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Their Tree House**, by Mildred A. Wirt

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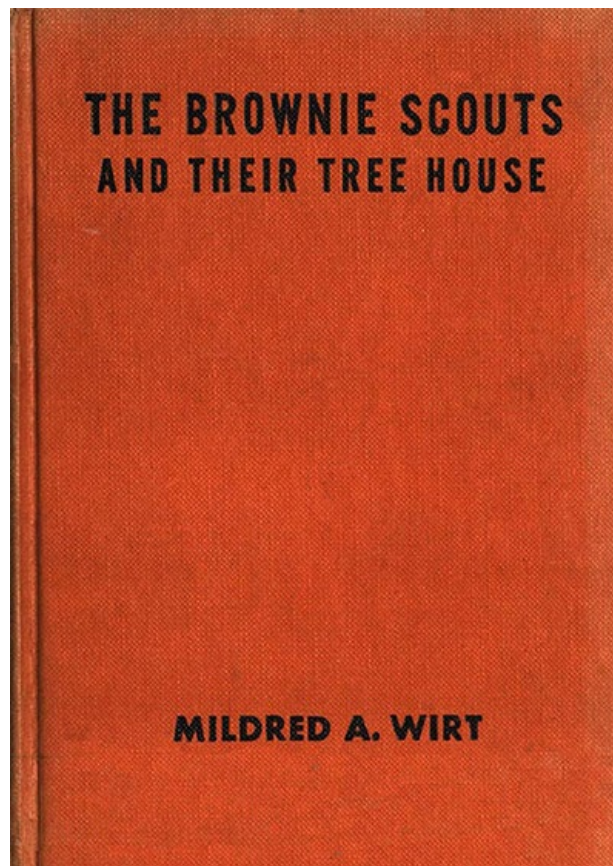
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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AND THEIR TREE  
HOUSE \*\*\*



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**The Brownie Scouts  
and Their Tree House**



“Open it quick!” urged Connie.  
“Brownie Scouts and their Tree House”  
(See [page 12](#))

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# The Brownie Scouts and Their Tree House

by  
Mildred A. Wirt

Illustrated

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THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AND THEIR TREE HOUSE

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# The Brownie Scouts and Their Tree House

## CHAPTER 1

### A Brownie Wish

ALL morning the forest had echoed with laughter. The Brownie Scouts—six of them—together with their leader, Miss Gordon, were enjoying a weekly hike through the metropolitan natural park.

Sure-footed, the girls had roamed over the many trails, lingering by the brook and tossing stones from the rustic bridge.

Now as the sun rose higher, they played their favorite game of identifying trees.

“Oh, that beautiful one directly ahead is a walnut!” declared Connie Williams.

The little girl was a leader in the Rosedale Brownie Troop and very bright at school. However, all the girls liked her for she never tried to show off.

“Oh, I don’t think it’s a walnut tree!” exclaimed Veve McGuire.

The dark-haired, freckled girl lived next door to Connie. Sometimes, just for the fun of it, she disagreed with her friend.

“It’s an oak tree!” chimed in Jane Tuttle, tossing her long yellow braids.

A hoot arose from the other Brownies, Sunny Davidson, Eileen Webber and Rosemary Fritche. Jane, they knew, nearly always was wrong about trees.

“It couldn’t be an oak,” insisted Eileen. “The leaves are shaped all wrong.”

Sunny appealed to Miss Gordon. “What kind of tree do you say it is?” she demanded. “An oak or a walnut?”

“A walnut,” replied the Brownie leader. “But then, I could be mistaken. Let’s look at the identification tag.”

Nearly all of the largest trees in the park had been marked with their correct names. The girls enjoyed making their own guesses, and then checking to see if they were correct.

Before Connie could do so, Veve darted ahead to read the tag on the tree trunk.

“Ha!” she cried. “Everyone is wrong! It isn’t a walnut and it isn’t an oak. It’s a *Liriodendron tulipifera*!”

“Oh, that’s the scientific name,” laughed Miss Gordon.

“It says tulip tree underneath,” revealed Veve.

“A tulip?” repeated the Brownie Scout leader, deeply puzzled. “That’s odd. To my way of thinking, it doesn’t look a bit like a tulip tree.”

“Aren’t the leaves of a tulip dark green and very glossy?” inquired Connie. She felt quite crestfallen to have made a mistake.

“I always thought so,” replied Miss Gordon. “Also, the leaves of a tulip usually are restless, almost like those of a poplar tree. Apparently though, I’m not as clever about recognizing varieties of trees as I thought.”

Starting on down the trail, the Brownies soon came to another interesting-looking specimen.

“Well, there at least is a tree that no one can mistake,” declared the Brownie leader. “Who agrees with me that it’s a red maple?”

“I do!” laughed Connie.

"Of course!" shouted Jane. "No one can mistake a maple."

As the girls approached the beautiful, slender tree, Miss Gordon told them that at every season the red maple had distinguishing characteristics.

"Even during winter, the twigs shine as if covered with red varnish," the teacher explained.

Each leaf, she added, had from three to five points, often with red stems.

"I'm going to gather some of the leaves for my notebook," declared Eileen. "I want to find one that is changing color."

Although frost had not yet come, the weather had turned somewhat chilly. The Brownies noticed that many of the trees were beginning to shed their leaves. Others were turning yellow, gold and rusty brown.

In the act of picking up an especially pretty leaf from the ground, Eileen chanced to glance at the tag tacked to the tree trunk.

"Say! This isn't a maple tree!" she exclaimed.

"Go on!" Sunny retorted. "Don't try to kid us!"

"Read the tag for yourself if you don't believe me."

The other Brownies clustered about Sunny. In amazement they read that the tree was a white ash.

"But that's utterly impossible!" protested Miss Gordon. "Why, I never in my life failed to recognize a red maple!"

"We have a white ash tree in our yard at home," contributed Rosemary. "It has seed pods and the leaves droop. This tree doesn't look one bit like our white ash."

"I thought I could recognize nearly all of the more common trees," wailed Connie. "Now I'm mixed up."

"We're all mixed up," said Miss Gordon. "I simply can't understand it. Do you suppose the tags could have been exchanged?"

"Maybe the pixies did it!" laughed Sunny. She liked to say she believed in fairies, although she knew none actually existed.

Deeply puzzled, the Brownie Scouts resumed their hike.

Coming presently to a giant oak tree, they selected the site for their picnic ground. The brisk morning walk through the wild park area had made the girls very hungry. Eagerly they spread out the lunch.

"What a beautiful oak!" Connie said dreamily, gazing up into the leafy branches.

"Are you sure it's an oak?" teased Jane, biting into a peanut butter sandwich. "There's no identification tag."

"In that case, I'm sure!" chuckled Connie. "Don't you say it's an oak, Miss Gordon?"

The teacher agreed with her that it was. "I can't understand our mistake about those other trees," she added, frowning thoughtfully. "When we leave the park area, I intend to stop at the caretaker's house and talk to him about it."

After finishing their lunch, the Brownies rested for a while beneath the rugged old tree.

"Tell us a story, Miss Gordon," Rosemary urged, stretching lazily on the grass.

"One about fairies," added Sunny.

"May we hear the story about the Brownies?" pleaded Veve. "The one upon which our Brownie Scout organization is based?"

The girls had heard this tale many times, but never tired of having it repeated.

So, starting off "Once upon a time in old England," Miss Gordon launched forth into the story of how a little girl and a boy named Mary and Tommy learned to be helpful in their home.

She told of their visit to the wise old owl in the forest and their plea that he instruct them how to find the brownies who once did all the family work.

"Hoot! Hoot!" said Veve, pretending that she was the owl. "I know of two brownies that live in your house right now!"

"In my house?" echoed Connie, taking on the part of Mary, the little girl.

"In your house," repeated Veve. "But they are idle."

"How can we find those brownies?"

"I'll tell you how to find one of them," said Veve, the owl. "Go to the pool in the woods and turn yourself around three times, saying this charm:

"Twist me and turn me and show me the elf,  
I looked in the water and saw—"

"MYSELF," shouted the other girls in the Rosedale Brownie troop.

"Oh, you're getting ahead of the story!" Veve protested. "Mary didn't learn that she was the Brownie until a long while later."

"We all know what happened," said Jane impatiently. "The children started doing the work at home, making the old couple think they were the brownies. Then one day they were discovered."

"Even so, they kept on helping," Connie contributed. "And everyone said the children were a blessing, not a burden."

"That's a bob-tailed version of Mrs. Julianna Horatia Ewing's lovely story," Miss Gordon laughed. "More than anything else, it embodies the ideals of our organization."

"I wish there were real brownies today," Veve said wistfully.

"Ones that would do useful things such as washing the breakfast dishes!"

"And making the beds!" added Eileen. At home that particular task fell to her.

"If I had a brownie all my own, I'd want him to plan special surprises for me," declared Veve dreamily. "I wouldn't wear him out doing grubby household tasks."

"What would you ask your brownie to do?" Connie asked.

"Oh—wonderful magic things!"

"For instance?" probed Connie.

"Well—oh, I know! I'd have him build me a tree house!"

"A tree house!" exclaimed Eileen, intrigued by the thought.

"I'd have the brownie build it right here in this oak tree," Veve went on grandly. "It would be a wonderful little house! With windows and doors and a roof! I'd have curtains and a table and chairs!"

"How would you get up to your tree house?" scoffed Jane. "Fly like the birds?"

"Oh, my brownie would build a stairway around the tree trunk. He'd take care of everything!"

"You need a carpenter, not a brownie!" laughed Connie. "Some boys in our neighborhood once built a tree house. It wasn't very sturdy though and fell down when a strong wind came along."

"A tree house would be grand," declared Sunny. "Oh, wouldn't it be heavenly if the Brownies—us, I mean—had a place of our very own up in that oak?"

"Let's all wish hard for it!" proposed Veve, fired by her own imagination. "Maybe—who knows—it might come true!"

"Are you crazy?" demanded Jane scornfully. "You know very well wishes hardly ever come true."

"Well, they could!" Veve insisted.

"Let's all wish," urged Sunny. "What's the difference? Even if it doesn't come true, it won't do any harm."

"It's silly," Jane argued.

Sunny and Veve refused to be turned aside. To humor them, the other girls said they would join in making the wish.

Jane, however, would have no part in the pretense.

"We have to do this right or it won't work," Veve instructed the Brownies. "Everyone close her



eyes.”

“Not I!” announced Jane.

“Now everyone wish very hard for a beautiful little house right above our heads in this oak,” went on Veve, ignoring Jane. “Wish hard, hard, HARD.”

Jane snickered.

“Where’s your tree house?” she teased. “I don’t hear any hammering.”

“The charm didn’t work because you wouldn’t wish,” Veve retorted crossly.

“It didn’t work because there aren’t any brownies,” corrected Jane. “Of all the silly ideas—”

A stone clattered down the hillside, rolling and bouncing until it came to rest almost at the base of the oak tree.

“What was that?” Jane interrupted herself, startled by the sound.

Veve was staring at the stone, unable to believe her own eyesight.

“Look!” she finally managed to say.

Attached to the stone—in fact, wrapped entirely around it—was a paper. A rubber band held it tightly in place.

“Well, what do you know?” Jane mumbled.

By this time Veve had recovered from the first shocked surprise.

Darting forward, she seized the stone.

“It’s a message for us!” she shouted. “Who says now that there aren’t any brownies?”

## CHAPTER 2

# The Tossed Stone

SO excited that they chattered like a flock of blackbirds, the Brownie Scouts gathered about Veve.

"Open it quick!" urged Connie.

"What does it say?" demanded Jane, forgetting that she ever had teased Veve about being silly.

The stone obviously had been tossed from the cliff a short distance behind the oak tree.

Miss Gordon gazed quickly in that direction. However, the face of the cliff was covered with cedar and scrub trees. She could see no one hiding there.

"Here, give me that paper!" Eileen exclaimed, trying to take it from Veve. "Your hand is shaking so you can't unwrap it."

Veve, however, had gained a grip upon herself. Quickly, she unrolled the paper.

"It is a message for us!" she cried. "It is!"

"Read it, can't you?" pleaded Jane.

"To the little girl who believes in brownies," Veve began, her voice shaky. "Return to this same tree two days from today and who knows? Your wish may be fulfilled."

"Well, can you beat that?" Jane muttered.

"It proves there are brownies!" Veve cried happily. "We're to have our tree house!"

"If that brownie is so smart, why didn't he just wave a wand and have the tree house built presto-chango?" Eileen asked, doubt entering her mind. "You know what I think? Someone is playing a joke on us!"

"Of course!" agreed Jane, seizing upon the explanation. "From that cliff above, our conversation easily could be heard. Every word of it!"

"Let's find out," proposed Connie. "May we go up there, Miss Gordon?"

The teacher hesitated and then nodded consent. "Yes, I think we should investigate," she said. "I'm curious myself to learn who tossed that stone. I tend to share Jane's belief that someone must be playing a joke on us."

Losing not a moment, the Brownie Scouts started up the steep trail. In their haste they slipped and scuffed their shoes on the sharp stones. But at last they reached the summit.

"No one here!" Connie announced, glancing carefully about.

"Of course not!" exclaimed Sunny triumphantly. "That proves the message came from a genuine brownie!"

"Genuine, my eye!" Jane cut in. "Ask Miss Gordon if fairies and brownies are real."

"We all know they are merely story-book characters," the Brownie Scout leader said. Then, seeing how crestfallen Sunny and Veve looked, she added kindly:

"But someone certainly tossed a message down the slope. Let's look around for clues."

Spreading out, the girls covered every inch of the cleared area.

"Someone was here all right!" cried Connie as she came upon several large footprints. "He wasn't a brownie either! Look at these huge footprints!"

At least six large shoe marks were visible in the moist earth.

"A person could have stood here and looked directly down upon our picnic site," Miss Gordon observed. "I wonder if voices carry that far."

Eileen and Rosemary offered to run back to the oak tree to make a test. Five minutes later as they talked together below the cliff, those above were able to hear nearly every word.

"That explains how the person chanced to learn of Veve's wish," Miss Gordon said.

"But it doesn't explain who threw the stone," protested Veve.

"It was someone's idea of a practical joke," Connie replied, sitting down on a log to rest. "Too bad! I'd have liked a tree house. Think of the good times we could have had there."

"Maybe we'll get it yet," Veve hinted.

The others, with the exception of Sunny, laughed. They were convinced that the stone had been thrown by a practical joker.

"All right, laugh!" Veve said crossly. "Maybe I will have the last one."

"You aren't silly enough to think that tree house will be built?" Jane demanded.

"Maybe it will. At any rate, I intend to come back here in two days to see."

"Why wait two days?" Sunny asked. "Let's come again tomorrow."

Veve, however, said that would never do. "We must obey instructions exactly," she insisted. "Miss Gordon, may we have another hike through the park?"

"Well, I suppose so, if the others are willing," the Brownie leader answered thoughtfully. "As for finding a tree house at the end of two days—well, Veve, I think it unwise to build up false hope."

"At least it won't do any harm to come," Veve argued. "Please, Miss Gordon."

"It's entirely up to the girls to decide what they wish to do."

Veve quickly put the matter to a vote. Everyone except Jane said they would like to return to the park area in two days.

Rejoining Rosemary and Eileen at the oak tree, the girls gathered together their knapsacks and nature notebooks.

Now not even Veve really expected that upon their return to the area they would find anything out of the ordinary.

However, in the past the Brownies had enjoyed several unusual adventures. From experience they knew that strange things could occur. Hadn't the entire troop once been snowbound at Snow Valley?

And another time, Veve and Connie had been carried away with a traveling circus. The Brownie Scouts never would forget that time, because in trying to find the two girls they also had become involved with a man named Pickpocket Joe.

Even more recently the Brownies had earned a great deal of money picking cherries at a nearby orchard. Through their efforts the city had sponsored a cherry festival. Then, as a special reward, the Brownies had been sent to Washington with all expenses paid. This story has been recounted in another volume, entitled: "The Brownie Scouts in the Cherry Festival."

Wishing for a tree house, however, was an entirely different matter. Even Veve and Sunny who were very imaginative, knew that fairies existed only in story books. Yet could one be certain that the message telling them to return had been a joke?

"Time to start home," Miss Gordon abruptly announced. "We've had enough excitement for one day."

En route to the exit gate, the girls kept an alert watch for strangers. The trail was deserted and not a car had been parked in the enclosure near the road.

Without meeting a single person they came presently to the caretaker's stone hut.

"Let's stop here a minute," Connie suggested. "Maybe the superintendent can tell us who has been in the park today."

"An excellent idea," agreed Miss Gordon. "I was about to propose the same thing myself. I also want to ask the caretaker about those markings on the trees."

A cheerful fire blazed on the hearth inside the stone gatehouse.

As the Brownies shuffled in, the superintendent, Charlie Karwhite, poked at a log to stir up the flames.

Hearing footsteps, he turned around to smile at the girls. The six were dressed exactly alike in pinchecked Brownie uniforms, stout hiking shoes, and beanies on their heads.

"Well, well," he said in a friendly way. "A delegation! Anything I can do for you?"

Mr. Karwhite, a man well past middle age, had supervised the metropolitan park for seven years.

The heavily wooded tract was less than a mile from the outskirts of Rosedale. Stone fireplaces had been built in the area and many trails marked. For the most part, however, the park remained in its natural state.

Circling around, the Brownies enjoyed the warmth of the fire.

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Miss Gordon explained that the troop had hiked through the park. "A few minutes ago we had a most unusual experience," she added.

Sensing that the teacher had something interesting to report, Mr. Karwhite put his poker away and listened attentively.

"First of all, may I ask a question?" began Miss Gordon. "Are all your trees correctly marked with scientific names?"

"Why, yes. The job was done early this spring by Phillip Mallet, the naturalist."

"Several trees on Trail 3 seem to be improperly identified. Either that or I am hopelessly confused."

"I've not been over the trail within the last three days," Mr. Karwhite replied. "I'll check the matter as soon as I can."

The matter of the trees disposed of, the Brownie leader next asked the superintendent if many persons had visited the park that morning.

"Not many," he informed. "A few boys came through right after breakfast. They didn't stay long."

"No one else?"

"Two or three cars drove through."

"No one in the last hour or so?"

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"Not that I've noticed," Mr. Karwhite answered. "However, there is another gateway at the far end of the park. Anything wrong?"

"Someone played a little joke on us," the teacher said. "We were eating our lunch by a large oak tree when someone tossed a stone from the cliff."

"A message was attached," contributed Sunny. "It said—"

Jane gave her a hard nudge in the ribs. She did not want Mr. Karwhite to hear about the tree house.

Sunny subsided into silence. The superintendent did not appear to notice how quickly she had broken off.

"It must have been those boys who threw the stone," he said. "I've warned 'em to behave themselves or have their park privileges denied."

"We're making no complaint," Miss Gordon said quickly. "After all, it was just a little joke. Furthermore, we aren't certain who tossed the stone. The footprints we saw on the cliff were quite large."

"Well, if you're annoyed again, let me know," Mr. Karwhite invited. "I'll not tolerate any foolishness."

The Brownies soon said good-bye to the superintendent and started for home. Veve and Sunny lagged at the rear of the line, talking over the events of the morning.

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"Maybe it was just a joke," Veve said, walking along with her arm about Sunny's waist. "I don't think so though."

"Neither do I," agreed the other. "I'm certain that stone never was thrown by a boy."

"There's one thing sure," Veve announced impressively. "I don't care what the other Brownies do! Two days from today I'm going back to the park."

"So am I," agreed Sunny. "I don't really believe in fairies, but if we should get our tree house—how wonderful it would be!"

## CHAPTER 3

# Surprise!

TWO days had elapsed.

For the Brownie Scouts, never had time seemed to pass so slowly.

"Oh, I hardly can wait to see if anything has happened!" Veve declared excitedly.

Except for Sunny and herself, the other girls pretended they weren't much excited at the thought of returning to the metropolitan park area.

Actually, they wouldn't have missed the hike for anything in the world.

On the appointed day, the girls gathered after school at Miss Gordon's home.

Each Brownie brought her own neat package of sandwiches. In addition, the leader had provided two thermos bottles filled with hot chocolate.

"This is a silly trip," Jane complained good-naturedly. "I wish we'd gone somewhere else."

The beautiful early autumn day had turned a trifle chilly. Even if the weather had not been nippy, the girls would have walked fast, so eager were they to reach the park.

"I don't know why I came," Jane went on. "It's a long walk out here."

"No one asked you to come," Veve said crossly. She was certain that when they reached the oak tree, Jane would say "I told you so." Already she had been teased too much about wishing for a tree house.

"Girls, let's not bicker," interposed Miss Gordon. "I thought we were going on this hike for the fun of it. I'm sure no one expects to find a tree house."

Veve and Sunny looked at each other and made no response.

"*They* expect to find one!" teased Jane. "I guess all that wishful dreaming comes from reading books like 'Jack and the Beanstalk.' Veve figures a tree house will sprout out of the ground, complete with curtains and a fireplace!"

"Oh, hush!" Veve retorted savagely.

Miss Gordon brought peace by directing the girls' attention to a rabbit which had paused near a briar patch. When Jane tried to creep closer, the animal hopped away.

Passing the stone gatehouse, the Brownies again selected Trail three.

"Why don't we eat our lunch before we go to the cliff?" proposed Jane. "I'm hungry."

"Try eating your words for a while," Veve muttered. "The rest of us want to go straight to the oak tree."

Jane said no more. Or at least she managed to remain silent until the troop approached the cliff area. Then she could not resist remarking: "If we should find anything, I'd drop dead! I would for a fact."

Veve, who was at the head of the line of hikers, had stopped on the trail.

"All right, Jane!" she exclaimed. "Drop dead then! 'Cause I can see something ahead."

"Oh, you're kidding," Jane retorted, unimpressed. "You don't see a thing."

"Don't I?" demanded Veve. "Then my eyes are deceiving me!"

Swinging her knapsack over the other shoulder, she ran forward.

"Do you suppose—" Sunny began, and then she uttered a little shriek of joy. "Veve's right!" she cried. "Something has been built in the oak tree!"

Sunny also bolted down the trail.

Not to miss out on anything, the other girls followed as fast as they could.

Reaching the clearing, the Brownies stopped dead in their tracks.

Directly ahead of them stood Veve and Sunny, their enchanted gaze fastened upon a little house built in the lower branches of the oak tree.

"Pinch me," whispered Connie. "I know I'm dreaming."

Eileen obliged by giving her such a hard nip that she yipped in pain.

"Is it real?" whispered Rosemary in awe. "It doesn't seem possible!"

Jane was too dumbfounded to speak. Veve and Sunny however, capered around as if they were crazy.

"Didn't we tell you?" Veve shouted. "Now who says wishes don't come true?"

The square house had a window, a door and a balcony with a stairway leading down. The steps were far apart, but a railing had been put up so that anyone climbing to the little house would not fall.

"What are we waiting for?" demanded Veve. Excitedly, she started up the stairway.

"Veve!" called Miss Gordon.

Reluctantly the little girl waited for the teacher.

"Dear me, I don't know what to think!" Miss Gordon declared testing the stairway. "The steps are well constructed and seem safe enough."

"Up I go!" shouted Veve.

Before the teacher could offer a protest, she darted up the steps.

Reaching the balcony, Veve turned to look down. The Brownies, watching from below, appeared rather small.

"Oh, it's a wonderful house!" the little girl shouted. "And it's all ours too!"

She disappeared into the house.

Sunny and Connie now started up the stairway, but Miss Gordon called them back.

"I must be certain that the steps are strong enough to bear so much weight," she warned. "I'll climb up first. Then if it appears safe, you all may come."

"Hurry! Hurry!" urged Jane, who now had forgotten that she ever had made fun of Veve or Sunny.

As Miss Gordon started up the steps, Veve popped her head out of a window.

"It's super—simply super!" she yelled down. "The house has a window seat and a cupboard!"

The other Brownies by this time were jumping up and down in their excitement. Unable to wait for Miss Gordon to give the word, Eileen started up a few steps.

"The stairway is very sturdily built," the leader called down. "You may come up one at a time. Eileen first, since she is half way up."

Each girl took her turn. Jane, the disbeliever, was the last one to climb the stairway.

As she viewed the interior of the neat playhouse, her breath was quite taken away.

"Oh, this place will look grand when we bring dishes and books and put curtains at the window!" she exclaimed.

"But is it really ours?" returned Miss Gordon quietly. "I can't understand how this house came to be here. It is well built, evidently by a skilled carpenter."

"We don't care who built it," chortled Jane. "It's ours to use, isn't it?"

"I'm far from certain that it is," replied the leader. "This is a public park you must remember."

"Very few people come here, especially so late in the year."

"All the same, I'm sure no one would have the right to put up a tree house without permission. Or for that matter to use it."

The house had been built large enough so that all the Brownies and their leader could enter.

At first Miss Gordon would allow only two or three of the girls in the room at one time. As the

house remained absolutely firm in the branches she finally permitted the others to join the group.

"Let's eat our lunch here!" Connie proposed. "Oh, we're going to have wonderful times!"

"Providing we're allowed to use the playhouse," Miss Gordon reminded her. "It's a marvelous thing in a way—but I can't understand how it came about."

"The brownies," laughed Veve.

"A very substantial brownie, I think," said Miss Gordon. "Mr. Karwhite may know something about the matter. We'll question him when we leave the park."

As the girls ate their sandwiches and sipped hot chocolate, they made elaborate plans. The house was perfect, they thought, except that it needed a table and chairs.

"How cosy it will look with a rag rug on the floor and a curtain at the window," Rosemary declared. "And the view! One can see the road from here!"

"And the stone bridge!" added Eileen, peering over her shoulder.

"I feel just like a bird living up in a tree," laughed Veve happily. "Wouldn't it be fun to sleep here at night?"

"The house would rock you to sleep!" laughed Connie. "It's just like a cradle when the wind blows."

"It wouldn't be any fun in a storm," Sunny said with a shiver. "This house would rock like an earthquake was shaking it then. And it might come crashing down."

The girls so thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the little house that they took a long while eating lunch.

With an anxious glance at her wrist watch, Miss Gordon warned that it was time to leave.

"We have stayed far too long," she declared, gathering up the lunch papers. "Unless we hurry, we'll be caught on the road after dark. That will never do."

"We may come again soon?" Sunny pleaded. "Tomorrow perhaps?"

"I hardly know what to say," replied Miss Gordon. "Before I give my answer, I must make inquiries. I do hope though, that this house is truly ours to use."

Reluctantly, the girls trooped down from the tree house.

Once on the ground, they stood for a moment, gazing up at it.

"Wouldn't it be dreadful if it vanished over night?" Connie said, voicing the fear that had beset them all. "Oh, it's such a perfect little house!"

"Let's wish hard that it's just for us," proposed Sunny.

Not even Jane offered a protest.

"And let's wish that the brownie, whoever he is, builds us a nice table and set of chairs!" added Veve.

"Why, that's greedy," protested Connie. "We should be grateful that we have this splendid house."

Veve, however, only laughed, as she turned to follow the others up the trail.

"It's forethought," she insisted. "I have a hunch we'll get to use this darling little tree house for a long while. So while that Mr. Brownie is in a good mood, why not ask him to do a good job of furnishing our home?"

## CHAPTER 4

**Through the Field Glass**

IN leaving the park area, the Brownies again stopped at the gate house to talk to Mr. Karwhite.

The superintendent listened in amazement to their story that a tree house had been built in the branches of the oak.

"Why, I can't believe it!" he exclaimed.

"Then the house couldn't have been constructed by park workmen," remarked Miss Gordon.

"I should say not!" agreed Mr. Karwhite. "We'd be afraid to put up a tree house lest some child climb up and fall. I'll have it torn down immediately."

A wail of protest greeted this announcement.

"Oh, no! You can't!" cried Veve. "It's such a cute little house."

"It was built for the Brownies too," insisted Sunny earnestly. "It would be a shame to destroy such a darling little place."

"The house seems very well built," added Miss Gordon. "Whoever put it up knew his business."

"That's what annoys me," sputtered Mr. Karwhite. "No one had the right to put up any structure without my permission. Where is this tree house?"

Although the hour was growing late, the Brownies offered to show the superintendent the way.

Back at the oak, Mr. Karwhite scratched his head in perplexity as he gazed up at the house amid the leaves.

"Well, at least it looks well built and in keeping with the rustic design of other park buildings," he admitted grudgingly.

"Then you won't tear it down?" Connie asked.

"I suppose it could stay up until winter," the superintendent said after he had inspected the stairway. "Now that it's so late in the season not many children come here any more. The house isn't as high from the ground as I thought either."

"And the stairway has a railing," pointed out Eileen. "Oh, Mr. Karwhite, having a little house like this would be so wonderful!"

The superintendent turned to Miss Gordon. "I can't have children playing here unwatched," he said. "Now, if you were to be here with them—"

"I always accompany the Brownies on all their hikes."

"Then I'll let the house stand for the time being," the man consented. "I don't know who built this house, but I have an idea. Most of the work must have been done late in the day when I'm at the other end of the park feeding the deer."

The Brownies plied Mr. Karwhite with questions, seeking to learn the name of the person he thought might have built the house.

"I can't say," the superintendent put them aside. "I intend to do a little investigating though."

Long shadows were beginning to envelop the forest.

Fearful of being caught on the road after dark, the Brownies and their leader hurriedly said good-bye to Mr. Karwhite.

All the way to their homes, the girls could talk of nothing except what they would do in the new play room. Miss Gordon promised she would make a pair of dainty curtains for the window.

Several of the girls had extra dishes which they planned to bring.

"May we go tomorrow?" Connie pleaded. "The park officials may decide to take the little house down. We want to play in it every minute we can."



Miss Gordon was very easy to persuade. "Yes, we'll hike to the park again after school," she decided. "It isn't every Brownie troop that has its own tree house!"

"And a mystery with it!" added Jane pertly.

"What's the mystery?" inquired Rosemary, trudging along beside her.

"Why, how did the tree house come to be in the park?"

"A brownie built it!" laughed Veve. "My wish came true!"

"Your wish!" Jane snorted. "You know very well there isn't such a thing as magic except in story books."

"You said we'd never get a tree house, Jane Tuttle! Wrong, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was. But to say the tree house was built by a brownie is downright stupid!"

"I'm not stupid," Veve retorted. "It's fun to pretend a brownie did it. And until you can give me a better explanation, I'm going to keep right on saying so! There!"

"Girls, girls!" laughed Miss Gordon, who always found it necessary to make peace between Jane and Veve. "We're certain of one thing. Whoever built the tree house, must have heard our wish. And the person, whoever he or she is, wishes to have his identity remain unknown. So perhaps, just as a little game, we can say that a brownie was responsible."

"See!" exclaimed Veve triumphantly.

To the bitter disappointment of all the girls, the following day was cold and rainy.

By Saturday, however, the sun was out, and the Brownies again visited the park.

Clomping along in galoshes, they found the trails muddy and the forest area deserted. Not even Mr. Karwhite was in evidence at the gate house.

"We'll certainly have the park to ourselves today," declared Miss Gordon.

The Brownies selected the shortest route to the tree house. Their way took them past a stone grill, across a rustic bridge and then down a long series of steps cut in the side of the steep slope.

"The house is still there," declared Connie in relief as they presently came within view of it.

"I'll race you!" shouted Veve.

Before Miss Gordon could warn the girls not to run, she was off, with Connie close behind.

Breathless, the two reached the base of the giant oak.

"Beat you to the top!" challenged Veve.

Again she was first. Two steps ahead of Connie she arrived on the tiny balcony. Waving at the other girls on the ground, she ducked into the tree house.

Immediately she gave a loud yell, which told those below that another surprise awaited them.

"Hurry! Hurry!" shouted Veve.

The girls hastened up the stairway as fast as they could.

Upon reaching the doorway, they instantly saw why Veve was so excited.

During their absence, a table and six sturdy chairs had been added to the little house. Also, a corner shelf had been built to hold books or miscellaneous articles.

"Our wish came true!" cried Veve, quite carried away. "Now what do you say?"

"Who do you suppose did it?" murmured Jane in awe.

"Mr. Karwhite maybe," suggested Eileen.

The others, however, did not share her belief that the park superintendent had contributed the furniture.

"I can't understand it," Miss Gordon remarked, deeply puzzled. "Girls, where were you standing when you made the wish for table and chairs?"

"At the foot of the stairway by the oak tree," supplied Veve promptly. "But no one except the Brownies heard the wish."

"Someone must have," insisted the leader. "Even though we saw no one near, a person could

have been hidden back among the bushes. It gives me a queer, uneasy feeling to think about it."

"I think it's nice to have an unknown good fairy doing things for us!" laughed Connie.

Thrilled by the latest gift for their house, the girls set to work "moving in." Miss Gordon had made a pair of dainty red and white dotted curtains which exactly fitted the window.

From home, Rosemary had brought one of her mother's handmade rag rugs for the floor. Connie, Eileen and Rosemary contributed dishes which they arranged attractively in the cupboards.

"Oh, if Mr. Karwhite only allows us to stay here, we'll have grand times," Connie declared gaily.

The other girls were equally thrilled. Taking turns they peeped out of the window into a delightful world of branches and tinted leaves.

From the balcony, they could see the gate house, the road, and many of the park trails.

Best of all, however, they enjoyed the gentle movement of the little house, as the breeze rocked it in its bough cradle.

"I feel almost as if I'm part of the tree," declared Veve dreamily. "Wouldn't it be fun to sleep here at night?"

"Now don't get ideas," interposed Miss Gordon. "Our tree house activities definitely are limited to the daytime."

The brisk morning hike had made the girls very hungry. Although it was not yet noon, they voted to have lunch immediately.

"We must try out the new dishes," said Eileen. "My, I wish we had a little stove! Then we could heat things and have a hot meal."

"And be snug and warm after the weather turns cold," added Eileen. "Maybe we could keep coming here all winter!"

"Dear me, don't make any more wishes," laughed Miss Gordon. "Let's be satisfied with this little house just as it is."

The girls spread out their lunch of sandwiches, hard cooked eggs, fresh tomatoes and beverage. Scarcely had they settled down to eat than Veve held up her hand in a signal for silence.

"Sh!" she whispered. "I hear something!"

The others listened intently. But they heard no unusual sound.

"It was the wind whispering in the leaves," declared Connie. "Or maybe a bird."

Veve shook her head. "I'm sure it was someone below in the bushes!" she whispered.

"Veve's right," suddenly agreed Eileen, becoming tense. "Someone's sneaking up the stairway!"

Distinctly now, the girls could hear footsteps on the steps below them.

Rather alarmed, Miss Gordon went quickly to the door. Then she laughed.

"We do have a visitor, girls! It's Mr. Karwhite."

The superintendent came on up the stairway. He peeped into the little house, but did not try to enter. In fact, not a square inch of space was available for him.

"Well, well," he chuckled. "A full house! How are you getting along?"

"Oh, just fine!" replied Connie. "We have a new table and chairs. Aren't they cute?"

Mr. Karwhite agreed that the furniture was very nice. Carefully, he examined each piece, remarking that the articles had been made of good lumber and were well finished.

"I can't understand who is doing this!" he said in an annoyed tone. "It's against park rules. Whoever built this house had no right to do it without permission."

"But it's such an adorable little house," said Connie anxiously. "You wouldn't make the person tear it down if you could find him, would you?"

"I reckon not," Mr. Karwhite smiled. "At least not before spring. But it does annoy me."

He told the Brownies then that he was in a rather bad mood that morning because in inspecting

Trail No. 3 he had discovered that several of the trees were incorrectly marked.

"Then we were right about it!" exclaimed Connie.

"You certainly were," the park superintendent assured her. "The tree you thought was a maple actually was one. Someone deliberately changed the tags on at least five trees."

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"What a stupid thing to do," commented Miss Gordon.

"I've no proof, but I figure the trick was done by a group of boys who come through the park now and then. I'd like to catch them!"

Mr. Karwhite started to leave, and then thought of another matter.

"This tree house is almost like a lookout station," he declared. "If any of you see those boys playing pranks, I wish you'd let me know right away."

"We will!" promised Connie.

Mr. Karwhite unstrapped a black leather case which he wore over his shoulder.

"Here, keep my fieldglass," he directed. "You'll have fun using it, and will be able to see almost anywhere in the park from such a high point."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Veve, taking the glass from him. "How do you make it work?"

The superintendent showed her how to adjust the glass. Each girl insisted upon her turn.

"Just leave the glass at the gate house when you start home," Mr. Karwhite instructed. "And if you should see those young rascals tampering with the tags, be sure to notify me right away!"

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After the superintendent had gone, the girls had a great deal of fun looking at various points of the park through the field glass.

"I can see the animal pens!" announced Sunny when her turn came.

"Let me look," pleaded Veve.

Taking the glass from Sunny, she adjusted it to her own eyes. After studying the animal pens for a time, she trained the instrument upon the roadway.

"Come on, it's my turn now!" exclaimed Jane impatiently. "You've had that glass for five minutes."

Veve waved her aside.

"Wait," she mumbled.

"Wait!" Jane retorted in exasperation. "It's always 'wait' when you have the glass, and 'hurry up' when someone else is looking."

"I'm really seeing something," said Veve impressively. "Something queer."

Her words drew the attention of all the Brownies. Quickly they clustered about her, eager to learn what held her interest.

"What d'you see?" Connie demanded. "Those boys Mr. Karwhite asked us to watch for?"

"It's more interesting than that," announced Veve, clinging fast to the glass as Jane tried to take it from her. "Oh, my goodness! Where *is* she going with that sack?"

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## CHAPTER 5

**Mixed Signs**

VEVE'S remark about a woman with a sack, further plagued the Brownies. Quite carried away by curiosity, Jane took the field glass from her.

"Who do you see with a sack?" she demanded.

"Look toward the side road," directed Veve.

Jane trained the glass in that direction. The only living object in her line of vision was a lean white horse with an old fashioned buggy attached.

The buggy had pulled up at the side of a dirt road beyond the park boundary. Contentedly, the old horse grazed on grass. Her owner was nowhere visible.

"I don't see anyone with a sack," Jane complained. "I guess you were kidding us, Veve."

"No, I wasn't," Veve denied. "She was there a moment ago. Here, let me have that glass again."

She took it from Jane. But after studying the roadside area intently, acknowledged that the woman no longer was there.

"That's funny," commented Veve. "She must have disappeared somewhere in this park. But what's she doing with a sack?"

"You're sure you actually saw her?" Eileen questioned doubtfully.

"Of course! The buggy is proof I did!"

"What did she look like?" questioned Rosemary.

"Well," Veve said, thinking hard, "she was queer looking and real thin. She wore a straw hat. Her dress was long with a full skirt. That's all I remember except the sack—and the odd way she looked around when she jumped out of the buggy."

"What do you mean by the odd way she looked around?" asked Connie, taking her turn at the field glass.

"She acted as if she were afraid someone would see her."

"Oh, well!" Jane shrugged, losing interest. "She's gone now anyway. Who cares what she does with her sack?"

"I'd like to know why she ducked into the woods," Veve said. "Maybe she might have something to do with this tree house."

"How could she?" demanded Sunny.

"It's just one of Veve's crazy notions," said Jane.

"Maybe it's not a crazy notion," retorted Veve. "I guess if we ever expect to learn who built this playhouse, we'll have to ask a few questions."

"The woman may live near the park," Connie said, coming to her friend's defense. "It's possible she does know who built the house."

While the girls talked, Miss Gordon had been looking through the field glass herself. On one of the trails not far from the rustic bridge, she had sighted the woman.

"There she is!" she exclaimed. "Veve's right! She does have a bag!"

"I told you so!" declared Veve shrilly.

Miss Gordon watched the old lady until she was blocked from view by the trees.

"Where do you suppose she's going?" speculated Sunny. "She can't be in the park just for the fun of it, because she's in such a hurry."

"She does appear to have business here," Miss Gordon admitted. "The trail she is taking leads over the bridge and to the spring."

"She can't carry water in her sack!" laughed Veve. "I wish we knew more about her. I know! Why don't we manage to meet her at the spring and ask a few questions?"

"We need water too," declared Connie, indicating the empty thermos bottle.

"I don't want to go," said Jane, who sometimes liked to be contrary. "It's a long walk to the spring."

"I'd rather stay here in the tree house," agreed Rosemary.

Sunny and Eileen sided with Veve and Connie, urging that they be allowed to head the woman off at the spring.

"I doubt you'll learn anything by talking to her," Miss Gordon told the four girls. "But run along if you like. I'll stay here with Jane and Rosemary. We'll finish tidying up while you're gone."

"Just don't take all day," Jane tossed at them. "We want to start home before too long."

Taking the empty thermos bottle with them, Eileen, Sunny, Veve and Connie started down the winding stairway.

"You know the trail?" Miss Gordon called after them.

"Oh, yes!" replied Veve confidently.

"We always can follow the trail markings," added Connie.

Walking single file, the girls moved briskly off in the direction of the spring.

The trail they followed was number two and at intervals was marked with a tiny numeral "2" on little wooden signboards.

The girls made a great deal of noise as their shoes crackled through the leaves and dry pine needles. Gaily they trotted along, wondering what they would say when they met the old lady at the spring.

They were certain she must be going there, for after the trail crossed the rustic bridge, it ended rather abruptly.

Soon the girls came to a fork in the trail. Connie, who was leading, paused to be certain she was taking the right turn.

To her surprise she noticed that the signpost directed: "The Spring," and the little red arrow pointed toward the left hand path.

"Why, I thought we turned right here," she said in perplexity.

"So did I," said Eileen, gazing up at the sign.

"Well, the sign must be right," argued Veve, adding with a laugh, "That is, it must mean we're to take the left hand path. Come on, we're wasting time!"

Still Connie hesitated.

"It seems as if we should go the other way," she said doubtfully.

"Oh, you're mixed up," Veve told her. "From above, the trails look different. This must be the right direction."

Veve now took the lead, walking fast because she did not want to miss meeting the queer old lady with the sack.

Eileen followed directly behind, while Sunny and Connie brought up the rear.

After the girls had gone a short way along the winding path, they came to another marker which bore the numeral "2".

"You see, were on the trail all right," Veve declared. "Nothing to worry about."

"It just doesn't seem right," Connie answered.

Veve trudged on with the others close behind. The trail seemed to be getting narrower and less plainly marked.

Quite often Veve had to push bushes aside to make room to slip through. Some of the long branches whipped back into the faces of those who followed.

"Say! The park attendants don't keep this trail up very well," she complained.

"O-oh!" wailed Sunny. She had stepped into a soft spot and had sunk half way to the top of her galoshes in mud.

"I don't like this one bit," Connie declared, helping Sunny. "I never remembered that the spring was so far away."

"Neither did I," said Eileen, abruptly halting. "And where is the rustic bridge? Shouldn't we have passed it long ago?"

Even Veve had grown uneasy. "I guess it only seems as if we've been hiking a long while," she said. "This trail must be right because it's plainly marked."

"It was at first," Connie corrected. "We haven't seen a signpost for a long while now."

"But we've not passed another fork," Veve insisted. "So we couldn't have taken a wrong turn."

Not knowing what else to do, the girls went on, but at a slower pace. The path now seemed dark and mysterious.

Suddenly Veve halted to stare at a marking tacked to a tree trunk.

Behind her, Connie also saw it at the same instant. She uttered a gasp of dismay.

"Why, it says Trail 3 instead of Trail 2!" she exclaimed.

"And look what's written in pencil directly under the lettering!" Eileen cried.

Veve read the nearly illegible message aloud. In pencil someone had scrawled: "Fooled you!"

Seeing the sign, the four girls were badly frightened.

"What does it mean?" Sunny asked, her voice shaking. "Why does the trail sign say 3 instead of 2?"

"Because someone has mixed up the signs!" Connie answered. Her eyes flashed angrily. "Oh, those horrid boys who changed the markings on the trees must have done it!"

"Then we're on Trail 3 instead of Trail 2, and a long way from the spring," Eileen declared uneasily.

"I don't think we're on Trail 3 either," Veve said, peering ahead.

"Then where are we?" Sunny demanded.

"We're just off somewhere in the forest," Veve admitted, her voice weak from fright. "The trail has played out entirely. If you want to know the worst—we're lost!"

## CHAPTER 6

# A Mysterious Sack

OF the group, Connie was the only one who remained entirely cool and collected.

"We can't be lost," she advised the others. "All we have to do is return the way we came."

"But we're off the regular trail," Veve insisted, less frightened. "We must be a long distance from the spring."

"Those horrid boys should be kept out of the park!" declared Sunny indignantly.

The other Brownies shared her belief that the trail signs deliberately had been changed by pranksters.

They were convinced too, that the mischief had been done by the same persons who had exchanged the tags on the trees.

"We've wasted a lot of time," Connie said regretfully as the girls started to retrace their way. "I suppose the best thing now is to forget about that queer old lady, and return to the tree house."

"Provided we can find it," Eileen said, her confidence ebbing. "This path has twisted and turned so much I'm not at all sure of my directions." 53

"I think I can lead the way back," Connie declared.

However, with only false signs to guide her, the path proved most confusing.

Coming to a fork, Connie could not be certain which way to turn. Veve and Eileen were for going in one direction, while Sunny was equally sure that the other way was right.

"Let's keep to the left," Connie urged. "The sun will be to our backs then."

Veve demanded to know what that might have to do with the matter.

"When we faced the roadway earlier, I noticed that the sun was shining that same way—on our backs," Connie explained. "The highway runs one entire side of the park. So if we keep walking in the same direction, were almost certain to come out at the road."

"But we don't want to end up there," protested Eileen.

"If we once reach the road, it will be easy to take bearings," Connie pointed out.

"Connie's right," agreed Veve, siding with her. "We're sure of striking the road, so let's go that way." 54

With the sun to their backs, the four girls trudged on. By this time they were on a well traveled trail again, but one entirely without markers.

"Maybe this isn't taking us to the road after all," Sunny presently remarked. "We've been walking a long while."

"I see something ahead!" Connie encouraged her. "Yes, it's the roadway!"

In a moment the girls emerged upon a narrow dirt road. Connie convinced the others that if they followed it for a short distance they would come to a familiar trail which would lead them back to the tree house.

"Which way do we go?" Sunny asked uncertainly.

"To the right, I think," Connie said, after studying various landmarks. "If we are wrong we will circle the park and eventually come out near the gate house."

"Miss Gordon will be worried to death if we don't get back to the tree house soon," Eileen declared anxiously. "Let's hurry."

The girls walked along the grass at the side of the road to avoid mud. By the nearly unbroken stretch of the thoroughfare, they knew that few vehicles had passed that way during the day. Automobiles usually followed the paved highway which wound through the heart of the woods. 55

Swinging around a curve, the girls were both startled and relieved to observe a horse and

buggy tied up at the roadside.

"Why, that's the same old-fashioned outfit we saw from the tree house!" exclaimed Veve. "I know where we are now!"

"So do I," laughed Connie, greatly relieved. "We can't be very far from the big oak tree and our sky house."

The girls wondered what had become of the old lady with the sack. Evidently, she remained somewhere in the park area, for the horse and buggy had not been shifted from their original place.

"Maybe she took a wrong trail as we did," Connie remarked. "It would be easy to do with so many markers mixed up."

As the girls approached the old horse, Veve heard someone moving rapidly through the woods.

"Someone's coming," she murmured.

Even as she murmured the warning, the roadside bushes suddenly parted.

From one of the nearby trails, the queer old lady unexpectedly emerged.

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At close range, she looked even stranger than from a distance. Hair streamed over her face and her hat was pushed far back from her forehead.

Slung over her shoulder was the sack which first had drawn the interest of the Brownie Scouts.

Oddly enough, the sack now appeared to be half filled. Also, the old lady carried the burden as if it were quite heavy.

The Brownies were too far away to see what she had obtained. They were very curious however.

"Now what do you suppose she's carrying?" Veve speculated.

Although the little girl spoke in a quiet voice, the old lady heard the remark.

Glancing up in a startled manner, she seemed to hesitate and to act confused. To the Brownies it was evident that she did not want them to see what she was carrying.

They were certain of it when she moved swiftly to the buggy and shoved the sack out of view beneath the seat.

"She's hiding something!" whispered Sunny.

The other Brownies thought so too.

"Let's try to find out what it is," urged Veve, keeping her voice low. "Maybe she's stealing from the park!"

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As the four girls approached, the old lady hastily climbed into the buggy. The Brownies moved a bit faster.

"Good afternoon!" Veve greeted her breathlessly as they hurried up.

The old lady gazed at the four girls and her thin lips cracked into the faintest suggestion of a smile. However, she merely inclined her head and did not speak.

She gathered up the reins, intending to start away.

"We're lost," said Connie to hold her attention. "That is—we were until a second ago."

"Lost?" repeated the old lady.

"Can you tell us how to reach the big oak tree with the house built in it?" inquired Sunny politely.

"The park is filled with oak trees," replied the old lady somewhat tartly. "As for a house being built in one—I never heard of such a thing. If you're lost though, just keep walking and you will come to the gate house."

"We saw you a few minutes ago from our tree house," said Veve, hoping to continue the conversation. "You were carrying a sack."

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The remark seemed to be a poorly chosen one.

Apparently taking offense, the old lady gave Veve a sharp glance. Without a word she gathered up the reins and drove away.



"Well, how do you like that!" exclaimed Veve, very much displeased.

"She was annoyed because you spoke of the sack!" declared Connie. "What do you suppose she had in it?"

"Something she got here in the park," declared Eileen. "We know she hid it under the buggy seat too, thinking we might see what she had."

"She's a rude old woman!" Veve said crossly. "I don't like her one bit."

"I thought she had a nice smile," Connie replied, staring after the disappearing buggy. "We probably seemed prying to her because we asked questions."

"Well, what did she have in that sack?" Veve persisted.

No one could hazard a guess.

"We'll have to report to the other Brownie Scouts that we didn't find out," Eileen said in disappointment. "They'll think we were not much good."

Rather let down by their experience, the four girls took careful bearings before starting toward the tree house.

To their relief the trail which they now followed was thoroughly familiar and the signs had not been disturbed.

Their way skirted a small pond fringed with cattails. Veve paused to pluck one and to toss a pebble at a bull frog who croaked from his perch on a lily pad.

"Don't fall in, young lady," said a gruff voice.

Veve whirled around and then laughed. Mr. Karwhite had come up without any of the Brownies hearing him.

"My, you walk on velvet feet!" exclaimed Connie.

"How are you getting along at the tree house?" the park superintendent inquired.

The girls told him that so far as they knew everything was fine at the little house. Then they went on to relate their unpleasant experience on the trail.

"Those pesky boys again!" exclaimed Mr. Karwhite angrily. "If ever I catch the rascals I'll see that they are punished!"

The superintendent explained that the past two days he had kept an alert watch for the gang.

"I find mixed-up signs, broken shrubbery and other evidence they've been here," he declared. "Somehow I can't catch up with them. They slip into the park from somewhere along the road, instead of coming past the gate house."

"We'll help you keep watch," Connie offered.

"Good! If you see them doing any mischief, let me know."

"You have another park visitor who slips in from the roadway," contributed Veve. "We don't know her name, but she drives an old horse with a buggy."

"Oh, that must be old Minnie Myles."

"Who is she?" asked Connie.

"A widow who lives in a farmhouse about a half mile from here," revealed the park superintendent. "She's an odd one and no mistake! Lives by herself with her chickens and goat. She's harmless though."

As Mr. Karwhite talked, he had been glancing at the sky.

Following his gaze, the Brownies were astonished to notice that the sun no longer shone steadily. Very frequently it was hidden by dark clouds.

"It's getting a bit chilly again," observed Eileen, pulling her sweater tightly about her.

"That's because the wind is shifting," Mr. Karwhite informed her. "We're in for another storm, I'm afraid."

"Not soon?" asked Connie anxiously. She hoped the Brownie Scouts would not be caught by rain en route home.

"It's coming up fast," the park superintendent replied, studying the fast-moving clouds. "I

doubt we'll have much rain. But we're likely to have wind."

Mr. Karwhite gazed thoughtfully at the four girls, and then asked where the other members of the troop were.

"At the tree house," Connie told him.

"Better hike back there right away and warn your leader a storm is coming up," the man advised. "A tree house isn't the best place to be in a high wind. You may all come to the gate house until it passes over."

The girls thanked Mr. Karwhite for the invitation, and hastened away.

"My! It is getting dark here in the woods!" Eileen murmured uneasily as they scurried along.

On either side of the path, they could hear the trees and bushes gently stirring. Mr. Karwhite had been right! The wind rapidly was rising.

Presently the path opened up, permitting a view of the tree house. The girls could see Jane leaning out of the tiny window.

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As she caught sight of the four on the trail, she waved and motioned for them to hurry.

Quite breathless, the girls reached the oak and climbed the stairway to their little house.

"You've been gone ages!" Jane accused them.

"We've been terribly worried," added Rosemary, jumping up from the window seat. "What made it take so long?"

Veve started to tell about being lost on the trail, but Connie cut her short.

"There isn't time for that now," she said, recalling Mr. Karwhite's urgent message. "We have to leave right away!"

"That's right!" agreed Sunny. "A storm is coming up."

Now Miss Gordon had noticed that the little house was swaying gently in the tree. She had observed too that the sky was darkening. However, she had not realized how fast the wind was rising.

At Sunny's words, she went quickly out on the tiny balcony.

"A storm is blowing up," she agreed. "We must leave at once. We'll have to move fast if we reach the gate house before it breaks!"

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Alarmed, the Brownies began to gather together their possessions.

Connie was packing the remains of lunch into her knapsack, when she felt the oak tree give a deep sigh.

Then the little house started to rock back and forth.

"Oh!" squealed Rosemary in terror.

"The wind is here!" declared Miss Gordon. "Oh, dear! Now what?"

Several large drops of rain had pinged on the roof of the house.

Before the girls could start down the stairway, the droplets came faster and faster.

"We'll be soaked if we try to reach the gate house now!" squealed Rosemary.

Peering out of the tiny window, she saw only a world of crashing leaves and tree boughs.

So fast was the rain falling that the ground below was invisible.

"Oh, Miss Gordon, what will we do?" asked Eileen anxiously. She was very frightened.

The leader was worried, but tried not to show it.

"Now don't be alarmed," she comforted the Brownies. "This house is sturdily built and will withstand a strong wind."

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"Shall we make a dash for it?" asked Connie, shivering.

The air had turned so cold she dreaded the thought of having her clothing soaked.

"For the time being, we'll stay right here," Miss Gordon decided after a moment's hesitation.

“What if the tree should be struck by lightning?” demanded Jane, who always speculated on the very worst possibilities.

“So far there is no lightning,” Miss Gordon replied calmly. “Unless the wind continues to rise, we’ll be as safe here as if we were dashing through the woods.”

“And a lot warmer,” declared Connie, settling down on the window seat. “I think it will be fun staying in a tree house during a storm!”

The other Brownies huddled together and kept their thoughts to themselves. Connie, they knew, was only putting up a brave front.

Already the tree house was rocking back and forth as if it were a boat on a choppy sea.

Below, the stairway appeared wet and slippery. If the Brownies finally decided to make a dash for the gate house, the footing at best would be very treacherous.

The girls were a trifle frightened. Conscious of every lurch of the old oak tree, they clung together and wished very hard that the storm quickly would pass.

## CHAPTER 7

**Collecting Buttons**

FOR ten minutes heavy rain fell. Back and forth the tree house rocked, the branches beneath the planking creaking weirdly.

To make the girls forget the storm, Miss Gordon began to tell them of plans for early fall activities.

"Soon the weather may turn cold, and then we'll be unable to come here to the park," she declared. "For the time being, we'll work on our nature scrapbooks. After those are finished, how would you like to collect buttons?"

Now this idea was entirely new to the Brownies.

"Button, button, who has the button?" warbled Veve. Rocking back and forth in the tree house made her feel a trifle silly.

"We have some buttons at home in Mother's sewing basket," said Rosemary without too much enthusiasm.

"My mother will let me have some of her extra ones," declared Sunny.

Miss Gordon explained that she did not refer to ordinary buttons which could be bought in the stores.

"I propose to have the troop collect only unusual ones," she told the girls. "Many buttons are very decorative and beautiful. Some of the old ones have historical significance."

"Just as quilts do!" exclaimed Rosemary. "Remember those we collected to display at the cherry festival?"

"I'm afraid old buttons may be a trifle more difficult to find than pattern quilts," Miss Gordon warned the girls. "Nevertheless, even if we fail to find many buttons, we'll have a good time searching for them."

Jane inquired what would be done with the buttons once they were collected.

Miss Gordon explained that they might be strung, mounted on cards for display or made into beautiful pins.

"A pin!" cried Veve, now intrigued by the proposal. "That's what I'd like. Where will we find old buttons?"

Miss Gordon replied that each girl must conduct her own search.

"I can give you a few hints though," she said. "Old buttons frequently may be found in attics, usually attached to out-of-style garments."

"I'm going through our attic just as soon as I return home!" announced Sunny. "I think some of my great-great-grandmother's dresses are packed in a walnut chest."

"Whatever you do, don't snip any buttons without first asking permission," warned the leader. "Your mother wouldn't like that, I'm sure."

"We have no old clothes in our attic," said Veve in a crestfallen tone. "We haven't an attic for that matter."

"Many of us are in that same situation," smiled Miss Gordon. "If you have no attic, inquire of friends and acquaintances. Elderly persons in particular are likely to have old buttons."

"I know a lady who might have some!" exclaimed Veve, for the teacher's remark had given her an idea. "She's old enough!"

The little girl winked at Connie, who guessed that Mrs. Minnie Myles was the person meant. However, neither she nor Veve knew where the woman lived, or whether or not she would be friendly.

Miss Gordon suggested that the girls see how many buttons they could collect before the next Brownie meeting.

"May we hold it right here in the tree house?" pleaded Jane.

Now that she was becoming accustomed to the gentle rocking of the tree, she no longer felt frightened by the storm.

In fact, so snug was the little house, that she rather enjoyed the dash of rain against the tiny window.

The other Brownie Scouts were feeling more at ease too. They did not mind how long the storm lasted.

"We'll decide about our meeting place later on," Miss Gordon answered Jane's question. "This tree house is nice though. And I must admit that whoever built it for us, did an excellent job."

Observing that the rain had nearly ceased, the teacher went to the door.

As she opened it, a blast of cool air rushed in. Stepping out onto the balcony, Miss Gordon studied the overcast sky. Clouds were moving swiftly. The sun, however, was trying to straggle through.

"The first part of the storm has passed over," she commented. "During the lull, we should be able to make it to the gate house."

"Oh, must we leave so soon?" protested Eileen. "We were having such fun!"

"I don't like the look of those clouds," Miss Gordon replied uneasily. "The wind may pay us a return visit. Buckle on your galoshes, kiddies, and let's be on our way."

Reluctantly, the Brownies put on their overshoes and gathered up sweaters and jackets.

"Before we go, let's wish for a little stove or a fireplace!" suddenly proposed Veve. "Then when we come again, maybe it will be here waiting for us!"

"Whoever heard of a fireplace in a tree house!" scoffed Eileen.

"Well, we could have a little stove," Veve defended her idea. "It would make the house cozy and nice on chilly days."

"Let's be content with the room as it is," said Miss Gordon.

"You don't really think we'd get a stove if we wished for it?" Veve demanded.

"Probably not," laughed Miss Gordon. "This oak tree seems to have large ears however. Even though one can't believe in magic, strange things have happened here—delightful but amazing things. I simply can't understand who would give us this little house."

"You're certain you didn't arrange to have it built for us as a nice surprise?" questioned Rosemary.

"Gracious, no!" the teacher denied. "The house was as much of a shock to me as to anyone else."

"Mr. Karwhite says he didn't do it either," commented Connie, thinking aloud. "He smiles whenever he speaks of the tree house though. I think he must know who built it or at least have an idea."

"I intend to talk to him," said the Brownie leader. "I'd like to know who built the place, if only to express our appreciation."

Knowing that they must make haste, the girls hurriedly left the tree house. Walking carefully on the slippery steps, they descended single file to the ground.

"Miss Gordon is right!" Connie announced as they started away from the clearing. "It's certainly going to rain again."

Miss Gordon was somewhat disturbed to note how swiftly the clouds were moving.

"We must hurry, girls," she urged. "I think we can make it to the gatehouse at least."

The Brownies walked as fast as they could, but the trail was muddy. Often they had to make little detours to avoid deep patches of surface water. Mud caked on their galoshes and had to be dug off with sticks. Drippy bushes splattered droplets, dampening their uniforms.

"I feel like an elephant walking!" laughed Veve, lifting up an overshoe encased foot which was heavy with muck. "Here I go! Plop! Plop! Plop!"

"Never mind the comedy," called Miss Gordon from the head of the line. "If we don't move faster, the storm will catch us again."

Made uneasy by the darkening of the trail, the girls heeded their leader's warning.

Even though they walked fast, they were far from the gatehouse when rain again began to fall. The drops were smaller this time, but they came down steadily.

"Oh, it's going to rain a long time," groaned Connie. "We'll be soaked getting home."

"Brownies are tough!" declared Jane staunchly. "We can take it."

"We can," agreed Eileen, ducking her head to avoid the sheet of rain. "But who wants to? I'm freezing!"

As she spoke, a flash of lightning brightened the trail.

Although it was not close, the clap of thunder seemed very loud in the forest. Several of the Brownies cringed and gazed anxiously at their leader.

"We'll soon be out of the woods—" began Miss Gordon encouragingly.

Another flash of lightning startled the girls. This time it was brighter and the roar of thunder followed quickly.

"Wow! That was close!" exclaimed Veve, breathing hard.

"Too close for comfort," agreed Miss Gordon. "I'm glad we left the tree house. We're not very safe here amid the trees though. One could be struck."

The Brownie leader was thoroughly familiar with all the park trails. Even though a blinding wall of rain had started to descend, she knew which direction to turn when the path forked.

"How far to the gate house?" gasped Veve. The distance never had seemed so long before.

"Several hundred yards," the teacher told her. Anxiously she gazed up at the swaying tree branches.

As she watched, a heavy dead limb came crashing down, falling across the trail.

"The road is close by," said Miss Gordon, making a quick decision. "We'll strike for it, and then circle back to the gate house. On the road we'll be in no danger of having limbs fall on us."

Taking an off-shoot path, the teacher led the girls to an old-fashioned rail fence. They scrambled over, leaped a ditch and reached the paved main highway.

"At least it's easier walking here!" gasped Sunny. "But that rain!"

A loud "toot, toot!" sounded directly behind the girls.

The Brownies moved farther to the side of the road to allow the car to pass.

Instead, it pulled up alongside.

"Want a ride into town?" inquired the driver.

The man who had called wore heavy work clothes. Veve noticed a set of carpenter tools in the back of his car as she peered curiously in. The car itself was rather old and dirty, but no one minded about that.

"Indeed, we'll be grateful for a ride!" exclaimed Miss Gordon.

The girls piled into the car. Miss Gordon, Veve and Rosemary sat in the front with the driver. The others scrambled into the rear seat.

"Going far?" inquired the man in a friendly way.

"We had intended to seek shelter at the gate house," Miss Gordon explained. "If you're driving to Rosedale though, we'll ride along—that is, if it doesn't inconvenience you."

"Glad to have you," the man assured her cordially. "This storm sure came up fast."

He then introduced himself as Sam Vincent, and explained that he was a carpenter by trade. The man said he had been building a porch at a house three miles down the road, but had halted work when the rain started.

"We were in our tree house when the wind came up," Veve announced.

Mention of a tree house so interested Mr. Vincent that he asked a great many questions. The girls told him about the mysterious person who had built the playhouse, and also about the mischievous boys.

"When I was driving to work this morning I saw four boys climbing the fence into the park," the carpenter recalled.

"Then maybe they're the ones who mixed up the trail signs!" exclaimed Veve.

"I drive past the park nearly every day," Sam Vincent said. "If I see those boys up to any mischief, I'll report them."

Even though it meant driving a considerable distance out of his way, the carpenter insisted upon taking all of the girls to their separate homes.

Miss Gordon, Veve and Connie were the last ones to be dropped off.

"We appreciate this so much," said the Brownie leader, thanking him for all of the girls.

"I should say so!" added Veve. "I hope we see you again some time, Mr. Vincent."

"You probably will," he replied, his eyes twinkling.

"You must come to see our tree house," Veve invited him earnestly. And then without thinking that the other Brownies might object, she added: "Come next Saturday—for lunch."

"It's a date," agreed Mr. Vincent, pleased by the invitation. "Shall we say twelve o'clock sharp?"

Veve glanced at Miss Gordon and Connie, who made no move to help her out of the predicament.

The carpenter accepted their silence for assent.

"Saturday noon," he repeated, shifting gears. "I'll be there, and with a huge appetite!"

## CHAPTER 8

**Mrs. Myles' Advice**

THE moment the car had driven away, Connie turned accusingly upon Veve.

"Now you've done it!" she exclaimed. "You've invited a man we scarcely know to lunch! And what's worse he's expecting a big meal."

"How'd I know he'd accept?" Veve mumbled.

"The other Brownies may not like it one bit," Connie went on severely. "And who is going to prepare the lunch?"

"Maybe he won't come."

"You hope—" said Connie.

"Why, I think it was nice to invite Mr. Vincent," interposed Miss Gordon. "Especially after he brought us all into Rosedale. The lunch will be no problem."

Veve felt much better then. Saying good-bye to Miss Gordon she ran into her home. Connie lived next door, while the teacher resided only a half block farther on.

School examinations occupied the Brownies for the next three days. After that came rain and more rain.

By Friday the weather had turned chilly and no one could be certain whether or not it would be possible to visit the tree house on the following day.

"What will we do about having Mr. Vincent to luncheon?" Veve fretted. "I forgot to ask where he lives so I can't very well get in touch with him. If he should go to the tree house, and we aren't there—how embarrassing!"

"You should have thought of that when you invited him," Connie said severely.

Except for Veve, the Brownies did not worry much about Mr. Vincent. During the week they had become engrossed in making periodic searches for old and decorative buttons.

Rosemary excitedly reported that in her mother's attic she had come upon an old wedding dress with five embroidered taffeta buttons made in a star pattern.

Her "find" had started the other Brownies on an intensive search.

Jane obtained an opaque glass button, very old looking, and another of clear glass on black pigment foil with gold stripes.

But the button Eileen found on an aged coat cuff was the most interesting of all—the head of a horse on a black background.

"If anyone finds two buttons just alike, I'll trade," offered Rosemary.

Connie and Veve felt rather discouraged because they could obtain only modern, uninteresting buttons.

"Don't give up," Miss Gordon encouraged them. "Our search has only started, you know."

Veve and Connie asked their friends for buttons and then tried the homes of strangers. On Friday night after school, they stopped at several places near the outskirts of Rosedale. In each instance the lady of the house regretfully told them that she had only modern buttons.

"It's no use," declared Veve, ready to give up.

"Let's try one more house," urged Connie.

Now it so happened that a Mrs. Listerstrom lived there and by chance she had kept a very pretty cameo button which had belonged to her grandmother.

"You may have it, my dear," she said to Connie. "I'm sorry I haven't two of them. But I know where you might find a great many old buttons."

"Where?" demanded Veve eagerly.



Mrs. Listerstrom directed the girls to a house farther out into the country, not far from the natural park.

"I don't think we should go out there today," said Connie. Now that she had her cameo button she was ready to go home.

"Oh, it isn't far," insisted Veve. "We can walk fast. And just think! We might find dozens of buttons!"

Connie allowed herself to be coaxed into making the long hike.

After a while the girls came to the house which had been described to them by Mrs. Listerstrom. The dwelling stood some distance back from the highway and looked very old.

Withered vines covered a sagging porch. The house had not been painted in several years. To add to the untidy appearance, chickens and geese ran within the enclosure.

"I don't like the look of this place," murmured Connie, holding back.

"It may be a little old, but that's so much the better," argued Veve. "We'll be more likely to find a lot of old clothes. And old clothes mean old buttons."

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Thus encouraged, Connie walked on with her friend to the side door of the dwelling. Someone was at home, they knew, for they could hear movement within the kitchen.

Veve rapped on the door. Soon it was opened by a thin woman in a dark plaid gingham dress.

The two girls were so astonished that for a long moment they could not speak.

Standing before them was the same woman who so abruptly had driven away from them in the park! Her name, Mr. Karwhite had told them, was Minnie Myles.

"Good afternoon," the woman greeted them as the girls remained silent. "Haven't I seen you somewhere?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Veve in confusion.

"At the park," supplied Connie, wondering if Mrs. Myles would order them away.

"To be sure! To be sure!" The woman spoke most pleasantly. "Do come in, girls."

Now Veve and Connie were sorry they had chosen this particular house at which to inquire for buttons. However, it was too late to retreat, so they entered the warm kitchen.

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Mrs. Myles had been baking bread. Three fragrant, crusty brown loaves cooled on the table. Heat continued to pour from the oven of the old-fashioned cook stove.

"H-m, that smells good!" exclaimed Veve, sniffing the air.

"Wouldn't you like a piece, with wild grape jelly?" invited Mrs. Myles.

Now the change in the woman's manner amazed both Veve and Connie.

At the park, Mrs. Myles had seemed unfriendly to all of the Brownie Scouts. The two girls could not understand why she previously had been so cross unless their questions about the sack had annoyed her.

"W-ell," hesitated Veve. She very much wanted a piece of the warm bread, but did not wish to appear too eager. From the barren appearance of the kitchen she was afraid the woman might not have very much food for herself.

"Of course you want a slice of bread," declared Mrs. Myles. "I never met a child who wasn't hungry. I'll give you each a large slice. I'm sorry I have no butter. Now tell me what brought you here this afternoon."

84

Feeling far more at ease, the girls explained that the Brownie Scouts were collecting old and historical buttons.

"Well, that sounds like an interesting hobby," declared Mrs. Myles.

"The other girls are getting ahead of us," Veve disclosed. "So we thought we would come here and ask if you have any old ones."

"Not good buttons," Connie said, stooping to pet a black and white cat that rubbed against her legs. "Just buttons you no longer use."

"Let me see," murmured Mrs. Myles, thinking hard. "Why, yes! I must have dozens and dozens of them."

"Old ones?" gasped Veve hopefully.

"Goodness, yes! The chest in the storeroom is stacked with old clothes."

Veve asked if they might see the garments. She was trying hard not to reveal her excitement.

"I'll see what I can find for you, while you're eating your bread and jam," Mrs. Myles offered.

She sliced a generous piece of bread for each girl. Then, leaving them by the fire to play with Tops, the cat, she disappeared into the adjoining room.

During the woman's absence, Veve and Connie gazed curiously about the kitchen.

The room was scantily furnished. A well-scrubbed kitchen table, a corner cabinet, three chairs and the stove constituted the only visible items. Lacking an ice box, Mrs. Myles had set a milk bottle outside the window.

Connie could see that the dining room was equally bare. The floor had no rug and the curtains were nearly worn out.

"Mrs. Myles must be very poor," she whispered to Veve. "Maybe we should offer to pay for the buttons."

Veve did not know what to say. Neither she nor Connie had brought any money with them. Nor did they know how much old buttons might be worth.

By the time the girls had finished their bread and jam, Mrs. Myles returned. Her arms were laden with old garments which smelled faintly of moth balls.

Shaking out a dress for the girls to see, she explained that it had belonged to her grandmother.

"The velvet buttons are very nice," she remarked. "One doesn't find their like in the stores these days."

The front of the dress was decorated with four of the buttons. Of silhouette design, they were made in two pieces with velvet showing through the cut-out metal of the face.

"Oh, I'm sure none of the other Brownies have buttons such as these!" exclaimed Connie. "They're even nicer than the taffeta ones Rosemary found!"

The girls were hopeful Mrs. Myles would offer them the four buttons. In that event they would have a grand time trading with Rosemary!

However, Mrs. Myles said quite frankly that she did not want to ruin the dress by removing the buttons.

"I know!" she declared. "You may have the button on the belt. It will never be missed."

Taking her scissors from the sewing basket, she snipped the thread and gave the button to Connie.

"Please, Mrs. Myles," the little girl offered, "can't I pay for it?"

"No, my dear. You are welcome to the button. Now let's see what we can find for this other little girl. You're—?"

"Veve McGuire."

"To be sure. Well, we must find a nice button for you also."

Mrs. Myles examined several of the garments she had brought from the chest. Veve noticed nice buttons on several dresses and would have taken them. Mrs. Myles, however, told her that they were not very old or valuable.

"I know!" she exclaimed suddenly, putting away the pile of clothing.

Again Mrs. Myles disappeared, returning a moment later with a tiny box. From it she removed several small articles, and then came upon the button for which she had searched.

"Recognize this face?" she asked Veve.

Veve looked carefully at the button. "Why, it's a picture of one of our presidents!" she exclaimed. "President Grant!"

"I see you know your history, my dear. Yes, this is a tintype button popular in Victorian time. It will make a nice addition for your collection."

"Is it really for me?" Veve asked in awe.

"I have no further use for it, my dear."

The girls wondered if Mrs. Myles might not have many other interesting buttons in her home.

Not wishing to appear greedy, they did not hint that they would like to see them. Instead, they thanked her for the two she had given them and said it was time to leave.

88

"Wait!" Mrs. Myles said impulsively. "I have something else to show you. Come with me."

She led the girls into the living room. The sofa was frayed and the chairs appeared to be falling apart. Lace curtains, once of good quality, had been mended many times.

Nevertheless, the room did have one attractive object. On the sofa was a beautiful pillow decorated in neat cross-stitching.

Veve noticed it at once and remarked on its beauty.

"My mother made that pillow," said Mrs. Myles proudly. "I've had it in the house more years than I can remember. But this is what I want you to see."

She pointed to a star-shaped match holder on the wall.

Veve and Connie drew in their breath, for the decorative object was made entirely of buttons! Many appeared quite old.

"Oh, wouldn't the other Brownies be excited if they could see this!" explained Veve.

Mrs. Myles was very pleased by her interest in the match holder. However, she explained it had been made by her mother, and for that reason she could not give it away.

89

"Anyway, we're glad to have these other two buttons," Connie thanked her.

The hour was growing late, so the girls said they must be hurrying home.

"Do come again," Mrs. Myles invited them cordially. "Tomorrow perhaps? I may be able to find a few more buttons."

"We'd love to," accepted Connie.

"But tomorrow's Saturday," Veve reminded her friend.

"That's so," Connie agreed. "If the weather is nice, all the Brownies will be at our tree house in the park."

"We'll be pretty busy too," added Veve in a worried tone. "You see, we invited Sam Vincent to luncheon."

The name seemed to startle Mrs. Myles. "Sam Vincent?" she repeated in an odd tone.

"He's very nice," declared Connie. "The other day during the storm, he picked us up in his car and drove us to our homes."

"Sam has plenty of time to go galavanting around in a car it seems!" Mrs. Myles said tartly.

90

"You know him?" asked Connie in surprise.

"Know him! Well, rather! If I were to give any advice to the Brownies, I'd say to have nothing to do with him! But then, it's none of my affair! Good afternoon."

The woman firmly closed the door upon Veve and Connie.

## CHAPTER 9

**Unwelcome Visitors**

"WHY, what did we say that offended Mrs. Myles?" Connie demanded as she and Veve started toward the road.

"Nothing that I know of," replied the other little girl. "We were talking about going to the tree house tomorrow."

"And having Mr. Vincent there for lunch," reflected Connie. "Do you suppose she was offended because we didn't invite her?"

"I think it was mention of Sam Vincent's name that made her so angry, Connie. Her eyes snapped like firebrands. And don't you remember, she started to say she could give the Brownie Scouts some advice about having nothing to do with him—"

"Only she broke off and closed the door on us."

"It was mention of Mr. Vincent's name that annoyed her," Veve said with conviction. "For some reason she must dislike him. I wonder why?"

92

"He seemed very nice," Connie answered thoughtfully. "Of course, we don't know him well. Maybe we should have become better acquainted before inviting him to lunch."

"Well, he may not come," Veve returned, almost hopefully.

The following day dawned bright, although not particularly warm. Directly after breakfast Miss Gordon telephoned each member of the Brownie Scout troop to say that the hike would be held. Each girl was given a list of items to bring.

"Mr. Vincent may not take Veve's luncheon seriously," the teacher declared. "Our motto though is to be prepared. So, if he does come, we'll have a little food for him."

By ten o'clock the Brownies had arrived at the park. Carrying their well-filled knapsacks, they paused for a moment at the gate house. Mr. Karwhite, however, was not there.

In fact, the entire park area appeared deserted.

"We're the only ones here so early in the day," declared Sunny, covering a yawn. "I'll bet a frosted cookie Mr. Vincent never shows up."

"He has plenty of time to get here before noon," Connie assured her. "What are we having to eat?"

93

She had brought sandwiches, but did not know what the other girls had been asked to contribute.

"Were having a hot drink from the thermos jug," replied Miss Gordon. "We have cake too and a salad. I planned the menu when the weather was warmer."

"A hot meal would taste better today," declared Jane. "I wish we had decided to cook it in one of the park fireplaces. In that case though, we couldn't serve Mr. Vincent lunch in our tree house."

On their way to the giant oak, the girls walked a short distance on Trail No. 3. Immediately they noticed that during their absence from the park, workmen had placed correct identification tags on each tree.

"It's a relief to know that we weren't as confused as we thought that other day," laughed Miss Gordon. "After reading those mixed-up tags I began to wonder if ever again I could tell one tree from another!"

The teacher called attention to a handsome white ash, whose leaves mostly had been swept away by the wind.

"The tree is very regular in shape," she pointed out. "Notice that the wide-spreading branches stand opposite each other."

94

"What's that tree next to it?" inquired Rosemary.

"A horse-chestnut, I believe," returned Miss Gordon. "In summer, or rather, early in May, tall white flowers appear upright on all the branches."

"Like a tree with thousands of white candles!" declared Connie, who frequently had noticed the sight.

Miss Gordon went on to explain that after the flowers of the horse-chestnut tree fell, prickly burrs formed. Inside were large brown nuts.

"Are they good to eat?" Sunny inquired.

"No, the nuts are quite bitter," the teacher replied. "I should advise you not to sample any of them."

Eileen made a pencil sketch of the tree for her nature notebook. Then, aware that time was elapsing, the girls hiked on toward the tree house.

"What time is it now?" inquired Veve anxiously.

"Fifteen minutes after eleven," Miss Gordon said, looking at her watch. "We'll have just time enough to set the luncheon table."

"I'm sure Mr. Vincent won't come," Jane said pessimistically. "He only said he would to be polite."

"Well, if he fails to show, we'll have more food for ourselves," laughed Rosemary. "I wish though, that we were having a hot meal."

95

The cool air and the long hike had given all the girls hearty appetites. To wait very long for their invited guest might be rather trying, they thought. But having extended the invitation, politeness required that they postpone their own meal for at least twenty minutes past the noon hour.

The girls had reached the base of the oak tree. Veve stared at a cluster of footprints plainly visible in the soft earth.

"Say, someone has been here while we were away!" she exclaimed indignantly.

Miss Gordon reminded the girls that the park was for the use of everyone.

"We can't prevent people from visiting our tree house," she said. "Naturally, it will attract attention."

"We could keep people out if we had a lock on the door," Veve replied.

"Let's wish for a lock!" proposed Connie, half in jest. "We've had luck with our other wishes. Maybe we can get one!"

The girls were disturbed to observe that the trail of footprints led up the steps to the tree house balcony. Thick, half dry mud had caked heavily on the unpainted boards.

96

"Someone's been here, all right, since the rain," Veve announced with disapproval.

"Mr. Karwhite, probably," Eileen returned carelessly.

With Veve and Connie, she started up the steps. Miss Gordon and the other girls waited below. Although the stairway was sturdily built, the teacher never allowed more than three persons to ascend or descend at one time.

Reaching the balcony, Connie put down her package of dishes to open the door.

The recent rain had warped it a trifle. She had to shove hard to force it backward.

"This old door's stuck!" she complained.

As she spoke, it suddenly swung open. Caught off balance, Connie stumbled forward into the room.

Behind her, Veve and Eileen uttered shrieks of dismay and anger.

Not only was the floor covered with mud, but dishes had been removed from the shelves. Furniture had been overturned. Everything was a shambles!

97

"Our tree house!" wailed Veve in a voice which carried to those waiting below. "It's ruined!"

## CHAPTER 10

# A Guest for Lunch

STARTLED by Veve's cry, Miss Gordon, Jane, Rosemary and Sunny came hurrying up to the balcony.

"Oh, what a mess!" exclaimed Jane as she too viewed the upheaval.

"Who did such a mean, hateful thing!" exclaimed Sunny wrathfully. "Our lovely little house!"

Miss Gordon righted the chairs and picked up the broken pieces of a cup.

"Those horrid boys must have done it!" Veve declared. "Oh, I wish we could catch them!"

From the shoe tracks on the floor, the girls were convinced that at least three persons had been in the invading group. Miss Gordon shared the opinion of the Brownies that the same boys who had mixed up the trail signs were responsible for the disorder.

"Fortunately, the house itself hasn't been damaged," she said to encourage the girls. "We can clean up this litter." 99

"Yes, but unless we catch those boys, they'll come again and do the same thing!" Connie declared.

"They might," the Brownie Scout leader admitted.

"If only we'd had a good lock on the door, this never could have happened," remarked Veve. "Oh, let's all wish again very hard for one!"

Connie had been glancing carefully about the room to see if anything were missing.

"The cushion for the window seat is gone!" she exclaimed.

The girls could find it nowhere in the little house. Nothing else appeared to be missing. However, before the room could be used, every dish would have to be washed.

"What time is it?" Eileen suddenly demanded.

Her abrupt question reminded the girls that it must be nearly noon.

And at any moment Sam Vincent might arrive for lunch.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Veve, deeply regretting the invitation. "What shall we do now? We can't possibly get this place cleaned up in time."

"He'll think we're horrible housekeepers," added Rosemary in distress. 100

Miss Gordon told the girls that it was exactly ten minutes until twelve o'clock.

"We can't possibly serve the lunch here," she decided. "If Mr. Vincent does come, we'll have to find another place somewhere in the park."

"That won't be any fun," Jane said, frowning. "We wanted him to see this tree house."

"I'm sure he'll understand when he learns what happened," Miss Gordon answered.

"Will we have enough dishes?" Rosemary asked. She had noticed that two cups were smashed and also a small plate.

"We'll be short of cups," the teacher admitted. "Otherwise, I think we can manage."

"Let's get to work," proposed Connie briskly. "We can clean up the worst of this mess before he arrives."

Quickly the girls gathered up the broken dishes and restored other china to its assigned place. Having no broom they could not clean the floor.

Noon came and another ten minutes elapsed. Mr. Vincent had not appeared.

"He isn't coming," Veve announced with conviction. She felt quite relieved. 101

"I think he will," insisted Connie. "It's barely possible he doesn't know how to find the place, or is mixed up on the trails."

After another ten minutes had elapsed, she and Veve and Sunny asked if they might go to the gatehouse to inquire if Mr. Vincent had been seen in the park.

Miss Gordon told the girls they might go and suggested that while there they report to Mr. Karwhite the damage done to their playhouse.

"Don't be gone long," she said as the girls started away. "We're all very hungry."

At the base of the oak tree, the three Brownies paused a moment to study the cluster of footprints.

"If we followed those, we might trail the persons who wrecked our house," Sunny suggested.

"Oh, the footprints must be a day old by now," Connie discouraged her. "We would only waste time."

"Anyway, Miss Gordon told us to hurry," declared Veve, starting off down the trail.

The little girl had taken scarcely a dozen steps when she was brought up short. At that moment an amazing thing happened.

Something red flashed in front of her, lodging over her head in the trunk of a young maple tree.

The object was an arrow.

"Indians!" shrieked Veve, backing away.

"Indians, my eye!" snorted Connie. "They're all on reservations these days."

"But it is an arrow," declared Sunny in awe.

"And something is attached to it!" Recovering from fright, Veve darted over to the maple to pluck the arrow from the bark.

Attached to it was a neatly rolled scrap of paper.

Veve unsnapped the rubber band, and spreading out the message, read:

"COME TO THE RUSTIC BRIDGE. A SURPRISE AWAITS YOU."

"A surprise!" murmured Sunny. "We've already had one unpleasant one today. Who wants another?"

"This may be different," declared Veve. "I think we should investigate. Don't you, Connie?"

"Yes," she agreed, "but not without telling Miss Gordon."

The three girls remained within view of the tree house. Seeing Jane shaking out a rag on the balcony, they waved frantically to her.

"What's wrong now?" she shouted back.

Connie held up the arrow with the message attached.

"Jeepers creepers! I want to see that!" cried Jane. Dropping the rug, she started down the stairway.

Made aware that something exciting had occurred, the other Brownies and Miss Gordon quickly joined the group below.

Carefully the teacher read the note. "This may be another joke those boys are playing," she said slowly. "On the other hand, we've had many pleasant surprises since we came to the park."

"Let's follow instructions," urged Veve. "It won't take long to dash to the rustic bridge and see what's what."

"Veve and I could go," offered Connie, equally excited.

This proposal, however, the teacher rejected. "No, we'll all hike there together," she decided. "It may be another trick those mischievous boys have played. If so, I want to be along."

The person or persons who had shot the arrow were nowhere visible. Hastening along the trail without seeing anyone, the six girls and their leader soon reached the rustic bridge.

Connie gazed carefully about. No one was within view.

"It's a trick," she announced.

"Maybe it isn't," insisted Veve. "Someone has been here."

"That's so," agreed Miss Gordon. "I see smoke coming from one of the fireplaces. Someone built a fire there."

The Brownies walked over to the stone fireplace. The wood had burned down to cherry coals which were exactly right to broil steaks.

An iron frying pan stood ready for use, filled with uncooked meat. On the back of the fire a kettle of thick bean soup gently simmered.

"Uhm, uhm," murmured Rosemary, "does that ever smell delicious?"

"Just the sort of food for a fall day," added Jane enviously.

Connie had been looking over the rustic table near the fireplace. Buttered buns were in a paper sack, and there was an ample supply of paper plates and plastic tableware.

"Oh, just the sight of this food is driving me wild!" Rosemary moaned. "Let's get away from here quick!"

"I wonder where the picnickers are who started the fire?" Veve speculated.

"And the mysterious person who shot that arrow!" added Jane indignantly. "We've been taken in again."

"No, we haven't!" Connie suddenly exclaimed.

Turning toward her, the other girls saw that she had picked up a sheet of paper from the rustic wooden table.

"Here's another message!" she announced. "It's in the same handwriting as the one attached to the arrow!"

The girls clustered about her.

"What does it say?" Sunny demanded impatiently.

"TO THE BROWNIES," Connie began, reading aloud.

"Why, that's us!" laughed Jane. "What about the food?"

"The message says: 'EVERYTHING HERE IS FOR SIX LITTLE GIRLS WHO LIVE IN A TREE HOUSE.'"

"That IS us!" shouted Jane. "Hurrah!"

"What a glorious surprise!" yelled Veve, capering about. "Especially after our tree house was left in such a mess."

"Let's start those steaks to broiling," urged Jane. "I can eat a dozen of 'em myself."

"With the lunch we brought from home, we'll really have a feast," laughed Miss Gordon. "My, that soup smells delicious!"

"How will we serve it?" asked Connie in perplexity.

Rosemary, who had been peering into another sack, produced a nest of paper cups.

"We can use these for the soup," she announced. "Whoever gave us this wonderful meal thought of everything."

Miss Gordon directed Jane and Eileen to hike back to the tree house for the cold food which had been left there.

"Make certain that Mr. Vincent hasn't arrived for lunch belatedly," she advised. "If he should be there, invite him to join us. I'm sure he'll like a hot meal much better than the one we prepared."

The two girls were gone nearly fifteen minutes. When they returned carrying the picnic baskets, the steaks were nearly done.

Jane assured Miss Gordon that Sam Vincent had not put in an appearance at the tree house.

"Too bad," declared Veve, hovering near the fire. "If only he had come, we could have offered him a real meal."

All the Brownies and Miss Gordon as well were convinced that Mr. Vincent had forgotten about the luncheon invitation.



"He isn't coming or he'd have arrived a half hour ago," Connie said. "Let's eat!"

Soon the steaks were ready. The girls filed past Miss Gordon, each receiving a cup of steaming soup and a hot sandwich.

Gathered on either side of the wooden table, they excitedly discussed who might have prepared the feast for them. Their mysterious benefactor was nowhere to be seen. Nor had he left any clue as to his identity.

"The brownies must have done it," chuckled Veve. "The imaginary ones I mean."

"I wish we knew who built the tree house," Connie said, taking a large bite of sandwich. "The person who did that must have planned this surprise for us too."

Eileen asked Miss Gordon if she had any idea who might have provided the meal.

"Not the slightest," the teacher said, placing another pan of steak on the coals. "I did have a thought about the tree house, but this completely baffles me."

Before the girls could question Miss Gordon as to the person she had in mind, Connie unexpectedly held up her hand in a signal for silence.

"Listen!" she commanded.

Startled, the other girls became quiet.

Distinctly, they could hear someone approaching on the trail. As yet they could see only a slight movement of the bushes.

"Keep quiet, everyone!" whispered Connie. "Someone is coming this way. Who knows? It may be the person who planned this nice surprise for us—the one who shot the arrow."

## CHAPTER 11

**Mischievous Boys**

AS the Brownie Scouts waited by the picnic table, an old lady came into view on the trail. In her hand she carried an empty sack.

"It's Mrs. Myles, the button lady!" exclaimed Veve.

"And she's carrying that sack again!" murmured Eileen. "I wonder what she does with it?"

By this time, Mrs. Myles had seen the Brownies. She slackened her pace. Then, as if aware that she could not retreat without being very obvious, she reluctantly came on toward them.

"Let's ask her to share our lunch," suggested Connie impulsively. "Perhaps she'll tell us more about the old buttons she has at her home."

Miss Gordon said she thought it would be very nice indeed to extend the invitation.

Veve and Connie ran to greet the woman. Mrs. Myles seemed a trifle embarrassed at meeting them again. They noticed too that she tried to keep them from seeing the empty sack.

110

"Mrs. Myles, do have luncheon with us," Connie invited cordially. "Doesn't the steak smell delicious?"

"My goodness, it does!" exclaimed the old lady.

"Do come," urged Veve, tugging at her hand. "The Brownies want you to tell them about old buttons."

Mrs. Myles allowed the girls to pull her over to the table.

"I don't know very much about buttons," she apologized. "In fact, I never thought on the subject until you young'uns came to my house to ask if I had any."

As Connie introduced the other girls, Mrs. Myles' bird-like gaze darted from one person to another. The array of food on the table seemed to fascinate her.

"Steak," she murmured. "Why, I haven't tasted any since—well, never mind."

Quickly the girls set a place for Mrs. Myles and filled her plate. Remarking that she had not eaten much breakfast that day, the woman ate greedily.

Finally, when her plate had been refilled and emptied the second time, she laughed self-consciously.

111

"There! I've made a pig of myself! This crisp outdoor air gives one a tremendous appetite."

Secretly, the Brownies wondered if Mrs. Myles had enough to eat at her home. Of course, they were too polite to hint at such a thing.

After lunch, the girls questioned their guest about buttons. Despite the fact that she owned a match holder made of them, she did not know the history of any of the odd types.

Miss Gordon, though, described milk glass buttons, hair buttons, lithographs, those of carved bone, horn buttons, gold coin, brass, pewter and kinds the girls never had heard of before.

"Why, I'm sure I have samples of some of those!" Mrs. Myles declared in astonishment. "When I return home, I'll see. If I have them, the Brownies may have every single one. But not the match holder!"

Thanking the girls for the delicious lunch, Mrs. Myles picked up her sack and went on her way. She did not say where she was going or why she came to the park so regularly.

"What do you suppose she does with that sack?" Sunny speculated.

112

"Perhaps she gathers wood or sticks," suggested Jane.

This explanation did not satisfy the other Brownies. They pointed out that if Mrs. Myles needed wood, she could obtain it much nearer her home.

"This forest is filled with mysteries!" laughed Connie.

"Our tree house is the greatest one of all," agreed Veve, helping to gather up the paper plates. "I'd give a lot to know who built it. Or for that matter, who gave us this luncheon today."

"The brownies," chuckled Jane. "Wasn't that what you said, Veve?"

"I was only joking. I don't really believe in them. You have to admit though, that it's queer so many nice things keep happening to us."

"It wasn't nice the way those mean boys broke into our playhouse," Sunny declared. "I do wish we had a lock on the door."

Of the opinion that Sam Vincent never would arrive for luncheon, the girls cleared away the remains of the meal. Paper napkins and plates were burned and refuse dropped in a can provided for the purpose.

113

Finally, when everything was spic and span, the girls started back to the tree house.

The six were trotting along the trail ahead of Miss Gordon when from somewhere to the left, they heard a strange cry.

For a moment the girls thought that the sound had been made by an animal. Then they were certain that it was a human cry.

"What was that?" Rosemary asked uneasily, pausing to listen.

"I thought it sounded as if someone were shouting," declared Jane.

"It was a woman's voice," insisted Veve.

"I heard several boys," asserted Connie. "They were laughing!"

Drawn by a confused babble, the girls turned down an off-shoot path to try to discover what was wrong. Before they had gone many yards the voices became plainer.

"I can hear Mrs. Myles!" declared Veve. "She's in trouble!"

"It does sound that way," agreed Miss Gordon, moving ahead of the Brownies. "Hurry, girls! We must find out what is wrong."

114

At a dog trot, they all hastened on, soon coming to a small clearing. As the trees opened up ahead, the girls plainly saw what was causing the commotion.

Mrs. Myles stood beneath the branches of a black walnut tree, hemmed in by four boys. On the ground beside her lay a sack half filled with nuts.

"Stealing walnuts—stealing walnuts!" the boys chanted.

One of the naughty lads picked up a nut from the ground and threw it at Mrs. Myles.

As she angrily started toward him, another darted in and quickly upset her sack of walnuts.

"Why, those mean boys!" exclaimed Connie. "Stop it!"

Her cry caused the four to turn quickly around. Seeing Miss Gordon and so many Brownie Scouts, they knew that it would be wise to retreat.

One of the boys hurled a walnut at Jane, but missed his aim.

As the other girls started to gather up nuts to return the barrage, the four doers of mischief ran away.

"Are you hurt?" Miss Gordon asked, hastening to the old woman's side.

115

Mrs. Myles murmured that she was quite all right. "But those dreadful boys—see what they did," she mumbled, her gaze on the spilled sack of walnuts.

"Never mind," the Brownie leader comforted her. "That can be quickly remedied."

Taking their cue from Miss Gordon, the girls began to gather up the scattered nuts. For the first time they realized that Mrs. Myles had tried to keep them from learning why she came to the park area.

"She's been gathering nuts in that sack we've seen her carry," Veve whispered to Connie. "Do you suppose she is taking them without permission?"

Now Mrs. Myles was deeply embarrassed to find herself in such a situation. Although she did not hear what Veve said to Connie, she knew that the Brownies must be wondering about her.

"It isn't true that I am stealing nuts," she said quietly. "Mr. Karwhite gave me permission to

take as many as I like.”

“I’m sure he did,” agreed Miss Gordon. “Don’t be disturbed by anything those boys said or did. They are very badly behaved and have caused considerable trouble in the park.”

After the Brownies had picked up all of the scattered nuts, they offered to escort Mrs. Myles to her horse and buggy.

“This sack really is too heavy for you to carry,” Miss Gordon said somewhat anxiously.

By this time, although Mrs. Myles had not said so, the Brownies guessed that she gathered nuts because she needed them for food.

Connie and Veve, who had visited her rundown home, were certain of it.

Walking with Mrs. Myles to the road, the girls took turns carrying the heavy sack of walnuts. The horse and buggy were within view, when from a slope above the trail a small stone clattered down.

“Someone threw that!” declared Miss Gordon, halting.

Another pebble came skipping down the steep bank, striking Sunny on the leg. Although it did not hurt much, she let out a sharp cry.

“It’s those boys again!” shouted Jane furiously. “Come on, let’s teach them a lesson!”

She and Sunny were carrying the bag of walnuts at the moment. Dropping it on the trail, they started up the slope. The other Brownies were almost at their heels. Miss Gordon and Mrs. Myles, fearful that the girls might be injured if it came to a fight, started after them.

The boys, however, easily eluded their pursuers. Shouting taunts, they darted down and seized the abandoned sack of walnuts.

“Oh, they’re going off with them!” cried Veve in dismay.

Four boys were in the group. One was tall and large enough to be fifteen years of age. The others, who seemed to follow his orders, were younger.

“Ya! Ya! Ya!” they mocked the Brownies. “Stealing walnuts! Stealing walnuts!”

“That’s not so!” shouted Jane. “You’re the ones who mixed up the park signs!”

“Put that sack of nuts down!” ordered Veve. “Don’t you dare—”

The older boy, who had slung the sack over his shoulder, deliberately untied the cord as if to empty the contents upon the ground.

Miss Gordon tried to reason with him, but he paid no attention to anything she said.

“Take one step down the slope, and I’ll dump ‘em all!” he challenged.

“What possible fun can you see in making work for a nice lady?” Miss Gordon asked, edging a little closer. “Did she ever make any trouble for you?”

“She’s been stealing walnuts,” the boy repeated.

His companions took up the hateful chant: “Stealing walnuts—stealing walnuts.”

“You’re just saying that to be mean!” Jane accused. “We know very well that you’re the ones who mixed up the tree signs and broke into our playhouse.”

“You ought to be reported to the police!” Eileen added.

“Please be reasonable and put down Mrs. Myles’ sack,” requested Miss Gordon.

“Like fun!” retorted the eldest boy in the group. “I just guess I’ll take these nuts home!”

Slung the sack over his shoulder again, he started away.

Now the Brownies could not know whether he was merely trying to goad them or whether he meant to take the walnuts.

At any rate, with one accord they started down the slope in pursuit. But the other three boys blocked off the trail.

“If they want a fight, let’s give it to ‘em!” shouted Jane.

Trouble certainly would have developed save for the timely arrival of Mr. Karwhite. The park superintendent, who had been working nearby, had been drawn by the loud cries.

Wondering what might be amiss, he came hurrying up the trail.

“What’s going on here?” he demanded.

His appearance was enough to frighten the four boys.

“Beat it fellows!”

With this warning to his three companions, the eldest culprit dropped the sack of nuts, and fled through the trees.

## CHAPTER 12

**Help for Mrs. Myles**

MR. Karwhite did not attempt to pursue the fleeing boys.

Nevertheless, he had recognized one of the gang.

"The taller boy was Al Bramowitz, unless I'm mistaken," he told Miss Gordon. "He's frequently been in trouble with the police and Juvenile Court authorities."

"Those boys never should be permitted in the park again," declared Mrs. Myles. "Why, they are hoodlums!"

The park superintendent assured both Miss Gordon and Mrs. Myles that the boys would be ordered away.

"First, though, I have to catch them," Mr. Karwhite said grimly. "That won't be easy. They slip over the fence and then run off whenever they see me approaching."

"Perhaps the Brownies can help you," suggested Eileen.

121

"You certainly might," agreed the park superintendent. "If ever you see those scamps changing trail signs or causing anyone annoyance, report to me at once."

Mr. Karwhite picked up Mrs. Myles' sack of nuts, offering to carry it to the roadside for her.

"Thank you," she murmured gratefully. "I'll go directly home. Meeting those boys has upset me dreadfully."

Saying good-bye to the old lady, Miss Gordon and the Brownie Scouts went on to the tree house where they had left a few belongings.

"It's downright queer who fixed that meal for us," Connie remarked as they walked along. "Could it have been Mr. Karwhite?"

"The possibility occurred to me," Miss Gordon admitted. "He seems very busy though. I doubt he would have time for such doings."

"He didn't act as if he knew anything about it either," chimed in Veve.

The Brownies were equally certain that Mrs. Myles had played no part in the pleasant surprise. By now they were firmly convinced that she had none too much food herself.

122

"That's why she tried to keep us from learning what she did with the sack," Jane declared. "She was ashamed to have anyone know she gathered nuts for food."

Presently, the Brownie Scouts came within view of the big oak tree.

Rosemary, who led the line of girls, was the first to see that someone stood on the balcony of the tree house.

"We have a visitor!" she informed the others.

"Oh, great toads!" exclaimed Veve, recognizing the man. "It's Mr. Vincent!"

The Brownie Scouts were dumbfounded. With one accord, they halted on the trail to discuss the embarrassing situation.

"He's here for lunch!" Connie said. "And all the food is eaten!"

"What can we do?" Jane demanded. "If this isn't a pickle!"

Miss Gordon consulted her watch. "It's well past one o'clock," she said. "I can't think Mr. Vincent would have expected us to wait so long. At any rate, all we can do now is to explain what happened."

Rather reluctantly, the Brownies went on to meet their visitor.

123

Seeing the girls, Mr. Vincent came quickly down the stairway.

"Am I late for luncheon?" he asked with a broad smile.

Then as the Brownies looked very unhappy indeed, he said quickly:

"To tell you the truth, I've had my meal. I didn't think you would expect me."

"But we did!" declared Connie in relief. "Only we thought you would come much earlier."

"So we ate up all the food ourselves," added Veve truthfully.

Mr. Vincent assured the girls that it did not matter in the least.

"My real purpose in coming was to see this wonderful tree house," he announced. "I've already looked in, but I'd like a personally conducted tour."

The Brownies were proud to show the carpenter their playhouse. He inspected every nook and corner, declaring that it was sturdily built and safe even in event of a severe wind storm.

"We know that!" laughed Connie ruefully. "The house is very snug. We need a lock on the door though, to keep mischievous boys away."

"And a little stove to keep us warm," added Veve, shivering in the chill wind.

"Both could be easily acquired," the carpenter assured the girls. "Tell you what! I'll see that a lock is put on the door."

"Oh, fine!" shouted Jane. "I guess that will keep those boys out of our place!"

"And it will be another wish come true," declared Veve. "First, we received this adorable tree house, and its furnishings. Then our dinner mysteriously appeared!"

"Mr. Vincent, you didn't see anyone building a fire in the stone chimney near the rustic bridge, did you?" Rosemary inquired.

"Why, no," the carpenter replied. He replied rather absently for he was carefully looking over the interior of the playhouse. "I think a little stove could be put in here very easily," he told the girls. "It would be no trick to run the pipe up through the roof."

"Then we'd be warm and cozy on the coldest days!" cried Connie. "We could use this house almost until the snow flies."

"Let's all wish hard for the little stove," laughed Veve.

Miss Gordon asked the carpenter if he really thought it would be safe to have a stove in the little house.

"As safe as in any home on the ground," he reassured her.

"The stove would be used only when I am here," the Brownie Scout leader said, thinking aloud. "And it would make the room much cozier."

"Then the stove is the same as ours right now!" chuckled Sunny. "Let's all wish for it, girls."

The Brownies noticed that Mr. Vincent was estimating distances with his eye. They couldn't be sure, of course, but they thought he might be thinking of installing the stove for them.

Miss Gordon seemed to think so too, for she gratefully told the carpenter that it was nice of him to take an interest in the tree house and the activities of the troop.

"I enjoy doing it," he replied. "Someday I may ask a favor in return."

"You must come for luncheon—really come I mean," urged Connie.

"Maybe we can get the park brownies to cook it for us," laughed Veve in high humor. "They did a good job today!"

Mr. Vincent apparently did not understand the remark, so the girls told him of the mysterious manner in which their luncheon had appeared.

Veve elaborated too upon their meeting with the group of boys who had pelted Mrs. Myles with walnuts.

"Mrs. Myles?" the carpenter repeated in surprise. "Does she come here to the park?"

"We've seen her twice," revealed Rosemary. "Each time she brought her sack with her."

"She gathers nuts," contributed Eileen, aware that the conversation interested the carpenter. "We think she has to have them for food."

"Her house is run down and she's very poor," added Veve. "We didn't see much to eat in the house when we went there looking for buttons."

"Of course we don't know how much she had in the cupboards," Connie said truthfully. "She did have some nice warm bread."

"The Brownies are judging from superficial evidence," remarked Miss Gordon. She did not want Mr. Vincent to think that the girls were gossiping about the old lady behind her back.

"Nevertheless, I'm afraid what they say may be true," declared the carpenter, looking troubled. "Years ago—well, I knew Mrs. Myles very well indeed. She never had much money. I'm alarmed lest she may actually be in need and not let anyone know because of her pride."

127

"Doesn't she have any children to look after her?" inquired Rosemary earnestly.

"No, the only child she ever had died in infancy. Her husband too has been dead many years. He left her almost nothing except the farm which eats itself up in taxes."

"Hasn't she any sisters or brothers?" This question was posed by Eileen.

"She did have a brother," Mr. Vincent replied. "He tried repeatedly to help her, but Mrs. Myles is proud. She refused to accept any assistance from him."

"You know Mrs. Myles real well, don't you?" remarked Veve.

"I've not seen her in several years," the carpenter replied. "That is, not to speak to her. I do see her driving along the road sometimes in her buggy. Each time she looks thinner and more tired —"

Mr. Vincent broke off to gaze speculatively at the Brownies. The girls could tell that he had thought of some plan which involved them.

128

In this they were right too, for an instant later he said:

"How would you girls like to help Mrs. Myles?"

"HOP is our motto!" chuckled Veve.

Mr. Vincent did not understand what she meant, so Miss Gordon explained that HOP was a code used by the Brownies. The letters stood for "Help Other People."

"'DYB' means 'Do Your Best,'" supplied Rosemary eagerly. "We make up lots of code words."

"We'd like to help Mrs. Myles," declared Connie, thinking how nice the old lady had been about giving away buttons. "How do we go about it?"

"I'm not certain what she needs," replied the carpenter thoughtfully. "Undoubtedly she is short of money, but that may be a delicate matter. Suppose we start by making certain she has ample food."

"Do you think she would like to accept charity?" Connie asked.

"She would refuse," Mr. Vincent answered. "If I offered her anything, she would turn it down. There's only one way."

"What's that?" questioned Veve.

"We must make it into a game. Furthermore, she must think that everything given to her comes from the Brownie Scouts."

129

"While you'll actually be the one doing it?" asked Veve.

"I'll supply the money to buy anything needed. For a long while I've wanted to help Mrs. Myles. This is my chance."

The Brownie Scouts very much wanted to co-operate in the plan, but they had no idea how to begin.

"I live not far from here," explained Mr. Vincent. "At the first white house on the main highway after one passes the park entrance gate."

"Oh, I know that place!" cried Connie, recalling the well-kept lawn.

"Suppose the Brownies come to my house tomorrow after school," the carpenter suggested. "My wife will have two baskets of food ready to take to Mrs. Myles."

"What if she refuses to accept them?" murmured Connie anxiously.

"That's where the Brownies must use psychology. Ever hear of the word?"

"I guess it means getting folks to do something you want 'em to without letting 'em know they're being twisted around your little finger!" chuckled Veve.

130



"I have an idea," proposed Miss Gordon, who had listened attentively to the carpenter's proposal. "The Brownies might act out the story of Little Red Riding Hood going through the woods to Grandmother's house."

"I want to be Red Riding Hood!" shouted Veve. "May I wear a red cape?"

"You don't own a red cape," cut in Jane. "But I do! I have a bright red rain cape, but it's much too large for you!"

"We'll decide later who is to be Red Riding Hood," said Miss Gordon, settling the argument before it was well started.

"Then I may count on the Brownies to help me?" asked Mr. Vincent, pleased that the girls had taken so enthusiastically to the proposal.

"We'll be at your home Monday right after school," Veve promised.

Mr. Vincent soon departed, but before he left he promised the Brownies again he would see that a lock was put on the door of the tree house.

"He's real nice," declared Rosemary, watching until the carpenter was out of sight on the trail. "Imagine offering to help Mrs. Myles—almost a stranger!"

"She may be a stranger to us, but he knows her well," Connie declared thoughtfully. "Didn't you notice how he listened to every word we said about her?"

"He's well acquainted with her—or was," agreed Veve. "I think he has a special reason for wanting us to help her—one he isn't telling about."

"Mr. Vincent did act mysteriously," Connie admitted. "And don't you remember, Veve? Mrs. Myles bristled up the other day when we mentioned Mr. Vincent's name!"

"That's so!" Veve replied. "Oh, playing Red Riding Hood will be a lot of fun! Not only can we help Mrs. Myles, but we may run into some very interesting information!"

## CHAPTER 13

**Grievous Trouble**

"MY, what a big mouth you have!" teased Veve, pretending to gaze in horror at Rosemary's tiny set of even teeth.

"The better to eat you with, my dear," responded Rosemary, making a playful lunge at her friend.

In high spirits the two were playing "wolf," acting out the lines from Little Red Riding Hood.

The entire Brownie Scout troop was en route after school to the home of Sam Vincent. By common consent it had been decided that Jane, who owned the only red cape, was to be Little Red Riding Hood.

The carpenter's house of white clapboards was not large, but had been well built. A tidy workman, he had surrounded the yard with a neat picket fence, freshly painted.

As they entered through the ornamental gate, the girls saw Mr. Vincent trimming dead wood from a bush in the yard.

"We're right on time!" sang out Jane. "I'm Red Riding Hood. Are the baskets ready to take to Mrs. Myles?"

"They certainly are," the carpenter assured her. "My wife has packed them so full of good things to eat that I'm afraid they may be too heavy for even husky Brownie Scouts to carry."

When the girls saw the two well-filled baskets, they were inclined to share the carpenter's opinion.

One of the baskets contained a pie and a cake and several pounds of smoked meat, besides numerous other small items.

The larger basket was loaded with staple items such as coffee, tea, sugar and flour.

"I'll take you most of the way in my car," Mr. Vincent offered. "Then when we come within view of Mrs. Myles' house, you may go on alone. Remember—you must never hint to anyone that my wife and I furnished this food."

The Brownies promised to keep the secret.

Everyone crowded into Mr. Vincent's automobile, although it was a very tight squeeze. Miss Gordon sat in front, holding the two baskets.

"This is as far as I dare go," Mr. Vincent announced when the car rolled over a hill and the tumble-down Myles home was seen ahead. "Think you can manage those heavy baskets without me?"

"Oh, yes, we'll take turns carrying them, even if I am Red Riding Hood," declared Jane quickly.

Mr. Vincent handed the baskets down from the car after the girls had scrambled out.

"Now don't forget!" he said in final warning. "Even if Mrs. Myles questions you, don't let her know I sent the food."

"We won't," promised Connie.

"If you can, without seeming to ask too many questions, learn if she needs money," the carpenter urged. "We may be able to find a way to help her."

Carrying the heavy baskets, the Brownie Scouts trudged on to the Myles home.

Jane had been coached in her lines. When Mrs. Myles presently opened the door, she made a very pretty speech about being Little Red Riding Hood.

"And I'm the big bad wolf!" added Veve, not to be cut out of the act.

Mrs. Myles gazed at the two baskets filled to overflowing with attractively wrapped foods.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, eh? And what is this?"

"Baskets of food we've brought through the woods," said Jane quickly. "You're supposed to be Grandma and take the gifts."

"Come in, come in," Mrs. Myles invited, belatedly thinking of her manners.

She seemed very flustered as she examined the many packages. The girls could not tell at first whether or not she was offended.

"Now I'm sure you have all of these things," Miss Gordon said. "The Brownie Scouts like to be helpful, and they especially appreciated the way you gave them buttons the other day. I hope you don't mind humoring them in this little game."

"Mind?" Mrs. Myles laughed rather excitedly. "I've needed some of these things for a long while." Aware that she was revealing too much about herself, the woman added hastily: "The grocery store is so far from here, I don't buy as regularly as I should."

"Then you'll keep the things?" Jane demanded.

"I'll be glad to, my dear." To Jane's embarrassment, she stooped and imprinted a prim little kiss on the end of her freckled nose.

"Since it's so hard for you to get to the grocery store, perhaps we could do some of your shopping for you," offered Veve. "What else would you like to have?"

"Dear me, I need potatoes and dried beans," Mrs. Myles revealed. "I would like material for a new dress and—"

She stopped at that point and laughed self-consciously.

"Thank you, my dears, for offering to do my buying for me. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. A check I've been expecting for several weeks hasn't come, so I will have to wait a few more days."

The Brownies knew then that Mrs. Myles did not have enough money to purchase the things she needed. This information they would relay to Mr. Vincent.

As the girls talked, they heard a loud rap on the front door.

"Now who can that be?" murmured Mrs. Myles.

While the Brownie Scouts waited, she went to open the door.

The girls heard a low murmur of voices. Although they made no attempt to listen, they could not fail to catch a few phrases of the conversation.

Mrs. Myles was talking with a man whom she seemed unwilling to admit to the house.

"I'll do the best I can, Mr. Jennings," they heard her tell the caller. "Don't press me too hard. I work and slave but I can't make ends meet."

"I know, Mrs. Myles," the man replied with sympathy. "I hated to come here today. But you know how it is. I'm merely an employee of the bank."

"I'll pay on the loan as soon as I can. You have my promise."

"We know you mean well, Mrs. Myles. But the bank already has given you an extension of time. You owe three hundred and fifty dollars, not counting the main note of nine hundred and eighty dollars."

"I can't pay it this month," Mrs. Myles said nervously. "Please go away now—I have guests."

"Very well," the bank employee said politely. "In due time you will receive written notice of our action. We deeply regret it but to protect our own interests we must collect."

"Action?" the old lady asked in a quavering voice. "What action do you mean?"

"We must foreclose this property. In fact, steps already are being taken."

"Oh, no!"

The voices dropped to a murmur again and the Brownies heard no more of the conversation. A moment later, however, Mrs. Myles closed the door and returned to the girls.

Her face was flushed but she spoke brightly to cover her embarrassment and heart-break.

"We were speaking of—buttons?" she inquired.

"Groceries," corrected Connie.

"Oh, yes, to be sure," nodded Mrs. Myles. "Well, as I said, a check I've been expecting has

failed to arrive. So, although I very much appreciate your offer, I can't allow you to put yourselves to the trouble of assisting me with my shopping."

As the Brownies started to protest that they would be glad to bring other baskets of food, Mrs. Myles firmly shook her head.

"No, my dears. I understand you are trying to help me, but no one can." Her eyes filled with tears. "Please go now. I do not wish to be rude, but I have grievous troubles. I must be alone to try to think of a solution."

## CHAPTER 14

# Mr. Vincent's Disclosure

THUS dismissed, the Brownies did not linger at Mrs. Myles' home.

However, once they were on the road again, en route to report to Mr. Vincent, they discussed the snatch of overheard conversation.

"Mrs. Myles is upset because she is afraid she will lose her home," Connie commented. "Miss Gordon, do you think the bank will take it away from her?"

"I'm very much afraid of it," the teacher replied. "From what Mrs. Myles said, I doubt she ever will be able to pay off the loan on her property."

"What's a loan?" demanded Rosemary, who knew little of business matters.

"When Mrs. Myles found herself in financial need, she undoubtedly went to the bank and asked if the officials there would advance her a little money. I assume that they agreed to do so, but to protect themselves, took a mortgage or lien on her property."

"And now that she can't repay the money, they're entitled to claim the house," supplied Eileen.

"The house and possibly its contents will be sold at sheriff's sale," Miss Gordon explained. "Of course if more money should be obtained than the amount Mrs. Myles owes the bank, then she would receive the difference."

"I don't think that place will bring much," said Sunny dubiously.

"Nor do I," agreed Miss Gordon. "I'm afraid Mrs. Myles is in a serious predicament. I only wish we could help her."

"Maybe Mr. Vincent will think of a way," suggested Connie. "He's very much interested."

The carpenter was waiting in the yard when the Brownies straggled in, carrying their empty baskets. Eagerly he went to meet them at the gate.

"She kept the food?" he asked. "How did she take it?"

Miss Gordon related the entire conversation with Mrs. Myles. As she added that the woman did not seem to have enough food, his face became deeply troubled.

"I was afraid of it," he nodded. "Well, we'll see to it that she gets baskets regularly."

"Mrs. Myles said not to bring any more food," Veve interposed. "Besides, she has a worse problem."

"How is that?"

The girls told him of the conversation they had overheard.

As Mr. Vincent listened, he kept moving the gate back and forth. In his nervousness he did not notice that it was making an unpleasant creaking sound.

"Oh, this is serious!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know she had mortgaged her place. In that case, she hasn't anything left!"

The Brownies thought it odd that the carpenter seemed so distressed by Mrs. Myles' misfortune. They very much wanted to help the old lady too, but the matter did not excite them as it did Mr. Vincent.

"Exactly what did the bank man say?" he questioned the girls.

They related the conversation as best they could, telling of the sums the bank employee had mentioned.

"She must owe at least \$1,330," Mr. Vincent calculated. "That's a tidy sum. Mrs. Myles couldn't raise it in a year. Unless someone helps her, she's certain to lose her home."

"Quite soon too," added Miss Gordon. "We heard the man from the bank say action already had been started."

"Do you know of any way to help Mrs. Myles?" Veve asked the carpenter.

"Yes, I do," he replied. "I could pay off the loan myself if she would permit me to do it."

Even Miss Gordon was amazed by this generous offer.

"The loan amounts to considerable," she commented.

"Yes, but I have a comfortable home of my own and a savings account. I would like to help Mrs. Myles. The question is, will she permit it?"

"She might, now that she is in such desperate circumstance," said Miss Gordon thoughtfully. "Why not go to her and—"

"No, that would never do. She would refuse to see me."

"How stupid!" exclaimed Sunny.

"If Mrs. Myles is that proud, I don't think she deserves any help," declared Jane, tossing her pigtails.

Mr. Vincent smiled. "You don't understand," he said quietly. "My acquaintance with Mrs. Myles goes back a long, long time. The story is one I hesitate to tell."

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"We don't wish to pry into personal affairs," Miss Gordon said quickly. "Please don't feel that you need to explain anything, Mr. Vincent."

"Nevertheless, you must wonder why I take such an interest in Mrs. Myles."

"I'm sure she needs help. It's very generous of you to concern yourself."

"Oh, I'm not such a charitable person by and large," Mr. Vincent belittled himself. "The truth is, I have a special reason for thinking of Mrs. Myles' welfare."

The Brownies listened attentively, certain that the carpenter was about to make an interesting revelation.

Nor were they disappointed. Taking a deep breath, Mr. Vincent went on:

"You may not know this. Mrs. Myles dislikes me intensely. I might even say she hates me."

"But why?" cut in Veve. "You're awfully nice."

"Thank you," he said, smiling down upon her. "To go on, Mrs. Myles hasn't spoken a word to me in years. My sister detests the ground I walk on."

The Brownies wondered if they had heard correctly.

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"Your *sister*?" echoed Connie.

Mr. Vincent nodded.

"Now you know why I take a personal interest in Mrs. Myles," he said. "I want to help her and feel it is my duty to do so. But she will have nothing to do with me."

"How strange!" exclaimed Sunny, unable to understand the odd situation. "Why doesn't Mrs. Myles like you?"

The instant the question had been asked, the Brownies were sorry. Mr. Vincent, they could see, did not want to answer.

"It's a long story and a painful one," he said. "I'd prefer not to say any more about it just now."

"Of course not," agreed Miss Gordon promptly. "We'll do anything we can to help."

"I'll appreciate it," Mr. Vincent said soberly. "You might approach my sister to see if she will accept the money. It will be difficult to convince her though, and I'm very much afraid she'll reject any offer of help."

## CHAPTER 15

**Watchful Waiting**

TWO days elapsed before the Brownie Scouts again found time to visit their tree house in the metropolitan park.

Meanwhile, Mr. Vincent had made inquiry at the bank, learning the exact amount of money owed by his sister.

"Unless the sum is promptly paid, everything she owns will be sold at auction," he informed Miss Gordon. "I am told she not only mortgaged her house, but all her furniture, too."

The Brownies were eager to see Mrs. Myles at once to ask her if she would accept money from the carpenter.

Miss Gordon, however, held off making the call.

"We will not speak to her of the matter until Mr. Vincent definitely instructs us to present his offer," she decided. "This is a case in which too much haste might ruin everything."

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Dismissing Mrs. Myles temporarily from their thoughts, the girls hiked once more to their tree house deep in the woods.

"I wonder if Mr. Vincent put a lock on the door for us?" Connie speculated as they reached the big oak tree.

"He's doing that tomorrow," Miss Gordon answered. "When I talked with him yesterday, he told me he had been too busy with other work to get around to it."

"Then I guess we have no surprises in store for today," Connie said, as she started up the stairway.

Veve had gone on ahead. "Yes, we have too!" she shouted.

In a moment the other Brownies saw what the little girl meant.

A tiny stove had been set up in the playhouse. The pipe was in and everything appeared in readiness for a fire. Beside the stove was a neat pile of wood and kindling.

"Oh, do you suppose Mr. Vincent did this?" Veve cried.

"It's possible," admitted Miss Gordon. "He didn't say a word about it yesterday though when I talked to him about Mrs. Myles."

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"Then maybe he didn't do it," said Eileen doubtfully.

"Anyway it's another wish come true!" laughed Sunny. "Oh, it will be cozy here with a fire."

"We'll be able to use our little house much later in the season too," added Eileen.

The girls were all for building a fire immediately. However, Miss Gordon said it would be necessary first to obtain permission from Mr. Karwhite.

"The park has strict rules about starting fires," she reminded the girls. "I feel certain it will be all right, but to avoid any possible difficulty, we must ask permission."

"Let's do it right away!" urged Veve.

Leaving a few belongings in the tree house, the girls and their leader tramped to the gate house. Mr. Karwhite was not there, but they found him a short distance away, repairing a fence.

"Hello, strangers," he greeted them, putting aside his tools. "Haven't seen you for a long while."

"Two days," laughed Connie. "While we were away, another splendid surprise arrived at our tree house."

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"No!"

"A little stove," explained Sunny. "Now we want permission to use it."

Miss Gordon assured the park superintendent that the stove had been properly installed and appeared very safe.

"The Brownies never will use it except when I am with them," she added.

"In that case you may use the stove whenever you like," the park superintendent consented.

"We'd like to know who installed it for us," Connie said. "Have you seen Mr. Vincent here lately?"

"Not that I recall. He comes and goes occasionally. As I said before, I don't pay too much attention."

"It's certainly queer how that house of ours was built and no one knew about it," Jane murmured. "I'd like to find out who is responsible for all our nice surprises."

"Finding out might detract from some of the fun," suggested Miss Gordon. "Why not enjoy the tree house and not worry too much about our kind benefactor?"

"The work must be done late in the afternoon or maybe at night," Jane went on thoughtfully. "You know what! I'd like to hide out and watch sometime!"

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"Let's!" proposed Sunny taking up the idea.

Miss Gordon did not encourage the girls in the matter, so the proposal quickly was dropped.

"We're wasting valuable time," Veve complained. Always impatient, she was eager to return to the tree house. "Let's get back and try out our new stove!"

"Race you!" challenged Jane.

Off they ran with the other Brownies in pursuit.

Veve and Jane, having a start of the others, were the first to reach the tree house.

"Say! Someone's been here while we were away!" exclaimed Veve, pointing to fresh footprints at the base of the oak tree.

"I'll bet a cent they went up into our tree house too," Jane said indignantly. "Oh, I'll be glad when Mr. Vincent gets that lock put on the door. Then we won't have to worry about anyone breaking in."

Uneasy lest damage might have been done, the two girls swiftly ascended the stairway. Veve pushed open the door.

A squirrel sat on the table, nibbling at a nut.

"Why, the little scamp!" laughed Veve. "How did he get in here?"

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"Through the window."

"But we didn't have the window open," Veve recalled. "It's chilly in here and we kept it closed all the time."

"That's so, we did," recalled Jane, looking around. "Oh, see what's happened!"

She pointed to the wood which had been scattered.

"The squirrel didn't do that!" cried Veve.

"It must have been those mean boys again! They're somewhere in the park."

"I wish Mr. Karwhite could catch them at their tricks."

"So do I," Jane muttered, starting to pick up the wood.

The other Brownies came trooping up the stairs and were informed what had occurred. By this time the squirrel had scampered away. Running along the balcony rail, he leaped into a tree branch. From there he chattered excitedly.

"Mr. Squirrel is annoyed too!" Rosemary declared. "Oh, I wish we could find those boys."

"They can't be far from here," Veve said.

"Let's track them down," proposed Jane. "We'll arm ourselves with sticks and—"

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"No, girls!" Miss Gordon reproved firmly. "That would never do."

"If we don't stop them somehow, they'll keep on wrecking our tree house," Eileen protested. "How are we going to catch them?"



"I know!" proposed Veve suddenly. "Why don't we hide out in the bushes and keep watch? They may come sneaking back here."

"Probably they ran away because they saw us returning," Jane added, instantly falling in with the idea. "We could pretend to leave the park, but not actually do it."

The girls now beseeched their leader to consent to the plan.

"We might wait hours to no purpose," she tried to discourage them.

"I wouldn't care if I had to stay all night!" Jane announced. "It would be worth it to catch those bad boys."

The other Brownies said they felt the same way about it.

"Very well," Miss Gordon finally gave in. "We'll hide out for awhile. Even if we aren't successful, it may teach us how to be patient."

Putting the little house to rights, the Brownies gathered up all of their personal possessions.

When they were ready to leave, they closed the door of the tree house and tacked a sign on the door which read:

"Brownie Scout property. Please do not enter."

"There!" Veve said in satisfaction as they went down the stairway. "If they deliberately disobey now, they'll deserve to be arrested!"

The Brownies walked a short distance down the trail. As they came to a dividing path, they saw a group of four boys playing in a nearby pond. The youngsters were tossing stones into the water.

"There they are now!" exclaimed Jane. "I'm sure they're the ones!"

"We can't be certain," Miss Gordon said quietly. "Before we can turn anyone in, they must be caught actually damaging our property. Keep walking girls, and don't look toward the pond."

Well aware that they would be watched by the group of boys, the Brownie Scouts continued on the path until they no longer could see the pool.

"We'll come to another trail a little farther on," Miss Gordon said. "By taking it we can double back to the tree house without being seen."

Convinced that the boys would take advantage of their absence to invade the playhouse again, the Brownies hurried as fast as they could.

However, when they reached the oak tree there was no indication anyone had been there.

"We haven't given them very long," said Miss Gordon. "Suppose we seek hiding places."

Each girl found herself a hide-out amid the bushes. Jane and Veve were the closest to the oak tree, sheltered by a heavy screen of branches and leaves.

For a time, it was very exciting to lie in wait. Each time a stick crackled or any unusual sound was heard, the girls waited tensely, certain that the boys were coming. But they never did.

"Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all," Jane said presently, shifting her cramped legs. "How long have we been here now?"

"Oh, fifteen or twenty minutes," Veve replied.

"It seems a couple of hours. I don't think I want to wait much longer."

"You were the one who said you wouldn't mind waiting all night!" Veve reminded her.

"Well, I'm getting tired. Besides, I don't think they're coming back. Those boys probably are playing at the pond."

"You're too impatient," Veve chided her. "I'm not going to be the first Brownie to quit. No, sir!"

"Who is quitting?" Jane demanded crossly. "I just said I was tired—that's all."

To make the waiting period pass more quickly, the girls watched the birds. They played a game of identifying trees, flowers and plants within their range of vision.

Finally Veve became deeply interested in watching what went on in an ant hill.

"Look at 'em go!" she exclaimed, scraping sand from the top of the mound.

"Quiet, you dope!" warned Jane, punching her hard in the ribs.

Veve listened intently. She could hear light steps on the trail.

“Someone’s coming!”

“Sure,” whispered Jane. “Be quiet. Or do you want to give everything away?”

On the opposite side of the path, Miss Gordon and the Brownies also had heard the sound of shuffling feet through dry leaves. Flattening themselves on the ground, the girls quietly waited.

## CHAPTER 16

**Captured Culprits**

PRESENTLY four boys swung into view on the trail.

Batting at the bushes with their sticks and whistling gay tunes, they seemed in high good humor.

"It's those same boys who pelted Mrs. Myles with walnuts!" Jane whispered.

Veve pinched her as a warning to remain silent.

The boys now were so close that she was afraid they would hear even a whisper.

"Let's go up to the tree house, fellows," proposed the eldest boy.

"Aw, we've been up there once today," a companion rejoined. "We had to beat it when we saw that Brownie Scout leader coming."

"Sure, but she's gone now. Didn't we see 'em all leaving the park? They won't be back today."

"Now that they've gone, we can have a lot of fun," urged another boy. "We'll really make that tree house into a mess!"

"Afterwards, let's mix up some more park signs," his companion proposed. "And then tear off tags from the trees."

"Okay, only it will be too bad if old Karwhite catches us!"

"He won't," the older boy said confidently. "Not that fat old duck! He can't run worth a cent."

The four passed very close to the clump of bushes where the Brownie Scouts lay hidden. Veve was tempted to reach out and grasp one of the boys by the leg, but instead she kept very quiet.

Never dreaming that they were being watched, the four boys climbed the stairway to the tree house.

On the balcony they halted to stare in astonishment at the sign which the Brownies had tacked on the door.

"Hey, what's this!" exclaimed one of the boys.

He read the message aloud, and his companions all hooted.

They considered it a great joke that the Brownie Scouts would tack up a sign requesting them not to trespass.

"Let's do a good job tearing up the place!" proposed the leader of the gang. Boldly he ripped the sign from the door. "How about it, fellows?"

"Sure!" the others agreed, following him into the tree house.

By this time Miss Gordon and the Brownies had emerged from their hiding places. Several of the girls would have started up the steps after the boys, but the teacher told them to wait.

"They would only dart away and elude us again," she advised the girls. "Veve, you and Jane run as fast as you can to the gate house. Bring Mr. Karwhite here."

"We certainly will," Jane promised.

"Fast too," added Veve. "Just don't let those boys get away until we return."

Making no sound, the two girls slipped away. Once they were a few yards away and knew they could not be heard, they broke into a run.

"What if Mr. Karwhite isn't at the entrance gate?" Veve gasped, short of breath. "That would be just our luck."

"He *has* to be there," Jane replied. "This is our one chance to have those boys arrested."

The girls reached the gate house, and flung open the door.

Mr. Karwhite had been working at his accounts. Seeing the girls, he regarded them in astonishment.

"Come quickly, Mr. Karwhite!" Veve urged, tugging at his hand.

"Why, what is wrong? Is anyone hurt?"

"Oh, no!" Jane assured him. "It's those horrid boys. They're wrecking our tree house."

"They are, eh?" demanded the park superintendent. Before leaving the gate house, he equipped himself with a stout stick which he kept handy behind the door.

"Hurry, Mr. Karwhite," Veve urged, as she and Jane led the way.

The boys had been right in saying that the park superintendent could not run very fast. The two girls had to slow their pace so as not to outdistance him.

Upon reaching the oak tree, Veve and Jane found that Miss Gordon was having difficulty in restraining the other Brownies. It had been very hard for them to remain on the ground, knowing that the four boys were inside the tree house.

"They tore down the curtains!" Rosemary informed the park superintendent. "We saw them do it."

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"And they threw some of the wood over the balcony railing!" added Eileen. "Get them quick, Mr. Karwhite."

"I will," he said grimly.

The park superintendent told Miss Gordon to stand at the foot of the stairway. In that way she would block off any possible escape, should the boys elude Mr. Karwhite.

All the Brownies gathered beside the teacher, ready to assist her if their help was needed.

Armed with the stick, Mr. Karwhite started up the stairway.

He made no attempt to muffle his footsteps. As he reached the balcony, the door suddenly flew open.

"Jeepers!" cried one of the boys, belatedly warning his companions. "It's Old Karwhite!"

The other boys poured out of the house like ants from a disturbed hill. Their escape, however, was cut off.

"I've finally caught up with you," the park superintendent said. "You're coming with me!"

"Aw, have a heart," pleaded one of the boys. "We aren't doing any harm."

"You've mixed up park signs, pulled valuable shrubs, not to mention the damage you've done here."

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"We won't do it again."

"Let us off this time," wheedled the eldest boy. "We'll stay away from the park after today."

"You'll stay away all right," the superintendent agreed.

First he took the names and addresses of the four boys. Then he ordered them to march ahead of him down the stairway to the base of the oak tree where the Brownies waited.

"Now if you try to run away, it will be the worse for you," he warned. "I'm turning you over to the police."

The boys were badly frightened. No longer arrogant and cocky, they obeyed the superintendent's order.

Mr. Karwhite made the boys walk in single file to the gate house. There, while the Brownies and Miss Gordon listened, he gave them a severe lecture on their misconduct.

"We know we did wrong," one of the boys admitted. "Please don't arrest us, Mr. Karwhite. Let us off this time and we'll never come to the park again."

"We'll clean up everything in the tree house," volunteered another of the group. "Just give us a chance."

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Now Mr. Karwhite had not intended to call the police even though he had threatened to do so. He only meant to frighten the boys so they never again would come to the park.

"Very well," he said. "Arm yourselves with brooms and scrub pails. We'll see to it that you give

the tree house a thorough cleaning. If you do a good job I may consider letting you off."

Relieved that they were to have another chance, the boys accompanied Mr. Karwhite to the oak tree. While the Brownies sat on the ground watching from below, they cleaned every inch of the little house.

The park superintendent made them put up the curtain they had torn down. He also ordered them to wash and polish the window, even though they had not dirtied it.

When the playhouse was in perfect order, Mr. Karwhite told the boys they were free to go.

"But never come here again," he warned them. "Remember, I have your names and addresses. If ever I set eyes on you in the park, I'll turn you over to the police."

The boys were very glad to be let off so easily. Promising Mr. Karwhite that they would stay away, they darted off.

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"They'll not be back," the superintendent told Miss Gordon confidently. "This time I really threw a scare into them they won't forget."

So much time had been consumed, that it was too late for the Brownies to build a fire in their little stove.

Regretfully, they gathered together their wraps and notebooks and prepared to leave the park area.

"From now on, you should not be annoyed here," Mr. Karwhite assured them. "The playhouse will be all yours until the snow flies."

"I only wish we knew who built the house for us," remarked Rosemary wistfully. "It would be nice to thank the person."

"Are you sure, Mr. Karwhite, that you don't know who built the house?" Veve asked him.

"Well, maybe I do, and maybe I don't," he said mysteriously.

"That means you do know!" accused Eileen.

Mr. Karwhite merely laughed. "Be patient," he advised. "In good time, I'm sure you'll learn the answer for yourselves!"

## CHAPTER 17

**Bitter Words**

THE following week the Brownie Scouts found many demands upon their time.

Not only were they busy at school, but the organization gave a tea for all the mothers. At this meeting the girls displayed the buttons they had gathered and discussed plans for obtaining others.

Eileen had acquired a glass swirlback button, unlike any other on exhibit. Molded on the front, it had a wire loop shank with the back twisted in a snail-like spiral.

Sunny's mother had given her an old Czechoslovakian button and there were others of foreign make. The most beautiful one of all, however, was an old Sheffield silver button which Miss Gordon herself had obtained. She planned to have it made into a pin.

Although gathering buttons and giving a tea required a great deal of work, the girls nevertheless found time to have a cook-out at their tree house. 165

Since Mr. Karwhite had ordered the gang of boys away, no one had bothered the little tree dwelling.

True to his promise, Mr. Vincent had put a sturdy lock on the door. However, it was not really necessary. Only the birds and the squirrels were regular callers.

To the delight of the Brownies, surprises continued to come at most unexpected times. On one occasion the girls arrived at the tree house to discover mysterious boxes piled on the balcony. Inside they found a complete set of dishes with a handsome cherry design.

Another time a book was left explaining about the different kinds of trees and flowers.

Eileen, who was verging on ten, had become very studious. She spent many hours reading all types of books, particularly those relating to the Girl Scout organization.

Now, though the matter seldom was mentioned, all the girls knew that Eileen soon would be leaving the Brownie troop.

Upon her tenth birthday she would move on up into an intermediate Girl Scout troop—"flying up" as the occasion was called. 166

Eileen was looking forward to the day when she would join the older girls. In preparation for the "fly-up," she spent hours learning tenderfoot requirements—the Girl Scout Promise, the laws, slogan and motto. Nevertheless, the thought of leaving behind her good chums and Brownie activities filled her with regret.

"I'll hate to give up this darling little tree house," she remarked one day to Veve. "Were having such grand times."

"You can come back to visit the troop next year," Veve assured her.

"It won't be quite the same though," Eileen said wistfully. "I wish before I become a Girl Scout that we could solve the mystery of the identity of the person who gave us this house."

"Is that a real wish, Eileen?"

"Yes, it is. I hope it comes true as some of the others have."

"I'll make the same wish," declared Veve. "Maybe that will help make it come true."

"I have another wish too," added Eileen after a moment.

"What's that?" 167

"It has nothing to do with this tree house—or not directly. I wish we could help Mrs. Myles."

"All the Brownies feel that way. I don't know why Miss Gordon never has taken us to her house again."

Now as Veve spoke, it so happened that the Brownie leader and several of the girls came up the stairway after being on a hike. Miss Gordon could not fail to hear the remark.

"Veve, I'm glad you mentioned Mrs. Myles," she said. "I've held off going to her home because Mr. Vincent thought it might be better to wait a few days. Now a certain situation has arisen, so we'll go there today."

"Today?" demanded Eileen in pleased surprise.

"Yes, the date of the sheriff's sale has been set. Something must be done soon if Mrs. Myles' home is to be saved."

"What does Mr. Vincent say we should do?" inquired Connie.

"He wants us to go to Mrs. Myles and offer her the money she needs. If she insists upon knowing who is giving it, then we must tell her. But only if she insists."

"Let's go now," urged Sunny. "It's getting late."

"Yes, it is," agreed Miss Gordon, preparing to lock the door of the tree house. "We have no time to lose."

A brisk hike took the girls to the Myles home. In the gathering shadows of late afternoon, the tumble-down dwelling looked even more desolate than on the first occasion they had seen it.

"I don't think this place is worth saving," Jane muttered. "A good strong north wind would blow the house over."

"Nevertheless, it's the only home Mrs. Myles has," declared Miss Gordon. "What a pity she dislikes her brother so intensely. He could fix this place up for her if she would allow it."

"Wonder why she will have nothing to do with him?" Connie speculated. "She must have a very good reason."

"Mr. Vincent was careful not to tell us that part of the story," remarked Eileen.

Before knocking on the front door, Miss Gordon advised the girls to let her do most of the talking.

"This mission is a most delicate one," she said with a worried frown. "I'm not at all certain that we'll be successful."

Mrs. Myles seemed very pleased to see the Brownies and their leader again. Cordially she invited them into the kitchen.

Glancing around, the girls noticed that several boxes and barrels had been packed with dishes.

"Excuse the untidy appearance," the widow apologized. "I'm packing a few things the bank has allowed me to keep out of the sale."

Mrs. Myles spoke with forced brightness. The Brownies knew though, from the strained expression on her face, that she had suffered.

"It's the sale that I came to discuss," began Miss Gordon. "There need be none."

Mrs. Myles, who had been wrapping a dish in paper, nearly dropped the piece of china.

"No sale?" she inquired. "Oh, I wish you were right, Miss Gordon. Unfortunately, the bank has refused to extend credit. Posters are already out, advertising the auction."

"If you say the word, it can be called off."

"That is quite impossible, Miss Gordon. Oh, it's useless to pretend. I have no money. I can't pay the bank loan or even the interest on it. I'm down to my last dollar. When I leave here, I don't know where I'll go."

Sinking into a chair, Mrs. Myles covered her face.

"Please don't cry, Mrs. Myles," the Brownie leader comforted her. "Money is available to pay off the bank loan."

The widow gazed at Miss Gordon as if unable to believe the wonderful news.

"Oh, I prayed that help would come," she murmured. "It just doesn't seem possible that my prayers were answered."

"They were, Mrs. Myles. You need worry no longer."

"You went to the bank and the president agreed to extend the loan?"

"No, a friend of yours—someone who has your welfare deeply at heart—has offered to pay the indebtedness."

Mrs. Myles arose and walked nervously across the kitchen.

"Charity," she said in a bitter voice.

"No, one can't call it by that name, Mrs. Myles. You need the money badly and it will save your home."

"Who is the person that has made this kind offer?"

"I feel it would be better if the person remained anonymous."

Mrs. Myles shook her head. "I can't accept with out knowing."

Miss Gordon glanced at the Brownies and drew a deep breath.

"You insist upon knowing, Mrs. Myles?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, I will tell you. Your brother, Sam Vincent, has made the offer."

Mrs. Myles appeared stunned by the revelation.

"Sam!" she exclaimed. "That sneak! He didn't have the nerve to make his offer face to face. He knew I'd never listen to him!"

"He honestly wants to help you, Mrs. Myles. Who has a better right than your own brother?"

"Don't call him a brother of mine! I'm ashamed I ever knew him!"

The Brownies could not understand Mrs. Myles' strange outburst. So far as they knew, Sam Vincent was a very kind man who always did nice things for people.

"Never as long as I live will I take a penny from Sam!" Mrs. Myles went on angrily. "He's a cheap, low-down thief!"

Miss Gordon and the Brownies were shocked by the accusation against the carpenter.

"Surely you don't mean that!" gasped the teacher.

"I do! I never want to see Sam again in my life! I'll starve before I'd accept money from him."

"He seems to have your interests so deeply at heart," Miss Cordon murmured. "If it's only a misunderstanding—"

"Sam is a thief!" Mrs. Myles repeated. "He knows it too. That's why he's ashamed to come here himself! He knows I'll never speak to him as long as I live. Didn't he bring disgrace upon the family?"

"That I wouldn't know," the teacher replied quietly. "The important thing now is that a little money would save your home. If your brother is willing to help—"

"Don't talk him up to me," Mrs. Myles interrupted again. "He's given me nothing, and he never will."

"Oh, but he has given you something!" exclaimed Veve.

Too late, she recalled that Miss Gordon had warned the Brownies to let her do most of the talking.

Mrs. Myles was quick to take advantage of Veve's slip of the tongue.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "What did Sam ever give me?"

"Those baskets of food," informed Sunny as Veve remained silent.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Myles, exactly as if she had received a deep stab wound. "To think of it! If I had dreamed Sam had sent the food, I wouldn't have touched it!"

"We didn't mean to deceive you," Miss Gordon said. "Sam only wanted to help."

"Well, I know now!" the widow exclaimed. "Thank goodness, I learned in time. Don't ever bring anything here again! The sale will go on, and if I land in the Poorhouse, Sam has only himself to blame!"



## CHAPTER 18

**The Auction Sale**

MRS. Myles' bitter tirade left the Brownies without a single argument.

From what she had said, they were certain nothing they could tell her ever would induce her to accept money from her brother.

Realizing that it was quite hopeless to try to change Mrs. Myles' mind, Miss Gordon arose to leave.

The elderly lady walked with the teacher and the Brownies to the door.

"I'm sorry I let my temper flare," she apologized. "I bear you no ill will. It's only Sam that has me so riled. He should have known better than to think I'd take the money."

Miss Gordon told the widow that if she should change her mind before the day of the sheriff's sale to notify her.

"You'll not hear from me," Mrs. Myles said firmly.

On the road en route to their homes, the Brownies discussed the failure of their mission. All were agreed that Mrs. Myles was too stubborn ever to change her mind about accepting the money.

"I can't understand why she dislikes her brother so intensely," remarked Connie. "I think he's nice."

"She called him a thief too!" recalled Veve. "It must have been something about money that caused their first quarrel."

Regretfully the Brownies reported to Mr. Vincent their failure to induce Mrs. Myles to accept the money.

Of course they were too tactful to tell him everything his sister had said. They were hopeful that the carpenter would disclose why he and Mrs. Myles had quarreled. He did not do so, however.

"If Minnie refuses to accept the money, then nothing can be done to help her," he said. "At least I tried."

The coming auction sale had been advertised on posters. Reading that all household goods were to be sold the next Saturday, the Brownies asked Miss Gordon if they might attend in a group.

"Why, yes, if the girls care to," the Brownie leader consented. "I may buy a few things just to help out."

"I'd like to bid in some buttons," declared Veve. "I wonder if the match holder and cross-stitch pillow will be auctioned?"

On the day appointed for the sheriff's sale, the six girls went early to the Myles' home.

Cars were parked two deep in the yard and a considerable number of persons had gathered there. Nearly all of the household goods had been set out in the yard.

Veve spied Mr. Vincent in the crowd and ran over to talk to him.

"I didn't expect to see you here!" she greeted him.

"I couldn't stay away," he replied. "I've tried to talk to Minnie, but she won't speak to me."

Mr. Vincent told Veve he was afraid the auction would not raise enough money to pay off the bank loan.

"Not a cent will be left for Minnie to live on," he declared anxiously. "What will she do? Where will she go?"

Miss Gordon had come up in time to hear the remarks.

"Don't worry about your sister," she assured the carpenter. "After the sale is over, I expect to

ask her to come to my home to live for a few weeks until she can adjust her affairs.”

Mr. Vincent gratefully thanked Miss Gordon for her generous offer.

“I only hope she accepts,” he said. “Minnie is proud.”

Soon it was time for the auction to start.

First the auctioneer put up a barrel of dishes. Only two persons made a bid, for the china was old and not very valuable.

The entire barrel sold for fifty cents!

Next the man auctioned off a bedstead and a rocker. These brought only a few dollars. A chest of drawers and a dining room table went for three and five dollars.

“This is terrible!” Mr. Vincent whispered to Miss Gordon. “I am going to bid on the next item.”

The auctioneer offered an old clock. It was shabby in appearance and the carpenter knew for a fact it never had kept accurate time.

All the same, his opening bid was five dollars.

“Five dollars!” shouted the auctioneer, his hope reviving. “Five dollars! Who will make it six?”

Before anyone could raise Mr. Vincent, Mrs. Myles stepped forward. She whispered a moment with the auctioneer.

“I am sorry,” the man then announced to the crowd. “Mrs. Myles requests that the bid not be accepted. Let’s have another. How much am I offered for this handsome old clock?”

A gasp of astonishment went over the crowd. People looked at Mr. Vincent and whispered.

“Minnie won’t even allow me to bid on any of the furniture!” he said bitterly. “Oh, it’s useless to try to help her.”

No one seemed willing to bid on the clock. Connie had brought a dollar with her. Timidly she called out: “I’ll bid fifty cents.”

“A little girl offers fifty cents,” called the auctioneer. “Who will make it a dollar?”

A woman some distance away raised her hand. Then the auctioneer tried to get the bid up to a dollar and a half. But no one would offer that much.

“Sold to Mrs. Flikinger for one dollar!” called the auctioneer.

After that several other items were sold. Only one of the articles, the cookstove, brought more than four dollars.

“This sale won’t total a hundred and fifty dollars,” Miss Gordon murmured. “Of course the house will bring something—perhaps a thousand dollars.”

Only a few items now remained to be sold. Although the Brownies had watched closely, they had not seen many things on which they cared to enter a bid.

But now the cross-stitched pillow was held up by the auctioneer.

“How much am I offered for this bit of fluff?” he asked the crowd.

Without stopping to think, Veve shouted: “A dollar!”

The money was every cent she had brought with her.

Connie tugged at her sleeve. “Dope!” she chided. “The pillow isn’t worth it. Why you could buy a chair with a dollar!”

“I don’t want a chair,” retorted Veve in a voice so loud that persons nearby heard her. “I want that pillow.”

No one else bid. The auctioneer now was hastening to be done with the sale.

“Sold to the little girl in the blue dress!” he called. “Catch!”

The auctioneer tossed the pillow directly into her arms.

“I know what I’ll do with this,” Veve declared, well pleased with her purchase. “I’ll keep it in our tree house.”

“I’d like to buy the match holder made of buttons if it is offered for sale,” Connie announced.

The Brownies paid close attention but the article in which they were so interested was not put up. Finally, the last item had been sold and the crowd began to leave.

Mrs. Myles came over to speak to Miss Gordon and the Brownies. Her face, they noticed, was streaked from tears. However, she tried to act as if she had not minded seeing her possessions sold.

"There! Everything is gone! What a relief it will be not having to keep house and dust!" she chattered.

As the Brownies could think of nothing to say in return, Mrs. Myles offered Connie a package.

"This is for all of the Brownies," she said. "Hang it in your tree house, or wherever you like."

Connie unwrapped the parcel. Out tumbled the match holder made of buttons.

"Just what we wanted!" Connie cried in delight.

"I always intended you should have it," Mrs. Myles said. "Well, good-bye my dears. I probably won't be seeing you again soon—"

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The widow's voice broke then and she could not finish.

Miss Gordon took her gently by the arm.

"Mrs. Myles, you must come home with me," she urged. "I have a room waiting for you."

"It isn't right to burden you with my troubles," the old lady protested.

"We'll work out everything," the teacher assured her. "Eileen, you and Jane take Mrs. Myles to my car. I'll be along in a minute. I must speak to someone."

Mrs. Myles gave up protesting. She allowed the two Brownies to lead her to the parked automobile.

Once the widow was out of sight, Miss Gordon sought Mr. Vincent who had remained in the crowd.

"Your sister has agreed to go to my home," she assured him. "She'll be well taken care of for the time being. Later we can work out something."

The carpenter gripped the teacher's hand gratefully.

"This old house wasn't worth saving," he said. "If only I could induce my sister to move in with me, all would be for the best. I'm afraid though, she'll never have anything to do with me."

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"Why not?" demanded Veve, who had joined the group. "Is it because she thinks you are a thief?"

"Veve, hush!" commanded Connie in a shocked voice.

Miss Gordon and the other Brownies were sorry Veve had spoken so carelessly. No one had intended to mention to Mr. Vincent what his sister had said about him.

The carpenter remained silent a moment. Then he replied:

"You have a right to know the true story of what occurred so many years ago. I'll tell you my version, and then you may decide for yourselves whether or not I am a thief or an honest man."

## CHAPTER 19

## “Flying Up”

LOWERING his voice so that others would not hear, Mr. Vincent related to the Brownies what had happened many years before.

“As a boy I lived in the city with my father and sister,” he began the story. “That was before either of us married. We did not have very much money in those days.

“For some reason my father did not entirely trust the banks. So he kept some of his savings in the house. To make the story short, five hundred dollars disappeared.”

“And you were accused?” interposed Connie.

All of the Brownies and Miss Gordon were listening attentively to the story.

“Yes, I never could understand why my father had so little faith in me that he would make such an accusation. Perhaps it was because I was a heavy spender of my earnings in those days. Easy come—easy go, was my motto then. I’ve since reformed.”

“You say five hundred dollars vanished?” Miss Gordon asked thoughtfully. “Was it never recovered.”

“Never. My father was sure I had taken it because no one except my sister and myself had been in the house.”

“Maybe someone broke in,” suggested Rosemary.

Mr. Vincent smiled and shook his head. “My father almost never left the house in those days. He was old and ailing. In fact, the feeling that I had taken his money was an obsession with him.”

“He died without learning that you were honest?” asked Veve, deeply troubled.

“Yes,” the carpenter replied. “I should have told you that my father ordered me out of the house. Instead of trying to reason with him, I packed up and left.”

“Your sister didn’t take your part?” Miss Gordon questioned.

“Far from it. Minnie sided with my father. After he died, she married and moved to this house. Her husband never was well-to-do, and he also passed on a few years ago. About all Minnie had was this house and the furniture—most of that came from the old homestead.”

“How long ago was it that your father died?” the Brownie leader inquired.

“Twenty-nine years ago.” The carpenter drew a deep sigh. “How fast time passes! It hardly seems possible.

“In those twenty-nine years I’ve tried repeatedly to make Minnie come to her senses. She’s as stubborn as a mule! She took the attitude that disappointment over me hastened my father’s death. Minnie just hasn’t been rational on the subject.”

“It seems funny that five hundred dollars could just disappear,” Connie offered her opinion. “Maybe it was spent.”

“I rather doubt that.”

“What do you think did become of it?” Veve asked.

“I wish I knew, little girl. Your guess is as good as mine. I’ve thought, though, that my father might have hidden the money somewhere and forgotten about it.”

“From what you say, he could have done exactly that!” declared Miss Gordon.

“Unfortunately, the money never came to light. And it never will.”

“I don’t suppose so,” Miss Gordon regretfully admitted. “Thirty years, or twenty-nine, to be exact, is a very long time.”

“A great deal of water has gone over the dam,” the carpenter murmured. “Our old family homestead has been sold, and now the last of the furniture is gone. Poor Minnie! If only I could help her!”

"Don't worry, Mr. Vincent," Miss Gordon said to cheer him. "Right now she is very much upset to see her home sold. However, after she has had a few days to reflect upon matters, she may view everything in a different light."

"You don't know my sister Minnie if you think she will ever change her mind about me! She never will accept a penny from me—she'd go to the Poorhouse first."

"Those were her very words!" Connie recalled.

"Minnie is convinced I stole the money and nothing ever will make her change her mind."

"Not even if the money were found?" asked Veve.

"That is an impossibility now," Mr. Vincent answered. "I'm sorry to have bored you with my story. I only told you what happened so you would understand."

"We're sure you never took the money!" cried Veve.

"I should say not!" added Connie.

"Thank you, for having confidence in me," Mr. Vincent said, smiling. "Well, I'll move along, or my sister will think it odd that I am talking with you."

He turned and gripped Miss Gordon's hand. "Thank you mightily for looking after Minnie," he said. "I can't give you money now for her keep, or she would refuse to go with you. Later, I'll see that you're repaid."

The teacher assured him that pay for an act of kindness had not entered her mind. Promising to let him know how matters went with Mrs. Myles, she escorted her Brownie charges to the parked car.

"What was Sam saying to you?" the widow demanded as they squeezed into the sedan beside her.

Before anyone could answer, she announced flatly: "If he's given you money for my keep, I won't go an inch—not an inch!"

"Mr. Vincent didn't give me any money," Miss Gordon said in a soothing voice. "He is concerned about your future though."

"I can imagine!" Mrs. Myles retorted. "I'll have nothing to do with him and that's final."

Although the Brownies longed to question the widow about the lost five hundred dollars, they knew better than to do so.

She herself abruptly changed the subject by talking about the cross-stitched pillow which Veve had bought.

"My mother made that pillow and set great store by it," she remarked sadly. "It's gone now—everything is gone."

"You keep it," Veve said quickly. "Please take it back."

Mrs. Myles smiled through her tears. "Thank you, child," she said, patting Veve's hand. "No, I can't take the pillow. It would mean nothing to me now in any case. My life is ended."

Lapsing into a moody silence, she said no more during the ride to Miss Gordon's home.

During the next week and a half, the Brownies saw Mrs. Myles infrequently. Nevertheless, she managed to dominate their lives.

Whenever they called at Miss Gordon's home, they found her occupying a rocker in the sun room. She complained constantly about her "hard lot," yet made no attempt to plan a future.

The Brownies knew Miss Gordon was worried because the old lady took so much of her time. She was forced to cancel a Brownie meeting. Unable to take the girls to the tree house, she asked Mrs. Davidson to drive them there in her car.

"Were losing Miss Gordon," Veve declared one day when the girls were all at the tree house. "It's Mrs. Myles' fault too! I don't think it's fair of her to take up so much of anyone's time."

"Mrs. Myles doesn't mean to be selfish," Connie defended her. "She just doesn't think, that's all."

Mrs. Davidson told the girls she did not believe very much could be done to change the unfortunate situation.

"Miss Gordon can't very well send Mrs. Myles to the county home," she said. "She has no other place to go."

"She could live with her brother," Veve insisted.

"If she would," agreed Mrs. Davidson. "But why discuss something we know is utterly out of the picture? I doubt if Mrs. Myles ever will change her mind."

As the fall days grew a bit sharper, the Brownies visited their tree house every few days. They wished to make the most of their time, knowing that very soon the snow would fly. 190

"We've had such wonderfully good times here," Eileen said wistfully. "It seems a pity we never learned who built the house for us."

"Mr. Karwhite could tell if he would," declared Rosemary. "Whenever I ask him about it, he only smiles and says the secret isn't his to reveal."

"After the fifteenth of the month, we likely won't be coming here again," Sunny remarked. "Oh, dear!"

Now the Brownies had set aside the fifteenth as the day upon which they would have their last ceremonial meeting of the fall season. On this occasion, Eileen would "fly up" into the Girl Scout organization.

"I almost wish I could be a Brownie forever," she remarked regretfully. "Being a Girl Scout will be fun too though!"

For nearly two weeks Miss Gordon had taken little active part in the Brownie meetings. Instead, she had turned the programs over to Mrs. Davidson and Connie's mother.

However, the girls knew she would be on hand for the final ceremony of the year. To insure that their leader could come, they had extended an invitation to Mrs. Myles as well as their own parents. 191

"I hope the weather is right," Connie said anxiously. "What a pity if it should turn cold before Saturday."

"Rain or shine we'll have to hold the ceremonial," Mrs. Davidson assured the girls.

All that week the girls worked very hard preparing for the affair. The tree house was given a thorough cleaning and everything put to right.

By Saturday, cookies and cakes had been baked ready to serve to the mothers. Brownie uniforms and ties also had been pressed and cleaned.

Several Girl Scouts and their leader planned to attend the ceremonial.

"Everyone will be here," Eileen declared, her teeth chattering. "Oh, I'm so scared. I know I'll forget my lines."

"You will not," comforted Connie, squeezing her hand. "Almost before you know it now, you'll be a Girl Scout."

"But being a Brownie was such fun, Connie. I almost think I don't want to fly up."

"Nonsense!" Connie laughed. "We'll all join the Scouts before long. And you always may come back and visit our tree house." 192

This assurance made Eileen feel much better.

Soon Miss Gordon, Mrs. Myles and many of the parents began to arrive at the tree house.

Because it would have been impossible to get even a portion of the crowd into the house at one time, it was planned to hold the ceremonial at the foot of the oak tree.

The day had started out warm and sunny. This pleasant beginning, however, was only a "teaser."

Not long after the parents had gathered, clouds began darkening the sky.

"We're due for rain," announced Mrs. Myles, drawing her shawl about her. "Soon too."

Miss Gordon and the mothers shared the old lady's opinion. So it was decided that the ceremony should be hastened.

Those who were not to take part, seated themselves on cushions near the base of the big oak.

The Brownies formed a horseshoe, and upon signal, the Scout Troop made a similar one opposite the younger girls.

Miss Gordon then opened the service by saying that the time had come for Eileen to take wings and fly up to the Rosedale Girl Scout Troop. 193

"Tell us, Eileen," she invited, "what did you like best about being a Brownie?"

Now that question was very easy to answer.

"I liked everything," she answered promptly. "The hikes, the parties and the cook-outs. I loved our wonderful week-end at Snow Valley and the time we spent with the circus. It was fun picking cherries too. But best of all, I liked this tree house!"

All of the Brownies cheered, for of course, they felt the same way.

Now came an important moment.

Miss Gordon moved forward and pinned the Brownie Wings on Eileen's Girl Scout uniform. Of gold, embroidered on green felt, they signified her past membership in the Brownie organization.

Eileen then was asked to repeat the Girl Scout Promise:

"On my honor, I will try:  
To do my duty to God and my country,  
To help other people at all times,  
To obey the Girl Scout Laws."

The Girl Scouts then greeted Eileen as a new member after reciting in unison their laws:

A Girl Scout's honor is to be trusted.

A Girl Scout is loyal.

A Girl Scout's duty is to be useful and to help others.

A Girl Scout is a friend to all and a sister to every other Girl Scout.

A Girl Scout is courteous.

A Girl Scout is a friend to animals.

A Girl Scout obeys orders.

A Girl Scout is cheerful.

A Girl Scout is thrifty.

A Girl Scout is clean in thought, word and deed.

The Scout pin was bestowed upon Eileen, who then was welcomed into the troop by the girl Scouts of the Rosedale Troop.

"I guess I'm a full-fledged Scout now," she said with a laugh. "Dear me, it seems a Girl Scout must be just about everything!"

The ceremony now was over, and everyone congratulated Eileen. She was glad to have joined the older girls' organization, but of course she was sorry to bid farewell to the Brownie troop.

"I really should fly down instead of 'fly up,'" she remarked, gazing ruefully at the tree house. "After having a meeting house up in the branches, it will seem strange to have a regular down-to-earth meeting place."

"A regular room has some advantages though," declared Connie as a drop of rain splashed on her upturned face. "One thing, you aren't always in danger of being caught by a storm."

The rain began to come down faster and faster.

"Let's all run to the shelter house," urged Miss Gordon. "I don't believe this will last very long."

The mothers and friends of the Brownies hastened through the woods to the gate house.

For five minutes the rain came down very fast and hard. Then it ceased as abruptly as it had started.

"I believe it's safe to return for our cookies and cake," encouraged Miss Gordon as the sun straggled out again. "The trail isn't very muddy."

Some of the Girl Scouts and the mothers did not care to return to the tree house since the investiture had been completed.

However, all of the Brownies, Eileen, Miss Gordon, Mrs. Myles and a few of the mothers braved the slippery path to have their refreshments.

Before leaving the tree house, Miss Gordon had taken care that all of the food was under cover. Some of the cushions had been overlooked.

As the group reached the base of the oak tree, Mrs. Myles noticed that the cross-stitch one which once had belonged to her, was thoroughly rain soaked.

"Oh, what a shame!" she exclaimed, picking it up from the ground. "The feathers must be aired or they will mat down."

With a hairpin, Mrs. Myles ripped the covering of the pillow. Reaching in, she began to fluff the damp feathers.

"If these don't dry out before I leave, I'll take the pillow home—" she began.

Mrs. Myles did not complete what she had started to say.

Instead a most peculiar expression came over her face.

"Why, what is wrong, Mrs. Myles?" inquired Connie, who had been gathering up the other water-soaked pillows. She thought that perhaps the elderly woman suddenly had been taken ill.

"I—I think I've found something inside this pillow," Mrs. Myles said in a strange voice.

The Brownies and their mothers quickly closed in about her.

"What have you found?" demanded Veve, for Mrs. Myles had not withdrawn her hand from the interior of the pillow.

"It's something round—tied with a piece of string," Mrs. Myles murmured. "I'm—I'm almost afraid to look."

Now the Brownies thought this a most peculiar attitude to take.

"What have you found?" Veve repeated impatiently. "Show us!"

Very slowly, Mrs. Myles withdrew her hand. Clutched in her gnarled fist was a roll of greenbacks. The bills were neatly fastened in a roll with a piece of string.

"Money!" shrieked Veve in such an excited voice that a squirrel overhead dropped a nut. "Where'd it come from?"

Mrs. Myles held the bills almost as if they would burn a hole in her hand. She leaned back against the oak tree for support.

"I think I know how this came to be inside the pillow," she said in a shaky voice. "If this roll should contain exactly five hundred dollars, then I've done a grave injustice to my brother Sam!"



## CHAPTER 20

## A Wish Fulfilled

"LET'S count the money," urged Connie as Mrs. Myles made no attempt to do so.

The widow seemed quite stunned by the unexpected discovery of the roll of bills inside the pillow. Without saying a word she handed it over to Miss Gordon.

Rapidly the teacher computed the amount of money. Nearly all of the bills were tens, most of them old in appearance.

"Exactly five hundred dollars," Miss Gordon announced when she had completed her count.

"Then this must be the money my father lost so long ago," Mrs. Myles said in a weak voice. "He was very forgetful. I suppose he hid the roll of bills in the pillow and then in his infirmity, forgot all about it."

"But Sam Vincent was accused," Veve reminded her. "All these years he has been blamed."

"I'm so ashamed—I don't know what to say. Father was so sure the money had been stolen. Oh, dear, what shall I do?"

"This is a fine windfall for you," declared Miss Gordon, delighted over the widow's good fortune. "I'm sure you have use for five hundred dollars."

"But the pillow no longer is mine. One of the Brownies bought it at the sale."

"That doesn't matter," declared Veve quickly.

"I should say not," added Connie. "It was only the pillow that was bought—not the money inside of it."

"How will I ever make amends to Sam?"

"That part should be easy," Miss Gordon assured her. "He always has wanted to help you."

Mrs. Myles nearly broke down then. "That makes it all the harder," she declared. "He always insisted he was innocent, but I never would listen to any explanation. I was as unjust as I could be."

"You couldn't have known the money was hidden in the pillow," Rosemary said kindly.

"I should have trusted my own brother," Mrs. Myles berated herself. "Oh, I'll never be able to face him."

"Nonsense," declared Miss Gordon. "Now that the money has been found, everything can be adjusted very easily. Just leave that part to me."

Drawing apart from Mrs. Myles, the Brownie leader whispered to Veve and Connie. She requested them to hasten to Sam Vincent's house and if he were at home to ask him to come to the park at once.

The two girls ran most of the way, so eager were they to impart the news.

Reaching the Vincent home, they found Sam's wife there, but the carpenter had not yet arrived from his work.

"He should be driving in any minute," Mrs. Vincent assured the girls. "Sam was working on an outside job and probably started home when it began to rain."

"I see a car coming now that looks like his!" cried Veve.

The automobile turned in at the driveway. Seeing that it was indeed the carpenter, the girls ran to meet him.

"Well, well, this is a surprise!" he greeted them with a warm smile. "How does it happen you aren't at the tree house today? Rained out?"

"Not exactly," Connie answered. "We were having an important ceremony—"

"Eileen flew up into the Girl Scout troop," Veve broke in. "But that's not the important part. It

began to rain and the pillow got wet.”

“So Mrs. Myles ripped it open,” Connie resumed the story.

“Minnie was there?” The carpenter was surprised at this information.

“Yes, of course,” Connie said impatiently. “She ripped open the pillow—and what do you think was inside?”

“Money!” shouted Veve. “Five hundred dollars!”

“Five hundred dollars,” Mr. Vincent repeated. “I don’t get it.”

“The pillow was the one with cross-stitching on it,” Connie explained. “The one that belonged to your family.”

At last Mr. Vincent understood.

“Then the money Minnie thought I took has been found,” he said quietly.

“That’s right,” laughed Veve.

“Miss Gordon wants you to come as fast as you can to the tree house,” Connie urged. “Your sister is waiting for you there.”

“You bet!” the carpenter replied. “We’ll drive to the park. Hop in!”

During the swift ride to the gate house, Veve and Connie told Mr. Vincent exactly how the money had been found. He laughed when they repeated that Mrs. Myles had said she would be ashamed to face him.

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“I never held it against Minnie that she thought so poorly of me,” he told the girls. “For a long while I’ve only felt sorry for her. Now that this misunderstanding is cleared up, I hope she’ll let me help her.”

At the tree house, the Brownies remained very excited over discovery of the money. Between bites of cookies and cake, they reviewed every detail of the wonderful day.

“I’m so glad we found the money today, while I’m still almost a Brownie,” Eileen declared. “I couldn’t have stood it if the roll of bills had turned up later on.”

“To think that the money was hidden in the pillow all these years!” Mrs. Myles murmured. “If it hadn’t been for the Brownies, I never would have learned the truth.”

At this moment Veve, Connie and Sam Vincent arrived at the tree house.

Seeing her brother so unexpectedly made Mrs. Myles feel ill at ease.

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However, he walked over to her and flung his arm around her thin shoulders.

“Oh, Sam, you know about the money?” she murmured. “Can you forgive me?”

“There’s nothing to forgive,” he assured her. “Minnie, the only thing that matters is the money has been found. You know now that I never took it.”

“Sam, I’m so ashamed of myself for ever doubting you—” Mrs. Myles covered her face and began to sob.

“There! There!” her brother comforted her awkwardly. “Let’s forget about it now. I want to help you, Minnie.”

“I’ve lost everything.”

“You have five hundred dollars,” Veve reminded her.

“That’s right,” Mrs. Myles agreed through her tears.

“And you have a home for the remainder of your life,” her brother convinced her. “My wife and I want you with us.”

“I can’t impose on you.”

“We really want you,” Mr. Vincent said firmly. “Later on, if you find you would like to have a place of your own, I’ll build you a modern cottage close to our property.”

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By this time the Brownie Scouts were certain that Sam Vincent was a most wonderful person. They were pleased that Mrs. Myles would have a good home and that she no longer would be dependent upon charity or Miss Gordon’s kindness.

"Oh, hasn't everything ended just like a story book!" Rosemary said, her eyes shining.

"Miss Gordon will have lots of time for our Brownie troop from now on," Jane declared in satisfaction.

Of all the girls, only Eileen seemed a trifle sad.

She fingered the Brownie wings on her uniform and stood silently gazing up at the tree house.

"Don't think about it," Connie said, taking her hand.

"But I want to," Eileen replied earnestly. "Never as long as I live do I want to forget about the grand times we've had here."

"You'll come back next summer, Eileen."

"I know, but only as a visitor. I wouldn't so much mind not being a Brownie any more, if only one thing had been settled."

"What's that?" asked Connie. She thought she knew, though, the answer Eileen would give.

And she was right.

"More than anything else, I'd like to know who built this tree house for us," Eileen said slowly. "I don't suppose we ever shall though."

Veve had overheard the remark.

"I have an idea," she proposed. "Almost all of the wishes we've made here have come true, haven't they?"

"That's so," nodded Sunny.

"Let's all close our eyes and wish hard that we knew who built the tree house for us," Veve went on. "Maybe we'll have our answer."

The suggestion appealed to the other Brownies. All of the girls, including Eileen, closed their eyes, and for a moment concentrated very hard on the wish.

When they opened their eyes again everything was exactly the same. However, Mr. Vincent, who had been leaning against the oak tree, had an odd expression on his face.

"Do you youngsters really want to know who built your house?" he asked.

"Of course!" cried Connie.

"I should say so!" added Jane. "Eileen never will have any piece of mind as a Girl Scout unless she learns the answer today."

"Was it Mr. Karwhite?" demanded Sunny, who began to suspect that the carpenter might be hiding something.

"It wasn't Mr. Karwhite," replied the carpenter.

"But you do know!" cried Jane. "You could tell us if you would!"

"Yes, I could," Mr. Vincent replied slowly. "I'm wondering, though, if the fun might not be spoiled."

"Oh, no!" cried all the Brownies together.

"We're not children," added Veve. "It was fun to say that the brownies built our tree house, but we always knew better."

Sam Vincent stood gazing down at the girls, his eyes twinkling.

"It was a very large brownie who built this house," he said. "One about my size."

"You did it!" shouted Veve. "Oh, that doesn't surprise me one bit!"

"Or me either!" cried Connie. "I think I suspected it all the time. Only I couldn't quite be sure."

The Brownies gazed at Miss Gordon and saw that she did not look surprised either.

"I've known for quite a while," she admitted with a smile. "I didn't tell you because it wasn't my secret to relate."

The Brownies urged Mr. Vincent to tell them exactly how he had chanced to build the house.

"I frequently come to the park just to walk around," he explained. "Mr. Karwhite is a good

friend of mine. Well, one day I overheard the Brownies wish for a tree house. I knew one could be built quite easily.”

“Then it was you who threw that first stone with the note attached,” Sunny recalled.

“Yes, I managed to hide while you were searching for me.”

“But how did you get the house built so quickly?” Connie asked.

“For a carpenter, the job wasn’t such a big one. I had plenty of boards at home. I did take one chance though.”

“What was that?” questioned Veve.

“Well, I didn’t tell Mr. Karwhite about the tree house until after it was built. I figured if I asked him first, he’d turn me down.”

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“That’s why he didn’t know anything about it that first time we talked to him,” remarked Connie.

“I brought the boards and materials I needed in at night and built the house in one day—it happened that Mr. Karwhite was away from the park. I did a good job on the house if I do say so myself!”

“Magnificent!” declared Miss Gordon.

“At any rate, Mr. Karwhite decided to let it stay in the park when he saw that it was a good sturdy job. One thing that influenced him was the fine time you youngsters were having here.”

“Tell us how you were able to make so many of our other wishes come true,” urged Sunny. “Every time we asked for something—presto chango! There it was!”

“Not quite presto chango!” laughed the carpenter. “I was curious to see how you liked the tree house, so I frequently hid in the bushes to overhear your comments. It pleased me to make a few of the wishes come true.”

Connie asked Mr. Vincent if he were the one who had prepared a hot meal for the Brownies on the day they had invited him to lunch.

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“Guilty,” he chuckled.

The Brownie Scouts told the carpenter again how well they liked the tree house and the many surprises.

“It wasn’t much,” he said, belittling his work. “The Brownies did far more for me by finding the lost money.”

The day had turned rather chilly following the brief rain. Mr. Vincent built a fire in one of the stone fireplaces of the park and everyone gathered about to warm themselves.

Some distance away, plainly visible in the old oak, could be seen the little tree house.

“Now that the leaves are falling, it stands out just like a light house!” declared Connie proudly.

“Yes, it does resemble one,” cried Veve, her imagination deeply stirred. “That little window is the searchlight!”

“A bright beacon blazing a trail to the future,” supplied Miss Gordon.

“May we come back here next spring?” Connie asked.

Even before the teacher replied, the girls knew what her answer would be.

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“Of course,” she said heartily. “We’ll fly back with the birds—not only for good times, but to carry out many wonderful new Brownie plans!”

## Transcriber's Note

Punctuation has been standardised. Changes to the original publication have been made as follows:

- Page 65  
best would be very treachous *changed to*  
best would be very [treacherous](#)
- Page 76  
the girls to their sepearte homes *changed to*  
the girls to their [separate](#) homes

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BROWNIE SCOUTS AND THEIR TREE HOUSE \*\*\*

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