

THINKING STRAIGHT

A Novel by Robin Reardon (Kensington)

Excerpt from Chapter One

He strictly warned him, and immediately sent him out, and said to him, “See you say nothing to anybody, but go show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing the things which Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”

– *The Gospel According to Mark, 1:43*

It’s the end of the second day. Almost. And there’s only ... counting, counting ... only forty more to go.

Only forty?

That’s going to seem as long to me as it must have to Noah. And for me it’ll be only forty if I’m lucky. If I behave.

I wish I knew the best approach to take. Should I play along and let them think I’ve drunk the Kool-Aid, or are they smarter than I am? They’ve done this before. I haven’t. Would it be a better plan to do my damndest—oops! not supposed to use words like that—to get expelled, or whatever the term is?

Maybe I should look that section up again. Where the hell—more demerits—is that booklet? I mean, Booklet? Ha. It’s not like it’ll get lost in my other stuff. I mean, there ain’t no “other stuff.” I can’t have any of it here. My cell phone, my iPod, even a wire-bound notebook is forbidden. No keeping of journals here. I remember that one. But what about getting expelled?

Here’s the stupid thing. Let’s see ... Temperance. Cleanliness. Center Rules ... Ah—Violation Consequences. According to this—and I’m not making these capital letters up—my punishments can go up on a scale from Public Apologies for what I’d done wrong, to some number of SafeZone days when I can’t talk, to having to Write a Three Thousand Word Paper About My Offences, to Expulsion, to Isolation from the Group.

Isolation is worse than Expulsion? Is that what they think? Don’t they know I’m used to isolation?

Expulsion. I could do that.

But then what? Dad said it would be military school for me if I don’t finish here. I didn’t even know they still had places like that, but Dr. Strickland had all the info Dad could want.

Back to the forty days, then. And all because I was honest.

That part really kills me, you know? I mean, if I hadn’t told them they’d never have known. But they kept bugging me, and I had to keep lying. Jesus hates lies.

It was, “Taylor, why don’t you want to go to your own junior prom?”

And then when I did, it was, “Taylor, why don’t you ever ask that nice girl Rhonda out any more?”

Then when I told them Rhonda was nice but she wasn't my type after all, it was, "Taylor, the Russells are bringing Angela when they come over for dinner tonight. Why don't the two of you plan to go for a walk afterward?"

Then, when they'd about given up, "Taylor, isn't there *anyone* you're interested in?"

Yeah. There is. His name is Will.