

# CHAPTER ONE

I KNEW I SHOULDN'T HAVE opened that package that my long-lost grandfather sent me on my sixteenth birthday. If I had just listened to my gut, like my older brother Thomas always used to say, maybe I wouldn't be falling from a six story building to my death to the street below.

Let me back up a bit. My name is Jack McDonald and I just turned sixteen a week ago. Most kids, when they turn sixteen, look forward to getting their driver's license, if they haven't already gotten their driving permit. And sure, I'd like to get my driver's license at some point as well, because driving a car would be freaking cool and I wouldn't always have to have my parents shuttle me around everywhere. I'd even be able to take girls out on dates.

But when I received a package from my grandfather on my sixteenth birthday ... well, let's just say that getting my driver's license became the last thing on my mind. It was replaced by a realization that I could avenge my brother's death and maybe even save the city of Rumsfeld itself from the deadly villains who threatened it.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. It all started about a week ago, on the morning of my sixteenth birthday ...

*Friday, May 4th, 2018*

Like all kids, when I woke up on the morning of my birthday, I was actually excited. I hopped out of bed, took a shower, and got dressed, pausing briefly in the mirror to make sure my red hair was in good shape and that none of my clothes had holes or dirt on them. Mom would kill me if I left the house 'looking like a bum,' as she always put it, so I had gotten into the habit of making sure I looked my best whenever I left the house, whether for school or anything else.

I thought I looked pretty good, so I slung my backpack over my shoulder and ran out of my room and down the stairs to the first floor. As I ran, the smell of bacon and eggs wafted through the air, becoming stronger and stronger the closer I got to the kitchen. I heard Mom working in the kitchen, the bacon in her pan hissing and spitting, while Mom herself was humming a tune I couldn't quite make out. Not that I cared. I just wanted my bacon and eggs.

Entering the kitchen, I said, "Good morning, Mom! Those bacon and eggs smell great."

Mom, who stood at the stove with her back to me, nodded. "Morning, Jack! Since today's your birthday, I thought I'd make bacon and eggs for breakfast. There's a plate at your spot on the table."

I immediately spotted the huge plate of bacon and eggs on the table, next to a small brown package I had never seen before, and quickly sat down at my seat. Picking up my fork, I began shoveling mouthfuls of fluffy scrambled eggs—which also had butter and cheese melted into them—into my mouth as fast as I could, along with handfuls of crunchy, greasy bacon that made my taste buds explode. "Man, Mom, this is great! Is Dad up yet?"

"He had to leave early for work," said Mom, glancing over her shoulder at me. "Something came up at the construction site that required his attention, so your father had to leave, even though today was supposed to be his day off."

I frowned. I had been looking forward to spending the afternoon with Dad after I got home from school today, but it looked like we were going to have to put that off for now. "Dad isn't going to have to work too late, is he?"

Mom shrugged as she moved the pieces of freshly cooked bacon from her pan and carefully laid them out on the paper towel lined plate next to the stove. "I'm not sure. Walt said he was going to try to get off work as soon as possible, but it sounded to me like he was going to have a long day. He said he would probably be back by dinner for your birthday cake."

My shoulders slumped. I didn't want to just have cake with Dad. I wanted to go down to the gun range with him and get some shooting in today. I wasn't old enough to legally carry a gun yet, but Dad had already taught me how to shoot and handle a gun and he had promised me we could do that this afternoon after I got off school. "Well, okay. I hope he can get off early anyway."

"Me, too, Jack, me, too," said Mom. "Oh, and a package arrived for you earlier."

"A package?" I said. "For me?"

Mom nodded. "Yes. It's there next to your bacon and eggs."

I had been so hungry that I hadn't paid much attention to the small brown package that stood next to my plate. It was very small, slightly larger than Dad's wristwatch. It had no marks on it, except for two words in big black marker: FOR JACK.

"Who sent this?" I said, looking at Mom again.

"I'm not sure," said Mom. "When I got up this morning to make breakfast, I heard a knock at the door and came to see who it was. But when I opened the door, I didn't see anyone. Just that package on the front porch."

"Are you sure it's safe?" I said, looking at the package uncertainly. "If we don't know who sent it—"

"Don't worry," Mom interrupted. "As far as I can tell, it's perfectly safe. I felt it thoroughly and didn't feel anything dangerous inside it. Likely, it's just a birthday present from someone."

I frowned again. "Who would send me a birthday present in such a weird way?"

"I have no idea," said Mom without even the slightest hint of worry. "But you should open it and see what's inside. Maybe there's a note inside from the person who sent it explaining who they are."

Being curious, I decided Mom had a point. So I tore open the end of the package and turned it upside down. A small object fell out of the package on the table next to my plate. Dropping the package, I picked up the object and looked at it curiously.

It was a wristwatch. Not one of those smartwatches that my math teacher, Mr. Gonzales, had, but more like the old-fashioned clockwork ones, although it didn't look very old. It was blue and white, which was a cool color combination, but my attention was mostly drawn to the even cooler "TW" symbol just underneath the clock hands. The T looked kind of like a cross, while the W had lightning-like thunderbolts pointing from either end of its upper parts. The watch was light in my hands, though it felt sturdy nonetheless.

"Is that a watch?" said Mom as she turned off the stove top and turned around to look at me.

I nodded, turning over the watch to get a better look at its entirety. "Yeah, but I've never seen it before in my life."

Mom tilted her head to the side. "There's something familiar about that watch, but I just can't place it."

"Yeah, I agree," I said. I snapped it onto my wrist and was amazed at how natural it felt, like it was just an extension of my body. "It fits perfectly around my wrist, but who would send me a watch as a gift? I've got a phone if I need to tell the time."

"Is there anything in the package that might tell you who sent it?" said Mom, leaning forward slightly. "A note, perhaps?"

I picked up the packaging and shook it again. This time, a folded up note fell out of the package and landed on the table. I picked up the note and unfolded it to discover that it said this, which I read aloud:

*HAPPY BIRTHDAY. A BIG BOY LIKE YOU NEEDS A BIG WATCH LIKE THIS.*

I looked up at Mom, mystified. "Okay, this is starting to get *really* weird. This is either someone's weird idea of a prank or I'm being stalked."

Mom looked every bit as confused as me. "I have no idea what that could mean. If I were you, I wouldn't wear that watch until your father gets home. He might be able to find out where it came from."

I reached over to remove the watch, but then a voice in the back of my head, one which sounded like Grandfather's voice, said, "*Stop. The Watch is not dangerous. Keep it on. Don't take it off.*"

The voice *should* have worried me, because I never heard voices in my head, but for some reason this one didn't. Maybe because it sounded just like Grandfather for some reason.

Lowering my hand, I said, "Mom, it's just a watch. Yeah, we don't know where it came from or who sent it to me, but so what? I think it looks pretty cool myself."

Mom frowned, but then she slowly nodded and said, "Well, I suppose you have a point. Still, this is starting to scare me. That package appearing on our front porch out of nowhere, the watch, the note ... something's rotten in the state of Denmark."

I had to admit that I agreed with Mom about how strange this situation was. At the same time, however, I also felt like this watch was too important to give up. There was something about this watch that made it too valuable to throw away or even take off my wrist. Maybe I'd show it to my friend, Kyle, at school. He was a science and engineering geek, so he might help me figure out if there was more to this watch than meets the eye.

"You know, it reminds me of the watch your grandfather wore," said Mom. "I don't know if you remember, of course, given how he disappeared when you were only six-years-old, but he always wore a watch around his wrist that looked similar to that, even when he was doing superhero work. In fact, today is the tenth anniversary of his disappearance, if I'm not mistaken."

I looked at my watch again. "You know, it *does* kind of look like Grandfather's watch. But that's impossible, of course, because like you said, he disappeared years ago and no one has seen him since."

That was true. Ten years ago, Grandfather had retired from his job as Trickshot, the superhero of Rumsfeld, Texas, on the same day as my sixth birthday, and then utterly vanished for reasons that no one knew. I had only been six-years-old at the time, but I could still remember how anxious and worried Mom and Dad had been, as well as how the topic dominated the local news for weeks and even months afterward. Grandfather's disappearance had prompted a massive search conducted by police and volunteers alike all over Rumsfeld, but they had completely failed to find any trace of him. As a result, the police closed the case only a year after it started, because there was literally no evidence or clues to help lead them in the right direction. The police chief had told Dad that there was a very good chance that Grandfather was dead, but Dad hadn't accepted or believed it, which was why we hadn't held a funeral for Grandfather yet, and probably never would.

As I grew older, I'd learned that the topic of Grandfather's disappearance became something of an urban legend among the people of Rumsfeld. There were plenty of conspiracy theories online about why Grandfather disappeared, such as aliens abducting him or the federal government whisking him away to some black site in the middle of nowhere due to his alleged knowledge of government secrets.

Personally, I had no idea what happened to Grandfather. I didn't even think about it too much because my memories of Grandfather were pretty hazy due to how young I had been at the time. Even his disappearance happening on my birthday didn't bother me as much as it should. Still, I remember being about as upset as everyone else when we first heard the news and the topic always came up whenever my birthday rolled around.

"It's probably just a coincidence," I said with a shrug. "Grandfather's been missing for a decade. He's probably ... not around anymore, so he couldn't send me a birthday gift even if he wanted."

Mom nodded, but she still looked troubled. "I guess you're right." She glanced at the clock above the fridge. "Oh, the bus will be here soon. Are you ready to go?"

I gulped down the last of my eggs and, standing up, said, "Not yet. I left my phone in my room, so I'm going to rush back up there to get it."

I ran out of the kitchen and bounded up the stairs two at a time, knowing that I didn't have much time left before the bus pulled up. Pushing open the door to my room, I spotted my phone lying on my desk next to my bed. It was strange that I'd forgotten it, but I guess I'd been in such a hurry to get breakfast that I wasn't as careful as I normally was.

In any case, I just walked over to my desk, snatched the phone off its surface, and turned around to find myself face to face with Grandfather.

-

Read the rest by clicking [HERE!](#)