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Mildred A. Wirt**

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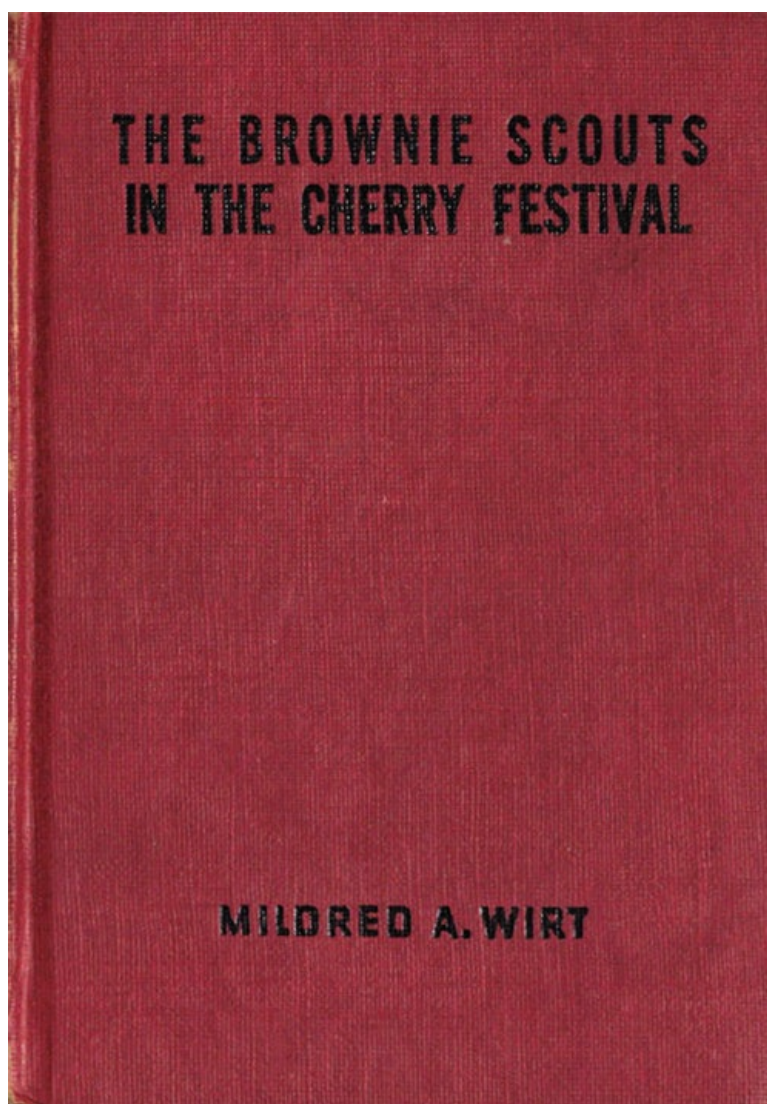
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS IN THE CHERRY
FESTIVAL ***



The Brownie Scouts in the Cherry Festival



“Ella Cooper,” Connie read aloud.
Brownie Scouts in the Cherry Festival (*See Page [201](#)*)

The Brownie Scouts in the Cherry Festival

by
Mildred A. Wirt

Illustrated

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THE BROWNIE SCOUTS IN THE CHERRY FESTIVAL

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CHAPTER 1

Crazy Quilt

STITCH-stitch-stitch.

Six needles nibbled at the gay scraps of cotton cloth. Six pairs of scissors went snip, snip, snip as the Brownie Scouts worked at their sewing in the Williams' living room.

The girls were making a crazy quilt. Dark-eyed Veve McGuire, who hated to sew, declared that the task was as silly as the quilt's name.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaimed as her thread tangled into an ugly knot. "Why not pitch this old thing and think of an easier way to earn money?"

"I don't mind sewing," piped up Rosemary Fritche, who always liked to be cooperative.

"Neither do I," chimed in Connie Williams. A leader among the Brownies, she had worked very hard to make the organization a success.

"But sewing a quilt is a lot of work," sighed Sunny Davidson.

Eileen Webber and Jane Tuttle, the other two girls who made up the Rosedale Brownie Scout troop, nodded sober agreement.

Miss Jean Gordon, the Brownie leader, had suggested weeks before that the girls sew and sell the quilt to raise money.

No one wanted to be disloyal or lazy. But the girls had stitched steadily for nearly six meetings now. Even for Connie and Rosemary, who liked to sew, the task was becoming a bit tiresome.

"How else could we make money?" speculated Jane. She folded her patchwork and gazed thoughtfully at Veve.

"W-e-ll—" Veve was unprepared for the question. "We could tend babies maybe. Or run errands."

"Everyone thinks we're too young to look after babies—for pay, that is!" returned Jane, tossing her long, yellow pigtails.

"And folks always forget to offer money when you do something for them," added Eileen.

"Well, there must be some way we could earn money," Veve insisted. "Maybe there's an advertisement in the paper."

Taking the afternoon paper from the table, she spread it out before her on the rug.

Veve was still studying the ads when Miss Gordon came briskly into the living room. The Brownie leader, who also taught fourth grade, had brought a plate of freshly baked cookies and a pitcher of chocolate milk.

"Any tired little Brownies here?" she asked in her cheery voice. Miss Gordon was very pretty, always pleasant, and the girls loved her.

"We all are," answered Connie Williams, and the others nodded in agreement.

"Piecing blocks is hard work," grumbled Veve. "The thread tangles. Besides, I pricked my finger twice!"

"Dear me, I'm afraid this session of sewing has run on a little too long," replied the Brownie leader. "But making a quilt is so worth while. And you've done splendidly!"

Miss Gordon placed the pitcher of milk on the table as she bent to inspect the pieced blocks.

All the Brownies except Veve had done very well indeed. So rapidly had the quilt grown, that very soon it would be ready for the quilting frames.

Now the coverlet was an amazing thing. Blocks were of all color, shape and size. A red triangle of cloth taken from one of Connie's cotton frocks, snuggled against a square which once had been part of Eileen's outgrown black checked jumper.

Even the stitching was different. Rosemary had used beautiful feather stitching. Connie had pieced her blocks with a briar stitch. Veve had used very plain and long ones.

Nevertheless, the over-all effect was pleasing despite the "crazy" hit-or-miss pattern which gave the quilt its name.

"My thread knotted," Veve explained. Out of the corner of her eyes, she had noticed that Miss Gordon frowned as she examined a badly stitched orange block. "Anyway, I don't like to sew!"

"Why, Veve!" Miss Gordon smiled at the little girl. "Our lovely quilt is nearly finished now."

First she unknotted the tangled thread and sewed a few neat stitches just to encourage Veve.

Then she told the Brownies they might put away their patchwork for the day. Connie and Sunny began to pass the cookies and glasses of cool milk.

Veve scarcely nibbled at her cookie. Instead, she kept reading the advertising page of the paper.

"I wish I could find an easy way to make money," she mumbled. "Only no one seems to want a baby sitter."

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Miss Gordon began to tell the girls about the various types of quilts.

"Beautiful patterns were originated by pioneer women who outdid themselves to see how cleverly they could piece the blocks," she declared. "Many of our earliest American patterns were adapted from designs on rugs and shawls brought to this country from Europe and the Orient."

"Quilt patterns have names too," declared Rosemary eagerly.

"Indeed, they do. Can you mention any of them, Rosemary?"

"The Hand of Friendship,' and the 'Pine Cone.' My mother has one she calls an 'Album' quilt."

"Altogether, there are hundreds of patterns," explained the Brownie leader. "Some of the better quilts were signed with the name of the maker."

"Is that the same thing as an autograph quilt?" asked Connie. She had heard her mother speak of such a coverlet.

"No, in a true autograph quilt, each block was inscribed with the name of the person who made it," Miss Gordon replied. "Many of the blocks were dated."

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"Were the names stitched on?" inquired Sunny, reaching for her third sugar cookie.

"Sometimes they were. Then again they often were written on the block with indelible pencil or ink. These old type quilts are historically important."

Having ended her little talk, Miss Gordon handed around several books which showed quilt patterns in beautiful colors.

Veve, however, was too deeply absorbed in the newspaper to look at the pictures when they were passed to her.

"Girls, how would you like to have a quilt show?" Miss Gordon asked unexpectedly.

All the Brownies pricked up their ears and listened hard. Even Veve forgot for a minute that she didn't much care for anything connected with quilts.

"How can we have a show when the only quilt we own isn't finished?" This practical question came from Connie.

Miss Gordon explained that she did not expect the Brownies to sew all the quilts which would be displayed in the show.

No, indeed! Instead, she proposed that the girls borrow from their acquaintances as many different types as they could.

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"I can bring my mother's album quilt!" Rosemary offered eagerly.

"I know where I can get a beautiful orange and yellow one," added Connie. "It's called the 'Sunburst' pattern and is out of this world!"

The girls chattered excitedly, discussing where they could obtain quilts to display in the Brownie show. Veve, however, was more interested in the advertisement page of the *Rosedale Herald*.

Suddenly she uttered a squeal of delight. "Say, I've found it! This ad is just the thing!"

"Oh, who wants to be a baby sitter?" scoffed Eileen. "Having a quilt show will be more fun."

"Who's talking about being an old baby sitter?" Veve thrust the newspaper page under the other girl's eyes. "This is a chance to make real money!"

"Doing what?" demanded Sunny skeptically.

"Picking cherries."

Veve's announcement took the Brownies so by surprise that they stopped eating cookies.

"Where?" questioned Connie. Although she intended to remain loyal to Miss Gordon and the quilt show, she couldn't help being interested.

"Just read the ad!" Veve had jumped up from the rug and was prancing around the room like a frisky steed.

"How can anyone read it with you hopping up and down?" Eileen demanded. "Hold still a minute!"

As Veve quieted down, the Brownies crowded around to see the advertisement for themselves.

It read: "Cherry Pickers Wanted Immediately. Two Cents a Pound. Apply Wingate Farm, Rt. 1, Clove Rd."

"Two cents a pound!" Veve chortled. "I bet I could pick a hundred pounds in just a few minutes."

"Like fun you could," scoffed Jane Tuttle. "Where is Clove Road anyhow?"

"Just at the edge of town," supplied Connie. "I've seen the Wingate Farm too. We drove past it one Sunday afternoon when the cherries were in bloom. Oh, the orchard was pretty then!"

"Cherry picking might not be so bad," spoke up Sunny Davidson. "And we could earn money fast."

Miss Gordon waited until the Brownies had talked about the matter for a while. Then she said:

"Girls, not for anything would I discourage you in any of your plans. However, I think cherry picking might be very hard work. Perhaps more tiring than sewing quilt blocks."

"It would be exciting though," Veve cut in quickly. "We'd earn a lot of money too for our troop."

"I'm a little afraid the advertisement may have been intended for grownups," the Brownie Scout leader went on.

"You mean they wouldn't take children as pickers?" Veve asked, her disappointment keen. "Why, we'd be good at it."

"I'm sure you would, dear. It's possible they'd take Brownies, but—"

"Then why don't we do it?" Veve broke in before the teacher could finish. She was eager to have the matter decided at once.

"We really know nothing about Wingate Farm—"

"I'll find out!" Veve offered. "As soon as the Brownie meeting is over, I'll ride out there on the bus and talk to the man in charge."

Miss Gordon smiled at her enthusiasm.

"I suppose it will do no harm to investigate," she admitted. "But you mustn't go alone or without your mother's consent."

"I'll telephone her."

Veve's mother worked in a downtown office. However, the little girl knew how to reach her.

The Brownies talked about the matter for quite a while.

"Why don't we appoint Veve and Connie to find out all about it?" Rosemary proposed, winding up the discussion. "That is, if their mothers will let them go."

"That's what I think too," chimed in Sunny.

So the decision was reached that the two girls, after obtaining permission, should make the trip to Wingate Farm that very afternoon.

Upon their return they were to report to Miss Gordon, who would notify the other Brownies.

"We'll have to work fast to get the job," Veve said anxiously. "I imagine a lot of people may have read the advertisement."

The meeting now broke up with all the girls singing the Brownie organization song.

Immediately afterwards, Veve telephoned her mother to ask if she might go to the orchard. The distance by bus was not far.

"Why, yes, if Connie is going with you," Mrs. McGuire consented after hearing the plan. "But don't stay late."

Meanwhile, Connie had gone to the kitchen to talk to her mother.

Mrs. Williams was quite busy washing dishes the Brownies had used for their refreshments.

"If only I had the car this afternoon, I gladly would drive you out to the orchard," she told her daughter. "How far is it, dear?"

"Oh, not far," Connie assured her. "Veve and I don't mind a bit going by bus. We'll be back long before dark."

"If you can wait until tomorrow, I'll have the car."

"We don't dare wait, Mother. If we do, other folks will get the job instead of our Brownie organization."

Mrs. Williams knew that this might be true. So after thinking a moment, she said Connie might go.

The two girls wore their Brownie beanies and put on light coats over their brown pinchecked uniforms. Mrs. Williams gave Connie enough bus fare for both girls.

Veve frequently took a bus downtown and knew which one they must catch to reach the outskirts of Rosedale.

"It's marked 'Crosstown,'" she told Connie. "I don't think the bus runs very often though. We'll have to watch sharp or we may miss it."

In about ten minutes along came a yellow bus which had "Crosstown" printed on a card in the front window.

When it stopped at the curb, Veve and Connie climbed aboard. They dropped their fare into the box.

Then, just to make certain they were going the right direction, Veve said to the driver:

"This bus goes to Wingate Farm, doesn't it?"

"Where's Wingate Farm?" he asked. By this time the bus was moving.

"It's on Clove Road," shouted Connie. She had to yell to make herself heard above the roar of the big motor and the clash of gears.

"Clove Road?" The bus driver shook his head. "This bus only goes to the city line. Clove Road's a half mile beyond."

Connie and Veve were aghast.

"Then we're on the wrong bus!" Connie exclaimed.

"You can transfer at the city line," the driver said, stopping for a traffic light. "You'll have a twenty minute wait. Board a Fulton bus and it will take you directly to Wingate Farm. Coming back you may be able to catch a Rosedale bus which will eliminate the twenty minute wait. Got it?"

Connie and Veve weren't at all certain that they understood.

So they asked the driver to say it over once more. To make sure she wouldn't forget, Connie then wrote it down on paper.

"If we have to wait twenty minutes each way, we may be late getting home," she said anxiously as they took seats.

"Oh, we can hurry after we get to Wingate orchard," Veve replied. She was not in the least worried.

The nearly empty bus whizzed along at a fast clip.

Soon it had arrived at the city line and the end of the run. The friendly bus driver told the girls

it was time to get off.

"Don't forget," he directed them. "The Fulton bus stops across the street. It should come along in twenty minutes. Don't miss it, because after it leaves, another isn't due for a long while."

"We won't miss it," laughed Veve. "A Brownie Scout always is punctual."

"Some Brownies are," Connie corrected with a laugh.

She was thinking that upon more than one occasion Veve had been tardy for Brownie meetings. Once too, when the troop was on its way to Snow Valley, she had nearly missed the train.

However, Connie was not really worried about catching the bus.

The girls alighted and stretched their legs a bit.

"We have lots of time to look around," Veve remarked. "Twenty whole minutes."

They gazed into a drugstore window before crossing the street to the other bus stop.

"Let's get a dish of ice cream," Veve proposed. "One with nuts and whipped cream on it."

This suggestion Connie promptly turned down.

"Why, Veve, you greedy girl! Didn't you have milk and cookies at the meeting?"

"Yes, but that was a long time ago. I'm hungry."

"You're always hungry," Connie accused. "We might miss our bus if we don't stay right here."

"Oh, all right." Reluctantly, Veve gave up the idea. "It will be tiresome waiting, though."

The girls seated themselves at the curb, watching cars whiz past.

After a while, Connie arose and sauntered a short distance down the walk. She tried stepping over each crack. It seemed to make the time pass faster. The little girl had counted twelve cracks when she paused near a large white house. Something in the back yard drew and held her attention.

"Look, Veve!" she exclaimed.

On a clothes line hung a freshly washed green and white patterned quilt.

"Oh, isn't it a dream!" she exclaimed.

"It's as nice as any of those pictures Miss Gordon showed us," Veve agreed, joining her friend.

"Wouldn't it look beautiful in that show we're going to have?"

"Grand, Connie. Let's ask if we may have it!"

"Oh, no, Veve."

"Why not?"

"We don't know who owns it for one thing."

"Well, it won't take long to find out. Come on!" Veve seized Connie's hand, pulling her a few steps along the sidewalk.

"We might miss our bus, Veve."

"Oh, we have plenty of time. Anyway, it will take only a jiffy."

Against her will, Connie allowed herself to be led along.

Pausing only a moment to admire the green and white quilt, the girls went directly to the door and rapped. A long while elapsed before they heard footsteps.

Meanwhile, Connie kept her eyes on the bus stop.

Finally, a pleasant-faced woman in a blue house dress came to the door. She smiled in a very friendly way when she saw the girls, for she recognized their Brownie uniforms.

"Well, I declare! Brownies!" she greeted them. "I'll venture you're selling cookies."

"Oh, no," Connie said breathlessly. "We saw your quilt on the line. It's very beautiful."

"The green and white one?" the woman asked, pleased that the girls had noticed it. "My mother made that particular one. It's called the 'Sawtooth' pattern."

"We were wondering—" Connie became a trifle ill at ease, then went quickly on, "—you see, our Brownie Troop is planning a quilt show. Miss Gordon—she's our leader—asked each Brownie to get as many quilts as possible to display. So we thought—"

"We thought you might be willing to let us have your quilt—just for the show, that is," Veve cut in quickly. "We will have to have your answer right away."

"Right away?" the lady repeated. "Dear me, you have taken me so by surprise. I suppose you might have the quilt if I were certain it would be returned in good condition."

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"Oh, thank you," Connie said gratefully. "We can't take the quilt now, but we'll come back later for it."

"Dear me, you *are* in a hurry," observed the lady. "You haven't even told me your names or the troop to which you belong."

Connie supplied the information, all the while keeping her eye on the bus stop. It seemed to her that twenty minutes must be nearly up.

"My name is Mrs. Grayson," said the nice lady. "I have several other quilts, though none quite as nice as the 'Sawtooth.' But I do have something you should see!"

"What is that?" asked Veve.

"An old woven coverlet. It is blue and white and shows the face of George Washington."

"The first president of the United States!" exclaimed Connie in awe.

"Yes, the coverlet is an historical treasure. It is in perfect condition. You really should have it for your exhibit as it is much nicer than the Sawtooth quilt."

"And may we?" Connie asked eagerly.

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"We'll see," promised Mrs. Grayson. "Before we decide, I'll show it to you."

By this time both Connie and Veve were becoming uneasy about how fast time was slipping away.

"We have to catch a bus," Connie explained regretfully. "Please, may we come back tomorrow to see the coverlet?"

"Of course. What bus are you taking?"

"The Fulton," Connie replied. "It's due here almost any minute."

"It's more than due!" broke in Veve shrilly. "*It's coming!*"

With a little squeal of dismay, she seized Connie's hand. Not even taking time to say good-bye to Mrs. Grayson, they made a dash for it.

Already the bus had pulled up at its regular stop. Only two passengers alighted and not a single one got on.

"Hey, the driver's not going to wait!" Veve cried in panic. "He hasn't seen us!"

"Wait!" shrieked Connie. "Wait for us!"

Both girls were running as fast as they could and waving their arms.

The bus driver, however, did not see them. Already several minutes behind schedule, he slammed the door, and drove away.

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For an instant, Connie and Veve were too stunned to say a word.

They gazed down the road at the fast disappearing bus, and then looked at each other.

"Brownies always are so punctual," Connie said at length. "Oh, sure!"

"It wasn't anyone's fault," Veve replied in a subdued voice. "It—it just happened."

"And now we're stranded here." Connie sounded a bit frightened, as indeed she was. "The driver told us another bus wouldn't be along for a long time. Now what are we going to do?"

CHAPTER 2

Cherry Pickers Wanted

QUILTS and coverlets no longer seemed important to Veve and Connie as they realized that they were stranded at the bus stop.

An hour might pass before another Fulton bus came along. How were they to reach the cherry orchard?

"We never should have gone to that lady's house to see the quilt," Connie said, self-accusingly. "Oh, dear!"

"It wasn't your fault," Veve replied. "I made you go."

"At any rate, the bus is gone, and we're not on it. What shall we do?"

Veve had no answer.

However, Mrs. Grayson had been watching the two girls from her front porch. Of course she knew that they had missed their bus. Still wearing a kitchen apron, she came down the sidewalk toward them.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said. "Were you traveling far?"

"To Wingate Farm," Veve supplied. She had to sniff very hard to keep from crying.

"Why, that's not far," declared Mrs. Grayson. "I know! I'll get the car out of the garage and drive you there."

At this unexpected proposal, Veve and Connie instantly perked up.

"Oh, *will* you take us?" Connie asked, all dimples. "Won't it make you too much trouble?"

"Not in the least. Wait here, and I'll soon pick you up."

Mrs. Grayson re-entered her own home to change from her apron. Less than five minutes later she came outdoors again, this time wearing a hat and a light tan coat.

"Here we are," she said, bringing her coupé to a standstill beside the curb.

Connie slid in beside Mrs. Grayson, while Veve sat on the outside. On the way to Wingate Farm, the girls chatted gaily, telling about their Brownie Troop and the quilt show which was planned.

Veve told her too about the exciting times the Brownies had enjoyed the previous year—at Snow Valley, and later with the circus folk. Both of these stories are related in the volumes, "The Brownie Scouts at Snow Valley," and "The Brownie Scouts in the Circus."

"I was the youngest Brownie to be 'nitiated," Veve explained proudly. "Miss Gordon says I make more trouble than all the others put together. That's because I'm always thinking up things to do."

"Veve once was carried away on a sled hooked to an automobile," Connie revealed. "Then another time, she crawled into a circus car and—"

"Never mind that," broke in Veve. "I'm grown up now. Was it my fault we missed the bus?"

"No, it wasn't," Connie admitted. "Anyway, it's much nicer riding with Mrs. Grayson."

The girls began to talk of quilts once more. Mrs. Grayson told them that there were some which had political or patriotic names such as the Union Calico quilt, the Yankee Puzzle and the Confederate Rose.

"And do you have samples of them?" Connie asked eagerly. She hoped, of course, that the unusual quilts might be obtained for the Brownie quilt show.

"The only quilt of quality I have is the one you saw," the woman replied. "And then, the woven Washington coverlet."

"May we have them both for our Brownie display?" Connie asked the question before Veve could frame the same one.

"Yes, I think I can promise you the quilt and the coverlet," Mrs. Grayson replied.

Veve sat very still for a moment. She was glad that Connie had obtained both a quilt and a coverlet for the show. All the same, she wished she had thought of asking for them first.

Mrs. Grayson had slowed the car to peer at mailboxes along the road. The name, Carl Wingate, had been painted on one of them.

"Here we are," the lady announced. "Wingate Farm."

All along the road the cherry trees were so loaded with scarlet fruit that the boughs hung almost on the ground. The girls had never seen a more beautiful sight.

"Are you sure you'll be all right now?" Mrs. Grayson asked, opening the car door. "Oh, yes," Connie assured her. "Thank you for the ride and the quilt."

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Scarcely noticing as Mrs. Grayson drove on, the girls gazed up and down the road. On either side, as far as could be seen, stretched row upon row of cherry trees.

"It looks like a sea of red," Veve declared in awe. "There must be millions and millions of pounds of cherries here! Don't you wish we could pick them all?"

"Every single one!" laughed Connie.

Both girls were now in high good humor, thinking of the money they and the other Brownies would make for the troop. Unfastening the gate, they walked between rows of cherry trees, up a winding driveway toward the house.

When the two girls were half-way up to the dwelling, they heard someone speaking in a loud, angry voice. At first they could not guess who might be talking, for they could not see the speaker.

But his voice reached them very clearly.

"Juan, you're a lazy, no-good!" the man shouted. "Three times today I've told you not to bruise the fruit in stripping it! But do you pay attention? Not the slightest. Either you'll take orders, or quit the orchard. Savey?"

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"*Si, Senor,*" came the muttered reply.

"Now get back to your picking," the man snapped.

Veve and Connie had rounded a bend in the road and now were able to see the two speakers. The man, who wore a rough checkered shirt and large straw hat, was short and fat. His sunburned face twisted into hard lines as he talked.

The one he addressed appeared to be a Mexican lad, no older than 10 or 12 years of age. Juan was dressed in ragged grayish-white trousers and shirt. He too wore a straw hat to protect himself from the sun, but was barefoot.

The boy scooted off with his empty cherry pail as the girls approached. Rather nervously, Connie and Veve spoke to the man, who eyed them in a most unfriendly way.

"We're looking for Mr. Wingate," said Connie politely.

"Well?" the man demanded.

"Can you tell us where to find him?"

"I am Wingate. What d'you want? Be brief, because I've got work to do."

Connie and Veve gazed at each other in dismay. From the very first moment, they had disliked this man because of his rough way of speaking. And now he proved to be Mr. Wingate, the man for whom they expected to work!

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"Well, what d'you want?" the owner of the orchard repeated. He fast was losing patience. "Out with it!"

"Please—" Connie swallowed twice and struggled on. "We would like a job picking cherries."

"Not just us," Veve amended quickly. "All of the Brownies."

"The Brownies?" Mr. Wingate demanded. "Who are they? Fairies?"

"Oh, no!" Connie corrected. "We're an organization. Our troop motto is: 'Lend A Hand.' That's what we want to do here at your cherry orchard."

"For pay, that is," added Veve. She was afraid Mr. Wingate might get the wrong idea.

"I hire only experienced pickers," the orchard owner said. "Can't use kids."

"But we heard you talking to a little boy," Veve reminded him.

"Sure, but he's one of the Mexicans. I use a crew of 'em—professional pickers. A stupid lot too!"

"Don't you need any more pickers?" Connie persisted.

"I need experienced pickers, sure. My fruit is ripening fast and if I don't get it marketed, I'll lose a nice profit."

"Then may we have the job?" Veve asked hopefully. She did not like Mr. Wingate, but she thought he might be nicer to the Brownies than to Juan.

"Listen!" the man exclaimed. "I told you once! I hire only experienced pickers. I can't be bothered with a bunch of fairies—"

"Brownies," said Connie, flushing. "And we *are* dependable. Ask Miss Gordon."

"Run along," Mr. Wingate ordered. "I have work to do and you're bothering me."

Thus dismissed, Veve and Connie dejectedly walked back to the main road. After all their hopes and plans, they were not to be allowed to pick cherries. It was very discouraging.

"Never mind, Veve," her friend said to cheer her. "We'll make money when we sell the crazy quilt."

"But it would have been more fun to have picked cherries."

"I don't think it would have been very nice working for Mr. Wingate, Veve. He talked so ugly to that little Mexican boy. Miss Gordon never would have wanted us to work for him."

"And he was fussy about the way the cherries were picked," Veve agreed. "I guess it wouldn't have been much fun."

Arm in arm, the girls walked up the road, looking for a bus stop. They were becoming tired now, and wished that Mrs. Grayson had waited for them. Evidently, she had driven on home, for her coupé was nowhere to be seen.

"I'm thirsty," Veve said presently. "I wish I had a drink of water. Or maybe a handful of those cherries."

Thoughtfully she gazed toward a tree whose heavily laden branch hung over the fence.

"Oh, no you don't!" said Connie, reading her mind. "Those cherries belong to Mr. Wingate. Not to us. We're not taking a single one."

"Who wants any of *his* stupid old fruit? Anyway, I think the trees on the other side of the road have larger and riper cherries."

"We're not taking any of those either, Veve McGuire!"

"Oh, I'm not swiping anything," Veve retorted. "But it doesn't do any harm to think how nice those juicy cherries would taste. SAY—"

The last was uttered in a loud voice, for the little girl had noticed a painted sign on the fence to the left.

In large red letters it read: "Pickers Wanted."

"That's us!" exclaimed Veve. "We'll get a job for the Brownies yet!"

Connie, however, was less enthusiastic. She pointed out that very likely if they applied, they would be turned down again.

"Well, it won't hurt to try," Veve insisted.

"We may miss our bus again."

"We'll get home somehow," Veve waved aside the objection. "Don't you want a job, Connie?"

"Course I do. Only I didn't like Mr. Wingate."

"But this is across the road, so it can't be his orchard. The gate's just ahead. Let's go in, Connie. I'll do the talking this time."

The barrier had been securely fastened with a chain. The girls could not open it. However, they climbed over and started up the gravel driveway.

Cherry trees were everywhere, fairly dripping red treasure. Under many of the boughs, fruit had fallen to the ground.

A few ladders stood against the low, well-pruned trees. Back in the orchard only a few pickers could be seen.

In vain the girls looked about for a dwelling. Where a house once had stood there now was only a gaping, burned-out hole.

"Why, the place is all gone except its foundation!" Veve exclaimed. "The house must have burned a long while ago, and never was rebuilt."

The only building to be seen was a long, low shed in which cherries were sorted and packed for market.

Stepping to the open doorway, the girls peered inside.

A bent old man, his back toward them, busily packed cherries into a big box. He whirled around upon hearing footsteps. And a shaggy white dog that had been dozing in a corner, sprang up with a warning snarl.

Startled, Veve and Connie retreated.

"Down, Cap!" the old man ordered the animal. To the girls he said: "Don't be afraid. He won't bite you or anyone else. I keep him on the place to frighten off intruders. His bark, though, is all bluff."

Thus reassured, Veve and Connie stood their ground. They rather liked the old man who looked like a farmer in blue overalls and white shirt. His face was friendly and his eyes twinkled as he studied them.

"I'm Pa Hooper," he introduced himself. "What may I do for you young ladies?"

Now this made Connie and Veve feel quite at ease. And even Cap tried to show them that they were welcome, for he came sniffing at their heels.

"We saw your sign," Veve said, going directly to the point. "We would like a job picking cherries."

As Mr. Hooper kept studying her, not saying a word, she told him about the Brownie organization. And Connie added that Mr. Wingate next door had sent them away most rudely.

"We may not be experienced pickers, but we can learn," she declared. "Just give us a chance and we'll prove what Brownies can do."

Pa Hooper was greatly impressed with the direct approach of the two little girls.

He told them he very much needed pickers because some of the larger orchards had hired most of the Mexican pickers.

Unless his fruit could be harvested quickly, he might lose a large portion of it.

"Then are we hired?" Veve questioned.

Still Mr. Hooper hesitated.

"I scarcely know what to say," he told her kindly. "Cherry picking isn't as easy as it looks. You might fall from a ladder and hurt yourself. In that case, I'd be liable."

"Brownies are taught to be careful," Veve assured him. "You wouldn't catch us falling off a ladder!"

Pa Hooper chuckled. "I pay a cent and a half a pound for stripping," he explained. "That's not as good a rate as some of the orchards offer. It takes a lot of cherries to weigh a pound."

"We won't mind," Connie said. "Please, Mr. Hooper, let us try! The trees aren't high, and you could let us pick the lower branches."

The orchard owner thought a moment. Then he said:

"I'll tell you what I'll do. Suppose I test you with a half hour's picking? If you do well, and think you would like the work, then I might hire all the Brownies. How many are there of you?"

"Six, not counting Miss Gordon," supplied Veve. "Where do we start?"

Mr. Hooper said he would show the girls as soon as he had finished packing another lug.

The box was a fancy one, filled with especially large cherries.

Other boxes in the shed were “jumble” pack. This, Mr. Hooper explained, meant that the fruit was not placed in any particular order.

After he had finished sorting cherries for the fancy box, the orchard owner told the girls to follow him.

Mr. Hooper led them to a low-hanging tree near the roadway. Two short ladders already were in place.

The orchard owner showed the girls how to strip cherries rapidly from the trees.

Even if a few stems fell into the pail, it would not matter, he said. Once the cherries reached the canning factory, they would be washed and stemmed.

“I’ll be back here in half an hour,” Mr. Hooper said. He handed each girl a tall tin bucket. “Just be careful. Don’t climb more than a few steps on the ladders.”

Veve and Connie mounted separate ladders. At first they went up only three steps. It was easy to reach the fruit.

“Let’s have a race,” Veve proposed. “I can pick more cherries than you, Connie!”

Both girls stripped as fast as they could. But try as they would, they could not make the fruit fall into the pail as fast as Mr. Hooper had done.

34

When Connie’s bucket was half filled, she began to feel a little tired.

“It’s getting late,” she remarked uneasily. “I wish Mr. Hooper would come back.”

The girls had seen one Rosedale bus pass the orchard, and they knew another soon would be due.

Unless they started for home very shortly they were afraid their parents would worry.

“Oh, here comes Mr. Hooper now,” Veve announced a little later. She felt very much relieved.

“We’ve picked a lot of cherries,” Connie said proudly. “Do you suppose he’ll think we have done all right?”

Veve nodded and stretched her cramped arms.

For a moment she stood quite still on the fifth step of the ladder. From her perch, she could gaze directly across the roadway into the Wingate orchard.

Apparently, something the little girl saw there startled her.

At any rate, she twisted around to obtain a better view.

Now in doing so, Veve’s right arm came sharply against the half-filled pail of cherries. It teetered and started to fall.

35

Frantically, the little girl clutched to save the bucket.

But her hand missed. Down clattered the tin pail, spilling cherries in every direction!

Nor was that the extent of the disaster. In working convulsively to save the precious fruit, Veve had thrown the ladder off balance.

For a moment it wobbled and swayed.

Then, as she uttered a wild yell, it slipped sideways, hurling her to the ground.

CHAPTER 3

Over the Fence

"ARE you hurt, Veve?"

Connie scrambled down from her own ladder to help her little friend up from the ground.

Veve brushed dirt from her Brownie uniform and picked up the beanie which had fallen from her head. Ruefully she gazed at the spilled cherries. Scarcely a handful remained in the tin bucket.

"Oh, I'm all right," she muttered, rubbing an elbow. "But see what happened! Now Mr. Hooper won't want the Brownies to pick in his orchard."

Even as she spoke, the orchard owner hurried up, Cap barking at his heels.

From a distance, he had seen Veve tumble from the ladder. He was afraid she might have been injured.

"Didn't I warn you to be careful?" he asked a trifle crossly. "If you had broken an arm—" 37

"You don't have to be liable for my fall," Veve assured him. "I'm not hurt a bit."

Hurriedly she began to pick up the scattered cherries.

"We tried so hard," Connie said. She felt quite crushed by the disaster. "I—I guess we aren't very good pickers."

Pa Hooper patted her shoulder. "You've done well for the first time," he said, peering into her pail. "It was just an accident. They will happen sometimes, despite precautions."

"Then you think we're good enough to get the job for the Brownies?" Veve demanded. Pa Hooper's words had revived her hope.

Before the orchard owner could reply, Cap gave a little yip to attract attention. Then he sat up and begged, waving his two front paws.

Veve and Connie had to laugh. Cap looked very cute, and seemed to be coaxing his master into saying that the girls might have the cherry picking job.

"So you think I should, eh, Cap?" chuckled Pa Hooper. "That does it, old boy. We'll hire the Brownies! The entire troop!"

"Whoopee!" shouted Veve. She capered around so madly she nearly upset Connie's pail of cherries. 38

"Careful now," warned Pa Hooper, rather sternly. "Cherry picking is serious business. If you work here you'll have to obey orders and not act the fool. Furthermore, you'll have to use the short ladders. I can't risk having you fall from the top of a tree."

"We'll do exactly as you say," Veve promised. Because she couldn't curb her high spirits, she broke into a snatch of a Brownie song:

"We snip and paste and hammer too,
To aid folks young and old.
And after all our work and play,
A story we will tell.
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!
The Brownies are with you to stay!"

"I hope the Brownies do stay and prove to be good pickers," Mr. Hooper said, sighing. "I've had plenty of trouble with the crop this season."

"What sort of trouble, Mr. Hooper?" inquired Connie.

"Well, as I said, the larger orchard owners have hired nearly all of the professional pickers. I'm supposed to have a crew coming in tomorrow, but they may fail me. And my fruit is ripening fast." 39

Mr. Hooper gazed thoughtfully up into a cherry tree as he spoke. The fruit nearly all was bright red and so plump it looked as if it might burst.

The orchard owner took Connie's pail of cherries to the shed for weighing.

"You've picked four pounds," he said. "That's six cents. After you've practiced awhile, you'll find you can strip the trees three times as fast."

Pa Hooper told the girls that a professional picker usually made from six to ten dollars a day. The Brownies, of course, never could hope to earn that much.

Instead of paying Connie for the cherries she had picked, Mr. Hooper wrote her name on a card and the amount that was due.

"This is your account," he said. "If you're a good picker and stick to it, the sum should grow and grow like Jack's beanstalk."

Then and there, both Connie and Veve made up their minds to be the fastest pickers in the Rosedale Brownie troop. They scarcely could wait to return home to relate their good news!

"Be at the orchard early in the morning if you want to get a good start," Mr. Hooper urged. "At least by seven o'clock." 40

Now, as a rule, Connie and Veve scarcely had their breakfasts by that hour. You may be sure, though, that they didn't tell the orchard owner. Instead, they merely nodded and promised to be on hand.

The girls felt quite happy as they trudged to the bus stop. Their arms ached from such fast picking, and Veve had several cherry juice stains on her pinchecked dress. But they were pleased to have obtained a promise of work.

"We should make a lot of money for the troop," Veve declared as they waited for their bus.

"What if Miss Gordon shouldn't let us pick?" Connie asked anxiously. "After all, she only told us to find out about the job. Not to take it."

"And it will be hard getting the Brownies to the orchard by seven o'clock," Veve added.

"Mr. Hooper really needs our help though. If he doesn't get pickers soon, his crop will be lost. When the Brownies hear about that, I'm sure they'll want to pitch in."

"Sure, they will," Veve agreed confidently. "If they don't, we'll make 'em!"

The arrival of a city-bound bus brought the talk to an end. During the ride into Rosedale, Veve had little to say. After awhile, Connie noticed her companion's unusual silence. 41

"What's the matter with you anyhow, Veve?" she demanded. "Tired?"

"Not very."

"Then what is wrong?"

"Nothing," Veve said in a tone which meant just the opposite.

"Aren't you glad we got the job?"

"Of course! Only—"

"Only what, Veve?"

"Well, I was wondering if Mr. Hooper will treat the Brownies right."

"Treat them right?" Connie couldn't understand what Veve meant. "Why, he agreed to pay a cent and a half a pound. That must be a fair price, even if some of the larger orchards pay two cents."

"Oh, I didn't mean money, Connie. I was wondering if Mr. Hooper will beat the Brownies if they make mistakes."

"Beat them! Whoever heard of such a thing! He wouldn't dare!"

"Well, he might."

Connie stared at her little friend, who now was etching a face on the dusty bus window. 42

"What ails you, Veve?" she asked. "Didn't you like Mr. Hooper?"

"Course, I did."

"Then what put such a thought into your head? He wouldn't hurt anyone."

"Maybe not," Veve admitted, "but some of the orchard owners beat their pickers."

Connie had become a bit annoyed. She was quite certain Veve had no reason for making such remarks.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Because I *saw* it."

"You *saw* it?" Connie echoed in disbelief. "Well, I didn't. And I've been with you every minute this afternoon."

Veve smoothed wrinkles from her skirt. "I saw it from the tree," she revealed. "That was what made me fall. I was so startled."

"You must have been looking over into Carl Wingate's orchard. What did you see, Veve?"

"Mr. Wingate struck Juan with a stick, Connie. I saw it plainly. He hit him hard too."

The information worried Connie, even though she knew the Brownies never would pick cherries in the Wingate orchard.

"Mr. Wingate is a cruel man," she declared. "I'm surprised that the Mexicans pick for him even if he does pay two cents a pound instead of only a cent and a half."

"You see now why I fell out of the tree," Veve defended herself. "I wasn't awkward. You'd have tumbled too if you'd seen what I did!"

Connie told her little friend that she thought it would be wise not to alarm the Brownies by repeating the story. If they heard about Juan being whipped, they might refuse to pick for Pa Hooper.

"And he isn't in the least like Carl Wingate," she declared.

The bus now had reached a familiar street. Veve and Connie alighted to walk to their homes. However, because they were in such haste to tell Miss Gordon the good news, they stopped at a drugstore to telephone her.

Pa Hooper's offer surprised the Brownie leader very much. At first, she hesitated and declared she hardly knew what to say about the girls taking on the picking job.

"Mr. Hooper really needs our help," Veve urged. "And think how much money we will make for the troop."

Finally, the Brownie leader gave her consent. She said she would telephone each girl personally. If parents were willing, the troop would meet at Miss Gordon's home the next morning at six-thirty sharp. From there they would drive in the Brownie leader's car to the cherry orchard.

"Be sure to wear old clothing," she warned Veve and Connie. "Cherry picking could be very hard on Brownie uniforms."

The two girls were jubilant as they hung up the receiver. If Miss Gordon called the other Brownies, the cherry picking job was assured!

"We'll have a lot of fun at Mr. Hooper's orchard," Connie declared gaily. "I like him so much."

"He's a queer one though."

"Queer?" Connie considered Veve's remark most strange.

"He must be a hermit or a miser or something, living all alone at the orchard."

"How do you know he does, Veve?"

"He sleeps in the packing shed." Veve was proud that she had made the observation. "I saw his cot in one corner of the room. He had an electric plate too where he cooks his food."

"Well, I suppose he has to stay there, because he has no house."

"That's another strange thing, Connie. His home must have burned down a long time ago. Why didn't he rebuild it?"

"Maybe he didn't have the money. Or perhaps he just didn't want to."

Veve had been reading mystery books and considered Connie's explanation entirely too matter-of-fact.

“That isn’t it at all,” she insisted. “Mr. Hooper must have a special reason for not rebuilding his house. While we’re picking cherries at his orchard, I intend to learn all about it!”

CHAPTER 4

“Tail-ender”

AT six-thirty the next morning, six sleepy-eyed Brownies were at Miss Gordon’s home, ready to drive to the cherry orchard.

Eileen was the last to arrive. Usually she did not arise until eight o’clock and so felt a little cross.

“I don’t see why we have to get up so early,” she grumbled.

All the girls wore blue jeans instead of dresses, for Miss Gordon had warned them that frocks might be ruined by fruit stains. The Brownie leader had packed enough lunch for everyone, and had filled a thermos jug with hot chocolate.

“All aboard for Pa Hooper’s orchard!” she called, herding the girls into her car. “Time to get started if we’re to arrive there by seven o’clock.”

During the ride to the orchard, the Brownies asked Veve and Connie dozens of questions about the work they were to do. Everyone except Eileen thought it would be great fun.

When Miss Gordon was less than a half mile from Pa Hooper’s place, her car was passed by a truck. Mexican workers were leaning over the high sideboards. Seeing the Brownies, they laughed and shouted, and waved their hands.

“They must be pickers for the Wingate place,” Connie declared. She had glimpsed Juan, the little Mexican boy, among the group.

A few minutes later, the Brownies saw the truck turn in at the orchard.

Miss Gordon drove her own car into Pa Hooper’s place. As the girls tumbled out, they noticed only a few persons picking cherries some distance from the packing shed.

“Well, you did come after all!” Pa Hooper exclaimed, walking over to the group. “I need pickers. Ready to start in?”

“Oh, yes!” Veve agreed. “We want to earn a lot of money.”

The orchard owner laughed and said that would depend entirely upon how steadily the girls kept at their picking.

“It’s easy the first hour,” he declared. “After that—well, we’ll see how you hold up.”

Then and there the Brownies made up their minds that even though the job was hard, they would not give up!

Mr. Hooper led the girls to a group of nearby trees. Each Brownie received a pail and was shown exactly how to strip a branch.

“Pick clean and don’t bruise the fruit,” he instructed. “When your pail is filled, weigh in at the shed.”

The orchard owner told the girls to strip only the lower tree branches. He said he could not risk having them fall from the stepladders, and so would leave the higher picking for older persons.

After Mr. Hooper had gone to the shed, the Brownies fell to work with a will. At first the cherries thudded into the tin pails, making a tinkling sound. Soon the bottoms of the buckets were covered.

“I have almost two inches of cherries in my pail!” Rosemary called after a few minutes.

“Oh, I’m ahead of you,” laughed Jane, who was picking in the next tree.

Hearing the report, Veve began to strip at a faster rate, for she was far behind. She had stopped too often to sample a cherry and to look around.

Seeing a clump of especially large cherries directly overhead, the little girl reached for them. Her hand touched something which was dark-green in color and very slimy.

With a squeal of dismay, Veve pulled back. The pail of cherries nearly dropped from her hand.

But she managed to save it.

"O-oh, see this horrid creature on the tree!" she exclaimed. "Ugh! It gives me the creeps."

The other Brownies and Miss Gordon, who were picking close by, came over to look.

"Why, it's only a harmless little slug," the Brownie Scout leader laughed. "One frequently finds them amid the foliage."

Miss Gordon plucked the leaf which the creature had been eating. Half of the soft leaf tissue had been nibbled away, leaving ribs and veins exposed.

"Orchard owners control slugs by spraying with arsenate of lead," she told the girls. "Somehow, this fellow escaped."

"I don't want to pick on this tree any more," Veve said.

"Fraid cat!" teased Sunny Davidson.

"I am not!" Veve denied. "I just don't like slugs."

The other girls laughed and told her she would have to stick to her own tree.

Veve went back to work but she kept looking at the foliage before she touched it. She did not see another slug.

50

When Mr. Hooper presently came to the orchard to see how the Brownies were doing, Veve remarked that she thought the trees needed spraying.

"Why, bless you!" the orchard owner chuckled. "Already they've been sprayed four times. I put on one early in the season to control scale insects. Then I sprayed a second time just before the blossoms opened up. Since then the trees have had two extra treatments."

Veve was amazed that so much work was required to keep the orchard in good condition.

"It's a never-ending battle," Mr. Hooper sighed. "One has to fight leaf spot, brown rot and the fruit fly, to mention only a few troubles."

After the orchard owner had returned to the shed, the Brownies picked steadily for a while.

Then Rosemary shouted that her pail was filled. She was far ahead of the other girls.

"My bucket is full too," announced Miss Gordon. "Come, Rosemary, shall we be the first to weigh in?"

Everyone began to pick very fast, not wanting to be a tail-ender.

Soon Connie was ready to have her fruit weighed. Jane's pail next was filled. Both girls were proud to have done so well.

51

After that, Eileen and Sunny finished their picking in rapid order.

"Veve's the tail-ender!" teased Jane. She whirled around fast and her jeans caught on a strand of wire attached to the fence.

As the little girl pulled away, she heard a tearing sound. A long jagged hole had been torn in the leg of her almost-new jeans.

"Oh, now see what I've done!" she exclaimed. "My knee shows right through!"

"That comes from picking so fast," declared Veve. Actually, Jane had not been stripping the tree at the moment of the accident.

Near tears, Jane hastened to the shed to show Miss Gordon the torn place. Veve followed her, although her pail was not quite filled.

In the shed, Pa Hooper had just finished weighing in the cherries and noting down the amount on cards.

When he saw Veve's pail, he shook his head. "Only three-quarters filled?" he asked. "Now, it's a waste of time to weigh in less than a full pail."

"Mine will be full next time," Veve assured him. She really meant it too.

Miss Gordon told Jane she would sew up the tear in the jeans during the lunch hour.

52

"I have a sewing kit in my car," she said. "Also a first aid kit. But I hope and trust we'll not need the latter."

"Will it soon be lunch time?" Rosemary asked. Already she was growing hungry.

"Why, we've scarcely started to pick," laughed Miss Gordon.

After Pa Hooper had weighed all the fruit, the Brownies returned to their posts. Soon their arms began to ache from reaching up into the branches. And as the sun rose higher and higher, they became very warm.

However, the Brownies were good sports and not afraid of hard work. No one wanted to be the first to complain or quit, so they all kept on. But everyone, even Miss Gordon, picked at a slower pace.

Veve became very thirsty. Now and then she would eat a cherry or two.

"No wonder you can't keep up with the rest of us," Connie scolded her. "You stop so often to eat."

Veve knew she deserved the lecture, for she found it hard to keep her mind on work. She liked to watch the other pickers and to glance now and then over into the Wingate orchard to see what was going on there.

53

By eleven-thirty the Brownies were so hungry they declared they were nearly famished. They were certain they could not wait another minute for lunch.

"We'll weigh in and open up the hamper," Miss Gordon decided. "My! I wonder if I packed enough lunch?"

All of the Brownies except Veve quickly went to the shed to have their cherries weighed.

"Coming, Veve?" asked Miss Gordon.

"In a minute," the little girl answered. She did not have many cherries in her pail and was ashamed to have either the Brownies or Mr. Hooper see how poorly she had done.

While the others were in the shed, Veve picked as fast as she could. Even so, her bucket was not half filled.

She was still working when the girls trooped out of the shed again.

"Do come along, Veve!" Miss Gordon called. "We're having our lunch now."

Veve climbed down from the stepladder and walked slowly toward the shed. The Brownies already were at the car, removing the lunch hamper and thermos jug. They planned to eat under a shady oak in the front yard.

54

"Hurry up, slow-poke!" Jane shouted. "You won't get anything to eat if you don't."

Without going to the shed, Veve covered her pail with a handkerchief, and joined her friends.

"Haven't you weighed in your cherries?" Connie asked her as she helped to spread a tablecloth under the oak tree.

"I'll do it later," Veve mumbled. She knew Pa Hooper would not accept a half bucket of cherries. He had told her twice to fill the container to the brim before bringing it in.

"It doesn't matter how many cherries anyone picked," said Miss Gordon quickly. "The important thing is we're doing useful work and earning money for our troop."

"How much have we earned already?" Eileen asked eagerly.

Miss Gordon said she had not kept accurate account, but she was certain it amounted to several dollars.

The morning work had made the girls very hungry. Although the Brownie leader had prepared two sandwiches for each person, it did not seem enough. Veve bolted hers in a twinkling and so did Sunny. The chocolate disappeared equally fast.

55

"Oh, dear, I'm still hungry," moaned Sunny. "I could eat anything—anything, that is, except cherries."

Her remark made Veve think of a little joke. "What's worse than biting into a worm?" she asked the Brownies.

"What could be worse?" demanded Connie.

"Biting into half a worm!"

The Brownies did not laugh very hard at Veve's joke. During the morning picking, nearly everyone had bitten into at least one worm. It had not been a pleasant experience.

"I'm so hungry, I could even go for a worm," added Veve, just to make the girls shudder. "Say, whose car is that?"

She had noticed a familiar blue sedan turning into the driveway.

"Why, that's our car!" cried Connie, leaping to her feet. "It's Mother!"

Now the Brownies were very surprised and pleased to see Mrs. Williams. Eagerly, they swarmed about the car.

"Having fun?" Connie's mother asked.

"Oh, yes!" the girls told her. They really were, too.

Connie had spied two large covered baskets on the back seat of the automobile.

"What are in these?" she demanded.

"Oh, those!" smiled her mother. "I thought the girls might want a little more lunch. I baked a cake and made potato salad. But if you've already had too much, I can take them home."

The Brownies all hooted in protest at such a proposal.

"You leave those baskets right here!" laughed Connie.

"I should say so!" echoed Eileen.

"I could eat an entire cake myself," added Jane.

The Brownies carried the baskets to the big oak tree. There, upon the tablecloth, they spread out an array of delicious looking food.

Besides cake and salad, Mrs. Williams also had brought cheese and pickles.

Veve helped herself to a large piece of cake.

"I'm thirsty," she announced when she had finished the last crumb.

The thermos bottles were empty. Veve thought she would try to find a pump.

"There's one back of the shed," Miss Gordon told her. "The water, though, tastes of mineral. You'll find better water at the spring."

"And where is that, Miss Gordon?"

"Only fifty feet from the entrance gate. Just follow the road." The Brownie leader pointed out the direction.

Not wishing the other girls to see the contents of her cherry pail, Veve carried it with her.

After she had trudged a short distance along the dusty road, she found the spring. A cool stream of water flowed out of a small pipe.

But someone was there ahead of Veve.

She saw at once that it was Juan, the little Mexican boy.

He had been washing his hands under the stream of water piped from the hillside. One of them seemed to be scratched, for it was bleeding.

"Why, what's the matter?" Veve asked anxiously.

Juan glanced up and grinned, his lips parting to show a double row of even, white teeth.

"Nothing, *Senorita*," he replied. His tone was most polite.

Veve felt quite grownup to be called a *senorita*, which she knew was a Mexican word for "Miss." It worried her, though, to see that Juan's hand had been deeply scratched and bruised.

"How did you hurt your hand?" she asked.

"Wingate." Juan answered briefly.

Veve was horrified. "You mean he cut you?" she gasped.

"No, *Senorita*. He shoved me and I stumbled into the wire fence."

"Oh, Juan! How could he be so mean?"

The Mexican boy shrugged his thin shoulders. "Wingate has an evil temper. He treats all of his

pickers mean—but he hates me worse than the others. Often he beats me.”

“I know! I saw him strike you with a stick only yesterday. Why do you work for him?”

“The pickers have a contract,” Juan explained. But he added darkly, “We may break it. *Si!* If we leave before the fruit is harvested, then he will be sorry!”

“I should think so,” agreed Veve soberly. “Juan, wait here! I am going to get Miss Gordon’s first aid kit and wrap up your hand.”

She ran to the car for the materials she needed—cotton, gauze, iodine and tape. Returning to the spring, she dressed the cut as Miss Gordon had shown the Brownies how to do, and taped on the bandage.

The finished job did not look too neat, but Juan said it was fine and made his hand feel better. He seemed very grateful.

“How do you like stripping cherries?” he inquired. “Does the orchard owner beat you if you damage the fruit?”

“Oh, no! Mr. Hooper is very nice. All the Brownies like him.”

Juan had glanced at Veve’s nearly empty pail. “How many pounds a day can you pick?” he asked.

“I’ve filled my bucket almost three times this morning.”

Juan did not say anything, but from the way he smiled, Veve knew he did not think she had picked very many cherries.

“Here,” he said, a moment later.

Before Veve could prevent it, he picked up his own filled bucket and dumped cherries into hers until it was ready to overflow.

“Oh, you shouldn’t have done that!” she exclaimed. “Mr Wingate won’t like it.”

“Who cares for that old goat?” scoffed Juan. “He has no friends. Hooper, his own relative, dislikes him—and for good reason too. *Si!*”

“Are Hooper and Wingate relatives?” Veve asked in astonishment.

Before Juan could answer, he heard his name angrily called. Mr. Wingate stood at the entrance to the orchard, gazing toward the spring.

“You, Juan!” he shouted. “Stop loafing, and get back to work!”

“*Si, Señor,*” the little Mexican boy muttered. Picking up his nearly empty pail, he smiled again at Veve, and ambled up the road.

Back at the Hooper orchard, the Brownies had finished their lunch and were ready to resume their picking.

“Where’s Veve?” Jane demanded impatiently. “She’s always late. She hasn’t even weighed in her last picking.”

“That’s because she didn’t have enough cherries to turn in,” said Eileen.

Veve came up to the oak tree just in time to hear the last remark.

“Who says I haven’t any cherries?” she demanded, offering her pail in proof. “Full to the brim!”

The Brownies were amazed. They had been so certain that Veve’s bucket was nearly empty.

“How did you get so many cherries so quickly?”

Connie asked suspiciously. “When I last saw your pail—”

“Oh, I’m a fast picker,” laughed Veve. Then, because she knew a Brownie had to be honest, she added: “Well, maybe I had some help!”

The girls plied her with questions. Finally, after she had tantalized them, Veve told about her meeting with the Mexican boy.

“One can’t blame the Mexican pickers for thinking of leaving if they are mistreated,” remarked Miss Gordon when she heard Juan’s conversation repeated. “However, I hope they don’t. If the pickers should go away from the area before the fruit is marketed, it would be most serious for all of the orchard owners.”

The Brownies now were well fed, rested, and ready to return to their work. Connie's mother was sorry she had not worn old clothes so that she too might help.

"Perhaps I'll come again tomorrow," she declared. "That is, if it doesn't rain."

The sky had become slightly overcast. Although it did not look as if it would rain very soon, a storm appeared in the offing.

While the other Brownies returned to their trees, Veve went to the shed to have her cherries weighed.

"You did very well," Pa Hooper praised as he marked the poundage on her card. "Guess you're finally getting the trick of it."

Veve flushed and decided then and there that during the afternoon she would keep her mind on her work.

"Oh, Mr. Hooper," she said suddenly. "Is Carl Wingate any relation to you?"

The orchard owner nearly dropped the lug of fruit he was carrying out to load into a truck.

"What made you ask that?" he demanded. He did not seem very pleased by the question.

"I just wondered."

"Someone put you up to it! Carl Wingate is my cousin. Now get back to your picking and don't be pestering me with questions."

Pa Hooper spoke almost crossly. Veve could not understand why her question had annoyed him. She remembered though, that Juan had said something about the orchard owner disliking Carl Wingate.

She meant to learn more about it before the Brownies were through with the cherry picking. However, she would have to bide her time. Pa Hooper, she could plainly see, had no intention of revealing any secrets.

CHAPTER 5

The Brownies Lend a Hand

VEVE awoke the next morning to the sound of rain on the roof. For a moment she lay quite still, wondering if it were time to get up.

"Oh, dear!" the little girl thought. "This means there will be no cherry picking today."

Veve was not too disappointed, however. For when she rolled over in bed, her shoulders ached and so did the muscles of her legs. She felt as if she could sleep a thousand years.

Just then, her mother called from downstairs: "Time to get up, Veve! It's after nine o'clock!"

Nine o'clock! When Veve heard that, she rolled out of bed and began to dress. She had not dreamed it could be so late for it looked dark outside. Half the morning already was gone!

Mrs. McGuire had breakfast waiting when the little girl came downstairs. She had set out Veve's favorite cereal, and had cooked tiny sausages.

"U-um, u-um," Veve declared, smacking her lips. "I'm as hungry as a bear! Cherry picking certainly makes one hungry."

Mrs. McGuire set a tall glass of milk in front of her daughter's plate. "I let you sleep late because I knew you were tired," she said. "There will be no cherry picking today. Miss Gordon called a few minutes ago, to say the Brownies are having a meeting though."

"Where?" Veve demanded between bites of sausage.

"At Miss Gordon's home. You're to work on the quilt again."

Veve made a grimace which showed exactly how she felt about sewing.

"The meeting starts at one," her mother informed her.

Veve would have liked to be a little late to cut down her sewing time. She already had one demerit for tardiness, however, and could not risk another. So she decided she would be on time.

After lunch, she changed into her Brownie uniform and went to Miss Gordon's home. All the girls were disappointed by the rain. But they agreed it was a fine time to finish the crazy quilt.

"If we each sew three blocks, it will be finished," Miss Gordon declared. "Then I'll put it on the frames and quilt it for you."

"When will we have the quilt sale?" Connie asked.

Miss Gordon said she thought the auction and show possibly might be held within a week or ten days.

"It all depends upon when we have our quilts ready to exhibit," she added. "Let's have a report now. How many have arranged to have at least one quilt entered in the display?"

Connie quickly announced that she would have two exhibits, the Sawtooth quilt and a woven Washington coverlet.

Rosemary next made her report. She said she had been promised an Evening Star pattern. Eileen was sure she would have one in the Pine Tree design. Sunny's aunt had given her a very old one, made entirely of little scraps of velvet and silk.

As for Jane and Veve, they both told Miss Gordon they surely would find quilts to enter in the show. Actually, they were a trifle worried, for the time was short.

When four o'clock came, the girls finished the last quilt block, and put away their sewing. They were very tired. But they were happy and proud too, for the crazy quilt now was ready for the frames.

"I'll stitch in our Rosedale Brownie Troop name," Miss Gordon promised the girls. "You've done quite enough as it is."

Ice cream and cake were served. Then the girls sang a Brownie song and ended the meeting by repeating the Brownie Scout Promise:

"I promise to do my best to love God and my country, to help other people every day, especially those at home."

The girls stood at attention as they spoke the words, saluting smartly at the end.

After the dishes had been cleared away, it was time to leave.

Arm in arm, the Brownies ambled down the street. The rain had ceased, and the clouds were drifting fast as if they might clear away.

"I hope it's nice weather tomorrow," Connie said. "I want to pick cherries again."

At the next corner, the girls began to separate to go to their homes. Veve walked with Connie for most of the distance to their street. Then abruptly, she announced that she had to go the other way.

"Why, you don't live down that street," Connie protested. "What are you up to anyhow?"

Veve would not say. Nor would she agree to allow her friend to accompany her.

"You'll hear all about it at the next Brownie meeting," she laughed. "That is, if I have luck."

Now Veve had made up her mind to get busy and find a quilt for the show. She had recalled that a lady who lived on White St. had a beautiful one with dogwood flowers across its face. She meant to ask her for permission to display it in the exhibit.

"See you later!" she dismissed Connie.

Now Veve knew that the owner of the dogwood quilt was Miss Adelia Brimborough. She had never talked to her, however.

Therefore, the little girl was completely taken by surprise when a tall, prim lady answered her rap on the door.

Just by looking at her, Veve guessed that she did not like children.

"Well?" inquired Miss Brimborough. Her tone implied that she was in a great hurry.

Veve started to explain about the Brownie organization and the coming quilt show.

Miss Brimborough scarcely listened. When Veve asked her rather timidly if she would allow her dogwood quilt to be shown by the Brownies, her answer was firm.

"My dear, I am so sorry. I should like to help your fine organization—indeed, yes. But you may not know that my dogwood blossom quilt won second prize in the county fair last year."

"That's why we would like to exhibit it," Veve said quickly.

"My dear, I couldn't risk entering such a valuable quilt in a Brownie show. It might be damaged, you see. Children are so careless."

"Brownies aren't," Veve insisted. "We're taught to be responsible and to take care of things. If you'll let me have the quilt I'll promise—"

"Now please don't tease," the lady cut her short. "I am sorry, but I can't let you have the quilt."

Veve was tempted to make an unkind reply. She wanted to tell Miss Brimborough that she was mean and selfish.

Just in time, though, she remembered that Miss Gordon had said a Brownie must always be courteous even though others might be rude.

Miss Brimborough hadn't been exactly rude. She merely had been very firm.

With as much dignity as she could muster, Veve said good-bye. She felt bitterly disappointed by the refusal.

Where in the world now would she find a quilt for the show? In all Rosedale she did not know of another person who had a pretty one.

Twenty minutes later, when Veve reached home, her mother had arrived from the office.

"Mom, do you know of anyone who might have a quilt for our Brownie show?" the little girl asked.

Mrs. McGuire, who was making out the grocery list, did not give the question very much thought. "Why, no, dear," she answered absently. "Must you have one soon?"

"Right away."

"We'll try to think of someone who has a nice quilt," her mother said. "Just now I'm so busy—"

The telephone had started to ring. Mrs. McGuire asked Veve if she would answer it.

Taking down the receiver, the little girl was surprised to hear Miss Gordon's voice.

"Veve," the Brownie leader said. "I've just received a call from Mr. Hooper. He needs our help." 70

"At the cherry orchard, you mean?" gasped Veve. She knew Miss Gordon would not have telephoned if the matter were not of utmost importance.

"Yes, this rain has made the cherries ripen very rapidly. Mr. Hooper is afraid he will lose much of his crop if he doesn't get pickers right away."

"Does he want the Brownies to come out there now, Miss Gordon?"

"Not tonight. But he has asked us to report the first thing in the morning. Can we count on you, Veve?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Good!" Miss Gordon approved. "I'm calling all the other girls. We're to meet at my home at six-thirty sharp."

"I'll be there," Veve promised.

"Oh, yes, another thing. Mr. Hooper wants us to bring any other pickers we can find. I thought possibly we might induce some of the mothers to go with us."

"That would be fun! And we'd make a lot more money for the organization!"

"We certainly would," laughed Miss Gordon. "The important thing though is that we have a chance to help Mr. Hooper save his crop. It seems he can't have his turn at the professional pickers for several more days. By that time he's afraid his crop will spoil." 71

"I'll ask my mother to go," Veve promised.

Mrs. McGuire worked nearly every day at a downtown office. It so happened, however, that she was entitled to a little time off.

"I'll be glad to accompany the Brownies to the orchard," she assured her daughter. "Until now I've had little chance to help the organization. This will give me a splendid opportunity."

All of the other mothers felt exactly the same way.

So the next morning, six Brownies and six mothers gathered early at Miss Gordon's home.

"Thirteen of us," the Brownie leader declared, counting noses. "Dear me, I hope that's not unlucky."

"It will be a lucky number for our Brownie troop!" laughed Connie. "Think how many pounds of cherries we'll pick today."

Everyone was in high spirits. The sun shone brightly and the day gave promise of being pleasant. With the mothers going along, the cherry picking would become a real outing.

Six heavily laden lunch hampers already had been loaded into the cars. 72

Veve spied Miss Gordon putting in another large, squarish package which did not look as if it contained anything to eat.

"What's in that one?" the little girl asked curiously.

Miss Gordon only smiled.

"Surprise," she hinted mysteriously. "Wait until lunch time. Then you'll see!"

CHAPTER 6

A Missing Coverlet

VEVE was happy as a lark, humming a Brownie song as she stripped cherries into her pail. Now that she had learned the trick of pulling the fruit from the trees, it was much easier for her to keep up with the other pickers.

Furthermore, she had a secret! In fact, two of them.

"What makes you so chirpy this morning?" demanded Connie, who was picking in the next tree.

"Oh, I'm just feeling top-notch!" laughed Veve. "Thinking of that good lunch we'll soon be eating!"

"That's not entirely the reason," insisted Connie. "You've been pepped up ever since we drove out here this morning. In fact—you acted as if you saw something on the way that gave you a big lift."

"Maybe I did."

"Well, I didn't see anything different than usual."

"Then you couldn't have looked where I did," Veve teased. "I saw it right close to Pa Hooper's farm—at the first one down the road."

"Carl Wingate's place?"

"Goodness, no. I mean the house on this side of the road."

"Well, I didn't see anything," Connie declared. She brushed a strand of hair from her eyes. "Stop teasing me, Veve! What did you notice?"

"A quilt hanging on the line!" Veve announced, her eyes sparkling. "Oh, it was a beauty, Connie! Even from the road I could see that the pattern was unusual—all stars and wheels in blue and white."

"I must have been looking the other direction. I didn't see it."

"None of the Brownies did. It was flapping there on the clothesline as much as to say, 'Come and get me, Veve!' That's what I intend to do! At lunch time, I'm going to slip over to that house and ask the lady if she'll let me have the quilt for our show."

In her enthusiasm, Veve did not realize that she was talking in a loud, shrill voice. Jane Tuttle, who was working in the next tree, heard the conversation. She became so interested that for a minute or two she forgot to pick cherries.

"I guess I won't be a tail-ender after all!" Veve declared in satisfaction. "I'll beat Jane!"

The little girl said no more about the quilt. However, when at last Miss Gordon signaled the Brownies that it was time to knock off for luncheon, she was off her ladder in a flash.

"See you later!" she called to Connie. "Save me some lunch, if I'm late."

Miss Gordon was directing the girls and their mothers to the big oak where lunch was to be served. In counting noses, she failed to see Jane Tuttle.

"Why, I wonder where she is?" she inquired aloud. "Come to think of it, I haven't seen her around for the last fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Jane went to the shed awhile ago to weigh in her fruit," Sunny informed. "I never saw her come back though."

At that very moment, one of the girls sighted the missing Brownie. She came walking jauntily through the gate, pigtailed swinging. Her shoes were quite dusty, an indication that she had tramped along the road.

"Oh, girls! Guess what?" she greeted the Brownies. Jane looked directly at Veve as she spoke.

"Where have you been?" Veve demanded suspiciously.

Jane laughed. "Off looking for a quilt!" she informed saucily. "Found one too!"

"You found a quilt for the Brownie show?" Veve asked in a weak voice.

"At the farm next to this one! Oh, it's a dandy! Blue and white. It's called the Ship's Wheel pattern. The lady who owns it says she'll be glad to let me have it for the display."

"She'll let *you* have it!" Veve cried. "But that was *my* quilt!"

"It wasn't yours until you had it promised," chuckled Jane. "The early bird catches the worm, you know! You're a pretty late bird, Veve."

"You heard me tell Connie about the quilt!" Veve accused. "Then you sneaked off before I had a chance and asked for it."

"So what?" laughed Jane. "You can get another quilt. Only of course, this makes you the tail-ender!"

Miss Gordon, who had heard the girls arguing, came over to ask what was wrong. Veve told her what had happened.

"Why, Jane," the Brownie leader said in surprise. "I didn't think you would do a thing like that. It doesn't seem quite honest or fair."

"I only wanted to get ahead of Veve," Jane said, now feeling ashamed of herself. "Oh, well! I'll give her the old quilt."

Veve, however, was too proud to accept it.

"No, thank you," she said. "I will find another one—a much nicer pattern."

The other Brownies did not tease Veve about being a 'tail-ender.' In fact, they very carefully avoided talking about the Ship's Wheel quilt. Jane knew that the girls felt she had been unfair in taking Veve's quilt. She was sorry now that she had done it, but she did not know how to make amends.

The girls and their mothers ate lunch under the oak tree. While they rested, Miss Gordon brought out the mysterious package Veve had seen her slip into the car that morning.

"Here's the surprise," the Brownie leader announced. "Our quilt—entirely finished!"

As the teacher carefully spread the quilted coverlet on the grass the girls exclaimed in delight.

The quilt might be "crazy" in pattern, but never had they seen such a splash of gay colors! Blue, gold, red, green, yellow and every hue of the rainbow.

Altogether, the quilt was so beautiful that the girls disliked the thought of selling it. Of course they would, however, for the organization needed money.

"How did you finish it so quickly?" Connie inquired.

"I had many willing helpers," Miss Gordon explained. "Last night we had a quilting bee at my home."

"What's a quilting bee?" questioned Sunny curiously.

"A quilting party," Miss Gordon explained. "I invited teachers from the Rosedale School and a number of my other friends. First we tacked the quilt onto wooden frames. Then we put a backing on it and filled in a layer of cotton. Finally, we tacked it down and took it from the frames."

"My, that must have been a lot of work!" exclaimed Rosemary. "Even more than making the quilt blocks."

"It was," admitted the teacher. "But finishing such a fine quilt was well worth while. Don't you all feel that way about it?"

"Oh, yes!" agreed the Brownies.

Miss Gordon showed the girls the lower right-hand corner of the quilt. In tiny red stitches, the Rosedale Brownie Troop name had been etched in.

"Oh, I like that!" Connie cried. "Now, even though someone else buys our quilt, the Brownie name always will be on it."

"It's almost like having an autograph quilt," declared Veve.

While the other girls chattered excitedly about the coming quilt show, Jane Tuttle had nothing to say.

In truth, she felt quite ashamed of the way she had acted.

"Don't feel bad, Jane," Veve said to cheer her. "It's all right about the quilt. I'll find another."

Jane brightened at that. "I'll help you get one, Veve," she promised.

Then she added: "You know something? While I was at that next-door house, I learned some interesting things about Mr. Hooper."

"You did?" Veve was eager to hear all about it.

"His house burned down nearly three years ago, the lady said. And guess why he never rebuilt it!"

"Maybe he didn't have the money."

"That's not the real reason," replied Jane. "He didn't rebuild the house, because he's afraid he will lose his entire orchard."

"Lose it? How? Doesn't he have enough money to pay the taxes?" Veve had heard her mother say that to hold property one had to pay taxes regularly.

"Oh, it isn't that!" Jane explained impatiently. "He's afraid he will have to turn the place over to Mr. Wingate."

"To that old demon!"

"It's because of a will or something," Jane said vaguely. "The lady told me, but I didn't pay close attention. Anyway, Pa Hooper and Mr. Wingate have had a lot of trouble. They're cousins, but they dislike each other."

"I can't blame Mr. Hooper for not liking Carl Wingate," Veve declared with feeling. "Why, it would be dreadful if he would get both orchards."

"The quilt lady seemed to think that's the way it will turn out. She said Pa Hooper is afraid this harvest is the last one he'll ever get from his orchard. And he may lose most of it too!"

"Why will he lose his cherries, Jane?"

"Because the fruit is ripening so fast. He expected the Mexican pickers two days ago, but they're still at the Wingate place. Mr. Hooper can't get them until they've finished Wingate's picking."

"He has us."

"But you know we're not fast pickers, Veve. A good stripper can get almost 300 pounds a day from a tree. Mr. Hooper needs two experienced pickers to every acre. At least that's what the quilt lady told me."

"I wish the Mexicans would leave Mr. Wingate's place and come here."

"So do I, but they have to finish their contract first. Mr. Wingate has a heavy crop, and he won't let the pickers move on until they're completely finished."

As the girls talked, Miss Gordon called that it was time to return to the orchard. Before leaving, she carefully folded the quilt inside out and left it lying on the grass not far from the picnic baskets.

During the afternoon, the Brownies and their mothers picked steadily.

The work seemed much easier now. Even so, everyone began to grow a little tired about four o'clock.

Mrs. Davidson had just finished filling her bucket when, without warning, the breeze began to freshen.

Two or three strong gusts swept through the orchard, blowing papers and stirring the limbs of the trees.

"Girls, better come down from your ladders," Miss Gordon called. "It looks as if we're in for a wind storm."

Scarcely had the girls descended, however, than the wind died away as quickly as it had come.

"False alarm," laughed Miss Gordon. "We may as well go back to work."

Mrs. Davidson said it was time for her to go home and start supper. She was the first to leave, taking Sunny with her.

After that, Mrs. Williams had to go and so did Eileen's mother. They promised, however, that if the weather remained favorable, they would return the following morning.

"Mr. Hooper really needs every picker he can get," Miss Gordon said soberly. "He tells me his entire crop must be harvested before the end of the week. Otherwise, much of the fruit will be rejected by the cannery as over-ripe."

One by one the mothers left the orchard, taking their daughters with them. Miss Gordon was among the last to depart.

"Girls," she said to Veve and Rosemary, who were to ride with her, "will you bring the lunch baskets, please?"

Hand in hand, they raced to the oak tree where lunch had been served. All but two of the baskets already had been loaded into other cars.

"I'm glad there's not much to carry," Veve said.

She picked up one of the baskets and gave the other to Rosemary.

At the parked car, Miss Gordon shoved the hampers into the rear luggage compartment.

"There, I guess we have everything," she declared. "My, but I am tired."

"So am I," yawned Veve. "After this picking job is over, I'll go to bed and sleep a million years!"

The two girls curled up on the back seat, intending to relax during the ride into Rosedale.

A truck from the canning factory had blocked the entrance gate to Pa Hooper's property. Not until it had moved on with its load of fruit, was Miss Gordon able to drive out into the main road.

The automobile had traveled perhaps a mile toward the city when the Brownie leader thought of an important matter.

"By the way, I don't recall packing the Brownie crazy quilt," she said. "Did either of you look after it?"

"Not I," said Rosemary.

"Neither did I," returned Veve. "I didn't even see the quilt under the tree when we picked up the lunch baskets."

"Maybe one of the mothers took it," suggested Rosemary.

Miss Gordon now was rather troubled.

"I should have thought about the quilt, but it slipped my mind," she said, slowing the car. "It may have been left under the tree. I believe we should drive back there to make certain."

The Brownie leader turned the automobile around and returned to the Hooper orchard. This time she went with Rosemary and Veve to the oak tree where they had eaten the picnic lunch.

However, they could not find the crazy quilt.

"One of the Brownie mothers may have taken it," Miss Gordon decided. "Oh, well, I wanted to be sure the quilt wasn't left behind. Odd, I didn't see anyone carry it to a car."

En route back to Rosedale, the Brownie leader did not have a great deal to say. Veve and Rosemary could not tell whether she was uneasy about the quilt or was thinking of other matters.

Miss Gordon dropped Rosemary off at the Fritche home. Mrs. Fritche said she had not seen the crazy quilt either.

"Perhaps Mrs. Davidson has it," she suggested. "As I recall, she was one of the first to leave."

"I'll telephone all the mothers," the Brownie leader said. "Someone must have the coverlet."

Before taking Veve home, Miss Gordon stopped at her own residence. From there she called Mrs. Davidson.

Sunny's mother reported that she had not seen or taken the crazy quilt from beneath the tree.

In turn, Miss Gordon called all the mothers who had attended the picnic. Mrs. Williams was the last name on her list.

"Why, no," replied Connie's mother, in answer to the Brownie leader's question. "I did not take the quilt. For that matter, I didn't even notice that it was under the tree."

Miss Gordon turned away from the telephone, very much discouraged.

"Veve," she said, "how can I tell the Brownies? After all our work, the crazy quilt is gone! While we were so busy picking, I'm afraid someone took it!"

CHAPTER 7

Pa Hooper's Trunk

NEXT morning at the orchard, the main topic of conversation was the loss of the crazy quilt.

Everyone agreed that Miss Gordon had left it lying under the oak tree. No one recalled seeing it after that.

"Pickers went to and from the orchard all day," Miss Gordon declared. "Oh, dear, it was careless of me not to have locked it in the car. And to think how many long hours the Brownies spent on their beautiful blocks!"

"Maybe one of the Mexicans took it!" suggested Rosemary. "I saw that little boy they call Juan walking along the road about four o'clock."

"Juan wouldn't steal," Veve said, going quickly to his defense. "He's nice and I like him!"

"We mustn't accuse anyone," said Miss Gordon. "The fault was entirely my own. I'll try somehow to make it up to the Brownies. Just at the moment, I can't think of any way to do it. Every one of those stitches was precious." 87

The Brownies felt the same way about their work. Not for anything in the world would they have sewed another quilt. They felt its loss very keenly.

"Does this mean we won't have the quilt show or the auction?" Eileen asked.

"We can't have the auction because we have no quilt to sell," the teacher replied. "As for the show, I vote that we go on with it exactly as we planned."

"So do I!" cried Connie, and all the other girls agreed.

Veve, however, was not as enthusiastic as the others, because she was afraid she never would find a quilt to display.

"I have another idea too!" Miss Gordon announced cheerfully.

The Brownies demanded to know what it was.

"Why not have a cherry festival in connection with our quilt show?" the teacher proposed. "It might help to draw a crowd and would be fun to plan."

"Oh, that sounds exciting!" approved Connie. "How do we do it?" 88

Miss Gordon outlined her plans, and invited the girls to add their own suggestions. She had cut out petal patterns from which the girls could make artificial cherry blossoms to decorate booths.

"We can have paper lanterns decorated with the blossoms," she went on. "Then you might like to select a festival queen. If so, we'll need a throne."

"Wouldn't that mean a lot of work?" Eileen asked. Already she was feeling rather tired from so much cherry picking.

"The throne could be made quite easily by using a swing. The rope strands would be entwined with cherry blossoms. I think it would be nice if we had the festival out-of-doors. That is, if the weather is fair. We've had so much rain lately."

One and all the Brownies liked Miss Gordon's idea for the cherry festival. Somehow, planning for it eased the loss of their quilt.

"When will we have the festival?" Veve asked.

Miss Gordon said she thought the next week-end might be the best time. Although that did not give the Brownies very long for their preparations, they could do it if everyone worked together. And all the mothers had promised to help. 89

"I'll make the posters tonight," Miss Gordon offered. "As soon as you can, bring the promised quilts to my house."

With the festival and quilt show almost at hand, Veve wondered what she would do for an exhibit.

Later that morning when she carried her pail of cherries to the shed for weighing, she asked Pa Hooper if he knew of anyone who might have a quilt she could borrow.

"Bless you, no," he answered. "If my sister, Ella, were alive, she could give you a dozen of 'em. Ella made beautiful quilts."

"Haven't you any of them now?"

"Not a one, child. All the quilts burned when the house was destroyed. That was right after my sister died. All my papers and records were burned too. Everything I owned."

Mr. Hooper sighed as he poured Veve's cherries into a sorting bin.

"If everything hadn't burned," he hinted, "I might not find myself where I am now. I'd show that upstart, Carl Wingate, a thing or two! As it is, he holds the whip hand."

Veve could not guess what the old man meant.

"Didn't you save anything from the fire?" she asked. "Not a single thing?"

Pa Hooper waved his gnarled hand toward a far corner of the shed.

"Only that old trunk and bureau," he said, pointing to two dusty, carpet-covered objects. "Neither of them contained anything of value."

"Have you looked carefully, Mr. Hooper?"

"Most carefully, Miss Veve. I'd give a lot if I could find one of Ella's old letters—in fact, anything bearing her signature."

"You're certain there isn't an old letter somewhere in the trunk?"

"Quite certain."

Veve hesitated a moment, and then said:

"Sometimes, Mr. Hooper, trunks have secret compartments or false bottoms. I know, because I've read about it in stories."

Mr. Hooper chuckled as he stooped to pat Cap, who licked his hand.

"So you think my sister's old trunk might have a secret compartment?"

"Couldn't it?"

"My sister Ella wasn't the type to hide anything. She was open and above board about everything she did. That's why it seemed so queer about her will—"

The old man lapsed into deep thought without finishing what he had started to say. He seemed to forget that Veve was in the shed.

After awhile, recalling her presence, he said briskly: "Well, four more pounds of cherries to add to your total. You're catching up with the others, Veve. Keep up the good work!"

"Yes, sir," Veve agreed.

Then, because she was deeply interested in the old trunk and the bureau, she spoke of them again.

"Would you mind if I went through 'em sometime?" she asked. "Perhaps I might find an old letter of your sister's. Mother says I have very sharp eyes."

"I've looked through the trunk a dozen times," Pa Hooper returned. "It's a useless task."

Observing Veve's disappointment, he added quickly: "But you may search if you're a mind to."

"Right now?" Veve asked eagerly.

"I guess you could, only it will keep you from your cherry picking."

"I'll go through the trunk at the lunch hour," Veve decided.

The little girl returned to the orchard to tell the Brownies of her plan. She found several of the girls gathered in a group around Jane.

"It's been taken!" Jane was saying excitedly. "The Brownie pin was on my jeans and now it's gone. It disappeared the same as the quilt did!"

Miss Gordon came down from her ladder to learn what was wrong.

Jane told her that she had worn the dancing elf pin that morning on her shirt. Only a few minutes before she had noticed that it was missing.

"You must have lost it somewhere in the orchard," the Brownie leader declared. "But it isn't right to suggest that someone took it."

"Well, someone went off with our quilt!"

"That was a different matter, Jane. And I blame myself. I never should have left the coverlet under the tree."

Jane made a great fuss over the loss of the pin. For nearly half an hour she gave up cherry picking and searched everywhere on the ground.

Several of the Brownies helped her. But they could not find the missing pin.

"It makes me fairly ill," Jane said in a discouraged voice. "First our quilt—and now my pin. There must be someone dishonest in this orchard!"

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"But Jane, no one could have taken the pin off your jeans without you having seen them," Connie pointed out. "Besides, the pickers all seem very nice. I'm sure they wouldn't steal."

Besides the Brownies and their mothers, Pa Hooper had ten and sometimes twelve other persons picking for him. Everyone seemed friendly and pleasant.

The women pickers always spoke to the Brownies when they met them at the packing shed. Of course the girls had asked everyone about the missing quilt. No one had seen it. And now, no one knew anything about the lost pin.

After awhile the Brownies went back to their picking again. Even though Jane wanted them to keep looking for her pin, they felt they could not take any more time.

Veve told the girls about the trunk and the old bureau in the packing shed.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could find some of Ella Hooper's handwriting!" she speculated. "If I could, maybe Pa Hooper wouldn't have to give up his orchard!"

The morning was pleasantly cool. By now the Brownies had become fairly steady if not fast pickers. Of course, they could not keep up with the others. But there were so many of them that their total kept growing and growing.

94

"What will we do with all our money?" Connie mused.

"Go camping, or maybe on a long trip!" Eileen proposed instantly. "I'd like to go to New York City or maybe Washington!"

All the Brownies laughed, for the idea seemed quite impossible. Even if they picked cherries for a week, they knew they could not earn enough for a long trip. But just the thought of it excited them.

At noon the Brownies ate their luncheon as quickly as possible. Veve went to the spring, hoping to see the little Mexican boy again. He was not there, but as she bent down for a cool drink, she saw something bright and shining lying in the mud.

It was the missing Brownie pin!

"And Jane was so sure someone took it!" Veve chuckled, washing the emblem under the stream of water. "Wait until she hears about this!"

Racing back to the orchard, she gave the pin to Jane.

"Well, can you beat that!" the other girl exclaimed. "I remember now, I went to the spring a couple of hours ago. I guess the pin must have slipped off my jeans and I didn't notice."

95

"You see how unfair it is to accuse anyone when you aren't sure," added Rosemary severely.

"I didn't accuse any one person," Jane defended herself. "I just said it might have been someone. Anyway, our quilt still is missing!"

With lunch finished, Veve planned to get busy on the old trunk.

Before she could do so, however, Miss Gordon called the Brownies together.

"Girls, how would you like to ride to the canning factory?" she inquired.

"What would we do there?" Connie asked quickly. She was very much interested, as were all the Brownies.

"I thought we might see how cherries are canned commercially."

"Will we go now in your car?" inquired Sunny.

Miss Gordon explained that they would ride with Bill Flint, a truck driver, who hauled Mr. Hooper's cherries.

"Oh! We're going in a truck?" Veve exclaimed. Immediately, she decided to postpone her examination of the old trunk. "That will be gobs of fun!"

"I thought you might enjoy it," Miss Gordon smiled. "Bring your sweaters, girls. We may be gone for an hour or so."

The mothers of the Brownies decided they would rather remain at the orchard. All of the girls, however, wanted to go.

Off they raced for their jackets and sweaters. Already Bill Flint was loading the truck with lugs of cherries.

"I'll take Miss Gordon and two of the Brownies with me up front," he told them. "The rest will have to stand up in the back. It's not far, though, to the factory."

Connie and Rosemary sat with the Brownie leader. The other girls climbed into the rear of the truck, finding a tiny space which was not loaded with boxes.

"Whoever saw so many cherries!" Veve marveled. "And just think! We picked most of 'em!"

Bill Flint started the big truck engine. It made such a roar that, for a minute, the girls could not hear their own voices.

The truck rattled off down the road, past the Wingate orchard. At the first corner it turned right, onto a wide paved road.

Before the truck had gone very far, the Brownies caught sight of another cherry hauler, directly ahead. And as they neared the factory, they saw more and more trucks, all laden with fruit.

"Everyone must be going to the cannery!" Veve laughed. Her words came out in jerks, for the truck at that moment was passing over a broken patch of pavement.

A moment later, the vehicle came to a complete standstill.

"What's wrong?" called Eileen in alarm. "Do we have a flat tire?"

Bill Flint did not need to answer the questions. By looking ahead down the road, the Brownies could see an almost endless line of trucks. Bumper to bumper, they stood, waiting their turn to move up to the factory loading and unloading dock.

"Afraid we're stuck here for awhile," the truck driver said, switching off the motor.

Indeed, the Brownies were traffic locked. Until the cherry-laden trucks ahead moved up, they could not budge.

CHAPTER 8

Duck's Foot in the Mud

AT first, the Brownies did not mind waiting in line. They sang songs and played one of their favorite games.

Connie started it by saying: "I see something green which begins with the letter 'P.' What is it?"

"A tree!" cried Eileen before she stopped to think.

"A tree doesn't start with the letter 'P,'" Connie reminded her.

"Paint!" guessed Sunny Davidson, stretching a cramped arm. "Green paint on that truck just ahead!"

"That's a good guess, but you aren't right," laughed Connie. "I'll give you a tiny hint. The object I'm thinking about is over in that field to the right."

All the Brownies glanced toward the truck garden where many green things were growing.

"Potatoes!" cried Veve. "Green potato plants!"

"That's right," agreed Connie. "Now it's your turn."

Veve looked quickly about for an object. On the opposite side of the road, a washing hung on a line. The little girl noticed a blue shirt flapping in the breeze.

"I see something which starts with the letter 'S'—" she began, and then broke off.

She had seen another object even more interesting. Also on the line hung a red and white patterned quilt. Even from so far away Veve could see that it was a most unusual design.

"Oh, I see a quilt!" she cried.

"You're not supposed to tell," Jane chided her. "And quilt doesn't start with 'S.'"

"I'm not playing that game any more," Veve announced. She was thinking hard. "I have an idea."

"You and your ideas!" scoffed Jane.

Veve, however, did not hear. She nudged the truck driver.

"Bill, how long will we have to stay here?"

"Hard to tell," he replied. "Something seems to be holding up the trucks at the cannery. They're not moving up very fast."

"Will we be here ten minutes?"

"We might. Then again we might not."

"I can make it," Veve declared and started to scramble over the high sideboard of the truck.

Jane clutched her by the seat of her jeans.

"Hey, you! Where do you think you're going?" she demanded.

"After that quilt." Veve pulled free and leaped lightly to the pavement. "I'm going to ask if I may have it for our Brownie show."

"You'll be left behind!"

"It won't take me but a minute," Veve insisted. "May I go, Miss Gordon?"

"Are you certain you won't take longer than ten minutes?"

"I'm sure I can make it! Oh, please let me inquire about the quilt."

"Run fast then," the Brownie leader urged. "If the trucks ahead move on, we will have to pull

up too to keep our place in line.”

“I can catch up,” Veve insisted. “The trucks only move a few feet at a time.”

Before Miss Gordon could offer another objection, she darted off to the farmhouse.

Good luck was with Veve. As she entered the yard, she saw a stout woman in a pink checked gingham dress hanging up another basket of clothes.

101

“Good morning,” Veve gasped. She was quite out of breath from running.

“Good morning, my dear,” returned the lady, taking clothes pins from her mouth. “Have I ever seen you before?”

“I don’t think so. You see, I just jumped out of that cherry truck. I wanted to ask about your beautiful quilt.”

As she spoke, Veve glanced over her shoulder toward the road. To her dismay, she saw that the truck already had moved a few feet ahead. She would have to talk fast unless she wanted to be left behind.

“It is a lovely quilt,” said the lady. “I believe the pattern is called ‘Duck’s Foot in the Mud.’ The pieced blocks do resemble the imprint of a duck’s webbed foot.”

“Oh, yes,” agreed Veve, scarcely heeding what the woman said. “The quilt would look simply gorgeous in our Brownie quilt show. Would you—would you please let me borrow it for the display? I’d take the very best care of it.”

The lady smiled because the little girl seemed so worried and earnest.

102

“Why, I’d love to let you have the quilt for a display,” she said. “Only I can’t.”

“You can’t?” Veve quavered.

“No. You see, the quilt isn’t mine to offer.”

“But I thought—”

“You saw it hanging on the line and assumed I owned it? No, I merely am washing the quilt for another lady. She lives a long distance from here too.”

“Oh!” Veve’s face, which had been very bright, now became as dreary as a rainy day. “Then of course you couldn’t let me have it. Oh, dear! I’ll always be a tail-ender, I guess. You—you don’t own a single quilt of your own?”

“No, I’ve always used blankets.”

The lady very much wanted to help Veve. However, she did not know how to do it.

“Mrs. Gwinn on Seventeenth St. owns the ‘Duck’s Foot in the Mud’ quilt,” she said. “I could telephone her, but I am afraid she would not want anyone to borrow her quilt. Of all the folks for whom I wash, she is my fussiest customer.”

“I guess I will just have to go without a quilt,” Veve said, deeply discouraged. “Well, thank you just the same.”

103

The little girl started away.

“Wait!” the lady called her back. “Come to think of it, I do have a quilt!”

“Oh, grand!” exclaimed Veve, scarcely believing her good fortune.

“On second thought, I’m afraid you wouldn’t want it for your exhibit. You see, it’s a very old quilt—but not in the least fancy.”

“That doesn’t matter. Just so it’s a quilt. That’s all that counts.”

“Wait here,” the lady instructed. “I’ll show it to you.”

She disappeared into the house. A few minutes later, she was back again with the quilt.

Even though Veve had not expected an elegant coverlet, it was hard for her not to show her disappointment. The quilt was faded and never had been made of very pretty colors. In general appearance it resembled the Brownies’ crazy quilt. However, it was not half so pretty.

“You see, it isn’t much,” the lady apologized. “It was given to me years ago, by a lady now dead. But if you can use it, take it along. You needn’t bother to bring it back as I never use it any more.”

104

"You mean it's mine to keep?"

"Yes, dear, if you think you can use it. I'm sorry I haven't a nicer quilt to offer."

"Oh, I can use this one," Veve assured her. "Yes, indeed!"

The pleasant lady offered to wrap up the coverlet, but there was no time.

Already the long line of cherry-laden trucks had started to move slowly ahead.

From the roadway, Miss Gordon and the Brownies waved their arms and shouted for Veve to hurry.

"Never mind wrapping the quilt," the little girl said nervously. "I'll take it just as it is. Thanks a million!"

"You're welcome, I'm sure," the lady smiled. "Do come and see me again sometime when you have more time. Who knows? I might have a few spare sugar cookies in my jar."

"I'll come," Veve promised. She really meant it too.

Starting off at a run, she called over her shoulder, "You must come to our Brownie quilt show! I'll let you know the day later."

The quilt tucked under her arm, the little girl raced for the road. In her haste, she ran through a mud puddle and caked both shoes. But she could not stop to clean them.

Bill Flint and the Brownies had waited for her, even though the other truck drivers did not like it very well. The trucks ahead had moved up, leaving a long gap of roadway.

Behind the Brownie truck, drivers were tooting their horns impatiently. They wanted Bill Flint to pull on ahead.

"Hurry! Hurry!" the Brownies called to Veve.

She leaped a little ditch and reached the side of the truck, quite breathless.

Reaching down, the Brownies hauled her, quilt and all, over the side.

Bill Flint started ahead an instant later. The thunder of the big truck engine was so loud for several minutes that Veve could not make herself heard.

Soon, however, the truck had caught up with those ahead. Then it slowed to a standstill again.

"Veve McGuire! You nearly gave us heart failure!" Jane accused crossly. "You stayed and stayed at that house on the hill, and paid no attention when we yelled for you to come!"

"I ran as fast as I could. Anyway, I got a quilt."

"Let's see it," Sunny urged. "Is it real pretty?"

Veve was careful not to answer the question. She spread the quilt out for the girls to see.

In the bright sunlight, the coverlet looked even more faded than at first sight. The right hand corner bore an ugly brown stain. One of the edges was frayed.

For a moment, the Brownies merely gazed at the quilt. No one said a word.

Then Jane, always outspoken, found her tongue.

"You call *that* a quilt?" Her tone was most scornful.

"It is a quilt!" Veve said, her eyes flashing. "The nice lady said so! Furthermore, she didn't just loan me the coverlet. She gave it to me!"

"And no wonder!" went on Jane. "It's not worth a thing! Why, I bet a dog used it for a bed!"

"That's not so," Veve retorted. She was becoming angry now as well as hurt. "It's a good quilt and I like it!"

"Maybe you can find a better one before the show," Sunny interposed. "One that's not so faded."

Veve started to reply, but words would not come. Instead, a salty tear trickled down her nose.

In the front seat of the truck, Miss Gordon had turned around to see what was wrong.

"May I see your quilt, Veve?" she asked kindly.

The little girl nodded and handed it over in a lumpy roll. She felt ashamed of the quilt now, and

wished that she never had accepted it even as a gift. The girls never would get over teasing her!

Miss Gordon examined the quilt for a moment without comment. Jane and Eileen openly tittered.

"Why, Veve!" the Brownie leader said unexpectedly. "What a lovely old quilt! It's the only one of its type we have for our show."

The tears stopped trickling down Veve's nose. She did not trust herself to answer. Did Miss Gordon really like the quilt or was she only trying to be kind?

"The quilt's old enough!" giggled Jane. "It must have come over in the Ark!"

Miss Gordon gazed at the little girl most severely.

"Jane, I'm afraid you're not a very good judge of quilts," she said. "One can't always judge by the brightness of the colors, you know."

"Is the quilt really good enough to be in our exhibit?" Veve asked, taking hope.

"Indeed, it is. Girls, this is an excellent example of the autograph patch!"

The Brownie leader explained that in an autograph patch quilt, each block was made by a different person who signed her name or stitched it in.

"This quilt has dozens of names and the dates when the blocks were made," she pointed out. "See, some are in cross-stitch. Others have been written with indelible pencil or ink."

"Then I did find a good quilt!" announced Veve triumphantly.

"You certainly did," agreed Miss Gordon.

Carefully she folded the coverlet as if it were very precious. "You've found more than a quilt, Veve," she said. "You're now the owner of a possession which takes on historical importance!"

CHAPTER 9

Veve's Autograph Quilt

TO hear Miss Gordon say that the quilt was historically important made Veve very proud.

Instead of having a worthless coverlet, she now was the possessor of one that was the equal of any of the others obtained for the Brownie show. Best of all, it was her very own.

The truck was moving ahead again. Soon it came to the gate of the canning factory.

"Hi there, Bill Flint!" the gateman greeted the driver. "I see you have a full load. All those kids yours?"

"Wish they were," laughed Bill.

The truck kept edging along closer and closer to the cannery.

At the unloading dock, all the Brownies piled out of the vehicle. An inspector came over to look at the lugs of cherries.

"These are plenty ripe," he said. From one box he removed a cherry which had turned brown and split open.

"Too much rain," replied Bill. "And Mr. Hooper can't get enough pickers."

"Well, tell him we'll reject the fruit if it comes in too ripe," the inspector said. "He'll be wise to round up pickers and get the job done fast."

"Try and find 'em," Bill rejoined. "Carl Wingate has tied up the works by hanging onto his crew too long. The Mexicans were supposed to have been at Hooper's place yesterday."

"I know," the inspector agreed. "Too bad. But I have to protect the cannery."

The snatch of overheard conversation troubled the Brownies. They liked Pa Hooper and did not want him to lose any of his fruit.

"When we get back to the orchard, we must pick faster," Connie whispered to Veve and Rosemary.

Both girls soberly agreed. However, they knew that the amount of cherries they could pick would not count up very fast. If Mr. Hooper were to save his crop, he needed the Mexican pickers.

"Come along, girls," said Miss Gordon, guiding them into the cannery.

The truck would be unloaded quickly. Bill had told the Brownie leader that he would return to the orchard for another load. He expected to pick up the Brownies on the second trip, which would be in about two hours.

"We'll be able to see the factory and have time to spare," declared Miss Gordon.

The Brownies watched workmen unload the cherries and place them on a conveyor which took them to a large room with mechanical stemmers.

A single stemming machine had a long cylinder made up of a series of short rubber rollers.

As the rollers turned, they caught and pulled away stems and leaves. The cherries themselves were not crushed or bruised.

"Say, that's neat!" approved Eileen.

In the next canning operation, the fruit was thoroughly washed. Then it moved on to a grading machine.

By means of a screen, the cherries were sorted into groups of five different sizes.

The Brownies were even more interested in the machine which removed the pits from all the cherries. They stood for a long while watching the fruit fall into tiny cups. Once there, the stones were removed by cross-shaped plungers.

A man who showed the girls over the plant, told them that to keep the fruit from spoiling it was

necessary to sterilize it at 212 degrees for twelve to twenty-five minutes.

"Cherries receive a long exhaust too," he declared. "At least ten minutes."

"What's an exhaust?" inquired Jane, puzzled.

The guide explained that it was a process which eliminated air from the can.

He showed them next the room where the cans were stacked after sterilization had been completed. Sprays of water passed over them to cool the tin.

"Is that so they'll be easier to handle?" Connie questioned.

"Oh, no," explained the guide. "If the cans were not cooled quickly, the contents would continue to cook for several minutes. Then the cherries would darken."

After the cans were sealed, each one was carefully tested.

"Poorly sealed ones give off bubbles of air," the guide told the Brownies. "Those are discarded."

Imperfectly sealed cans or "leakers" made a hollow sound when tapped with a short steel rod, the man further explained. A properly sealed one gave off a dull, flat sound.

The Brownies saw how bright colored labels were pasted on the cans which then were ready for packing. That ended the tour.

"It took us less than an hour," Miss Gordon declared when the girls came out into the bright sun again.

"Then we have another hour to wait for Bill Flint," said Connie.

She looked up and down the road. Other trucks were pulling up to the cannery every few minutes. But Bill's truck was nowhere to be seen.

The sun was uncomfortably warm. Miss Gordon suggested that they cross the roadway and wait under the shade of a large oak.

Once there, however, Veve had an even better idea. She had noticed that the river ran close by. A trail led from the road to a sandy beach where several persons were bathing.

"Let's go down to the beach!" she proposed.

Miss Gordon looked again at her watch. "We have time enough, I guess," she decided. "Bill isn't in sight yet and he will have to unload his truck after he reaches the cannery."

The Brownies trooped down to the beach. Several children were there, wading in the shallow water.

"Oh, Miss Gordon, may we go in too?" demanded Veve.

The Brownie leader hesitated. Before she could say 'no' all the girls began to tease to go into the water.

"It's so hot!" Eileen declared. "I'm simply roasting."

"We haven't long—"

"It will only take a jiffy," said Veve, starting to strip off her shoes and stockings. "Oh, that water will feel good!"

Miss Gordon had to give in. All the Brownies except Rosemary decided to go wading. They rolled up their jeans and splashed into the water.

The beach was not a very nice one. On the bottom were many sticks and stones. Veve stepped on a jagged rock and hurt her toe. However, she only laughed. She knew if she made a fuss, Miss Gordon would make all the girls come out of the water.

"Stop splashing!" Connie scolded her friend. "You're getting my jeans all wet."

"Don't forget, we're supposed to pick cherries when we get back to the orchard," added Sunny. "We can't do it if our clothes are soaked."

Veve moved farther away from the Brownies toward the group of strange children. Among the boys and girls, she saw someone she knew. It was Juan, the little Mexican boy.

"Hello!" she called.

"Hello, yourself," he returned the greeting.

A moment later Juan walked over to the group of Brownies, grinning from ear to ear.

"Why aren't you picking cherries?" Veve asked him.

The little Mexican boy shot the question right back.

"Why aren't *you*?"

"The Brownies all came to the factory to see how cherries are canned," Veve explained. "We're waiting now for Bill Flint to return for us."

"Did you visit the factory?" Eileen asked the boy politely.

She could not help thinking that he was dressed oddly, even to go wading in the river. The boy wore a straw hat. His shirt was torn and two buttons were off. A patch had pulled loose from his trousers, showing an area of bare leg.

"I have never been inside the cannery," Juan replied. "I did not pick cherries today because I did not feel like it."

"You played hookey, didn't you?" Jane caught him up. "Shame! When cherry pickers are so badly needed too."

"If the orchard owners want pickers they should pay us more," said Juan with a shrug. "And they should treat us better."

The Brownies could think of no answer to that remark. They knew, of course, that Carl Wingate had struck the Mexican boy with a stick. Whether or not Juan had first caused the orchard owner trouble, they had never learned.

Just then a man came down the trail toward the beach.

At first, he merely stood and watched the children as they waded in the shallow water. But after awhile he noticed Juan.

"Hey, you!" he called to the little Mexican boy.

Juan acted as if he had not heard.

The man came quickly to the water's edge. He was scowling and appeared very displeased.

"Come here!" he called again to Juan.

This time the boy could not pretend that he had not heard. Very slowly he waded in toward the man.

"*Que, Senor?*" he mumbled, acting as if he neither spoke nor understood English.

"You heard me!" the man said angrily. "What do you mean by going in wading at this beach?"

Juan merely shrugged.

"You know you have no right here. I won't have Mexicans on my property! Now go, and don't let me catch you sneaking back."

Juan waded out and picked up his straw sandals.

"Get a move on!" the man urged.

Shocked by the man's angry attack, the Brownies quickly followed the Mexican boy from the water.

"No, I didn't mean you girls," he said in a quieter voice. "You may stay if you like."

"But you just now told Juan to leave—" Veve began in bewilderment.

"He's a Mexican."

Juan drew himself up proudly. "*Si, Senor*, I am a Mexican and proud of it," he announced. "I have as much right here as anyone else."

"We'll see about that!" said the land owner, starting toward him. "You'll leave or I'll turn you over to the sheriff."

Juan grabbed his straw sandals and hobbled off over the sharp pebbles.

But as he disappeared among the trees, he hurled a threat over his shoulder.

"You'll be sorry," he warned. "So will all the orchard people! Wait and see!"

CHAPTER 10

At the Cannery

AFTER Juan had disappeared among the trees, the land owner turned to speak to the Brownies. By this time all the girls had waded out of the water.

"I didn't mean you," he said. "You may stay here as long as you wish."

"But why did you send Juan away?" asked Veve. She did not like the way he had treated her little friend.

"Oh, he's a Mexican. The pickers have a camp not far from here."

"But Juan is nice."

"He's a Mexican, and they aren't allowed to use the beaches hereabouts," the man repeated. "Juan, as you call him, may be all right, but if I let him swim here, all the camp would show up. The pickers are a shiftless lot."

The Brownies without saying any more began to put on their shoes and stockings.

"I didn't mean to frighten you girls away," the land owner tried to reassure them. "Wade here whenever you like."

"I don't want to stay if Juan can't," Veve said.

Until now, Miss Gordon had taken no part in the conversation.

"I really think it is time that we leave," she said. "Bill Flint soon will be returning in the truck."

The girls quickly put on their shoes and stockings and started up the trail to the road. Once beyond hearing of the beach owner they were very outspoken.

"It was mean of him to send Juan away," Veve declared. "Why, he wasn't making any trouble or doing anything he shouldn't."

"The man just doesn't like Mexican pickers!" added Connie. "I wonder why?"

"I wonder myself," said Miss Gordon. "So many persons seem to have that attitude. As far as I've observed, the pickers appear to be a group of quiet, well-behaved people."

The Brownies had reached the roadway. Bill Flint was not yet in sight with the truck.

"Did you hear that threat Juan made as he ran off?" Connie recalled. "Do you suppose he meant it?"

"He was annoyed because the land owner had ordered him off the property," Miss Gordon said. "I'm sure Juan didn't mean his threat seriously."

As the Brownie leader spoke, the girls were startled to hear a yell of dismay. The cry had come from Eileen, who had walked a short distance ahead of the others down the road.

In attempting to leap a tiny ditch from the roadside to the pavement, she had slipped and fallen. Now as she slowly picked herself up, her shirt and jeans were plastered with mud. So were her hands and face.

"Just look at me," Eileen wailed. She began to cry.

Miss Gordon tried to comfort her. "We'll go to a filling station rest room and clean you up," she said brightly. "Don't cry, Eileen."

"But the truck is coming!" exclaimed Sunny, who had spied it far down the road. "There won't be time."

"It will take Bill Flint a little while to unload the cherries," Miss Gordon said. "I'll take Eileen to the filling station. The others go on to the factory loading dock and meet Bill."

The Brownies followed their leader's instructions. This time, however, Bill had driven to the factory without a full load.

In a short while all the lugs had been removed from the truck, and he was ready to start back

to the orchard.

Veve ran to the filling station to tell Miss Gordon and Eileen that the driver was waiting.

In the wash room, Eileen had removed her jeans so that the Brownie leader could scrape off some of the mud.

"Dear me, I didn't expect him to be ready so soon," Miss Gordon said. "I'm afraid Eileen and I will have to catch him on his next trip."

Veve took the word back to Bill Flint. "I could wait a few minutes," he said, looking at his watch. "But it won't be necessary. Joe Evans hauls for the Wingate Orchard. His truck is coming in now."

"Then he should be ready to leave in about twenty minutes."

"Right-o. Miss Gordon could ride back with him."

The arrangement suited everyone except Eileen. She had wanted to ride back with the other girls. Of course, she realized it would be better to wait until the worst of the mud had been cleaned from her clothes.

Leaving Miss Gordon and Eileen behind, the other Brownies rode back to the Hooper orchard.

"We will have to pick fast now," Connie urged her companions. "We've lost so much time."

"But our mothers have been working while we were away," declared Sunny cheerfully. "That will help."

Veve picked a full bucket of cherries and took it to the shed for weighing. While she was there Connie came in with her brimming pail.

"Oh, there's that old trunk!" Veve exclaimed as her gaze fell upon it. "I was going to look through it and forgot!"

"Why don't we do it now?" proposed Connie. "That is, if Mr. Hooper doesn't mind."

"I don't," the orchard owner replied. "Not if you don't take too long at the job. I want to get those cherries picked."

"It won't take us hardly a jiffy," Veve declared. "Not with two of us to work."

The trunk was an old-fashioned affair with a rounding top. An old rug had been thrown over the cover to protect it from dust.

Veve pulled off the covering and unfastened the rusty clasps which held down the lid. Cap, deeply interested, trotted over to watch.

"You won't find much," said Mr. Hooper. "I wish—"

"You wish what, Mr. Hooper?" Connie inquired curiously.

"Oh, I was only thinking I wish you'd stumble onto some of my sister's handwriting."

"Maybe we will."

"Not in that trunk, I'm afraid."

"We may find a letter tucked away somewhere," Connie insisted hopefully. "Would it mean a lot to you to have one?"

"I'd give a hundred dollars for a sample of my sister's handwriting," Mr. Hooper said. More talkative than usual, he went on: "You see, Ella made a will leaving this orchard to me. It was a typed document drawn by a lawyer."

"Ella signed it, of course, in the presence of witnesses. All well and good. I thought she had left me her entire property, including this orchard. But a short while ago, a cousin, Carl Wingate, appears with another will."

"Had your sister made two of them?" Connie asked in surprise.

"That's what Carl claims. The will he produced is only three lines long, and the signature doesn't look exactly like Ella's. But the will is of later date than the one which left the orchard to me."

"The second will gives this land to Carl Wingate?" questioned Connie, reaching down to pat Cap.

"Yes, and cuts me off with only her personal possessions." Mr. Hooper laughed without mirth.

"Her personal possessions! All that is left, is in that trunk and the bureau which was saved from the fire."

"Why would it help to have a letter from your sister?" inquired Veve.

"Because it would give us other writing of hers and another signature to compare with Carl Wingate's will."

"You said the writing on the second will doesn't look the same as on the first one?" Connie pursued the subject.

"No, it looks like a copy to me. I've been thinking of taking the matter to court, but so far I've no evidence."

"Maybe we can find some evidence," Veve declared confidently.

She began to burrow in the top layer of the trunk. As she lifted out an old brown wool skirt, three moth balls rolled onto the floor. Cap, thinking they were meant for play, began to chase them.

Besides the skirt, other clothing had been neatly folded away. Connie and Veve found a black silk dress, two pairs of shoes, and a silly looking hat with a blue feather.

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The girls wanted to try it on, but did not take the time. Instead, they carefully examined each garment for pockets. In one, Veve came upon a piece of paper.

For a moment, she thought she had made an important discovery. However, the paper proved to be only a recipe for gingerbread, torn from a newspaper.

Finding nothing in the top shelf of the trunk, the girls removed the tray.

The lower section proved even more disappointing. It was only half filled with old books, yellowed linen and a box of woolen underwear.

Veve and Connie examined the pages of the books, hoping that something had been written in them. But nothing had been. It was most discouraging.

"You see," remarked Mr. Hooper. "Nothing of value."

"We might try the bureau," suggested Veve half-heartedly.

"You'll find it practically empty," the orchard man told her. "But go ahead."

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The girls opened the drawers of the battered oak dresser. The top one was entirely empty. In the second they came upon a stack of old newspapers and magazines.

More old clothing had been folded into the lower drawer.

"It's quite useless," Mr. Hooper told the girls. "Ella had beautiful things, but they were all destroyed in the fire."

"I suppose we may as well get back to our picking," Connie said, closing the bureau drawers.

She picked up her pail, intending to leave the shed.

Before either she or Veve could do so, Eileen came rushing up. Only a moment before the little girl had arrived on a Wingate truck with Miss Gordon.

"Well, I see you're back!" laughed Connie before Eileen could speak. "Your jeans don't look so very bad now that they're dry."

Eileen was too excited to hear the remark.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "I've got important news! What do you think I saw on the ride back from the canning factory?"

Neither Veve nor Connie could guess, but they were very much interested.

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"What did you see?" Connie demanded.

"Our quilt!"

"Not the Brownie crazy quilt?" Connie asked, scarcely believing the astonishing news.

"I'm sure it was! Miss Gordon saw it too, but she wouldn't say for certain that it was our missing quilt. She thought there might be a mistake. But I'm sure it was the same one!"

The news had caused both Veve and Connie to become rather excited. Since the disappearance of the crazy quilt they had asked many persons if they ever had seen the coverlet. No one had

noticed it. So the Brownies were convinced that they never would find the quilt again.

"You found our quilt!" Veve said, clutching Eileen's arm. "Where?"

"This will really slay you," Eileen declared. "Of all places—"

"Well, tell us!" Veve broke in impatiently.

"I'm trying to if you'll give me time." Eileen paused for dramatic effect, and then said impressively: "It was at the Mexican camp. Veve, I guess your little friend, Juan, isn't so honest after all!"

CHAPTER 11

The Mexican Camp

QUESTIONED by Veve and Connie, Eileen related what had occurred on the return trip from the canning factory.

After Miss Gordon had cleaned the mud from the little girl's clothing, she and the Brownie leader had waited quite a while for the Wingate truck.

The trucker had been very willing to give them a lift back to the Hooper farm. However, on the way to the orchard, he had chosen a shorter side road instead of taking the main highway.

Not far from the canning factory, the truck had passed a camp where the Mexican cherry pickers lived.

"Several Mexican blankets hung on a clothes line strung up between two trees," Eileen revealed. "And guess what I saw on another?"

"What?" demanded Veve.

"I saw the missing quilt! Our crazy quilt!"

"Did you stop to look at it?" Connie asked, deeply troubled.

"Oh, no! The truck driver was in a hurry. We didn't dare ask him to stop."

"How close were you to the Mexican camp?"

"Oh, fairly close," Eileen said vaguely. She never could estimate distances.

"Close enough to really see that it was our crazy quilt?"

"Well, it looked like it to me. The quilt was made up of a lot of colors and pieced blocks of all sizes."

"But all crazy quilts are like that," argued Veve. She did not want to think that any of the Mexicans had taken the coverlet.

"That's what Miss Gordon said," Eileen admitted. "All the same, the quilt looked like ours. Another thing, Mexicans don't usually have quilts. Every other coverlet on the line was a woven blanket."

"There's one way we could tell for certain if the quilt is ours," said Connie thoughtfully.

"How?"

"Don't you remember? Miss Gordon stitched in the Brownie troop name in one corner."

"That's right!" Eileen agreed. "Let's get the girls together now, and hike over to the camp. We'll find out if that quilt is ours. If it is, we'll have all the Mexicans arrested."

Pa Hooper had been listening to the conversation of the three girls.

"I hope you don't have all the Mexicans arrested," he said, speaking for the first time. "If you do, we'll never get our fruit picked."

"At least we'll have the one who stole the quilt put in jail," Ellen insisted. "I'll bet it was Juan. I've seen him around here more than the others."

Veve went quickly to the defense of her little friend.

"I'm sure it couldn't have been Juan," she declared. "He seemed very honest to me."

"As long as I had Mexican pickers on my place, I never had anything taken," Pa Hooper added. "This year, though, they seem more restless and dissatisfied. Can't figure it out."

While Eileen, Connie and Veve talked, Jane and Rosemary came into the shed with filled pails. They too heard about the quilt, and were all for taking action at once.

"Let's go to the Mexican camp this minute!" Jane urged.

"Hold on," interposed Pa Hooper. "Who's staying here to pick cherries? This afternoon I'm not getting 'em stripped fast enough to keep the truckers busy."

Miss Gordon arrived just then and she too was in favor of the girls continuing with their picking.

"If the quilt really is ours, it will be at the camp later on," she advised. "We can finish our picking, and stop there on our way home."

"Will we have the Mexicans arrested?" Eileen demanded.

"That remains to be seen," Miss Gordon answered. "The important thing is to be certain that the quilt is ours before we say any more about the matter. It would be dreadful to accuse someone and then learn that we had been mistaken."

The Brownies were willing to be guided by the teacher's suggestion. All returned to the orchard where they picked steadily for the next two hours.

During the afternoon, however, they could talk of little except the missing quilt.

"If we get it back, we'll have a truly grand quilt show!" Sunny Davidson declared gaily. "Has it been decided for sure when we're to have the display?"

From the next tree, Miss Gordon herself answered the question.

"How about this Saturday night at the church? I've already arranged to have the parlor for the affair if we want it."

"Oh, fine!" approved Rosemary. "Let's make it Saturday night for sure."

"Can everyone have her quilt on hand by that time?"

"I can," laughed Veve. "My autograph one is right here now. It needs washing though, but that won't take long."

The other Brownies were fairly certain they could obtain the promised coverlets in time.

Miss Gordon urged them to busy themselves that very night on the telephone, letting all their friends know about the coming affair. She said she would make additional posters to put in store windows, advertising the quilt show.

"How much admission will we charge?" Connie asked. She wanted to make a great deal of money for the Brownie organization.

"I don't think we should charge anything," Miss Gordon decided. "However, we certainly will auction off the crazy quilt—if we're lucky enough to get it."

"Anyway, we don't need money as badly now as we did," Veve said. She reached on tiptoe to strip an especially heavily laden branch. "After we finish here at the orchard, the Brownies will be rich!"

Excitedly, the girls chattered about what they would do with so much money.

"We ought to make a thousand dollars at least!" Veve declared grandly.

Her remark made the other Brownies laugh, for they knew that even if they picked night and day, they could not earn that much.

"We'll be lucky if we make a hundred dollars," Connie said. "The cherries won't last much longer."

As the girls talked, she noticed that Miss Gordon had very little to say. The teacher was picking fruit rather slowly now.

Quite frequently she would raise a hand and press it to her forehead.

"Don't you feel well?" Connie asked her after awhile.

Miss Gordon admitted that she had a slight headache.

"I forgot to wear dark glasses today," she confessed. "The bright sun must have strained my eyes."

As the afternoon wore on, Miss Gordon felt increasingly miserable. Mrs. Williams, who was helping the Brownies pick, noticed the strained expression on the teacher's face.

"You really shouldn't be here," she declared. "Let me drive you home."

"I don't like to be a quitter—"

"Nonsense," said Connie's mother firmly. "You should be in bed. I'll drive you home now, and return for the Brownies."

Miss Gordon allowed herself to be persuaded. "Now don't worry about me, girls," she said, noticing the troubled faces of the Brownies. "It's only a headache. I'll be on hand again early tomorrow morning."

After Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon had gone, the Brownies picked steadily for a long while. They kept watching the road, thinking that Connie's mother soon would return.

The trip seemed to take a very long while. Eileen began to worry lest something had happened to the car.

"What if we shouldn't get to the Mexican camp before dark?" she fretted. "Then we might not find our crazy quilt."

"Shouldn't we go there right away?" Veve proposed impatiently. "Miss Gordon didn't say anything about it when she left."

"She was feeling too ill," Connie said. "But I'm sure she expected us to go on to the Mexican camp the way we planned."

"Is it too far to walk?" asked Veve.

Eileen was certain that the camp was not more than a mile away.

"Let's ask my mother to take us there now," she urged, climbing down from her low step ladder. "It's late and we can't pick many more cherries anyway."

The other Brownies were tired from their work and so favored the proposal.

Seeking Eileen's mother, who also had driven a car to the orchard, they asked her if she would take them to the Mexican camp.

"Without Miss Gordon?" she asked reluctantly. "I hardly think—"

"We don't dare wait until tomorrow!" Eileen cut in. "The quilt may be gone if we do."

"But dear, you might have been mistaken. If the quilt shouldn't belong to the Brownies, I would feel so embarrassed."

"Miss Gordon said she wouldn't want us to accuse anyone wrongfully," Connie recalled. "We could be real careful though! Couldn't we sneak up on the camp and look around without letting the pickers know what we were doing?"

"Well—"

"Oh, please!" coaxed several of the Brownies. And Sunny added: "After all our work on the quilt we just have to get it back."

In the end, Mrs. Webber agreed to drive the girls to the Mexican camp. She disliked to take the responsibility, however, in Miss Gordon's absence.

Eileen sat with her mother in the front seat, pointing out the side road which the Wingate driver had taken a few hours before.

Soon the car came to a grove of trees. From the roadside the girls could see the tents of the Mexican cherry pickers.

"Stop here, Mother!" Eileen directed.

As the car halted just off the road, Connie heard an interesting sound.

"Listen!" she commanded.

Mrs. Webber switched off the car engine and everyone listened.

From amid the trees came the strumming sound of a guitar. The girls also could hear someone singing in Spanish.

"Where's our quilt?" Veve demanded, jumping out of the car. "I don't see it anywhere."

"It was hanging between the trees only a few hours ago," Eileen insisted. "Some of the Mexicans must have taken it down."

Mrs. Webber advised the girls not to approach the camp too boldly. She did not know how they might be received by the Mexican pickers.

"Why can't Eileen and Connie and I go on ahead and see if we can find the quilt," Veve

proposed. "If it's there, we'll signal for the rest of you to come on."

"I want to go too," announced Jane. She was afraid she might be cut out of some of the excitement.

"Four would be too many," Veve insisted. "We'd be certain to attract attention."

Mrs. Webber said she could see no point in all of the Brownies descending upon the camp. The girls were so excited, she feared they might make remarks which would offend the Mexicans.

Favoring Veve's proposal, she gave the three girls permission to go on ahead.

"Now remember, it hasn't been proven that the quilt belongs to the Brownies. Or that it actually was stolen," she cautioned the trio. "Don't make any trouble. Just notice if the quilt is anywhere in camp. And if it is, signal."

"I'll hoot like an owl," Veve promised.

"I think a simple wave of the hand would be better," Mrs. Webber said, smiling. "But don't signal unless you are certain the quilt is there, and that it belongs to the Brownies."

Veve, Connie and Eileen were very pleased with the arrangement. The other Brownies, who must wait at the car, were less happy. They did not want to miss anything.

The three girls set off through the woods. A narrow trail wound in among the trees and led directly to the camp.

Drawing fairly close, Veve, Connie and Eileen paused to see what was ahead.

In the camp, Mexican children were romping over the grass, having a happy time. Near one of the tents, a Mexican woman with a bright orange apron was cooking supper. She seemed to be making cakes from ground corn and meat.

"Oh, that smells good," declared Eileen, sniffing the air.

Nearby, another woman sat at a loom, weaving a black and white woolen blanket. The pattern was very beautiful.

"Wouldn't that one look lovely in our quilt show," Veve whispered.

"We're not having any Mexican blankets!" Eileen replied firmly. "I should say not! The pickers took our quilt!"

"I don't see it anywhere," Veve said, her gaze sweeping the camp. "Maybe you were wrong about it."

Eileen shook her head. "Miss Gordon saw it too," she insisted. "It must be somewhere in the camp."

The three girls walked on a few steps. Coming to a clump of bushes, they halted there.

Without being seen they could view everything that went on in the camp.

Everyone seemed to be very happy. Several of the little boys and girls were playing with a shaggy dog. Veve saw Juan sitting with his back to an oak tree. The little boy was carving a figure from a block of wood.

"I don't believe the crazy quilt is here," Veve announced.

She was ready to turn around and return to the parked automobile.

Eileen, however, insisted that she had seen the quilt.

"It's probably been taken inside one of those tents," she declared. "Let's walk into camp and look."

"Miss Gordon warned us not to make any trouble," Connie reminded her friend. "And so did your mother."

"We don't have to make any trouble or accuse anyone. Can't we just wander in and peep around?"

Veve and Connie were not too pleased over the proposal. Nevertheless, they followed their friend as she walked on.

As the three girls stepped out from amid the trees, several of the Mexican children saw them. Juan put aside his whittling knife and sprang to his feet.

"Chiquita! Carmen! Raul!" he called. "We have visitors."

Two little Mexican girls and a small boy who looked like Juan, came running.

"My brothers and sisters," Juan introduced them to the Brownies. "They are very pleased to meet you."

The three children bowed politely and smiled.

Veve, Eileen and Connie scarcely could think of anything to say in return. The children were so friendly they knew it would be awkward to say anything about the quilt. 141

Connie noticed that the boys and girls were rather thin as if they did not have enough to eat. Some of them were barefoot, while others wore *huaraches* or straw sandals.

Nearly all of the men in the camp had *sarapes* thrown across their shoulders. The *sarapes* really were colorful blankets with a slit in the middle.

Excited to have visitors, Juan escorted them about the camp, showing them everything. He introduced the girls to his mother, to his father and to his aging grandmother.

Everyone was so friendly that the Brownies began to think they had made a serious mistake ever to believe they would find their missing quilt in the camp.

"Veeve was right," Connie whispered to Eileen. "Juan and the Mexicans are nice—just like other people. You must have been mixed up."

"Well—maybe," Eileen admitted unwillingly. "But I didn't think so at the time. I was sure I saw the quilt or something that looked exactly like it."

Juan next took the girls to see his goat, Peter, who was staked down near one of the tents. The animal had nibbled away so much grass that the ground was bare all around him. 142

"Did you make much money today picking cherries?" Veeve asked her little friend.

He shrugged his shoulders, replying briefly: "Enough."

A moment later, he added: "What do I need of money? The sun is *la capa do los pobres*."

"The sun is what?" Veeve demanded, for she knew Juan had spoken in his own language.

"The sun is the poor man's coat," the little boy translated.

The Brownies were somewhat puzzled and did not understand Juan's meaning. Seeing their expressions, he went on:

"If a Mexican has a sun to warm his back, he does not need fine clothing to be happy."

Juan said no more just then. However, later, as he was showing the girls the figure he had carved, he remarked that he might not see them again.

"Why, aren't you staying with the other pickers until the crop is harvested?" Connie asked quickly.

Again Juan shrugged. "Who knows?" he questioned. "All of the pickers may leave."

"Is it because you don't like to work for Carl Wingate?" Veeve asked. She recalled how the boy had been hit with a stick. 143

"He has been very ugly," Juan replied. "He cheats on weight and does not pay us all he owes."

"But the other orchard owners aren't like that," Eileen insisted.

"The picking here is nearly finished. My people are tired of the place. So we may move farther north."

"Surely you wouldn't leave until Mr. Hooper's cherries are picked!" Veeve said in dismay.

"Who knows?"

"But that wouldn't be fair," Connie interposed. "Mr. Hooper would lose at least half of his fruit harvest if the pickers left without coming to his place."

"He has been expecting the crew for several days," added Eileen. "The fruit is too ripe now. We heard the canning factory man say it would have to be picked fast, or it will be rejected."

"Then the orchard people should treat us better. If we move on, it is only themselves they have to blame."

"Mr. Hooper wouldn't mistreat anyone," Veeve insisted. "He isn't a bit like his cousin, Carl Wingate."

"You tell your people that," Connie urged. "It just wouldn't be fair to Mr. Hooper not to pick his cherries."

"I will tell them," Juan promised soberly. "We do not have anything against Mr. Hooper. But the townspeople have no liking for us. At the stores they charge us more for food. We cannot use the beaches or have any pleasures."

The Brownies knew that the boy's complaint was a just one. That very day, he had been driven away from the same beach where they had been permitted to wade. They hardly knew what to say.

"But you are my friends," Juan finished warmly. "Come, I will show you some of the beautiful lacework my mother brought from Mexico."

He led the three girls to a nearby tent. Veve was the first to peer inside as he pulled back the flap.

The little girl drew in her breath sharply. A brown Mexican baby was playing on the floor of the tent. The infant lay upon a quilt of many colors—unmistakably, the lost Brownie coverlet!

CHAPTER 12

A Quilt Show

FOR a long moment, no one said a word. Veve, Connie and Eileen merely stared at the Mexican baby and their crazy quilt.

Then Eileen reached down and turned back one corner of the coverlet.

Just as she had feared, the Brownie troop name was stitched in the corner.

"This is our quilt," she said, looking hard at Juan. "It is the one we lost."

Eileen was certain that the Mexicans had stolen the coverlet, but she was careful not to make a direct accusation.

"Your quilt?" Juan repeated. He seemed very much surprised.

"Juan, how did it get here?" Veve asked. She hoped that somehow he would be able to explain.

"Why, I found the quilt," he answered without hesitation.

"You *found* it?" Eileen demanded. "Where?"

"Blown against the fence at the edge of Mr. Hooper's orchard."

"Blown against the fence!" Eileen could not understand.

"Miss Gordon left the quilt folded up under a tree," Connie declared. "There was a fence not far away—"

"This quilt is yours?" Juan asked politely.

"Of course it is," Eileen told him, pointing to the Brownie name. "That's the name of our organization."

"Brownies?" Juan appeared to consider the name an odd one.

"It's a national organization," Connie said proudly. "When we're too old to be Brownies we'll 'fly up' and be Girl Scouts."

"We try to help others," Veve explained. "That's why we started picking cherries at Mr. Hooper's orchard."

"And the quilt?" Juan asked.

"We pieced it, expecting to sell it at a quilt show," Eileen answered. "Instead, we—we lost it. Miss Gordon left it under an oak tree on Mr. Hooper's place, and the next thing we knew, it was gone."

"Now we find it here!" Connie said severely. "Juan, did you really find our quilt blown against the fence?"

"*Si, Senorita*, I truly did," Juan replied, becoming a bit excited. "I would not steal. Do you not believe me?"

"I do," said Veve instantly. "Now that I think back, a strong gust of wind did come up that day. It could have blown the coverlet against the wire fence."

Juan picked up his baby sister and moved her off the quilt.

Carefully, he folded the coverlet and handed it to Veve.

"It is not much hurt," he said. "I am very sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," Veve reassured him. "We're just glad to get the quilt back. And to know that it wasn't stolen."

"I would not steal," Juan said proudly. "Especially from my friends."

Now that the girls had their crazy quilt, they started to leave the camp. But Juan would not let them go. He wished to make amends for the quilt.

"Wait!" he commanded.

The little boy ran off. Three minutes later he was back again, bearing an armload of beautiful gifts.

He handed Eileen a blue apron with fancy drawn-work. For Connie he had a bowl painted with red and green and black colors. The design was very unusual.

Upon Veve, Juan bestowed the nicest gift of all. He gave her a handsome red and white hand-woven blanket which was far more expensive than the quilt.

"Oh, we can't take all these things!" Connie protested. "All we want is our own quilt back again."

"You are my friends," Juan said, flashing his warm smile. "Keep the presents. They are mere trifles."

He told the girls again that he was sorry he had taken the quilt by mistake.

"There's an old saying that it's an ill wind that blows no one good," Connie laughed. "That old wind that carried our quilt off, certainly brought us luck."

The girls knew that Mrs. Webber and the Brownies were waiting at the roadside. So reluctantly they bade Juan good-bye. They were sorry they did not have longer to stay at the Mexican camp, for everyone seemed very friendly.

"You must come again soon," Juan invited cordially.

The three girls promised that they would return. They really meant it too, for the camp was a most interesting place.

"We are having a quilt show and a cherry festival Friday night on the church grounds," Veve informed the little Mexican boy. "Our crazy quilt will be sold to the highest bidder."

"A cherry festival," Juan said, his eyes dancing. "Will there be music?"

"Well, I don't know about that," Veve admitted. "We will have lots of fun though and make money." Impulsively, she added: "You must be sure to come, Juan. And bring all your friends."

Juan seemed a trifle surprised, but very pleased to receive the invitation.

"You want us?" he asked, almost in disbelief.

"Of course!" Veve did not notice that Connie and Eileen were sending warning signals in her direction.

"Thank you, Senorita," Juan said, bowing and smiling.

He walked with the girls to the edge of the camp. From there they went on alone, bearing their gifts and the crazy quilt.

Once beyond hearing of the Mexican boy, Connie and Eileen took Veve to task.

"What possessed you?" Eileen demanded. "Why did you invite Juan and his friends to our festival?"

"Because I like him."

"So do I," admitted Eileen. "All the same, I don't think you should have invited him. Do you, Connie?"

"Well—I'm afraid the townfolk may not like it. They never invite the Mexicans anywhere."

Veve tossed her head. "That's all the more reason for asking Juan. I don't think it's fair to make the Mexicans stay here in their camp all the time, just because they're pickers."

"Well, maybe they won't come anyhow," Connie said. "After all, you didn't tell Juan what time the festival starts."

"That's so," Veve agreed, somewhat in relief.

At the car once more, the girls showed Mrs. Webber and the other Brownies the fine gifts they had received.

"Oh, I'm so glad you have the quilt back again," Eileen's mother declared. "How pleased I am that no one actually stole it."

Rosemary, Sunny and Jane also were delighted to have regained the precious quilt.

Nevertheless, they felt annoyed because the other three girls had not motioned for them to come to the camp.

"You could have waved your hand the way you promised you would!" Jane said with a toss of her head. "I guess you wanted to have all the fun yourselves!"

"And get a lot of presents," added Sunny.

"We didn't have time to signal," Veve insisted. "Honest!"

"That's so," added Connie earnestly. "Until the last minute, we didn't think the crazy quilt was in the camp. Then we finally saw it inside a tent."

"Juan was standing right beside us," Eileen explained. "If we had signaled, he would have thought it strange."

"I think the girls did very well," Mrs. Webber ended the discussion. "Matters have been handled perfectly—much better perhaps than if we all had gone to the camp."

Taking the quilt and the gifts with them, the Brownies returned to the orchard. By this time it was too late to do any more picking. 152

In fact, as they gathered up their belongings to leave, Mr. Hooper told them that they would not need to come the following day, which was Saturday.

"I expect the Mexican crew to move in here early tomorrow," he explained. "They should finish up at Wingate's place long before lunch and then pick my orchard. Otherwise, I never could save my fruit. It has been ripening so fast that the cannery soon will start rejecting."

"Will you lose any of the fruit?" Veve asked the orchard owner.

"Not if the Mexicans move in here on schedule tomorrow," Mr. Hooper replied. He glanced thoughtfully at the sky. "The only thing that worries me is the weather. If it should rain—"

"Why, the sun is shining," Eileen observed. "It doesn't look a bit like rain."

"Not now it doesn't. But one never can tell at this season of year. However, I'm not borrowing trouble."

The Brownies were rather sorry that for them the cherry picking had ended. Although the work had been hard, they had enjoyed it. Likewise, they had earned considerable money. They wondered if Mr. Hooper would speak of that. 153

Already the orchard owner was consulting the cards in his filing cabinet.

"You'll have to wait while I figure out how much I owe you girls," he said. "Shall I make out the sum in one check or several?"

"To the organization," Connie told him. "How much have we earned?"

"That's hard to say off-hand. Counting the work your mothers did, it will come to more than fifty dollars. Maybe sixty."

"Sixty dollars!" gasped Eileen. "Why, the Brownies are rich!"

"That's the most money our organization ever made," Connie added proudly. "And we still have our quilt to sell."

She told Mr. Hooper about the festival which the Brownies planned to have the next day.

"If you aren't too busy here at the orchard, we would like you to attend," she invited him.

Mr. Hooper thanked Connie and said he certainly would come if he could.

"It will take me a long while to figure out what I owe you girls," he said, after consulting the time cards again. "Tell you what! Why don't I mail the check to your leader, Miss Gordon? Or even better, bring it to your festival?" 154

The Brownies and their mothers agreed that this would be an excellent plan. Already it was growing late and they were tired from such a long day.

"We will see you at the festival!" Connie declared as the girls left the orchard. "Don't forget, Mr. Hooper!"

Veve, Connie and Eileen rode home in Mrs. Webber's car. As they were driving into the outskirts of the city, Veve suddenly noticed the sky.

"Oh, see!" she exclaimed, pointing. "The sun is drawing water up into the clouds! That means it will rain tomorrow!"

Mrs. Webber slowed the car and took a quick glance at the sky. The clouds had separated so that the sun shone through. The rays did appear to be drawing water from the land.

"The sun doesn't actually pull water up into the sky," she told the girls.

"Why, you can see it plain as anything!" Veve insisted.

Mrs. Webber smiled and shook her head.

"It only appears that way, Veve. Instead, the sun shines upon dust and millions of water droplets already in the air. They reflect the sunshine and the rays show plainly against the cloudy sky."

"But how did the water get into the air?" Veve asked.

"I'll try to make it clear by a simple illustration. Did you ever leave a shallow pan filled with water out in the yard?"

"I guess so," Veve admitted.

"And later the water nearly all disappeared?"

"That's right. Danny, the dog that lives next door to us, drank it up!"

"Well, if Danny hadn't come along, the water would have evaporated."

"Oh, I've seen that happen," Connie declared. "Once at our house a plant dish filled with water during a rain. A few days later every drop was gone."

"But how does the water 'vaporate'?" Veve demanded. "I never saw it happen."

"The water separates into particles which are called molecules," Eileen's mother explained. "Molecules are too small to be seen. However, they turn into water vapor which is light enough to be carried away."

Eileen remarked that she would think the air would be damp from the vapor.

"Sometimes it does seem so if the vapor is heavy," her mother replied. "Water vapor is everywhere. At times a great deal is in the air, and at other times only a small amount."

Rather anxiously, Veve studied the cloudy sky.

"I just hope it doesn't rain tomorrow," she said. "If anything should prevent the Mexican pickers from coming to Pa Hooper's orchard, he would be almost certain to lose the rest of his fruit."

"A rain would ruin our festival too," added Connie, stretching her tired feet. "I wonder how Miss Gordon is feeling? If she should be ill, we would have to postpone the quilt show."

The next day the Brownies were very relieved to learn that their leader felt as well as usual. She assured the girls that the festival would be held exactly as planned.

Now, all the mothers had worked very hard to make the affair a success. They had made fancy paper lanterns decorated with cherries, to string in the church lawn.

The table where cherry pie was to be served had been decorated with garlands of paper cherry blossoms.

Several booths had been set up for the display of quilts.

However, the Brownies thought the most interesting feature was the queen's throne. A swing had been used. The ropes which hung from a large maple tree, had been entwined with artificial cherry blossoms.

Mrs. Davidson had fashioned the paper crown to be bestowed upon the girl who was chosen queen. The material was elegant, consisting of gold mat stock shaped to fit a small head. Colored cellophane had been used to fashion jewels.

The queen was to be chosen by vote. Only members of the Brownie organization were privileged to ballot.

"I hope I'm elected queen," Veve said, trying the crown on her head. "See, it fits perfectly!"

"It fits any of the Brownies," Jane Tuttle replied. "We're supposed to vote for the girl who has been the most helpful to the organization. The one considered the most resourceful and kind."

"I was the one who thought of picking cherries," Veve pointed out.

"Oh, Miss Gordon doesn't mean things like that," Jane retorted. "She wants us to select for our

queen the Brownie who has been the most courteous, helpful and fair."

"That would be Connie," Veve said honestly. "She always is polite to everyone. And I've heard Miss Gordon say that she has very good judgment. I'll vote for Connie."

"Maybe I will too," Jane returned. "I haven't decided yet."

Throughout the morning and early afternoon the Brownies were kept very busy. Although their mothers took care of the hardest work, there were many errands to run.

By four o'clock, however, everything was in readiness for the festival.

All of the quilts were arranged for the display. On the long table stood a long row of freshly baked cherry pies.

"My, how good they look!" Veve exclaimed. "Only I wish they were chocolate or lemon or apple. After picking so many cherries, I'm a little tired of them."

At five o'clock the Brownies went home to dress for the festival and to have an early supper. The affair was supposed to start at six-thirty.

"Be sure to wear your Brownie uniforms and to be here on time," Miss Gordon warned the girls.

Connie and Veve both were back at the church by six-fifteen. Miss Gordon told them their assignment was to greet the visitors. After nearly everyone had arrived they were to take charge of one of the booths where quilts were displayed.

"When will we auction off our crazy quilt?" Connie asked.

Miss Gordon said the coverlet would not be sold until nearly everyone had arrived. The queen, however, was to be chosen fairly early in the evening.

Veve and Connie enjoyed greeting the guests. Very soon, people began to arrive.

At first only the parents came, but presently others began to straggle in. The table where cherry pie was served became very popular.

"Dear me, I never dreamed so many persons would attend our festival on such short notice," Miss Gordon whispered to Connie's mother. "Do you suppose we will have enough cherry pies to serve everyone?"

After that, the mothers cut the pies into smaller pieces. The Brownies did not take any and neither did Miss Gordon.

"Oh, see who's coming!" Veve said suddenly, nudging Connie.

A tall woman in a stiff sailor hat was walking briskly down the street.

Under her arm was a large bundle.

"Who is she?" Connie whispered, for she did not recognize the woman.

"It's Miss Adelia Brimborough," Veve said in an undertone. "She wouldn't lend me her quilt for the show. I think she has nerve to come here now."

Seeing the two girls, Miss Brimborough moved directly toward them.

"Good evening," she said, addressing Veve. "Here is something for you."

She handed over the awkward-shaped bundle.

"It is my dogwood blossom quilt," she explained to the startled Veve. "After you left that day, I thought how selfish it was of me to refuse to let you have the quilt. The Brownies, I am told, are highly responsible. So here it is, my dear."

"Oh, thank you!" Veve gasped.

She and Connie took the quilt to add to the display. They spread it out very carefully, for they knew that Miss Brimborough would hate to have it soiled.

"I have three entries now!" Veve laughed. "The autograph quilt, the Mexican blanket, and now this one!"

A car had driven up to the curb. Connie saw the driver alight, and scarcely could believe her eyes.

"Why, it's Harold McLean, president of the Rosedale Chamber of Commerce!" she whispered in awe. "He's terribly *important*."

"Did you invite him, Connie?"

"No, I didn't. Maybe he saw one of the posters. You greet him."

"No, you," Veve insisted, hanging back. "I don't know what to say."

Miss Gordon herself came forward to welcome the Chamber of Commerce president. She was as surprised as the Brownies to see him there.

"Well, well, WELL," said Mr. McLean in a hearty voice. "A cherry festival in full swing, eh? I saw your lighted lanterns and couldn't resist stopping. I always was a push-over for cherry pie."

"Then do have a large piece," invited Miss Gordon. She escorted him to the nearby table.

Mr. McLean ate one piece of pie and then asked for another.

"We're certain to run out if this keeps on," Connie whispered anxiously. "And see! Someone else is coming."

Another automobile, one which the girls were certain they had seen before, had driven up to the churchyard. 162

The driver stepped out and looked around. As the light shone on his face, both Veve and Connie recognized him.

"It's Carl Wingate!" Veve muttered in an undertone. "Now who invited him?"

"I'm sure I didn't."

"Nor I."

"Eileen must have done it that day she rode back on the Wingate truck from the canning factory. Oh, dear, and we're running out of pie too. I don't feel like being nice to him."

"We must though, Veve. We're the official greeters."

The two Brownies went forward to speak to the orchard owner. He did not seem to remember them or to recall that he had refused to give them a job.

After that several women came who had donated quilts for the show. Everyone admired the fine coverlets on display. The Brownies were kept busy explaining about the different patterns, and showing their own crazy quilt.

"I wish Pa Hooper would come and bring our check," Connie remarked as the evening wore on. "But I guess he isn't coming."

"Maybe it's just as well," Veve hinted. "With Mr. Wingate here, they might not get along together. I don't see why *he* had to come." 163

Presently, Miss Gordon announced that it was time for the Brownies to choose their queen. Slips of paper were passed out to the six girls.

Veve was writing Connie's name on her sheet when she heard laughter from far down the street.

An old battered car chugged up to the churchyard. A Mexican man was driving it. In the automobile were at least a dozen children, dressed in their brightest.

"The cherry pickers!" exclaimed Veve. "They did decide to come."

"And there is Juan with his brothers and sisters," added Connie.

The Mexican children piled out of the car, shouting with laughter.

However, as they started across the churchyard, Carl Wingate moved forward to meet them.

Before either Veve or Connie could greet the newcomers, he walked directly to them.

"What do you mean coming here?" he demanded. "You know you're not wanted."

CHAPTER 13

Trouble Afoot

AS Carl Wingate berated the Mexicans for coming to the cherry festival, Juan drew himself up proudly.

"We were invited, Senor."

"That's right," said Veve. "I asked them myself."

The orchard owner did not hear the little girl speak.

"Get moving!" he ordered the Mexican children again.

Juan's face puckered up. For a minute he looked as if he might cry. Then he became very angry.

"You will be sorry, Senor," he muttered. "Very sorry—and soon."

The other Mexican children looked unhappy. Without saying a word, they climbed back into the battered old car.

"Wait!" called Veve.

Miss Gordon, who had been discussing one of the quilts with a visitor, now hastened forward.

She was too late, though, to speak to the Mexicans. The car had pulled away.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Miss Gordon murmured. "Not for anything in the world would I have hurt their feelings."

"They had no business being here," Mr. Wingate said. "They knew it too."

"But I invited them," Veve told him. "Juan is my friend."

"The Mexicans can't be allowed to attend social affairs. They're making enough trouble as it is."

Miss Gordon disagreed with the orchard owner. However, it was too late to recall the Mexican children. So she decided to say no more about the matter just then.

The festival continued. Everyone had a good time, but the Brownies could not forget how Juan and his friends had been sent away. The thought of it made them feel rather unhappy.

Everyone brightened though when Miss Gordon announced that the festival queen had been elected.

She clapped her hands for attention.

"The votes have been counted," she said. "I take great pleasure in announcing that the queen of our festival is—"

The Brownie leader paused and her gaze wandered from one eager face to another. All of the girls were hoping that they were the one elected.

"Our festival queen is Connie Williams!" she completed. "She received five out of a possible six votes!"

"Hurrah for Connie!" shouted Veve, and the other Brownies took up the cry.

Connie was embarrassed. She had not expected to be chosen. In fact, she had voted for Veve. All the other girls had written her name on their slips.

Miss Gordon placed the golden crown on Connie's head. The Brownies then escorted her to her throne where she was to remain until the end of the festival.

Next on the program came the auctioning of the crazy quilt.

The Brownies were eager to make more money for the organization. Nevertheless, they had worked long hours at their sewing. To see the quilt put up for sale gave them a queer feeling.

Connie's father acted as auctioneer.

"What am I bid for this fine Brownie quilt?" he asked the crowd. "Who will start it? Five dollars? Five dollars? Who will bid five dollars?"

A woman who lived on Rosemary's street, raised her hand.

"Five dollars! Who will make it ten?" shouted Connie's father.

At once Mr. Davidson nodded his head. Then the first lady bid fifteen dollars.

Mr. Davidson dropped out of the bidding, but Mr. McLean said he would pay twenty dollars for the quilt.

The Brownies were very proud. Twenty dollars for a quilt! Their quilt!

"Twenty dollars!" Mr. Williams shouted, trying to get the bid even higher. "Do I hear twenty-five?"

He looked directly at the woman who had offered fifteen. But she seemed to have lost interest.

Everyone else had stopped bidding except Mr. McLean.

"Going—going for twenty dollars," began Connie's father.

At that point, Mr. McLean spoke up.

"I'll make it twenty-five," he offered.

The crowd gasped. Mr. McLean already had bid twenty and his was the last bid.

"It's a fine quilt," Mr. McLean laughed. "Why, where else could I get one made by a troop of Brownies? My bid of twenty-five dollars stands."

"Sold to Mr. McLean!" shouted Connie's father.

He handed the quilt to the Chamber of Commerce man.

Mr. McLean gave Miss Gordon twenty-five dollars in crisp new bills. Then he did a most surprising thing.

He also handed her the Brownie quilt.

"I really have no use for this, although it is a handsome quilt," he said. "The twenty-five dollars is my contribution to the organization. Keep the quilt, or if you like, put it up and auction it off again."

The Brownies all gathered around Miss Gordon.

"Keep the quilt!" they urged. "Keep it!"

"Yes, that's just what we will do," Miss Gordon nodded. "Our organization will treasure it always. However, it hardly seems right to accept twenty-five dollars without giving something in return."

"But you have given me something. Two excellent pieces of cherry pie." Mr. McLean became serious. "And you've also planted an idea in my mind. A very valuable idea."

Miss Gordon did not understand.

"What sort of idea, Mr. McLean?"

"Your cherry festival made me think that it might be worth while to have a large-scale affair—one in which the entire city takes part."

"Oh, that would be splendid!" Miss Gordon exclaimed.

"I feel sure the orchard owners would cooperate," the Chamber of Commerce president went on. "We could have several bands and elect the queen."

"Connie?" interposed Veve. She had heard the conversation.

"For a city-wide festival it might be better to select an older girl," Mr. McLean replied. "Not that a Brownie queen wouldn't be fine."

"Being queen of one festival is enough," laughed Connie from her throne in the decorated swing.

"As a climax to the festival we might have a giant cherry pie," Mr. McLean resumed. "One that would be as large as a small room and serve everyone! The pie would contain pounds and pounds

of cherries.”

“I wouldn’t venture to bake such a pie,” laughed Miss Gordon. She was rather excited by the plan.

“Oh, a commercial bakery would take over. The pie would not be difficult. Why, our festival might gain national attention. After all, Rosedale is in the heart of the cherry country.”

“It would be worthwhile to advertise the community to the nation,” Miss Gordon agreed. “However, the festival would have to be held very soon for the cherry season is nearly over.”

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“Yes, we would need to work fast,” Mr. McLean nodded. “Fortunately, I have a large organization of trained staff members. Now as to the cherry pie—I have another idea!”

By this time all of the Brownies had gathered near to hear what Mr. McLean proposed.

“We’ll bake a cherry pie to take to the President!” he announced.

“To the President of the United States?” Connie asked in awe.

“What better way of bringing to attention the fact that Rosedale has the best cherries in the nation?”

“Oh, it’s a wonderful idea!” Miss Gordon approved. “Quite breath taking! Do you think the festival could be carried through?”

“I’m sure of it. We’ll get every organization in Rosedale to help. May I depend upon your Brownie troop?”

“How about it, girls?” Miss Gordon asked. Of course, she already knew what they would say.

“Yes, yes!” cried the Brownies.

And Veve, quite carried away with the thought of another festival, tossed her Brownie cap into the air and shouted:

“Hurrah, for the cherry festival!”

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Other persons at the churchyard affair thought that Veve was acting strangely. In a few minutes, however, word went around of Mr. McLean’s plan. Everyone became very enthusiastic and promised to help.

“We’ll need exhibits,” Mr. McLean went on outlining his plans. “This quilt show, I notice, has attracted the interest of women. We’ll want to repeat the display.”

“Most of the quilts were borrowed,” Miss Gordon explained. “I think, though, that we can arrange to have them again.”

“I’ll loan my autograph quilt,” offered Veve quickly.

Mr. McLean said that because the cherries were ripening so fast, it would be necessary to have the festival early in the coming week.

“My organization will look after everything,” he promised Miss Gordon. “If the Brownies take responsibility for the quilt show, that’s all they’ll be called upon to do.”

Miss Gordon assured the Chamber of Commerce president that the girls would have a much better quilt display for the next festival. Now that the organization was through picking at Pa Hooper’s orchard, the girls would have ample time to search for other coverlets.

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After Mr. McLean had moved on, the Brownies excitedly discussed their plans. They hoped to obtain at least twenty quilts for their show.

“I wish Connie or one of the Brownies could be queen at the next festival as well as this one,” Veve remarked.

Miss Gordon did not share her view. She felt that Brownies should remain in the background at any public gathering.

“But just think of taking a cherry pie to the President of the United States,” Veve sighed enviously.

Even though the hour was early, a few persons began to leave the churchyard. Soon the Brownie festival would be over.

“It’s been a wonderful success,” Rosemary said happily. “And just think! We made twenty-five dollars for our crazy quilt.”

“What’s more, we still have the quilt,” chuckled Jane. “That’s what I call good business.”

Connie had been gazing over the thinning crowd.

"It's odd Pa Hooper didn't come," she remarked. "He said he might bring our check for the cherry picking."

"Probably he was detained at the orchard," Miss Gordon replied. "Don't worry about the check. It may come by mail tomorrow."

The Brownies began to gather up paper plates and to pick up napkins that had blown from the serving table.

Since the start of the festival, the wind steadily had freshened. Dark clouds scudded across the sky.

"It looks a little like rain," Miss Gordon observed rather anxiously. "I hope not. A storm tonight might seriously damage Mr. Hooper's cherry harvest."

"Several other orchards remain to be picked too," Mr. McLean said to the Brownie leader. "On the whole, though, the fruit is at the cannery."

Connie started to fold up some of the quilts. She wanted to put them away so that if rain began to fall, they would not be damaged.

"I don't think any more people are coming anyhow," she remarked.

Just as she spoke, an automobile turned down the street. As the Brownies watched, it pulled up at the churchyard.

To the surprise and delight of the girls, Pa Hooper leaped out of the car.

"Oh, he did come after all!" Connie exclaimed, starting toward him.

"And every piece of cherry pie, is gone," Veve said in dismay. "We haven't anything now to serve him."

Pa Hooper, however, was not interested in cherry pie.

He was concerned with far more important and serious matters.

As the orchard owner strode across the festival grounds, the girls saw that he was deeply troubled about something.

"Hello, Mr. Hooper!" Connie greeted him. "We're glad you were able to come after all."

"Hi, there," the orchard owner said, but he scarcely noticed the little girl. "Is Carl Wingate here?"

The question took Connie by surprise. She could not guess why Mr. Hooper would ask about his cousin.

"At his place, they told me he had come here," Mr. Hooper explained, his gaze sweeping the group of people on the lawn.

"Mr. Wingate was here a few minutes ago," Connie said. "Yes, there he is now. Over by the table, talking to Mr. McLean!"

Mr. Hooper walked directly to the two men.

"Carl, there's trouble afoot now!" he said, addressing his cousin.

The owner of the Wingate orchard turned to face Mr. Hooper.

"Trouble?" he repeated. "What d'you mean?"

"It's the Mexican pickers. They're leaving!"

"Leaving?" Mr. Wingate demanded. "Nonsense! A bunch of 'em were here not three quarters of an hour ago."

"And that's what caused the trouble. You ordered them away."

"So what? The Mexicans know they're not allowed to run riot in town. They're supposed to stay in their own camp."

"That's why they're dissatisfied," Mr. Hooper insisted. "They feel they have no social rights. For a long time they've been dissatisfied. Sending them away from the festival tonight was the straw that broke the camel's back."

"The pickers can't leave," Mr. Wingate muttered. "There's a good two hours work at my place

yet. And your orchard!”

“They’re breaking camp now. A bad storm is rolling up too! Unless we can stop the pickers and get them to pick tonight, I’ll lose most of my cherries.”

Mr. McLean seized Carl Wingate’s arm. “Come on!” he urged. “We can’t let those pickers leave. We’ve got to get out there right away and stop them!”

CHAPTER 14

Racing the Storm

MR. Hooper's startling news brought the festival to an end.

Several orchard owners besides Carl Wingate were at the affair. They, too, were alarmed lest the Mexican pickers leave Rosedale and fail to return another season.

Not only Mr. McLean, Carl Wingate and Pa Hooper, but several other men said they would drive at once to the Mexican camp.

"Can't we go too?" Veve coaxed Miss Gordon.

The Brownie leader hesitated.

"Maybe we could help," Veve argued. "After all, the Mexicans are leaving because they weren't allowed at the festival. And I invited them."

"We might be able to clear up the misunderstanding." The Brownie leader spoke thoughtfully. "I certainly don't want the Mexicans to leave the community. Nor for that matter to feel that we turned them away from our social gathering."

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The mothers and fathers of the Brownies all were interested in seeing that the cherry pickers did not leave Rosedale.

Mr. Davidson, Connie's father, and Mr. Webber offered to drive their cars to the Mexican camp. Everyone piled into the three automobiles.

"Drive fast," Connie urged her father. "If we don't hurry, we will get there too late."

In a short while, the cars reached the site of the Mexican camp.

The tents had been taken down and the animals and furniture loaded into several trucks.

As the Brownies followed their parents and Miss Gordon along the dark trail leading from the road, they could hear the sound of men's voices.

Carl Wingate was arguing with several of the Mexicans.

"See here!" he said angrily. "You can't pull out and leave us in the lurch. You signed a contract to pick cherries for the season."

"Senor, you mistreated us," one of the Mexicans replied. "You beat my son, Juan, with a stick. Tonight you drove the children away from the festival after they had been invited there. We Mexicans are a proud race."

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"You're insolent and lazy!" Wingate retorted. "You're not breaking camp because you've been mistreated. Oh, no! You've learned that they're paying a half cent more for pickers up north. That's why you're leaving."

"It is not true, Senor."

"Unload those trucks!" Wingate ordered.

"No, Senor."

The elderly Mexican eyed the orchard owner for a moment. Then, wrapping his serape tightly about him, he started to climb into the cab of the truck.

Carl Wingate seized him by the shoulder.

"Listen, you!" he said furiously. "A storm is coming up. If we're to save the unpicked fruit, it must be harvested tonight. We need pickers—now!"

The Mexican leader remained unmoved. "Senor should have thought of that before," he shrugged. "It is too late now."

He gave the signal for the trucks to move out of the camp.

"Wait!" requested Pa Hooper. "I'm sure the orchard owners want to be fair. If you will pick my trees tonight before the storm breaks, I will pay a half cent more. I can't afford it, but I will do it

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rather than lose my fruit.”

“We do not ask more money, Senor. Only better treatment.”

“You’ll get it at my orchard,” Pa Hooper assured the Mexican leader.

Juan’s father hesitated, and it seemed for a moment that he might change his mind. Then he shook his head.

“It is no use, Senor,” he said. “We have made up our minds. We leave now.”

“Well, this writes finish to my plans for the cherry festival,” Mr. McLean said unhappily. “Too bad!”

Mr. Hooper also moved back from the truck. He was very discouraged. Although it was not his fault that the pickers were leaving, he would lose more than any of the other orchard owners.

At the far end of the line of trucks, Veve spied Juan sitting on a pile of canvas with some other children. She hurried over to speak to him.

“Oh, Juan!” she said. “It isn’t fair for the pickers to leave when Mr. Hooper needs them so badly.”

“My father has decided,” answered Juan. “We are unwanted here.”

“Oh, that isn’t so, Juan. It was all a mistake that you were ordered away from the festival tonight.”

“That’s true,” added Connie. She had followed Veve to the truck. “Mr. Wingate had no right to order you away. After all, it wasn’t his festival.”

“The Brownies all wanted you to be there,” Veve said, noticing that Juan was listening hard to Connie’s arguments.

“And so did Miss Gordon, our leader,” Connie went on. “She said it would be a shame if the pickers left the community.”

“In a way, I will be sorry to go,” Juan admitted.

“Then why not stay?” Veve urged.

“It is no fun being kept always near camp. The shop people do not want us in their stores. We cannot use the beaches.”

Connie and Veve could not blame the Mexicans for feeling as they did.

“If it could be fixed up so that the Mexicans could go places and have fun, then would you stay?” Veve asked. She spoke hurriedly for she saw that the trucks were starting to pull away.

“Perhaps we would stay,” Juan agreed. “That would be for my father to decide.”

“Then tell him to stop the trucks!” Veve said excitedly. “I will talk to Mr. McLean and Mr. Hooper.”

Still Juan hesitated.

“Oh, please do it,” Veve pleaded. “It isn’t fair for Mr. Hooper to lose his cherries.”

Juan suddenly made up his mind to do as the little girl requested.

Leaping off the back of the truck, he called to his father who was driving one of the heavily laden vehicles ahead.

Juan spoke rapidly in Spanish. The girls could not understand what he said.

However, Juan’s father not only stopped his truck, but ordered the others to wait in line.

Elated, Veve and Connie ran back to Mr. Hooper and Mr. McLean.

“If you want the Mexicans to stay, tell them that they are invited to the cherry festival!” she cried.

“And that they may use the beach near the cannery!” added Connie.

“Why, of course we’ll be glad to have the Mexicans attend the festival,” the Chamber of Commerce president replied instantly. “It is for everyone. Tell you what! We’ll offer them a regular part in the show!”

“That would be splendid!” cried Veve.

"I'm sure they'd like it," agreed Connie, clapping her hands. "And they have Mexican wares to display!"

"A Mexican dancing and singing act would be the ticket," declared Mr. McLean. "It would add to the festival too."

Veve and Connie ran back to the truck to report to Juan.

His eyes began to sparkle as the girls told him about Mr. McLean's plans for including the Mexicans in the cherry festival.

"I would like to stay," he said at once. "Wait! I will ask my father."

Juan talked to him for a while. The girls could not understand what was said, for it was in Spanish.

But Juan's father then spoke to other men among the pickers. Finally, after much arguing and gesturing, the Mexicans approached Mr. Hooper and Mr. McLean.

"Is it true, Senor, that my people will be welcome at the cherry fiesta?" he inquired.

Mr. McLean assured him that it was so. He promised also, that the Mexicans would receive better treatment from the orchard owners.

"And does Senor Wingate agree to this?" Juan's father asked.

Mr. Wingate had no choice but to say that he did.

Grudgingly, he promised that he never again would strike any of the pickers, even if they annoyed him. He said, too, that he would allow them longer lunch hours when they returned to the orchard next season.

"Well, that's settled," Mr. McLean declared in relief. "We'll get the fruit in, and hold the festival after all."

The night was coming on very dark. Even in the glow of the camp lanterns, the sky seemed much blacker than usual.

"That storm is moving this way," Mr. Wingate said, scanning the fast-moving clouds. "We must get the cherries into the shed. Drive your trucks direct to my orchard and let's get at 'em. There's no time to lose."

Juan's father did not like the order.

"No, Senor," he said. "First, we will finish the picking in Mr. Hooper's orchard."

"But you haven't completed your work for me," Mr. Wingate said angrily. "It will only take an hour or so."

Mr. McLean broke into the conversation.

"It's only fair that Mr. Hooper should have a chance at the pickers," he said. "He's been forced to wait on you several days. Also, if the storm breaks, he has more to lose."

Mr. Wingate did not like the arrangement. But he could do nothing about it.

The Mexicans drove at once to the Hooper orchard. Soon the trees were dotted with lighted lanterns as the professional strippers went to work with a will.

"Will you save your fruit, Mr. Hooper?" Miss Gordon asked the orchard owner anxiously.

With the Brownies and their parents, she had stopped at the shed to see how the work was progressing.

"I hope so," Mr. Hooper answered. "But it will be nip and tuck. That storm is rolling up fast, and it looks like it will be a bad one when it breaks."

"Why don't we all pick?" Connie proposed.

Miss Gordon had been thinking of the same thing. She had hesitated to suggest it, however, knowing that it was after eight o'clock. The Brownies, she knew, should be home in their beds.

"I could use a dozen more pickers," Mr. Hooper said before the Brownie leader could reply. "If I had them, I might beat the storm!"

"May we pick?" Connie appealed to Miss Gordon.

"Please let us!" urged Jane and Veve.

Miss Gordon replied that it was not a matter for her to decide. She thought the parents of each girl should make the decision.

"Connie may pick for a while," her father answered at once. "Furthermore, I'll help her!"

"And I'll race Eileen to see who can strip the most cherries!" declared Mr. Webber.

All of the Brownies were granted permission to pick. Veve had no father, but her mother was there. Even though Mrs. McGuire had on a good dress, she wanted to help too.

"We're the Brownies,

Here's our aim—

Lend a hand and play the game!" warbled Veve crazily as she carried her four gallon pail into the orchard.

The other Brownies took up the song, singing it with a will.

Soon, in another section of the orchard, the Mexican pickers also began to sing. Everyone worked feverishly.

The warm night air had turned slightly colder. Connie, who was picking as fast as she could, felt a gust of cool wind on her neck.

Pulling her sweater closer about her, she glanced up into the sky. The black clouds were fairly boiling.

"The storm certainly is coming!" Mr. Williams said. "It's not far off either!"

In the nearby trees, everyone began to strip even faster. No one took time to go back and forth to the shed.

Mr. Hooper himself collected the buckets.

"Good work!" he praised the Brownies and their fathers. "We may beat the storm yet, but it will be close."

"How are the Mexican pickers doing?" Connie's father inquired.

"They've gone at it with a will," the orchard owner reported. "Never saw 'em strip trees so fast. If this storm just gives us a break, we'll make it."

The storm, however, drew closer and closer. Suddenly, the clouds overhead parted as a flash of lightning made the orchard as bright as day.

Connie uttered a squeal of terror. She was not really frightened, but the brilliant light had startled her.

"Better hike to the shed," her father warned.

Even as he spoke, Connie felt the first drop of rain on her hand.

Other large drops began to splatter through the leaves of the cherry trees.

Mr. Hooper came hurrying from the shed. "This is it," he said. "All the Brownies take your buckets to the shed."

Connie and the other girls raced for shelter. Their fathers stayed a few minutes and then they too ran to get in out of the rain.

The Mexican pickers, however, did not seem to mind. Nearly all of them stayed in the orchard, picking until their tree was stripped clean.

Juan was laughing as he tramped into the shed, his clothing soaked. His feet were muddy too, but his pail was brimming full of cherries.

"That's the last of them," he told Veve. "Mr. Hooper won't lose thirty pounds because of the storm. The orchard is nearly bare."

The rain now was falling so fast, that the Brownies could not make a dash for the automobiles. Instead, they waited in the shed.

Mr. Hooper was very pleased to have saved his fruit. He thanked everyone for the help he had received.

"Here is the money I owe the Brownies and their helpers," he said, giving Miss Gordon a check. "It doesn't half express my appreciation."

The Brownies gathered around their leader to read the amount of the check.

"Seventy-two dollars and forty-nine cents!" Sunny Davidson exclaimed. "Why that's almost a hundred dollars when you count the money we made on our crazy quilt!"

"Did we really pick that many cherries?" Veve asked.

"You certainly did with the help of your parents," Mr. Hooper replied. "Next year you'll be able to earn more—"

He checked himself and finished rather lamely: "that is, you will if you pick for me."

"Of course, we'll work for you!" declared Veve before she stopped to think. "You wouldn't catch us stripping for Mr. Wingate."

The remark embarrassed the Brownies. Too late, Connie nudged Veve as a hint to keep silent.

"I'll certainly want the Brownies to work for me," Mr. Hooper said in a hearty voice. "Couldn't have a better crew! The trouble is—I won't have an orchard."

For a moment no one made any reply. The Brownies did not like to think of Mr. Hooper losing his place.

"If I could hold on to the orchard, I'd rebuild the house," Mr. Hooper went on. "I've lived here most of my life, and I'd like to keep the place 'til the end of my days. But it can't be."

"Won't Mr. Wingate consider selling, even if he does take over the orchard according to the terms of the will?" Miss Gordon inquired.

"Not a chance," Mr. Hooper told her. "I talked with him only yesterday. Carl Wingate doesn't want money. It's this orchard he's after—it's one of the best in the valley."

The rain had slackened. After peering out the shed windows, the Brownies decided they could make a dash for the parked cars.

"I guess we should be going," said Miss Gordon rather reluctantly. "It is late for the children."

Even then, she did not make a move to leave. Nor did the Brownies.

In truth, they were sorry to say good-bye to Mr. Hooper. Unless they made a special trip to the orchard, they might not see him again.

They were certain it would never be as much fun to pick cherries for another orchard owner.

"How long will you be able to keep your place here?" Mrs. Davidson asked the old man.

"That's hard to tell," he replied. "As soon as the will is probated, I'll probably turn over the orchard."

"Is there no possibility that your sister's will can be set aside?"

"I was talking to Judge Hutchins about it," Mr. Hooper said. "I could fight it out in the courts, but it would make an ugly mess. Besides, except for Ella's first will, I can't produce any of her handwriting."

"It seems unfair to lose your beautiful orchard," Mrs. Davidson murmured. "I wish we could do something to help."

"It's just one of those things, ma'am." Mr. Hooper tried to speak cheerfully. "I'll find another place. Not in Rosedale though. I intend to move far away."

"At least you'll have a good profit from your cherries."

"Yes, I've done well," Mr. Hooper agreed. "No complaint on that score. But if it hadn't been for the Brownies, I'd have lost all my profit."

The orchard owner walked with the girls and their parents to the cars.

Only a few drops of rain now fell, for the storm had passed over as quickly as it had come.

Across the roadway, the wind had severely tossed Mr. Wingate's cherry trees. Fruit from those which had not been completely stripped lay on the ground.

"I'm sorry for Carl Wingate," Mr. Hooper remarked. "He didn't lose much of his harvest though. Next year he'll treat the Mexican pickers more kindly."

Juan and a half dozen other Mexican children ran over to the car to say good-bye to the Brownies. They had enjoyed picking cherries in the rain.

"Don't forget the festival next week," Veve reminded her little friend.

"Oh, no, *Senorita*," Juan returned, flashing his wide smile. "We will stay in camp here until after the fiesta is over. Then we travel north to pick more cherries."

"And next year you'll be back again?"

"*Si, Senorita*. We will return."

Tired and sleepy, Veve snuggled into the comfortable cushions of Mr. Davidson's car.

What an exciting night it had been for the Brownies! Mr. Hooper's harvest had been saved and the Mexican pickers coaxed to remain.

Best of all, the cherry festival was still ahead!

CHAPTER 15

Washington Calling!

DURING the next few days the Brownies were busier than ever before in the history of their troop.

With the aid of their fathers and mothers, they built a booth which was set up on the public square.

The girls then decorated it with colored crepe paper, and put up posters so that everyone would know about the Rosedale Troop quilt display.

"Invite all your friends too," Miss Gordon urged. "We want everyone to come and learn what Brownies can do when they work together."

From neighbors and acquaintances, the girls obtained the promise of many beautiful quilts for the show.

Everyone, it seemed, wanted to make Rosedale's first cherry festival a great success.

With Mr. McLean in charge, plans already were moving forward very smoothly. Newspapers carried front page stories about the coming festival. The Brownies were given full credit for having started the idea. That, of course, made them feel very important.

The festival was to be on such a large scale that it fairly took away the Brownies' breath.

Not one high school band, but *six*, were to furnish music.

A wooden platform was built in the center of the park. Here, a special program would be given.

Each high school was to put on a number, and there were several professional acts.

Then, the Mexican pickers had their place on the program. Mr. McLean told Miss Gordon that he was astonished to find such talent among them. The Mexicans were providing their own guitar music, while several talented young men and women would dance in colorful costumes.

"Oh, it's going to be perfectly grand!" Veve told Connie. "I wonder who will be chosen queen?"

Now several very pretty young women had given their names to the committee. They said they would like to have the honor of taking the cherry pie to Washington.

As yet, no one knew who the lucky person would be. A ballot box had been set up on the public square. At the proper time, those who wished to, would be given a chance to vote for their favorite.

"How wonderful it would be to go to Washington," sighed Veve enviously. "Just think of meeting the President of the United States!"

"And seeing the White House," added Connie in awe.

"I would like to go when the Japanese cherry blossoms are in bloom," chimed in Sunny. "It must be an even prettier sight than our own orchards."

"I want to see the Washington Monument," Rosemary declared. "It rises 555 feet straight into the sky."

Jane said the point of interest which would draw her would be the Jefferson Memorial. She also wanted to view the Red and Green rooms of the White House and the Lincoln Memorial.

All the Brownies, in fact, had a different reason for desiring to see the great city. Of course they were only talking, for they never expected to make such a long trip.

Now it seemed to the Brownies that the day set for the cherry festival never would come. Actually, it was close at hand. However, every hour and minute of waiting seemed very long.

And then at last, the awaited red letter day arrived!

In their separate homes, the Brownies awoke with a wonderful feeling that many exciting events lay ahead. This day really was to be their lucky one, but of course, they could not know that.

At the McQuire home, Veve opened her eyes in a semi-dark bedroom. She knew it must be morning because she could hear saucy sparrows chirping on the window sill. The room, though, was shadowy.

"Oh, dear!" thought the little girl. "I hope it isn't going to rain and ruin the cherry festival."

For a moment she lay very still, wishing hard that the day would be a bright one.

Then she leaped out of bed and ran to the window. The Venetian blind had been pulled down and was flapping in the breeze.

Veve raised it and looked out. The sun was shining brightly!

"Oh, it will be a fine day!" she told herself in relief.

Veve was afraid she already had wasted valuable time. Quickly she put on her pinchecked Brownie uniform, a crisp fresh tie, and brushed her hair until it shone.

When she skipped down the stairs, her mother had breakfast waiting.

"How nice you look, Veve," she said. "Oh, by the way, Miss Gordon telephoned before you were up."

"What did she say, Mother?"

"The Brownies are to meet in the public square at ten o'clock."

"What time is it now?" Veve asked anxiously.

"Only a few minutes after eight. You have plenty of time."

"I want to be there early, Mother," Veve said, eating her breakfast of scrambled eggs and toast as rapidly as she could. "Is my quilt ready?"

"Yes, dear, and I must say it looks very nice now that I've washed it. I've rolled it into a tight bundle. I think you can manage it."

"Oh, a quilt is easy to carry," laughed Veve.

As soon as she had finished breakfast and attended to several errands, the little girl was ready to leave.

As she skipped out of the house with her large bundle, she saw Connie Williams also coming out of her residence with a similar looking package.

"Hi!" shouted Connie. "Want to ride down town? My mother will take both of us in her car."

Veve was glad to get a ride. A little farther on, Mrs. Williams picked up Eileen and Jane also.

At the public square, the girls found Miss Gordon already there. Rosemary arrived only a few minutes later.

"Where's Sunny?" asked Veve.

"Oh, she'll be along," Miss Gordon said. "It's still quite early."

The Brownies busied themselves arranging their booth.

Each quilt was spread out attractively and the name of the pattern pinned to it.

In addition to the Album quilt donated by Rosemary's mother, there were many others—Eileen's Pine Tree pattern—Jane's Ship's Wheel and the velvet and silk one brought by Sunny.

Many new patterns were shown too. All were very beautiful.

One quilt was called The Double Wedding Ring, and another, Morning Star.

Grandmother's Flower Garden also attracted much attention with its array of delicate colors.

Of course, the Brownies liked best of all their own crazy quilt which occupied the central position in the fine display.

Veve's favorite quilt was her own—the autograph. Now that the coverlet had been washed, the writing on each block stood out quite plainly.

The names, however, meant nothing to the little girl. She was certain the persons to whom they once had belonged, could not have lived in Rosedale for a long while.

Toward noon, the crowd began to gather for the festival. Becoming hungry, the Brownies wandered about to sample food sold at other booths, and to view the huge cherry pie on display.

"What a giant pie!" Veve observed, pausing with the other Brownies before it. "It must contain several hundred pounds of cherries!"

"And just think!" added Eileen. "Maybe we picked some of them!"

"I'm hungry now," Connie declared. "I wish they would cut the pie right away."

The girls obtained hot sandwiches at another booth. After that they listened to the bands and watched several acts of entertainment in the center of the square.

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When the Mexican pickers came on in their festive costumes to play music and dance, the Brownies clapped hard. So did nearly everyone in the audience.

"The pickers had the very best number," Veve declared proudly. "I guess Mr. McLean and the others are glad now that they invited them to be in the festival."

After the number was over, Juan came through the crowd searching for the Brownies.

He handed Veve a little package.

"This is something I made for you, *Senorita*," he said.

Veve opened the package. Inside was the figure the little boy had carved from wood. Very cleverly, he had fashioned a saint in long robes.

Veve was pleased with the gift and told Juan so. She was sorry she had nothing to offer him in return.

"You have given me much," he assured her warmly. "After the fiesta, my people leave for the north."

"You're going with them, Juan?"

"Oh, yes, *Senorita*."

Veve told her friend she would be sorry to see him leave Rosedale.

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"I will return next year when the cherries are ripe," he assured her. "Until then, *adios*." The little boy bowed politely, and the next moment had melted into the crowd.

After a while, Veve, Connie and Eileen went back to the quilt booth to relieve the other Brownies who were working there.

A steady stream of visitors, largely women, came by to look at the quilts and examine them.

Veve was rather disappointed because so many persons appeared more interested in the bright colored ones than in her autograph quilt.

"Don't you mind," Connie said to cheer her. "It really is a fine quilt. The very oldest one in our collection."

Presently, Mrs. Evans, a lady who lived only six doors from the Williams' home, came to the booth.

She seemed interested in the quilts and spent a long time examining each one. However, she barely glanced at the autograph patch.

"Here is a nice one with names on it," Veve pointed it out.

"Dear me, it has the appearance of a very old quilt," remarked Mrs. Evans. "I wonder if the names of any of my friends are embroidered or written on it? I knew many of Rosedale's old settlers, you know."

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The lady picked up a corner of the quilt to read some of the names.

"Flora Winequist," she repeated aloud. "Why, I remember her. She died two years ago, rest her soul."

"Here's another old sounding name!" Connie exclaimed. "'Hannah Goodhue.' Her name is written in ink, but it's still legible."

"Prudence Smith," Veve read aloud. "'Georgia Doan. Ella—'"

"I don't recall any of those names," said Mrs. Evans.

Veve, however, had forgotten the lady's presence.

Very much excited, she was staring at the quilt block as if unable to believe her own eyesight.

"Why, Veve, what is the matter?" Connie inquired. Her little friend had such a peculiar expression on her face, she was afraid she might be ill.

"See this quilt block!"

"Ella Cooper," Connie read aloud. She could not understand the reason for Veve's strange behavior.

"No! No! It isn't Ella Cooper," the other insisted impatiently. "Look again!"

This time Connie peered more carefully at the handwriting on the white block.

"Ella Hooper," she corrected. "Hooper—Veve, do you suppose—?"

"Ella Hooper was Pa Hooper's sister!"

The girls were delighted by their discovery. Leaving Miss Gordon and Sunny Davidson in charge of the booth, they dashed off to see if they could find Mr. Hooper anywhere in the crowd.

Finally, they located him at one of the stands, eating a ham sandwich, and drinking coffee.

"Oh, Mr. Hooper, come with us!" Veve urged the orchard owner.

Mr. Hooper put down his cup of coffee. "What's this?" he asked in surprise.

"We want you to see my autograph quilt!" Veve said, tugging at his hand.

"Now you know I'm no judge of quilts," Mr. Hooper protested, holding back.

"Oh, we don't want you to judge one," Connie interposed. "We want you just to see a name on it."

"A name?" The orchard owner was deeply puzzled. "Let me finish this cup of coffee first and then I'll come."

"The name on the quilt block is Ella Hooper," supplied Veve.

"And it's in her own handwriting," finished Connie.

Mr. Hooper completely forgot his coffee then. He gave the two girls his undivided attention.

"Let's get this straight," he said. "You have a quilt with my sister's signature on it?"

"We aren't sure," Connie admitted. "But the name is the same as hers—Ella Hooper."

"We'll look at that quilt right now," Mr. Hooper declared. "It's barely possible the name may be Ella's, because she liked to make coverlets and fancy work."

The Brownies escorted the orchard owner back to the booth.

During their absence, Miss Gordon and the other girls had been examining the autograph quilt carefully. The date upon which the coverlet had been completed was stitched in the lower right-hand corner.

"My sister was alive at that time," Mr. Hooper said, noticing the date. "And it seems to me she was working on an autograph quilt to give to a friend."

"Here is the signature," Miss Gordon said, spreading the quilt over the counter.

Mr. Hooper glanced at it and said without an instant's hesitation:

"There's no question about it! This is my sister's handwriting!"

Miss Gordon asked if it appeared to be the same as her signature upon the will.

"Why, it's a dead-ringer for the way she signed her name on the document that left me the orchard," Mr. Hooper replied. "But it doesn't much resemble the handwriting on that later will which Carl Wingate claims is genuine."

"Then doesn't this prove the second one was false?" Connie asked.

Mr. Hooper smiled and kept staring at the quilt block. He was thinking very hard.

"I've always been certain Carl Wingate's will was a forgery," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, this provides positive proof. But the courts might decide differently."

"Why?" asked Veve.

"Well, I'm uncertain a quilt would be admitted as evidence."

"Then finding your sister's name on the block won't be any help in saving your orchard?" Connie asked. She was deeply disappointed.

"I don't know," Mr. Hooper admitted. "It might be—it all depends on how hard a fight Wingate is inclined to put up."

At that moment, Veve saw the other orchard owner wandering through the crowd.

"There he is now," she pointed him out.

Mr. Wingate was walking away from the Brownie quilt booth. However, he turned around when Pa Hooper called his name.

"Come over here a minute, Carl," his cousin requested.

Rather reluctantly, Carl Wingate walked over to the booth. He could not understand why his cousin had called him.

"You wanted me?" he asked.

"Yes, we want you to see a quilt in this display," said Mr. Hooper. "An autograph quilt. You will note that the blocks bear the names and signatures of their makers."

Carl Wingate gazed at the faded coverlet without understanding what the older man meant.

"I never was much interested in quilts," he began. "Now if my wife were here—"

Mr. Hooper pointed to the block which bore his sister's name.

"Look at this one," he suggested. "I think you'll find it interesting."

Mr. Wingate stared at the block a moment. Then he became somewhat flustered. But he would not admit that he was worried.

"Well, what about it?" he asked.

"You'll observe that this is a sample of my sister's writing," Pa Hooper told him. "Also, that it does not look much like the signature on the will you claim was the last one she signed."

Mr. Wingate's face flushed with anger. He now seemed quite confused.

"What does this prove?" he blustered. "Not a thing! A person's signature never appears exactly the same."

"True," agreed Mr. Hooper. "But in this case, the handwriting on the quilt only confirms what I long suspected—that the will you produced was a fraud."

"That's not so," Mr. Wingate denied. "You knew all my sister's possessions were destroyed in the fire. So you thought you could claim to have discovered the new will, and no one could prove otherwise."

The men began to argue about the matter. At first their voices were fairly quiet, but gradually they spoke in louder and louder tones. Miss Gordon and the Brownies were quite distressed. Other persons were glancing curiously at the two men.

Drawn by the argument, an elderly gentleman sauntered over to the booth. Connie recognized him as Judge Hutchins of Probate Court.

The judge stood for a while listening to the two men talk. Then he picked up the autograph quilt and studied the signature of Ella Hooper.

"Wingate," he said, "if I were you, I'd withdraw that will which gives you title to the Hooper orchard."

"And be cheated out of my rightful inheritance?" Wingate demanded furiously.

The judge shrugged. "It's up to you to decide what you want to do," he replied. "But if I were in your place, I'd forget the matter. This appears to be the authentic signature of Ella Hooper. Offhand, without comparing it with the name which is signed to the two wills, I would say it more closely resembles the signature on the document already filed in our court."

"I'm being cheated," Mr. Wingate muttered.

"Do as you please," the judge said. "Take the matter into court if you like. However, if it should be proven that the signature on your will is a forgery, your cousin then could bring action against you."

Mr. Wingate knew that he would have no chance in court.

"You have the best of me," he said angrily. "Thanks to this quilt! Keep your stupid orchard! I have enough trouble looking after my own!"

"Then you'll drop your claim to the property?" his cousin demanded.

"I'll drop it, because I don't want to have a long court fight," Mr. Wingate snapped. "But I'm not admitting that the will isn't a genuine one."

Glaring at the judge and his cousin, the orchard owner strode off into the crowd.

Mr. Hooper then turned to the Brownies, thanking them for finding the quilt and saving his orchard.

"Oh, it was Veve who did it," Connie said, giving full credit to her friend. "The autograph quilt is all hers."

"But I might never have noticed the name on the block if it hadn't been for the quilt show," Veve replied. "I think all the Brownies deserve credit."

Mr. Hooper seemed to think so too. At any rate, he thanked each girl in turn.

"You don't know what this means to me," he said. "I hated the thought of giving up that orchard as I've worked hard for many years to make it productive. Now I'll be able to remain there."

"Will you rebuild your house?" Rosemary asked him.

"Indeed, I will. When it is finished, we'll have a house warming party. The Brownies are invited!"

"We'll be there," promised Veve.

Not only did Mr. Hooper thank the Brownies, but afterwards, he told his friends how the girls had saved his orchard.

In turn, they told other persons, until it seemed that almost everyone at the cherry festival heard about the affair.

The Brownies were asked so many questions they were glad when it came time to select the queen of the fiesta. Everyone gathered near the platform where the election was to be held.

"I wonder why folks keep looking at us and whispering?" Rosemary remarked uneasily. "I don't like it!"

Mr. McLean now read off the names of several girls who hoped to be chosen queen. These candidates had entered their names with the committee.

"If you wish, you may write in additional candidates," Mr. McLean instructed. "The queen—" he paused for emphasis—"or queens, we feel, should be truly representative of Rosedale. The festival committee wishes to send to Washington the person or persons who have done the most to make this affair a success."

The Brownies were somewhat puzzled by the Chamber of Commerce president's remarks.

"How could several persons be queen?" Connie speculated.

"I don't see what he meant," Veve added, equally mystified.

Persons who cast their votes seemed to know, for they smiled in a most peculiar way as one after another, they dropped their folded ballots into the box.

The Mexican pickers were allowed to vote too. In a group they marched to the box and dropped in their slips.

"You'll be surprised when you learn who is queen of the fiesta," Juan told Veve.

"Tell me!"

"You wait and see," Juan laughed.

Veve wondered then if some of the people might be voting for Connie, even though her name had not been on the list. But Connie, she thought, would be too young to take a cherry pie to Washington by herself.

The Brownies became very curious indeed, and scarcely could wait until the votes were counted.

Finally, the task was completed. Again Mr. McLean mounted the platform. He was smiling broadly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, clapping his hands for attention. "I shall now give you the results of the balloting."

The Brownies moved closer so that they would not miss the important announcement.

Mr. McLean read off the names of five leading candidates. "Miss Marana Jones, 43 votes. Miss Eva Parkhurst, 51 votes. Miss Esther Illman, 64 votes. Miss Geraldine Gainsworth, 75 votes. Miss Martha Fellows, 79 votes—"

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A few persons in the audience began to clap, for Miss Fellows was the leading candidate. Only the five girls had given their names to the committee. Even the Brownies thought that she had been elected as the festival queen.

Mr. McLean, however, held up his hand in a signal for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he boomed. "We also have write-in candidates. I now give you *The Winner* with 1,398 votes—"

The crowd became very quiet. Everyone listened.

"THE BROWNIES!" announced the Chamber of Commerce president.

Everyone began to whistle and clap and shout. The Brownies were so taken by surprise, they scarcely knew what to think.

It did not seem possible that they had been elected to the honor!

"But we can't all be queen," Jane whispered uneasily. "There must be some mistake."

"Mr. McLean announced that several persons could be chosen," Connie recalled. "Only we didn't even enter our names!"

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The girls crowded about Miss Gordon, who, oddly enough, seemed very little surprised that the organization had been selected instead of a single queen.

"You knew it all the time!" Veve accused the teacher. "Didn't you?"

"Mr. McLean talked to me about it earlier today," the Brownie leader confessed. "He convinced me that inasmuch as the idea for a cherry festival originated with the organization, it would be suitable for the troop to take the cherry pie to Washington."

"You didn't tell us anything about it," Connie said.

"At first it seemed very uncertain that the Brownies could be elected on a write-in basis," the teacher explained. "But I underestimated Mr. McLean. I think he must have told everyone to vote for the Brownies."

"And so did Mr. Hooper," added a bystander. "Also, the Mexican pickers voted solidly for the troop."

"Just think of going to Washington!" Connie exclaimed, her eyes star-bright at the thought. "Is it really true, Miss Gordon?"

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"Yes, I've given my consent," the Brownie leader nodded. "And so have your parents."

"Will you go with us?" Rosemary asked anxiously.

"Yes, that is the plan. All expenses will be paid and we're to stay nearly a week."

"Will we really see the President?" Eileen asked in awe.

"Indeed, yes," smiled Miss Gordon. "And the White House as well."

"I want to visit the Red Room!" shouted Sunny. "And see the swimming pool!"

"I want to visit the mint where the money is made!" laughed Eileen.

All of the girls thought of dozens of things they intended to see and do.

The crowd began to clap and to call for the Brownies to appear on the stage.

Miss Gordon lined up the girls and had them march single file onto the platform. In their pinchecked uniforms, each with a jaunty little brown beanie, they looked very nice indeed.

Mr. McLean then made a speech, telling the girls how grateful Rosedale was for their efforts in making the cherry festival a success.

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The Brownies wanted to tell him that it had not been work at all—only good fun. However, with so many persons looking at them, they were a trifle embarrassed.

"Accept this plaque as a token of the city's appreciation," the Chamber of Commerce president resumed. He held up a large bronze badge in the shape of a cherry blossom. "The name of the Rosedale Brownie Troop will be engraved upon it."

Mr. McLean waited for one of the girls to step forward. No one wanted to do it. Eileen nudged Jane and Jane nudged Veve who gave Connie a little push. So she had to take the plaque.

"Thank you so much, Mr. McLean," she said, speaking as well as if she had planned her speech. "In behalf of the Brownie organization, may I say that we deeply appreciate the honor? We'll do our best to bring credit to Rosedale!"

"You'll do it too!" approved Mr. McLean. "We couldn't have chosen a better set of queens if we had scoured three counties! On to Washington!"

You may be certain that the Chamber of Commerce president's words made the Brownies very happy and proud.

At a signal from Miss Gordon, they all raised their hands in the Brownie salute and stood for a moment at attention.

"Hurrah for the Brownies!" shouted the crowd.

"Give my regards to the President!" joked some one in the vast audience.

The President! Even the thought of meeting such a great person made the chills run up and down the spines of the Brownies.

Their organization had won the highest honor any troop ever could achieve. Not only would they see and talk to the President, but they would have a full week at the nation's Capital.

"On to Washington!" laughed Mr. McLean.

"On to Washington!" shouted the Brownies.

With a vision of wonderful times ahead, they were ready, you see, to start at any moment.

Transcriber's note:

Punctuation has been standardised. Other changes to the original publication have been made as follows:

- Page 25
I am Wingate. What d' you want? *changed to*
I am Wingate. What [d'you](#) want?
- Page 156
remarked that she yould think *changed to*
remarked that she [would](#) think

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS IN THE CHERRY
FESTIVAL ***

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