

## Chapter 1

### 'You're under arrest!'

'My life is hell!' Ryan thought. Most days weren't good, but today was worse than usual. He walked out of the corner shop with a packet of cigarettes. Sixteen-year-old Ryan Atwood lived in Chino, California. Eighty kilometres away, in Orange County, there were beautiful Pacific beaches and very rich people. Chino was a different world. The Chino streets were poor and dirty. No one had any money and at night there was always trouble. Police cars were never far away. It was all Ryan knew – and he hated it.



'Hi!' His oldest friend, Theresa, was sitting outside her house. She smiled at Ryan. For a while in high school, Theresa was Ryan's girlfriend. But, for now, they were just friends – good friends.

'I got some cigarettes,' Ryan said. He gave her a

cigarette and sat down.

'Are you OK?' Theresa knew things were always hard for Ryan at home.



'Trey didn't come home until this morning and he was really drunk. Then A.J. hit me ...,' Ryan said and then he stopped. Two houses further down the street he could hear his mom, Dawn, and her new boyfriend, A.J. They were fighting again. Now that his dad was in prison, his mom usually had a boyfriend. Ryan thought A.J. was the worst. A.J. didn't have a job and Dawn paid for everything. She often drank all day and didn't go to work. A.J. didn't want Trey and Ryan around. Now Trey, Ryan's older brother, often stayed out all night.

'It's A.J.'s fault that Trey doesn't come home. Now I've got nobody,' Ryan thought. 'I want to get out of Chino.' Ryan dreamed of a better life. He knew that he could never have it in Chino.

'Tonight, let's try and forget all of that,' Theresa said.

'Do you want to stay here? You can sleep on the sofa.'

A.J. and his mom were still fighting. Ryan didn't want to go home. He smiled at Theresa and followed her inside.

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'Ryan, wake up!' Ryan sat up suddenly and looked around. There was nobody there.

'Was I dreaming?' he asked himself.

'Get up.' It was Trey. He was standing outside at the window. Ryan looked at his watch. Two o'clock in the morning? Why was his brother there?

'Come with me.'

'It's two in the morning. Where?' asked Ryan.

'I can't go home and I can't stay here. Come on,' Trey said.

'Ok ... I'll be out in a minute.'

Ryan got dressed. 'I won't leave a note for Theresa,' he thought. 'I'll be back in a few hours. I can explain later.'

He met Trey outside. 'Where are we going?' he asked.

'I can go out with my little brother for some fun, can't I? We're going to a party,' Trey said.

Ryan decided to go with Trey. They walked through the back streets until they came to a strange house.

'This isn't where Trey usually hangs out,' Ryan thought. He went in after Trey.

'Atwood. You came.' A guy came over to Trey. Trey went with him into another room.

Ryan wasn't surprised. Trey often left him alone. He went into the kitchen and got a beer from the fridge. He started to drink it but then a big guy took it from him angrily.

'That's one dollar. The drinks aren't free. Not for Trey Atwood's friends,' he said.

'What does he mean?' Ryan thought. The guy didn't seem to like his brother. Ryan paid and left the kitchen fast. He wanted to be alone. He went into the bathroom, closed the door and drank his beer.

'Why is my life always difficult?' he thought. 'I've always dreamed of leaving Chino and having a real family. But it never happens.'

Suddenly he heard loud, angry voices in the room next to the bathroom.

'Five thousand. By tomorrow morning,' someone shouted.

'Five thousand? Five thousand what? *Dollars?*' Ryan didn't understand.

'I mean it, Atwood. No money, you're dead!'

'You'll get your money,' Trey shouted.

Trey was in trouble. Ryan was frightened. He didn't know what to do.

'I could climb out of the window ... but I can't just leave Trey. He's my family.' Ryan left the bathroom and went back to the kitchen. Trey walked in.

'Let's go,' he said.

They left. Ryan didn't know what to do. Trey didn't know that he knew about the money. Ryan looked at his brother. Trey looked worried. Ryan knew that the people from the party were dangerous.

'Trey can't get five thousand dollars by tomorrow. And mom doesn't have it. They'll kill him,' he thought. The idea was terrible.

'I'm sorry,' Trey said.

'For what?' Ryan asked. But he already knew the answer.

'You know. Everything,' Trey said. Ryan knew Trey wanted to be the perfect big brother, but he was always in

trouble.

'Do you think we'll ever get out of here?' Ryan asked.

'Now? No.'

'Yeah, it's a dream,' Ryan said.

'Listen to me,' said Trey. 'I haven't learned much in my life, but I know one thing. Dreams don't come true.'

'He's right,' Ryan thought. 'Not in Chino.'

'We're not going home,' Trey said suddenly.

'What are we going to do?' Ryan asked.

'Have you ever stolen a car?'

'Stolen ... a car? No,' he said.

'There,' Trey said and pointed to a car. 'That's ours. We're getting out of here.'

Ryan couldn't believe it. Was Trey joking? But then he remembered the money and the guy from the party. He understood. Trey was leaving Chino and he was taking Ryan with him. Could he leave Chino? He was frightened. He looked at his brother.

'Are you sure?' he asked.

'Come on!' Trey said. Quickly he broke the car window. The two brothers jumped in.

'I wanted to get out of Chino,' Ryan thought, 'but not in a stolen car. This isn't going to end well.'



They started to drive down the road. Trey laughed. Ryan couldn't believe it.

'We're free,' he thought. 'We've done it. We're leaving.'

Suddenly he heard a police car. He looked out the back window and saw the red and blue lights. Trey drove faster.

'Don't worry, we'll escape,' he shouted. He almost crashed into two cars which were passing in front of them. Ryan held onto the seat. Then Trey nearly hit another car. The police car wasn't following them now.

'We did it!' Trey shouted.

But the next minute there were more police cars. Two, three, four? Ryan wasn't sure. Trey tried to lose them, but a police car crashed into their car.

'Oh, no!' Ryan thought. 'My life will never be the same again.'

The police got out of their car and ran over. Trey got out, with his arms above his head. This wasn't his first arrest. Ryan was frightened. He didn't move. Someone handcuffed Trey and put him into the back of a police car.

'Will they arrest me too? Will I go to prison? Or Juvie\*?' Ryan thought, worried.

'Get out!' one of the police shouted. 'You're under arrest!'

He handcuffed Ryan. It hurt. Then Ryan got into another police car. He thought about Theresa. 'She'll wake up and I won't be there. She won't know what's happened. I didn't even leave a note.'

As they were driving away, Ryan could see Trey's face in the other police car.

'Will I ever see Trey again?' he asked himself, sadly. He felt more alone than ever.

\* 'Juvie' is a kind of prison centre for young people under the age of 18.