

Lea Park Chapter 10

One of the girls stepped forward.

She was tall, elegant for her age, and towered over Ryan as she approached, her red hair spilling out from under a brown cowboy hat.

'You think we're impressed, you fool?' Her tone was immediately dominant and accusatory. No-one spoke to Ryan like that at school. Ryan seemed actually taken aback.

'People actually lived there, y'know. Real people. Real lives.'

'Er, well...I'm like sorry I did it, right? It was just an accident. Kinda.'

As Ryan dug deeper, he didn't notice Stephen waving his hands frantically in front of him, as one of the officers minding the site emerged from his car and started making his way towards where Ryan was holding court. Ryan's final comment condemned him.

'Yeah well it wasn't worth keeping anyway. I'm glad it's gone.'

Officer Chavez, a man of at least three hundred pounds, stumbled on the loose gravel surrounding the fence, almost toppling over as he struggled to remove his handcuffs from his belt. Stephen gasped.

'You'd better come with us, son.' Ryan's heat-reddened face turned ashen gray as Chavez fumbled with the handcuffs around his wrists. Ryan seemed torn between keeping up the bravado, and resisting being arrested for something he didn't do. Chavez continued.

'These good people have just witnessed you confessing to a clear act of criminal damage by arson.' It sounded serious. The trio of girls turned and started to melt away. Stephen was about to speak in defence of Ryan, who seemed to wait a moment until the girls had dispersed, then said,

'Well, I...y'know I didn't actually...'

'You confessed, son. And I have witnesses.' From what Stephen knew of the law (mostly from *Be your own Attorney*), securing the witnesses was an important part of the process, but Chavez and his colleague (a stick-thin rookie called Liam) seemed in no hurry to question anyone. They bundled Ryan into one of the cars.

Stephen stood and strained to hear what they were saying to him through the open door of the police vehicle. He distinctly heard the words *cells* and *charged*. After what seemed like an hour or more, the car drove off with Ryan inside.

He struggled to turn and held up his manacled hands to Stephen, desperation in his eyes.