

## MYSTERY OF MOONRUN PARK

“Mysterious Robber Strikes Again.” Donny waved the newspaper in my face. “This is it, Paul—our chance to make that million.”

Donny was always expecting to make that million, like it was just waiting for fifth graders like us to gather it in. Haven’t seen it yet, though.

“See, we catch the robber and collect the reward. Simple as that.”

“A million dollar reward?” I snatched the newspaper out of Donny’s hands. “How many zeros does a million have?”

“Well, it’s not exactly a million.” Donny grinned. “Kilron, Inc. will give \$10,000 to anyone who catches the robber. He stole a laptop from corporate headquarters. They’re really ticked.”

“Kilron, huh?” Kilron, Inc. deserved to lose a laptop, in my opinion. They were tearing down Moonrun Park, home of the coolest skateboard course in Clarion, to build their stupid Broccoli Bars plant. As if anyone wanted to eat granola bars with broccoli in them!

Donny laughed at the frown on my face. I think he can read my mind.

“You wouldn’t mind taking \$10,000 off those Kilron people, would you, Paul? Let’s solve this mystery.”

We looked for clues in the newspaper story. “All the robberies took place within a mile of Moonrun Park,” Donny read. “Besides Kilron’s laptop, the robber stole a camera from Wood’s Hardware, an iPod from the Sweet Shoppe, and some cookie cutters from Mrs. Schumann’s kitchen.”

“The electronics make sense,” I said. “He could sell those, easy. But why would he take a

pile of cookie cutters?”

“That’s pretty weird,” Donny said, “but it’s not the weirdest thing. Why would Kilron pay \$10,000 to get a laptop back? They only cost \$2000.”

We decided to start our investigation with Mrs. Schumann. “Maybe she’s got some cookies left,” Donny called over his shoulder. We parked our bikes in the driveway and knocked on the front door.

“Well, hello, boys.” Mrs. Schumann stepped out the door in her sock feet. “Are you selling raffle tickets?”

“No, ma’am, we’re here to solve the mystery.” Donny pointed to the newspaper story. “What’s all this about cookie cutters?”

Mrs. Schumann sighed. “Come see the mess that robber left.” She made us take off our shoes in the doorway, “to keep the carpets clean.” She led us to the kitchen.

I’ve never seen a more sparkling kitchen in my life. My mom would pay me big bucks to keep my room half that clean.

“Uh, mess?”

“Biggest mess I’ve ever seen.” Mrs. Schumann scrolled through some pictures on her phone. “I cleaned it up, of course.” She held out the phone. I recognized the kitchen, ‘cause I was standing in it, but Mrs. Schumann was right, it sure was messy. Dishtowels lay on the floor, a can of flour was tipped over with white powder everywhere, and cookie crumbs covered the sink. I could just make out a bunch of dirty fingerprints on the shiny countertop. Very tiny fingerprints.

Donny pointed at the prints in the photo. “There’s our first clue, Paul.”

“So what, the robber’s a midget, or a little kid?”

Mrs. Schumann shrugged. “He took all my stainless steel cookie cutters. I can only make drop cookies now.” She gave us each a chocolate chip cookie, and waved us out the door.

Our next stop was Wood’s Hardware. My dad could spend hours there, looking at nails and screws in tiny drawers. He loved that crowded, musty store. I didn’t mind, ‘cause Mr. Wood kept a pile of old superhero comic books for us kids. But we weren’t here for Spiderman today.

“Hi, Mr. Wood. What can you tell us about this robbery?” Donny held up the newspaper.

Mr. Wood leaned his elbows on the dusty counter. “I can’t figure out how the guy got in. I always lock the doors and windows, and last night was no exception. None of them were broken or forced.”

“Maybe he was hiding in the store when you closed up?” Donny said. The thought gave me the willies. What if someone was watching from the power tools aisle right now?

Mr. Wood shrugged. “I found this stuck in the cat door.” He held out a piece of torn gold braid. “Can’t make head or tails out of it. No one could get in through that tiny opening.”

“Another clue, Paul,” Donny whispered, his eyes shining. You’d think he’d just won the lottery.

The Sweet Shoppe was right next door. A bunch of kids milled around, drooling over coconut drops and peanut butter fudge. The teenage girl at the counter called out, “Next!” like a barker at the county fair.

Donny wormed his way up to the front. “It says here the mystery robber stole an iPod from your store.”

“My iPod,” the girl corrected him. “If I ever catch that thief, I’m gonna make a mystery out of him. All my music’s on that iPod.” She fished in a drawer under the counter. “He wolfed down half a pound of caramels, and left this behind.” She handed Donny a crumpled up scrap of

paper. "It's from a flyer for the circus in the park this week."

"Another clue!" Donny looked at me. "Next stop, Moonrun Park."

Besides the skateboard course, Moonrun Park had a lake with paddleboats, a couple playgrounds, and a huge lawn for flying kites or playing ultimate Frisbee. This week, it also had a traveling circus.

Donny and I ditched our bikes and joined a crowd of kids hanging around to watch a teenage boy exercising an elephant. You don't often see that in Clarion, Ohio!

When we went to check out the rest of the circus, I spied a tiny monkey wearing a snappy blue vest decorated with gold braid. He was perched on my bike tire, busy twisting off the rear reflector.

"Hey, stop that," I called out.

The monkey ripped my reflector free and waved it over his head, chattering. I could swear he was laughing at me.

"Give me that, you little thief," I yelled, diving for the monkey. He sidestepped, and I landed flat on my face in the dirt. Donny doubled over laughing.

"You're no help," I grumbled.

A young boy with curly red hair came running up. "I'll get him," he said. "C'mere, Peter!" He held out a chocolate donut. It worked like magic! The monkey leaped onto the boy's shoulder, clutching my reflector in one hand and grabbing the donut with the other. Great, now I'll have chocolate fingerprints all over my reflector.

Suddenly I smacked my forehead, as everything came clear. Donny, that mind reader, realized it the very same instant.

"It's the monkey," we both shouted. "The monkey is the Mystery Robber!"

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We were right, of course. When the boy took us to the monkey van, we found a stash of electronics, a pile of cookie cutters, and a monkey-sized hole in the window screen.

The ringmaster called the newspaper to declare the mystery solved. He had to apologize for his light-fingered monkey. He let us take the laptop to collect Kilron's reward.

Donny threw the laptop into his backpack, and we hopped on our bikes to ride to Kilron headquarters. But before we got there, he pulled over in a gravelly vacant lot.

"I want to check out this laptop," he said, as if he hacked into other people's computers all the time. "I want to find out what information in here is worth \$10,000 to Kilron."

Kilron might be the biggest industry in Clarion, but its managers sure were stupid. Donny guessed their password on the second try: Password1.

He grinned at me. "All the corporate secrets of Kilron Inc. lie before us. Look, here's the secret recipe for Broccoli Bars."

I pretended to gag, and pointed to a file named "Clarion Master Plan." Donny clicked it open, and we both gasped as a computer model of our town popped up. Turns out, Kilron wanted more than Moonrun Park. Houses, churches, even City Hall vanished under a fancy model of a Broccoli Bars factory covering the entire downtown. Another factory for Cauliflower Candy wiped out my entire neighborhood. I really did gag at the thought of that.

Donny locked eyes with me. "Kilron's taking over the whole town, and no one knows about it," he whispered. "We gotta take this to the Mayor. Nuts—no \$10,000 for us!"

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The Mayor was outraged. She and the Assembly ran Kilron out of town. They gave

Donny and me each a medal for outstanding community service, and held a picnic in Moonrun Park to celebrate. We ate enough hotdogs to make ourselves sick, and then we went to the circus.

While the monkeys zoomed around the ring on their tiny bicycles, Donny poked me on the arm. “If we got ourselves a monkey like that, and put on shows every weekend, I’ll bet we could make that million . . .”