

CAUGHT



I can't believe I'm in here again. I promised myself I would never be back.

I fell back into the lower bunk, my head in my hands. The other inmates were watching TV at the end of the unit so I knew I wouldn't be disturbed. I could afford a few moments to myself.

It's probably not the same cell as last time, but it's identical. The big metal gray door, the tiny window, the two "roommates." Just like last time. The cells are made for two, but they never just put two in them, do they? I hate this place. It stinks worse than the high school locker room after football practice. And the air never moves. Everyone in here stinks. I stink.

The negative thoughts would not stop swirling around in my head. I looked down at my county-issued orange jumpsuit, white socks, and foam sandals. "It's not even my fault," I said out loud to the empty cell.

I can't believe I got arrested again, and for something so stupid, I thought. It started as a way for me to have a good time. It was just beer, no big deal. Jeff, my best friend, and I were shooting the breeze on Jeff's front porch. He lives two blocks from my house.

"Cold beer sure would be good right now," Jeff said.

"Sure would," I agreed. I knew that drinking on a suspended sentence was against the rules, but who would find out? Nobody would even care. "Got any cash?"

"Nope. Don't need it." Jeff winked at me, reached in his pocket for the keys to his pickup, and motioned for me to follow. I knew what he wanted to do. Neither of us spoke as he drove the truck to the convenience store. We left it running and both got out.

We walked in and smiled at the clerk. He looked at us and returned to counting cartons of cigarettes. I wasn't worried about him. He was just some fool working for a few bucks an hour. He probably wouldn't even try to stop us.

We went to the back corner of the store. Jeff and I both grabbed a twelve-pack of beer and headed toward the counter. The clerk stopped counting, turned toward the register, and had just enough time to see us laugh and run to the truck. The clerk was on the phone by the time I closed the passenger door.

Jeff backed the truck away. I tore open the box of beer and grabbed a single can. We both laughed like crazy because we got away with it. Jeff drove the truck out of the parking lot, turned right, and headed south. He waited until he'd made the turn to pull the light switch on so that the license plate would not be illuminated. Just three more turns and we'd be home free ~well on the way to a great night.

Not one second after the lights came on, the truck died. That's when we stopped laughing. I looked at Jeff in amazement. How could he plan a stunt like this without enough gas in his truck? I was terrified. The store was less than a block away.

It must have been a slow night for the cops. A police cruiser pulled up behind us with its overhead lights on. And that was it. All I could do was cup my head in my hands and shake it in disbelief. My chest tightened, my heart beat faster, and my mind raced, wondering, *How will I tell Mom? How long am I going to be locked up? What kind of life will I have now that I've been arrested again?*

It's not even my fault. If that idiot had just put some gas in the truck, neither one of us would have been caught. My life sucks.

None of that mattered now. Nothing mattered.