely knew him; they were just kids at school that wanted to keep up their good image.

Finally it was my turn. Daniel Gustina had just gotten off and from what he said I knew I had to talk to him. He spoke about how much he regrets the times that never talked to Frank, and how during middle school they were best friends, which I knew to be true. I tried to keep it brief, mostly to keep myself from crying. I simply talked about how he was special and a great friend. He was hard to figure out most times, but if you waited through that you would find a great person and even better friend. I concluded with a poem he wrote about time being the most precious thing, and when you take it for granted time takes something you loved. He wrote that around the time his grandfather died.

The burial was much quieter, mostly close friends and family. Afterwards we all went into the town dinner. We all ate there, then went to his house for coffee and to discuss things, we all knew that with the investigation beginning in the morning this would be the last peace and quiet we would have for a while. I didn’t feel like being around his relatives much so I asked if I could go home.

As I approached the house I heard somebody behind me. It was Mike and he wanted to talk.

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â I know about your plan to run away, I made Frank tell me.â

â I figured he would. I decided not to, you know with his killer still on the loose and all.â

â Youâ re not going because you realized how little your problem is compared to what Frank had to go through. Listen Iâ m not in the mood to talk to anybody right now, so tomorrow how about we meet in the park at noon and we can talk then.â I said coldly.

â Thatâ s fine and just knowâ

â That if I need to talk to anybody your available. I know Iâ ve heard it a thousand times today.â I said annoyed as I slammed the door behind me.

I went straight to my room and started working on the stories again. I worked nonstop until my parents got home and made me stop. Even that night I couldnâ t stop reading the journals, making notes about which ones could mean something and when they were written. I woke up the next morning to my phone going off. It was then I realized that other than the shoes and tie I had slept in the dress clothes. Just as chills went up my spine as I thought that Frankâ s theory about them being right, I saw the text I was woken up by was from Daniel Gustina.

â Hey I know we donâ t know each other really, but I thought we should talk about Frank. After all he was both of our best friend at one time and I still have a few questions.

I responded â Sounds good I have a few things I would like to ask you, but things arenâ t safe so I will meet you near the woods at 5 Oâ clock.â

The day went on and I talked to Mike. He really didnâ t have much to say. He said that the day that he went missing Frank had sent him a text saying that he was going to know how it would feel if he left. Then a few days before he showed up he thought he saw Frank breaking into his house late one night, but didnâ t think anything of it. All he found out of place the next morning was his school laptop. The strange part of the story was that I had heard it before. About five to ten people I had talked to all said they thought they saw somebody in there house one night, but thought it was a shadow, then found there laptop out of place the next morning.

I said a few brief things to Cheryl. As it turns out she was asked out the night of the party. She took him going missing pretty hard, but had started to recover. I told her that Frank really liked her and made up some story about how he spent the whole night talking about how beautiful she was. Itâ s what he would have wanted; for her to feel better and move on.

The rest of the afternoon seemed to go by slowly. I worked on getting everything typed and I was about three quarters of the way done when to cops came to take my statement. I told them exactly what they had asked me. There seemed to be nothing out of sorts. I had seen enough CSI reruns to know that this was all just standard. Full name, date of birth, parents names, relation to the deceased, last seen alive, and other stuff like that. The one thing I did leave out was the notebooks. Until they needed them I was going to keep them a secret or else I may not be able to copy everything onto my laptop.

I waited until 4:30 to start walking toward the woods. It was maybe a fifteen minute walk, but I wanted to be early. As I approached the meeting place I realized the Daniel and Frank had been more alike than I thought. He was already there, Frank was always early. Then I saw what he was wearing was basically what Frank would have worn, an orange polo tucked into nicely creased khakis with brown leather dress shoes and white undershirt and his brown hair nicely combed so you could see his hazel eyes on his seemingly perfectly tanned skin. Every so often Frank dressed like that, but he hadnâ t in the months before he went

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missing. For a second I thought it was Frank.

â Hello Jeff Iâ m Daniel T. Gustin. Dan for short, Iâ m glad we could meet.â He said with a confidence and a smirk that reminded me of my brother getting in trouble.

â The pleasure is all mine. I had always wanted to talk to you for a while. Itâ s just too bad that it had to be under these circumstances.â

â Yes, even though he contacted me for the first time in three years a week before his party I still consider us being great friends.â

â Why did you stop talking to each other?â

â We just grew apart. He started spending more time with other guys and so did I. Eventually we had a fight that we didnâ t recover from.â

â What was it about?â

â Something about me trying to take his money from his coat pocket one day. I would say that I wasnâ t but you probably know that he wouldnâ t accuse somebody of something they didnâ t do, but I had a good reason. I need some cash fo

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