The Case of the Tomato Bandit

Saturday morning. Gus the groundskeeper came rattling up to the Fox Bros. golf ball stand in his green work cart.

Gus always called Jack "Professor" and Robbie "Pint-size." Not today. "Boys," he said. "I've been robbed."

"I grew three giant tomatoes. Ruby, Rosie, and Gus Junior. Gus Junior was as big as a grapefruit! Last night they were on the vine. This morning... gone!"

"Big Tom the turkey was in my garden yesterday," said Gus. "The deer come by every evening. Biscuit, the beagle next door, digs up everything. And raccoons live by the creek. But I bet it was that turkey."

Jack wrote all four names in his green notebook. Four maybes. Detectives call a maybe like that a **suspect**.

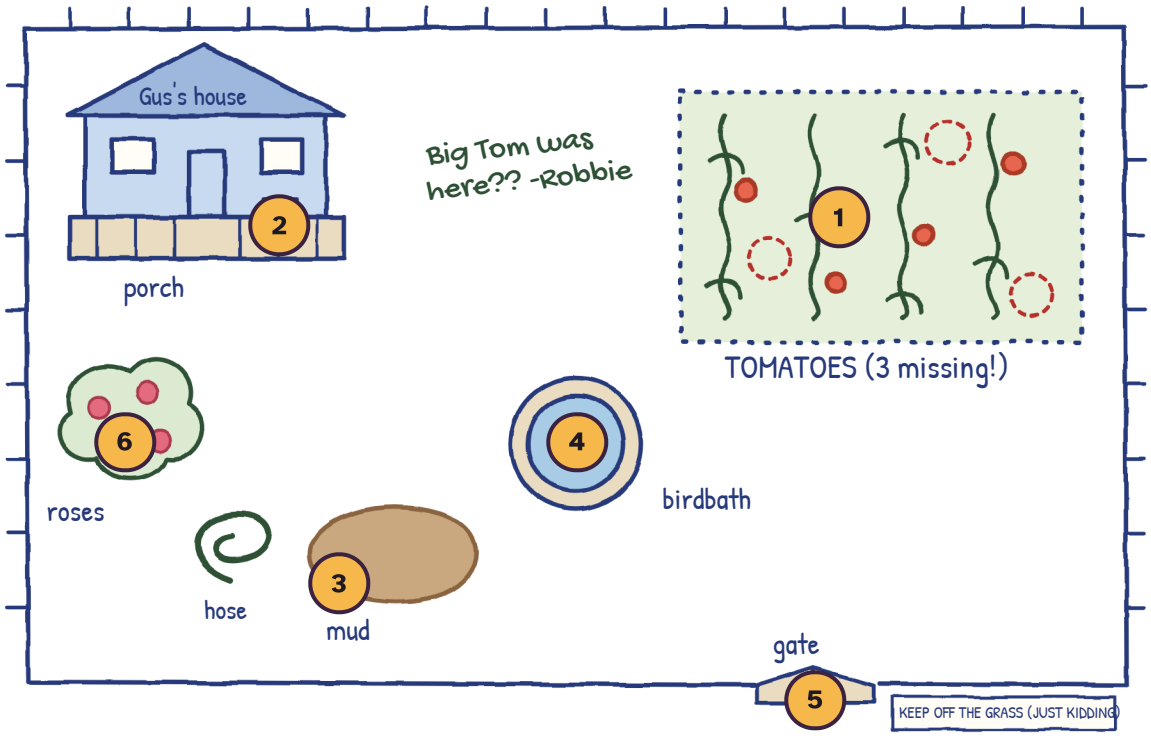
"We'll take the case," said Robbie. Detective, that means you, too. Robbie will look down low. Jack will write it all down. Your job? **Notice everything.**

> **Detective word: suspect.** Anyone who might have done it. Being a suspect doesn't mean you did it.

How to play on paper

1. Cut out the 6 clue cards on page 2. Turn them face down on the numbered map spots.
2. Flip them over one at a time and read them out loud.
3. On page 3, give Jack's card to one detective and Robbie's card to another. No peeking!
4. Cross off suspects, make your accusation, and plan the stakeout.
5. Check the sealed answer on page 4 only when you're sure.

Jack's map of Gus's garden



Cut on the dashed lines.

Gus's garden is behind his little blue house, across the creek. Put a clue card face down on each numbered spot on Jack's map, then flip them one at a time. Find all six clues.

CLUE 1 · TOMATO PATCH

Not one leaf eaten

Three empty stems. Not one leaf nibbled. "Somebody wanted tomatoes," said Jack. "Only tomatoes."

Found by Jack

CLUE 2 · GUS'S GARDEN LOG

Gus's garden log

Friday, 7:00 p.m. Watered. Streetlights on. Tomatoes looking GREAT.

Saturday, 6:00 a.m. Still dark. Checked with my flashlight. GONE!!!

(Gus used three exclamation points.)

Found by Jack

CLUE 3 · MUD BY THE BIRDBATH

Smudgy footprints

"Footprints!" said Robbie, his nose almost in the mud. Gus had raked this mud smooth last night, so the prints were new. But birdbath water had splashed them. "Too smudgy. I need a closer look."



Found by Robbie

CLUE 4 · BIRDBATH

Seeds in the birdbath

Muddy water. Tomato seeds swirling around. A little green tomato top bobbing like a boat. "Who takes a tomato for a swim?" asked Robbie.

Found by Robbie

CLUE 5 · GARDEN GATE

No digging

The gate was still shut. Its sign said KEEP OFF THE GRASS (JUST KIDDING). Jack checked the whole fence. Nothing had dug under it. Not one hole.

Found by Jack

CLUE 6 · ROSE BUSH

A turkey feather!

A giant brown feather in the rose bush! "TURKEY! I KNEW it!" yelled Robbie. "Told you," said Gus. "Big Tom was in here yesterday afternoon. I chased him out with my broom."

Found by Robbie

The suspects



Big Tom

WILD TURKEY

- In the garden yesterday afternoon. Gus chased him out.
- Eats almost anything.

Cross off: ☐



The deer

A DEER FAMILY

- Come out at dusk and wander at night.
- Love to munch leaves.

Cross off: ☐



Biscuit

THE BEAGLE NEXT DOOR

- Loves to dig holes.
- Sometimes escapes in the daytime.

Cross off: ☐



The raccoons

CREEK NEIGHBORS

- Come out at night to find food.
- Excellent climbers.

Cross off: ☐

The Two-Brain Challenge

Jack knows one thing. Robbie knows another. You need both cards! Playing with someone? Each of you flips ONE card. No peeking! Tell each other what your card says.

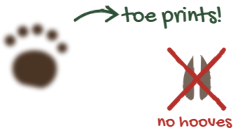
JACK'S BRAIN · THE THINKER

Jack's notes

- Gus's log: the tomatoes vanished between 7:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. It was **dark** the whole time.
- Wild turkeys sleep up in trees all night. Big Tom sleeps in the oaks on the golf course.
- Biscuit's owner: "He sleeps on my couch every night. Snores like a tuba!"

ROBBIE'S BRAIN · THE NOTICER

Robbie's close look



- The tracks are smudgy, but I can see **toe** prints! Too smudgy to count the toes.
- Turkeys, dogs, and raccoons leave toe prints. Deer leave hoof prints, shaped like an upside-down heart.

Who's the Tomato Bandit? Cross off anyone who doesn't match Jack's card. Then anyone who doesn't match Robbie's card. Who's left? My accusation: _____

Plan the stakeout

"Our rule is home when the streetlights come on," said Dad. "Unless I'm with you. So tonight, we all watch Gus's garden together."

Robbie packed snacks. A LOT of snacks. "We're supposed to watch, not eat," said Jack. "Why not both?" said Robbie.

> **Detective word: stakeout.** Hiding somewhere safe and watching very, very quietly. That's what the Fox Bros. are about to do.

Gus has a few cherry tomatoes left. If a raccoon grabs one, where will it go first, before it takes a bite?

- [ ] Back over the fence
- [ ] To the birdbath
- [ ] Under the porch
- [ ] Into the rose bush

Stuck? Hint: What did Jack's animal book say raccoons do with their food?

SEALED ANSWER. FOLD THIS PART UNDER UNTIL YOU'VE MADE YOUR ACCUSATION!

The Tomato Bandits were the raccoons. The tomatoes vanished in the dark, so Big Tom (asleep in an oak on the golf course) and Biscuit (snoring on the couch) have alibis. The tracks showed toe prints, not hoof prints, so it wasn't the deer. Raccoons come out at night, leave toe prints, and climb fences, so they didn't need to dig.

The stakeout: watch the birdbath. When there's water nearby, raccoons often dunk their food before they eat it, and Robbie found tomato seeds in the birdbath.

Solved it? Print your Case Closed certificate at Detective HQ.