

MEG CABOT

Allie Finkle's
RULES *for* **GIRLS**

Book Six:

*Blast from
the Past*



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*For my old friends and my
new friends . . . and friends
I haven't even made yet*

*Many thanks to Laura Langlie
and Abigail McAden*

RULE #1

No Sell Phones Until You're in the Sixth Grade

Our across-the-street neighbors went on a cruise for a week, so they asked me to pick up their newspaper and mail every day while they were gone.

This was a job that required *a lot* of responsibility.

But I never missed a day. Not even when it rained so much one day that the wall in Mark's closet started cracking, and then bubbling, and then finally burst open because of all the water that was trickling down inside it from a leak in our roof.

That day, I just put on my raincoat and boots and went and got the Aronoffs' newspaper and mail in the rain like it was nothing.

So you can imagine my complete surprise when the

Aronoffs got home from their cruise and gave me ten dollars because they were so impressed by the great job I had done neatly stacking their mail and newspapers in their front hallway while they were gone.

Honestly, I would have done it for free. *It's important to be nice to your neighbors*, so that when you do something such as accidentally run over their azaleas while practicing skidding to a sudden stop on your bike like a girl motocross racer, they won't be as mad at you.

That's a rule.

Anyway, that ten dollars plus the twenty-six dollars I'd already saved up from my allowance for doing chores around the house meant that I had thirty-six dollars.

And thirty-six dollars is enough to buy a lot of things. Such as a cell phone.

"I thought your parents said you couldn't have a cell phone until you were in the sixth grade," my uncle Jay said when I asked him to come over and take me to the mall so I could buy my new cell phone.

"But it's my own money," I explained. "I'm allowed to buy anything I want with my own money."

That's a rule. Or at least it should be.

I'd been wanting my own cell phone for as long as I could remember. I knew lots of kids in the fourth grade — like my friend Rosemary — who had their own cell phones.

My parents wouldn't let me get one because they said that I was too young and hadn't shown that I was responsible enough to own one (especially given what had happened with my Nintendo DS).

But it wasn't like I had ever really liked my Nintendo that much in the first place. I enjoy games that require a stretchy imagination more than games that require stretchy thumbs.

My parents say *Losing electronic devices is irresponsible*. If we lose ours, we have to buy new ones with our own money.

Both my brothers have been extremely careful not to lose their Nintendos ever since they found out about this rule.

But if you ask me, this rule isn't fair. Mom and Dad didn't even tell us this rule until *after* I'd lost my Nintendo.

I said, “Telling someone that something is a rule after they’ve already broken that rule without knowing it was a rule in the first place isn’t fair.”

But my dad said, “*Ignorance of the law is no excuse.*”

Whatever that means.

Anyway, I don’t believe I’m not responsible enough to own a cell phone. I nursed a tiny kitten — my cat, Mewsie — practically from death into healthy young feline adulthood.

And okay, yes, I lost my Nintendo.

But that is just a handheld game-playing device! I wouldn’t lose something important like a cell phone. I actually *need* one of those (even though Mom says I don’t). I have a lot of important calls to make.

Like to my mom if, for instance, my little brother Kevin (whom I have to walk to and from school every day) ever happens to fall down an air shaft in a freak accident and break his leg, or something.

This could totally happen.

And having enough money to buy the phone myself definitely shows that I’m responsible enough to own one!

“I don’t even think you can get a cell phone for thirty-six dollars,” Uncle Jay said.

“Yes,” I said. “You can. I saw one in the store the other day for less than that.”

“But that’s just the cost of the phone,” Uncle Jay said. “You also have to pay for the calling plan.”

“The what?” I had no idea what he was talking about.

“You have to pay for every call you make and every text you send, in addition to the cost of the phone. Look, I don’t mind taking you to the mall,” Uncle Jay said, “but I want to make sure your parents are okay with this plan of yours before we go.”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “They will be.”

The only problem was, my mom wasn’t.

“*What?*” She pushed some hair back behind one ear.

I’ll admit Mom was kind of distracted.

Because she was holding a flashlight for my dad as he lay with his head in a hole in my brother Mark’s closet, looking at the dry rot they had discovered inside the wall, which also turned out to be inside all the walls of the entire upstairs of our house.

“I have thirty-six dollars of my own money,” I explained again very quickly. “So now Uncle Jay is going to take me to the mall to buy a cell phone. I’ll be home in time for dinner. Bye!”

“Ouch!” Dad said as he hit his head trying to crawl out of the hole.

“Can I go inside the wall next?” Kevin wanted to know. He was sitting with Mark on the bottom bed of the bunks the two of them used to share in our old house, but that had been split apart now that they both had separate rooms.

“No,” Mom said, switching off the flashlight.

“But I’m the smallest,” Kevin said.

“He is,” Mark agreed. “He could tell you how far back the dry rot goes.”

“*No one*,” Dad said, crawling out from the closet, “*goes in the wall*. That’s a rule.”

“I saw snails when I looked in there before,” Mark reported. “Also mushrooms.”

“Good God,” Mom said.

“We could make a casserole,” Uncle Jay suggested.

“Okay,” I said. “Well, I’ll be seeing you.”

“Wait,” Mom asked. Her eyes focused on me, and not in a good way. “Where did you say you were going?”

“I told you,” I said. “To the mall to buy a cell phone. And you can’t say no, because I’m doing it with my own money.”

“Hey,” Kevin said. “I want a cell phone, too.”

“Me, too,” Mark said. “No fair.”

“That’s enough,” Mom snapped.

Moms don’t snap too often.

But when they do, you had better stop whatever you were doing wrong, if you know what’s good for you. That’s a rule.

“All of you,” Mom said. “Just stop it.” She pointed at me. “You know the rules. No cell phones until you’re in the sixth grade.”

“But, Mom!” I couldn’t believe it. Well, I guess I sort of could, under the circumstances. But still.

“We agreed you wouldn’t be allowed to have a cell phone until you were in sixth grade,” she said. “And then only if you can show you’re responsible enough.”

“But, Mom,” I said. “I *did* show I’m responsible enough! It’s my money. I earned it picking up the Aronoffs’ mail

and newspapers and doing chores around the house. *If I earned the money, I should be able to spend it on whatever I want.* That's the rule."

Or at least, that *should* be the rule.

"Not if you're spending it on something that we already discussed you're not allowed to have until you're older," Mom said. "Trying to trick your uncle into taking you to the store so that you can buy something we've forbidden you to own just proves that fact. It's hardly what I'd call responsible behavior."

Was this true? I wasn't sure. I mean . . . it *was* my money.

And I *did* ask permission.

Uncle Jay looked down at me. I knew I couldn't blame him for how all of my dreams of being a cell phone owner were crashing and burning down around me. He'd been very supportive, offering to drive me to the store in his car — which doubles as his pizza delivery vehicle, so it always smells faintly of pepperoni — and everything. Even if he *had* said he'd only do it if Mom and Dad said it was okay.

“Sorry, kid,” Uncle Jay said. “Those are the rules.”

“Yeah, well,” I muttered. “Sometimes the rules are stupid.”

“What was that, Allie?” my mom asked in a dangerous voice.

“Nothing,” I said.

But it was true. Apparently, it wasn’t enough to pick up a neighbor’s mail during a rainstorm, or to raise a kitten, or to walk a six-year-old brother back and forth to school.

How was it that I was responsible enough to do all those things, but not responsible enough to spend my own money (that I had earned) on the things that I wanted . . . or even needed?

When were my parents *ever* going to think I was responsible enough? Sixth grade?

But that was *two whole years away*.

They might as well have said “never.”