

The Case of the Pilfered Pellets



A Brodericks Mystery

By Caitlind L. Alexander



A LearningIsland.org
15 - Minute Mystery

In case you haven't met them yet, Kendall and Jamie are a brother/ sister team that likes to solve mysteries. Kendall is older and a bit more cautious. Jamie is younger, more impetuous, and can be a bit of a spitfire.

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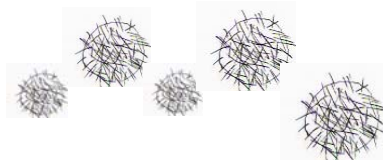
Summary: Jamie and Kendall Broderick try to help a friend get back a stolen science experiment.

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The Case of the Pilfered Pellets

It was a very hot day. Kendall and Jamie were sitting out on the front porch eating an ice cream cone. It was too hot to do much of anything else.

Suddenly Tommy Watkins rode up to the Broderick house on his bike. He was breathing hard. Sweat was running down his face, but Tommy didn't seem to care.

“Hi Tommy,” Jamie said. Tommy was in her class at school.

“Someone stole my science experiment,” Tommy wailed. “You guys solve mysteries. I need your help. If I don’t get those pellets back before tomorrow I won’t be able to finish. Then I won’t have a chance to win the science fair prize.”

“What is the prize?” Jamie asked. Tommy looked as if he was ready to cry.

“It’s a new computer,” he answered. “I was counting on it. My mom can’t afford to buy us a computer since my dad died,” he explained. “It takes forever to get time on the computer at the library. I really need it.”

Jamie and Kendall knew that Tommy wanted to be a scientist when he grew up. He had been studying science for a long time.

“Just what did he take?” Jamie asked.

“Owl pellets,” Tommy said. He pulled a paper from his pocket and showed it to the Brodericks. It was a receipt for five owl pellets.

“What exactly are owl pellets?” Kendall asked.

“The droppings from owls,” Tommy explained. “Owls eat an entire animal. Their stomach digests everything. But they can’t digest the fur and the bones. These make a hard pellet in their body.

Their body then throws up what it can’t use. If you pull apart an owl pellet you can figure out what kind of animal the owl ate,” Tommy said excitedly. “It’s really cool.”

He pulled a book from his back pocket. “I even got a book that shows me what the bones of different animals look like. I’ll be able to compare the leftover bones to these. Then I can figure out what the owl ate.”

He opened the book and showed it to Jamie and Kendall. It was filled with drawings of small animal bones.

“Do you have any idea who stole your pellets?” Kendall asked.

“It was Johnny Thomas. He’s always hanging around my house. My mom tries to make me be

nice to him, but I don't like him. He lies a lot and he always bullies me.”

“Do you have any evidence against him?” Jamie asked.

“No,” Tommy answered. “But he was there when I got the pellets in the mail. I showed them to him and told him what I was going to do.”

“Then what happened,” Kendall asked.

“Then I went up to my room. Tommy followed me. I was going to tell him to get out, but my mom was there. She thinks we should be friends because both our fathers are dead. It takes more than that to be a friend,” Tommy said.

“Sometimes parents have strange ideas about who we should be nice to,” Jamie agreed.

“Yeah,” Tommy agreed. “Who wants to be friends with a bully?”

“So Johnny followed you inside?” Kendall asked.

“Yeah,” Tommy went on. “I went up to my room. I didn't have time to hide the pellets, so I set

the box on my desk. I started to get out some poster board so I could diagram everything. Tommy tried to tell me that we should do the science project together. I didn't want to."

"Then my mom called me down to the kitchen," Tommy added. "She handed me some milk and cookies. She said she thought we might like a snack. When I got back up to my room, the pellets were gone from the box and Johnny was gone from my room."

"Have you asked him about it?" Jamie asked.

"Yeah," Tommy said. "But he just called me a liar and a freak."

"Let's go talk to Johnny," Kendall said.

He and Jamie got up off the front porch. They called inside to let their mom know where they were going. Then they got on their bikes and pedaled down the road.

It only took a couple of minutes to reach Johnny's house. Johnny's mother let them in. "He's up in his room," she said. "Go on up."

They headed upstairs. When they reached Johnny's room they looked in.

The room was a huge mess. Papers and toys were laying everywhere. The bed hadn't been made and dirty clothes were all over the place.

Johnny was sitting at his desk pulling apart a small ball of fur.

"My owl pellets," Tommy cried. "You DID steal them."

Johnny turned around. "You're crazy. These are my owl pellets," he said.

"Do you have a receipt for them?" Kendall asked. Johnny looked at him. Kendall was older and bigger. Johnny didn't want to make him mad.

"I didn't buy them," Johnny said. "I found them. I was walking through the woods late last night. I was coming home from the movies."

"Suddenly I heard a sound. I looked up and saw an owl. I think it was a barn owl. It looked brown, but with big yellow eyes."



“I stopped cold,” he continued. “I didn’t want to scare it away. While I was watching, the owl lifted its tail feathers and pooped the pellets. Then it flew away.”

“I had been wondering what to do for a science experiment. Mother Nature gave me the answer.

I collected the pellets from the ground. I'm going to pull them apart and figure out what the owl ate."

"That was *my* science experiment," Tommy yelled angrily. "You stole the pellets and the idea."

"Prove it," Johnny challenged.

"I can," Jamie said.

What made Jamie so sure that Johnny was lying?

Answer:

“Oh yeah?” Johnny challenged.

“Yeah,” Jamie answered. “You said the owl raised its tail feathers and pooped the pellets.”

“Yeah,” Johnny answered. “He did.”

“He couldn’t have,” Jamie challenged. “Owls don’t poop the pellets from their backside. Deer and rabbit pellets come out the back end of the animal, but owl pellets don’t. Owls throw up the part of the animal they don’t eat.”

Kendall wrinkled his nose. He gave his sister a disgusted look.

“Owls poop through their mouth?” he asked.

“That’s right,” Tommy said. “Owls poop through their mouth.”

Johnny’s mom stood at the door. Johnny, did you take Tommy’s science experiment,” she demanded.

“Yeah,” Johnny said sullenly. His mother glared at him with her hands on her hips.

“And...” she said. Tommy knew what she expected him to say.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured. “Here are your pellets back.” He handed the pellets back to Tommy.

Tommy wrapped them in his receipt and turned to Jamie and Kendall. “Thanks you guys. I really owe you one.”

“No problem,” Jamie said. “It was fun.”