

Kenny Can

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1

Homework Troubles

Kenny sat at the kitchen table with his math workbook open in front of him. He shuffled his feet, squirmed in his chair, and bounced the rubber end of his pencil against the table.

“Randy . . . had . . . eight . . . calves . . . in . . . the barn,” he read slowly. “Each . . . calf ate two . . . pounds of . . . fence—no, *feed* . . . a day. How . . . many . . . pounds . . . of feed does Randy . . . have to . . . measure out each day?”

It took Kenny a long time to read the problem. He groaned and ran his hands through his hair. His shoulders slumped in discouragement. *I’m so dumb*, he told himself. He was nine years old, but only in the second grade.

Reading was such hard work. The words didn’t always look the same to him. It seemed as if his brain had a



wrinkle in it. By the time he had read to the end of a problem, he had forgotten the first part of it.

Mom, who was sweeping the floor, came to look over his shoulder. She had already helped him with his English lesson. To Kenny, nouns and verbs were as strange as cannibals or astronauts. They made no sense to him.

Mom helped him with his homework every night. He wished he could learn as fast as his older brothers, Jeffrey and Ray. Even his younger brother Anthony could write his own name and count to a hundred, and he wasn't even in school yet.

Kenny's three brothers were all out tobogganing in the moonlight while he sat here at the table with numbers dancing all over the page in front of him.

"How many calves were there?" Mom prompted.

Kenny threw down his pencil. "I don't know. If I had those calves in the barn, I would just feed them. I wouldn't need to know how much they ate altogether. I just can't figure it out on paper."

Mom sat down and helped him with that problem and then the rest of the math lesson. She didn't know either why Kenny couldn't get things into his head. She could help him with telling time one night until she thought he knew how to do it. But the next day on a test, Kenny would get the time problems all wrong again.

"School was hard for me too," Dad said. "I didn't learn to read well till I was out of school."

That gave Kenny hope. His dad was smart now. He had a whole family of boys and a shop where he made

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kitchen cabinets and furniture. He could fix the car or the washing machine, and he could have devotions at church. Kenny hoped that when he grew up, his brain would wake up too.

At last, his homework was finished. Kenny shoved his books into his backpack and headed for the basement.

In one corner of the basement, he was building a miniature farm on a half sheet of plywood. He had molded some hills and a little streambed out of plaster of paris. The fields were covered with fake grass and tiny corn plants made of twisted crepe paper. The stream was blue paper covered with plastic wrap.

Kenny had built a little bridge out of stones and made a woodlot with snippets of green sponge. The house and barn were built of painted popsicle sticks. Black and white cows grazed in the pasture, and chickens pecked in the farmyard. As Kenny could afford it, he was slowly adding to his collection of plastic farm animals.

Kenny hummed happily as he made an old-fashioned rail fence from twigs he had collected in the woods. This was something he *could* do.

2

Accident-Prone

Mom was doctoring the cuts and scrapes from Kenny's latest accident. He had been ramping his bike over a board set on a rock. The rock had rolled as he hit the end of the board. Kenny and his bike had sprawled onto the gravel.

"At least this accident isn't as serious as some of your others," Mom said. She gently swabbed his elbow with peroxide. "I don't think this will need stitches. It's been four years since your last accident, so it was about time for something else to happen," she teased.

His parents said Kenny was "accident-prone." When he was two years old, he had gotten his fingers into the belt of an air compressor and lost a layer of skin. When he was three years old, he had tried to climb up the pulpit at Trillium Christian Church while Mom was cleaning

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there. Because the pulpit wasn't fastened down, it had fallen over on him and broken his wrist.

Four years ago, Kenny had been watching as Dad used his radial arm saw to cut a board. When the cut was made and the saw turned off, Kenny had reached up to grab the small piece that was left. The blade was still spinning, and he had lost the tips of two fingers.

Everyone wondered what would happen next. Except for spraining his ankle jumping from a beam in the barn and getting stung while knocking a hornet's nest off the porch roof, he'd had only minor cuts and bruises for several years.

"Maybe this is my accident for now," said Kenny. He watched as Mom wrapped a bandage around his scraped elbow. "I did fall into the water when we were rafting, but that wasn't serious. I only got wet. I don't know why everything happens to me."

"It isn't just by chance that you're accident-prone," Mom told him. "You're too rammy. You get yourself into trouble. Stop and think before you do risky things. You should have made sure that stone wouldn't roll before you rode your bike up the ramp. Did Ray try that ramp first?"

Kenny shook his head. "He wasn't around. I made it myself."

"I hope you learn to be more careful before you hurt yourself really bad."

"Kenny's guardian angels have to work overtime," joked Ray. He had come into the house for a drink.

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“I’m glad they do,” said Mom. “I’m thankful for guardian angels that watch over my boys. Just take it easy so your guardian angels don’t have to work so hard,” she told Kenny.

“I’ll try, Mom,” Kenny answered with a grin and a wave as he headed back outside to ride again.

3

Hurricane Esmerelda

Kenny charged up the basement stairs and burst into the kitchen. “Who wrecked my farm?” he demanded. “Wait till I get my hands on him. Was it you, Anthony?” He whirled and grabbed his younger brother by the arm.

Kenny didn’t get angry easily, but he was angry now. He shook Anthony, who struggled to get away, whimpering, “Let go! I never touched your farm.”

“What’s wrong, Kenny?” asked Mom.

“Somebody messed up my farm. The buildings are piled up on one end, the hay bales are scattered all over, and the fences are broken down. It’s ruined. I’ll never be able to fix it up.” Kenny fought the tears that had started to spill from his eyes.

“Let’s go see this disaster,” Mom said. She led the parade, including Ray and Anthony and Dad, down the