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Mildred A. Wirt**

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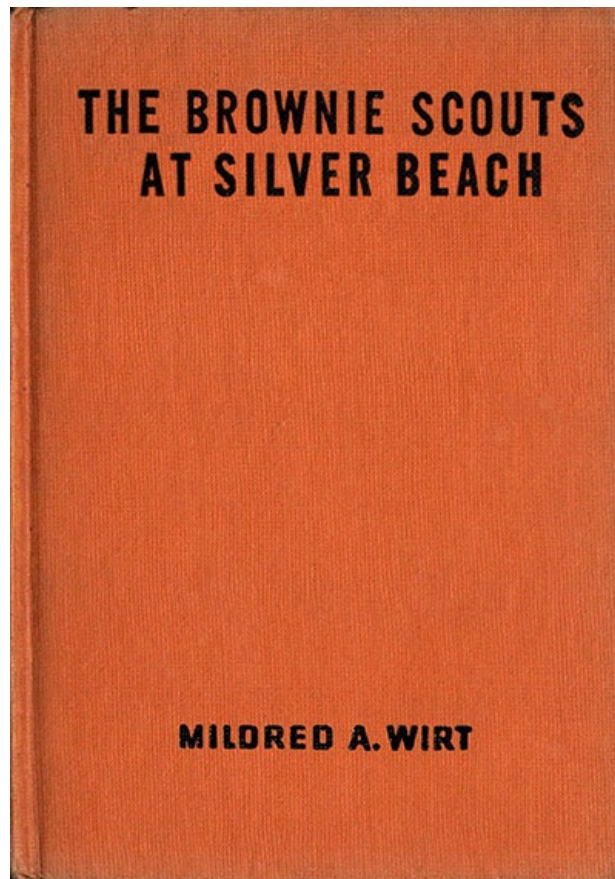
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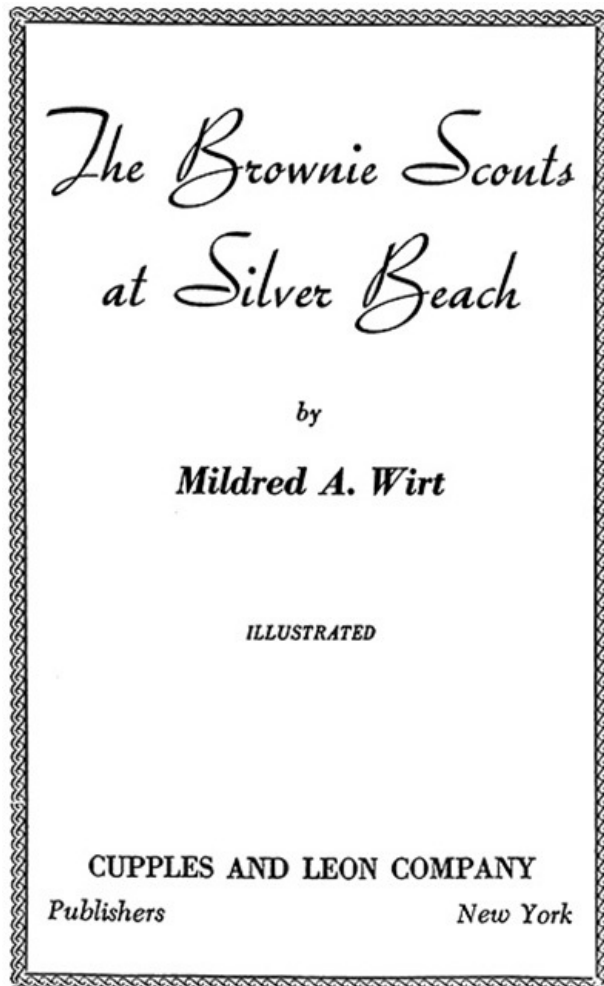


**The Brownie Scouts
at Silver Beach**



Soft wisps of mist enfolded the shadowy
building.

(See Page 34) "BROWNIE SCOUTS AT SILVER BEACH"



*The Brownie Scouts
at Silver Beach*

by
Mildred A. Wirt

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THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AT SILVER BEACH

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THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AT SILVER BEACH

CHAPTER 1

SAND DOLLARS

“WATCH me dive into that big wave! I’m a fish!”

Vevi McGuire shouted the words as she ran along the sandy beach toward the ocean. In her red bathing suit, the dark-haired, freckled little girl made a bright flash of color against the blue sky.

“Be careful, Vevi!” called Connie Williams. “The tide is coming in, and those waves are strong.”

Now Vevi did not heed the warning of her friend. In fact, she didn’t even hear what Connie had said. That was because she was thinking only of being the first Brownie Scout to get into the water.

Flinging her arms wide, she ran to meet a big saucy wave. Icy cold, it slapped hard at her knees.

Vevi squealed and turned her head to see if the other girls were watching.

“Last one in is a sissy!” she challenged the group of Brownie Scouts. “Who says the water is cold?”

“Watch out!” shouted Connie.

Another big foam-flecked wave came rolling slowly in. Vevi did not turn quickly enough to see it.

Before she could brace herself, a great wall of water washed over her.

Now Vevi was very much surprised, for she had not known that a wave could be so rough. Her feet were swept from beneath her and she fell flat on her knees.

Spluttering and choking, Vevi clawed at the sand. For a second she could not get her breath and was very frightened. She was afraid she might drown.

Then the wave was gone, and Vevi found herself lying in a puddle of salt water. When she scrambled to her feet, her bathing suit was gritty with sand. Her elbow had been skinned too.

“My, if you didn’t look funny when that big wave slapped you!” laughed Connie Williams.

Connie was Vevi’s very best friend, and a leader in the Rosedale Brownie Scout troop. Her blue eyes twinkled, for she always enjoyed a joke.

“It’s not funny,” Vevi protested, rubbing the skinned place on her elbow.

“Look out, or you’ll be knocked flat again,” warned Jane Tuttle, another Brownie Scout. She had long yellow braids which shone in the bright sunlight.

This time, Vevi saw the wave coming and raced to safety. She did not feel nearly so brave now that she knew how hard water could slap.

The five Brownies, Vevi, Connie, Jane, Sunny Davidson and Rosemary Fritche, were spending their very first day on Silver Beach along the Atlantic Coast.

All the girls were looking forward to ten wonderful days as guests of Miss Gordon, the troop leader. Rosemary, Jane and Sunny were staying at the teacher’s vine-covered cottage overlooking Silver Beach. Vevi and Connie bunked at Starfish Cottage rented by Connie’s mother.

Now as Vevi shook sand from her bathing suit, the other girls waded into the water. They were careful though, not to get knocked down by a wave.

Nearby, Connie’s mother, Mrs. Williams, and Miss Gordon sat watching from beneath the shade of a yellow beach umbrella.

“Oh, see what I’ve found!” cried Jane Tuttle suddenly.

She stooped to pick up something from the sand.

“What is it?” demanded Rosemary, running up. Jane showed her an odd-appearing, round, gray object. “It doesn’t look like a shell,” she said, “and it isn’t alive either.”

“Let’s ask Miss Gordon,” proposed Rosemary.

The Brownies ran over to the beach umbrella where the two women were reading magazines.

"Why, Jane, you've found a sand dollar!" the Brownie leader exclaimed when she saw the gray-purplish colored disc.

"A sand dollar!" echoed Jane, greatly excited. "Is it real money?"

"Dear me, no," laughed the teacher. "It is only called by that name because of its shape. Sand dollars really are like sea urchins, having five parts to their shells. They have many hair-like spines or legs, and eat tiny pieces of seaweed."

"I'm going to find a sand dollar!" announced Vevi. "A dozen of 'em!"

All the Brownies joined in the search. No one, however, could find another sand dollar. Connie picked up a pretty clam shell and Rosemary found one of pure white which Miss Gordon told her was called an angel's wing.

"I wish the Brownies could gather shells every day we're here," Connie declared. "And then maybe have an exhibition of them."

Miss Gordon nodded approval.

"Perhaps we can, Connie," she replied. "I thought too that we might study sea life and perhaps learn a little about the birds."

"And the ocean," broke in Vevi. "I want to know where it came from and how it got its salt."

"The story of how the ocean became salty must wait until tomorrow," Miss Gordon said, smiling. "This afternoon we are to have a swimming lesson. Barney Fulsom, the life guard, has promised to give the Brownies a few pointers."

"Is that Barney coming now?" asked Connie.

A deeply-tanned, broad-chested young man was walking briskly toward the group of Brownies. The girls knew he was a life guard for he wore a Red Cross emblem on his black bathing trunks.

"That's Barney," agreed Miss Gordon. "Now we must all do exactly as he tells us."

Barney carried a rubber sea horse under his arm.

"Hi, kids," he greeted the Brownies. "All set for your first lesson?"

"I want to ride the sea horse," announced Vevi. "I already know how to swim—at least a little."

"It didn't look like it a minute ago when that wave smacked you," teased Connie.

Barney told the Brownies that the one who did the best in the swimming lesson would be the first to ride the sea horse.

Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon decided they would go into the ocean too. The teacher removed her wrist watch, slipping it into the pocket of her beach robe. She left the robe lying in plain view on the sand.

"Now kiddies," said Barney when the Brownies had gathered in a circle about him. "We're going to pretend to be jellyfish. Watch me!"

Wading out a few feet into deeper, smoother water, he flung himself face downward in the water.

The Brownies were surprised to see that although he didn't move arms or legs, he floated easily on the water's surface.

"How do you breathe?" Connie asked when the life guard stood up again.

"Just hold it," Barney instructed. "And lie perfectly still on the water. It's easy."

One by one the Brownies tried to float like jellyfish. Connie and Jane weren't afraid to put their faces in the water. They learned to float quite easily.

Sunny, Rosemary and Vevi didn't like to get their feet off the sand even when Barney held their hands and pulled them along.

"I don't like being a jellyfish," Vevi complained. "Whenever I put my face in the water, I taste salt."

"You'll soon get used to it," Barney told her. "Only the Brownies who do as I say may ride my sea horse."

Vevi wanted very much to ride the rubber steed, so she gritted her teeth and ducked her head

into the water. After the first time or two it was easy.

"Lesson's over for today," Barney announced after the Brownies had practiced for awhile. "Connie did the best so she may ride the horse first."

Connie tried to climb on the back of the rubber pony. She could not get on until Barney lifted her up.

"Kick your feet," he advised. "That will make the old boy go."

Connie thrashed her legs back and forth and the horse moved with little jerks through the water.

"This is fun!" she cried.

"Let me try next," pleaded Vevi.

Just then a wave upset the horse, and Connie fell off. Barney picked her up and sat Jane astride the rubber steed.

"I'm going to stay on a long while," she boasted.

Even as she spoke, a wave struck the horse, and over she went!

One by one the Brownies took their turn. Vevi was the last one to ride. When a wave upset the horse, she clung to his neck for a long while. But finally she ran out of breath and had to let go.

"That was fine!" approved Barney. "You stayed under water a long time, Vevi."

Connie stood watching a swimmer far out near the pier. She was afraid he might be in danger for she could see he was in very deep water.

"Oughtn't you to save him?" she asked the lifeguard anxiously.

"That's Raymond Curry, a guard at the hotel beach," Barney told her. "He's an expert swimmer. Each day he swims from the hotel beach over here, a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile."

"My, he must have strong muscles!" exclaimed Rosemary. "Will we be able to swim that far after we've had a few more lessons?"

"I'm afraid not," Barney smiled. "Raymond has been swimming all his life and has won several medals."

The children watched the lifeguard for awhile.

He was swimming very smoothly away from Silver Beach. At times his head would disappear from view. But a moment later, it would pop up again between the waves.

"I wish we could take lessons from *him*," remarked Vevi.

"Raymond doesn't care too much about teaching youngsters," Barney told her. "Figures it's too hard work. He has a son of his own only a little older than you girls."

The Brownies were starting to shiver, so Miss Gordon sent them to get their beach robes.

"It's time to dress now," she said. "But before you race to the showers, I must tell you of our plans for tomorrow."

"Another swimming lesson?" pleaded Connie.

Miss Gordon nodded. "We'll have an early beach breakfast," she promised. "I'll tell the Brownies how the ocean got its salt. Meanwhile, I want you all to watch the sea birds. Learn the name of at least one and be prepared to report on its habits at the meeting."

"I already have my bird!" cried Connie. "The gull."

"And I'm going to tell about the sand piper," added Rosemary.

"My report will be on the tern," declared Sunny Davidson, quick as a flash.

"I'll tell about egrets," announced Jane. "I wrote a paper on them last year in school."

Now all the girls except Vevi had named a bird on which they would report.

"Maybe I'll tell about a robin," she said.

"A robin isn't a sea bird," Jane reminded her. "Anyway, we know all about robins."

"Vevi will think of a bird before our meeting tomorrow," said Mrs. Williams kindly.

"I'll think of the best one of all," Vevi boasted.

Miss Gordon reminded the girls again that it was time to dress. She and Mrs. Williams began to gather up their sun glasses and other possessions.

"What time is it?" inquired Connie's mother.

Miss Gordon had slipped on her beach robe. She reached into a pocket for the wrist watch she had left there.

A strange expression came over her face. The Brownies knew at once that something was wrong.

"What is it?" questioned Vevi. "What's happened?"

"I can't find my wristwatch," Miss Gordon murmured. "It's gone!"

CHAPTER 2

A TURTLE RACE

AT first, Miss Gordon and the Brownie Scouts could not believe that anyone had stolen the wrist watch.

"I must have dropped it somewhere in the sand," murmured the teacher.

Mrs. Williams and the Brownies looked carefully beneath the beach umbrella. Miss Gordon removed her beach robe and shook it. But the missing watch could not be found.

"I'm certain I put it in the pocket of this robe not a half hour ago," the teacher declared. "When I went in swimming I left it lying on the sand. Oh, dear, I should have checked the watch at the bathhouse. I kept it because I wanted to keep track of the time."

"I can't believe anyone would steal the watch," insisted Connie's mother. "Certainly not while we were so close by."

Miss Gordon declared that the robe never had been out of her sight. "I'll admit though," she added, "that during the swimming lesson, I seldom glanced in this direction."

Connie, who had been poking about in the sand, suddenly shouted: "See what I've found!"

The other Brownies thought that she had come upon Miss Gordon's missing watch. Instead, Connie pointed to a large footprint in the loose sand.

"It was made by a man with wet feet!" she exclaimed. "See, here's another—and another! Maybe the person who left these prints stole your watch, Miss Gordon!"

"I think not," replied the teacher, examining the prints. "These marks plainly were made by a bather. See, the trail goes directly down to the sea."

"And one wouldn't take a wrist watch into the water," said Rosemary. "That would be stupid."

Just then Barney Fulsom, the lifeguard, came over to the group to ask if anything were wrong. Miss Gordon told him about losing her watch.

"It's been stolen, all right," Barney said. "That thief gets bolder every day."

"Then you've had other articles stolen here?" inquired Mrs. Williams.

"We've had at least a dozen thefts reported during the summer. Several cars have been broken into too, and a couple of cruisers. It's giving the beach a bad reputation."

"Can't police catch the thief?" asked Vevi. "Once when Connie and I traveled with a circus we helped the circus people trap a pickpocket."

"I wish the Brownies would help me catch this fellow," replied Barney soberly. "So far we haven't a single clue."

Mrs. Williams inquired how long the beach thefts had been going on.

"All summer," the life guard answered. "Almost from the day I started to work here. That's what makes it look so bad for me. Folks are starting to shun the cottage beach and use the one by the hotel."

"The thefts never occur there?"

"None has been reported so far. Raymond Curry guards at the hotel beach. He likes to twit me and make out that it's my fault so many things are taken here. He says I don't keep close enough watch."

"My loss certainly wasn't your fault," Miss Gordon said. "I never should have left jewelry in the pocket of a beach robe. I blame only myself."

Barney told the teacher that it would be most unwise in the future to leave any item of value on the beach. Lockers were provided in the bathhouse for the safekeeping of all valuables.

"Your watch may turn up later," he said. "I doubt it though."

"Maybe the Brownies can catch that thief," suggested Vevi. "We'll all keep watch for 'spicious characters."

Miss Gordon felt her loss most keenly. However, she told the Brownies they were not to worry about it.

"Scamper to the bath-house now and dress," she advised them. "You'll have an hour or so to play before dinner time."

Miss Gordon told the girls that if they liked they might use the free period to watch the sea birds and learn their habits.

The teacher did not think to warn the Brownies that they were to stay close to Starfish Cottage. Anyway, she knew all the girls could be trusted to use good judgment.

Now none of the Brownies lived at Silver Beach. Instead, their homes were at Rosedale, a town many miles away.

At Rosedale, Connie and Vevi were next door neighbors. Always they had been close friends, enjoying many good times together even before both had joined the Brownie troop.

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Miss Gordon's unit was a very active one. With her as the leader, the girls had spent several exciting days at Snow Valley.

Another time, Vevi and Connie had been carried away with a circus. However, that had been an accident.

On one occasion the Brownies had taken part in a wonderful cherry festival. At Rosedale, the troop met either in private homes or their own little tree house which had been built in the metropolitan park. If you wonder how they ever acquired a tree house, read the book called, "The Brownie Scouts and their Tree House."

The Brownies now raced off to the bathhouse to dress.

Connie and Vevi dressed faster than the other girls. They both took showers, washing salt water from their bathing suits. Then they put on their pinchecked brown gingham uniforms with white stitching. On the right side of each collar was a tiny Brownie pin.

Vevi gave her dark hair a quick brush and put on her brown felt beanie. "Come on, slow poke," she said to Connie. "Let's walk up to the hotel beach."

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The girls left their bathing suits with Connie's mother and started off.

"Don't be gone long," Mrs. Williams called after them. "Dinner at six."

Hand in hand, the two girls skipped along the beach. They kept watching for birds but the only ones they saw were gulls.

Before long, Vevi and Connie came within view of the big Beach House hotel. The waterfront was dotted with colored umbrellas and many bathers were in the sea.

An even larger crowd had gathered in a huge circle on the lawn in front of the hotel.

"Why, what are all those folks doing?" Vevi demanded, stopping short.

"Let's find out," proposed Connie.

The children approached the group of people, who were laughing and having a good time. In the center of the circle were a number of turtles. The creatures were crawling toward the rim which had been chalked on the grass.

"It's a turtle race!" cried Vevi. "Let's watch!"

She and Connie crowded into the front line. A tiny turtle with a yellow painted stripe across its back, was coming directly toward them.

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"Come on, yellow!" shouted Vevi. She wanted the little turtle to win.

Instead of coming on toward the edge of the circle, it stopped short, raising up its head to look and listen.

A spotted pond turtle went around it. Vevi and Connie thought it would be the winner. But a moment later a snapper went around both turtles. It was crawling very fast, much like a creeping baby.

Suddenly everyone began to shout. The snapper had crossed the chalk line, winning the race.

Raymond Curry, the hotel life guard, had been conducting the race.

"No. 10 wins," he announced in a loud voice. "Who owns him?"

A boy of ten years stepped forward to claim a prize for having the winning turtle.

"Ten dollars for you, son," said the lifeguard. "Nice going! Now remember, folks, we'll have another race here Saturday afternoon. The hotel again will offer ten dollars to the winner, and a second prize consisting of a free motor boat ride." Vevi pinched Connie so hard that it hurt. "Did you hear that?" she whispered.

"Ten dollars," murmured Connie. "That's a lot of money!"

"Maybe we could win it for our Brownie troop!"

"But we have no turtle."

"There must be a way to get one," Vevi declared. "Let's ask."

The girls sidled over toward the lifeguard. He was busy and did not act as if he wanted to be bothered.

"Well, what is it?" he asked impatiently.

"Please," said Connie politely, "may anyone enter the race?"

"That's right."

"We have no turtle," Vevi informed him. "How do we get one?"

"You'll have to hunt," replied the lifeguard. He spoke rather crossly, snapping out his words.

"But where does one find a turtle?"

"That's up to you," the guard returned, shrugging his powerful shoulders. He walked away before the girls could ask another question.

"I don't like him one bit," said Vevi. "His name should be 'Snapper.' He snaps just like a turtle."

Picking up a stick, she poked it at one of the turtles which was crawling across the lawn. It huffed up and bit fiercely at the stick.

"Careful," warned the man who owned the turtle. "That old boy is a biter. The only safe way to handle him is to pick him up by the tail."

"I don't think I want a racing turtle," said Connie, backing away.

"Only the snappers are cross," the man explained. "They're safe enough if you handle them right. If you youngsters want to enter the race, better get yourselves a pair of nice pond turtles. Most of them are good-natured."

"I don't think Mr. Curry wants us to be in the race," declared Vevi. "He wouldn't tell us anything about it."

"Oh, Curry's out of sorts this morning," the man replied. "It seems his son has run away again."

Now Vevi and Connie had forgotten that Barney Fulsom had told them the hotel lifeguard had a son. In fact, they did not know anything about him, except that he was a fine swimmer.

"Curry and his son, Jamie, can't seem to get along well," the man went on. "Every so often, the youngster chases off somewhere for a day or two. It makes his father very angry."

Vevi and Connie now understood why the lifeguard had spoken so crossly to them. They thought though, that he might have taken time to tell them more about the race.

"I'd give you youngsters this snapper, only I'm afraid you couldn't handle him," continued the friendly man. "Better get a pond turtle."

"But how do we find one?" asked Vevi eagerly.

"Try Cabell's pond. That place should be thick with them."

Without telling the children how to reach the pond, the man walked away with his snapping turtle.

"I guess we may as well forget about the race," sighed Connie, deeply discouraged.

"And not win ten dollars for our troop? Why, Connie Williams!"

"I'd like to win a race. But how can we ever find Cabell's pond?"

Vevi had sighted Barney Fulsom far down the beach near Starfish Cottage.

"Let's ask *him*," she proposed. "He's much more friendly than Mr. Curry. I'm sure he'll tell us how to reach the turtle pond."

CHAPTER 3

FOG

BARNEY Fulsom was raking papers and seaweed from the beach when Vevi and Connie hurried up. They were quite breathless from hurrying so fast.

"Please, Mr. Lifeguard," began Vevi, "can you tell us how to get a turtle?"

Barney leaned on his rake, smiling down at the girls. "What kind of turtle?" he inquired. "A huge one that lives in the sea?"

"Oh, no, we want a little turtle," explained Connie, "One that won't bite. And one we can enter in the hotel beach race next Saturday."

"If you want to win you probably will need a fast-moving snapper," the life guard replied. "You never can make a pet of it though. The same is true of a pancake, musk or mud turtle. Other kinds of pond turtles are more friendly."

"How do we reach Cabell's pond?" Vevi questioned eagerly.

Barney told the girls to take the main paved road leading away from the beach. When they reached Bus Stop 23, they were to turn off onto a dirt road and keep walking until they came to the pond.

"Is it far?" Connie asked.

"Less than a half mile. It's a pretty walk through the trees. Once you reach the pond, you'll see plenty of turtles."

Connie asked if the turtles were hard to catch.

"Well, there's a trick to it," the lifeguard answered. "Turtles are fast in the water. If they see you coming, they'll duck down to the bottom of the pond. I'll lend you my net and that should make it easier."

From the bathhouse Barney brought a long-handled net. He warned the children to be very careful at the pond.

"The water is shallow there," he said, "but if you should tumble in, you'd ruin your clothes."

"We won't fall in," laughed Vevi. "When we come back, we'll have a lot of racing turtles!"

Carrying the net, the two girls went first to Starfish Cottage to tell Mrs. Williams where they were going. They could not find her or Miss Gordon, so they left a note saying they would be gone for an hour.

"It looks sort of misty," Connie said, glancing at the sky. "Do you think we should go, Vevi?"

"Oh, we'll be back in an hour," Vevi replied. "Come on."

They started off along the main highway. Cars whizzed past very fast. One driver stopped for a moment, offering the girls a ride. Vevi and Connie did not know him, so they turned down the offer.

Presently, they came to Stop 23 and the winding dirt road.

"It can't be much farther now to the pond," Vevi sighed. She was feeling a little tired.

The road wound through low ground, in among the tall, whispering trees. Soon Vevi and Connie found their shoes coated with dust. The air seemed chilly too for the sun had disappeared under a thickening blanket of clouds.

"Maybe we shouldn't have come," Connie said anxiously. "I didn't think it would be so far."

"Neither did I," admitted Vevi. "We can't turn back now though. We must be almost there."

The children trudged on. And then, as they were becoming very discouraged, they glimpsed an expanse of blue through the trees.

"There's the pond!" cried Vevi. "We'll get our turtle yet, Connie!"

Although small, the pond was very attractive. It was rimmed with trees and shrubs and at one

point had a tiny sand beach. An old boat was tied to the end of a sagging dock.

Vevi and Connie walked out on the planks, taking care not to slip through any of the yawning holes.

"Oh, look!" cried Connie. She stopped so suddenly that Vevi who was directly behind, bumped into her.

"What do you see, Connie? A turtle?"

Connie shook her head. Without saying a word, she pointed toward a bird with a striking feather pattern of orange-red, jet black and white.

Amazingly, the little fellow was digging and pushing in the mud, turning over small stones in a search for food.

"Oh, I wish I knew the name of that bird," Connie whispered. "I'd report on it at our next Brownie Scout meeting."

"It looks like a dove with bright orange legs and feet," added Vevi in awe.

Her words startled the bird. Frightened, it took wing.

In the air, the colors merged, giving the bird the appearance of a flying marble cake.

"Oh, we must tell Miss Gordon about this place," Connie declared happily. "Why, it's simply alive with birds!"

Overhead, gulls were winging in graceful flight. Sandpipers twinkled at the water's edge on their fast-moving, tiny black legs.

Vevi, however, was more interested in finding a turtle she could race.

"I don't think this old pond has any turtles," she complained. "I don't see a single one."

"I do!" exclaimed Connie whose eyes were keen.

"Where, Connie?"

In her excitement, Vevi nearly fell off the dock.

"Out there in the middle of the pond. See that log!"

Vevi gazed where Connie pointed. Sure enough, a small spotted turtle was perched on the log, drying his shell.

"Let's get him!" she cried.

"How? We can't wade out into the middle of the pond."

Vevi went quickly to inspect the old boat. There were no oars. Besides, several inches of water had seeped in over the floor boards.

"We can't use that old boat either," said Connie quickly. "It would be too risky."

"There must be other turtles in this pond," Vevi declared. "We'll find 'em."

Leaving the sagging dock, the girls started around the pond. The water was very still. Several times they saw bubbles rising to the surface.

"Turtles must be down there," Vevi declared. "But I can't see a single one."

The girls walked until they were tired. Finally they sat down on a little bank to rest.

"It's getting late," said Connie, glancing at the murky sky. "We ought to be starting back to the cottage."

Vevi shivered, for the air had turned damp and chilly. She would not admit, though, that she was the least bit cold.

"Let's not go just yet," she pleaded. "I want to catch a turtle."

"So do I," agreed Connie. "But since we aren't having any luck—"

Vevi at that moment grasped her friend's arm. She pointed toward a clump of reeds and lily pads directly below where they sat.

A tiny head was peeping out of the water. For a minute, Vevi and Connie both thought that the creature was a snake. Then, in the clear water, they made out a round, curving body and four claws.

"A turtle!" whispered Vevi. "Watch me get him."

"Be careful or you'll scare him away," Connie warned.

Carrying the net in her right hand, Vevi slipped down the grassy bank.

Just as she was about to reach out and scoop up the turtle, his head disappeared from view.

"Oh, he's gone!" she wailed. "How mean!"

A moment later, however, the turtle's head popped up again farther from shore.

"I'll get him yet!" Vevi announced grimly.

She stripped off her shoes and stockings. Then, moving carefully so that she would not splash, she stole toward the turtle.

"Now!" whispered Connie.

Vevi made a quick sweep with the fish net. She felt something heavy hit the circular rim.

"I've got him!" she declared triumphantly.

"Where?" demanded Connie.

Vevi had raised the net. The turtle had not been trapped.

"I'll get him next time!" Vevi said crossly. "He'll stick his old head up in a minute and then I'll net him."

Patiently, the girls waited. But the minutes went by and not a glimpse of the turtle did they obtain.

Vevi began to feel very chilly without her shoes and stockings.

"We can't wait any longer," Connie told her. "It's late and the sky looks funny."

"Sort of smoky," Vevi agreed.

Wisps of fog were filtering in over the treetops. The girls could feel dampness everywhere.

"Fog is coming in from the ocean," Connie said uneasily. "We must leave right away."

Vevi began to pull on her shoes and stockings. She had lost interest in turtles. The heavy mist went through her light clothing making her quite uncomfortable.

"It won't take us long to get back to Starfish Cottage," she declared. "My, I'm hungry!"

The girls walked very fast along the dirt road. However, before they had gone far, Vevi stopped short. A look of dismay came over her freckled face.

"Oh, Connie," she wailed. "I left the fish net lying on the shore! What'll we do?"

"We'll have to go back," Connie decided. "Barney wouldn't like it if we lost his net. Oh, Vevi, why didn't you think about it?"

"I—I just didn't. Connie, you wait here. I'll get the net. It won't take me long, if I run."

"All right, but hurry," Connie agreed. "Fog is coming in fast. I'm cold already."

Leaving her friend to wait along the roadside, Vevi hurried back to the pond. It took her a long while to get the net. By the time she returned, mist was swirling everywhere.

"It took you an age," Connie said.

"I hurried as fast as I could," Vevi puffed.

Hand in hand, the girls hastened on down the road. Fog was settling everywhere, blotting out all but the closest trees.

"It's like being in a forest fire—only colder," Vevi murmured uneasily. "Oh, Connie, what if we couldn't find our way home?"

Connie had been afraid of the same thing. But she spoke bravely.

"We'll come to the main road any minute now," she said to encourage Vevi. "After that it will be easy. We're not far from Starfish Cottage."

The dirt road dipped down into a small, winding valley. Here the fog had gathered even heavier. Hurrying along, the girls could see only a few yards in front of them.

Presently, to their relief, they saw a ribbon of dark pavement ahead.

"The highway!" Connie exclaimed. "Well be all right now."

At the exit to the dirt road, the girls paused. Landmarks did not look familiar.

"Do we turn right or left?" Connie asked in perplexity. "Which way is toward Starfish Cottage?"

"I remember passing a large white house," Vevi recalled. "We should be able to see it from here."

"The trouble is we can't see anything in this fog, Vevi. Nothing looks right."

Connie's voice quavered. Cold and tired, she longed to be snug at Starfish Cottage. Even now, the other Brownies would be preparing for a warm supper.

"I guess we turn left," Vevi said after a moment.

"Left? Why, I'm sure the ocean is the other way."

Connie and Vevi stared at each other, truly alarmed.

The fog was settling about them like a damp rain cloak. Nothing looked familiar.

"We can't be far from home," Connie murmured. "But this mist is getting worse."

"And we're lost," Vevi added in a frightened voice. "Oh, Connie, what'll we do?"

CHAPTER 4

THE SHIP HOUSE

NOW Connie was as worried as she could be, but she tried not to show it. She remembered that a Brownie Scout always must be calm in an emergency.

"We can't really be lost," she told the frightened Vevi. "Not as long as we stay on the main road."

"We can turn the wrong direction though," Vevi insisted. "If we do, we'll be hours getting home."

With the mist settling more closely about them, the girls stood for a moment trying to get their bearings.

In either direction, the road ahead was like a gray, dim tunnel.

"Listen!" commanded Vevi. "What was that?"

She had heard a strange, deep-throated sound which seemed to come from a long distance away.

"The fog horn out on the bay!" Connie exclaimed. "That means it's really getting bad. Ships are being warned so they won't run into the rocks along shore."

The girls could not decide which direction to walk. Connie thought they should go one way, while Vevi was in favor of the other.

As they debated, Connie heard a car coming from far up the road.

"Oh, we can stop the driver and ask directions!" she exclaimed, greatly relieved. "Maybe too, we can catch a ride to Starfish Cottage."

Soon the children caught a glimpse of headlights boring through the mist.

Stepping out into the roadway, Connie and Vevi shouted for the driver to stop. In the thick fog they scarcely could be seen. Their voices apparently did not carry.

Without glancing toward the girls, the driver of the car went on. A moment later the red taillight of his automobile had completely vanished.

Vevi and Connie were too discouraged to say a word. They stood at the roadside a moment, cold and miserable.

"Another car will come along in a minute," Connie said at last.

Huddling together, the girls waited and waited. Finally, because they didn't know what else to do, they started walking along the paved road. To find their way, they had to watch closely lest they wander off the pavement.

"Connie, I'm sure we didn't come this way," Vevi murmured after they had gone a short distance. "Didn't we pass a house just before we turned off onto the dirt road?"

"I think so, Vevi. I'm not sure. We didn't pay enough attention."

The girls trudged over a little hill. Ahead, the fog seemed a trifle lighter. Instead of being dense and thick, it rolled in clouds.

"I think I see something over there to the right," Vevi declared hopefully. "It looks like a house!"

Soft wisps of mist enfolded the shadowy building, giving it an eerie, almost ghostly appearance.

"It's a house of some sort," Connie admitted. "But I don't see any light. It—it doesn't look lived in, Vevi."

"Let's find out, Connie."

Hand in hand, the girls left the pavement and stumbled up a gravel path. The fog was lighter and they could trace the outline of a low, rambling shingle and timber building.

"Why, it's not a house at all!" Connie exclaimed.

"It's a little ship! But how could a ship be here on dry land?"

Vevi squeezed her friend's hand nervously. Through the mist the building had a most unreal appearance. Was her imagination playing tricks?

"Pinch me, Connie," she whispered.

Connie obeyed, nipping Vevi's arm so hard she squealed.

"It's real, all right," Vevi said, satisfied that she was wide awake.

Cautiously, the girls inched closer. Now they could see that the building really was a house. It had been built though, to resemble an old ship.

The windows were round like portholes. Just inside a picket fence stood a huge anchor, painted white. An old ship's lantern dangled by the cottage door. Just above it was a battered sign.

Moving in close, the children were able to read the lettering on the carved piece of board. It said: "WELCOME."

"Friendly people must live here," declared Vevi, feeling less afraid.

Connie looked carefully about the yard. Weeds had grown very high and flower beds were untended.

"This old ship house looks deserted to me," she said in awe. "Another thing—I'm sure we never came this way before, Vevi."

"That's so. We must have turned the wrong direction when we left the dirt road. What'll we do?"

"Let's knock," Connie suggested. "Someone might live here, but I don't think so."

The front door was made of heavy wood and appeared to have been removed bodily from an old sea vessel. Door knob and hinges were of iron.

Raising her hand to knock, Connie made a startling discovery.

"Why, the door's unlocked!" she exclaimed. "See, it's partly open!"

Vevi saw that Connie was right. The door stood slightly ajar.

"Then someone must live here after all!" she cried.

Connie knocked twice and waited. The girls thought they heard a flurry of footsteps inside. But no one came to let them in.

"Try again, Connie."

Once more Connie rapped on the door, this time so hard that it opened a trifle wider. But still no one came.

"Someone must live here," Vevi reasoned. "Otherwise, the door wouldn't be unlocked. Unless the place is owned by a ghost," she added with a nervous giggle.

Connie rapped twice more. "It's no use," she said at last.

"But I'm sure I heard someone inside, Connie. Let's peek in for a second."

"I don't think we should, Vevi."

"Why not?" her companion argued. "The sign says 'Welcome.' That must mean we're to walk right in if no one answers."

"I hate to, Vevi."

"Well, I'm going to do it," Vevi announced boldly.

Before Connie could stop her, she gave the door a little push with her foot. It swung back with a loud, screeching sound.

"Just like on a radio serial," Vevi giggled. "Come on! Who's afraid? Not I!"

Connie followed her friend into the little ship house. In the front hallway, they stood very still, listening.

Not a whisper of sound disturbed the quiet. Yet Connie had a dreadful feeling that they were not alone in the house.

"Is—is anyone here?" she called.

Her voice sounded so strange and weak that she scarcely recognized it as her own.

"No one is home," Vevi declared, looking around. "I don't think anyone has lived here for a long, long while. Everything's so dusty."

"But it's a darling place," Connie said, becoming a trifle excited. "Just like a ship inside. Or a club house!"

The girls had tiptoed from the hallway to a main living room.

There were no rugs on the floor or curtains at the porthole windows. The furniture was all built into the walls. At one end of the long room there were two double-deck bunks.

"Someone must live here!" cried Connie. "At least that lower bunk has been slept in. See, the blanket is mussed!"

A desk had been built into the opposite wall. Connie went over to inspect it.

Almost at once she came upon a dusty old Bible. She turned slowly through the yellowing pages. Toward the back of the huge book, her exploring fingers encountered a photograph.

"It's a picture of a young man," she informed Vevi. "There's writing on the back of it."

Vevi quickly crossed the room to see what Connie had found. Taking the picture to the window where a little light filtered through, they were able to make out the writing. Connie read it aloud.

"Jerry R. Tarwell, 19, lost at sea, Dec. 25, 1934."

"Why, that was on Christmas Day," Vevi said, staring at the picture. "He's nice looking."

"This old Bible hasn't been opened in a long while," Connie added, brushing dust from her hands. "It's queer."

"What is, Connie?"

"Why everything. This ship house. The open door. This picture. This bunk that's been slept in."

"That part is the queerest of all, Connie. This house looks deserted, and yet someone appears to be living here. You don't suppose—"

"A ghost?" Connie interposed with a quick laugh. "Don't be silly, Vevi. You know there aren't any such things."

"I know, but I was sure I heard footsteps—"

Vevi broke off, listening hard.

"What was that?" she whispered.

"I—I didn't hear anything. Yet, I do too!"

Distinctly, both girls could hear a tiptoeing sound. They were certain someone was moving about in the adjoining room.

"I'm scared," Vevi whispered. "Let's get out of here!"

Connie nodded. Clinging together, she and Vevi started toward the hallway.

The corridor connected with another room, apparently a kitchen. But the girls had no desire to explore further. Their one thought was to leave this strange old house and be on their way.

As they reached the doorway opening into the hall, they stopped short.

At the outside door they saw the flash of clothing. A boy in blue jeans and a rough, cloth jacket turned toward them in a fleeting instant. He uttered a choked cry as if sharing their fright.

Then, he darted through the door and was gone.

"Wait!" Connie called impulsively. "Don't run away!"

"We want to find out how to get to Starfish Cottage!" Vevi shouted. "Wait!"

But the boy did not turn back. Leaving the door wide open, he fled into the fog and quickly was swallowed by the gray mist.

CHAPTER 5

AN OLD SEA CAPTAIN

THOUGH Vevi and Connie called after the boy several times, he did not return.

"Do you think he was real?" Vevi asked anxiously. "We didn't imagine we saw him?"

"Of course not," replied Connie. "He was real enough."

"But why did he run away?"

"We must have frightened him, Vevi. Maybe he had no right to be inside this little house. So when we came in, he waited for a chance to sneak away without being seen."

"Whoever he was, I wish he'd waited, Connie. Maybe he could have told us how to get to Starfish Cottage."

Feeling that they had no more right to be in the little ship cottage than the runaway boy, the girls decided to leave. Connie took care to close the front door firmly behind them.

"I wish we knew who owns this cute little place," she remarked. "Perhaps the owner doesn't know that the door is unlocked."

The fog horn was tooting again as the two girls picked their way down the path. Vevi shivered, for the damp air had chilled her through.

"What'll we do now?" she asked in a discouraged voice. "I can't even see the main road."

"Listen!" Connie commanded suddenly.

Vevi stopped short. For a minute she thought her friend wanted her to listen to the wail of the fog horn. Then, she too heard the sound that Connie's keen ears had detected—a crunch, crunch, crunch of gravel.

"Someone's coming," whispered Connie.

The girls huddled motionless by the trunk of a huge hard maple, peering into the mist. Gradually they made out a shadowy, moving figure.

"A man," whispered Vevi, half afraid.

Through the mist, the figure appeared very large, almost a giant.

The man was very close to the little girls before he saw them. He pulled up quickly, exclaiming with a hearty laugh:

"Avast, there! Nearly ran you down in this pea-soup fog, didn't I?"

The elderly man had such a friendly voice that Connie and Vevi lost all fear. He was tall, with broad, slightly stooped shoulders.

Walking seemed hard for him, for he carried a stout cane. Perched jauntily atop his head was a seaman's cap.

"Aren't you young ladies afraid to be walking alone in this dense fog?" he asked with concern. "You might get lost."

"We are already," Connie gravely informed him.

"We're trying to get back to Starfish Cottage," added Vevi. "We don't know which way to go. Please help us."

"Lost, eh?" chuckled the friendly old seaman. "This fog put me in mind o' the day we were running from Halifax to New York on the *John Horner*. The fog was so thick you could have cut it with a knife."

"Are you a sea captain?" Connie asked. She had noticed that the old man wore a uniform with gold braid.

"Aye," the stranger chuckled. "An old sea dog that's coiled up his cables. I've been in dry dock so many years all my hinges are rusty."

"Don't you sail any more?" asked Vevi.

"Haven't set foot on a deck since my son was lost at sea. I'm an old salt that's quit the sea—swallowed the anchor, so to speak. But what were you saying about looking for a starfish?"

"Not a fish—a cottage by that name," explained Connie.

"Starfish Cottage?" the old man repeated. "Never heard of it, but it must be one of those little places along the beach."

"We can't even find the beach," Vevi declared. "Everything is all mixed up and nothing looks right."

"Now don't you fret," soothed the captain. "Just grab my hand, and I'll steer you through the shoals. We'll be at Starfish Cottage before you can say Davey Jones Locker."

Vevi and Connie felt quite safe now that they were with the captain. They fell into step on either side. The captain noticed that Vevi was shivering and made her put on his warm jacket. After that she felt very comfortable.

Tapping along the gravel walk with his cane, the captain led the Brownies to the paved highway.

"Now, we could follow this road to the beach," he said. "But I know a shorter way that cuts off a quarter of the distance."

The captain walked along the pavement only a short distance. Presently he chose a path which wound in between clumps of tall trees. Vevi and Connie never would have known that it was there. Their guide, however, seemed familiar with every inch of the trail.

"We'll be at Starfish Cottage quick as the wind," he encouraged the girls. "Now tell me how it was that you lost your way."

Trudging along beside the old seaman, Vevi related how she and Connie had started for the pond to find a racing turtle. She told also of coming to the strange ship cottage and of seeing a boy run out of the dwelling.

"The door was open?" The captain seemed quite disturbed. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes," insisted Vevi. "Connie saw him too. We shouted to him to wait, but he wouldn't."

"Now how do you suppose that door came open?" the captain muttered, talking to himself. "I must look into it right away."

The path had become very steep. Vevi and Connie had to step carefully not to slide and fall.

"Doesn't anyone live at the little ship house?" Vevi asked as she paused an instant to catch her breath.

"Not any more."

"It's such a darling little house," sighed Connie. "I wish the Brownie Scouts could hold meetings there."

"And who are the Brownie Scouts?" inquired the old captain.

Vevi and Connie told him about the Rosedale Troop and of the good times they were having at the beach.

"We have Brownie songs and we do useful things," Connie explained proudly. "We have a secret slogan too—its initials are HOP."

Now Vevi and Connie both knew that the initials HOP stood for "Help Other People." Because it was a secret, they could not tell the captain.

"I'll show you the Brownie salute," Connie offered. "It's like this."

She raised her right hand smartly to the temple, the first two fingers straight. The ring finger and little finger were held down by the thumb.

"The two straight fingers stand for the two parts of the Brownie Promise," Vevi told the captain. "Want to hear the Promise?"

The captain said he did, so she recited it.

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

The captain said it was a very nice promise indeed. He reminded the girls that they had told him almost everything about themselves except their names.

"I'm Vevi McGuire, and this is Connie Williams. At Rosedale we live next door to each other."

"Now tell us *your* name," urged Connie.

"Why, I'm Cap'n Tarwell. Just an old sea dog that's lost his bite. I like to walk in the fog."

"Tarwell?" Connie repeated the name thoughtfully. "Why, that same name was in the old Bible at the ship cabin."

"Jerry R. Tarwell," recalled Vevi. "He died at sea."

She wanted to ask the old captain if he were related to the young man mentioned in the Bible. From the odd way he looked, she thought he must know all about the ship cottage.

Before she could ask a question however, they came within the sound of the breakers.

"Hear 'em roar?" asked the captain, pausing to listen. "We're almost at the beach now, and the fog's lifting a bit. By tomorrow it'll burn off and we'll have a nice day."

A little farther on, Captain Tarwell showed the girls a group of cottages through the mist.

"Oh, I know where I am now!" Connie cried. "I can see Starfish Cottage from here!"

Even though the girls were sure they would not lose their way again, Captain Tarwell walked with them to the cottage.

Connie's mother, Miss Gordon, and all the Brownies had gathered on the porch. They were ready to start off in search of the two missing girls.

"Oh, here you are!" Mrs. Williams exclaimed as Connie and Vevi dashed up the steps. "We've been so worried."

"The fog came in so fast," added Miss Gordon. "I couldn't find you anywhere."

Feeling ashamed to have caused so much trouble, Connie and Vevi explained once more about their search for a racing turtle. Then they introduced Captain Tarwell and told how he had brought them safely to the beach.

"'Twas nothing," insisted the captain when Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon tried to thank him. "The children weren't lost really. The fog only confused them."

Captain Tarwell turned to leave. Vevi took off the jacket he had given her and politely returned it.

"So you'd like to have a racing turtle?" the old man asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"Tell you what! If your troop leader says the word, I'll take all the Brownies to the pond to hunt for turtles. Blast my barnacles, I will!"

"Oh, may we go?" cried Vevi.

"Tomorrow?" demanded Connie.

Miss Gordon laughed and said she would think the matter over.

That night, the Brownies sat around a fire at Starfish Cottage, singing songs and telling stories.

The walls fairly rocked as the girls warbled:

"We're the Brownies, here's our aim,
Lend a hand and play the game!"

Everyone plied Vevi and Connie with questions about their adventure in the fog. They tried very hard to describe the strange little house they had discovered beside the road.

"I never heard of a house built like a ship!" exclaimed Rosemary in awe.

"You say no one appeared to be living there, and yet the door was open!" added Jane.

"And a boy ran out while you were there!" commented Sunny Davidson. "Maybe you imagined it."

Vevi and Connie became indignant at such a suggestion.

"We did not imagine it!" they declared together. "The captain was real enough, wasn't he?"

"Oh, he was real," Jane agreed with a shrug. "But he didn't say anything about a little ship house. Fog, they say, gives rise to strange fancies."

Now Vevi and Connie were very annoyed. Jane, they felt, was putting on airs. She wanted the other Brownies to believe that they had been confused.

"Another thing," Jane went on, "it seems funny to me that Captain Tarwell would have the same name as the one written in the Bible."

"Well, it's so!" Vevi declared. "At least the last name was the same. You heard him tell Mrs. Williams he was Captain Tarwell."

"Oh, yes," agreed Jane. She flashed a very wise smile. "But did anyone hear him mention a little house?"

"One with 'Welcome' over the door?" giggled Sunny.

"He didn't have a chance," retorted Vevi hotly.

"Oh, yes, he did," insisted Jane. "He was here quite a while. You mentioned the little house once, Vevi, and he gave you a very odd look. I think he knew you had imagined the whole thing!"

"Oh," gasped Vevi. "Connie and I will prove to you that the little house is as real as Starfish Cottage!"

"And that it's built to look like a ship," added Connie.

"How?"

"We'll take you there," Connie offered. "We'll take all the Brownies. That is, if Miss Gordon says we may."

The Brownie Scout leader, who had been listening to the heated debate, smiled and nodded.

"What better way to settle the question?" she laughed. "As soon as the fog disappears, we'll all go together to see what we can learn."

CHAPTER 6

HOUSE IN THE MIST

WISPY fog still hung over Silver Beach when Connie and Vevi awoke next morning.

The mist, though, had started to burn off by the time they had finished breakfast. Eagerly they ran next door to see how many Brownies were awake at Oriole Cottage.

“Let’s start for the little ship house right away!” urged Vevi, bursting in upon the group.

However, Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams had made other plans. A picnic had been scheduled at the hotel beach.

Observing Vevi’s disappointment at the announcement, Miss Gordon promised her that later in the day they would try to hike to the cottage.

Quickly the girls made their own beds and helped with the dishes. Before they were through, Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams had the lunches packed.

By the time the Brownies reached the hotel beach the sun was shining quite bravely. Nevertheless, Miss Gordon decided it was a little too cold for comfortable swimming.

“We’ll have our bird session first,” she announced. “Who will make the first report?”

Sunny Davidson wanted to be the first to offer her talk. That was because she had switched from a tern to a gull. She was afraid Connie would get ahead of her if she delayed the report.

“I’m going to tell about the herring gull,” she announced quickly. “He sits on piers, rocks and buoys when he isn’t flying around looking for food. He’s a noisy bird too.”

“We knew all that before,” said Vevi. She was a bit rude because she had wanted to tell about a gull herself.

“Sometimes one sees brown or speckled gulls,” went on Sunny, paying no attention to Vevi. “They’re the young gulls. When they become adults they turn white. Some of them have a little gray, black or blue in their plumage.”

“And did you notice the color of the gull’s legs?” questioned Miss Gordon. “That is most important in identifying a herring gull.”

Sunny had failed to notice the gull’s legs. But at that moment one of the big fat birds flew lazily overhead. “Why, they’re real pale!” Sunny exclaimed. “Sort of flesh colored.”

“That’s exactly right,” approved the Brownie Scout leader. “Your report was excellent, Sunny. I’ll reward you by giving you a few crumbs to toss out on the water.”

Sunny broke up a slice of bread the teacher gave her. She tossed several of the small pieces far out into the waves.

The next instant the Brownies heard a loud “squawk, squawk.” Down dived the big white gull, flapping its wings as it seized the bread.

“Oh, let me throw the next piece!” pleaded Vevi.

Miss Gordon gave her a chunk which she hurled into the waves. This time, not one gull, but two came after the food.

The loud squawking of the birds also brought Raymond Curry, the life guard.

“You’re not supposed to feed the gulls here,” he scolded the children.

“It was my fault for I gave them the bread,” Miss Gordon apologized. “I’m very sorry.”

The Brownies gathered in a semi-circle again to resume their bird talks.

Jane’s turn came next. She told about the tern, describing it as one of the most graceful birds she had ever seen.

“They look like large black-capped swallows,” she told the Brownies. “When they fish, they’re faster than a gull, plunging head-first into the water.”

Jane went on to describe the common type tern as a white bird with an orange-red bill. It was

much smaller and thinner than the average gull.

Connie told about the turnstone she and Vevi had seen at the pond. Rosemary gave a long talk on the habits of the spotted sandpiper.

"Now it's your turn, Vevi," said Miss Gordon. "What bird will you tell us about?"

Vevi had made no preparation for the talk. She thought very fast.

"I'll tell about a blackbird," she announced.

The other Brownies hooted.

"A blackbird isn't a water bird," Jane said, flipping her long braids. "I guess you've been paying too much attention to turtles and little houses to think of the assignment."

"No such thing," Vevi defended herself. "I just didn't have time, that's all."

"It really doesn't matter," said Miss Gordon quickly. "Vevi can make her report at our next beach meeting. At any rate, I had planned today to tell you how the ocean got its salt."

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"Vevi's a tail-ender, all the same," Jane teased. "I'll bet she won't have a report at the next meeting either."

"You just wait and see!" Vevi retorted.

Miss Gordon began to tell the girls about the ocean. The Atlantic, she said, had more salt than most large bodies of water.

"Rivers are largely responsible," she went on. "Can anyone guess why?"

No one could answer so Miss Gordon told the girls that each year the rivers carried large quantities of soluble mineral matter to the sea.

"Salt doesn't dissolve easily. Therefore, each year the amount in the ocean keeps increasing."

"Some day will the entire ocean be a big bed of salt?" asked Rosemary anxiously.

"No, the rivers never could carry that much," Miss Gordon smiled.

Jane, who had noticed a jellyfish on the beach that morning, asked the teacher to tell about them.

"Their bodies consist of a jelly-like substance," Miss Gordon explained. "They have no skeleton. Some types have stinging cells." "I know because I stepped on one!" cried Connie. "How do they move through the water when they have no legs or fins?"

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"By muscular tissue action. Oh, that reminds me! We're to have a jellyfish hunt this morning."

Jane looked troubled. "I don't like jellyfish," she announced. "I wouldn't pick up one for anything in the world."

"Neither would I," shuddered Sunny. "I'd rather look for sand dollars."

"Wait until you see our jellyfish," laughed Miss Gordon.

Now, unknown to the Brownie Scouts, she and Connie's mother had filled balloons with water, tying them securely with string. The balloons were every color of the rainbow. After Miss Gordon had dropped them into the shallow water, they did gleam like real jellyfish.

"A prize to the Brownie who finds the most jellyfish!" Miss Gordon spurred the girls on.

With shouts of laughter, the Brownies dashed into the water. The waves were tossing the jellyfish about, and it wasn't easy to find them.

Rosemary got her hands on the first one, a yellow balloon. But when she lifted it out of the water, it slipped from her fingers. A wave swept it toward Jane, who grabbed it and held on.

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"It's my jellyfish!" she cried.

Vevi managed to get a balloon next and then Connie was able to seize one. In getting it though, she pierced the rubber with her fingernail. The water oozed out and she held only a flat piece of rubber.

"Connie's got an old dead jellyfish!" Sunny Davidson teased. "Does that count, Miss Gordon?"

Before the teacher could answer, the Brownies saw Raymond Curry, the life guard striding down the sand. He looked very grim, as if displeased.

"What goes on here?" he demanded of the children.

"We're hunting jellyfish," Jane informed him. "I'm the leader because I just found another! That makes me two!"

"Hunting jellyfish!" the lifeguard retorted. "Littering up the beach, you mean. I don't allow you to toss wet balloons around. We don't permit picnics here either."

Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams had come up by this time. They apologized to the guard, assuring him that they would pick up all the scattered balloons. "We didn't know about the rule against picnics," Mrs. Williams added. "We've been having them at the cottage beach. Barney Fulsom, the guard there, never objected."

"Well, Barney doesn't care if his beach looks like a garbage dump," the hotel guard replied. "We're more particular here."

Miss Gordon, Mrs. Williams and the Brownies thought Raymond Curry was being most unfair. They were willing to obey all the rules. However, they had not scattered balloons or paper plates.

"Mr. Fulsom's beach is nice," Vevi said. "It's as clean as this one!"

Mrs. Williams gave her a quick glance, so Vevi did not say any more. But she and all the other girls were provoked that the hotel guard had spoiled their morning's fun.

"Who wins the prize?" Jane asked as they began gathering up their belongings.

"I guess you do," Miss Gordon said. From her beach kit, she removed a curious object and gave it to Jane.

"Oh, it's a starfish!" Jane cried in delight.

"I found it on the beach this morning," Miss Gordon said. "If we have a little exhibition of shells and sea animals, you can include it."

"Oh, I shall!" Jane's eyes shone. "But after the exhibition, is it mine to keep?"

The Brownie leader assured her that it was.

"Where will we have our exhibition?" Vevi inquired as the girls trudged back to the cottage beach.

"We'll find a place," Miss Gordon promised.

Vevi had been thinking about the little ship cottage. She remarked that it would be nice to have the exhibition there.

"I don't believe you and Connie ever saw such a place!" Jane challenged again.

"We did too!" Vevi retorted. "What's more, we'll prove it, if Miss Gordon will let us!"

The girls began to tease the Brownie leader to take them on the promised hike into the hills.

"This morning?" she asked dubiously.

"Just as soon as we've eaten our lunch," Rosemary pleaded.

The teacher allowed herself to be persuaded. At the cottage beach, the children spread out the lunch. After the meal, they carefully gathered up all the paper plates, disposing of them in a trash can.

"I like this beach much better than the one at the hotel," Vevi announced. "And I like Barney better than Mr. Curry too!"

All the Brownies said they felt the same way.

"I'm sure Mr. Curry doesn't mean to be unkind," Mrs. Williams declared. "He's had trouble with his son, I understand. The boy ran away for a day or so. I believe he came back again though."

Lunch over, the Brownies dressed in hiking clothes and stout shoes. With Vevi and Connie leading the party, they all set off at a brisk pace along the paved highway.

"Wouldn't it be dreadful if we couldn't find the little house again?" Vevi whispered to Connie. "We'd never live it down!"

"Without the mist, everything looks different," Connie replied uneasily.

Soon the girls came to the dirt road which turned off toward the pond.

Vevi and Connie paused, uncertain which way to go.

"I think we keep on walking straight down the highway," Connie decided at last.

"Don't you know?" demanded Jane, who had overheard. "I'm not sure," Connie admitted. "In the fog, we couldn't tell where we were walking."

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She and Vevi went on, looking hard along both sides of the road. Tall trees loomed as far ahead as they could see.

"We may as well turn back," Jane said impatiently. "I guess this proves who was right."

"We haven't walked far yet," Miss Gordon remarked. "Besides, I think I see something that looks like a house set back among the trees on the left hand side of the road."

"That's it!" cried Vevi. "The little ship house!"

The Brownies hadn't believed that the cottage could be real. Now that they saw it was, they became very excited.

With Vevi and Connie leading the way, they all started to run up the gravel path. Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams were hard pressed to keep up with the girls.

"Now who was right?" Vevi demanded of the crestfallen Jane.

"Oh, I guess the cottage is real enough," Jane admitted grudgingly. "I was only teasing."

"It looks as if it had come from the pages of a picture book!" declared Sunny. "How wonderful if no one owns it! Then we could use the place for our shell exhibitions."

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"And sleep here overnight," Connie added. "It has bunks and everything."

"Wait until you see the inside!" Vevi laughed.

Eager to show the other Brownies, she raced on ahead.

At the entrance, she halted suddenly. The door remained closed as she and Connie had left it the previous afternoon.

But there had been a change.

Across the crack of the door had been placed a metal bar. With a sinking heart, Vevi realized she never would be able to show the Brownies the inside of the cottage. For attached to the metal bar was a huge padlock which had been snapped shut.

CHAPTER 7

THE LOCKED DOOR

"WHY, it's locked!" Vevi exclaimed, rattling the padlock. "We can't get in."

"The owner must have been here since yesterday," agreed Connie. She too was disappointed. "He must have found the door open and locked it."

The Brownies circled the little house several times, peeping through the porthole windows. Plainly, the cottage was deserted.

"This place would be ideal for our shell exhibition," declared Rosemary. "And what grand cook-outs we could have here!"

Miss Gordon reminded the Brownies that the cottage did not belong to them.

"Since we don't even know the owner, we may as well forget it," she advised.

The Brownies did not want to forget the ship cottage. Reluctant to leave, they wandered about the grounds for a while. The back yard sloped down to the cliffs which overlooked the ocean.

"Why, one can see Starfish Cottage from here!" exclaimed Connie.

"The beach too, and the docks," agreed Sunny. "Looking down from here is like being in an airplane."

The little girl never had been in one. She imagined though that scenery would look much the same if one were high in the sky.

After the girls had left the cliff, Vevi pleaded with Miss Gordon to let the Brownies hike on to Cabell's pond.

"Turtles?" asked the teacher, smiling.

"To see the birds," Vevi answered quickly.

Both Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams thought the hike would be worth while. The matter was put to a vote. Everyone was in favor of making the trip on to the pond.

Vevi and Connie knew the way well now that there was no fog to confuse them. Without once hesitating, they led the troop to the tiny body of water off the winding, dirt road.

"Oh, someone's here ahead of us!" exclaimed Vevi.

A boatman was fishing in the center of the pond. Apparently, he was having no luck. At any rate, upon seeing the children, he rowed in.

"Catch anything?" Vevi demanded, running up to peer into the bottom of the boat.

"Nothing except turtles," the fisherman replied in disgust. "They're a nuisance in this pond. Always taking your bait."

"I wish I could catch one," Vevi said quickly. "I'd give anything in the world if I could. You know what I'd do with him? I'd race him at the hotel beach!"

The fisherman smiled. He seemed to like Vevi for after asking her several questions about the race, he said:

"It's easy enough to get a turtle. The trick when you're fishing at this pond, is not to get one. Jump into my boat and we'll have a turtle in nothing flat."

Vevi made a scramble for the boat and so did all the other Brownies. The fisherman had to tell them to get out again.

"I can't take you all," he said. "Only two may go. The little girl who wants the turtle and you." He pointed to Sunny.

Sunny and Vevi jumped into the boat and the fisherman pushed off. He did not row out very far.

"Now you'll have to be quiet, or we'll never get a turtle," he warned the pair.

Hardly moving the oars, the fisherman eased the boat into a little reedy cove. Vevi and Sunny looked sharp, but they could not see a single turtle.

For awhile, the fisherman sat motionless in the boat, just watching the water. Vevi and Sunny began to grow tired. They thought the man was wasting a lot of time.

"There's one!" he whispered suddenly.

"Where?" demanded Vevi.

In her eagerness to see, she turned around fast and struck the oars. They clattered loudly.

"He's gone now," said the fisherman. "You'll have to be quiet if you want to catch one."

Vevi and Sunny kept as still as they could. The sun beat down on them and they were rather uncomfortable. They began to think they never would see another turtle.

Then the fisherman without saying a word, pointed a few yards ahead of them. At first Vevi and Sunny didn't see anything unusual. Then they noticed a black head peeping up amid the lily pads.

The fisherman eased the boat forward. While it drifted, he picked up a net from the bottom of the craft.

So fast that Vevi and Sunny were astonished, he swished the net into the water directly under the turtle.

"Got him," he announced triumphantly.

Wrapped in the folds of the net was a spotted turtle. It clawed at the netting trying to escape.

"He's not too likely a specimen," declared the fisherman. "But at least he's a turtle you can enter in the race. Now we'll get one for the little girl with the big smile."

"Oh, I don't want one, please," said Sunny. She was afraid of turtles. "I'd rather have a water lily."

The fisherman shoved the boat into the water lily pads. Sunny picked her own flower. The stem was tough though and she had to pull very hard.

Vevi was too busy looking after the turtle to think about flowers. The fisherman showed her how to hold it so she would not be bitten.

The turtle though, would not hold still. He kept squirming and squirming. The shell was wet and slippery and Vevi finally dropped him into the bottom of the boat.

"Don't you dare let him get near me!" squealed Sunny, edging away.

The turtle had fallen upon his back. But he used his long neck to lift himself up and flip over on his feet again. Vevi picked him up before he could crawl toward Sunny.

All the Brownies were waiting when the boat reached shore.

"You don't know what you missed!" Jane called out before Vevi could show her turtle.

"We saw a wonderful bird," added Connie, her eyes shining. "It had long legs like a stork."

Vevi thought at first that the girls were only teasing her. Then she realized that they really were excited.

"Who cares about an old bird?" she replied. "I'd rather catch a turtle any day."

Miss Gordon told the girls that the bird the Brownies had seen was a great blue heron, rarely observed in the area.

"It had a neck like a flat 'S' loop," Jane described the bird. "And a funny long tailpiece on its head. When we saw it, it was standing in the edge of the water looking for crayfish."

Miss Gordon told the girls that herons belonged to a group of birds called waders. For that reason, she explained, they had long legs, and long necks and sharp bills with which to search for food.

"Want to see my turtle?" Vevi offered. "I'd rather look for another heron," declared Jane, running off.

The other Brownies followed her.

Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams both admired the spotted turtle. But they warned Vevi it would require a great deal of work to look after it properly.

"I don't mind," replied Vevi. "I'll make a little pen and feed and water my turtle every day. I'm going to name him 'Lightning.' He'll win the race for the Brownies!"

Vevi dropped her turtle lightly on the ground to see how fast he would go. He crawled very slowly, then faster and faster toward the water.

"Oh, no you don't," Vevi laughed, running after him. "You don't get away from me!"

She recaptured the turtle and held him for awhile. By this time the other Brownies were having fun exploring along shore. Vevi would have liked to join them, but was afraid to leave the turtle for fear of losing him.

She decided to put Lightning in the boat for awhile. But the fisherman already had overturned it on shore. As he started to leave the pond, he warned the girls never to use the boat in his absence.

"We won't," Vevi promised. "Brownie Scouts are honor bright. They never take property that doesn't belong to them."

Sunny, who had come up behind Vevi, heard her remark.

"Why, we didn't even try to get into the little ship cottage," she added earnestly. "And we wanted to dreadfully."

The fisherman did not know what the children meant, so they told him about the cottage built to resemble a ship.

"Oh, you mean Captain Tarwell's place!" he exclaimed.

The name took Vevi by surprise. "Is that who owns it?" she asked quickly.

"Yes," replied the fisherman. "He's a retired sea captain. These days he doesn't do much except act as a caretaker and guard at the Yacht Club docks. One occasionally sees him walking along the shore or through the hills—always by himself."

"Connie and I met him in the fog," Vevi said. "He didn't tell us though, that he owned the cute little house."

"Captain Tarwell isn't one to talk about his personal affairs. He's never been quite as cheerful since his son was lost at sea."

The fisherman then went on to explain that since the cottage had been built no one ever had lived there. Captain Tarwell had constructed it with his own hands, intending it as a home for himself and his only son, Jerry. After the boy's drowning, he had locked the doors, refusing even to rent the place.

"Maybe Jerry isn't really dead," said Vevi. "Perhaps someday he'll come back."

The fisherman shook his head as he gathered up his fishing equipment.

"Jerry never will return," he said. "His drowning was well established. Captain Tarwell ought to try to forget the past."

Now Vevi and Sunny felt very sorry for the kindly old sea captain. Nevertheless, they considered it a shame that he would not allow anyone to live in the little cottage.

"Captain Tarwell must have put up the padlock after Connie and I told him about the door being unlocked," Vevi said thoughtfully. "I suppose he doesn't want us going there any more."

Very shortly after the fisherman had left the pond, Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon announced that it was time for the Brownies to leave also.

Vevi was ready to go, because she was having trouble with the turtle. Whenever she would put him down, even for a minute, off he would start for the water.

Lightning would be plenty of work, Vevi realized. Not only would she have to make him a pen, but she would need to feed him each day.

"What do turtles eat?" she asked Connie's mother.

Mrs. Williams told her she could buy turtle food at the store, if she wished. Or she might feed her pet bits of raw meat, fish and lettuce leaves.

A half hour later, back at Starfish Cottage again, Vevi looked around to see what she could use for a turtle pen. Not finding anything that would do, she wandered down to the beach to ask Barney Fulsom if he had any ideas.

The lifeguard was busy giving a swimming lesson and did not have time to help her.

"Ask Jamie Curry," he suggested, pointing to a boy who was digging with a stick in the sand. "He's an expert on turtles."

The name startled Vevi. She knew that Jamie must be the son of Raymond Curry, the hotel lifeguard. But she thought he had run away.

"Jamie's back again," Barney said, as if reading Vevi's mind. "Better not say anything to him about being a runaway because I hear his father gave him a licking. Hey, Jamie!" At the lifeguard's call, the boy came over. He was barely thirteen, but very muscular and strong for his age. His nose was blotched with hundreds of freckles. Vevi liked him because she had lots of freckles too.

Barney introduced the youngsters and then said: "Jamie, Vevi has a turtle and needs help in fixing up a place where she can keep him."

Jamie looked at the turtle. He didn't seem to think very much of it.

"What d'you want a sluggish old turtle like that for?" he asked. "He's no good."

"He is too," Vevi insisted. "I call him Lightning. I'm going to enter him in the race Saturday. Maybe I'll win for the Brownies."

"You won't win with that old slow poke," Jamie scoffed. "I'd toss him in the water."

"No," Vevi answered firmly. She was so hurt and disappointed she felt like crying.

Jamie seemed to be ashamed of himself for making fun of the turtle. At any rate, he said quickly:

"Oh, he's not too bad. And you never can tell about turtles. Sometimes the fast ones won't start up right, or maybe they get scared and stop just before they reach the finish line."

"Then you think he might win?" Vevi demanded eagerly.

"Might," Jamie shrugged.

"You'll help me fix a pen for him?"

Jamie told her that she wouldn't need a pen. "An old dish pan will do," he said. "I can get you one, I guess."

The boy took her across the beach to the big hotel. On the way he pointed out a little beach house where he lived with his father during the summer.

Jamie didn't say much about his father, or explain why he had run away. Vevi wanted to question him, but she was afraid he might be offended if she acted curious.

She couldn't help thinking though, that he was exactly the same size as the boy she and Connie had seen in the fog. Had he hidden in the little ship house? And had she and Connie frightened him away?

Jamie took Vevi around the big summer hotel. In the courtyard, near the trash barrel, they found an old dishpan.

"It's rusty," the boy said, giving it a crack with his stick, "but it will hold water."

They took the pan back to the beach. Jamie found several rocks and built up an island in the center of the pan. Then he poured in a pail of fresh water.

"That will make a first-rate turtle pond," Jamie declared. "Now where's Lightning? Stick him in."

An odd expression came over Vevi's face. She tried to answer and couldn't say a word.

"Don't tell me he got away?" Jamie demanded.

Vevi nodded miserably. She hadn't meant to be careless. But she had been so interested in watching Jamie build the rock island, that she had forgotten all about the turtle. Just for a second she had put him down on the sand. Now he was gone.

"You'll never see that turtle again," said Jamie in disgust. "Oh, well, he never would have made a good racer anyhow."

Two big tears rolled down Vevi's face.

"Don't start bawling," Jamie said quickly. "Turtles are a dime a dozen. There's only one I know of that would be worth keeping."

"What one is that?" Vevi asked him.

"A young snapper that won every race here last summer. His name was Clover and it was painted in yellow on his shell. If you had *him* you might win."

"What became of the turtle, Jamie?"

"He was tossed back into the pond."

"He's still there then?"

"Might be. Turtles live for years and years."

Already Vevi had lost interest in Lightning. Clover, she decided, would be a much better turtle to own.

"Oh, Jamie," she said, catching her breath. "I'd give anything to own Clover. Couldn't you find him for me?"

"I'd like to find him for myself," Jamie admitted with a laugh. "Not much chance though. There are thousands of turtles in Cabell's pond."

"They come out on the logs to sun themselves. If Clover has a name painted on his shell, couldn't one spot him?"

"Maybe, if you were there at just the right time."

"Won't you try to get Clover for me?" Vevi pleaded. "I do so want to win the race for the Brownies."

Jamie seemed to be thinking over the request.

"I don't like to promise," he said after a long silence. "My dad keeps me close to the beach since—well, lately. I might be able to get you a turtle, but not Clover."

"Any will do," Vevi said. "I'd rather have Clover though. Will you please get me a turtle right away?"

"If I get one at all, it will be right away," Jamie answered soberly. He looked out across the waves. "I'm not figuring on being around here much longer."

"You're not going to run away again?" Vevi asked.

Jamie did not appear offended by her question.

"Maybe I will. And next time, I won't come back! I'll go so far my dad never will find me."

Vevi was very troubled by the boy's threat to leave home.

"Oh, Jamie, you mustn't run away," she said quickly. "Silver Beach is wonderful! I shouldn't think you'd want to leave. Don't you like your father?"

Jamie hung his head and didn't answer the question. He dug the sand with the toe of his beach sandal.

"You wouldn't like it here either, if you knew what I do," he said finally.

Having spoken, he turned and ran off down the beach.

CHAPTER 8

HIGH TIDE

VEVI had hoped to return soon to Cabell's pond to search for Clover.

However, she had no chance to do so the next day, for Miss Gordon told the Brownie Scouts they were to have an outing at Brant's Point.

"We'll picnic there and gather shells for our collection," she outlined plans. "Vevi will have a chance too to give her bird report."

Vevi said nothing, but she felt rather queer inside. She had been too busy to give the required report a single thought.

"I'll bet Vevi won't have one ready!" teased Jane.

"Oh, yes, I will," Vevi insisted. "Just you wait and see."

After the breakfast dishes had been washed and the beds made, the girls all piled into Mrs. William's big sedan. The tide was low, so it was possible to drive along the beach without the tires sinking in.

Before long, the Brownies sighted the tall lighthouse directly ahead. Often at night the girls had observed its revolving ray blink on and off.

"Brant's Point light has saved many a ship at sea," Miss Gordon told the troop. "And the lives of countless birds."

Rosemary asked her how a lighthouse could save birds.

"Some of the older lighthouses have beacons that burn steadily," Miss Gordon explained. "Such a light always seems to attract birds. Some circle the light towers until from sheer exhaustion they drop into the sea. Others fly against the windows and batter their wings."

The teacher went on to say that birds were much less likely to be attracted by Brant Light, which blinked off at intervals. Also, the tower had projections or shelves where a tired bird might rest in its long flight southward.

"May we visit the lighthouse?" Connie asked as the girls unloaded the lunch hampers at the point.

"Federal regulations prohibit visitors," the teacher replied regretfully. "Anyhow, we'll not have too much time here. After we've had our lunch and gathered a few shells, it will be time to leave."

Mrs. Williams remarked that they must under no circumstance over-stay their time. "I've been told that the tide comes in very strong and fast here by the lighthouse," she said. "By late afternoon, this beach will be almost entirely covered with water."

"Is it safe to be here?" asked Sunny anxiously.

Mrs. Williams assured her that it always would be possible to scamper to higher ground.

"But if we should stay too long, my car might be trapped," she explained, "for there is no roadway out. We'll leave very soon. Then there will be no danger."

The Brownies helped unload the lunch baskets and set the table with paper plates. Then, with Miss Gordon's permission, they peeled off shoes and stockings and started to look for shells.

"Don't wade far out into the water," the teacher warned. "The surf is strong here now that the tide has turned. There's a tricky undertow."

Waves came in with a great roar, nibbling greedily at the sand. The Brownies had no desire to wade out more than a few feet.

"See what I've found!" cried Connie. She held up a very attractive shell with a half-moon opening. "It's not like the others we have."

When she showed it to Miss Gordon, the teacher told her that it was a moon snail shell.

The Brownies never had seen the waves bring up so many nice shells. Soon Jane dug up a yellowish-white whelk marked by spiral ribs. The other girls found unbroken clam shells and a brown one which not even Miss Gordon could identify.

After the Brownies had wearied of searching, Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams set out the food.

"It will soon be time for Vevi's bird report," Jane reminded the group. "I'll bet she doesn't have it ready."

Vevi pretended not to hear. She had boasted that she would be able to tell about a special bird. Actually, the only ones she had seen were those on which the other girls already had reported.

She ate her sandwich very fast. While the others were finishing their cake, she slipped off behind one of the sand dunes. Vevi thought she would walk toward the lighthouse. Perhaps she would see a special sea bird on which she could report. But if not, she would be so late in getting back that Miss Gordon and the Brownies might decide to postpone asking for her talk. Meanwhile, Miss Gordon began to tell the Brownies about some of the strange habits of birds. She said no one knew why they migrated from one part of the country to another, or how they found their way.

"Year after year they'll return to the same place, often the same nest," she declared. "A bird is guided by keen eyesight, but also apparently by instinct."

Miss Gordon advised the girls to observe birds carefully, taking note of points that would help in making an identification.

"Always notice a bird's size," she instructed. "Remember that male and female birds vary in color and marking. Notice wing motion too and whether the bird walks, runs or hops on the ground."

By this time waves were breaking higher and higher on the beach. Mrs. Williams remarked uneasily that the tide seemed to be coming in faster than she had expected.

"Perhaps we should start back to the cottages," she suggested.

As the girls began to gather up their belongings, Miss Gordon noticed Vevi's absence.

"Now where has she gone?" she inquired. "She was here only a moment ago."

"She went off so she wouldn't have to give her bird report," Jane declared. "I see her wandering around over there behind the lighthouse."

"I'll go after her," offered Connie.

"Call to her instead," advised Mrs. Williams. "We really have no time to waste."

Connie shouted Vevi's name several times. "Hurry up!" she yelled. "The tide is rolling in, and we want to start home."

"Coming," Vevi answered.

Despite the urging to hurry however, she kept loitering by a large sand dune. She seemed to be examining something she had found there.

"That old slow poke!" Jane exclaimed. "I'll get her!"

"No, she's coming now," Mrs. Williams said. "I want everyone to stay here. Gather up everything and bring it to the car."

Connie's mother regretted now that she had not turned her car around before parking it on the sand.

She had not realized that the hard, firm beach which had provided her with a safe roadway could disappear so fast.

Although ample space remained along shore for the return drive, not much area was left in which to turn the car around.

"I'm going ahead to move the car," Mrs. Williams said.

Connie and Sunny went along with her. When they reached the car they noticed that the larger waves were breaking only a short distance from the rear car wheels.

"Oh, the tide is coming in so fast!" Connie exclaimed. "Will we make it, Mother?"

"We'll be all right once we turn around," Mrs. Williams replied. She was more worried though, than she cared to have the children know.

Quickly she started the car and swung the steering wheel. The automobile moved slightly uphill into loose sand.

Now Mrs. Williams had not intended to swing in such a wide arc. Nor had she realized that the sand was quite so soft.

Slower and slower crept the car, its engine laboring.

“Keep going, Mother!” shouted Connie. She could see that the auto was about ready to stop in the deep sand.

Mrs. Williams shifted into another gear, but the car would not pull. With a gasping chug, it came to a standstill. The rear wheels kept spinning, but there was no traction.

The car would not budge. They were stuck fast in the sand with the tide rolling in!

CHAPTER 9

STUCK IN THE SAND

THE tires of Mrs. Williams' car kept spinning faster and faster in the loose sand. They dug in deeply until the wheel was mired to its hub cap.

"Oh, dear, by trying to get out, I'm only making it worse." Mrs. Williams gasped. "What shall we do?"

Switching off the engine, she sprang out of the car to look at the rear wheels.

By this time, Miss Gordon and all the Brownies except Vevi had come running across the beach with the lunch hampers. They were very worried.

"Are we really stuck?" demanded Jane breathlessly.

"Will the tide wash the car away?" questioned Sunny.

"Let's all push," suggested Connie.

"We'll have to if we are to get out," Mrs. Williams said. She gazed nervously at the waves. Each one was chewing away a larger and larger bite of sand.

By noticing the rim of dried seaweed along shore, the Brownies could tell that the ocean came exactly that far at high tide. The waves would be certain to sweep over the floor boards of the car.

"Salt water ruins a car very easily," declared Miss Gordon. "We must get out somehow."

She glanced hopefully toward the lighthouse. Connie offered to run there and ask for help. But Miss Gordon told her it would be useless as the lone attendant never was allowed to leave his post.

Jane found several large blocks of wood which she placed under the rear tires. It did no good. When Mrs. Williams tried to pull forward again, the pieces of wood were thrown aside.

"Let's all push," urged Rosemary. "I'm real strong."

Miss Gordon agreed that the girls might try to shove the car out. She warned them however, not to strain hard.

At a given signal, everyone stood ready. All the Brownies, that is except Vevi. She was walking slowly from the lighthouse, not even aware that anything was wrong.

"Now girls, together!"

As Miss Gordon spoke, Mrs. Williams let out the clutch of the car. Again the rear wheels began to spin, slowly at first, then faster and faster.

Miss Gordon applied all her strength. The Brownies pushed too, but they were not very strong. Their feet kept slipping in the sand.

"It's no use, no use at all," the teacher finally gasped.

She signaled for Mrs. Williams to turn off the motor again. The Brownies could smell rubber. By turning so rapidly in the sand, the rear wheels had generated a great deal of heat.

"Can't we send for a garageman to tow us out?" suggested Rosemary. "That's what my mother always does when our car won't run."

"Dear, there isn't time," Mrs. Williams replied. "The tide will be washing against the car in another ten or fifteen minutes."

Miss Gordon and Connie's mother looked up and down the beach. Usually any number of cars were in view. Not one was in sight when help was so badly needed.

Connie glanced out across the tumbling water. Not far from shore she saw a small motor boat chugging along. The operator was Raymond Curry, the hotel lifeguard.

"Maybe he'll help us!" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon had noticed the boat at the same moment.

"If we had a strong man to push, I think we might get out!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams. "Let's call to him."

"He's a lifeguard," laughed Sunny. "He ought to help us rescue a car!"

The Brownies shouted as loudly as they could and waved. Mr. Curry heard them, for he throttled down the engine and turned to gaze toward shore.

"Help us!" yelled Connie. "Our car's stuck in the sand."

"And the tide's coming in fast!" screamed Jane. She cupped her hands to her mouth to make the words carry.

Now the Brownies were certain that the lifeguard understood their request. Even if he couldn't hear, how could he fail to see that they were in trouble?

The lifeguard didn't even wave his hand in friendly greeting. He stared toward shore for a minute, and then turned his head away. Speeding up the motor again, he cruised on past.

Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams made no comment. But they looked at each other in a most peculiar way.

"He saw us!" Jane declared in a shrill voice. "How mean of him not to help!"

"We'll never get out now," Mrs. Williams said. She was deeply discouraged.

Each huge wave that swept in came a little closer to the car. Finally a big one actually lapped at one of the rear tires.

"We may as well take our belongings and climb back on one of the dunes," Miss Gordon said. "The sea will not rise higher than the rim of seaweed."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Connie. "I see someone coming down the beach!"

She had noticed a man with a cane, strolling along the sand toward the lighthouse.

"Why, it's Captain Tarwell," she recognized him.

The old seaman came closer, gazing toward the group of Brownies. Observing how near their car was to the foaming sea, he began to walk faster.

"Ahoy," he greeted the girls. "What's wrong here? Aground, eh, and with a strong tide running."

The Brownies, all talking at once, tried to explain what had happened.

Captain Tarwell didn't bother to listen for he could see for himself what was wrong. He knew too, that he would have to work fast to beat the tide.

"I'm not as strong as I was in the old days when I was master of the *Gorchester*," he remarked after inspecting the mired wheels. "But with all hands to help, I think we can heave 'er free. Lay to!"

Rosemary, Jane and Miss Gordon got on one side of the car. Connie and Sunny stood by the other, to help the captain. Mrs. Williams started the engine again.

"Heave-ho!" shouted the captain. "All together now! Push, maties, push!"

The Brownies exerted all their strength. Slowly the car began to move. One tire caught firmly in the sand and then the other.

Suddenly the car spurted forward so fast that Connie and Jane went sprawling in the sand. It did not hurt them. They were laughing as they scrambled to their feet.

"We're out!" cried Connie. "Just in time too!"

Mrs. Williams swung the car in as narrow an arc as possible. Another moment and all four wheels were on firm sand again. Best of all, the car now was headed toward the cottage beach.

"Oh, Captain, we're so grateful!" Miss Gordon thanked him. "I hope you didn't strain yourself pushing so hard."

"Not a bit," he chuckled, picking up his cane. "Always glad to answer an SOS distress call."

"Can't we give you ride to town?" Mrs. Williams offered.

"I am a mite tuckered from my walk," the captain admitted. "Aye, if you have room, I'll ride along."

By this time the Brownies had piled into the back seat, leaving the front for Mrs. Williams, Miss Gordon and the captain.

"Where's Vevi?" demanded Mrs. Williams.

Everyone looked toward the lighthouse. Vevi was coming, but very slowly. She seemed to be holding something in her arms, beneath her brown sweater.

"Vevi!" shouted Jane. "You hurry up!"

Mrs. Williams tooted the car horn sharply three times.

Vevi began to walk faster. But despite urging by the Brownies, she would not hurry.

"What's she got?" Jane demanded suspiciously. "She doesn't want us to see it."

Vevi, unaware of the danger the Brownies had been in, grinned from ear to ear as she sauntered up.

"Where've you been so long?" Jane demanded. "And what are you hiding under that sweater?"

Vevi answered not a word. She kept grinning and looking very wise. Whatever she held beneath the sweater was alive, for the girls could see the woolen cloth twitch.

"Jump into the car, Vevi!" Mrs. Williams ordered impatiently. "We've lost too much time now."

Thus urged, Vevi leaped into the back seat. But she kept tight hold of the sweater.

"You went off because you didn't want to give the bird report," Jane accused her.

"Maybe I did," Vevi admitted. "But let me tell you a thing or two. I've got something better than an old stupid report. I've got a real live bird!"

CHAPTER 10

A BIRD REPORT

"I'VE got a beautiful gull," Vevi announced proudly. "See!"

Pulling aside the sweater, she showed the Brownies a white pigeon with arched wings and well-formed tail.

One of the wings though, appeared to have been injured, for it hung limp.

"Vevi calls that a gull!" scoffed Jane.

"It's a carrier pigeon and it's been hurt!" exclaimed Sunny.

By this time the car was moving swiftly along the narrow stretch of beach. Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon no longer were worried for the sand was hard and firm. As they neared the cottages at Silver Beach, the roadway also became much wider.

Captain Tarwell was very much interested in Vevi's bird. He examined the wing, which he said was only bruised, not broken. Then he looked at a metal band fastened to the pigeon's leg.

The band bore the number 68971.

"Is the bird carrying a message?" Connie asked eagerly.

"No, only this identification number," Captain Tarwell replied. "With kind treatment, the pigeon should fly again soon."

"Where did you find him, Vevi?" Rosemary questioned, eager for all the details.

"In the dunes near the lighthouse. I think I'll call my bird Snow White. Snow White tried to get away, but he couldn't fly because of his wing. Is he really a messenger pigeon?"

"Aye," the seaman assured her. "A young one though. It may have run into trouble on its first flight."

"Maybe it came from across the ocean," Vevi speculated.

"Hardly that far," answered the captain. "From the number, I'd judge this pigeon may belong to Harmon Green's loft."

Vevi had never heard of Harmon Green. She asked where his place was situated.

"About a quarter of a mile from Silver Beach," Captain Tarwell replied. "Mr. Green breeds and races pigeons. If this isn't his pigeon, at least he'll know how to find and notify the owner."

Vevi stroked the pigeon's plumage, not saying anything. She had hoped that the bird could belong to her. But she knew now that she must try to find its owner.

"Snow White is a stupid name for a racing pigeon," spoke up Jane. "Especially for one that isn't a girl."

"I like it," Vevi said. "Captain Tarwell, how far can a pigeon fly?"

"Oh, that depends on the bird," he returned. "The best racing homers have been known to wing home a thousand miles. But not young, untrained birds."

"I'll bet Snow White could fly a long way if he hadn't hurt his wing," Vevi declared proudly.

Soon the car approached Starfish and Oriole Cottages. As everyone alighted at the bathhouse, Mrs. Williams remarked that she didn't know what to do about Vevi's pigeon.

"Tell you what," offered the captain. "If you like, I'll take the pigeon to Harmon Green."

Vevi spoke up quickly. "I want to go along," she insisted. "So do I," Connie added.

All the other Brownies then wanted to go. However, Miss Gordon thought it would be unfair for Captain Tarwell to look after so many children. So it was decided that Vevi and Connie, having spoken first, should make the trip.

Taking Snow White with them, the two girls walked with Captain Tarwell into the hills. A shady, winding street finally brought them to a gray shingle house. Off to one side was a small building which looked like a garage with a flat roof.

"That's the pigeon cote," Captain Tarwell told the girls. "Hey, what's coming off here?"

From the direction of the flat-roofed building the girls heard a strange commotion. Birds were making a fearful clatter. They could hear a man talking very angrily.

As Captain Tarwell and the children walked toward the pigeon cote, the door swung suddenly open.

Out came a young man in dirty overalls and grimy white cap. His face was very grim.

"Don't ever come back here looking for a job," another man in the doorway called after him. "You don't know how to handle birds."

The man in the doorway, who was Mr. Green, saw Captain Tarwell and the two girls. He knew the seaman well, calling him by name.

"Having your troubles, I see," observed Captain Tarwell.

"Operating a pigeon loft with hired help is no fun," Mr. Green replied. "I had to fire young Gradbrough just now. He excites the birds and doesn't handle them skillfully. He neglects to clean the cages too."

"Lose any birds?" Captain Tarwell questioned him.

"I lost three in the last flight test. That looks like one of my birds."

Mr. Green's gaze had fastened upon Snow White, snuggled in Vevi's arms.

Vevi told him where she had found the pigeon. Mr. Green briefly examined the leg band and confirmed that the bird belonged to him.

"Frankly, I don't think the pigeon is worth its feed," he added. "In two different tests it failed miserably."

"But Snow White's wing was hurt," Vevi said, coming quickly to the bird's defense. "How could he fly back home?"

"The pigeon isn't as strong as it should be," Mr. Green explained. "I breed for profit. If a bird fails repeatedly in tests, it must be culled out."

The cote owner examined the pigeon very carefully and put it into one of the wire cages.

"It will be all right in a few days," he said. "Then I'll make one more test. If the bird fails another time, out it goes."

The pigeon cote had been divided into sections set apart by mesh wire fence. Old birds were separated from young ones. Those that were sick were housed in a special pen.

Mr. Green filled the water pans and placed grain in long feeding troughs. The birds could not crowd each other because a six-inch space was provided for each one.

Adjoining the cote was an exercise cage. The building itself was set in an open place, facing south so that more sunshine would filter in.

Mr. Green told the Brownies that in training pigeons one had to be very patient.

"Food is the key to success," he declared. "A pigeon always will return to the place where it has been fed."

The cote owner explained that in training racers he began by whistling for the birds just before he fed them.

After a week, he would place the pigeon on a landing platform outside the loft. When another training period had elapsed, he would start leaving the birds a short distance away but in view of the loft.

"They'll always return to the landing platform in search of food," Mr. Green said. "The first real test comes when I take the pigeons in a basket some distance away and release them in a group. After that test, I try them singly at one mile, then five and perhaps ten miles. The pigeon you girls returned failed both the five and the ten-mile test."

"I hope you give Snow White another chance," Vevi said.

"In the first test I thought the pigeon might have been confused by the fog," Mr. Green said. "This last time, the bird may have run into other trouble. The others came back though. So I'm about through bothering with it."

As Captain Tarwell and the Brownies were ready to leave, Mr. Green asked the seaman if he knew of any young man who would like a job at the pigeon cote.

"Not off hand, I don't," Captain Tarwell answered. "I'll keep it in mind though."

"I pay good wages," Mr. Green said. "The work is exacting though. I need a dependable person, one who can be trusted to handle the birds when my back is turned."

Vevi was a little worried about what would be done with Snow White.

"You really think he'll get well?" she asked the cote owner anxiously.

"Oh, he'll be all right in a day or two," Mr. Green replied. "The wing isn't broken. But as I said, I doubt the pigeon ever will be any good for racing."

"You will give him one more chance?" Vevi pleaded again.

"I promised, didn't I?" Mr. Green asked a trifle impatiently. "I'm testing a basketful of birds Wednesday. If your pigeon is well enough, I'll include him in the lot."

"May all the Brownies watch the test?" Connie asked. "I'm sure they'd like to see the birds fly home."

Mr. Green said he had no objection.

"We'll be here!" Vevi declared, her eyes bright. "And I know Snow White will do splendidly next time. He'll make all the Brownies very proud."

CHAPTER 11

A TEST FOR SNOW WHITE

THE hours at Silver Beach were all too short for the Brownie Scouts. It seemed to them that they never had time to accomplish half the things they wanted to do.

Most intriguing of all was the sea itself. Each morning it coaxed them in for a swim. By the time the girls had taken their sun baths and searched for shells it was nearly lunch time.

"The days are just flying," Connie sighed. "Before we know it, we'll be returning to Rosedale."

"We haven't learned anything more about that little ship house either," Vevi replied soberly. "So many things are undone. We haven't even found Miss Gordon's wrist watch."

Now the teacher long ago had given up all thought of recovering the missing timepiece. The Brownies, however, kept hoping that the watch would be found in the sand. Nearly every day when they were on the beach, they would dig around, hoping to find it.

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Since Vevi and Connie had visited the pigeon cote, all of the Brownies wanted to go there. Whenever the troop went on a hike, the girls usually walked in the direction of Mr. Green's loft.

The pigeon breeder would not allow the Brownies inside the building lest they disturb the birds. It was fun though, to stand outside, watching the pigeons drop into the roof traps after long flights.

The racers would alight on the building and walk along the eaves. When they stepped into one of the traps, Mr. Green could reach up and grab them by the legs. Then he would feed them and put them in their cages.

Some of the pigeons had gray and blue plumage with black bars on each wing. Others had feathers in a salt and pepper effect. The less common birds were black, red, yellow and silver. Vevi did not see a single one that appeared as white as the pigeon she had found near the lighthouse.

She asked Mr. Green why he did not have more white racers.

"White birds are more prone to attack by hawks," he explained. "By the way, your bird has recovered its strength again."

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"Then it's ready to race?" the little girl asked eagerly.

"It's as ready as it will ever be. As I said, I doubt the bird ever will be much good."

"But you promised to give it one more chance."

"So I did," Mr. Green agreed. "I'm testing out a dozen birds today. I'll include your pigeon in the lot."

All the Brownies wanted to watch the test and Mr. Green agreed that they might. He told Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon that he would release the birds at a point five miles away from the pigeon cote.

Everyone drove there in Mrs. William's car. By the time they arrived, Mr. Green already had unloaded several wicker baskets of pigeons which he planned to release.

Vevi went over to talk to Snow White. The pigeon was in a basket by himself. His feathers were smooth and glossy and he looked as if he were in good condition for racing. At least Vevi thought so.

"Now you must do your very best today," she said to the pigeon. "When Mr. Green tosses you into the air, fly straight home! Fly faster than any of the other birds!"

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"You're goofy, talking to a pigeon!" Jane teased, coming up behind her. "He can't understand you."

"Maybe he can," Vevi insisted. "Anyway, you just wait! Snow White will do fine this time."

The Brownies gathered around as Mr. Green prepared to release the pigeons.

"The birds are hungry, so they should fly directly to the loft," he declared. "As soon as I've set them free, I'll drive back. I want to be on hand to check their time as they arrive at the cote."

Mr. Green tossed all of the birds into the air. They rose and circled once or twice. Then one by one they flew off in the direction of the pigeon loft.

"Snow White went with the others!" Vevi cried in delight. "I'll bet he's the first to reach the roost!"

Having released the birds, Mr. Green did not waste any time. He drove off home immediately. Mrs. Williams, Miss Gordon and the Brownies followed, but at a more leisurely rate.

"Can't we drive faster?" Vevi urged impatiently.

"Not on this curving road," Mrs. Williams replied. "We'll be there soon enough."

The pigeons had started to arrive by the time the Brownies finally reached Mr. Green's place.

As the girls alighted from the car, they saw a gray-blue bird winging in to alight on the rooftop.

Vevi watched it fall into the trap and disappear. Then she ran to the door of the dove cote.

"Has Snow White come yet?" she shouted to the loft owner.

"Not yet," Mr. Green replied. "Only three of the birds have come so far. I'm very busy now. Don't bother me."

Through the windows, the Brownies could see the loft owner seizing each bird as it arrived. He would record its number and exact time in a little book.

"Where is Snow White?" Vevi fretted as one after another of the pigeons arrived.

"Your old bird isn't any good," teased Jane.

"Wait and see," Vevi retorted. "I think he's coming now!"

She was wrong though. The bird which had settled on the roof was a light colored pigeon which from a distance had appeared almost white.

Mr. Green fed the bird and put it back in its cage. Then he appeared in the doorway of the pigeon cote.

"Well, they're all in now except one," he told the Brownies. "No use waiting for it, because it won't show up."

Vevi knew he meant Snow White. She was so disappointed she felt like crying.

"I'm sure it wasn't Snow White's fault," she told Mr. Green. "Maybe his wing wasn't entirely healed."

"That could be," agreed the pigeon breeder. "But I only tested the bird to please you. I'm through bothering with him even if he does show up later."

All the Brownies, even Jane, had wanted the bird to make a satisfactory test. They were sorry that Snow White would never be given another chance.

So that the Brownies would not think too much about the lost bird, Miss Gordon proposed that everyone return to the beach for a swim.

Vevi only waded through the sand while the others took their lesson from Barney Fulsom. Spying Jamie Curry walking along in a maroon sweat shirt and brown shorts, she went over to tell him about Snow White's misfortune.

"Say, I'd like to work for Mr. Green!" Jamie exclaimed. "I wonder how much he would pay?"

Without waiting for Vevi to answer, he went on quickly: "My father wouldn't let me work there though. He doesn't let me do anything I like. One of these days—soon too—I'll run away again. Next time he won't find me."

Jamie had made the same remark before. So Vevi did not think he really meant it.

"Oh, Jamie," she protested, "why would you want to do such a foolish thing?"

"You'd want to run away too if you knew what I do," the boy hinted again.

Then he quickly changed the subject by asking Vevi if she had found a turtle for the Saturday race.

"Not yet," she admitted. "I don't know how to get one either."

"It's easy as falling off a log," Jamie said. "Why don't you try the pond again? Maybe you'll catch that snapper I told you about."

The boy added that if Vevi hoped to win a prize for the Brownies, she would have to enter the Saturday race.

"That will be the last one this season," he told her. "My father said yesterday he's going to give up his job and go west."

"You'll leave with him, Jamie?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

Vevi could not understand the boy's strange attitude toward his father. Because he didn't seem to care to talk about it, she spoke again of the turtle pond.

"Want me to take you there?" the boy offered. "I'll catch you a dandy turtle."

Vevi knew that Miss Gordon would not want her to go to the pond without an older person along. She realized too, that the other Brownies would not favor an outing there, for they were enjoying their swimming lesson.

"I guess I can't go," she said, her face downcast.

Just then, old Captain Tarwell strolled up to talk to the children. Hearing mention of the pond, he offered to take Jamie and Vevi.

"I want to stop at the cottage on the way," he remarked. "I'll be glad to have company. That is, if you'll promise not to walk too fast."

Miss Gordon said that Vevi might go. So off the three went, idling along so that the old seaman would not tire himself.

On their way to the pond, Captain Tarwell stopped briefly at the little ship cottage. He went inside for a moment to make certain no one had broken in since his last visit.

After snapping shut the padlock again, Captain Tarwell slipped the key under a loose shingle on the side of the house.

"Now you know my secret," he said, "but I'll trust you both not to tell where I keep the key."

Vevi remarked wistfully that she wished the Brownie Scouts might hold their shell exhibition at the cottage.

"We wouldn't damage anything," she promised.

Captain Tarwell acted as if he had not heard the request. Telling the youngsters to come along, he started on down the road toward the pond.

The captain could not walk fast on his lame leg. Out of politeness, Vevi and Jamie kept exact pace.

"Hunting pond turtles puts me in mind of the days when I'd see giant tortoises roaming island beaches in the Pacific," he remarked. "It's fun to watch the big leatherbacks come out of the sea on moonlight nights to lay their eggs."

"I'd like to run off to sea," Jamie said.

Captain Tarwell gave the boy a quick, sidelong glance. "Better forget that idea, lad," he said.

Then he went on to tell how the giant turtles would come out of the ocean on moonlight nights to dig holes for their eggs. He explained that the reptiles would cover the eggs with sand and return to the sea. Vevi hadn't known that turtles laid eggs. Or that they left them for the sun to hatch. She asked what became of the turtle babies.

"As soon as they hatch, they creep down to the water," Captain Tarwell explained. "There they feed on tadpoles, snails and insects."

He told the children that one could guess a turtle's age by the rims on its shell. "If a shell has six rims, then the turtle is six years old," he said. "But after many years, the rims wear away, so then one can only estimate the age."

By this time, the three had reached Cabell's pond. Captain Tarwell sat down on the beach to smoke his pipe and rest. He said he would wait there and watch while the children caught turtles.

Stripping off shoes and stockings, Jamie boldly waded in.

Moving quietly into a patch of rushes, he soon caught a pancake turtle in his bare hands. But after he had examined it, he threw it back into the water.

"You don't want this old fellow," he called to Vevi. "He's sickly. You'd never win a race with him."

Jamie kept looking for other turtles. Soon he had caught three. But he let each one go. One had a broken shell and the other two were not active.

"I'd like ANY turtle," Vevi declared.

Jamie paid no attention to her. He kept diving into the water with his hands. Now that he had stirred up the pond, the turtles were harder to catch. He waded farther and farther out into the pond trying to find them.

"Be careful," warned Vevi.

"Oh, I can swim," Jamie replied carelessly. "My father taught me how."

Just as he spoke, he stepped into a deep hole. Falling forward, the boy made a terrific splash. As he scrambled to his feet his clothes were all wet.

Captain Tarwell walked down to the edge of the water.

"Avast, there!" he called to Jamie. "Time we start for home, son. You need some dry clothes."

Jamie reluctantly waded back toward shore.

"Oh, dear," murmured Vevi. "We have to leave, and after all our work, we have no turtle."

"After all my work, you mean," corrected Jamie. He grinned though, as he said it. Turtle hunting had been fun.

The boy suddenly stopped short, gazing toward a rotted log which stuck up out of the water.

He did not say a word for a moment. Then he whispered excitedly:

"Look over there!"

Vevi gazed at the log. At first she didn't notice anything unusual. But as she kept looking, something moved. She caught a little flash of yellow.

Sunning itself on the log was a big snapping turtle. On its shell had been printed a name in yellow paint.

"That's HIM!" whispered Jamie, moving stealthily through the water. "That's Clover! Hold your breath, Vevi. I'm going to nail that old boy!"

CHAPTER 12

FOUND IN THE REEDS

WHILE Vevi stood perfectly still, Jamie sneaked up on the turtle. Clover was sunning himself on the log, barely moving his claws.

Closer and closer Jamie crept, taking care not to splash in the water. He was almost on the turtle when it stretched its neck sideways. Apparently it saw the boy, for quick as a flash it flopped into the water.

"Oh, dear, there goes my chance of winning the race Saturday," sighed Vevi. "We'll never get him now."

Jamie watched but the turtle did not reappear on the surface of the pond.

"Time to go," shouted Captain Tarwell. "Shake a leg, you kids."

Vevi and Jamie teased to stay a few minutes longer, but the seaman had grown tired of waiting. Besides, he had promised he would have them back at the beach by an early hour.

Jamie started to wade in. He was nearly ashore when he halted again. An object in the reeds had drawn his attention.

"Avast, there!" called the captain. "None o' that restin' on the oars! Come along with you!"

"But I see something fluttering in the reeds!" Jamie exclaimed. "It's not a turtle either! It's something alive and it's white!"

"I see it too!" cried Vevi. "It looks like a duck!"

Jamie started to wade over toward the reeds. Captain Tarwell let him go, because he wondered too what it was the boy had seen.

By this time Jamie had reached the reed patch. He scooped in his hand and pulled a white bird from the water.

"It's a pigeon! A carrier pigeon!" he called to those on shore.

Vevi became very excited.

"Maybe it's Snow White!" she exclaimed. "Is there a leg band with a number, Jamie?"

Carrying the pigeon, the boy waded ashore. "It has a number, but it's smeared with oil and I can't read the figures," he announced. "The bird's feathers are soaked with oil. I'm getting it all over me."

Vevi was certain the moment she saw the bird that it was the missing Snow White. Captain Tarwell wiped oil from the pigeon's wings and the leg band. With the metal plate clean again, he could read the numerals. They were 68971.

"It's the same pigeon all right," the captain confirmed. "Dash my binnacles, if it isn't!"

"The bird's been in a fight, maybe with a hawk," guessed Jamie. "See, there's a bloody mark on his head. He doesn't seem much hurt though."

Captain Tarwell examined the pigeon carefully. Except for a slight head wound, he could find no injury.

"It was the oil on his feathers that kept him from rising into the air again," he told the children. "When he fell or lighted on the pond, he must have settled into a patch of oil. He'd have starved to death if we hadn't come along."

Vevi was very pleased to have found Snow White again. She wanted to take the pigeon to Starfish Cottage.

Captain Tarwell said they would carry the bird instead to Mr. Green's loft. "It won't be much out of our way," he declared.

When the children and Captain Tarwell arrived at the pigeon loft twenty minutes later, Mr. Green was very busy. He was working on his records which he said were not being kept up properly.

"I need a likely boy to help me," he told Captain Tarwell. "Know of anyone who would like a job?"

"How about Jamie here?" asked the captain, half seriously and half in jest.

"I'd like to work with pigeons!" exclaimed Jamie. "How much will you pay, Mr. Green?"

The pigeon cote owner did not answer the question. He looked Jamie over carefully.

"You're too young," he said finally. Then, seeing how disappointed Jamie looked, he added: "But I'll think it over. Come around in a day or two."

Mr. Green had not seemed very pleased to have the lost carrier pigeon returned to the loft.

"That bird is worthless," he declared impatiently. "I'm through bothering with it. Or feeding it either!"

"Won't you give Snow White another chance?" Vevi pleaded. "He couldn't rise from the water no matter how hard he tried. His wings were all coated with oil when Jamie rescued him."

"I know," agreed Mr. Green. "But if it isn't one thing, its another. White birds are more subject to attack than pigeons of another color. This bird isn't strong enough to be a valuable racer. So I'll cull it out."

"Don't do that," pleaded Vevi quickly. "Give the bird to me."

"You're welcome to it. But where will you keep the pigeon?"

Vevi knew that Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon would not want her to have it at the cottage.

"I can give you a cage for it," Mr. Green offered. "And enough feed to last a week. I'm warning you though, a bird is a lot of work."

Captain Tarwell told Vevi that she might keep the cage in the yard of the ship cottage.

"For a few days, that is," he added. "By that time you'll tire of looking after the pigeon and be willing to let it fly away."

"Oh, no!" protested Vevi. "I'll never want to give up Snow White."

"If you decide to let the bird go, I hope it doesn't fly back here," spoke up Mr. Green.

After watching the pigeon cote owner feed some of his birds, Captain Tarwell and the children walked back to the ship cottage.

They found a sheltered place for the cage, and after feeding and watering the bird, left it there.

"I'm afraid Snow White will be lonesome," Vevi said anxiously.

"I come here often," the captain reassured her. "I'll look in now and then to see how he's doing. I'm not worried about the bird being lonesome. I'm more afraid he'll be chilled. Pigeons need a warm, snug nest."

The trio walked on down the road toward the beach. A breeze was blowing off the sea, sending in long, rolling waves.

"Lots of white horses today," remarked the captain.

Vevi didn't know what he meant until he told her that whitecaps on the waves were called white horses in seamen's slang.

"A large wave is a smokehouse," he explained. "The long rolling ones are beachcombers. That little wave over by the pier is a white nose."

Vevi turned her head to see the wave the captain had pointed out. The little "white nose" snubbed itself against the post of the pier and vanished even as she watched.

At the shore end of the pier where a long line of cars had been parked, a crowd had gathered. Amid the throng, Vevi saw Miss Gordon and several of the Brownies.

"Why, what is everyone doing there?" she asked quickly. "Maybe there's been an accident!"

"Something does seem to be wrong," agreed the captain.

Vevi and Jamie raced on ahead of him to learn why such a large crowd had gathered.

Nearing the pier, they met Jane and Connie coming along the beach.

"Has there been an accident?" Vevi asked the two Brownies.

"That's what we want to find out," Connie answered.

The four children hastened on, reaching the end of the pier where so many grownups had gathered. In the center of the crowd they saw a middle-aged woman in a white suit talking excitedly to the lifeguard, Barney Fulsom.

"It happened while I was in the little curio shop," she told the guard. "Why, I wasn't gone ten minutes. When I came out, I saw a man walking away from the car. I thought nothing of it until I discovered that the glove compartment had been opened."

"What was taken, Mrs. Allison?" the guard asked her.

"My coin purse. I shouldn't have left it there with the car unlocked—that I realize. But I barely turned my back."

"How much did you lose, Mrs. Allison?"

"A ten dollar bill and odd change. The little purse was brown leather set off with gold initials A.W.A."

By this time Vevi, Connie, Jane and Jamie had drawn in close to hear what was being said. Also in the crowd were Mrs. Williams, Miss Gordon, Sunny and Rosemary.

"I'm certain it was a man in black bathing trunks and light brown sweat shirt who took the purse," Mrs. Allison continued. "At least I saw him walking away from the car. He mingled with the other bathers and I lost sight of him."

The life guard was quite disturbed about the theft. Even though Mrs. Allison had left her car unlocked, he felt partly responsible.

"I watch as carefully as I can," he said. "Lately several persons have reported losses. We can't seem to snare the thief."

"After this, I'll park my car elsewhere," Mrs. Allison declared. "I'll swim at the hotel beach too. I've heard others say that one can't sea bathe here without running the risk of losing anything left loose on the beach. It's true, apparently."

Very annoyed by the loss of her purse, the woman climbed into her car and drove away.

Barney walked among the bathers, searching for a man in black trunks and brown sweat shirt.

"It's no use," he told Miss Gordon and the Brownies a little later. "Even if I found the fellow, I couldn't accuse him, having no proof. But unless I can put an end to these thefts, the beach will lose all its customers."

"It's not your fault," Mrs. Williams commented.

"No, but the management holds me responsible. I have an idea who may be breaking into the cars, but it's only a theory. A wild one at that."

"Is it anyone you know?" asked Connie, who had been listening hard.

"Some one I know very well," replied the lifeguard. "I can't convince myself that my suspicion could be true. And yet, Mrs. Allison's remark about the black trunks and brown sweat shirt set me to thinking. Many bathers wear black trunks. But I know of only one hereabouts who has a brown sweat shirt."

"Who is he?" demanded Vevi, fairly overcome by curiosity.

Barney however, would not mention a name.

"I'm not sure that I have the right slant on the situation," he replied. "It would be unfair and unwise to accuse anyone without absolute proof. What I must do is keep closer watch than ever of this beach."

"The thief may over-step himself," remarked Miss Gordon.

"The Brownies will help you watch the beach," eagerly offered Vevi. "Jamie will too, won't you?"

Now Barney Fulsom had forgotten that the little boy was standing close by. He turned quickly toward him as did all the Brownies. Everyone was surprised to see that the youngster appeared very disturbed.

"You'll help, won't you, Jamie?" Vevi repeated her question.

The boy stared at her a moment as if he had not heard.

"I—I won't be here much longer," he mumbled at last. "I'm going to run away. I've made up my

mind!"

And with that, he turned and ran off down the beach.

CHAPTER 13

JAMIE'S PRESENT

NEXT morning after the Brownies had swept the cottages and washed the dishes, Miss Gordon announced that she had a delightful surprise.

"Another beach picnic?" guessed Rosemary.

"A treasure hunt?" laughed Sunny.

Miss Gordon smiled and shook her head. Both guesses had been incorrect.

"I know!" cried Vevi. "We're all going to the pond to search for Clover, the turtle!"

"We're hiking in that direction, but not to the pond. Captain Tarwell has given us permission to visit the ship cabin. We'll have lunch there, using the outdoor grill for cooking."

"I've been there a lot of times already," said Vevi, a trifle disappointed by the announcement. "Now if he would only give us the key—"

"But he has," explained the Brownie Scout leader. "I was very much surprised. Captain Tarwell came to see me last night. He said he'd been thinking matters over and had decided that he was being selfish never to allow anyone to use the cottage. We're to have use of it as long as we're at Silver Beach."

"May we hold our exhibition of sea shells there?" asked Connie eagerly.

"Yes, indeed. If we like, we may stay overnight too, using the bunks. Of course that would mean taking in considerable bedding."

"I wouldn't mind!" declared Jane. "I think it would be fun!"

"Captain Tarwell made one stipulation," Miss Gordon warned the girls. "We must be very careful not to damage anything in the cottage. Or to disturb any of the possessions there."

"The Bible?" asked Connie.

"The captain didn't mention that specifically. But he probably had it in mind."

"We won't hurt anything," Sunny declared, speaking for all the Brownies.

Jane demanded to know how soon they could start for the cottage.

"As soon as we can assemble the makings of a lunch. If everyone works fast, it shouldn't take long." Each Brownie was assigned to a particular task. Connie buttered rolls. Miss Gordon looked after the things which would be needed to cook outdoors. Jane and Sunny filled the thermos bottles with milk. Vevi was sent to the corner grocery store to buy an additional supply of paper plates and napkins.

"Do hurry dear," Mrs. Williams advised her. "Everything will be ready by the time you return."

"Don't poke along as you sometimes do," Jane called from the kitchen. "Get a move on!"

Vevi made up her mind not to keep anyone waiting. So she walked as fast she could to the store. She bought the paper plates and napkins, and remembered to pick up the change.

On the way back to the cottage she decided to take a short cut along the beach. As she walked, she kept looking down at the sand, hoping she'd find a pretty shell for the exhibition the Brownies were to have.

She was so intent upon the search that she did not see a man in black bathing trunks coming toward her. When she glanced up she was nearly face to face with the lifeguard, Raymond Curry.

Vevi would have walked past him without saying a word had he not stopped her with a question.

"Have you seen my son anywhere this morning?" he asked.

"Jamie?" Vevi shook her head. "I haven't been up very long though."

"When did you see him last?"

Vevi thought it odd that the lifeguard should ask so many questions.

"Why, I saw Jamie late yesterday afternoon," she replied, thinking hard. "He ran off after a car was broken into."

"Did Jamie—say anything? About running away, that is?"

"Why, yes he did. But I don't think he meant it."

"He meant it," the lifeguard replied. "Jamie never came home at all last night. I got in late myself and didn't look in his bed until this morning when it was time to call him to get up. The bed wasn't slept in."

Vevi was shocked to hear that Jamie actually had carried out his threat. Mr. Curry, she thought, had never shown much interest in his son.

"My mother always tucks me into bed at night. That is, when I'm home," she said. "Don't you even say good night to Jamie before you go to sleep?"

"Jamie's too old to be tucked into bed," answered the guard. "I'm not worried that he won't come back in a day or so. The thing is, I'd intended to leave town and take him with me. Now I'm in a spot."

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Mr. Curry seemed to be thinking aloud, scarcely aware of Vevi's presence. In a moment he started on down the beach.

"If you see Jamie anywhere, let me know," he flung over his shoulder.

By the time Vevi reached Starfish Cottage all the lunch baskets had been packed. The Brownies were in the yard, impatiently waiting.

"It took you long enough!" Jane greeted her. "Did you bring the paper plates?"

Vevi held up the package. "I hurried as fast as I could," she said breathlessly. "Mr. Curry stopped me for a minute to ask me about his son."

"What about him?" Jane demanded.

"He's run away again."

All the Brownies gathered close to hear what had happened. Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon were especially disturbed by the news.

"Jamie seems so unhappy and upset," remarked Connie's mother. "I knew yesterday that something was dreadfully wrong."

"He and his father seem to have no understanding of each other," agreed the Brownie leader. "I do hope the boy is found soon." Jamie slipped from everyone's thoughts as a start was made for the ship cabin in the hills. Miss Gordon drove slowly so that the girls might enjoy the beautiful view of the ocean front from the higher level.

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Presently, the car came within view of the little cottage. Miss Gordon parked just off the highway and the girls walked the remainder of the way, carrying the lunch baskets.

"It's really almost the same as our cottage now!" declared Vevi, prancing up the path. "I guess it was lucky Connie and I lost ourselves that day in the fog!"

Miss Gordon unlocked the front door with the key Captain Tarwell had given her.

"Now remember," she cautioned the Brownies. "We mustn't disturb anything. But we're free to use this cottage as a meeting place while we're at Silver Beach. We can have our exhibition of shells here too."

The girls moved from room to room, admiring the clever carpenter work. Rosemary noticed that the floors were all pegged instead of having been nailed together.

"Want to see the old Bible?" Connie asked the other Brownies. "With the notation about Captain Tarwell's son?"

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The girls all were eager to read what had been written so many years before. However, when Connie searched for the Bible she could not find it.

"I guess Captain Tarwell must have taken it away," she said at last. "He probably didn't want strangers reading about his son being lost at sea."

Miss Gordon, Vevi and Jane had wandered on into the tiny kitchen. It had been built very neatly with high shelves on three of the walls. The stove was an old fashioned wood burner.

The Brownie Scout leader noticed at once that wood had been burned there recently. When she touched one of the stove lids it was faintly warm.

"Captain Tarwell may have been here last night," she remarked. "He likely burned a little wood to take off the chill."

"Someone slept here again too," Connie declared. She had noticed a mussed blanket lying on a bunk in an adjoining room.

"That's odd," remarked Miss Gordon. "Captain Tarwell has a very comfortable room at Silver Beach. I shouldn't think he would care to stay here at night." "Especially when the cottage is so dusty," added Vevi. "I don't think it was Captain Tarwell at all!"

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"It may have been the same person who was in the cottage that day of the fog!" added Connie. "But who was he?"

As the Brownies went from room to room they found other evidence that someone had been there ahead of them.

Dried bread crumbs had been left on the top of the kitchen table. On the floor near the wall bunk Connie discovered muddy shoe tracks.

"Why, these prints are no larger than if I'd made them myself!" she exclaimed. "They're much too small to have been made by Captain Tarwell's shoes!"

Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams were inclined to agree with Vevi and Connie that someone other than the captain had been making use of the cabin.

"Whoever the person is, I hope he does no damage here," Miss Gordon said anxiously. "If Captain Tarwell is unaware his cottage is being used, he might blame the Brownies for anything amiss."

Although the cottage had been kept locked, an extra key had been left hidden beneath the shingle by the front door. Vevi and Connie thought Captain Tarwell was taking risks in leaving it there.

"This place is too dirty," declared Rosemary. "Let's clean it up for Captain Tarwell."

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"I had intended to suggest that very thing," said Miss Gordon. "In fact, you'll find a broom, dustpan and dusting cloths in the car. I also brought window cleaning spray if anyone feels industrious."

"I'll help dust!" Sunny offered quickly.

"I'll sweep," volunteered Connie.

Jane said she would dust also, which left Rosemary and Vevi to volunteer for the window washing job.

"I have to see about my pigeon," Vevi suddenly recalled. "I'll bet he hasn't had anything to eat or drink yet today."

"You thought that up to get out of work!" Jane accused. "You don't want to wash windows."

"Vevi will have time to feed the pigeon while Mrs. Williams is bringing the cleaning things from the car," Miss Gordon said. "Let's all see how Vevi's bird is getting along."

The Brownies trooped out of the cottage into the yard. Vevi was relieved to see the pigeon cage where it had been left in a sheltered place.

"Why, someone already has fed Snow White!" she exclaimed.

"This morning too," agreed Connie, noticing the uneaten grain in the pigeon's basket.

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"It must have been Captain Tarwell," declared Sunny. "He probably was afraid you'd forget to look after the bird, Vevi."

Now Miss Gordon knew that Captain Tarwell had not been at the ship cottage that morning. She had talked with him on the beach shortly after breakfast. However, she did not mention this to the Brownies.

Vevi removed Snow White from his wicker cage, gently stroking his glossy feathers.

"He needs exercise," she remarked. "But if I let him fly free, he might return to Mr. Green's loft."

"No chance of that!" teased Jane. "He'd just get lost again."

Miss Gordon remarked that she did not know what to do about Vevi's bird. The Brownies soon would be leaving Silver Beach to return to their homes at Rosedale. She did not think Vevi's mother would want the little girl to bring a carrier pigeon with her.

"We must try to find a good home for the bird," she declared. "We can't keep it here at the cottage more than another day. The pigeon shouldn't be so closely confined. Besides, it needs a warmer place."

"Couldn't we keep it inside the cottage?" Vevi suggested. "It would be warm there."

"No, dear," Miss Gordon replied firmly. "Captain Tarwell would not want a pigeon flying around in his house. Of that I am certain. If Mr. Green won't take the bird back, we must find a new home for it or let it go free."

"A hawk might get him," Vevi said, close to tears. "I want to keep Snow White."

Miss Gordon merely shook her head and said no more. Vevi understood though, that when the time came she would have to let the pigeon go.

"Don't you mind, Snow White," she whispered to the bird. "I'll find someone who will want you. I promise."

"Say, what's this over here in the bucket?" Connie suddenly demanded.

She had wandered over to the back of the ship cottage, noticing a tin pail which someone had placed there. A board half-covered the top.

As Connie curiously lifted off the board, a piece of paper fell from it to the ground. Seeing that something had been written on the torn sheet, she dropped the board and picked up the paper. "Why, it's addressed to Vevi!" she cried. "A note!"

"A note for me?" demanded Vevi very much surprised.

Forgetting Snow White, she hastily thrust the pigeon back in his basket.

"What does it say?" she questioned, running over to where Connie stood.

"It's very poor writing," Connie replied, trying hard to make out the words. "All it says is, 'For Vevi and the Brownies.' It's signed 'Jamie.'"

"What has he left for us?" Vevi asked. "Is the present in that pail?"

"It's something alive," declared Rosemary, joining the group of Brownies.

The girls peered down into the pail which was three-quarters filled with water. A turtle was swimming slowly around.

"Jamie calls that a present!" scoffed Jane in disappointment.

"But it is!" cried Vevi. "It's a wonderful gift! Just look at that old turtle's shell. See what's painted on it!"

"C-L-O-V-E-R," Rosemary spelled out the yellow letters.

"The fastest turtle at Silver Beach!" Vevi laughed in sheer delight. "Now the Brownies will be able to enter the race at the hotel Saturday! With Clover we can't lose!"

CHAPTER 14

HIDDEN IN THE SAND

VEVI lifted the snapping turtle out of water and set him on the ground.

He started off as fast as he could toward the road.

"Look at him go!" shouted Vevi. "Why, he must be the fastest turtle in the world!"

"He'll be gone if you don't catch him," Connie warned.

Vevi quickly ran after Clover. When she tried to pick him up he snapped at her.

"Do be careful, Vevi," Miss Gordon warned anxiously. "He seems to be a very lively fellow."

"I know how to handle him. He can't bite if I hold him right."

Vevi pretended that she wasn't a bit afraid of the turtle. Nevertheless, she dropped him as quickly as she could back into the pail of water.

"Isn't Jamie the little boy who ran away from home?" remarked Miss Gordon thoughtfully. "He must have been here since his father discovered him missing."

"Maybe he slept in the bunk last night," suggested Connie. "And ate his sandwiches on the kitchen table."

"The boy certainly has been here," Miss Gordon agreed. "He may return. His father must be notified as soon as we return to Silver Beach."

Vevi felt sorry that Jamie would get into trouble because of the turtle. She realized though, that he had made a serious mistake in running away from home.

"Let's forget pets for awhile and clean up the cottage," Miss Gordon proposed briskly. "After that we'll cook lunch."

The girls went to work with a will. Vevi and Rosemary washed the windows, polishing them until they shone like diamonds. By the time they had finished, the other Brownies had made the inside of the cottage spic and span.

"How nice everything looks now!" exclaimed Rosemary, gazing about proudly. "I should think Captain Tarwell would want to live here instead of in a stuffy old room."

With work out of the way, Miss Gordon built a fire in the outdoor fireplace overlooking the cliffs. Soon the air became fragrant with the odor of sizzling hamburgers.

"I'm starved," Vevi announced, hovering over the frying pan. "I could eat six of 'em myself."

Lunch finally was ready. The girls made their own sandwiches and sat down on the grass to eat them. From the high cliff, they could see the ocean, the beach and the yacht club basin.

Presently, it was time to leave. Vevi took a last look at her pigeon and turtle while Miss Gordon locked up the cottage.

"We must tell Captain Tarwell that someone besides ourselves has been here," the Brownie Scout leader remarked.

As soon as the group reached Starfish Cottage, Miss Gordon took Vevi, Connie and Sunny with her and went in search of both Mr. Curry and the old sea captain.

At the hotel where the lifeguard worked, the teacher was informed that he had not been seen that day. Although he regularly was assigned to guard the bathing beach, he had failed to appear for work.

Nor could Miss Gordon find Captain Tarwell. However, later in the day as she searched with Connie for shells, Vevi spied the elderly gentleman taking his daily stroll along the beach.

"Captain Tarwell!" she shouted, running toward him.

"Blow me down!" he greeted her with a friendly chuckle.

"Captain Tarwell, the Brownies were at your cottage today!" Vevi informed him breathlessly. "We cleaned it for you."

"Why, that's fine, splendid, Vevi."

"Someone had fed my pigeon, Captain Tarwell. Was it you?"

"Not I," returned the captain. "Fact is, I haven't been up to the cottage this day. On my way now."

"Did you know someone slept in the cottage last night?"

"What makes you think that, Vevi?"

"Because the bunk had been used. And there were crumbs on the kitchen table. If you weren't at the cabin, then it must have been—"

"Don't give it any thought," broke in the captain before Vevi could finish what she had intended to say. "Let me worry about the house."

"Then you knew someone was staying there?" Vevi asked quickly. "You told him he could?"

"No! No!" exclaimed the captain. He spoke rather impatiently. "Please don't worry about it, Vevi. And please don't talk about it—to others, I mean."

"About anyone staying at the cabin, you mean?" Vevi could not understand why the captain seemed so annoyed.

"There are some things I can't tell you about," Captain Tarwell said. "You wouldn't understand, and other folks might not either. Just enjoy the use of the cottage."

Then, as if afraid that Vevi might ask other questions, the old seaman walked on down the beach.

It was time for the Brownies' swimming lesson, so Vevi ran home to Starfish Cottage to change into her bathing suit.

"You're late," Connie greeted her as she ran across the sand. "Mr. Fulsom started in early and we're all through now."

"It's getting too cold to swim anyhow," said Vevi. "I'd rather play in the sand. I'm going to hunt for Miss Gordon's lost wrist watch."

"You're silly," said Jane, who came splashing out of the waves in time to hear the remark. "You know very well that Miss Gordon's watch was stolen. So how could you hope to find it in the sand?"

"Maybe it wasn't stolen. We don't know that it was. Anyhow, it won't do any harm to look for it."

Vevi sat down and began to dig sand into her pail.

"You're not even sitting where Miss Gordon lost her watch," Jane went on. "You'll never find anything there—or anywhere."

"Oh, won't I?"

With a shriek of triumph Vevi pounced upon something in the sand.

"What did you find?" Jane demanded coming quickly over to see.

"A penny!"

"And you get excited over that!" scoffed Jane.

"Maybe I'll find more money." Vevi began throwing up sand at a furious rate.

Seeing her so hard at work, the other Brownies came hurrying up to learn why she was so excited.

"You're wasting your time, Vevi," Jane insisted. "One could hunt all day and never find any more money."

"Oh, is that so?" Laughing gleefully, Vevi held up another copper she had discovered in the sand.

This second discovery fired all the Brownies with a fever to search for coins. Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams stood nearby, smiling as they watched the children.

Only a short time before they had observed Captain Tarwell place a few coins along the beach where he knew the Brownies would play. He had thought that a treasure hunt would be good fun for the girls.

"Here's a nickel!" suddenly cried Sunny. "I'm rich!"

Connie found a penny. By now, everyone was digging, even Jane.

Then a long while went by without any of the Brownies turning up a coin. The beach became dotted with little holes and mounds of sand.

"I'm getting tired," sighed Rosemary. "I don't think we'll find any more money."

Miss Gordon told the girls that they must level off the holes before leaving the beach. Jane, Connie and Rosemary began to smooth out the sand immediately. Vevi and Sunny kept digging, hoping to find another coin or two.

"Was it Captain Tarwell who hid the money for us?" guessed Vevi.

"Yes, dear," Miss Gordon replied. "He's enjoyed watching the Brownies and talking to them since they've been at Silver Beach."

"Are there any more coins?" inquired Sunny.

"I think you've found most of them now. There may be another penny or two."

"I'm quitting," announced Sunny, brushing sand from her hands.

"So am I," agreed Vevi with a tired sigh. "Anyway, I have two pennies. And it was fun."

"Don't forget to smooth out all the holes you have made," the Brownie Scout leader reminded her. "We owe it to Mr. Fulsom to keep the beach looking nice."

Vevi began to shovel sand back into the holes. It was nearly as much fun filling them up as it had been searching for the coins. The others finished ahead of her.

"Hurry up, pokey," Jane urged her. "It's time to get dressed."

"I'm hurrying," sighed Vevi.

She had one more hole to fill. She shoveled sand into it, patting it down with her hands. Then because the hole still wasn't quite filled, she reached for a little more sand.

As she dug down with her shovel, the edge struck a soft object.

Vevi thought she had uncovered a wadded up handkerchief or a piece of cloth. But as she pulled the article out of the sand, she saw that it was neither.

"See what I've found now!" she shouted. "An old faded purse! One with gold initials on it!"

CHAPTER 15

A FACE AT THE WINDOW

HEARING Vevi shout that she had found something in the sand, the other Brownies quickly gathered about her.

"Why it *is* a purse!" exclaimed Connie in astonishment. "It's been on the beach several days too, because it's water stained!"

"What are the initials on it?" Sunny asked, trying to make them out.

"A-W-A," Vevi read the letters. "Or maybe its A-M-A."

"No, it's A-W-A," Jane decided. "Say! This pocketbook must belong to Mrs. Allison!"

"That's right," agreed Rosemary. "I think her first name is Alice. She lost a purse. Or at least it was stolen from her car."

By this time, Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon had joined the group. They too, were very much interested in the purse and agreed that it might indeed belong to Mrs. Allison.

"Maybe the money she lost is still here!" Vevi declared. She felt quite pleased with herself for having made such an important discovery.

"Open it and see," urged Jane impatiently. "Or hand it over to me."

Vevi unfastened the zipper which was clogged with sand. Inside was a smaller coin purse, a comb and a vanity case. In addition, there were four keys on a metal ring.

"There's no money here," Vevi reported, opening the coin container. "Not a penny."

"Mrs. Allison lost ten dollars," Connie recalled. "But the purse was taken from her car. How did it get here in the sand?"

Miss Gordon told the Brownies it was her theory that the thief had discarded the pocketbook. After taking it from Mrs. Allison's car, he had kept the money, throwing the purse away.

"I'd return it to the lady, Vevi," Mrs. Williams suggested. "Even though the purse is ruined, the vanity case isn't tarnished. Besides, the keys will be needed."

"I'll take it to her just as soon as I get dressed," Vevi promised. "My, I'm good at finding things! I wish I could find your wristwatch, Miss Gordon!"

"I wish you could too, dear," smiled the Brownie leader. "However, I never expect to see the watch again. I'm sure it was stolen by the same person who's been breaking into cars. Even if the watch were found in the sand, it would be ruined after all this time."

The Brownies soon ran to the beach house to take showers and dress. Vevi and Connie were the first ones to finish wringing out their suits.

"Let's take the purse to Mrs. Allison now," Vevi proposed to her little friend. "I know where she lives."

"So do I," agreed Connie. "She has a place right on the water."

Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams told the girls they might go, but not to be gone long.

Mrs. Allison's rented house was on Flower Street overlooking the bay. All along the wharf sailboats and cruisers had been tied up. Gulls and terns were flying about, now and then alighting on the water or diving into it in search of food.

"That's Mrs. Allison's house," Connie said, pointing to a two-story building which extended out a short distance into the water.

"And it must be her boat tied up beside it!" added Vevi.

The craft which had drawn her gaze was a large cabin cruiser of mahogany. In the sunlight the brasswork gleamed like pure gold.

"My I'd like to take a ride in that boat!" Vevi said wistfully, "wouldn't it be fun?"

"I wish all the Brownies could go for a spin," Connie replied.

A plank walk led from shore out over the water to the side of the house. A railing guarded it so that one could not fall.

Before knocking on the door, the children paused to gaze again at the beautiful cruiser. The name "Adventurer" had been painted on it in gold letters. As the waves lolloped gently against the wharf, the boat rose up and down as if it were breathing.

"Let's climb down there and look at it," Vevi proposed. "I'd like to see the inside of the cabin."

"Oh, no!" Connie protested firmly. "It wouldn't be polite."

She rapped on the door. Almost at once it was opened by the same lady the children had seen many times on the beach. She was wearing a housedress this time and looked different.

"We've found your purse," Connie told her quickly. "Or rather, Vevi did."

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"But the money's gone," Vevi added.

"Why, that is the pocketbook that was taken from my parked car!" Mrs. Allison exclaimed as she saw the faded cloth.

Vevi and Connie told her how they had chanced to come upon the purse buried in the sand.

"It doesn't matter about the money," the lady assured them. "I'm happy though, to recover my keys. Wait here, please."

Leaving the door open, Mrs. Allison went back into the house. When she returned a moment later, she had another pocketbook in her hand.

"I can't thank you enough for finding my keys," she said. "Please accept this for your trouble."

She offered the girls a dollar bill.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Connie, moving back a step. "We couldn't take it."

"We're Brownie Scouts," explained Vevi. "Our motto is 'HOP.'"

"That means, 'Help Other People,'" explained Connie. "We were glad to help you."

"I see," smiled Mrs. Allison, putting away her money. "Well, I certainly appreciate the trouble you've gone to in bringing my purse here. Won't you come in for awhile?"

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"Miss Gordon told us not to stay," Connie replied reluctantly.

"It must be fun living right on the water," Vevi remarked, unwilling to leave so soon.

"One always has a cool breeze here," Mrs. Allison returned.

"And you can step right into your boat," added Vevi. "I'll bet that would be exciting. If I lived here, I'd go for a boat ride every day."

Mrs. Allison seemed to guess that Vevi was hinting she would like to go for a spin in the *Adventure*, for she asked:

"Would you children care to ride in my boat sometime?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Vevi. "When?"

"Not this afternoon, I'm afraid," the lady replied regretfully. "My husband isn't here and I hesitate to take the boat out alone. Perhaps we could make it Saturday."

"Saturday would be fine!" exclaimed Vevi. "Only we're entering our turtle in the race that day."

"And the Brownie Scouts may go on a hike in the afternoon," added Connie.

Mrs. Allison said that Monday or Tuesday would be equally satisfactory.

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"We may not be here then," Vevi told her. "Our vacation is almost over. All the Brownies must return to Rosedale soon. I think we're starting back Monday."

"And we do want to ride in your beautiful boat," Connie declared earnestly. "It would be more fun than anything we've done."

Mrs. Allison asked the children about the time of the turtle race and the hike.

"I know!" she exclaimed. "If you can get up early, we'll go for a before-breakfast spin. My husband and I will serve breakfast on the boat."

"Oh, grand!" laughed Connie. "What time shall we come?"

Mrs. Allison asked if seven o'clock would be too early.

"We can get here even earlier," Connie promised.

"Seven will be early enough," Mrs. Allison smiled. "You may bring your other friends too, if you like."

"All the Brownies?" Vevi questioned.

"Yes, and your leaders. We'll make a party of it."

"We'll all be here," Connie promised.

"By the way, on Saturday the boat probably will be tied up near the pier," Mrs. Allison said. "So instead of coming here, come to Wharf 5. Do you know where it is?"

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"Oh, yes," Vevi assured her. "Anyway, we know the boat and its name. We'll be there."

"Seven o'clock," Mrs. Allison reminded them again.

Thrilled by the invitation, Vevi and Connie ran back to the cottage to tell the other Brownies of the wonderful outing awaiting them.

"Why, that will make a very nice climax to our vacation," Miss Gordon declared. "We'll enjoy the boat ride in the morning. In the afternoon we'll watch the turtle race. Sunday we'll have an all-day exhibition of our shells at the ship cottage. Then Monday morning we start for home."

"Don't mention that part," groaned Sunny. "We never want to leave Silver Beach."

"Not without catching that thief who took your wrist watch," added Jane. "Can't we stay just a few days longer?"

"I'm afraid not," Miss Gordon smiled. "All good things come to an end, you know. But let's enjoy to the full these last few days."

"I know one thing I'm going to do before we leave," Vevi announced mysteriously. "What?" demanded Jane.

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"I'm not telling," Vevi laughed. "It has something to do with turtles though."

Now the little girl had been very much interested in Captain Tarwell's story of how huge sea turtles came up on the beach to lay their eggs. Before she left Silver Beach, she very much wanted to see one of the huge creatures. She had made up her mind that on Friday night, when the moon was full, she would slip out of the cottage and watch. But she did not tell anyone what she intended to do.

The next morning after breakfast while the other Brownies gathered shells, Vevi and Connie walked to the ship cottage to feed the pets.

"Animals and birds are a lot of work," Vevi sighed. "After tomorrow I'll let Snow White fly away. And as soon as Clover wins the race for the Brownies I'll put him back in the pond."

"Maybe Clover won't come in first," Connie replied. "I hear some of those hotel boys and girls have some fast turtles. Besides, Clover has been cooped up too long."

"He should have more exercise," agreed Vevi, frowning. "It's hard to look after him properly when he's here, and I'm at the cottage. But I'll give him a good work-out today."

The little girl removed the cover from the dish pan. Clover was sitting on a pile of wooden blocks which had been fixed for him. He stuck out his head and snapped at Vevi when she poked a stick at him.

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"He still has plenty of pep, Connie. I think he will win first place in the race, don't you?"

"I don't know," returned Connie. "But I'm sure of one thing."

"What's that?"

"Someone has been taking care of him for you. See! The water has been changed and he's been fed too."

"That's so, Connie! Do you suppose Captain Tarwell did it?"

"Maybe, but I wouldn't think he would want to walk so far uphill just to feed a turtle or a pigeon."

"Let's look at Snow White," Vevi proposed quickly.

The pigeon was in his wicker cage, pecking at a scattering of grain.

"See!" Connie exclaimed. "Snow White has been fed too."

"Not very long ago either."

"Then maybe Captain Tarwell is still here."

Vevi glanced quickly toward the cottage. The front door was closed.

However, as she gazed toward one of the tiny porthole windows which overlooked the back yard, she was startled to see someone standing there inside the house.

For a moment a face was pressed against the thick pane of glass.

Even as Vevi stared, it was withdrawn. For a second, she was a little confused. Had she really seen a face or had she imagined it?

"Someone's watching us from the house!" Connie exclaimed. She too had seen the shadowy face.

"It wasn't Captain Tarwell," whispered Vevi. "It was someone else."

"Someone we both know," added Connie. She had seen the face quite plainly. "I don't think he has any right to be here either. Let's find out about it, Vevi!"

CHAPTER 16

A MOONLIGHT SWIM

CONNIE started directly for the front door of the ship cabin. Vevi followed close behind, though she was a trifle nervous.

"Aren't you afraid to walk in there?" she whispered. "We don't know who may be hiding inside."

"I know!" Connie answered. "At least I think I do. Captain Tarwell gave us permission to be here. So we have a right to go inside if the door is unlocked."

At the front entrance to the cottage the two children paused to listen. The door was slightly ajar. But they could not hear anyone moving about inside.

Vevi pounded on the door and called: "Is that you, Captain Tarwell?"

There was no answer. But the girls were certain they heard someone tiptoeing away from the front room.

"Someone is hiding in there!" Connie said grimly.

"Let's not go inside," Vevi murmured, holding back.

"You may stay here if you like," Connie answered. "I'm going in. Captain Tarwell would want us to find out who is sneaking in and out of his cottage."

"Maybe he already knows, Connie. He acted funny when I tried to tell him about it."

Connie paid no heed to Vevi's protests. She turned the knob, slowly pushing open the door.

"Who's there?" she called.

Her own voice echoed through the empty house, but there was no answer.

"I'll go one way and you go the other," she directed Vevi. "Then we'll be sure to catch him."

Vevi did not want to set foot inside the cottage. She was unwilling, though, to admit to Connie that she was afraid, so she reluctantly followed her friend over the threshold.

"You go to the left and I'll go to the right," Connie instructed in a whisper. "We'll meet in the kitchen."

Vevi's heart began to pound as she tiptoed across the empty living room. She reached the corridor opening into the kitchen just as Connie entered it from the opposite direction.

"Ha!" cried Connie. "Just as I thought!"

Jamie Curry stood there in his faded jeans, fairly trapped. His hair had not been combed and his eyes were red from lack of sleep.

"So you're the one who has been sneaking into Captain Tarwell's cottage!" accused Vevi.

"I am not either a sneak," the boy denied.

"You were in here the day of the heavy fog," Connie insisted. "When we came in, you ran away."

"All right, maybe I was here that day without permission. But that was because the door was open."

"Captain Tarwell put a new lock on," Vevi reminded him.

"And he knows I'm sleeping here too," Jamie insisted stubbornly. "It's the only place I have to stay."

Jamie's face puckered up and the girls thought he was going to cry. He fought back the tears and said defiantly:

"Girls are tattle tales. I suppose you'll run to my father and tell him you saw me here."

"You shouldn't have run away," Connie replied severely. "Your father has been trying to find you. You must go back home."

Jamie thrust his feet apart, glaring at the two girls.

"Not on your life!" he announced. "I'll never go back—not even if I starve."

"Does your father make you work too hard?" asked Vevi. "Is that why you don't want to go home?"

"No," Jamie answered sullenly. "That's not the reason."

"Is he mean to you?"

"No-o," Jamie replied, dragging out the word. "He treats me all right most of the time."

"Then what is wrong?"

"I can't tell you," the boy muttered. "Don't ask me. Go away and leave me alone."

"We have a perfect right to be here," Connie told him firmly. "Captain Tarwell gave the Brownies permission to hold a shell exhibition here Sunday. We're going to fix up the cottage and invite a lot of people."

"Then everyone will be coming here." Jamie was aghast. "I won't be able to stay?"

"Not unless you want to be seen," Connie informed him.

Jamie was silent awhile, thinking matters over.

"I won't go back home," he announced. "Mr. Green has promised me a job at his pigeon loft. I start in there tomorrow morning. Maybe he will let me sleep at his house."

"Your father won't like it," Connie said severely. "We can't promise not to tell him we've seen you either."

"Tell if you want to," Jamie shrugged. "He can't make me go back because I know—"

The boy broke off quickly, acting as if he had said too much.

As Jamie started to leave, Vevi remembered to thank him for finding Clover.

"It was nothing," the boy answered. "I caught him easy. He ought to win the race Saturday for the Brownies. Just be careful you don't scare him when you start him off."

"I've never raced a turtle," Vevi said anxiously. "Why don't you come and show me how?"

Jamie shook his head. "Turtle races are old stuff to me," he said. "Besides, I'm not going back. Goodbye."

He moved off again, intending to leave.

"Jamie, it was you, wasn't it, who fed Clover and Snow White?"

"Sure," the boy admitted. "You didn't want 'em to die, did you? I'll give you a tip. I won't be here tonight, and it's too cold outside for your pigeon. Unless you want him to get sick, you'd better take him somewhere that's warm."

Then, although Connie and Vevi tried to persuade Jamie to stay, he sauntered off. The girls locked the cottage, hiding the key under the shingle.

"We'll have to take Snow White and Clover with us," Vevi decided.

"I'll carry Snow White's cage," Connie said quickly. "You look after Clover."

Vevi was a little afraid of the turtle, but she drained off all the water in the pan and carried him in that. Clover did not like it very well. He kept clawing at the sides of the container, trying to crawl out.

At Starfish Cottage, Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams were none too happy to see the pets arrive. However, they said Vevi might keep the pigeon over-night and the turtle until after the Saturday race.

"I hope Clover wins," Vevi declared. "Just think of winning ten dollars for the Brownies!"

"You haven't won it yet," Jane reminded her. "What time is the race?"

"Two o'clock."

"How can you enter Clover in the race if the Brownies are going for a ride in Mrs. Allison's boat?"

"Oh, we'll be back in plenty of time," Vevi said. "The boat ride is at seven."

The Brownies' vacation at Silver Beach fast was drawing to a close. Everyone hated to leave, even Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon. Vevi especially, had a million things she wanted to do. And one in particular.

Ever since the little girl had been told that giant turtles sometimes came up on the beach at night to lay their eggs, she had wanted to view the strange sight.

Starfish Cottage was only a few steps from the beach, so close that Vevi could hear the roar of the surf. Often at night she would lie awake in her bed, listening to the pounding of each wave on the sand. Several times, when she was not too sleepy, she looked out the bedroom window. But she never had seen even one of the huge turtles.

Now Vevi knew that if ever the big loggerheads came out of the sea it would be on a moonlight night. On this particular evening the moon would rise early. It would be a full one too, for she had heard Mrs. Williams tell Sunny so.

As the afternoon wore on, Vevi became more and more quiet, thinking over her plans. 165

"You're not ill, are you, dear?" inquired Mrs. Williams.

"Oh, no! I feel fine!"

Vevi had made up her mind not to tell anyone of her plan to watch for the big turtles.

After dinner, the Brownies all gathered for a songfest at Starfish Cottage. Later, they arranged shells, printing cards for each one.

Vevi began to squirm restlessly.

"How long before we go to bed?" she asked, looking at the clock.

"Why, it's only ten minutes after eight," Rosemary protested. "You don't look a bit sleepy either, Vevi McGuire!"

"We have to get up early tomorrow for the boat ride," Vevi answered quickly.

"Yes, seven o'clock will be tapping on our door almost before we know it," Mrs. Williams agreed. "Early to bed, early to rise."

"This is the first time I ever heard Vevi ask to go to bed early," grumbled Jane.

Vevi paid no attention to the teasing of the other Brownies. After Mrs. Williams had taken Jane, Rosemary and Sunny to Oriole Cottage, Vevi undressed as fast as she could. Before she leaped into bed though, she folded her clothes carefully, leaving them where they could be found easily even in the dark. 166

It took Connie a long while to get ready for bed. She spent ten minutes brushing her hair. Finally though, the light was turned out.

Vevi lay perfectly still, pretending to be asleep. At first she felt very wide awake. The bed covers were pleasantly warm. The little girl snuggled deeper into them, closing her eyes.

When she opened them again with a start, Vevi knew she had fallen asleep by mistake. The bedroom she shared with Connie was very quiet. In the next room Mrs. Williams was sleeping soundly. It was late, for moonlight streamed in the open window.

Dismayed to have slept so long, Vevi crept from bed. Connie stirred but did not awaken.

The bedroom floor was cold and a chill wind came in from the sea.

Her teeth chattering, Vevi put on all her clothes except her shoes. Then she took a blanket from the bed, and wrapping it around her, sat down by the window. From where she watched, Vevi could see a long stretch of deserted beach. The sand gleamed ghostly white in the moonlight. Not a person was astir. 167

"I wish the turtles would hurry and come," Vevi thought. "I don't want to sit and wait all night."

The little girl did not have a watch but she thought it must be at least midnight. Only a few automobiles were parked along the beach beside some of the cottages. Often renters who had no garages, left them there all night.

Vevi kept her gaze on the roaring surf, watching the fringe of foam. She began to feel very drowsy. Finally a shoe which she held in her hand, slipped from her fingers. It struck the floor with a loud thump.

Hearing the noise, Connie sat up in bed. She rubbed her eyes. As the cobwebs of sleep cleared away, she saw Vevi huddled in her blanket.

"Why, Vevi!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing out of bed?"

"Sh!" warned Vevi. "Don't wake anyone. I'm watching for turtles."

Connie threw off the covers and came over to the window.

"Vevi McGuire! You're walking in your sleep!"

"I am not," Vevi whispered hotly. "I'm not even sitting in my sleep. I'm just watching."

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"You won't be able to get up in time for the boat ride tomorrow," Connie predicted. "Get back into bed this minute."

"But I want to see a big turtle lay its eggs on the beach."

"You might watch all night and not see one, Vevi."

"I s'pose so," Vevi admitted unwillingly. Already she had grown tired of sitting so long in a chair. "I'll come to bed—say! What's that?"

Greatly excited, she reached out in the darkness to grasp Connie's hand.

Vevi's sharp eyes had detected movement on the beach. A dark object had emerged from the sea.

Connie began to giggle, smothering the sound with her hand.

"You think that's a turtle?" she teased. "Why, it's only a man swimming in the ocean."

By this time Vevi too was able to see that the dark object was a bather. The man had come from the direction of the pier and now was moving across the sand toward the row of cars.

"It's Raymond Curry," Connie recognized him. "Why does he swim so late at night?"

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"And on our beach instead of his own," whispered Vevi. "He's acting awfully queer. Let's watch and see where he goes."

CHAPTER 17

MRS. ALLISON'S CRUISER

FROM the bedroom window, the children saw Raymond Curry walk directly across the sand toward the roadway. His black bathing trunks were dripping wet, but he did not seem to mind the chill air.

"What a funny time to swim," Connie whispered. "It must be long after midnight."

"Everyone has gone from the beach too," added Vevi.

The lifeguard had paused at the roadside where three or four cars had been parked for the night. Vevi and Connie saw him glance up and down the beach as if to see if anyone were watching.

Then, one by one, he began trying the car door handles to see if they were unlocked.

"I guess he's just checking the automobiles," Connie said, losing interest. She stifled a yawn. "I'm going back to bed."

"Wait!" Vevi commanded. "Why would Mr. Curry check automobiles at this time of night?"

"It does seem queer, Vevi."

"On Mr. Fulsom's beach too. I think he's trying to break in."

"Mr. Curry?" Connie exclaimed in disbelief.

"Then maybe he's trying to find his son," Vevi speculated. "He may think Jamie is sleeping in one of the parked cars."

"That must be it," Connie agreed, her mind relieved. "But he won't find Jamie here at the beach. If he didn't go to Mr. Green's place, he's still at the captain's cottage."

"We ought to tell Mr. Curry where he can find his son."

"You mean now?"

"We may not see him tomorrow, Connie. We go boat riding so early. After that, there's the turtle race."

"Maybe you're right," Connie agreed unwillingly.

"I'll tell him now," Vevi decided. "It will take only a minute. I hate to go outdoors alone though."

"I'll dress and go with you," Connie offered. "Help me find my shoes."

In the dark bedroom the girls had to search for a minute or two before they found all of Connie's clothes. She dressed as fast as she could. "Hurry!" Vevi urged. "Mr. Curry's still trying car doors, but he's almost out of sight up the beach."

"I'm hurrying as fast as I can," Connie gasped. "My shoe strings are all tied in knots."

"Don't bother about that. Unless we catch him right away, he'll be gone."

"Shouldn't we tell Mother we're leaving the cottage?"

"No time," Vevi insisted. "We'll be back in a minute anyway. Come on."

The two girls groped their way to the front door. It was locked. However, the key was in the lock.

Vevi turned it as far as she could, but it seemed to be stuck.

"It won't open, Connie."

"Let me try, Vevi."

Connie pushed hard on the key. At first she could not make it turn far enough either. Then she gave the door a quick shove with her hip. The jolt made the key click all the way over.

"There, it's unlocked!" Connie exclaimed.

Shoving open the door, the girls stepped outside. The beach, bathed in soft moonlight, looked ghostly and unreal.

"It's c-cold," Vevi shivered. "And I'm scared."

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Connie felt rather frightened too though she could not have explained why.

"Maybe we should wait—" she began, but Vevi cut her short.

"No, let's tell him now," she urged. "Come on, before he gets too far away."

Already Mr. Curry was some distance from the cottage. He was standing beside a parked sedan, checking to see if one of the glass windows could be pushed down from the top.

"Oh, Mr. Curry!" called Vevi.

In the still night air her voice carried very clearly.

The lifeguard heard, for he turned around quickly. Then he did an odd thing. Instead of answering Vevi, or waiting for the girls, he deliberately walked away from them.

They saw him dash into the surf. Wading out to shoulder depth, he swam off toward his own beach.

"Now, why did he do that!" Vevi exclaimed in disappointment. "He didn't give us a chance to tell him about Jamie."

"He acted as if he didn't want to talk to us," agreed Connie.

The girls had not taken time to put on sweaters or jackets. Teeth chattering, they crept back into the cottage and into their beds. They had lost all interest in lifeguards and turtles.

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Vevi was awakened next morning by the clatter of an alarm clock.

She rubbed her eyes drowsily. Then realizing that it was six o'clock, she leaped out of bed.

"Time to get up!" she aroused Connie, giving her a hard shake. "We want to beat the girls at Oriole Cottage. If we don't hurry, we'll be late for the motorboat ride."

Connie mumbled drowsily and burrowed deeper into the covers. Vevi jerked them off.

"Get up, sleepy head!" she ordered. "We want to be the first to get to the wharf."

As Vevi gave her another hard shake, Connie really came awake. She leaped out of bed and dressed so fast she was ahead of everyone.

For a while all was hubbub in the cottage as the girls from Oriole Cottage began to arrive. Connie and Vevi though, were the first to get their beds made and have their room straightened.

"We'll go on ahead to the wharf," Vevi told Miss Gordon.

"Isn't it rather early?" asked the teacher. "Mrs. Allison doesn't plan to leave the dock before seven-thirty."

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"It won't do any harm to be there a little early," Vevi said. "That way, Mrs. Allison will be sure the Brownies haven't forgotten."

Miss Gordon smiled and told the two girls they might walk on ahead if they liked. "We'll come as quickly as we can," she promised.

In leaving the cottage, Vevi recalled that she had not fed her pets that morning.

"I must keep up Clover's strength, or he won't win the race this afternoon," she declared.

Vevi fed the turtle, and then dropped a little grain in Snow White's cage.

"Your pigeon needs exercise," Connie said. "Why not let him fly away, Vevi? You know you can't take him home when we leave here Monday."

"Maybe Miss Gordon will let me."

"You know she won't, Vevi. Besides, you have no place where you could keep a bird except for a few days. Let him go now, Vevi."

"He might get lost again."

"You'll have to let him go by tomorrow at the latest," Connie said severely. "So why not now?"

Vevi stubbornly shook her head. "Maybe I will find a good home for him."

"Where?"

"Captain Tarwell might take Snow White."

"He can't be bothered with a bird and you know it."

"Jamie would like to have my pigeon."

"We don't know what has become of Jamie. So you know he can't look after the bird."

"Maybe Mrs. Allison would like Snow White," Vevi said hopefully. "She could keep him at her house on the water and he'd be happy there. I know! I'll take him along this morning and ask her!"

"He'll be in the way," Connie said, trying to discourage her friend.

"I don't care," Vevi insisted. "I want Snow White to have a nice boat ride. Anyway, we won't have much longer to be together."

Connie said no more. So Vevi picked up the cage. On the way to the wharf, she carried it very carefully so as not to jar the pigeon.

"There's the boat!" Connie exclaimed a few minutes later as they came within view of the *Adventurer*, tied up at the wharf.

"But where is Mrs. Allison and her husband?" asked Vevi. "I guess we are here too early."

The cabin cruiser was completely deserted. Dew lay heavy on its decks and the canvas covers had not been removed.

"I hope Mrs. Allison didn't forget," Vevi said anxiously as she and Connie walked out on the dock.

"Oh, she'll be along. It's early. We're the only persons anywhere around."

"Let's go aboard," proposed Vevi.

Connie hung back. "Oh, should we? Maybe Mrs. Allison wouldn't like it."

"She won't care, Connie. We won't hurt anything. I want to peek inside the cabin before the other Brownies get here."

"Oh, all right," Connie consented reluctantly. "We'll get on for just a minute. Then we'll get right off and wait for Mrs. Allison."

Still carrying the pigeon cage, Vevi scrambled aboard. The boat was rocking gently up and down on the waves.

"I'm tired of carrying this basket around," Vevi announced as Connie joined her on deck. "I'm going to leave it in the cabin."

"Mrs. Allison may not like it, Vevi."

"Oh, she won't mind. We aren't hurting anything. Aren't the seats grand?"

Vevi plumped herself down in one, bouncing up and down.

"Vevi, let's get off," Connie said anxiously. "We might damage something."

"I'm not hurting this seat one bit."

"I don't like to be here unless Mrs. Allison says it's all right."

"We aren't doing any harm," Vevi insisted.

"I'm going to get off."

"Oh, all right, so will I," Vevi grumbled. "But first I'm going to put Snow White inside."

She disappeared into the cabin with the pigeon cage. A moment later, Connie heard her call for her to come in too.

"It's darling inside, Connie! You ought to see!"

Connie could not resist taking a quick look at the cabin's interior. The room had been made very attractive with red draperies at the portholes. Bunks lined one side of the wall. A galley or kitchen unit filled the other side. The third wall was taken up by a leather seat.

"Why, one could live on this boat!" Vevi cried. "See! The cupboard is stocked with groceries!"

"We're staying aboard too long," Connie said uneasily. "Let's go before Mrs. Allison finds us here."

Even as she spoke, the girls heard soft footsteps on the dock.

"Someone's coming now!" Connie declared, moving quickly to the window. "It's probably Mrs. Allison or her husband."

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Peering out the porthole window, the girls tried to see who approached. At first they could see no one, although they kept hearing the soft tread of bare feet.

But as they watched, a man came into view. He wore only black bathing trunks and evidently had been swimming for his suit was wet.

"It's Mr. Curry again," said Vevi in a whisper. "Why does he swim so often? And so early in the morning?"

"At our beach too," added Connie. "He's coming here, I think."

Now, although the girls had done nothing wrong they felt very uneasy. Not saying a word, they remained by the window, watching.

The lifeguard had not seen them. He came on down the dock toward the *Adventurer* and the other cruisers tied up alongside.

Vevi and Connie saw him pause beside a mahogany craft which bore the name *Miss Lady*. It was one of the most expensive boats at Silver Beach, owned by a very wealthy man.

Mr. Curry glanced quickly around to be certain no one was watching. Then he leaped lightly aboard the vessel.

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"Let's tell him about seeing Jamie," Vevi suggested.

She started to leave the cabin. Connie caught her by the hand, drawing her back to the porthole.

"Don't make a sound," she advised. "Just watch! He's up to something!"

Vevi could not imagine why Connie had become so excited.

Then, peering through the window, she understood the reason. Although no one appeared to be aboard *Miss Lady*, the lifeguard was trying to force open the cabin door!

CHAPTER 18

ADRIFT

AT first, Connie and Vevi could not guess what the lifeguard was trying to do. They saw him push hard against the cabin door.

When it did not open, he brought forth a small metal tool from inside his bathing trunks.

"Why, he must have a deep pocket inside his bathing suit!" Vevi exclaimed in amazement. "How funny!"

"Imagine trying to swim with a heavy piece of metal," added Connie. "I never heard of such a thing before!"

As the girls watched from behind the curtains, they were shocked to see the lifeguard deliberately break the door lock of the nearby cruiser.

"He shouldn't have done that!" Vevi declared. "The owner of *Miss Lady* won't like it."

Connie gave the Brownie sign for complete silence.

Vevi realized then that something was dreadfully wrong. Connie, she noticed, looked rather frightened.

Unaware that anyone was near, Raymond Curry had entered the cabin of *Miss Lady*.

Vevi and Connie could see him going hurriedly through drawers and boxes. Most articles he threw on the floor. But the girls saw him stuff two small items into the inner pocket of his bathing trunks.

Vevi no longer could remain silent.

"Connie, he's a thief!" she whispered tensely. "He's taking something that doesn't belong to him!"

"And last night we saw him trying car doors," added Connie. "He must have been trying to get in."

"He's been doing his stealing at our beach, so no one would suspect him! Oh, Connie, I'll bet he was the one who took Miss Gordon's wrist watch!"

"We saw him swimming on our beach that day! He may have been the one who took Mrs. Allison's purse too!"

By this time the girls were so excited they scarcely could contain themselves. In trying to see, Vevi accidentally scratched her hand against the window glass.

Though the noise was slight, it was heard on the next boat. Mr. Curry whirled around, seeing the children watching him from the cabin of the *Adventurer*.

The lifeguard came quickly out of the cruiser, closing the door behind him.

"He's going to go away with all that stuff he took!" Vevi cried. "Let's stop him, Connie."

Both girls remembered that once at the circus when a pickpocket had tried to get away, all the Brownie Scouts had surrounded him. But now there was no one to help them.

Without stopping to think, Vevi ran out of the cabin.

"Stop!" she shouted at Mr. Curry, who had leaped off the *Lady*. "You're a thief! We saw you take something from that boat."

Mr. Curry paused. He looked up and down the waterfront, not seeing anyone. Then he came over to where the *Adventurer* was tied up. He was smiling, but not in a friendly way.

"So I'm a thief, am I?" he asked pleasantly. "You saw everything?"

"Yes, we did!" Vevi retorted. "You put back what you stole or we'll tell the police! You took Miss Gordon's watch too!"

"Well, well, what clever little girls you are!" Mr. Curry said. "So you saw everything? And you'll run straight to the police with it?"

As the lifeguard talked, he bent down by the dock post. Vevi and Connie did not realize what he was doing until it was too late.

Then they saw that the man deliberately had untied the rope which held the *Adventurer* fast.

"You'll not tell the police anything for an hour or so," said Mr. Curry. "You're taking a little ride out into the bay."

As he spoke, he gave the cruiser a hard shove. It shot several feet away from the wharf, barely clearing another boat tied on the other side.

"You'll not be carried too far out," Mr. Curry called. "The drifting boat will be sighted eventually by the lighthouse keeper or from shore. So relax and have a nice time, kiddies. You'll not be seeing me again!"

Mr. Curry stood a moment, watching the boat drift slowly away. Then he turned and was lost to view behind another cruiser.

Connie and Vevi were so frightened that for a moment or two they could not speak.

Already the cruiser was so far from the wharf that they could not leap ashore. The water was much too deep for them to jump off and try to wade in.

"What'll we do?" Vevi wailed.

"Scream for help!" Connie advised. "Yell as loudly as you can."

Both girls called for help, over and over again. Although it now was nearly seven o'clock, no one seemed to be on the beach. Captain Tarwell was not in sight either, nor were any of the Brownies.

"Oh, Connie, we're being carried out to sea!" Vevi gasped.

"And Mr. Curry will get away from Silver Beach with everything he's stolen," added Connie in despair. "That's why he cut our boat loose! So we wouldn't be able to tell anyone what we saw, until after he's safely away!"

"Oh, we've got to do something—quick! Let's yell for help again."

Cupping hands to their lips, the girls shouted until they were nearly hoarse. Although the cruiser had not as yet drifted far from shore, no one was abroad to hear or see them.

"It's no use," moaned Vevi, grasping the *Adventurer's* railing for support. "We're going to be carried way out into the ocean. I'm getting seasick too! I feel just awful."

Big tears splashed down the little girl's cheeks. Running into the cabin, she flung herself on the cushioned seat and buried her head in a pillow.

CHAPTER 19

SNOW WHITE WINGS HOME

NOW Vevi was more frightened than ill. The *Adventurer* was bobbing up and down on the waves. But the motion was a gentle one, and the girls had not been aboard long enough to really become seasick.

It was the fear of being carried out to sea that worried Vevi and Connie more than anything else. They were troubled too, lest the drifting cruiser crash into one of the other boats which had been tied up to buoys in the bay.

Connie followed her little friend inside the *Adventurer's* cabin.

"Don't cry, Vevi," she comforted her. "We're still in the bay. Mr. Curry said we'll be sighted before we drift very far out."

"Mr. Curry doesn't care what becomes of us," Vevi said, lifting her head out of the pillow. "He was mean and deceitful!"

"Mr. Curry is afraid we'll tell what we saw," Connie declared. "Oh, I wish we could get off this boat in time to catch him!"

Far across the bay the girls heard the muffled roar of a motorboat engine.

Hopeful of a rescue, they darted out of the cabin. The boat they had heard was a long distance away, moving not toward them, but in the opposite direction.

Nevertheless, Vevi and Connie screamed and screamed for help.

Their cries were useless. The boat kept on, soon disappearing in the direction of the distant lighthouse.

"Why doesn't someone see us?" whimpered Vevi. "Why doesn't Mrs. Allison come? Or the Brownies?"

Connie was becoming more worried by the moment. The *Adventurer*, she noted, was drifting faster and faster.

No longer was it close to shore or other boats. If once it passed the mouth of the bay, they would truly be at sea.

"If only we'd drift past one of those red buoys, maybe we could grab onto it," she said.

The buoys which marked the harbor channel ran almost in a straight line out from shore. But the *Adventurer* did not drift very close to any of them.

In reaching out, trying to grasp one of the markers, Connie lost her brown Beanie cap. It fell into the water and was caught by a wave. For a minute she could see it floating on the foamy crest. Then it was gone.

Hopefully, the girls gazed toward shore. They could see the long rows of cottages, the pier, the town dock and two church spires.

"It's almost seven o'clock," Connie said. "Don't worry, Vevi. Mrs. Allison, my mother or Miss Gordon will be coming down to the beach soon now. They'll see that the boat is missing and send help."

"But they won't know what's become of the *Adventurer*, Connie. We've drifted so you can't see the dock where the boat was tied up."

"Let's tie a white cloth to the railing," Connie suggested. "Maybe someone will see that and know we're in trouble."

Going into the cabin, the children searched for a suitable object. Finally they found a towel they were able to use. But they did not have much hope it would attract anyone's attention.

Vevi's gaze presently fell upon Snow White's basket. The pigeon was drowsing.

"Say! Why didn't we think of it before, Connie?"

"Think of what?"

"We can send a message for help by carrier pigeon!"

"Send it where, Vevi?"

"Why, to Mr. Green's pigeon loft. Snow White would fly there."

"You mean he would if he didn't get lost."

"Let's try it anyhow," Vevi urged. "It's our only chance."

"All right," Connie agreed quickly.

Writing materials were found in the built-in desk inside the cabin. Vevi urged Connie to print the message so it could be more easily read.

Connie picked up the pen, thought hard for a moment and then wrote:

"Carried out to sea on the *Adventurer*. Send help quick!"

She signed the message, "Vevi and Connie."

"Underline that word 'quick' three times," Vevi advised.

Connie marked under the word and folded the paper until it was very small. Removing Snow

White from his basket, the girls then placed the message in the carrying cartridge on his leg. 191

"Oh, Snow White, do your best," Vevi pleaded as she bore the pigeon to the railing. "Fly straight home!"

She stroked the pigeon's glossy feathers for a bit. Then she tossed him into the air.

"He's going to settle on that rock beyond the buoy!" Connie gasped. "Oh, that Snow White! He's just no good."

"Yes, he is too!" Vevi insisted logically. "He's just getting his bearings. Give him a minute or two to get started."

Snow White had circled the big black rock as if intending to settle on it. Vevi and Connie watched anxiously. They knew if the pigeon stopped to rest, he would never fly back to his home loft.

"There he goes!" cried Vevi jubilantly.

As if suddenly making up his mind, the pigeon winged off toward shore. He flew in a dead straight line.

"He's going toward Mr. Green's place!" Vevi shouted. "Oh, I knew Snow White could do it."

"He isn't there yet," Connie reminded her. "He may meet a hawk on the way and get into a fight." 192

"It isn't far to Mr. Green's place though. And Snow White's flying fast."

The girls watched at the railing until they no longer were able to see the bird. Then as the cruiser began to wallow heavily in the waves, they went back inside the cruiser.

"At least we won't starve even if we are carried out to sea," said Connie, looking around.

The *Adventurer* evidently had been stocked for a long cruise. In addition to tins of meat, vegetables and miscellaneous items, there were sacks of fresh fruit and cookies.

"I'm awfully hungry," said Connie, her mouth watering at sight of a big juicy pear. "I don't think we should eat any of Mrs. Allison's food though, unless we're almost starving."

"I am now," declared Vevi. "I'm thirsty too."

Though the girls looked everywhere they could not find any drinking water.

Time passed very slowly. Thinking that at least an hour had elapsed, Connie went outside to try to learn what time it was.

However, the *Adventurer* had drifted so far that she could not see the town clock. "It must be at least eight o'clock," she declared. "And we never were missed!" 193

"What could have become of everyone?" speculated Vevi. "Why didn't the Brownies come down to the wharf? Don't they care what becomes of us?"

"Surely in all this time, they'd have missed us."

"Something must have happened," Vevi said gloomily. "I'm really getting scared, Connie."

Her face puckered up and she looked as if she were about to cry again.

"Listen!" commanded Connie suddenly.

In the distance, a clock had begun to strike.

Anxiously, the girls counted the strokes.

"Eight o'clock!" exclaimed Vevi. "Or was it nine? I got mixed up."

"I counted only seven. But can that be right?"

"We've been drifting for hours, Connie."

Connie squinted at the rising sun and shook her head.

"I don't think so," she said. "If it were eight o'clock, we'd be farther out from shore. And people would be on the beach taking their sun baths."

Vevi dropped a piece of paper into the water. A moment later the cruiser had drifted past it.

"We must be in a current," Vevi said. "We're moving awfully fast."

194

"Away from the lighthouse too. The waves are getting bigger and bigger."

The breeze which blew across the deck was rather cold. Spray from the higher waves dampened the girls' hair and made them feel chilly.

"I'm going to stay inside," Vevi said, her teeth chattering. "I don't think we'll ever be picked up. We'll be washed clear out to sea and never see our folks or the Brownies again."

"Don't talk like that," Connie scolded her friend. "You're a Brownie Scout, aren't you? Brownies are supposed to be cheerful and always look at the bright side."

"I'm trying to be brave but—oh!"

The cruiser had given a sudden lurch which nearly flung Vevi from her feet.

"Something hit us!" she wailed, clutching Connie's hand.

"It was only a big wave. When the boat engine isn't on, you feel 'em more. That one hit us broadside."

"I'm going inside," Vevi repeated. "It's not safe out here on deck. We might be thrown overboard."

She dived into the cabin. Connie took another look around to see if help might not be near. Seeing no one or any moving boat, she followed her friend into the cabin.

195

Vevi had huddled down on one of the bunks, wrapping a blanket about herself. Connie joined her there, sharing the warmth of the cover.

"I wish we'd never decided to go for a ride on this stupid old boat," Vevi murmured.

"What I wish is that we hadn't gone on ahead of the other Brownies," declared Connie.

The two girls felt very miserable and discouraged. They were beginning to fear they never would be missed. Although they were not really seasick, the steady rolling of the boat made them feel uncomfortable.

"I'm going to be sick," announced Vevi, lying down on the bunk.

Connie curled up beside her under the blanket. For a long while they kept very quiet, listening to the slap of the waves on the *Adventurer's* hull.

"It's hours since we started to drift," Vevi whispered. "We must be way out in the ocean now."

Connie arose and went to the porthole window. Looking out, she saw only an empty stretch of water.

Badly frightened, she moved across to the other side of the cabin. From this window she was relieved to be able to see the shore.

196

As she watched, the cruiser swung slightly, so that Connie saw a huge mound of piled up rocks. She knew that it marked one side of the harbor entrance.

Once the cruiser passed that point, it really would be out at sea.

"Where are we?" demanded Vevi, swinging her legs over the side of the bunk.

Before she could start across the cabin, she felt a hard jar as something struck the *Adventurer* amidship.

"Was that a log?" she gasped. "Or another boat?"

The girls were afraid to hope that anyone had come to their rescue.

"Ship ahoy!" they heard someone call. "Anyone aboard?"

Laughing in sheer joy, Vevi and Connie rushed out of the cabin.

"We're here!" they shouted.

Captain Tarwell had come alongside in another cruiser. Aboard were Mrs. Allison, Connie's mother, Miss Gordon and all the Brownies.

"Thank goodness, you're both safe," cried Mrs. Williams. Captain Tarwell hooked the two boats together so that Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon could step aboard the *Adventurer*.

197

Mrs. Williams held Connie tightly in her arms while the Brownie leader gave Vevi an affectionate hug.

"How did you find us?" Connie asked when she could catch her breath. "Did you see our drifting boat?"

"The report came from several places almost at the same time," Miss Gordon explained. "The Brownies were a little late getting to the wharf. Before we arrived, a telephone call came to Captain Tarwell from Mr. Green."

"From the pigeon loft?" Vevi demanded, her face lighted up. "Then Snow White got through with our message!"

"Yes, Jamie was feeding the pigeons when the carrier alighted on the roof. He read the message and called Mr. Green."

"Mr. Green didn't know what to make of it," Mrs. Williams went on with the story. "So he telephoned Captain Tarwell, asking him to investigate."

"About that same time," Miss Gordon resumed, "Mrs. Allison reached the dock and couldn't find her cruiser. While she was wondering if it had been stolen, another telephone call came in from the lighthouse keeper. He'd sighted the drifting boat."

198

"We really caused a lot of excitement, didn't we?" grinned Vevi.

"You certainly did," agreed Miss Gordon. "You frightened us half out of our wits. What in the world possessed you to untie the *Adventurer*?"

The question astonished Vevi and Connie.

"But we didn't!" they cried together.

"Then how did the boat get loose?"

Vevi was so excited that her words came out in a rush.

"It was Raymond Curry who set the boat adrift!" she informed the startled adults. "We saw him steal from another cruiser. He didn't want us to tell so he untied the rope."

"He wanted to get away from Silver Beach before anyone caught him," added Connie earnestly. "Miss Gordon, he was the one who stole your wrist watch! If you call the police right away, maybe you can get it back!"

CHAPTER 20

BROWNIE OF THE DAY

CONNIE'S declaration that Raymond Curry should be arrested as a thief astonished Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams.

However, after asking a few questions, they were convinced that there was no mistake. Captain Tarwell also had heard Vevi and Connie make the accusation.

"It doesn't surprise me—not one whit!" he announced. "I've had my eye on that young fellow all season. If I could have dug up proof, he'd have been thrown in irons long ago."

"But he's a lifeguard at the hotel," murmured Miss Gordon. "It hardly seems possible he'd stoop to such a low thing."

"I've been watching him for quite a while but never could catch him at it," replied the captain. "Jamie himself gave me a clue, not meaning to, of course. I've felt mighty sorry for that lad. That was why I let him sleep in my cabin after he ran away."

"Then you knew it all the time!" exclaimed Vevi.

"Aye, I guessed the lad was there. I'd have sent him packing back to his father, but I couldn't make up my mind Jamie ought to be returned without Juvenile Court looking into the situation. So I arranged for him to get a job for a few days with Mr. Green."

"What's to be done about Raymond Curry?" asked Mrs. Williams.

She told the captain she felt that even if it could not be proven he had stolen anything, he should be severely punished for setting the *Adventurer* adrift.

"Aye, and he shall be," promised the captain grimly. "It's plain he figured by untying the boat, he'd gain time enough to get out of town."

In the glare of sunlight, the old seaman studied his watch.

"It's only 7:35," he announced. "That gives him roughly forty-five minutes start."

Now both Vevi and Connie were amazed to learn that so little time had elapsed. They were certain they had spent hours in the drifting boat. "Curry couldn't catch a train out of Silver Beach at this hour," went on the captain. "He has no car. My guess is he'd head for the airport. A westbound plane is due out at 7:55."

"Then we'll never stop him!" gasped Mrs. Williams.

"Maybe we can if we move fast," replied the captain. "I'll take this little boat in and call police. The rest of you follow in Mrs. Allison's cruiser."

This plan suited everyone except Vevi and Connie. After their unpleasant experience, they would have felt safer in the captain's boat.

The old seaman waited only long enough to make sure Mrs. Allison could start the *Adventurer's* powerful motor. Then he headed for shore in the smaller boat, traveling at top speed.

Once the engine of the *Adventurer* began to purr, the cruiser no longer drifted. Mrs. Allison headed it so that the waves would not slap so hard.

"Shall we go on with our morning cruise or return to shore?" she asked the Brownies.

Jane was all for continuing the ride. The other Brownies, however, voted to return to the wharf.

"Never mind," Mrs. Allison said to Jane. "Later in the day we'll have our cruise. Just now we're anxious to learn what has become of Raymond Curry."

Events moved very rapidly, once the Brownie Scouts were ashore.

However, it was more than two hours later before the girls learned all the details of what happened at the airport.

Shortly before noon, Captain Tarwell reappeared on the beach to report that police had arrested Mr. Curry as he prepared to board a plane west.

"He denied everything," the captain told the Brownies. "But in searching his luggage, police

came upon valuables taken from one of the cruisers. They also found a pawnticket which has been redeemed."

The seaman then showed Miss Gordon the wristwatch she had lost on the beach.

"Mr. Curry pawned it for a trifling sum, along with several other items," Captain Tarwell explained. "You can identify the watch?"

"Oh, yes, it is mine! I'm so happy to get it back again. But what of Mr. Curry?"

"He is under arrest. In searching his luggage police found his bathing trunks. A deep inside pocket had been sewed into them. It provided a pouch where Curry could carry small items. Sometimes, he swam off with them. At other times, if carrying articles that might be damaged by water, he merely walked back to the hotel."

203

"And because he was the lifeguard there, no one suspected him of wrong doing!"

"Connie and I did!" interposed Vevi quickly. "We saw him trying to break into cars last night on the beach. Only then we weren't sure what he was doing."

Miss Gordon asked Captain Tarwell what was to become of Jamie.

"The court will direct his future. For the time being, he'll stay on with Mr. Green, helping with the birds. By fall, when it's time for the lad to start school, I'm hoping the court will turn him over to me. I'd like to adopt the boy and make a home for him at the cottage. Time I'm opening that place and forgetting the past."

"I guess Mr. Curry never would have been caught if it hadn't been for Snow White," Vevi declared proudly. "I guess that bird proved he was some good after all!"

"He certainly did," agreed the captain heartily. "Oh, yes, Vevi, I have a message for you from Mr. Green."

"For me?"

"Aye, he said to tell you not to worry about Snow White anymore. He'll keep him at the loft with his other pigeons. Even if he never proves to be a fast racer, he'll always give him a home."

204

"He'll be known as a hero pigeon, won't he?" Vevi laughed. "That's a lot more important than winning a race."

Her mention of a race reminded the Brownies of the turtle contest which had been scheduled for that afternoon. With Mr. Curry under arrest, they were quite certain it never would be held.

"I guess the Brownies won't have their chance to win prize money," sighed Sunny. "We need cash badly in our treasury too."

Directly after lunch, Mrs. Allison took the Brownies for a long ride in her cabin cruiser. While they were aboard, she showed them a fine collection of shells she had gathered the previous winter in Florida.

The shells were larger and more beautiful than any the Brownies had in their collection.

"I want you girls to have them for your exhibition tomorrow at the cottage," Mrs. Allison declared. "Furthermore, you may keep them after the show is over."

Now it seemed to the Brownies that everyone was trying to help them.

205

"It's our motto 'Help Other People,' working for us!" Rosemary laughed. "I guess that was because we helped other folks first."

When the Brownies returned from the cruise, another pleasant surprise awaited them.

Mr. Fulsom told the girls that the turtle race was to be held on the hotel lawn just as scheduled.

"The hotel people have asked me to run it off for them," he added. "From now on I'm to work there as a lifeguard. I'll take Raymond Curry's place and make a much better salary."

The Brownies were sorry to know that their friend no longer would be at the cottage beach. Of course, it did not really matter, for after Sunday they would be in Rosedale again. They were happy that he was to have a better job, and especially pleased that the turtle race was to be run.

"How soon does it start?" Vevi demanded, fairly beside herself with excitement.

"Sharp at two o'clock."

"It's almost that now," Vevi gasped. "I must get Clover right away. I hope he's feeling well."

All the Brownies ran with her to the cottage to fetch the turtle. When they lifted Clover out of the pan, he snapped and tried to get away.

"He's feeling well, all right!" laughed Vevi.

By the time the Brownies reached the hotel lawn, many other children had gathered there. Nearly everyone had a turtle to race.

A large white circle had been drawn on the grass. Mr. Fulsom explained the rules. He said the turtles would start from the center of the ring. The one which first crossed the chalk line would be declared the winner.

All the children, including Vevi, carried their entries to the center of the ring. After the turtles were set down on the grass, Mr. Fulsom told the children to step back.

"You may cheer your favorite," he said, "but no one must frighten a turtle."

Now a turtle race was much slower than the Brownies had expected. The entries did not start off very fast. Some of the turtles didn't seem to know they were in a race. A few failed to move.

"Come on Clover!" shouted Connie.

The snapper started to crawl very fast toward the sea.

At the same time, several other turtles moved in other directions toward the chalk line. A turtle with the name "Elmer" painted on its shell, crawled even faster than Clover.

"Look at him go," said Jane anxiously. "He's going to win!"

"Come on, Clover!" pleaded Vevi. "Come on!"

In her excitement she jumped up and down, clapping her hands. So much noise seemed to frighten Clover. He halted and twisted his long neck, looking at the crowd.

"Oh, he's stopped," groaned Connie. "Now we'll never win!"

"I'll give him a push!" cried Jane.

Vevi seized her hand, holding her back. "No! That's against the rules! He'll be put out of the race entirely if you do."

"Anyway, Elmer has stopped too!" exclaimed Rosemary. "That other turtle called Pete is ahead now."

For the next few minutes, it was hard to tell which turtle was winning. First one would crawl and then another. Sometimes they would go very fast toward the finish line and then slow down.

"Clover never will win," Jane said in despair. "He's too lazy."

"He is not," Vevi defended her entry. "Look at him go now! Why, he's almost running!" It was true. Clover had suddenly come to life again. He crawled faster and faster toward the finish line.

On the opposite side of the circle, Elmer also was moving rapidly. No one could tell which turtle would reach the chalk line first.

"Elmer wins—" the lifeguard started to say, and then he corrected himself. The turtle had stopped short just a half inch from the finish line.

"Clover is the winner!" Mr. Fulsom shouted. "An entry by the Brownie Scouts of Rosedale!"

Vevi ran to recapture Clover before he reached the water. He did not want to be picked up and tried to snap at her.

"Let him go, Vevi," urged Connie, running up. "He wants to be free."

"And you can't take him with you to Rosedale," added Rosemary, joining the girls.

Vevi held Clover for a minute, hating to let him go. She knew though, that Connie and Rosemary were right.

Without a word, she set the turtle on the grass. He crawled very fast down the slope, across the sand and into the water.

"Goodbye, Clover," Vevi said then. "Maybe next summer, if the Brownies come here again, we'll find you once more."

Mr. Fulsom gave Miss Gordon a ten dollar bill for the Brownie organization. She promised the girls to keep it safe until it could be put in the bank at Rosedale.

After the turtle race the Brownie Scouts had a great deal of work to do. Not only was it necessary to pack their suitcases, but they also had to fix their shell exhibition at the ship cottage.

"The Brownies aren't too well known at Silver Beach," Connie said anxiously to her mother. "Do you think anyone will come to our show tomorrow?"

"I'm sure they will," replied Mrs. Williams. "Besides, the Brownies are better known than you think. You see, the newspapers carried stories of your adventure and Vevi's aboard the cruiser."

Early Sunday morning after church, the girls were at the cottage ready for visitors. Their shells all had been neatly classified and arranged in attractive patterns on tables.

"It will be awful if we've gone to so much trouble and no one comes," sighed Sunny. "I couldn't bear it."

Just then a car drove up. Mrs. Allison was at the wheel, but with her were several ladies.

"At least we'll have someone!" laughed Sunny, greatly relieved.

After that a number of friends Miss Gordon had made at the beach began to arrive. Mr. Fulsom came, bringing two other men. Then there followed a steady stream of visitors, persons the Brownies never before had seen or knew only slightly.

"I guess everyone at Silver Beach heard about our exhibition!" Jane declared happily.

"Everyone except Captain Tarwell," said Vevi. "I thought he would surely come."

The afternoon wore on and still the old seaman did not appear. All the Brownies were disappointed, for more than anyone else, they wanted him to see their shells.

"We may as well put everything away," Jane said at last. "It's getting late."

"Let's wait just a few more minutes," pleaded Vevi. "I'm sure Captain Tarwell will come."

"I think he will too," agreed Miss Gordon. "We can't wait too long though. Now, does the organization have any unfinished business, anything to be done before we leave Silver Beach?"

"Vevi never gave her bird report," Jane reminded the group.

"You would bring that up," muttered Vevi.

She felt rather annoyed at Jane. That was because she had forgotten all about making a report, and did not know of a bird she could tell about.

"Vevi's worse than a tail-ender!" Jane teased. "She doesn't have any report. Today's the last chance to make it too."

"Who says I haven't a report?" Vevi retorted. "Just wait!"

"That's what you always say!" twitted Jane.

"I'll give my report in just a minute," Vevi said, stalling for time. "First, I want to see if Captain Tarwell is coming."

Quickly, she ran out of the cottage. Now Vevi hoped that outdoors she might see a bird upon which she could report.

Not a bird was to be seen. As luck would have it though, Captain Tarwell came walking up the path.

"Am I too late for the big show?" he inquired.

"Oh, no, you're just in time," Vevi told him.

Captain Tarwell noticed the little girl's downcast face.

"Storm clouds?" he chuckled. "What's the trouble, Vevi? Have you lost one of your pets?"

Vevi told him then how Jane was teasing her because she had been unable to make her bird report.

"I've thought and thought and I can't think of a single one the other girls haven't told about," she said sadly. "I guess I'm just no good."

"Now if I were a little girl with a report to make, I'd use my eyes," chuckled the captain. "I'd tell about a bird that lives in this very cottage."

"Here?" Vevi asked in disbelief. "Oh, I'm sure you must be mistaken, Captain Tarwell. No bird

except Snow White ever lived here.”

“No?” inquired the old seaman.

Without saying more, he raised his eyes to gaze up into the sky. Vevi saw then that he was watching a short, fat bird that was wheeling overhead.

Its wings were beating swiftly and in such stiff fashion that the creature appeared to be a mechanical toy rather than living.

As Vevi watched, the bird dived down into the chimney of the cottage.

“Oh, won’t it be killed?” Vevi asked anxiously.

“Not that bird,” answered the captain. “A chimney swift always builds its nest in a chimney. I’ll tell you all about it.”

The old seaman recounted everything he knew about the bird, which was a great deal, indeed.

“Oh, thank you!” Vevi said gratefully. “Now I’ll be able to make my report!”

213

She raced into the cottage ahead of the captain to tell the Brownies what she had learned.

“My bird lives right here in the chimney!” she declared. “He’s soot colored. He’s called a swift because he’s so fast on the wing. When he eats insects he keeps his mouth wide open, snapping at them as he flies through the air.”

“Where did you learn all that so fast?” Jane demanded suspiciously.

“The chimney swift is the most active in cloudy weather and in the evening,” Vevi recited. “Their nests are cup-shaped, made of tiny twigs. There’s one in the chimney now!”

“Why, Vevi, that’s a fine report,” praised Miss Gordon.

“But it’s not about a water bird,” Jane insisted. “It doesn’t count.”

Vevi did not know what to say. Captain Tarwell came to her rescue.

“Many’s the time I’ve seen a swift dip down into the surface of the water in full flight,” he informed the group. “The creature feeds on the wing, drinks on the wing and bathes that way too.”

“So I guess that makes it a water bird!” Vevi declared triumphantly. “Doesn’t it, Miss Gordon?”

214

“I’m inclined to accept the report,” smiled the teacher. “Besides, Vevi has produced two live birds, one on the beach, and now another in our chimney.”

“Vevi helped the Brownie Scouts win ten dollars too,” Connie reminded the girls.

“She found a home for Snow White when his owner didn’t think he wanted to keep the pigeon,” added Rosemary.

“And she found a son for me,” said Captain Tarwell quietly. He went on to explain: “It’s just been decided that Jamie will live with me here at the cottage. Frankly, I never would have reopened my home if it hadn’t been for Vevi, Connie and all the Brownies.”

“Vevi’s really our Brownie of the Day,” laughed Connie, very proud of her friend.

“She deserves a Brownie salute!” cried Sunny. “Let’s give it to her.”

The girls clustered about Vevi. Smartly they raised their right hands to their temples, two fingers extended. Vevi returned the salute.

“Speech! Speech!” teased the Brownies.

“I—I don’t know what to say,” mumbled Vevi, deeply embarrassed. “Isn’t it nice being chosen Brownie of the Day?” prompted Connie.

215

“Oh, yes,” laughed Vevi. “I’d rather be a Brownie forever though! That’s because it’s the nicest organization in the whole wide world!”

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

Punctuation has been standardized; inconsistent spelling retained. Changes to the original publication have been made as follows:

- Page 37
friend into the little ship *changed to*
friend into the [little](#) ship
- Page 64
down to the cliffs which overlooked *changed to*
down to the cliffs which [overlooked](#)
- Page 153
can get up early. We'll go *changed to*
can get up [early, we'll](#) go
- Page 162
Connie said severely *changed to*
Connie said [severely](#)
- Page 185
added Connie in dispair *changed to*
added Connie in [despair](#)
- Page 205
hotel lawn just as sheduled *changed to*
hotel lawn just as [scheduled](#)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AT SILVER BEACH

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