

1

This is how Kyle Keeley got grounded for a week.

First he took a shortcut through his mother's favorite rosebush.

Yes, the thorns hurt, but having crashed through the brambles and trampled a few petunias, he had a five-second jump on his oldest brother, Mike.

Both Kyle and his big brother knew exactly where to find what they needed to win the game: inside the house!

Kyle had already found the pinecone to complete his "outdoors" round. And he was pretty sure Mike had snagged his "yellow flower." Hey, it was June. Dandelions were everywhere.

"Give it up, Kyle!" shouted Mike as the brothers dashed up the driveway. "You don't stand a chance."

Mike zoomed past Kyle and headed for the front door, wiping out Kyle's temporary lead.

Of course he did.

Seventeen-year-old Mike Keeley was a total jock, a high school superstar. Football, basketball, baseball. If it had a ball, Mike Keeley was good at it.

Kyle, who was twelve, wasn't the star of anything.

Kyle's other brother, Curtis, who was fifteen, was still trapped over in the neighbor's yard, dealing with their dog. Curtis was the smartest Keeley. But for *his* "outdoors" round, he had pulled the always unfortunate "your neighbor's dog's toy" card. Any "dog" card was basically the same as a "Lose a Turn."

As for why the three Keeley brothers were running around their neighborhood on a Sunday afternoon like crazed lunatics, grabbing all sorts of wacky stuff, well, it was their mother's fault.

She was the one who had suggested, "If you boys are bored, play a board game!"

So Kyle had gone down into the basement and dug up one of his all-time favorites: Mr. Lemoncello's Indoor-Outdoor Scavenger Hunt. It had been a huge hit for Mr. Lemoncello, the master game maker. Kyle and his brothers had played it so much when they were younger, Mrs. Keeley wrote to Mr. Lemoncello's company for a refresher pack of clue cards. The new cards listed all sorts of different bizarro stuff you needed to find, like "an adult's droopy underpants," "one dirty dish," and "a

rotten banana peel.”

(At the end of the game, the losers had to put everything back exactly where the items had been found. It was an official rule, printed inside the top of the box, and made winning the game that much more important!)

While Curtis was stranded next door, trying to talk the neighbor’s Doberman, Twinky, out of his favorite tug toy, Kyle and Mike were both searching for the same two items, because for the final round, all the players were given the same Riddle Card.

That day’s riddle, even though it was a card Kyle had never seen before, had been extra easy.

FIND TWO COINS FROM 1982 THAT ADD UP TO THIRTY CENTS AND ONE OF THEM CANNOT BE A NICKEL.

Duh. The answer was a quarter and a nickel because the riddle said only *one* of them couldn’t be a nickel.

So to win, Kyle had to find a 1982 quarter *and* a 1982 nickel.

Also easy.

Their dad kept an empty apple cider jug filled with loose change down in his basement workshop.

That’s why Kyle and Mike were racing to get there first.

Mike bolted through the front door.

Kyle grinned.

He loved playing games against his big brothers. It was just about the only chance he-ever got to beat them, fair and square. Board games leveled the playing field. You needed a good roll of the dice, a lucky draw of the cards, and some smarts, but if things went your way and you gave it your all, anyone could win.

Especially since Mike had blown his lead by choosing the standard route down to the basement. He’d go through the front door, tear to the back of the house, bound down the steps, and then run to their dad’s workshop.

Kyle, on the other hand, would take a shortcut.

He hopped over a couple of boxy shrubs and kicked open the low-to-the-ground casement window. He heard something crackle when his tennis shoe hit the windowpane but he couldn’t worry about it. He had to beat his big brother.

He crawled through the narrow opening, dropped to the floor, and scabbled over to the workbench, where he found the jug, dumped out the coins, and started sifting through the sea of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters.

Score!

Kyle quickly uncovered a 1982 nickel. He tucked it into his shirt pocket and sent pennies, nickels, and dimes skidding across the floor as he concentrated on quarters. 2010. 2003. 1986.

“Come on, come on,” he muttered.

The workshop door swung open.

“What the . . . ?” Mike was surprised to see that Kyle had beaten him to the coin jar.

He fell to his knees and started searching for his own coins just as Kyle shouted, “Got it!” and plucked a 1982 quarter out of the pile.

“What about the nickel?” demanded Mike.

Kyle pulled it out of his shirt pocket.

“You went through the window?” said a voice from outside.

It was Curtis. Kneeling in the flower beds.

“Yeah,” said Kyle.

“I was going to do that. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line.”

“I can’t believe you won!” moaned Mike, who wasn’t used to losing *anything*.

“Well,” said Kyle, standing up and strutting a little, “believe it, brother. Because now you two *losers* have to put all the junk back.”

“I am *not* taking this back to Twinky!” said Curtis. He held up a very slimy, knotted rope.

“Oh, yes you are,” said Kyle. “Because you *lost*. Oh sure, you *thought* about using the window. . . .”

“Um, Kyle?” mumbled Curtis. “You might want to shut up. . . .”

“What? C’mon, Curtis. Don’t be such a sore loser. Just because I was the one who took the shortcut and kicked open the window and—”

“You did this, Kyle?”

A new face appeared in the window.

Their dad’s.

“Heh, heh, heh,” chuckled Mike behind Kyle.

“You broke the glass?” Their father sounded ticked off. “Well, guess who’s going to pay to have this window replaced?”

That’s why Kyle Keeley had fifty cents deducted from his allowance for the rest of the year.

And got grounded for a week.

2

Halfway across town, Dr. Yanina Zinchenko, the world-famous librarian, was walking briskly through the cavernous building that was only days away from its gala grand opening.

Alexandriaville's new public library had been under construction for five years. All work had been done with the utmost secrecy under the tightest possible security. One crew did the exterior renovations on what had once been the small Ohio city's most magnificent building, the Gold Leaf Bank. Other crews—carpenters, masons, electricians, and plumbers—worked on the interior.

No single construction crew stayed on the job longer than six weeks.

No crew knew what any of the other crews had done (or would be doing).

And when all those crews were finished, several super-secret covert crews (highly paid workers who would deny ever having been near the library, Alexandriaville, or the state of Ohio) stealthily applied the final touches.

Dr. Zinchenko had supervised the construction project for her employer—a very eccentric (some would say loony) billionaire. Only she knew all the marvels and wonders the incredible new library would hold (and hide) within its walls.

Dr. Zinchenko was a tall woman with blazing-red hair. She wore an expensive, custom-tailored business suit, jazzy high-heeled shoes, a Bluetooth earpiece, and glasses with thick red frames.

Heels clicking on the marble floor, fingers tapping on the glass of her very advanced tablet computer, Dr. Zinchenko strode past the control center's red door, under an arch, and into the breathtakingly large circular reading room beneath the library's three-story-tall rotunda.

The bank building, which provided the shell for the new library, had been built in 1899. With towering Corinthian columns, an arched entryway, lots of fancy trim, and a mammoth shimmering gold dome, the building looked like it belonged next door to the triumphant memorials in Washington, D.C.—not on this small Ohio town's quaint streets.

Dr. Zinchenko paused to stare up at the library's most stunning visual effect: the Wonder Dome. Ten wedge-shaped, high-definition video screens—as brilliant as those in Times Square—lined the underbelly of

the dome like so many orange slices. Each screen could operate independently or as part of a spectacular whole. The Wonder Dome could become the constellations of the night sky; a flight through the clouds that made viewers below sense that the whole building had somehow lifted off the ground; or, in Dewey decimal mode, ten sections depicting vibrant and constantly changing images associated with each category in the library cataloging system.

“I have the final numbers for the fourth sector of the Wonder Dome in Dewey mode,” Dr. Zinchenko said into her Bluetooth earpiece. “364 point 1092.” She carefully over-enunciated each word to make certain the video artist knew what specific numbers should occasionally drift across the fourth wedge amid the swirling social-sciences montage featuring a floating judge’s gavel, a tumbling teacher’s apple, and a gentle snowfall of holiday icons. “The numbers, however, should not appear until eleven a.m. Sunday. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Dr. Zinchenko,” replied the tinny voice in her ear.

Next Dr. Zinchenko studied the holographic statues projected into black crepe-lined recesses cut into the massive stone piers supporting the arched windows from which the Wonder Dome rose.

“Why are Shakespeare and Dickens still here? They’re not on the list for opening night.”

“Sorry,” replied the library’s director of holographic imagery, who was also on the conference call. “I’ll fix it.”

“Thank you.”

Exiting the rotunda, the librarian entered the Children’s Room.

It was dim, with only a few work lights glowing, but Dr. Zinchenko had memorized the layout of the miniature tables and was able to march, without bumping her shins, to the Story Corner for a final check on her recently installed geese.

The flock of six audio-animatronic goslings—fluffy robots with ping-pongish eyeballs (created for the new library by imagineers who used to work at Disney World)—stood perched atop an angled bookcase in the corner. Mother Goose, in her bonnet and granny glasses, was frozen in the center.

“This is librarian one,” said Dr. Zinchenko, loud enough for the microphones hidden in the ceiling to pick up her voice. “Initiate story-time sequence.”

The geese sprang to mechanical life.

“Nursery rhyme.”

The geese honked out “Baa-Baa Black Sheep” in six-part harmony.

“Treasure Island?”

The birds yo-ho-ho’ed their way through “Fifteen Men on a Dead Man’s Chest.”

Dr. Zinchenko clapped her hands. The rollicking geese stopped singing and swaying.

“One more,” she said. Squinting, she saw a book sitting on a nearby table. *“Walter the Farting Dog.”*

The six geese spun around and farted, their tail feathers flipping up in sync with the noisy blasts.

“Excellent. End story time.”

The geese slumped back into their sleep mode. Dr. Zinchenko made one more tick on her computer tablet. Her final punch list was growing shorter and shorter, which was a very good thing. The library’s grand opening was set for Friday night. Dr. Z and her army of associates had only a few days left to smooth out any kinks in the library’s complex operating system.

Suddenly, Dr. Zinchenko heard a low, rumbling growl.

Turning around, she was eyeball-to-icy-blue-eyeball with a very rare white tiger.

Dr. Zinchenko sighed and touched her Bluetooth earpiece.

“Ms. G? This is Dr. Z. What is our white Bengal tiger doing in the children’s department? I see. Apparently, there was a slight misunderstanding. We do not want him permanently positioned near *The Jungle Book*. Check the call number. 599 point 757. Right. He should be in Zoology. Yes, please. Right away. Thank you, Ms. G.”

And, like a vanishing mirage, the tiger disappeared.

3

Of course, even though he was grounded, Kyle Keeley still had to go to school.

“Mike, Curtis, Kyle, time to wake up!” his mother called from down in the kitchen.

Kyle plopped his feet on the floor, rubbed his eyes, and sleepily looked around his room.

The computer handed down from his brother Curtis was sitting on the desk that used to belong to his other brother, Mike. The rug on the floor, with its Cincinnati Reds logo, had also been Mike’s when *he* was twelve years old. The books lined up in his bookcase had been lined up on Mike’s and Curtis’s shelves, except for the ones Kyle got each year for Christmas from his grandmother. He still hadn’t read last year’s addition.

Kyle wasn’t big on books.

Unless they were the instruction manual or hint guide to a video game. He had a Sony PlayStation set up in the family room. It wasn’t the high-def, Blu-ray PS3. It was the one Santa had brought Mike maybe four years earlier. (Mike kept the brand-new Blu-ray model locked up in his bedroom.)

But still, clunker that it was, the four-year-old gaming console in the family room worked.

Except this week.

Well, it *worked* but Kyle’s dad had taken away his TV and computer privileges, so unless he just wanted to hear the hard drive hum, there was really no point in firing up the PlayStation until the next Sunday when his sentence ended.

“When you’re grounded in this house,” his father had said, “you’re *grounded*.”

If Kyle needed a computer for homework during this last week of school, he could use his mom’s, the one in the kitchen.

His mom had no games on her computer.

Okay, she had Diner Dash, but that didn’t really count.

Being grounded in the Keeley household meant you couldn’t do anything except, as his dad put it, “think about what you did that caused you to be grounded.”

Kyle knew what he had done: He’d broken a window.

But, hey—I also beat my big brothers!

“Good morning, Kyle,” his mom said when he hit the kitchen. She was sitting at her computer desk—sipping coffee and tapping keys. “Grab a Toaster Tart for breakfast.”

Curtis and Mike were already in the kitchen, chowing down on the last of the good Toaster Tarts—the frosted cupcake swirls. They’d left Kyle the unfrosted brown sugar cinnamon. The ones that tasted like the box they came in.

“New library opens Friday, just in time for summer vacation,” Kyle’s mom mumbled, reading her computer screen. “Been twelve years since they tore down the old one. Listen to this, boys: Dr. Yanina Zinchenko, the new public library’s head librarian, promises that ‘patrons will be surprised’ by what they find inside.”

“Really?” said Kyle, who always liked a good surprise. “I wonder what they’ll have in there.”

“Um, books maybe?” said Mike. “It’s a *library*, Kyle.”

“Still,” said Curtis, “I can’t wait to get my new library card!”

“Because you’re a nerd,” said Mike.

“I prefer the term ‘geek,’” said Curtis.

“Well, I gotta go,” said Kyle, grabbing his backpack. “Don’t want to miss the bus.”

He hurried out the door. What Kyle really didn’t want to miss were his friends. A lot of them had Sony PSPs and Nintendo 3DSs.

Loaded with lots and lots of games!

Kyle fist-bumped and knuckle-knocked his way up the bus aisle to his usual seat. Almost everybody wanted to say “Hey” to him, except, of course, Sierra Russell.

Like always, Sierra, who was also a seventh grader, was sitting in the back of the bus, her nose buried in a book—probably one of those ones about girls who lived in tiny homes on the prairie or something.

Ever since her parents divorced and her dad moved out of town, Sierra Russell had become incredibly quiet and spent all her free time reading.

“Nice shirt,” said Akimi Hughes as Kyle slid into the seat beside her.

“Thanks. It used to be Mike’s.”

“Doesn’t matter. It’s still cool.”

Akimi’s mother was Asian, her dad Irish. She had very long jet-black hair, extremely blue eyes, and a ton of freckles.

“What’re you playing?” Kyle asked, because Akimi was frantically working the controls on her PSP 3000.

“Squirrel Squad,” said Akimi.

“One of Mr. Lemoncello’s best,” said Kyle, who had the same game on his PlayStation.

The one he couldn’t play with for a week.

“You need a hand?”

“Nah.”

“Watch out for the beehives. . . .”

“I know about the beehives, Kyle.”

“I’m just saying . . .”

“Yes!”

“What?”

“I cleared level six! Finally.”

“Awesome.” Kyle did not mention that he was up to level twenty-seven. Akimi was his best friend. Friends don’t gloat to friends.

“When I shot the squirrels at the falcons,” said Akimi, “the pilots parachuted. If a squirrel bit the pilot in the butt, I got a fifty-point bonus.”

Yes, in Mr. Lemoncello’s catapulting critters game, there were all sorts of wacky jokes. The falcons weren’t birds; they were F-16 Falcon Fighter Jets. And the squirrels? They were nuts. Totally bonkers. With swirly whirlpool eyes. They flew through the air jabbering gibberish. They bit butts.

This was one of the main reasons why Kyle thought everything that came out of Mr. Lemoncello’s Imagination Factory—board games, puzzles, video games—was amazingly awesome. For Lemoncello, a game just wasn’t a game if it wasn’t a little goofy around the edges.

“So, did you pick up the bonus code?” asked Kyle.

“Huh?”

“In the freeze-frame there.”

Akimi studied the screen.

“Turn it over.”

Akimi did.

“See that number tucked into the corner? Type that in the next time the home screen asks you for your password.”

“Why? What happens?”

“You’ll see.”

Akimi slugged him in the arm. “What?”

“Well, don’t be surprised if you start flinging *flaming* squirrels on level seven.”

“Get. Out!”

“Try it. You’ll see.”

“I will. This afternoon. So, did you write your extra-credit essay?”

“Huh? What essay?”

“Um, the one that’s due today. About the new public library?”

“Refresh my memory.”

Akimi sighed. “Because the old library was torn down twelve years ago, the twelve twelve-year-olds who write the best essay on ‘Why I’m Excited about the New Public Library’ will get to go to the library lock-in this Friday night.”

“Huh?”

“The winners will spend the night in the new library before anybody else even gets to see the place!”

“Is this like that movie *Night at the Museum*? Will the books come alive and chase people around and junk?”

“No. But there will probably be free movies, and food, and prizes, and *games*.”

All of a sudden, Kyle was interested.

