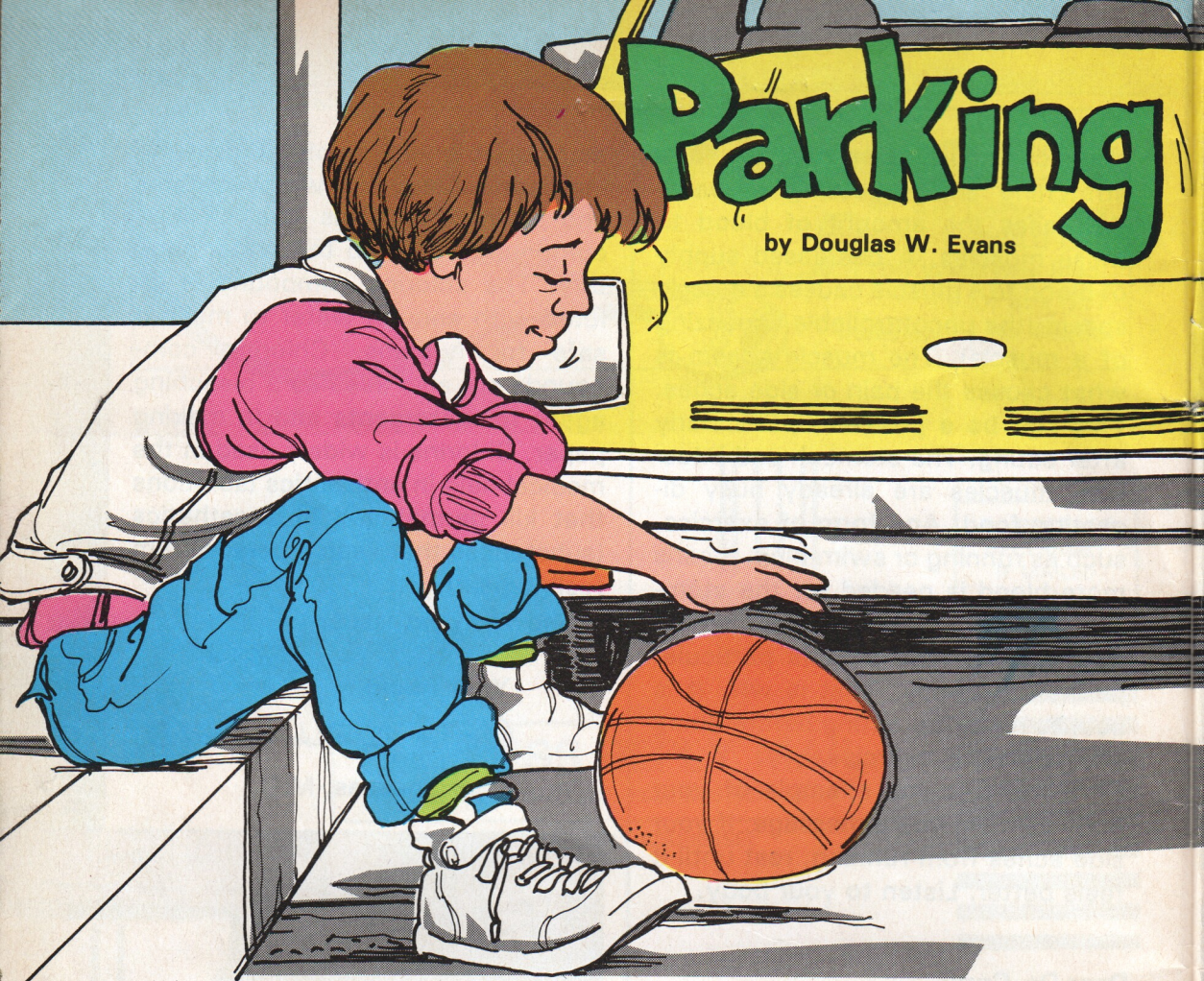


# Parking

by Douglas W. Evans



Art by Maurie Manning

Frank sat on the curb seeing how low he could dribble his basketball. Yesterday he could dribble it only waist-high. This morning he could dribble it knee-high. Now he was sitting down, and the ball was going no higher than his ankles. Frank was feeling quite proud of himself when the basketball hit the curb and shot straight out across the street. The ball hit the opposite curb just as a green compact car pulled in to park along the side of the road. The green compact parked right over Frank's basketball.

"Rats," said Frank, and he ran across the street to the parking car.

A tall man in a tweed jacket hopped

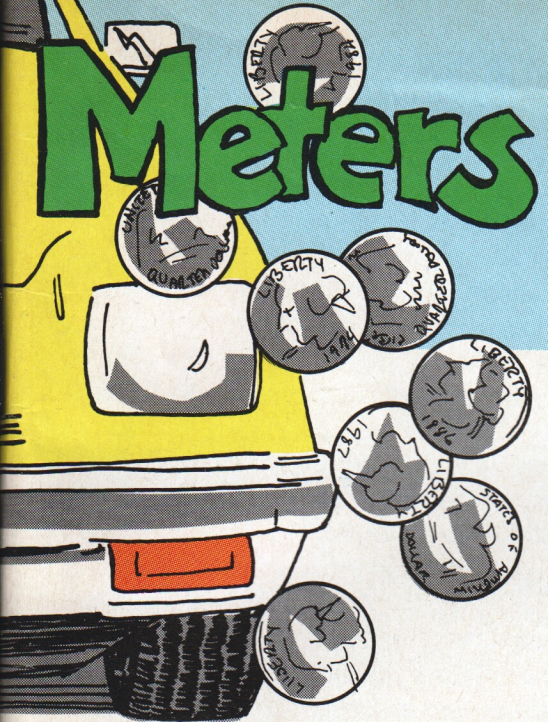
out of the car. He stepped up to the parking meter. "Parking spaces are a pain in the neck to find in this city, honey," the tall man said, fishing in his pocket for some change to put in the meter.

Frank thought it was strange that the man called him honey, until he noticed a pretty woman climbing out of the passenger side of the car.

"And wouldn't you know it, honey," said the man, "this meter is good for just fifteen-minute parking. If we want to go shopping for my new suit, it will take at least forty-five minutes."

"Yes, dear," replied the pretty





woman, who looked worried.

"I'd hate to risk getting a ticket for overparking. It's a twenty-buck fine in this area," said the tall man irritably. He glanced at his car; then he glanced at Frank standing next to it. "Hey, kid," the man called to Frank. "How would you like to make one easy dollar?"

"Huh?" replied Frank, who had been thinking only about his basketball.

"I'll give you eight quarters, you see," said the man, still fishing in his pocket for some change. "Now all you have to do is plug one quarter in this meter every fifteen minutes when the

time runs out. We won't be gone more than forty-five minutes—that's three quarters' worth of time, you see. When we get back, you can keep all the money you have left. What do you say, kid?"

"Sure," answered Frank, who had intended to hang around anyway and wait for his mother. "Sounds like a good deal."

The tall man pulled his hand out of his pocket. "Honey, do you have any change?" he said, smiling at the pretty woman.

"Yes, dear," she replied, raising one eyebrow. She opened her purse and handed Frank eight quarters.

"Well, see you later, kid," said the man in the tweed jacket, as he walked around the green compact. He put his arm around the pretty woman and led her off toward the stores.

Meanwhile, Frank plugged a quarter into the meter and turned the metal crank. A black arrow pointed to the fifteen-minute mark on a dial in the little window. Then, dropping to his knees, Frank searched for his basketball under the car. But the ball was gone.

"Rats," Frank mumbled, "that ball must have rolled down the road." He peered under the next car and the next. Finally, he spied the basketball leaning against the front wheel of a white Cadillac.

After retrieving the ball, Frank began to practice dribbling it around his back. He always found this hard to do without having to arch his back. Minutes passed quickly, as minutes usually do when you practice something you want to practice.

But Frank remembered his duty. *Must be time to put another quarter in*



that meter, he thought, and he walked back down the road. He passed the white Cadillac and two more cars. Then he stopped and gave his basketball two hard bounces. To his astonishment, the next two cars parked in the row were green compacts. "Now, which green compact was I supposed to be watching?" Frank said aloud to himself, scratching his head.

He ran up to the two meters. "Rats," he said, "the time on both of these meters has almost run out." Frank waited a few minutes when—*zip! clink!*—a red sign appeared in the window of the first parking meter. The sign read: VIOLATION—TIME EXPIRED. He put in a quarter and turned the crank. As soon as he did this—*zip! clink!*—the next parking meter ran out.

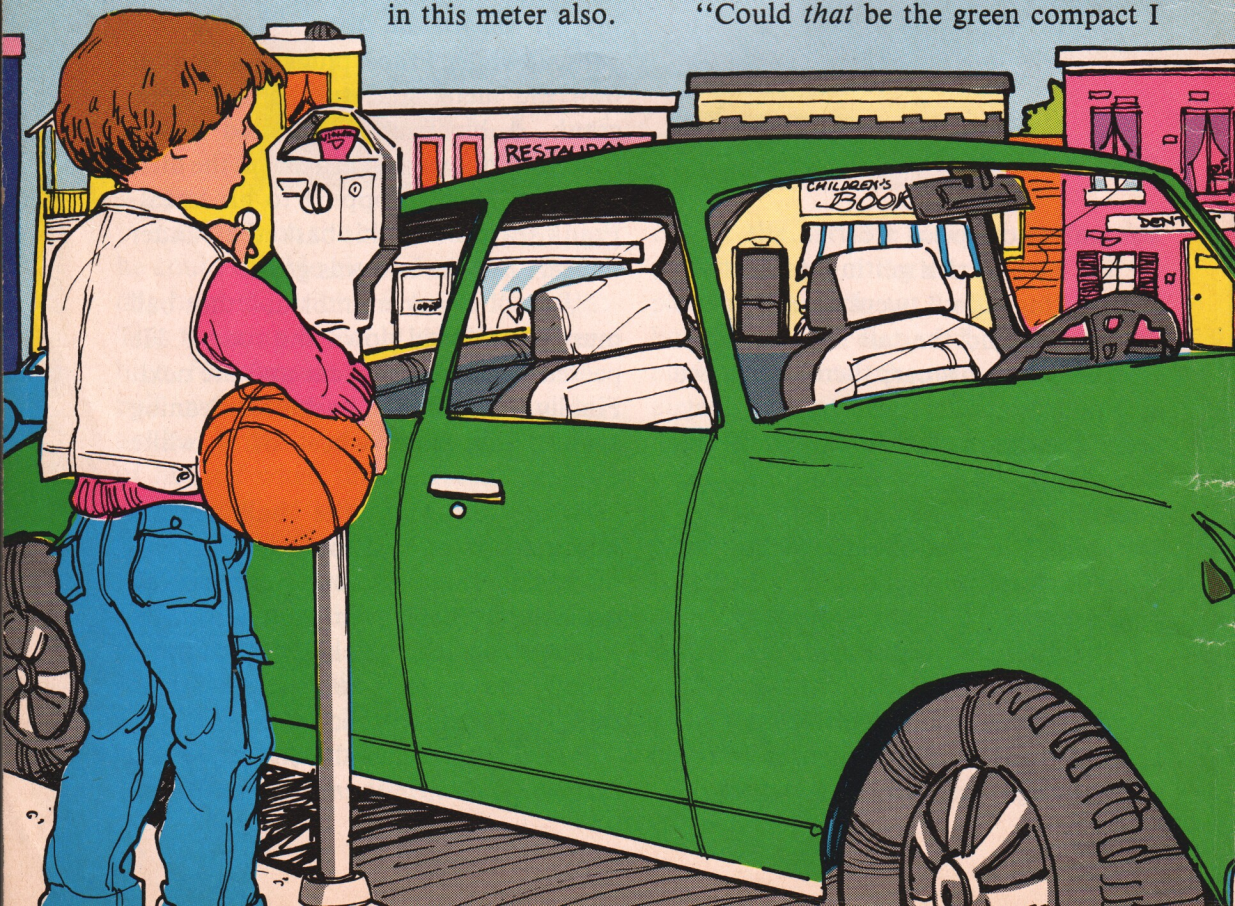
He had to stick a quarter in this meter also.

Frank paced up and down the sidewalk. But he soon forgot about the wasted quarter. He now decided to practice twirling the basketball on the end of his finger.

When he thought fifteen minutes had passed again, he checked the two meters. *Zip! clink!* went the first meter next to the first green compact. *Zip! clink!* went the second meter next to the second green compact. Frank had to plug a quarter into each parking meter and turn the crank.

At that moment, farther up the road, the meter maid was slowly driving the small, white van past the line of parked cars. Frank saw her stop, check a parking meter, and begin writing a ticket in her little black book. Frank's jaw dropped. The car she was giving the ticket to was another green compact.

"Could that be the green compact I





was supposed to be watching?" Frank muttered. But he didn't have time to think. He raced up to the meter maid.

"Wait, ma'am!" he yelled. "I have a quarter for that meter!"

The meter maid smiled at the panting boy, who was stuffing a quarter into the meter. "All right, dear," she said, crumpling up the ticket. "You just saved someone twenty dollars." She drove off slowly.

Frank checked his quarters. He had only three left. He was glad when a fat man soon came and drove away in the first green compact. *That man doesn't even know that I saved him from getting a parking ticket*, thought Frank.

But all too soon, time ran out on the second parking meter. With a groan, Frank had to spend another quarter. Shortly afterward, time ran out on the last parking meter and another quarter disappeared. Frank sat glumly on the curb. He now had only one quarter left.

"Well, kid, thanks for waiting around," Frank heard a voice say. He glanced up and saw the tall man in the tweed jacket and the pretty woman climbing into the second compact. The man waved to Frank and drove off.

Frank stood up and tucked the basketball under his arm. "Rats," he said, examining his last quarter, "not even enough change left to buy a double-decker ice-cream cone."

Frank walked down the road. He was passing the white Cadillac when he saw the meter maid writing out a ticket for an overparked car ahead of him. This car was a station wagon; it was a blue station wagon. It was Frank's mother's blue station wagon.

Frank rushed up to the meter and crammed in his last quarter. The meter maid gave Frank a leery look and slapped her black ticket book shut. Frank turned the metal crank. He shrugged his shoulders and walked off.

THE  END

