

"How did it go?" Patrick asked once the door closed. He checked on the meatloaf, it would be done in a few minutes.

His mother didn't answer immediately. He heard her take off her shoes before she came into the kitchen carrying her suitcase. The smile she gave him was hesitant. "I passed the course." She sat down.

"You don't sound as happy about it as I thought you would."

"I am." She forced her smile larger. "It's just. They already promoted me and four others to team supervisors. I'm just stunned and a bit nervous. I got the news when the bus dropped us off at the factory."

"You'll be great mom."

Now her smile was genuine. "Thank you. I'm going to be on probation for three months, After that they'll decide if I'm staying there or going back to the floor. Regardless, I'm getting a fifty cent raise. If I become a supervisor permanently, it'll be an other dollar and a half."

"Two bucks an hour?" Patrick sat down. An extra eighty dollars a week could mean much better food, not going hungry as much.

"Yes. With that, you wouldn't have to worry about working at the junkyard."

Patrick hadn't thought of that. "Or you could slow down at the diner."

"I suppose. You know I don't really like you working there, there are so many chances you could get hurt."

"Mom, we're careful, and I like working there. I probably would even if Joey didn't pay me, so focus on yourself. It's your money, try to make your life a little better."

She nodded. "Or we could continue as we are, and improve things over all. Get us some news clothes, buy fresher food. We could get you your own phone."

Patrick almost stammered. "Ahh, mom, don't."

"Why not? you shouldn't have to rely on mine all the time."

"I'm used to it. I'm fine. I really don't need one. I mean, really, you don't have to leave it at home. I don't spend that much time here, and my friends don't really bother calling me."

"I don't know. I'd feel a little better if you had one."

Patrick went to the oven to prevent himself from fidgeting. What was he going to do if she just bought him a phone? He couldn't stop her from doing that, it was her money.

The meatloaf was done.

"I'll buy one." The words were out of his mouth as the thought struck. He put the loaf on the stove and put the sheet of foil over it.

"I can do that," she said, "I don't want you worrying about bills."

Patrick already spent most of his time worrying about them, but he didn't tell her that. "I know, but if it's going to be my phone, I should be the one buying it, and I should buy my own plan."

"Patrick, that's forty-five dollar. It's half that if I just add you to mine."

"I know, but I'm eighteen. I think it's time I start having bills of my own." He tried to be casual about it. he had to convince her to let him do that. He didn't want to have her spend money on a phone he'd never use. She couldn't afford to waste that money.

When he turned to put plates on the table she was looking at him, beaming. "Oh, I get it now."

Patrick almost dropped the plates. "Wh... what? I just mean..."

Her smile became brighter. "I know what you mean. Come on Patrick, I'm your mother I know how you think."

Patrick put the plates on the table, because he knew he was going to drop them if he didn't. What had he let slip? She couldn't know about his phone. Had one of the neighbors noticed Albert dropping him off and told her? They couldn't have, it had been really late, and she wouldn't be smiling if they had.

She almost laughed. "Patrick, it's okay. I get it, you don't want me to find out about the girls you're calling."

The who? She thought? He almost told her that wasn't what he meant at all. His mouth was open, but he stopped the words from coming out.

"You're right," she said, not quite stifling the laugh this time. "You're old enough to have your own phone and not have to worry about me figuring out if you're seeing someone. My worry is if you're going to be able to afford it."

He had to get his brain to work again. He couldn't just stare at her. "I... err... yes, I can. I mean, I wouldn't give you as much as before since I'd be using part of it to pay for the phone, but I can probably get more work at the junkyard to make up the difference." He closed his mouth to stop the babbling. He was probably going to reveal everything if he kept talking.

He busied himself with setting the table.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to embarrass you," she said as

he put the meatloaf on the table.

"That's not it," he replied. he had control of his voice now, and his mind. "I just didn't realize you knew." The lie tasted like ash. His tongue was dry. he drank two glass of water and it didn't help much.

She put a hand over his. "Patrick, it's okay. I'm not going to be that mother who needs to know everything you do, but if you ever feel like introducing one of them to me..." she left the offer hang there.

Patrick nodded. He couldn't bring himself to say anything. he didn't think he'd be able to get another lie to pass his lips.