

Lea Park Chapter 8

Stephen and Ryan were unlikely scout-mates, but were thrown together each summer.

The scouts served only as a focal point for each day, and even then a weary teenage half-heartedness was the predominant level of anyone's commitment.

At the beginning of each week, a couple of scout leaders would show up, and try to instil some form of organization into them. If there was any plan or objective, it was that they were making preparations for the annual scout camp, which took place each year, in the last week of the vacation. But other than that, it was endless games of *Capture the Flag*, the occasional camp fire (which weren't exactly allowed in the park), and some community singing. At fourteen, there was only so much singing of *If I had a Hammer* that they could take. The first few games each day were alright, but the more recent ones just seemed to pale. Same stupid teams. Same winners. Same arguments.

Although Ryan was Stephen's utter nemesis at school, during the summer they were forced to get along. Stephen's mother actively encouraged it. She claimed that Ryan came from the *right sort of people*, which usually meant that they were a little richer and better connected than she was. Ryan often boasted about his family's car, their boat on the lake, and their fifty-eight inch TV set, but nobody had ever seen any of those things. The car was always 'in for a service' and the boat was usually 'moored up for the winter'. Even in summer. So Ryan coming from the right sort of people simply meant that he came from reasonable, working people from just about the right side of town.

But taking Ryan anywhere was actually unsafe.

He wasn't a bad kid, he just wanted to be, so he had developed a habit of doing the wrong thing. At school it was all contained within the campus, and although he had once managed to half-incinerate a classroom and partially-destroy the principal's car, he was quite safe there. It was when he was let out that things had a tendency to go really wrong.

Especially if there were girls involved. He just couldn't help himself.

It was mostly showing off really. A bit of stealing. Some minor vandalism. A touch of arson here and there. No-one ever got hurt. He always returned the money. He helped repair the damage. He was that kind of person - a kind person actually, just someone who made wrong decisions quite a lot of the time, and who seemed to like doing it. Oh - and he seldom got caught.

Stephen never made wrong decisions, because he never made any decisions at all. He was a *go with the flow* kind of guy, so when the inevitable drift down towards the park happened each morning, he just drifted with it. He packed up a couple of cheese and onion sandwiches, or took money for a hot dog, dragged himself onto his bike, took the same five-minute route through the suburbs, under the overpass through to the eastern entrance, passed by the shelter, and sat in the same clearing at the north end of the park, waiting for something to happen.

Which it very rarely did.