Adventures in ODYSSEY®



EUGENE'S NOT-SO-BRIGHT IDEA

by Christopher P. N. Maselli

An Emily Jones Solve-It-Yourself Mystery

When Eugene's Christmas display fails, Emily and Matthew shed some light on the situation.

It's up to a private investigator to figure out the key to correctly unlock a mystery. Figuratively speaking, of course. Mysteries rarely have anything to do with actual keys. Sometimes they have to do with lights.

Thousands upon thousands of Christmas lights.

"Greetings and salutations, Jones and Parker Detective Agency," said Eugene Meltsner, all-around brilliant guy and technological genius.

"Hey, Eugene."

Eugene was placing the finishing touches on his gigantic Christmas light display at Whit's End. The front lawn was decorated with trees, a cross, reindeer, stars, presents, snowmen, wreaths and about everything else seasonally appropriate.

"Was this your idea?" I asked. "I mean . . . making it huge?"

Eugene nodded proudly.

"I see you've used an infinite number of lights."

Eugene plugged one light set into another. Then he carefully stepped over a cord by a set of presents. "The lights are quite finite. There are exactly 12,801."

"Wow. And one," Matthew echoed.

Eugene pointed to a yellow light on top of a tree. "A single star. It flickers."

I nodded. "Cool."

Matthew stood with his hands on his hips. "So when do we get to see it lit up?"

"The sensor is set dusk-to-dawn, so if the weather report is correct, it should be activated tomorrow night around 5:42 p.m.," Eugene said. "But since you're here, would you like a sneak peek?"

"Would we!" both of us cheered.

Eugene twisted his lips as he surveyed the magnificent display. A squirrel ran along the top of a nearby fence. Eugene looked at the sky, graying with the evening.

"Let's wait another 15 minutes for maximum effect."

Matthew and I sat on the chilled ground, waiting for the time to pass. Once it did, Eugene circled around a large reindeer covered with lights.

"Prepare yourself!" he shouted as he plugged a single cord into the power box.

Fwump! We could actually hear the 12,801 tiny lights ignite all at once.

Our eyes grew large as the technological wonder lit up around us like lights in a football stadium.

"Oooo," I said.

"Whoa," Matthew said.

"Excellent," Eugene said.

The squirrel covered its eyes.

The yellow star on top of the tree flickered.

Then the lights shut off. Completely.



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Eugene's mouth dropped. "What?!" He leaned down to check the cord, but before he reached the box—Fwump!—the lights came back on.

"Oooo," I said.

"Whoa," Matthew said.

"Excellent," Eugene said.

The squirrel was frozen.

The yellow star flickered.

Then the lights shut off again.

Eugene bent down and quickly unplugged the cord. He crumpled to the ground. "Oh no, oh no, oh no. I must figure out the cause of this problem before everyone arrives tomorrow night."

Eugene plugged the display back in, stood up and started checking all the electrical cords.

"You guys can go. I've got a long night ahead of me."

Matthew and I exchanged glances.

"No," I said. "We're gonna stick this out with you as long as we can. If there's one thing your Christmas lights remind me of, it's that Jesus came to Earth so we could walk in His light and help each other."

Eugene smiled. "I would be most appreciative. Junior detectives may be just what I need."

Together, the three of us checked the cords throughout the display, searching for any evidence. Of course, without the lights steadily on, it made it very difficult. A half hour later, we all stood staring at the snowmen, the trees, the reindeer, the presents and the sometimes-flickering star.

The squirrel had clearly lost interest and was gnawing on a dark nut.



I noticed both Eugene and Matthew eyeballing him.

"Hey," Matthew said, "sometimes on our Christmas tree there's a light in the chain that makes all the others blink. Could there be a blinking light in your chain?"

"Not that I know of."

"Or maybe something's wrong with the breaker," I suggested.

Eugene thought about it, but shook his head. He checked the plug again. "To borrow the colloquialism, there should be more than enough amperage for this circuit."

Matthew and I just stared at each other.

Suddenly, the squirrel popped up behind the outlet. Eugene jumped from surprise and lost his balance. He fell back and knocked over the reindeer guarding the source of power. Snap! Crash! Matthew and I ran to help him.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine."

Then Eugene froze.

"What?" Matthew said.

Eugene nodded. We looked behind us. The remainder of the Christmas lights shone brightly. Everything looked perfect.

"I see no rhyme or reason to this," Eugene said.

"Maybe the lights on the reindeer drew too much extra power from the outlet," Matthew said.

I narrowed my eyes. "No, the key to this mystery isn't in the power. But I know what it is."

Do you know what caused Eugene's Christmas lights to shut off? What were the clues? Keep scrolling to read the solution!

Solution to

EUGENE'S NOT-SO-BRIGHT IDEA:

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"You're going to say the squirrel did it, aren't you?" Eugene said.

"Definitely not," I said. "That would be just nuts. Ha! No, in this case, the problem was the reindeer."

"Right!" Matthew said. "It did take too much power—because it was so bright."

"Not exactly. The key wasn't the power it took, but the light it gave. It's all about the light."

"I'm not following," Matthew said.

Eugene tapped his foot. "I think I am!" He moved over to the power box. "This is a dusk-to-dawn power box, meaning it has a sensor to 'see' when it becomes dark or light."

"Exactly," I said. "When the sun goes down at dusk, the sensor turns on the lights, and when it's light at dawn, it turns them off. The problem was that the reindeer was sitting right in front of the box. So whenever the lights turned on—"

Matthew finished my thought. "—the sensor thought it was morning. So it turned off the display. But then it was dark again, and it thought it was night. So it turned the display on, then off. On, off, on, off."

"Indeed!" Eugene shouted. "Which explains why it works now that the reindeer has been removed from the equation. I must offer my thanks to you both. Now everyone will see my bright idea after all!"

Biblical evidence:
"If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." –1 John 1:7

CASE SOLVED