

THE KIDNAPPING

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Hunter & Holmes
Mystery



By Aiden Vaughan

ChucksConnection Promotional Feature

A Hunter & Holmes Mystery

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The Kidnapping

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This story is meant for readers 13 years old and up. If it were a film, it would be rated PG-13 or a television show Mature-14 due to some descriptions of violent acts, frank discussions of the thoughts and actions of predators, and the impact of a traumatic crime perpetrated on a young teenager.

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PART I:

THE ORDEAL



CHAPTER 1

NETTED AND CAGED

(Monday Night – Tuesday Morning)

Everything was a dark blur to Jason Hunter as he gradually regained consciousness. His entire body felt numb. As his mind began focusing, he realized something was very wrong — things were still murky black. The reason he couldn't see anything was due to a blindfold over his eyes. Then he became aware his mouth was biting on cloth and could feel a gag had been stuffed into his mouth and then tied tightly around his head. When he tried moving, he couldn't very well, as his wrists, arms and legs had been bound with rope. Naturally, he struggled against the ropes for a few minutes, but his captors had done their job very well. Prickles of pain darted through his wrists and ankles when he tried loosening the ropes. Just those simple movements quite exhausted him. Briefly a wave of nausea shuddered through his body and then he drifted back into unconsciousness.

The next time Jason woke up, he came to more quickly, but his situation had not changed at all for the better. His body began sending all kinds of messages, telling him he was in peril. By now his wrists now were totally numb and his bladder was sending painful, "I have to go now," signals. Although his gag was saturated with his own saliva, his body felt very dehydrated. With his stomach empty, it was rumbling for some food. He had no idea how long he had been tied up but the way his body felt, it seemed like at least a day.

Frustrated, he tried to make his mind remember how he had gotten into this situation. Yesterday he had been a carefree, fourteen-year-old, just beginning to enjoy his summer break from school. He had been planning to hang with his friend Daniel, maybe go bike riding or play some games. Instead he had ended up going to City Park because his second cousin, Vic Encino, had called and insisted that he go to the park with him. Jason had tried to get out of meeting Vic, because they really didn't get along very well, but his mother, Edith, had said he had to go.

One of his parent's big things was maintaining family relationships. Even though the Encinos were not close relatives, they were considered "family." "We need to socialize with them every now and then, so I want you to go to the park with them today," Edith had told Jason. "It won't hurt you to play some ball with your cousins."

That's easy for Mom to say. She doesn't have to spend the day with Vic and his annoying little brother, Kyle, Jason thought.

Normally, Jason would have elected to ride his bike to the park, but Vic and his mother, Janet, insisted on picking him up at his house and driving them there.

It was annoying that Vic was always trying to prove how much better he was than Jason or anyone else. They never could have just normal time to talk or have fun. Instead, every activity was always a challenge, designed in such a way that Vic would have the advantage. As for their get-togethers being family time, Vic's mom would often use these "family" occasions to get away, go shopping, or get her hair done, figuring because Jason was older, he would serve as a temporary companion or sitter for her two kids. Janet liked to posture that she was the caring soccer mom, happily catering to kids in the community, but Jason figured her real motive in picking him up was to make certain that he would actually be there. Sure enough, that was the plan this time. When they arrived at the park, Janet dropped them off and told them that she would pick them up around 2:00 p.m.

The three boys, Jason, Vic, and Kyle, wandered around the park for a while. It was a large park with a lake, gardens, picnic tables, playground areas, and baseball fields. Eventually they ended up at one of the baseball fields where they played a hitting game devised by Vic. In Vic's rules, everything that Kyle did or didn't do (he was not coordinated at all and rather useless at baseball) somehow went onto Jason's score. But at least they were doing something fun that would pass the time away until two.

Around 11:15 that morning, one of Vic's friends happened by and said, "Hey, Vic, are you getting ready for our Little League practice?"

"Oh, that's right, we start in fifteen minutes," Vic replied.

"Sorry about that, Jason. You don't mind watching our practice for a couple of hours until my mom gets back, do you?" That was so typical of Vic. Of course, all along, he had known about the practice. He had just wanted someone to help him warm up so he would look better to the rest of the team.

This time Jason wasn't buying into Vic's little scenario at all. "No, Vic, I think I'll just head on home now since you will be playing with your team. Kyle can stay with you and watch your team practice."

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The park was over four miles from his house, but Jason didn't want to sit around the park with nothing to do, when he could get back home, eat some lunch, and do something with his friends. *Now, I really wish I had brought my bike here*, he thought. *But it is a beautiful day and I'm wearing comfortable clothes*. His outfit consisted of a San Francisco 49ers team baseball cap, an Ocean Pacific tee shirt, brown camouflage cargo shorts, and his favorite sneakers, a nicely broken-in pair of red Converse Chuck Taylor high-tops. *Besides, the walk probably will only take me only thirty minutes or so*.

Boy, was he regretting that decision now. Through the fog in his brain Jason struggled to remember what had happened during his walk home. He remembered strolling down one of the park pathways that led to the east exit, which was a relatively direct route home. Everything was typical of a nice summer day in the park. It hadn't been crowded at all. In fact, he hadn't seen anyone around where he walked. Then, just as Jason arrived at the park exit and access street, he had suddenly felt a sharp prick in his neck. Surprised and stunned, he had reached up and discovered a little sharp dart had hit him. Right away he felt disoriented, but immediately there were a couple of people there to help guide him. All he could remember was being walked like a zombie to a nearby van, with his "helpers" shoring him up on either side. After that everything went dark.

Obviously somebody had planned to kidnap him, or maybe someone else walking down that path. Traveling down that park pathway had led Jason into the most frightening event of his young life.

Jason knew from assemblies at school that there were men who preyed on young kids and he had heard stories about kidnapers who wanted large ransoms for their victims. But it puzzled him why he had been chosen. His family was considered well-off, but not wealthy. They lived in a normal tract house and both his mother and father worked. Edith, his mom, worked at a software company and his father, Bill, ran the family import/export business that mainly dealt in antiques. The family had some money but not the big money professional kidnapers would target. They were not particularly prominent in the community, just family-oriented, normal parents. He involuntarily shuddered and a chill ran up his spine as he began to think of the other option. Scared and frustrated, he screamed into his gag, but all that came out was a garbled gurgle.



CHAPTER 2

JASON IS MISSING

(Monday Afternoon)

Daniel Holmes was looking forward to the summer ahead with the same happiness that his best friend, Jason, had expressed. He had some morning activities during the week, but they were things he liked doing. Five days a week he had a conditioning class at the local YMCA, which included a variety of activities. Sometimes it was running or swimming and other times it was lifting weights and doing floor exercises. Also, he was taking a guitar class several days a week, which was something he wanted to do for a long time.

He had some talent as a musician, singing in the school choir, and now he had a chance to expand his musical horizons by learning to play the guitar. Secretly, he had dreams of playing in a professional band some day; now he was developing some real skills, not just playing rock star video games like most of the other kids. Daniel carefully cultivated the rock star look (as much as his parents would let him) by keeping his curly black hair long and always wearing black high-top Converse All Stars. In the summer he completed the look with band tee shirts and denim shorts. At the same time, he liked keeping fit and in shape so that the other kids wouldn't think he was a nerd or a wimp.

Although Daniel was nearly a year older than Jason and an inch taller, they were in the same grade at school because his birthday was a few weeks later than the school district deadline for registration. As a result, he acted just a little more assured than most of the other students in his class and tended to avoid his classmates who were more immature. Daniel and his parents had only moved to the Silicon Valley from the east coast a couple of years ago. School could be a difficult adjustment in a completely new environment. Since their last names both started with the letter "H," Daniel was put in the same homeroom class as Jason. By doing some people-watching, looking for potential new friends at the school, Daniel immediately noticed that Jason was wearing red Converse

high-tops, and this gave him an opening to make friends. Actually, all it took was the comment, "Hey, cool chucks" and a conversation was started. The two quickly discovered they had common interests and abilities. Within a couple of months they had become best friends, and were spending a lot of their time together.

This day Daniel was looking forward to some game-time with Jason in the afternoon, but there was a message from him on his cell phone. "I will be at City Park until about three o'clock with my cousins. See you after that."

On hearing the message, Daniel figured Jason would come to their session in a bad mood because he remembered how his friend often complained about his cousins. Daniel tried calling Jason back around noon, but he didn't answer his cell. Since Jason was at the park, Daniel decided to use the extra time to practice his guitar. In his lesson that day, he had been taught how to play a new chord progression, which required a lot of practice in order to get his fingers in the right places on the fret board.

Around three o'clock Daniel decided to head on over to Jason's house, even though he hadn't heard anything more from him. When he arrived at the house there was no answer, so he figured he would just wait until Jason arrived back from the park. While waiting, he tried another call to Jason's cell phone. Again there was no answer. With nothing else to do, Daniel sat in the wicker rocking chair out on Jason's front porch, hoping that his friend would soon arrive home or return his phone message.

About forty minutes past three, a 2007 Toyota Prius pulled up and out stepped Jason's mom, Edith. "Hi, Daniel, are you waiting for Jason? I thought he would be back here by now. Maybe the Encinos were delayed."

"Could be, but why isn't Jason answering his cell phone? I even tried texting him, with no reply to that either," Daniel explained.

"I don't know, but I think I will give Janet Encino a call. She was the one who took the boys to the park and she said that she would be bringing Jason home sometime after two."

Edith dialed Janet's cell phone and as she talked, Daniel saw she did not like what she was hearing. "You're telling me that Jason left at noon by himself?" she exclaimed in disbelief. "Why didn't you drive him back home? What do you mean you weren't there? Little League practice? I thought this was supposed to be a fun day in the park for the boys."

Needless to say, Edith was getting worked up with the news that no one seemed to know where her son was. After disconnecting from Janet, Edith immediately tried Jason's cell number again. Still there was no answer.

“Daniel, do you have any ideas where Jason might have gone? Do you think that he stopped to see someone on the way home, or perhaps went to the Westfield Mall to look at video games or other electronics?” Edith anxiously asked.

“Maybe, Mrs. Hunter, but the last time I heard from Jason, he was counting on our gaming session this afternoon and was sorry that our meeting was going to be delayed. I would think that getting out of the park early would have meant he would try to get back home here. Since he didn’t have his bicycle, it’s possible he tried taking the bus and got lost or maybe he stopped somewhere for lunch. But neither of those things would take more than an hour.”

“What if he ran into someone he knew on the way home or somebody offered him a ride and he ended up going to their place? Jason can be impulsive sometimes.”

“Hopefully you are right, Mrs. Hunter, but why hasn’t he called? I wonder if his phone battery went dead or something happened to it?”

Edith was now nervously pacing around. “I think I should begin calling everyone I know until I find out where he is. Would you be willing to do the same?”

“Sure, I’ll help out. But I just had another idea. What if he stopped in at Mr. Hunter’s store since he was near the downtown and had some time to kill?”

“Good idea, Daniel, but unfortunately my husband is out of town on business, so Jason would have no reason to go there.”

As the conversation between them got increasingly more frustrating, Daniel began to get a very anxious and sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. But until every friend and acquaintance had been contacted there was still hope of a simple explanation for Jason’s whereabouts.

For the next half hour, Daniel and Edith tried calling everyone they could think of who might have seen Jason that day. When all was said and done, there were a lot of people on the lookout for Jason, but no one had any real information.

With no solid leads, Edith felt it was time to bring in the authorities. First she called several local hospitals, but no one had any reports of a fourteen-year-old boy being admitted with injuries. Then she called the police. After a few transfers she was connected to a detective in the missing persons unit who took down the basic information about Jason, and then said that a police officer would be sent out immediately to her house. Finally, she called her husband, Bill. He didn’t answer his phone so Edith left a brief message about Jason and told him to call her back immediately.

Now the waiting game began.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLICE ARRIVE

(Monday Afternoon)

About fifteen minutes after her telephone call to the police, a Ford Crown Victoria sedan pulled into the Hunter driveway. Two detectives from the missing persons unit got out and knocked on the door. When Edith answered, the two showed their identifications and introduced themselves. Lieutenant Antonio Garcia was the initial spokesman and the rugged-looking officer in his early thirties introduced his partner, Detective Andrea Spencer, who was younger, with thin features and Brunette hair cut in a pageboy style. Edith responded by introducing Daniel as one of Jason’s friends helping her look for him. She invited them to come into the house and sat down with them in the living room.

“Mrs. Hunter, I know that you are concerned about your son and want some action right away, but before we can do anything, we need to find out what you know so far. Please tell us everything that you can about Jason’s activities for today.” Both officers had notebooks out and began writing.

Edith recapped the events of the day as she understood them, mentioning how Jason was off to City Park with his cousins, the Encinos, his failure to return home, and how she had been calling around to his friends. “I thought he was with them and Janet Encino until at least 2:00 p.m. but apparently Jason decided to leave the park around noon because his cousin had Little League practice. I was surprised to find out that she wasn’t with them at the park.”

“Was Jason permitted to go around town on his own?” Lt. Garcia asked.

“Sometimes he would go places on his bike, but the rule is that he communicates his whereabouts at all times if he isn’t at home or school,” Edith replied. “If he was going someplace that we didn’t know about, he was to ask permission first. That’s one of the main reasons we let him have a cell phone.”

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Lt. Garcia asked her to give them Jason's cell number, service provider, and the Encino's address and telephone numbers. "We will check out the calls on his cell number and we definitely have questions for the Encinos we would like to ask." Garcia then asked Daniel what he knew about Jason's activities for today.

Daniel told the lieutenant about the message Jason had left on his cell phone that morning while he was at the YMCA, and that he hadn't heard anything from him since. "I have tried to reach him on his cell several times this afternoon because we were planning to get together and play some video games. But I never got a response. Not calling me back is not like Jason. He liked to keep things organized and moving, especially since he was the one who changed our meeting time."

Lt. Garcia then asked Edith, "We need a complete description of Jason—what he was wearing and a photograph we can borrow."

"Jason is fourteen-years old, about five feet five inches tall and weighs about 125 pounds. He has medium sandy blond hair, which is almost yellow. I think I have four or five of his school photos in the desk that you can take. He was wearing a white and blue print tee shirt, brown, camouflage-patterned shorts, and red sneakers," Edith described.

"Not just any red sneakers," Daniel added, "but red Converse Chuck Taylor All Star high-tops. They are very distinctive in appearance."

"Yeah, you're right. They are quite noticeable. I had a pair of chucks when I was your age. Glancing at Daniel's feet Lt. Garcia continued, "I see they are still considered cool today." Garcia closed his notebook and stood up to take the photographs from Edith. "Detective Spencer, why don't you talk to young Daniel outside while I talk in private with Mrs. Hunter?"

Detective Spencer and Daniel went outside and sat on wicker chairs. The Hunters had a nice, old-fashioned, covered porch that overlooked the street and neighborhood. Andrea Spencer spoke first. "Daniel, I know that this is difficult for you right now, with your friend missing, but we have to ask a lot of questions in order to get a clear picture of the situation. Now, how long have you known Jason?"

"We met at school about a year and a half ago. My parents and I had just moved here from Maryland. Jason was one of the first persons I was able to make friends with."

"How well would you say that you know him?"

"I would say over the past year we have become best friends. We certainly have spent a lot of time together."

"How does Jason get along with his parents? Are there any problems you are aware of?"

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“As far as I know, they are getting along great. Jason had never talked in a negative way about them and I don’t ever remember him being grounded or in trouble at home since I’ve known him. Whenever I have been over at his house, his parents have always made me feel welcome and comfortable. Outgoing, just like Jason, they make you feel like family when you are in their company. They always seemed interested in what Jason and I or his others friends were doing, in a way that was respectful of our space.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Hunter sound like great parents to me! What about with other family members? Does he have brothers and sisters?” the detective continued.

“No, Jason is an only child, just like I am. Maybe that’s one of the reasons that we get along so well.”

“Were there any problems that Jason had at school? Any problems with other kids?”

“I don’t think so. Jason can be very charming when he wants to, and I believe most of the other kids think highly of him. He has a brilliant, analytical mind, and schoolwork comes easily to him. Yet, he never brags about his intelligence or tries to act as if he is better than other people.”

“Were some of the other kids jealous of him...perhaps resenting his success and popularity?”

“If there are people who don’t like Jason, they sure haven’t made themselves known to me.”

“How about girlfriends or other romantic entanglements? Is there anyone special that he is seeing?”

“Jason doesn’t have a steady girlfriend but he does like socializing and having fun. He often goes to school social activities like dances and mixers. Diana Miglione and Laura Friesen are two of the girls that he likes to socialize with.”

Smiling, Det. Spencer said, “Jason sounds like a really nice kid, but does he have any hidden secrets or problems that you knew about? Did he ever experiment with drugs or alcohol?”

Shaking his head, Daniel answered, “He never indicated an interest in using drugs to me. Although we didn’t speak often about it, I think that getting high didn’t have a lot of appeal to Jason. He always seemed much more interested in how things worked, playing sports, games, or trying out new interests and pursuits than just sitting around smoking a joint or sneaking a beer from his father’s liquor cabinet.”

“Daniel, I really appreciate your candor about things. You know that it is very rare for someone to just go missing, run away or disappear

without some sort of personal reason behind it. Usually there is a burning issue in someone’s life that leads them astray or gets them in trouble with their parents or the law. From what you are telling me, there are no such issues in Jason’s life. So what do you think has happened to him?”

“That very question has been eating away at me ever since I realized that something has caused Jason to go missing. I keep going over and over in my head what could have happened to him and no good answer comes to mind. How could a young teen, with no problems in his life, be playing in a public park in broad daylight one minute and then go missing the next? It just doesn’t make sense.” Daniel hung his head in frustration.

“That clearly is the question that we are facing today. What kinds of answers have you come up with so far?” the detective asked, hoping the young man might be able to come up with a suggestion or possibility.

Again, shaking his head as he hesitantly voiced his thoughts, Daniel replied, “I’m really afraid...that some sort of serious harm has come to him. I know that he would try to contact someone with his cell phone if he could. That’s what bothers me the most. There have been no messages or calls from Jason to anyone I have talked to today...most likely because someone has prevented Jason from doing so...”

“A second possibility is that somehow he has rubbed someone the wrong way and that person responded with violence. While Jason can be very pleasant and charming, I know that he sometimes will speak impulsively if he sees something he doesn’t like. That is one of the reasons that we hit it off as friends...because I also don’t like a lot of the immature or rude behavior that we see from so many people today.

“Another possibility is that somehow Jason stumbled into some sort of crime going on—a drug deal or gang rivalry—and he was the innocent bystander in the wrong place at the wrong time.

“And my worst thought is that he is in the hands of a predator—someone who saw an attractive young kid by himself and pounced.”

“Wow, Daniel, you talked about Jason having an analytical mind. I would say you have the same. You should consider a career in law enforcement.” Detective Spencer reached into her purse, took out a business card, and handed it to him. “If you think of anything else at all, don’t hesitate to call me. It doesn’t matter what time of the day or night.”

She stood up, placed her hands on Daniel’s shoulders and looked him in the eyes as she said, “Daniel, honey, please know that we will do everything in our power to find your friend.” Stepping away she continued, “We have a very good team in place and now we have a lot of work to do in order to track down Jason. Thank you again for your cooperation and assistance.”

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Back inside the house, a similar conversation was going on between Detective Garcia and Jason's mother. "Mrs. Hunter, now that we have pretty much exhausted all of the innocent possibilities as to why Jason is missing, we have to take a look at the unpleasant ones. Jason could have come across a crime scene or criminal activity. His actions could have been totally harmless or inadvertent. But, unfortunately, a lot of people are killed or injured due to just this reason. This particular scenario doesn't appear too likely to me at this time. We haven't heard of any major criminal activities going down at City Park recently and with the park in use a lot, and regularly patrolled by the police, gangs have tended to stay away, especially during the day.

"The next possibility is that Jason is the victim of a sexual predator who saw him wandering through the park and decided to act. This possibility is highly unlikely also, because usually predators take some time to stalk and check out their victims before acting. The stalker would have to know the victim's schedule of activities prior to grabbing him in order to prepare a way to capture him. The fact that Jason went missing in broad daylight would make this type of crime particularly brazen and difficult to execute without being seen by someone. But it is possible. Have you noticed anyone strange hanging about or has Jason mentioned anything about incidents at school or on the way there?"

"Jason never mentioned anything to me recently. Aren't these type of crimes usually committed on younger kids because they are less likely to be aware and easier to subdue in an attack?" Mrs. Hunter asked. "Jason is fourteen and in good physical shape. We have talked to him about resisting, shouting out loud, or trying to run away if he was ever accosted. Wouldn't you think that there would be at least signs of a struggle if an attack on him had occurred?"

"Your point is well taken, Mrs. Hunter. And the fact that he went missing from the City Park area, a place that he didn't normally frequent, makes it highly unlikely that someone was out to get Jason specifically, unless they had been already following him for some reason."

Lt. Garcia continued, "We also should look at the possibility of an actual kidnapping for ransom. This is the classic missing-person crime. When a young boy is kidnapped, the crime is usually due to some previous action on the part of the parents. The crime is typically done for revenge or to settle a debt—either financial or personal—or to extort a large sum of money from a wealthy family."

"I don't know what to say to that, Lieutenant Garcia. My husband and I have some financial means, but we certainly aren't what the average person would describe as rich. We are not involved in any organized crime and we have a very low profile in the community. When you look around Santa Clara County, there are literally hundreds of people better

off than we are—millionaires with very high profiles. A lot of money has been made here and has stayed here. I work in the marketing department of a software company. Why would we become targets?"

"I can't answer that at this time, but maybe your husband can shed some light on this when he arrives back here."

"Bill is currently on a business trip out of town. As soon as I can get in touch with him, I will have him get on an airplane," she said.

Taking a deep breath, as if he was about to address something unpleasant, the lieutenant said, "Mrs. Hunter, there is one more possibility that we must explore. Is there any circumstance in Jason's life that would cause him to run away from home? Are there any family problems you haven't mentioned, or has Jason been secretive about some part of his life lately?"

"I can't believe you are asking me these questions," Edith snapped back angrily. "I have been patiently spending over half an hour describing everything we know about Jason and his social environment. We are a loving family and there are no problems that I know of with Jason. I'm sure Daniel and his other friends will back me up on this!"

Somewhat embarrassed, Lt. Garcia apologetically said, "I'm sorry to upset you, Mrs. Hunter, but you would be amazed at how many parents don't really know what goes on in their children's lives. Then, when a crisis erupts, they are often the last people to find out. When I commit a team of police officers on a missing person's investigation, I have to be sure that we have all the pertinent information so that we don't waste our time looking in the wrong places."

"I know that you are trying to do your job, Lieutenant Garcia, but we are wasting precious time. Jason has been missing for over five hours now. He's a wonderful person who must be in terrible danger. Can you stop talking about it and do something out in the field? I totally believe that he would do the right thing if he was capable of it. Please do something now to find him!" she implored.

"All right, Mrs. Hunter, we'll get a team on it right away. Please be aware that we may have to question you again until we get a real lead. Also, we would like you to give us permission to put a tap on your telephone in case there is a ransom call. I am going to leave Detective Spencer here with you now. I will ask for around-the-clock surveillance and someone will always be here at the house until we hear something."

"Do what you must do. Please find my son!" With that Edith burst into tears.



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