



# Kidnapping in Greendale

“I thought you were going to be catching all your own food on this trip,” Karen said to Kento and Earl.

“Well, we haven’t had time to go fishing yet,” said Kento.

“Mmm-mmm,” Earl mumbled through a mouthful of food.

The Five Squad members were sitting around a campfire, munching sandwiches that Karen had prepared while the boys had been setting up the tents. It was the evening of the first day of spring break, and Christopher, Susan, Kento, Earl, and Karen,

accompanied by Earl’s uncle Williams—a park ranger—were camped out under a group of trees in the middle of Pine Ridge Forest, an hour’s drive from their hometown of Sheldon.

Kento tuned his phone radio to the local news broadcast and reached for another sandwich.

“Ssh ... listen,” he said.

*“...the Greendale Police Department is continuing to hunt for clues in the Farell kidnapping case. It has now been two days since Jason Farell was first reported missing...”*

Karen gasped.

“J-Jason ... Jason Farell?”

“Who is Jason Far—?” Christopher began, but Karen put a finger to her lips and turned her attention back to the radio announcement.

*“...So far the only sign of intention or demand that the Farell family has received from the kidnappers*

*was a Polaroid picture of their son held hostage. The Farell family owns several businesses, including the Farell Jewelry stores. It is speculated that the ransom demand will be astronomical. In other news today...”*

As the news broadcast moved on to items of lesser importance, the others turned to look at Karen.

“Who’s Jason Farell?” Christopher asked again.

“I went to school with him in Greendale. A rich snob that acted as though the universe revolved around him. Not many real friends. Not surprising, I suppose. He always acted as if he was better than everybody else. I doubt many kids there are feeling sorry for him.”

“That’s not very nice,” said Susan.

“Okay, I’m sorry,” said Karen. “But his parents are so rich, they’ll have no difficulty paying whatever the ransom is. They have nothing to worry about.”

“I’m sure he has plenty to worry about,” said Christopher. “We should pray for him.”

“Of c-course...”

“Yes,” said Susan and closed her eyes.

“Dear Jesus, please watch over Jason and keep him safe. Help the kidnappers to make their demands known soon, and send the Farell family a sign that You will bring Jason back to them safe and unharmed.”

“Yes, Lord,” said the others.

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"So you really think we're going to catch anything?" Earl asked Kento early the next morning. With half-empty backpacks and a couple of stuffed waist pouches, the two had set out on their own as the others were still asleep.

"Of course we will. We'll show Karen. She won't tease us about eating her sandwiches anymore. She'll be begging us for a taste of fresh barbecued fish!"

"Good ... as long as it doesn't take too long. I'm already starving!"

"Here, Frisky!" Kento called out. "We're off for the hunt! Want to come with us?"

Frisky yelped and dashed ahead of the boys into the forest.

For more than an hour, Kento and Earl roamed around, checking their books and charts to identify any edible nuts and berries, as well as watching out for any that were described as poisonous. By and by, the boys came upon the river that ran through the heart of the forest, where they gathered sticks and constructed fish traps from pieces of rope that they were carrying in their pouches. They placed these makeshift snares along the river's edge, hoping to catch some fish to take back to camp before the day was over.

Suddenly, Frisky barked and dashed into a thicket of bushes. Assuming he had picked up an animal's scent, the boys chased Frisky

until, breathless, they found him barking and pawing at a small hole in the ground.

"Let it go, Frisky," said Earl. "That animal won't come out of there as long as you keep barking at it!"

Frisky pulled back, whimpered, and slunk to Earl's side.

"Hey, Earl, look at this," said Kento. He was crouched, inspecting a scrap of paper. "It looks like part of a letter, but there are so few words. Just 'I wish I' and 'just want' and 'nobody seems'—I can't make out the rest. Here."

"It sounds sad, whatever it is," said Earl, and tucked the scrap of paper into his pouch.

A short distance up the nearby road, Earl noticed another piece of paper.

"And look ... there's more in that direction," Kento said, pointing down a trail to the side. "Some people just throw trash anywhere. It certainly takes away from the feeling of adventure. What a shame."

"Well, let's pick up these scraps and return to camp."

And so they did, and with each new scrap they found, they would see another one further down the path.

"It's like a treasure hunt," said Earl.

"More like a *trashure* hunt," Kento said with a grin.

"You think there's anything at the end of it?" Earl asked.

Kento shrugged. "No idea. But there's one way to find out."

By the time they had reached the end of the paper trail, Earl's pouch was full of the scraps, and the boys found themselves in a clearing, in the middle of which stood a dilapidated and deserted logger's cabin.



"Looks as though we've found our treasure," Kento said glumly.

"Well, maybe now that we've got all these bits of that letter," said Earl, "we can put it together and find out what it was all about!"

"It's probably nothing..." said Kento.

"My uncle has some tape back at the camp," said Earl. "Let's see!"

\* \* \*

"It's dated just a few days ago," Earl said, looking over the two sheaves of paper that he had pieced together from the scraps. "It seems like part of a personal journal or something. Written in silver ink, of all things."

"Is there a name?" Christopher asked.

"Not so far. It's not finished."

"Maybe there are other campers in the park," said Susan. "Although Ranger Williams did say we had the whole place to ourselves."

"Did you say silver ink?" Karen asked Earl.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, n-nothing. But it would be an amazing coincidence."

"Coincidence?" Kento and Susan asked in unison.

"Well, it's just that Jason Farell always used to write with silver ink in class."

"The kidnapped kid?" Earl whispered. "You think it could be from him?"

"I doubt it. We're nowhere near Greendale. What does it say?"

Earl handed Karen a sheet of the paper. Karen scanned it and stopped to read aloud.

"I wish I could find someone to be friends with, not like the kids who just want to be around me because of my money. There are times when nobody seems to care who I really am, what I really feel inside. If they did, maybe they wouldn't envy me so much."

"Poor fellow," said Christopher. "I wonder if it is actually Jason Farell."

"It could be anyone," said Karen dismissively. "There are at least five schools that I know of in Sheldon with plenty of rich kids attending them."

"All writing with silver pens using silver ink," Kento said with a chuckle.

"I don't think this could be him, though. Jason loves people envying him. Even his silver pen, he was always flashing it around, bragging that it was actually made of real silver. He never let anybody else borrow it or even touch it."

"Well, whoever wrote this sounds like they could use a friend," said Susan.

"And some help," said Christopher. "Maybe we should return to this logger's cabin and see if we can find any other clues about who might have written this."

The others agreed, and after informing Ranger Williams of their intentions, they gathered to pray. Ever since their escapade with Skeets Manchester of Coin World, they had been wary of embarking on new and potentially dangerous adventures without first asking Jesus to lead and go with them.

\* \* \*



"This is where we found the papers scattered along," Kento said, stepping to the side of the main path and pointing to a trail that led deeper into the forest.

"Not much of a trail," said Christopher. "But it's obviously been used a few times."

Soon the team arrived at the dilapidated cabin. The front porch looked as though it was about to collapse, and Christopher stepped gingerly across it to try the door. It felt loose on its hinges, but it was still locked. Since they didn't know who this cabin belonged to, they decided not to try to force it as it could break the door. But from what they could tell through the dusty, broken windows, the place was largely

empty, with only a few pieces of furniture and empty shelves.

"So this is where the paper trail ended?" Karen asked. "Then somebody else has been here recently."

"Oh, my God!" Susan suddenly shrieked, picking up a scuffed silver pen with a name ornately inscribed on its wide clip.

"I can't believe it," said Karen. "It *was* Jason Farell!"

"What should we do?" Kento asked.

"Get out of here," said Susan. "If those kidnappers have anything to do with this place, I don't want them to find us here."

"We should tell Ranger Williams about this," said Kento.

"And the police," Susan said, and slipped the pen inside her pocket. "The sooner we get back to camp, the better I'll feel."

\* \* \*

"Yes, we need to alert the SPD as quickly as possible," Ranger Williams said after the Squad explained the situation to him. "In order to be convincing in our report, I should present the evidence myself. I'll drive into Sheldon. It'll probably take over an hour, so you should all come with me."

In spite of Ranger Williams' objections, Earl insisted on staying behind, which caused Christopher, Susan, and Karen to volunteer to stay too.

"We'll be fine," said Earl. "Maybe the kidnappers will come back, and we can see what they're up to."

"Yeah, or they can kidnap you too," Karen said.

"I wouldn't go *that* close," Earl protested. "With my binoculars I can keep an eye on the place from a safe distance, like up in a tree where they'd never think of looking."

"Then I'll go with you," Karen said.

Susan was nervous. "I'm not sure that's such a good idea."

"Don't worry, we'll be careful," Earl said.

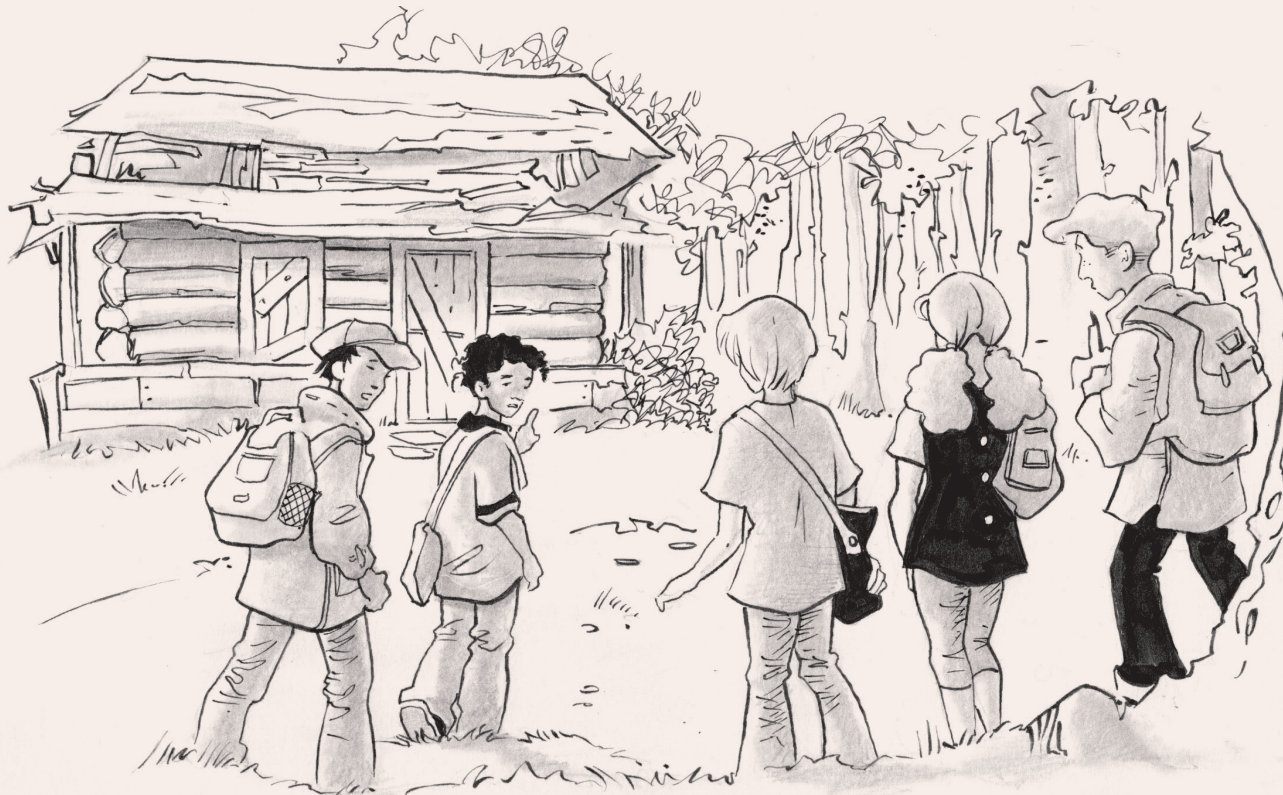
"Yeah, Earl knows how to survive in a forest—don't you, Earl?" Karen said. "We'll be fine."

"Uh ... okay," Susan said weakly.

"Be careful!" Christopher called after the two as they walked into the underbrush that surrounded their camp.

"We will," they called back.

\* \* \*



"What are you doing here?" Earl asked, when Christopher and Susan found him and Karen perched in a tree and spying on the shack some time later.

"We decided it was best if you both weren't out here alone," said Susan.

"Hmm," said Earl. "And what are you trying to do now?"

"You think I can't climb a tree as well as you?" Susan said, clambering up. "And let me have a peek with those."

Earl sighed and handed her the binoculars.

"You know what?" Susan whispered suddenly and sharpened the binoculars' focus. "I saw something move underneath



the house. Something ... or someone ... is there—in the cellar."

"There's a cellar?" said Christopher. "Funny we never noticed it before."

"Here, climb up and take a look—at that grate in the stone wall on the base of the cabin."

"You're right," said Christopher, lowering his voice. "I saw something move, too. We've got to get a closer look."

"What?" said Susan. "Are you crazy?"

"Keep your voice down," said Christopher.

"Okay. But what if it's the kidnappers?"

Susan whispered.

"Hold on," said Karen. "What if it's Jason, trapped there by himself, locked up, and this is our only chance to rescue him?"

"I'm not saying we should break down the door just yet," said Christopher as he climbed down. "I'm just going to sneak over for a closer look."

Karen and Earl joined him, and the four of them crept to the bushes at the side of the cabin where they had seen the grating.

"I'm small enough to get closer," said Earl, and crawled underneath the bushes until he was next to the grate.

Earl gasped. "Someone is tied to a chair, and he seems to be alone."

"The opening to the cellar must be inside," said Christopher. He dashed to the front door, and after he threw himself against it a couple of times, it tore loose from its padlock and crashed to the floor.

"It'd be a miracle if no one heard that," Karen said with a wry chuckle.

Inside, the children found a hatch underneath the table, and they scaled a ladder down into a dark cellar.

A boy in the center of the room turned his head as they entered. Tape covered his mouth.



"Jason? Jason Farell?" Christopher asked, nursing his bruised shoulder.

The boy nodded.

"I'm Christopher."

"And it's me, Karen—Karen Dale. You remember me?"

The boy nodded again.

"And I'm Earl."

"We're friends ... and I'm Susan."

"Enough with the introductions," said Karen, and strode towards him. "We've come to rescue you."

"Owww!" Jason responded to Karen tearing the band of tape from his mouth. Christopher was cutting the ropes binding him to the chair.

As soon as his hands were free, Jason rubbed his sore mouth. "Do you know where we are?" he asked.

"We're in Pine Ridge Forest, a ways out of Sheldon," said Karen. "We're camped nearby."

"How did you find me?"

"A trail of shredded paper!" Earl said proudly.

Jason chuckled. "I wondered if that would work. People could have thought those scraps were garbage."

"Well, I never imagined they had anything to do with you."

"But *I* found your pen outside," said Susan.

"Okay, so now what do we do?" Karen said testily.

"Exactly," said Jason.

"My uncle, Ranger Williams, went with one of our friends to contact the SPD," said Earl. "They should be here in a couple of hours or so."

"A couple of hours? Phew."

"Sheldon isn't very close to here," said Christopher.

"One thing's for sure," said Susan, "your kidnappers chose an excellent spot if they were looking for remote. I bet

they weren't counting on a few friendly campers being somewhere nearby!"

"Speaking of camps, we'd better get you to ours," said Karen. "There's no telling when your kidnappers might..."

The five children fell silent at the sound of a car pulling up outside and stood petrified as they heard its doors opening and slamming and footsteps approaching.

"Those voices don't sound like police," was all Susan could say before a silhouette appeared over the hatch and a man dropped lithely into the cellar.

"Well, well, what have we here?" he said as another person climbed down after him. It was a woman. "It looks like Jason has been entertaining friends, Wilma."

The woman sighed. "Great, Doug. More hostages—just what we need," she muttered and pulled a gun from the back of her jeans. "Okay, we're going for a ride. We'll think about what to do next once we're away from this place."

\* \* \*





Ranger Williams, Kento, and Frisky jumped out of the truck, shocked at finding the camp empty. A police car pulled up, and Lieutenant Gibbs and Officer Hooper stepped out.

"Where are the others?" Hooper asked

"No idea," Kento answered as he tousled the fur on Frisky's head. The dog whimpered. "All we know is they left to find Earl. Maybe they're..."

"...hoping to crack another case by themselves," one of the police officers said dryly.

"Anyway, we'd better get going," said Officer Hooper. Kento, Frisky, and Ranger Williams climbed into the squad car. "Just show us the way."

The shack's door was splintered and broken. Muddy tracks showed signs of a car that had skidded off in a hurry.

Officer Hooper searched the outside of the cabin, while Kento and Williams followed Lt. Gibbs into the cabin, where they discovered the open hatch to an empty basement.

"Whoever was here, they've left now," Lt. Gibbs said as he surveyed the room containing only a table with scraps of food and a threadbare mat. He noticed several syringes lying on the floor, and he slipped his hand into a latex glove to pick one up.

"Some sort of drug," he muttered. "They've probably been keeping their captives under sedation. We'll have to get this analyzed at the lab."

"Officer Hooper, may I borrow your flashlight?" Kento asked. "I think I've found something,"

"Sure. What is it?"

"There's something scratched in the dust here. A line of dots and dashes ... a code?"

"Earl!" Ranger Williams exclaimed. "I taught him Morse code earlier this year."

"Maybe he left us a clue," said Hooper.

"Can you read it?"

"Yes. It looks like letters and numbers. Not a message at all. Two zero five K X Z."

"Sounds like a license plate number to me," said Gibbs. "Let's go."

Back in the police car, Gibbs began speaking into the radio.

"Station, code 12. Hideout of Greendale kidnapers located. They have fled the area, presumably in a vehicle. Need roadblocks in a 30-mile radius from Pine Ridge Forest. Check for license number two zero five, K X Z—that's two zero five, kilo x-ray zulu. Advise caution. They may be holding five children as hostages. Recommend approach procedure 4-12."

"Roger," crackled a confirmation on the other end of the radio. "That's roadblocks around Pine Ridge Forest on the lookout for vehicle bearing the license number two zero five, kilo x-ray zulu, procedure 4-12."

"Well, kids, you'd best hop in. We've got some reports of missing children to fill in, and parents to notify."

\* \* \*



"What now, Wilma? I can't believe this," a man yelled as he opened the glove compartment and pulled out a gun. "A roadblock!"

"Put that away, Doug!" the woman shouted as she slowed the car. "We have no idea what they're looking for. Let's stay calm, and if things get hot, we'll just step on it and break through the barricades."

Doug stuffed the gun under his seat and glanced back at the four drugged children slumped on the back seat.

"They're sleepin' kinda peaceful, like..." he muttered. "Unusual kids. They seemed to handle us and this whole thing in a different way than ... you know."

"What are you ramblin' on about? Different than what?"

"Well, most other kids would've gotten hysterical and screamin' an' stuff. I think the

girl in the glasses was mutterin' prayers the whole time..."

Suddenly, Wilma pulled the car to a halt in front of two police cars and several metal barricade fences. A policeman sauntered up to her window, while another man with a dog began circling the car.

Wilma rolled down her window.

"Good afternoon, officer."

"Good afternoon, ma'am, sir," the officer said, scrutinizing the other occupants in the car. "Where are you headed?"

"Back to Hallewick."

"Hallewick? That's quite a ways from here."

"Yeah, it sure is. We've been camping here with our niece and her friends. They're pretty tired, though—were up almost all last night stargazing. They've been sleeping solid for the past hour. Is there a problem, officer?"

"There could be. We're on the lookout for an escaped convict. He is most likely armed and dangerous and might try to use this road to get somewhere."

"We haven't seen anyone, but we'll keep a lookout."

"See that you do, ma'am—and don't pick up any hitchhikers, especially not with those kids in the back. You never know who it could be."

"Thanks, officer. We'll be sure to keep that in mind."

"Very well. I won't keep you any longer," the officer said with a polite smile. "Have a good trip and drive carefully."

The officer stepped back and waved for one of the other policemen to remove the barricade fences. The man with the dog had also finished circling the car and gave the first officer an all-clear sign.

Wilma rolled up her window and inched her car past the barricade. At last, the barricade was behind them and out of sight.

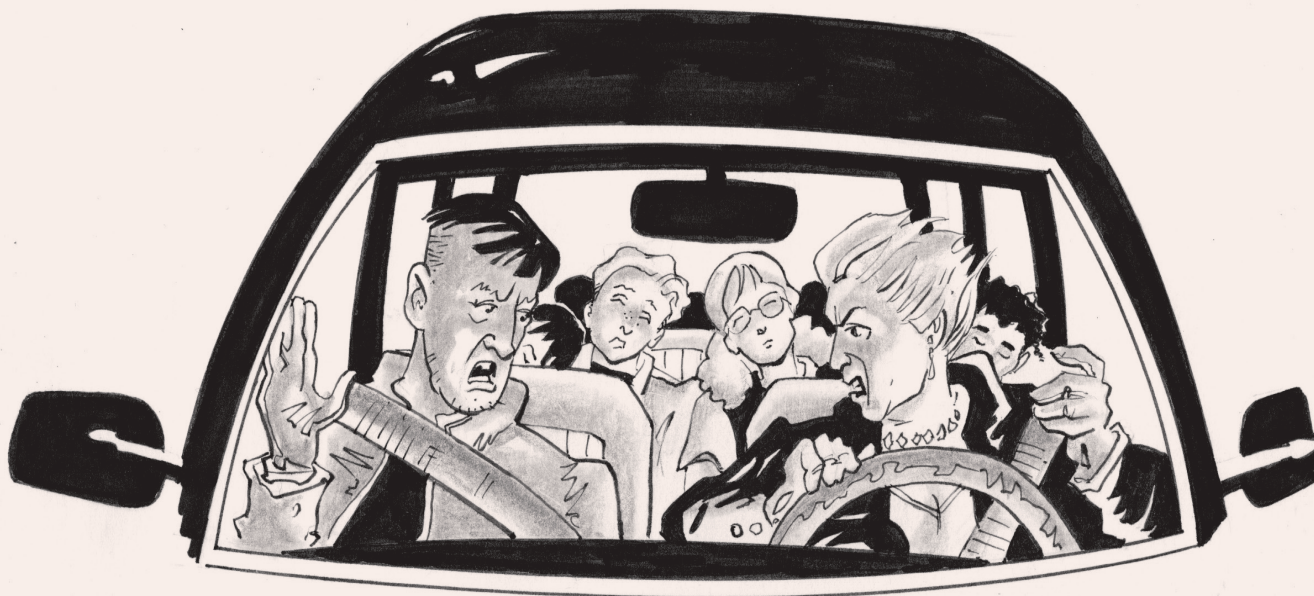
"There—that wasn't so difficult, was it?" she said with a sigh of relief and a condescending glance at her companion.

"I guess," the man answered with a nervous look through the back window. "Funny that the officer didn't think it suspicious that these kids don't look one bit like us, or that we were ending our vacation when spring break is only just beginning."

"You worry too much, Doug."

"Maybe. But step on the gas, because as soon as these kids are reported as missing, that officer is going to know exactly what way we've gone."

"Risk getting pulled over for speeding? Let me do the thinking and planning on this, okay? Those Farells are going to pay for firing me and ruining my housekeeping career ..."





Doug smirked. *With a little inventory theft on the side*, he mused.

"...and nobody—not these darn kids, and not even you, Doug—will stand in my way."

"You're the boss, baby." *As long as you give me my share when we're all done with this.*

For the next half hour, Wilma and Doug listened attentively to the drone of the radio for any mention of missing children or updates on the Greendale kidnapping case. But there were none.

In the middle of an advertising jingle, however, both Wilma and Doug became aware of a hiss that seemed to be coming from one of their tires. Before either of them could say anything, there followed the sound of a wheel rim grinding against concrete.

"A blowout!" Wilma shouted, slamming her hands onto the steering wheel as she slowed the car to a stop on the side of the road. "Just what we needed!"

"Looks like a service station up ahead," said Doug.

"I'll go check," Wilma said. "You stay right here, and if anyone asks, the back trunk is jammed, all right? We can't get anything out of there."

"Got it, babe."

Doug watched Wilma trot up to the service station. Then he waited ... and waited.

\* \* \*

"What an adventure," said Susan, as the Squad gathered, waiting at the police station.

"Talk about it," said Christopher. "But flying back here in that helicopter must have been the most exciting part."

"Not for me," said Karen. "It's left me feeling nauseous. I think finding ... umm ... Jason was the most exciting part."

"For you," Christopher said with a grin, and Karen blushed. "What about you, Kento?"

"Hmm ... I'd say discovering Earl's Morse code."

"Earl?"

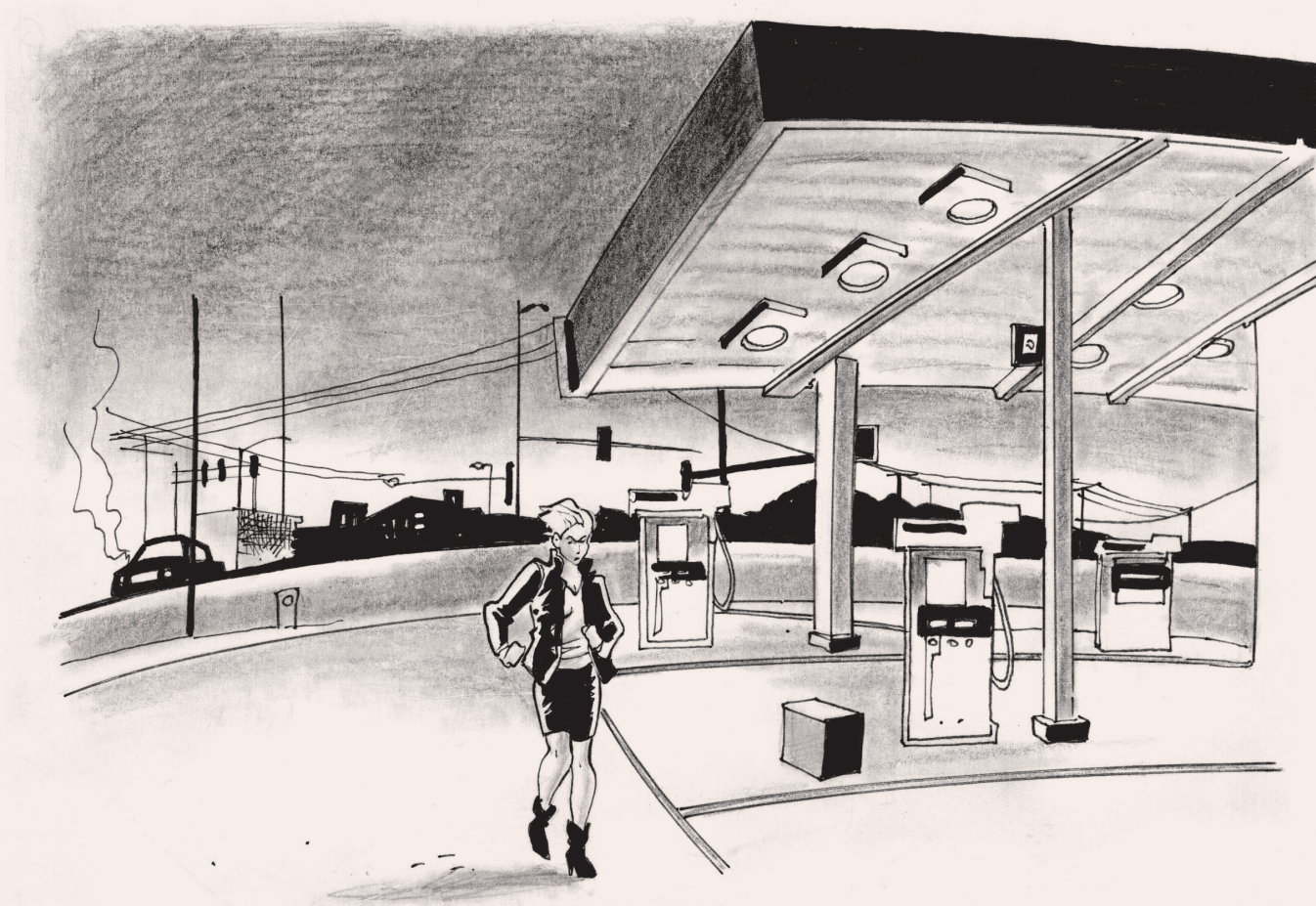
"Getting the idea to write it!"

The five were laughing hard at Earl's witty reply, when Officer Hooper entered. "Seems you are all in high spirits," he said. "Not too traumatized."

"No," said Susan. "Thank the Lord."

"You know, sir, I had never heard of remote-control tire-popping devices," said Kento. "Amazing."

"Can you fill us in on what happened, sir?" Susan asked. "Too bad we were drugged asleep through it all."





Pleased to satisfy the children's eager curiosity, the officer smiled, cleared his throat, and began. "Well, after we found your Morse code message with the car's license plate ... smart move there, kid, by the way," he added, turning to Earl, who unabashedly beamed with pride, "...we then notified the department, and so our guys at the roadblock recognized the car right away. But

since there were children in it, they couldn't risk arresting the kidnappers directly. So our guy with the sniffer dog attached this device to the car's wheel while the other officer was talking to the driver. Then once they drove off, we radioed ahead for reinforcements to be waiting at the next service station, Lt. Gibbs activated the remote and the tire deflated!"



"Clever," said Christopher. "It's movie material!"

"You're right, kid. We get lots of that on a regular basis! Anyway, so when the car got waylaid and the lady went to the service station, we were waiting to arrest her. And when the man got tired of waiting and stepped out of the car to check on her, we got him too, and the rest of you were safe!"

"But is, er ... what's-his-name, Jason okay?" Karen asked.

"He's fine," Lt. Gibbs answered, having just entered the room with Jason.

"H-hi," Jason said nervously as the five greeted him warmly. "I-I just wanted to say thank you for saving my life."

"Actually, God saved your life," said Susan.

Jason lowered his voice. "I know. I did some, you know, p-praying too."

"We didn't make all the best moves," Karen added. "Like we shouldn't have gone into the cabin on our own. That wasn't exactly smart, but we had forgotten to ask Jesus what we should do."

"Anyway, He worked it all out in the end," said Christopher. "This whole adventure could have ended really badly if we hadn't prayed for His protection."

"In any case, thank you for what you did," said Jason.

"S-so you'll be going back to Greendale now, I imagine?" Karen shyly asked.

"Yup. My parents are flying in to pick me up. I'm sure they'll give you all a substantial reward for helping in my rescue."

"The biggest reward is knowing that you are safe again," said Karen.

"Thanks."

Karen looked down, biting her lip. "There's s-something I've got to tell you."



“Huh?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? About what?”

Karen’s eyes moistened. “I-I thought you were a jerk before. I hardly got to know you when we went to school together in Greendale. It w-wasn’t right for me to judge you like I did.”

Jason blushed; it was his turn to look away. He cleared his throat.

“It’s not the first time I’ve been called a jerk. The way I was in school, I would have never made friends with someone like you. But now I see that friendships are about a lot more than who has the latest gadget, clothes ... whatever. I hope you...”

Jason hesitated, turning to the other members of the Squad who had now gathered around him. “And *all* of you, let me consider myself your friend.”

“Of course,” they responded.

\* \* \*

A few weeks later, the Squad was gathered in the lodge when Christopher heard his mother call him, saying there was a package for him. Christopher dashed over to the house and returned with a box in his hand.

“Hmmm,” said Susan. “A present for you? Nice.”

“It’s for all of us,” said Christopher. “Postmarked from Greendale.”

“From who?” Earl asked.

“Well ... judging by the address...” Christopher grinned and handed the package to Karen.

“Written with a silver pen,” Karen muttered, blushing.

“Go ahead and open it,” Christopher said, and Karen carefully opened the package. Inside were six smaller packages, each bearing a name—Christopher, Susan, Karen, Kento, Earl, and Frisky. Jason Farell had sent each member of the Squad a silver pen and a package of silver ink refills. Frisky received a silver-studded collar.

“To Christopher Fulton—thanks for being a friend,” Christopher said, reading the engraved inscription on the side of his pen.

“Sweet,” said Susan, and after reading her personalized inscription too, Kento and Earl read theirs in turn.

“And yours, Karen?” Christopher inquired.

“Umm ... j-just a tiny h-heart. But here’s a note inside the box ... for *all* of us.”

*To my friends—the Five Squad,*

*I know my parents have already given you a reward for having a part in my rescue and for having done what you all did for me. But I wanted to give you a small reward of my own. I hope these pens will help you remember that you have a friend in me, and I hope someday to help you as you’ve helped me. Maybe I can be part of your Squad?*

*Sincerely,  
Jason Farell*

“That’s an idea,” said Kento. “Then we’ll be the Six Squad.”

“Don’t know about that,” said Susan. “It would sound like the Sick Squad.”

“That means we will have to recruit another member,” said Earl.

“True,” said Christopher. “So we’d better start looking soon. Can you think of anyone?”

Frisky barked and the five children laughed.

“Doesn’t seem we have to look very far,” said Karen.