

# CHAPTER 1

**C**onvoy's house reeks. I could get high just standing in his living room. I look around while he's filling my order. Hundreds of plants on makeshift sawhorse tables. Grow lights. Fans. Classic hard rock thumping in the background.

I've been here a few times. It's still impressive. He's got an outside grow too, hidden under the redwood trees. Or so he tells me. The location is secret. He doesn't want people ripping him off.

"Here you go." Convoy emerges from a bedroom. He hands me a paper sack. With his long beard, fat belly, and overalls, he looks like Santa Claus. Or maybe Santa Claus's grungy brother.

"Thanks." I take it from him.

"Almost trimming season," he says. "Want a job?"

"Maybe." My friend Eric told me trimming pays good, but it's tedious. And I'm always worried about getting busted. There's a California medical certificate tacked to Convoy's living room wall. This is clearly more than

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what's legal. I'm nervous. "So, see ya," I say. Then I head to the door.

"Hey, Diego," he says. "Got a minute?"

"Not really."

"Come on. I want to show you something. You'll appreciate this."

I take a breath. I want to leave. But I'm curious enough to say, "Okay. A minute."

I follow Convoy's wide butt down a long hallway. Turn to the right. He stops in a small room pasted on the back of the house. That's typical for the old houses around here. Lots of add-ons. What's not so typical is what's in the room. Beakers. Bunsen burners. Scales. Chemicals. I glue myself in the doorway. Don't want to get any closer.

"What is it?" I ask, although I have a good idea.

"Meth." Convoy grins. "I'm branching out."

"Is it safe?" The lab looks sloppy to me. Like it could blow up any second.

He shrugs. "It's safe if you know what you're doing."

"Don't you make enough money with weed?"

"There's never enough, son. I'm supporting an ex-wife and four kids. Anyway, how much more trouble can I get into?"

He has a point. But now I'm even more nervous. "I have to go."

"I've got some ready," he says. "Nice quality." He pulls

two tiny bags from his pocket. White powder sparkles inside. “Try it. Give one away. Let me know what you think about it.”

“No thanks.”

“Are you sure? It will sell itself.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m just ... I’m not into it,” I say.

He shrugs. “Suit yourself.”

I’m out of there. Convoy’s pit bull and Rottweiler follow me down the front steps. I forget their names. I’d pet them, but I haven’t figure out if they’re friendly or just pretending. I shove the bag of weed into my backpack. Ride my bike down Convoy’s gravel driveway to the dirt road.

It rained this morning. The road is muddy and slick. Redwood trees tower over me, filtering out the sunlight. It takes all of my focus not to slide and take a header.

A mile later I reach the paved highway. The emerald forest turns into pastures. I ride past dairy farms. Sheep farms. Goat farms. The cheese factory where my aunt works. Into the town of Seton, where cows, sheep, and goats way outnumber people.

I park my bike next to our duplex. Lock it to the gas meter. I want to keep the bike in my room, but my aunt births a cow (heh) when I get mud in the house.

I head straight to my room. Rummage in the corner of my closet. Toss shoes and my soccer ball off the old wooden toy box. Slide it across the floor. Pull the sandwich

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bags and scale out from under a stuffed tiger and an old Xbox. Convoy bought the scale for me. After I explained my aunt and dad would not understand why a seventeen-year-old needed a scale.

I set a clean sheet of drawing paper on the floor. Carefully measure out several one-ounce bags. I like this part. It's like a meditation. Weigh weed. Seal weed in sandwich bags. Layer bags in toy box. It gives me time to think. Not always a good thing. But I do it anyway.

I think about Convoy and his new meth lab. Seems like a risk, but what do I know? He's right. He's already in major trouble if he gets busted. He's also right about meth selling itself. Lots of kids at school use it. Adults too. People who buy my weed often ask if I can get meth for them.

But no. No way. I'm afraid I'd like it. Get hooked. Anyway, I don't need a lot of money. Just enough to support my weed habit. Buy a few art supplies. Save for tuition to art school.

My phone dings. It's a text from Tanya. "U home? I'm alone XOXO <3"

I text back, "Cool. See u in a few"

My task done, I set aside two bags. One for me, one for Tanya. I put the remaining weed and scale in the bottom of the toy box. Put the toys back inside. And return the box to the closet. Layer the shoes and ball on top. Close the door.