

MYSTERY OF THE TALKING DOGS  
A Novel for Middle Readers, 7-12

By

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## Chapter 1

### A STRANGE STORY

"What'd the custodian say? Tell me again," thirteen-year-old Joe Craig eagerly asked. The black-haired, thin—almost skinny—teen was shaking with excitement. After all, it was such a weird story.

Joe's grown-up cousin, Jeremy Williams, seemed irritated. The twenty-year-old sandy-headed student was in graduate school at the University of Mississippi, commonly called "Ole Miss." He quickly summarized the story that one of the building custodians had told him. "He said there's some weird things happening over at the Army Complex on the west side of campus. Something about talking dogs and finding a dead dog in the dumpster over there."

Joe popped up in the chair in Jeremy's little graduate student office in the biology building of the university, eyes sparkling with delight. He looked like a junior nutty professor. "Talking dogs! How could they teach 'em to do that?"

Jeremy shrugged, turning his head and raising his eyebrows. "Don't know. They do all kinds of scientific research out there. You never know what kind of new things the scientists have developed. But who knows, maybe the custodian just got his story mixed up."

"Does the Army run the place?"

"They own the place, but I think Ole Miss gets lots of money from the military to do research. And I think it's about half Ole Miss and half Army scientists out there."

Joe could tell that Jeremy was ready to go back to work, but he wasn't about to let something this exciting die. He was bored, and this was the first interesting thing he'd heard in the week since he had come to stay with his dad. Spending the summer with his dad at Oxford, Mississippi, wasn't his idea of fun. He loved his dad, but he was a professor of philosophy and couldn't seem to get down on Joe's level. Luckily, his aunt and uncle, Kurt and Mandy Williams, and their son Jeremy lived in Oxford, so Joe at least knew somebody in the small college town.

"Com'on, let's check it out," Joe said. "I've got to see one of those talking dogs for myself."

"What do you mean check it out?" Jeremy snapped. "You're not much more than a kid!"

"But you could help me . . ."

"Maybe. A little. I've got to teach biology labs and work on my master's degree research this summer. But maybe I could go around with you a little."

Joe was sharp enough to know that Jeremy only half meant that remark. He was probably just being nice to his younger cousin from out of town.

"Well, at least tell me everything you know about the talking dogs."

"Okay, but it has to be quick. I've got to go. Here's all I know. First, that custodian I was talking about has been telling people about weird things going on over at the Army Research Complex, and something about finding dead dogs in the dumpster. Best I can tell, nobody much believes him. And second, one of the college students here told me he was out on the jogging trail real early one morning and saw a guy in an Army uniform jogging way out in front of him. He had a German shepherd dog running beside him.

The student said the Army guy was talking to the dog. But that wasn't the weird thing. The really strange thing was that the dog kept looking up and nodding like it understood him."

"No way!" Joe shook his head and waved his arm in a dismissive manner. "That guy's just crazy." Then, with an apparent change of mind, he continued, "How could they do that?" His mind whirled with possibilities.

"Whoa, hoss! Don't get all excited. You don't know for sure it's true," Jeremy said coolly, standing up to go. "You can't believe everything you hear you know. I'm going to teach a lab."

"Could I come up here tomorrow? And watch you do your research?" Joe asked. "It'd give me something to do during the day."

Jeremy half nodded on his way out the door.

In a moment Joe heard Jeremy talking warmly to a girl out in the hall. He ran to the office door to investigate. They were standing about twenty feet down the hall. She was a beautiful blond, about regular height. From her close stance and warm smile Joe knew she must be Kristen Miller, Jeremy's girlfriend. Kristen was a biology student trying to get into medical school. Up to now, Joe had only heard about her. But what really got his attention was the pretty young teen standing shyly behind Kristen. The slender girl looked about Joe's age and had a very unusual color of hair, strawberry blond.

*Cool!* Joe thought. *That must be Kristen's sister or something.*

Joe's desire to meet her wrestled with his shyness toward girls. He never knew what to say or how to act around them.

Ducking back inside the little office, he hoped: *Maybe if she comes up here to the lab with Kristen a lot, I'll see her enough to get up the nerve to talk to her.*

Later, on the short walk across campus to his dad's apartment in Faculty Housing, Joe thought about the dog story. Teaching dogs to understand people language would be something to see. *I've got to look around those Army buildings as soon as possible.*

Joe's dad, Dr. Jeff Craig, was in the middle of a two-year process of writing a college textbook on philosophy, so the apartment was stacked to high heaven with every kind of book. It looked like a library blown to bits by a tornado. Books and papers were lying everywhere on the couch, the floor, the kitchen table, even the bathroom. Joe's dad lived like a hermit since the divorce from Joe's mom two years earlier. Joe knew his dad loved him, and even his mom, but somehow the family fell apart. He figured it had something to do with his dad's head being up in the clouds and not down on earth where people are. Anyway, Joe tried to keep from being angry about it. Best thing he found to do was not think about it. And certainly not watch TV shows with happy families. He even lost interest in church, something he used to enjoy. After all, his parents had been church members, and it didn't keep them from divorcing. He believed in God, and even prayed, but church seemed to be only for perfect families.

Writing the new book seemed to be the only thing on his dad's mind lately. All he ever talked about was weird stuff like existential-something or another, or Kierkie-somebody; Joe couldn't even pronounce such words, much less understand them. He wished his dad would just sit down and talk normal to him.

Joe dug through the cluttered cabinets, found some Little Debbie snack cakes, and flopped on the couch to watch TV. Papers which had been scattered around on the couch wrinkled under him. Soon he was fast asleep.

An opening door jolted Joe awake. "Hey Dad!" he said, though still groggy.

"Hi," the tall, but bent, Dr. Craig replied. His tie was loose and over to one side, and he clutched a bundle of white papers. He patted Joe's foot warmly as he went past the couch. "How was your day?"

He listened for a few moments as Joe recounted the visit at the biology department with Jeremy, but soon his dad seemed to be looking down and reading one of the papers. "Uh-huh, yeah, I bet that was fun."

With that, Joe's dad ambled toward the tiny kitchen mumbling something about TV dinners in the freezer.

But Joe wasn't finished talking yet. It was this way every time. His dad just always seemed to have his mind somewhere else.

After eating a warmed up two-piece chicken frozen dinner, Joe asked his dad about visiting Jeremy again at the biology department.

"Sure. Just stay out of trouble. And, just so you'll know, I don't mind you going over to your Aunt Mandy's."

Joe knew what that meant. His dad probably felt as awkward as he did and wanted him to stay some with Jeremy's parents who lived in a subdivision about one mile north of the campus. Aunt Mandy was his dad's sister and could provide that sweet motherly influence for Joe.

"Oh yeah, I will. I like being around Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt."

"Just make sure to tell me if you're going to be staying the night over there," Dr. Craig said while cleaning off the kitchen table. "Sometimes I forget where you've told me you're going. Then I get worried that I was supposed to pick you up somewhere."

They talked some more and watched TV together for awhile. Unfortunately, Joe's dad kept analyzing the plot of every show, and saying things like, "I don't like the premise of that episode."

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About 9:00 the next morning, Joe walked to Jeremy's office. For once, Jeremy seemed happy to see him.

"Hey, how's the little professor today?"

Joe beamed. "Fine! Just fine!"

"I was wondering if you were coming up here today. I might need you to help me feed the laboratory rats."

"Cool."

"And maybe even enter some data into the computer for me. You being such a little computer guru."

Joe blushed. "Maybe not a guru. Hey, who was that girl out'n the hall yesterday?"

"What girl?"

"You know, the one right after you left here to go teach that class."

"Oh, you mean Kristen? I've told you about her, she's—"

"Not her," Joe interrupted. "The girl with her."

"That was Kristen's sister, Ashley. Sorry. I should've introduced you guys. Hey, she's about your age."

Jeremy suddenly raised his eyebrows quickly a few times and smiled. "Now there's a possibility."

Joe laughed nervously, a little embarrassed. "Heard any more about the talking dogs?"

"No, probably nothing to it. Just weird stories going around."

"Can we snoop around some out there at the Army area? I'd like to see one of those dogs. Maybe I could talk with it."

Jeremy laughed. "Typical thirteen-year-old."

But Joe wasn't kidding. "Come on, at least go out there with me once so I'll know where to go."

No answer. Jeremy bit his lip.

"Please. . ." Joe squirmed. "I promise not to bother you after that."

"Okay, squirt. I'll go with you. But only to walk around some on the outside. I don't want you getting me in trouble. You know that since I'm a student here, they could kick me out if I do something wrong."

Joe nodded.

"Wednesday," Jeremy said. "Wednesday'll be the day. That's the first day after classes end. I'll have a few days off before the summer session starts. We'll have to go early though."

"Whatever," Joe said, in a high pitched voice, almost a squeal. "Early or late. I'll be ready anytime."

## Chapter 2

### AMAZING OBEDIENCE

At seven-thirty Wednesday morning, Joe heard a sharp knock on his dad's apartment door. He ran and flung the door open. It was Jeremy.

"Are you ready?" Jeremy said instantly. "This is the day . . . remember? College classes ended yesterday."

Joe waved him inside. "Almost ready. Just a second."

"Hurry. We've got to do all our snooping around before nine-thirty or ten when the university employees take walks on campus during their breaks. If we wait that late they might see us."

Joe grabbed a cold Coke out of the fridge on the way out. The two got into Jeremy's ten-year-old brown Buick for the quick trip to the west side of campus. Figuring that security patrols were common around the Army complex, they decided to park at the fitness trail and walk to the complex. Soon the two were walking through the woods on the west side of campus toward the Army area. Dew was still on the leaves as they tromped under the big oak trees.

The complex covered at least a hundred acres and was surrounded by a high, red-brick wall with pointed columns about every twenty feet. The red-brick wall was easy to see through the trees and green undergrowth as the two cautiously approached the complex. The top halves of several large brick buildings could be seen far behind the wall. They spent a few minutes standing behind a cluster of large oak tree trunks watching the road that went into the main entrance to the complex. There was a security gate at the entry point. Two guards sat like statues in a little guardhouse.

"How in the world we gonna get in there?" Joe asked, wiping sweat off his forehead with his left hand. The day was starting to heat up.

"Don't know. Looks pretty much sealed off. I don't think there's any way to go in through the front unless we have some kind of fake I.D. or something."

Joe had a thought. "Let's make our way around the outside of the complex . . . the wall may not be entirely complete, or maybe there's a hole in it somewhere."

The two carefully made their way around the outside perimeter of the complex. There were plenty of huge oak trees close to the outer wall so they could stay relatively hidden. Green vegetation of all sorts surrounded the big trees, but there was a grassy lane about ten feet wide next to the wall, apparently where the Army people mowed the grass for a fire lane or security zone.

It took twenty minutes for the pair to make their trip around the outside of the complex looking for ways to get in. But they could find no opening; it was completely sealed off.

"What do you suggest now, Sherlock?" Jeremy asked.

"Can't give up. Let's go around again, this time looking for a hole or crack in the wall to look into the complex and see what's going on."

Joe took off through the trees toward the north side of the complex. Jeremy followed.

The north wall of the complex turned out to be the best area for sneaking around. It was far away from any parking lots, loading docks, and any other people stuff. There they could walk out in the grassy lane and inspect the wall closely.

"Look here," Joe said excitedly after a few minutes, pointing to a spot in the wall. Jeremy ran over to look.

Joe had found a place in the wall where there was a cracked brick and some loosened mortar.

"Looks like their mower threw a rock into the wall making this spot," Joe said. "Let's dig the mortar and broken brick out enough to see into the compound."

Jeremy quickly ran out into the woods and returned with a short stubby stick while Joe worked the cracked brick piece back and forth with his hands. By prying with the stick they were able to get about a fourth of the broken brick out. They could then crouch down and clearly see through the wall into the compound.

Joe pitched the broken piece of brick on the ground.

"No. Keep the piece of brick so we can put it back when we leave," Jeremy instructed. "We don't want the Army folks finding our little peephole and fixing it."

The two took turns looking into the compound through the hole in the wall. The view was astonishing. Just inside the wall was a moat-like canal, apparently to keep out intruders. It was full of black stagnant water and a few lily pads. Far to the other side of the compound were numerous brick buildings, parking lots, storage sheds, barracks, and a small water tank. Closer to the north wall, where the boys were looking in, was a practice battlefield, complete with foxholes, machine gun set-ups, jeeps, armored personnel carriers, and even a tank. Burned areas on the ground and blackened spots on the equipment indicated that the Army folks had been conducting some "real life" war games.

The mock battlefield was lifeless with not a person in sight anywhere.

"Wonder when they do their war games?" Jeremy asked.

"Don't know, maybe when they'd draw the least attention. But they must use this area often. Look at how the grass is all torn up with clods of dirt everywhere."

Joe continued, stating his plan. "Let's plug the hole back up and come back at different times of day. Let's start tomorrow by coming very early—say about daylight. You know how the Army says all that stuff about doing a day's work before the rest of the world gets up."

Jeremy even seemed interested now. "Good idea, but I can't come with you at all the different times. Maybe I could come in the morning though. Right now, let's go back to the biology building. I've got to work on my research project, and I need you to help me. But hey, why don't you come over to the house tonight? We'll talk more about it then."

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That night after supper, Joe sat around in the living room with Jeremy's parents talking about all kinds of things. His uncle Kurt was in his late forties, well-built, and likable. Even though he was a very smart man, he wasn't hard to talk to like Joe's dad was. Aunt Mandy was short, thin, with shoulder-length black hair, and attractive. She was his mother's sister and, like his mom, was very sweet and affectionate. Even though Aunt Mandy was born and raised at Eastport, Mississippi, located in the middle of nowhere, she must have read a book on good manners, because she was ever conscious of the proper behavior or etiquette. Their house was quite pleasant. It was a new brown

brick house decorated with all kinds of old-fashioned stuff. Various pieces of antique furniture dotted the inside of the house, and all sorts of old jars, urns, bottles, and vases stood proudly on the mantle and small tables. The living room furniture was a burnt-orange color and added to the harvest or country look. The couch and chairs were so comfortable. Joe enjoyed this kind of thing, just sitting around talking about anything depending upon the mood of the day. Jeremy had cautioned him about bringing up the dog mystery because both parents worked for Ole Miss. Getting them, or any other adults involved, without hard evidence would create problems. People in the South were loyal to their jobs, the government, and government institutions. And especially Ole Miss. It was the pride of Mississippi's rich and famous.

Just before Joe left, Jeremy got a call from one of his graduate student friends at the biology building who reported that something seemed to be wrong with one of the ultra-low temperature freezers. Since Jeremy used the freezers for his research, his experiments might be ruined. He promised the caller that he would come up there first thing in the morning to see about the freezer.

Joe had known this would happen. Jeremy was so busy with his research for his master's degree that he didn't have time to investigate the dog mystery. Being a graduate student meant being at school or in the lab almost twenty-four hours a day. Joe would have to investigate the mystery by himself and report his findings to Jeremy.

Early the next morning Joe slipped out of the apartment and headed for the Army complex. He didn't tell his dad but knew he wouldn't mind anyway. There wasn't much crime in tiny Oxford. It was light enough to see, but the sun was not up yet. A gray haze clouded his view through the woods, but he had no problems heading back to the north side of the complex where the hole in the wall was located.

He heard something!

Loud popping like gunfire was coming from the complex, as well as voices. The Army people were having a war game!

Joe walked quickly to the north outside wall.

It was the sound of gunfire—both a sharp cracking kind and a deep pounding kind—coming from inside. He removed the piece of brick for a view. What he saw inside was like a war movie.

At least ten men, dressed in full combat gear, were advancing across the open grassy area toward a series of machine gun nests among some big trees. Most of the men were crawling on their bellies, while some crouched behind a group of jeeps looking at a map and talking into walkie-talkies. They seemed to be the officers deciding on how to proceed with the assault.

Small explosives were blowing up all around on the ground, apparently pre-placed to give the scene a realistic look. Joe guessed they were using blanks in the machine guns, but the big guns still made a deep sounding rhythmic pounding noise. The whole scene was awesome. Joe thought that if a real war was anything like this, it'd be awfully scary.

There was one machine gun nest across the way, surrounded by hedge bushes, that was continuously shooting. Through the smoke and early morning haze Joe could make out three mannequin-like dummies dressed like soldiers propped up around the machine gun. He guessed the gun was being operated by remote control. The officers behind the jeeps seemed to be nervously watching the spot.

Joe then noticed that one of the officers crouched behind the jeep had a dog with him. It was a nice-looking brown and black German shepherd. The officer was arranging some kind of canvas bag-like thing around the dog's neck. The other two officers turned and seemed to be talking to the man with the dog. It looked like they were preparing the dog for something.

Joe couldn't believe his eyes when the dog handler started talking to the dog. Face to face just like people talk.

It was like watching a movie or something. *This can't be real!*

The dog actually nodded as if it understood the commands, whatever they were. Joe soon could see for himself what the commands were because the dog crouched somewhat and walked away from the jeeps back from the incessant firing of the machine guns, toward the back of the mock battlefield.

*Where's he going?*

The dog skillfully sneaked through several clumps of bushes and trees around to the rear of the machine gun nest. At this time he was barely visible to Joe, he was so far behind the machine gun.

*He must be trained to attack the people in the machine gun nest, Joe thought. But what's that bag of stuff doing around his neck? This is the weirdest thing I've ever seen!*

Joe didn't get a chance to find out—he heard a mower coming. He would certainly be seen standing out in the open lane. He immediately stuffed the piece of brick back in place and rushed to the tree line just in time to whirl and see a red Yazoo tractor-mower round the corner and mow down the open lane right where he had been standing. On down the lane it went and rounded the next corner. Since the lane was more than one swath wide, Joe knew the mower would be back in a few minutes.

"Why are they mowing grass this early in the morning?" Joe mumbled. All he could figure was that they were trying to avoid the summer daytime heat.

Boom! His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a loud explosion inside the complex. He could see clumps of grass and dirt flying high above the brick wall. "What the heck is goin' on here?" he said out loud. Joe's mind ran wild with ideas. *The explosion must have been part of the war game. But what? And what about the dog?*

By the time the mower had made two more passes in the grassy lane, Joe knew that the fake battle was over. All shooting had now ceased.

He started a quick walk back toward the main part of the campus. He had to tell this to Jeremy!

### Chapter 3 WEIRD RESEARCH

Joe walked as fast as he could to the biology building. He had to tell Jeremy about this as soon as possible. It was about eight o'clock so Joe knew he'd be around somewhere. The young teen ran up the incline entranceway to the building, through the double glass doors, to the right and up the stairs to Jeremy's small graduate student office. The door was partially open, but nobody there.

Joe turned and walked aimlessly down the hall, looking into each of the laboratories and classrooms. The building seemed deserted. Just then a young man in a white coat emerged from one of the labs.

"Excuse me," Joe asked. "Do you know where Jeremy Williams is?"

"He's down there in that last room on the right, where the ultra-low freezers are."

Joe quickly made his way down there and, sure enough, found Jeremy sitting on a stool arranging small vials in a special box for freezing samples. Next to him was a long chest freezer kind of thing with several gauges and lights on its side.

"Jeremy," Joe said, loud at first, but then trailing off, not wanting anyone to hear. He looked both ways before continuing. "You won't believe what I just saw!"

Jeremy put the small freezer box down. "Believe what?" As usual, he was calm.

"The Army guys, they used a German shepherd, there was a war and they commanded a dog to do stuff!" Joe blurted out quickly, not making any sense.

Jeremy stood up; for once seeming excited.

"Come on." He waved his arm. "Let's go down to my office where we can talk."

Joe had calmed down some by the time they sat down in Jeremy's tiny office. He collected his thoughts for a moment and then told all that he had seen out at the complex.

Jeremy sat there with a blank look on his face, apparently stunned. "Are you absolutely sure that's what you saw?"

"Yes, I promise. . . it really happened, just like I'm tellin' you."

Jeremy just sat there for a minute with a faraway look in his eye. He suddenly looked very serious. "Well, we've obviously got to do something about it. Some way or the other the Army is doing research on teaching dogs how to understand English. I'd guess they're teaching them to be kamikazes. You know, like the Japanese pilots in World War II . . . how they purposely crashed their planes into enemy ships. Killing themselves was all part of the plan."

He rubbed his chin. "But, we've got to be careful here. That research grant is probably in the millions of dollars. If we cause trouble, complaining about the treatment of the dogs, the Army may decide to move its research and money elsewhere. So, who do we tell first? And how do we go about getting this research stopped?"

Joe had an answer for that. "We could go to the Ole Miss Chancellor, or the campus newspaper."

"First though," Jeremy threw in, "We need to talk to Mom and Dad about it. What about telling your dad?"

"I don't think he'd listen enough to understand," Joe said. "It's hard to get his undivided attention. Lately, his mind's been on writing that new philosophy textbook."

"Maybe we'll explain it to him later, or maybe he'll listen to my dad."

"Well whatever we do, let's do it this morning," Joe exclaimed.

"No, I want to think about it and talk to them tonight. Besides, they're at work by now over at the pharmacy building. Since they both work for Ole Miss we need to proceed cautiously. I wouldn't want to get them in trouble with their bosses or anything like that."

"Okay then," Joe agreed. "We'll do it tonight. I guess in the meantime I'll walk downtown to that big bookstore and look around some. Everybody says it's one of the best bookstores in Mississippi. Then, I'll probably spend some time in the library. See you back at your house tonight."

"All right, see you then," Jeremy rose from his chair. "I'll tell you one thing, this certainly is a strange story. Like I said, I need to think about it. There could be another explanation. But first, I've got to get back to my experiment."

Joe followed Jeremy out into the hall toward the lab, but turned and went outside toward downtown Oxford where the bookstore was.

After several hours killing time in downtown Oxford, Joe went to the Ole Miss library. The place was huge, about a hundred times bigger than a regular school library. He finally found a reading room containing popular magazines and daily newspapers. Just when he was about to sit down in one of the big cushiony chairs, he saw the girl again. It was Ashley! She was sitting across the room near the newspaper rack reading a magazine. Joe grabbed a copy of *Popular Science* and sat down, pretending to read it. He was far enough away that she didn't notice him studying her. She had on baggy faded blue jeans and a green pullover shirt that accented her strawberry blond hair.

*Boy, this girl is fine!* he thought. The way she sat upright, the way she turned the pages, the way she swiped her hair behind her ear with her hand—all showed Joe how graceful she was.

*Man, I'd love to meet her . . .*

Before he got up the courage to try, she rose, replaced the magazine, and walked away, seemingly totally unaware of Joe's presence.

"Well, at least she's coming up here on campus during the day," Joe mumbled. "Maybe I'll get to see her again."

Joe made his way back to Jeremy's house where he loafed around the rest of the day watching T.V. and eating anything he could find. He knew that Aunt Mandy wouldn't mind.

About 6:30 that night the family converged at the supper table. Aunt Mandy prayed a blessing over the food before they began. The meal started out being like a formal event. Soon though, he forgot all about manners and gorged himself on Aunt Mandy's lasagna. He ate three huge helpings. They all ate and talked about the day's events. A soft whitish-yellow light from the chandelier above the dining room table made the dinner meal seem pleasant. Joe felt right at home with his uncle's family.

"How was your day Joe?" Aunt Mandy asked in a little while. "I'm sorry that we're all gone during the day, leaving you here in town by yourself."

Joe wiped several little strings of cheese from his chin with a soft beige cloth napkin. "Oh, no problem . . . I went up to the biology building early this morning, then downtown. I watched some T.V. and took a nap this afternoon."

Joe glanced at Jeremy who seemed to be saying wait with his eyes, so he decided to hold off telling the story about the war games until Jeremy was ready.

"Well," Mandy continued. "Kurt and I want to make sure that you don't get too bored. I know your father's real busy. Perhaps I should take off a day and take you to a museum or something."

Joe thought that was corny, but he knew that Mandy was just trying to be motherly. "That's not necessary. Thanks anyway. I'm fine."

"At least go to church with us on Sunday," she continued. "Unless, of course, your dad takes you."

"Okay," he said half-heartedly. *Maybe their church will be more fun than mine.*

Soon, the meal was over and kitchen cleaning began. Everybody pitched in for the clean-up. Joe's job was to load the dishwasher. Handling all those gunked up plates was gross. But he did his duty, after all, he was a guest in their house. Afterward, back in the den, the family sat around watching TV and talking. Joe decided to let Jeremy bring up the talking dogs mystery to his parents when the time was right.

After about thirty minutes Uncle Kurt got tired of flipping channels with the hand-held remote control, mumbled something about there being nothing good on TV anymore, and turned the set off. Then the family began to talk more seriously.

Jeremy's dad somehow got off on the glory days of Ole Miss football when they were a national powerhouse. He talked on and on.

"Yep," he said wishfully. "Those were the good old days. People knew who Ole Miss was back then. Now we sorta have an identity crisis. . . enrollment is going down. . . Mississippi State's enrollment is going up. I don't know what we're going to do."

Apparently, Jeremy thought that was as good a lead as any.

"Speaking of Ole Miss, Joe and I would like to tell ya'll something we found out going on here at Ole Miss. Something very weird and inhumane."

Aunt Mandy seemed startled. Her eyebrows shot up. "What? Please tell us."

"Well, it began when a friend of mine on campus said he saw an Army guy out jogging with a military dog along side him. My friend swore up and down that the guy was talking to the dog . . . and the dog understood him! Then, later I heard some of the custodians up at the biology building say they found a dead dog in the dumpster at the Army complex."

"What kind of nonsense is this, son?" Jeremy's dad gave him a hard look. "Are you absolutely sure about these things?"

"I'm not through yet. There's more."

Aunt Mandy seemed confused but tried to make something out of the strange story. She shook her head quickly but said nothing.

Jeremy continued. "Joe and I went looking around out at the complex and found a place in the outer brick wall where we could see inside. We didn't see anything the first day, but the next day when Joe went by himself . . . well, you won't believe what he saw. Tell them Joe."

All eyes turned toward the boy.

Joe blurted out his story. "They were having war games and commanded a dog to carry a bag of explosives or something toward a machine gun. The dog did it!"

"What happened to the dog?" Uncle Kurt asked hurriedly.

"I didn't see. I had to run back into the woods because a mower came by."

"Maybe it was a mechanical dog or small robot," Aunt Mandy said, trying to explain the ghastly story. "After all, you were looking through a hole in the wall. You didn't have the best of views."

"It wasn't a robot. It was a German shepherd dog. Wagging its tail and everything. And it might have been blown up. They purposely used a dog for a test or experiment or something."

"We think the Army's doing research on how to teach dogs to carry out commands flawlessly," Jeremy added.

After more detailed discussion of the incident, the reality of what Joe had described gripped Jeremy's parents. The story seemed so unbelievable, but yet they could find no reason to question the boys. The parents just sat there in an awkward silence looking at each other.

Jeremy broke the silence. "We want to put a stop to the project. We want to go to the newspaper, or to the Ole Miss Chancellor, or somebody—whatever it takes—to get this kind of inhumane research stopped."

Uncle Kurt spoke first. "What you've described is very strange and obviously seems unethical and inhumane. But, scientific research is very complicated these days. There's probably a lot we don't understand. If we were on the inside—like a member of the Army research team, or a government official—we could clearly see the need for such research. I know it seems uncaring, but I think we should let the research people decide what's needed. They're supposed to be accountable to all kinds of animal-use rules these days. And besides, it's scientific research that's led to the high standards of living and health we enjoy today."

Jeremy thought his mom would feel differently. "Mom, don't you think this kind of research should be stopped?"

She obviously was torn emotionally from hearing the story, but seemed hesitant. "We have to be careful boys, not to stir up anything that might bring the university down or put us in a bad light. You know people all over the country already think people in the South are ignorant. If we make waves, the Army may just take their grant money somewhere else. I'm afraid I'm going to have to agree with your father on this. Let's leave well enough alone. There might be a perfectly legitimate reason for doing the research. And besides, we don't know enough about the project to judge its merits."

"So we're going to just let them mistreat dogs every day out there?" Jeremy said with a note of anger so unlike him. "You two have always preached to me hot and heavy about 'doing the right thing,' and here you are, hiding your head in the sand over something obviously immoral."

When neither parent would answer, he got up and walked out. Joe followed sheepishly, not liking confrontation.

Back in Jeremy's room, the two talked about what to do next. Jeremy sat on the bed, leaning up against the headboard. Joe remained standing.

"We can't just do nothing!" Joe said, hoping to channel Jeremy's anger into action.

However, Jeremy was calming down. "Maybe Mom and Dad are right. . . I just don't know. Probably shouldn't have said those things."

Joe admired Jeremy for confronting his parents, even about their moral standards. What he had said made sense to Joe. If a person was going to have a moral standard, it

should be that way all the time, not just when convenient. Even if it meant taking some heat for it.

He tried to keep Jeremy talking. "I'd like to keep investigating. You know, like snooping around some more. If we could get concrete evidence of the animal abuse, maybe we could change your mom and dad's minds. Or, possibly go above them directly to the newspaper or something like that."

"Maybe." Jeremy rubbed his face. "I don't know. It might work. But I won't be able to help you much; I've got to finish the last phase of my thesis research by September. That'll take lots of nights at the lab."

"I don't mind snooping around myself. Hey, I've got an idea. Do you think your mom and dad would let Susan and Dennis come help? Two more cousins coming down wouldn't hurt anything would it?" Joe said with a laugh. "After all, we're just one big happy family. And, besides, we're all trained at the Robin's Cliff detective school."

Joe was speaking of Dennis and Susan Craig, who were also first cousins, being Joe's other Uncle Bob's two teenage children.

Jeremy just rolled his eyes at Joe's corny statement. "Robin's Cliff was nothing more than a childhood club of yours, and you know it."

"But we used to investigate stuff —"

Jeremy cut him off. "I don't mind them coming, but Mom might." Then he scratched the back of his neck, thinking for a minute. "What about staying with your dad?"

"No way would he go for that! He's not too excited about me being here, much less two more kids. Besides, he's working all the time on that new book. The whole apartment is covered up with books and papers."

"Dennis and Susan coming might be a good idea though," Jeremy mused. "Maybe we can work it out for them to come here, but we have to be careful. If Mom thinks they're coming to investigate the mystery, she'll say no."

"Why don't we wait a few days and then come up with a way to invite them down here," Jeremy continued. "In the meantime, let's not say anything else about the dog research . . . maybe Mom and Dad'll just assume we've forgotten about it."

"Okay, good plan. Let's do it!"

"Come on, Joe." Jeremy waved. "Let's see if Mom has any more of those homemade peanut butter cookies left."

"Yeah," Joe said following Jeremy out the bedroom door down the hall toward the kitchen. "But there may not be any left . . . I hit 'em pretty hard this afternoon," he mumbled under his breath.

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It was almost a week later when Jeremy thought it safe to ask his parents about Susan and Dennis coming for a few days.

The parents apparently thought the two boys had dropped the issue of the talking dogs, and didn't make a connection between the mystery and their request for Dennis and Susan to come. Aunt Mandy had always been kind-hearted, especially concerning family, and gladly agreed for another niece and nephew to come stay a week. Joe could tell that Uncle Kurt was a little disturbed that his routine would be upset by two more teenagers in the house, but outwardly he tried to show full approval.

"I don't mind ya'll all being here," he said. "But keep in mind that Jeremy can't spend much time with you since he's doing that research."

Joe answered with clear purpose. "But Dennis and Susan are crazy about Ole Miss – they both want to go to college here—and I'll show them around campus. Jeremy can visit with us whenever he can."

"Okay, but I think a week is about long enough."

Two days later arrangements were made for Uncle Bob to bring Susan and Dennis to Oxford on one of his trips to Memphis. Bob operated a marina on the Tennessee River at Eastport and often needed boat parts and supplies from Memphis.

Joe really liked his other two cousins. The trio felt right at home with each other, spending countless summer days as children in the woods at a place they named "Robin's Cliff." Members of the secret Robin's Cliff club met weekly (daily in summer) to plot, scheme, and devise new ways to spy on people or investigate local mysteries. But now, Dennis was fourteen and a jock, hunk, or whatever new term the girls had for good-looking guys. He and Joe often played basketball or sometimes fished together when their families visited one another. Susan was thirteen, extremely clever, and seemed to be endowed with a unique mechanical mind. She had lots of common sense. Joe was not much of a jock, but knew a lot. His friends called him a "brainiac."

About five o'clock on Tuesday Joe was stretched out in a recliner chair taking a nap in Aunt Mandy's house when he heard a car outside. He quickly sat up, the chair neatly folding up under him. He walked to the front door in a daze. The daze evaporated when he saw who it was. It was Uncle Bob with Susan and Dennis.

Joe burst through the door, gingerly making his way toward them in his sock feet. "Hey girl! How ya'll doing! And hey there slick head!"

"Who you callin slick head?" the muscular Dennis said with a laugh. He had on athletic shorts and a cut-off T-shirt. "When you have to exercise as much as I do in this heat, you'll get your hair cut close too."

Dennis shook Joe's hand firmly and they each noticed how much the other had grown. Dennis was much more bulked up with muscles than when Joe had seen him last. His blond hair was cut short, just like that of a military recruit.

Joe then hugged the tall slender brunette. She had on a pair of green jeans, a yellow casual shirt, and brown suede oxford shoes. "Susan, you're looking good. What you been doin' this summer?"

"Just hangin' around the marina, working for Mom and Dad. I was glad to get to come here for a week . . . you know how much I like Ole Miss."

Joe then greeted his Uncle Bob who was busy getting Dennis and Susan's things out of the trunk of the car. Uncle Bob said he couldn't stay but a minute; he'd try to visit more when he came back to pick up the two teens next week.

By the time Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt arrived home from work, Dennis and Susan were settled in and Bob had left for Memphis. Joe had shown them the rooms where Aunt Mandy wanted them to sleep. Aunt Mandy seemed genuinely happy to be around the teens, especially Susan. Joe guessed it was because she'd never had a daughter and Susan was the closest thing to that for her.

Later, Susan helped Aunt Mandy make supper while Dennis and Joe helped Uncle Kurt outside with some old railroad cross ties. He was trying to arrange them in a square

shape for a flower bed. They'd worked up a pretty good appetite by seven-thirty when Susan called them to supper.

"That Jeremy must be tired of working twenty-four hours a day," Joe said during the meal, calling attention to his absence from the dinner table.

"Yeah, but it'll be worth it," Uncle Kurt said. "He's a hard worker. That research for his master's thesis is tedious. A lot of his friends have been working on their master's degrees for several years. But he'll get through in two. I think that'll help him get a job. Especially when people see how self-disciplined he is."

"What's his research about?" Susan asked.

"Something about the hormonal control of tissue development in embryos. He's using white laboratory rats and has to surgically remove the embryos for the experiments."

"Kurt, let's not talk about that stuff at the table," Aunt Mandy said, apparently a little squeamish.

After more conversation the three teens finished their meal, visited for a while with the Williams', and later gathered in one of the guest bedrooms to discuss the dog mystery. Joe had told them a little bit about it on the phone before they came, and they wanted to hear more.

Joe closed the door and told the story in complete detail. His pacing back and forth while talking left a flattened place in the brown carpet. He re-emphasized that they mustn't tell Uncle Kurt and Aunt Mandy that they were still interested in the dog mystery. During Joe's discourse, Dennis lay sprawled out on the bed acting half interested, while Susan sat Indian style in a chair with eyes glued on Joe.

When Joe finished the story, Dennis sat up on the side of the bed. He cast off his half-interested pretense. His blue eyes sparkled. "Well it ain't right! I mean, I'm all for the Army and that kind of stuff—even animal research—but that ain't right. That's too much. I think we ought to expose 'em. Call that T.V. show *Sixty Minutes* or something."

Susan agreed, but not as forcefully. She rubbed the side of her face while thinking, seemingly trying to come up with a plan.

Joe started the brainstorming session. "What do ya'll think we should do? We obviously want to see the research stopped. But how? Remember, we need to be very careful here. If we go off half-cocked, we're going to get Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt in trouble at work and possibly my dad. And Jeremy in trouble at school. The professors could easily find an excuse to keep him from graduating."

Dennis had an answer. "Let's go right up to the researchers at the complex, tell em we know what's going on, and demand they stop or we're going to tell the newspapers."

"Dennis, didn't you hear what Joe just said?" Susan huffed. "You can't do something like that. That's crazy! If they know we're on to them, they'll hide or destroy all evidence of the research and likely move it somewhere else. And Jeremy and them'll get in trouble. We've got to get as much evidence as we can, then show it to somebody. If the research is as gruesome as we think it is, maybe we can convince Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt that something needs to be done."

Joe kept the discussion going. "But what'da you think we should do? I mean, specifically, what step should we take next?"

Dennis acted frustrated. He apparently realized that his "take charge, meet the enemy head on" approach wouldn't work.

Susan had an idea. "I think the first thing we should do is to gather more evidence. How about sifting through the garbage coming out of the complex? We might find documents or something showing what they're doing."

The others thought that idea made sense. Then after that, they agreed, they could decide what to do next.

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The next night, when Joe returned to his dad's apartment, he tried explaining the dog mystery. They both sat on the cluttered couch. His dad actually seemed interested at first. Beginning with the custodian's story about the dead dog, Joe quickly told his dad about the mystery.

His dad looked down and then to the side like he was deep in thought. "I don't know. Could be coincidence. Hard to believe that a major university would risk its grant money by doing cruel research. Maybe there's another explanation for what you saw."

"But no, Dad!" Joe exclaimed, loud at first but then trailing off. "Something really bad's going on out there!"

Joe's dad rose to return to his book writing.

Joe remembered what his dad had told him a few days earlier about the book. "Are you still writing the chapter about ethics and social morality?"

"Yes, but—"

Joe played dumb. He hoped it would work. "Could you explain to me what the word ethics means? I was trying to explain it to Susan yesterday."

His dad was booksmart, but didn't have common sense enough to see where his son was leading him. He fell for the trap. "Ethics is a modern word for the study of good and evil and moral duty."

"No, Dad, what does it mean in everyday language?"

"It means the study of doing what is right. Doing what you think you *ought* to do."

Joe got up and headed for the kitchen. "Thanks, Dad!"

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It was Thursday before the three teens could come and go freely from their aunt and uncle's house. It took a couple of days for the newness of the visit to wear off and for Aunt Mandy to quit asking what they were going to be doing every minute.

Jeremy had driven the trio around the outside of the complex a couple of times during the week so they knew exactly the layout of the garbage dumpsters and good hiding places nearby.

The three teens waited til after supper that Friday night to make their move. They secretly gathered some rubber gloves—obtained from Jeremy—flashlights, and dark-colored parkas to put on. Even though it was summer and would be hot wearing the light jackets, they couldn't risk wearing bright-colored clothes. They told Aunt Mandy they'd be watching TV at Joe's dad's apartment and would be back later. She seemed totally unaware of their scheme.

The three teens did go to Joe's apartment to watch T.V. for a few minutes, just so they wouldn't be telling Aunt Mandy a lie. Then they headed out for the secret complex. When they got to the other side of campus, there were less and less buildings. The night was dark. If there was a moon, it was only a small sliver or out-of-sight. A few street lights in the complex parking lot and along the wall partially illuminated the outside of the complex. The garbage dumpsters were outside the wall on the east side of the

complex, not too far from the parking lot. There was a paved access road to the dumpsters for garbage trucks to empty them periodically. The teens stood for a few minutes amid the dark shadows of the big oak trees before sneaking up to the dumpsters. A light southerly breeze made the shadows dance on the ground. Joe's heart raced. Not that he was really scared. He didn't think what they were doing was all that illegal. It was just the excitement of secretly investigating a big-time government research project. Just like in the movies. Joe looked at his companions. Dennis looked like a marine, standing in the shadows with a solemn look on his face, like a warrior going into battle. Susan was more relaxed, apparently more interested in the overall plan, not just this little part.

"There's probably a night watchman or security guard who walks around the place at night," Joe said.

"Duh, you think?" Susan snapped. "That's why we gotta to do our thing and get outta there!"

She didn't wait for Joe or Dennis. "Let's go!"

Dennis and Joe followed—actually half-chased—Susan up to the three shiny brown dumpsters. Each had a heavy lid closed down on top and a small sliding door on the side a little bit bigger than a large pizza carry-out box.

Susan slid open one of the small doors and looked inside. "Let's each take a dumpster and sift through the garbage. Just tear open those bags. If you see anyone coming, run like crazy. Meet back up at the Coliseum parking lot."

Joe went to the middle dumpster. It was hard to see much in the garbage. Even though he had a flashlight, the tangled wet mess created sharp angular shadows from the light. Some of the trash was loose and not in bags. Most of the garbage bags were black, but a few were bright orange. Joe figured that's where the good stuff would be, so he started tearing them open.

The first bag he ripped into was filled with tiny tubes, bottles and crumpled paper towels. He hit the jackpot with the second one. It had a dead German shepherd dog in it. Joe carefully rolled the stiff dog over with a stick. He saw a bandage on its head, right behind the left ear. It was more than he could take. He turned aside.

"Hey ya'll, look at this!"

Susan and Dennis darted over.

"See, just like the custodian told Jeremy. They're experimenting on dogs."

"Let's keep looking," Susan said. "See if you can find something small enough to take back as evidence; or look for notebooks or letters about the research."

All three teens then started tearing open bags. Most only contained gauze, bandages, and used syringes or tubes.

"We need to hurry!" Joe whispered to Dennis and Susan. "The security guard'll surely be around in a minute."

"Just a couple more," Susan said, leaning way over into the dumpster trying to reach some of the orange biohazard bags at the bottom. Her long legs came up off the ground, waving in the air.

Just as she ripped a bag open and spotted a strange electrical device amid the gauze and bandages, Dennis called out strongly, "Someone's coming around the building . . . I see the shadow. Run!"

Dennis and Joe took off like lightning toward the big oaks. Susan stayed, determined to get the electrical device. Dennis seemed to know what he was doing, but Joe was confused. Should he hide behind a big tree or a little one? Or lie flat on the ground?

A uniformed security guard rounded the corner and started toward the dumpster on his way around the complex wall.

Susan knew she couldn't run, so she climbed inside the dumpster and crouched down in the wet garbage. Cool moistness soaked through her jeans in several places.

The guard walked slowly by the dumpsters, playing his flashlight all up and down and between the dumpsters. He paused for a moment, but then went on.

After a few minutes, Susan carefully climbed out and ran toward the trees, clutching the electrical device. Maybe this was the evidence they needed.

The trio met back at the coliseum parking lot. Standing under one of the parking lot lights, Susan told them about having to hide in the dumpster. "I can't believe you'd climb in there with all that nasty garbage," Joe said.

She grinned. "A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do!"

Dennis huffed. He didn't like his sister being tough.

Then she showed them the electrical device. It appeared to be a dull white plastic computer flash or jump drive with tiny blue and red wires attached to one end, and a USB connector on the other. They decided to take it up to Jeremy's graduate student office at the biology building for a closer look.

They found Jeremy's office open and went on in. He wasn't there, so Joe went looking for the young biologist.

"While he's looking for Jeremy, I'm gonna go to the bathroom and try to clean all this gunk off me," Susan said, holding both hands out and shaking them in a "grossed out" gesture.

In a few minutes Susan was back and Joe had returned with Jeremy. They discussed the night's discovery. Jeremy asked Joe to shut the door behind him just in case someone was nearby. They passed the electrical device around for each person to look at extensively.

"What do you think it is?" Joe asked Jeremy.

"Not sure . . . obviously a flash drive or jump drive modified as a transformer or transducer or something that transfers electrical signals from one machine to another."

"We found a dead dog too." Dennis threw in.

"That had a bandage on its head," Joe said, holding the device. "I like the term 'transducer' for this thing. Let's call it that. I agree that it's got to be a device for transferring computer information from one place to another. Do ya'll think these loose wires connect to the dog's brain and the USB port to a computer?"

"Certainly possible." Jeremy stood up. "They could be transferring electrical impulses to the dogs in some special way or pattern to help them learn English. Maybe like electrical shocking for obedience training. Or, they might be trying to transfer information directly into the brain. But you'd have to have more than just two loose wires on the brain end. You can't just touch two wires to a brain and expect information transfer to take place. Besides all that, computer language and brain language are not even close to compatible. Even if you could hook up a brain to a computer, the brain wouldn't understand the computer language."

"Maybe that's what the research is all about," Joe said, excitedly. "Maybe they've figured out a way to transfer human language or instructions straight into a dog's brain."

"That must be it," Susan said, nodding. "Because otherwise you could never teach a dog to understand English."

Jeremy wasn't convinced. "I don't think so. The research project may be to teach the dogs human language by ordinary means to get them to obey simple commands. I mean, I know it would take a long time and involve intensive training. But maybe it could be done. This transducer, you call it, may just be a way to shock them or to monitor brain activity during the research."

"Let's take this transducer to the police or somebody like that, and also tell them about the dead dogs in the dumpster," Dennis said. "I don't see what the problem is . . . all this technical mumbo jumbo doesn't alter the facts. They're mistreating animals out there."

Jeremy played the devil's advocate. "Let's say we go report what we've found. Let's say the Army folks deny killing dogs in war games. What does this transducer prove? By itself? That the Army's doing research on dogs? That they're monitoring their research with electrical devices implanted in the experimental animals? What's wrong with that? A lot of universities do research on dogs."

"You mean we did all that tonight for nothing?" Dennis asked, obviously irritated.

Jeremy didn't have an answer for that question. He reached toward Joe who had the transducer. "Here, hand me that thing. Let's keep the transducer hidden here in one of my cabinets."

"What about your dad, Joe?" Jeremy continued. "Do you think we should talk to him about it? Could he help us with this?"

"Probably not. The other night I tried to tell him a little bit about it. I didn't want to tell him too much though. I was afraid he wouldn't let me keep coming up here to your office. Anyway, right in the middle of me talking about it, he sort of cut me off. Later, he said something about if it was all right with Uncle Kurt and Aunt Mandy, it was all right with him. He seemed distant."

The others in the little office looked at Joe with concern. The pain in his voice obviously revealed a longing for a closer relationship with his dad.

Susan took over. "We can talk to Uncle Jeff about it later when we have more evidence. Surely he'll understand then."

"I agree," Jeremy said. "As I see it, ya'll are starting to find pieces of the overall puzzle. But you still need more evidence—more information to figure this thing out and then to tell others about it. I suggest you get inside the place. And I think I can get you in. My girlfriend Kristen does research over there. If she'll agree to help sneak you in, you could look around for more evidence. Besides, even if they catch you, you can play ignorant. You don't have to lie, you can just say you were curious about the place and what all goes on there. And that's the truth. What are they going to do anyway? *Kill you?*"

Joe agreed. "Right. We've got to get inside the complex and get hard evidence of the cruel research."

"Well, let's do it!" Susan hollered out.

## Chapter 4 THE SECRET COMPLEX

Monday morning Jeremy delivered on his promise to help the teens find a way into the complex. Kristen, Jeremy's girlfriend and fellow student at the biology department, was working on a research project in which she regularly used one of the Army's lasers at the complex. She had a special decal on her windshield which allowed her entry through the gate. Jeremy told her some about the mystery and asked her to help Dennis, Joe, and Susan get inside.

The plan was to meet at Jeremy's office and make plans. Joe's heart skipped a beat when Kristen walked in. Ashley was with her! Kristen nudged Ashley forward and introduced her to the group. "This is my sister, Ashley. She's been helping me some on my research this summer." Joe didn't hear the rest. His eyes were glued on her. She had beautiful green eyes and that strawberry blond hair. A few freckles dotted her perfectly shaped nose.

Susan was first to shake her hand. Then the others. Joe tried to be confident but still looked down when he told her his name. Then they all took a seat—some on the floor, some on the desk—and Jeremy started talking to Kristen about sneaking the kids in. She was polite, but not overly eager to help. She looked and acted like a typical pre-med student, all serious and self-disciplined. Kristen said she was working on her master's degree in biology while waiting to get into medical school. Although she didn't know everything about the purpose of the illegal visit to the Army complex, she apparently trusted Jeremy enough to help the teens without really understanding all the reasons. Oddly, she only made one demand—that the kids keep Ashley out of it. Joe wondered if that meant the young girl had often asked to visit the other teens at Jeremy's office. The teens made their plans around Kristen's regular one-hour visit to the facility. They agreed to hide under a tarpaulin in the back of her bright red Chevy S-10 pick-up until she had driven through the gate and parked in the parking garage. Then, they decided, if questioned upon entry into the research area, they'd say they were with Kristen, helping with her project. After all, there were other young teens doing summer work on campus. Since Kristen was a regular visitor there, maybe they wouldn't be questioned.

The ride through the guard shack checkpoint was uneventful, except for the heat. The three teens didn't realize how hot it would be under a plastic tarp in the early summer. Just past the guard shack the pick-up went over a special bridge over the water-filled moat surrounding the complex. By the time Kristen stopped in the parking garage and uncovered them, they were sweating profusely.

"Thank goodness," Joe said while climbing out of the truck. His navy blue pullover shirt clung to him, totally soaked with sweat. "I thought I was gonna die under there."

Susan seemed uncomfortable but didn't complain.

"Oh, you're just a weenie," Dennis said pointedly. "That wasn't nothing."

Kristen folded up the tarp and was ready to go inside. "Now, ya'll walk right beside me and act like you're with me. Maybe anybody who sees us will just assume that I have permission to have helpers for my project. Generally, no matter where you are, if you act like you know what you're doing, nobody'll challenge you."

It was about eleven o'clock by the time Kristen and the three teens walked over to the main entrance of the complex. It was quite sophisticated. The buildings were connected with walkways. Every building of the complex was bricked with cream-colored bricks. Scattered throughout the brick walls were darker brown bricks making various patterns visible when viewed from a distance. The brick wall over the main entrance had a nice sphere-shaped pattern in the bricks. The sidewalk at the entrance had a large round metal U. S. Department of Defense seal imbedded in it. It reminded Joe of CIA headquarters or something like that.

Once inside, the first thing Joe noticed was a series of cameras lining the walls and pointing in every direction. The complex was probably full of security cameras. A sick feeling gripped his stomach. He hoped this little stunt wouldn't get Jeremy and Kristen in trouble.

A nice looking blond-headed woman sat at the reception desk. Joe got worried. How were they going to get past a receptionist? She recognized Kristen and spoke as they approached the desk. Kristen replied confidently and with great familiarity as if she and this girl were best friends.

Thinking quickly, Kristen also started talking to the teens. "I've got to try those sodium fluoride salts in the host animals today. Maybe the laser will activate the salts for high energy dissolution."

When she reached the desk she never broke her stride talking to the teens about the laser experiment. She continued the discussion even while bending over and signing in. She purposely didn't sign in Dennis, Joe, and Susan, hoping her distraction would draw attention away from signing the register.

It worked. The receptionist must have thought Kristen got permission out at the guard shack to bring the teens in to help her because she didn't ask any questions. She was obviously disarmed by Kristen's demeanor and smooth talk.

Kristen walked with the teens across the open reception area of the building to a set of double doors that opened up into a hallway with offices on both sides. Joe noticed people in a couple of the offices, but most were empty.

When they got into the hall, walking down toward the stair well at the end, Kristen spoke freely, "Okay, now I'm going to show you where the research area is. I'll be going to the physics lab, but you'll need to go downstairs into the lower research wing in the basement. I've heard that's where they do some animal research. If what you want to see is not down there, I can't help you any further. There's a lot I don't know about this place since it's so big. I'll meet you back at the top of the stairs in exactly one hour. Don't be late. Keep moving. As long as you're walking *toward* someplace they tend to think you belong here. The minute you stop and stand around, you're in trouble—they'll question you. And, don't mention my name if you get caught. You'd better have some kind of story made up about how you got in here."

At the stair well the hall turned to the left. Kristen stopped briefly and pointed. "Ya'll go down those stairs. I'm going this way. Good luck!"

Joe felt uneasy as Kristen walked off down the long hallway. It looked like it was a mile long. Now the three teens were alone. How could they keep from getting questioned walking around in a government building for an hour?

Joe ran his hand through his hair. *It'll be a miracle if we don't get caught!*

Joe, Susan, and Dennis walked down the stairs lightly, trying not to make noise. At the bottom of the stairs there was another set of double doors. Before walking through them, Dennis said, "This ain't gonna work. We've got to be doing something besides just walking around looking at everything."

"You're right," Joe said nervously, "But what?"

Dennis didn't have an answer.

The trio opened the double doors and looked both ways down another hall, this one being perpendicular to the upper level hall. Some rooms were obviously open because light streamed out of the rooms onto the gray tile floor.

Voices echoed in the closest room to their right, so the teens went to the left. Some of the rooms they walked by were obviously labs—very clean looking, white lab table tops, with microscopes and other stuff placed around on them.

The place seemed empty. Joe figured maybe it was because it was about lunchtime, or maybe the researchers were in some kind of meeting.

On the left side of the hall they found what appeared to be an animal holding room. Actually it was one huge room with many little rooms off to the sides like closets, only a little bigger. There was a metal cage-like door sealing off the entrance into the animal room but the teens could see enough through the door to tell that dogs were caged inside, off to the sides in the smaller rooms. They even heard muffled barks and whimpers.

"This must be where they keep the dogs," Susan said. "We've got to get in there."

"No way!" Dennis said, looking closely at the cage-like door. "Look at this card slot. You have to stick an i.d. card or something in here to get in." The lock mechanism that operated the heavy cage door looked complicated. Dennis shook the handle slightly to make sure the door was closed completely, guessing it was possible for the door to be slightly ajar.

It was locked.

Joe looked around. "Look here," he said, pointing to a storage room right by the animal area. Its door was open and the teens could see boxes of supplies, paper towels, and sacks of animal cage litter inside. Joe ran in there, seeing a coat rack containing several white coats.

He took one down from the rack. "I bet the animal keepers wear these when they clean out the cages."

"Then let's put them on," Susan instructed, "maybe people will think we're work-study students or something."

"I didn't think of that," Joe said. "Good idea."

They each put on a white lab coat. Joe's was too big but he rolled the sleeves up a bit. Dennis's was too small and was tight across the shoulders. Of the three, Susan's actually fit. She looked like a real laboratory technician.

Since they couldn't get into the animal area, the three decided to look in some of the empty labs. They decided to just make quick walk-throughs in any lab where they didn't hear voices. They didn't want to get caught digging through desk drawers or anything like that.

Neither of the three knew enough about research to know what all the fancy equipment was. Some rooms had large metal hood-like things with a stool sitting in front. Inside each hood were a bright light and a fan sucking air down through holes in the edge of the hood.

In the third lab they went into, Susan walked over to a nice wooden desk while Joe and Dennis looked at the equipment and chemicals out on the lab tops.

Susan hit the jackpot!

"Hey guys, come here!" she said as loudly as she dared to.

"Look, here are two log books, apparently describing what they're doing."

Joe ran over and snatched up one of them while Susan and Dennis looked at the other one. The books were maroon colored hard-bound record books like accountants use to record daily cash receipts. The writing was scribbled and somewhat hard to read, but all the research work was listed by day, like a diary.

"Hey, let's take these back to that storage room where we can spend time reading them," Joe said quickly. "It won't be as bad if someone sees us in there."

Dennis and Susan agreed and all three walked swiftly back to the storage room by the animal area. One of the labs they walked by on the way had somebody in it, but the teens went right on by as if they knew exactly where they were going and what they were doing. They didn't even glance inside.

They closed the storage room door behind them and started reading through the log books. They had to read fast since the hour was ticking away and they would have to meet Kristen at the top of the stairs.

The log books were like a cross between an encyclopedia and a doctor's prescription—scribbled technical writing. It was hard to make sense out of any of the entries. Joe, at least, was able to make out the gist of some entries. But it was very time consuming.

Most of the descriptions of the research were about specific detailed experiments. In a while Susan read a portion of one out loud.

"Op Shep. 0.05 cc keta admin i.m. 30 m prior. Started proc. as per Dr. Gibbs. Probs with extravas. Tried again. Maybe lead dia.'s are two high. Possibly rec. for. Macroph. and Neutro. +. Soaked probes w/MEM and AB's—standard Spiked on 3.01nm"

"Nobody can understand this stuff. It's like written in a code," she said with a huff. Susan threw her book down on large paper towel box and checked her watch. They needed to be going in just a few more minutes.

Joe felt the beginnings of a nervous sweat. She was right. He knew that the notes worked fine for the researchers as reminders of their procedures, but unless he could find something written about the overall scheme of things, or overall plan, he would be hard-pressed to stop the cruel research.

He quit trying to read every entry and started thumbing through the log book looking for non-coded entries or editorial-like comments.

Then Joe noticed a page or two where the writing was clearer and with fewer abbreviations. His mind was whirling. They needed to be going back to meet Kristen. Joe ran his hand through his hair. *Maybe these clearly written pages are where the researcher sat back at the end of the day and summarized the findings, or perhaps forgot to code the writing.* He tried to speed read those pages.

He must have guessed right. Pages 76 and 77 showed signs of being written slower and discussed more about the overall plan. Joe's eyes almost popped out when he read the sentence, "In Op Shep it seems that we can successfully use experimental programming to convert computer code into appropriately patterned electro-physiological

impulses for transfer to the host. Hosts seem to generally understand verbal commands after transfer."

"Wow!" Joe exclaimed, "This is it. They're transferring the ability to understand English directly into the dog's brains."

Susan and Dennis huddled around him, trying to read it also.

After a quick perusal of a few more entries Joe found an even more ominous notation.

Dennis interrupted, "We've got to go! It's twelve o'clock."

"Look at this," Joe pointed to the middle of a sentence, ". . . unfortunately, impartation overwrites key areas of host memory, apparently leading to subsequent dysfunction. Apparently all efforts to focus imparted knowledge to specific brain regions have failed. Thirteen of fifteen hosts died within two weeks of impartation. The remaining two were viable long enough for field testing. This is a point for future research."

Joe interpreted the technical language. "This means they haven't figured out exactly how to do it yet. The information transfer messes up part of the dog's brain, eventually killing the thing."

Susan insisted that they leave. "Bring that log book with you. That'll be our evidence."

"Okay, but let me run down there and put the other log book back, and then we'll leave."

Joe nervously returned one of the log books and met Dennis and Susan back at the storage room. The three then replaced the lab coats and cautiously walked down the hall toward the stair well with the other log book in hand.

Little did they know that a security camera was recording their exit.

## Chapter 5 VICIOUS DOGS

By the time the teens met Kristen at the top of the stairs and made it back out to her pick-up, they started to feel great—like a ton of bricks was lifted off of them. They had done it! They had secretly gotten in the complex and obtained evidence to expose the evil research.

Kristen asked about their mission. "Did you get what you came for?"

"You bet. We sure did." Joe answered. "Thanks so much for your help. Now, please just get us out of the complex parking area without getting caught!"

Kristen seemed curious, but not too much so. She was very serious, like a military officer or something. Joe guessed that's what it takes to be a doctor. "Where do you guys want me to take you when we go out through the gate?" she asked.

"Back to the biology building. We'll go to Jeremy's office."

The trip out of the complex was not as bad as the teens thought. They could tell they were almost out of the complex when they heard the sound of Kristen's pick-up on the little bridge over the moat.

"Wonder what that moat's for?" Dennis commented from his position under the tarp.

"Probably to keep people like us out," Joe giggled.

"Well, it's not very wide, judging by the length of the bridge."

"I bet it's deep though," Joe continued.

Nothing unusual happened at the guard shack. Apparently, the security guards were not as strict on who goes out as on who goes in.

Back at the biology building, the teens again thanked Kristen and scurried up the stairs on the south end of the building to Jeremy's graduate student office. He was not in, but the door was open.

Joe jumped into Jeremy's big brown desk chair and slapped the log book down on the desk. "Jeremy's around here somewhere . . . otherwise the door would be closed. While we're waitin' for him to come back, let's read the log book some more."

He opened the book and started reading the scribbled daily lab notes.

Dennis seemed restless. "I'm hungry. We missed lunch you know."

Joe responded without looking up. "Go down the hall and get some junk food. There're all kinds of snack machines. And a dollar changer."

"Hey, I'm into junk food," Dennis replied, leaning way back in his chair so he could fumble through his pockets for change. "Com'on Susan, let's walk down there."

"Okay. Want anything, Joe?"

"Just a leaded Coke and some chips. Any kind."

"We'll be back in a few minutes."

As Dennis and Susan walked out, Joe hollered, "If you see Jeremy, tell him to get down here right away."

In a moment Joe had a feeling someone was watching. He glanced up. Ashley was standing in the doorway!

"Oh, com'on in," Joe blurted out. "Take a seat and, uh, oh, hi."

Ashley seemed to overlook Joe's fumbling for words. "How was your trip?" She ran her fingers through her hair nervously.

Joe, being careful not to tell her too much, explained that they had found evidence of cruel research on dogs at the Army Complex.

"What's this all about anyway?" she asked, this time making firm eye contact with Joe.

"I guess we're just trying to make 'em stop the cruel research on dogs. That's all."

"Can I help? I love dogs."

"Sure, but you heard what your sister said earlier about keeping you out of it."

"Oh, she's just being overly protective. She won't mind."

Joe wanted her involved. There was nothing in the world he wanted more than to be around

this girl more and get to know her. But on the other hand, he didn't want to cross Kristen because then Jeremy would be mad and then . . . well, everything might fall apart.

He changed the subject and they talked about other things.

By mid-afternoon Jeremy still had not returned to his office. Ashley left to help Kristen. After Ashley left, Joe continued looking through the log book, but didn't find any new information. Except for the entries they had already found, most of them were short, abbreviated, and written in a way that only someone working with the project could understand them. Dennis and Susan were bored and couldn't understand why Joe had to talk to Jeremy first before showing the log book to the police or campus administration. But Joe insisted on waiting. He knew that anything this big about Ole Miss must be handled correctly. He didn't want to get Jeremy or his parents in trouble.

The trio was relieved when Jeremy finally came in.

"Where've you been?" Dennis said with a hint of anger. "We've been waiting here for you for three hours."

Jeremy was not to be out done. "Well excuse me, I work around here you know, plus do research, plus take classes of my own."

Joe smoothed things over by diverting the attention to the log book. "We got it! We got the evidence we need about the research at the complex. Look!"

Joe handed the log book to Jeremy with it opened up to the place where the research description was written out clearly.

"Here," Joe said, jumped up giving him his seat. "Sit here and read that."

After a few minutes, Jeremy stopped reading, leaned back in the chair, and paused a moment before speaking. "Wow! This is big time! I really can hardly believe it, even though you saw the fake battle and all. But here it is in black and white. They really are transferring the ability to understand English to the dogs through a computer hook-up."

Joe was eager to discuss the project. "Did you see that part about it overwriting key areas of the brain?"

"Yeah, as best as I can tell from this data entry, the researchers transfer human-understandable information directly into a dog's brain through a computer hookup. That's why they adapted a flash drive for the project—it already had a USB port on one end. Apparently, they first transfer into the dog's brain the information necessary to understand English language. Then, I guess, they can verbally tell the dog what to do. This business about overwriting key areas of the brain sounds to me like the whole

process is crude and sloppy. I bet they have a hard time directing the information to the right area of the brain. The dogs are probably able to function for a while, but soon go haywire or something."

"What do you think that 'Op Shep' notation means there at the beginning?" Joe asked.

"Who knows?" Jeremy huffed. "Could be something as simple as 'Operation Shepard.' The military loves that kind of wording."

"Can't we put a stop to this crazy research now," Susan said, seemingly frustrated at all the technical talk and lack of action. "I mean, ya'll can sit around talking about what military operation it is or the scientific parts of this research for months after it's stopped. I don't like the idea that they are purposefully abusing dogs out there. I want to see it stopped, and I want to see it stopped now."

"You're right, Susan," Jeremy said, raising his hands. "It's immoral. And we've got to do something about this immediately. But, we need to at least show this book to Mom and Dad tonight. Then we can show it to the Chancellor tomorrow. I want Mom and Dad to know what we are going to do, and why. If I get kicked out of the biology department because of this, I want them to at least know why. Let me call Dad over at work and see what time they'll be home. I've got a few things to finish up around here. By the way, we'll all be walking home today. My old car is in the shop."

Jeremy called his dad who worked on campus. The other teens watched and listened closely to what Jeremy said.

During the conversation, Jeremy seemed careful not to reveal exactly the source of evidence they had, but relayed to his father the fact that the teens had come across something they wanted to show them as soon as possible. He then asked when they would be home.

After nodding his head a few times, and saying, "Okay, I see . . ." Jeremy hung up.

"What'd he say?" the teens asked almost in unison.

"He said that he and Mom had to attend some kind of faculty senate meeting after work, but would be home by eight o'clock. Dad acted puzzled when I said we had something to show them. I guess they've forgotten about the dog research."

"Well, what are we going to do til then?" Dennis asked impatiently.

"You guys can go on home. I'll meet you there by eight," Jeremy said.

"I'd like to go over to the library and look up some stuff on computer programming—like C-Plus, Java, and Visual Basic—so I'll be up on them when we talk to the Ole Miss Chancellor tomorrow," Joe said, always craving knowledge as usual.

"Dennis, you and Susan can go on home if you like. I'll give you the key Aunt Mandy gave me."

Joe continued. "Since the library is right across the campus, Jeremy, why don't I meet you back here and we can walk home together?"

"Okay, fine with me. Be here at seven-thirty."

Dennis and Susan took Joe's suggestion and went on home. Joe's time at the library was not as productive as he had thought. C-Plus and Java were difficult computer languages, and the books written about them were all on the college level; Joe had a hard time understanding them. Visual Basic was a little easier, but there were hundreds of "controls" containing pre-programmed instructions to use in writing a program. Stuff like "ActiveX" and "OLE" would confuse anyone.

At seven-thirty Joe met Jeremy back at the biology building and the two started the mile or so walk home.

The sun was beginning to set behind the big white-columned administration building as they made their way through the grove toward the north side of the campus. Joe clutched the log book tightly; he didn't want anything to happen to their only hard evidence of the Army research.

On the north side of the campus they got on the main sidewalk. As they headed down a big hill, the Ole Miss Twin Towers dormitory looked about half full, based upon the number of cars in the parking lot.

"During the fall and spring semesters, that parking lot is packed full," Jeremy said, waving his arm to the left toward the dorm.

"I can't wait til I can get to come here," Joe threw in wishfully. "College life seems so fun."

"Well, it is fun, but if you do it right, studying and library work squeeze out a lot of the fun stuff. The ones who have the most fun usually flunk out after a semester or two. I knew a guy who partied all the time. When he got his grades, his grade point average was just a little more than zero!"

Joe laughed hard. He knew that a four point grade average was perfect and zero was a failing grade. He also knew Jeremy was talking from experience, having been in the pressure cooker of college life for a long time, both undergraduate and graduate. Even though he had smiled when telling about the boy with the low grades, Jeremy had a serious look on his face, like a person who has been in a war and seen many of his friends not make it.

Jeremy suddenly changed the subject. "Let's cut through that patch of woods across the highway. It's a shortcut to our subdivision."

They scampered across the busy highway which marked the edge of campus. By now it was almost dark, so Joe just fell in line behind Jeremy and followed closely; he'd never been through this short cut.

Jeremy walked swiftly up through the patch of big oak and hickory trees. A well-worn footpath was visible in the fading light, especially if you didn't look straight at it. By following close to Jeremy and glancing out the corner of his eyes to see the path, Joe could keep from tripping on the roots and vines along the path.

Joe began to have a strange sensation as they tromped through the woods. Limbs above, as dark shadows, danced in the warm southerly breeze. Soon, only a pinkish-orange spot in the western sky remained, and it was mostly blocked by stalwart tree trunks. Fear began to grip his stomach. Was someone or something behind them? What if someone knew that they stole the log book, and was following them? Joe tried to shake off the thoughts, but began to shiver—a nervous kind of shiver.

Just when it seemed like they were in the middle of the patch of woods, Joe distinctly heard a rustling sound in the bushes behind him. He reached forward and grabbed Jeremy's arm.

"Jeremy, stop a minute. Somebody's following us."

Jeremy stopped, turned around and stood still. Unlike Joe, he didn't seem to be afraid. The two young men stood in the darkness for a few moments listening.

Joe shivered. All he could hear was his pounding pulse.

The rustling started again, this time closer. It seemed to be coming from several people or animals—like the sounds two or three people make when walking in the woods. Joe felt a strong urge to turn and run. Jeremy stood fast, staring intently toward the approaching noise.

Just then three dark animal-like figures exploded out of the bushes about twenty feet away and started running straight toward the boys. When they started growling Joe knew what they were. Dogs!

"Run!" Joe screamed, turning to run.

"No, that won't work. Get up a tree. Quick!"

Jeremy went one way, Joe the other. Joe half-climbed, half-crawled up the nearest oak tree that had limbs fairly low to the ground. Rough bark, like uneven concrete, skinned up his arms. He clutched the log book as best he could.

Three large German shepherd dogs raced to the spot snarling and barking with white teeth showing. Oddly, they seemed less interested in pursuing the boys than in the backpack Jeremy dropped on the ground. The dogs ripped open the backpack and carefully sniffed and looked at each item in it. It was like they knew there was some meat or something in the backpack, and were trying to get it out.

Knowing he was safe, Joe caught his breath and looked around for Jeremy. It was totally dark by then.

"Jeremy, where are you?"

"Over here," a voice came from a big oak to Joe's right. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, I guess . . . scared, but okay."

The dogs began circling the trees, still acting like they were looking for something. Apparently, they knew the boys were up in the trees, but scarcely looked up. One of the dogs kept nosing around Jeremy's books scattered on the ground.

"What do you think we outta do?" Joe asked.

"Just wait quietly . . . they'll probably go on in a few minutes."

Suddenly, almost as if someone called the dogs from a distance, they turned and disappeared into the dark bushes. Joe waited a few minutes before starting to go down. Then he half slid down the tree. He spent the next few moments brushing the bark off of his clothes and arms. Jeremy walked over. He quickly scooped up his books and the ripped-up backpack.

"Com'on, let's get outta' here before they change their minds and come back."

When they came out of the woods into the lighted subdivision, they felt more at ease and talked about the incident.

"That scared the stew outta' me!" Joe remarked.

"Me too. I'm glad there were some trees to climb."

"Yeah, I haven't climbed a tree in years, but I sure shot up that thing quick as lightnin'. And, holdin' this log book too. I'm glad you thought of climbing trees instead of running. We couldn't have outrun those dogs."

"Did you notice that they were German shepherds?" Jeremy asked seriously.

Joe nodded. "I know what you're thinking . . . that the Army folks sent the dogs to attack us."

"Yeah, we'd be hamburger meat by now if it hadn't been for those trees."

"I don't think that's it at all," Joe replied, using his keen analytical skills. "The way the dogs carefully searched your backpack makes me think they were looking for

something like the log book. I bet they were commanded by the researchers to follow us and find the log book. Good thing I took it up the tree with me."

"But you know what that means, Joe? It means they know you got the log book."

"I know. They must've figured it out somehow."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," Jeremy said as they walked into his parent's yard.

"We'd better do whatever we're going to do immediately—like first thing tomorrow!"

"Right, man," Joe said. "Let's show it to your parents tonight, take it with us to the Chancellor's office tomorrow, and then hide it somewhere."

Jeremy agreed, mumbling something about finding a good place up at the biology building.

When they got inside, Aunt Mandy had supper cooking and it smelled good. As he made his way to the bathroom, Joe guessed from the smell that the meal was one of the hamburger helper types, probably lasagna flavor. As hungry as he was, it would still be difficult to eat knowing what was about to happen.

In the hall by the bathroom Joe quickly told Susan and Dennis about the dog attack on their way home. He didn't want to tell Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt yet. He wanted to see how Jeremy would handle that. The teens ate supper quickly and politely, but with great expectation of what they knew was coming.

The showdown came after supper. Jeremy called his mom and dad into the living room. Joe could tell that Aunt Mandy and Kurt probably knew something was up, and were trying to read Jeremy's face. He seemed pretty cool about the whole thing, business-like and serious. Joe, Dennis, and Susan felt the tension and decided to let Jeremy do the talking. They sat on the floor with their backs up against the fireplace hearth, watching.

Jeremy's mom and dad looked stunned upon hearing about the log book. They obviously were upset that the teens had sneaked into the complex, but that seemed to take a back seat at the moment to the real issue—what Joe had originally told them about the fake battle and blowing up dogs was true! It was like Einstein telling somebody that the moon was made of cheese. They couldn't deny it because of the evidence and authority of the one telling it, but they couldn't believe it either.

"Let me see that thing," Uncle Kurt said seriously, leaning forward with arm outstretched toward Jeremy. Jeremy opened the log book to the most understandable entry and handed it to him. The he continued making his case, looking now toward his mom.

"I don't know about ya'll, but I think we've got to do something this time. If we go talk to the Chancellor, or whoever, and eventually nothing is done to stop this kind of research, then at least we've done our part. And also, for other reasons which I'd rather not tell you at this time, Joe and I think we need to go talk to the Chancellor as soon as possible."

Uncle Kurt looked up from reading. "What do you mean, 'other reasons'? Is there more that you're not telling us?"

"Ya'll haven't done anything illegal, have you?" Aunt Mandy said in a wavering voice, seeming overwhelmed by the whole thing.

"No, no . . . nothing big time, but we think the Army researchers know we took the log book. But hopefully, they realize that the log books are written in a coded or secret way, and aren't too worried about us exposing the project . . ."

"But this entry plainly says stuff about the research . . ." Kurt tapped on the open page with his finger.

"But I think that's the exception. Possibly the researcher forgot to write in code that day," Joe threw in.

Jeremy finished his point. "Well, regardless, we need to do something as soon as possible. Like tomorrow."

Uncle Kurt looked over the top of his glasses to Mandy, paused then said pointedly, "That settles it. We're going to see the Ole Miss Chancellor tomorrow, even if it means trouble for your mother and I. It's the right thing to do."

Jeremy looked relieved and sat down. At least now his parents were going to stand up for what was right. Joe slapped Susan on the thigh and let out a high-pitched, "all right." Dennis got up like a bulldog ready for a fight. This was his kind of thing—face-to-face confrontation.

## Chapter 6

### A TANGLED WEB

The next morning the teens met in Jeremy's office at the biology building waiting for Uncle Kurt to let them know the time for the appointment with the Chancellor. They figured it would be at least noon before they could get an appointment to see the leader of the university.

During a break from his research Jeremy showed the teens where he had decided to hide the log book as soon as the meeting was over. It was the same place they had hidden the transducer—an old three-by-five index card filing cabinet in the corner of his office.

"This where we're going to hide it when we get back," Jeremy told the teens. "If we need to show it to the newspaper folks or somebody like that, we can always get it out. But let's keep it here."

"But the Chancellor might want the thing," Dennis said, somewhat puzzled.

"I don't care if he does," Joe interrupted, knowing what Jeremy was thinking. "You never give up your evidence."

Soon they got the call from Uncle Kurt. The teens and Jeremy were to meet Kurt and Mandy on the front steps of the administration building at 11:30 am. From there they would go in and meet with the University Chancellor. The teens were all filled with mixed emotions, like when you have to appear before the principal.

Uncle Kurt and Aunt Mandy were already there when the teens arrived at the front of the building. Not much was said. They all went on in.

A nice middle-aged secretary escorted them into the Chancellor's office. The man, apparently in his sixties, was dressed in a fancy gray suit and was seated behind a desk that looked three times as big as a normal desk. Three gray leather chairs formed a semi-circle in front of the desk. He had a smile on his face from the moment they walked in.

He stood up, walked around front to greet each of the family, and graciously introduced himself. Kurt, Mandy, and Jeremy sat down in the chairs. The young teens stood politely behind them. After some small talk, the real issue came up.

"Now, what can I do for you for folks?" the Chancellor said, grinning.

Joe noticed how his facial features and the look in his eyes didn't quite match. The man was smiling big, but his eyes looked empty. There was no warmth in them at all.

Uncle Kurt did the talking. Beginning with the account of Joe seeing the mock battle, and ending with the log book, he told the Chancellor the entire story. In an unusual fashion, Kurt seemed bold talking to his boss.

"We are convinced that the Army is conducting unethical and flat-out immoral research on dogs, and we want it stopped."

"Now, Kurt, you and I both know that scientific research sometimes seems harsh, but the end results are good for society."

Susan bristled. Dennis also looked like he was going to say something or jump up and punch him.

The Chancellor was smooth. He could read people well. "Now folks, I'm sorry if I offended you with that statement. I'm as much against cruelty to animals as anybody. I'm just saying let's don't go off half-cocked. The Department of Defense is one of our biggest supporters in the way of grants to the university. There may be more to this

research than we know about, and even be some very good reasons for it. Besides, I'm not convinced that it is as cruel as you say."

"But the boys have one of the log books right here," Kurt said. "It tells in detail, at least in one or two spots, what they're doing at the Complex."

"Let me see that thing. Where, or how, might I ask, did you get this?"

Joe thought he recognized a fleeting glimpse of fear cross the man's face as he reached out for the log book. Joe opened it to the clearest entry and handed it to him.

Kurt just mumbled something about how the boys "came across it" somehow. He was not a good liar. The Chancellor knew they had somehow stolen the log book.

He took a long time reading the log book entry, then placed the book on his desk and leaned back in his chair. All eyes were on the Chancellor.

"You people are right. If this really is a log book from the Army complex, and if these things are true, then we've got to put a stop to it. I'll get right on it. Would you mind if I keep this book? I'd like to show it to the Army folks when I confront them about this."

Uncle Kurt and Mandy seemed relieved and mumbled and nodded.

Jeremy spoke up, shocking his mom and dad.

"No sir, we'd rather not give up our evidence. We might need it if we have to go to the newspaper or something."

With their eyes Jeremy's mom and dad shot every kind of dart there is at their son, trying to get him to stop saying that.

"Oh, Jeremy," the Chancellor said smoothly. "You don't want to do that. I'm sure you love Ole Miss too much to stir up trouble about a story that may or may not be true. Think about the bad publicity that you might cause and how it would affect your friends and professors over in the biology department. Besides, you're in a master's degree program over there. Come on, let me keep it. I'll give it back in a few days."

Jeremy stood his ground. "No sir, I'm afraid I can't let you do that. If you like, you can photocopy that one page, but that's all."

Jeremy's parents were between a rock and hard place. They loved and supported their son, but this man was the head of a major university—where they worked.

Reluctantly, the Chancellor gave in and asked his secretary to make a copy of the entry in the log book. Soon, with log book back in Jeremy's hand, the group was ready to leave.

"Give me to the first of next week," the Chancellor said, smiling and shaking their hands. "I'll straighten this out. Trust me. I'll call you Kurt, as soon as I find out more, and will tell you what kind of action I'm taking. Ya'll please don't do anything foolish. Let me handle this, then I promise we'll fix it to your satisfaction. I'll call you soon."

Everybody seemed relieved, except Joe. He wondered about the guy and his promise to stop the research.

Once outside, the group stood around for a few minutes talking about the meeting with the Chancellor. Aunt Mandy fussed at Jeremy for talking back to the Chancellor. Kurt reminded him that he was risking not graduating. He argued back saying that it would be stupid to give up their only evidence.

In a minute Kurt realized that the fussing was getting out of hand.

"Okay," Uncle Kurt said seriously. "That's enough. Let's take the man at his word and give him a week or so to do something. We've pushed it far enough."

Jeremy, Joe, and Susan were standing together. They didn't appear so optimistic. Jeremy gave in. "Okay, but I'll believe it when I see it. These administrators can soothe you with their words, but later you find yourself wondering what they really said."

"Yeah," Susan said, "I didn't like the look in his eyes."

Aunt Mandy seemed ready to let the university leaders handle the problem. "Com'on Kurt, we've got to get back to work. We can talk more about it later."

Not much more was said about the meeting with the Chancellor, even that night at supper. Besides, each of the family members knew the ball was now in the Chancellor's court. If he didn't take action to their satisfaction within a week they would go public with the log book.

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Fortunately, with all the turmoil about the dog mystery, Uncle Kurt changed his mind about Dennis and Susan staying only one week. He allowed Susan to call her dad and tell him not to come pick them up as scheduled. Kurt sensed that making the youths go home before the issue was resolved would be frustrating. Besides, it seemed that he liked the company. But the teens knew that as soon as the dog mystery was solved they would have to go home.

On Wednesday morning the teens gathered at Jeremy's graduate student office, as was quickly becoming their custom. Since he was mostly off in the laboratory, they had the room to themselves. They could talk or play cards or board games. Usually they just sat around until about lunchtime drinking Cokes and talking with the other graduate students who would happen by the office.

Susan sat at Jeremy's desk reading a campus newspaper, while Joe tried as best he could to explain to Dennis how Jeremy's research project was designed.

Ashley peeked in.

"Hey girl," Joe jumped up. "Come in."

Surprisingly, she walked in and stood by Joe. Susan raised a knowing eyebrow at Joe.

Joe tried to keep Ashley standing there. "Whatcha' been doin'?"

"Helping Kris some. How's the dog mystery coming?"

The teens all looked at each other. They didn't know how much she knew.

Joe was the spokesman. "We've about got the cruel research stopped. We've been to see the Chancellor."

"That's great." Ashley said with a pat on Joe's back.

That was about as much as Joe was willing to tell her right now.

"Hey Ashley," Susan changed the subject. "Why don't you come around more often? We'd love to have you hang out with us. Even over at Aunt Mandy's house. We could watch movies or something."

"Okay. Tha'd be cool."

In a few minutes she turned to leave. "I guess I need to get back to helping Kris."

Joe tried to keep eye contact with her. "Thanks for stopping by."

"No problem." She smiled on her way out.

"I think she likes you, Joe," Susan said with a grin.

Joe blushed.

Jeremy walked in. "Hey, what ya'll doing?"

"Nothin' much," Joe answered. "What you been up to this morning?"

Jeremy plopped down in one of the yellow chairs. His khaki shorts and short sleeve pullover shirt were wrinkled. Plus, his eyes looked tired, like someone's eyes after being up all night. "Oh, just the same old stuff . . .taking care of the rat colonies and making the dissections I need for my embryology research. I love research, but this stuff is too tedious. I get tired of it some days."

"How much longer before you finish?" Dennis asked, apparently amazed at how much work a person has to do for a master's degree besides taking the courses.

"I'm nearing the end. I should be through with the research by September, then I'll have to analyze the data and write the thesis by Christmas."

Joe changed the subject. "Have you heard anything about the dog research?"

"No, but that reminds me . . ." Jeremy jumped up and hurried over to the index card filing cabinet where they had hidden the transducer and the log book. "I want to check and make sure our prized possessions are still here."

The other three teens perked up at that. They were all thinking the same thing. "What do you mean 'it reminds you'?" Joe asked.

Without looking up from digging in the back parts of the file cabinet, Jeremy answered. "One of my friends down the hall told me this morning that he was working late up here last night and thought for sure he heard me down here in my office. But when he came down to chat a little while later, the door was locked."

"Uh-oh, that doesn't sound good," Susan said, going over to stand by Jeremy and looking intently over his shoulder. Joe also knew what it meant—somebody might have been snooping through Jeremy's office looking for the log book.

"It's gone!" Jeremy cried out.

"Are you sure?" Joe said. "Double check."

"Yep, both the transducer and the log book are gone . . .they were right here. I can't believe it!"

"Was your door locked when you came in this morning?" Joe continued.

Jeremy half-stumbled, half-walked over to his desk chair and pushed back his hair with his hand, almost like rubbing his forehead. "I just can't believe it. Someone stole our only pieces of evidence . . . *Yes*, the door was locked."

"Well, it obviously means that whoever it was knew we had the log book and guessed we hid it here. And, it means they had a key to the building and the office."

Everybody knew what Joe was hinting at. The Chancellor, or possibly the biology department chairman under orders from the Chancellor, must have come in at night and removed the items. No one else would have any reason to search through a graduate student's office. Jeremy was probably now known to be a troublemaker in the biology department.

Susan was stirred up. "That Chancellor is crooked as a snake. He never intended to do anything about the Army research. Now we can't even go public with our story. Nobody will believe us."

"Com'on!" Dennis said loudly. "Let's go see him and push him around a little. That'll show em we mean business." He made a fist. "I think I can get him to fess up."

"That won't do any good." Joe rolled his eyes. "You can't just go beat up the Ole Miss Chancellor. We need to think this through. What should we do next? I mean *really*?"

The group calmed down a little. For the next few minutes they tossed around ideas; Jeremy came up with the best one.

"Let's call Mom and Dad. I think Dad knows one of the aides to Senator Lapp—"

"A state senator couldn't do anything."

"He's not a state senator. He's one of Mississippi's United States' Senators. Like I said, I think Dad knows one of his aides. He might could get us a meeting with the Senator."

Jeremy made the call across campus to Uncle Kurt and, after telling him about the theft of the log book and transducer, suggested that he try to arrange a meeting with the Senator. Uncle Kurt expressed anger about the theft and agreed that going to the Senator was probably a good idea. He said he would get right on it and see if it could be arranged.

Meanwhile the youths were frustrated.

"We can't do anything about the research now," Jeremy brought out. "Without hard evidence we'll be blowing in the wind . . . and you can better bet that the Army folks have covered up their tracks by now. I bet you'd have a hard time finding a log book or a transducer over there now."

"How can you be sure that going to a Senator will help?" Dennis asked. "Maybe they're all in it together."

They all knew Dennis was right. There was no way to know for sure if even a Senator could be trusted in this matter. Perhaps all government officials knew about the research and even approved of it.

Dennis seemed even more restless. He jumped up. "Well, what are we gonna do next? I've had about enough of this mess!"

"Nothing," Jeremy said, his voice trailing off. "Just wait and see if we can get in to see the Senator. It may be a few days."

"Well, I'm going back to the house," Dennis continued. "This is stupid. I told ya'll how I'd handle it."

Susan rolled her eyes, then indicated that she was going home with Dennis. "What are you going to do, Joe?" she asked.

"I think I'll take a long walk out on the fitness trail. I want to think this through. I'll meet ya'll back at the house this afternoon."

Jeremy went back to his research.

Out on the fitness trail, Joe tried to clear his mind before thinking about the mystery. The only way he could do it was to force himself to look around at the outdoor scenery—really look around and observe things. It was hot and humid, typical for a June day in the Deep South. When he realized how hot he'd get walking at mid-day, Joe decided to sit on one of the benches under the dark shade of a massive oak tree.

Sitting there was pleasant. The early summertime Mississippi landscape was pretty. There was a light southerly breeze blowing and everything out from under the shade looked a bright green. Birds were singing; crickets and grasshoppers chimed in unison in the high grass next to the trail.

Joe thought about the mystery: *This dog thing is crazy. Here's a case where a big university and big government are cooperating together to do research on something that most people would not agree to. But apparently there's nothing that an ordinary person can do about it. If you complain to either the university or the government, they deny*

*that any such research is going on. If you try to go public with the story, like to a newspaper, they ask for evidence. And if no evidence is produced, you are made fun of as a nut, or worse, labeled a troublemaker.*

Joe thought awhile longer. He was totally frustrated.

*What in the world can we do? He racked his brain. We could try getting something done through the Senator's office. He might not be in on it. If that doesn't work . . . well, we could try sneaking in there again, although it may be harder this time to find any evidence. The Army has surely hidden most of the evidence by this time. Other than that, we are pretty much out of luck.*

Joe whispered a little prayer. This was serious business, "God, please help me know what to do."

After that, he just sat there for a while hoping to think of something else—some other plan of action. Often, when he had a difficult problem, if he just get still and get his mind to quit whirling, he could think of an answer. Finally it came to him!

*If the Army has hidden or destroyed much of the hard evidence, he quickly formulated, then there're still the dogs.*

*If we could just somehow get to one of the dogs—even for a short time—we might could access its brain through a notebook computer and make a copy of the information stored in his brain. Or, even possibly override the command system and command the dog to escape the complex and meet us outside the complex. Then the dogs would be our evidence!*

Joe realized it would be difficult to gain access to the dogs. But, it was worth a try, especially if the meeting with the Senator went badly.

Soon he got up and started the walk home. "Yep, that's what we'll do," he mumbled. "If the meeting with the Senator fails to get anything done, we'll sneak back into the complex."

After supper that night the family sat around in the den for a while talking about the latest developments. Joe really felt comfortable at Aunt Mandy's. It was like a real home. This night the discussion was intense. By now Uncle Kurt and Aunt Mandy were starting to see what the teens had suspected all along. A big cover-up going on.

"I hate to admit it, but you guys were right about the Chancellor," Kurt said. "I just can't believe the man is purposefully blocking our efforts to get this research stopped."

Jeremy gave the reason why. "Well, Dad, you know that the money called 'overhead' that Ole Miss gets from a grant is about forty percent of the total grant. Let's say the grant was for five million dollars. Then the amount of money the administration can scoop off the top is about two million dollars . . . and they can spend that on any other university's program. Ole Miss just can't risk losing that kind of money."

"I don't care. We're going to bring this to a head real quick," Uncle Kurt said with authority. "My friend at Senator Lapp's office said the Senator is in the state this week and we can probably get in to see him. There's one of his offices here in Oxford, you know."

"I can't wait," Susan said. "I've never talked to a U.S. Senator."

Mandy offered instructions. "Yes, but we must be very careful what we say to the Senator, and how we say it. We don't want to come across as a bunch of crazy people or as people just wanting to lash out at the government. Word could get around you know . . ."

"Who cares what people think," Dennis said loudly. His eyes glared.

Aunt Mandy stopped her little lecture, and looked hurt from Dennis's harsh words.

Susan tried to smooth things over. "I think Dennis is just saying that we need to do what is right, even if it is unpopular. None of us would do or say anything out-of-line. We'll all be on our best behavior at the Senator's office.

Although that was probably not how Dennis meant his remarks, he dropped the subject. Their behavior at the Senator's office would soon take care of itself.

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It was Friday afternoon before the family could get in to see Senator Lapp. The office, located downtown on the Oxford square, was one of several scattered around the state, each having a small staff to handle mail and solve local problems. It looked like an old brick building that had been painted tan; silver lettering above the double doors indicated that it was the Senator's office.

For the second time in a week the Williams family, along with their two nephews and a niece, found themselves asking for the help of a very important person trying to get the dog research stopped.

It was soon clear how Mr. Lapp had become a U.S. Senator. He was a warm and friendly man who talked smoothly. First, he cordially greeted the family and made them feel like they had known him for years. He asked the youths about their schoolwork and Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt about their jobs. When each responded, he listened closely and looked them in the eye, acting as if that person were the most important human in the world.

Then it came time to talk business. Again, Uncle Kurt did the talking. He quickly recounted the story about the dog research and how they came about finding out about it. Then he told about the meeting with the Ole Miss Chancellor and the theft of the transducer and log book several days later.

"We didn't know what else to do, sir," he continued. "It seems like a cover-up is going on. We are tax-paying citizens and feel morally opposed to this kind of research. We want it stopped . . .and, uh, up to this point we have gone through all the appropriate channels without getting any response."

Joe was trying his best to read the Senator to see if he was in on the research or not. The man actually looked surprised at the story, but not overly upset, almost like this was just a minor problem to deal with.

"Are you people sure about this?" The Senator ran his hand through his hair. "These are serious charges. Maybe you're misinterpreting a few isolated events or facts."

When Kurt insisted that the research was in fact being done, the Senator backed down a little.

"Okay, Kurt," he said while getting up and walking over to some filing cabinets, "let me check something . . ."

He slid a huge book of computer print-outs off the top of one of the cabinets, and clumsily flopped it down on his desk. Papers flew off his desk from the wind it made. He mumbled as he flipped through the thing. The family waited patiently for what seemed to be a long time.

Finally, he said something under his breath like, "Here it is" and quickly grabbed a ruler out of his desk to line up the columns and rows so he could read the numbers correctly.

"Okay, Kurt and Mandy," he said, still reading the book. "This is a print-out of all government grants and contracts in the State of Mississippi. I've got it here at the page listing grants to Ole Miss . . . Let's see. Hmm. The Army has several projects going on out there, but the only one that involves dogs is a grant to conduct research on nerve gas antidotes. There's no research on 'talking dogs' or teaching them the English language through a computer hook-up."

"But they *are* doing that kind of research," Susan erupted, then seemed embarrassed at blurting out that statement. She finished her sentence but with her voice trailing off. "We found a dead dog in the dumpster and it had a bandage on its head like . . ."

The Senator gave Susan a strange look, but didn't answer.

That was it. Joe knew they were wasting their time. The Senator was in on the research just like the Chancellor. That was why he didn't say a thing about the dead dog in the dumpster.

Kurt tried some more. "Is there nothing you can do to help us? I mean you're our Senator."

He shook his head. "According to this, there is no such research going on out there. By law, all grants and contracts must be listed here . . ." He stopped mid-sentence, as if he just thought of something. "Unless it could be part of the Department of Defense ultra-secret research program. That's a portion of the total research budget that is off the books. They don't even tell us what they're doing sometimes, other than the basic research goals. But to my knowledge, there is none of that kind of research going on anywhere in Mississippi at this time."

Joe knew they were stumped. There was nothing else to do.

"Well, I guess we'll just go home and decide what to do next," Kurt said, still trying to act like they might go to the newspaper or something. Maybe the fear of publicity would make the Army give up the research.

"All I can say is that I'll check on it for you," the Senator said politely, as they all stood up to leave. "I have a friend or two at the Pentagon whom I could ask about it. I'll see what I can do and let you know as soon as possible."

They all shook his hand and filed out the door, obviously disappointed.

On the short walk over to their car, the family discussed the visit.

"Looks like we've come to end of our rope," Kurt said, wistfully. "Not much else we can do."

"I knew he would be in on it," Joe said, angry for once. "It's like no matter where we turn, we hit a wall."

"Can't we try going to a national television network investigative program?" Susan said, still trying. "Sometimes they get into these kinds of things."

Kurt seemed determined. "We can talk about it more later, but I think we've about done our moral duty. We tried as best we could. It's over."

Joe knew Uncle Kurt and Aunt Mandy had done all they could. Now, there was nothing else legally to do. He must now resort to plan B—sneaking back into the complex. This time to try to get one of the dogs.

## Chapter 7

### TWO CAN PLAY THAT GAME

Joe was thrilled that Ashley Miller soon became part of the biology department group. He hoped she would eventually be his first real girlfriend. Saturday evening the teens hung out at Aunt Mandy's. They talked about hitting a dead-end in solving the mystery while eating chips with picante sauce and half-way watching a movie in Jeremy's room. Joe sat comfortably by Ashley. By now, she knew almost everything about the mystery.

"I wish we could stay longer," Susan said. She paused to fiddle behind her head with her dark hair that was held up with a big clip. "Now that we've hit a road block with the mystery, I'm afraid we'll all have to go home next week. We've put Uncle Kurt and Mandy out long enough."

Jeremy didn't dispute Susan's remark, so Joe took that to mean that he agreed with her. Joe knew if they were to try his next little stunt it would have to be right away.

"Let's try one more thing," Joe began. He didn't even look up at the others—he just kept dipping huge tortilla chips into the delightful sauce and gobbling them down.

"What?" Dennis asked, seeming irritated.

Joe quickly told them about his plan to sneak inside the complex again and get to one of the dogs.

The other teens showed a little interest but were not convinced.

"How do you propose to get back inside, since they know we're on to them," Dennis said. "They've surely increased their security by now."

Joe didn't answer, but after a moment Jeremy did.

"The only way I can think of to get back in there is to try the same thing you did last time," he said uneasily. "You might get caught this time, but I think Kristen would be willing to help you try it, that is, if you'll guarantee not to tell on her if you do get caught."

"Oh, I know she'll do it!" Ashley exclaimed.

"We've got to try," Joe said. "Even if it's the same way again. And this time I want to take your notebook computer with us. I've got to try to access one of the dog's brains to make a copy of the command files or whatever else the researchers have implanted in there."

"Now think this through, ya'll," Susan said, motioning for calm and trying to bring common sense to the discussion. "You said the Army guys sent the dogs after you the other night to retrieve the log book. And you said that meant they knew we stole it. If they know we stole it, then they probably know how we sneaked in."

Joe had already thought about that. "No, not necessarily. If they saw us steal the book and knew how we sneaked in, they would have caught us at the gate on our way out. I would guess they caught a glimpse of us on camera inside the complex—probably later that day when they were reviewing their security camera tapes—but didn't get a good look at us or make the connection between us and Kristen. Then later they probably noticed that the log book was missing."

Dennis then said the obvious. "If they just got a glimpse of us, how did they know where to send the dogs to retrieve the book?"

Joe raised his eyebrows then glanced down. "I don't know. Can't explain it. Maybe the dogs went by smell; you know they can do some awesome things by their keen sense of smell."

"Smell of what? We were in a pick-up!"

"Maybe the log book . . ."

Jeremy intervened. "This fussing won't do us any good. I still think that it's your only chance to get back in there. It's a long shot though."

"I'm all for it," Dennis said, suddenly more up-beat. "Joe just wasn't making any sense. I couldn't let that go by. I don't care if we get caught or not. What's the worst thing that can happen? They can't kill us or anything like that. They'd probably just call security and we'd get a butt-chewing."

"Are you going to go with us this time, Jeremy?" Joe asked.

"I'd like to, but I've got the most to lose if we get caught. I could get into serious trouble with my professors. The Chancellor probably already has them watching me like a hawk. I'll try to make the arrangements with Kristen for you though. It may take some begging. And I'll think about going with you. I really would like to go this time."

At nine o'clock Monday morning the three teens met Kristen at Jeremy's office and discussed the plan. Even though she was sweet and Jeremy's girlfriend, she seemed much more skeptical this time.

"Okay," she finally agreed. "We'll go around lunch time like we did last time, let's say eleven-thirty. There's usually less activity inside the building at that time. But, I repeat, if you're not back at the meeting point at twelve-thirty sharp, then you're on your own. I *will* leave and, believe me, I won't know you or anything about this whole thing when you get caught. Even if you do tell on me, I'll say you hid in the back of my pick-up without my permission. And, remember, Ashley cannot go. I *will not* have her involved in this."

Kristen's stern look at the teens scared Joe. *Will she change her mind and leave early?* he thought. After all, Kristen had no potential reward or other interest in the mystery. And she had a lot to lose, possibly getting into medical school. She was obviously just doing this as a favor for Jeremy.

Joe tried to reassure her. "Don't worry, if we get in trouble, you go on back. We'll lay low somewhere in the complex until we can sneak out, probably sometime after dark. We might could climb over the wall. If it happens that way, just tell Jeremy not to worry about us until an hour or so after dark. Then he'll have to do something . . ."

"Like what?" Kristen interrupted, raising her palms. "What's he gonna do? It's the U.S Army. Besides, he told me that he might go with you guys this time."

"I don't know what he could do if we get caught. But that's not your problem. Trust me, if we get caught, we won't get you in trouble in any way."

Kristen raised both eyebrows and said, "Okay, meet me out in the parking lot at my pick-up at eleven-twenty. I'll run home in a few minutes and get that tarpaulin for ya'll to hide under again in the back of the truck."

"Okay, we'll meet you there."

As Kristen walked out and down the hall, Joe turned quickly and commented to Dennis and Susan, "Let's go double check Jeremy's notebook computer. See if the

battery is charged up and if we have a USB connector cord. We've got to try to connect the computer to the USB port in one of the dogs."

By the time they were ready to leave, the three began to realize the seriousness of their plan. On their way down the stairs and out into the parking lot they talked nervously.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Susan said with a frown.

"I do too," Joe replied. "But we still gotta try."

"Aw, who cares?" Dennis said noisily. "I'm not afraid of 'em."

Joe looked at Susan, agreeing with her. He figured Dennis was just putting on a front.

At Kristen's truck they carefully tucked the notebook computer under her front seat, along with three white lab coats they had borrowed from the biology department.

Ashley ran up to offer support. "Please be careful guys. I'll be waiting here for you when you get back."

She then went straight to Joe and hugged him. She clung tightly to him and then whispered in his ear, "Please be careful. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Joe heart jumped. *I think she really likes me.*

Just then Jeremy walked up. He had a white lab coat draped over his left arm. "I've been thinking. I want to go this time even if I get in trouble and can't graduate."

"Are you sure?" Joe asked.

Jeremy didn't want to discuss it. "Come on," he said, climbing into the back of the pick-up.

Kristen didn't say a word while they began unfolding the tarp in the back of her truck. She seemed upset that Jeremy was going with them.

"Quick," she finally said. "Get under there. I don't want anybody to see you getting in."

After a minute or two they were on their way across campus in the back of her pick-up.

The teens lay perfectly still when the small pick-up stopped at the gate house to the Army Complex. They heard the conversation.

"Yes?" The guard's voice sounded really serious this time.

Joe's heart raced. He thought: *This is it! We're caught, even before we get inside!*

"I'm Kristen Miller." Her reply was respectful. "I'm a biology graduate student and I've got an experiment going on over here. Did I do something wrong? I've been through here lots of times without being questioned."

"I don't remember you." The guard shot an angry look at her. "Anyway, we've got new orders to stop everybody now, even those with a decal on their windshield."

"Let me check our list of approved entrants . . . oh yeah, here you are. I guess you can go on in."

The teens sighed with relief when the truck started up again. They knew they were inside the complex wall when they heard the familiar sound of the truck going on the bridge over the moat.

They parked and started the walk up to the main building. As before, the four young people walked inside the big complex as if they were with Kristen to help with her experiment. Jeremy carried the computer since he was the oldest and looked like a real

scientist. As they approached the reception desk, Kristen again talked confidently about what she was going to try in that day's experiment.

Kristen and Jeremy both kept talking a bunch of scientific talk while she signed in at the reception desk. The same blond headed girl was there working the reception desk. She seemed impressed by the high-sounding conversation and asked no questions. Joe was worried that she would ask about the small briefcase-looking computer case that Jeremy was carrying.

As they walked around the corner and down the hall, Joe knew they had made it, at least thus far.

"My dad always told me that if you act like you know what you are doing, nobody'll ever question you," Kristen said with a laugh. "It works every time. People are afraid to question a confidently acting person for fear of being embarrassed if they're wrong."

She paused when they got to the place where the hall turned left and the stairs went down to the research area.

"This is it. Remember, twelve-thirty sharp or I'm outta here—with or without you guys."

I owe you for this, Kristen," Jeremy said quietly, looking intently into her eyes. "If we don't make it back here on time, go on without us. Don't say a word to anybody. Give us time to sneak out on our own."

Kristen pressed close to him to show her concern. "Are you sure? What about your folks?"

"Don't tell them. We'll get out somehow. If you tell them, you're getting yourself in trouble."

Kristen had an answer for that. "But I could call them and say that I heard you talking about sneaking in the complex. I wouldn't have to say I helped."

"Whatever," Jeremy said. "Maybe we won't have to worry about that anyway."

"Good luck," Kristen whispered as the four young people walked down the stairs into the research area. She then disappeared down the long hallway.

Joe led the way as they opened the double doors at the bottom of the stairs and turned left down the hall toward the animal room. Again, for some reason, the place seemed relatively quiet. Joe guessed that either a large portion of the staff were off to lunch somewhere, or that the place was just huge compared to the actual number of employees, making it seem empty. Joe did notice three people—technicians perhaps—sitting on the lab tabletops in one of the rooms on the right as they walked by. He just glanced quickly, daring not to stare.

The youths noticed a man in a white lab coat come out of a room on the left down the hall quite a ways and walk the other way for about ten doors. Then he stopped with his back toward them talking to a young lady who was standing in the doorway.

"He looks like a big shot," Joe whispered under his breath to Jeremy. "He may have come out of the animal room. I hope he doesn't turn around and come back our way before we get there. That could be bad."

The four kept their eyes on the man as they neared the animal room. They hoped he wouldn't turn around.

They quickly darted to the left when they got to the small hallway marking the entrance to the animal room. They stood a moment by the metal cage door listening for voices before making any attempts to open it.

Dennis pulled on the metal cage door. It was open this time!

"Let's go," he said quickly.

"Keep your eyes open," Joe whispered. "It could mean that someone's still in here."

The four entered the animal research room and carefully closed the door behind them so it wouldn't clang shut. Joe thought he heard the muffled sound of a dog bark somewhere in the back room.

The room was very long and narrow with several tiny rooms off to each side. Lights were on in some of the rooms. Most of the little rooms contained stainless steel animal cages—some big, like for dogs, and some small, like for rabbits or guinea pigs. At the back of the main animal room was a partition that came out most of the way across the floor, creating another room-like area behind it. But it was not totally sealed off. On the side of the back wall, opposite the partition, was a door that was propped partially open with light shining through from the outside. The door was one of those funny kind of doors split into two parts—a top and a bottom—like those in barns for horses to stick their heads out of the top part. Joe figured it led to a courtyard or exercise yard for the animals.

"Look in these small rooms for dogs," Joe said. "And quickly! We'd have a heck of a time explaining why we're in here."

The group split up going off in different directions to look for one of experimental dogs. Jeremy went behind the partition to see what was there.

"Over here," Susan said as loudly as she dared to. In the third small animal room were two cages with German shepherd dogs inside. The cages were plenty big—about the size of a household washer and dryer combined—and had one dog in each.

They all ran over there. The dogs looked funny with cloth muzzles over their mouths, apparently to muffle their barking. They wagged their tails in excitement.

"Aw, poor babies," Susan said affectionately, while trying to pet one of them through the bars.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "It has a transducer attached. See the place behind this ear with a computer connector. Man, I'd like to make a cut behind one of those researcher's ears and see how they like it."

"This one has it too," Dennis said from the other cage. "Let's hook em up to the computer and see what it says."

"But what if it tries to run around in the cage?" Susan said. "It'll pull the USB connector cord and tear the incision."

"Susan's right," Jeremy said, putting his hands on his hips. "We've got to put it to sleep to do the hook-up. Let's take it over behind the partition. There's a lab table over there."

"Put it to sleep!" Dennis said. "Why should we kill a perfectly good dog?"

"Oh shut up, Dennis," Susan said. "He doesn't mean kill it."

Dennis huffed.

In a minute they had let the handsome dog out of the cage and had gotten it over to the lab table behind the partition. Susan stood by the dog on the table with her arms around it to make sure it would stay still. The dog was huge, bigger than most German shepherds. It made no attempt to get away, almost as if it had been through this many

times. Jeremy began digging through some of the drawers looking for anesthetic and a syringe.

Joe's heart was pounding. Somebody would surely come in the room in a few minutes. How in the world would they explain putting one of the research dogs to sleep?

Jeremy found a syringe and a small bottle of medicine labeled "Keta-Set."

"This ought to do the trick. Hold him while I give him a little shot."

"How do you know how much to give him?" Susan asked.

"I do this kind of thing all the time in my research. You go by approximate body weight. Such and such milligrams per kilogram of weight. And this is a big dude. I guess they just use the biggest dogs in their research so they can carry heavy explosives."

Dennis stood watch at the edge of the partition while the others waited for the anesthetic to take effect. He was to signal the instant someone started opening the cage door into the room. They decided they would hide as best they could if that happened.

Soon the dog was knocked out. Jeremy carefully hooked the USB port of the transducer to the notebook computer with a USB cable. Joe worked the computer.

"Let's see here . . . It says, 'New hardware found. Top secret DOD project number 7657-A-TR-897.12 located on drive E.'" Joe rubbed his face in anticipation of what he was about to do next. "By using the 'my computer' icon and accessing drive E, maybe we can see what kind of folders and directories the researchers have created in the implanted device in the dog's brain. Then maybe I can copy them to my computer."

After a moment or two of following the various menu options, Joe groaned. "It says, 'Restricted access, password required.'"

"Can't you figure it out or bypass it?" Susan asked. "Computer hackers do it all the time on T.V."

Joe never took his eyes off the screen. "This isn't T.V., Susan."

"Just try as many possibilities as you can think of," Jeremy said. "Things like 'Army,' or 'DOD,' or 'dog experiments.'"

Joe typed furiously. Nothing worked. Then he suddenly snapped his fingers. "I bet that's it! Not 'dog experiments' but 'operation shepard.' Remember us seeing those words in the log book?"

"Try it," Susan urged. "That might be it."

After a few quick clicks on the keyboard, Joe was allowed access to drive E, the device implanted in the dog's brain.

"Here it is! I can't believe it!" he said excitedly. "I would never in a million years have believed it, but here it is. There are two folders in this device connected to the brain. Let's see, I believe these are executable command files written in Java computer language. Let me try something . . ."

"Hurry," Dennis interrupted from his position at the edge of the partition. "Copy whatever it is to our computer. You can decipher it later. We've got to go before someone comes."

"No, I think I can get out of the actual program and look at what it does. Yes, this'll work."

Joe frantically tapped the keys trying things as quickly as he could.

"Okay, this is it. I can read it now. Look, Jeremy and Susan. Look at this." Joe pointed out the words on the screen. "There's a folder of commands, teaching the basics

of the English language. I guess that's what enables the dog to understand human commands; the dog actually understands English.

This second folder looks like a list of commands. Look! Here are several commands on where and how to place and detonate explosives. Uh-oh, there's one called 'self-destruct.'"

"What's that for?" Susan asked.

Jeremy had the answer to that. "Probably to blow himself up if things go bad. Virtually all military projects have self-destruct commands so no one can ever find out what they're doing."

This time Dennis said more urgently, "Ya'll can figure all that stuff out later. We've got to go. Now!"

"Okay," Joe mumbled. He knew Dennis was right. But he was so excited seeing that what the teens had guessed about the illegal work was right—that the researchers were transferring human commands to dogs via a computer hook-up. Joe's mind raced: *There's also got to be some circuitry in the device which handles the interface between computer language and the physioelectrical system of the dog's brain.*

"Let's copy all this to the notebook computer."

"Let's see . . . Windows . . . copy and paste to the desktop. Is that right Jeremy? Won't that work?"

"It should. Or just hit 'send to' and then tell it where. The thing's already in the proper folder. Maybe it'll just copy everything in that folder to the desktop."

Joe tried the command, "Copy/Paste to Desktop."

"Well, it's copying. See the little light's on."

"Good."

"Com'on," Susan pulled at Joe's elbow. "Dennis is right. We've got to go."

"Okay, just a second. I want to do two more things. I want to delete the current list of commands from the command folder in the dog. I wouldn't feel right if I didn't. And, I want to command the dog to escape at its first opportunity and meet us outside the complex near the back wall."

"They'll just re-enter the explosives commands," Jeremy said quickly. "Just do the second thing."

"Okay, just a second."

Just then the dog started moaning softly and trying to raise its head.

"I think he's coming to," Jeremy said. "I didn't give him much Keta-Set."

"But I'm not finished."

Suddenly Dennis whispered as loudly as he could without being heard, "Someone's coming! They're out in the hall near the cage door! Hide!"

"What are we going to do now?" Susan said with panic in her voice.

"Ya'll pick us a place to hide—closets, cabinets, whatever—I'm going to add one more command."

Joe kept frantically punching buttons. The dog was almost awake now, but lying still and looking about.

Susan, Dennis, and Jeremy scurried around behind the partition area looking for a place to hide. They quickly darted over to the door to the exercise yard, but came right back when they saw a fence surrounding it. Then they went around opening some of the large cabinet doors to see if any were big enough to hide in.

"These two might do," Jeremy whispered. "Dennis, you and Susan get in, I'll help Joe disconnect the dog and put him back in the nearest cage."

"You'll never make it!" Dennis said while bending down to get into the cabinet. "The man is right out there in the hall by the cage door!"

For some reason the researcher didn't come on in. He was apparently talking to someone in the hallway.

"Joe typed in some more commands and then, to everyone's shock, said out loud, "Okay, dog, this is what my voice sounds like."

"Shhhh!" Jeremy said sternly while returning from helping Dennis and Susan hide. "Are you crazy? What are you doing?"

"No time to explain now. Unhook me!"

Jeremy rapidly unhooked the transducer. "You hide the computer, I'll put the dog back," he said, scooping up the groggy dog.

"Don't lock his cage," Joe ordered.

Jeremy looked puzzled, but nodded. No time to question the little brainiac.

Joe, thinking fast, jumped up on the lab table and hid the computer in the very back of the highest cabinet he could find. If they got caught, he didn't want their only evidence to be captured. He then swept all the paper towels, needles, alcohol pads, and syringes up in his arms and stuffed them into the garbage can.

Just as Jeremy darted back across from the small room where he had put the dog, both of them heard the cage door open and shut with a clang.

Footsteps approached.

The boys instantly started looking for another cabinet big enough to hide in. They tried a couple. They were all full except for the one where Dennis and Susan were hidden!

"This might work," Jeremy insisted, darting toward the very back, by some laundry-type bins.

Just then a deep voice split the air like thunder. "What are you doing in here!"

Joe and Jeremy whirled to face a large flat-faced burly man. He was apparently one of the researchers. The man was dressed sloppily and had on a blood-stained white lab coat.

At once he ran to the phone on the counter top and called security.

"Code eight. We have two trespassers in the animal area. Get down here immediately."

Joe and Jeremy stood petrified. They were caught. Joe just looked down; he could feel his face flushing.

"Answer me you two! What are you doing here?"

Jeremy spoke up. "We were just looking around. Have we done something wrong?"

"What do you mean 'looking around'?" the man said, almost screaming by now.

"This is a U.S. government research lab. You couldn't have just walked in here off of the streets."

Jeremy's feeble attempts at lying were not working.

"What have you been doing in here?" he continued. The man was red in the face and his eyes were glaring. Joe only glanced up at him every few moments.

The boys didn't answer.

"Are you alone? You'd better tell me! It's a federal offense to break into a U.S. government facility."

Still no answer. Joe heard the metal cage door clang again and what sounded like heavy boots pounding the floor. The security guards were coming.

Just then the cabinet door popped open and Dennis and Susan spilled out from under the lab counter. Apparently they figured it was useless to continue hiding.

The researcher jumped back, red-faced, and becoming even angrier. Susan looked terrified, but Dennis looked angry. Joe noticed that his right fist was half doubled up. He feared Dennis might try fighting the man so they could run out.

Dennis lurched up in front of the group. His short blond hair bristled and he poked his muscular chest out. "You just need to calm yourself down! We're not in here stealing anything or vandalizing the place or anything like that. If we're in a place we ought not be, that's one thing, but it gives you no right to scream and holler at us."

When two security guards rounded the partition's corner, the researcher barked orders. "Here, lock 'em up. Then, check every closet and cabinet in this room for more of them."

"Lock them up where?" one of the security guards asked, acting a little surprised at the researcher's extreme anger. "We don't have a jail cell in the complex."

"Just put them in a couple of large dog cages in that room over there. I'm going to find Dr. Abernathy. He'll want to deal with this personally. I'll be back in a few minutes."

The security guards forced the four young people to take off their white lab coats and then go into the same animal room where the dog they had worked on was located. They then locked them in two of the empty stainless steel dog cages. Joe and Jeremy were placed in one cage, while Dennis and Susan were in the other. It took both security guards to wrestle Dennis into the cage.

"You can't do this kind of thing," Jeremy said, trying to appeal to their better judgment. "Our family attorney and the local police will see to it that you are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law if you mistreat us. You have no right to put us into animal cages."

One of the guards glanced nervously at the other one when Jeremy said that, but apparently it didn't do any good. "Shut up!" The other guard said. "We work by contract for the U.S. government. If one of the researchers tells us to do something, we do it. End of discussion!"

With that, the two walked away and out through the metal cage door to the hallway to wait for Dr. Abernathy. Joe heard them talking on their hand-held radios about sealing the gate and searching the premises for other trespassers.

Joe felt like crying. He had never been in serious trouble before. He prayed under his breath, "God help us outta this . . ."

Susan said the obvious, "What in the world are we going to do now?"

Nobody answered. Nobody knew.

## Chapter 8 STAGED ENTRY

When the researcher returned with another man, Joe thought things might get better, but they didn't. He made no efforts to release the youth out of the cages. This new man was apparently the big boss. The researcher who had hollered at them stood dutifully behind him.

"Apparently we have a problem here," he started, speaking calmly. The man was fiftyish, well dressed, and plainly in control. Joe noticed a coldness in his eyes, like what you see when looking into a mannequin's eyes.

"I'm Dr. Nelson Abernathy, the Principal Investigator on this government research project. As you kids certainly must know, this is a U.S. government research facility. You had no permission or authority to be snooping around."

"Sir," Jeremy spoke up. "We're sorry. Could we go somewhere and sit down and explain it all to you? Just please let us out of these cages."

"No, I don't think that'll be necessary. We'll just keep you nice and cozy in there while we search the complex for any friends you may have brought in with you. We know about you young people. The Chancellor warned us about you. You must be the ones who broke in here last time and stole the log book. When we sent the dogs after the book that night, we should've told them to take care of you then. You've really got yourself in a mess this time."

When the teens heard that they were shocked.

"What're you going to do with us?" Jeremy answered.

Dr. Abernathy didn't answer. He just stared at them with an icy smile.

"Why don't you just call the police?" Jeremy offered.

"You'd like that, now wouldn't you?" Dr. Abernathy answered, then turned and started walking back toward the hallway. "Come on, Peters, let's talk to the security guys."

"Hey, come back!" Dennis said angrily. "You can't just leave us in here!"

Susan and Joe also begged for their release, but the men ignored the cries.

They didn't go far, just outside the metal cage door. The teens could hear them talking.

"What're they doing now?" Dennis asked.

"Shhhh," Joe answered. "Talking. Let's listen."

The conversation was hard to follow, but Joe clearly heard them saying something about making it look like the teens were attempting to sneak over the complex wall near the moat. Also, something about staging an accident, if necessary.

Apparently the other teens heard it too.

"We're in big trouble!" Jeremy said shakily. "They might be planning on killing us!"

"Oh no!" Susan cried. "It can't be true. What can we do?"

"I don't know, but from the way they're talking, they'll be in here to get us in a minute," Jeremy said solemnly, as if he had already resolved to die.

"I've got an idea," Joe said. "But it's a long shot."

"What is it?" the others said almost in unison.

Joe didn't have time to explain; he just started doing it.

"Come to the edge of the cage, dog!" Joe spoke loudly to the dog they had worked on. It was fully awake by now and was in the cage adjacent to the one Joe and Jeremy were in.

Just then the metal cage door clanged again. Joe had to work fast.

The dog acted as if it understood Joe fully and walked to the edge of its cage. Joe started talking into its ear something about getting loose at the first opportunity since its cage door was not locked and sneaking out to the moat area around on the inside of the wall.

The men were approaching.

Joe kept making up commands and telling them to the dog while the men were coming. He had to be finished by the time they got to the cage.

All the other teens could hear was something about hiding out in the bushes by the moat.

"It'll never work," Jeremy said stoically. "It'll never be able to get over that fence in the animal exercise yard."

"I'm telling it to try several different ways of escape . . ."

"All right boys and girls," one of the security guards interrupted the conversation. Joe immediately turned away from the dog. "It's time to go," the man said.

This time, there were three guards. From their conversation, Joe knew one was named Ed and another named Ralph.

"What are we supposed to do now?" Ed asked Peters, the researcher.

"Dr. Abernathy said for you guys to take them around to the moat on the back side of the complex—back there near the mock battlefield so no one will see you—and then walk the kids around some to make footprints in the dirt there. Then just tie em up there for now. I think he's going to call the police and ambulance and make out like we caught them climbing over the wall. It'll look like the kids fell in the moat while climbing over the wall. He may change his mind and set up something else, if you catch my drift."

The teens knew from that remark that he might stage a drowning or something.

"Okay," Ed said. But are you sure? We're not going to jail for you doctors."

"Don't worry. Nobody's going to jail. And, remember, you'll be paid well for this out of Dr. Abernathy's special account. Now, hurry and get some of those huge laundry carts to sneak the kids out to one of the trucks."

After some crafty maneuvering to avoid being seen, the three security guards transported the teens in the dog cages to the mock battlefield area on the far backside of the complex grounds.

"This'll do," Ed said when they arrived at the spot. "Let's park the truck out here on this service road and walk them over to the moat. The last thing we want to do is leave a bunch of tire tracks by the moat."

The big guards took turns grabbing the teens out of the cages, twisting their arms behind their backs, and forcing them to walk around on the wall side of the moat. The third guard—the one Joe didn't know the name of—had to drag Dennis because he wouldn't cooperate. Ralph returned to the truck for Susan. He handled her differently—almost gently—and didn't say a word. It was obviously bothering him to be a part of this crime.

When they had finished, the guards hunted around for bushes and small trees to tie the young people up to. The battlefield area was dotted with huge oak trees and shrubs

and low bushes. The deep moat snaked around under the high brick wall. It had a steep and slippery bank.

"Hey," Ed hollered to the other two guards. "Dr. Abernathy said to tie them up with electrical wire out of the truck so we can say we were just driving by when we saw the teens jump over the wall and tied them up with the only thing we had."

The task of tying the young people up to bushes next to the moat was soon finished. Joe's spot was awfully close to the water itself. In fact, his feet were barely two inches from the slippery moat side. He leaned forward to look down. The water dropped straight off into a deep abyss. The bush he was tied to cracked! He instantly bolted upright to try to keep it from breaking.

The men carefully backtracked to the truck.

"Hey, what was that!" the third guard suddenly said, looking back to the left.

"What?"

"Something darted between that big tree and those bushes! I saw it out of the corner of my eye. Somebody's watching us."

"No way," Ed said. "There's no way someone could get back here unless they drove a vehicle, and we'd hear it. You're just wimping out on us."

"I'm not either. I swear I saw something."

"Com'on," Ed said. "Let's get outta here!"

In a few minutes they sped away in a cloud of dust.

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Joe was at least twenty feet away from the nearest person. He dared not move because he was precariously perched at the edge of the deep moat. If his bush were to break and he fall in—still tied up—he would surely drown. It scared him to think of dying. He began to think about his short life, what all he had done and not done on this earth. Funny, everything seemed clearer now. Most stuff he had wished for and worried about in his life seemed so petty and foolish.

Before he could think about it any longer, the bush creaked again, then snapped! Joe fell headlong into the warm, muddy water. He tried to tell his legs and arms to move but nothing happened. He was tied both hand and foot!

There was nothing else to do but hold his breath. For what reason he didn't know; he was surely going to drown anyway. Down he drifted into darkness at the bottom of the moat. The stagnant water was warm and stung his nose.

It was the weirdest feeling—being aware of his situation, but yet being "far off" due to the paralyzing fear of drowning. He was in a time warp; seconds seemed like hours. *Is this the end? Am I about to meet God?* He suddenly had a deep longing to be with his mom and dad back together again. And his anger about the divorce. It seemed so futile now. What really mattered was having a relationship with them. As best as it could be, divorce or no divorce.

His lungs felt like they were going to burst! Even though he had only been underwater a minute or two, it seemed like forever. Just when he couldn't hold it any longer, Joe suddenly sensed a swirling of water above him, like someone swimming. His mind was still working, but very slow. Before he could figure out what it was, something big and strong grabbed him in the back by the shirt and started pulling him up and toward the moat's edge.

*Somebody's got me! I'm gonna make it!*

Joe's head broke through the water's surface at about the same time his legs struck bottom at the water's edge. The dark figure that had pulled him in leaped up on the shore and started pulling him upward. It was the dog Joe had commanded to save them!

Joe gulped air, lying limp at the water's edge. "Thank you, God!" he said. The large brown dog stood statue-like by his side. Joe could hear Jeremy, Dennis, and Susan hollering for him. They had seen it all.

Just then Joe had a thought. He commanded, "Dog, please chew at these wires and untie me." Then he had another thought, "And be careful. Don't bite me."

It was like magic. The big dog instantly started nipping and tugging at the electrical wire on his wrists. Soon he was free enough to untie himself.

"Great! Good dog. Good dog." Joe said quickly as he jumped up and ran to untie the others. Soon they were all free, standing in a circle trying to figure out what to do next.

"Well, I would have never believed it," Jeremy said, dusting off the seat of his pants. "That dog obeyed your commands, somehow escaped, and followed the guards out here to rescue us."

Susan knelt close to the dog and held him close, stroking his wet fur.

"That was a wonderful thing you did. We owe our lives to you."

The dog wagged his tail and licked her hand and arm as she petted him.

"Man, I thought we were gonners there for a . . ." Dennis' comments were interrupted by the wail of sirens. The sound was still far off but definitely coming toward the complex. The sirens got closer and closer.

"Quick," Joe said. "We've got to hide. I bet that's the police."

"Why should we hide?" Dennis asked. "We'll just meet them here and tell the cops everything."

"Well, I didn't think of that . . ."

"But we don't know for sure who will show up out here first," Susan snapped. "If the guards do, and they see us, they might send the cops back or something."

Everybody knew she was right. They had come so far that they couldn't risk it all now. They ran over into a patch of shrubs and bushes to wait. In their excitement and confusion they failed to see the dog go off into the bushes on the opposite side. He acted afraid of the sirens.

The sirens drew ever closer. Soon two police cars and an Army car raced out to the battlefield area.

Doors flew open and rescue personnel darted in all directions like ants. Three men got out of the Army car.

It was Dr. Abernathy and two of the guards who had tried to kill the teens!

Dr. Abernathy led the way to the water's edge. "Over here," he said. "Over here is where my men say they left the teens tied up."

The rescue personnel looked up and down the shoreline for the young people.

"Let's go!" Dennis blurted out and bolted out into the open. The others followed. "Hey, here we are. We're okay!"

The police ran over to meet the teens. Dr. Abernathy and the guards looked shocked. They just stood there with their mouths wide open.

Dennis started the accusations. "These men caught us in the building, drug us out here and tried to make it look like we climbed over the wall. They nearly killed Joe here .

. . his bush broke and he fell in the moat. They're doing illegal research at this place and we knew about it, so they tried to stop us. Arrest them!"

The police turned and looked at the Army men, then back at the youths.

The teens all chimed in trying to tell the story to the police.

Dr. Abernathy tried to act calm. "Com'on officers. These kids are just trying to divert your attention from the real issue, that is, trespassing on government property. They were obviously trying to sneak over the wall and one fell in. All this other stuff is just nonsense."

The officers seemed to believe Dr. Abernathy. After all, he was dressed up in a suit and talking calmly. And his explanation made sense. But the teens, standing on government property, had obviously been trying to trespass. And one of them was dripping wet as if he'd fallen in the moat while crossing the wall.

"I think we'll take you kids to the station and call your parents," the senior officer said. "Then we'll see what you have to say, and also, decide how to proceed with the trespassing charges."

Dennis was getting hot. "I'm telling you these slime bag, so-called scientists captured us and would have killed us! And we can prove it."

"That's enough young man!" the officer said forcefully, pointing his finger in Dennis' face. "Save it til we get to the station."

"But the dog," Susan said. "Joe, show em how you can command the dog."

Dr. Abernathy looked visibly shaken at that statement. He looked angrily at his security guards. They couldn't explain the remark. It was new to them too.

"What dog?" the officer asked, a little softer this time as if he wanted to see proof of the teen's story.

"Here dog, here dog," Joe called loudly, looking in all directions. He called over and over. The teens began looking around for signs of the German shepherd.

After a few moments the officer switched and became skeptical again. "There's no dog around here. Let's go, we'll talk about it at the station."

The four teens were then loaded into police cars which started down the twisting turning back roads of the complex towards the gate. As they passed the main headquarters building, Joe was shocked to see a middle-aged man arguing angrily with a researcher in the front.

"Dad!" Joe screamed. "That's my dad! Stop the car!"

The police officer stopped the patrol car and got out to speak to Joe's dad. Upon hearing that Joe was in the back of the patrol car, Dr. Craig shot over to the car.

"Joe! Are you alright? I've been so worried."

He whirled to face the officer. "What are you doing with my son?"

"It's not only your son in there," the man answered coolly.

Joe's dad looked again. Sure enough, all four of the cousins were loaded in the two patrol cars.

"I think we should all go downtown to City Hall to discuss this," the officer said.

## Chapter 9

### RESEARCH TERMINATED

The Oxford City Hall was typical for that of a small Mississippi town. The police station and jail were in one end of the building. It was a red brick Victorian style building with marble floors, and high ceilings. Ceiling fans, spinning slowly high above, stirred the hot summer air.

The police did what most good cops would do. First, they handed the teens some towels and allowed them to clean up in the restroom. They then sent them into four different rooms, each with a policeman, to hear their story. Supposedly, this was to see if their stories matched. Lastly, they sent Joe's dad off with another officer. They wouldn't let him speak with the young people until after the cops did.

Dr. Abernathy and the guards filed a complaint for trespassing but quickly left the station, saying they needed to get back to the Army complex immediately.

Meanwhile, the chief of police called Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt. They weren't off work yet, but asked permission to leave early. When they arrived at the police station the interviews were just finishing.

The police chief briefly updated the parents. He was a very serious man, not smiling or talking very fast. Every comment was slow and well thought-out. He then asked Kurt and Mandy to come into the conference room.

The teens were already in there waiting. They hugged Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt. Mandy looked real upset. Then the police brought in Joe's dad and immediately Aunt Mandy ran to hug her younger brother. He looked serious and not in a cloud as he usually was. He hugged Joe and even lingered, apparently not wanting to let go.

The chief waved his hand for quiet, then explained the situation to the parents. He seemed to represent both sides of the story fairly. He talked about how serious it was to sneak into a government facility, and how Dr. Abernathy had decided to press charges. Then he indicated that the teens' stories were consistent, making them believable. The chief said that he tended to agree with Dr. Abernathy that they might have made the story up after climbing over the wall in order to turn the fault back on the Army. He said it was like a kid getting into trouble for breaking a window with a rock and then saying the window shouldn't have been there.

He continued the discussion with comments about how serious the accusations were that the teens were bringing against the researchers. He emphasized that research at the university was not his responsibility, but that kidnapping and attempted murder was. Then the chief indicated to the parents that they had better spend some time alone with the teens and make sure they were telling the truth before proceeding with the case.

"Why don't ya'll go on home and get cleaned up and get some rest," he said. "I think I'll wait a few days before pushing this case. Maybe the truth will come out by then. I've seen a lot of these kind of things in the past—teenagers doing things for one reason and swearing up and down it was for some other reason when they get caught. Well, I'm in no hurry. We'll get to the bottom of it eventually. Do you have any questions?"

The teens whispered among themselves while the chief's attention was on the parents.

"He's obviously in on it also," Dennis whispered to Jeremy. "We can't trust him."

"Tell him about the computer we hid in the complex," Susan said under her breath to Joe. "That's hard evidence. They could just walk in the complex and get it."

Joe shook his head. "No, we can't be for sure if he's a part of the scheme or not. If he's in on it, he'll just tell Dr. Abernathy to find and destroy the computer. Then we'll have no evidence at all."

Apparently Aunt Mandy and Uncle Kurt were thinking that too, or maybe they just wanted to get the kids home so they could talk, because they agreed with the chief and stood up to leave. They didn't even try to explain to him what they knew about the dog research. Joe's dad also remained silent. He probably wanted to talk to Joe about it first. The chief asked the parents to sign some forms and then released the young people.

They all went to the Williams home. Joe's dad, Aunt Mandy, and Uncle Kurt immediately asked to hear everything. They didn't even offer Joe time to get changed out of his damp clothes. Jeremy started, explaining how they got back inside the complex and all about hooking up the computer to the dog. The others kept bringing up details that he left out.

Kurt, Mandy, and Joe's dad sat there for a few moments, but it seemed like forever. They were stunned, just like telling them something crazy like, "Scientists have recently discovered that pigs are really a species of bird." They had the strangest looks on their faces.

Then Kurt sat up on the edge of his brown recliner chair and spoke up. "If this story was told to me by anybody else in the world I wouldn't believe it. But I have to believe it—but I can't. It's the most bizarre thing I've ever heard that is supposed to be true. This is the kind of stuff in movies."

"Well, I'm just thankful that you weren't killed," Mandy said, apparently deciding to believe the story. She looked angry. "And this is the last straw. Doing weird and cruel research is bad enough, but trying to kill innocent people . . ."

Then the attention turned to Joe's dad. "Dad, why were you out there today?" Joe asked. "You looked so angry."

"Yeah, Jeff," Kurt said. "You've been awfully quiet."

The usually stiff and intellectual Dr. Craig was humble. He had a look on his face like he had been found guilty in a court. "I'm sorry that I haven't paid attention to my son like I should have these last couple of weeks. I guess my mind was on that new book I'm writing. Anyway, Joe tried to tell me about all of this and I guess I shrugged it off as misconception or false interpretation of what he saw. I see now how wrong I was."

He paused and looked at Joe. "I'm sorry, Son."

"It's all right Dad," Joe beamed. A weight suddenly lifted from his shoulders.

"Well anyway, I was working on that chapter about ethics when I realized that maybe I should pay attention to what Joe had been telling me. After all, it would be unethical to ignore such cruelty to animals. So I made some calls, and through a friend of mine, got inside the complex for a meeting with one of the researchers. Peter or something like that."

"Peters," Jeremy threw in. "He's not a nice man."

"Yeah, that's him. He made me real angry by saying it was none of my business what was going on there since I wasn't a scientist. The more I talked to him, the more I realized that you kids were telling the truth. We've got to stop these people somehow."

"But what are we gonna do?" Dennis asked. "You see how everywhere we turn, somebody else is in on the thing. Even the police chief. Don't ya'll think he's in on it too?"

Kurt seemed to be going from unbelief to anger. "I've had it with these local guys. I'm gonna call my friend at the Senator's office and give him one more chance to do something—I really don't think the Senator knew anything about the research. Then, I'm going to call the other Mississippi Senator, the FBI, and all the way up to the president if I have to. This dog thing is bad enough, but now they've attempted murder! Somebody's gonna have to pay for that."

"Call one of those television news programs that investigates stuff like this," Dennis said.

Kurt was already up out of his chair and on the way across the room to the phone. "I might do that too," he said.

"Well, while he's making that call, I'll make us a bite to eat," Mandy said. "Ya'll go get cleaned up and change your clothes."

Later at the supper table, the family munched on sandwiches and chips. Joe sat by his dad almost glowing with pride that his dad believed him. And the close brush with death he had just experienced made him keenly aware of how precious life really is. Uncle Kurt came back with some news. "I really blew the hair back on my friend at the Senator's office . . ."

Susan and Dennis laughed out loud, interrupting him. They'd never heard that expression before.

"I mean I pitched such a fit, and chewed on him so bad, that he said he was going right then to talk to the Senator for us. He said he'd call right back."

"I hope you're right in thinking he's not in on the whole thing," Joe's dad said. "If he is, they'll just all get together and get their stories worked out and destroy all the evidence."

"I hope they don't find the computer," Susan said.

"What computer?" Mandy asked.

Joe told her about hiding the computer way up high in one of the cabinets.

The phone rang. Kurt jumped up and ran to answer it. The family listened intently.

"Yes, I'm glad you called back. I'm sorry for chewing on you so much while ago."

He paused, listening to the caller.

Kurt then brightened. "Yes, I know. And now, since Joe fell in and almost drowned, we have attempted murder to add to the other charges. That'll be great. We'll be there in about thirty minutes. You don't know how much I appreciate this. I owe you. Okay, bye."

Kurt turned and relayed the news. "The Senator wants to see us! Tonight! We need to leave in a few minutes."

"Great!" Mandy said. "Quick, ya'll help me stack these dishes over by the sink."

Everybody buzzed around, helping clean off the table, and getting ready to go. Joe hoped this was the chance to finally get some help.

It was about six-thirty when they arrived at Senator's Lapp's office. Uncle Kurt's friend had stayed late to meet them at the door. "He's waiting to see you. I can't promise how receptive he'll be since he doesn't like staying late."

Inside the plush office the Senator again was very polite, but somewhat aloof. Apparently, he was used to hearing all kind of weird complaints.

After some small talk and meeting Joe's dad, the Senator said, "My aide said you wanted to talk to me again about the research at the Army complex. I apologize for not having contacted my friend at the pentagon yet about it. I just haven't had time. My aide said you have startling new information. Is this true?"

"Yes sir," Kurt said and proceeded to tell him about the events of that day. Then he asked the teens to recount their story.

The Senator listened closely. As the teens talked he began to really look interested. By the time they finished he was sitting up on the edge of his chair, resting both arms at the edge of his desk. He propped his chin with his left hand and thought a minute.

"This is amazing. I have to admit the first time we talked I was skeptical. I figured you were a bunch of misguided, whiz kid type of teenagers. But this is really weird. So weird, in fact, that it must be true. But what about evidence? Can you prove any of this, or tell me a way to prove it?"

"Yes sir," Joe spoke up. "We hid the notebook computer that we used to copy information out of the dog's brain. I'll bet that the researchers haven't found it. Even if they've tried to remove all evidence by now, chances are they don't have the slightest idea we used a computer."

"If there's a computer inside a cabinet you point out, that'll be powerful evidence by itself that you were in there. Could you show me exactly where you hid the computer?"

"Yes sir."

"All right, let's go."

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

The Senator pressed his intercom button. "Mark, come in here."

Uncle Kurt's friend came in the room.

"Mark, call the General—whoever it is—that's over all Army research and development. Tell him I want to talk to him."

"But sir, it's evening. I may have a hard time getting in touch with him."

"I don't care. Get him. I don't care if it takes a while. We're going out to the Army complex. When we get back I want to talk to him."

"Also, call the local FBI agent and have him meet us over at the Army complex."

"Yes sir."

They took two cars. It took about ten minutes for the group to get to the gate house at the Army complex. As they drove up, they saw a gray Ford Bronco with the FBI logo on its doors parked off to the side with its motor running. The Senator got out and walked over to the Bronco and started talking to the two agents inside. The driver was a woman and the other was a young man. It was clear that they were FBI agents. The woman had on a navy blue suit and a white blouse; the man had very short hair and a cap with "FBI" on front.

Then the two agents got out and walked with the Senator up to the little gate house. Two guards in the house began to question their right to enter.

Even though Joe and the others were still in their car, they could make out part of the conversation. "I don't care what your orders are . . . I'm a United States Senator . . . I can have this place shut down. Go ahead, call your bosses!"

Presently three Army cars drove out to the gate from inside the complex. Several men in business suits and one Army officer greeted the Senator and FBI agents. They were obviously afraid of the Senator because they kept saying nervously, "yes sir" and "no sir."

"Hey, that's Dr. Abernathy!" Joe said, pointing from inside the car. "That's the head man. He's the one who ordered us to be captured."

"Are you sure?" Mandy asked.

"That's him alright."

Jeremy, Dennis, and Susan agreed.

The Senator walked back to the car. "They've agreed to let us come in and look around. But they don't want us to drive our vehicles inside. They're bringing a van to take us all in . . ."

"They're just stalling for time," Joe said. "I bet they've got people inside that animal area right now removing or destroying all evidence of the dog research."

After about ten more minutes of waiting, a pale green Army van drove out to the gate house and everyone went over to get in. When the teens walked by Dr. Abernathy, he acted as if he didn't know them.

"Why, hello there Dr. Abernathy," Dennis said sarcastically. "It's good to have you come out and give us a tour."

"Excuse me, young man," he said calmly. "I don't believe I know you or your companions."

"Oh, you know us all right! I should have knocked the snot outta you when I had the chance."

"Dennis," Mandy said, grabbing his shoulder. "That's enough. Don't talk like that."

Dr. Abernathy still had that cold look in his eyes, but he looked a little afraid this time.

"We want you to take us to the animal research area," the Senator said.

"Yes sir."

Soon the group was inside the complex and walking down the same hall where the young people had been that morning. Joe thought how weird it felt to be openly walking down the hall this time instead of being afraid like they were that morning. Upon entering the animal holding room through the metal cage door, the teens could immediately tell there had been a major cover-up effort. There was not one dog cage anywhere! The only cages in the small rooms off to the side were smaller cages; some contained white rabbits.

"They've changed it all up," Jeremy told the Senator. "There were dogs in here this morning."

"There haven't been any dogs in here in a long time," Dr. Abernathy said in a business-like manner.

The group walked around behind the partition. Even that area was changed. They had removed the examination table and replaced it with a wooden desk, making the area look like a little office. There were even two potted plants sitting on either side of the desk along with a floor lamp.

Joe hoped they hadn't found the computer.

"Okay son," the Senator said. "Show us."

Dr. Abernathy looked a little nervous, but seemed confident that they had destroyed all the evidence.

That all changed when Joe hopped up on the desk and opened the upper cabinet. He reached way back and felt around. He felt it. They hadn't found it!

"Here it is!"

Dr. Abernathy's mouth flew open. His face and neck began to flush with red. He was caught!

Joe gingerly handed the computer down to Jeremy who laid it on the wooden desk. The Senator was beaming. He probably knew that this kind of story was very important politically. There would surely be newspaper headlines like, "Honest politician helps little common guy fight government corruption."

Jeremy got the computer up and running and then let Joe take over. Everybody gathered around watching the tiny screen.

In a moment or two Joe exclaimed, "Watch this. Here it is."

Sure enough, right there on the screen were the two folders of information copied directly out of the dog's brain, complete with instructions on how to place and detonate explosives.

"Amazing!" the Senator said. Then he turned to the Army officer and Dr. Abernathy. Dr. Abernathy was fully red-faced by now.

"What have you got to say about this?"

"The computer could have been planted here as a scheme to discredit the Army," Dr. Abernathy said weakly. Then after a moment he continued, "Other than that, I'll withhold any further comment until I speak with my attorney."

"You're going to need one."

The Senator then turned to the two FBI agents. "I want you to arrest this man for kidnapping and assault. We'll also want to see all the guards and the researchers in this place so the kids can pick out the ones who helped in the kidnapping."

"Yes sir," the woman agent said firmly. Then she gave instructions to the other agent. "Arrest this guy, David, while I go see the head of complex security. We'll have all available security guards and researchers come down here so the kids can see them."

While the FBI agent was gone to get the security guards and researchers, the Senator and woman agent tried to get Dr. Abernathy to talk. He wouldn't admit anything. He just stood there with his arms crossed so tightly across his chest that it wrinkled his black pin-striped suit. He repeated that he wanted to talk to his lawyer.

After about thirty minutes of trying to identify staff members at the complex the Senator suggested that the group go home. "We can continue this tomorrow. Some of the staff members aren't here anyway. They've already gone home for the day."

Everybody agreed. It had been a long day. They returned to Kurt and Mandy's. The answering machine blinked constantly with messages from Kristen and Ashley. Jeremy called them back and told what all had happened. After a few minutes he called for Joe.

"Ashley wants to talk to you."

Joe eagerly took the phone. "Hey, Ashley!"

"Yes, I'm all right. Thanks."

Joe noticed that Susan and Dennis were watching him and snickering, so he pulled the phone around the door to continue his conversation.

"I was so worried about you," she said. "I guess I realized how much I've grown to like you."

"I like you too," Joe replied. "*Very* much."

After several minutes he hung up and returned to the group gathered in the living room discussing the day's events one more time. By now, Joe was pooped.

Susan mumbled something about being zapped and left for her bedroom.

Mandy walked over to Joe's dad and gently touched his arm. "Hey, brother, why don't you and Joe stay here with us tonight? That sofa makes a bed."

"I think I might take you up on that. It's been a strange day."

Mandy then walked over and stood beside Joe. She patted him on the back. "Why don't ya'll just sleep late tomorrow," she said with a warm, affectionate look in her eyes. Then she turned toward Jeremy. "Even you Jeremy. That research of yours can wait a half a day. I'm sure there'll be lots of questions to be answered tomorrow. You need a good night's sleep."

"And you'll probably be interviewed on television since this is such a weird story," Kurt threw in. "Ya'll need to be rested up."

Everybody agreed. They went to bed, but it was hard for Joe to go to sleep. It was like he still had left-over adrenalin in his body. After flopping from side to side and wiggling his feet for some time, Joe finally drifted off to sleep.

The teens slept until almost noon the next day. Joe's dad went to work at the Philosophy Department. By the time the teens were up and dressed, Uncle Kurt and Aunt Mandy came home for lunch. Kristen and Ashley soon followed.

After finishing a large platter of grilled cheese sandwiches that Mandy made, the big group sat around the kitchen table talking. Ashley sat close by Joe.

"When's Dad coming back?" Joe asked.

"He said he's got classes through lunch today. He'll meet you at the apartment after three-o'clock," Mandy replied.

"Have you heard anything about the dog situation this morning, Dad?" Jeremy asked.

"Yes," he started. "I've got some news. The police chief called me this morning. One of the security guards has confessed to his part in carrying out Dr. Abernathy's plan to tie ya'll up out by the moat. He claims that he didn't agree with the plot from the beginning, but didn't know how to get out of it."

"That's great!" Joe exclaimed. "One of them—I think his name was Ralph—did act like his conscience was bothering him."

"Well, there's more. The police have arrested the other two guards, a researcher, and Dr. Abernathy. He still hasn't admitted anything, but with the guard's confession and the computer information ya'll got from the dog's brain, I think old Dr. Abernathy is gonna see some jail time. They're also investigating the Chancellor and his role in this thing. Apparently, he was the one responsible for stealing the log book and transducer out of Jeremy's office. He'll probably be charged with something like obstructing justice."

"Wow!" Joe said.

"What about the dog?" Susan asked. "What happened to the dog that pulled Joe out of the moat?"

Uncle Kurt lowered his head. "Unfortunately, the police chief said that all the German shepherds used for research in the complex were found dead in biohazard bags in the dumpsters this morning. They'd been killed and autoclaved to destroy all traces of the

brain research. None contained implanted transducers. Apparently, Dr. Abernathy had ordered the devices surgically removed and the dogs killed late yesterday afternoon."

Susan's eyes filled with tears. "But the one that saved us was not in those cages. He was loose out on the complex grounds somewhere."

"No, Dear, the guard said that they captured it sometime before dark yesterday out near the moat. Apparently, it was just standing around out there, like it didn't know what to do after rescuing Joe and untying you guys. Somebody said that later it was sniffing and 'listening' to different people looking for its master. The guard said it was put to death also."

Susan openly cried. "It was looking for Joe." Joe fought back tears.

Jeremy said something that made them feel a little better. "Well, as sad as it is, the dog would have to be put to sleep anyway. Remember the notes in the log book about how the procedure messes up their brain? Besides, that dog had a self-destruct command in it which could be triggered at any time. Remember us seeing that command?"

Still though . . . " Susan said, crying. "It saved our lives. And it was such a sweet dog. Remember how it cooperated so well when we put it to sleep to read its brain."

Just then the doorbell rang. Everyone went to see who it was. Kurt opened the door; it was the Senator. Kurt tried to change his expression from sad to inviting.

"Come on in Senator. It's good to see you."

After shaking everybody's hands and exchanging greetings, he sat down on the sofa. All eyes were on the Senator. They knew he probably had some important news.

"I just wanted to stop by and let you folks know what all's going on. The police and FBI have searched the complex and also arrested three guards, a researcher, and Dr. Abernathy. One of the guards has confessed . . . "

"Yes sir, we know," Kurt said. "The police chief called me this morning."

He smiled and nodded. "Okay then, since you know that part, let me tell you what I've been doing. After talking to the General in charge of all Army research, I've found out that the research on teaching dogs to talk was, in fact, being conducted out at the complex. The reason I didn't know about it was because it was ultra-secret and therefore off-the-books. I've called some of my friends in the Senate and we've all agreed that the research should be terminated immediately. Also, the Senate is going to pull a lot of this type of research out from under the Pentagon and put it under the National Institutes of Health. The NIH has strict animal use rules to prevent cruelty. Also, we're going to set up a panel of experts and lay people to review research projects like this. That panel will consist of physicians, veterinarians, lawyers, ministers, and even blue collar working class citizens. If the panel doesn't approve of a research idea . . . Well, it won't be done. I think it's high time this kind of secret research is stopped."

"That's wonderful," Kurt said. "Thank you so much for your help in this matter."

Mandy had a suggestion. "Don't you think that panel of experts should have a philosopher on it? Especially one who has written a book about ethics?"

Everyone knew she was talking about Joe's dad.

"Sure," the Senator said.

Joe's pride spilled over. "Thank you. Thank you, sir."

"Don't thank me. I was reluctant to believe the story. Remember? Thank yourselves."

"Well, all I've got to say," Jeremy said, "is that it's a good thing Joe thought to overwrite one of the command files in that dog so he could tell it to save us. If not, we'd probably be dead by now and the dog research would go on for no telling how long."

Everybody looked at Joe. Jeremy was right. Joe's curiosity about the dog research, his persistence in pursuing the case, and his knowledge of computers had saved them and put a stop to a horrible research project.

He just smiled sheepishly and reached for Ashley's hand. "Yeah, it's pretty exciting around here. I think I'll be staying with Dad more often."

