

The Case of the Pickled Beets

Middletown is a sleepy, suburban town where most people know each other by first name. It's not a city, but it's not a small town either. It's in the middle, as its name suggests. There are some farms, some woods, but there are also some busy streets and a bustling town center.

However, Middletown is anything but ordinary. The schools are among the best in the state, with many kids getting scholarships to Ivy League schools. The sports teams also are very good and always compete for championships. The basketball team has won the state title for three years in a row.

Unfortunately sometimes these intelligent, driven, and competitive kids can be too smart for their own good. Luckily, three of the brightest kids in the town have one common interest; Solving puzzles and mysteries. Actually they have many things in common as they are brothers, but solving puzzles and mysteries is one of their favorite things to do. They call themselves the "Elementary Detectives" based on one of the most quotable sayings of the great Sherlock Holmes.

It also should be noted that all three brothers are in elementary school. Jack, the oldest, is in fourth grade. He loves sports, science, and puzzles of any kind. Ben, in second grade, is inquisitive, extremely smart, and quick with a joke. He remembers everything, which comes in useful when recalling facts. William, in kindergarten, is the youngest but is fearless and outgoing.

Whenever a mystery pops up in school, the other kids know exactly who to go to. These three boys have developed a reputation for getting to the bottom of things, and had already solved quite a few cases. Even Principal Evans turned to the Elementary Detectives to help students with their problems. However, sometimes the Elementary Detectives have a funny knack for stumbling onto mysteries all on their own.

Such was the case with the episode that came to be known as "The Case of the Pickled Beets". It began shortly after school started in the fall, when local farmers began to harvest their crops. One of the largest farms in town was owned by Clarence Evans. Clarence just happened to be the brother of Principal Harvey Evans. It was a funny coincidence that the school bought almost thirty percent of the fresh beets from Clarence's farm. Lunch Lady Lucy spent almost every weekend pickling the beets so that they would stay fresh all winter.

Therefore, the storerooms of the school were full of pickled beets. Every Thursday was pickled beets day at school. Unfortunately, it was the most hated school lunch day of the week. Almost no one bought their lunch on Thursdays. Those kids that did buy their lunch did not eat the pickled beets. This caused a big problem for the school. They could not sell the pickled beets. The storerooms began to overflow and jars of pickled beets were piled up in the kitchen.

The situation became dire when Principal Evans and lunch lady Lucy unexpectedly switched pickled beets day to Monday. The kids showed up for lunch and were not happy when they were served a “two for one” special of pickled beets.

Now the corner table in the back of the lunch room was fondly called “The bully’s corner”. The elementary school bullies all sat together to plot out their next wedgie or spitball victim. As outrage over the pickled beets mounted, a chant rose up from the bullies’ table. It started out low but was soon joined by almost the entire lunchroom...”We hate pickled beets! No more pickled beets! We hate pickled beets! No more pickled beets!”

The teachers tried to restore order, but the chant continued. It was a tense situation, and all it took was one spark to turn the lunchroom into chaos. That spark was Simon Smedley. Simon was something of a genius. He was only in second grade but he was taking college science courses. His parents had thought about having him skip elementary and high school altogether, but they wanted him to stay with his classmates. The problem was that Simon was a bit of a tattler. To his defense, he was picked on by the bullies. However, he also brought some of it on himself by telling on them whenever he saw fit.

On this particular day, Simon was the only student who was happy that pickled beets day was switched to Monday. Simon loved pickled beets. As he walked out of the lunch line with double helpings of pickled beets, he saw the other kids chanting and standing on tables...”We hate pickled beets! No more pickled beets!”

Being one of the smartest kids in school, Simon should have known to keep his mouth shut, but being Simon, he yelled out “I love pickled beets!”

The lunchroom became eerily quiet as all the kids stopped and stared at Simon. Simon stood in the middle of the lunchroom gripping his tray. He put his nose up in the air and said again “Pickled beets are delicious. Quiet down you bunch of children and let us eat in a civilized manner.”

Again the lunch room was silent. Until suddenly, from the direction of the bullies’ corner, a helping of pickled beets came hurtling through the air. It smacked Simon in the head and left a maroon blob covering his face. Someone yelled, “Food fight!” and in an instant the lunchroom went into a rage. Pickled beets started flying all over the place.

Teachers ran for cover, but it was all over in a matter of minutes. Everyone and everything was covered in pickled beets. Principal Evans was furious! Parents were called, and a special school assembly was scheduled. It took almost all night for lunch lady Lucy and her staff to clean up the cafeteria. Every kid in school was given detention.

This was unprecedented. There were so many kids that they had to start alphabetically. Kids with the last names beginning A to C had detention on Monday. Kids with the last

names beginning D to F were Tuesday, and so on. However, there were four students who did not have detention. Simon Smedley, the alleged victim, did not receive detention. Also the Elementary Detectives were all absent that day as the family had come down with the flu. This ended up being fortunate for the detectives as they missed the food fight and avoided the unpleasant punishment.

The mystery started on Tuesday after the first detention. When the lunch bell sounded, all the kids filed into the cafeteria. Usually there was only one choice on the menu for school lunch. However, today the students noticed a separate table set up at the end of the lunch counter. In addition to the regular school lunch, which happened to be pizza, the school was offering a second choice of pickled beets.

Kids started laughing as they knew no one would pick the pickled beets. However, to their amazement, a line was forming at the pickled beets counter. Lunch Lady Lucy piled on the pickled beets and several students walked slowly to their tables to eat. Jack, one of the Elementary detectives overheard one of the kids chanting; "I love pickled beets. Everyone should eat pickled beets."

Jack could not believe his ears. He saw his brother Ben, and told him the story.

"No way!" Ben said dismissively. "No one likes pickled beets except Simon Smedley."

However, just then another kid came out from the lunch room with pickled beets. "I love pickled beets. Everyone should eat pickled beets." They heard him saying. Even more surprising was that he was Tom Bryson, one of the meanest bullies in school. He went over and sat at the bully table. The other bullies could not believe it either.

They began to yell at him. "Why are you eating pickled beets? They are horrible!" The bullies said.

But Tom just kept saying "I love pickled beets. Everyone should eat pickled beets."

All over the lunch room, there were kids eating the pickled beets and saying the same thing. At recess, the other kids were still freaked out. No one could believe what just happened. Even the Elementary Detectives were puzzled. Jack met Ben and Will on top of the monkey bars.

"This is really weird" Will said. "Jimmy Connors hates pickled beets but then decides today that he loves them?"

"Same thing for Tom Bryson, Matt Anderson, and Chuck Billings." Said Ben.

Jack was deep in thought for a minute and then he said. "Don't all those kids have last names beginning with A to C?" he asked.

“You are right!” Ben exclaimed. “They all had detention last night for the pickled beets food fight, and now they come in the next day and love pickled beets?”
“That’s weird” Will said. “Maybe they were brain washed!”

Ben gave Will a shot in the arm. “There’s no such thing as brain washing!”

“There has to be a connection some how” Jack said as he began to think again. “We need to investigate.”

The rest of the afternoon, the Elementary detectives began to round up and interview the students who ate the pickled beets. After comparing notes, they discovered that all the students could not remember saying “I love pickled beets. Everyone should eat pickled beets.” The kids remembered eating the pickled beets but could not say why they decided to eat them. The kids all said that despite eating the pickled beets, they did not like pickled beets.

What was more disturbing is that the next day, the same thing happened. All the students with the last names beginning with A to C chose and ate the pickled beets. Also all the students with last names beginning with D to F chose and ate the pickled beets. All the students came out of the lunch room chanting the same thing. “We love pickled beets. Everyone should eat pickled beets.”

The entire student body was completely freaked out. The kids with last names beginning with G to I were scared and did not want to go to detention. Some were crying and others pretended to be sick so they got dismissed early. However the Elementary Detectives had a plan.

Will, getting excited, said: “We need to sneak into detention and find out what is going on.”

“For once, little brother, I agree with you.” Ben said “And I have a plan.”

The others looked at Ben, who explained his plan. They arranged to stay late at the library to do some studying. When the buses left and the school settled down, the detectives sprung into action.

Ben and Will took a remote controlled car out of their backpack. There was a video camera taped to the back of it. Ben had his ipad and he could watch what the car camera recorded. They snuck down the hall until they were right outside the lunch room. They could hear lunch lady Lucy and Principal Evans inside. They were talking low so no one could hear them.

Ben and Will opened the closet door that was in the hallway next to the lunch room. The antenna on the remote control car only worked in close range but they dared not sneak into the lunch room. Ben carefully put the car on the ground in the hallway. He picked up the monitor while Will worked the controls on the car. Will moved the car until it was

peeking around the side of the lunchroom door. He could see the back of lunch lady Lucy as she was talking with Principal Evans.

Will took a deep breath and zoomed the car into the lunch room. Ben gave him instructions as he watched the monitor. Will parked the car under some metal shelves and then inched it forward until the camera had a clear view of the lunchroom. Will and Ben each put an earphone from their ipad into their ears and plugged it in. They now could see and hear everything going on in the lunchroom.

Meanwhile, Jack crept down the main hallway towards the administration offices. Most were deserted as school was out for the day. Jack approached Principal Evans' office and quietly opened the door. He quickly went behind the desk and began looking through the files. He knew there had to be a clue as to what was going on.

Back in the closet by the lunchroom, Ben and Will heard the whole plan explained to them. Lunch lady Lucy was complaining to Principal Evans that they were going to get caught.

"We are not going to get caught Lucy" he said with a smile "Even if they suspect something, they will never be able to prove it."

"But how do we know that these pills will not harm the children?" Lunch lady Lucy said nervously as she held up a bag of small blue pills. She took a handful and dropped them into the pickled beets she was stirring up.

"Because I said so!" a familiar voice chirped in. Simon Smedley stepped into the lunchroom. "My scientific calculations are perfect! My special serum combined with a little hypnotism will soon have every kid in school eating pickled beets every day."

Principal Evans leaned over towards lunch lady Lucy "Just think my dear, you soon will have your storerooms back and we will never have left over pickled beets again." He said with a wicked laugh. "I keep the pills locked up in a safe behind the picture in my office, and no one will ever find them."

Ben and Will saw and heard all this on the ipad. They looked at each other and gave each other a high five. "Gotcha now!" Will whispered.

Ben took out his phone and texted Jack. "They're using pills to drug kids into eating pickled beets. The evidence is in a safe behind a picture."

Jack was still looking through the desk when he got Ben's text. He jumped up and went over to a picture of a farmhouse hanging on the wall. Gently peeking under it, the picture swung back revealing a wall safe. Jack took out a special instrument he had gotten out of a spy magazine. He put an earpiece on that connected to a long cord with a suction cup on the other end. He listened carefully as he turned the dial on the safe. Each time he

heard a “click” he knew he had the right number to the combination. After three clicks, he cracked open the safe.

Looking inside he saw a bag of blue pills. Inside the bag was a note with handwritten instructions on how to use the pills. The note was signed by Simon Smedley. “I guess you are not a genius after all” Jack said to himself.

Just then, Jack got another text from Ben. “Principal Evans is heading back to his office. Get out now!!!!”

Jack quickly grabbed the bag and shut the safe. He turned and sprinted for the door. Just as he opened it, Principal Evans appeared at the entrance. They both looked at each other in surprise for a second. Jack then dove through the shocked Principal’s legs and took off down the hallway. Principal Evans yelled in anger and ran after him.

Jack was running down the hallway as fast as he could. He could hear Principal Evans screaming at him to stop. Just as he was approaching the lunchroom, lunch Lady Lucy ran out and blocked his path.

Jack was trapped between lunch lady Lucy and Principal Evans. Just when he was about to give up, Jack saw a small black object zoom out from the lunchroom. The remote control car rammed into Lucy’s legs and knocked her flat on her back. Jack took off and jumped around her.

Just then Simon Smedley came running out of the lunchroom. However, the closet door opened up right in front of him and he crashed into the wooden door. Ben and Will paused long enough to watch Simon drop to the ground, before bolting after Jack. Principal Evans kept running too and the chase led them right into the gymnasium.

Jack, Ben and Will ran into the gymnasium and straight over to the ball bins where stacks of dodge balls were loaded up for the night. Ben yelled out that he had called 911 and the police were on the way. Will just grinned and grabbed a dodge ball in each hand. “Let’s light him up!” he yelled playfully.

Fully armed with dodge balls, the detectives retreated to the top of the bleachers. Principal Evans burst into the gym and immediately started to chase them up the bleachers. The boys turned and held up the dodge balls in warning.

“You wouldn’t dare hit your Principal with a dodge ball” Principal Evans said angrily. “Give me the ipad and the pills and we can work this out. How does straight A’s for the rest of elementary school sound to you?”

Ben yelled back. “We can’t be bought off with good grades! You made kids eat pickled beets!”

“Eat dodge ball!” Will said and launched his first ball. The ball hit Principal Evans in the arm but he knocked it aside.

Then Jack and Ben hummed their dodge balls at the Principal. He couldn’t block them all and one of the balls hit him right in the foot as he was trying to climb up the bleachers. Principal Evans lost his balance and stumbled backwards. Then each boy loaded up with his second shot. The three balls each hit Principal Evans in the chest and sent him toppling down the bleachers.

By the time the police rushed into the gym, the Principal lay knocked out at the bottom of the bleachers. The boys showed the police the evidence and they arrested Principal Evans, lunch lady Lucy, and Simon Smedley. Simon cried all the way to the police station.

The next day, Vice Principal Mrs. Smith was promoted to be the new Principal. She gave Jack, Ben and Will a special medal for helping crack the case. All detentions were cancelled and the other students gave the Elementary Detectives a huge round of applause. She also outlawed pickled beets and decreed that they would never be served again for school lunch.