

Carter's Decision

"I can't decide!" Carter told his mom. They were sitting at the kitchen table. Mom was finishing her morning coffee and Carter needed to talk to her before school. He had a big decision to make, and he was agonizing over it.

"You have to decide. And soon!" Mom took a sip of her coffee. "It's not fair for both boys to think you are coming to their parties. I think you should go to Tyler's party. He invited you first and you told him that you were going to come. Besides, it will be at the lake! You love to swim."

"I know. But, Josh is having a go-kart party! We are all meeting at his house and then going to the go-kart track! That would be amazing!"

"Carter, I told you what I think you should do. But you're old enough to start making these kinds of decisions on your own. Either way, though, you need to tell the boys what you are doing today. Saturday is only four days away. You can't delay this any longer. Now, you better get outside. I think I hear the school bus coming."

Four days later, Carter was leaving the house for Josh's party. He never did tell Josh or Tyler that he would not be attending their party. They were both expecting him to attend. He meant to tell Tyler that he wasn't coming, but he felt so bad about it. Tyler was his best friend. They met in second grade and have been best friends ever since. But go-karts! How could he possibly turn down the chance to drive go-kart around a racetrack?

Mom was in the kitchen mopping the floor. Carter hoped to get out of the house quickly. She still had not asked him if he told Tyler he was not coming to his party, and Carter was hoping she would not. "Are you sure you don't want a ride?" she asked him as he entered the kitchen.

"No. I'm just going to ride over to Josh's house. It's not that far."

"Okay. We are all going to breakfast, but I'm sure we will be home before you get back. Just in case, though, make sure the spare key is under the flowerpot."

"Alright! Have fun! See you later!" Carter said as he hurried out the door.

As Carter rode his bike toward Josh's house, he could feel the sun on his back. It was already a warm morning. A perfect day to be at the lake, he thought with a little regret. But there would be other days to swim at the lake. Today was go-kart day! He smiled and pedaled harder. He hoped his go cart was fast. Carter imagined racing around the go cart track and pedaled even faster.

As he rode up Josh's driveway, he was surprised to see there were no cars parked in the driveway. He was a little early, so he expected to see a few parents dropping off their sons. He laid his bike down in the grass, walked to the door, and rang the doorbell. Standing there waiting for someone to answer the door, Carter wiped his forehead with the back of his arm. Once he was at the track and racing, he would be cooler. He imagined the wind blowing on his face and smiled. After a few more seconds, he rang the

doorbell again. Maybe they didn't hear it the first time, he thought. Carter looked at the driveway, and then down the road. No cars. That seemed odd.

The door opened and startled him. It was Josh's teenage sister, Kayla. She didn't look happy. She was wearing pajamas and looked like she just woke up. "What do you want?" she asked.

"I'm here for the party. Josh's birthday party."

"No one's here. Just me. I think they already left."

"But it was supposed to start at ten! It's not ten yet!" Carter said, throwing his hands out, palms up, in confusion.

"Dude! It started at nine. They left like an hour ago." Kayla scratched her head and tried unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn.

"Nine! I thought it was ten!" Carter smacked his hand against his forehead.

"Nope. It was nine," Kayla said as she swung the door shut.

Carter stood at the door, stunned. He missed the party! No go-karts! How could he have made that kind of mistake? He thought Josh's party was at ten and Tyler's party was at nine. Maybe he mixed them up! Tyler's party must be at ten. He ran to his bike. He could still make Tyler's party. He would be swimming in that cool lake soon!

Sweat trickled down his sides as he pedaled home. Heat radiated from the pavement. He never noticed how few trees were on this road before. Carter wished for a tree-lined street full of shade. He really hated missing that go-kart party but swimming at the lake sure sounded great right now. There was a big bouncy float at Tyler's lake house. Carter imagined himself bouncing high into the air and then splashing into the water. He was so thirsty. He wished he had brought a bottle of water. Or lemonade! Oh, lemonade sounded so good right now. Mom made the best lemonade. He wondered what time it was. It couldn't be much past ten o'clock. There would be plenty of time to make it to the party. His tee shirt clung to his back. He would have to change clothes before he left for Tyler's house. Maybe even take a quick shower if he had time. He pedaled faster. Finally, in the distance, his house was in sight.

Carter raced up his driveway and around the back of his house. He jumped off his bike before it even came to a halt and let it crash to the ground. He hoped Mom wasn't looking out the window. She always told him he should use his kickstand, but he hated taking the time to do that. Carter took the stairs two at a time and grabbed the doorknob with his sweaty hand. It did not turn. Carter tried again. It was locked. He tried once more. It was still locked. "Mom!" he yelled. He tried to remember. Mom said they were going somewhere. What was it she said? Carter ran to the garage and looked through small windows in the door. One of their cars was gone. The SUV. That probably meant they were all gone. He ran back to the door and pounded his fist against the wooden surface. "Mom!" he called out! "Mom!" No answer.

Then he remembered the spare key under the flowerpot. Maybe if he called Tyler's house, Tyler's mom would come and pick him up! He ran to the corner of the porch and lifted a white flower pot full of pink flowers. There was nothing under it. He remembered Mom telling him to check the flowerpot this morning and make sure the spare key was under it. He never did. The key must be in the junk drawer, he thought. It was always there or under the flower pot. Whoever used it last to get into the house must have forgotten to

put it back under the flower pot. Carter remembered using the spare key not too long ago and had the feeling that he was the one who forgot to put it back under the flower pot. This was the worst morning ever. He placed the flower pot back in the corner and sighed in resignation.

Weary, he dragged his feet over to the porch swing and plopped down. The chain squeaked under Carter's weight. At least the porch was shaded, he thought. He used the bottom of his tee shirt to wipe the sweat from his face. Right now, his friends were either racing around a go-kart track or getting ready to go swimming at the lake. He felt bad about not going to Tyler's party. He imagined Tyler wondering where Carter was. Now, Carter wished he had told Josh he was already going to Tyler's party. It was the right thing to do. Mom was right. She usually was. He had to admit, that was kind of annoying. Carter looked around the yard and spotted his bike on its side in the grass. He stood, crossed the yard, and picked up his bike. He put the kickstand down and then returned to the porch to wait for his family to return home.

Questions

1. Who answers the door at Josh's house?
2. Carter gets thirsty on his way home and wants to drink something. What?
3. Where is Carter's family when he gets back home?
4. What color are the flowers in the flower pot?