

The Big Mistake  
June 16th

Remember how I once said we've got nice neighbors on one side and mean ones on the other? Well, this past week, I made a big mistake...and it involved both of them.

I'll admit, recently, I've been very eager to make money. Maybe too eager.

My mom told Ruby and me she'd take us to NYC at the end of the Summer, so I've been saving up A LOT. (Think: extra household chores, a bake sale, and last week's lemonade stand!) I plan to buy everyone's Christmas presents while I'm there.

Because of this, I was very excited when the nice neighbors told me they were going out of town and needed someone to watch their pet turtle.

So for the first few days, I'd go out the back door, open the gate to their yard, let little "Morris" out to roam around, put him back in his cage, and close the gate.

Then, I think I bit off more than I could chew. The mean neighbors said they too were leaving town for a few days and recruited me to plant-sit. I readily agreed, though now, of course, I regret the whole thing!

Here's the story that I'm not excited to tell...

Yesterday, Clare and I hung out all day, but when the sun set, I realized I had yet to do my responsibilities!

I raced down the street and unlocked the meanie's back door. I took the watering can and methodically fed each indoor plant, just like 'Mrs. Meanie' had instructed.

And, because it hadn't rained in a few days and they were returning home tomorrow, I even brought the can outside to water their precious fruit and vegetable garden, row by row.

I then cut through my backyard and into the other neighbor's. It was getting dark, but I promised 'Mr. Nice' that I'd let Morris the turtle roam around once a day, which I forgot to do earlier. So after some thinking, I decided to let him out to stretch his small green legs.

After about five minutes of roaming around in the now-dark grass, dirt, and plants, I went to scoop him up. But where was he?

I began pacing the yard, looking for Morris. I couldn't find him. So I ran to my house, grabbed a flashlight, bolted back to their yard, and searched.

Nothing.

## MISSING TURTLE ALERT!

I began to panic. I then asked the twins and my mom to help me look. All four of us overturned leaves, checked under shadowy bushes, and looked for movement in the grass but saw nothing.

“Joanie, it’s getting late,” my mom said after some time. Ty and Ruby weakly protested but, after a sharp look from Mom, regretfully flicked off their flashlights.

I felt sick. Little Morris the turtle was gone, and it was all my fault. I imagined him scared, lost, and curled up in his shell somewhere.

My face suddenly felt hot, and I began to cry. What if he never came back? The nice neighbors would miss him so much.

My mom said we’d better go to bed, and I could keep looking in the morning when the sun was up. She hugged me and whispered, “I’m sure he’ll turn up. He couldn’t have gone far.”

Ty and Ruby raced back inside. My mom put her arm around me as we slowly walked towards our back door, and my nose grew stuffy, and my eyes blurred with tears of guilt.

\*\*\*

Grant’s voice woke me up in the morning. He stood in the doorway of my room and said, “The mean neighbors are home, and they’re furious.”

“What?” I said, still feeling weak and wretched from the night before. Had I done something wrong at their house, too?

“Yeah, I saw them shouting in their backyard! Joanie, did you eat some of the ‘untouchable berries’?”

“I didn’t eat their strawber—” I started to say, but then realized that I knew what did! I jumped out of bed, flew past a confused-looking Grant, and ran outside in my pajamas.

There, in the middle of the mean neighbor’s perfectly kept garden, was a very much alive Morris, slowly munching on berries after a long night’s trek across two backyards. I felt flooded with relief! His legs swam through the air as I picked him up. What an adventurous little stinker, I thought as I carried him back to his cage!

In the end, neither neighbor paid me after I confessed my story to them. But after that whole stressful fiasco, I didn’t even care about the money!

Your Friend,  
Joanie