

# Chapter One

**R**obinson Paige was only fourteen years old, but he'd already seen a lot of folks get arrested. Sometimes on the news, sometimes on cop shows or at the movies. Most often, he saw it in person since he lived on the baddest block in the baddest hood in the very bad city of Ironwood.

Robin—everyone called him that except for the enemies who'd nicknamed him “Shrimp”—shared an apartment with his grandmother. The apartment was on Ninth Street, directly over her little restaurant, the Shrimp Shack. They lived in fear of the biggest gang in the city, the Ninth Street

Rangers. The Rangers sold drugs and terrorized everyone on the block. His grandmother even paid the Rangers a hundred bucks a week so they wouldn't wreck her business.

Every so often, the cops would swoop in to arrest a Ranger or two. Robin could watch the bust from his cracked bedroom window. The arrests were for show. The charges never stuck. The gangstas always came back.

Robin was a good kid. Good in school, good to his buds, good to the neighbors, good to his grandma. He wasn't the kind of kid who got himself arrested.

At least, that's what he thought.

“Help! Help me!” Robin screamed as the cops hustled him away from the Barbara Jordan Community Center. No one had, so far. He'd seen the cops' badges when they'd grabbed him. Officer Leedham was

tall, older, and white. Officer Goodall was shorter, younger, and black. Both were in black pants, white shirts, and blue windbreakers, with IRONWOOD PD in huge yellow letters on the back. Both had guns. Both were scary.

“Shut your face!” Leedham clamped a hand over Robin’s mouth.

“Ain’t nobody gonna help your sorry ass, Robin Paige!” Officer Goodall tightened his grip on Robin’s right arm.

“Why are you taking me? What’d I do?” Robin screeched

“That’s for us to know and you to find out,” Leedham told him. “Now shut up and get in the car!”

Their cruiser was parked by the loading dock. Goodall opened the rear door. They shoved his head down roughly and pushed him inside. He slumped in the backseat, feeling even smaller than his five feet and

ninety-eight pounds. His knees were like jelly. His blue school uniform was soaked with flop sweat. Thoughts pounded in his head as the cruiser shot onto busy Marcus Garvey Boulevard.

Why had they arrested him? What had he done? Didn't he have a right to know what was happening? Did he get popped for BWB—"Breathing While Black?" Or was it something worse?

A frightening thought smacked him. *Maybe this has to do with the Rangers' money.*

The week before, Robin had learned that the Center needed twenty-five thousand dollars for repairs, or it would close its doors forever. Just that Monday Robin had figured out where the drug dealers hid their money before they brought it to Rangers' headquarters.

Robin had snuck out of his apartment at night and stolen that money. Then, with

the help of his two buddies, Sylvester “Sly” Thomas and Karen “Kaykay” Knight, he’d secretly donated it so the Center could stay open. The only other person who knew about this was the kids’ best friend at the Center, old Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith said that Robin was like Robin Hood, stealing from bad guys and giving to the good.

*Is this some kinda revenge for me taking the money? Are these cops working with the Rangers? If they are? I’m dead.*

The cruiser headed north on Garvey. Robin peered out at the familiar storefronts. His mind was reeling—too many things didn’t make sense.

*Why didn’t they put cuffs on me? There’s no siren. And there’s no backup!*

*They always send two cars when they make a bust!*

A metal grate separated Robin from the cops. He took a chance and called out.

“Please? Can you tell me where we’re really going?”

Goodall swung around to face him. He held up a bag of chips.

“Relax, Robin.” Goodall’s voice was actually reassuring. “What happened back there was just an act, in case anyone was watching. You want some Doritos? Or some water?”

*Just an act? What does that mean?*

*They have to be messing with my mind!*

“Not funny,” Robin muttered.

Goodall pushed a water bottle through a hole in the grating. It fell at Robin’s feet. “No one’s joking, Robin. No one’s arresting you. Drink up.”

Robin was baffled. “What do you mean, no one’s arresting me?”

“Because you’re not under arrest. It was an act,” Leedham repeated. “Be cool. We’ll be there soon.”

“Be where?” Robin demanded.

“Just be cool,” Goodall advised.

Even with the cops’ reassuring words, Robin’s throat was still parched from fear. The water bottle was tempting. “That water isn’t drugged, is it?”

Both cops laughed.

“We got a flippin’ comedian on our hands,” Leedham commented.

“A regular Chris Rock,” Goodall agreed.

“You think he likes frozen yogurt?” Leedham wondered aloud.

“I guess we’re gonna find out!” Goodall declared. “You doin’ okay back there, Robin?”

Robin stayed silent. He was sure the cops were playing with his head. It had to be some kind of setup. They were now out of the hood, heading into an unfamiliar white neighborhood.

He thought maybe the best thing to do was try to escape.

He tried the door handle. It was locked. He was trapped.

The ride continued. The neighborhood got nicer; full of upscale shops and restaurants that Robin and his grandmother could never afford.

His grandmother. Robin was desperate to call her. Wasn't he entitled to a phone call? But what could he say?

“Hi, Gramma, it's Robin. I'm in a cop car, and I don't know why!”

All of a sudden, Leedham swerved the cruiser into an open parking space outside a frozen yogurt shop called Fro-Yo.

*Holy moly.* They hadn't been kidding about the frozen yogurt.

*What the hell is going on here?*

The cops were gentle as they helped Robin out of the car. “We're really sorry, Robin. We never would have brought you



here like this if your grandmother hadn't said okay," Leedham told him.

Robin's eyes got wide. "My grandmother knows about this?"

Goodall grinned. "Here she is. Why don't you ask her?"

Goodall pointed to the door of the frozen yogurt shop. Robin's mouth fell open as he saw his grandmother step outside. Known to the whole hood as Miz Paige, she was as tall as many men, big, and brassy. She smelled of shrimp and perfume when she embraced him.

"Oh, Robin, Robin," she said softly. "I'm sorry if you got scared. The police wanted to talk to us both. They thought this was the safest way."

Robin looked up at her. She was smiling, but he saw worry in her eyes. That wasn't good.

“Talk about what?” Robin’s voice was guarded. He still wondered if this had something to do with the Rangers.

Goodall put a hand on Robin’s shoulder. “Come on inside and eat some frozen yogurt. We’ll fill you in.”

They found seats inside the shop. Robin, his grandmother, and Goodall were the only black faces. Mostly it was white moms with their kids or Latina nannies with white kids. Goodall brought him a frozen yogurt piled high with nuts and sprinkles, but he was still too shook up to eat.

Leedham, the older cop, talked first.

“Before we get going, Robin, people are gonna ask about what just happened. You’ll say you got arrested by mistake. Got it? Don’t tell anyone we wanted to talk to you and Miz Paige together. Got it?”

Now that he was safe, Robin felt more angry than scared. “No! I don’t got it. If you