

The Lucky Penny

She, Judy Moody, had a penny. Not just any penny. Not a regular old Abe Lincoln penny.

A lucky penny. No lie!

Judy and her family took Grandma Lou out to breakfast at the Two Chicks on a Raft Diner. Stink ordered – what else? – silver-dollar pancakes. Judy said, “I’ll have the special – two chicks on a raft. And some moo juice.”

“Moo juice?” asked Stink, sitting up.

Judy pointed to all the funny names for food on the menu. “Two eggs on toast. And milk to drink.”

“Chocolate moo for me, please,” said Stink.

“So anyway,” Judy told her family, “Grandma Lou took me roller-skating at Mount Trashmore, right?”

“And we rolled right past one of those penny machines,” said Grandma Lou.

“And she gave me this way-old penny she had from the 1970s—”

“Waayy old,” said Grandma Lou, smiling.



“And we put it in the machine and – check it out!” Judy held up a penny with a four-leaf clover



inside a horseshoe that said MY LUCKY PENNY. MT. TRASHMORE, VA.

“That’s not a lucky penny,” said Stink.
“That’s a squashed penny. Weird. It looks like it got run over.”

“It’s still a lucky penny, Stink,” said Judy. “Says so right on it, see?”

“How much did you pay for that?” Stink asked.

“Fifty-one cents,” said Judy.

“Fifty-one cents! You paid fifty-one cents for a penny?”

“A *lucky* penny,” said Judy.

“It’s a special penny,” said Mum. “A keepsake.”

“A souvenir,” said Dad.

“I’m so going to start collecting these,”

said Judy, rubbing her penny. "It'll be my new thing."

"I thought your new thing was collecting banana stickers," said Stink. "And ice-lolly sticks with jokes on them."

"Stink? Do you have to know everything about me?"

"Kids," Dad warned. "Don't start."

While they waited for their food, Judy got an idea. She had seen a machine in the front lobby. A way-cool machine full of something else she collected. Stuffed animals!

"Grandma Lou?" Judy asked. "Do you have any quarters?"

Grandma Lou dug down to the bottom of her purse. "Four. Will that do?"

“Yes. Thanks, Grandma Lou!”

“Are you gonna smash quarters, too?”
Stink asked.

“No, I just want to play the Super Claw,” said Judy. She pointed to the glass case.

“Forget it,” said Stink. “It’s super-impossible. Nobody beats The Claw!”

“Yah-huh,” said Judy. “People do. Or else the glass case would be full. Besides, it’s fun to try. What’s there to lose?”

“Duh! Money!”

Judy scooped up the quarters. “C’mon, Stink-o. Before the food gets here.”

She dashed away from the table and headed for the lobby.

“Wait for me!” said Stink.

“One, two, three...” Judy said. “We have exactly four quarters.”

“It costs a dollar a turn!” said Stink. “That’s four quarters.”

“I’ll go first,” said Judy.

“But then I get to go *never*,” said Stink.

“Not if I win. If I win, we get a free turn,” said Judy.

“Like I said. Never,” said Stink.

“C’mon, Stink,” said Judy, pressing her nose to the glass. “Which one should we go for?”

“The yellow elephant,” said Stink. “His ear’s sticking up. No wait. The blue monkey! No wait! The green lion.”

“Purple rhino it is!” said Judy. *Clinkety-clink-clink-clink!* The four quarters landed

in the machine. *Whirr!* The thirty seconds began ticking away. Judy grabbed the joystick. She moved the giant arm until the claw dangled right over the purple rhino.

“Hurry up!” said Stink, standing on tiptoes to see better. “You only have twenty-three more seconds.”

She, Judy Moody, went in for the big grab.

Stink leaned in closer. “Six seconds!” he said.

The open tentacles of the claw came down around the rhino’s snout. “Gotcha!” Judy whispered. She pressed the big green button on the joystick to lock the claw in place.

“Don’t drop him!” shouted Stink.

Judy held her breath. She tried not to itch. She tried not to twitch. *Steady, steady. Careful, careful.* With the joystick, she eased the rhino over to the chute and *wa la!* She let go. He slid down the chute into the hatch.



Judy opened the prize door and pulled out the purple rhino. "Mine, all mine!" she cooed, hugging it to her.

"Free turn," said Stink. "I'm next."

"No way, Stinker."

"But you said—"

"Stink, I won! I beat The Claw! I'm on a roll. Do you really want to mess with that kind of luck?"

Stink shook his head no.

Judy reached into her pocket and rubbed her lucky penny. "Ready?" she asked.

Stink nodded. "Ready, Freddy," he said.

Judy took hold of the joystick. Her hand was sweating. She took a deep breath.

"Orange cow," said Stink, pointing. "Go for the orange cow!"

In just under seventeen seconds, Judy managed to nab the orange cow, keep it in the grip of the claw and send it down the chute to the prize door.

“We won,” said Stink, reaching in first to grab the orange cow. “You did it. You beat The Claw two times in a row!”

“Free turn,” said the machine. “Free turn.”

“Should we go for three?” Judy asked.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah-yeah-yeah,” said Stink. He was so excited his cheeks flushed bright red.

“OK, Stinker. Your turn. The pressure is on.”

“No way!” said Stink. “You’re on a crazy good winning streak.”

Judy took out her lucky penny and set it on the machine. “C’mon, lucky penny,” she whispered. She clutched the joystick one more time.

This time, she grabbed a blue monkey – barely – by the tip of the tippy tail. She pulled back on the joystick, slowly, slowly.

“Don’t drop it!” said Stink. “You’re going to drop it.”

Blue Monkey’s head bumped into Pink Crab’s claw!

“Watch out!” said Stink.

At last, Judy let go of the button and Blue Monkey dropped down into the prize chute. Music went off. Lights blinked and flashed. “Game over!” said the machine.

Judy and Stink rushed back to their

table, clutching Purple Rhino, Orange Cow and Blue Monkey.

“Whoa,” said Stink. “You beat The Claw three times in a row! That’s like some kind of record.”

Judy held up her shiny coin and smiled. “It’s all because of my lucky penny, of course!” she said.

