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Mildred A. Wirt**

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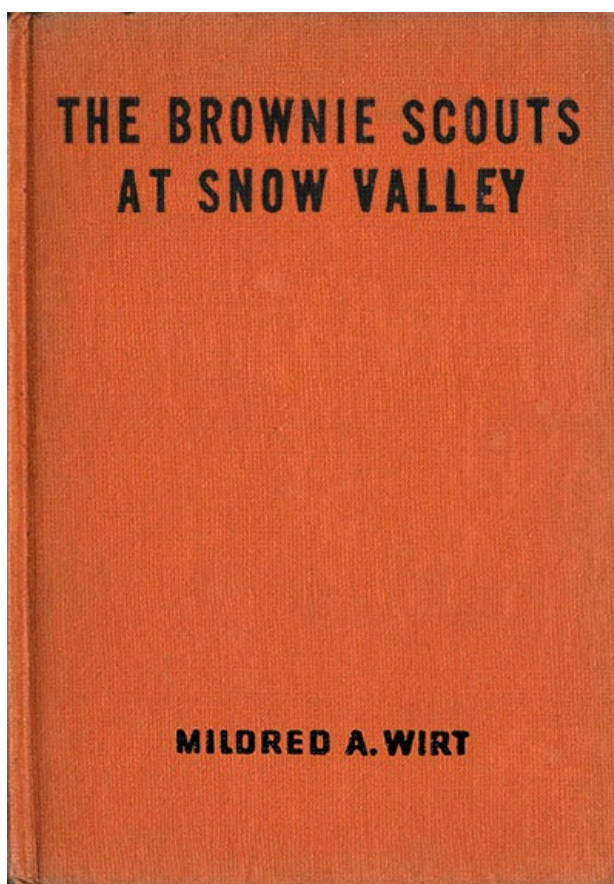
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AT SNOW VALLEY



**The Brownie Scouts
at Snow Valley**



She held a golden locket on a chain.
"Brownie Scouts at Snow Valley"
(See page [188](#))

The Brownie Scouts at Snow Valley

by
Mildred A. Wirt

Illustrated

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THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AT SNOW VALLEY

Printed in the United States of America

To
MRS. ELEANOR T. GIBSON

*Executive Director of the Toledo Girl Scouts in
appreciation of her helpfulness and cooperation.*

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CHAPTER 1

A Runaway Sled

SIX little Brownie Scouts, busily pasting scrapbooks in Connie Williams' living room, perked up their ears to listen.

"Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!"

Again came that firm, quick tapping on the window pane.

Through the cold, frosted glass, a little girl in scarlet snowsuit peered in at the Brownies, seated cross-legged in a semi-circle on the rug.

Her freckled pug nose made a tiny smudge as she pressed it hard against the pane, trying to see what went on in the room.

"Why, it's Veve McGuire!" said Connie, scrambling to her feet.

"Let's not pay any attention to her." This advice came from Jane Tuttle, another member of the Rosedale Brownie Troop. With a toss of her long, yellow pigtails, she went on snipping papers. "Veve's just trying to act silly because she isn't a Brownie."

Veve McGuire lived next door to Connie. That fall when Miss Jean Gordon, the fourth grade teacher at Rosedale School, had organized the Brownies, the little girl had been invited to join.

But Veve had tossed her dark curls and said she didn't think she wanted to be a Brownie.

"Who wants to belong to any old troop?" she had scoffed. "What do Brownies do anyway, except have meetings?"

"Brownies have loads of fun," the other girls had told her. "They go to camp, they help at home, they plan entertainments—"

Veve hadn't listened. Even when the six girls bought their new uniforms of pinchecked brown gingham, each with a cocky felt beanie cap, she had pretended she wasn't a bit interested. But now that the Brownies were so busy with their work and plans, she really missed her playmates.

Connie, who very much wanted Veve to be a Brownie Scout, knew all this. So while the other girls paid no heed to Veve, she went to the window.

"Come on out and play!" Veve shouted. "I'm going to make a big snowman. I'll let you all help me!"

Now it had snowed nearly all day, the first real storm of December. Little feathery drifts had blown against the Williams' white shingle house.

During the last hour, the wind had died. Water dripped steadily from the roof, for the weather had turned warmer. The snow, though melting fast, was just soft enough to roll.

"Come on out!" Veve shouted again, waving a red mitten.

Connie shook her head. She had to turn her back on Veve's disappointed face, for just then Miss Gordon, the troop leader, came into the living room from the kitchen.

"Well, girls," she said, "shall we pick up our scrap papers and call it an afternoon? I think we've made wonderful progress."

The six Brownies, Connie, Jane, Rosemary Fritche, Eileen Webber, Belinda Matthews and "Sunny" Davidson, had been pasting scrapbooks for patients at Rosedale Hospital. Three of the books already were finished.

Forgetting about Veve, the girls cleaned up the scraps from the rug. When the room was tidy, they sang their Brownie song:

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

Then as the girls started to leave, they told Connie how very much they had enjoyed themselves at her home.

"The chocolate and cookies were awfully good," said Jane, wriggling into her heavy snowsuit.

"Will you all meet at my house next week?"

Before anyone could answer, Miss Gordon spoke.

"Oh, girls," she said, "I nearly forgot! Let's not plan our next meeting just yet."

"Not plan another meeting?" Connie echoed, a puzzled look in her deep blue eyes.

"I may have a surprise for you," Miss Gordon hinted mysteriously. "No, don't ask me about it just yet. I can't tell you any more now."

She broke off and laughed in her delightful way, which made the Brownies more curious than ever. The hall buzzed with excited talk as the girls put on their galoshes and woolen mittens. What could Miss Gordon's "surprise" be?

"Give us a tiny hint," they pleaded.

"Can't," laughed their leader. "Not until after I've talked to your parents. You may hear all about it at our next meeting."

"And when will that be?" Jane inquired anxiously, for she had asked to be the next hostess.

"I'll telephone you in plenty of time," Miss Gordon promised.

Out in the Williams' front yard, Veve had started to roll a huge snowball. She hadn't known it was the regular time for the Brownie meeting to break up, and thought the girls meant to play with her.

"Come and help me push!" she shouted. "I want to make this snowball as big as a mountain!"

Belinda Matthews and Rosemary Fritche only smiled at her as they ambled down the walk arm-in-arm. Next, Eileen Webber and Jane Tuttle came out of the house, and they barely noticed Veve or her snowball.

Connie, who stood in the doorway saying goodbye to Sunny and Miss Gordon, saw that Veve was very disappointed. The little girl looked as if she might cry. Miss Gordon noticed it too.

"What wonderful snow for rolling!" the Brownie Scout leader remarked.

"Let's help Veve!" proposed Connie. Usually known as "sober face," she was now very gay as she dived into the cloak closet for her snowsuit and galoshes. "Can you stay awhile and play, Sunny?"

"I'll call my mother," Sunny offered.

Reached by telephone, Mrs. Davidson said that her daughter might remain until five o'clock. Sunny struggled into her zippered white woolen snowsuit and the two girls went outdoors together.

Veve tried not to show how glad she was to see them. "Let's push this snowball down the driveway," she urged.

The big ball went "crunch, crunch," as the three girls rolled it over and over. From the driveway it picked up bits of gravel and rock.

"Isn't it large enough now for a snowman?" asked Sunny as she became breathless from pushing.

Veve walked around the huge ball to see how large it had grown.

"Yes, it will do," she decided. "This ball is for the snowman's feet. We will make the next one larger. That will be for his stomach."

The three girls stood the snowball on its flat end in the front yard. Then they started another which grew and grew as it rolled over the ground.

"Veve," Connie asked suddenly, "why don't you join our Brownie troop?"

In the act of lifting up a hard-packed snowball, Veve nearly let it tumble through her mittens.

"Oh, Brownies!" she teased. "They stay all afternoon in the house and make scrapbooks! I'd rather play outdoors!"

"Brownies don't stay inside all the time!" Sunny said hotly. "You have it all wrong. Our troop is wonderful!"

Veve tried to change the subject. "Our snowman needs a face. I'll get some coal for his eyes and nose."

On the driveway of the McGuire home next door stood a red coal delivery truck. A strong looking man with a very dirty face was shoveling coal into the basement.

"Hello, mister," said Veve, who never was afraid of strangers. "May I have some little pieces of coal for my snowman?"

"Help yourself, Sister," replied the man. He kept right on unloading the coal.

"My name isn't Sister," said Veve politely. "It is Veve McGuire. This is our coal too."

The little girl picked up several small pieces which had tumbled from the rear of the truck. However, they were not the size she needed. Veve saw better pieces over by the chute, but was afraid to try to get them. The coalman was shoveling so fast she knew she might be struck.

"Please, can't you wait a minute?" she asked.

"All right," agreed the coalman, resting on his shovel. "Pick up what you want."

Veve darted in and gathered up several pieces. As soon as she had jumped out of the way, the coalman went on with his work again.

Veve stood watching him a moment.

"My, but you are a strong man," she said admiringly. "Do you know what I would do if I had large muscles like yours?"

"No," replied the man. "I suppose you would be a coalwoman."

Veve laughed because she knew the man was teasing her. "I wouldn't like to get as dirty as you are," she said.

"I don't like coal dust either," returned the man, "but it can't be helped. Well, what would you do?"

"If I were strong, I would make the largest snowman in the whole world!"

The coalman laughed as he went on with his shoveling.

"I am too busy to make snowmen," he said. "I have a wife and four children to feed and clothe."

Veve very much would have liked to talk longer with the coalman, but she knew the girls were waiting for her.

So, taking the pieces of coal, she ran back to the Williams' yard.

"Why, Veve, you're all covered with dirt!" exclaimed Connie, noticing a streak on the little girl's face.

"I don't care," laughed Veve. "You should see the coalman. He's a lot worse than I am!"

The girls used the pieces of coal to mark the snowman's eyes, nose and mouth. Connie made a long row of black buttons down the front of the fat figure.

"That's his coat," she declared. "Now he's finished!"

"Not yet," insisted Veve. "He should have a hat and a pipe. Then he'll look like a real man."

"Where can we get them?" asked Sunny, stepping back to admire the snowman.

Connie knew that her father had a tall black silk hat which he never used, and she remembered a green plastic bubble pipe in the kitchen drawer.

"I'll ask mother if we may use them," she offered, and ran into the house.

Mrs. Williams gave her the bubble pipe, but hesitated when Connie asked if she might also have the black silk hat.

"Your father hasn't used that hat in years, so I suppose he won't mind," she said, after thinking the matter over for a moment. "You'll find it in the attic."

Connie climbed the stairs to the cobwebby room under the roof. The place was cluttered with trunks, boxes, and old pieces of furniture. Everything was very dusty.

Opening one trunk after another, Connie finally found the tall black silk hat which had been wrapped in tissue paper. With the bubble pipe, she carried it to the yard.

"Just what we need!" cried Veve in delight.

She thrust the hat jauntily on the snowman's head and the pipestem deep into his mouth. The

girls laughed aloud, for the figure now looked very funny.

"Doesn't he look grand!" exclaimed Connie. "Almost like Daddy!"

Unable to think of another way to improve the snowman, the girls sat down on the porch steps. Connie and Sunny began to talk about the Brownie meeting and to speculate on Miss Gordon's promised "surprise."

Again Veve deliberately changed the subject.

"It's getting warmer," she said. "Our snowman won't last very long, I'm afraid."

"He's wilting already," agreed Sunny. "Oh, don't you wish the snow would never melt?"

"It always goes away real fast here," sighed Connie. "We never have half enough ice skating or coasting."

"Say, why don't we go coasting right now?" Veve proposed eagerly. "Klingman's Hill!"

"All right, let's ask our mothers," Connie agreed, falling in with the plan.

"It's nearly five o'clock," Sunny said regretfully. "I'll have to run along. Remember, Connie, until our next Brownie meeting—DYB."

She winked at Connie as she spoke the mysterious letters.

"What does DYB mean?" Veve demanded.

"Oh, it's a Brownie secret," laughed Sunny as she started off down the street. "Our troop has lots and lots of them!"

Now Klingman's Hill was three blocks from the Williams' home. The road had been roped off to keep automobiles from using it. Usually a policeman was on hand to see that the children did not get hurt.

After Connie obtained permission from her mother, the two girls started for the hill.

"Tell me what DYB means," Veve coaxed.

"Can't, Veve. It's a Brownie secret, and Brownies never tell. Now if you were a member—"

"But I'm not," said Veve a trifle crossly.

By this time the girls were quite close to Klingman's Hill. They could see that the coasting place was nearly deserted. Much of the snow had melted, leaving ugly bare spots on the hill. Only a few boys and girls stood around looking very gloomy.

"Oh, Veve, no one is coasting!" cried Connie in disappointment. "We won't be able to slide after all."

"The snow always melts before we have a chance to coast," grumbled Veve. "I'm getting sick of it."

"So am I, Veve. But Miss Gordon says Brownies must learn to take disappointments."

Veve frowned, for she disliked the advice. "All I ask is a little cold winter weather," she mumbled.

Dragging their sleds, the two girls walked to the brow of the hill. Everywhere they could see patches of bare earth on the slope. Water trickled in the roadside ditches.

"Can't coast here," said a boy who stood near. "But there's snow left on Kelly's Hill. Most of the kids have gone there. That's where I'm heading." He started away with his sled.

Veve seized Connie's hand. "Come on," she urged. "Let's go too."

"But Kelly's Hill isn't roped off. Only the older boys coast there."

"Who's afraid?" scoffed Veve. "I want to use my sled at least once this winter."

"Do you think the hill is safe?" Connie was troubled. While her mother had not forbidden her to go to the other coasting area, she wondered if she should. A Brownie, Miss Gordon had said, always was trustworthy and responsible.

"We can be careful," Veve said. She started away.

"Wait!" called Connie.

Veve was a year younger than she, and inclined to act hastily. She could not let her friend go

alone.

Now Kelly's Hill was several blocks farther on at the south edge of Rosedale. The slope was very steep, with railroad tracks crossing it near the bottom.

A dirt road wound over the hill too. Automobiles passed now and then, so for that reason the coasting place was considered unsafe.

However, when Connie and Veve reached the steep hill they found plenty of snow. The run looked very fast. Many boys and a few girls were coasting.

Connie, who was worried because of the railroad tracks, said quietly: "Veve, I don't think we should coast here."

"So Brownies are afraid!" jeered her friend. "Well, I'm not."

All the same, she did not start down the hill right away. Instead, she removed her mittens and blew breath on her fingers.

"It's cold here," she said, stamping one foot and then another.

Connie laughed, for the air was not in the least chilly. She knew Veve was afraid of the hill. But she did not say so, for she hoped her friend would decide not to coast.

Just then, a group of older boys came along with their sleds. One of them knew Veve and tried to tease her.

"This hill isn't for girls! Too steep!"

The remark annoyed Veve. Forgetting to be afraid, she climbed on her sled and took the rope in her hands.

Before she was ready to start, the older boy gave her a hard push. Down the hill shot the sled, moving faster and faster.

Wind whizzed in Veve's face. She couldn't see. The sled went so fast it was hard to steer.

"Oh! Oh!" she squealed.

Another sled loomed up. Veve pushed hard on the steering lever with her foot. The sled skidded sharply to the right and she couldn't straighten it out. The next moment she was lying in a ditch with the sled on top of her.

Slowly she picked herself up and brushed wet snow from her suit. Connie ran down the hill to ask anxiously:

"Are you hurt, Veve?"

"Of course not! But look at my clothes. They're all wet. I don't like this hill."

"Let's go home."

"All right," Veve agreed. "It's not as much fun here as I thought it would be."

As the girls trudged slowly up the slope, a car overtook them. Several of the older boys ran after it, hooking the ropes of their sleds over the rear bumpers. They rode to the top of the hill and then jumped off.

"Say, that's an easy way to get up without walking," laughed Veve.

"I shouldn't try it," cautioned Connie. "Those boys might get hurt."

She knew they were being most unwise to risk hooking their sleds onto the car bumpers. If the automobile should speed up, they easily might be carried away.

Midway up the hill, Veve suddenly halted.

"See what's coming!" she shouted. "A runaway sled!"

"Jeepers!" Connie exclaimed. "It looks like mine!" Before starting down the hill she had tied her sled to a tree. Now she saw that someone had untied it for a joke.

The two girls tried to stop the sled, but were not quick enough. It glided past them into a ditch far down the hill. Of course they had to go after it.

"What a mean trick!" exclaimed Veve. "I'm ready to go home! Only I hate to climb all the way up this old mountain."

Nearby stood a parked automobile. The driver sat behind the steering wheel with the engine

running. However, he appeared to be waiting for someone and did not act as if he intended to start up the hill.

"Connie, I'll show you how the boys hook onto the car bumpers," Veve offered.

Before her friend could stop her, she darted to the parked car. The driver did not see her, for he was gazing in another direction.

"Just slip the rope over the bumper like this," explained Veve. "It's easy, Connie."

Now Veve had no intention of riding up the hill. She only liked to think she could do anything the older boys did. Never once did it occur to her that the automobile might start suddenly forward.

Therefore, she was startled when, without warning, the motor speeded up. Smoke poured from the exhaust pipe at the rear. The car began to move slowly ahead.

"Oh, he's driving off with your sled!" Connie cried in alarm.

"Hey, wait!" shouted Veve, running after the car.

The driver did not hear.

Connie and Veve soon caught up, for the car climbed the hill slowly. But instead of unhooking the rope, Veve threw herself flat on the sled.

"Jump on!" she invited Connie.

Connie raced alongside, urging Veve to unhook the sled.

"Not yet," the other girl laughed. "I'm riding to the top."

The car began to move faster, although it was still climbing. Connie fell behind. She was very worried for her friend.

"Get off now, Veve!" she shouted.

The car reached the hilltop and went so fast Veve could not unfasten the sled rope.

Connie saw that her playmate might be carried away by the automobile. In a moment it would start downhill, and then Veve never could jump off without being hurt.

"Roll off!" she urged. "Roll off, quick!"

Veve did not want to lose her sled. She kept clinging to it, hoping the car would slow down. Instead, it picked up speed.

"Stop!" she shouted to the driver. "Stop the car!"

The man could not hear because the chains on the wheels were making a loud clanking noise.

"Help! Help!" screamed Veve, now thoroughly frightened.

The car whirled around a corner, with the girl clinging desperately to her sled.

CHAPTER 2

In Search of Veve

BY the time Connie reached the bend, Veve and the car were out of sight. For a minute she was so frightened she couldn't think what to do.

Miss Gordon once had told the Brownies that whenever anything went wrong, the important thing was to remain very calm.

Connie felt anything but calm now. She was so excited she trembled all over. But she knew she had to think clearly or Veve might never be saved.

"I'll call the police," she thought.

At the next to last Brownie meeting, Miss Gordon had shown the girls how to dial police and fire department numbers in an emergency. Only Connie had no nickel and the nearest telephone was at the drugstore a block away.

Well, she had to do something quickly. Even if Veve were lucky enough not to be thrown from her sled, the driver was almost certain to take her far away without knowing it.

Dragging her sled, Connie ran all the way to the drugstore. The druggist was there, waiting on a customer who wanted a box of cough tablets.

"Please," said Connie breathlessly, "will you lend me a nickel?"

The druggist looked so surprised she realized that the request must seem an odd one. So she added quickly:

"Veve was carried away on her sled by an automobile! I must call the police station."

"The police station!" exclaimed the druggist.

He didn't understand what Connie meant about Veve and the sled, but he could see from her worried look that something was wrong.

He gave her a nickel and showed her where the telephone booth was located.

"Can you dial the numbers yourself?" he asked.

Connie nodded. The telephone directory hung on a hook, and on the front cover in large print were the instructions:

"In case of Emergency Dial Police—Adams 1234." The number was an easy one to remember.

A light flashed on as Connie stepped into the booth. She dropped the nickel into the coin box and waited for the clear dial tone. When she heard it, she carefully whirled the numbers.

Almost at once a gruff voice barked in her ear:

"Police station!"

Connie was a trifle nervous, for she never before had talked to anyone at the police station. However, she forced herself to speak slowly and relate exactly what had happened.

"Please come as fast as you can," she urged. "Veve McGuire and I were coasting at Kelly's Hill. She hooked a ride with her sled on an automobile—and was carried away."

The police sergeant seemed to grasp the situation instantly. He barked: "Did you get the car license number?"

"No-o," Connie admitted, trying hard to remember. "The first two letters were EB—the same as Edith Bailey's initials. But I can't remember the numbers. It was a large gray sedan."

"Going what direction?"

"West." Of this Connie was certain. "It was headed up the hill and went on toward the country."

"Highway 20," said the police sergeant, making notes on his pad. "The girl's name is Veve McGuire. Address?"

"2179 Kingston Drive."

"Right-o. And your name?"

Connie gave that too and then asked the sergeant if he thought Veve could be found. The officer promised to do his very best. He told her the information would be broadcast over the police shortwave radio system and picked up by all cruising police cars.

Connie hung up the telephone receiver and thanked the druggist for the nickel.

"I'll pay it back tomorrow," she promised. "Brownie Scout's honor."

"Don't give it another thought," he replied. "I only hope you find your little friend."

Both he and the lady customer asked many questions about how Veve had been carried away on the sled.

Connie answered them all as fast as she could and then hurried away home to tell her mother and Mrs. McGuire what had occurred.

She was quite breathless by the time she burst into the kitchen where her mother was getting the evening meal.

"Why, Connie," said Mrs. Williams in surprise. "Is anything wrong?"

"Veve's been carried away in a car, Mother!"

Again Connie told about the coasting mishap.

"Oh, Connie!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon in a frightened voice. "Does Mrs. McGuire know?"

"Not yet, Mother. I haven't had time to tell her."

"We must, at once. Though I'm afraid she still may be at work. Oh, dear!"

Veve's father was dead, and the little girl's mother worked part-time in a downtown office. During the afternoon Veve's grandmother usually came in to stay with her, but on this Saturday no one had been at the McGuire home.

Connie had never seen her mother look more worried. She hastened to the telephone and, after making several calls, reached Mrs. McGuire. Next she called Connie's father, asking him to pick up Mrs. McGuire at her office and bring her home.

"Will Veve be hurt, do you think?" Connie asked anxiously.

Mrs. Williams did not answer. She was in the front hallway putting on her hat and coat.

Ten minutes later Connie's father drove up in the car. He had made a very fast trip home.

With him in the car was Mrs. McGuire, her hat at a rakish angle. She asked Connie to tell her exactly what had happened at the hill.

"Veve is so reckless," she said when she heard the story. "Oh, I'm afraid she may be badly hurt."

"Now don't worry, Mrs. McGuire," said Connie's mother kindly. "Connie telephoned the police and already they are searching for the car. We'll start out too."

Connie could tell by the tone of her mother's voice that she was proud of her for having called the police station so promptly.

"We'll want you to go with us, Connie, because you may be able to recognize the car," said her mother, motioning for her to get into the Williams' automobile.

Connie rode in the front seat beside her father. At Kelly's Hill she pointed out the bend in the road where she last had seen the gray sedan.

Driving quite slowly, Mr. Williams watched both sides of the road. He was afraid Veve might have been thrown from her sled into a snowy ditch.

For nearly an hour, the car went up one street and down another. Mr. Williams drove far out on Highway 20, stopping at two filling stations to ask the attendants if they had seen a little girl in a red snowsuit being pulled on her sled by a gray car. No one had.

Connie sat with her face pressed against the car window, watching and hoping. Twice she thought she saw the gray car. But always it proved to be a different automobile.

Soon it was so dark she scarcely could see the road. Lights winked on inside the houses. Mr. Williams had to turn on the car headlights.

"We may as well return home," he said at last.

"By this time, the police may have found Veve," said Connie's mother. She spoke as cheerfully as she could because Mrs. McGuire looked as if she were about to cry.

"Let's go back as quickly as we can," agreed Mrs. McGuire.

Soon the car turned down the familiar, winding street, but Connie saw that the McGuire house was dark. Veve's grandmother had not returned. Veve couldn't be home either, or the lights would have been turned on.

When Mrs. McGuire looked at the dark windows, she began to cry. She couldn't help it because she was so very worried. Connie's mother held her arm as she helped her from the car.

"Now we'll soon find Veve," she reassured her. "Do come in while I telephone the police station. They may have news for us."

Mrs. McGuire started with Mrs. Williams into the house. Connie intended to go with them, but as she cut across the yard past the half-melted snowman, she noticed a car coming slowly down the street.

At first she couldn't even guess at its color because of the darkness.

However, the automobile looked very much like the one that had carried Veve away.

"Oh, Mother!" she cried. "See that car! I think it may be the one!"

Now Connie had made that very remark several times during the search for the gray sedan. Upon each occasion, she had been mistaken.

So, although her mother and Mrs. McGuire turned quickly to gaze down the street, they held little hope that she could be right.

Nearer and nearer came the automobile, passing directly under a bright street light.

"Oh, it *is* a gray sedan!" shouted Connie, fairly beside herself with excitement.

She tried to read the license number but could not make it out. The driver seemed to be alone in the car. He kept peering at the house numerals along the street.

"Mother," cried Connie, "the car is slowing down!"

Even as she spoke, it stopped directly in front of the McGuire house.

"It's the same car!" shouted Connie. "But where is Veve?"

CHAPTER 3

Safety Rules and Kitten Tails

THE door of the gray car swung open and out stepped the driver. As Connie, her parents, and Mrs. McGuire hurried up, he was peering at the numbers marked on the curb in front of the McGuire house.

"Aren't you the man who carried away a little girl on her sled?" asked Connie before he could speak.

"That's right," admitted the driver. Politely, he tipped his hat to Connie's mother and Mrs. McGuire.

"Tell me quickly," urged Mrs. McGuire. "Has my daughter been injured?"

Just then, the rear door of the sedan swung wide. Veve, her face streaked with tears, had been asleep on the back seat. She stumbled out looking drowsy-eyed, but very much alive and ashamed.

"Hello, Mother," she said. "Here I am!"

Mrs. McGuire ran down the sidewalk to clasp Veve in her arms. She was so happy to see her that she did not say a word about all the trouble that had been caused.

The car driver told Mr. Williams his name was Fred Clayhorn and that he was a drug salesman.

"Hope you haven't worried too much about this little scamp," he said, smiling at Veve. "I didn't discover she had hitched her sled to my car until I was miles out in the country."

"A filling-station man saw me and yelled for Mr. Clayhorn to stop," explained Veve.

"Fortunately, I am a slow driver," added Mr. Clayhorn. "Otherwise, I am afraid the little girl might have been thrown from her sled and seriously injured."

Although Veve had not been hurt, she looked rather the worse for her adventure. The fast sled ride had not been any fun.

Ice had slashed into her face and her snowsuit was caked with mud and slush. She was all worn out too, from clinging so tightly to the bouncing sled.

"Thanks for bringing me home, Mr. Clayhorn," she told him gratefully. "I never, never want to take another ride like that one."

"I hope you never do," he replied. "Next time you might not be so lucky."

While the grownups talked, Connie helped Veve remove her sled from the luggage compartment of the gray sedan. One of the runners was bent where it had struck a stone in the road.

She was showing the place to Connie when her mother called: "Come, Veve! You must have a hot bath and climb right into bed. We'll talk about this escapade later!"

"That means I'll catch it!" Veve whispered to Connie. She was so tired, though, that she didn't mind being put to bed.

After Mr. Clayhorn had driven away, Connie and her parents went into their own home.

The instant they opened the door, they knew something was wrong. Heavy black smoke filled the rooms.

"Oh, Mother!" cried Connie. "Is the house on fire?"

Mrs. Williams ran directly to the kitchen. She jerked a double-boiler from the stove. The bottom pan was black on the inside and smoke billowed from it in a great cloud.

"The chocolate pudding!" gasped Connie's mother. "I went off and left the gas turned low. All the water boiled away."

Connie helped her open windows to clear out the smoke. After a while it was not so heavy.

"I can't recall ever having done such a careless thing before," sighed Mrs. Williams. "I guess I was so worried about Veve I didn't think what I was doing. The pan is ruined."

"Was it a good one, Mother?"

"Yes, dear, but it doesn't matter. The important thing is that Veve is home safely."

Now that the excitement was over, Mrs. Williams sat down by the kitchen table and drew a deep breath. After she had rested a moment, she told Connie how proud she was of her for not having hitched a ride on the gray car, and also for having called help so quickly.

"Each day you are becoming more dependable," she praised. "I do believe your Brownie Scout training has helped."

"I wish Veve would join the troop, Mother. Why do you suppose she makes fun of the Brownies?"

"Veve is very young and likes to try to be different," answered Mrs. Williams. "Be patient, Connie. One of these days, she may ask to join the organization."

Now that the chocolate pudding was ruined, it was necessary to send someone to the corner store for a cake. Connie offered to go. However, it was dark so her father said he would make the purchase.

"And may we have ice cream too?" Connie requested.

"On a winter day like this?" her father asked in surprise.

"Oh, I could eat ice cream every day in the year," laughed Connie. Her blue eyes twinkled as she added: "Especially on my birthday."

Now Connie's birthday came on the twelfth day of December. The date was very near, and she was a tiny bit afraid her mother and father might forget about it. So she thought she would mention it just to be sure.

"Will I have ice cream and cake on my birthday?" she asked.

"We'll see," returned her mother. She smiled in a most mysterious way.

The next day, Mrs. Williams did not say anything more about the approaching birthday. She acted as if she had entirely forgotten it.

At school, although all of the Brownies were there, Veve's desk remained vacant.

Connie learned from Sunny and Jane that Veve had been kept home because she had a very severe cold.

"Serves her right," said Jane, who had heard about the coasting mishap. "If she had used good common sense, she wouldn't have been carried away on the sled!"

"Veve didn't mean to get into trouble," Connie defended her friend. "She's just careless."

Veve's cold kept her indoors throughout the entire week. But on Saturday, the first day she was allowed outside, she came running over to play with Connie.

But Connie was on her way to Jane's house to attend the regular weekly Brownie meeting and could not stop even to talk.

"I wish I could play with you, Veve," she said. "You know how it is. We aren't supposed to be late for meetings."

"I know how it is, all right," grumbled Veve. "I never see you any more—that's what. Since you joined those stupid old Brownies, you're no fun at all!"

"I'm having more fun than I ever did," Connie called over her shoulder as she skipped off down the street.

At Jane's house, the Brownies again were working on scrapbooks for the hospital.

Miss Gordon, however, had varied the program with another of her frequent "surprises."

Captain Frank Bentley of the Rosedale Police Station had been invited in to explain rules of safety to the Brownies.

Now, although the police officer was very much at ease when directing traffic or guarding school crossings, he seemed rather embarrassed as he faced the sober-eyed little girls.

He told them never to cross a street without first pausing to look carefully in both directions. And he warned them about the danger of dodging in behind parked cars or running when they

crossed a street.

"Another thing" he added. "In case you ever witness an accident, always notify an adult person, or call the police station."

"That's exactly what Connie did," spoke up Eileen proudly. "When Veve was carried away on her sled, she telephoned the police, and then she went home and reported the accident to her mother."

"Brownies are very smart little girls," said the police officer. "This talk probably isn't in the least necessary."

"Oh, but we've enjoyed it, and we've learned a lot!" declared Connie quickly.

"We'll all be more careful in the future, I'm sure," added Rosemary.

"That Veve McGuire is the one who should be here," declared Jane, fingering the dancing elf design on her Brownie pin. "She's worse than anyone I know when she dashes for school. Once she was nearly struck by a car."

"Oh, Veve isn't as careless as she was," Connie said, standing up for her friend. "Since her accident with the sled, she has been very careful."

"Careful!" snorted Jane. "That's because she's had to stay in the house most of the time. If there's one person in the world who should learn something about safety, it's Veve McGuire!"

Now Miss Gordon did not like to hear the girls discuss Veve so frankly when the little girl was not present. But instead of scolding Jane for being so outspoken, she changed the subject by asking:

"By the way, girls, has anyone learned if Veve plans to join our Brownie troop in the next few weeks?"

The leader of the Rosedale troop looked directly at Connie, who was much better acquainted with Veve than any of the other girls.

Now Connie did not wish to tell Miss Gordon all the unkind things that Veve had said about the Brownie organization.

So she replied quite truthfully that she had not discussed the subject with her for a long while.

"You might speak to her about it sometime," urged the leader. "We really want Veve."

"Not if she keeps on saying things about the Brownies," whispered Jane, who always was outspoken.

Rosemary gave her a warning nudge and she became quiet.

Following Captain Bentley's talk, the Brownies served fruit juice and cookies. Usually they had refreshments at the end of the meeting. This time they served early so the police officer would not need to wait.

Captain Bentley drank a cup of juice, ate three cookies and admired the fine scrapbooks. Then he said good-bye to the girls, reminding them again not to forget the safety rules.

"Whenever you come to a street intersection, always stop, look and listen," he advised as he started to leave. "That way, you'll avoid accidents."

Bowing to Miss Gordon, Captain Bentley backed out the door squarely onto the tail of Jane's kitten, Blackie, who drowsed in the sunshine.

With a squawk, the kitten scampered through the startled officer's legs. His foot slipped on a patch of ice. Arms and legs flailed and thrashed the air as he sought vainly to keep his balance.

Then, with a thud, his two hundred and ten pounds came down on the cement porch.

Captain Bentley wasn't hurt, only jarred. But he grinned with embarrassment as he picked himself up. All the Brownies shouted with laughter.

"Always remember the safety rules," the officer chuckled. "And I might add, they apply to kitten tails as well as street crossings!"

After the captain had gone, the girls worked hard on their scrapbooks. They talked about the approaching Christmas holidays and what they would do during school vacation. No one had made any special plans.

"We can't go coasting or ice skating, that's certain," sighed Rosemary, listening to the steady drip of melting snow on the roof.

Since the last Brownie meeting, the weather gradually had turned warmer. Only a little snow and a few icicles remained to remind the girls of the recent storm.

"I don't even want new skates for Christmas," declared Jane, carefully wiping up a blob of paste which had dropped on the rug. "Just once, I wish we could have a giant-size snowstorm here!"

"Out West where my Grandfather and Grandmother Williams live, they have wonderful snowstorms," Connie said wistfully. "Once they were snowed in their house nearly a week."

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"You mean they couldn't get out at all?" asked Sunny in awe.

"Not until a big snowplow came along and opened up the roads. They didn't starve though, because they had plenty of food in the house."

"In Minnesota, where my grandparents live, the snows are very heavy too," said Miss Gordon. She smiled at the recollection. "Christmas at Snow Valley—I count it as one of my happiest memories."

"Snow Valley," repeated Connie. "What a beautiful name!"

"Are the snows really deep?" asked Eileen.

"I've seen drifts so high they nearly touched the roof. And the coasting! Out of this world!"

Miss Gordon told the girls more about the farm home of her Grandfather and Grandmother Gordon. The living room fireplace was so large that quarter logs were burned in it instead of chopped wood.

"I wish a flying carpet would come along and take me there right now!" exclaimed Connie, her eyes bright.

"Perhaps I'll return to Minnesota for the holidays," revealed Miss Gordon. "And that brings me to an important question. You remember the 'surprise' of which I spoke?"

38

Immediately the room buzzed with excited conversation.

Miss Gordon had to raise her hand in the Brownie sign for silence. Connie followed suit, becoming as still as a mouse. Next Sunny raised her hand, and last of all, Jane, who was chattering like a magpie.

When one could have heard a pin drop, Miss Gordon said:

"Girls, I've talked to your parents, but I can't reveal the secret just yet. However, I have an important question to ask. Think well before you answer."

"What is the question, Miss Gordon?" Sunny was squirming with impatience.

"Merely this. How many would be willing to give up part of their school vacation for a Brownie outing?"

"A hike?" demanded Jane.

Miss Gordon smiled and shook her head.

"A trip?" asked Connie, who was a much better guesser.

"Now don't ask me to reveal the secret too soon," laughed the leader of the Brownies. "Christmas holidays are precious days. Even if your parents were willing, would you really want to go away from Rosedale?"

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"You mean for several days?" Jane asked, her breath quite taken away. "Over Christmas?"

"It might mean being gone on Christmas Day," Miss Gordon admitted soberly. "So far, the plan is not definite."

"Then if we were gone, we wouldn't get any Christmas presents," said Sunny, losing her happy smile.

"That part would be taken care of, I assure you," Miss Gordon declared. "Naturally, I can't expect you to say whether you would be willing to leave Rosedale, when I haven't told you where the troop would go."

The Brownies looked somewhat relieved and waited anxiously for their leader to continue.

Miss Gordon, however, realized that she had said almost too much.

"I can't tell you any more about the plan until we meet again," she said. "Until then, I'll merely ask you all to think very seriously of the question I have raised. If the answer should be 'yes'—"

CHAPTER 4

Miss Gordon's Surprise

CONNIE'S birthday came on Thursday. The little girl rolled out of bed and went down to breakfast feeling rather blue.

"Happy birthday, dear," said her mother, giving her a kiss.

"Why, Mother," laughed Connie, suddenly feeling quite cheerful, "I thought you had forgotten. And Daddy too!"

"Look beside your plate if you think that," teased her father.

Connie ran into the breakfast room. Beside her plate was a small package wrapped in tissue paper.

"It's a birthday present, isn't it?" she said, untying the pink ribbon. Of course she knew it was.

"A gift for the nicest little girl in the world," declared her mother, smiling.

Connie couldn't guess what her parents had given her. She pulled away the tissue paper and a ring popped out. On it was a design of a dancing Brownie, and her own initials.

"Oh, a Brownie ring!" cried Connie, doing a dance of her own on the carpet. "Just what I wanted!"

Connie was very proud of her new birthday ring. She showed it to the mailman when he brought the morning letters, and to the Brownies at school.

Only one thing bothered Connie. She had received no package from her Grandmother and Grandfather Williams. When she returned home at three o'clock, she asked her mother if a gift had arrived.

"Not yet, Connie."

"Do you suppose they forgot my birthday, Mother?"

Mrs. Williams replied she was quite certain they hadn't. She thought the package possibly had been delayed in the mail and might arrive the next day.

"But tomorrow won't be my birthday," said Connie. "I would so much rather have the present today."

"Tell me, has Veve seen your new Brownie ring?" asked her mother quickly.

"Not yet," Connie replied, wondering why her mother had asked the question.

"You may go over for a while," suggested Mrs. Williams. "But don't stay longer than half an hour."

At the McGuire home, Veve acted almost as if she had expected Connie. She wore a bright new pink gingham dress, and her dark curls had been brushed until they shone. However, she still had a trace of her cold.

"Why are you so dressed up, Veve?" Connie asked curiously. Usually Veve paid little attention to her clothes and liked to wear jeans with an old sweater.

"You'll find out later," laughed Veve. "Maybe I'm going somewhere."

Connie showed Veve the new Brownie ring. Veve tried it on her own finger and then said she would rather have a bracelet for her birthday.

"What else did you get?" she asked.

"That's all," Connie admitted. "My Grandfather and Grandmother Williams forgot."

"Maybe you'll get something more later on," hinted Veve.

For half an hour the two girls played together. Connie kept talking about the Brownies and their good times. She didn't intend to annoy Veve, but she scarcely could keep from thinking about Miss Gordon's "surprise."

"Now what do you suppose she meant?" she asked aloud. "Wouldn't it be grand if all the Brownies could go on a trip?"

"It's four o'clock," said Veve quickly. She had been watching the clock. "Let's go over to your house."

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Arm in arm, the girls crossed the yard. Connie started toward the kitchen door, only to have Veve catch her hand and pull her toward the front porch.

Even then Connie didn't suspect a thing. She opened the door and stood still. The living room fairly overflowed with her schoolmates.

All the Brownies were there, Jane, Rosemary, Eileen, Belinda and Sunny, whose smile stretched from ear to ear. Several other classmates also had been invited to the party. Miss Gordon was in the kitchen, helping Mrs. Williams make fancy sandwiches.

"Happy birthday, Connie!" everyone shouted. "Surprise! Surprise!"

Connie really was surprised. For a moment she couldn't say a word.

"I knew about it all the time," declared Veve, "but I didn't dare tell. And here's something for you."

Although it wasn't time to offer gifts or unwrap packages, she thrust a tissue-wrapped box into Connie's hand. All the other girls had presents for her too.

"You see, we didn't forget," laughed Veve. "We were only waiting for the party to start."

The girls played games which Miss Gordon directed. Connie's mother brought in a huge paper pie with strings attached. Each girl pulled out her fortune.

45

"Mine says I'm going on a long trip!" announced Eileen, reading her slip. "Oh, Miss Gordon, does that mean just me, or all the Brownies?"

"Tell us the surprise," the other Brownies chorused.

But Miss Gordon only smiled and said not a word.

When the party was nearly over Mrs. Williams served sandwiches, ice cream and cake. Each little girl received a paper hat and a horn that made a loud toot.

Then it came time for Connie to open her presents. Jane had given her a nylon hairbrush. Belinda's gift was a pair of Brownie woolen sox while both Sunny and Eileen gave handkerchiefs with the same Brownie design. Rosemary had shopped a long while to find a pretty mirror.

Veve's present was a bright red hair ribbon. The other girls gave an assortment of books, pins and games.

"Such wonderful gifts," declared Connie, opening them one at a time. She thanked everyone. "I've never had a nicer birthday!"

"Our Brownie troop soon will have a birthday," Miss Gordon reminded the girls. "Then we must celebrate again."

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Connie liked best of all the gifts with Brownie emblems, but she was too polite to say so. She did not show that any present pleased her more than another.

At five o'clock the party was over. One by one the girls went home, until only Veve and the Brownies were left. They offered to help Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams straighten up and carry the dirty plates to the kitchen.

"Did you have a nice time, Connie?" asked her mother.

"Oh, yes, Mother! This has been my very nicest party—only—"

Connie started to mention again that her Grandmother and Grandfather Williams had forgotten to send even a birthday card.

Before she could speak, her father's car rolled onto the driveway with a loud crunch of gravel. A moment later he came into the house, carrying a large package.

"Special delivery for Miss Constance Williams," he called in a loud voice. "Anyone here by that name?"

Connie laughed aloud, for although her name really was Constance, no one ever thought to call her by it.

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The package was long, narrow, and very large.

"Is it from my Grandmother Williams?" Connie asked eagerly.

She tried to untie the cords on the package but they were very firm. Her father finally had to cut them with his pocket knife.

While the Brownies and Veve gathered around, Connie unwrapped two layers of heavy brown paper. Next she removed a covering of tissue paper.

Two long, narrow boards with leather straps clattered to the floor.

"Why, what are they?" asked Connie. She could not hide her disappointment.

"Skis," announced Veve. "But how can you use them when there isn't any snow?"

"I'm afraid Grandmother forgot about our mild weather," admitted Mrs. Williams. Then to cheer Connie, she added: "Before spring, we'll surely have another snow."

Connie gazed out into the muddy yard and couldn't say a word. The other Brownies knew just how discouraged she felt.

The room was very quiet. Then, unexpectedly, Miss Gordon took a letter from her pocket.

"Girls," she said, "I know this isn't a Brownie meeting, so perhaps I should wait. But I do have important news."

"Tell us," chorused the Brownies.

"You remember the question I asked you to think over?"

"Oh, yes," agreed the Brownies. The skis now were forgotten and everyone listened hard.

Veve was the only one who acted as if she did not care to hear the news. She pretended to be looking at Connie's presents on the table.

"Girls," said Miss Gordon, coming directly to the point, "how would you like to spend a week at Snow Valley in Minnesota?"

For a second, the room was absolutely still. Then the girls began to chatter excitedly. Miss Gordon had to hold up her hand in the Brownie signal for silence.

"Before anyone answers, I'll explain the entire plan," declared the troop leader. "I haven't told you about it before, because I was uncertain how matters would work out."

"Please, Miss Gordon, tell us now," pleaded Sunny.

"As you may know, my Grandmother and Grandfather Gordon have a farm at Snow Valley," the teacher explained. "The house is large and there are beautiful snow-covered hills for coasting and skiing."

"And we're all invited to spend a week there?" Connie asked, her eyes shining.

"Yes, Grandmother wrote today saying she has room for six little Brownies. I've already talked to your parents, who have given their consent providing you care to go."

"Oh, we do! We do!" cried Jane, capering across the floor.

"Will it mean being away from home on Christmas?" asked Eileen soberly. "I don't think I would like that."

"This is the plan," explained Miss Gordon. "If we make the trip we will go by train, leaving the day school vacation starts. Grandfather Gordon will meet us at the station with his big bobsled. We'll stay at the farm a week and be joined by your parents for Christmas."

"You mean everyone will be there?" repeated Connie, looking relieved. "Oh, I'd like that! May I go, Mother?"

"I've already given my consent," said her mother.

"We'll have a wonderful week of winter sports, climaxed by a grand Christmas reunion," declared the leader of the Brownies. "However, I realize some of you never have been away from home for an entire week. So, I'll not ask anyone to decide now."

"I'd never be homesick!" insisted Sunny. "If Mother has said 'yes', I want to go!"

"So do I!" cried Rosemary.

"Me too," chimed in Eileen, though she looked a trifle troubled. She never had been away from home longer than two days at a time and wondered if she might be homesick.

"I'll be there with bells when that old conductor yells: 'Snow Valley!'" laughed Belinda.

Connie strapped on her new skis and skated across the living room rug.

"I'll take these with me!" she cried. "Oh, we'll have a wonderful time in Minnesota!"

Eagerly, the girls plied Miss Gordon with questions. They wanted to know how deep the snows were at the valley, how far the Gordon farm was from the station, and what luggage they should take.

Everyone was so interested in hearing about Snow Valley that for a while no one gave a thought to Veve.

She hadn't said a word, because, of course, she wasn't a member of the Brownie troop.

Finally, when the other girls had quieted down, she edged toward the door.

"I—I guess I'll go home," she said in a limp little voice.

"It's been nice having you at the party," declared Connie's mother, for she saw Veve was about to cry.

"Oh, Veve!" cried Connie. "I wish you were a Brownie so you could go with us to Snow Valley!"

Veve started to reply and choked on the words. She ran out the door, letting it close hard behind her.

Miss Gordon then was sorry that she had mentioned the trip in the little girl's presence.

"It was thoughtless of me," she apologized, "because naturally Veve would like to go with us. I only wish she were a member of the troop."

"Perhaps she'll join before the Christmas holidays," said Connie hopefully. "I'll ask her."

Miss Gordon smiled and shook her head.

"We want Veve to belong to the troop for its own sake and not because we are planning an outing. Besides, even if she should join now, I'm afraid we couldn't take her along without making special arrangements."

"Why is that, Miss Gordon?" Connie inquired.

"Grandmother Gordon has accommodations for only six Brownies."

"Then Veve can't go?"

"I don't see how she can," Miss Gordon replied regretfully.

No one said any more about the matter until the Brownies were putting on their wraps in the hallway.

Then Jane, tucking yellow braids under the hood of her snowsuit, remarked:

"It serves Veve right! She should have joined the Brownies long ago."

"That's true," declared Belinda, and the others agreed.

All, that is, except Connie, who knew Veve would be very lonesome if her friends went away during the Christmas holidays.

The next few days at Rosedale passed quickly. Connie and the other Brownies dashed to and from school with open coats flapping in the December breeze, for the weather had turned quite warm.

"How cold will it be in Minnesota?" Belinda asked Miss Gordon.

"So cold you may turn into a big icicle," laughed the teacher. "But if you do, Grandmother Gordon will know how to thaw you out at the kitchen woodstove."

Belinda never before had made a train trip longer than twenty miles. She was excited and a little worried. Another matter troubled her too.

"Are you sure we'll get our presents and see our parents on Christmas Day?" she asked the Brownie leader.

"According to the plan, your parents expect to arrive at Grandfather Gordon's farm no later than the twenty-fourth," replied the teacher. "Of course, something could go wrong."

All the Brownies were so thrilled at the thought of going to Snow Valley, they could talk of little

else. They were kept busy too, preparing for the journey.

Buttons needed to be sewed on and suitcases brought down from attics. Nearly every day after school Connie went downtown with her mother to buy little things she would need on the trip.

So busy were all the Brownie Scouts that they scarcely had time to talk to Veve. However, Connie noticed that her playmate looked very unhappy.

And then, on the final day before school was to be dismissed for the holidays, she came upon Veve sobbing in the cloakroom.

"Why, Veve!" she said in surprise. "Is anything wrong?" She thought perhaps the teacher had sent the little girl to the cloakroom as a punishment.

"Nothing's wrong," Veve replied, dabbing at her eyes.

"Yes, there is too," Connie insisted. She slipped an arm about the other girl's waist. "Tell me!"

Veve shook her head. Pulling away, she ran down the hall.

Miss Gordon entered the cloakroom just as the child darted through the doorway. She asked Connie why Veve was so upset.

"She wouldn't say," replied Connie, picking up a coat Veve carelessly had brushed to the floor. "I think though, she's disappointed because she can't go to Snow Valley with the Brownies."

Now Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams already had guessed that Veve longed to go with the troop, and had discussed the matter with Mrs. McGuire.

So, with scarcely any hesitation, Miss Gordon was able to say: "I think it can be arranged."

Connie wondered if she had heard correctly. Had the Brownie leader actually said Veve might go to Snow Valley?

"Only this afternoon I learned that Belinda will be unable to make the trip," Miss Gordon explained. "Grandmother Gordon is expecting six little girls, so perhaps we can include Veve."

Now this was astonishing news for Connie. Though she had noticed that Belinda's desk had been vacant all day, she hadn't known why she was absent from school.

"Belinda has a severe cold," Miss Gordon explained. "It's nothing serious, but her mother feels she should remain at home."

Connie was sorry to learn that Belinda would be unable to go with the troop to Snow Valley. On the other hand, she was pleased that Veve might be able to take her place. "Of course, Veve isn't a Brownie," Miss Gordon remarked, thinking aloud. "She might not care to go with the troop. Or she might not have a good time."

"Oh, I'm sure she would have a wonderful holiday!" cried Connie. "When will you invite her?"

"I'll talk with her mother again tonight," Miss Gordon promised. "Yes, I am hopeful everything can be arranged."

Early the next morning, Connie knew the Brownie leader had talked to Mrs. McGuire, for Veve came flying over to the Williams' home. She squeezed through the bars of the back yard gate and banged hard on the kitchen door.

Connie, who was finishing her breakfast, ran to let her in.

"Oh, Connie, guess what?" she cried, stomping into the kitchen. In her excitement, she hadn't bothered to put on her coat or a cap. "I'm going to be a substitute Brownie!"

"And go to Snow Valley?"

"That's right! How did you know?"

"Miss Gordon told me. Oh, Veve, I'm so glad!" Connie gave her an affectionate hug. "We'll have a grand time, and maybe—"

Connie started to say that perhaps before the girls returned to Rosedale, Veve would decide to join the troop. Veve was so excited, however, she cut her short.

"Can't stop to talk now," she declared, whirling around to open the door. "My suitcase isn't packed!"

"Miss Gordon says not to take too much luggage," Connie advised her friend. "I'm packing two Brownie uniforms and a pair of sweaters and skirts. And one dress for nice in case we have a party."

"Not your new skis?"

"Oh, yes," laughed Connie, "but I'll wear them on my feet, not my back!"

"Do you suppose I could take my sled along?"

"Not unless you check it in the baggage car, Veve. Anyway, Miss Gordon said there will be sleds at the farm. She told the Brownies that Grandfather Gordon made a bobsled that would carry six persons at one time!"

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"Connie, is the kitchen door open?" Mrs. Williams called from the breakfast room. She could feel a cold blast of air.

"I'm going now," said Veve. "Good-bye, Connie. See you later after I'm packed!"

She ran off home, allowing the door to bang hard behind her.

"Dear me," remarked Mrs. Williams as Connie came to the breakfast table. "Veve is so high-spirited, I wonder if Miss Gordon won't be kept busy looking after six Brownies."

"Five Brownies and a substitute," corrected Connie, reaching for a tall glass of orange juice. "Veve may make more trouble than all the others, but she's lots of fun."

Early the next morning, all the Brownies except Belinda were taken to the railroad station by their parents. The luggage was checked straight through to Deerford, the nearest town to Snow Valley. Miss Gordon took charge of the tickets, but allowed each girl to keep her own baggage check.

"Here comes the train!" shouted Veve suddenly.

58

Connie began to feel shivery inside. For just a minute she wasn't certain she cared to leave her parents and travel to Minnesota.

"Have a good time, dear," said her mother, stooping to kiss her. "It will only be a few days until we come for you."

Other parents were saying good-bye to Rosemary, Jane, Eileen, Veve, and Sunny. Then the train rumbled into the station.

"Hurry or we'll be left," urged Veve as passengers began to alight.

"We have plenty of time," replied Miss Gordon. "Please, girls, don't shove."

Although the Brownie leader said "girls," she really meant Veve, who was trying to bore a hole through the crowd.

After all the passengers were off the train, Miss Gordon went aboard with her six charges. Mr. Williams helped her find seats for everyone.

"I think you will be quite comfortable," said Mr. Williams. "Your train is due to arrive in Deerford at seven tonight."

"Oh, Daddy, hurry and get off before the train starts," Connie said anxiously. "You might be taken along."

"I have plenty of time," he replied. "But I'll say goodbye now."

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He kissed Connie and left the car.

Connie and Veve, who shared a seat, pressed their faces against the car window. Their mothers were standing near the train, watching.

"Goodbye!" the girls called out together.

They waved from inside the window. Their mothers waved in return and blew kisses. Then the train began to move.

Connie and Veve and the Brownies were on their way to Minnesota.

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CHAPTER 5

A Substitute Brownie

"I'M going to miss my mother a lot," Veve sighed as she sank back on the seat.

Connie didn't say anything. But from the way she looked, Veve knew she would miss her parents too. They both felt a bit homesick even though they weren't a mile out of Rosedale.

Soon the train was traveling at full speed. Fields and houses rolled by just as if they were moving instead of the train.

"I know what let's do," proposed Veve. "Let's count telegraph poles."

For a little while this was great fun. Eileen and Jane, who sat in the seat across from Connie and Veve, tried it too.

At three hundred and four Veve lost count and didn't want to play the game any more.

"What shall we do now?" she asked restlessly.

"Let's just ride awhile," Connie proposed.

Presently a cold draft of wind blew through the car. The conductor, who was fat and jolly, came down the aisle. He collected the tickets from Miss Gordon, and talked with the Brownies.

"You'll need to shake your furs out of moth balls when you get to Deerford," he joked. "Snow's six feet deep there. I nearly had my ears nipped off when we went through on the run yesterday."

The Brownies settled down to enjoy the long ride ahead. Eileen and Jane played a card game.

Rosemary, who sat with Miss Gordon, helped her turn the seat so that the four faced each other. Sunny, who didn't want to sit alone, squeezed in beside them.

After a while, when the girls were tired of playing cards and talking, Sunny began to hum the Brownie "Smile" song.

Soon, to the enjoyment of the passengers, all the girls except Veve were singing it. Veve tried to join in, but not being a Brownie, she didn't know the words.

"I've something in my pocket;
It belongs across my face,
And I keep it very close at hand,
In a most convenient place.

"I'm sure you couldn't guess it
If you guessed a long, long while,
So I'll take it out and put it on—
It's a great big Brownie smile."

As the Brownies sang the song, they grinned from ear to ear. Soon all the passengers in the car were smiling too.

"Is it almost time for lunch?" Veve asked after a while. "I'm starving!"

"So am I!" declared Rosemary. "I could eat a fried elephant!"

Miss Gordon looked at her watch. "It is only five minutes after eleven," she told the girls. "The diner won't be open for at least twenty-five minutes."

"Then where can I get a drink of water, please?" asked Veve. She was more restless than thirsty.

Connie had noticed a water cooler at the end of the aisle. She offered to show Veve.

Beside the tank was a metal container which held paper cups nested together. Veve took out one for herself and one for Connie. They drank the ice water slowly. It was so cold it made their teeth ache.

Veve, who liked to remove the paper cups from the machine, decided to take a drink to Miss

Down the aisle she started, balancing the filled cup carefully.

Just then the train gave a sudden lurch as it slackened speed for a curve. Veve stumbled sideways.

The cup slipped from her hand, and a little water splashed on a man who sat along the aisle.

"Oh, I am terribly sorry," Veve said politely.

When Veve finally reached Miss Gordon's seat, not much water was left in the cup. The teacher drank what little there was and thanked Veve.

Sunny offered to get her another cup, and soon all the Brownies needed a drink. Miss Gordon had to ask them to remain in their seats because she was afraid they might disturb the other passengers.

"Let's play jacks," suggested Veve, who wanted to do something every minute.

"What with?" inquired Connie, not very much interested.

"Oh, I brought some with me," Veve said, taking them from her pocket. "We can play on the seat."

The girls crossed their legs and sat at either end of the car cushion. This left a small place between them where they could play.

"You start first, Veve," Connie suggested politely. "Let's see if you can get past your 'ones.'"

"Oh, I'll go up to my 'fours' at least," Veve boasted. "Just watch!"

The little girl threw one jack on the cushion. She tossed another into the air, scooped up the one on the cushion and caught the other before it fell. Then she threw two down and continued until she had reached her "fours."

"Didn't I tell you, Connie?"

"Yes, but it's going to be hard now," said Connie. "There are three jacks together and one off at the side."

"I can do it. Just watch!"

Veve caught up three of the jacks. But when she tried to get the fourth, all flew from her hand and went helter-skelter over the car floor. Several rolled into the aisle.

Before Connie or Veve could pick them up, the same elderly man who had been doused with water ambled down the aisle.

He failed to see the jacks lying on the car floor. Veve tried to warn him, but she spoke too late.

The man stepped squarely on one of the jacks and the points cut through his soft-soled slipper.

"Ouch!" he exclaimed. "My goodness!"

The other Brownies, Miss Gordon and many of the passengers, turned to see why the man was making such a fuss.

"Mister, you are standing on one of my jacks," said Veve.

Although she spoke politely, it seemed to be exactly the wrong thing to say.

"Your jacks?" demanded the man. "You might have crippled me for life!"

"Veve didn't mean to do it," said Connie quickly. "The jacks just slipped from her hand."

She stooped down and gathered up four jacks which she gave to Veve.

"One is missing," said Veve, gazing directly at the elderly man. "I think you are standing on it."

"This is an outrage!" declared the man irritably. "Children should not be allowed to play games on trains. Where are your parents?"

Connie and Veve did not reply. They were relieved when Miss Gordon left her seat and spoke to the man.

She explained to him that Veve had dropped the jack quite by accident. The man accepted the apology, but he remained rather cross.

"It was an accident too when she spilled water on me," he said. "I hope it doesn't happen

again.”

The man went on down the aisle and Veve picked up her jack.

“Now shall I try my ‘fours’ again?” she asked.

“Oh, no,” Connie replied, shaking her blond tangled curls. “Let’s not play any more. Everyone is looking at us.”

“Then what shall we do until lunch time?”

“Let’s just ride awhile,” sighed Connie. “I think everyone needs a rest.”

Veve, she knew, was causing considerable annoyance to Miss Gordon and the other train passengers, although her playmate never intentionally made trouble.

“Look! It’s snowing!” cried Jane suddenly from across the aisle.

Everyone turned to gaze out the windows. Big feathery flakes were fluttering down, banking up on the double glass.

“What beautiful patterns!” cried Eileen. “Miss Gordon, are any two snowflakes ever alike?”

Now the leader of the Brownie troop was very glad that the question had been asked. It gave her an opportunity to call all the girls together and keep them from annoying other passengers.

“Shall I tell you a few things about snow?” she asked, without immediately answering Eileen’s question.

“Oh, yes! Please do!” pleaded the Brownies.

Connie and Veve perched on the chair arms as Miss Gordon gathered the girls in the double seats.

“Now first, I’ll answer Eileen’s question,” the teacher declared. “No two snowflakes ever are exactly alike.”

“How can one be sure?” inquired Jane.

“Scientists have photographed them. A study of more than five thousand flakes revealed no two quite alike.”

“Some of the snowflakes are like stars,” Connie said softly, watching them pelt against the window.

“The hexagonal shape is fairly common,” Miss Gordon explained. “Three-sided flakes are considered rare.”

Immediately the Brownies began to watch for a triangular snowflake. They did not see a single one.

“The flakes are like tiny white parachutes floating down,” Connie declared. “Why are they white when they’re made of water?”

“Another excellent question. Snow is white because it reflects and refracts light. If you should examine it under a microscope you would see that the edges are like a prism, breaking the light into rainbow colors.”

“What makes the flakes large or small?” questioned Sunny.

“Temperature, I believe, determines the size. At low thermometer readings, flakes tend to be smaller.”

“I think the flakes are getting smaller now,” announced Veve. “Does that mean it’s getting colder outside?”

“We’re traveling north, so it may be getting colder,” replied Miss Gordon. “However, I meant that large flakes are likely to fall when the temperature high in the clouds is at freezing or slightly below.”

“I don’t see any small flakes,” Jane insisted. “They’re still coming down as large as ever.”

“I wish we could save the flakes instead of having them melt,” said Connie quickly. She was afraid Veve might argue with Jane about the size of the crystals.

“There is a way, you know,” informed Miss Gordon.

“A way to preserve snowflakes?” Connie echoed, and all the other girls looked surprised.

"One needs a solution of plastic resin. A drop of it is placed on a glass side, then a captured snowflake, and another drop of the resin."

"A snowflake sandwich!" laughed Connie.

"Were you ever out in a heavy snowstorm?" Rosemary next asked the Brownie leader. "I mean a real blizzard?"

"Once when I was a girl in Minnesota. I remember how the wind howled and dashed snow in my face. I was walking home from school at the time and I feared I never could make it."

"What was it like?" Jane asked, eager for additional details.

"If ever you are in a blizzard, you never will forget the experience. The snow coats your face and even freezes on your eyelids. One can't see very far ahead and the wind catches your breath. Some folks have lost their way in such storms."

"Do they have blizzards in Minnesota—I mean at Snow Valley?" Veve corrected herself.

"Oh, yes, but a true blizzard is rather rare. I doubt we'll see other than heavy snow while we are there."

Just then the conductor came through the car calling:

"Albion Junction! Albion Junction! Twenty-five minutes stop!"

"May we get off and walk around?" Rosemary asked Miss Gordon. She was very tired of sitting for so long a period.

The Brownie leader said that perhaps the entire group could have luncheon at the Junction instead of going into the dining car where meals would cost a great deal more.

Accordingly, she talked with the conductor a moment and returned to report that Albion Junction had a lunchroom in the depot.

"Will we have time enough?" asked Sunny anxiously. She was afraid the train might leave without them.

"Yes, providing we go directly to the lunchroom and order promptly," Miss Gordon said.

She instructed the girls to pair off and to remain together. As soon as the train stopped at Albion Junction, they alighted and walked in orderly file to the lunchroom.

All of the Brownies ordered the plate luncheon. Veve, who wanted to be different, asked the waitress to bring her a sandwich and a cherry ice cream soda.

It took a long while for the sandwich to be made, so the other girls were nearly finished before she started to eat. Miss Gordon kept glancing anxiously at the lunchroom clock.

"We have five minutes," she warned the girls when finally Veve had taken a last sip of her cherry soda. "Everyone ready?"

The girls paired off, Veve walking with Eileen.

Already the other passengers were getting on the train.

"All aboard!" called the brakeman.

As the girls reached their car, Veve stopped short.

"My pocketbook!" she exclaimed in a frightened voice. "I left it on the lunch counter."

Before Miss Gordon could stop her, Veve whirled and ran back toward the lunchroom.

"Oh, she'll miss the train!" wailed Sunny. "It's ready to start now."

Miss Gordon was very worried. Directing the other Brownies to climb aboard and take their seats, she hurried off to the lunchroom in pursuit of Veve.

Now Veve, in reaching the cafeteria, saw her red purse lying on the counter where she had left it.

Snatching it up, she darted out the side door instead of the one she had entered. Therefore, when Miss Gordon came in a moment later, Veve was nowhere to be seen.

"Did you see a little girl in here just now?" she asked the waitress.

"Yes, she ran out the side door," the other responded.

Miss Gordon hastened back to the train. She looked up and down the platform. Veve was nowhere to be seen.

Had the little girl boarded the train? Or had she gone elsewhere? Anxiously, Miss Gordon asked the brakeman if he had helped the child onto the car.

"Haven't seen her," he replied.

"How long have we here?"

"Two more minutes," said the brakeman, looking at his big yellow gold watch. "Can't hold the train either. We're already fifteen minutes behind time."

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Miss Gordon was nearly beside herself with worry. She didn't know what to do. She couldn't allow the Brownies to travel on alone to Snow Valley, nor dared she leave Veve behind.

A few passengers who had alighted at Albion Junction remained on the platform. Miss Gordon asked them if they had seen Veve anywhere. No one had paid particular heed to the little girl.

The engine began to puff steam. In a moment it would start.

"All aboard!" called the brakeman again.

The last of the straggling passengers hastily entered the car. Only Miss Gordon remained.

"Sorry," said the brakeman. "I'd like to hold the train, but we can't. All aboard!"

He reached down to pick up the step-stool. Slowly the train began to move.

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CHAPTER 6

Snowland

ABOARD the train, all the Brownies wondered what had delayed Veve and Miss Gordon.

"I wish they'd hurry and come!" Connie said, squirming nervously in her seat.

"So do I," added Sunny. "The train's due to start any minute."

"Veve never should have forgotten her pocketbook," Jane offered her opinion. "And then she ran back without even asking Miss Gordon!"

"Veve never stops to think," Connie said, trying to defend her friend.

She was even more worried than the other Brownies, for she knew Veve's careless ways. If the little girl failed to find her purse, well, one couldn't guess what she might do.

"The train's ready to start!" Sunny said anxiously. "See, everyone is getting on!"

"Everyone except Veve and Miss Gordon," corrected Jane. "Oh, I could wring her neck! Veve's, I mean."

Connie scrambled across the aisle to a window which had not been frosted over. She saw Miss Gordon standing alone on the platform. Veve was nowhere to be seen.

Almost at the same instant, the Brownie leader noticed Connie. She ran over to the car window.

"Is Veve aboard?" she called.

Connie shook her head.

Miss Gordon was nearly frantic with worry. The train had started to move.

"Miss, are you getting on, or staying?" called the brakeman.

Before the Brownie leader could decide, Connie began to make strange motions. All the Brownies crowded to the car windows, beckoning for Miss Gordon to board the train.

The teacher thought they were only afraid that she would be left behind and they would have to go on alone to Snow Valley. Then she was startled to see Veve's face pressed against the car window.

Miss Gordon didn't hesitate an instant. She swung aboard the train a moment before the compartment doors were closed.

Feeling weak and trembly, she walked back to the Brownies.

"Oh, Connie," she murmured. "I thought you said Veve wasn't aboard. It gave me such a fright!"

"But Veve wasn't in the car when you asked me," Connie explained soberly. "She came in as you were calling through the window."

"That's right," agreed Veve. "I found my pocketbook. I was afraid the train might start up, so I got on the first car I came to and walked back. The train's a long one—that's why it took me so long to find this car."

"Oh, Veve," murmured Miss Gordon. "You might have missed the train."

"I knew I was on it all the time."

"But we didn't know it, and neither did Miss Gordon," said Jane severely. "Veve, you should be more careful."

"I will next time," Veve mumbled, looking ashamed. "Could I help it because I lost my pocketbook?"

"You might have checked to see if you had it before you left the lunchroom," lectured Jane. "A Brownie always is responsible."

"I'm not a Brownie, and I did try!" Veve replied, nearly in tears.

"Veve has learned her lesson and will be more careful in the future, I'm sure," declared Miss Gordon. She slipped an arm about the girl's shaking shoulders. "Now shall we forget about it?"

Veve sat down beside Connie and became very subdued. After a while, to make certain none of her money had been lost, she glanced in her purse.

Not a penny was missing. But her heart gave a skip and jump and tried to leap into her throat.

The luggage check! What had become of it?

Distinctly, Veve remembered having placed the bit of cardboard in her purse when Miss Gordon had given it to her at Rosedale station. She recalled too, having seen the check when she bought her lunch at Albion Junction.

Frantically, she dug down beneath the coins. The check was not there, or anywhere in the purse. Nor could she find it on the floor beneath the car seat.

"Looking for something?" asked Connie.

"My luggage check," Veve whispered. "Oh, Connie, whatever shall I do? I think I dropped it in the station when I bought my lunch."

"Oh, Veve!"

"Don't tell Miss Gordon or the other Brownies," Veve pleaded in a whisper.

"But they'll have to know. How will you get your luggage without the check?"

"I—I'll go without any clothes."

"That's silly. You'll have to have your suitcase."

"Maybe I'll find the check, Connie. Please don't tell the others—at least not yet. They think I'm so stupid for almost missing the train. Oh, Connie, please—"

"Say, what are you two whispering about?" demanded Jane from across the aisle. "Let us into the secret too."

"We were just talking," Connie replied. She decided not to tell the Brownies just then about Veve's latest difficulty.

When the other girls weren't looking, she helped Veve search for the luggage check. It was not in her coat pocket or anywhere on or under the seat.

"We'll have to tell Miss Gordon," Connie said. "Maybe she'll know what to do."

"I'll tell her when we reach Deerford," Veve decided unhappily. "Until then, let's not say a word. I want her to forget first about almost missing the train."

During the remainder of the trip, Veve did not make any trouble. She sat very quietly in her seat and wondered what she would do if she were unable to claim her luggage.

The Brownies watched the snow pelt on the train windows. Now and then they glimpsed a frozen lake in the distance. As the miles clicked away beneath the shining steel rails, the snows deepened.

"Another hour or two and we should reach Snow Valley," Miss Gordon declared, looking at her watch. "Once we reach Deerford station, it won't take long to drive to the farm."

"The coasting should be wonderful," said Rosemary, pressing her face close to the car window. By now it was so dark she scarcely could see the white-coated trees and rooftops.

"I wish this old train would go faster," Jane declared impatiently. "I can hardly wait to get to Deerford."

Everyone except Veve shared her eagerness to reach the Gordon farm. The leader of the Brownies noticed the little girl's downcast face and assumed that she still was troubled about nearly missing the train at Albion Junction.

"Cheer up, Veve," she said. "Think of the delicious dinner Grandma Gordon will have waiting for us when we arrive!"

Veve tried to smile but succeeded only in making a grimace. She kept wondering what Miss Gordon and the Brownies would say when she told them about the lost luggage check.

Thinking about it made her rather tired and discouraged. She really had tried to act properly and never cause annoyance. Nothing seemed to go right.

"Except for Connie, the Brownies don't like me very well," she thought, feeling very sorry for

herself. "Oh, dear, I almost wish I were back home."

A tear trickled down Veve's cheek. She was afraid to wipe it away for fear Connie or the other girls would see that she had been crying. So she closed both eyes tightly and counted the click of the rails.

The sound lulled Veve into drowsiness and slumber. Then she had a dream.

She thought she had arrived in a strange town. Grandfather Gordon could be seen motioning to her from the top of a spruce tree. Next he seemed to be floating along in front of her only a few feet from the ground. But no matter how fast she ran, she never could reach him.

The dream ended abruptly, as someone shook her arm.

"Wake up!" said Miss Gordon in her ear. "Another five minutes and we will be in Deerford Station."

For an instant Veve couldn't think where she was. Then it all came back to her, and she remembered the missing luggage check.

"Miss Gordon—" she began, but already the Brownie leader had turned aside to help Sunny lift a package down from the overhead luggage rack. 82

The brakeman came through the train, calling: "Deerford is the next station. Deerford! Deerford!"

He paused beside Veve's seat and smiled at her. "Don't forget to get off the train, little girl. And be sure to take your packages."

Now to make certain that nothing would be left behind, Miss Gordon made a last-minute check herself. The girls had brought very little hand luggage. Nearly everything had been sent to the baggage car.

"How will we get our bags?" Eileen asked, dusting off a fleck of soot from her coat.

"They'll be waiting for us at the station," Miss Gordon said. "Just have your claim checks ready, girls."

In a short while the air brakes began to make a whistling sound. The train slowed down a little at a time.

Then it came to a sudden stop and the brakeman called again: "All out for Deerford! All out!"

Connie led the way while Miss Gordon brought up the rear to make certain no one was left behind.

When the Brownies reached the vestibule, a chill blast of air struck their faces. Hastily, they buttoned their coats. 83

Outside the train, it was quite dark. Connie, who was the first to alight, looked up and down the platform.

"Where's Grandfather Gordon?" she asked. "Isn't he here?"

No one was in sight except the depot agent and a boy who was hauling luggage from the baggage car ahead.

Then Connie saw a man in a heavy overcoat and cap walking toward her. His face was covered with a warm muffler.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, grasping her firmly by the waist and swinging her off the platform. "If it isn't Sunny Davidson!"

"No, I'm Connie Williams," the little girl laughed. "Sunny's just getting off the train now."

"I'm Jane Tuttle," announced Jane, who had followed close behind Connie.

Grandfather Gordon gave her long golden braids a friendly tweak, and turned to say hello to Rosemary, Sunny and Eileen.

"And who is sober-face?" he asked, gazing at Veve as she stepped down from the train just ahead of Miss Gordon.

"I'm Veve McGuire," she told him, not even trying to smile. She was thinking about the luggage check. 84

Grandfather Gordon gave Miss Gordon a hearty kiss and hug, and then herded the Brownies ahead of him down the platform.

"Can't stand here getting cold," he rumbled. "Come on over to the bobsled. I'll tuck you all under the bearskin robe."

"What about our luggage?" asked Eileen.

The question brought Veve up short, and made her feel a little sick in the pit of her stomach.

"Oh, yes, the luggage checks, girls," said Miss Gordon. "Just give them to Grandfather. He'll take care of everything."

Everyone except Veve had her luggage check ready. All the girls were so excited about climbing into the big bobsled that they did not notice, and only Connie knew Veve did not have it.

"Five checks," said Grandfather Gordon, starting toward the baggage room of the depot. "I'll have the suitcases in a jiffy."

Connie fell into step with him. "I'll go along and help," she offered.

Grandfather Gordon took such long steps that she had to trot to keep up with him. The air was tingling cold.

"Please, Mr. Gordon," said Connie, and her breath came out in puffs of white vapor, "there should be six suitcases."

"Six?"

"You have only five checks, because Veve lost hers. Oh, Veve's had a dreadful time! She didn't want the other Brownies to know."

Connie poured out the entire story of how her friend had nearly missed the train at Albion Junction, and then had lost the luggage check.

Grandfather Gordon gave her hand a sympathetic squeeze. "Now don't you worry your pretty little head," he chuckled. "We'll get that bag and no one will be the wiser."

"You mean you can get it without having a check?"

"Harry Hopkins, the station agent, is an old friend of mine. Come along and point out the bag."

All the luggage had been piled up on the station platform, Veve's bag with the others.

Grandfather Gordon presented the five claim checks and explained about the one that was lost.

"I'm not supposed to turn over a bag without a check," said the station agent. "But under the circumstances, take it along."

Grandfather Gordon carried all of the luggage to the bobsled.

Veve caught sight of her bag with the others and nearly let out a war whoop. Grandfather Gordon didn't say a word. He lifted Connie into the sled and then unhitched the horses.

Snuggling beneath the bearskin robe, Veve whispered in her friend's ear:

"Connie, how did you do it?"

"Easy," she whispered in return. "Grandfather Gordon just asked for the bag and the station agent gave it to him."

Jane Tuttle stirred restlessly. "What are you two whispering about this time?" she demanded.

"Nothing," laughed Veve. She felt quite cheerful again.

Grandfather Gordon leaped into the bobsled and clucked to the horses. Away they started at a fast clip down the snowy road.

"We're off for Snow Valley!" shouted Eileen. "Hurrah!"

"Listen!" cried Veve.

Distinctly the girls could hear the merry jingle of sleighbells. A moment later, the sleigh itself appeared, drawn by a pure white horse.

When the tinkle of the bells had died away, the Brownies heard only the soft swish of the sled runners through the hard-packed snow.

On either side of the curving road rose huge drifts, which the girls glimpsed briefly whenever they passed a lighted house.

Connie noticed a high hill, frosted over like a beautiful white cake. Overhead, a few lonesome

stars twinkled their eyes.

"A magic mountain!" she exclaimed. "Right out of a story book!"

"Hammer Hill," said Grandfather Gordon, waving his mitten toward the mound of snow in the distance. "Snow Valley is hidden behind it."

"Will we be there soon?" asked Sunny, ducking her head to elude the biting wind. "I'm hungry as a wolf."

"As fast as old Maude and Ginger will take us," promised Grandfather Gordon. "Have to make one stop though." He tapped three large sacks of groceries stowed in the front of the sled. "I promised to drop these off at John Jeffert's place."

"We're coming to it now," added Miss Gordon. She pointed ahead to a forest of evergreen trees. The Brownies could not see the house.

"It's hidden deep in the woods," the teacher explained. "Mr. Jeffert is quite a character. He lives alone, and seldom goes into town."

"How does he earn his living?" inquired Jane curiously.

"Why, he raises evergreens for the market," Miss Gordon revealed. "He has hundreds of Christmas trees on his land."

88

At the entrance to the lane which wound in through the evergreens, Mr. Gordon drew rein. A track had not yet been broken through the deep snows ahead.

"I'll leave the sled and horses here," he announced. "Be back as soon as I've delivered the groceries."

Grandfather Gordon tied Maude and Ginger to a tree and unloaded the three sacks from the sled.

"Let me go with you and help carry them," offered Connie quickly.

"I'll carry a sack too," offered Jane.

"The snow is deep," Grandfather Gordon warned. "Think you can make it?"

Connie and Jane were certain they could. They buckled up their galoshes and leaped out of the sled, eager to help.

Grandfather Gordon handed each of the girls a light sack of groceries. He carried the heavy one himself and went ahead to break a trail.

Connie and Jane hadn't realized before how difficult it was to walk in deep snow. Their galoshes cracked through the crusty surface and down they sank almost to their knees. Soon they were puffing and gasping and wondering how they could keep up.

89

"It isn't much farther," said Grandfather Gordon.

"We'll climb through the rail fence here and take a short cut."

The night had darkened so that the two Brownies scarcely could see a foot ahead of them. They were glad Grandfather Gordon seemed so sure of the way.

"Over you go!" he laughed, helping first Connie and then Jane across the top rail of the fence. "Now follow me."

He set off, walking rather rapidly through the big drifts.

Hard pressed to keep up, the girls lowered their heads and plowed doggedly on.

Suddenly, in the darkness ahead, Grandfather Gordon stopped short. A shadowy figure had appeared from behind one of the snow-covered evergreens.

"Stop!" commanded a gruff voice. "Who is trespassing on my land?"

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CHAPTER 7

Santa Claus Jeffert

CONNIE and Jane were very frightened. Huddling behind Grandfather Gordon, they didn't say a word.

"Speak up, or I'll put a bullet through you!" commanded the gruff voice again.

"Is that you, John Jeffert?" called Grandfather Gordon, recovering his power of speech. "Don't shoot!"

For an instant, Connie and Jane were blinded as a flashbeam played directly in their eyes. Then it was turned off, and a tall, heavy-set man with snow-white beard, stepped out in front of them.

"Henry Gordon!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't see who it was. Hope I didn't give you a bad scare."

"Well, you did," admitted Grandfather Gordon. "Not to mention these youngsters I have in tow."

"I sure am sorry," Mr. Jeffert apologized again. "In the dark, I couldn't tell who was coming through the woods."

"So you thought you'd shoot on general principles?" Grandfather Gordon was a trifle annoyed to think that the girls might have been injured through Mr. Jeffert's carelessness.

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The other man had put aside his shotgun. "I wouldn't have fired," he said. "That was only bluff."

"Then why are you carrying a gun?"

"It's like this," explained Mr. Jeffert. "Lately, a number of my best evergreens have been stolen—cut down at night. The same thing happened last year, and the year before that."

"You never reported it to the sheriff?" asked Grandfather Gordon, for this was the first he had heard of the matter.

"No, because I have no idea who is taking the trees. Not many have been stolen, but enough so I lose most of my profit. I'm tired of it."

"Can't say I wouldn't feel the same," admitted Grandfather Gordon.

"This year, I'm keeping watch," Mr. Jeffert continued. "Always before, my trees have been chopped down just before Christmas. If I can catch the thief, I'll turn him over to the sheriff."

The man moved nearer, peering curiously at Jane and Connie. Now that they no longer were afraid of him, he looked quite friendly and nice. He was inclined to be fat and wore an odd red woolen cap. The long, white whiskers fell nearly to his middle.

93

"Why, you look like Santa Claus!" gasped Connie.

"I may look like the kindly old fellow, but I haven't his benevolent disposition," he chuckled. "At any rate, I don't propose to give away any more of my evergreens to sneak thieves!"

Mr. Jeffert thanked Grandfather Gordon for bringing the groceries. It was unnecessary for the Brownies to help carry the sacks on to the house.

"I'll take 'em when I go," Mr. Jeffert said. "Right now I want to remain here and keep watch."

He walked with Grandfather Gordon and the two girls to the rail fence.

"Come and see me again," he called as they bade him good-bye and waded off down the snowy lane.

Safely back in the bobsled with the other Brownies, Connie and Jane related their adventure with Santa Claus Jeffert.

"He's really quite nice and he does look like Santa Claus!" Connie declared. "I should like to meet him again."

The frosty air had made everyone hungry. Thinking of the warm meal awaiting them, the

Brownies were glad when the team presently turned in at the Gordon farm.

Against a back-drop of tall trees, they beheld the twinkling lights of the big white shingle house.

Mrs. Gordon, in blue-checked apron, came running to the door. She was a tiny woman for sixty-eight years, with snow-white hair.

One by one, she gave the Brownies and Veve a welcoming hug.

"You must be starved after that long train ride," she declared, showing the girls where to hang their coats. "As soon as you're washed up, we'll have supper."

From the kitchen came the most tantalizing odors of baked chicken, pumpkin pie and hot chocolate.

Mrs. Gordon bustled about, showing the girls to their rooms and making certain that they had towels and soap.

Connie, Veve, Sunny and Eileen shared one room with two beds. In the one adjoining, Rosemary and Jane were to sleep.

Neither of the rooms had running water, only a pitcher and a bowl. However, the water had been heated in the kitchen, so the girls were able to scrub themselves thoroughly.

In a twinkling they were downstairs again, exploring the living room and the big kitchen where Fluff, the cat, had curled up by the wood stove.

A fragrant pine knot blazed on the hearth of the dining room fireplace. It made the room very cozy and friendly.

When all the Brownies were downstairs, Grandmother Gordon called them to the dining room table. She had decorated it prettily with pink chrysanthemums, but the girls saw only the food.

A huge blue platter was piled high with crusty brown chicken. Beside it was a dish of cranberry sauce and another of whipped potatoes with a deep lake of melted butter.

For vegetables, the Brownies had their choice of carrots, spinach or string beans. Dessert was the best of all-pumpkin pie with whipped cream. However, by that time, the girls were so filled, they could not eat it all.

When finally the meal was ended, they said good night to Grandfather and Grandmother Gordon and stumbled off to their beds.

Next morning, Connie was the first Brownie to dress and come down to the warm kitchen. She asked Mrs. Gordon if she might help.

"Yes, dear, you may carry in the plates," Mrs. Gordon smiled. "Breakfast soon will be ready."

Eileen and Jane arrived next, and they helped put on the water glasses and arrange the chairs. There were only six of the regular straight-back ones, but two of the Brownies used the piano bench. Miss Gordon brought in a kitchen chair for herself.

The Brownies hadn't dreamed they could be so hungry. Mrs. Gordon had fried tiny sausages and made a giant stack of wheatcakes.

Connie ate three of the cakes, and after that lost count. She never had tasted such wonderful food.

When breakfast was over, Jane and Sunny elected to help with the dishes. Connie, Veve and Eileen volunteered to make all the beds. Rosemary cleared the table, and afterwards gave Fluff her saucer of milk.

"All work and no play will make Brownies very bored people," Grandmother Gordon declared. "I suggest you take advantage of the snow while it lasts."

"Let's go skiing," cried Connie, who wished to try out her birthday present.

"And coasting," added Jane. "But what will we use for sleds?"

"You'll find several in the barn," suggested Miss Gordon. "While they're not new, I imagine they'll serve."

Eagerly the Brownies donned mittens, snowsuits and galoshes. A path had been shoveled from the house to the barn.

"Where will we coast?" Connie asked.

Miss Gordon, who looked very young in her black and scarlet ski suit, pointed to Hammer Hill.

"A trail has been broken by the other children," she said. "So the coasting should be good despite the heavy snow."

"Do other children live near here?" Sunny asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes, indeed. The Stones are our nearest neighbors. I believe the family has three or four children. We may meet them on the hill."

In the barn, the Brownies found three small sleds, the big bobsled Mr. Gordon had made, and Skip.

Skip was a large, friendly shepherd dog, who barked when the Brownies called him by name. He sat up and begged to be taken along to the hill.

"May we?" Connie asked Miss Gordon.

"Yes, Skip loves the snow," the Brownie leader consented.

The horses, Ginger and Maude, were crunching corn in their stalls. They barely lifted their heads as the Brownies dragged out the sleds.

At the hill, the girls found at least a dozen other children their own age. The Brownies took turns using the small sleds, and riding the big bob which Miss Gordon steered.

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Once at the bottom of the hill, the sled overturned, and everyone was dumped into the snow. The Brownies howled with laughter and did not mind in the least.

After a while, Connie, who had brought along her skis, tried to slide down hill on them. Before she had gone six feet she fell. Both of the skis flew off.

"These skis aren't much good," she said in a discouraged voice. She hurled them away.

"Why, Connie," said Miss Gordon, laughing at her. "Have you forgotten the Brownie verse?"

"What verse?" asked Connie, digging snow from her collar.

"Now, little Brownie,
Strap on your skis;
Crouch low, little girl,
And bend your knees,"

"You mean, I'm supposed to bend my knees?"

"That's the general idea, Connie, if you hope to stay on your feet."

"I guess I'll try it again." Ashamed that she had given up so easily, Connie recovered the skis and strapped them on once more.

Following Miss Gordon's instructions, she bent her knees and was able to slide far down the slope before they again sailed out from under her.

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This time, however, she only laughed as she picked herself up. She tried twice more to ski down the hill and finally made it without falling. Because the other girls were eager to try their luck, she then turned the runners over to Jane.

Connie noticed that several new children had arrived at the hill. There were two girls only a little younger than herself, and a small boy. The three newcomers were not as warmly dressed as the Brownies and shivered in the wind. They were using large dishpans instead of sleds for coasting.

"How funny!" she exclaimed.

The other Brownies began to take notice too, for it really was amusing to see the children try to slide down hill in dishpans. Sometimes they turned around and the pans ended up in a snowbank.

"Why don't you get a sled?" Jane called to the youngsters.

"Sh!" warned Miss Gordon. "Those are the Stone children, Bennie, Barbara and Betty."

"The three B's!" chuckled Jane, who could not guess why the Brownie leader was signaling her to remain quiet.

"The Stone family is very poor," Miss Gordon explained in an undertone. "Don't make fun of their dishpans. Their parents can't afford to buy them sleds."

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"Oh!" murmured Jane, very much ashamed that she had spoken so hastily. "I'm sorry!"

Connie had been watching the Stone children and could see that they were very envious of the Brownie troop's sleds and her shiny new skis. She couldn't blame them a bit for feeling that way.

An idea came to her.

"Oh, Miss Gordon," she said earnestly, "can't we *heeley, eeley leedy pie?*"

Now the Stone children were climbing the hill with their dishpans. Connie had used the Brownie secret language so that the youngsters, even if they heard, would not know they were being discussed.

All the Brownies understood that Connie really had said: "Can't we help?" The game was one the troop members frequently played. Each nonsensical word made use of each letter of the word that actually was meant.

Of course, Veve, not being a Brownie, was as deeply mystified as the Stone children. She thought Connie was talking a foreign language.

"Your idea is an excellent one, Connie," approved the Brownie leader. "Come along, all of you, and we'll meet the Stone children." 101

Bennie, Barbara and Betty were rather shy when Miss Gordon introduced so many girls at one time. They could think of nothing to say.

"Won't you try my skis?" Connie politely invited Barbara. "I think I'll rest for a while."

"Oh, Jimminy Crickets!" Barbara's large dark eyes kindled with pleasure. "I've always wanted to try out a pair!"

The other Brownies took their cue from Connie. Sunny gave the sled she had been using to Betty, while Eileen and Rosemary took turns pulling six-year-old Benny.

Now the girls could not fail to notice that the little fellow's mittens were nearly worn out, though they had been mended many times. Barbara, the elder of the three Stones, wore a misfitting coat made from a garment of her father's. Betty had on a threadbare snowsuit much too small for her.

"I wish I'd get a new sled for Christmas," remarked Betty wistfully. "But I won't. Pop said that this year times are harder than ever, and we can't expect very much."

"Take another slide on mine," urged Sunny.

For half an hour the Brownies and the Stone children had a great deal of fun on the hill. Then everyone became acutely aware of the cold. Fingers began to tingle and toes to ache. 102

The Stone children said good-bye to their new friends and, with their dishpans, started home.

"I'm freezing too!" announced Eileen, stamping her feet.

"So am I," declared Rosemary, slapping her mittens together.

"It soon will be lunch time," declared Miss Gordon, squinting up at the sun which had climbed high overhead. "All those in favor of a nice warm fire, vote 'aye.'"

"Aye!" shouted all of the Brownies.

Dragging the sleds, they took a short cut through a field and across a tiny lake to the Gordon farm.

"Did you hear what Betty said to me about not expecting a sled for Christmas?" Sunny remarked as they turned in at the lane.

"I did," replied Connie. "And I think it's a shame!"

"The Stone children never have had many toys," informed Miss Gordon. "Their father is hard pressed to buy food and clothing for the family."

"I wish we could help," said Connie slowly. She was silent a moment as she reflected that her mother had given her two dollars to spend as she wished during the visit at Snow Valley. "How much does a sled cost?" she asked. 103

"That depends upon the type," Miss Gordon answered. "A fairly good one can be bought for four dollars."

"I'll give my two dollars spending money," offered Connie, suddenly making up her mind. "But that won't be enough."

"I have a dollar I'll contribute," volunteered Sunny. "I want the Stone children to have a sled for Christmas!"

"So do I," chimed in Eileen. "But I can only give fifty cents."

All of the Brownies voted to make a donation, and with a little money Miss Gordon added to the fund, it was more than enough to buy a good sled.

Of the entire group, only Veve could not offer to give anything. She had not brought any spending money along.

"Miss Gordon, will you buy the sled?" Connie asked the teacher.

"I'll be glad to shop for it." Miss Gordon noticed Veve's downcast face and added: "That is, if Veve will help me make the selection. Will you, Veve?"

"Oh, I'd love to, Miss Gordon!" Veve perked up, thinking that the troop leader needed her help.

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Reaching the Gordon farm, the girls swept off their snowsuits and left their galoshes on the porch. Then they stomped in to toast themselves by the kitchen stove and the fireplace where a big log crackled.

"Lunch will be ready directly," announced Mrs. Gordon, bustling to and fro. "Hot vegetable soup and all the hamburgers you can eat!"

"Miss Gordon, tell Grandma about our wonderful plan!" Jane urged the teacher.

"To be sure. I'm very proud of my Brownies for wishing to help others."

Mrs. Gordon began dishing soup from the big blue tureen. "So the Brownies have found themselves a project?" she inquired. "What is it, may I ask?"

"We've decided to give the Stone children a Christmas present," declared Connie, before Miss Gordon could answer. "We voted to use our spending money to buy them a new sled."

Now Grandmother Gordon truly was surprised. The soup ladle clattered from her hand against the rim of the tureen.

She gazed quickly at Miss Gordon, almost as if she were displeased.

"The Stone children?" she repeated. "But are you certain—that is—"

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She did not finish what she had started to say. Instead, with a worried shake of her head, she went on dipping up the hot soup.

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CHAPTER 8

Three Little Stones

"LUNCH is served," announced Grandmother Gordon quickly.

As she shoed the Brownies to their places at the long table, she was hopeful that they would forget her unfinished remark about the Stone children.

However, everyone wondered what she had intended to say.

Before anyone could ask, Grandfather Gordon came in and began questioning the Brownies about the fun they had had on Hammer Hill.

"The skating is good on the lake too," he told them. "Better try out those skates soon, because if a heavy snow should come along, the skating might be ruined."

"Will it snow again, do you think?" Sunny asked anxiously, peering out at the deep drifts.

"Can't tell. It might," replied Grandfather Gordon. "Haven't seen the weather prediction, but my bones tell me there's more snow in the air."

The coasting expedition had made the Brownies as hungry as polar bears. After the soup had warmed them, they devoted themselves to the huge platter of hamburgers. But no matter how many they ate, Grandmother Gordon always brought in more from the kitchen.

"Let's tell Grandfather Gordon about our plan to help the Stones!" suggested Eileen.

Connie shot her a warning glance, but she did not understand its meaning. Instead, she went on and told again of the plan to buy a Christmas sled for the three children.

"Well, well, that is a kindly thought," commented Mr. Gordon.

However, as he spoke, he glanced at his wife. Grandmother Gordon's thin lips were drawn into a tight line. She couldn't hide the fact that she didn't approve of the plan at all.

"Don't you like the idea of the Brownies using their spending money to help others?" Miss Gordon asked her.

"Why, yes, of course. I heartily approve of charity if the object is worthy."

"And you believe that the Stone children are deserving?" Miss Gordon asked, deliberately pinning her down.

Grandmother Gordon hastily began to gather up the dishes. She would have liked to avoid answering by escaping to the kitchen.

Miss Gordon smiled and took the dishes from her hands.

"Must I answer?" Grandmother Gordon asked uncomfortably.

"Indeed, you must, for you've raised a question in our minds."

"Well," said Grandmother Gordon facing the Brownies and choosing her words carefully, "I honestly must say, I hardly know the Stone children. Never once have they been in my home. For all I know, they are deserving enough."

"And yet for some undisclosed reason, you don't entirely approve of the Brownie plan. Come, out with it! Don't try to hoodwink us!"

From the far end of the table, Grandfather Gordon chuckled at his wife's discomfiture.

"You may as well fess up," he teased her. "Tell 'em the truth about why you don't like the Stone family."

"Oh, dear!" Grandmother Gordon sank back in her chair. She did not enjoy being cornered. "I suppose I must, or I'll never hear the last of it!"

"Tell the girls about the necklace," urged Grandfather Gordon.

"Necklace?" Sunny repeated in astonishment. She could not imagine what a necklace might have to do with the Stone children.

"It wasn't a necklace, but a gold locket," corrected Grandmother Gordon. She sighed and added: "My dislike of the Stones simmers down to this—I'm not convinced they're honest."

"The children steal?" gasped Connie.

"Oh, no!" hastily corrected Grandmother Gordon. "I'll start at the beginning—then you'll understand. Three years ago, Mrs. Stone worked for me at threshing time. She helped out in the kitchen and with the housework for nearly a month."

"Mrs. Stone works by the day," explained Miss Gordon. "Her husband has a job in the village, but is ill much of the time."

"I always liked Mrs. Stone, and I'll give her credit for being a good worker," Grandmother Gordon continued. "The poor woman probably was tempted. Otherwise, I'm sure she wouldn't have taken anything."

"You say she stole a gold locket?" asked Connie.

"It was my wedding locket which I set great store by. I foolishly showed it to Mrs. Stone and she greatly admired it. After that, I never could find it, though I scoured the house high and low."

"You're certain Mrs. Stone took the locket?" inquired Miss Gordon, deeply troubled.

"I can't be certain except in my own mind."

"You didn't accuse her?"

"No, but I never asked her to work for me again."

Grandfather Gordon, who had listened to his wife's story, now said with a chuckle:

"Suppose I tell you my version of what happened?"

"Yes, do!" urged the Brownies.

"In my opinion, the locket never was stolen. My wife just misplaced it."

"No such thing!" insisted Grandmother Gordon. "After I missed the locket, I searched the house high and low."

"You'll find it someday," declared Grandfather Gordon. "When you do, you'll be sorry you accused poor Mrs. Stone."

"I never did accuse her," corrected Mrs. Gordon. "It was just a feeling I had. I couldn't have her working in my home, because I was convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that she took the locket."

"Ah, a shadow of doubt!" teased Grandfather Gordon. "If my memory does not fail me, you have made slight errors before. Now the time your glasses were lost—"

"That was entirely different. To be sure, I have misplaced articles. But not the locket!"

"You say you recall showing it to Mrs. Stone?" questioned Miss Gordon thoughtfully.

"Distinctly. She had been working for me during threshing time. Then Grandfather Gordon and I planned a little wedding anniversary celebration—nothing elaborate—only a few guests.

"For the occasion, I put on my old lavender silk wedding gown."

"And the gold locket?" asked Connie, who was deeply interested in the story.

"No, the chain was broken, so I could not wear it. But I recall showing the locket to Mrs. Stone."

"You were in the kitchen at the time," said Grandfather Gordon, who had heard the tale so many times he knew it from memory.

"That's right. Mrs. Stone admired it and remarked that it was the most beautiful locket she had ever seen. She took it to the kitchen mirror and held it to her own neck a moment."

"A very natural reaction," commented Miss Gordon. "But it hardly proves—"

"The guests began to arrive then," Grandmother Gordon interrupted. "I left the locket lying on the kitchen table and entered the living room. Not until much later did I give the matter another thought."

"You surely asked Mrs. Stone about the locket?" inquired Miss Gordon.

"Only casually, for at first I thought surely I would find it. And how could I accuse her without

proof?"

"So you thought you would find it?" teased her husband. "That reveals to me that deep down in your mind, you knew you might have misplaced it yourself."

"Nothing of the sort! I recall leaving it on the kitchen table. While I entertained my guests, it disappeared. I've never seen it since, and never will."

"Couldn't anyone except Mrs. Stone have taken it?" asked Jane. "One of the guests perhaps?"

"Only Mrs. Stone was in the kitchen."

"Maybe the locket was thrown out with the garbage," speculated Eileen. "Once my mother lost a silver spoon that way."

"I don't see how such a thing could have occurred," declared Grandmother Gordon. "If the locket were lost, Mrs. Stone would be responsible, because she did all the kitchen work that day."

"Your mind is dead set against the woman," said her husband. "Poor Mrs. Stone and those children the Brownies want to help!"

"I feel very sorry for the three children. If they need toys, I see no harm in the Brownies helping out. I shouldn't have said a word about the locket."

"On the contrary, it's well to know the truth about the family," returned Miss Gordon. "However, since no one can be certain Mrs. Stone actually took the locket, I believe in giving her the benefit of the doubt. How about it, Brownies?"

"Let's buy the sled just as we planned," proposed Connie.

"I say so too!" cried Veve, forgetting that she was not a Brownie.

All the members of the troop agreed with Connie and Miss Gordon that their plan should not be abandoned.

"I truly am sorry I told you anything about it," apologized Grandmother Gordon. "I should regret it deeply if this story ever were repeated outside the family."

"Brownies know how to keep secrets," Miss Gordon assured her.

"I wish we could find the locket and prove that Mrs. Stone didn't take it," said Connie soberly.

"My dear, I wish you could too," smiled Grandmother Gordon. "Unfortunately, one can't alter facts."

No more was said about the matter just then. The Brownies cleared the table and did the dishes.

After that, some of the girls rode to the village with Grandfather Gordon. Connie, Veve, and Rosemary remained behind to write letters home. Later, they played with Fluff and pressed their Brownie uniforms which had become mussed on the trip.

"Now what shall we do?" Rosemary asked when the task had been finished. She liked to keep busy all the time.

"Have you any work you would like to have us do, Mrs. Gordon?" inquired Connie politely.

"Not a thing," the woman replied. "Just amuse yourselves."

"May we do anything we like?" Connie asked, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"Well, almost anything, dear."

"Then I have a very special request. You won't be annoyed?"

"Certainly not. What is your request, Connie?"

"While we're here, may the Brownies search for the missing locket?"

"Here in the kitchen?"

"Yes, and everywhere in the house."

Now the request had taken Grandmother Gordon quite by surprise. She could visualize the Brownies scurrying through the house, opening bureau drawers and peeping into every nook and cranny of the old dwelling.

"We'll be very careful," promised Connie eagerly. "We won't disturb anything."

"Then by all means search for the locket," Grandmother Gordon encouraged the girls. She smiled confidently. "You won't find the trinket, but you'll have fun."

CHAPTER 9

Tale of the Brownies

THE Brownies had no opportunity to search for the golden locket the next day, because directly after breakfast, Grandfather Gordon proposed a trip to the skating pond.

"Wrap up warmly because the mercury is nosing below zero this morning," he warned. "We mustn't have any little nipped fingers or toes."

By the time the Brownies were ready, Grandfather Gordon brought the sled and horses to the door. Loading everyone in, he tucked the robes snugly about them.

"Here comes Skip!" laughed Connie, as the dog came plunging through the snow. "He wants to go with us!"

To confirm her words, Skip began to bark and carry on at a great rate.

"Let's take him!" pleaded Eileen. "May we?"

Grandfather Gordon tossed Skip into the sled where he snuggled down beside Rosemary.

Then off they went over the hard-packed snow to a large circular pond which adjoined the icehouse.

Already many boys and girls were gliding over the smooth ice, laughing and shouting.

"The ice is frozen six inches deep and is safe everywhere except near the icehouse where the men have been cutting ice blocks," Grandfather Gordon told the Brownies. "Keep away from there."

The Brownies put on their skates and then hobbled over to the edge of the pond. Connie was the first one to start off. She sailed away so easily that Veve thought there was nothing to skating.

"Here I go!" she shouted.

The little girl took a long stroke, but something went wrong. Her skate runner struck a rough place in the ice, causing her to lose her balance.

Frantically, she swung her arms, but she could not save herself. Down she went, landing with a hard thud which shook the ice.

All the Brownies burst into laughter, for Veve looked so dazed and surprised.

"Spare the ice!" Jane shouted. "We want a chance—"

Just then her feet flew out from beneath her and down she went beside Veve! Grandfather Gordon picked up both little girls, making certain that they were not hurt.

Then he took each by a hand and, walking between them, helped them to skate.

Soon all the Brownies were out on the ice having a wonderful time. Remembering Grandfather Gordon's warning, they were careful to remain a safe distance away from the icehouse.

However, they noticed that some of the older boys actually were venturing out onto the area which had been so recently frozen. The ice there was very smooth, but dangerously thin.

"Those boys should know better!" said Connie anxiously.

Skating fairly close, she called to warn them of their danger.

"Oh, go on!" one of the boys retorted. "The ice is thick enough here. We skate where we please."

Connie said no more. She stood a moment watching the boys cut figure eights on the clear ice. As they glided past, she could see the thin surface weave beneath their weight.

Not knowing what else to do, Connie skated back to the other Brownies. Thinking that someone should impress upon the boys that they were in danger, she looked about for Grandfather Gordon.

He was some distance away, building a log fire at the edge of the pond. His back was turned so that he had not noticed the skaters near the icehouse.

"Oh, Grandfather Gordon!" Connie said, stroking over to where he stood. "Those boys are skating on the thin ice!"

Mr. Gordon turned quickly. Then dropping a stick of wood, he started toward the icehouse.

Before he could cover half the distance, a frightened shout came from the group of skaters.

"Someone has fallen through the ice!" Grandfather Gordon exclaimed, starting to run.

Connie now was close enough to see the frightened faces of the skaters who had backed away from the thin area. In its center, she saw a jagged hole, and a boy clinging desperately to the brittle crust.

"Hold on! Hold on!" shouted Grandfather Gordon encouragingly.

Ordering Connie to keep back, he ran as close as he dared to the broken ice. Then, flinging himself flat, he pulled himself inch by inch toward the shivering boy.

Connie was very frightened, not only for the skater, but for Mr. Gordon as well. She could see the ice bending beneath his weight, and was afraid it might break at any instant and plunge him into the freezing water.

When Grandfather Gordon was within a foot of the boy, he stretched out his arms.

"Hold fast!" he commanded.

Inch by inch, he pulled the boy to ice which was thick enough to withstand their combined weights without breaking. Then he helped the lad to his feet, and wrapped his own coat about him.

"You're the Gainsworth boy, aren't you?" he said, recognizing him. "And a long ways from home too. I'll take you there in my sled."

"Th-thanks," the boy said, his teeth chattering on the words.

Connie quickly rounded up all the Brownies, who removed their skates, and scrambled into the sled. Although the girls were sorry to have their fun end so abruptly, they were proud of Mr. Gordon for having saved the Gainsworth boy.

"You were lucky you didn't drown," Grandfather Gordon scolded the lad as he let him out at his own home twenty minutes later. "If you had used good common sense, you never would have risked your life skating on the thin ice."

"I've sure learned my lesson," the lad replied. "Thanks, Mr. Gordon."

Back at the Gordon farm once more, the Brownies enjoyed another of Grandmother Gordon's hearty lunches. Afterwards, they wrote letters home and sat reading by the fireside.

"I'm as sleepy as a cat," Connie said, yawning drowsily. "That skating trip certainly made me tired."

Since arriving at the Gordon farm, all of the Brownies had slept very soundly at night. In fact, their cozy feather beds were so comfortable they found it no easy matter to get up early in the morning.

On the day following the skating party, Connie and Veve were downstairs before any of the other Brownies.

Entering the kitchen, they discovered Grandmother Gordon there ahead of them. A roaring fire had been started in the wood stove.

The long table with blue and white checkered tablecloth already had been set. On the stove a thick mixture of mush boiled noisily in a big iron kettle, while bacon sizzled in an iron skillet.

"My, how delicious everything smells!" Veve declared, sniffing the air. "I scarcely can wait until breakfast."

The girls looked about for work to do. Connie stirred the mush, taking care not to burn herself.

Then Veve noticed that the woodbox was nearly empty.

"May we bring in more wood, Mrs. Gordon?" she suggested.

"Why, yes, if you care to," replied Grandmother Gordon. "Grandpa usually keeps the box filled, but this time he failed me."

Veve and Connie put on their snowsuits, mittens and galoshes and went outside.

On the porch they paused for a moment to look at the frozen lake, the white-clad hills, and the ghostlike evergreens. All the world seemed white with snow.

Following the shoveled path, the girls came to the woodpile near the barn. A brown squirrel, disturbed by their approach, scampered off leaving a trail of dainty tracks.

Veve and Connie filled their arms with chopped wood and carried it back to the house. After they had made a second trip, the woodbox was filled to overflowing.

By this time, all of the Brownies except Jane were up and dressed. Veve and Connie helped pull her out of bed, and then it was time for breakfast.

"Girls," said Miss Gordon, when the dishes had been done and morning work was out of the way, "how would you like to take a hike into the woods?"

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"Now?" asked Eileen eagerly. She always liked hikes and nature study.

"It's quite cold so early in the day. Suppose we start at ten o'clock after the sun is higher."

To this, the Brownies enthusiastically agreed. They straightened their rooms, made the beds, and then found time on their hands.

"I know what let's do," proposed Connie. "Let's hunt for Grandma Gordon's gold locket!"

"Where shall we start?" asked Rosemary.

"The kitchen!" proposed Eileen. "That's the most likely place."

Mrs. Gordon said she did not mind if the girls looked through all the cupboards. Connie brought in a stepladder from the barn and climbed up to the uppermost shelf. The dishes there were quite dusty, for the shelf was too high for convenient use.

"Dear me, I haven't cleaned up there for goodness knows how long," Mrs. Gordon laughed. "Anything may come to light."

While Connie handed down the dishes, the other girls washed them. She found a milk-white glass plate, which Miss Gordon said was an antique and should be kept where it could be seen and appreciated.

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There was an interesting Toby jug, a cracked pink glass pitcher and a little glass boat which bore the words: "Remember the Maine."

"Why, I lost that little boat years ago!" Mrs. Gordon exclaimed when Connie handed it down to be washed. "I never did remember what was done with it."

"Maybe we'll find the locket too!" laughed Rosemary.

However, the Brownies cleaned the entire shelf and did not come upon the lost trinket. Nor was it anywhere in the cupboards. One shelf contained a solid row of jelly in rainbow colors of red, orange, and mint green. On another was a vast array of canned fruit, and on a lower shelf in easy reach, a large collection of herbs and spices.

"We must make Christmas cakes and cookies soon," said Miss Gordon when she saw the spices. "Oh, dear, our time here is so short and we have so many wonderful things to do."

"It's time for our hike now," Jane reminded her.

The Brownies decided to abandon the search for the gold locket, at least for the time being. Only Connie had faith it would be found somewhere in the house. She made up her mind she would look for it whenever she had a spare moment.

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"Tomorrow may we search in the attic?" she asked Grandmother Gordon.

"The attic?" repeated Mrs. Gordon, rather puzzled. "How could the locket be there?"

Connie explained that she merely thought the attic would be an interesting place to explore.

"So it is," agreed Mrs. Gordon. "Filled to overflowing with old furniture, trunks, cast-off clothing, not to mention cobwebs. Rummage there as much as you like."

Now Connie was not the only member of the Brownie troop to have original ideas. Jane and Rosemary also had made special plans. After talking the matter over with Miss Gordon, they had decided to have a Christmas tree for the birds.

The night before they had made careful preparations, so that the tree itself might be selected on the morning hike.

The girls had filled small cardboard boxes with seeds, had pressed peanut butter into pine cones and had fixed tiny baskets of suet and bread crumbs ready for tying onto the evergreen limbs.

When everyone was ready, the Brownies set off on their hike, Miss Gordon leading the way.

The snow was very deep, which made walking quite hard. However, the Brownies soon emerged on a firmly-packed road, which wound on toward Mr. Jeffert's farm.

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Coming to a rustic bridge, Miss Gordon paused a moment so that the Brownies might catch their breath.

"May we hike through the woods?" Jane requested. "The trees are so pretty beyond the log fence. I am sure we could find one there that would be just right for the birds' Christmas tree."

"Mr. Jeffert doesn't mind if we go on his land," the Brownie leader replied. "I telephoned him this morning to inquire."

The girls climbed the rail fence and followed Miss Gordon through the maze of evergreens. Never had they seen such a beautiful forest of Christmas trees. The needles of the pines and spruces glistened with ice and flashed like diamonds under the bright morning sun.

The Brownies walked slowly, studying each tree as a possible feeding station for the birds.

Finally Jane came to one which exactly suited her. It was a little higher than her head, well filled out, and perfectly shaped.

"This is just the place!" she proposed.

Rosemary liked the tree and so did the other Brownies. All voted that it be made into a feeding station for the birds. Jane opened up the box of knick-knacks and the girls attached them to the limbs.

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"Will the birds find it, do you think?" Rosemary asked when the task was completed. She saw several sparrows nearby, but they did not come near the tree.

"Give them time," said Miss Gordon. "Within a day or two, I'll practically guarantee this will be a popular bird restaurant."

The Brownies tramped some distance on into the evergreen forest before turning back. Near the rail fence by the road, they all sat down on a log to rest.

"Tell us a story, Miss Gordon," urged Connie. "One about the fairies."

"No, about Brownies," pleaded Jane.

"I might tell you the Brownie Story by Juliana Horatia Ewing, which suggests the ideals and objectives of our Brownie Scout program," said Miss Gordon. "Some of you already have heard it."

"I haven't," said Veve, eager to hear the tale. Gathering the girls about her, the Brownie leader began in a low, clear voice:

"Once upon a time, a little girl named Mary and her brother Tommy, lived in England with their grandmother and father, who was a tailor.

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"Now, although the family was very poor and there was much work to do, the children never thought to help.

"So, was it surprising that the overburdened tailor one day complained to his mother that children were a grievance?

"'No, children are not a burden but a blessing,' the old woman replied, and she decided to prove it.

"One day when Mary asked her about the fairies, she sighed and repeated: 'Fairies? Ah, the luck of our house is gone. It went with the Brownie, I believe.'

"'Tell us about her,' urged Mary. 'Did she live with our family?'

"'Yes, for many generations,' replied the old woman. 'Each morning before the family was up, she slipped in to sweep up the hearth, set out the breakfast and do all the housework. Then she would be off before anyone could catch her.'

"'Yet they always knew it was a Brownie who came, Grandmother?'

"'Oh, yes, they frequently could hear her laughing and playing about the house as she worked.'

"'And her wages?' asked little Mary.

“A Brownie always works for love,’ explained the old woman. ‘Sometimes though, the family would set a pancheon of clear water for her overnight, or now and then they would leave a bowl of bread and milk. Oh, she was a dainty little creature!’

“And why did she leave the family, Granny?’

“I fear only the wise old hoot owl who lives in the woods can answer that,’ sighed the grandmother.

“I wish I could find the owl and learn how to coax the Brownie back again,’ said little Mary. ‘It would be so nice to have her to tidy the room, run errands and pick up chips. Oh, if only she had never gone away!’

“Now then and there Mary decided to discover if she could what had become of the helpful Brownie. So one night when the moon was high, she started off in search of the wise old owl in the forest.

“A white mist lay over the moor as she made her way to the forest.

“Hoot! Hoot!’ suddenly said a voice directly behind her.

“Please, can you tell me how to find a Brownie who will come to our house and help with the work?’ Mary boldly asked the wise old bird.

“Oohoo!’ hooted the owl. ‘I know of two Brownies who live in your house now, but they will not work because they are so very lazy.’

“Two Brownies in our house?’ echoed Mary, very much surprised. ‘I wish you would tell me where to find them. I would show them how to work.’

“I can tell you how to find one of the Brownies,’ replied the owl. ‘Now listen closely. When the moon is shining, go to the pool in the woods, and turn yourself about three times as you repeat this charm:

‘Twist me, and turn me, and show me the Elf;
I looked in the water, and saw—’

“And will I see a Brownie?’ asked little Mary.

“If you fail to see one, it will be no use,’ answered the wise old owl.

“Off went Mary to the pool deep in the woods. Gazing deep into the dark water which was like a mirror, she slowly repeated the magic words.

“But though she looked hard for the Brownie, all she saw was her own sober reflection in the pool.

“I must have done it wrong,’ thought Mary. ‘Anyway, there is no word to rhyme with “Elf.”’

“Disappointed and puzzled, the little girl went back to the old owl to report that the charm had failed to work.

“Whoooo,’ hooted the owl, winking his sleepy eyes, ‘and what did you see in the pool?’

“No one but myself,’ answered little Mary.

“Hoot! Hoot!’ said the owl, and he seemed to be laughing in his feathers. ‘And what did you expect to see?’

“A Brownie! You promised me I would!’

“Then the owl explained to Mary that she herself was the Brownie and that she could make herself beloved in the household by helping with the work.

“I’m not sure I would enjoy being a Brownie,’ said Mary, thinking over what the owl had said. ‘I would rather have someone else do the work for me.’

“Fie!’ the old owl scolded crossly. ‘You would be idle and lazy—one who eats, yet never helps with the supper!’

“Say no more,’ sighed Mary. ‘I don’t really want to be like that. I’ll go home now and tell my brother Tommy what you have said.’

“The very next day, the little girl told her brother of her talk with the owl. Together they worked out a plan whereby they arose each morning before the old folks were awake. They swept the hearth, tidied the house and started breakfast.

"Each day the children found more and more things to do for their father and their grandmother. The house rang with laughter and everyone was much happier.

"Now this went on for many days. Then one morning, the tailor stole downstairs very early to watch for the Brownies. Instead, he saw Mary and Tommy doing the work.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Where are the Brownies?"

"We are the only ones," laughed Mary and Tommy.

"Surely this is a joke," declared the astonished tailor. "Are there no real Brownies?"

"We are the only ones," laughed Mary.

"The old tailor then agreed with his mother that children indeed were a blessing and not a burden."

When Miss Gordon had finished the tale, she added:

"That is my own version of the Brownie story and a much shortened one. You all must read the original."

"I already have," declared Connie, who had obtained the tale at the Rosedale Public Library.

The Brownies all arose from the log, intending to start on toward the farmhouse.

As they were climbing the rail fence, a man in a dark flannel shirt and leather jacket strode down the road.

Evidently he had been chopping wood, for an axe was slung over his shoulder.

When the man saw the Brownies, he slackened his pace and gazed at them a trifle suspiciously. The girls began to feel a bit uncomfortable.

Now Miss Gordon knew the man only slightly. His name was Felix Gossart and his ten-acre place adjoined Mr. Jeffert's evergreen farm. He had never seemed very friendly and less so now.

"Good morning, Mr. Gossart," Miss Gordon said politely.

The man did not reply to the friendly greeting. He merely stared at the Brownies as they scrambled over the snowy rails of the fence.

"Trespassing on Mr. Jeffert's property?" he asked and his voice was not pleasant.

"Indeed, we aren't," answered Miss Gordon. "Mr. Jeffert said we might hike through the woods."

"Well, I wouldn't do it again if I were you," said Mr. Gossart, shifting the axe to the other shoulder. "Maybe you haven't heard. Someone's been cutting down trees in these parts. Wandering around careless like, you might run into unpleasant characters."

"Thank you, Mr. Gossart. If we come this way again, we'll be very careful."

Miss Gordon said no more, but gathering the girls together, started off down the road.

"Can't we go to the woods again?" Rosemary asked anxiously when they were well beyond Mr. Gossart's hearing. "If we don't we'll never learn whether or not the birds use our feeding station."

"When I talked to Mr. Jeffert this morning, he did not advise against going onto his property," Miss Gordon said. "If we stay close to the road, I see no possible danger."

"Whoever is cutting down the evergreens wouldn't do it in the daytime at any rate," reasoned Connie.

"Then why did Mr. Gossart warn us that we might meet unpleasant characters?" inquired Eileen nervously.

"He may have intended to be helpful," said Miss Gordon thoughtfully. "On the other hand, I wonder—"

"You wonder what, Miss Gordon?" demanded Connie.

The Brownie leader, however, did not intend to finish what had been in her mind.

"Race you to the bridge!" she challenged.

Off she darted, with the Brownies in hot pursuit. By the time they all reached the bridge, everyone was out of breath and Mr. Gossart completely forgotten.

CHAPTER 10

A Stolen Evergreen

THE Brownies and Veve were spending the afternoon rummaging in Grandmother Gordon's attic.

Connie had suggested the idea immediately after lunch and everyone had been enthusiastic. Mrs. Gordon, of course, did not expect the girls to find her missing locket, but she knew they would have a fine time poking about among all the old things.

The attic had only one small window to let in light. Everywhere cobwebs hung from file walls. Veve ran into one as she started toward an old spinning wheel which stood near the door.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed, fighting it off. "This old boy has me by the throat."

"Maybe there are mice in here too," Rosemary added uneasily.

"Grandma Gordon is too good a housekeeper to have mice," declared Connie. She was alarmed lest the girls decide to leave the attic before they had explored it. "Anyway, Fluff is here to scare them away."

The cat had followed the Brownies upstairs and was rubbing against Connie's legs.

"Fluff is too lazy to catch anything," laughed Rosemary.

The attic fairly overflowed with boxes, trunks, suitcases and broken furniture. Eileen tried out an old rocker which squeaked like an animal in distress.

Connie and Eileen began opening the trunks. In one they found old shoes, ancient hats and woolen goods scented with moth balls.

One box contained children's winter clothing, still in good condition and very little out of style. In another were several old-fashioned silk dresses with tight waists and long full skirts.

"What fun to dress up!" exclaimed Eileen.

"We couldn't without asking Mrs. Gordon's permission," said Connie. "If we start to dress up now, we'll have no time to look at the other things here."

"Then let's do it tomorrow," Eileen replied, temporarily giving up the idea.

Suddenly from the far end of the attic came a resounding crash.

Veve, who had tried to peep into a box that was higher than her head, had pulled it over. Barely missing her feet, it spilled its contents of books over the floor.

"Oh, Veve! See what you've done!" Jane exclaimed impatiently. "If that box had contained glass, it would have been smashed!"

"It wasn't my fault," Veve mumbled, starting to pick up the books. "The old box just fell over."

"You mean you accidentally pulled it down. Veve, you never stop to think before you act, and then when it's your fault, you don't like to admit it! Brownies believe in being honest about their mistakes."

Although it was quite dark in the attic, Connie saw that tears were coming into Veve's eyes. She really thought Jane was being too severe.

"Oh, why make a fuss about it?" she interposed. "Of course, Veve didn't mean to do it."

"She never does," retorted Jane crossly.

"Well, you're not being very nice yourself to blame Veve every time she has an accident," said Rosemary, siding with Connie. "At lunch today when you upset your glass of milk, no one said a word."

Jane started to say that the milk had spilled only because Sunny had joggled her elbow, but thought better of it.

"Sorry," she muttered. "I wouldn't have said anything about the box, only I think we should be careful or Mrs. Gordon won't want us to play up here."

"We *all* should be careful," emphasized Connie.

She and Sunny helped Veve pick up the books and stack them back in the box. The task had just been finished, when Rosemary let out a squeal of excitement.

"See what I've found!" she cried.

Rosemary had come upon a box of old buttons in a cardboard box tucked in the drawer of a rusty sewing machine.

"Say, maybe the golden locket is in there!" exclaimed Veve.

Hopefully the girls examined the many odd shapes and designs of the buttons. Some were of brass or silver; others were of glass and tin.

"Oh, see this button!" declared Jane, selecting one from the collection. "It has the face of George Washington on it and must be very rare."

"And here's one in the shape of a little house," added Rosemary. "One never sees buttons like these today."

"Except in collections," contributed Connie. "It would be nice if the Brownies could save buttons, only we have so many other interesting things to do."

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The girls spent nearly half an hour studying the assortment. So fascinating was the pastime, that they forgot their disappointment over failure to find the missing locket.

Time passed so swiftly that the girls all were quite startled when Mrs. Gordon called from the foot of the stairs to ask them to wash up for supper.

"Is it supper time already?" gasped Connie. "Oh, dear, and we've only half explored this wonderful place."

"Let's finish up tomorrow if we can," proposed Sunny as they all trooped down the stairs. "Maybe we can dress up in the old clothes. That would be fun."

All the Brownies agreed that it would be good sport to put on a style show. Next morning, however, they had so many other interesting things to do they had no time to think of the attic.

In the morning the girls played games in the snow and went coasting again on Hammer Hill.

After lunch, Miss Gordon announced that she would drive to the village in the sleigh.

"Who wants to ride along and help me select the sled for the Stone children?" she inquired.

All of the Brownies were eager to accompany her. However, everyone could not crowd into one sleigh. So in the end, Veve and Eileen were chosen to go with the Brownie leader.

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In the village, Miss Gordon attended to several errands. Then she took the girls to a hardware store where they inspected a number of sleds. After much debate, Eileen and Veve settled upon a handsome one which was large enough for two children to ride on at the same time.

While they were waiting for the sled to be carried out to the sleigh, Veve wandered to the rear of the store to look at a construction set.

As she stood there, she chanced to hear the owner of the hardware store talking to another man who was buying a snow shovel.

"Too bad about Stone," the storekeeper remarked. "I'd help him if I could, but business is slack now and I can't give him a place here."

Hearing Mr. Stone's name mentioned, Veve listened carefully.

"Yes, I've heard he's had no regular work for more than a month," the customer replied, "Pretty tough on that family of his, especially with Christmas coming on."

When Veve left the hardware store with Eileen and Miss Gordon, she repeated the snatch of conversation she had overheard.

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"I was afraid the Stone children might face a very meager Christmas, and this confirms it," declared Miss Gordon. "I wish we could give them other things besides just a sled."

"They must need food and clothing," said Eileen as she climbed into the sleigh. "And I noticed the youngsters' mittens were ragged."

"We'll have to do something about it," said Miss Gordon. "However, I don't wish to offend Grandma Gordon, so we must plan carefully."

After the three had returned to the Gordon home with the new sled, they reported to the other

Brownies what they had learned about Mr. Stone being out of work.

"If you want to give the children clothing, I know where there's some!" exclaimed Connie, before she stopped to think. "A trunk in the attic is filled with garments—"

Then she broke off, seeing from Grandmother Gordon's set expression, that the woman did not want to give any of the clothing away.

"Mr. Stone may be out of work temporarily, but I can't believe the family is in actual need," declared Grandmother Gordon. She lifted a stove lid to throw a chunk of wood into the fiery red coals. "Besides, Mr. Stone probably would have a steady job if he weren't so shiftless." 144

"Mr. Stone isn't shiftless," corrected Miss Gordon. "Work is very scarce just at this time. Besides, I know for a fact that he works very hard at his trap lines and does any kind of work he can get."

"Other men seem able to find means of providing for their families," sniffed Grandmother Gordon. "If I thought for a minute that he actually were deserving, I'd try to help the family."

"Isn't it true you dislike them because you believe Mrs. Stone took your locket?"

"I suppose it does enter into my feelings," Grandmother Gordon admitted.

"Yet no matter what you believe about Mrs. Stone, you shouldn't take it out on those poor children. It bothers me to think they may not have enough to eat."

"Since you've talked of it so much, it's beginning to bother me too," admitted Mrs. Gordon. "Why not go there and find out the truth? I know that's what you want me to tell you to do!"

"I'm very glad you suggested it," laughed Miss Gordon. "It's quite possible I may take a delegation of Brownies and go there tomorrow."

Nothing more was said about the matter at that time, but secretly, all the Brownies hoped Miss Gordon would find a way to help the Stone children. 145

Since the girls had arrived at the farm, time had flown very fast. They scarcely could realize that soon their parents would arrive for Christmas and to take them back to Rosedale.

Before that day came the Brownies planned to make cookies, cakes and candies and decorate the entire house with greens.

"Mr. Jeffert has promised us a Christmas tree," Miss Gordon told the girls. "He said we may have any one we select."

"One so tall it will touch the ceiling!" cried Rosemary.

"Please, may we choose it this afternoon?" pleaded Eileen, who was eager to return to the woods. "While we're there, we could see if the birds are using the new feeding station!"

"How many Brownies feel equal to another hike?" asked Miss Gordon.

"I do!" shouted Jane.

All the other girls voted for the trip too and ran to put on their warm snowsuits.

A brisk walk through the frosty air brought the Brownies to the edge of Mr. Jeffert's land.

"Our track has completely disappeared!" declared Miss Gordon. "Last night's snow was heavier than I thought." 146

The trail to the birds' feeding station had been completely blotted out by the light fall of snow. Eileen and Jane, however, knew the way.

"Follow us!" Eileen directed the girls.

She and Jane broke track through the snow. Now and then they glimpsed stretches of the old trail which had not been completely covered, so they were sure they were going the right way.

A moment later, Jane sang out: "Here we are. Our tree was right beside this tall one—but where is it now?"

She and Eileen, who were ahead, both stopped short. Only an ugly stump arose from the place where the birds' Christmas tree had stood the previous day.

Someone had chopped down the evergreen during the night!

"Why, it's gone! Our lovely tree is gone!" cried Eileen in a shrill voice.

The Brownies were so stunned they hardly said a word. They could not believe a mistake had

been made in the tree's location, for in the snow nearby were bits of ribbon and string and a pine cone with food still pressed into it.

"Oh, how could anyone be so mean?" demanded Connie.

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"Especially when the woods is filled with nice evergreens," added Rosemary, stooping to pick up the pine cone. "Why couldn't Mr. Jeffert have cut down another tree?"

"I don't believe Mr. Jeffert did it," said Connie soberly. "Our tree probably was chopped down by that same thief who has been sneaking onto his property."

"And I agree," commented Miss Gordon. "Mr. Jeffert never would have cut down our tree."

Behind them, the girls heard footfalls in the snow. Whirling around, they saw Mr. Jeffert himself striding toward them.

"Who speaks my name?" he called cheerily.

"Oh, Mr. Jeffert!" cried Connie. "You didn't take our tree, did you?"

She pointed to the stump and told the land owner what had happened. Mr. Jeffert's round face became as dark as a late afternoon sky.

"I certainly did not cut that tree!" he exclaimed. "But I have a good idea who may have chopped it down. Late last night I saw Clem Stone walking this way. He saw me watching from the woods and went on. I have a notion he may have sneaked back later."

"Then you believe Mr. Stone is the one who has been stealing your trees?" Miss Gordon asked, looking worried.

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"I've no proof. Clem is out of a job though, and he may be trying to raise money by selling a few of my trees. He didn't speak last night when he went past, and he was carrying an axe."

"But so was Mr. Gossart," revealed Connie.

"Mr. Gossart?"

"We met him after we fixed the tree for the birds," Connie explained. "He was carrying an axe the same as Mr. Stone."

"Well, one can't convict a man for having an axe," admitted Mr. Jeffert. "I probably was hasty in saying Mr. Stone could have cut the tree. It might have been anyone."

"Then you don't think it was Mr. Stone after all?"

"I honestly don't know. I've watched the woods night after night without catching the culprit. The fellow, whoever he is, is too smart for me."

Now that the birds' tree had been taken, the Brownie hike seemed quite purposeless. After talking with Mr. Jeffert for a while, the girls selected another evergreen which he promised to cut for their Christmas at the farm, and then they turned toward home.

"Let's take a shortcut through the fields," proposed Sunny who had wearied.

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Accordingly, they rolled under a wire fence, and set off through the deep snow. Although the distance was much shorter than by the road, the drifts made walking very hard.

When the snow was firm, the girls could walk along quite easily. But every few feet the crust would give way, and down they would plunge, nearly to their waists. However, it was fun and even Miss Gordon did not mind.

"Who lives in that little cabin?" Connie asked as they drew near a lighted dwelling.

Although it was not yet supper time, shadows were deepening everywhere. In another half hour it would be very dark.

"Why, the Stones live there," said Miss Gordon.

Smoke curled lazily from the cabin's chimney. A shaggy dog lounged on the back doorstep. The Stone children were nowhere to be seen.

The Brownies trudged on, coming quite close to the cabin. There were no curtains or blinds at the windows. Without meaning to look the girls peered directly into the Stones' kitchen.

Just inside the window stood a perfectly shaped Christmas tree! Strings of popcorn and cranberries were its only decoration.

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Jane Tuttle saw the tree and clutched Connie's arm excitedly.

"There it is!" she cried. "Our evergreen! Mr. Jeffert was right! Mr. Stone did chop it down!"

CHAPTER 11

Into the Storm

INSIDE the Stone cabin, oil lamps had been lighted, so the Brownies could see the Christmas tree quite plainly. It stood at a slight angle in the window, its branches brushing against the icy panes.

"Why, it *is* our tree!" agreed Sunny indignantly. "Of all the nerve!"

"I don't think the tree we selected for the birds was that tall," protested Connie, after a second glance.

"Neither do I," declared Eileen promptly. "Maybe it isn't the same evergreen, even though it looks a little like it."

The Brownies trudged on, deliberately breaking trail so that they would pass close to the Stone cabin.

"I still think it's our tree," insisted Jane when they were quite near the window.

"And I say it isn't," Eileen argued.

"Wait here!" Jane directed the Brownies. "I'll find out for sure!"

Before Miss Gordon or the other girls could stop her, she scrambled over a big snowdrift and crept through the dark to the kitchen window. Half hidden by an ice-coated bush, Jane was able to look closely at the evergreen without being seen by anyone in the lighted room.

At first glance she saw that the tree was not the one which had been taken from Mr. Jeffert's land, though it was a beautiful spruce.

The lower branches were a little scraggly, and viewed at close range, one side of the tree appeared slightly mis-shapen.

Satisfied that the evergreen was not the same one, Jane started to turn away. Then she waited a moment, for she saw the Stone children playing on the floor of the kitchen.

Mrs. Stone was setting food on the table for supper. One dish contained potatoes and another held turnips. Jane did not see anything else.

"Mom, may we have a new sled for Christmas?" she heard Barbara ask her mother.

"No, dear, and I've asked you not to keep pestering me about it," sighed her mother wearily. "With your father out of work, we can't afford toys this year. We'll be lucky to keep food on the table."

"Jane!" called Miss Gordon. She did not consider it proper for the little girl to peep through a window.

Jane quickly rejoined the Brownies. She knew she had not been seen by anyone in the cabin.

"It wasn't the same tree," she announced as the Brownies waited for her opinion.

"I thought it wouldn't be," declared Connie, while Miss Gordon nodded agreement.

"This proves that one shouldn't leap to hasty conclusions," added the leader of the Brownie troop. "How easy it is to misjudge a person."

As the Brownies started on at a brisk pace toward the Gordon farm, Jane was rather quiet. She kept thinking about what she had heard Mrs. Stone tell Barbara.

Finally, she said: "Miss Gordon, I wish we could give the Stone family more than just a sled. They need all sorts of toys and Christmas food—turkey, cranberries, plum pudding and everything."

The remark surprised Miss Gordon. She asked Jane why she thought the Stones might be in dire need.

"I heard Mrs. Stone say there would be no money for Christmas toys and maybe not any for food," Jane related. "All they were having for supper was potatoes and turnips."

"Oh, surely Mrs. Stone had other food prepared, Jane. Perhaps it was in the oven, or out of sight."

"That's all I saw at any rate."

"What was the kitchen like?" inquired Connie curiously.

"I didn't notice anything except the Christmas tree and the supper table. Miss Gordon called me before I had a chance to really see very much."

Now what Jane had reported deeply troubled Miss Gordon. She promised the Brownies she would make inquiries before Christmas to learn if the Stones actually were in need.

"If they are, we'll send a big basket of food," she said. "However, the Stones have lived in this community many years and I understand, are quite proud. They might resent charity."

"Will they be offended if we give them the sled, and perhaps a few other toys?" Connie asked anxiously.

"The children will enjoy the presents—I'm certain of that," declared Miss Gordon.

After the Brownies reached Grandmother Gordon's farmhouse they talked over what they could do to help the Stone children.

"We could stuff stockings and make them into dolls," proposed Eileen eagerly.

"And we could bake things," suggested Rosemary, who loved to cook. "That is, if Mrs. Gordon wouldn't mind having us use her kitchen."

"It's yours for the asking," laughed Mrs. Gordon.

The Brownies divided into two groups, one to sew and the other to work in the kitchen. Veve, Rosemary and Connie elected to cook, while the other girls sewed stocking dolls.

"What shall we make?" demanded Veve, after the three girls, wrapped in huge kitchen aprons, had taken possession of the kitchen.

"I have a recipe here for brownies," said Miss Gordon. "You might start with that. Then if you like, we can make sand tarts and regular Christmas cookies, decorating them with red and green sugar, citron and candied cherry."

"Are brownies a cookie too?" asked Veve, who never had done much cooking.

"A very rich and delicious variety," declared the troop leader.

She set out the ingredients and gave the girls Mrs. Gordon's favorite brownie recipe. It read:

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup shortening	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla
1 cup sugar	$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
2 eggs	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
2 squares chocolate	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup chopped nut meats.

"I'll chop the nuts!" offered Connie, digging in the kitchen cabinet drawer for the cracker.

Rosemary and Veve under Miss Gordon's direction blended the sugar and the shortening.

"Now while you add the two eggs, I'll step into the living room and see how our champion sewers are progressing," Miss Gordon said.

Left to themselves, Veve and Rosemary scarcely knew how to add the eggs to the creamy white mixture.

"You break one and I'll smash the other," proposed Veve. "That way, we'll both have a turn."

Rosemary cracked her egg squarely in the middle and let the yolk and white drop into the pan. A tiny piece of shell fell in too, but she fished it out with a spoon.

"Now it's my turn," laughed Veve. Though she never had cracked an egg, she was sure it would be easy.

Selecting the largest one in the pan, she tapped it smartly against the table edge as she had seen Rosemary do.

Now Veve struck the egg much harder than she had intended. Instead of cracking, the shell shattered completely, and the egg splattered on the floor.

"Oh, Veve! See what you've done!" cried Rosemary.

"It just slipped," said Veve contritely. "I didn't mean to do it." Then, because she realized she had made that same excuse many times before, she hung her head.

"Never mind, Veve," returned Rosemary kindly. "I almost dropped my egg too."

With Connie helping, the two girls tried to wipe up the egg with a cloth. It ran them a race on the linoleum. Finally, after washing out the rag several times, they were successful in cleaning up the mess.

"Now we'll have to wash our hands and break another egg," sighed Rosemary.

"It's your turn again," said Veve quickly. "I had mine."

While Connie and Veve hovered near to offer moral support, Connie broke the egg and dropped it safely into the cookie mixture. As she was stirring it in, Miss Gordon returned to the kitchen.

"How are we coming?" she asked gaily.

Veve told her about the accident, but the Brownie leader only laughed.

"Grandmother Gordon has lots of eggs and won't mind losing one," she said. "Now let's add the melted chocolate."

With Miss Gordon there to watch, it was easy to finish up the brownie mixture. Veve and Rosemary added melted chocolate, salt and vanilla. Then Connie dumped in all the chopped nuts, after making certain there were no shells.

"Yum! Yum! It looks delicious!" she declared. "How long must we wait for it to bake, Miss Gordon?"

"About twenty minutes at moderate oven temperature."

"What's a moderate oven?" asked Rosemary, who never had heard the term.

"Usually that means about 350 degrees heat. Grandmother Gordon's wood stove has no temperature control, so we'll have to test it by guess."

Miss Gordon opened the oven door and a blast of heat poured out into the kitchen. She thrust her hand into the cavern a moment and then withdrew it, closing the oven door.

"The temperature is about right now, I think," she decided. "Grease the pan, and let's pop those brownies right in."

While the cookies baked, Connie, Veve and Rosemary wandered into the next room to see how Jane, Eileen and Sunny were progressing with their stocking dolls.

The work was nearly finished. Jane had created the funniest figure, tying the foot of her stuffed stocking into two long rabbit ears. With needle and red thread, she had stitched on big eyes, a nose, mouth and a few whiskers.

"I'm sure the Stone children will love these dolls and the cookies as well," declared Miss Gordon. "As for the baskets of Christmas food, we'll decide later on, whether or not to send them."

Though the Brownie leader did not say so, she had talked the matter over the night before with Mrs. Gordon. They had been unable to agree on whether or not the Stones would resent receiving help. And Grandmother Gordon had argued that she still was unconvinced the Stones were a deserving family.

So the matter of sending a turkey and other substantial food, remained undecided.

During the next two days, the Brownies were too busy to leave the Gordon farm. They made decorations for the house, cut spruce boughs for the windows, and baked more cookies and made fancy candies.

Now, Mrs. Gordon had noticed that her supplies were beginning to dwindle. So late one afternoon she reminded Grandfather Gordon that if they were to have a Christmas feast, he must take the bobsled and drive to Goshen.

Grandfather Gordon stretched his long legs toward the crackling log and yawned. "Why drive all the way to Goshen?" he asked. "That's nearly twenty miles. Can't I get everything you want at Deerford?"

"The stores there never have what I need," complained his wife. "This time I have a special list and it's a long one."

"Goshen it must be then," sighed Grandfather Gordon. "I may as well start early in the

morning.”

He telephoned Mr. Jeffert to ask if he might pick up anything for him at Goshen.

“I’ll ride along if you’ll stop for me,” Mr. Jeffert said. “Meet you at eight o’clock.”

Now the next morning before Grandfather Gordon hitched the horses, he remarked that the sky looked very dark.

“Wouldn’t be surprised if we’re in for a heavy snow before nightfall,” he told Grandmother Gordon. “I’ll get along as fast as I can.”

Soon after Mr. Gordon had driven away with the bobsled, the flakes began to flutter down. So fast did they fall that the entire sky seemed full of moist feathers.

The Brownies loved the snow. All morning they played out in it, building a hut near the barn.

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However, by lunch time a sharp wind had sprung up, so that it no longer was pleasant to be out-of-doors.

Looking like ghosts in their heavily coated garments, the Brownies tramped into the house to toast themselves by the fire. The snow kept falling steadily, driving against the windows and banking up so that one could not readily see outside.

“I’ll be glad when Grandfather returns,” said Mrs. Gordon uneasily. “The storm is getting worse.”

“And the wind is drifting the snow,” added Miss Gordon.

Now the Brownies could see very plainly that both Mrs. Gordon and their leader were worried lest Grandfather Gordon and Mr. Jeffert have trouble getting home from Goshen.

Miss Gordon kept walking to the kitchen window to look at the main road.

“How long will the storm last?” Connie asked anxiously.

“That’s hard to say, dear,” replied the Brownie leader. “Usually not very long, but this one may be different. Once we had a blizzard which kept up three days and nights.”

“Three days!” gasped Connie. “But that would be until after Christmas!”

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“I didn’t mean this storm will last that long,” said Miss Gordon quickly. “However, I am afraid it may keep us from taking the sled to the Stone children unless we do so at once.”

“Let’s go now,” urged Eileen.

“I believe that will be wisest,” agreed Miss Gordon. “We must dress warmly though, for it is steadily getting colder.”

While Grandmother Gordon wrapped the cookies and the stocking dolls in heavy paper, the Brownies scrambled into their snowsuits. Miss Gordon brought out the shiny new sled.

“Everyone ready?” she asked, her hand on the doorknob. “Now we must keep close together and walk fast. Brace yourselves!”

She thrust open the door and a wild flurry of snow whirled into the faces of the Brownies.

CHAPTER 12

A Pair of Mittens

ALREADY the wind had piled up great snowdrifts on the road. At first the Brownies laughed and shouted as they climbed through them.

"This is just like scaling a mountain!" shrieked Veve as she plunged from one huge mound to another. "It takes your breath though."

Actually, the wind was at the girls' backs, bowling them along and making walking fairly easy.

"It will be a different matter coming home," Miss Gordon warned. "Then we must face the wind. Fortunately, we haven't far to go."

The girls took turns carrying the sled and the packages. They were surprised how quickly their fingers became numb through their mittens and gloves.

"Slap your hands together," Miss Gordon advised. "That will keep them warm."

Snow fell steadily in large flakes, dusting the girls from head to foot. Their eyelashes caked over.

By the time they reached the Stone cabin, Miss Gordon and her Brownies looked like a troop of walking snowmen.

As the girls rapped on the door, Mrs. Stone, who had seen them trailing through the yard, quickly opened it. A tall, thin woman, she wore a faded blue gingham dress.

Now the arrival of so many persons at one time astonished her, but she was too polite to show it. She was under the impression that the Brownies were on their way to the Gordon farm and had stopped to warm themselves.

"Come in! Come in!" she invited cordially. "You must be half frozen."

The girls were grateful for the warmth of the stove. However, as they glanced around, they saw that the kitchen was almost bare of furniture.

"We've brought the children something for Christmas," said Miss Gordon, brushing snow from her cap. "It was entirely the Brownies' idea."

"Here's a new sled," said Connie, depositing it by the tree.

Barbara, Betty and Benny, who had been staring at the Brownies, let out a whoop of joy. They rushed to examine the sled, gleefully dragging it over the bare kitchen floor.

"May we try it out on the hill now?" Barbara asked her mother. "It's such a dandy sled."

"Not right now," said Mrs. Stone regretfully. "The storm is getting much worse. I'm afraid it may prove to be a regular blizzard."

"Here's something else we brought," said Eileen, offering the stocking dolls.

"And some cookies we made," added Rosemary, giving the box to Mrs. Stone.

The children's eyes brightened at sight of the dolls, but the cookies seemed to please them even more.

"May we each have one now?" Betty pleaded. "It's been ages since we've had anything good to eat!"

Mrs. Stone gave each of the children a chocolate brownie. The cookies disappeared almost in one bite. When the girls saw how hungry the Stone youngsters were, they were sorry they had not brought more food.

"Mrs. Stone, if you have no objection, we'll bring you a goose or a turkey for your Christmas dinner," Miss Gordon offered impulsively. "Grandmother Gordon has a large flock."

At mention of Mrs. Gordon's name a very queer expression came over Mrs. Stone's face.

"Are—are you sure—" she began, and then finished quickly: "We'll be most grateful, Miss

Gordon. My husband hasn't worked for several weeks, and he's had bad luck with his traps. Except for your generosity, the children would have had no Christmas."

"We'll be back," Miss Gordon assured her. "Now we must run along, for the snow is coming down faster by the minute."

Mrs. Stone did not urge the Brownies to remain, for she too was alarmed by the increasing intensity of the storm.

Trooping out of the warm cabin, the girls were met by a blast of sub-zero wind which nearly swept them from their feet.

"O-o-oh!" squealed Veve. "This is awful! It's a lot worse than it was!"

"The wind has risen a little," Miss Gordon admitted, "and we must face it all the way to the farm. Duck your heads into your mufflers and follow me single file."

By going ahead, Miss Gordon broke the wind for the girls, making it easier for them to walk. However, the trail they had made only a few minutes before from the roadway to the Stone cabin, already had been swept away. They had to weave in and out to avoid the larger drifts.

"Wait!" cried Veve just as the girls reached the road.

Everyone paused, wondering why she had called out.

"I've lost my mittens!" Veve informed the group. "I—I guess I left them on the table in Mrs. Stone's kitchen."

"The little kitten has lost its mitten," mocked Jane. Snow was biting into her face, making her out of sorts.

"I—I didn't notice about the mittens because I had my hands in my pockets when we left the house," Veve mumbled. "Now my hands are simply freezing. I'll run back and get them."

"We'll freeze solid if we stand here and wait!" grumbled Jane. "Can't you go without your old mittens?"

"No. Veve will need them before we get home," Miss Gordon said before the little girl could reply.

"I'll go back with her," Connie offered quickly. "It won't take long. The rest of you walk on and we'll catch up."

"I don't like to separate in this storm," said Miss Gordon. "But then, you can't mistake the way if you keep to the road. We'll walk slowly until you catch up."

With the wind to their backs again, Connie and Veve made a fast trip to the Stone cabin. The mittens were on the kitchen table just where Veve had dropped them.

On their way once more, it seemed to the two girls, that the storm was the worst one of their experience. With Miss Gordon and the others not there to break the wind, it hurled itself full force against them.

"I can't see anything!" Connie cried as the snow pelted and stung her face.

"Neither can I," screamed Veve above the howl of the wind. "Where are the Brownies?"

The girls could not see anyone ahead—only a slanting, blinding wall of driven snow. Even the road was blotted from view though they knew where it was situated.

"Come on!" gasped Connie. "We'll catch up if we hurry."

Haste however, was impossible. The wind snatched their breath and tore at their clothing. Once Connie plunged through a large drift up to her shoulders. Snow went down her neck, making her colder and more uncomfortable than ever.

"Where is the road?" she demanded. "Oughtn't we to have come to it before this?"

"I think I see it over there," said Veve, pointing to the left.

"But our road was to the right. Or am I mixed up? Oh, dear!"

"It's a road," insisted Veve.

The girls struggled on, and soon reached the narrow thoroughfare, lined on either side by an arching wall of frozen bushes.

"I can't see the Brownies," said Connie anxiously.

"That's because the snow is coming down so fast, Connie. They can't be very far ahead. Let's run and maybe we'll catch up."

At a dog-trot, the pair started down the winding road. Before they had gone very far they had to slow down to a walk again. By now their hands and faces tingled with cold and their ears were beginning to hurt. It was impossible to see more than a few feet ahead.

"Does it seem to you we're going the right direction?" Connie asked after a while. "What if we turned the wrong way when we left the Stone cabin?"

Veve had been worried about the same thing, but had not wanted to admit it.

"This must be right," she argued. "Miss Gordon said we couldn't lose our way if we followed the road."

"But it doesn't look like the same road. We're climbing as if we were starting up a hill!"

"Didn't we come down one on our way to the Stone cabin?" Veve asked in a frightened voice.

"Not that I remember. This road is so narrow too. The one we followed was wide enough for cars to pass easily."

"Maybe we went the wrong direction after we reached the road, Connie."

Connie stopped and reached for Veve's mittened hand. "It's worse than that," she said. "This isn't the same road."

"But it *has* to be," wailed Veve, ducking behind her friend to escape the harsh wind.

"There was another road a long ways off from the Stone cottage," Connie said, thinking hard. "I remember noticing it that first day we went past there. It was just a side road and I think led close to Mr. Jeffert's evergreen farm."

"If we could get there, we could find our way," Veve said hopefully. "Or should we start back to the Stone cabin and ask Mrs. Stone how to get home?"

"I'm not even sure we could find the cabin now," Connie admitted. "This hateful snow hides everything."

"Then what shall we do?"

"Let's keep on a little ways farther and see if the road leads to Mr. Jeffert's farm."

On the girls trudged, becoming more discouraged by the minute.

"Listen!" cried Connie suddenly.

From up the hill, they heard the muffled roar of a motor. A truck was bearing toward them.

"Someone's coming!" Veve shouted. "Let's ask for a ride, or at least find out how to get to the Gordon farm."

Stepping to the side of the road, but not so far away that they would not be seen, the girls waited for the truck to draw near. Soon it loomed up through the wall of blinding snow.

The truck was carrying a load of freshly cut evergreens.

"Yell, or he won't stop!" Connie directed.

Both girls moved out into the road, waving their arms, and yelling for the truck driver to pick them up. He did apply brakes, and peer briefly at them from the cab. Then he drove past.

"Oh, how mean!" cried Veve, staring after the disappearing truck. "He saw us, and deliberately wouldn't stop!"

"It was Felix Gossart too," added Connie, who had seen his face quite clearly for an instant. "He had a load of evergreens. I wonder—maybe they were Mr. Jeffert's trees!"

"Trees he stole?"

"Mr. Jeffert went to Goshen with Grandfather Gordon," said Connie, thinking aloud. "It would be a good chance for someone to take the trees. Only of course we don't know that Mr. Gossart would do such a thing."

"He's mean or he would have picked us up," Veve insisted. She shook snow from her hood and huddled close to her friend. "Oh, Connie, I'm cold and we're lost! What are we going to do now?"

CHAPTER 13

Lost in the Blizzard

CONNIE scarcely knew what to do. The storm seemed to be getting worse, for snow came down faster and the wind was rising.

"Maybe another car or truck will come along," she said hopefully.

"We can't stand here and freeze," shivered Veve. "I think this is a side road. Mr. Gossart's truck may be the only one to drive past today."

Connie knew that Veve depended upon her to make a decision. While they might keep on walking, she could not be sure the road would lead to Mr. Jeffert's farm.

"Let's go back," she decided.

The wind howled in their ears and seemed to come from every direction. Snow stung their faces. Never before had the two girls been so miserable and cold.

"Why can't we see the Stone cabin?" Veve whimpered.

From the road the dwelling was nowhere to be seen. The driving, swirling curtain of white had blotted out the entire landscape, making everything appear strange.

"Are we walking the right direction?" Veve asked after a few minutes. "It didn't seem to me we followed the road this far before."

"I'm all mixed up," Connie admitted, turning around so that the wind would strike her back instead of her face. She was frightened, but did not want Veve to know.

The snowflakes were smaller now, hard and sharp as needles. They pelted the girls from every direction, and the wind seized their breath.

"I see something ahead!" gasped Connie a moment later.

She hoped it might be a car, but instead it proved to be a small bridge which arched over a frozen creek.

"We never passed this before," said Veve in despair. "Oh, Connie, we're truly lost!"

"Miss Gordon will be worried about us too!" Connie added. "Oh, dear!"

When the girls reached the bridge, it seemed to them they could not walk another foot.

"Let's stop under the bridge and rest," proposed Veve.

"All right," agreed Connie. "But we won't dare stand still very long." She had heard that in severe blizzards persons sometimes froze to death.

Under the bridge, the girls were protected from the wind and snow, but not the intense cold. Connie's fingers and toes ached, while Veve was certain her nose already was frozen. Huddling together for warmth, they tried to decide what to do.

Now, although the girls were unaware of it, help already was close at hand. Clem Stone, who had been out looking at his traps, came tramping along the frozen creek. He saw the two half-frozen children even before they heard his approach.

"Well, what's this?" he called out in astonishment.

Just then the girls did not know that the man was Mr. Stone. He wore a cap with ear muffs and a heavy mackinaw. His feet were protected by heavy shoes which came nearly to his knees.

"Oh, mister! Please tell us where we are!" Connie cried as she caught sight of the trapper. "We think we're lost."

"You're cold," observed Mr. Stone, staring at the two girls. "Now tell me your names and where you live."

Connie told him that she and Veve were staying at the Gordon farmhouse and had become separated from their friends after leaving the Stone cabin.

"Why, that's my place!" exclaimed the trapper. "You're not far from there now, or the main road. Just follow me."

Connie and Veve no longer were worried because they were confident Mr. Stone would take care of them. Hustling them along at a brisk pace, he went ahead to break the wind and snow. Walking was hard work, but much easier than it had been before.

Connie asked the trapper what road they were on.

"Just a little side cut that runs up to Mr. Jeffert's evergreen farm. The main road is across the field to the left. We'll soon be there."

Mr. Stone helped the girls over a fence, and aided them whenever they had to plunge through especially large drifts.

"This is a real blizzard—no mistake," he said once. "If it keeps on until morning, all the roads will be closed."

Soon Mr. Stone and the girls reached the main road.

"Thank you very much," Connie told him gratefully. "We'll be all right now."

But Mr. Stone would not permit them to go on alone.

"Not in this storm," he said. "I'll see that you get safely to the Gordon farm."

Mr. Stone walked a trifle too fast for the girls, who had to run a bit to keep up with him. However, they discovered that the brisk pace restored their circulation and made them feel much warmer.

Unexpectedly, the trapper halted to listen. He had heard an unusual sound.

"What was that?" he demanded.

The cry, "Yoo-ho-ho-yoo-ho!" resounded from far down the road. Connie knew instantly what it was.

"That's our Brownie cry!" she shouted. "Miss Gordon must be looking for us."

Connie gave an answering call. Then Mr. Stone and the two girls hastened on to meet the Brownie troop leader.

Soon they glimpsed her coming toward them through the slanting sheet of snow. Covered from hood to toe, she looked like a white ghost.

"Connie! Veve!" she exclaimed, giving them each a hug. "We've been so worried about you! I was afraid you were lost."

"We were afraid we were too," laughed Connie. "Mr. Stone found us."

Miss Gordon thanked the man for guiding the girls to the road, and assured him she would now have no difficulty in escorting them on to the Gordon farm. The other Brownies, she explained, already were there, as a friendly neighbor had overtaken and picked them up in his sleigh.

"I came back alone to find you girls," she told Connie and Veve. "Dear me, I never dreamed the storm would become so severe."

Saying good-bye to Mr. Stone, the girls started on down the road with the Brownie leader. They wanted to tell Miss Gordon about seeing Mr. Gossart with the load of evergreens, but decided the story must wait. Walking took all their breath, making it too hard to talk.

Now at Grandmother Gordon's home, all the Brownies were very worried about Connie, Veve and Miss Gordon. When finally, they saw them stumbling across the yard, they were waiting joyfully at the kitchen door.

Grateful for the warmth of the house, the three stomped in to shed their snow-covered garments. Grandmother Gordon had Veve and Connie sit in front of the stove with their feet toasting in the oven.

She served hot broth to everyone. After being out so long in the cold, it tasted good and made the Brownies feel warm through and through.

"I'm worried about Grandfather and Mr. Jeffert," said Miss Gordon. "I wonder if they will try to drive back from Goshen in this frightful blizzard?"

"I hope they decide to remain in town," Grandmother Gordon replied, noticing that the kitchen windows were starting to freeze over from the inside. "But if they do, we may have a difficult time of it here."

"The stock must be fed," nodded Miss Gordon.

"And our wood supply soon will be low. As for groceries, we have enough of sorts, but tomorrow is the day before Christmas. I had planned to do my cooking and baking for the Christmas feast."

The Brownies felt rather discouraged when they heard this conversation. Their parents were due to arrive the following night, and they wondered if the storm might prevent them from coming.

"Now children, don't worry," said Grandmother Gordon when she noticed the gloomy faces. "I'm sure Grandpa Gordon will drive home tonight if it's at all possible."

Even as she spoke the telephone rang. Three long jingles and two short ones. That was the Gordon's call.

Mrs. Gordon went quickly to answer it. She talked a few minutes and then came back to the kitchen where the Brownies awaited her anxiously.

"It was Grandfather Gordon," she revealed. "He telephoned from Goshen."

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"From Goshen?" repeated Miss Gordon. "Then he isn't coming home tonight."

"He can't," said Grandmother Gordon. "The blizzard is very bad there. Already the main road is closed, and there's no telling when a work crew will have it opened up again."

CHAPTER 14

Snowbound

ON the morrow, the Brownies awoke to find the house uncomfortably cold. Connie put on her slippers and robe and ran to the window to see if snow still fell.

The pane was completely frosted over in lacelike patterns. She could not see outside.

"I'm staying in bed," announced Veve, snuggling deeper down into the covers.

"You're getting up," contradicted her roommate. "Grandfather Gordon isn't here, so there'll be lots and lots of work to do."

"Today's the day before Christmas," mumbled Veve, still drowsy with sleep. "If Mother doesn't come—"

"Of course she'll come. All our parents will! Now stop sniveling."

"I'm not sniveling," Veve denied. "And just tell me how you think our parents can get here when the roads are closed! Grandfather Gordon is in Goshen, and our folks are due to arrive at Deerford."

"They'll find some way to get here. Wait and see." Connie spoke confidently, but at that time she had not seen the wind-swept road.

A little later, when she and Veve went downstairs, they caught a glimpse of the highway and yard through a window over the landing. Snow no longer fell, but a sharp wind had raised mammoth drifts during the night.

Not only was the road blocked in places, but similar mounds of snow isolated the house from the barn and outbuildings.

When Connie opened the front door onto the porch, an avalanche of snow tumbled in on the rug. All she could see was a wall of white.

"We're desperately short of wood, and I don't know how to get more," said Mrs. Gordon, who was baking pancakes. Only a few sticks were left in the nearby box.

"Can't the Brownies shovel a path to the woodpile?" asked Connie. She wanted to help.

"We can try, but the drifts are deep. There's the stock to feed too. If only the work crews would clear the roads with the snowplow!"

The Brownies wore their sweaters at breakfast, for although a fire still burned in the kitchen and on the living room hearth, cold kept creeping in.

Outdoors, the sun was bright but had no warmth. Wind kept howling about the corners of the old house.

Before the breakfast dishes were washed, Mrs. Gordon tried to telephone to Goshen. She learned then that the weight of snow and ice had broken the wire.

"Now that our telephone service is gone we're completely isolated," she declared. "Snowbound."

Mrs. Gordon and the Brownie troop leader talked quietly together, deciding what must be done. They knew that in another hour or two, all the wood would be gone.

"If necessary, we can burn the furniture," Mrs. Gordon decided. "I would hate to do it, though."

Miss Gordon and the Brownies thought they might be able to shovel a path to the woodpile. All they had to work with was a coal shovel, for the regular snow shovel had been left at the barn.

Taking turns, they dug and dug. It was hard, slow work. After an hour of shoveling, they had not cleared a path even a third of the way.

"We'll never be done at this rate," said Miss Gordon.

Just then, she and the Brownies heard a shrill whistle. Miss Gordon lifted Connie up on her shoulders, so she could see above the top of the drift to the barn.

"Why, it's Mr. Stone!" she shouted.

The man had snowshoed across the fields and now was shoveling away a drift which blocked the barn door.

"Hi, there!" he called. "Need help here?"

"Yes, we do!" Connie shouted in return. "Grandfather Gordon is gone, and we're almost out of wood."

"I'll feed the stock, and then shovel a path to meet yours," Mr. Stone called. "Cheerio!"

Just to know that help was near greatly relieved the minds of Miss Gordon and the Brownies. They shoveled faster, making the snow fly. Some of it tumbled back into the path, but they laughed and shouted and did not mind.

Within another hour, the Brownies' path joined the one Mr. Stone had made.

"Hi! Ho!" he greeted the girls. "I've fed the stock, and now I'll make a side path to the woodpile. You run back to the house and warm your toes."

"How are the roads?" Miss Gordon inquired anxiously.

"Still blocked. The snowplows can't do much until the snow stops drifting."

"And how is everyone at your place?"

Mr. Stone hesitated a moment and then said with forced cheerfulness: "Oh, fine! We have plenty of wood to keep the cabin warm."

"And food?"

"We're somewhat short," Mr. Stone admitted briefly. As if afraid Miss Gordon would ask him other questions, he picked up his shovel and hastened off down the cleared path toward the barn.

Returning to the house to warm themselves, Miss Gordon talked matters over with the Brownies and Mrs. Gordon. Although supplies were short, they knew that the Stone family had even less to eat.

"We can't let the children go hungry," declared Connie earnestly.

"That's the way I feel about it," said Miss Gordon. "On the other hand, the roads may be closed several days. If we share our supplies with the Stones, it means a sacrifice. We'll have a very drab Christmas Day dinner."

"Who cares?" demanded Sunny.

"Not I," sang out Eileen.

"I vote that we share our food with the Stones," added Rosemary, and Jane nodded agreement.

Veve did not say anything, for as she was not a Brownie, she felt she had no right to vote.

"I'll prepare a basket immediately," Grandmother Gordon said. "I must check my supplies to see what we have left."

By the time Mr. Stone came to the house with an armload of wood, the basket of food was ready. At first, he did not want to accept it, because he thought Mrs. Gordon would not have enough left for her brood of Brownies.

"Now don't you worry about that, Mr. Stone," she reassured him. "We'll manage."

Although Mrs. Gordon felt grateful to the man for feeding the stock and shoveling so much snow, she had not changed her mind one whit about Mrs. Stone. However, she could not bear to think of the family going hungry.

After Mr. Stone had gone, the Brownies had luncheon. Though the meal was a rather skimpy one, no one complained. Nevertheless, the Brownies felt increasingly blue, knowing that with the roads blocked they were unlikely to see their parents on Christmas.

"Do you suppose they'll come to Deerford and just wait there?" Connie speculated. "Or will they decide not to leave Rosedale?"

Miss Gordon had no satisfactory answer for either of the questions. With the telephone still out of service, it was impossible to call the Deerford station or Mr. Gordon, who had remained at Goshen.

After the luncheon dishes were washed and put away, the Brownies, for the first time since they had arrived at the farm, did not know how to occupy their time.

It was too cold to play outside. In any case, the only place they could go was through the long trench of snow to the barn and the woodpile.

"If the attic isn't too chilly, why not explore there again?" suggested Miss Gordon.

"Oh, yes, let's!" cried Eileen. "May we dress up in the old clothes?"

"Use anything you like," replied Grandmother Gordon.

The unheated attic was too cold for comfortable play. However, the girls made their selection of clothes and carried them down to the living room by the hearth.

Veve chose a short red skirt, a lace blouse and high button shoes. Eileen found a tight fitting black velvet gown and a tiny feathered hat which gave her the appearance of having stepped out of a very old picture book.

Connie put on Mrs. Gordon's lavender silk wedding gown. The full, ruffled skirt swished delightfully as she paraded up and down the carpet.

"How that dress brings back memories," remarked Mrs. Gordon, thoroughly enjoying the show the girls were putting on. "The silk has held up all these years. One can't buy such material these days."

"Let's have a style show," proposed Connie. "I'll lead off."

"And I'll provide the orchestra," laughed Miss Gordon, seating herself at the old organ.

Connie pranced across the living room in her best imitation of a department store model. All the Brownies clapped and laughed.

"Now it's Jane's turn," declared Connie. Just then her nose tickled, and without thinking she reached into the pocket of Grandma Gordon's wedding dress for a handkerchief.

Of course, there was no handkerchief in the pocket, but she did feel something small and round and hard.

"Why, what is this?" she said, pulling it out.

In her hand she held a golden locket on a chain.

Mrs. Gordon saw the trinket and uttered a startled cry. "My locket!" she exclaimed. "It's the one I lost!"

CHAPTER 15

Grandmother Gordon's Locket

ALL the Brownies and Veve clustered about Connie to see the locket which she had found in the pocket of the silk wedding dress. Inside were the pictures of Grandmother and Grandfather Gordon, taken on the day of their marriage.

"So this is the locket you were certain Mrs. Stone took?" Miss Gordon asked teasingly. "It seems Grandfather was right after all."

"Oh, dear, I'm heartily ashamed of myself," Grandmother Gordon apologized. "I never should have blamed Mrs. Stone. I realize now what must have happened."

"After you showed her the locket that day in the kitchen, you dropped it into your pocket and forgot the matter entirely."

"Yes, that must have been what happened," agreed Mrs. Gordon. "After the wedding anniversary celebration, I packed the gown into the attic trunk and never looked at it again."

"And all these long years, you misjudged poor Mrs. Stone."

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"Yes, I'm afraid I did," Mrs. Gordon sighed. "But you may be sure I'll make it up to her. I'll ask her to work for me again, and I'll see that the children have more things. Oh, I'm ashamed of myself! Had it not been for Connie and the Brownies, I might never have learned the truth."

Now Connie felt very happy to think that she had been credited with clearing up the misunderstanding between Grandmother Gordon and Mrs. Stone. She knew too, that recovery of the gold locket meant a great deal to her.

Throughout the day, with plenty of firewood available, the house was kept quite comfortable. The girls made repeated trips to the attic, sorting out clothing which could be sent to the Stone children.

Wind rattled the windows and cold crept in at the cracks. After a quick foray in the attic, the Brownies were grateful for the warmth of the downstairs fire.

"I hope our wood holds out," Grandmother Gordon said anxiously. "And our food."

Although the Brownies were glad to share their meager supplies with the Stones, they knew that the stock of provisions rapidly was running lower and lower.

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However, everyone was hopeful that somehow Grandfather Gordon would get home with the bobsled.

"The sun is shining," Connie observed cheerfully as the day wore on.

"And the wind is dying," added Jane, scraping a patch of frost from the window pane so that she could look outdoors.

By late afternoon everyone was encouraged to see that the snow no longer drifted. Nevertheless, huge mountains of it remained piled up near the porches and in the yard. Slowly the thermometer began to climb.

"The big plow should come through soon and open up the main roads," declared Mrs. Gordon. "I do believe luck will be with us for Christmas after all."

Her words brought good cheer to the Brownies. Gathering in the living room, they drove the blues away with several rousing songs.

"Here comes the snowplow!" Veve suddenly shouted.

All the Brownies rushed to the window to see the welcome sight. The plow swept past on the main road, throwing up tall ridges of powdery snow on either side.

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"Grandfather Gordon and Mr. Jeffert should be able to get through now," declared Miss Gordon in relief.

Her prediction proved entirely right. Almost on the heels of the big plow came the two men, their sled loaded with groceries and Christmas packages.

Stomping into the kitchen, Mr. Jeffert and Grandfather Gordon brushed snow from their overcoats. Then they related astonishing news.

"What do you know!" declared Mr. Jeffert, rocking back on his heels as he warmed himself by the kitchen stove. "After trying for two years to learn who has been stealing evergreens from my farm, I've caught the fellow!"

"You've caught the thief!" Connie exclaimed in astonishment.

"Rather, the storm did," Mr. Jeffert corrected.

"Who is the man, and where did you take him?" demanded Jane, all ears for the story.

"I should have said I know his name," Mr. Jeffert amended. "Police are looking for him now, so it's only a matter of hours until they place him under arrest."

"Who is the man?" asked Connie. "Not Mr. Stone?"

"No, I know now that he had nothing to do with it."

"Do tell us his name," pleaded Sunny impatiently.

"Felix Gossart."

"The man who has the farm next to yours!" exclaimed Connie.

"Yes, it's strange that I never once suspected him. He would much rather earn his money dishonestly than by hard work."

Now Veve and Connie were startled to hear that Mr. Gossart was the guilty party, for they recalled that he was the same man who had refused to give them a ride during the blizzard.

"How did you find out it was Mr. Gossart?" asked Connie curiously.

"His truck loaded with evergreens stalled in a big snowdrift about four miles from here," Mr. Jeffert revealed. "When he failed to get through, he abandoned the load and set off afoot."

"Mr. Jeffert was able to identify the trees as his, so he swore out a warrant for Gossart's arrest," added Grandfather Gordon.

As soon as they were warm, the men brought in all the boxes of groceries from the bobsled, and unhitched the horses. With ample supplies now on hand, Grandmother Gordon began at once to make plans for Christmas.

"We'll invite the entire Stone family here for a holiday feast," she declared. "Grandfather, as soon as you can, you must take some things to their cabin, and extend the invitation."

"And what about our parents?" Eileen asked anxiously. "Will they get here for Christmas Day?"

Now that was the question which no one could answer.

"We should know quite soon," said Grandfather Gordon. "The telephone lines still are down, so I can't call the Deerford station."

"How are the trains running?" inquired Grandmother Gordon.

"Probably about two hours behind schedule," replied Mr. Gordon. "I'll drive to town and find out."

"Let's finish decorating the house and make our plans exactly as if we were certain everyone will get here," proposed Miss Gordon.

The Brownies went to work with a will. They helped Grandmother Gordon clean the entire house, polish the silver and put extra boards in the dining room table.

Although they could not be certain their parents ever would arrive to see the beautiful decorations, they hung gold stars in the windows.

A large holly wreath was tacked on the front door. Candles were placed in every room, ready for instant lighting.

Late in the afternoon, a sleigh with gay bells jingling drove up to the door. Out stepped a white-bearded man. Behind him he dragged a Christmas tree, cut evergreen branches, and an array of packages.

"Santa Claus has arrived!" shouted Veve from the window.

"It's Mr. Jeffert," laughed Connie, "He's bringing our Christmas tree."

Mr. Jeffert could not stay long, but he helped the Brownies set up the tree in the living room. Its tall tip nearly brushed the ceiling.

"What are all these packages?" Eileen asked curiously, as Mr. Jeffert dropped them at the base of the tree.

"Oh, just a few doo-dads for the Brownies," laughed Mr. Jeffert. "I bought them while I was in Goshen. No fair peeking until tomorrow though."

After the owner of the evergreen farm had driven away in his sleigh, the girls trimmed the tree with shiny colored balls, tinsel and artificial snowballs.

On the mantel above the fireplace and along the window sills they arranged spruce and balsam boughs. Finally they could not think of another thing to do.

"Now we're all ready for Christmas," declared Rosemary. "But if our parents don't come, it won't be much fun."

The day wore on and no word was received from Deerford. Lamps were lighted and still Grandfather Gordon failed to return.

"It's hours past train time," declared Mrs. Gordon uneasily. "Either the train is very late or Grandfather has had trouble on the road."

Connie had gone to the window to peer out again. She could not see the road, but she thought she could hear the soft thud of horses hoofs in the snow.

"Listen!" she cried.

The other Brownies rushed to the windows. Jane was the first to see the sled.

"Grandfather Gordon is coming!" she shouted.

The Brownies strained their eyes to pierce the shadows. Was Mr. Gordon alone, or had he brought their parents from the station?

"They're here! They're here!" cried Connie.

The sled had pulled up near the shoveled path, and the grownups began to alight. Seeing her mother and father, Rosemary forgot how cold it was outside, and dashed out to fling herself into the arms of her parents.

Close behind, came all the other Brownies, laughing and shouting from sheer happiness. All the parents had come, including Veve's mother.

"Let's get inside before the Brownies freeze," urged Miss Gordon. "We were so afraid you might not arrive in time for Christmas."

Connie's mother explained that the train had been nearly four hours late due to the blizzard. However, all the parents had decided to make the journey, knowing that their daughters would be disappointed if they failed to arrive for Christmas Day.

"It will be a wonderful Christmas now!" declared Connie, and all the Brownies agreed.

Now the parents had brought with them many mysterious-looking packages of all shapes and sizes. These they whisked out of sight to their rooms, but the Brownies knew well enough they were to see those same packages on the morrow.

"This is the very nicest holiday I ever had," declared Eileen dreamily. "But I hate to think it soon will be over."

According to plan, the Brownies, their parents, and Stone family, were to enjoy a big Christmas dinner at the Gordon home. Then, after the day had ended, the Brownies and their folks would take a night train back to Rosedale.

"Tonight will be our last one here," said Connie, stooping to pick up a silver paper which had fallen from the Christmas tree. "I wish it never would end."

"We'll have a grand time tomorrow," Miss Gordon promised. "And don't forget the plans we Brownies will make after we're home! Summer is coming, you know, and we might decide on a camping expedition!"

"The Brownies are going to camp next summer?" Sunny demanded breathlessly. "Oh, that would be fun!"

"We mustn't count on it too far ahead," the troop leader warned. "However, you girls have proved to my satisfaction that you're highly responsible and dependable. So, who knows?"

Even a hint of what lay in store, thrilled the girls and made them glad they were Brownies.

Now, as it developed, the troop did go to camp the following summer, a story which is related in the second volume of this series, entitled: "The Brownie Scouts in the Circus."

And for boys, also interested in camp life and the out-of-doors, there is a book called: "Dan Carter, Cub Scout."

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However, with snows banked deep about the Gordon farm, the Brownies were thinking more about Christmas than of what they would do the following summer.

Everyone seemed to be having a wonderful time now that the parents had arrived—everyone, that is, except Veve.

Miss Gordon noticed that the little girl did not join in the singing and that she looked quite downcast.

"Why, Veve," she said, "is anything wrong?"

Veve shook her head and tried to smile, but instead only managed to twist up the corners of her mouth.

"You're not sad because we're leaving the farm?"

"I've had a fine time here," said Veve, looking down at her hands and avoiding Miss Gordon's direct gaze. "It's just—just that the other girls—"

"Yes, Veve?"

"They've been awfully nice to me. Only—only—I don't belong."

"You're not a Brownie, you mean?"

Veve nodded miserably and a tear trickled down her left cheek. Angrily, she brushed it away.

"I never do things right like the other girls," she mumbled. "I try and try, but I keep on making stupid mistakes."

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"We all do, Veve."

"Not the Brownies. They're dependable and reliable—and they're going camping next summer!"

"Why, Veve, I didn't know you wanted to be a Brownie. I thought you considered the organization rather silly."

"I didn't know anything about the Brownies then. But now the girls wouldn't have me. I've made so many mistakes, like losing my luggage check and forgetting my mittens."

"The girls like you very much, Veve," said Miss Gordon kindly. She was pleased that the little girl finally had decided she would like to be a member of the scout organization.

The troop leader said no more about the matter just then. However, a little later she called the Brownies together for a quiet talk. All of the girls said they would like to have Veve join the organization.

"Then let's have the investiture ceremony tonight," proposed Miss Gordon. "Your parents will enjoy watching it, and Veve will have the fun of becoming a Brownie before we leave Snow Valley."

Without telling Veve what they were doing, the girls prepared Grandmother Gordon's parlor for the initiation.

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In the center of the room, by use of a circular mirror, they constructed a fairy pool. When everything was in readiness, the girls seated themselves in a horseshoe pattern around it.

Then Miss Gordon sought Veve and asked her if she would like to join the Brownie Scouts and be initiated that very night.

"Oh, yes!" cried Veve, her eyes sparkling like stars.

"Then knock on the door of the parlor," Miss Gordon directed.

Veve went to the closed door and tapped twice.

"Who comes to the fairy wood?" called Connie from within.

Veve answered with her name.

"What do you want?" inquired Connie. "Would you like to be a Brownie?"

"Oh, yes, please!"

"Why do you want to be a Brownie?"

"Because Brownies are so dependable," answered Veve soberly. "Because more than anything in the world, I want to be a Brownie."

Connie turned to the other girls who were waiting in the candle-lighted room. "Shall we let Veve in?" she asked.

"Yes!" chorused the Brownies.

Veve was bidden to enter.

"Close your eyes," instructed Connie, leading her to the fairy pool. Placing a cap with a dancing Brownie emblem on Veve's head, she turned her twice around so that she stood in front of the mirror.

Next she told her to bend down and to repeat the verse which began:

'Twist me and turn me and show me the Elf,
I looked into the pool—'

Veve spoke the words slowly and as she gazed down into the mirror beheld a Brownie peering up at her.

"And saw *myself!*" she finished the rhyme.

All the Brownies gathered around and repeated the Promise:

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

"Now you're a full-fledged Brownie, Veve," declared Miss Gordon. "You must remember always to be courteous, kind, helpful and fair."

"Oh, I will, I will!" promised Veve.

"Veve is our Christmas Brownie," laughed Connie, happy that her friend at last was a member of the organization.

"Now that I'm a Brownie, am I entitled to know all the secrets?" asked Veve.

"Of course!" Sunny told her.

"Then what does DYB mean?"

"DYB?" repeated Jane, laughing. "Why, 'Do Your Best,' of course."

"We use the first letter of each word," explained Eileen. "For instance, LAH means 'Lend A Hand.'"

"And that's exactly what I will do," declared Veve earnestly. "I've had a wonderful time at Snow Valley and the very best part is that I'm a real Brownie!"

"We'll have grand times at Rosedale too," promised Miss Gordon.

In the dimly lighted parlor, the girls now heard a strange, scratching sound. Wondering what it might be, they turned to gaze toward the fairy pool.

Fluff, the cat, had padded through the open door into the room and now was dragging her paws across the circular mirror.

"Why, Fluff wants to be a Brownie too!" laughed Connie. "All in favor of admitting her to membership, say 'Aye.'"

"Aye!" sang out the six Brownies.

Connie swept off her own brown cap and placed it on Fluff's head. The cat was so surprised she could not shake it off for a minute.

"Now the Brownie salute!" directed Connie.

They gave it smartly, right hand raised to the temple, with the first two fingers straight and the little one held down by the thumb.

"To Fluff and Veve," said Connie, her face glowing in the soft candlelight. "And to all the Brownies everywhere!"

Transcriber's Note:

Punctuation has been standardised. Changes to the original publication have been made as follows:

- Page 30
that the cholocate pudding *changed to*
that the [chocolate](#) pudding
- Page 46
delivery for Miss Constance Gordon *changed to*
delivery for Miss Constance [Williams](#)
- Page 66
I hope it doen't happen *changed to*
I hope it [doesn't](#) happen
- Page 82
up rear to make certain *changed to*
up [the](#) rear to make certain
- Page 94
twinking lights of the big *changed to*
[twinkling](#) lights of the big
- Page 124
The kichen *changed to*
The [kitchen](#)
- Page 142
To bad about Stone *changed to*
[Too](#) bad about Stone
- Page 185
knew that the stone family *changed to*
knew that the [Stone](#) family
- Page 186
Veve did ont say *changed to*
Veve did [not](#) say

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AT SNOW VALLEY

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