

A Kahale and Claude Mystery

#2

SHADOWS OF DOUBT

Timothy R. Baldwin



Indies United Publishing House, LLC

Copyright © 2020 Timothy R. Baldwin
www.timothyrbaldwin.com

First Edition published May 2020

Published by Indies United Publishing House, LLC
All rights reserved worldwide. No part of this
publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given
away in any form without the prior written consent of
the author/publisher or the terms relayed to you herein.

Cover design
www.fiverr.com/adeebasialo1

ISBN-13: 978-1-64456-123-2 (paperback)
ISBN-13: 978-1-64456-125-6 (ePub)
ISBN-13: 978-1-64456-124-9 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020935300

www.indiesunited.net



Also by Timothy R. Baldwin

A Shot at Mercy (2020)

A Kahale and Claude Mystery Series

Book 1: Camp Lenape (2019)

Book 2: Shadows of Doubt (2020)

Book 2.5: A Bazaar Christmas (2020)

Book 3: Operation Varsity Blues (2020)

For my students, past and present.

Chapter One

Marcus

"Runners, take your places," the announcer called through the PA system. Then, the endless drone of the meet rules began. I'd heard it a thousand times before.

Shoes snug and muscles fully stretched, I strode toward the starting line to join my team and made sure my legs stayed limber. As I did this, I glanced at the cheering fans. Mom and my younger sister Bri waved, but I didn't see Dad. Not immediately, anyway. After a quick scan, I spotted him to the right of the stands. He seemed engaged in an intense conversation with Principal Moss. I knew Moss was no joke when it came to administrating the school. Some would even say he micromanaged everything and everyone at the school, including the

Shadows of Doubt

students. I guess that was his job. Still, Dad was the school's athletic director. He didn't need Moss on him all the time. Dad was already overworked as he managed over twenty-five sports that regularly made it to the playoffs. Moss needed to let up for just a bit, so Dad could watch my first meet of the season.

"Timers, are you ready?" The announcer asked, which snapped me into focus.

We cheered. I knelt into position. Focusing on the run ahead helped me push the scene between Dad and Moss from my mind.

"Starters, are you ready?" asked the announcer. The announcer paused. "Runners, are you ready?"

In another instance, came a sharp pop. We were off. My legs took control, and my heart seemed to pump fresh blood into my veins. For the moment, my thoughts felt left behind at the starting line. Though Dad wasn't watching, my coach was.

I paced myself, keeping twenty strides behind my rival, another junior named Brad. He played for the Buccaneers of Patterson High and he had no clue he was about to be whooped on the track. This year I planned to take the lead in varsity. I only wished Dad was here, sharing this moment with me.

Marcus

* * *

"Great job out there today," Mom said.

"Thanks," I said as I breathed heavily.

I looked to Bri, who still hung by the bleachers, with her nose in her cell phone. I just hoped she'd managed to film the end of the meet on her phone. Around the end of the race, I had kicked it into high gear on the track. The roar of the fans still rang in my ears, and the image of Brad, slowing down seconds before the finish line, still lingered in my mind. I had breezed past him to win it all.

I smirked. Hopefully, Dad saw what happened. I looked around, but only adoring parents, doting on their kids, were here.

"Where's Dad?" I asked.

"I'm sorry, honey," Mom said sadly. "Dad had something Principal Moss wanted him to attend to."

I shrugged, but my mood dampened slightly. "No biggie." Before I could figure out where Dad went, Nate Wilson, my best friend, approached. Beside him, came Janice Kane. She was his girlfriend, our fellow classmate, and Alissa Claude's best friend.

"Hey, Mrs. Kahale," Nate and Janice said in unison. They both waved to my mom.

Mom chatted with Janice and Nate. As activities committee chair on the PTSA, Mom

Shadows of Doubt

wanted to know everything that happened at school.

"How's the drama production coming together?" she asked.

"Fabulous," Janice said.

"Easy for you to say," Nate said as he huffed. "I'm working like a dog backstage."

Once all the pleasantries were done, I looked around. There was no sign of Alissa. "Janice, where's Alissa?" I asked. "Her game should've been over already."

"You know, Marc," Janice said, "there is a thing called a cell phone."

My face grew hot. "I just —"

"Kidding," Janice said with a smile and a twinkle in her eye. "You really do take things literally. She's running late. Check your messages."

When my phone turned on, I caught a quick text from Alissa.

Alissa: In overtime. Running late. Cya. Hugs.

I blushed. Alissa and I were also a thing and we grew up together. Getting to the first kiss was, well, more than a little awkward, but maybe I was overthinking it. I hoped we'd get to kiss when our families went to the beach for the upcoming Labor Day weekend.

Marcus

Nate socked me lightly in the arm, which made me jump.

"Are you okay?" he asked jokingly.

"I'm good, yeah," I said. "Alissa's in overtime."

"Told ya," Janice said. "You're gonna have to get a move on, though. She'll be here soon. I'll meet you guys at the parking lot after Marcus gets cleaned up, okay?"

Nate and I parted ways with Janice and Mom. Bri was still on the bleachers. She stood, raised her arm, and took a duck face selfie on her phone. Then, she bounded down the bleachers to join Mom. I shook my head. My one shred of hope that Bri had video evidence of my victory today disappeared. She could make any moment into a photo op for her vast following on Instagram.

* * *

As we headed to the locker room, we passed the flimsy ticket collection booth. The booth was a shed with faded cream paint that usually got repainted before the season started each year. Dad said it would be replaced with a permanent structure over the summer before the ticketed sports season began. But the renovation still hadn't happened.

Shadows of Doubt

"Check that out," Nate said. He glanced behind us.

"That's weird," I said. I looked and saw the doors were open. "Dad always keeps this area locked, even when there's nothing inside. Let's check this out."

As I approached, I saw the lock had been broken. A piece of it was lying in the grass. More disturbing, cabinet drawers and their contents had been tossed about the floors.

"Looks like a break in," Nate offered.

"I don't know why," I said. "There couldn't have been anything valuable inside."

Nate reached in his pocket. "What about game tickets?"

I shook my head. "He keeps those in his office. Do you think this is what Moss was worked up about?"

"Probably." He pulled out a pen and handed it to me. "Here, I'll keep watch from outside."

I gripped the pen. "What's this for?"

As I felt the weight of aluminum in my hand, I noticed the pen point. I clicked the button, which turned on a flashlight. Now, I realized Nate had handed me a tactical pen.

Someone must have stepped up their gadgets, I thought. I set my bag down and entered the shed; its interior illuminated by the glow of the flashlight.

Marcus

As I searched the room, I saw nothing but tissue boxes, notebooks, and a few old ledgers strewn across the floor. If there was anything valuable in here, which I doubted, it was gone now.

"Marcus," Nate whispered. "We've got to get a move on. Security's coming."

Exiting the booth, I saw Nate already had my bag over his shoulder. A hundred yards away, two security guards ran towards us, closing the distance too quick for my comfort.

Together, we jogged toward the parking lot. Security shouted at us to come back. But we ignored them, hoping they didn't catch a glimpse of us. No way I wanted to answer for a crime I didn't commit.

Our feet hit the parking lot, where I spotted Nate's Jeep. Janice stood in the front seat, her arms flailing as we ran faster to reach her. "Hurry up, you two!" She shouted.

I hopped in the back of the Jeep, while Nate keyed the ignition. He peeled out of the parking lot before Janice or I could even buckle-up.

Chapter Two

Alissa

I stood in the middle of the bus, leading my soccer team in a celebratory chant as we pulled into the driveway. Suddenly, Nate's Jeep squealed past us. My eyes grew wide as I recognized Marcus, sitting in the backseat, dressed in his cross-country uniform. He clung to the handrail as the Jeep made a sharp turn. Marcus shifted suddenly in his seat, barely able to keep himself from falling out. In the front, Janice, red in the face, shouted something at Nate, who didn't appear to be slowing down.

With my teammates still chanting, I glanced at my phone, wondering whether my friends got my text. It did go through, and they were supposed to wait for me. We planned to go to Slices on the Avenue together.

The bus screeched to a halt and I sat down. From the front, Coach Becky stood up, saying, "All right, girls. Nice playing out there again. I can't say it enough. You run a tight, cohesive squad. Let's recognize our MVPs for today."

I clapped and cheered, only half paying attention to Coach Becky's commendations to the team. As she began to rattle off commendations, the way my friends peeled out of the parking lot reminded me of the past summer. Nate and Marcus together almost always got themselves into trouble. But, at summer camp, Bri went missing, and Nate's and Marcus' little game of detective got real. Something was up with my friends. I knew that much, but I also planned to let Marcus squirm a little bit in his explanation.

I only hoped I could catch up with them for dinner on time so we could catch a movie together. Sort of an informal double date. I checked my phone. I thought for sure Janice would have responded on behalf of the others. Though I shouldn't have been surprised. Like Marcus, she was clinging to her own handrail when they sped out of the parking lot.

"Now, I've got some bad news," Coach Becky continued. "On our way here, I received an email from the school finance office. There's been a delay with our new uniforms."

Shadows of Doubt

"No way!" Someone shouted above the grumbles and murmurs. "We've got to wear these itchy-old things again?" This was followed by more grumbles and complaints.

What gives? I thought, wondering if this had anything to do with the proposed budget cuts. Two weeks ago, the school staff had told us we had to wait on uniforms, but promised they'd be in. I tugged at my jersey collar as I stood up again, ready to speak my mind.

"I'm sorry, girls," Coach Becky said. "I really can't say. Something to do with processing our orders."

"Aren't the orders already in?" I asked. "We need them to play against our rivals the Buccaneers next week. We barely made it to the state playoffs last year against them."

Coach Becky gave me a quick glance before she turned her attention to the rest of the team.

"Crisp new uniforms don't make the team," she said, adding an intentional pause. "Those who practice hard and play harder make the team. On three for beating the Buccaneers... One, two, three."

We all cheered and began to file out of the bus, slapping high fives with Coach Becky as we did so. I knew what she was doing. She was right; the uniforms don't make the team. But I wasn't going to be fooled either.

Alissa

"Hey, coach," I said after she high-fived me. "We're going to have the uniforms next week, right?"

"Alissa," Coach Becky said. "I didn't say that. I can only promise they're on order, okay?"

I nodded. "These uniforms are ancient. I just don't want the Buccaneer girls making fun of us again."

Coach Becky sighed. "I get it. I wore those when I went to school here, and they were old then. I'll try my best."

I smiled weakly. I respected Coach Becky. I got the feeling she either had no idea when the order was coming. Or someone forgot to put the order in. I decided I'd let it go for more pressing matters. Checking my phone, I saw I'd gotten a couple of text.

Janice: Really sorry. Didn't mean to ditch. The boys caught some trouble.

Marcus: Will explain what happened. Will make it up to you tonight. Can't wait to see you.

I grinned and texted Marcus back. *I can't wait to see what you have planned.*

As I headed to the girls' locker room to clean up, there was a bounce in my step. The idea of wearing itchy old uniforms for another game or two sucked. Still, I looked forward to letting Marcus squirm a little throughout the night as he tried to "make it up to me" tonight.

Shadows of Doubt

* * *

A bell chimed as I stepped into Slices at the Avenue, located directly across the movie theatre. Marcus stood as I entered. Janice and Nate turned and waved but remained in their seats. Sheepishly, Marcus approached.

"Alissa," he said. "I... uh... you look really pr— beautiful tonight."

I crossed my arms. "You have to do better than that."

Blushing, Marcus looked around, as if looking for support.

Gently slapping his arm, I said, "I'm just kidding. Are you okay? It seems like you all had a tough time getting over here."

Marcus cocked his head. "You saw all that?"

"Yup!" I said, hooking my arm into his and leading us to the booth. "Now, you've got some explaining to do." When we slid in the bench across from Janice and Nate, I added, "All of you, I mean." I leaned in. "Because whatever it was has got to be crazy for you all to leave me hanging at once."

As Marcus began to fill me in on what he saw, Nate thoughtfully scratched the stubble of his chin. Ultimately, what Marcus and Nate filled

me in on was so underwhelming that Janice had to add dramatic effect at the end.

"Oh my gosh, Lis," she beamed. "You would've thought they were being chased by a wild boar the way the two of them ran. Then, Nate almost killed us both when we nearly slipped out of our seats as we passed the team bus."

Matching Janice's own enthusiasm, I forced a squeal, "That's totally nuts." I paused and dropped it down a notch. "But I'm glad you're all okay. You think security recognized you?"

"When he first saw us, probably not," Marcus said. "But the way Nate drives and the fact that he's the only one with a Jeep at school, probably."

Nate shrunk in his seat. "Didn't think about that. But there was this guy in the back seat screaming at me to get out of there."

I laughed, nudging closer to Marcus. "Now what?"

Marcus, putting a friendly arm around my shoulder, said, "I'll let Dad know about what we saw when I see him tonight."

"That reminds me," I said. "There's a hold up with our new uniforms. Can you ask your dad about that tonight?"

Shadows of Doubt

"Yeah, definitely," Marcus said. "I wonder what the deal is. Dad's usually pretty quick on getting new equipment for the teams."

As we hung out for another half hour before the movie, Janice cuddled up next to Nate. She'd pull globs of cheese off her pizza and plop it on Nate's plate. He'd gobble it up while she made a face and laughed, commenting on how gross cheese is. We gave up on telling her to order a tomato pie instead.

Yeah, they're a weird pair with surprisingly ingenious approaches to life at times. Not that giving away unwanted cheese to someone more than willing to kill it in one bite is ingenious. But it is complimentary. They suit each other.

Just like Marcus and I... well, we've known each forever, but we're still figuring out this couple's thing.

Thanks for Reading

Thank you for taking the time to read *Shadows of Doubt*. If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review. Then check out the rest of the books in the series.

A Kahale and Claude Mystery



Buy now from your favorite retailer, or visit <https://www.indiesunited.net/timothy-baldwin>

About the Author



Tim grew up in Syracuse, New York. He currently resides in Maryland where he teaches English, Creative Writing, Film, and Theatre on the middle school level. At the insistence of his own students, he began writing seriously in 2014.

He credits his love for story to his mother, who spent countless hours reading to him and his siblings when they were growing up. Growing up, he devoured the literary words of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Piers Anthony, and many others. Mysteries, thrillers, and fantasies are among the genre he most frequently reads.

When he's not writing, he's reading, teaching, camping, or enjoying a live music concert.

Visit Tim on the Web

www.timothyrbaldwin.com

facebook.com/timothyrbaldwin

Twitter [@timothyrbaldwin](https://twitter.com/timothyrbaldwin)

Instagram [@timothyrbaldwin](https://www.instagram.com/timothyrbaldwin)