The story of the boy from Pallet Town is a well known one; those stories of his travels, growing up on the road and befriending nearly every soul he’s ever met. The boy was better known for his heart than his mind, but in the end that’s what made him unique in the world. His story has been told and retold countless times… his ultimate fate still undecided, but many possibilities have been written about. This story is similar to the one about that boy, and yet completely different…

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He was nothing if not excited; years of education had finally prepared him and allowed him to earn his Trainer’s License, and the final obstacle had been overcome mere days before the most important event of his life…

Ash Ketchum had turned ten years old.

One might think that the excitement would be his downfall, after all, five children in Pallet had qualified to earn their first pokémon from Professor Oak that year, but he was supposedly only giving out three starters: one each of a bulbasaur, a charmander, and a squirtle. If he didn’t make it in time, there may not be a pokémon left for him. This was why, when he didn’t wake to his alarm his mother could be found bursting into his room shouting, “Wake up! If you don’t, you’ll be late and you won’t get a pokémon!”

Ash awoke with a start, very nearly falling out of the top bunk of his bed. Grumbling a few times at the rising sun, he climbed out of the bed and gave a deep yawn. It wasn’t that he wasn’t a morning person, but some things must be sacrificed when one does not manage to get a full night’s sleep.

He hastily dressed himself in a simple black tee shirt and jeans, rushed down the stairs, grabbed a piece of toast, and headed out the door saying, “I’ll be right back!” The normally more laid back boy jogged through the streets of Pallet until he reached the massive Oak estate, which served as both the home of Professor Samuel Oak and his only child, Gary, as well as the location of one of the largest and most sophisticated research sites in all of Kanto.

Ash ran up the path and rang the buzzer next to the door, which was answered by one of Oak’s many assistants. Ash was recognized and allowed in, only to find that, to his horror, three of the other children were already there and holding a pokéball each; each one had their chosen pokémon released next to them, and Ash took notice of each of them in turn.

There were two boys and a girl standing there. The charmander trainer was the oldest, having chosen to put off getting his license until he turned fourteen; Ash vaguely recalled his name being Chad. The younger boy was ten like Ash and had chosen the squirtle starter; Ash remembered him from his classes as being named Tony. Finally the girl was another classmate by the name of Leah; she had seemingly picked bulbasaur. Gary, who had also qualified by turning ten this year was conspicuously absent from the group.

When the professor noticed Ash standing there, he beckoned the boy to stand with the others and said, “Ah, Ash; glad you could make it.” Ash didn’t feel glad, considering it looked like he just missed his opportunity, but tried to cover his disappointment as best as he could. Prof. Oak continued, “You’re in luck, m’boy; when I saw how many qualified for their license this year, I went ahead and prepared a fourth pokémon.” He pressed a button on the pedestal that once held the three starter pokéballs, causing a hole to open in the center and a pokéball with a lightning bolt seal to emerge from the new opening. “Be warned that this pokémon may be difficult to handle; he wasn’t entirely too cooperative with us in his time in the lab.”

Ash was simply grateful that he was able to get a pokémon in the first place. He extended his arm and gripped the ball while saying, “This sounds like a challenge; I’ll never back down.” Oak nearly panicked as Ash held out the ball and called out the pokémon. Energy shot out of the device as it opened, and in a bright white light, a small yellow creature coalesced.

“Pikachu,” it announced, proceeding to stare up at the new trainer. Ash, too, stared at the pokémon intently, the tension in the lab clear as the professor and the other trainers held their breath. After a minute, the young pokémon smiled and nodded, the trainer reciprocating the act while bringing the arm not holding the pokéball up. Ash crouched down and the pikachu jumped up onto his shoulder like it was the most natural thing in the world to do.

The others in the room relaxed and Oak’s eyes widened in complete shock. “Amazing…” The possibilities running through Oak’s mind clouded him to his surroundings, and it took a elbow to the ribs to bring him back to the present. “Ahem, uh, yes… here, one Pokédex programmed to each of you.” He handed them each a small red device, picking up a fifth one to demonstrate with. “These each come equipped with a camera to scan any pokémon it points to; it has two modes: interactive and silent mode. In interactive, it will voice a short description of the pokémon it scans, while in silent mode it simple scans the pokémon. On the right side is a small fold down slot, which you can place a pokéball into for transport to and from the lab. This is important in cases where you have more than six pokémon and you need to switch one or more out. There are other features, but these are the most important ones to remember.”

The four new trainers thanked the professor and the other three recalled their pokémon into their pokéballs; they looked to Ash expectantly, but he just shook his head and looked up to his new partner and said, “You don’t like staying in pokéballs, do you?” The pikachu shook his head at this and dug in tighter to his shoulder. “That’s fine with me; you need a name, though, to show you aren’t just any old pikachu... may I call you Sparkster?” The pokémon grinned and electricity played across his cheeks, signaling an agreement. Once more everyone’s eyes were wide at the odd display of implicit trust between a new pokémon and trainer partnership; Ash ignored this, though, and said goodbye to the group, leading the way out the door and back home.

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Ash entertained his new pokémon partner on the walk home, telling him all about his mom and his life before becoming a trainer. Ash’s home was modest, having lived alone with his mother for five years, with a small garden which was meticulously kept. As he stepped through the door, he was moderately surprised to find his backpack on the table in the living room, but his mother nowhere to be found. He opened it up and started sorting through it when she appeared coming from the kitchen with a small pack.

“Ah, there you are, honey.” His mom greeted. “I’ve got everything packed up for you, including your sleeping bag and a small pillow, four changes of clothes, some shorts for the summer, a jacket for when it rains, several pairs of underwear, your life savings so far, and of course…”

“My official league hat and gloves!” Ash cried out, putting them on at the same time. “Thank you mom; meet my new partner, Sparkster! He’s a pikachu.”

She knelt down to pet the small yellow mouse. “He’s just adorable.” She said, as Sparkster giggled at the attention. Standing up, she held the package she was carrying out to him. “I’ve packed you some food for the trip to Viridian. It typically takes about six days to get there on foot keeping a good pace, so I’ve given you enough that should last about eight or nine. Please call me when you get there!”

Ash put the food at the top of his pack. “Thank you mom…” He looked up to her for a moment before lunging forward to hug her. “For everything; I promise I won’t let you down. I’ll try to remember to call you whenever I get the chance!” They both had tears in their eyes as they separated. Ash hauled his pack onto his back and bent down to allow Sparkster back up to his shoulder perch, nodded to his mother and turned to walk out the door.

He was halfway down the road before he heard his mother shout his name; he turned to see her standing in front of their home waving goodbye to him. He and Sparkster waved back before turning and running until he was out of sight.