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## LEAVING HOME

I consider myself one of the luckiest cats in the whole world; this is not an exaggeration of any sort. I was born in Dark City, Nebraska a very friendly place, with a population of 100,000. It has two malls, one of which is large the other is small. Thankfully, Dark City College brings in another 10,000 residents into town every school year, most of which leave during the summer and other holidays.

Considering that I am a very intelligent American Tabby it's no wonder that I love the school spirit. Drs. William and Marcia Abbot are my beloved parents. They raised me quite well, taught me how to be an honest and polite kitty, and to love my beloved country, America. My parents are successful psychiatrists who work at the Dark City General Hospital. Our hospital is so incredible many of the patients therein are from other towns and cities in Nebraska. A smaller percentage of the patients are from the Midwest, and yet others are from far away, including a sleuth of foreign countries.

I am getting ready to go to bed, but at the same time, I am waiting for my milk and maple cookies. Mom always gives me both before going to bed. I know I am not supposed to sleep immediately after eating, but honestly, I only eat six cookies and drink about 500 ml of 1 percent milk. After finishing my tasty snack and drink I always brush and floss, then leap onto my bed and close my eyes. More so, I am an only child. My parents told me that they only wanted one son so they could spoil him rotten. Do not get me wrong. I am spoiled, but I am not a spoiled brat. There is a humungous difference between the two. There is nothing wrong with being spoiled, but a spoiled brat is a pathetic person. The latter is spoiled to the bone, always complaining because he or she wants more, is thankless and immature, not me.

Awesome, my mom just entered my bedroom. "Jason, remember to brush your teeth and to floss after you're done. Do not dare leave a mess, no television after you are done; sleep is very important for a young kitty like you. Tomorrow's Friday, remember, daddy and I only work Mondays through Thursdays."

"Thanks mom, and tell dad good night, I will do whatever is needed. In addition, umm, tell dad that I love both of you so much! You have given me more than I deserve. I don't know how to thank you."

"Jason, don't you remember? I just wanted to see if you forget or not. Remember what I told you last summer about dad and I retiring 'next summer'. Well, it is already next summer, and that is not all. We are going to have more time together. Who knows, maybe sometime in the near future a long vacation will be in the making." Mom grinned at me, turned, and then walked out of my bedroom.

Oh, I guess I forgot to tell you, my parents are in their seventies. They adopted me from an animal shelter. I was so woe-be-gone a little kitty that was born in an animal shelter, my biological mother was so sickly she died immediately after giving birth to me. Anyway, in the beginning I thought my biological father would somehow show up and explain to me what really happened, and why he left mom all alone.

Everything went just fine that night. I was able to watch a few late night oldies cartoons, Tom and Jerry are classics. I knew I was not supposed to watch T.V., but I just could not help it. How could I have my snack and drink without some form of entertainment.

I woke up the following day. The first thing that I heard was the buzzing sound of my alarm clock. After turning it off I noticed that it was 8:00 A.M., time for breakfast. It was easy to get out of bed, considering I could smell my favourite breakfast, which included French toast and milk. I leaped out of

bed then walked to the stairwell, descending and then continuing onward until I entered the kitchen.

"Mom, I don't feel like sitting on a chair today. Can you please place my breakfast on the floor?" Mom grinned at me then turned her head to face my father. After pausing for a moment, she grinned at him too. The sun's rays entered through the kitchen window, striking the left side of my face. I squinted, my eyes unable to withstand the beam of light.

"Don't worry, Jason, I know what's going on. That powerful beam of light is making you squint. The sun has no mercy on anyone; when it does that," dad barked. He walked to the kitchen window, partially closed the curtains just enough to protect me from the sun's rays and then returned to his chair.

"Mom, dad what's going on? Come on, I know that you are hiding something from me. I'm your only child therefore I absolutely demand that you answer my question!" My parents grinned at each other then directed their gaze at me.

"All right, Jason, we wanted to tell you about our plans tomorrow morning, but considering you're ready for the news, well, here it is the three of us are going to Orangeville, Nebraska tomorrow. We are going to drive there after lunch. How does that sound?"

"Awesome, dad ... mom, I mean, I'm long overdue for a vacation. Can I have permission to visit Timmy? I have to tell him the good news. In addition, umm, I want to stay over at his house until after dinner. Is that okay?" Timmy was my best human friend in the whole world, a red-haired, freckled-faced third grader who also happened to be my next-door neighbour.

"Oh, Jason, this will be your last goodbye. We are not coming back. Your mom and I decided to retire in Orangeville it is a nice place for retirees. Initially, we told you it was a vacation; this was an icebreaker of sorts. We wanted to know how you would respond. You are happy, so it is all right to open up to you.

My parents grossly miscalculated my response. I totally freaked out. No warning, no nothing, how could my parents do this to me. "Why didn't you tell me earlier? It is not fair! Mom, dad, I am going to lose all of my friends, especially Timmy. I don't know anyone in stupid Orangeville, and one more thing, what kind of psychiatrists are you?"

"Jason, may a cat bite your tongue! You must apologize to me and to your father immediately. We didn't raise you to be a bad mouth, especially to us, your beloved parents."

I lowered my head then shifted my gaze unto the exit of the kitchen. For a moment, I thought about leaving the kitchen without responding, but then I had a quick change of heart.

"Okay, mom, dad I'm very sorry for lashing out at you, but please understand that I'm going to miss my friends very much. And another thing, Orangeville is good for retirees, old hens and raisin-skinned men, I ... umm sorry I didn't mean to say that." My parents remained silent, carrying a sad expression on their faces. I stayed in the kitchen for a few minutes before saying goodbye and then headed to Timmy's house.

I left our mansion in a sad, dilapidated state. What was I going to tell Timmy, and how was he going to react? I walked through our beautiful lawn, admiring the flowers, grass, and three beautiful trees therein, a flash thought ran through my mind; I would run away from home, hide out for a few months, and then live with Timmy. The Johnson family always appreciated me going to their home. Perhaps, I could become their new adoptee.

That thought buzzed through my head until I reached the door of the Johnson home. That is when I came back to reality. It would not work! I had to stay with my parents. Besides, the Johnson family would never agree to my proposal, they would be breaking the law. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were very successful corporate attorneys.

I rang the doorbell twice and then waited attentively for someone to appear. The sun was almost directly overhead, illuminating the entire area within the horizon. Timmy opened the door. He was still wearing his pyjamas. I had to find out why.

"Timmy, what's going on here? Why are you still in your pyjamas? It's late."

"Jason, I was watching T.V. and time flew by faster than the speed of light. What can I say? Well, are you going to just stand there, or are you going to come in?" Timmy and I scanned the area outside of his home. Then, I leaped unto his chest and then we both embraced each other tightly. We dared not do this publicly. The people in our neighbourhood would talk. Even our parents never kissed us. It was kind of like living under the domain of John B. Watson, the late renowned Behaviourist. He believed that parents should not cuddle their children. Watson's granddaughter, Mariette Hartley, a famous actor was raised in this manner. I am surprised she did not go nuts. She claimed that she went into acting for this reason; actors must be very expressive, the anti-thesis of stringent behaviourism. Anyway, enough with the technical talk, the story must continue.

"Timmy, take Jason up to your room. I'll be there in a few minutes with a couple of popsicles, okay."

Mrs. Johnson was a very generous soul. Whenever I visited Timmy, the first thing she did was to ensure that I got a snack, sometimes a snack and later a wholesome meal. I sensed that she wanted me to be her second son come to think of it maybe I would

have been better off that way. However, today was like no other day. I was not in the mood to eat or drink anything. Somehow, the thought of leaving Timmy and all of my other friends, not to mention my hometown, was too painful.

"Mrs. Johnson, please. Do not be offended. I'm feeling kind of tired today, what about a rain-check on the popsicle?"

Mrs. Johnson appeared bewildered, but understanding. She nodded indicating an affirmative response then slowly walked away. That was the last time I ever saw her, she had no idea of that.

Timmy and I approached the stairwell, took a deep breath and then slowly scaled it. I could not help but notice the beautiful 17th and 18th century paintings aligning the walls and the beautiful chandeliers too. I felt like I was taking a trip back to Europe's past. Nonetheless, Timmy earnestly noticed my mannerisms and quietness. As soon as we reached the second floor, he placed the palm of his left hand over my neck indicating that he wanted me to stop and listen to what he had to say.

"Jason, come on, please tell me what's wrong. You're my best friend in the whole world; please, tell me or else I'll have a nervous breakdown."

Timmy could not wait a single moment he ran to the entrance of his bedroom and waited for me. The expression on his face indicated extreme anguish. The truth of the matter is his anguish had not even begun.

Upon entering Timmy's bedroom, I closed the door and then motioned him to lie down on his bed. Then, I leaped onto his bed. I extended my forelegs and then cupped Jason's face. I expected the worst. In addition, now that I am opening up about our close relationship, I must admit that Timmy had some emotional problems. He was not a normal kid I guess everyone's abnormal it is a matter of degree. Society as a whole accepts a certain level of abnormal behaviour from people, but not weirdo behaviours.

"Timmy, you and I are like blood brothers, no, much closer than that. We're best friends in the whole world and I for one can't imagine what it'll be like to live without you, even for one day."

Timmy interrupted me without warning. "Wait a minute! What do you mean by that? What is going on here! Jason, are you teasing me or something?"

"Jason please listen to me, very carefully do not jump the gun when it comes to judging me, and please understand that this oncoming situation is out of my control; I can't do anything about it!

My parents just told me that we are moving to Orangeville tomorrow, and we are never coming back. My parents are very old, and it is important for them to retire. I have now come to my senses. My walk to your home cleared my mind. I'm going to miss you so very dearly."

"No, you can't leave me! Please, Jason, do not leave me! Don't be like my sister ... I mean ..."

"Wait a minute. Timmy, are you hiding something from me? Remember our 'honesty pack'. We promised each other that we would never keep any secrets. Now, tell me about your sister."

Timmy started crying tears streamed down his cheeks. "Okay, I didn't tell you about my sister because it was too painful for me to convey the story. I had an elder sister who disappeared. I have vague unforgettable memories of the incident. It happened on a Saturday morning she told mom and dad that she was going to the supermarket to buy some gum. She never returned. My parents did everything they could. They called the police and they pasted over a thousand posters indicating my sister's photograph, description, and contact details. Nothing came of it. Now, I'm going to be forced to go through this process again, no, it's worse, because I've known you longer than I knew my sister, and not only are you my best friend in the whole world, you're also better than a blood brother to me, and a neighbour too, not to mention, I love cats."

I thought Timmy was going to have a nervous breakdown, or worse. I had to de-escalate the situation fast. However, just before I uttered my first word Timmy's mother opened the bedroom door and then came in. What happened thereafter made matters a lot worse but to tell you the truth I was completely helpless. Timmy did not notice his mother's entry into the room.

"Jason, now that everything's out in the open and it's a foregone conclusion that we're never going to see each other again, I have to tell you a secret; this secret involves you and your parents." Timmy stopped crying, in fact, the expression on his face turned very serious. "Jason, you don't know who you really are." I was just about to ask Timmy what he meant by that statement, but I was interrupted by his mother.

"Timmy, don't you dare say a word! I meant it!" Timmy's mother shifted her gaze towards me. "Jason, I think it's time for you to leave. And tell your parents that Mr. and Mrs. Johnson will miss them very dearly."

"Mom, you were eaves-dropping. You're a snoop!"

"I beg your pardon; how dare you speak to your mother in that manner, and in front of a house guest too." I knew that it was past time for me to leave the Johnson home. What else could I do? I slithered past Mrs. Johnson. The argument escalated. She did not even notice my brushing against her leg.

I left the Johnson home all shook up. It was horrible enough that I was never going to see my best friend in the whole world again. The argument between Timmy and his mother made matters considerably worse. Timmy is telling me that I did not know who I really was worried me. What's more, it sounded like my parents were keeping a very nasty secret from me. I had to investigate the matter.

Upon entering our mansion, I headed straight to the living room. It was late afternoon. That meant that mom and dad were watching television and eating a snack. I entered the living room focusing my gaze on my father. My parents were wearing casual clothing, and as I suspected, were eating popcorn.

"Dad, I need to ask you a very important question. I know that you're watching television, but I need you to give me a straightforward answer to my question." My parents stared at each other in shock then they shifted their gaze unto me. My dad shrugged his shoulders and then pointed his index finger at mom.

"Honey, umm, what do you want to know?" I could tell by the tone of her voice that I caught both of them off guard. They suspected that my question was going to squeeze them into a corner.

"Mom and dad have you always been honest with me, about who I really am? I mean, my name is Jason Abbott, right. In addition, I was born right here in Nebraska. My biological mother gave birth to me in an animal shelter, but died shortly afterward."

My mother coughed three times and then spoke. "Oh gosh I think a part of a kernel of popcorn is stuck in my throat. I guess it happens to everyone." I did not believe she really had to cough. I took it that my father was coaching her. They were stalling, for time. I was not in the mood to put up with it. In addition, to tell you the truth, my level of self-control was slipping away. I would never felt like this before. Somehow, a beast, or a wild animal within me was trying to crawl its way out of the deep depths into my conscious mind.

Although my father was an old man, he managed to stand up and puff out his chest, manifesting a fierce expression on his face, my mother followed suit. "Jason, what are you doing? Your back is arched, your claws are extended, your canines are bared, and your hair and tail are raised!" shouted my father.

I was unaware of how fierce I would become. I was ashamed of myself. Here I was, trying to terrify my own parents. It was not a conscious action. I was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

"Jason, listen up very good! I am your father, and as such, I have the right to order you to end your aggressive stance and to go back to your room immediately. Do not leave your room

until your mother and I give you permission to do so. Do I make myself clear?"

"Mom, dad, I'm so sorry. I do not know what overcame me. I just want to know what the big secret is." My parents continued their stare-down. Although I was a young and healthy cat who could easily out-stare my parents, I did the right thing. Without saying a word, I turned and then unceremoniously went to my room. Nonetheless, I had to know what the big secret was.

I dove onto my bed and then closed my eyes, later I awakened by an argument between my parents. It was already 7:00 P.M. and I was becoming quite anxious. I crooped up my ears in order to listen to what they were saying. The fierce argument lasted for roughly an hour, the whole time I was on edge. I stayed put because I knew that my presence downstairs would have further inflamed the situation.

Perhaps it was because of the trip the following morning; that is what I said to myself when it became apparent that my parents had hit the sack immediately following their argument. Taking advantage of the opening, I crept downstairs and then wolfed down my dinner. Following my meal, I returned to my room wherein I watched television for an hour and then read anthologies for a couple of hours. The incredible stress and the anxiety I had endured zapped the energy out of me. I do not remember what happened. Maybe I passed out. I awakened the following morning jittery and anxious.

It was apparent to me that resistance was impractical. I had accepted my fate; we were leaving by hometown and never returning. Timmy would soon become a faded memory; no doubt, he would forget me too. I went downstairs to see my parents. Thankfully, they had already packed. We left our home shortly after breakfast. Before entering our family van, I turned to look at our beautiful house and lawn one last time. It was a very sad sight indeed. As I turned back to face our van I caught notice of Timmy. He was standing on the sidewalk on the other side of the street. I could see that he was crying.

"Mom, dad, can I say one last goodbye to Timmy? No, you may not! His mother told us what happened yesterday. You initiated a problem between her and Timmy. This is your punishment!"

Immediately, my dad waved Timmy away. Time shrugged his shoulders and then started to cross the street. My Mother glared at him and then pointed her finger at his home, indicating that she was ordering him to go there. That was the last time I ever saw him again. I had to turn my face because of the powerful rays of the sun. I was standing several feet to the left of my parents. If only the sun's rays were pointing at their faces, I thought.



"Jason, come on, get into the van. We're going to our new home," said my mother. I looked away from my parents then got into our van, closed the door and then buckled up. I was in a horrible mood and I did not feel like talking to anyone.

My mother turned on the ignition, reversed, and then she began the long drive to Orangeville, Nebraska. From what my parents had told me, the trip would take roughly 7 hours. From the onset, I could feel the blood rushing to my face. I was so enraged at them and life in general, but thankfully, I was able to hold my behaviour in check.

"Jason, your mother and I know that you're angry at us. Try to see this permanent venue change from our perspective. We are aged, worn down, and have retired. We had to get away from Dark City because it was not a good place to retire in. That is not all our health is not as good as it used to be. Jason, you are a young, athletic, and good-looking cat. You do not know how we feel. We raised you to be understanding we hope that our hard work paid off."

I stayed silent for the following 4 hours. At 1:00 P.M., my mother entered an exit ramp leading to a rest area. Something did not seem right. We were supposed to be going to western Nebraska, it did not occur to me until that very moment. There were too many vehicles on the highway; routes leading to western Nebraska are relatively sparse.

As soon as mother parked our van and then turned off the ignition my cat curiosity got the best of me, but not before, I took a keen notice of my parents taking hold of several picnic baskets. "Mom, dad, please, exactly where are we going to? I know that we are no longer in Nebraska. I demand honesty and will settle for nothing less."

My parents exited the van, I followed suit, continuing onward until the three of us reached a wooden bench located beside a dining table. It was a mostly cloudy day, light Wind, and the rest area was relatively empty. For a moment, the thought of walking away from my parents struck my insides. Then, I quickly came to the realization that I would have nowhere to go, to sleep in or rest, or easy access to clean food and water.

My mother grinned at me and then spoke, "Honey, we're going to Pennsylvania! We wanted to surprise you, and that is not all, we are going to live in a nice apartment complex. Do not worry, it is not just for seniors, but the management is very meticulous as to who they allow to live in their building. The rent is relatively high for the typical American couple however our retirement, monthly pension, and other bonuses will allow us to live in luxury with much money left over."

"What's going on here, you should've told me earlier! What other secrets are lurking in the shadows. Mom, dad ... this is not good."

"Honey, we're very tired. We came here to sleep and rest. We are not young like you. Departure will be at 6:00 P.M.," said mother.

I walked away and then studied the area intently. Upon seeing a walking path into a forested area, I decided to enter it. I said goodbye and then left. I needed a nice walk really badly. I was confused because in the past 24 hours the problems that I had endured were more magnanimous than those of my entire life combined were. I was apprehensive about the future. Was I going to spend the following days, weeks, months, or perhaps years listening to more bad news. If that were the case, I would end up in the loony bin, a real mental asylum.

## JEFFREY RACCOON

As I proceeded to enter the forested area, I inexplicably became calmer and more content. Perhaps it had been excessively long since my last venture into nature. Well, I was not complaining. I saw an occasional animal here and there, consisting of birds and squirrels. However, it was not until I took notice of a lone raccoon resting on the branch of a Maple tree that I stopped dead in my tracks. I was certain that he was a city raccoon, but what was he doing in the forest, I wondered.

"Hey, kitty, come here for a minute. I want to talk to you, I mean, if you have a minute or two."

I was not sure if the raccoon was trying to lure me into a trap; but then, he could have been friendly. I had two options at hand, leave or approach the raccoon. Logic dictated that I continue walking. Unbelievably, some raccoons hate cats, it is a matter of envy.

As I continued to walk away, the raccoon started to plead with me. "Come on, kitty. Please, do not leave me. I have been in this forest for three whole days, eating leaves, nuts, and whatever I can scrounge from the forest floor. Please, if you do not trust me, I will understand. Just come a little closer and listen to my story."

I had a change of heart stopping in my tracks and then approaching the raccoon. Although I was aware that standing too close to the tree could result in a pouncing, I had a gut feeling that he was telling the truth.

"Alright 'Mr. Raccoon', I'll hear you out but on one condition. You must descend from the Maple tree and under no circumstances are you to make any sudden moves. Have I made myself clear?"

"I hear you loud and clear. Now, please do not prejudge me. I know that some cats have an inherent hatred towards raccoons. I for one do not like to reciprocate unless it is necessary. However, in our particular situation we are total strangers. In this regard, I would like to become your friend.

First, I must formally introduce myself I am Jeffrey Raccoon. I am originally from Lincoln, Nebraska. I left Nebraska a year ago in search of a smaller, more laid-back and peaceful environment, and to see another American state. The concrete jungle is a place that can raise your anxiety level, along with your pulse and blood pressure.

Up until three days ago, I lived in Cornville, Iowa, a town of roughly 5000. Sure, I had a run-in with a human or an animal every now and then, but overall the situation was okay. That is, until 3 days ago. I was resting on a tree branch behind a local Burger King. It was a sunny day, about noontime. Believe me, I was minding my own business, when all of a sudden, some moron decided to use me for target practice.

You should have seen this person; fat, ugly, pimple-faced, and I could see the crack of his butt because his pants and underwear were several inches below the cover line. You know what I mean; come on kitty, you must've heard many stories about cat-hating kids trying to shove fire crackers up a cat's ..., or what about hanging a cat by its tail, and the countless other stories. Well, my story involves a fatso kid who threw three rocks at me. Thank goodness, I was able to dodge the rocks, but the last one barely missed me. I would've left it at that, but the kid turned and then bent down and grabbed a handful of additional rocks, he turned back to look at me, carrying a big ugly smile on his face. What was I to do? Well, I will tell you ... I took hold of several rocks and then hurled them one at a time in his general direction. Now, I must make this point

clear; I could have nailed that ugly fatso but that was not my intention. I merely wanted to scare him.

Well, what ensued shocked me. The kid threw a fit, ran to the front of the Burger King restaurant crying his brains out and shouting lies about me. He said that a mean, ugly, dastardly raccoon was hurling rocks at him because he was a human. More so, he told the forming crowd that I had been harassing him for the past year, exactly when I first arrived in Cornville, Iowa. It was either a lucky guess or this snot of a kid had been eyeing me since I first arrived in town. Any way you see it, I was doomed.

I had no chance of any kind of a defence. I left the area as fast as I could, hiding in an abandoned house. For the following 24 hours there was an increased police presence in area, vigilantes roamed the streets shouting 'Death to the Killer Raccoon'! I became the 'killer raccoon'. The hatred and treachery is something that every raccoon knows. Mother raccoons teach their young, never trust a human. Although a minority of humans can be kind to my people, many others are neutral, and the remainder are outright sadistic."

"Wait a minute, Jeffrey, how long do you plan to stay in this forest? And how far away from here is Cornville?"

Kitty, although Cornville is 5 miles away, it seems like it is just around the corner. Furthermore, twice a day I cautiously walk to the peripheral of the forested area to see what is going on. I am still seeing members of the posse that are searching for me. In fact, I suspect there is an ASP (All State's Bulletin) out for me. That means I must leave Iowa immediately."

During our conversation, Jeffrey defecated three times. Worse yet, he was shivering and appeared gaunt, caused by malnutrition, extreme anxiety, and lack of sleep. I had to help him. "Jeffrey, I think that I can help you. I am here with my parents, were going to Pennsylvania. I will convince them to bring with us. What's more, you can eat, drink, and sleep in our van. How does that sound?"

Jeffrey shifted his gaze to the left, manifesting the facade of a terrified person, and then looked back at me. "Please, kitty, I know you mean good, but you may not know your parents as well as you think." I did not know this at the time, but Jeffrey was right. More so, they would come back to haunt me. "Please, you must understand. I am very apprehensive when it comes to additional humans knowing my secret. Are you absolutely certain that your parents can be trusted; that they'll help me and won't turn me in?"

I manifested an earnest expression on my face and then nodded in yes. "Jeffrey, if my parents try to call the police I will do whatever I can to dissuade them. My parents are in their

seventies. I'm certain I can keep them in line." The anxiety in the air drained us of much of our energy. The good news is by now Jeffrey had total trust in me, we slept side-by-side but not before, I formally introduced myself to him.

Upon awakening I gazed upwards; although the forest trees had filtered much of the sun's light, I was still able to discern that it was close to 6:00 P.M. "Jeffrey, we must leave the forest immediately. My parents are expecting me to return to the van by 6:00 P.M. I don't want to upset them."

Jeffrey and I proceeded to walk to the peripheral of the forest. As soon as we got there, I saw my parents standing beside our van. They grinned at me but glared at Jeffrey. I motioned Jeffrey to stay behind while I spoke to my parents. I walked towards my parents, stopping as soon as I was a foot from where my dad was standing. "Mom, dad, that's Jeffrey. Please give him a ride. He's going to Pennsylvania like us." After a long pause, my father waved at Jeffrey and then to our van, signifying that he wanted him to get in.

Jeffrey half-heartedly approached our van. He was not lazy. It was a case of anxiety and apprehension. I was hoping that his raccoon instincts were wrong about my parents. Not to mention my instincts; I had a gut feeling that my parents were hiding something quite ominous deep inside their minds. Nevertheless, we had to make the attempt. I could not allow Jeffrey to stay in the forest for the rest of his life. It would have hurt my insides.

"Oh my dear, Jason, tell us something about your new friend? The expression on my mother's face betrayed her kind, curious words. I brushed it off, thinking that perhaps she was apprehensive because he was a stranger and we were in the process of moving to Pennsylvania.

"Mom, dad, I'd like to formally introduce my new-found friend. His name is Jeffrey Raccoon. He is an affable person. In fact, I spent all of my free time conversing with him.

My father carefully studied Jeffrey, scanning his entire body slowly. It was as though he suspected him of having a concealed firearm or other dangerous weapon on his person.

Right before my mother turned on the ignition she shifted her gaze onto me, holding it there intently, and then onto Jeffrey. It was apparent that my parents did not believe that my newfound friend just happened to need a ride to Pennsylvania.

Then, there was total silence, a silence that lasted four roughly a minute. My mother turned on the ignition and then continued our drive to Pennsylvania. It took roughly an hour for Jeffrey and me to realize that something awful was in the making unless we told my parents the truth. My father frequently shifted his gaze onto Jeffrey and then to me, then eyeing his

mobile. It was like he was deciding whether to call the police. It was at a specific moment I realized that perhaps Jeffrey's raccoon instincts were correct. Still, I had some hope in my parents.

Jeffrey and I decided on a direct path, to tell my parents the whole truth and nothing but the truth. "Dad, can you please turn off the radio. Jeffrey has something very important to tell you and mother. Please do not interrupt him until he finishes, the story is not long. In all honesty, Jeffrey feels guilty about getting a free ride from you, and at the same time staying quiet about why he needs to leave Iowa. It took Jeffrey 10 minutes to convey his story.

"You see, Mr. and Mrs. Abbott, I had absolutely no options at hand. At least one posse, the townsfolk, and state and local police were hunting me down. Please forgive me I have always been an inherently good-natured raccoon. I am a law-abiding citizen; please show me some humanity. Jason told me how loving you are. If I had not believed him, I would not be here right now. I'd likely still be in the forested area." I did not feel hurt by Jeffrey's lie it was understandable under the circumstances.

"Oh honey, don't worry about it. We are an elderly couple. We don't carry prejudices against any race of humans or species of animals, said mother." I knew very well that at least part of that statement was an outright lie. My parents did have prejudices, and they were very strong. They only liked 'their own kind'. I never saw a visible minority in our neighbourhood, and that includes food delivery workers and cab drivers. Expectedly, my heart began to race, I felt Dizzy, and by all likelihood my blood pressure level was high; I knew this from the throbbing pain I felt in my head.

I was not sure what to do. Then, my father spoke; he calmed our nerves quite fast. "Hey guys, listen, mother's going to pull over into the next exit. I am in the mood for some tasty, wholesome milk. Do you guys want anything?"

"Wow, dad, Jeffrey is starving, can you please bring him more than just milk? Please, I can hear his stomach growling, it almost sounds like a lion's growl." My father nodded in yes.

About 10 minutes later mother turned onto an exit ramp, heading to a rest area. A short while later we entered a large open area consisting of a parking lot, tourist information center, a restaurant, and a grocery store. My mother parked the van in front of Eric's Grocery Store and then turned off the ignition. My father wanted Jeffrey and me to stay in the van while he and my mother went to get some food and drinks. Although they looked happy-as-can-be, my cat instincts were

telling me that deceit was in the air, something was terribly wrong.

My parents were gone for more than an hour. It seemed quite odd to take that long to buy a few simple foods and drink items. The area was relatively quiet traffic was very light. Perhaps my parents had to use the restroom, I said to myself.

Finally, my parents exited the supermarket carrying a bag of groceries in each hand. Believe me, if I had to endure another hour of anxiety it would have zapped all of my strength away.

"Jason, Jeffrey, here are your supersized vanilla milkshakes. Mr. Abbott and I will be drinking orange juice. We lost our appetite for food. I guess we've been driving for too many hours."

"Mom, dad, Jeffrey and I are wondering why the milkshake lids have been tampered with."

My mother stood motionless, unable to speak. My father took a step forward and then spoke his mind, "guys, you know what happened? Mrs. Abbott and I forgot that the milkshakes were for you. We are senior citizens our memories are failing us. I hope you understand, and please forgive us." My urge to drink the milk was so strong it caused me to lower my guard. Jeffrey waited until I took my first gulp before following suit.

Every single gulp of the vanilla milkshake gave me goose bumps. Ominously, I had no recollection of what ensued thereafter. Everything went blank. Suddenly, I found myself in front of the Garrison Apartment Building, in Penny, Pennsylvania. I did not know what to think of it. How could I have no recollection of what happened after I finished my milkshake? At no other time in my life did I ever have amnesia of this sort or suddenly pass out.

As soon as I started to recover from my disorientation, it became apparent to me what had happened. "Mom and dad, how did we get here?"

My mother turned off the ignition, and then she and my father exited the van. Immediately afterward, a couple of middle-aged men dressed in green outfits with a Garrison Apartment Building insignia on their shirts approached our van. My parents signalled me to exit the van. It was apparent that the men were going to carry all of our luggage and belongings to our new apartment.

The clock in the van indicated 12:00 P.M. It was a sunny day. Under normal circumstances, I would be delighted, but I felt an overwhelming apprehension. I exited our van took several steps to my left and waited attentively. I was standing next to my parents. What was missing here? I asked myself. I pondered



about this question while the men started to remove articles from our van.

I was certain that my parents had drugged me. More so, my throat was very dry and I had a throbbing headache. To tell you the truth it felt like a hangover. My mother knelt down, paused for a moment and then gently lifted me off the ground. She held me like a baby then began to sing me a lullaby. Under normal circumstances I would have thrown a fit; I was not a little baby! I was too exhausted to protest.

I closed my eyes, falling asleep for several hours before awakening to the sound of a television show. Although my headache was gone, I needed some water really badly. I had been sleeping on a sofa. As soon as I righted myself, I saw a large pitcher of ice water on a coffee table beside me. My parents knew that I was going to be very thirsty. It was not just because they were physicians, there was more to this than met the eye.

I grabbed the pitcher with both paws and then guzzled the contents until there was nothing left but ice. I felt fully rehydrated. More so, I was able to formulate my thoughts in a logical and correct manner. It was at that moment that I remembered exactly what was missing. Where was Jeffrey? This question was screaming in my ears.

My parents were sitting on a Brown coloured leather couch. I wasted no time getting down to business; believe me, I was furious to say the least. "Mom, dad, where is Jeffrey? And why do I have no memory of events following the drinking of the vanilla milkshake?"

My parents stood up, then walked away from their sofa until they were hovering over me. "Jason, your father and I suspected that Jeffrey was a sinister criminal. You know, most raccoons are that way. This is why we had to check him out first. We called the Iowa State Police before getting the groceries. We had a photo of Jeffrey, along with a perfect description of where he was hiding out. The state police gave us instructions on how to send the information to them.

A short while later we received a phone call from State Trooper Eric Burns. Jeffrey tried to kill a young, innocent boy, of having committed a string of robberies, assaults, and other heinous crimes. Briefly, he terrorized many people. Honey, we spiked both of your milk shakes. We know you understand."

"Mom, dad, what do you mean you know I understand; no, I do not understand! Jeffrey is a good person. Now, he probably thinks that I double-crossed him. You had no right to drug either of us. I don't trust either of you anymore." My blood was boiling. A menacing force began to overtake me. I roared, hissed, bared my teeth, arched my back raised the hair on my

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