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A. Wirt

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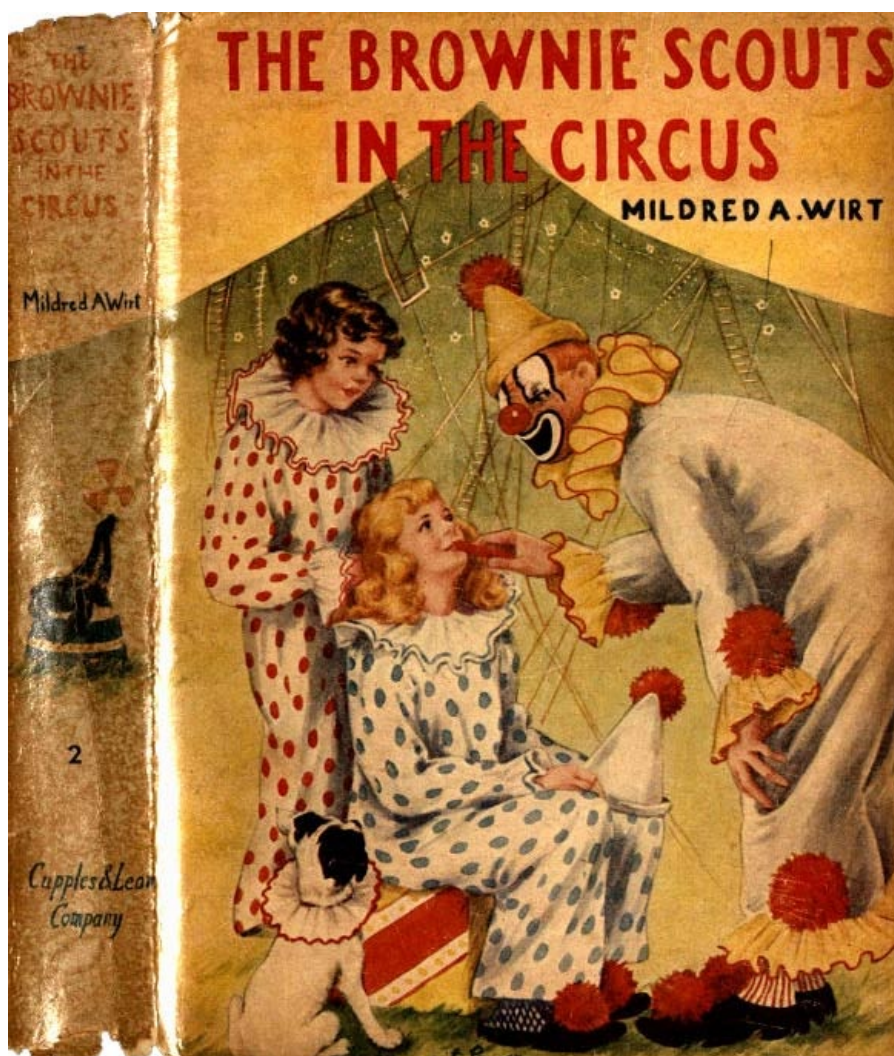
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS IN THE CIRCUS ***



The Brownie Scouts in the Circus



Lazy Tom rubbed himself against the bucket.
"Brownie Scouts in the Circus" (See page
21)

The Brownie Scouts in the Circus

by
Mildred A. Wirt

Illustrated

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THE BROWNIE SCOUTS IN THE CIRCUS

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CHAPTER 1

Who Knows?

DARK hair ruffled by the breeze, Veve McGuire dashed up the curving walk to the Gordon home.

Scaling the steps in one flying leap, she landed squarely in the midst of six Brownie Scouts, who were having their weekly meeting on Connie Williams' front porch.

"Am I late, girls?" Veve asked breathlessly. A school book slipped from her hand, landing with a thud beside the creaking porch swing.

"Are you late?" drawled Jane Tuttle, one of the older members of the Rosedale Brownie Scout troop. "What a question! Aren't you always late?"

Now all the Brownies liked Jane, but at times her tongue was as saucy as the pert red ribbons on her long yellow pigtails.

"I had to stay after school," Veve explained, scooping up the book. "Have I missed much of the meeting?"

"All of it," answered Connie Williams. A friendly smile took the edge from her answer. She had deep blue eyes, curly blond hair, and was growing so fast that her pinchecked Brownie uniform soon would be too small for her.

Connie lived next door to Veve. Nearly always she stood up for her friend, who was the newest and youngest member of the Brownie troop.

"Anyway, I haven't missed the hike," Veve sighed, sinking down on the steps. "When do we start?"

"Miss Gordon is in the kitchen checking over the things we're to take," informed Connie. "Oh, here she comes now."

At that moment, Miss Jean Gordon, the Brownie leader, appeared on the porch. Over her shoulder was slung a knapsack filled with ingredients for a trail meal.

"Everybody ready?" she inquired gaily.

"Let's go!" shouted Eileen Webber, springing up from the porch swing.

The seven Brownies and Miss Gordon had planned a late afternoon hike to Pearson Ravine, a natural park one mile beyond the outskirts of Rosedale.

Connie, Veve and Miss Gordon led the way down the street. Directly behind, in orderly file, came Eileen, Jane, Rosemary Fritche and Belinda Matthews. Sunny Davidson carried the big tin can in which the Brownie Scouts planned to cook their outdoor meal.

"I'm so hungry I scarcely can wait until we eat," declared Veve, skipping along beside Miss Gordon.

"So soon?" laughed the Brownie troop leader. "It will be a long while before we reach the ravine and start our fire."

Tramping briskly down Kingston Drive, the girls soon reached the main highway. Beyond the south edge of Rosedale, they selected a narrow side road which took them directly to the park entrance.

A series of log steps built into the hillside led down to the shady ravine. Stone fireplaces and picnic benches dotted the wooded area. On beyond the shelter house, a picturesque log bridge arched across a lagoon.

"First, shall we select a fireplace and start supper?" suggested Miss Gordon. "Later, we'll explore."

The Brownies dashed about, examining each fireplace to find the one best suited to their purpose. Finally, after much debate, they selected one in a dell near a spring.

While Connie and Veve helped Miss Gordon clear dead leaves and half-burned wood from the fireplace, Jane and Eileen brought dry wood and sticks. Rosemary, Sunny and Belinda began to

peel potatoes for the stew.

"Our fire is about right now," Miss Gordon said when it had burned down to scarlet coals.

Into the big tin can went tiny pieces of bacon, a large sliced onion and a little grease.

Soon the mixture began to sizzle and send up a tantalizing odor. The Brownies then added cut potatoes, a can of succotash, salt, pepper, a tiny can of tomato puree and enough water to cover.

"Umm—Uhhh," mumbled Veve, sniffing the delightful aroma. "How ever can I wait?"

Miss Gordon told the girls it would take nearly half an hour for the stew to simmer. "Meanwhile, we might explore the ravine," she proposed. "Shall we draw lots to see who watches the fire?"

Veve and Sunny received the short paper stubs, which meant they were to remain.

"I hope it's safe leaving you two alone," Jane remarked uneasily. "If you forget to keep water in the cooking can, our entire supper will burn up."

As she spoke, she looked directly at Veve, who was known to be forgetful at times.

"I'm sure Veve and Sunny are very dependable," said Miss Gordon. "At any rate, we'll not be gone long."

"No fair sampling while we're away," Jane tossed over her shoulder as the girls started off down the steep slope.

Following a marked trail, Miss Gordon and the five Brownies proceeded to the lagoon. The still surface of the pool was covered with lily pads. From beneath the bridge came the deep-throated croak of a big bullfrog.

"Oh, I wish we could catch frogs!" exclaimed Connie, who liked to collect pets. "I want to take one home in a jar!"

"May we, Miss Gordon?" asked Belinda.

"Not this afternoon, I'm afraid," the troop leader said regretfully. "Veve and Sunny soon will expect us for supper."

On tramped the Brownies along a trail which wound in among the oak and maple trees. Miss Gordon advised the girls to walk softly so that whenever they saw an interesting bird or animal they could stop to watch without frightening them away.

"I'm perishing of hunger," presently announced Jane, who was worried that the two cooks would forget to watch the stew. "When do we eat?"

"Our supper should be nearly ready by now," Miss Gordon smiled. "We may as well turn back."

Upon reaching the fireplace again, the minds of the Brownies were greatly relieved. Faithful to their duties, Veve and Sunny had kept the fire burning. Furthermore, they had stirred the stew at intervals, preventing it from sticking to the pan.

"How delicious that food smells!" cried Belinda. "May we eat now?"

Miss Gordon tested a potato to determine if it were done through and through. She smiled and nodded.

The girls lined up with their paper plates, and the Brownie leader dished out generous portions. Even so, enough was left in the cooking pan for second helpings.

"Hikes are wonderful," declared Connie dreamily, as she seated herself at the long wooden bench and table. "Especially the eating part. I wish we could have an outing every day."

"So do I," agreed Veve. Her freckled face was smudged and flushed because she had hunched so close to the fire. "Camping would be fun too!"

Now at mention of the word "camping" all the Brownies looked directly at Miss Gordon. Recently, she had hinted that the troop might plan such an expedition sometime during the summer. School soon would be out, and so far the Brownie leader had given them no further information.

Accordingly, the Brownies were quite surprised when Miss Gordon said casually: "How many of you would like to go camping this month?"

"*This month?*" Connie repeated, her fork suspended in mid-air.

All the Brownies stopped eating. Attentively, they listened.

"Yes, girls. School will be out next week. Except for the possibility of rain and cool weather, June is a beautiful month for camping."

"When do we start?" demanded Veve. "Where will we go and how long may we stay?"

"One question at a time," laughed Miss Gordon. "The trip depends upon a number of factors. First, let's have a report from our treasurer."

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Connie had been elected keeper of the Brownie Troop funds. Without consulting records she was able to report that the organization had on hand only \$4.35.

"Now this is the situation," explained Miss Gordon. "There is an established Girl Scout camp at Shady Hollow, about sixty miles from here. However, it is so new that to date, facilities have been provided for only a few girls, preferably older Scouts rather than Brownies."

"Will we go there?" demanded Jane, who could not wait to hear the news.

"That depends. I've written the director. The camp at this time does not have cabins or tents for us."

"O-oh," moaned the Brownies, sunk in despair.

"But," continued Miss Gordon, "if we're willing to provide our own tent and equipment, we're invited to use the camp and its facilities."

"Then we're to go after all!" cried Jane in delight. "Hurrah!"

"Save your cheers until you hear more," advised Miss Gordon. "Let's consider the problem of supplying our own equipment."

"How much will it cost?" asked Connie soberly.

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"At the very best estimate, I figure we'll need ten dollars apiece to cover a ten-day camping period."

The amount seemed rather large to the Brownies. Seated around the fire, they waited hopefully. From Miss Gordon's manner, they were quite certain she had a plan in mind.

"We could ask your parents for the money, but I'm not in favor of it," said the Brownie leader. "Each girl, I think, should try to earn five dollars as her individual share. Then the troop as a unit must scrape together the remaining thirty-five dollars."

"Our last bake sale wasn't very successful," sighed Rosemary. "We made less than four dollars."

"A bake sale isn't the answer to our problem," replied Miss Gordon. "Time is short and this money must be raised quickly. At the moment I have no definite plan, but by the next meeting I hope to have something to present."

"I know how I'll earn my five dollars," volunteered Connie. "My father promised to pay ten cents a hundred for all the dandelions I dig. Our yard is filled with them!"

"I can make money by wiping dishes," added Rosemary promptly.

"I'm good at washing cars," announced Jane. "My five dollars is the same as in the till right now."

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One by one the Brownies told how they would earn their camping expenses—all, that is, except Veve. She remained silent because she could not think of any way.

"Another thing," spoke up Jane before she stopped to think. "If we're going to camp, I think every girl should have a Brownie uniform."

Now as all the girls knew, Veve was the only troop member who did not have one. She had joined the organization at Christmas time while the girls were on a wonderful outing at Snow Valley in Minnesota. Since then, nearly six months had elapsed and still she had not purchased her uniform.

Veve had pretended she didn't want to bother wearing one. However, the truth was, she had been unable to buy the uniform.

The little girl's father had been dead several years, and her mother, who worked part-time in a downtown office, seldom had money for extras.

Now Miss Gordon had been careful never to speak of the fact that Veve had no uniform. For that reason, she was sorry Jane thoughtlessly had brought up the subject.

"I'm not sure I want to go to camp," announced Veve. Her cheeks were stained with color even though she had moved away from the fire.

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"Why, Veve!" exclaimed Jane indignantly. "Only a moment ago you said—"

"Girls," interrupted Miss Gordon, "it really is growing late. Let's gather up our scraps now and put out the fire. We'll discuss the camping trip later on."

Connie brought water from the spring to throw on the coals. Eileen and Rosemary gathered up the paper plates and disposed of them in the garbage can provided by the park. The blackened cooking can also was discarded.

"Our camp now is as tidy as when we came," said Miss Gordon. "Best of all, we have very little to carry home."

"Except ourselves," sighed Rosemary, who had eaten entirely too much.

Hiking back toward Rosedale, Connie fell into step with Veve. She noticed that her friend seemed very downcast.

"What's wrong, Veve?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"You didn't really mean it when you said you didn't care about going to camp?"

"Oh, I don't know," Veve said, a trifle crossly. "I don't have to decide now, do I?"

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Actually, the little girl was afraid she never could earn five dollars as her share of the camp money. Though she had tried hard, she never had been able to save enough to buy her own Brownie uniform.

"Hey, Brownies! Do you see what I see?" suddenly demanded Sunny Davidson. At the head of the troop, she abruptly paused to stare at a sign-board along the roadside.

The Brownies saw that a man in white overalls was pasting up a new advertising sign. Two of the long paper strips already were in place. His long-handled brush moved very fast, smoothing out the wrinkles.

"He's putting up animals!" shouted Sunny in high excitement. "Tigers, lions and a giraffe!"

"A circus must be coming to town!" cried Veve, cheering up at once.

Deeply interested, the Brownie Scouts paused at the roadside to watch the sheets being slapped skillfully into place. One revealed a pretty girl in a spangled costume, riding a snow-white horse.

"Oh, it *is* a circus!" laughed Connie.

"And it's coming here a week from Saturday," added Eileen as another sheet spread out before their fascinated eyes. "Oh, I hope I get to go!"

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"I wish we all might see it," declared Miss Gordon gaily. "You know—seeing this billboard has given me an idea as to how the Brownies possibly might make their camp money."

"How?" cried the Brownies.

But Miss Gordon only smiled in a most mysterious way.

"I can't tell you now," she said, "for as yet it's only an idea. Just be sure to come to the Brownie meeting next Wednesday. Who knows? I may have something interesting to report."

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CHAPTER 2

A Tightrope Act

NOW, as might be expected, not a Brownie Scout was late at the Wednesday afternoon meeting, for all were eager to plan a means of earning camp expense money.

When Miss Gordon arrived at Eileen Webber's home where the Brownies had gathered, she brought with her a fat stack of printed tickets. Rosemary noticed them at once.

"Oh, are we to sell tickets to a show?" she asked quickly.

"A circus, not a show," corrected Miss Gordon. "That is, if the troop is interested."

"Oh, we are," insisted Connie. "Circus tickets should be easy to sell."

Miss Gordon explained that the idea had occurred to her on the day of the Brownie hike when she had noticed the circus posters.

"I talked to the circus advance man," she added, "and the management has agreed to pay us forty cents for each ticket we sell."

"That's four dollars profit for every ten tickets," declared Connie, calculating rapidly.

"Also, for every eight sold, we are to receive a free one to the circus."

"I say let's do it!" cried Jane enthusiastically. "I'm sure I can sell at least ten myself."

Miss Gordon passed out the tickets, writing down how many each girl took. "Just one thing," she warned the Brownies. "Although we very much desire to earn money, we must not do so at the expense of dignity."

Seeing the puzzled expression on the girls' faces, she further explained: "I mean, in selling our circus tickets, we must not accost strangers. However, we may sell to friends, acquaintances, relatives and parents."

"I know my parents will buy," declared Eileen. "And my Aunt Sue."

"I'll ask the ladies at my mother's bridge club," added Sunny.

Nearly all of the Brownies were confident they could dispose of their tickets before the next meeting. Veve alone seemed uncertain. In her family there were few relatives, and she knew her mother could not take time from work to attend a circus.

"Between now and the next meeting try to think of other ways of earning money," the troop leader urged. "Our ticket sale may not raise enough."

The next few days the Brownies were very busy. They swarmed here, there, everywhere, selling their tickets.

By the end of the second day, Connie, Jane, and Rosemary had disposed of a total of twenty-two and had six "promised." Eileen sold seven, Belinda five, Sunny four, and Veve only one.

"I don't think I'll be able to sell any more either," she told Connie one afternoon as she sat in the Williams' yard where her friend was digging dandelions. "Everyone already has been asked by someone else."

"How are you going to earn your camp money, Veve?"

"Maybe I won't go."

"Oh, Veve! If you want to help me dig dandelions—"

"I don't," said Veve quickly, noticing a blister on Connie's finger. "It makes your hand sore. Can't you think of an easier way to make money?"

"I've earned two dollars already," Connie said, tossing another dandelion into the basket. "I'm not afraid of hard work."

"Say, I know a way to make money!" Veve broke in suddenly.

"Then why not try it?" Connie demanded a trifle crossly. Tired and discouraged from having

dug so many weeds, she felt that her friend at least might make an effort.

"Oh, I couldn't do it alone. But together we could work it out and it would be fun. Let's have a circus of our own!"

"A circus?" Connie echoed, faintly interested. "And charge money?"

"Of course. We'd make a lot."

"Where could we give the circus, Veve?"

"Here in your back yard! The walk that circles the lily pond would make a dandy circus ring. We'll ask the other Brownies to be in our show too!"

"We might give it tomorrow," Connie said doubtfully. "It will mean a lot of planning though, and hard work."

"Let's get busy right away and practice," Veve proposed, jumping up from the grass. "What can you do, Connie?"

"Well, I learned a tap dance at class—"

"Oh, they don't dance in a circus," Veve replied in a superior tone. "One has to be a bareback rider, a trapeze performer or something important. I'll be a lion tamer."

"But you have no lion," said Connie, rather amused.

"Not a real one," agreed Veve. "But I know where I can get a play lion."

"Where, Veve?"

"At Mrs. Moseley's house. I'll ask to borrow her Maltese cat."

"Oh, you mean old Lazy Tom," laughed Connie. "He's so old and feeble he'll not seem much like a real lion."

"That won't matter," insisted Veve, pulling her to her feet. "I've seen old lions at circuses. Come on, Connie. Let's ask to borrow him."

The two Brownies hurried down the street to Mrs. Moseley's house. The elderly lady lived alone. Of all the neighborhood children, Connie and Veve were her favorites.

"Good afternoon, girls," she said with a smile when Veve rang the doorbell. "I am afraid my cookie jar is empty today."

The girls explained that they had not come for cookies.

"We want to borrow Lazy Tom," Veve explained. "We need a lion for our Brownie circus."

"A lion!" repeated Mrs. Moseley, surprised by such a strange request.

Connie and Veve explained their plan for giving a play circus as a means of raising camp expense money.

"Oh, I see," replied Mrs. Moseley. "Well, perhaps a little wild animal life will do Tom good. Take him along."

The girls thanked the lady and Veve promptly gathered up the big cat in her arms. Lazy Tom disliked being disturbed because he had been enjoying a snooze on the window sill in the warm sun.

When the girls reached the Williams' yard again, they dropped the cat on the grass. Veve then ran to the garage for a large wooden bucket which Mr. Williams used when he washed the car. Turned upside down it made a fine pedestal.

"Now get up there, old lion!" she ordered the dozing cat. "Up, I tell you!"

Lazy Tom paid no attention. He merely said "Meow!" in a very bored voice.

"Don't you roar at me!" cried Veve. "I'm your trainer. Now do exactly as I say. Climb up there!"

Lazy Tom rubbed himself against the bucket, his long fluffy tail waving back and forth.

"Why not pick him up and set him on the pail?" suggested Connie. She thought Veve was wasting valuable time.

"Trainers never do that," replied the little girl. "An old lion would just bite off your hand."

"But Lazy Tom is no lion," giggled Connie.

Before Veve could tell her not to, she picked up the cat and placed him on the bucket. Lazy Tom was so comfortable he curled into a round ball and closed his eyes as if he were asleep.

"Oh, say, he's no good," cried Veve in disgust. "He's too tame. Tell you what, Connie. You be the lion."

Connie was quite certain she did not care to be a lion. However, her friend coaxed so hard that finally she consented.

"Get down on your hands and knees," ordered Veve. "When I say, 'Up King of Beasts,' you're to put your front paws—I mean your hands—on the bucket. Then move your head from side to side and roar."

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"But I can't do that, Veve. Lazy Tom is asleep on the bucket."

"I'll chase him off."

"Then he might run away," protested Connie. "You know we promised Mrs. Moseley to take good care of him."

"Well, I can't be bothered taking him home now," said Veve. "I know where I can keep him safe."

Gathering up the drowsy cat, she carried him into her own house. Carefully she laid him on the tufted spread of her bed.

"There Tom," she said, stroking his fur, "isn't that better than sleeping on a hard bucket?"

Eager to get on with the circus practice, Veve ran back to the Williams' yard where Connie awaited her.

"Up King of Beasts!" she shouted. "Up on the pedestal!"

When she touched Connie with a stick, the little girl placed first one hand and then the other on the bucket.

"You're forgetting to roar, Connie," Veve reminded her. "Go ahead! You can do it."

The sound Connie made was most unlike a roar. She tried again. This time it was loud enough to bring Mrs. Williams to the kitchen door.

23

"Connie, are you hurt?" she called, fearful that something serious had happened to her daughter.

Connie explained that she and Veve were only "practicing" circus, pretending to be lion and lion tamer.

"Well, you gave me a bad fright," said Mrs. Williams. "I do wish you would find a quiet game. Those wild roars are certain to disturb the neighbors."

"I don't like being a lion anyway," Connie declared, as she carried the wooden bucket back to the garage.

Veve was sorry that she couldn't keep on being an animal trainer. But almost at once she thought of another act even more exciting than taming lions. She would try walking a tightrope!

Gathering up a stout clothes-line, Veve strung it tightly between two trees on either side of the lily pond.

"I'll pretend the pond is Niagara Falls and walk the tightrope across it," she announced confidently.

"You may fall in and get wet, Veve."

"Not I," boasted the little girl. "Why, I've walked rail fences dozens of times."

24

"A clothes-line isn't as easy as a fence."

"Oh, I can do it easily. Only I should have an umbrella to balance myself properly. Tightrope walkers always carry one."

"I'll bring one from the house," Connie offered.

She returned a moment later with a red and green umbrella her father had given her at Christmas time.

"I'll need something to stand on," Veve said next.

Running to the garage, she found an orange crate which she placed against a tree trunk under

one end of the clothes-line.

“Now I’m ready to start my daring act,” she announced. “Hold my hand until I get balanced, Connie.”

Veve climbed up on the box. She stood a moment with one foot on the rope, the other on the orange crate. Holding the umbrella in her right hand, she swayed back and forth.

“Why are you doing that?” asked Connie, puzzled.

“I have to balance myself. Now if you want to see a real tightrope walker, just watch!”

Veve’s round, freckled face became very serious. Swinging her foot from the box to the rope, she started forward. The clothes-line sagged beneath her weight.

25

“Be careful!” cried Connie.

Her words ended in a loud shriek, for the little girl had lost her balance. Wildly, the red and green umbrella waved in the air. Then with a great splash, Veve pitched sideways into the lily pond.

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CHAPTER 3

The Brownie Circus

THE lily pond was quite shallow. Connie knew Veve would not drown. However, she was annoyed that her friend had fallen into the water, taking the red and green umbrella with her.

"Oh, Veve!" she exclaimed. "You were so sure you could walk across."

Veve did not hear because she was trying to untangle herself from the mass of roots and plants. Standing up, she tore off a big green lily pad which had plastered itself across her face.

"Just look at yourself," chided Connie. "You're dripping wet. And my pretty umbrella!"

"Oh, it will dry out," mumbled Veve. She waded to the side of the pool.

"Veve!" called a voice from across the yard. "Veve McGuire!"

The girls turned to see Mrs. McGuire coming toward them. She had returned from work and her face was quite stern.

"Veve, come into the house!" she exclaimed. "You've fallen into the lily pond and ruined your clothes."

"I couldn't help it, Mother," mumbled Veve, wringing water from her limp skirt. "The rope broke. And I hurt myself too. On a rock."

Mrs. McGuire glanced carefully at the bruised place on Veve's knee. She saw that the skin had not been broken.

"What were you trying to do this time, Veve?" she asked with a sigh.

"We were practicing for our Brownie circus," explained Veve. "We're having it tomorrow."

"There will be no circus tomorrow or any other day unless you mend your careless ways," replied the little girl's mother. "Now, into the house and change your clothes."

"What about Lazy Tom?" asked Veve. "Who will take him home?"

"Lazy Tom?"

"Our lion," explained Veve. "That is, I mean Mrs. Moseley's cat. He's upstairs resting on my bed."

"Oh dear," sighed Mrs. McGuire. "Veve, what won't you think of next?"

Now Mrs. McGuire loved her daughter very much, but Veve caused her considerable worry.

On one occasion the little girl had hooked her sled to an automobile bumper and was carried far out into the country. The story of this adventure and of the good time the Brownies had in Minnesota, is told in the volume: "The Brownie Scouts at Snow Valley."

Since joining the Brownies, Veve was a fairly responsible little girl, for she took very seriously the Brownie rule of being courteous, kind, helpful and fair.

Nevertheless, at times her high spirits carried her away and then she was likely to find herself in difficulties.

"I'll be glad to take Lazy Tom home," Connie offered.

Getting the cat from Veve's room, she carried him to Mrs. Moseley's house and then returned home for her own supper.

"You're rather late, Connie," her mother chided her. "Too busy a day?"

"Planning a circus is such hard work," Connie replied. "But it's a lot of fun and we may make money for the Brownies. Only we'll have to get busy right away!"

At school the next day she told the other Brownies about plans for the circus. All the girls were eager to help. In fact, they became so interested in making plans that it was difficult to keep their minds on their school work.

Eileen, who was clever with a pen, made posters to tack up in the classroom. Then each girl listed the things she could do or the animals she would furnish for the menagerie.

"I know what we can use for a bear!" cried Sunny. "My mother has a big bearskin rug I can wear!"

"Barney Adams has a pet goat and a cart," contributed Jane. "I think maybe I can borrow it if I work him right."

"I have some pet snails, a toad and a beautiful garter snake," Eileen added. "I'll bring them. Then we can make paper collars for our dogs and cats."

"And decorate the wheels of our bicycles for the grand parade," said Belinda. "Oh, I hope we make loads of money."

Because Veve had thought up the idea of having the circus, everyone agreed it was proper that she should be the master of ceremonies.

"I have a clown suit she can wear," offered Rosemary. "By the way, where is Veve?"

Although the little girl had attended school that day, she had seemed unusually quiet. Now that the Brownies thought about it, she hadn't talked very much about the circus plans. And the moment that classes were dismissed for the day, she had disappeared.

"Veve probably went home to get ready for the circus," Connie said. "We all must hurry."

"I'll have to see Barney Adams about his goat," Jane declared. "Why don't you come with me, Connie?"

"Oh, all right," the other agreed. "But we haven't much time."

The girls found Barney at his home. But when they told him about the Brownie circus and their need for a goat and cart, a speculative look came into his eye.

"What'll you give me?" he bargained.

"Why, Barney Adams!" Jane said indignantly. "This is supposed to be a charity circus."

"Not for me, it isn't," insisted Barney. "My goat takes a lot of care, and I can't let you have him without something in swap. Anyway, you might damage him."

"Whoever heard of damaging an old goat?" Connie demanded. "Why, he eats old tin cans!"

"He does not!" Barney denied.

"And he's frightfully dirty," said Jane. "Maybe we don't want such a dirty animal in our circus."

She acted as if she were about to walk away.

"Wait!" Barney called her back. "I'll let you have the goat if you'll give me your jacks set."

"Not my new one!" Jane said indignantly. "Your old goat isn't worth it."

"How would you like a free ticket to the circus instead?" coaxed Connie. "Your goat will have one of the leading parts."

Barney thought this proposition over. "Oh, all right," he suddenly said. "But take good care of him."

The boy hitched the goat to the little cart and the girls led him off down the street.

By the time they reached the Williams' back yard, many of the other Brownies were there, hard at work preparing for the circus. They had brought their bicycles, pets, and a great many odds and ends.

Before five o'clock, the hour set for the show, everyone was on hand except Veve McGuire.

"What's keeping her?" Jane demanded impatiently. "She thought up the circus, and since she's to be master of ceremonies she should be here right now."

Connie was worried about Veve's absence, for she knew her next-door playmate would not miss the circus deliberately.

Just as Jane spoke, she chanced to glance up toward Veve's bedroom window. She was startled to see her friend there, dressed in pajamas.

"Why, Veve isn't even dressed!" she exclaimed.

Seeing Connie gazing up at her, Veve raised the sash and leaned far out. Tears were streaming

down her cheeks.

"Why, Veve," Connie said, moving directly under the window. "Can't you be in the Brownie circus?"

Veve shook her head. She told Connie she had to stay in her room until six o'clock as punishment for falling into the lily pond.

"Oh, Veve! The circus will be ruined without you! We need everyone."

"I want to be in it too."

"Can't you ask your mother—"

"I have already," Veve said gloomily. "About a dozen times. It's no use."

So that the girls would not see her cry, she pulled down the window and moved back out of sight.

"Well, there goes our Brownie circus," Belinda said when Connie relayed the bad news to the waiting Brownies. "We can't have it without Veve."

"Perhaps if we all went to Mrs. McGuire and explained how important it is to have the Brownie circus, she'll excuse Veve," Connie suggested hopefully.

"Let's do it," urged Belinda. "We can't give up the circus after we've told everyone we're having it."

The other girls liked the proposal, so together they went to the McGuire home.

Mrs. McGuire, who had arrived from her office only a few minutes earlier, opened the door. Even before Connie explained why they were there, she seemed to understand.

"I do believe Veve has been punished enough for her misdeed," she said. "And I certainly wouldn't want to see the Brownie circus postponed."

"Then you'll let Veve out of the house?" Sunny asked quickly.

"I'll call her now," promised Mrs. McGuire.

Veve had been listening to the conversation from the head of the stairs. In a flash she was dressed and downstairs. Another five minutes and she had scrambled into the clown suit and was ready to direct the circus.

"Everyone get ready for the big parade!" she shouted. "The spectators are arriving."

Several boys and girls from Rosedale School already had gathered on the back fence with their nickel admission price ready. Within a few minutes, other children began to arrive, and a few of the parents.

Connie collected the admission fees. Then at last the circus was ready to start.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Veve called in a loud voice. She swept off the pointed clown cap and made a low bow. "Your attention please! We present—the great Brownie Scout circus!"

Having made the announcement, she darted back to take her place at the head of the parade.

Three times the procession went around the lily pool ring. Behind Veve came Connie riding in the goat cart. After her were the other Brownies who rode their bicycles or pulled coaster wagons bearing pets. All the spectators cheered and clapped.

After the parade, Veve announced that the first act would be a headstand "by one of the limberest acrobats in the whole world—Miss Sunny Davidson."

That young showlady, dressed in her gym suit, promptly stepped into the center of the ring. Her first attempt at a headstand was a failure. Legs waved uncertainly in the air a moment. Then she lost her balance and fell flat on the ground.

"Ladies and gentlemen," called Veve. "Miss Davidson was only practicing! You now will have the pleasure of seeing this great acrobat do a *regular* headstand."

The next time, Sunny kept her balance much better. When she jumped to her feet and made a sweeping bow, the audience clapped and everyone was sure the circus would be a great success.

"The next act, ladies and gentlemen," announced Veve, "will be an exhibition by the great-est horseback rider in the world—Miss Connie Williams."

Veve should have said "the greatest goat rider in the world," because Connie had no horse. She had unhitched the goat from the cart and was trying to climb astride.

However, her mount was not used to such treatment and refused to budge.

"Switch him a little, Veve," she urged.

Veve did as she was told, but laid the stick on a trifle too hard. The goat bolted across the vacant lot so fast that Connie was thrown to the ground. Luckily, she fell in the soft grass and was unharmed.

The circus continued, but at a slower pace. After awhile, Mrs. Williams and the other parents began to drift away, so that only children were left as spectators.

Scarcely had the grownups departed than a group of older boys came down the street. Seeing that a circus was in progress, they perched themselves on the back fence to watch.

"You have to pay five cents to get in," Connie informed them politely.

"What do you mean, 'get in'?" demanded one of the boys. "We're already in."

"No," denied Connie firmly. "You have to pay. We're trying to raise money for a Brownie camping trip."

"We'll not go on with the circus unless you pay five cents," said Veve, walking over to the fence.

"Listen to the little girl prattle!" jeered the boy. "She calls *this* a circus! Just look at those mangy cats in boxes!"

"You're trying to break up our circus!" Veve accused angrily. "Go away or we'll call a policeman!"

"She'll call a policeman," mimicked one of the boys. "There isn't one within ten blocks."

"Oh, yes, there is," cried Connie suddenly. "And he's coming straight here now!"

At that moment she had caught sight of Captain James Bartley, who was walking toward the Williams' yard. Now the older boys did not know that Connie had invited the police officer to see the circus. Instead, they thought he might be after them.

"Jiggers! Let's get out of here!" called the leader of the boys, sliding down from the fence.

With his companions, he ran away as fast as his legs would carry him.

"Well, well," said the policeman as he entered the yard. "Am I too late to see the Brownie circus?"

"You're just in time to save it," laughed Connie. "Those boys tried to break up our show."

"When they saw you coming they ran away," added Veve.

The policeman turned to look down the street. By this time the boys were too far away for him to overtake them easily.

"I know the gang," he said. "They're always into mischief. The next time I see them, I'll deliver a good lecture."

Eileen asked Captain Bartley if he would like to see the circus.

"Yes, that's why I came," replied the policeman. "I can't stay long, so on with the show!"

The Brownies were thrilled to have a uniformed policeman in the audience. So that he would not miss anything, they went through the parade again and Sunny repeated her headstand.

"Now I'll do my animal act," offered Veve.

The policeman said he could not stay to see any more of the circus. He was very sorry because it was such a fine show. As he was ready to leave, he reached into his pocket for a coin.

"Oh, you paid your nickel once," said Connie quickly.

"This circus is worth many times the admission price," declared the policeman. He dropped fifty cents into Connie's hand.

The Brownies felt very proud because Captain Bartley had liked their circus so well. Jane, who still had a few tickets to sell to the real circus, asked him if he would care to buy any.

"Why, yes, my wife and I had planned to go next Saturday," Captain Bartley replied, taking out his billfold. "The boys at the station should buy a few too. Tell you what! Give me six."

Jane did not have that many tickets left but she borrowed from Rosemary.

After Captain Bartley had gone, the Brownies counted the money they had taken in at the play circus, and the number of tickets sold for the real one.

"One dollar and fifteen cents for our show!" announced Connie. "And we've sold forty-two tickets to the real circus. That's sixteen dollars and eighty cents profit."

"Plus five free tickets," added Eileen in satisfaction. "Won't Miss Gordon be surprised?"

At school the next day, when the Brownies reported the success of their circus to the teacher, they learned that she also had a surprise for them.

"I sold a few tickets myself," she revealed. "Twenty-five."

"A few?" laughed Connie. "Why, that earns the troop another ten dollars!"

"And it gives us three more free circus tickets," cried Belinda. "We'll all be able to see the show now."

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The Brownies agreed that because their play circus had been a joint effort, the proceeds should go into the general treasury. Veve, who had thought up the idea for the show, did not mind. However, it meant that she must think up another way to earn her individual camp fee.

Miss Gordon told the Brownies she not only would take them to the circus, but also to see the unloading at the railroad station.

"It will mean getting up at six o'clock," she warned the girls. "Think you can make it?"

All the Brownies assured her they could. According to plan, they were to ride to the station in the Williams' sedan and Miss Gordon's coupe. Everyone was to meet at Connie's house at six o'clock Saturday morning.

Veve spent Friday night with Connie. When the alarm clock rang a few minutes after five o'clock, the girls were so sleepy they scarcely could drag themselves from beneath the covers.

By the time they were dressed and downstairs, Mrs. Williams had hot cereal, toast and chocolate waiting for them.

"Now do eat your breakfasts," she urged as Connie took a few bites and stopped. "You have a long, tiring day ahead of you."

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"I'm not a bit hungry," said Connie, but she finished all the cereal.

By six o'clock Miss Gordon and all the Brownies had arrived at the Williams' home.

Veve and Connie shivered a little as they squeezed in beside Mrs. Williams in the front seat of the sedan.

"It will be warmer now that the sun is coming up," said Mrs. Williams.

Few automobiles were on the street at such an early hour. But the Brownies saw many cars as they approached the railroad station. Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon parked as close as they could to the tracks.

"The circus train is in already!" cried Veve, catching sight of the brightly painted cars. "Oh, hurry or we'll miss everything!"

The Brownies kept close to Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams as they walked through the crowd. They knew they easily could become separated in such a large throng.

Circus men were unloading great tent poles, canvas, cook-house equipment, work horses and wagons. Heavy objects were being moved by the elephants. The Brownies found it all very exciting to watch.

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Veve and Connie were especially interested in seeing the animals moved. Some of the cages were covered with canvas so they could not see what they contained. But they glimpsed camels, a zebra, bears, lions, a baboon and a queer looking animal which even Miss Gordon could not name.

"Oh, see!" cried Connie as another cage was removed from one of the stock cars. "A tiger!"

"He's mad too!" laughed Jane, clutching her Brownie cap to prevent the wind from blowing it away. "Watch him stalk up and down and snarl."

The seven Brownies never before had seen such a large, handsome cat. But his eyes were very wicked looking. They watched the workmen carry the cage to a waiting truck.

"See that little girl, Veve!" exclaimed Connie a moment later.

She pointed toward one of the sleeper cars. A girl not more than ten years of age, dressed in

silk trousers and a blue velvet jacket, swung down from the steps.

"I wonder what she does?" speculated Veve. "Perhaps she's a trapeze performer."

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The little girl had been walking toward the Brownies and chanced to hear the remark. Pausing, she turned and looked squarely at Veve.

"I am not a trapeze performer," she said coldly. "I have my own riding act!"

"Do you ride bareback?" Veve asked breathlessly as the girl started away.

The circus girl gazed at her as if she considered the question rather stupid.

"Of course," she replied. "I somersault from one horse to another. My name is on the bill."

"Then you must be Eva Leitsall!" exclaimed Connie, who remembered seeing the name on one of the circus posters. "Is it fun to travel with a circus?"

The little girl did not answer, for just then a shout went up from the crowd. Eva whirled around to glance toward a truck where the wild animals had been loaded. The Brownies could see men, women and children scattering in all directions.

"What has happened?" gasped Mrs. Williams. She and Miss Gordon quickly drew the Brownies close together.

"The tiger is out of his cage!" exclaimed Eva Leitsall. "One of the attendants must have left it unfastened."

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And then the circus girl did a rather brave thing. Holding up both arms, she faced the terrified crowd.

"Be quiet, everyone!" she ordered. "The tiger will not attack unless you excite him! The animal men will get him back in his cage!"

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CHAPTER 4

A Missing Billfold

BEHOLDING the courage of the little circus girl, the crowd became quiet and no longer pushed.

Quickly, circus workmen and animal trainers formed a circle about the tiger. One of the men, whose name was Jim Carsdale, approached closer than the others.

He crept cautiously toward the big cat, talking to him as if to a pet.

"Careful, Jim," warned a companion. "Better shoot him."

The animal trainer shook his head. He kept moving closer and closer.

A strong cage had been opened up by the circus men. At a command from Jim Carsdale, the tiger leaped in and the door was bolted.

"Dear me, I feel weak all over," murmured Mrs. Williams as the men lifted the cage onto a truck. "That animal trainer was marvelous!"

"One of the best in the circus," said Eva Leitsall proudly. "Jim Carsdale."

"You were very brave yourself," declared Miss Gordon.

Eva shrugged off the praise. "Oh, I didn't do anything," she said. "I just knew that if folks started screaming, the tiger might attack."

The little circus girl nodded goodbye and sauntered off down the platform. After talking for a moment with Jim Carsdale, she swung aboard the sleeper car again.

"Oh, wouldn't it be fun to travel with a circus," sighed Veve. "One would feel so important!"

"And imagine having your own riding act!" said Rosemary enviously. "I'd love that."

"I imagine circus life has its disadvantages," commented Miss Gordon. "As a steady diet, one might grow very tired of it."

The Brownies watched the unloading of the cars for a half hour longer. Then Connie's mother looked at her watch.

"We really should be starting home," she said. "The afternoon performance begins at one-thirty."

The Brownies did not mind leaving, for they knew the show that afternoon would be even more interesting to watch than the unloading.

"Miss Gordon, when will we collect our ticket money?" Connie inquired as the girls walked along the tracks toward the parked cars.

"At the circus this afternoon," replied the Brownie leader. "And that reminds me, we should leave rather early. Shall we meet at my house at twelve-thirty?"

A strong wind had been blowing. Connie held tightly to her beanie to keep it from flying from her head, even so it whipped out of her hand and was carried under the wheels of the circus car.

"Oh, my cap!" Connie exclaimed. She was afraid it might be blown to the far side of the train. Then she might never recover it.

Not far away stood Jim Carsdale, the animal trainer. Quickly, he reached under the train to rescue the beanie before it could roll any farther.

"Here you are, little lady," he said, offering it to her.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Carsdale," replied Connie, speaking his name as if she knew him. "I saw you make the tiger go into his cage."

The animal trainer couldn't keep from showing surprise because the little girl knew his name. Mrs. Williams explained how Connie had learned it.

"Eva Leitsall is a smart youngster," declared the animal trainer warmly. "She helped to keep the crowd quiet. Tigers are nervous creatures, easily thrown off balance, Ma'am. We might have

had a bad time of it if folks had lost their heads.”

The Brownies hoped Mr. Carsdale would tell them more about tigers. Instead, he bowed to Mrs. Williams and walked on.

“I hope we see *him* again,” declared Connie, as the Brownies returned to the parked automobiles. “Circus folks are nice, aren’t they?”

“No doubt they’re very much like other people when one becomes acquainted with them,” replied Mrs. Williams.

“I wish I could be in the circus,” announced Veve enviously. “I’d be an animal woman. Only I’d train lions instead of tigers.”

At home once more, Veve and Connie did not have long to wait for the afternoon circus performance.

They played awhile together, had an early lunch, and then it was time to join the other Brownies at Miss Gordon’s home.

Catching a bus downtown, the girls walked directly to the circus grounds. Even from a distance they could hear music and it caused them to quicken their pace. Although it was early, a large crowd already milled about the entranceway.

“Oh, let’s go right into the big tent,” urged Sunny, skipping along beside Miss Gordon.

“First of all, I must collect the money for tickets we sold,” replied the troop leader. “Wait here, girls.”

Leaving the Brownies in a little group, she walked over to the ticket window. From there she was directed to a man who seemed to be managing the circus. Nearly twenty minutes elapsed before Miss Gordon finally returned.

“Did you get the money?” Jane asked anxiously.

“Yes, at last,” sighed Miss Gordon, tapping her billfold. “It’s all here, and our free tickets as well.”

“Then we’ll get to go to camp,” Connie declared happily. “Now let’s see the sideshows!”

A man stood on a narrow, high platform in front of a striped green and white tent.

“Right this way, lay-dees and gentlemen!” he shouted. “Only a dime, ten cents, to see Bo Bo, the Wild Man. He has hair like a lion and hands like a gorilla. His teeth are those of that fierce animal of the frozen north, the polar bear!”

“Are we going in?” asked Rosemary. She was a trifle uneasy. Bo Bo, she thought, must be a rather horrible person.

“I believe not,” said Miss Gordon. “Let’s move on.”

In the next tent was housed Madam Simla, the snake charmer. She was a tall, thin woman with long black braids which hung down over her bright scarlet robe.

“Only ten cents to see the little lady make the python purr,” called the barker. “Walk right in folks. The show begins in five minutes.”

Miss Gordon did not take the Brownies into Madam Simla’s tent. She considered snakes rather unpleasant for the girls to see. Instead, they walked on to the tent of the thin man and the fat lady. The queer pair were seated on a platform out in front.

“My, isn’t she large!” exclaimed Veve when she saw the fat woman. “Does she eat too much?”

“I think not,” smiled Miss Gordon. “Probably her glands fail to function properly.”

“And see the thin man!” squealed Eileen, her gaze upon the walking skeleton. “He looks starved!”

“Maybe he worries too much,” giggled Belinda.

Miss Gordon and the Brownies moved closer to hear the fat lady make a little speech.

Other people pressed in about them from all sides. One man shoved against Miss Gordon, who had to move away.

“Sorry,” the man muttered, slipping off into the crowd.

“May we see just one sideshow?” Jane pleaded.

"Step right up, folks," called the barker noticing how eager the Brownies were to buy tickets. "The show is just starting. Ten cents, one dime, step up, folks."

"This will be my personal treat," declared Miss Gordon. "A reward for earning so much money for our camping trip."

The troop leader walked over to the booth where a woman sold sideshow tickets.

"I'll take eight," she said.

Then she reached into the inside pocket of her suit, and a queer expression came over her face.

"Why, Miss Gordon, what is wrong?" asked Belinda.

The Brownie troop leader did not answer until she had searched through all her pockets.

"My leather billfold is gone!" she exclaimed. "Either I've lost it, or the money was taken by a pickpocket!"

CHAPTER 5

Under the Big Top

FOR just a minute the Brownies failed to realize how serious it was for Miss Gordon to lose her billfold.

"Step aside, please," requested the ticket seller to the Brownie leader. "You are holding up the line."

"I've lost my billfold," murmured Miss Gordon. "I'm afraid I've been robbed."

"Well, go tell a policeman," said the ticket seller, not very much concerned. "I can do nothing for you."

Miss Gordon stepped out of line so that other persons could buy their tickets.

"Oh, what will we do now?" asked Connie anxiously. "Won't we get to see the circus? And is our camping money gone too?"

Miss Gordon did not reply. Instead, she kept searching through her pockets, hoping to find the missing billfold. But it was not there.

"I distinctly recall placing the billfold in my inside suit pocket," she said. "I don't see how it could have fallen out."

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Hoping to find the lost money, the Brownies searched the sawdust near the sideshow tents and even walked back to the circus entranceway.

"It's gone," Miss Gordon acknowledged. "Probably taken by a pickpocket. Now that I think of it, a stranger brushed against me only a moment or two ago."

"While we were standing near the fat lady's tent!" recalled Veve. "When you looked at him, he said 'sorry' and hurried away."

Miss Gordon turned to gaze quickly through the crowd. The stranger no longer was to be seen.

"I remember him too," declared Jane. "He had a mole on his cheek."

"And he wore a brown suit," added Connie.

"I don't suppose we'll ever see him again," sighed Miss Gordon. "It makes me fairly ill."

"Is all our camping money gone?" Eileen asked plaintively.

"Every penny. Besides, the billfold contained five dollars of my own and our circus tickets."

As the full significance of the bad news dawned upon the Brownies, they were stunned. For a moment, they could say nothing.

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"Let's tell a policeman," Veve proposed at last. "He'll catch that old pickpocket."

"I fear we'll never see the billfold again," responded Miss Gordon. "Or the pickpocket."

"Now we'll miss the circus and not get to go to camp," Jane said, fighting to keep back the tears. "After all the work we did!"

"I'll make up the camp money," Miss Gordon offered quietly.

"Oh, that wouldn't be fair," Connie protested.

The Brownie leader insisted that she alone had been to blame for the loss. "If I had any money with me, I'd buy circus tickets," she added. "As it is, I don't see how we can attend the afternoon show."

All the Brownies except Veve had brought a little spending money, but not enough to pay for a circus ticket.

At the entrance to the big circus tent a barker now began to call in a loud voice:

"Right this way, folks! The show starts in five minutes!"

Inside the big top, a band had struck up. Hearing the lively music, the crowd deserted the side shows. Soon Miss Gordon and the Brownies were among the few who remained outside the main circus tent.

"I have an idea," declared the troop leader, for she saw that some of the girls were on the verge of tears. "I'll ask the ticket seller if he will take a personal check."

The Brownies considered her proposal a fine one indeed. Quite cheerfully they "tagged" along as the teacher hastened to the ticket booth.

"Eight?" the man asked, tearing off the pink tickets from a large roll.

"Yes," replied Miss Gordon, "if you will accept a check."

The ticketman looked hard at the Brownie troop leader. Having come on duty only a few minutes earlier, he never before had seen her.

"Sorry, we can't take checks, Miss."

Miss Gordon attempted to explain that the Brownies had earned free passes and money by selling circus tickets, only to have everything stolen.

The ticket seller did not act impressed by the story.

"I'm sorry," he repeated. "We can't take a personal check."

"I don't mind missing the circus myself," said Miss Gordon, "but my Brownies have planned on it for a week—"

"Please let us in," pleaded Veve, standing on tiptoe to gaze up at the ticket seller.

"I sure hate to disappoint a kiddie," he said. "Especially seven of 'em. Tell you what I'll do, Miss. You leave your wrist watch here as security, and I'll let you have the tickets."

"But I have no watch either!" gasped Miss Gordon, gazing down at her left wrist. "That pickpocket must have taken it too."

The Brownies were dismayed to learn that their leader's watch also had been stolen. They knew Miss Gordon needed it every day in her work as teacher of the fourth grade. Her salary was not so large that she could afford to buy a new wrist watch and make up the Brownie camp money.

Upon hearing that Miss Gordon did not have a watch, the ticket seller appeared to lose patience.

"I'm afraid you're out of luck, Miss," he said. "A rule is a rule. We can't take your check."

Miss Gordon and the Brownies were compelled to move away from the ticket booth. From inside the big tent the band had struck up another tune.

"The show's starting," said Veve. "And we won't see any of it." A tear splashed down her cheek.

"I'm as sorry as I can be," said Miss Gordon. "I might return home for more money, but the circus would be nearly over before I could get back."

"It doesn't matter," declared Connie bravely. "Brownies have to learn to take disappointments."

"You're all being splendid about it," said Miss Gordon. "But this is a bitter disappointment, I know. For all of us."

Now the Brownies were so engrossed in their troubles that they had failed to observe a circus man walking toward them. Seeing Connie, he exclaimed in a hearty voice:

"Well, well, if here isn't my little friend! Going the wrong direction, aren't you? The big tent is the other way."

Connie and the other Brownies turned quickly. The man who had addressed them in such a friendly way was Mr. Carsdale.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Animal Trainer," Connie greeted him.

"You'll be late for the circus unless you hustle into the big top," warned the man. "The show's starting now."

"We can't see it," said Connie, and she explained how Miss Gordon's billfold had been taken by the pickpocket.

"My wrist watch also," added the Brownie leader.

Mr. Carsdale gazed from one girl to another as he heard the story. Without being told, he knew the Brownies were bitterly disappointed and trying to hide it.

"This will never do," he said. "You really want to see the circus?"

"Oh, yes!" agreed the Brownies, scarcely daring to hope.

"Maybe we could carry water for the elephants—after the show," said Veve quickly. She had heard that children sometimes did that in order to see the circus free.

"Follow me," directed Mr. Carsdale. "I know an easier way."

Walking over to the ticket booth, he talked with the man in charge.

"Bill," he said, "these girls are all my friends. They're okay, so pass them right in."

"Sure, if you say to do it," the other man agreed.

From a cigar box he removed eight special tickets which bore the printed words: "Complimentary." These he gave to Miss Gordon.

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"Can't I pay you for them later?" Miss Gordon asked the animal trainer. "I could bring the money tonight."

"Forget it," answered Mr. Carsdale. "I have a financial interest in this circus, so what I say goes. Too bad about your billfold. Did you lose very much?"

"Nearly twenty-five dollars. Except for a five dollar bill, it was money the Brownies had earned for a camping trip. My wrist watch was a special keepsake."

"Marked in any particular way?"

"My initials 'J.G.' were engraved on the back of the gold case."

"We've had plenty of trouble with pickpockets lately," revealed Mr. Carsdale. "You didn't notice the fellow, I suppose."

"Several of the Brownies did."

"Think you might recognize the man if you saw him again?" the animal trainer asked the girls.

"I would," declared Connie and Jane in unison. Veve nodded her head also.

"In that case, it might be worth while for you to talk to our detective after the circus is over," suggested Mr. Carsdale. "Pickpockets tend to follow a show from town to town. We might run into this fellow later on."

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"For whom shall I ask?" inquired Miss Gordon.

"Clem Gregg. Wait at the exit after the show and I'll bring him around."

Miss Gordon thanked the circus man and promised to report the theft to the detective.

"I'll have to hurry now," said Mr. Carsdale, turning away. "My act soon will be on."

Miss Gordon and the Brownies did not wish to be late either. Hastily, they walked to the entrance gate of the big tent.

All along the passageway were wild animals in cages. However, the Brownies did not take time to look at them. As it was, they barely reached their seats high in the stand before a shrill whistle announced the start of the circus.

Connie and the Brownies drew happy sighs as they peered down at the three sawdust rings. After all their worry and trouble, they hadn't missed a thing.

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CHAPTER 6

A Little Circus Rider

AS the circus procession swept into the main tent, the Brownies caught their breath. Never before had they seen anything so elegant!

At the head of the parade rode a lady on a milk-white horse. Wearing a white silk gown and a hat with a long plume, she carried an American flag.

Behind came many of the performers dressed in sparkling costumes.

Six elephants followed in single file. A man who rode the lead animal used a long rod to guide his mount.

Next came the horses, ridden by circus performers.

Suddenly Veve pinched Rosemary's arm and cried: "Look!"

A large white steed with a red brocaded saddlecloth had entered the arena. Eva Leitsall rode gracefully on the animal's broad back. The little girl wore tights and looked like a princess, so proudly did she carry herself.

"Oh, Rosemary, don't you wish you could ride like that?" sighed Veve.

At that moment Eva gazed into the stands, directly at the Brownies. She noticed the Brownies, because with exception of Veve, they all wore their brown checked uniforms.

Eva had not forgotten the girls, for she smiled and waved her hand.

Following the bareback riders came the Queen, riding in a beautiful golden coach drawn by four white horses with purple plumes. At the very tail of the parade were the clowns, who rode in an old flivver that made crazy noises.

Suddenly the old car exploded with a loud bang. As it fell apart, the clowns ran in every direction, pretending to be frightened.

The arena cleared and then skilled performers came into the rings. So many interesting things went on at one time that the Brownies could not watch half of them.

Thrilling indeed were the trapeze performers. Even better, the Brownies liked the butterfly act. Girls with large colored wings on their backs were raised high into the air and whirled around.

The Brownies clapped hard when Mr. Carsdale did his animal act. With ease he made his tigers roll a large red ball and jump through a paper hoop. One of the large cats kept snarling and trying to strike the whip with its paw.

"Mr. Carsdale must be the bravest man in the circus," declared Veve.

Soon the riding acts came on. Eagerly the Brownies watched for a glimpse of Eva Leitsall.

"There she is!" cried Veve, standing up in the bleacher seat. Rosemary had to pull her down so that other spectators could see.

Eva Leitsall turned a somersault from one horse to another. At the very end of the act, she made her steed jump through a paper hoop.

"Such beautiful riding," sighed Connie. "It must be wonderful to travel with a circus."

"And never have to do any school work," added Belinda. Examinations were due the next week and already she was dreading them.

Soon a man came through the audience selling pop and lemonade, peanuts and popcorn. Just to watch him made the Brownie Scouts very hungry and thirsty.

"Here you are, folks," called the white-coated salesman. "Get your hot roasted peanuts! Twenty cents a bag. Peanuts! Popcorn! Cracker Jack!"

The man passed so close the Brownies could smell the good things he carried.

"I'll have a box of Cracker Jack," announced Jane, who had brought a quarter spending money.

"I should get a prize."

All the girls except Veve and Connie bought something. Veve had no money, while Connie felt it would be impolite to make a purchase when Miss Gordon and her little friend were without funds.

Rosemary and Belinda offered some of their popcorn to the two girls, but eating a little only made them hungrier.

The circus was only half over when a man in the seat ahead moved directly in front of Veve. Unable to see, she stood up to watch the trained seals balance red balls on the tips of their noses.

Now Veve, who had worn a hat, had been holding it on her lap. Before she could catch it, down it tumbled between the gap in the board seats. She saw it drop to the ground beneath the stand.

"Oops! There goes my hat!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, Veve!" groaned Jane, annoyed by the interruption, "why weren't you more careful?"

"I was as careful as I could be," Veve insisted in a hurt voice. "The hat slipped before I could catch it."

"I'll go with you to get it," offered Connie, who knew Veve would not want to go alone.

"Are you certain you can find your way back?" Miss Gordon asked the girls.

"That's easy," Connie said. "We're five rows from the top of the tent."

"In Section C," added Miss Gordon. "Well, run along before someone picks up Veve's hat."

The two girls had a difficult time getting out of the long row of seats because people seemed unwilling to move. One fat man took up so much space Veve barely could squeeze past his knees.

Taking care not to slip on the plank steps, the girls went down beneath the stand. Veve's straw hat lay in the dust, but it had not been damaged.

Gazing upward into the stand, the girls could see hundreds of shoes above them. They wondered which ones belonged to Miss Gordon and the Brownies. Of course they could not tell.

Lying on the ground beneath the stand was a strange assortment of articles—pop bottles, scraps of paper, empty boxes and a lady's belt.

Bending down to pick up the belt, Veve saw a round, shiny object half covered by a piece of colored candy paper. For an instant she thought it might be a cap to a pop bottle. But as she kicked the paper away, she saw that it was a fifty cent piece.

Never before had Veve found so much money. She knew it had fallen from the pocket of someone in the stand above. But in the crowd she never could hope to find the owner.

Tying the coin into her handkerchief, Veve searched for other money. However, she could not find any, so finally she and Connie returned to their seats.

"You missed the best part of the circus," Rosemary whispered as they sat down.

"Who cares?" answered Veve, displaying the belt and the fifty cent piece. "See what I found."

Miss Gordon suggested that the belt be turned in at the circus office at the conclusion of the show.

"And the money?" Veve inquired anxiously. "Must I give that up too?"

"No," replied the teacher. "The person who lost it couldn't possibly identify a fifty cent piece."

"Then it's mine to spend?"

"Yes, Veve."

"I know what I want," declared the little girl. "Peanuts."

When the salesman came around again, Veve signaled for him to stop. She bought a bag of peanuts for herself and one for Miss Gordon. Connie had her own money and would not let Veve buy any for her.

The Brownies enjoyed every minute of the circus but toward the end began to grow a bit tired. Just before the last act, a number of cowboys and cowgirls galloped into the ring, swinging their ropes.

Then a man announced that immediately after the circus there would be a Wild West show.

"Will we stay for it?" Eileen asked eagerly.

Miss Gordon explained that one had to buy another ticket in order to see the show.

"Anyway, we've had quite a day already," she added.

"We're to meet Mr. Carsdale and the detective too," Connie reminded the Brownies. "They'll be expecting us."

"That's right," agreed Miss Gordon.

Soon the circus came to an end. When they stood up, the Brownies felt stiff and tired, for the bleacher seats had been very hard.

"Let's wait until the crowd has left the tent," suggested Miss Gordon. "It will be much easier than trying to push our way through."

Soon the circus tent was fairly clear of spectators. Miss Gordon and the Brownies then were able to climb down over the board seats with ease.

Once at the exit, Miss Gordon glanced about for the animal trainer. Mr. Carsdale was nowhere to be seen.

"He seems to have forgotten about us," the Brownie troop leader remarked.

For ten minutes they patiently waited, but the animal man did not come. Miss Gordon said she thought it would be useless to remain any longer.

"No, wait!" cried Sunny. "I see him now."

Mr. Carsdale walked briskly toward the Brownies, accompanied by a tall, thin man. The girls were quite certain he must be the circus detective.

However, they were a little disappointed, because the man did not look in the least as they had expected. He wore a gray business suit and did not show a badge.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," apologized Mr. Carsdale. "This is Clem Gregg, the company detective. You might tell him about losing your billfold and the watch."

"Carsdale says you saw the man who stole it," commented the detective, addressing Miss Gordon.

"I thought perhaps I did," replied the Brownie leader. "At least I recall a man who pressed close to me in the crowd near one of the side shows."

The circus detective asked Miss Gordon for a description of the pickpocket.

"To tell you the truth, I scarcely noticed him," the teacher admitted. "The girls' observations were much better than mine."

"He had a mole on his cheek," volunteered Connie. "And he wore a brown suit."

"A man may change his suit," remarked the detective. "He cannot so easily rid himself of a telltale mole. Would you say he was short or tall?"

"Fairly short," declared Sunny before Connie could speak.

"And did he have a pointed nose?"

"Yes, he did!" exclaimed Veve in astonishment. She wondered how the detective could know so much about the pickpocket.

"Your description fits Joe Potassick," declared the detective. "'Joe the Pick' we call him. I thought I saw him in the crowd today. But he slipped away from me again."

"Then you know of the man?" inquired Miss Gordon in surprise.

"Every circus detective knows Pickpocket Joe. He's given us plenty of trouble."

"Does he steal from the circus people?" inquired Jane curiously.

"No," replied the detective, smiling down at the Brownie with the shining braids. "Joe the Pick follows the circus from town to town. He mingles with the crowd and takes pocketbooks and jewelry."

"Just as he stole Miss Gordon's billfold and the Brownie money," supplied Jane.

"That's right," agreed the detective. "As a rule we have little trouble rounding up the average pickpocket. But Joe is a slippery fellow. So far he has managed to elude me."

"What do you do with pickpockets if you catch them?" Belinda asked curiously.

"Sometimes we merely run them out of town," the detective replied. "But if ever we catch Joe in the act, we'll have him arrested and sent up."

"I realize there is little chance to recover the money taken from my billfold," said Miss Gordon. "I plan to make up the loss to the Brownies. The watch, however, was a prized keepsake."

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The detective asked the teacher for a description of it, as well as her name and address. Carefully he wrote the information in a little red booklet.

"If the watch ever turns up, I'll notify you," he promised. "The chances are though, that Pickpocket Joe will pawn it."

While Miss Gordon and the detective talked, Mr. Carsdale chatted with Veve, asking her if she had enjoyed the show.

"Oh, yes, especially your act," she replied politely. "Was it hard to make the tiger jump through the hoop?"

"Not when you know how," laughed the animal man. "What else did you like?"

"Oh, the beautiful golden coach. And the little circus girl rider."

"Eva Leitsall? She's standing over there now."

Mr. Carsdale nodded toward the entrance of the big tent. The circus child stood there, watching the Brownies. But when the little girl saw them looking at her, she slipped back out of sight behind the flap of the canvas.

"Bashful, I guess," chuckled Mr. Carsdale.

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A few minutes later, Mr. Carsdale went away to talk to one of the circus workmen who was driving a stake. Again Eva peeped out at the Brownies. This time she did not appear in the least shy.

"H—ist!" she whispered, looking directly at Veve and Connie.

The two Brownies scarcely could believe their eyes. Plainly, Eva was motioning to them, signaling for them to come over to the entranceway of the tent.

CHAPTER 7

The Lost Keys

"WHAT do you suppose *she* wants?" whispered Veve.

"Let's go over and see," replied Connie, who also had seen Eva's strange motions.

The two girls sauntered over to the entranceway of the tent where the circus rider stood.

"Hello," Connie greeted her politely.

"Hello, yourself," answered Eva Leitsall. "Why are you talking with the detective?"

Connie and Veve told her how the pickpocket had stolen Miss Gordon's billfold and the organization's money. Her curiosity satisfied, Eva lost interest immediately.

"Oh, that happens lots of times," she said with a shrug. "It's nothing at all."

"I guess you would think it something if you lost *your* money," retorted Veve. She thought Eva acted entirely too important.

"I thought you said it was Miss Gordon's money," Eva shot back.

"It belonged to all of us," explained Connie. "The Brownies sold circus tickets to earn enough money to go on a camping trip. Now we may have to stay home."

"That is bad luck," Eva agreed. "Who are the Brownies?"

"It's an organization," Veve told her. "We have secret passwords and loads of fun! Last winter we spent a week at Snow Valley."

"I wish I could belong to a club," Eva said wistfully. "This old circus always travels, and I never have a chance to join anything."

"We liked your riding act," said Connie shyly. "Is it hard to turn somersaults?"

"Course it is," promptly answered the circus girl. "Not many grown-up riders can do it."

"Aren't you ever afraid?" questioned Veve.

Eva Leitsall hesitated before she replied. Now in truth, she often was afraid of the somersault from one horse to another. Once in practice, she had fallen and hurt her shoulder. But, being proud, she had no intention of admitting this to Connie and Veve.

"I'm not afraid of anything," she said boastfully.

"I guess you'd be afraid to walk a tightrope," retorted Veve.

"I would not," Eva denied. "Anyway, riding a horse and somersaulting is much harder than any tightrope act."

Veve and the circus girl acted as if they might argue, so Connie said quickly:

"Guess what we found under the stands?"

"What?" asked the circus girl, all interest.

"Money."

"How much?"

"Fifty cents. Veve spent most of it for peanuts and pop."

"Fifty cents isn't much," said the circus child. "Once I found a five dollar bill."

Connie, who usually was very even tempered, began to feel a bit provoked. She was quite sure now that Eva was trying to put herself forward as a very important person.

"What did you do with the money you found?" she inquired, attempting to be polite.

"Savings bank," replied Eva briefly.

"I have a savings account too," said Connie. "I've built it up to fifty-eight dollars and twenty-nine cents."

Eva laughed in a superior sort of way. "I make that much money every week," she said.

Now the Brownies did not like the circus girl's boastful manner. But they were rather impressed.

"You make that much money just riding a horse?" asked Veve.

"And I only have to be in two performances daily," added Eva, smoothing an imaginary wrinkle from her costume.

"You don't go to school either, do you?" questioned Connie.

"Do you see any schoolhouse around here?" asked Eva. She was careful not to say that she never had to study. During winter months, she and the other circus children were sent away to boarding schools in the East. And each night when she traveled with the circus, her parents made her study in her tent or sleeping car.

"I wish I could be in the circus," sighed Veve.

"What could you do?" demanded Eva discouragingly.

Veve thought she might learn to do a tightrope act or perhaps help Mr. Carsdale.

"Children aren't allowed to handle wild animals," Eva told her. "You couldn't do anything at all in our circus." 81

"Who wants to be in *your* circus?" retorted Veve crossly. "I would be in a better one."

"Our circus is the best on the road," Eva said, scowling as she turned away. "But I can't waste any more time talking to you. I have to go now and get my dinner before the next performance."

She disappeared into the big tent.

"Miss Know-It-All," muttered Veve. "That old Stuck-Up makes me sick!"

"Don't you mind," Connie comforted her friend. "I didn't like her very well myself."

By this time Miss Gordon had finished talking to the circus detective. She called to Veve and Connie, who quickly rejoined the group.

"Well, I see you met Eva Leitsall," remarked Miss Gordon as she and the Brownies left the circus lot.

Connie and Veve repeated the conversation, adding that they had not liked the little circus girl because of her boastful manner. The leader of the Brownie Scout troop only laughed.

"You shouldn't have taken her remarks so seriously," she advised. "No doubt Eva only was trying to make you envious. I am sure circus life couldn't be the fun she would have you believe." 82

"All the same, I wish I might try it," declared Veve. "I'd ride the big elephant all day long."

"And I'd eat popcorn until I couldn't hold any more," laughed Sunny.

"I'd ask for a job selling balloons," announced Jane, her gaze on a roadside stand where a circus man was vending all sorts of novelties.

During the long walk to their homes, the Brownies chatted gaily about everything they had seen. Miss Gordon, however, seemed unusually quiet. Although she did not say so, the girls knew the teacher was very discouraged about losing her wrist watch and the Brownie camping money.

During the next few days, the girls gradually forgot the circus, for examinations occupied their attention. Then came the class picnic at Elk's Grove. After that, report cards were handed out, and school was over until fall.

At the regular Brownie Scout meeting held in Belinda Matthews' home, Miss Gordon was quite cheerful about the lost camping money.

Taking the blame entirely upon herself, she told the girls again that she would make up the loss.

"Well go ahead exactly as we planned," she declared. "Our reservation is in for the third of June at Shady Hollow. This very afternoon we'll go downtown and buy our camping equipment." 83

"Will we have enough money?" Connie asked anxiously. "None of the girls have paid their five dollar individual fee yet."

"I brought mine today," announced Eileen, waving a five dollar bill.

"I'll have my money by tomorrow," added Rosemary. "I guess I've wiped a million dishes to earn it!"

All the other troop members except Veve, said they would have their fee within two days.

The Brownies were careful not to look directly at her. Veve, they knew, had tried to earn money, but had failed.

Except for the idea of putting on a home circus, she had not thought up a single way to earn her fee. And now it was so late she would have no further opportunity.

"Shall we start for the camping equipment store?" Miss Gordon proposed quickly. "Girls, you may go on ahead. Veve and I will catch up."

The Brownies thought it rather strange that the troop leader should remain behind with Veve. However, they did not ask questions. Instead, by pairs, they started slowly down the street toward the bus stop.

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Left alone with Veve, Miss Gordon came directly to the point.

"Veve," she said kindly, "I believe you haven't been able to earn your camp fee."

Veve gazed down at the rug and shifted from one foot to another.

"I'm not going with the girls," she said, trying to look unconcerned. "It doesn't matter."

"Oh, but it does," insisted the Brownie leader. "The girls all want you, and so do I."

"I can't earn any money, Miss Gordon. Last week I offered to run errands for Mr. Vargo, who lives down the street. He said I could do it if I wanted to, but he couldn't pay me."

"That is discouraging, Veve. But I think I have an idea."

"You have, Miss Gordon?"

"Yes, I'll advance your five dollar fee. Then you may have until fall to earn the money and repay me."

Veve's face brightened momentarily, only to collapse.

"But if I can't earn the money by then, Miss Gordon?"

"I'm sure you'll think of a way," the troop leader encouraged her. "If not, well perhaps I'll have a suggestion or two. Now shall we hurry and catch up with the Brownies?"

"Oh, yes," Veve declared happily. "I'm really going to camp?"

"Of course," Miss Gordon assured her, slipping an arm about the girl's slim waist, "and this little talk will be our own secret. You needn't tell anyone that I am putting in your five dollars."

"I'll earn it before fall," Veve announced firmly as they went down the street together. "I'll think of some way!"

Now when the couple joined the Brownies at the bus stop, neither told of their conversation. However, Veve was so cheerful, the other girls guessed that Miss Gordon had said something very pleasant to her.

And at the camping equipment store, Veve unintentionally let the secret out.

"I'm going camping after all," she announced to Connie as the girls rode up the elevator to the fourth floor.

"But what about your camp fee?" her companion asked.

"Oh, I'll have it," Veve announced confidently. "I know a way now."

"So that's why Miss Gordon kept you! She's paying your fee!"

"I didn't say so," Veve answered quickly.

The elevator had reached the fourth floor. Veve left it hurriedly, and refused to say anything more about the camping trip.

However, all the girls had heard her remarks and were quite certain Miss Gordon had offered to pay Veve's way.

"I'm glad she's going with us," Jane whispered to Connie as the troop walked toward the

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camping equipment department. "All the same, it's hardly fair for Miss Gordon to have to pay for everything."

"I know," Connie agreed. "I know Veve would much rather pay her own way. But what could she do?"

For the next half hour, the Brownies had a thoroughly enjoyable time looking over camping equipment. They tested beds, darted in and out of umbrella tents, and examined nested cooking pans.

One of the tents had not been set up very well. Veve and Eileen were giggling and laughing as they whirled around one of the supporting poles.

The support suddenly gave way, and down came the canvas upon their heads. Clawing wildly, the girls fought their way out from beneath the folds.

"Oh, see what you've done!" Jane exclaimed indignantly. "The salesman will think Brownies have no manners. Just look at that tent!"

"It wasn't our fault," Veve insisted. "The old pole slipped!"

"That's right," agreed Eileen. "We didn't do a thing!"

The tent salesman was very nice about the accident. He told Miss Gordon and the Brownies that because the canvas could not be staked down, all of the support came from the center pole.

"Not a bit of harm has been done," he assured Veve and Eileen.

After much debate, Miss Gordon finally selected a tent which was just large enough for seven Brownies and one adult "sleeping end to end."

"We'll have no room for beds," the teacher said regretfully. "Each girl will have to make her own of balsam boughs."

Miss Gordon paid for the tent and bought other items which would be needed on the camping trip. Then, en route home, she gave each girl a list of the things she should take with her to Shady Hollow.

For the next two days the Brownies were so busy gathering together everything they would need, that they barely had time to see one another.

Connie and her mother made repeated trips downtown for shorts, a heavy jacket, a new bathing suit and a dozen and one odds and ends.

When towels, blankets, camera, a heavy bathrobe and Brownie uniforms were added to the mounting pile of clothing on the little girl's bed, she wondered where it would be packed.

"If all the Brownies take as much, you'll need another tent just to hold your luggage," laughed Connie's mother.

According to plan, the Brownies were to leave for Shady Hollow Saturday afternoon, there to spend a week in camp.

Miss Gordon would take her coupe loaded with equipment. Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Davidson also had promised to drive their cars. However, the two mothers expected to return home that same night after the Brownies were settled.

On the day scheduled for the departure, the girls met at Connie's house. As early as twelve-thirty they began to arrive with their bedrolls and knapsacks. Soon the lawn near the driveway was dotted with luggage, boxes of equipment and odds and ends.

"Dear me, where will we put everything?" Miss Gordon asked in despair.

Her car was packed first so that she might drive on ahead with the tent. The leader expected to have it set up by the time the Brownies arrived in the other cars.

After Miss Gordon finally pulled away, it took a long while to pack Mrs. Davidson's sedan. Eileen, Sunny, Belinda and Jane were to ride with her. But when they climbed in, the luggage was stacked so high on the floor, they had little space for their feet.

Presently the Davidson car drove away, and only Mrs. Williams, Connie, Veve and Rosemary remained. So eager were they to be off that they fairly threw suitcases and bedrolls into the car.

"Oh, Mother, we're terribly late," Connie fretted as Mrs. Williams carried one thing after another from the house.

"Now, do relax," her mother soothed. "We'll reach Shady Hollow in ample time. Is everyone ready?"

"We've been waiting for hours," groaned Veve, scrambling into the car beside Rosemary.

"I believe were ready to start," declared Mrs. Williams. "Now let me see—my car keys."

A baffled expression came over her face as she searched, first in one pocket and then another. The keys were nowhere to be found.

"Oh, now I remember," she said, as the Brownies watched her anxiously. "They're in my purse, lying on the kitchen table."

Intending to fetch the purse for her mother, Connie ran to the side door. She found it locked. Her mother also had snapped the night latch on the other doors.

"Mother, I can't get in anywhere," she called.

Mrs. Williams knew this to be true. Unwittingly, she had locked her purse into the house, and with it both the car keys and those of the dwelling.

"Oh, Mother, what can we do?" Connie asked miserably. "All the other Brownies have gone on without us! Without the car keys, we can't drive to Shady Hollow!"

CHAPTER 8

Shady Hollow Camp

CONFRONTED with the problem of how to drive a car without an ignition key, Mrs. Williams was deeply concerned.

"I don't know how to get into the house without breaking a window," she said anxiously. "I dislike to do that, for it would mean leaving the home unprotected while we're at Shady Hollow."

"Perhaps one of the windows was left unlocked," Rosemary said hopefully. Getting out of the sedan, she wandered around the house testing the ones she could reach. All were securely fastened.

"I'm certain I locked all the windows," Mrs. Williams sighed. "Unless—"

"Unless what, Mother?" Connie demanded.

"I may have overlooked that tiny one in the washroom. But it's too far overhead to reach."

"Lift me up and I think I can," Connie urged her mother.

Mrs. Williams raised her daughter high on her shoulders. Connie wobbled and weaved but finally held her balance.

Then she tried the window. But though she tugged and shoved and pushed it would not budge an inch.

"It's no use," said Mrs. Williams, lowering Connie to the ground. "The window is locked."

"What can we do?" Rosemary asked in deep despair. "Won't we get to go to camp with the other Brownies?"

"We'll get there somehow," declared Mrs. Williams. "If only I could think—"

"I see a window that is open!" Veve suddenly broke in.

"Where?" demanded Connie and Rosemary, taking new hope.

Veve pointed to a small attic window which during the summer months always was left open for ventilation purposes.

"I'm afraid it's a little out of reach," smiled Mrs. Williams.

"Couldn't we get up there if we had a high ladder?" Veve insisted.

"It would take a very tall one indeed," said Mrs. Williams.

"I know how Mrs. Bevens once got into her house when she had locked everything up," Connie announced suddenly. "She called the fire department!"

"Now that is an idea, Connie. But dear me, how mortified I'd be to have a fire company car pull up here."

"Let's be mortified," urged Veve. "It's terribly important that we get to the Brownie camp."

"Yes, it is," agreed Mrs. Williams reluctantly. "Very well, I'll call the fire station and see if they can help us."

Going to the home of a neighbor, she immediately telephoned the nearest station, explaining the situation. Greatly to her relief, the Chief assured her that he would send a ladder crew immediately.

Rosemary, Veve, and Connie scarcely could contain their excitement when the big red truck drove up to the front door.

"I wish they'd blow the fire siren," Veve said, skipping down the walk to meet the firemen.

Even a glimpse of the equipment had brought many spectators. Neighbors and children began to gather, thinking that the Williams home might be on fire.

The firemen talked to Connie's mother and then they ran a ladder up to the second-story

windows. However, all of them had been locked.

"We'll have to break a window," one of the firemen said at last. "That is, unless we can get in through the attic."

The window was much too small for a fireman to crawl through. But as he spoke, the ladder man gazed speculatively at Veve.

"How would you like to be a fireman?" he asked.

"I'd like it!" Veve declared promptly.

"Then do exactly as I say," instructed the fireman. "Climb up the ladder just ahead of me. I'll keep close beside you, so you can't fall."

While Mrs. Williams and the other children watched from below, Veve began the exciting climb. She was not in the least afraid, for the fireman kept a firm hold on her arm.

When Veve had reached the attic level, she gazed down. The lawn and the watching people looked very far away. She waved to Connie, and then she felt a trifle dizzy.

"None of that," the fireman scolded her. "Just keep your eyes on the window. I'll boost you in."

With the fireman helping, it was easy for Veve to wriggle through. Once she thought she would stick fast, but her dress merely had caught. The fireman loosened it for her, and she squeezed on into the attic.

"Now scoot downstairs and open one of the doors or lower floor windows," the fireman instructed.

Veve groped her way past the dusty boxes and barrels in the attic. A door blocked the entranceway to the second floor. For a second she was afraid it might be locked.

However, it opened readily to her touch, and she ran on downstairs. With scarcely any trouble, Veve unlocked the front door. Everyone drew a sigh of relief as she stepped out into the yard.

"Oh, thank you, Veve!" declared Mrs. Williams gratefully. "You've saved the day!"

Entering the house, she found the car keys on the kitchen table where she carelessly had dropped them.

Mrs. Williams thanked the firemen for their trouble and then prepared to lock up the house again, ready for their departure.

"Mother, do you have everything now?" Connie asked, an instant before the front door closed.

"Every single thing," laughed Mrs. Williams. "At least I think so! But let's start before anything else goes wrong."

"Yes, let's!" chorused the Brownies, piling into the car.

With the other two automobiles now far ahead, Mrs. Williams drove rather fast, hoping to make up for lost time. The girls kept watch for the Davidson car. However, it was nowhere to be seen on the winding woodland road.

By three o'clock Mrs. Williams had arrived at the village of Shady Hollow. Stopping at a filling station, she bought cool drinks and inquired the way to the Girl Scout Camp.

"It's a half mile farther on," the filling station man said. "Turn left at the next traffic light. You'll see a sign. You can't miss it."

The side road leading to the Girl Scout Camp wound through a dense growth of trees, and along the banks of a wide river. All along the shore, the girls saw attractive bathing areas and summer cottages. The woods gave off a fresh, springlike aroma which made them breathe deeply.

"I believe we're coming to the camp now," Mrs. Williams said a moment later as the car rounded another curve. She had caught a fleeting glimpse of a cleared area with a cluster of tents and cabins.

A moment later the automobile swept through a gateway which bore a sign: "Shady Hollow Girl Scout Camp," and pulled up at a little office constructed of logs.

Connie ran inside to ask how to reach the area where the Brownies were to camp.

"Follow the roadway to the left and you can't miss it," she was instructed. "Your friends already are here."

On the car rolled, while the three girls twisted their heads this way and that, trying not to miss a single detail of the camp.

In the central area were several large buildings made of logs. Beyond them were a number of tents.

At the beach on the river, they saw several girls lounging on the sand. Others in Scout uniforms or shorts and blouses were playing tennis or practicing archery.

"Oh, this camp has everything!" Veve declared breathlessly. "But where are the Brownies?"

Just then she glimpsed the tent which the Rosedale Troop had bought at the store. Already it had been set up and staked down. Nearby, crackled a fire over which hung a kettle of steaming food.

"Hi!" shouted Veve, leaping from the car almost before Mrs. Williams brought it to a standstill. "We're here at last!"

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"Whatever kept you girls?" demanded Jane, coming to meet her. "We've been here ages and explored half the camp."

Veve explained about the lost car keys.

"Well, at least you got out of some work by being so late," Jane laughed. "The tent is up and most of our things unpacked. We have to make our beds next."

"But we didn't bring any," said Veve. "Aren't we going to sleep rolled up in blankets?"

"Not unless you want to break your back," Jane rejoined, helping Veve to lift a suitcase from the car. "Miss Gordon will show us all how to make balsam beds."

"What's a balsam bed?"

"You'll find out," laughed Jane, pointing to a pile of cut boughs which Miss Gordon had brought in from the woodland.

The troop leader instructed the girls on how to insert the butt end of the boughs into the ground at a slant, thus making a slight arch.

"The needles must point downward or they'll work through the blanket and prick you," she explained. "If you take care all the branches are at the right angle, and that there are no gaps, your bed should be quite springy and comfortable."

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"All this seems a lot of bother," grumbled Veve, who was rather tired from the long automobile ride to Shady Hollow. "Wouldn't it be easier just to sleep on the ground?"

"Easier perhaps, but not very comfortable," replied Miss Gordon, smiling. "While you're making up the beds, I'll attend to supper."

Selecting the shorter ends of balsam, the girls struggled with their beds. Although it had looked easy when Miss Gordon showed them how, they found it no simple task to place the branches evenly.

"You're not doing it right," Jane told Veve severely. "Pine needles are sticking out everywhere like porcupine quills."

"I don't care!" Veve retorted, losing patience. "Who wants an old balsam bed anyhow? I'll sleep on the ground."

Flinging aside a branch, she sauntered out of the tent. Miss Gordon crouched over the fire, browning steak in a frying pan.

"Why, Veve," she said in surprise. "How quickly you made your bed."

"I didn't make it," Veve replied, avoiding the troop leader's direct gaze. "I'm not going to have a balsam bed. I'd rather sleep on the ground."

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Miss Gordon acted as if she were about to say something, and then changed her mind. She turned another piece of steak before she remarked indifferently:

"Suit yourself, Veve. But I'm afraid by morning you may find the ground rather hard and cold."

While the other girls were making their balsam beds, Veve wandered down to the beach. She also toured the camp, noticing the lodge where some of the other campers took their meals. Shady Hollow seemed very nice, she thought.

By the time Veve returned to the Brownie tent, Mrs. Davidson and Mrs. Williams had started home. The girls had made their beds and now were washing up for supper.

"Come and get it!" called Miss Gordon.

As the girls filed past, she filled their plates with steak, potatoes and buttered carrots. They

also had milk and ice cream bought at the scout dining room.

"Yum! Wonderful food!" declared Veve, presenting her plate for a second helping. "I love camp!"

"Who wouldn't, if you never do any of the work," said Jane pointedly.

"Speaking of work," interposed Miss Gordon as she began to clear away the cooking pans. "We all must do our share. Each girl is expected to wash her own utensils and dry them."

"Will you do all the cooking?" Rosemary inquired, feeling that so far the troop leader had taken the heavy end of the camp work.

"I'll take the responsibility for lunches and the main meal at night. With the training you girls have had in cooking, I think you're capable of assuming the planning and preparation of breakfast."

"When do we start?" Connie asked.

"In the morning. I'll appoint the committee now. Veve is in charge and must do the planning. Her assistants are Jane and Eileen. Remember girls, breakfast at eight o'clock sharp."

"But what will we have?" Veve asked in panic.

"That's entirely up to you," smiled Miss Gordon. "You'll find bacon, eggs and oatmeal in the supply box."

"And what about the fire?" Jane inquired uneasily.

"I'll start it, and after that you must keep it going. I suggest you gather a good supply of fuel before you go to bed tonight."

Veve, Jane and Eileen were somewhat troubled by their appointment as cooks. After the dishes had been done, they gathered in a group to plan.

"Let's have something easy like boiled eggs," suggested Eileen.

Veve promptly overruled her. "No, we're going to have a good breakfast, so all the girls will say we're the best cooks in camp!" she insisted. "We'll have scrambled eggs, bacon and oatmeal and maybe toast."

"Isn't that too much?" protested Jane. "Think of the work."

"I'm chairman and do all the planning," Veve reminded her helpers. "Miss Gordon said so. Each one of us will cook one thing. I'll fry the bacon. Jane can cook the oatmeal while Eileen scrambles the eggs."

"But I don't know how to cook oatmeal," Jane complained. "Let's settle for packaged breakfast food."

"No! Oatmeal is easy to cook. I've watched Mother lots of times. You just measure some in and add water. That's all there is to it."

When the girls told Miss Gordon of the menu they had planned, she raised her eyebrows slightly and said: "A little elaborate for a first meal, isn't it?"

However, the Brownie leader did not suggest any changes. She merely showed the girls where they could find needed supplies.

"Now if you need advice, don't hesitate to come to me," she remarked.

"Oh, we'll get along fine," said Veve confidently. "Cooking is easy."

Deep shadows presently crowded in upon the little camp by the willows. Miss Gordon tossed a log on the fire, and the girls gathered about to sing and tell stories. By nine o'clock everyone was sleepy and ready to retire.

One by one the girls tumbled into their balsam bough beds, snuggling down under the blankets. The only space left for Veve was near the door.

Rolling up in her blankets, she pretended to be very comfortable. And at first she did not mind lying on the ground.

But as the night wore on, her back began to hurt. She rolled onto her side. In a moment it felt paralyzed, so she twisted into another position.

"Quit squirming," Jane said in a drowsy voice. "We want to go to sleep."

Veve lay still as long as she could. The ground had begun to feel cold through her cocoon of

blankets. Then something bit her squarely in the back.

Veve jumped and flung an arm out across Jane's face.

"Say, quiet down or we'll toss you out of the tent," Jane said crossly. "We want to go to sleep."

Except for Jane and Veve, the others already were in dreamland.

"Can I help it if something bit me?" Veve muttered. "I'm cold. I'm going out and sit by the fire."

Some distance from the tent, the remains of a log still smoldered. Taking her blankets, Veve snuggled down by the glowing coals. At first she was fairly comfortable. But as the log died down, the cold of the night again needed her shaking body.

Finding a pile of wood which had been left for the breakfast fire, Veve kindled the dying flames. Again she was comfortable for an hour or so. After that, the wood was gone and the night went on and on.

Shivering and shaking, Veve wondered if the dawn ever would come. Not a sound could be heard from the tent where the other girls apparently were sleeping snugly.

When the sun finally broke through the willows, Miss Gordon, arising to start the fire, was surprised to discover Veve huddled by the dead ashes.

"Why, Veve, you look half frozen!" she exclaimed. "Didn't you sleep comfortably last night?"

"Oh, I decided to get up early," Veve replied quickly. "I'll start breakfast right away."

However, she continued to hunch by the dead embers of the fire, waiting until Miss Gordon had started a lively blaze. Gradually, she began to thaw out.

"We seem to be rather short of wood," the Brownie troop leader remarked. "I'm afraid you'll have to gather more in order to keep the fire going."

"I'll tell Eileen and Jane," Veve said. "They should be up now to help me."

Soon all the girls began to arise and dress. The sun climbed higher, drying the tent and warming the air.

"While breakfast is being prepared the rest of us may as well have a dip in the river," Miss Gordon suggested. "Last one in is a sissy!"

Clad in bathing suits, the Brownies all dashed off to the beach, leaving Eileen, Veve and Jane to struggle with the fire.

"I can't keep it going without more wood," Veve complained, "and you two stand here loafing."

"We do not!" Jane retorted. "There was a good pile of wood there last night. I know because I gathered some the last thing before I went to bed."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Veve quickly. "Just get some more, while I start the bacon. We have to have breakfast ready by eight o'clock."

Soon the bacon began to sizzle in the pan. Satisfied that it was frying well, Veve turned to help Eileen break eggs into a dish. They could not decide how many it would take to feed eight hungry persons.

As they debated the matter, Veve suddenly noticed smoke rising from the frying pan.

"The bacon is burning!" she screamed, turning to rescue it.

"It's burned you mean—to a crisp," mourned Eileen as she saw the shriveled, blackened strips of meat. "Now what'll we do?"

"Why bother with bacon?" Veve asked. "With eggs and oatmeal we'll have enough. Here comes Jane with the wood now."

The girls built up the fire, but for some reason it refused to burn down to coals. Instead, it caused more smoke than flame.

"Oh, bother!" Jane exclaimed impatiently. "Who wants to wait all day? I'm putting the oatmeal on now."

Following instructions printed on the cereal box, she added water to the oatmeal and placed the pan on the fire. In a short while, the kettle was black from smoke, but the water refused to boil.

"I'm sick and disgusted and mad!" Jane announced furiously. "Who ever thought camping would be fun?"

The girls still were struggling with the fire when the other Brownies raced in from the beach, dripping wet.

"We've had a marvelous swim!" Connie shouted. "And we're starved. Is breakfast ready?"

"No, it isn't," announced Veve. "What's more, I don't think it ever will be!"

Miss Gordon, without saying anything, rebuilt the fire. Veve, Eileen and Jane expected her to cook the breakfast, but instead she sat down nearby with her back to a tree.

"If first you don't succeed, try, try again," she remarked. "We're all pretty hungry, but I guess we can wait a while longer."

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For the three cooks nothing remained but to start in all over again. Veve put on another pan of bacon, and this time watched it closely.

After the bacon was crisp, Eileen cooked the eggs. Miss Gordon told her when to take them off the fire so they would not scorch. As for the oatmeal, it proved so lumpy that no one wanted to try any. In any event, the cooks had forgotten to go to the camp store for milk or cream.

"On the whole, I think our cooks did very well," Miss Gordon praised the girls. "However, as supplies have been used rather lavishly, we'll need to go into Shady Hollow for more."

"Can't we get what we need at the camp store?" inquired Belinda.

Miss Gordon explained that the camp sold only perishables. Staple foods must be purchased at one of the village stores.

"I'll go," offered Veve. "After all, I used up the extra bacon."

Miss Gordon also named Connie and Rosemary to make the trip, offering to take the three girls in her car some time after lunch. Meanwhile, she told the Brownies they might have a free hour in which to write letters or do whatever they liked.

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"I want to make myself a balsam bed," Veve announced promptly.

"I'll show you how," Miss Gordon offered.

The bed did not take long to make. After the balsam boughs had been laid in place, Veve went swimming with Eileen and Jane while the other girls explored the woodland trails.

At noon, the Brownies trooped in, eager for the stew, hot biscuits and canned peaches which Miss Gordon had ready for them.

"Camp is great when someone else does the cooking," Jane sighed blissfully. "I wish we could stay here forever."

In the early afternoon the girls played games, loafed on the beach and gathered stones. At three o'clock, Miss Gordon told Connie, Veve and Rosemary it was time to start for Shady Hollow. She had made out a long list of needed supplies.

"We should buy a water bucket also," she remarked.

At Shady Hollow, the four separated, Miss Gordon and Rosemary going to the grocery store, while Veve and Connie went on to the hardware to purchase the water pail.

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Now, directly behind the hardware store ran a railroad siding, but the two girls did not notice this immediately.

Carefully they made their purchase of the bucket, paid for it, and left the store.

Only then did Veve see the railroad tracks. A train with circus cars stood on the siding. The engine did not appear to be hooked on.

"Why, it's a circus!" she exclaimed. "It looks like *our* circus!"

Veve meant that it appeared to be the same one the Brownies had witnessed a week earlier at Rosedale.

"It does look like the same one," Connie admitted in astonishment. "I wonder if it is playing here?"

"Shady Hollow is too small a place. Probably it has pulled up on the siding so another train can go by."

Thinking that perhaps they might see Eva Leitsall or Jim Carsdale, the girls cut through a vacant lot to the railroad tracks.

The Pullman cars were far up ahead. However, directly in front of them was a gaudily painted

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box car, the door of which stood slightly ajar.

"Wonder what's inside!" Veve speculated. "I think I'll see."

Upraising the newly purchased bucket, she stood on it and peeped into the car.

"Oh, Connie!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Guess what? The golden coach is in here!"

"The one we saw in the circus?"

"The very same. Oh, it's beautiful, Connie. Raise me up higher."

"I can't," said Connie. "Pull yourself up on the edge of the car. Then you can see better."

Veve swung herself to the edge of the circus car. She sat in the open doorway, her feet swinging over the side.

"Now help me up," Connie commanded. "I want to see too."

Veve pulled her up and they both sat there gazing at the beautiful golden coach.

"Maybe we shouldn't sit here," Connie said uneasily.

Now, neither she nor Veve once thought of being carried away by the circus train. So far as they could tell, the engine was not even hooked on. They knew too, they could jump to the ground any time they liked.

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Veve scrambled to her feet the better to gaze at the golden coach.

"Let's sit in it!" she proposed.

"Oh, no, Veve."

"Just for a minute," coaxed Veve. "Then we'll meet Miss Gordon." Before Connie could stop her, she ran over to the coach. "Say, it has red plush seats and everything. Do come see!"

Veve climbed into the coach and began to bounce up and down on the soft cushions.

Connie, against her better judgment, decided it would do no harm to sit in the coach for only a minute. She went over and climbed in beside Veve.

"Wouldn't it be fun to ride in the grand procession?" she asked, her eyes shining.

"You play you're the Queen," proposed Veve. "I'll drive the white horses." She scrambled up into the high box at the front of the coach.

Taking a long whip from its holder, she pretended to switch the horses.

But Connie felt very uneasy. "Veve, we must meet Miss Gordon," she reminded her friend.

"Oh, all right," Veve agreed, replacing the whip.

Now the two girls had been so engrossed in inspecting the beautiful coach, that they had failed to hear footsteps outside in the gravel.

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Before they could climb out or say a word, the heavy door of the box car was slammed shut.

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CHAPTER 9

The Golden Coach

WHEN the door of the box car slammed shut, Connie and Veve were so startled that for an instant they scarcely could think.

Then they both jumped from the coach and ran to the door.

"Let us out!" screamed Connie.

"Open the door!" shouted Veve.

The man who had locked them in by accident did not hear. He had walked away. With the door closed, the box car was very dark.

Badly frightened, the two girls beat on the door with their fists. But they could not force it open.

"Oh, why doesn't someone let us out?" wailed Connie.

Even as she spoke, the car gave a hard jolt. Veve nearly was thrown from her feet.

"The engine is being hooked on!" she cried. "Oh, Connie, we'll be carried away with the circus."

Connie was nearly as terrified as her little friend. Frequently she had remarked that she would like to go away with a circus. Of course, she hadn't really meant it. And certainly she didn't wish to be carried away in a locked box car.

"What will Miss Gordon think?" she gasped. "She will wait and wait at the car for us, and we'll never get there."

Frantically, the two girls began to beat on the door again with their fists. "Let us out! Let us out!" they shouted over and over.

Veve screamed as hard as she could. She even called Miss Gordon's name, though she knew the Brownie troop leader was too far away to be of any help.

The screams of the two girls went unheard. Already the circus man who had locked the door was far away.

All too soon, the girls heard a loud hissing sound.

"I know what that is," whispered Veve.

"What, Veve?" It was all Connie could do to be brave.

"The engineer is letting air out of the brakes. That means the train is about to start."

Veve was right too. Within a few minutes the car lurched forward and the couplings between the other cars went, "chunk-chunk, chunk-chunk." The two girls nearly were thrown to the floor.

Despair overcame them as they heard the wheels going "clickity-click" every time they passed from one rail to another. The sound came faster and faster. Connie and Veve knew the train was leaving Shady Hollow, moving along at a lively clip.

"Oh, Connie, were being carried away with the circus," Veve wailed. "How will we ever get back to camp? How will we ever get home?"

Connie wondered the same thing. She was desperately afraid it might be a long while before anyone came to open the car door. And by that time they would be miles away from Shady Hollow.

Only a little light filtered into the car through a small ventilator door high in the wall. Although they could see each other, objects about them were hazy.

"Stay close to me, Connie," Veve shivered. "I'm afraid."

"I don't feel so brave myself," answered Connie.

"Do you think we ever will get out of here?" Veve asked in a quavering voice. She stared at the

canvas bundles and boxes stacked in the car. They looked as if they might be alive, though she knew they weren't.

"Of course we'll get out," replied Connie staunchly.

"But when?"

"I don't know when," admitted Connie. "But they will have to open up this car sometime. Probably at the next stop."

Clinging together and bracing themselves against the side of the car, the girls tried not to think about Miss Gordon and the Brownie camp. But they couldn't help worrying. What would the troop leader do when they failed to meet her at the car? Would she ever guess that they had been taken away on the circus train?

And the good times they would miss at camp! Even now, the other Brownies probably were enjoying a swim at the beach.

"We never should have crawled into this hateful old box car," Connie said, raising her voice above the rattle and bang of the rolling wheels. "Miss Gordon's told us a thousand times that Brownies THINK before they act. We didn't at all, Veve."

"It was a mistake to get into the car," Veve admitted. "But the engine wasn't hooked on. How did we know a man would come along and slam the door shut?"

"That's where we didn't think," Connie sighed. "Oh, dear! Miss Gordon will be about frantic wondering where we are. And no one ever will guess we're on this circus train."

Veve said nothing for a few minutes. With all her heart she wished that she were back at Shady Hollow camp or at least home with her mother. The nice house in Rosedale with its green lawn and trees seemed a million miles away.

"Connie," she called. Her voice was scarcely louder than a whisper.

"What, Veve?"

"Do you think we will starve to death in here?"

"No," answered Connie. "I have a chocolate bar in my pocket. I brought it from home and haven't eaten it yet."

Veve felt greatly relieved. Now, at least she thought they would have something to eat for their dinner. Already she was beginning to feel hungry too.

"Let's eat the candy right away," she proposed to Connie.

"No, we must save it until we're terribly hungry," Connie told her. "We may be in here a long while, and it's all the food we have."

The train was moving very rapidly, causing the car to sway back and forth. Connie could feel the floor trembling beneath her feet. She wondered if riding in a box car was anything like being in an earthquake.

Both girls were feeling a little less afraid when suddenly they heard a terrific roar. Plainly it came from the car just ahead of theirs.

Veve clutched Connie's hand. "What was that?" she whispered.

"It sounded like an old lion," Connie said. Her teeth were chattering.

"Oh, Connie, what if it should try to break in here?"

"It won't," replied Connie. However, she did not feel too certain.

Other animals on the train had started to make strange noises also. Now and then something banged hard against a car wall. The girls imagined it was the lion trying to break out.

For a long while, Veve and Connie huddled together, listening. The wild animals had become quieter now.

"That old lion can't get us," Veve said presently. "I'm not afraid of him." She stood up to stretch her cramped legs.

By this time, Connie felt more at ease too. As her eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, she began to gaze about the car.

"Let's find out what has been stored in here," she proposed. "Maybe we can find some food."

Crawling through the body of the golden coach, the two girls came out on the other side.

Stacked high against the sides of the car were several large bundles of canvas.

"What do you think they are, Connie?" inquired Veve, kicking one of the bundles.

"Side show tents."

"We could slide down 'em," said Veve. "Only I don't think it would be much fun."

"Neither do I. We'd get all dirty." Connie looked down at her Brownie uniform, already wrinkled.

Veve's white blouse was smudged with dust and her hands felt gritty. The box car seemed to be very dirty.

"Let's climb back into the golden coach," Connie suggested. "It will be more comfortable there than sitting on the car floor."

For a while, the girls amused themselves by playing imaginary games. Connie pretended she was queen of the circus while Veve drove the horses. Tiring of that, they tried Wild West. The girls took turns driving the mail in their stagecoach and saying that the Indians were after them. But soon they became tired of that game too.

"It's no fun without real Indians," Veve complained. "What time do you suppose it is?"

"We've been on the train at least an hour—maybe two or three. It must be nearly six o'clock."

"Then let's eat the candy bar. I'm terribly hungry, Connie."

"So am I," admitted Connie.

From her pocket she took the candy bar. Somehow it had become crushed, the tinfoil pressing down into the chocolate.

However, the girls did not mind. Peeling off the foil, they divided the bar into equal parts and ate every crumb.

Veve now became very thirsty. She thought of the cool glass of milk she might have had at camp, and felt like crying.

"Do you suppose Miss Gordon has missed us yet?" she asked.

"Of course she has, Veve. She must have known something happened to us soon after we failed to meet her at the car."

"But she can't know we were taken away by the train."

"Not unless the hardware man saw us climb into the car. And I don't think he did."

Veve was silent for a while and then she said:

"Do you suppose Miss Gordon will tell our folks that we're missing? Then they might look for us."

"But they can't find us," Connie said dismally. "We must be a hundred miles from Shady Hollow by this time. Maybe two hundred. The only persons we can expect to find us now are the circus folk."

Both girls were very tired and worried. But they were careful not to blame each other for their predicament. They knew they both had been equally careless in climbing into the car.

Gradually, it became darker in the golden coach where the children sat. Too discouraged to play games, they merely rode in silence.

Then suddenly, the car gave several little jerks as it rolled along.

"The engineer is putting on the brakes!" cried Veve. "We're slowing down!"

With Connie close beside her, she scrambled from the coach and ran to the car door. Pressing their faces close to the cracks, they tried to see out.

"We're stopping all right!" exclaimed Veve hopefully.

"Now someone should find us!" cried Connie. "Let's yell as loud as we can."

The two girls waited until the train came to a complete stop. Then they pounded as hard as they could on the door and shouted.

"Oh, Connie, won't anyone *ever* hear us?" wailed Veve.

No one came to open the door. In the cars nearby, the animals had started to roar again. The shouts of Connie and Veve were completely drowned out. Within a few minutes, the train began to move again.

"I guess we only stopped to take on water," said Connie in a discouraged voice. "It wasn't a regular station."

"How much longer do you think we will have to stay in here?"

Connie didn't try to answer. She really was worried. But she kept telling herself the circus couldn't have a show without using the golden coach. When that time came, it would be unloaded and they surely would be found.

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Seeking a comfortable place to sit, the girls climbed back into the rear coach seat. The steady rocking of the train made them feel rather drowsy.

Connie curled up in a ball, kitten fashion, and went to sleep. Veve made up her mind she would stay awake, but soon she had dozed off too.

However, it seemed to Connie that she scarcely had closed her eyes when someone shook her arm.

At first Veve thought she must be dreaming. The car was dark and she didn't know where she was.

"Wake up!" commanded a voice. She was given another hard shake. "How did you get in here?"

Before Veve could answer, the man went to the door of the box car. He shouted to someone far down the tracks.

"Hey, Bill! Come here! I've found a couple of kids asleep in the golden coach! Runaways!"

Both Connie and Veve sat up, rubbing their eyes. By now they were very much awake.

"We're not runaways," Veve said quickly. "Someone locked us up in this old car by mistake. And we want to get out right away!"

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CHAPTER 10

Rescue

"YOU'LL get out of here all right," said the circus man to Veve.

He spoke rather gruffly because he was annoyed to find the two girls in the car. To send them home to their mothers would cause considerable trouble.

"We want to go back to the Brownie camp," said Veve with a half-sob. "Miss Gordon will be worrying about what happened to us."

"Who is Miss Gordon?" asked the circus man.

"Our Brownie Scout troop leader," explained Connie.

The circus man lifted both girls down from the golden coach. Their limbs were so cramped they barely could stand on their feet at first.

"How long have you youngsters been in this car?" he asked in a more friendly voice.

"We don't know," Veve answered between sobs. "Ever since the circus train left Shady Hollow."

"That was late yesterday afternoon. It's practically morning now. How did you get in this car anyhow?"

Veve and Connie told him of their excursion into Shady Hollow to buy groceries to take back to the Brownie Scout camp, and of their desire to sit in the golden coach "just for a minute."

"We didn't mean to be carried away," Connie explained earnestly. "Someone just slammed the door and we couldn't get out."

"What will become of us?" inquired Veve anxiously.

"You'll have to stay with the circus until your parents send for you."

"But we don't want to go home," Connie said quickly. "We want to return to Shady Hollow Camp."

"Then we'll notify your troop leader," the circus man agreed. "What is your name, little girl?"

"Connie Williams, and this is Veve McGuire."

"I'll send a telegram to your Brownie Scout leader right away," the circus man promised. "Hungry?"

"Practically starved," said Connie.

By this time, the man who had been called "Bill" came to the doorway of the car. He reached up his arms and the other workman handed the two girls down to him.

Veve and Connie were relieved to escape from the dark, cramped quarters. However, the night air was very chilly and they had no sweaters or jackets.

"The sun soon will be up," one of the men said, slipping his jacket over Connie's shoulders. "Then as soon as the cook tent is up, we'll have breakfast."

"When will we get back to Shady Hollow camp?" Veve asked.

"That depends. We're several hundred miles from there now. Someone will have to come after you."

"Oh," said Connie in a thin little voice. She was thinking how very much trouble and expense Miss Gordon would be caused.

The circus man asked for the full name of the Brownie Scout leader, writing it on an envelope. As he talked to the girls, other circus folk wandered by from the sleeper cars. They too paused to ask questions. Everyone seemed quite friendly.

Suddenly, in the group, Connie caught sight of Mr. Carsdale. The animal trainer saw her at the same instant.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "How did *you* get here?"

Once again Connie related how she and Veve had been locked inside the box car.

"Mr. Carsdale, do you know these youngsters?" asked the workman who had found them.

"Sure, they're old friends of mine," replied the animal trainer. He told of his meeting with the entire Brownie troop at Rosedale.

"Then suppose I turn the girls over to you," proposed the first man. "You might see that they get breakfast and a place to sleep if they're tired. I'll send off the telegram right away."

"Sure, I'll be glad to look after them," promised Mr. Carsdale.

"Are we to have something to eat right away?" asked Veve, who was very hungry.

"Just as soon as the cook tent is up," replied Mr. Carsdale. "That shouldn't be long now, for we're unloading the circus. Meanwhile, I'll get some chocolate bars to tide you over."

"I'm thirsty too," said Connie, licking her dry lips.

Mr. Carsdale led the two girls into the railroad station. There he bought four chocolate bars, giving them each a couple. At the fountain, Veve and Connie drank all the water they wanted.

"Now we'll hop a truck and ride to the circus grounds," declared Mr. Carsdale. "The lot isn't far from here."

"Will there be a show today?" asked Veve eagerly.

"Not until tomorrow," replied the animal trainer. "The circus is having a day of rest."

"I hope we get to see another show while we're here," declared Veve.

Already she was beginning to feel very much at home with Mr. Carsdale. Now that she knew she was safe, she thought it would be fun to stay with the circus several days. However, that would mean missing camp, and neither of the girls wanted to do that.

Mr. Carsdale boosted the children up into the truck. When it was fully loaded, the driver started off for the circus lot.

By this time the sky was brightening. Near the circus lot torches were burning.

"Why are the torches lighted?" questioned Connie, who wished to learn about everything. "Is it so the drivers can see better?"

"Oh, no," laughed Mr. Carsdale. "We 'torch the road' so the truckmen will know how to reach the lot. When the torch is on the left-hand side of the curb, it means we are to turn left."

"And a torch at the right-hand side means turn to the right?" asked Veve.

"Yes, when there are no torches, we keep straight ahead."

The sun was up by the time the truck rattled into the circus lot. Workmen were driving stakes and setting up the big canvas tent. Already nearly all of the smaller ones used by the performers were in place.

"Yonder is the cook tent," said Mr. Carsdale, pointing it out to the girls. "When the flag goes up, it means breakfast is ready."

As Connie and Veve watched the work around the circus lot, they kept within view of the cook tent. They could see curls of smoke arising above the canvas. And then at last, the flag was raised.

"There it goes!" Veve shouted to Mr. Carsdale. "It's flying now!"

"Then we'll go right over," smiled the animal trainer. "I'm pretty hungry myself."

The air was fragrant with the odor of frying sausages. Walking toward the cook tent, Connie and Veve sniffed the air. They thought they never had smelled anything so utterly delicious.

At the entrance of the tent a man stood taking tickets.

"Do we have to pay to get in?" asked Veve in surprise.

"No," answered Mr. Carsdale, "but the workmen must have tickets. They're required to prevent those who don't belong to the circus from getting free meals."

Veve and Connie observed that the animal trainer seemed well acquainted with the man at the entrance of the cook tent. He guided them into another tent which served as the circus dining

room.

Already a number of performers were seated at several long tables set with heavy china.

"Where do we sit, Mr. Carsdale?" asked Connie politely.

"My place is over here near the tent wall," said the animal man. "You may sit next to me."

A waiter in a white coat brought the girls pancakes, sausages, tomato juice and fruit. The food was very good and there was a great deal of it. However, Veve and Connie saw so many interesting persons that after the first few minutes they nearly forgot to eat.

Across the table from Veve sat the Thin Man from the side show. Next to him were several little people no taller than Connie or Veve. Although adults, they never would grow any larger, and were known as Lilliputians.

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"Why are they so small, Mr. Carsdale?" Veve asked in a whisper. "Didn't they have enough cod liver oil when they were children?"

Connie gave her friend a quick kick under the table. However, Mr. Carsdale merely laughed and answered the question.

"They're not small from any lack of food," he explained. "They're just that way because they're freaks of nature."

Veve and Connie were only half through breakfast when Eva Leitsall sauntered into the tent. The little circus girl stopped short on seeing them at the table. She certainly never had expected to meet Veve and Connie again.

"Come over here, Eva!" called Mr. Carsdale.

The little girl sat down in an empty seat next to Veve. Now that she was not dressed in her circus costume she looked like any ordinary child. Her curly hair had not been combed very well and her eyes were sleepy.

"Have you joined the circus?" she asked Connie and Veve.

"Sure, they both have," laughed Mr. Carsdale, who had decided to have a little fun. "At least for a while."

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"What have you signed on to do?" asked Eva, not very well pleased.

Now, Mr. Carsdale liked Eva but he also enjoyed teasing her. He knew the little circus girl was inclined to feel rather proud of her accomplishments and that she sometimes boasted. So he said quickly:

"I may make Veve my assistant in the animal act. And Connie might be in the riding act."

"We don't need anyone," replied Eva, scowling. "Besides, she can't ride, can she?"

"Didn't I hear your father say he needs someone who can do the somersault without being afraid?" teased Mr. Carsdale.

Eva stared at the animal trainer and didn't say a word.

"Connie wouldn't mind practicing hard either, would you, Connie?" Mr. Carsdale went on.

"Oh, no," replied the little girl. "I would like to be a wonderful rider."

"I guess it wouldn't seem so wonderful if you had to be in two shows every day," retorted Eva. "I have to work all the time. My parents make me practice that silly old somersault over and over."

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"That's so you will be sure of it and never fall and injure yourself," said Mr. Carsdale.

"Anyway, I'm sick of doing it," announced Eva. "I'm tired of riding on trains. I'd like to live like other children do and just have fun." Her gaze rested for an instant on the dancing elf pin attached to Connie's Brownie uniform. "I'd like to be a Brownie," she added.

"Don't you like the circus?" Connie asked in astonishment.

"Not when I have to work all the time."

Connie and Veve were very much surprised by the circus girl's words. They realized now that Eva had only been pretending before. She had tried to make them think circus life was exciting, only to arouse their envy and admiration.

"Suppose you take Connie and Veve in tow and show them around the lot," Mr. Carsdale suggested to Eva. "Everything is new to them, you know."

"All right," agreed Eva willingly enough. "As soon as I finish my breakfast."

Presently Mr. Carsdale went away, leaving the three girls together.

"Are you really joining the circus?" Eva asked when the animal trainer was out of hearing.

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"Oh, no," answered Connie. "We're returning to Shady Hollow just as soon as someone comes for us."

She told Eva about the Brownie camp and how she and Veve had been locked inside the railroad car.

"I knew Mr. Carsdale was teasing me," the little circus girl said in relief. "I was sure no one else would be given my place in the riding act."

Eva finished her breakfast. Then she asked the girls what they would like to see first.

Veve said she would enjoy visiting the big kitchen. Eva took the girls into a nearby tent where nearly all the circus food was prepared. Instead of ordinary sized pans, huge steam cookers were used.

"My, it must take a lot of food to feed so many people," remarked Connie.

"We buy a hundred and seventy loaves of bread a day," said Eva. She spoke as if she did the ordering herself. "And we bake nearly that many pies."

Stacked outside the tent were many unopened crates of fruit and vegetables. Connie and Veve saw oranges, grapefruit, apples and even strawberries.

Next, the little circus girl led her companions to the butcher shop. Entire quarters of beeves were lying on long wooden tables. Men in white aprons chopped off huge steaks and tossed them into cooking pans.

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"My, wouldn't the Brownies like to see this?" murmured Connie. "I wonder if they know yet where we are?"

Although she and Veve had been told that a telegram had been sent to Shady Hollow Camp, as yet no reply had been received.

After seeing the butcher shop, the three girls wandered about the lot. Eva introduced her friends to several other circus boys and girls.

However, few of the children had time to talk for more than a few minutes. All of them seemed to have work to do. Two boys were practicing on the trampoline, a taut canvas which tossed them into the air when they sprang from it.

Over and over the boys would practice backward and forward somersaults.

"Want to see Sniff, our dog, do it too?" one of the boys asked. "He's better than we are."

When they dropped Sniff on the canvas, he leaped into the air and turned several somersaults backwards.

"Are you in an act together?" Connie asked, greatly impressed.

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"Not yet," one of the boys answered. "We're not good enough."

A little farther on, a mother was teaching her five year old daughter how to hang by her teeth from a rope. The rope, however, was only a few inches from the ground.

"That's Fifi," said Eva, nodding toward the child. "She'll be in the butterfly act when she's older."

Now Connie and Veve did not say much, but already they recognized that to be in the circus one needed to be very skillful. Apparently, even the children had to work hard and practice almost constantly.

"How many children are there on the lot?" Connie asked curiously.

"Oh, eight or ten or twelve," Eva said. "I never know for certain. They come and go."

"Any girls your own age?" inquired Veve.

"Oh, sure. Elsie, Mae, Charmaine and Cleo."

"Enough for a Brownie Scout troop," said Connie jokingly.

"I wish we could have a club," replied Eva in a serious tone. "But no! All we do is work, work, work."

Now that Veve and Connie were getting fairly well acquainted with the little circus girl they liked her much better than they had at first. She did not act as know-it-all as she had at Rosedale.

"What do you want to see now?" asked Eva.

"Could we look at the elephants?" Veve requested.

"Of course. I think the elephants are the most interesting part of the circus myself. They're one of the smartest animals in the world."

The elephants had been chained to heavy iron stakes now that their morning's work was done. An attendant had just given them their ration of hay.

Veve and Connie laughed aloud as they watched the elephants swish it up with their long, snaky trunks.

"That big fellow over there is Old Sal," said Eva. She pointed to an elephant with a very wrinkled skin. "You should see her boss the others around."

"And do they really obey her?" asked Veve.

"They have to," answered Eva. "When they don't, she beats them hard with her trunk. That makes them come to time right away."

The little circus girl told the pair more about the ways and habits of elephants.

"Don't get too near Old Sal," she warned Veve. "She might take that blue hair ribbon when you're not looking."

"Why would she want my ribbon?" Veve asked, backing away.

"Old Sal collects everything bright colored," explained Eva. "You'll notice she has bits of paper and ribbons hidden in the hay. Old shoes too and cigar butts."

At another stake the circus girl pointed out Bubbles, an elephant that had been captured in Ceylon.

"My, it must be hard to tame an elephant," Connie said. "They're such big animals."

"You'd think so if one ever stepped on you," laughed Eva. "Bubbles weighed nearly five tons when she first came to the circus!"

"How was she captured?" Veve asked curiously.

"Oh, elephants always travel in herds, you know," the circus girl explained carelessly. "To catch one elephant you have to catch a herd of them."

"You didn't ever do it?" Veve questioned, for Eva talked exactly as if she had taken part in the big elephant drive.

"Oh, no, but I'd like to! I've heard the circus men talk about it lots of times. To trap a herd of elephants, the hunters first mark out a huge circle in the jungle and set up log posts all around. That's called the *kraal*."

"Why do they build a *kraal*?" Connie asked, puzzled.

"Because after they trap the elephants, they'd break right out again if the pen weren't terribly strong. After the fence has been built, the hunters cover it with leaves and underbrush."

"That's to fool the elephant?" Veve guessed.

"Elephants are pretty smart," the circus girl nodded. "If they wised up that they were being driven into a trap, they'd put up an awful fight."

"How do the hunters get the elephants into the *kraal*?" inquired Connie.

"Oh, hundreds of native boys go into the jungle and frighten the elephants by shouting and beating on toms-toms. The herd is driven through the gates into the enclosure. Then quick as a flash, they light fires, so the elephants won't try to get out the way they came in."

"That doesn't sound very hard," Veve said. "I thought it would be a much bigger job to catch an elephant."

"I guess it would be if you were doing it," Eva replied. "Sometimes the elephants get so angry at being trapped that they tear down the *kraal*. But if it has been strongly built, they can't get away. After a while, the elephants quiet down and behave themselves. Then the men ride in on tame elephants and pick out the elephant they want."

"After going to all that trouble, why not keep them all?" questioned Veve. "If I were a hunter,

that's what I would do."

"Oh, no you wouldn't!" corrected Eva, tossing Bubbles a peanut. "One can't hunt elephants without a permit. And the government never allows many to be taken at one time. That's to protect the herds from being destroyed."

"Well, anyway, it would be fun to capture even one elephant," Veve declared. "And once you had him, he would live a long time."

"Wrong again!" laughed the little circus girl. "Elephants have a life span the same as a man. They do their best work in their twenties and thirties and are old when they get to be seventy or eighty."

"Eva, did you ever hear of a rogue elephant?" Connie asked. She had read the name in an animal book but did not understand its meaning.

"Oh, sure," the circus girl replied, eager to impart information. "Every elephant herd has a natural leader. Usually it's the bull that is the best fighter. But sometimes another elephant will try to become the leader. Then he fights him. The winner becomes the herd leader, and the loser usually goes off, turning bad."

"What do you mean, he turns bad?" Veve inquired, rather puzzled.

"Oh, if it's in the jungle, he tears up small trees and smashes branches. Sometimes he raids the plantations. Such an elephant is called a rogue. We had one once here in the circus and had to get rid of him because he made so much trouble."

Connie and Veve very much enjoyed watching the elephants and hearing about them. But despite their interest, they were growing very tired. Veve especially, kept rubbing her eyes.

"I guess you've seen enough of the circus for now," said Eva. "After you've rested, I'll show you more. We'll go now and ask Mr. Carsdale where you're to sleep."

"Do circus folks sleep in the daytime?" Veve asked, trying to cover a yawn.

"You can if you like," Eva answered, leading the girls across the lot. "I guess you had a hard time of it in that box car and are pretty tired."

"We're dead," admitted Connie.

She felt very grateful to the little circus girl for showing so much interest in helping them. Eva really was very nice.

"I wonder when we'll hear from Miss Gordon," remarked Veve anxiously, following the other two girls.

"Probably by the time you've had your snooze a telegram will be here."

"Then we'll have to go home or back to camp," said Veve. "I won't mind if it's the latter. But first, I want to see the circus performance again."

"I know something I should like to do too," declared Connie earnestly. "Something important."

"What?" asked Veve and Eva.

"I should like to find the man who took Miss Gordon's wrist watch and the Brownie Scout money. Then maybe she would forgive us for riding away on the circus train."

"I don't think there's a chance we'll ever see that old pickpocket again," replied Veve.

"We might," insisted Connie. "Detective Clem Gregg told us that pickpockets usually follow the circus from one town to another."

"That's so, they do," agreed Eva. "That man might be in the crowd at the show tomorrow."

"I intend to watch for him if we're still here," announced Connie. "If Miss Gordon should recover her wrist watch, she might be glad we were carried away on the circus train!"

"I'll keep my eyes open too," offered the little circus girl. "If we see that old pickpocket, we'll make Clem Gregg arrest him."

CHAPTER 11

Feeding the Animals

THE next morning before Connie and Veve were dressed, Eva Leitsall came to their tent door.

"Wake up, you sleepy heads!" she called. "You slept most of yesterday, and now you'll miss your breakfast if you don't hurry."

"Breakfast?" Connie mumbled, throwing off the covers. "Is it morning? What happened to last night?"

Jumping out of bed, she began to dress as rapidly as she could. Veve also leaped out and scrambled into her clothes. Both girls were annoyed to think they had spent so much time sleeping when they could have been exploring the circus lot.

"What time is it?" asked Veve, stepping outside of the tent. The bright morning sunlight made her blink like an owl.

"Seven o'clock," laughed Eva. "If you want to see the animals fed, we'll have to move right along. And the afternoon circus performance is at one-thirty. Worse luck!"

"Can't you get out of being in the act just for today?" suggested Veve.

"It wouldn't do any good to ask," sighed Eva.

"You mean you *always* have to be in the show?" Connie inquired. "Whether or not you want to?"

"Always. You daren't be a minute late either."

"I shouldn't like that," declared Connie.

"At least you don't have to go to school and study," remarked Veve. "That part might be nice."

The circus girl gave a quick laugh. "A lot you know about it! My mother makes me study my lessons every single night."

"Summer time too?"

Eva nodded. "In the winter months I go to a regular school in the East. 'Course then I don't get to see my mother or father."

"Do you have to study lessons all by yourself here on the circus lot?" Veve asked.

"Sure. And if I don't know them, then I can't have any candy or ice cream."

Connie and Veve both liked school even though sometimes they pretended they didn't. But the part they enjoyed best was playing with other boys and girls at recess. And if they occasionally missed having perfect lessons, no one made them go without candy or ice cream.

"I suppose you must get plenty of candy and good things to eat," remarked Veve. "If I traveled with a circus, I would eat Cracker Jack all day long."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," Eva corrected her quickly. "Every single package of it has to be paid for."

"You mean you can't have popcorn and peanuts whenever you want them!" exclaimed Connie.

"Every sack is counted. If even one is missing, well there's trouble!"

"Don't you have any fun at all?" demanded Veve.

"Oh, I get to play some between shows. When we're in the larger cities, the circus bus takes all the children to the swimming pool, or maybe a picture show."

"Don't you like being in the riding act?" Connie questioned.

"I like it when folks clap and applaud. Only I so hate to do that old somersault. Once I fell—"

"I just wouldn't do it," announced Veve firmly.

"Oh, yes you would," corrected the circus child. "My mother and father tell me that unless I practice every day and keep doing it, I'll never be a really great performer."

Again the girls went to the cook tent for their breakfasts. They were given eggs, bacon, cereal and milk—all they could eat. The food was excellent, but Connie was not very hungry.

She kept thinking of her mother and father, Miss Gordon, and the Shady Hollow camp. She wondered why no answer had been received to the telegram sent to the Brownie Scout leader.

"Now what would you like to see this morning?" Eva asked her friends as they left the tent.

"May we see the giraffe?" inquired Veve eagerly.

Eva led the two girls to a high iron screen enclosure where the long-necked animal was kept. An attendant was giving the giraffe water from a wooden bucket.

"What a distance the water has to travel!" chuckled Veve. "Does a giraffe ever have a sore throat, Mister?"

"He never told me about it if he had one," laughed the attendant. "But then, a giraffe can't make a single sound, you know."

"Not even a tiny one?" Veve questioned. All she ever had known about a giraffe was that it had a long neck.

"Not a squeak," replied the attendant. "Sometimes a giraffe will cry, but the tears come without any sound."

Connie asked the man what a giraffe liked to eat.

"Clover, oats, corn biscuits," the man replied. "And as a special treat, onions."

Now Veve and Connie considered this a very strange diet, even for an animal. They would have asked other questions, but Eva warned them they must hasten on.

Before they had walked very far, Veve stopped to listen. She had heard a loud roar.

"That was Buster," said Eva. "He's mad because the attendants are slow in uncovering his cage this morning."

"Can you tell which lion it is so far away?" asked Connie in surprise.

"Oh, sure," replied Eva carelessly. "Every lion has a different kind of roar. Buster's voice is real deep."

"Let's go to see him," Veve proposed.

The three girls drew near the lion cages. An attendant had removed nearly all of the canvas cage covers.

Buster, a sleek old animal with a mane, kept pacing up and down. Now and then he would give a loud roar.

"Buster is in a hurry for his breakfast," laughed Eva. "And here it comes now."

A man brought several large chunks of raw meat for the lions. Buster's allotment fell just outside his cage. The lion kept trying to pull the meat through the bars, but could not get it easily.

"He can't get his food," said Connie anxiously. She thought someone should help the lion.

"Yes, he can," replied Eva. "Buster enjoys his meal more if he has to work to get it. The attendant always puts it just outside the cage."

In a moment Buster managed to pull the big hunk of meat through the iron bars. Holding it in his teeth, he leaped up on a shelf in the cage. There he lay, chewing contentedly.

"Now what shall we see?" asked Veve. She was a little tired of watching the lion.

"I can't show you anything more," said Eva regretfully. "It's time for me to practice my riding act. See you later."

Left to themselves, Connie and Veve wandered slowly about, watching the men feed the other animals. As they were staring at the camels, they heard footsteps directly behind them.

"Hi, there!" greeted a familiar voice.

Veve and Connie whirled around to see Clem Gregg, the circus detective.

"Well, if it isn't my young friends from Rosedale," he said gaily. "I heard you two had joined the show. How do you like it by this time?"

"Oh, hello, Mr. Gregg," said Connie. "We like the circus, but we're not intending to stay."

"You don't think you'd care for it as a steady thing?"

"Well," returned Connie politely, "we would miss our parents. Besides, we want to go back to Shady Hollow Camp."

"When will someone come for us?" Veve asked.

"We haven't received word from Shady Hollow yet. I imagine there may be a telegram at the railroad station now."

"How soon will you know?" inquired Veve.

"I'm on my way to the station now," returned the detective. "Would you like to come along?"

"Oh, yes, let's!" cried Veve.

Mr. Gregg said they would walk to the station which was only three blocks away.

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"We haven't any time to waste," he told the girls. "The nine-fifteen train will arrive in ten minutes."

"Are you expecting someone?" Connie asked him.

"Well, no one in particular," answered the detective. "I always meet all of the morning trains."

"Why do you do that?" inquired Veve curiously. By this time she knew circus people almost never did anything without a special reason.

"It's my job to keep watch for the slick-fingered lads," explained the detective. "Whenever I recognize one, I tell him to get out of town right away."

"Do you mean pickpockets?" questioned Veve, walking fast to keep up with the long-legged detective.

"Yes, they frequently ride in on the excursion trains."

"I wish we'd see Pickpocket Joe," remarked Connie.

"Not much chance of it," replied the detective. "He gives me a wide berth because he knows I'm looking for him."

Mr. Gregg and the girls reached the station only a minute before the train came in. The detective attentively watched passengers alight from the coaches.

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"Ah, there's someone I know!" he exclaimed.

Going over to the man, he touched him on the arm. The fellow looked worried when he saw Clem Gregg.

"You're not wanted around here," the detective said to him. "Get right back on the train. Keep riding unless you want my boys to take you out of town the hard way."

The man answered something which Veve and Connie did not hear. Clem Gregg took him by the arm and shoved him back onto the train.

Connie had been watching other people who were leaving the train. Suddenly she noticed a man coming around the end of the last car with a small suitcase in his hand.

"Oh, Veve!" she whispered excitedly. "See that man sneaking away from the train! Doesn't he look almost like Pickpocket Joe?"

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CHAPTER 12

Pickpocket Joe

BEFORE Veve could turn to look where Connie pointed, the man had turned his back to the two girls. Walking rapidly, he mingled with the crowd of passengers leaving the railroad station.

"Oh, that fellow is wearing a black suit," said Veve carelessly. "Don't you remember? Pickpocket Joe had on a brown one."

"Just the same, it looked like him," insisted Connie.

"Did he have a mole on his cheek?"

"I couldn't see that far. But I am almost certain it was Pickpocket Joe, Veve."

"Then let's tell Mr. Gregg."

The girls hastened over to where the detective stood. He was watching the train to make sure that the other pickpocket did not alight from the coach again.

"Oh, Mr. Gregg!" Connie cried excitedly. "He's here!"

"Who is here?" inquired the detective.

"Pickpocket Joe! Veve and I saw him only a minute ago."

The detective whirled quickly around. "Where?" he demanded. "Do you see him now?"

"No, he melted into the crowd."

"Then I'll not have much chance of catching him," said the detective regretfully. "I wonder if the man you saw really was Pickpocket Joe."

"It looked exactly like him except for the color of his suit," insisted Connie.

"The man might have left the coach from the other side of the train," Mr. Gregg said thoughtfully. "But I'm inclined to think you were mistaken."

Connie said no more about the matter. However, she did not believe she was wrong in her identification. She determined to watch the crowd for the man. Perhaps she would see him later on the circus grounds.

After the train had pulled out, Mr. Gregg escorted the girls into the station. He asked the agent if there were any telegrams for him.

"Three," replied the man. He gave the detective the yellow envelopes.

Pressing closer, Connie and Veve waited anxiously as the detective ripped open the first message.

"Does it say anything about us?" inquired Veve.

"This one concerns routine business," replied Mr. Gregg. "We'll look at another."

He slit the second envelope.

"Is it from Miss Gordon?" questioned Connie hopefully.

The detective shook his head.

Connie and Veve waited uneasily as he finally slit the third envelope. They were worried lest it fail to contain a message from the Brownie Scout leader or their parents.

Eva had told them the circus would leave late that night for another city fifty miles away. They did not wish to travel any farther from Shady Hollow Camp.

"Yes, this telegram does concern you," Mr. Gregg announced.

Connie drew a deep breath. "What does it say?" she asked.

"The message is signed by Miss Gordon. She says she is driving through with Mrs. Williams and

should arrive sometime this afternoon.”

“Mrs. Williams!” laughed Connie. “Why, that’s my mother!”

“I wonder if the Brownies are coming?” speculated Veve. “It would be nice if they all get to see the circus tonight.”

“What else does the telegram say?” asked Connie.

“It merely instructs us to keep you until they arrive,” said the detective, handing her the telegram.

“At least Miss Gordon didn’t say a word about being angry with us,” said Veve as she reread the message over Connie’s shoulder. “But then, it probably would have cost more money to have wired that!”

After attending to a few errands at the railroad station, Mr. Gregg took the girls back to the circus lot.

“What shall we do now?” Veve asked rather listlessly.

Both girls were rather tired of looking at the wild animals. And nearly all of the circus performers seemed to be too busy to talk with them.

For a while they watched the men anchoring the big tent so that it would be secure should a hard wind blow up. By this time the girls knew that the mammoth canvas was familiarly known to the circus folk as “the old rag.”

In fact, they had noticed that circus people seemed to have a different name for almost everything. The stand where pop was sold was spoken of as “the juice joint,” and the hamburger sandwich stand, “the grease joint.”

Veve thought it especially funny the first time she heard the balloon seller called “the bag guy.” After that she became used to it and spoke of him the same way herself.

“I know what let’s do,” she proposed to Connie as an idea suddenly struck her. “Let’s look at the steam calliope.”

“The horse piano!” laughed Connie, who had heard Eva use that name. “Yes, that should be fun!”

The girls found the calliope in a large wagon decorated with gold and white carvings. Pat Dawson, the operator, was working on the instrument when they climbed up beside him.

“Why, the keyboard looks almost like our piano at home!” Connie exclaimed in astonishment.

“Want to play a tune?” the operator invited.

“Oh, I can’t play a circus calliope,” Connie said, shrinking back at the thought.

“Can you play the piano?”

“I know ‘The Buttercup,’” Connie admitted, after thinking a moment. “And I can play part of ‘The Merry Sleigh Ride.’”

“Then sit right down here,” the man urged, making room for her at the keyboard. “The steam is on. Go to it!”

Connie was almost afraid to touch the keys. But plucking up her courage, she began to play the first measure of “The Merry Sleigh Ride.”

The keys played almost like those of her piano at home. However, as she touched them, a terrific blast of sound shook the wagon.

With a startled exclamation, Connie jerked her fingers away from the keyboard.

“You’d get used to it if you played a calliope all day,” the operator laughed. “But it helps to keep cotton in your ears.”

To show the girls how easily the instrument operated, the man began to play “There Will be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight.”

Veve and Connie hastily scrambled down from the wagon.

“Why, I’m surprised you don’t like my music,” the man laughed.

“Oh, we like it very much,” Connie said politely after he had stopped playing so she could make herself heard. “It’s just a little bit loud.”

"Well, it should be," Pat chuckled. "This horse piano is a special-built job and can be heard for nearly six miles on a quiet day."

After leaving the calliope wagon, Veve and Connie chatted for a while with the Fat Lady and Madam Womba, the sword swallower.

"Is it hard to learn to swallow a sword?" Veve asked the woman.

"It takes years of practice," she replied. "I shouldn't advise either of you ever to try it."

The girls watched the midgets for a time, and then they could think of nothing else to do.

"Let's see if we can find Eva," proposed Connie. "She must be around here somewhere."

The little circus girl was not in her dressing tent or anywhere to be seen on the lot.

"You'll find Eva in the big top working on her riding act," a workman finally told them.

By this time Connie and Veve knew that they must never disturb their little friend when she was practicing for the circus.

Accordingly, they entered the main tent quietly and sat down in the front row of bleacher seats.

Eva was so busy she did not see them at first. She was riding a large white horse around and around the sawdust ring. Close by stood the little girl's parents, who were watching her work quite critically.

"Now the somersault, Eva!" called her father.

"Oh, please, not today," the little girl pleaded. "I don't feel well. I will do it tonight at the regular performance, if only you won't make me practice it now."

"The somersault, Eva!" ordered her father again. He knew that his daughter only said she did not feel well as an excuse to avoid the turn. "You must practice it over and over until you have no fear."

Connie and Veve couldn't keep from feeling sorry for the little circus girl. They didn't blame her a bit for being afraid to try the somersault.

Eva rode her horse at a prancing trot around the sawdust ring. Behind her came another white horse without a rider. However, its gait was even and the animal knew exactly what to do without being guided.

At a signal from her father, Eva stood up on her mount. Then at exactly the right moment, she turned a quick somersault in the air, landing on the broad back of the second horse.

"Well done, Eva!" praised her father.

Then to the surprise of Connie and Veve, he made the little girl do the somersault several times more. Once Eva slipped and would have fallen had not her father caught and held her.

"Now you may rest for a few minutes," he told his daughter at last.

Eva went over and sat down beside Connie and Veve.

"Must you always work so hard?" asked Connie.

"Every day except Sunday," sighed Eva. "I wouldn't mind, if only I could learn to do that somersault the right way."

"One must keep trying," said Connie soberly. "That's how it is when you're a Brownie Scout. Miss Gordon says if a job is hard, one always should do his best."

"Scouts always are courageous too," added Veve. "And they believe in being courteous, kind, helpful and fair."

"I'd give anything to be a Brownie Scout," sighed Eva. "But I never can."

While the little circus girl rested, her mother and father led another horse into the ring. They were trying to train it for their act. For a long while they merely kept the horse trotting around the circle at an even pace.

"A rosinback must be trained so he'll never miss a single step," explained Eva to her friends.

"Why do you call your horse a rosinback?" asked Veve, who was learning a great deal about circus animals.

"Oh, that's because we rub powdered rosin on their backs," answered Eva. "We do it so a performer won't slip and fall. A horse's hide is real slick."

After a while Mr. and Mrs. Leitsall announced that the horse was ready for his next lesson.

"How would you girls like to help train him?" Eva's father asked.

"Oh, fine!" cried Connie eagerly. "Only we don't know how."

"Your part will be easy," encouraged Mr. Leitsall. "All you need to do is to shout and scream when I raise my hand."

"But how will that help to train the horse?" inquired Connie, deeply puzzled.

"A ring horse must learn to pay no heed to noise," explained the circus man. "Even if a storm blows the tent down he must not lose a single step."

Eva found several old tin cans. She offered Veve two of them.

"What are these for?" Veve asked.

"Bang them together and they'll make a lot of noise," laughed Eva. "We'll see if we can frighten the horse."

Connie and Veve never had heard of training a horse in such a strange way. However, they were very willing to help.

While the three girls sat by the ringside, Eva's father made the horse canter around the ring. Suddenly he raised his hand.

"Now!" shouted Eva. "Make all the noise you can!"

Connie screamed at the top of her lungs. Veve rattled her tin cans, yelling as hard as she could. Eva's father cracked his long whip and shot off a revolver which had been loaded with blanks.

The horse had been so well trained it did not appear to notice. Undisturbed, the animal kept cantering around and around the ring at the same steady space.

Mr. Leitsall raised his hand in signal again. The girls became quiet once more.

"Well done, old boy," the trainer said to the horse. "Here is your reward." He took two lumps of sugar from his pocket.

After Eva had tried her somersault again, her father told her she need not practice any more. The little girl started gaily away with Connie and Veve.

Before she could leave the tent, however, her mother called:

"Oh, Eva, aren't you forgetting something?"

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed the circus girl. "Must I do my stupid old lessons now? Let me off, just this once."

"Every child has to go to school," replied her mother firmly. "Yesterday you missed three words in your speller."

"Oh, all right," grumbled Eva.

She told Connie and Veve she would see them at lunch time. Then she went with her mother to do her lessons.

"I don't think I should like to travel with the circus after all," announced Veve. "It's much more fun just to come and visit."

"Everyone has to work so hard here," agreed Connie. "I think living in Rosedale and going to camp with the Brownies is much better."

At a loss for a way to spend their time, the two girls wandered about the circus lot. They watched the trained seals and talked to several of the clowns. Then before long it was luncheon time.

Eva sat beside the girls in the cook tent, but she did not eat very much.

"Don't you feel well?" Connie asked.

"I'm all right," muttered the little girl.

"Maybe you are tired from practicing so hard," said Veve.

"I'm not tired at all," denied Eva, a trifle irritably. "I wish you wouldn't keep talking about it."

Connie knew then that the little girl was worried about her act. Already she was thinking about

the somersault she would be required to do in the afternoon and evening shows. When luncheon was over, Eva walked away to talk to her father.

"Please don't make me do the turn today," she pleaded. "If you will let me off this once, I will try it tomorrow without fail."

"I have excused you too many times as it is," replied her father. "Unless you do the somersault every day you never will overcome your fear. You never will become a great rider."

"I don't care," said Eva crossly, although she really cared a great deal. "I wish I could leave this old circus! Then I could do exactly as I please."

Connie and Veve were astonished to hear the little girl's remark. And Veve recalled she once had said almost the same thing. She had wished to join the circus so that she could enjoy an easy life.

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"No one ever is allowed to do exactly as he pleases, Eva," her father told her. "But if you're serious about leaving the circus, it might be arranged. I might send you back to that city called Rosedale with Connie and Veve. You'd like that?"

"I don't know," Eva replied, hanging her head.

Mr. Leitsall turned to Connie and Veve. "Do you girls always get to do exactly as you please?" he asked them.

"Oh, no," answered Connie. "At home I usually have to go to bed at eight o'clock."

"I'd hate that," announced Eva quickly. "Here I always stay up until the circus is over. I never go to bed before midnight."

"We have lessons to study too," added Veve. "And jobs to do at home."

"Well, you might think it over, Eva," remarked her father. "When Miss Gordon and Mrs. Williams arrive here, I'll talk to them about taking you to Rosedale. No doubt they could find a nice place for you to board and room."

"We should like to have you, Eva," declared Connie politely.

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"You could join our Brownie troop," added Veve. "Of course we have rules you would have to obey."

"I'd like to be a Brownie," said Eva slowly. "That would be the best part."

"Then you'll return home with us?" Connie asked.

But Eva was not ready to give her answer.

"I don't know," she said soberly. "I will think about it hard today and let you know later. After all, perhaps I would rather stay in the circus."

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CHAPTER 13

The Silver Whistle

WHILE Eva was dressing for the afternoon circus performance, Connie and Veve mingled with the crowd which was arriving for the show.

"This will be our last day with the circus," Connie said as they wandered about the grounds listening to the barkers. "In a way, I will be sorry to leave."

"So will I," agreed Veve, "but I'll be glad to go back to camp too."

The girls visited several of the side shows and did not have to pay to get in. By this time they were known to nearly all of the circus people.

"Keep watch for Pickpocket Joe," Connie urged Veve. "I am sure he is somewhere in the crowd."

The two Brownies did not see anyone who resembled the man in the least. Before entering the big tent to watch the afternoon show, they talked again to Clem Gregg. He told them he had not seen Pickpocket Joe either.

When it was time for the circus to start, Connie and Veve found seats in the front row near the center ring.

Veve enjoyed watching a man in a white suit who held a silver whistle. Whenever he blew it, she noticed that the band music changed. Then a new act went into the ring.

"I guess he must be the most important person in the circus," she declared. "Without him, the acts couldn't start or stop."

The girls were quite worried when Eva's riding act came on, for she had told them she had decided to try the difficult somersault that afternoon instead of waiting for the night performance.

"I'm almost afraid to watch," whispered Connie nervously. "What if she should fall?"

She closed her eyes tightly as the beautiful horse cantered about the ring. But she opened them just in time to see Eva spring lightly from her mount. The little circus girl made a perfect turn, landing firmly on the back of the other horse.

"That's the best somersault she's done yet!" cried Veve, clapping hard.

Eva seemed rather proud of herself too. She was smiling from ear to ear as she rode out of the ring. And she blew kisses to Veve and Connie.

"Let's not watch the rest of the show," said Veve, getting up from the hard seat. "We'll be seeing it again tonight anyway."

In the lot behind the big top, the girls found Eva who had made a quick change from her costume into jeans.

"Did you see my somersault?" she demanded as they strolled up.

"It was fine!" Connie praised her.

"Father said it was perfect," Eva laughed. "And I did it easy as anything. I didn't even think twice before I went into the snap."

"Weren't you afraid?" asked Connie.

"Only for a second," replied the circus girl truthfully. "But I never will be again. I am sure I can do it from now on."

"Of course, Eva, you won't need to do somersaults if you leave the circus," chuckled her father who stood nearby.

"Who is leaving the circus?" demanded Eva. "I have decided to stay right with it. Why, that turn was almost fun!"

The circus girl was in high good humor. Many of the performers came to praise her, telling her

they were proud because she had practiced so hard and conquered her fear. Even the man with the silver whistle stopped by to say a few words.

"Why aren't you two girls in the show?" he asked, turning to Veve and Connie.

"Because we don't know how to do anything," replied Veve.

"I could give you a job," laughed the man.

"What doing?" asked Veve. She was afraid the task might be too hard.

"I might let you blow my silver whistle," the man proposed. "How would you like that?"

"You mean—when the circus is going on?" demanded Veve, stammering a little because she was so surprised and pleased.

"Why not? Here, let me see you try it now."

He handed Veve the silver whistle. She took a deep breath and blew a long, hard blast.

"That's the idea," declared the man. "Only you must blow it sharp and quick."

"May I try it too?" asked Connie eagerly.

The circus man handed her the whistle and she blew two quick blasts.

"That's the way, little lady," said the starter. "It's not hard at all."

"But what if we should blow at the wrong time?" questioned Connie anxiously.

"I'll see that you don't," he assured her. "I'll stand beside you and tell you when to toot the whistle."

Connie and Veve were so thrilled they scarcely could wait until the evening performance. However, they were a tiny bit nervous. What if they should blow the silver whistle at the wrong moment? It might ruin the circus!

"Do you suppose Miss Gordon, Mother, and the Brownies will get here in time for the show?" Connie remarked anxiously.

"I hope so," said Veve, "but it's a long distance for them to come. Something might go wrong so they wouldn't get here."

The afternoon wore on. Never had time seemed to pass so slowly. Veve and Connie wandered through the animal tent and visited the sleek-backed horses which were picketed back of the main top.

As shadows began to enfold the circus lot, the two girls became very uneasy. If Mrs. Williams, Miss Gordon, and the Brownies failed to arrive, they knew they would have no other course but to travel on to the next town.

"I don't think they're coming," Veve declared in a discouraged voice.

"Neither do I," agreed Connie. "If we travel on with the circus train, they may never find us."

Just at that moment Eva came running across the lot toward her friends. The girls could tell from her smiling face that she had exciting news.

"Guess what!" she cried, skipping up to them. "They're here!"

"Mother and Miss Gordon?" cried Connie.

The question was unnecessary, for behind Eva trooped all the Brownies, Miss Gordon, and Mrs. Williams. Although the newcomers looked rather tired from having driven so far, everyone was smiling.

"Connie, are you all right?" asked her mother, giving her a hug and a kiss. "And you, Veve?"

"We're fine!" both girls answered together. And Veve added: "We're to be in the show tonight!"

"Not in a real circus act?" demanded Jane, impressed.

"Just you wait and see," laughed Veve. "Connie and I are going to have one of the most important parts in the show!"

For the next hour, everyone tried to talk at once. Veve and Connie told the Brownies about their exciting experiences with the circus, while the Brownies in turn related many interesting camp incidents.

"Oh, I'd love to go camping, especially at a Brownie Scout camp," declared Eva with an envious sigh. "It would be lots more fun than traveling all summer with a circus."

Taking Jane and Sunny aside, she asked them a multitude of questions about the Brownie organization.

Meanwhile, Veve and Connie were catching up on events which had occurred since they had been carried away in the circus box car.

"When I couldn't find you girls anywhere in Shady Hollow, I was nearly frantic," Miss Gordon related. "First, I went to the hardware store, but the man there had no idea where you had gone."

"Then what did you do?" Veve asked, enjoying every detail of the story.

"We searched the town high and low. Not only the Brownies but the Girl Scouts helped. However, it wasn't until late in the day that the water bucket was found along the railroad tracks."

"The one we bought at the store," supplied Connie.

"When we found that water bucket, you might know we were more worried than ever," Miss Gordon resumed her story. "We were afraid you might have been carried away by a tramp."

"I guess we did make a lot of trouble," Veve sighed. "When we climbed into the circus car the engine wasn't hooked on. We never dreamed the train would start off."

"Finally, we learned that the circus train had gone through just about the time you two girls turned up missing," the leader of the Brownies continued. "We began to put two and two together."

"Was Mother real worried?" asked Connie.

"She was as soon as she learned that you were missing. And so was Mrs. McGuire. I wired both your mothers at Rosedale. Mrs. Williams started immediately for Shady Hollow. Before Mrs. McGuire could come, a wire arrived from the circus people, telling us you had been found."

"I already was at Shady Hollow with my car," Mrs. Williams completed the account. "So it seemed advisable to start here at once. The trip was rather hard on everyone. We must return early in the morning."

After hearing the story, Connie and Veve knew that the Brownies could not have had too pleasant a time during the past few days.

Not only had the camping trip been interrupted, but both Mrs. Williams and Miss Gordon had spent considerable of their own money on the long automobile journey.

However, no one blamed the two girls for the way matters had turned out. Being good sports, the Brownies all said they didn't really mind missing several days of camping fun.

"But they do," Connie whispered to Veve. "I'm as ashamed as I can be for having upset everyone's plans."

Now the Brownie Scouts were pleased to learn that Connie and Veve were to be allowed to blow the silver whistle for the night circus performance. But, as was to be expected, they were a trifle envious.

Eva, who talked with all the Brownies, soon realized this.

"I know!" she exclaimed as an idea popped into her mind. "How would you *all* like to be in the show?"

"How could we?" Rosemary asked doubtfully. "We couldn't very well take turns blowing the silver whistle."

"No, but you could ride in the golden coach in the opening number! Would you like to do it?"

"Oh, yes!" cried all the Brownies.

"Then I'll ask right now!" Eva dashed away and soon ran back to report to the Brownie Scouts that everything had been arranged.

"Be sure to wear your Brownie uniforms so you'll all look alike," she advised the girls.

Miss Gordon had no objection to the girls riding in the golden coach, so the matter quickly was arranged. Eva told the Brownies their part would be very easy.

"When the coach passes the American flag, you're to salute it," she instructed. "That's all you need to do."

"Brownies always salute the flag, so it won't be a bit hard," declared Jane confidently. "I wish we had speaking parts too!"

Just before the dinner hour, Eva brought nearly all of the children of the circus lot to meet the Brownie Scouts. At first they were a trifle shy, but soon everyone was chattering as if they had known each other for years.

Without intending to make the circus children envious, the Brownies told them about the wonderful camp at Shady Hollow and of the good times their organization had in Rosedale.

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"Brownies have so much fun," sighed one of the little circus girls.

"I wouldn't mind traveling with the circus if only I could be a Scout," Eva added wistfully. "But I never can be."

"Why, you have enough girls of the right age to form your own troop," declared Miss Gordon, who had overheard the remark.

"You mean we could have a Brownie troop here in the circus?" Eva asked in amazement. She never before had considered such a possibility.

"Certainly."

"But we have no leader."

"Is there no one in the circus who likes children and would enjoy helping them with their organization?"

Eva thought for a long while. Nearly everyone she knew was too busy to take on any added duties. Then suddenly she had an idea.

"Miss Whitlock might do it!" she cried. "She helps write publicity for the circus and is a nice college girl."

"Shall we talk to her?" Miss Gordon proposed. "Miss Whitlock may be just the person to organize the troop."

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And so it proved to be. As first, Miss Whitlock said she was entirely too busy to direct a Brownie Scout troop. However, after Eva and the other circus girls had teased and teased, she agreed to become their leader.

"We might arrange a mass investiture ceremony tonight," Miss Gordon said thoughtfully. "But would it be possible on such short notice?"

"I guess you don't know the circus!" laughed Eva in delight. "Just tell me what you'll need and we'll have everything ready after the show."

"Everything?"

"I'll just tell the wardrobe man what we need," declared Eva confidently. "Scenery—costumes—flowers—just give me a list."

"The requirements really are very simple."

"Then may we have the ceremony tonight?" Eva pleaded. "I've waited such a long time to be a Brownie."

Miss Gordon gazed from one expectant face to another. All the girls were waiting hopefully for her answer.

"Yes, Eva," she agreed. "If matters can be arranged we'll have the investiture immediately after the show."

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"Just leave everything to me!" laughed the little circus girl.

With a shout of pleasure, she darted off to find the wardrobe man and tell everyone the exciting news.

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CHAPTER 14

Miss Gordon's Watch

THAT night not only the Brownies, but the circus children as well, were so excited they could not eat much dinner.

"Just think!" Eileen declared to Rosemary. "We're to be in a real circus performance—not just a make-believe show! What a story we'll have to tell when we return to Rosedale!"

While the Brownies were excited at the thought of being in the circus, Eva and the circus children could talk only of the Brownie Scout troop which was to be organized. Miss Gordon and Miss Whitlock had spent an hour together, discussing the investiture ceremony.

Eva, happier than she had been since Connie and Veve had joined the circus, flew everywhere, issuing instructions. She was not satisfied until she knew every detail had been arranged for the initiation.

"Will you do your somersault tonight?" Veve asked her as the time approached for the evening performance to start.

"Of course," replied Eva. "Who's afraid? Not I. I'll do that turn in the air without thinking twice. Just don't forget to blow the whistle for my act."

"We won't forget," promised Connie.

Just before the circus started, she and Veve were taken into one of the dressing tents to be fixed up for their "special" number.

One of the clowns who was an expert at make-up, coated the children's faces with a cold-cream-like covering of zinc oxide and olive oil. This was not very pleasant.

Then their faces were heavily dusted with white powder. Next the clown painted on heavy red lines and lips with a stick of grease paint. Connie sat very still while the job was being done, but Veve kept twisting and wiggling.

"It tickles," she complained.

Veve and Connie were dressed in clown suits and then they were ready for their act. The starter of the circus told them where they were to stand. They were instructed to remain out of view near the band players until time for them to blow the silver whistle.

"I'll let Connie start Eva's riding act," the man said. "And Veve may end it."

The music soon struck up, filling the big tent which by this time was crowded with spectators.

Veve and Connie stood very still, feeling a tiny bit frightened.

"I'm glad we don't have to ride a horse or swing on a trapeze," Veve whispered. "Then I *would* be scared."

The music had changed tempo, the signal for the opening procession. Into the arena trooped the elephants, the horses and the performers in their spangled costumes. Expectantly, Veve and Connie waited for the arrival of the golden coach.

Soon it rolled into the sawdust ring, drawn by spirited white horses with red and purple plumes.

Seated proudly in the coach were all the Brownies—Jane, Eileen, Rosemary, Belinda and Sunny, who grinned from ear to ear.

"How grand they look!" Connie whispered.

Half way around the big ring the coach was drawn, and then the driver halted the steeds in the center of the tent facing a large American flag.

The band struck up a piece which the girls knew very well indeed, for it began:

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

As the coach halted, the Brownies smartly saluted, raising right hand to the temple with the first two fingers straight and the baby finger held down.

Everyone cheered and clapped, Connie and Veve longer and louder than anyone else.

Then the music changed, the golden coach rolled on, and the circus began. With their part over, all the Brownies except Veve and Connie, crowded into the front seats to watch the show.

Whenever the whistle blew, the circus acts would change.

"It's nearly time for Eva to ride now," Veve whispered nervously.

"I—I wish we hadn't promised to blow the whistle," Connie said, her teeth chattering.

The man in charge stepped over to where the two girls stood.

"All right," he said in a low tone. "Come with me."

Connie and Veve followed him to the edge of the center ring. The stands were so filled with people they scarcely could see a vacant seat. High in the tent, trapeze performers whirled back and forth on their swings.

The man thrust the silver whistle into Connie's hand.

"Now!" he ordered.

Connie took a deep breath and blew a shrill blast. Instantly, the music changed. Down the ropes slid the trapeze performers. And into the ring rode Eva, her mother and father on their beautiful white horses.

The three riders went through their act, winning thunderous applause. Eva at the right moment did the difficult somersault just as well as she had in the afternoon show.

The man in charge of the circus was watching the act closely. Turning to Veve, he gave the command:

"Now!"

Veve raised the whistle to her lips and blew as hard as she could.

Again the music changed. The riding act left the ring.

"Now scamper back to your places," the circus man instructed the two girls. "That will be all."

Connie and Veve moved toward the exit, trying not to walk in front of spectators. They both felt very proud and relieved, for they had blown the silver whistle at exactly the right moment.

Suddenly Connie paused, staring at a man in the audience.

"Veve, look over there!"

"I can't hear you," answered Veve. "The band is making too much noise."

"Look over in the fifth row of seats!" exclaimed Connie in a louder voice. "Doesn't that man look like Pickpocket Joe?"

Veve turned to stare at the spectator.

"Why, it does look a little like him," she agreed. "Only I can't see him very well because of the bright lights."

"Let's find Clem Gregg right away," proposed Connie. She was very excited now.

"But are you sure it's Pickpocket Joe, Connie? If we made a mistake, Mr. Gregg might be annoyed at us for bothering him."

Connie gazed again at the man who was watching the ring acts.

"I'm not real sure," she admitted.

"Then let's sneak out into the audience and get behind him," suggested Veve. "Perhaps we can see him better then."

"All right," agreed Connie. "Don't look at him when we walk past."

The girls found vacant seats almost directly behind the man. Connie was certain he was the same person she had seen that morning at the railroad station. But was he Pickpocket Joe?

"I wish he would turn his face this way," she whispered to Veve.

"Watch me! I'll make him do it."

Deliberately, Veve gave the man a little kick with her shoe. The fellow turned around quickly enough then.

"Say, be careful," he said, scowling. "That's my back you're kicking."

Now the man didn't really glance at Veve or Connie. On the other hand, the girls obtained an excellent view of his face. Plainly, he had a large mole on his cheek.

"It's Pickpocket Joe!" whispered Connie after the man had turned around again. "Now what shall we do?"

"We ought to get Clem Gregg."

"The circus is nearly over," whispered Connie. "He might start to leave before we could find Mr. Gregg and get back here."

"Then let's just keep watch. If we could catch him taking a pocketbook, we'd have proof he's a pickpocket."

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Connie thought for an instant and then had an even better plan.

"I'll stay here and watch," she offered. "You go as fast as you can for Mr. Gregg."

"I'll get back as quickly as I can," Veve promised, scurrying away.

For a while after she had been left alone, Connie sat very still, scarcely taking her eyes from the man. He did not attempt to take anyone's money, but only watched the circus.

The minutes passed and Veve did not return with Mr. Gregg. Anxiously, Connie looked about for them. She could not see Veve or the detective anywhere in the audience.

All too soon, the show came to an end. As the crowd started to leave the tent, the man also arose.

Connie scarcely knew what to do. She decided to follow the man, but that was not easy because he walked directly into the dense crowd. Connie had to wriggle and push to keep up with him.

The pickpocket was walking toward the exit. He did not appear to notice that he was being followed.

After a while, Connie saw him press quite close to a fat, bald-headed man.

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"Beg pardon," he mumbled. "Did I step on your foot?"

As Pickpocket Joe spoke, his hand slid deftly into the man's coat pocket. His fingers were very nimble. Had Connie not been expecting it, she never would have seen him steal the billfold.

Hardly knowing what else to do, she tugged at the fat man's sleeve.

"Oh, Mister!" she cried. "Your billfold has been taken. And *he* took it." She pointed to Pickpocket Joe.

The bald-headed man clutched at his coat pocket.

"My watch is missing too!" he exclaimed. "Hey, you!"

Whirling around, he seized Pickpocket Joe by the coat-tails. The man jerked away and started to squeeze through the crowd.

"Oh, he's escaping!" cried Connie in alarm.

The fat man started after the pickpocket. However, he never could have overtaken him, for he was too large to get through the crowd easily.

Connie also darted after the pickpocket, calling for help.

Now, unknown to her, assistance was close at hand. Veve, unable to find Clem Gregg, had gathered the Brownies together. Even at this moment, Miss Gordon, Mrs. Williams and the girls were coming directly toward the pickpocket.

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Miss Gordon saw the man at the very instant that Connie called for help. And she recognized him as the stranger who had brushed against her at the Rosedale circus.

"Spread out, girls!" she gave the order. "Form a ring around him."

Veve and the other Brownies obeyed the command, hemming the pickpocket in. Their action gave the fat man time to rush up and seize Pickpocket Joe.

"Help! Help!" he shouted, and his voice carried a long distance in the tent.

"Clem Gregg!" shrieked Connie.

Now the circus detective stood near the tent exit. Hearing the shouts, he elbowed his way to where the Brownies had ringed in the pickpocket.

The thief jerked free from the fat man only to run straight into Clem Gregg.

"Not so fast, Joe," said the detective, seizing his arm and holding it in a tight grip. "I've been looking for you."

"Let me go!" the man demanded angrily. "I've not done anything."

"Yes, he has," accused the fat man. "He took my billfold."

"And he's the same one who stole Miss Gordon's watch and our Brownie camp money," added Veve excitedly.

Detective Gregg went through the man's pockets. He found only one wallet which did not belong to the fat gentleman. Nor was his missing watch there either.

Veve and Connie were deeply puzzled. What had become of the articles? They knew the pickpocket had taken them.

"I suppose you dropped the watch and billfold when you ran," said the detective to Pickpocket Joe. "An old trick of yours!"

"It may be an old trick, but you can't prove anything," the man retorted. "You've no evidence."

Mr. Gregg knew the pickpocket was right. If he turned him over to the police, the man might bring a charge of false arrest.

Hearing the detective's words, the Brownies started back through the thinning crowd. Carefully they searched the sawdust for the missing billfold and watch.

The girls still were searching unsuccessfully when Connie heard a lady directly behind her exclaim:

"Well, I never! See what I've found!"

Connie whirled around in time to see the lady pick up an object from beneath one of the board seats. She knew Pickpocket Joe had passed that same place only a moment before his capture.

"Oh, give it to me, please!" she cried, hurrying toward the lady.

"Surely two watches and a billfold can't belong to you," replied the one who had found the articles.

"*Two* watches," repeated Connie. "I saw Pickpocket Joe steal only one."

Just then she caught a glimpse of the two watches. The large yellow gold one obviously belonged to a man. The other was a lady's wrist watch, tiny and made of white gold.

Connie scarcely could believe her own eyes.

"Why, that's the watch Pickpocket Joe stole back in Rosedale!" she exclaimed. "It belongs to Miss Gordon!"

CHAPTER 15

The Traveling Brownies

WHILE Connie was trying to explain to the lady about the two watches, Clem Gregg hurried over, bringing Pickpocket Joe.

Close behind him were the Brownies, the fat gentleman, Miss Gordon and Connie's mother.

Seeing the big yellow gold watch, the stout man immediately identified it as his property.

"And this is my billfold too!" he exclaimed. Rapidly he counted the money. None of it was missing.

"Miss Gordon, isn't this your lost wrist watch?" Connie asked the teacher, showing her the other recovered article.

"Why, it certainly is!" cried the amazed Miss Gordon. "See, my initials are on the case!"

"How about the Brownie camp money?" Jane interposed hopefully. "Is it here too?"

The Brownies and Mr. Gregg searched carefully under the seat where the lady had found the two watches. Miss Gordon's billfold was not to be found.

"Pickpocket Joe undoubtedly threw it away long ago and spent the money," commented Mr. Gregg. "In my opinion, Miss Gordon, you're lucky to recover your watch."

"I think so too," agreed the troop leader. "My, how proud I am of Veve, Connie, and all my girls."

"Then you're not annoyed at us for being carried away with the circus?" Veve asked quickly.

"It was an accident," smiled the Brownie Scout leader. "A rather fortunate one for me as matters turned out. Otherwise, I might never have recovered my wrist watch."

"All the same, don't ever ride away with another circus," interposed Connie's mother.

Veve and Connie both assured her that they intended to be very careful in the future.

Detective Gregg had tried without success to force the pickpocket to admit he had taken Miss Gordon's billfold as well as her watch. However, the man stubbornly refused to answer questions.

"Oh, well," the detective said with a shrug, "it doesn't matter one way or the other. Now that we've recovered and identified the watches, we have a case against you. Come along to jail."

As Mr. Gregg started to lead the pickpocket away, he thought of an important matter.

"By the way," he said, "I suppose you know of the reward for Pickpocket Joe's capture. The circus offered it three months ago when he was giving us so much trouble."

Now this indeed was news to the Brownies.

"A reward?" echoed Veve. "How much?"

"A hundred dollars."

The girls considered the offer a very large one. Jane asked Mr. Gregg who would receive the money.

"The person or persons responsible for capturing Pickpocket Joe."

"That was Connie," said Veve promptly. "She saw him first."

"No, Veve should have the reward," returned Connie. "Without her, I never would have had the courage to have trailed Pickpocket Joe. And she brought help just when we needed it."

"All the Brownies were responsible for capturing Pickpocket Joe," Veve insisted. "It wasn't any one person."

"Yes, his capture was a cooperative affair," admitted the detective. "As nice an exhibition of team-work as I ever hope to see. All the same, I can't give the reward to seven girls. How about splitting it evenly between Connie and Veve?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the Brownies.

Veve and Connie, rather dazed at the thought of receiving fifty dollars apiece, did not speak.

"I'll see that you receive your checks tonight before the circus moves on," Mr. Gregg said, starting to take Pickpocket Joe away.

"And may we use the money in any way we like?" Veve asked.

"Sure, if your parents give their okay."

"Then I know what I'll do with my money!" cried Veve, her face crinkled in smiles. "First of all, I am going to pay Miss Gordon for my camp fee. This really is money I earned myself, isn't it?"

"Certainly," laughed the Brownie Scout leader.

"I still have forty-five dollars," Veve continued, thinking aloud. "Next I intend to buy myself a Brownie Scout uniform so I'll have one to wear to meetings."

"Splendid!" approved Miss Gordon. "I couldn't think of a better use for the money."

"I still have lots of it left," laughed Veve. "It was mostly my fault that Connie and I were carried away on the circus train. So I want to make up for it by paying for the camping trip."

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"Oh, no!" broke in Connie. "That is what I plan to do with *my* reward money! I intend to repay Miss Gordon the amount she advanced to the troop after Pickpocket Joe stole her billfold."

"How sweet of you both, and I do appreciate it," returned Miss Gordon. "However, I never expected the money to be repaid. This reward money is your very own."

"To spend as we like," added Veve quickly. "And we want to pay for the camping trip, don't we, Connie?"

Connie nodded soberly. "The Brownies lost out on some of their fun at Shady Hollow because of us. So it's only fair that we use a little of our money to pay for the trip."

"Especially when the Brownies helped capture Pickpocket Joe," added Veve quickly.

Miss Gordon thought for a moment and then said that she might allow Veve and Connie to repay the amount that had been lost, but only on one condition.

"And what is the condition?" inquired Connie.

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"That some of the money be used to provide a few days extra camping time at Shady Hollow."

"To make up for the days we were with the circus!" Veve cried instantly. "Oh, I'd like that!"

"So should I," agreed Connie.

"Your balsam beds are waiting for you at Shady Hollow," laughed Belinda. "You'll have to practice your cooking though, because the rest of us have improved since you went away."

The matter of the reward money settled, the girls set off to find Eva and the other circus children who were to take part in the Brownie investiture ceremony.

A moment later the circus rider came into the big top, accompanied by the girls who had decided to join the organization. Altogether there were five circus children, ranging in age from seven to ten years.

"Workmen will tear down this tent in a few minutes," Eva explained. "So we will have the ceremony in one of the dressing rooms. Everything should be ready by now."

As the Brownies and the circus girls walked to the nearby dressing tent, Connie and Veve related the manner in which Pickpocket Joe had been captured. Eva was greatly impressed by the story.

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"Brownies certainly know how to work together," she declared. "I'm more than ever glad I'm going to become one."

Because the hour was so late, Miss Gordon and Miss Whitlock had decided to make the investiture ceremony a mass affair and quite brief. All the circus children would be taken into the organization in a group.

Upon reaching the dressing tent, the Rosedale Troop Brownies went inside. Eva and the other circus girls waited at the doorway until they were summoned. Finally they were told they might ask for admittance.

"Who comes to the fairy woods?" Connie asked as Eva scratched on the tent flap.

"Five girls who wish to become Brownies," replied Eva promptly. She had been told what to say. "May we come in?"

"Why do you wish to become Brownie Scouts?" inquired the voice from the darkened tent.

"To form a troop of our own," answered Eva.

"Then enter the fairy wood," directed the voice.

Scarcely knowing what to expect, the circus girls tiptoed into the tent. In the glare of the gasoline lamp they beheld a room which had been transformed into a bower of beauty.

A thick carpet of artificial grass covered the tent floor. Canvas walls had been completely hidden with a painted backdrop of forest trees.

Embedded in the mat of grass were five diamond-shaped mirrors, which had been borrowed from dressing rooms of the circus performers. Behind the row of mirrors in a semi-circle, sat Connie, Veve and the other members of the Rosedale Troop.

Briefly Miss Gordon explained the purpose of the Brownie Scout organization and its aim to help each girl find and develop her particular abilities so that she might become a happy, resourceful person.

Then the circus girls were instructed to line up in front of the mirrors which represented fairy pools.

"Gaze deep into the water at your own reflection," Miss Gordon said. "Then—presto-chango!"

As she spoke, Brownies of the Rosedale Troop stepped forward, turning each circus child so that for a moment her back was to the mirror.

On the heads of the circus girls were clapped Brownie Scout caps which the wardrobe mistress had bought that very day in the city.

Then the five girls were whirled around again so that once more they gazed down into the mirror. This time as they studied their reflections, Brownies appeared to be gazing up at them.

"Now let's all repeat the Brownie Scout Promise and try to live up to it," Miss Gordon said.

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

The circus girls repeated the words, speaking them very clearly. Then the Rosedale Brownies saluted the new scouts and the ceremony was over.

"Do you suppose we'll be the first troop of traveling Brownies?" Eva asked, cocking her new Brownie cap at different angles to see which was the most becoming.

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised," laughed Miss Gordon. "When you register your troop with national headquarters you might inquire."

"Having a Brownie troop will be fun," Eva declared. "I'll write the Rosedale Troop members letters reporting how we get along. You must send me all your ideas."

"We'll exchange them," smiled Miss Gordon. "I'm certain your own troop will think of many ways to be useful."

All too soon it came time for the Rosedale Brownies to say goodbye to their many circus friends. Eva must board the circus train sleeper at midnight, traveling on to another city. The Brownies, who would spend the night at a nearby tourist camp, expected to return to Shady Hollow the next morning.

Eva told the Rosedale Brownies how nice it had been knowing them. "But I hate to think that soon your car will be traveling one direction and our circus train another," she sighed.

"Why not come home with Connie and me?" Veve invited impulsively.

"Thank you," replied Eva politely. "I have thought it over and I would rather stay with the circus. Especially now that we have organized a Brownie Scout troop of our own."

"But you'll visit us sometime?" inquired Connie.

"I'll see you again next year," promised Eva. "Watch for the circus when it comes to Rosedale."

Before Miss Gordon, Mrs. Williams, and the Brownie Scouts were ready to leave the circus lot, Mr. Carsdale and Clem Gregg came around to shake hands and bid them goodbye.

The detective had not forgotten to bring the reward money.

With a flourish, he handed Connie and Veve each a check for fifty dollars, which they in turn gave to Mrs. Williams to keep for them.

"You did a very real service in capturing Pickpocket Joe," the detective praised the two girls. "Thanks to you, he's in jail now where he'll make no further trouble for a while."

"And don't forget," added Mr. Carsdale in parting. "When the circus hits Rosedale next year, you're all to be my guests."

"We'll remind you," laughed Rosemary, and to this, all the other Brownies agreed.

The tourist camp where Miss Gordon, Mrs. Williams and the Brownies were to spend the night, was situated not far from the railroad siding.

Accordingly, the party stopped there briefly to see Eva and to watch the circus train pull away.

"Are you sorry not to be traveling on with the show, Connie?" asked her mother.

"Oh, no," Connie answered honestly. "I would much rather return to Shady Hollow Camp. Besides, don't you need me?"

"Indeed I do," declared her mother, giving her a squeeze. "Neither your father nor I could manage to get along without you."

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"A circus is interesting to watch," added Veve thoughtfully, "but for every day I think it would become rather tiresome."

"Just the same, it was fun to capture Pickpocket Joe and earn the reward," sighed Connie, watching soberly as the circus train pulled from the siding onto the main track. "I hope we have another adventure sometime."

Now you may be sure that many surprises awaited the Brownie Scouts at Shady Hollow Camp, but of course they could only guess at the good times in store for them.

The circus train slowly began to pull from the siding. Windows of the long line of sleepers were dark.

Although the Brownies knew Eva was somewhere aboard, they had no idea where her berth was located. It made them feel a trifle sad to think that they wouldn't be able to wave a last farewell.

"We may as well go now," suggested Miss Gordon.

"No, wait!" cried Veve.

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Suddenly on the darkened circus train, a single light twinkled in one of the sleepers toward the end of the line. As the Brownies watched, it winked on and off three times in rapid succession.

"That's Eva!" cried Connie. "It's her way of saying goodbye."

Soon the car rolled slowly past the place where the Brownies stood. Eva's smiling face was pressed against the window glass.

"Goodbye! Goodbye!" shouted the Brownies, though they were afraid she might not hear.

But Eva did. Still wearing her new Brownie cap, she nodded and smiled. She kept tugging at the window.

Suddenly it flew up and the little circus girl shouted: "See you next summer! Have a good time in camp!"

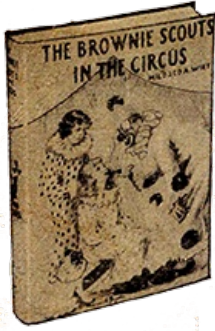
The Brownies kept waving until the circus train was far up the track. Then they turned to walk to the waiting automobile.

"Say, won't we have tales to tell when we reach home," remarked Veve. "All the girls in Rosedale will wish they were Brownies when they hear what happened to us!"

"Even after we pay for the camping trip, we'll have some of our reward money left," added Connie, linking arms with her friend.

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Already the circus train had been forgotten. The Brownies, you see, were happy just to be going home.



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was very even tempered, *beban* *changed to*
was very even tempered, [began](#)
- Page 95
scoot downstars and open *changed to*
scoot [downstairs](#) and open
- Page 134
She certainly never had expected *changed to*
She [certainly](#) never had expected
- Page 162
With a startled exclamation *changed to*
With a startled [exclamation](#)
- Page 199
it certainly is *changed to*
it [certainly](#) is
- Page 208
come home with Connie and Me *changed to*
come home with Connie and [me](#)

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