

CHAPTER ONE – THE QUESTION

RESERVATIONS CONFIRMED!

“Paul,” Mrs. Pontiac said, peering over the top of her HP laptop toward the living room where her young teenage son was lounging across their couch watching “The Jetsons” on TV Land, like he normally did most Saturday mornings. “How would you like to go with me to visit your brother in High Point for a couple of weeks?”

*My brother? High Point? And for two whole weeks? Heaven forbid! Every time Jack gets near me, he usually acts like an overgrown butthead. No, thank you! I'd definitely prefer to stay right here in good ol' Hollywood, Florida. That way I could either hang out with my friends, go swimming in our pool, or head out to the horse ranch and ride Half Pint.*

“Do I have to go, Mom?” Paul asked, deliberately dragging out the word go for at least a couple of seconds.

“No. Not if you really don't want to,” Ellen replied. “But since I just reserved a couple of airline tickets, I thought you might be interested.”

“Airline tickets?!?” Paul said, jerking himself to a sitting position. *Whoa. That's different.*

“Would that mean we'd actually fly to North Carolina, instead of making that long tedious drive like we usually do?”

“That's right,” Ellen said, displaying a broad smile.

“Hmm. You know summer vacation has just gotten started,” Paul said, clearly mesmerized by the thought of boarding a 747 for the first time in his life. “If I do decide to go with you, how soon would we leave?”

“Monday morning.”

“Cool. But what about Half Pint? She'll need to be fed and groomed.”

“She'll be OK. Your dad would take care of her.”

A crease instantly appeared across the middle of Paul's forehead.

*With the way Dad's drinking has gotten steadily worse these past few months, I wouldn't be too sure about that.*

“Mom, are you sure we could depend on him? You know how he's been recently. And I'd die if anything happened to her.”

“I know. But I can assure you, there’s nothing to be worried about.” Though she tried to sound positive, Ellen shared her son’s concern. After all, it was just last night that her husband, once again, had come home after work, drunk. He then proceeded to yell incoherently at them about something he was blaming on her and Paul. Shortly thereafter, he passed out on the couch.

“Your father knows that Half Pint means a lot to you, and I’m sure he would take good care of her while we’re gone. However, if you want to, you could ask Tim if he’d be willing to keep an eye on her.”

“I think I just might.” Paul then noticed the time being displayed in the bottom right hand corner of their 50-inch plasma TV. “By the way, Mom. Isn’t it about time for us to be heading out to the horse ranch? Yesterday I told Tim that I would be meet him inside the stables no later than 9:30 this morning, and it’s nine already. He’s probably already waiting for me.”

Ellen briefly glanced at her watch. “We’ll be leaving soon. But before we do, I’d like for you to eat breakfast.”

Paul glanced in her direction and exhaled as he shook his head. “OK Mom. If you insist.”

Sliding himself on top of one of the stools at the breakfast bar a few seconds later, Paul grabbed a box of Sugar Pops and filled his bowl. *I’ll definitely need to remember to ask Tim to keep an eye on Half Pint*, he thought as he reached for the milk. *That’s the only way I can be assured that Half Pint would be taken care of while I’m gone.*

Minutes later, he skidded through his bedroom door. Quickly snatching everything he thought he might need during the next 24 hours, he then headed toward the living room where his mom was waiting.

“Gee, I wish you could get ready to go that fast when it’s a school day,” Ellen said, standing next to the front door with her arms crossed, tapping her foot.

Paul, in reply, just looked up at her and smiled.

*Well. How about that?* he thought as he proceeded down the walkway toward their blue Chevrolet Impala. *I guess there are a few things in life that parents will never understand.*