

THE BOBBSEY TWINS' BOOKS

No. 1. The Boys

THE BOBBSEY TWINS IN ECHO VALLEY.



THE BOBBSEY TWINS BOOKS

By Laura Lee Hope

THE BOBBSEY TWINS

IN THE COUNTRY

AT THE SEASHORE

AT SCHOOL

AT SNOW LODGE

ON A HOUSEBOAT

AT MEADOW BROOK

AT HOME

IN A GREAT CITY

ON BLUEBERRY ISLAND

ON THE DEEP BLUE SEA

IN WASHINGTON

IN THE GREAT WEST

AT CEDAR CAMP

AT THE COUNTY FAIR

CAMPING OUT

AND BABY MAY

KEEPING HOUSE

AT CLOVERBANK

AT CHERRY CORNERS

AND THEIR SCHOOLMATES

TREASURE HUNTING

AT SPRUCE LAKE

WONDERFUL SECRET

AT THE CIRCUS

ON AN AIRPLANE TRIP

SOLVE A MYSTERY

ON A RANCH

IN ESKIMO LAND

IN A RADIO PLAY

AT WINDMILL COTTAGE

AT LIGHTHOUSE POINT

AT INDIAN HOLLOW

AT THE ICE CARNIVAL

IN THE LAND OF COTTON

IN ECHO VALLEY

ON THE PONY TRAIL

AT MYSTERY MANSION

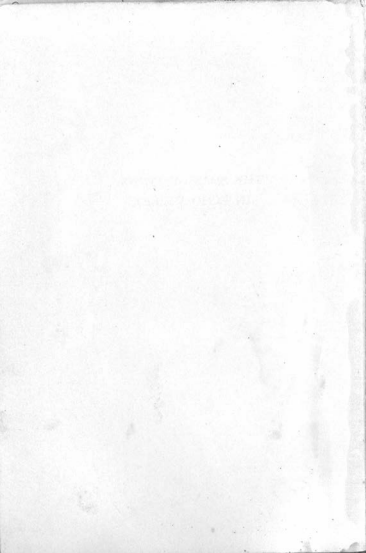
AT SUGAR MAPLE HILL

IN MEXICO

TOY SHOP

IN TULIP LAND

IN RAINBOW VALLEY





"IT'S A TREASURE," FLOSSIE EXCLAIMED.

The Robbery Twins in Echo Valley

Frontispiece (Page 122)

The Bobbsey Twins In Echo Valley

By
LAURA LEE HOPE

Author of
THE BOBBSEY TWINS SERIES

Illustrated by
MARIE SCHUBERT

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers New York

COPYRIGHT, 1943, BY
GROSSET & DUNLAP, INC.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Bobbsey Twins in Echo Valley

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AN IMPORTANT VISITOR	1
II. A DAY OF SURPRISES	10
III. THE FAMILY TREE	18
IV. A CALL FOR HELP	25
V. ANTIQUE TOYS	33
VI. GOOD NEWS	41
VII. WAGGO TO THE RESCUE	49
VIII. DEBORAH'S STORY	56
IX. THE NEW OLD HOUSE	64
X. SPOOKY SOUNDS	73
XI. HIDDEN TREASURES	83
XII. THE WOODSMAN	93
XIII. A FIRE LONG AGO	103
XIV. THE ECHO SPIRIT	113
XV. A GIFT TO FLOSSIE	120
XVI. THE CIRCUS PET	131
XVII. THE ANSWER ECHO	140
XVIII. THE WISHING WELL	147
XIX. SECRET CLOSETS	156
XX. LOCKED INSIDE	165
XXI. HOUSE FOR RENT	172
XXII. WELCOME ARRIVALS	181
XXIII. THE PLAYHOUSE	188
XXIV. LOST IN THE STORM	195
XXV. THE TREE'S MESSAGE	203

THE BOBBSEY TWINS IN ECHO VALLEY

CHAPTER I

AN IMPORTANT VISITOR

TRU—UT ! Tru—ut ! Tru—ut !

Freddie Bobbsey, dressed in a policeman's costume, came striding down the street. Though Freddie was young and short, he was taking very long steps, just like the big policeman on the corner. In his mouth was a whistle which he was blowing loudly.

Tru—ut ! Tru-u-ut ! Tru-u-ut !

"Freddie ! Don't make so much noise," called out his twin sister Flossie. She was wheeling her favorite doll in a carriage up and down the sidewalk. "My baby is asleep. You mustn't wake her."

Freddie paid no attention to the little girl. He was having too much fun. Also, when Freddie was playing

a part, he was apt to forget everything else, and right now he was a policeman.

For a long time the little boy had thought he wanted to be a fireman when he grew up. That was because one Christmas he had received a beautiful fire engine. But sometimes when he got excited playing with it, he squirted water on the wrong things! Then his mother made him put it away for a while.

Tru-ut! Tru-u-ut! Tru-u-ut!

"Land sakes, Chile, what's de mattah?" said a voice as Freddie walked toward the back of the Bobbsey house. Dinah, the dear old Negro cook of the family, came from the kitchen door. "Yo' sho scared me. Ah thought a real policeman had a accident on his hands."

Freddie still kept on blowing his whistle. He marched into the kitchen, stopped for a second to sniff the delicious odor of cookies which Dinah had just taken from the oven, and then went on to the hall.

"Hey, Freddie, cut that out!" cried a boy a few years older than he. The lad was Freddie's brother Bert. "Don't you know that when policemen are home, they are off duty?"

"What's 'off duty'?" asked Freddie, stopping his blowing long enough to listen to an answer.

"When a policeman is working at his job, he is on duty," explained Bert, "but when his job is over, he

changes his clothes and puts his whistle away. Then he is off duty."

Freddie laughed. "Can't a policeman go in a house when he is on duty?" he asked. "I want to be a Junior policeman and I haven't practiced enough yet."

With this he blew a loud blast on his whistle. From upstairs came two voices, both exclaiming, "Freddie!"

Nan, who was Bert's twin, came hurrying down the steps. "Where did you get that outfit?" she asked.

Behind her came Mrs. Bobbsey. She too was surprised to see Freddie in the policeman's suit. She thought he looked very cunning, but she would not tell this to the little boy. Freddie was a very manly little fellow, and it always annoyed him when any of their grown-up relatives or friends referred to him as cunning.

"I borrowed this suit from Ted Blake. He is going to be a Junior policeman some day and he asked me if I would join his—his—organization."

Mrs. Bobbsey smiled. "You mean organization, dear. What is this organization?"

Freddie was not quite sure himself what it was. It seemed that several small boys had seen high school students assisting the regular police force of Lakeport in guiding traffic when the school children were coming and going to classes.

Bert said that there was talk of allowing boys younger than those in high school to join a Junior

police organization, but that Freddie was not quite old enough to be one of them.

"I can still practice, can't I, Mother?" asked her small son.

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Bobbsey, "but please don't blow the whistle in the house. It is a very loud one. Now I think perhaps you had better take the costume back to Ted Blake. And come straight home, as lunch will be ready in a few minutes."

"Are we going to have some fresh cookies?" asked Freddie.

Now that he had been reminded of lunch, he began to feel very hungry, and he was more interested in getting some of the cookies than he was in being a policeman. He hurried off to Ted's house.

In the meantime Flossie had a worry of her own. She had noticed the Bobbseys' old dog Snap going down the street. This was very unusual, for he never went away from the house.

"He just couldn't stand Freddie's whistle, I guess," she thought. "He will come back as soon as it's nice and quiet here."

But Snap did not come back then, nor later either. The children called and called him. Freddie felt very bad, because he knew that he had been the cause of the dog leaving home.

Young Waggo, their fox terrier, seemed to know what they were worrying about. He tried to make up

for it by being very playful. He went through all his tricks without having been told to do so. He even had a new one which made them laugh.

"Look!" cried Flossie. "Waggo can run on one front leg and one hind leg!"

"He is like roller skates with two wheels instead of four," giggled Freddie.

While the children were outside, Mrs. Bobbsey came from the house, a small suitcase in her hand. Bert immediately took this from his mother and asked her where she was going.

"Daddy telephoned to me a little while ago," she said. "He has to go out of town on business and wants me to go with him. We will be gone overnight. I am meeting him at the train. A taxi will be here in a moment."

"Don't worry about us," said Nan, who was always thoughtful of others. —

Mrs. Bobbsey depended a great deal upon this daughter of hers to help with the younger twins. She now gave the girl an affectionate hug and smiled.

"I shan't worry, dear, and Daddy and I will be home tomorrow. I know all of you will help Dinah and Sam; in fact, you might go to the back garden now and help Sam."

The taxi came and she drove away, waving to the children as long as they were in sight. Then they went around to the back of the house where Dinah's hus-

band was working in the garden. When the twins offered to help him, he smiled broadly, showing his fine white teeth. Sam was an old man, but nothing about him seemed old except his hair, which was gray.

"Dere's entirely too much crab grass in dis yere lawn," he said. "If yo' chilluns will dig it out, I'll plant some clover seed in place of it."

Flossie wondered why the flat little plant was called crab grass. She had seen crabs at the seashore and in the window of the fish market, but she did not think they looked one bit like this brownish-green stuff she was pulling up. She asked Sam how it got its name.

"Well, I don't rightly know, honey chile," he replied, "exceptin' maybe it's because it can stick so hard. If a crab grabs yo' finger, yo' cain't get him off, and if crab grass once gets in yo' lawn, it's pretty hard to get it out."

A few minutes later Dinah came to the door and asked Nan to step inside the house. "Dere's a gen'man here to see yo' mother. Maybe yo' would like to talk to him yo'self."

All the twins trooped into the house to see who the caller might be. He was a tall, thin, kindly-looking man and wore nose glasses. These were attached to a black ribbon fastened to his coat.

"How do you do, children?" he said. The glasses dropped from his nose, but he immediately put them

back on again. "My name is Mr. Meggs. I am a lawyer. I am sorry your mother is not at home, for I have something important I want to see her about."

"Won't you sit down, sir?" asked Bert.

Nan introduced herself and the other children, and inquired if there was anything they could do to help him.

"Did you say this boy is your twin and the little boy and girl are twins also?" the man asked in surprise. "This is very unusual—two sets of twins in one family."

"I guess it is," replied Nan.

"But we like it," said Freddie staunchly.

Mr. Meggs laughed, and his glasses popped from his nose again. Once more he set them in place. Flossie had a hard time to keep from giggling.

"When will your mother be home?" the caller questioned them. "I should like to see her as soon as possible."

"She will be here tomorrow," said Bert. "Are you sure there is nothing we can tell you or do for you until she comes?"

"Would you like one of Dinah's cookies?" asked Flossie. "They are awfully good."

"Who is Dinah?" Mr. Meggs wanted to know.

"She is the one who let you in," explained the little girl. "She cooks our meals and does lots of other

things, too. If you are hungry, I will get you one of her cookies."

Mr. Meggs smiled broadly. Off came his glasses. This time Flossie did laugh. She wanted to ask the lawyer why he did not wear eyeglasses which would stay on. But she was too polite a little girl to do this. The man put the glasses back on his nose, thanked the little girl for her offer, but said that he was not hungry.

"I have a great surprise for your mother," he said mysteriously. "I am sure the news will please her very much. And you children, too."

The lawyer arose and walked toward the door. Bert handed him his hat, which he had laid on the hall table.

"Can't you tell us a tiny bit about it?" asked Flossie wistfully.

"I am afraid not," Mr. Meggs replied. "Your mother must hear the news first. Then she must decide if she wants to bother with what I have to offer. But you children would love it," he added as he went out the door.

The minute he set his hat on his head, his glasses fell from his nose. All the children giggled and watched him as he picked them up. This time he did not put them on his nose, but into his pocket instead.

"He's going to give the poor glasses a rest," said Flossie.

"What do you suppose he wants to tell Mother?" asked Bert. "He said we would love it if she wanted to bother with it."

"Bother with it!" said Nan. "Mother and Daddy always want to bother with things that we twins love!"

CHAPTER II

A DAY OF SURPRISES

FOR a long time after the lawyer Mr. Meggs had left, the Bobbsey twins talked over what the man had said.

"I hope Mother doesn't stay away longer than to-morrow," said Nan. "What *do* you suppose the big surprise is?"

Not one of the children could think what it might be, even though they were used to surprises. Ever since the days when Bert found out the joke about the ghost right in their own home, told in the very first story written about them, the twins had had many amazing adventures. They had traveled a good bit, too; to the seashore, out West, and just recently to the Land of Cotton, where they spent a very interesting vacation on a Southern plantation.

Once in a while their parents went away without them. Every time they did, it seemed as if something strange took place at home, just as it had this afternoon.

"Do you remember when Mother and Daddy took a trip and Aunt Sallie Pry came here to stay?" asked Nan. "And all the funny things that happened because she was deaf?"

Aunt Sallie Pry was not a real aunt to the twins, but a dear kind old lady whom they affectionately called aunt.

"Let's go see her now," suggested Freddie. He always wanted to be doing something.

The others thought this a good idea, and decided to look for Snap on the way. They set out at once for Mrs. Pry's little cottage. She had not lived in it very long, and the children had been there only once, so they had to watch the street signs carefully to be sure not to make the wrong turn.

"I see it!" cried Flossie. "At the end of the street where the white fence is."

The twins hurried down the block and opened the little gate at the walk to Mrs. Pry's home. It was a neat white house with a pretty flower garden on each side of the walk. Bert rang the bell. In a moment the door was opened by the elderly deaf woman. She smiled broadly when she saw the twins.

"Well, bless your little hearts, if it isn't the Bobbseys. Come right in. How did you know he is here?"

"How did we know who is here?" asked Bert.

"Noah?" said Mrs. Pry. "I didn't say Noah."

"Not Noah," shouted the boy. "I said *know who* is here?"

"Oh, didn't you know your dog is here?"

"You mean Snap?"

Mrs. Pry nodded. "When I opened the door a little while ago, there was your Snap. He did very well to find this house, because he was here only once before."

Freddie looked relieved at the woman's announcement. He thought that Snap had left the Bobbsey house because he could not stand the blowing of the whistle. Now their nice old dog was found.

Aunt Sallie opened the door to her kitchen. Snap, hearing familiar voices, walked slowly into the living room. Snap never hurried. He was too old. The dog put his paw on Freddie's shoulder and licked the little boy's face.

"I guess he is forgiving me for making him go away," said the small twin. Then he whispered to Snap, "I will never make such noise again if you will promise never to leave home."

The children heard footsteps on the stairs. Looking up, they saw a very pretty girl about Nan's age coming down the steps. When she noticed the twins, she looked surprised, turned about, and started to go back to the second floor. At once Aunt Sallie hurried to the hall and went up after her. As she did so, she called over her shoulder:

"Deborah is totally deaf. She cannot hear a word. She is shy with other children."

"Please tell her to come down," called Nan.

Mrs. Pry did not hear what Nan said. By this time she had reached Deborah, and began to make motions with her fingers.

"That's the sign language used by people who cannot hear anything," Nan explained to the younger twins.

The children wondered what Aunt Sallie had told Deborah. Whatever it was, the girl came downstairs and walked into the living room. She smiled at the Bobbseys.

"Deborah has come to live with me," explained Aunt Sallie. "She has been in an orphan home ever since she was a baby. I have grown so deaf that I decided to learn the language of the hands. Now I can talk to Deborah that way, and we have a very nice time together."

The twins wanted to talk to the sweet-faced girl, but they were at a loss to know what to do. Nan decided to write, so she took a pad and pencil which she saw on Aunt Sallie's desk and wrote out:

"I am Nan Bobbsey. Bert, the taller boy, is my twin brother. Flossie and Freddie are twins, too. We should like to have you come to our house sometime to play with us."

After Deborah had read this, she took the pad and pencil from Nan and wrote:

"Thank you very much. My first name is Deborah. I do not know what my last name is. When I am older and can earn some money I am going to try to find out who my mother and father were."

Aunt Sallie read the notes and explained a little more about Deborah, who had not learned to speak because she did not know how words sounded.

"When Deborah was a baby, a woman brought her to the Echo Valley Orphan Home, saying her house was on fire. She asked them to keep little Deborah for a while and promised to come back for the baby later. But the woman never came and nobody else ever did either."

"That's dreadful," said Nan. "Wasn't there ever any clue?"

"Oh, she's not blue," replied deaf Mrs. Pry. "She really is a very happy little girl."

Nan smiled and repeated her question. "Hasn't anyone ever found a clue to show who Deborah is?"

Aunt Sallie understood this time. She shook her head. Then she spoke to Deborah by using her fingers and the girl replied in the same way.

"How would you like to have Deborah spell your names?" asked Aunt Sallie. "First she will spell Nan."

The little deaf girl held up her hand. She made a

fist, putting her thumb inside. Finally she pointed her first two fingers downward.

"That is N," explained Mrs. Pry. "Now she will make an A."

Again Deborah held up her hand. She made a fist again, and pointed her thumb straight up. Then she opened her hand and once more made an N in the sign language. After that she spelled out Bert, Freddie, and Flossie in such quick succession that the children could not possibly follow her. At once the little twins tried to imitate her, but soon found that this was difficult.

Bert too, though interested, soon gave it up, but Nan felt different about the whole thing. It occurred to her that she could play games much better with Deborah if she could speak her language. So she decided then and there to learn the symbols. Before she left the house, she was able to spell Nan very quickly on her fingers.

"I will give you my chart to take home," said Aunt Sallie, "and you can practice by yourself. I think it would be nice if more people would learn the deaf man's alphabet. Then they could understand one another."

As the twins were about to leave, Freddie shouted to Aunt Sallie, "We will take Snap home. Waggo will be glad to see him."

"You won't have to take Snap home in a wagon,"

replied Mrs. Pry. "He can walk all right, even if he is old."

The little twins tried not to giggle at Aunt Sallie's mistake. Manfully Freddie repeated his remark so that she would know he had said Waggo and not wagon.

The old dog trotted along after the children. On the way home they talked about Deborah and hoped that some day her wish would come true about learning who her parents were.

"Then she'll know what her last name is, won't she?" asked Flossie.

Nan said, "Yes."

The twins also talked over what a day of surprises this had been. They spoke again about Mr. Meggs and wondered how soon he would tell their mother the big secret.

They did not have long to wait, for Mrs. Bobbsey returned the next afternoon. When the children came in from their play, they found her talking to the lawyer. She called them into the room.

"I believe you met the twins yesterday, Mr. Meggs," she smiled. "I know they are very eager to hear what you have been saying to me. Will you tell them the secret yourself?"

The children stood very still and waited. As Mr. Meggs was about to speak, his eyeglasses fell from

his nose and had to be rescued before he went on. He adjusted them and then said with a smile:

"I have been searching a long time for a relative of a certain Mrs. Laurie. I think perhaps your mother is that person. If she can give me the proof I need, she will inherit a lovely old house with a barn and gardens and fields around it. It is in Echo Valley."

Echo Valley! Wasn't that where Deborah came from?

CHAPTER III

THE FAMILY TREE

WHEN the twins recovered from their surprise, Nan asked Mr. Meggs if there was an orphan home in Echo Valley. The lawyer said he was sorry that he did not know.

"Please tell us about the house," begged Flossie. "Is it big? Is there an attic to play in on rainy days?"

Freddie, too, had several questions. "Are there any animals there? And is there a swing?"

Mr. Meggs smiled, put his glasses back on his nose, from which they had just fallen, and told the children about the place which might belong to their mother. He said that no one was living in the house, but on the property there was a smaller one in which a Mr. and Mrs. Osgood lived.

"They have been there for several years, taking care of the land and looking after the property," explained Mr. Meggs. "They are very nice people, and

would like to continue renting the cottage. Mrs. Osgood is an expert cheese maker. If you go there, she will show you how she turns milk into cheese almost as if she were a magician."

"No one lives in the big house?" asked Mrs. Bobbsey.

"No one has lived there since Mrs. Laurie died," the lawyer replied. "I am sorry to have to tell you, but the place will need a good bit of fixing up before it can be occupied. You probably will have to hire plumbers, carpenters, and painters."

Mrs. Bobbsey's eyes sparkled. "I have always wanted to fix up an old house," she said. "Oh, I do hope this one really will be mine."

"The twins would love the place," said Mr. Meggs. "It is over two hundred years old, and I am told it has all sorts of secret closets and hidden rooms in it. I have never seen any of them myself. It would almost be like a treasure hunt to find them."

"I want to go!" cried Freddie. "I will put on my detective suit and that will help me find the secret rooms."

All the twins asked to see the place, but Mr. Meggs pointed out that it would be necessary for Mrs. Bobbsey to prove her ownership of the old home in Echo Valley before they could pay it a visit.

He inquired if Mrs. Bobbsey had any old letters or photographs by which she could prove that Mrs.

Laurie was her relative. The twins' mother gazed into space for several moments, thinking, then she smiled.

"I have it!" she said eagerly. "Our old family Bible may have a record. It's in a trunk in the attic. I have not looked in it for years." She smiled at the lawyer. "It is a very precious book, and I was so afraid the twins might harm the old Bible that I put it out of sight. I will get it at once."

She hurried from the room. Flossie and Freddie ran after her. They wanted to be the first ones to see the old Book. Nan and Bert remained in the living room to talk with Mr. Meggs.

"How did Echo Valley get its name?" Bert asked the lawyer. "Are there special echoes there?"

"Indeed there are," the man answered. "In fact, the valley is a most remarkable spot. If a person stands on one hill above the valley and shouts across to the other hill, his words will come back to him very distinctly. I am told that at one point anything shouted will be repeated three times. I have never tried this myself, but Mr. Osgood is the one who told me about it, so I guess it is true."

"It would be lots of fun to play echo," said Nan. "Oh, I hope Mother will inherit the property so we all can go there. There is another reason I should like to go, too."

She explained to Mr. Meggs about Deborah, say-

ing what a sweet girl she was and that she was very happy but wished awfully hard she knew who her parents were.

"The mystery about them may be found in Echo Valley. Perhaps if we go there, we can solve it for her. Wouldn't that be wonderful, Bert?"

Nan's twin agreed that it would be, but he said if the grownups had not solved it already, he did not see how they could.

"Mother will help us," said Nan, "and Daddy, too. Anyway, if we go, I am going to look for clues."

"It seems to me, little lady," said Mr. Meggs—at this point his glasses on the long black ribbon fell from his nose, and he did not go on speaking until he had put them in place again—"it seems to me that you have set yourself a very hard job, but I wish you success with it. It would be very fine indeed if you could find out what Deborah's last name is, even if you cannot locate her parents."

At this moment Mrs. Bobbsey and the younger twins returned. She was carrying a leather-bound Bible. She seated herself on a sofa and the lawyer sat down beside her. Nan took the other side, while Bert, Freddie, and Flossie seated themselves at her feet on the floor.

"What does it say?" asked Flossie.

Mrs. Bobbsey opened the volume carefully and turned several pages until she came to some on which

there was handwriting. Nan noticed how beautiful the script was and thought at once that people today do not take such pains with their handwriting. The letters were even and shaded, so that the pages looked almost like pictures.

"Now here it tells when I was born," said the twins' mother, pointing. "And here is my mother. This is her sister," she added, "and this name, Abigail Fairweather, was *their* mother's name."

She went on pointing and explaining, while Mr. Meggs looked on. The twins listened carefully, but could not make head or tail of the family relationships. When Flossie owned up to this, Mrs. Bobbsey laughed.

"This is what we call a family tree," she said. "There is the family name which is like the trunk of the tree. The different branches of the family are like the tree's branches. Every one of those has twigs on it which represent the different children."

"What are the leaves?" asked Flossie.

Mrs. Bobbsey had to admit that the leaves had nothing to do with it. Bert jokingly said maybe they were the members of the family that had left, like Deborah's mother and father had.

"Oh, I wish we could find a tree with a family on it for her!" said Flossie.

Everyone laughed at this. But they all agreed that

it would be very fine if they could find out for Deborah who the people were on her family tree.

Presently Mr. Meggs stood up, saying, "I must go now. If you will copy the names of these relatives of yours, Mrs. Bobbsey, and send them to me, it will be very helpful. I trust that you will prove to be the right person to inherit the lovely old house at Echo Valley."

He put his glasses into his pocket, said good-bye, and left the house. The children watched him as he went up the street, hoping that the next time their mother heard from him, it would be good news. They wanted so much to go to Echo Valley!

As Mrs. Bobbsey was about to start copying the names from the pages in the old Bible, the children noticed that the Book contained beautiful pictures. They begged their mother to tell some of the stories and let them look at the pictures.

For nearly an hour they sat near her, fascinated by the artist's drawings of Biblical characters. Presently Freddie asked if any twins were mentioned.

"Yes, dear, there are two sets of them," replied Mrs. Bobbsey. "The best known story of twins is about Jacob and Esau."

"Isn't that the one where Jacob saw the ladder reaching from the earth to the sky?" asked Nan. "There were angels on the ladder."

"That's right," said her mother. "You may remember that Jacob was not very nice to his twin brother

Esau. He took everything from him and left home. One night he had a dream about the ladder and the angels. It made him realize how mean he had been, so he became a very good man, and went home again."

Flossie liked the story, but she had grown tired of being still so long. The little girl now got up from the floor where she had been sitting and went outdoors to play a while. About fifteen minutes later, the others, who were still talking with Mrs. Bobbsey, heard the kitchen screen door slam. Then Dinah exclaimed in a surprised voice:

"Fo' goodness sake, Flossie chile, what in de world done happen to yo'?"

CHAPTER IV

A CALL FOR HELP

"WHAT has happened?" thought Nan.

She was the first to run from the living room to the kitchen. Mrs. Bobbsey was close behind her. What a sight met their eyes!

"Flossie, what have you been doing?" her mother exclaimed.

The little girl was covered with mud from the top of her blond curly head to her white sandals. Some of it was dry, some half dry, but most of it still was wet and sticky.

"I was making a bowl," explained Flossie. "At least I was trying to make a bowl like the one we made in school."

"You used modeling clay in school, not mud," said Bert, who now had reached the kitchen and heard what his little sister had said. "You can't make a clay bowl out of Bobbsey mud."

"Why not?" asked Flossie. "My teacher said clay is a form of mud."

"Yes, it is," agreed Mrs. Bobbsey. "But there are many kinds of mud. The clay mud with which people make bowls and other pottery is quite different from the kind in our garden."

"I guess that's why I couldn't make my bowl stick together," said Flossie with a sigh. "When I put a lot of water with the dirt, the mud fell on my dress, and when I didn't put a lot with it, it squashed in my hands."

Nan offered to help Flossie take a bath and put on clean clothes, while Mrs. Bobbsey copied the family tree to send to Mr. Meggs. Nan ended up by washing Flossie's clothes and hanging them on the line in the yard.

By the time she had finished and Flossie was spic and span again, their mother had the letter ready. The girls wanted to know if they could mail it at once in the Lakeport post office so that the lawyer could get it as soon as possible.

"All right," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "I'm eager myself to find out if the lovely old house with the secret closets really will be mine."

The girls hurried off to mail the letter. On the way back they were startled to hear a cry.

"Help! Help!"

Flossie was frightened. She grabbed her sister's hand and stayed close to the older girl. In a moment the sound was repeated.

"It's down that way," said Nan. "We must go. Someone may be hurt."

A policeman already had heard the cry for help and was running down the street. The Bobbseys hurried after him. They turned a corner onto a street where there were no stores and only a few houses.

"See all the people!" gasped Flossie who was breathing hard from running.

Sure enough, several men and women had heard the cry and were on their way to find out what had happened. The shout for help did not come again. No one was in sight.

"What happened?" asked Flossie.

Nan could not answer this. She followed the other people who now were going toward a large red barn. The girl knew this building was never used any more. Had someone gone into it and fallen?

"Where are you?" called out the policeman.

Nobody answered, but from around the corner of the building came Freddie Bobbsey. Nan and Flossie hurried to him and asked what he was doing there.

"Just playing," he replied.

"Does Mother know you're here?" asked Nan.

"N-no," said Freddie. "But Bert told me I could play echo by this barn."

Suddenly Nan began to wonder about something. "Freddie, did you call out 'Help! Help!' real loud?" she asked.

"Y-yes, I did. Wasn't that all right?"

Nan did not answer him. She ran quickly to the policeman and told him what her brother had done. The officer was a little provoked at first, but when he saw that Freddie was only a small boy and had not meant to frighten anyone, he laughed.

"But next time you play echo, call out some words that won't make me think somebody is in trouble," he said.

The policeman went off down the street. Nan, Freddie, and Flossie walked home. Flossie asked her twin why he was playing echo and how he did it.

"Bert told me what Mr. Meggs said about Echo Valley," explained Freddie. "You shout at the mountain, and the same words come back. There's one place where it comes back three times."

"Oo," said Flossie. "I want to try it."

"That's why I went to shout at the barn," explained Freddie. "Bert said maybe I could hear my words again, but I didn't."

When the children reached home, Daddy Bobbsey was driving in. He kissed each of them in turn, then swung Flossie to his shoulder.

"There, my little Fat Fairy, you may ride into the house in style," he laughed. "Duck your head. I shouldn't want to muss up those lovely curls."

Daddy had to hear at once all about Mother's possible inheritance.

"It's an old house with secrets," said Flossie. "And the lady who lives near it makes cheese like magic."

"The mountain across from it has three echoes," added Freddie, getting all mixed up.

"Mother has a tree in the Bible with a family on it," said Flossie. "She needs it to get the house."

"And we're going to find Deborah a tree just like it," Freddie told his father.

Daddy Bobbsey laughed gaily and asked them to please start at the beginning and tell him everything slowly. The little twins were so excited they could not make him understand, so in the end Nan and Bert had to tell all that had happened.

"I hope the old house will be Mother's," he said. "She would love to fix it up, and you would have fun helping her."

"Oh, may we go there for a vacation?" asked Nan.

"From what Mr. Meggs says, you wouldn't be able to stay in it," said her father. "Maybe we could find another place near by to use in the meantime. But nothing can be planned until we hear whether Mother owns the house."

Bert asked him to explain why some places would send back echo sounds and others would not. He told how Freddie had tried shouting at the barn without result.

"Probably he was standing too close to it," said Daddy Bobbsey. "Or maybe there was a door or some

opening where the sound went right through, instead of hitting the barn and coming back."

"I was standing near it," Freddie told them. "How far away would I have to be?"

"Every place is different," said Daddy. "In Europe there is a church which is so perfect to catch sounds on the inside that if I should hold up my watch at one end of the building, you could hear the ticking at the other end. And it's a long church, too."

"What makes echoes come back more than once?" asked Bert.

"When the sounds you make hit several different objects an instant apart," said his father, "like the side of a mountain that isn't flat, for instance. When you shout at it, the sounds hit first one part, then another, and then another. The echoes come back, one by one."

"What's the one that came back the most times?" asked Freddie.

"I don't know that," replied Daddy Bobbsey. "But the longest whole sentence repeated by an echo had seventeen words in it."

Freddie thought this was amazing and wanted to play echo some more right away, but dinner was ready and he had to give up his idea. By the next morning he forgot about it, because he saw Bert in the garden playing mumbletypeg and he wanted to

try the game. His brother was playing with a new jackknife which he prized.

"Please let me try it just once," pleaded Freddie.

"All right. Just once. But look out where you throw the knife. I don't want it ruined," said Bert.

As it happened, his little brother tried again and again, but somehow he could not seem to make the knife stand up straight in the ground, its open blade sticking in the dirt. It fell over on its side every time.

"Show me how," Freddie asked at last.

"I'll show you some good tricks," said a voice near him, but it was not Bert's.

The Bobbsey boys looked up to see a lad a little older than Bert standing a few feet away. He was Danny Rugg, a boy they did not like, for he bragged a good deal and often played mean tricks.

"Let me have your knife, Bert, and I'll show you how to throw it right," continued Danny.

Bert Bobbsey did not want to lend Danny the knife, but also he did not want to be a poor sport.

"Be careful with it," he said, as Danny started to throw the blade toward the grass.

The boy was pretty good at mumbletypeg, and not once did the knife fall over. Bert and Freddie looked on, but said nothing. Both of them knew Bert could do just as well as Danny had so far, and they were waiting for some of his tricks.

In the meantime Flossie had come from the house.

She was carrying the Bobbseys' pet cat Snoop. He was trying to jump down, but she held on to him tightly and watched the game.

"Now I'll show you a very special trick," announced Danny. "I hold the knife up high and—zing!"

He gave the blade a flip, and over his shoulder it went. Either the boy did not aim it right, or he did not know anyone was standing in back of him.

Instantly there was a loud yowl, followed by a scream from Flossie.

CHAPTER V

ANTIQUE TOYS

BERT, Freddie, and Danny Rugg turned around quickly when Flossie screamed. Dinah ran from the kitchen, and Mrs. Bobbsey and Nan rushed from the dining room.

"Oh, you bad boy!" cried Flossie. "You've hurt my kitty!"

Snoop had bounded from her arms. Now he sat in a corner near the porch, furiously licking the tip of his tail.

"You must have cut him, Danny," said Bert. "And you might have hurt Flossie, too. You ought to watch where—"

Bert had turned to look at the other boy. But Danny was not there. Frightened, he had taken to his heels and was far down the street.

"He might have waited long enough to 'pologize to Snoop," declared Flossie angrily.

Nan already had hurried over to the cat and examined the nick which Danny had put in the animal's tail. Though it was a painful cut, she knew Snoop himself could take better care of it than she.

In the meantime Freddie had picked up the knife and put it into his pocket, and Bert had run down the street after Danny. Bert was very indignant to think that the boy had not said one word about being sorry for the trouble he had caused.

"He's certainly mean," thought Bert. "And when I find him—"

But he did not find Danny. At last he gave up the hunt and returned home. Mrs. Bobbsey and the other children were in the attic looking through the old trunk in which the family Bible had been kept. As Bert went up the stairs, he heard a shout of laughter. Then Flossie said:

"Why did your Great-uncle Cyrus wear so many whiskers, Mother? He looks as if he were trying to hide behind them!"

Bert had to laugh, too, when he saw the old faded photograph. All that could be seen of the face were two eyes, a nose, and lips. Over the rest were a beard, a mustache, and sideburns. Even Great-uncle Cyrus's hair had been combed down over his forehead.

"I'm told he was a very handsome man," said Mrs. Bobbsey, "but I must admit one never would know it from this picture."

She held up several other photographs of her relatives. One was a girl of Nan's age, who resembled Nan Bobbsey very much. Turning it over, the twins' mother was surprised to find that the child's name was Nan Browning.

"Was I named after her?" her daughter asked.

"No, dear, you were named for an aunt but perhaps *she* was named for this person."

"Where is she now?" asked Flossie.

"She's not living, dear," replied Mrs. Bobbsey. "If she were, she'd be a hundred and fifteen years old now."

"Phew!" said Freddie. Then he asked, "What is the oldest living thing in the whole world?"

"Trees are," answered his mother. "If trees could talk, we wouldn't need so many history books. One old giant redwood in California started growing two thousand years ago."

Again Freddie said, "Phew!"

While Mrs. Bobbsey had been speaking, Nan had been looking at various things in the trunk. Now she held up a pair of beautiful old-fashioned curtains.

"Couldn't you use these in the country house?" she asked her mother. "Old houses should have old things in them, shouldn't they?"

"Yes, so long as they are useful," replied Mrs. Bobbsey. "I shouldn't want any old chairs that would break down when someone sat on them!"

"Let's go to Mr. Moser's Antique Shop and see what he has," begged Nan. "He might have lots of things for the old house."

Her mother felt that they ought to wait until she heard whether or not the place in Echo Valley was to be theirs, but the twins teased so hard to go that she consented. When they reached the shop, she explained to Mr. Moser why they were there.

"You look around all you like," the man said. "I'll be glad to lay aside anything you may want and keep it until you know if the new place is yours."

For an hour Mrs. Bobbsey and the children looked around. Nan and her mother selected two lamps with dainty china bases, which really were ladies in old-fashioned dresses with hooped skirts. Each one carried a parasol which formed the shade for the lamp.

"Can't I have this hobby horse?" asked Freddie, who was astride a wooden pony.

It was gaily painted. A red saddle was across its back, and there were bright yellow trappings. Leather reins came from the animal's mouth. Freddie rocked back and forth contentedly.

"I'm afraid that horse would be too large to move," his mother said. "We must pick out small things."

Flossie giggled. "The old rhyme says you can 'ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross,'" she said. "Why couldn't Freddie ride this one to Echo Valley?"

Everyone laughed and decided it would take Fred-

die so long he would be grown up before he could get there! So the little boy began to hunt with Bert for smaller playthings. They came to the conclusion that in olden times the girls must have done all the playing, for there was hardly anything of interest to boys. They saw plenty of dolls and dishes and doll furniture, but nothing more manly.

"This is a darling cradle," said Nan. "It's almost big enough for Flossie."

"It is big enough," cried her sister, jumping into it. "Rock me, Nan."

Unfortunately, the rocking did not last long. There was a sudden cracking sound, and the old cradle seemed to fall apart in every place at once. The sides came off, the front and the back split away. Flossie found herself on the floor.

"Oof!" she cried.

Nan felt very bad about the mishap. She instantly went to report it to Mr. Moser. That kindly old gentleman looked at the girl over his glasses, then said that he had no idea the cradle was in such bad condition.

"Maybe it's just as well that it broke in my shop. Someone might have bought it and put a real baby in it, and the poor little thing might have been hurt."

"But it broke because I put Flossie in it," explained Nan. "I want to pay for it. Maybe I could work for you until I earn enough money."

Mr. Moser examined the pieces of the cradle carefully, and decided definitely that it was about ready to fall apart anyway.

"I shouldn't have left it alongside this radiator," he said. "The heat has dried out the old wood. It is not your fault, Nan, so do not worry about it any more."

The girl was relieved, but decided that she and the other children had better not play with anything else in Mr. Moser's shop. Soon Mrs. Bobbsey said it was time to go. She had asked the shop owner to put aside a small table, several bureau scarves, and a tablecloth and napkins.

"We can carry these on the train if we should go to Echo Valley," she said. "If Mr. Bobbsey should come up later in the car, I shall ask him to bring those four lovely old chairs over in the corner there."

As soon as the Bobbseys reached home, Nan went to her room to practice the sign language which deaf people use. She got out the little chart which Aunt Sallie Pry had given her. Starting with A, she went through the alphabet, letter by letter. After doing this several times, the girl began to make words. She kept this up for some time, then called her mother into the room.

"Please ask me to spell something with my fingers," her daughter suggested. "Don't make it too hard," she laughed.

Mrs. Bobbsey was amazed that Nan had learned the sign language so quickly. The girl said she was not sure a deaf person would understand her. The only way to find out would be to go over and talk to Deborah.

"Suppose you wait, dear, until I hear from Mr. Meggs. Then, if we are really going to Echo Valley, you will want to ask Deborah some more questions about the place where she lived. It may not be the same Echo Valley."

The following morning when Bert went to the front porch to bring in the newspaper, he saw the mailman coming. Wondering if there might be a letter for his mother from the lawyer, he ran down the street to meet the carrier.

"Hello, son," the cheery man greeted him. "Lots of letters for the Bobbsey family today. Just a moment and I'll get them for you."

He reached down into his bag and brought out a large bundle of letters which had an elastic band around them. From these he picked out twelve and handed them to Bert. Quickly the lad looked them over.

There was one from Mr. Meggs!

Bert ran up the street as fast as he could, took the porch steps two at a time, and rushed into the front hall. He almost knocked over Dinah who was coming

out herself to get the morning paper for Mr. Bobbsey.

"Mah goodness, honey chile, somethin' impo'tant must be goin' on fo' yo' to be in such a hurry."

"I guess there is," said Bert, hurrying into the dining room where he knew his mother would be. "A letter from Mr. Meggs!" he cried.

The other twins heard their brother and came running from all directions. Eagerly they waited for their mother to open the important letter.

Was the lovely old house at Echo Valley with its secret rooms to be theirs?

CHAPTER VI

GOOD NEWS

As Mrs. Bobbsey opened the important envelope, she asked her family to guess what the letter would say.

"I bet it says 'Yes,'" cried Freddie.

"I am so afraid the place won't be ours," sighed Nan, "but I hope—"

By this time her mother was reading the first paragraph of the letter from Mr. Meggs. She smiled broadly, then looked at her family.

"Everything is all right," she announced. "I am to inherit the old place. Isn't that wonderful?"

"Aren't you glad your family had a tree on it?" asked Flossie excitedly.

"Yes, Mary," said Mr. Bobbsey to his wife, "your family tree in the old Bible was a great help. I am so glad that the property is yours. What else does Mr. Meggs have to say?"

The twins' mother finished reading the letter, then

she told her family that she would have to leave them for a couple of days, while she went off to sign some papers and get the keys to the old house.

"I shall look the place over," she said, "and decide about our going up there for a vacation. The lawyer writes that the former caretakers—their names are Mr. and Mrs. Osgood—would like us to stay with them at their cottage while we fix up the old house. I shall see about that, too."

The children were very excited and urged their mother to be sure to fix things up so that they could go to Echo Valley. As soon as breakfast was over, each of the twins ran off to tell his best friend the good fortune that had come to the Bobbsey family. By the time the children returned to the house, Mrs. Bobbsey already had left. Dinah told them that there was a surprise in store for them. She herself was busy in the kitchen packing meat, potatoes, and fruit.

"Yo' daddy said fo' me to get a picnic ready. We's gwine to de woods and cook yo' lunch."

"Hooray!" yelled Freddie. "How are we going? Will Daddy drive us?"

"No," replied Dinah. "Dat's part o' de surprise. Yo' jest wait an' see what's gwine to happen."

The twins could hardly wait. Presently they saw a truck, drawn by a team of horses, coming up the street.

"It's one of Daddy's trucks from the lumber yard."

cried Nan, "and Sam is driving. Oh, what fun to go to a picnic in that."

Eagerly the twins rushed outside to meet Sam as he came into the driveway. When Sam's face lighted up the Bobbseys thought he had the nicest smile of anybody in the whole world.

"Everybody ready?" he called out, grinning, as he drew in the reins to stop the horses. "Ef yo' wants to ride to de picnic behind de smartest team in town, jest climb aboa'd."

Bert and Nan went over to stroke the velvety noses of Ike and Mike, the two gentle, snow-white horses. The girl laid her face against that of Ike, and he stood very still as she patted him.

Sam had jumped down and now carried out the lunch basket, which was overflowing with good things to eat. Dinah secretly had tucked in a few extra goodies which she had not told the children about.

The twins climbed into the back of the truck. Sam had put plenty of straw on the floor, so that it would not be hard to sit on. Dinah got her coat and a special bandanna she wore whenever she went out. No matter how hot it was, Dinah never had her hair uncovered, indoors or out. When everyone was seated, Sam called out:

"Giddap!"

Suddenly there was a sharp barking. Waggo ran

up, made a flying leap, and landed beside the children. They let him stay there.

Away went the truck down the street. The twins waved to several friends as they passed by.

"I think it would be nice to take Deborah with us," said Nan. "Let's ask her."

The others agreed, so Sam turned down the street where Aunt Sallie Pry lived. Nan hurried into the little white cottage and told the woman they wanted the girl to get ready to go to the woods for a picnic.

"You say you want Deborah to get some wood for a picnic?" said deaf Mrs. Pry. "Do you want it for a fire?"

Nan laughed and shook her head. "We want Deborah to go on a picnic," she shouted.

"Oh, that's nice," said Aunt Sallie. "She's making some cookies. Take them along. You'll find her in the kitchen."

Nan found Deborah just taking a tin of wafers from the oven. She smiled and watched as Nan spelled "picnic" with her fingers and motioned toward a window. Deborah looked outside, saw the truck with the other twins in it, and got the idea at once.

"I'll take these cookies," she said with her hand.

She spelled so fast that Nan did not know what she meant, but she guessed, for Deborah put the goodies into a little box, took off her apron, and went outside with her.

Dinah and Sam were introduced and the group went off once more.

"Are you going to use the fireplace that's built in the woods for picnickers?" asked Nan.

"Yes, honey chile," replied Dinah. "Dat's de safest thing to do. Den we won't set de woods on fire."

Sam drove directly to the picnic spot which the town of Lakeport had fixed up. There were long tables and benches and two stone fireplaces. Bert helped Sam unhitch the horses. Nan and Deborah carried the lunch hamper to one of the tables, then Dinah removed the meat which she was going to cook.

Flossie played a game with Waggo. She would throw a stick to different distances. If it went only a short way, Waggo was supposed to catch it in his mouth. If it went far away, he would run very fast, pick up the stick in his mouth, and bring it back to his young mistress.

"I guess I will go play echo," said Freddie, thinking that everybody heard him.

As a matter of fact, nobody heard him, and no one noticed when he walked off into the woods alone. In the distance he had seen a very large rock. He thought if he shouted near it, the sound of his voice might come back to him.

When he came close he called "Hello," but the word was not repeated. So he walked on and on, hunting for some spot which really would make an echo.

"I am going downhill now," he said to himself. "Maybe there is a mountain on the other side. I think I'll shout. Hello, hello," he called as loudly as he could.

"O—o," came back to him very faintly.

The little boy was delighted and tried several other words. He could not make all the syllables repeat themselves, but it was fun to hear any sounds at all. He walked farther, hoping to find just the right place.

"Hello," he called presently.

"Hello, yourself," said a loud voice.

Freddie was startled. That was no echo! He turned around. Back of him stood Danny Rugg, grinning broadly.

"You are lost, aren't you?" said the older boy.

"No, I'm not lost," replied Freddie.

"I bet you are," said Danny. "I'll bet you can't tell me where your family is right now."

The little boy pointed. "They are right over there."

"They are not," laughed the big boy gleefully. "They are nowhere near there. You can't find them unless I show you where to go."

Freddie did not know whether to believe Danny or not, but when he thought it over, he realized he was not at all sure how he had come through the woods. He had turned this way and that while hunting for a good echo spot.

"I won't cry," he thought. "And I won't let Danny know I am lost."

Manfully Freddie turned away and began walking in the direction he felt he ought to take. As he started off, he put his hands into his pockets. What was this he felt? Bert's knife! He had forgotten to give it back to his brother. He took it out to look at it. This was the worst thing he could have done, because it put a wicked idea into Danny's head.

"You're lost, and you know it," he said to Freddie. "If you will give me that knife, I'll take you back to your folks."

Now Freddie had no intention of giving away Bert's knife. He would rather take a chance on being lost than doing such a thing. He did not answer the older boy.

When Danny saw that he was not going to have his way, he became angry. "Give me that knife!" he shouted.

Still Freddie paid no attention, so there was only one thing left for Danny to do. He rushed up to the little boy, grabbed the knife from his hand, and ran off.

For an instant Freddie was so shocked that he hardly realized what had happened. Then he too became angry. Danny must not take Bert's property!

Quickly the little fellow went after the older boy. But poor Freddie was no match for Danny. His legs

were much shorter, and the bigger lad had had a head start. Freddie was going to do his best, however. Through the brush and over the sharp rocks he ran. Suddenly Danny seemed to slow up, and the younger boy took new hope.

"Maybe I can catch him," thought Freddie excitedly.

The two lads had come to an open space. Now they were racing downhill at a fast rate. Suddenly Danny vanished. Too late Freddie realized that he was coming to the end of the hillside. It dropped off sharply below. He tried his best to stop, but lost his balance.

He pitched headlong off the edge of the big rock and fell to the ground below. He lay very still.

CHAPTER VII

WAGGO TO THE RESCUE

WHEN Flossie became tired of playing with Waggo, the little fox terrier looked around for something else to do. In a moment he saw a chipmunk and decided to chase it.

Now Waggo was a bright little dog, but it so happened that the chipmunk was very bright, too. The little animal soon realized the fox terrier was after him. Like lightning it ran up a tree trunk and out onto a limb. Since the dog could not climb trees, the little chipmunk was safe. It sat up and scolded Waggo.

The fox terrier did not like the fact that the smaller animal had got the better of him, so he sniffed at the ground, pretending he was interested in something else. In a moment he did become interested in something else. Freddie's scent!

Waggo had played games so often with the little boy that he knew right away Freddie's shoes had

passed over this spot. He would find him, and maybe Freddie would play with him.

Quickly the dog followed the scent. In a few minutes he came to the cliff from which the twin had fallen. Below him lay the small boy. In a moment the dog was beside Freddie, licking his face affectionately and whimpering loudly.

"Oh, oh!" said the lad, opening his eyes.

For a few seconds he thought he had been asleep. Then he remembered that he had had a bad tumble. His head hurt a little, and he closed his eyes again. Once more Waggo licked Freddie's face. When the boy did not get up, the dog grabbed the shoulder of his coat and tried to pull him away.

"I'm—I'm all right, Waggo," said the twin. "But I guess I'm lost. Take me back to Nan and the others."

Slowly Freddie got to his feet. As he did so, he was surprised to see something lying on the ground—Bert's penknife.

"Danny must have dropped it when he jumped from the cliff," the little boy said to himself.

Joyfully Freddie picked it up and slowly followed Waggo through the woods. He wondered where Danny had gone. Danny was *such* a mean boy. Something ought to be done about it.

"I'll tell Bert," decided the Bobbsey twin. "He'll fix him."

Freddie wondered how Waggo knew his way so

well among the trees and bushes. Soon the lad could see the smoke from the open fireplace where Dinah was cooking the meat for the picnic. How delicious the odor was, and how good it seemed to be back again with his brother and sisters and old Dinah and Sam.

"Here comes Freddie!" shouted Flossie.

She had been crying because her twin had stayed away so long. They all had feared something had happened to him. Sam, Bert, and Nan had gone off in different directions looking for him. How relieved they were when they returned to find the little boy back safe and unhurt except for the bump on his head.

"Waggo did it," said Freddie, and told about how the little dog had rescued him.

The picnic was a joyful one. Deborah especially seemed to have a very good time. She was so sweet and cheerful the other children knew it made no difference to her that she could not hear.

Whenever she wanted to say anything, she spelled it out to Nan on her fingers. Of course, she had to go very slowly, because Nan still was having trouble making words out of the letters.

"Your cookies are delicious," spelled out Nan, and the little guest smiled in appreciation of the compliment.

"Dinah's dinner was very good," Deborah replied.

"I ate too much."

All the children felt as if they had eaten too much,

but when Dinah cooked hamburgers and put them between homemade rolls, it was hard not to overeat. As a surprise, she had brought ice cream pudding in a bucket of ice.

After the children had played games for a while, Sam decided it was time they should go home. So he hitched up the horses and drove the picnickers back to the center of Lakeport. He stopped at Mrs. Pry's to let Deborah out, and the little girl declared she had never had a better time.

Bert asked Sam to let him out at Pine Street, saying he had an errand he wanted to do before going home. No one knew what this was, but Freddie strongly suspected that his brother was going to Danny Rugg's house, because Freddie had asked him to do something about the mean trick the bully had played on him.

Freddie was right. Bert set off up the street, turned a corner, and presently came to the Rugg home. Danny was pumping up the tire on his bicycle in the back garden. Bert marched straight up to him.

"What do you mean by hitting somebody smaller than yourself?" he demanded.

Danny looked up, but kept on pumping the tire. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

"You do, too," replied Bert, his eyes flashing. "Instead of helping my little brother when he was lost in the woods, you made him have an accident."

"Did he get hurt?" asked Danny, looking a little frightened.

"Not very badly," said Bert, "but it might have been much worse, and you just left him there when he got knocked out, and you never helped him a bit."

"I didn't know he got knocked out. I didn't hurt him. He chased me."

"Sure he did, and why? Because you took my pen-knife away from him. You are the meanest boy in town and you should have a good licking."

Bert advanced toward Danny, his fists doubled up. Before he could do anything more, the kitchen door opened and Mr. Rugg strode out.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded.

"Bert is trying to make up a story," replied his son. "I was in the woods this afternoon. I saw Freddie Bobbsey there. I knew he was lost and I offered to take him back to his family, but he wouldn't let me."

Mr. Rugg looked at Bert. "Suppose you tell me your side of the story," he suggested.

Now Bert was no tattletale, so he did not know what to do. He certainly thought Danny should be punished, but he was not going to tell on him. As he hesitated, Mr. Rugg smiled.

"Never mind telling me," he said. "When I was in the kitchen I overheard what you said. You will not have to fight Danny. I will attend to him myself."

Bert thanked the man and turned away. As he went

toward home, he wondered what Mr. Rugg was going to do. Had he known, he would have been very much surprised. Danny's father gave his son a strong talking-to, ordered that he have only bread and milk for his supper, and made him go to bed at once. As he said good night to him, he added :

"I think I had better keep my eye on you for a while. I am going on a business trip and shall take you with me."

"That won't be any fun," said Danny. "Where are you going?"

"It is not supposed to be fun. If anything, it is punishment," replied Mr. Rugg. "Part of the time I shall be in a little town where you can get into no mischief."

"What's the name of it?" asked his son.

"Echo Valley," replied his father.

The following day Mrs. Bobbsey returned from her trip. She announced to her family that she was perfectly delighted with the place she had inherited.

"It is the darlingest old house I ever saw. It must have been a small home to start with. Then a room was added here, and another one there. Now it rambles up two steps and down two steps and around corners. There is a wide stairway here and a narrow stairway there. You never know what you are going to come upon. There are lots of windows for the sun to shine through, and lovely old shade trees outside to keep it cool."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Nan. "And are we going to go there?"

"Yes, dear," replied her mother. "Just as soon as we can get ready."

Freddie let out a yell and did his usual somersault. Freddie always made somersaults when he was happy. All the children began to talk at once and make plans.

"We shall stay with the Osgoods," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "They are lovely people, and I am sure we'll enjoy being there until we get our own house fixed up."

"Did you have a chance to find out about the echo?" asked Bert.

Mrs. Bobbsey smiled. "Yes, I did. I heard several echoes. And I also heard something else. The strangest thing happened while I was there."

"What was it?" cried all the twins together.

CHAPTER VIII

DEBORAH'S STORY

THE Bobbsey twins eagerly awaited their mother's reply to the question about the sounds in Echo Valley.

"It was very strange," she explained. "I had been to the village with Mr. and Mrs. Osgood to see about carpenters and painters. On the way back Mr. Osgood said he would drive along the mountain on one side of the valley and I could try out the echo myself. All visitors to the spot like to do that!"

"What did you say?" asked Nan.

"Oh, I called out 'Hello' and 'How are you?' "

"Did Echo say the same thing?" Flossie wanted to know.

"The very same words," replied her mother. "And very distinctly, too. Then we drove on. Presently Mrs. Osgood suggested that we stop. She told her husband that he ought to let me hear the answer echo."

"What is that?" asked Bert.

"When I stood in a certain place and called, my words didn't echo back to me," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "Instead, my questions were answered. For example, I called loudly, 'How far is it to the village?' A faint answer came back, 'One mile.' "

"How can that be?" said Bert, who could not believe such a thing was possible.

"You'll have to hear it yourself," smiled his mother. "And now, we must decide what clothes to take with us."

As the boy brought suitcases from the attic, he kept puzzling over the strange echo. He was determined to find out about it.

"It's the first thing I'm going to do when I get to the valley," he decided.

As the boy carried a bag into Nan's and Flossie's room, his little sister gave a loud wail.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"My doll! My doll! My fav'rite doll is gone!" Flossie cried out.

"Where did you leave her?"

"Right here in her bed."

The little girl pointed to the empty cradle in which her baby, as she called her doll, always slept. Now the covers were half on the floor, as if the person under them had been pulled out in a hurry.

"You're sure she's not in her carriage?" asked Bert. "That's downstairs, isn't it?"

By this time everyone in the house knew what had happened, for Flossie was still crying. Mrs. Bobbsey and Dinah, as well as the children, helped in the search. But the doll could not be found.

"Barbara can't walk, so she couldn't go off herself," declared the little girl. "But where is she?"

Where Barbara could be remained a mystery. Mrs. Bobbsey suggested that her young daughter take some other doll with her to Echo Valley, but Flossie felt that she could not enjoy the trip so much if her special baby were not along.

"I just *must* find her," she said tearfully. "After I pack, I'll hunt some more."

The twins went upstairs again to help their mother pick out the clothes to go into the suitcases. Most of them were to be for play or work, because each child was to help get the house ready.

Of course, too many dresses and suits were chosen, and in the end several things had to be removed from the suitcases. At last everything was ready for Mrs. Bobbsey and the twins to leave on an early train the following morning.

They decided that Waggo was to go along. It was necessary to carry him in a basket, because dogs are not allowed to run loose on trains.

"I am afraid Waggo's puppy basket is too small for him now," said Nan. "We'll have to get a new one."

"And Waggo had better have a bath," suggested Mrs. Bobbsey. "Suppose you give it to him now."

Bert said he would help. Nan went to the cellar to draw the water into one of the laundry tubs. She got the special soap and the two towels used especially for Waggo and Snap.

Bert went out to the kennel where Waggo and Snap slept. The little fox terrier came running to the gate of the fenced-in enclosure. Bert did not let him out at once. He went inside, deciding to clean out the little dog's house so that it would be fresh for him after his bath. As he knelt down and looked inside, he was amazed to see something in the corner which did not belong there.

"It's Barbara!" he cried.

Quickly he reached his arm inside and pulled out the doll. She did not seem to be harmed, but she was very dirty. Apparently Waggo had pulled her from her cradle and dragged her through the dust. The doll was a sorry-looking sight.

"Waggo," said the boy, "why did you do this? You know better. You aren't a puppy any longer. I'm surprised that you would want to play with dolls, anyway," he chided the little dog.

Waggo hung his head. He knew well enough what Bert was saying to him. He followed the boy through the garden and into the house.

"Flossie," called Bert. "Flossie, come here. I've a surprise for you."

His little sister came running down the stairs. When she saw Barbara, she took the doll and hugged it. Then she held it off at arm's-length and looked at her baby.

"You're a most dreadful sight!" she exclaimed. "Where have you been?"

"Visiting Waggo," explained Bert. "I guess she'll need a bath as well as Waggo."

"Oh! Oh!" cried little Mother Flossie. "What a lot of work I'll have to do. Wash and iron all her clothes and shampoo her hair."

She climbed slowly up the stairs to start the job. Bert and Waggo went to the cellar. The little dog was put into the tub and given a good scrubbing.

"As soon as we finish, let's go over to see Deborah," suggested Nan. "We'll tell her we're going to Echo Valley, and we can ask her how we might find out who her parents were."

"It's a good idea," agreed Bert.

In about half an hour they set out for Aunt Sallie Pry's cottage. On the way the children stopped at a hardware store and bought a large covered basket in which Waggo would ride to Echo Valley. There was a special little window in one side so he could look out. Bert took the basket over his arm, and the twins

trudged along until they came to the little white cottage.

There they found the elderly woman practicing the finger language with the little girl. She welcomed the Bobbseys, and gave each of them an apple.

"We're going to Echo Valley tomorrow," announced Nan.

"What's that?" asked Aunt Sallie.

This time Bert shouted the information. Nan slowly spelled it with her hands. Both listeners were excited to learn this. Aunt Sallie began to give the Bobbseys all sorts of advice, while Deborah talked so fast with her fingers that Nan laughed and shook her head to signify she did not understand any of it.

"The Echo Valley Orphan Home is only about two miles out of town," said Mrs. Pry. "That's where Deborah lived."

"What else can you tell us?" Nan shouted.

Aunt Sallie had little more to tell. She had borrowed Deborah, so to speak, from the Home. Each was going to see how she liked living with the other. After a definite period of time, they were going to decide whether the little girl would return to the Orphanage or stay in Lakeport. The woman had learned nothing about the child, except that she had been left there as a baby by an excited woman who had said, "Will you keep Deborah for a little while? I'll be back for her." Unfortunately, the woman had never come.

"Is that all you know?" asked Nan.

"As you realize, I don't hear very well," Aunt Sallie replied. "And it was very difficult to talk to the people there, so I did not find out anything else. Maybe if you go to the Orphan Home they will tell you more about it," Mrs. Pry stated.

After a little further talk on the subject, she requested Bert to try to fix the plug on a floor lamp which would not work. The boy went off with her to get some tools. In the meantime Deborah and Nan carried on the conversation about finding clues to the deaf girl's parents.

"Aunt Sallie is very kind to me," wrote Deborah on a pad. "I should like to keep on living with her here. But I do wish I had a father and a mother."

"Tell me everything you know that would help us find them," Nan wrote.

"Very little," was Deborah's answer. "I was born deaf. I guess it was too much trouble for the people at the Home to tell me things when I was a little girl. Then all new women came to run the place. I suppose they didn't know anything at all about me."

"Can't you give us even one clue?" begged Nan.

"I once was told something about a fire. The lady who brought me had a fire. I don't know whether she was my mother or not."

This was all that Deborah could tell. Nan decided that, with such a small amount of information, it would

be pretty hard to trace Deborah's father and mother. But she was going to do everything she could to help this lovely little girl.

By this time Bert had finished his job. Aunt Sallie thought he was very smart to be able to fix the lamp. As she thanked him, she put a little box of homemade candy into his pocket, saying he could pass it around on the train the next day.

When he and his twin reached home, Mr. Bobbsey was there, and an early dinner was served. While they ate, Nan related what they had learned about Deborah.

"It isn't very much," she said. "Do you suppose we could possibly find out who her mother and father were?" she asked her dad.

"I shall do all I can to help you," he replied. "Let me know as soon as you discover anything else about her."

"We simply must find a tree with a family on it for Deborah," declared Flossie.

Her parents smiled. Flossie had her own way of talking about family trees. This time they did not correct her. Really, it made no difference whether it was a family tree or a tree with a family on it. The main thing was to find out what Deborah's last name was and who her mother and father were.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW OLD HOUSE

"WAKE up!"

Freddie opened one eye and saw his mother standing over him.

"My sleepy little boy will have to get up, or we'll miss the train to Echo Valley," she smiled, leaning down to kiss her small son.

Echo Valley! Freddie felt a little ashamed that he had not been the first one to awaken. He could hear Bert in the shower bath. Flossie, fully dressed, went past his door and called out, "Sleepy head!"

Freddie got right up, bathed, and put his clothes on so fast that he was ready for breakfast as soon as Nan and his father were.

"I'se got a special treat dis mo'ning," said Dinah after the family had eaten their fruit. "Yo' all is gwine on a long trip, so I'se fixed a good breakfast fo' yo'."

She set a plate of steaming muffins on the table.

When the twins broke them open, they found juicy huckleberries inside. After the butter they spread on them melted, the children thought they had never tasted anything better.

"This is a treat, Dinah," declared Daddy Bobbsey. "You might make me some every morning while my family is away. They may keep me from being lonesome," he laughed.

As soon as breakfast was over, Mrs. Bobbsey and the children hurried upstairs to get their coats and hats. Sam already had brought down the suitcases and placed them in the back of the automobile. Dinah put Waggo in his basket and fastened the lid. The little dog did not like this, so to keep him from whimpering, the cook opened the lid again, dropped a couple of puppy biscuits inside, and locked him up once more.

Mr. Bobbsey took his place behind the wheel. As soon as the rest of the family got into the automobile, he drove down the street toward the station. They were in good time; in fact, they had ten minutes to wait. Freddie asked permission to buy the tickets, so his daddy let the little boy go up to the window and purchase them.

"Five tickets to Echo Valley," he said.

The ticket agent leaned forward and smiled. "Why, it's Freddie Bobbsey! Who is being left out of this trip?" he asked.

"My daddy can't go," replied the little boy. "You don't need a ticket for a dog, do you?"

"No," the man answered. "But you have to have your dog in a basket if you want to take him on the train."

"Waggo is in a nice new basket," said the small boy. "He'll be no trouble on the trip."

When Freddie said this, of course he thought nothing was going to happen. And no one was more surprised than he when Waggo did get into trouble. Mrs. Bobbsey and the twins had not been on the train very long before the little dog decided he was tired of being cooped up in the basket. He soon found that by pushing his head against the top, he could loosen the catch.

None of the Bobbseys and none of the other passengers in the coach noticed what was going on. Slowly but surely Waggo was freeing himself. Finally he was able to raise the lid of the basket. Being a wise little dog, and knowing that he was not supposed to get out, he peeked around without raising the lid very high.

Suddenly he sniffed and decided that somewhere in the coach there was a cat. At once all his dog instincts were aroused. With a bound, he leaped from his basket. For a moment he stood still, cocking his ears, then ran up the aisle.

"Br-r-rr! R—r—rr!" he barked.

Waggo had found a basket on a seat beside an old lady. There was a cat inside.

"Get out of here!" the woman cried, jumping up. "Go away!"

The instant the dog had barked, the Bobbseys had looked up. In a moment Bert was up the aisle and had grabbed his pet.

"Is this your dog?" the old lady asked. "What's he doing loose? Like to have frightened me out of my wits. Take him away!" she scolded.

Of course, Waggo was going to do no harm, but the poor woman did not know this. Fearful that her own pet might be injured, or that the Bobbsey dog would bite her, she decided to move out of the car at once.

As Bert walked back and put Waggo into his basket again, the old lady gathered up her things and prepared to leave. From a rack above her head she took a hat box, an umbrella, and a large package. Then she picked up a satchel and a covered bird cage from the floor. Finally she hooked the basket with the cat in it over her arm, and started down the aisle.

"Oh, excuse me," she said as she knocked a lady's hat off with her umbrella.

As she turned around to say something else, she brushed the neck of one of the other passengers with her hat box.

"I'm so sorry," she apologized, turning the other way and this time bumping the leg of a man with her basket.

By now Freddie and Flossie were convulsed with

giggles. Nan got up to help the woman, but Mrs. Bobbsey said she would speak to her.

"Please sit down," she begged. "I will see that our dog does not get out again. I am afraid it will be dangerous for you to walk between the cars while the train is moving. Here, I will help you put your bundles back."

The old lady decided to take the advice, and one by one her packages were laid on the rack, on the floor, and onto the seat again. Flossie and Freddie walked over to her after a while and asked if they might see her cat. Since Waggo had not bothered her any more, the woman had forgiven the Bobbseys for giving her such a fright.

Now she invited the little twins to sit down opposite her and talk. She showed them a lovely black cat curled up in the basket and two little lovebirds which sat side by side on a perch in their cage.

"Are you moving your animals to a new home?" Flossie asked her.

"Yes, I am going to live with my daughter at Echo Valley."

"That's where we're going," said Freddie.

"We know a girl who used to live at the Orphan Home there," said Flossie. "We feel sorry for her because she hasn't any mother or father, and we are going to find a tree with a family on it for her."

The woman smiled. "That is very fine," she said. "What is the little girl's name?"

"Deborah," replied Freddie. "She hasn't any last name. We are going to get her one."

"Can you give us any clues?" asked Flossie.

At this the woman laughed. Clues was such a grown-up word for a little girl to use. But she supposed that Flossie had heard this from her father and mother.

"I'm afraid I can't help you," the old lady replied. "I have never been in Echo Valley, and my daughter has lived there only three months."

Soon after this the conductor called out, "All change!" The passengers gathered up their packages and got out at a junction where it was necessary to take another train to go to Echo Valley. The ride was only a short one, and it seemed no time at all to the twins before they were getting off the train and being greeted by Mr. Osgood. He was about fifty years old and had blond-gray hair. His eyes were very blue, and his complexion was ruddy. The twins liked him at once.

"Here, son, I'll take those bags," he said to Bert, who was struggling with two heavy suitcases. "My car is right over there."

He helped the Bobbseys into a small automobile. When they and all the bags were inside, it was so crowded that there was hardly room left for Waggo.

Finally Bert put the basket on top of a suitcase he held on his lap.

The Osgood cottage was a mile from town. It stood on a back road at the edge of the property which Mrs. Bobbsey had inherited. The house was attractive, and though it looked small from the outside, it had enough extra bedrooms to accommodate all the Bobbseys. Mrs. Osgood opened the door for the guests and welcomed them cordially.

"We are very glad to have you twins," she smiled. "In fact, it is a great honor to entertain two sets of twins from one family. Now let me get the names straight. You are Nan and this is Bert, and the younger brother and sister are Freddie and Flossie."

Freddie looked up at her in wonder. "You must have been practicing," he said. "How did you learn our names so fast?"

"I guess I talked about you so much when I was here, that Mrs. Osgood recognized you at once," said Mrs. Bobbsey.

"Can't we go to our place soon?" the little boy asked. "I want to see the secret doors and closets."

"I will be glad to drive you over right away," said Mr. Osgood, "if your mother will let you go."

"Suppose we all go," suggested Mrs. Bobbsey, "but first we must change our clothes. The old house will probably be very dusty."

The twins unpacked their clothes in short order,

hung them in the closets, and were ready to leave within twenty minutes. Off they went toward the place they had waited so long to see.

The road from the Osgood cottage was a winding lane banked by different kinds of fruit trees. Everything had a delicious odor, and the twins breathed deeply of the fresh country air. In a few minutes the rambling old house came into view. It looked just as Mrs. Bobbsey had described it, only prettier.

"Oh," said Nan, "it is a lovely old house."

"May we put a swing on the back porch?" asked Freddie.

"Yes, dear, and we can put another one out among the apple trees at the back."

"I'd like to have my bedroom facing the west," said Nan. "I know the sunsets must be beautiful."

"Indeed they are," spoke up Mrs. Osgood. "And the front room to the right of the stairway on the second floor would be a nice one for you and Flossie."

"The house has lots of chimneys," said Bert. "Does that mean there are many fireplaces?"

"There are six in the house," replied Mr. Osgood.

"How wonderful!" Flossie cried, clapping her hands in delight.

Mr. Osgood unlocked the big front door with a large key. Nan had expected the old house to be musty, but to her surprise it was not. Mr. Osgood had opened

the windows that morning, and the air inside the house was fresh with the lovely scent from the apple orchard.

For a moment the twins stood in awe. This place was so much nicer than they had expected. Soon, however, their curiosity got the better of them, and they began to run hither and yon, looking for secret doors and hidden closets.

The children happened to meet in the back hall of the second floor. Bert had just opened a door he had not tried before. They all peered into a closet. Suddenly Flossie screamed.

"A ghost!" she cried, pushing the door shut.

Bert wondered whether he should open it again. He, too, had seen a form inside which certainly looked like a person. Perhaps he had better call his mother or Mr. Osgood. He looked at Nan.

"Better wait a minute, Bert," the girl advised.

She went to the stairs and called to the grownups below. They came hurrying up.

"Did you find one of the secret closets?" laughed Mr. Osgood.

"We found a ghost!" cried Flossie. "Please be careful, Mr. Osgood, when you open that door!"

In wonder the children watched as the man slowly turned the knob.

CHAPTER X

SPOOKY SOUNDS

THE Bobbsey twins held their breaths as Mr. Osgood opened the door to the back hall closet. Even Mrs. Bobbsey looked eagerly into the interior. She had not examined this place on her first visit to the house.

"Well, here's your ghost!" exclaimed the man, reaching inside and drawing something into the light of the hall.

"A dressmaking form!" laughed the children's mother. "That certainly fooled us."

The twins laughed also. Before them stood a headless woman, wearing a long old-fashioned dress. She was nothing but a form made of wood and covered with black cotton material.

"We used to have one of those at my home when I was a little girl," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "We called her Aunt Nellie. My mother made all her own clothes and always fitted them on Aunt Nellie."

Flossie giggled. "When you stick pins into her it doesn't hurt, does it? I think it would be fun to play with her. Can't we leave her out, Mother?"

"I'm afraid she would get very dusty while the men are working here. We had better put her back in the closet until the house is nice and clean."

The children went on with their investigating. Each one became intent on something, and for a few minutes everything was quiet. It was because of this that they suddenly heard scurrying sounds overhead. They listened carefully.

"More ghosts?" laughed Bert. "I'm going up to see what they look like."

"You'd better not," Flossie warned him. But her big brother said he was not afraid.

He opened the door to the attic stairs; that is, he opened it when he found it. He had to try three others before he came upon the right one. The stairway was very steep, and it was dark overhead.

"I guess I'll need a light," he called down. "Nan, will you ask Mr. Osgood if he has a flashlight in his car?"

The girl ran to the first floor. Flossie followed her, saying that Bert wanted a light to find more ghosts. Mr. Osgood found a flashlight in a compartment of his car. He himself went upstairs to help Bert investigate the attic.

"Mice," he said after looking around. "I guess they made the ghostlike sounds you heard."

It seemed to Bert that there were a hundred mice in the place. The little gray furry animals scampered about so fast in their efforts to get away that it seemed as if there were many more of them than there really were.

"I guess the best thing to do is set some traps up here," decided Mr. Osgood. "I'll take care of that. Don't you worry about it, Bert."

The man was as good as his word. The Bobbseys never learned when he came to the house again, nor what he did. But they were not bothered with mice any more.

"Time to go home!" called out Mrs. Bobbsey late that afternoon. "It's nearly six o'clock!"

The twins gathered, and soon they were on their way back to the cottage in the automobile.

"The lunch we had on the train wasn't much," said Bert to Mr. Osgood. "I'll bet we eat a lot for supper!"

The Bobbseys did eat a lot. Mrs. Osgood was a very good cook, and also she was an excellent cheese maker. There were several varieties on the table, all from her dairy.

"Mother said you have a cheese house," spoke up Flossie.

"That's a good name for it," said Mrs. Osgood. "Tomorrow I'll show you my cheeses, and perhaps

you'd like to take some of them into town to the post office."

"My wife mails packages all over the country," said Mr. Osgood proudly. "I think she makes the best cheese I've ever eaten."

In the morning the twins eagerly followed the woman to a stone building, one end of which was sunk in the ground. Mrs. Osgood explained that she had her ripening room here, because cheese ripens better in a cool place.

"What's ripening?" asked Freddie.

"That's the last part of cheese making," said Mrs. Osgood. "Suppose we start at the beginning, and then you'll understand it better."

She opened the door to a sunlit room in one end of the stone building. The walls were of white plaster and everything was very clean.

"First, I put milk into this big metal pail," she said. "Then I set it inside this other pail."

"The outside one has water in it," remarked Nan.

"Yes, warm water. That heats the milk, which is cool when the farmer brings it here," replied Mrs. Osgood. "It has to be just the right temperature for the little plants in it to grow," she smiled mysteriously.

All the twins asked at once what she meant by this. Mrs. Osgood explained that one would have to look at these plants under a magnifying glass to know that they are plants.

"In the warm milk these plants grow and make new plants—millions of them."

"Do they make yellow cheese out of white milk?" asked Flossie.

Mrs. Osgood laughed. "No, dear, if I want to make cheese yellow, or green, or any color, I have to put some vegetable dye of that color in it."

"I wouldn't like green cheese," said Freddie. "But yellow is nice."

"You're a good American, I see," smiled Mrs. Osgood, who came from a country far across the Atlantic Ocean. That was where she had learned to make cheese. "Yellow cheese with nothing else in it is called American cheese," she explained.

"What else do you put in?" asked Bert.

"The next thing is rennet," replied Mrs. Osgood. "That is a kind of acid. I use that to help curds form faster in the milk."

"You mean curds like Little Miss Muffet had?" asked Flossie.

"Just the same," said the cheese lady. "That little girl was eating curds and whey when the spider sat down beside her, wasn't she?"

"Yes," replied the Bobbsey twin. "But I never knew exactly what they were."

"Whey is water, dear," explained Mrs. Osgood. "And the curds are the thick part that becomes cheese."

She led the children to a machine into which the curds were put. In it the big loose pieces were cut up into tiny ones. Then salt was added, and the mass put into cheesecloth.

"Now comes the interesting part," said Mrs. Osgood. "I put the cheese into a mold—you see those wooden boxes with the holes up on that shelf—well, one like those. Then I press it down tightly, clamp it fast, and leave the cheese to be squeezed eighteen hours."

"Eighteen," said Bert, figuring quickly, "would be from now until three o'clock tomorrow morning. You aren't going to get up that early to work, are you?"

"Oh, no," laughed Mrs. Osgood. "It won't hurt if I don't touch the cheese until later. But it takes at least eighteen hours for all the whey to run out of it and a firm shape to form. I shouldn't want one side of my cheese to fall off in the mail!" she laughed.

Now she took the twins to her dark room, which was in the end of the building below the ground. Shelves lined the walls. On them were cheeses of various sizes and shapes—more cheeses than the Bobbseys could count quickly.

"I'm glad they're all yellow," said Freddie. "Are they ripe now?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Osgood. "These on this shelf are ready for shipment."

"How long have they been here?" Freddie wanted to know.

"The ones I'll send away this morning were ripening for three months," the woman said. "And every day I've turned them over."

"Maybe I can help you turn your cheeses while I'm here," offered Nan.

"That would be very nice," answered Mrs. Osgood.

"Is there anything I can do?" asked Bert.

"You might help Mr. Osgood load the car," the woman answered. "The boxes ready to ship were wrapped and addressed yesterday."

Bert hurried away to find the man. Flossie and Freddie were allowed to put silver-colored paper around some of the yellow cheeses. Then Mrs. Osgood gave them attractive little stickers to paste on. Each one had the picture of a lady in Dutch costume. In fancy lettering were the words:

OSGOOD CHEESES ECHO VALLEY

"They look pretty," said Flossie, holding up a package. "I'd like to send my Aunt Emily one for her birthday. May I?"

"Indeed you may," the woman smiled.

"You have to pay for it," spoke up Freddie.

" 'Course I do. I know that," said his twin.

Flossie sometimes became provoked when Freddie told her what to do. He had once said that since he was going to be a man some day, he knew more about business than she did. But Flossie was not sure of this. Maybe some day she would be a business woman, she argued, and know as much as Freddie.

"I'll give you a cheese for your aunt," said Mrs. Osgood, smiling. "Suppose we call it a sample. Then if she likes it, she can buy more herself. How will that be?"

Flossie decided it would be all right if she could still call it a birthday gift.

"All ready for town," called Mr. Osgood through the screen door. "And on the way back I'll take you twins to the echo spots," he promised.

The twins climbed into the automobile in a jiffy. They were a little crowded, for one side of the back seat was piled high with the packages to be sent away. In a little while Mr. Osgood arrived at the post office.

The Bobbseys helped him carry the cheeses inside. Finally the postmaster finished writing out the postal receipts and gave them to Mr. Osgood.

"I'll drive along the west mountain this time," the kindly man said when he was ready to go. "Some other day we'll try the east hill."

"Is one side better than the other?" asked Bert.

"It's a matter of opinion," replied Mr. Osgood.

"This one has the better echoes, I believe. The other side has the echo wishing well."

"What's that?" inquired Nan, curious at once to know what an echo wishing well could be.

"That must remain a secret until I take you there," smiled the man. "But we'll go soon," he added as the twins' faces showed disappointment.

In a few minutes he stopped the car and suggested that the children start playing echo. They climbed out in a hurry and began shouting "Hello."

"You don't have to call so loudly," said Mr. Osgood. "It would be better if you take turns and wait for the echo to come back before you call again."

"You go first, Bert," said Nan.

"All right." The boy said loudly, "It's fun to play echo!"

"—fun to play ech—" came back faintly.

"Speak distinctly," advised Mr. Osgood. "Then all the syllables will be heard."

"I like it here," called Bert.

"I—like it—here," was the answer.

"It's my turn," said Freddie. He stood up very straight and cried out, "I'm a boy twin!"

Everyone laughed and almost missed Echo saying, "I'm a—boytwin."

After all the Bobbseys had played the game, Mr. Osgood asked them to get into the car. He drove for half a mile, then stopped again.

"Here is a special place to play echo," he said. "If you find just the right spot, something quite remarkable will happen."

In turn each twin called out, but they could hear nothing different than they had before. Mr. Osgood suggested they keep moving around. It was not until Flossie, standing near a big tree, had cried out that the children heard the strange answer.

"I'm getting hungry!" she called to the mountain across the valley.

"I'M GETTING HUNGRY! I'M GETTING HUNGRY! I'm getting hungry!" came the echo.

Three times the sentence had been repeated. The twins thought this remarkable and tried it over and over. Echo never failed.

"What makes it do that?" Flossie asked Mr. Osgood.

He smiled at the little girl, and said, "Maybe the dwarfs who live over there are calling to you!"

CHAPTER XI

HIDDEN TREASURES

"THE dwarfs are calling to us?" asked Flossie, her eyes bright. "Do some little men live over there on the mountain?"

Mr. Osgood said it was a long story, and they all had better sit down on the grass while he told it. He started by asking Bert and Nan if they knew where the country of Iceland was.

"Yes," they both answered at once.

"And do you know where Norway and Sweden and Denmark are?"

"We've studied about them, too, in Geography," replied Nan.

"Well, the story about the dwarfs comes from those countries," explained Mr. Osgood. "Many, many hundreds of years ago the people there thought that dwarfs lived inside of certain hills. The little men liked to play games, and whenever anyone called

loudly enough for the dwarfs to hear, they would answer with the same words."

"And how did the little men get here?" asked Flossie. She did not know exactly where Iceland was, but she knew it was far, far away from Echo Valley—a long way across the water for dwarfs to come.

"About seventy-five years ago several families came to Echo Valley from Sweden," said Mr. Osgood. "When they heard the echoes, they remembered the story about the dwarfs they had heard in their childhood. So they laughed and said there must be some of the little men over in that other mountain."

"Do they wear beards and pointed caps?" inquired Flossie, who liked the idea at once and wanted to pretend that it was true.

Mr. Osgood's eyes twinkled. "I expect they do," he said. "And pointed wooden shoes, too."

"Do they have tools and build things under the mountain?" Freddie wanted to know.

"There are some benches along the paths on that mountain," the man replied. "I always thought the town of Echo Valley put them there, but maybe the dwarfs built them to sit on in case they got tired."

Nan and Bert laughed, but Freddie and Flossie were very serious about the dwarf story. The little boy wanted to know if the tiny men could be heard saying anything except what someone else said first.

"The only time they do is when there is a storm,"

said Mr. Osgood, carrying on the game. "The dwarfs do not like the rain. They scold about it and their voices rumble like thunder."

"I'm going to listen hard next time thunder and lightning comes," declared Flossie.

She got up from the ground and followed Mr. Osgood, who already was starting toward the automobile. As they drove off, Bert asked if it was too late to go to the place where Echo answered questions. The man reminded the children that it was nearly lunch-time.

"Didn't I hear a little girl say she was *hungry*?" he laughed.

It was decided that they would go home to eat first, then Mr. Osgood would take them to the strange place. After that, he would drop them at the old house.

"The workmen probably are there. You'd like to see what they're doing, wouldn't you?" he asked.

The twins said they would, and could not make up their minds what they would rather do first. When luncheon was over, and the Bobbseys had rested for an hour, they heard Mr. Osgood start his car. At once they all ran outside, and he invited them to climb aboard.

"It's not out of my way to go to the answer echo place," he said good-naturedly.

He went up the hill a little way, then told the children to get out and go over to a certain big rock. He

followed them, watching in amusement as they talked over what to ask the answer echo. Finally Flossie called out:

"Where's Waggo now?"

Eagerly the twins awaited a reply. Faintly it came to them. "In—the barn."

This was true! The little dog had been tied there for punishment, because he had been bothering the chickens. Bert suddenly thought he guessed how the answer echo was made, and he decided to try a question which it could not answer.

"Where does Aunt Sallie Pry live?" he asked.

In a moment the faint reply came back, "In Lakeport."

At once Bert knew his idea had been wrong. He had thought somebody was told in advance that a visitor was coming and hid by the rock to answer questions. But no one around here could know where Aunt Sallie Pry lived. The boy was completely puzzled.

"Where does the answer echo come from?" he asked Mr. Osgood at last.

The man merely shrugged his shoulders. "It's one of the mysteries of Echo Valley," he said with a smile. "Maybe some day you'll guess the riddle."

"There's another mystery in this place we'd like to solve," Nan told him. "We met a girl who used to live at the Orphan Home near here. She'd like to find out who her parents are."

"She's awfully pretty," spoke up Flossie, "so her mother and father ought to be nice."

"Is something being done about finding them?" asked Mr. Osgood.

"No," replied Nan. "We'd like to help her while we're here. The only clue we have is that when Deborah was a baby, there was a fire where she lived. Somebody left her at the Home and never came back for her."

"That's too bad," said the man sympathetically. "I'm sorry I can't tell you anything to help you. Mrs. Osgood and I have lived here only a few years. She knows more people than I do, and maybe she could send you to someone who might know more about the story."

"I'll ask her when we get back," Nan decided.

Mr. Osgood drove to the old house which Mrs. Bobbsey had inherited, and the children scrambled out of the car. They could hear hammering, and there was a strong odor of paint.

"The men are working!" cried Freddie with enthusiasm. "Hurrah! We can move in soon. I'm going up to see about my bedroom!"

He ran into the house and up the stairs. In the second floor hall it was rather dark—at least it seemed so after coming inside from the bright sunlight. Freddie did not see a box of nails and screws at the head of the stairs where one of the carpenters was working.

The little boy stumbled into it. Over he went, and over went the box, too. The nails and screws flew in every direction. Freddie had gone down so hard he was winded for a second. But he got up, panting:

"Oh, I—didn't—mean to do that!"

"I'm sure you didn't," said the workman kindly. "No harm done, if you'll pick 'em all up."

Freddie was glad not to be scolded, and set to work at once gathering up nails and screws. What a lot of them were there! Big and little ones, long and short ones; some with big heads, some with practically none. The little twin thought he never would finish the job.

"How soon do you think we can move in?" Freddie asked him.

"I couldn't say exactly," the carpenter replied. "The painters could answer your question better than I."

"It would be too bad to leave Aunt Nellie in the closet for a long time," said the little twin.

The carpenter looked surprised. "Who is Aunt Nellie?" he inquired.

"Our ghost," answered Freddie.

The man was more amazed than ever to hear this, but he laughed heartily when he heard that Aunt Nellie was a dressmaking form. Mr. Jones—that was the carpenter's name—said his mother also had one, and as a boy, he and his sister used to play with it.

While all this was going on, Nan and Flossie had gone up to the attic. Now they were busy unpacking

trunks and boxes with Mrs. Bobbsey. Every few moments they would exclaim over a new treasure they found.

"This is such fun," remarked Nan. "Look at this old, old scarf. It's big enough to wind around three people!"

Flossie put it on, and it went around her eight times! After they had folded it up again, Mrs. Bobbsey pulled out some lovely curtains. On them were embroidered little girls in all sorts of old-fashioned costumes; skating, dancing, playing hoops. Nan asked if she might hang them in the bedroom which she and Flossie would share.

"There are just enough," she said. "Three pair."

"Here is a bedspread to go with them." Mrs. Bobbsey drew out a large counterpane of the same material with the same figures. "If I let you have these, you and Flossie must take very, very good care of them," she added.

"We will," promised Nan. "But on what are we going to put the spread? We haven't a single bed yet!"

They all laughed. Furniture for this summer home was going to be a problem. Up to date they had four chairs, a kitchen table, and one bureau. And six Bobbseys just couldn't get along with those.

"Not unless we sleep on the floor!" said the twins' mother.

For several minutes there was silence as an old

sampler, some towels, and a tablecloth and napkins were taken from a box. Suddenly Flossie, who had opened another box, gave a shriek.

"A dolly!" she cried out. "A lovely dolly! She's going to be my very fav'rite one."

She held it up for the others to see, then she cuddled it lovingly.

"It is sweet," agreed Nan. "But won't Barbara be jealous?" she teased.

Flossie considered the idea for a moment. Then she said, "Barbara shouldn't be jealous to have a nice extra sister."

The new doll, or rather the old doll, was made of china. Its hair and face were painted on, and Nan thought that it was not so pretty as Barbara, who had real hair and whose eyes could open and close.

The china doll had more elaborate clothes. Not only did she have on a silk and lace dress and bonnet, but Flossie found a little trunk filled with beautiful clothes for her.

"I wonder what her name is," said the little girl.

She did not have to wonder long. Mrs. Bobbsey opened a large package. Within was a doll's cradle. It was made up, ready for sleeping. On the bedspread were embroidered the words "Mary Jane."

"Now I know her name!" exclaimed Flossie in delight. "And I'll always love her, same as my other dolls."

An hour had gone by since the twins had reached the house. During that time Bert had been doing some real exploring. The boy was determined to find some of the secret closets he had heard about, so he started his hunt on the second floor and opened every single door. When he did not see anything unusual, he began tapping the walls.

"Maybe some door or opening has been papered over," Bert thought. "I'll try everything."

But the Bobbsey twin found nothing. Finally he went down to the first floor. Starting in the kitchen, he looked in every built-in drawer and the two big closets. He even went down the cellar with a flashlight, but again the boy was disappointed, except that he found several jars of jelly. He wondered how long ago they had been made. He tasted one. It was perfectly good, so he decided to take the jar upstairs.

"I don't believe there are any secrets here at all," he concluded a moment later. "That lawyer was just teasing us."

Bert's curiosity was too great for him to stop searching, however, so he went to the dining room and the living room. Nothing of particular interest was there, but he did examine the fireplaces carefully to see if the little closets that were built right into the chimney held any treasures.

"They certainly were cleaned out well," he said to himself when he found nothing.

Next Bert went to a wing of the house. This was only one story high, and was just like a little home all its own. It even had a tiny kitchen.

"Probably this is where Dinah and Sam will stay whenever they come," the boy thought. "Maybe this is the part where the secret places are," he added, becoming excited all over again.

He hunted thoroughly, but there was not a sign of anything hidden. At last he came to the hall closet. It was dark. He turned on a flashlight to look at the walls. As he stepped inside, he thought he had found the secret place.

"This is big enough to—"

Bert got no further in his thinking. The floor suddenly opened up. The boy fell headlong and disappeared.

CHAPTER XII

THE WOODSMAN

MRS. BOBBSEY, Nan, and Flossie finished looking through all the old trunks and boxes in the attic. They packed everything away neatly, and started down the steep stairway.

"I wonder where the boys are?" said Mrs. Bobbsey.

"There's Freddie," said Nan who was in the lead.

The little twin had finished picking up all the nails and screws and was on his way to the attic to see what the others were doing. He was a little disappointed to know that he had missed looking through the treasures, but when he heard that they were mostly things to interest his mother and the girls, he did not mind so much.

"Where is Bert?" asked Mrs. Bobbsey.

"I don't know," said Freddie. He called "Bert" loudly, but there was no answer.

"See if you can find him for me," his mother re-

quested. "I think we should trim off the lilac bush which has grown across this window. It makes the hall too dark."

The little boy scampered off. In a few minutes he came back to report that he could not find Bert anywhere. The workmen were questioned, but they had not seen the older twin.

"Maybe he went home," offered Nan.

Mrs. Bobbsey was silent for several seconds. She was sure Bert would not have left without telling her. A fearful thought that somehow the boy had got himself into trouble came to her. She had not taken the story about the secret closets very seriously, but now she began to think that perhaps it was true. At last she said:

"I believe we should start a real search for Bert."

Nan caught the look in her mother's eyes. A lump arose in the girl's throat. Had something happened to her twin?

The old house was very quiet, until suddenly Mrs. Bobbsey said:

"Listen!"

From somewhere came a muffled sound. The children had heard so much recently about echoes that for a moment they wondered if it could be the sound of their own voices coming back to them. Nan was the first to trace the faint cry. It came from beneath the floor of the hall.

"Bert! Bert! Where are you?" she yelled.

"Down here," came in low tones. "I can't get out."

Nan, her mother, the little twins, and the workmen were stumped. There was no door leading to any cellar in this part of the house. They hurried to the kitchen stairway, but found that the basement under that section of the house was very small and did not connect with the wing of the house. A carpenter ran outdoors and looked for a door or window which might lead under the house. But there was none.

"If Bert got down, there must be an opening," declared Mrs. Bobbsey.

"Bert! How did you get down there?" Nan called loudly.

The boy replied that he had fallen through the closet. At once one of the carpenters opened the door to the hall closet. There he found the trap door.

"Stand back, all of you!" the man ordered. "We don't want anybody else falling through. I'll see how this thing works."

Very carefully he pushed the floor. It proved to be a very strange trap door. Every time the pressure was taken from it, the floor came back into place.

"There must be a lock or something to hold this thing," the carpenter said, looking around. "Oh, here it is," he added as he came upon an old-fashioned hinge with a lock.

This time it stayed in place, revealing a flight of

steps. At once Bert started up. He was not hurt, for he had fallen onto soft dirt.

"Ugh! but that's a spooky place," he said. "We ought to look around down there. I kept bumping into all sorts of things."

Freddie remembered seeing a lantern in the barn. He ran off to get it. Luckily there was a little oil in it. The carpenter struck a match and a small flame flared up. He led the way to the newly-discovered cellar, followed by Mrs. Bobbsey and the twins.

What a surprise greeted them! It was a regular furniture storehouse. If they had not been so interested in finding it, they might have wondered who had taken the trouble to put the pieces down there. For the moment they were absorbed only in the fact that suddenly their country home was furnished.

"Here's a nice bed for me!" exclaimed Flossie as she spied a child's mahogany four poster.

"Now we won't have to sleep on the floor," said Freddie, looking around and counting enough beds for the whole Bobbsey family.

The twins' mother was delighted with the find, and asked the workmen if they would carry the furniture upstairs so that she might view it in a better light.

"It is in remarkably good condition," Mrs. Bobbsey announced a little later. "That storehouse must be well built, for no dampness seems to have affected these pieces."

"Let's go home now," said Freddie. "I want to let Waggo loose. I promised I would play with him before supper."

Mr. Osgood stopped by in his automobile just then, so Mrs. Bobbsey and the twins climbed in and went to the cottage. As soon as they reached there, Freddie untied Waggo and began to romp with the little fox terrier. How glad the dog was to have a playmate!

Nan went into the kitchen where Mrs. Osgood was preparing supper and offered to help.

"Do you know anyone around here who could tell me about a fire several years ago?" she asked while making some toast. "I want to find out on account of Deborah."

Mrs. Osgood thought for a moment, then she replied, "I believe old Mr. Silas could. He is eighty years old. I understand he has lived here all his life. If anyone would know, I'm sure he would."

"Where does he live?" inquired the girl.

"Not far away. I'm sure Mr. Osgood would be glad to drive you over to his house sometime."

"I'd like to do it soon," said Nan, "because I want to help Deborah find her parents."

At this moment a car drove up to the kitchen door. Out stepped a handsome young man, dressed in woodsman's clothes.

"Oh, it's Dyke! My son!" cried Mrs. Osgood. She was out of the kitchen in a moment. By the time he

was out of the car, she had put her arms around him.

Mr. Osgood too was delighted to see his son, and said he hoped he was going to make a long visit at home. Dyke smiled and said he would be there for a couple of days. One by one the Bobbseys were introduced. They liked him at once.

The following morning Dyke Osgood said he would take the children for a walk in the woods. They were thrilled to have an expert woodsman point out different trees and plants to them.

"Have any of you ever been lost in a forest?" he asked.

The twins nodded. Each of them had been lost at some time, but not for very long, and they had not been in any real danger.

"Do you know what you should do when you become lost?" asked Dyke.

When they said "No," he explained, "Just stand still. Don't run around. That is the worst thing you can do. Try hollering, and someone may answer you. But you must not move, because the person who hears you might not be able to find you unless you stay in the same spot."

"What would happen if you got lost all night?" asked Freddie.

"Probably nothing," replied the woodsman. "You might get cold if you were not warmly dressed, but I doubt that anything serious would happen to you."

"How about wild animals?" Bert wanted to know.

"A hungry bear, for instance?" Dyke Osgood laughed. "I believe it is said that the only animal that will attack a man, unless a man bothers him, is a tiger. In America we wouldn't have to worry about tigers."

"How about snakes?" asked Nan.

"Most animals and snakes sleep at night," replied Dyke. "So if you get lost in the woods, that is what you should do. Then by morning, if no one has found you, maybe you can remember how you came into the woods and will be able to find your own way back. But above all, remember that if you are lost, do not move very far from the spot where you are standing."

The twins thought very hard about this advice as the woodsman trudged with them up the mountain. He took a different road from any they had been on before. This led directly into a forest which overlooked Echo Valley. As soon as they started walking among the trees, Dyke began pointing out interesting sights.

"Who knows which side of the tree the moss grows on?" he smiled.

"North," said Bert, sure that he was right.

"Usually," replied Dyke, "but not always. Moss likes the water and grows on the cool moist side of a tree."

He told the twins that a true woodsman does not need a compass to tell him where he is going. A fallen

tree, a twisting brook, or a bird's nest can give him directions. But he added that all these things had to be learned.

"The Indians knew them better than any other people," he said. "And they have taught us nearly everything we know. They searched for food by looking for animals' tracks. Oh, here are some now," he added. "These were made by a rabbit. Let's see if we can find him."

He led the way and very carefully and quietly tiptoed off the path and across some dry leaves and twigs. Suddenly the noise of the crushed twigs startled a little white rabbit from its burrow. Quick as lightning, the little fellow bounded away and out of sight.

"Now if I were an Indian," said Dyke Osgood, "and were hunting for my supper, Mr. Rabbit would not have escaped that easily."

At this moment something else came bounding through the woods. The twins were surprised to see that it was Waggo. The little dog had not been invited to go on the hike, but he had decided to come anyway. It had been no trouble at all for him to follow the scent of their footprints.

"Let's play hide-and-seek," suggested Freddie. "It would be fun among the big trees."

"All right," said Nan. "I'll be 'It' first."

The others hurried away. Even Dyke Osgood decided to hide. At first Waggo did not understand what

was happening, but he had played this game before, so in a moment he knew what they were doing. He made up his mind to follow Flossie. The little girl ran farther than she had intended. Suddenly she heard Nan call out:

"Ready or not, I'm coming!"

It was not hard to find Dyke or Freddie, and Nan reached "home" before they could. Bert ran free, but Flossie could not be found. Her sister searched, then gave up.

"Come home, come home, wherever you are," she called loudly.

Flossie giggled. She felt proud to think she had been able to hide with Waggo in a spot that her older sister could not find. She was about to leave the little hollow where she had been lying down, her arm around the fox terrier, when she heard a movement in the bushes near her. To her surprise, she saw a mother bird rise from a nest in a bramble bush. The bird carefully made her way among the thorns, then flew off. At once four little heads poked themselves above the rim of the nest.

"Oh," said Flossie. "The mother has gone off and left her babies."

The little girl felt that this was a very funny place for a bird to build a nest. Even if the mother knew how to get out of the bush without becoming scratched, surely the babies would be injured.

Flossie did not know that Nature has all sorts of ways of protecting her animals. Instead of this being a poor place for the bird to leave her babies unguarded, it was a very good one, because no one would want to get all scratched up going through the bush to take the little birds. That is, no one except a frisky dog like Waggo.

The instant he saw the babies in the nest, he decided to tease them. He started to bark loudly, and poked his head right into the bush.

"Don't you hurt those birds!" commanded Flossie.

The little dog paid no attention to her. Little by little he got first his head in, then one of his paws, until it reached the nest. Flossie was very frightened. Maybe Waggo was going to kill the poor little birds!

CHAPTER XIII

A FIRE LONG AGO

"WAGGO! Stop that!" cried Flossie. "Don't you dare touch those baby birds!"

The little dog did not need the scolding. Already the briars on the bush were scratching his nose and pulling his fur. Carefully he drew back. The birds were safe, but the little fox terrier had several bloody streaks near his mouth. That was punishment enough for him.

By this time the other children and Dyke Osgood had run up. They were glad to see there was no serious trouble. Hide-and-seek was played a little longer, then they all went home. Nan decided to practice the sign language of the deaf until lunchtime.

"Spell my name," said Flossie, who had followed her sister to their bedroom.

Nan did this, and the little twin thought the older girl was wonderful to have learned to make her fingers move so quickly.

"Now you can talk to anybody who can't hear, can't you?" the little girl praised her.

"I hope so," Nan replied. "Maybe I'll forget the alphabet before I meet anyone."

"When we move into our own house, let's invite Deborah here," suggested Flossie.

Nan thought this was a very good idea. It also reminded her to see Mr. Silas for some information regarding the fire at Deborah's home.

"Bert, will you walk over to Mr. Silas's with me right after lunch?" she asked her twin while they were eating.

She explained why she wanted to see the man, and her brother at once was eager to talk to the oldest living inhabitant of Echo Valley. As soon as the meal was over, the two set off for the village. Mr. Silas's house was at the edge of town.

The twins found him to be a kindly person. He had snow-white hair and a flowing white beard. He wore a red cap on his head, and had twinkling blue eyes. If he had not been so thin, the children might have thought he was Santa Claus!

"How do you do," he said. "Won't you come inside? I suppose you'd like to see my stamps."

"We didn't come for that reason," Bert replied. "But I'd like to see them. Do you collect stamps?"

"Indeed I do," answered Mr. Silas as the twins

stepped into the quaint house. "Got thousands of them. Some are pretty rare. I'll show you."

He led the Bobbseys into his living room and unlocked an old-fashioned desk. As he brought out several books of stamps, he asked the names of his callers and where they came from.

"Oh, yes, Lakeport," he said. "I was over there once. Showed my stamps in an exhibition."

For nearly half an hour Mr. Silas talked about his collection, pointing out rare stamps which he said he would not sell for any amount of money. Nan was interested and too polite to interrupt the elderly man, but she wondered just when she might get a chance to ask him about Deborah. Finally she spoke up.

"We came to see you about a fire," she said. "Did a house around here burn down some years ago, and was a baby who lived there taken to the Orphan Home?"

"I don't know anything about a baby," Mr. Silas answered. "The house on the farm next to the one your mother inherited burned to the ground some years back."

"Who lived there?" asked Nan eagerly.

"An elderly lady named Markham," the man answered. "She only rented the place. She didn't come from around here, and nobody knew her, because she kept to herself."

"Where did she go after the fire?" inquired Bert.

Mr. Silas did not answer at once, then he said sadly, "Folks around here think she lost her life when the house burned."

"Then that couldn't have been the same fire," said Nan, "because some lady brought a baby named Deborah to the Orphan Home when their house was on fire. What other places around here burned?"

"How old is Deborah now?" Mr. Silas wanted to know.

"My age," replied Nan.

The old man scratched his head. "It's strange about the baby," he said. "There hasn't been a house on fire in this neighborhood, except Mrs. Markham's, in over fifteen years. Maybe the person who left Deborah came in a car from some distance away."

"That must have been it," sighed Nan. "But I believe Deborah thinks she was not carried far from the fire. If Mrs. Markham was elderly, she couldn't have been the girl's mother, anyway, so the mystery is worse than ever."

"Did Mrs. Markham live alone?" asked Bert.

"Yes, she did," Mr. Silas answered. Then in a moment he said, "Wait now. I believe some young folks were reported visiting her. Maybe they had a baby with them."

Bert and Nan were stunned. Maybe Deborah's parents had burned in the fire! Perhaps the grandmother had rescued the baby, taken her to the Home,

and gone back, only to be burned herself. This would explain why no one had ever called for the baby.

"But by the time Mrs. Markham could have got back, surely she wouldn't have rushed into the flames," Nan reasoned to herself. "No, the person who left Deborah couldn't have been Mrs. Markham."

The twins thanked Mr. Silas for his information. Feeling disappointed that they had not learned more to help them find Deborah's parents, they left his house.

"Let's stop at the Markham place on our way home," suggested Nan. "I'd like to see what it looks like."

The Bobbseys found it in a bad state. No one had built another house on the property, and the place had not been cared for since the fire. Weeds had grown high in the lawn and flower gardens. Even the mound that contained the ashes of the burned house was covered with tall rank grass.

"Probably it was beautiful once," said Nan. "There's a nice view. What a shame no one lives here."

Bert had picked up a stick and was poking around the ruins. He thought there was a slight chance he might uncover some kind of clue. Nan worked for a while, too, but neither of them could find anything. There was a tumble-down barn still standing, but not a thing was in it.

"We'd better get out of here," advised Bert, looking up. "The roof is likely to fall in any minute."

The twins moved outside. Nan stopped to look at a gnarled old tree which stood alone a little distance from the house.

"That's like the trees mother told us about," the girl said. "If it only could talk, it might tell us what happened here at the time of the fire."

"That's right," agreed Bert. "I suppose if Flossie were here, she'd get her words mixed up again and say she wished she could put a family on the tree for Deborah!" the boy laughed.

"I guess the best way to get a clue to her family tree," decided Nan, "would be to go to the Echo Valley Orphan Home and find out all we can. I wish we could visit it now. It's not such a long way from here."

"Maybe Mother would like to go with us," said Bert. "Let's go home first and ask her."

The other Bobbseys and the Osgoods were very interested in the story the older twins had to tell. They agreed that the best way to get further information would be to talk to the people at the Orphan Home. At three o'clock the twins and their mother set off in the Osgood car.

"Keep straight on this road until you come to the fork," the man said. "Then turn left. You can't miss the building."

Mrs. Bobbsey had no trouble finding the place. She and the children were taken by a nurse to a sweet-faced woman who was the matron. The twins' mother explained that they had met Deborah in Lakeport.

"Oh, yes," said the woman, whose name was Mrs. Bailey. "She's such a sweet girl. And is she happy at Mrs. Pry's?"

"I believe she's a very happy child, except for one thing," replied Mrs. Bobbsey. "Deborah is very eager to learn who her parents are."

"She hasn't any last name," Freddie spoke up.

"And she hasn't any family on a tree," added Flossie.

Mrs. Bailey smiled at this remark, then she became serious. "I had no idea Deborah was worrying about this. I'm glad you told me. As soon as I have time, I'll look into the matter."

Nan was disappointed to have the affair laid aside in this way. She wanted action!

"We were hoping we could solve the mystery ourselves," she said wistfully. "If you could just give us a clue or two, maybe it would save you a lot of work."

The matron smiled at the girl. "It is very kind of you to do that for Deborah," she said. "I'll help you as much as I can. We'll have to depend on the records here, though. There is not a person working in this Home who was here when Deborah was brought in."

Mrs. Bailey turned to a filing cabinet in her office

and pulled out a long drawer. In a moment she took out a large envelope with several papers inside. While the others waited, she read each one carefully. At last she spoke.

"I'm afraid this isn't going to help you or anyone else very much," she said. "When the woman who left Deborah did not return for her, an investigation was made. But nothing came of it."

The twins were crestfallen. How were they ever going to solve the mystery?

"I'll read you part of the report," offered the matron. " 'An excited elderly woman rang the bell late one evening. A young nurse went to the door, and a baby was put into her arms. 'My house is on fire,' the woman cried. 'Please keep little Deborah until I come back for her.' ' "

Mrs. Bailey turned the page, reading on, " 'No one ever came back. The nurse was so excited when the baby was handed to her that she did not notice whether or not the caller came in a car. But the woman acted as though she had been running.' "

"Does the report say what this woman looked like?" asked Mrs. Bobbsey.

"Yes. She was tall and very thin. Her hair was gray and curled tightly to her head. That was all the nurse could remember about her."

"Let's go ask Mr. Silas what Mrs. Markham looked like," suggested Nan excitedly. Turning to Mrs.

Bailey, she explained what she had heard that morning and asked, "Is there anything else in the report?"

"Very little," replied the matron. "One of the directors of the Home at that time did some investigating but learned nothing. The rest of these papers are a record of Deborah's health and her marks in the school we have here."

Before they left, Mrs. Bailey took the Bobbseys through the Home, and they decided it was a very nice place for the orphans to be. The children looked happy and were very friendly.

"They have more toys to play with than we have," said Freddie as the family drove away. "Gee, I wish I had that swell slide that's out in the garden."

His mother drove directly to Mr. Silas's house. When the man opened the door, he smiled broadly at Bert and Nan.

"Well, well," he said. "Back again. Brought your family to see my stamps, did you?"

Nan introduced her mother and her small brother and sister.

"Twins, you say?" Mr. Silas chuckled. "Two sets in the same family. That's wonderful. Well, come right in and I'll show you my stamps."

"Oh, thank you," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "I'm afraid we can't do that now. Nan and Bert have told you we're trying to trace the parents of a certain little girl. They want to ask you one more question about it."

Nan spoke of their visit to the Orphan Home, and ended by inquiring if he would describe the woman whose house had burned down at the place next to theirs.

"Let me see," the man said. The Bobbseys waited eagerly as he paused. "I believe she was tall—yes, she was tall and very, very thin. I don't seem to recall much about her face, but I remember her hair. It was short and extremely curly."

That was enough! Surely the woman who had left Deborah at the Echo Valley Orphan Home was Mrs. Markham!

CHAPTER XIV

THE ECHO SPIRIT

As the Bobbsey twins and their mother drove back to the Osgood cottage, they discussed hopefully the exciting news they had just heard.

"Maybe Deborah's name is Deborah Markham," said Nan. "Anyway, we have solved the first step in the mystery. I believe I will write and tell her about it."

"I don't think you should do that," said Bert. "You will get Deborah all worked up, and maybe nothing will ever come of it. Why don't you wait until we find out something more?"

Mrs. Bobbsey thought this was good advice, so Nan said that she would not say anything to Deborah yet. One thing was sure, though—Mrs. Markham could not have burned in the fire. But where had she gone? And why hadn't she come back?

"What do you think we ought to do next, Mother?" asked Nan. "Try to find Mrs. Markham?"

Mrs. Bobbsey was silent as she drove the car. It was fully half a minute before she answered her daughter's question. "I believe we should write to Daddy about this," she decided. "He may have a good suggestion as to what to do. In the meantime, we will see if we can uncover any more clues around here."

Bert reminded them all that old Mr. Silas had said he had heard some young people were visiting Mrs. Markham at the time of the fire.

"Where did they go?" he asked. "How could we ever find out after all these years?"

Mrs. Bobbsey said they should not become discouraged. If the mystery had been easy to solve, it would have been solved long ago. With this they had to be content. Nan wrote to her father that evening, explaining everything.

The following morning Mrs. Osgood asked the twins if they would like to go with her to a clay bank. Flossie thought the woman was talking about a bank in which people put money, and she asked how big the mud building was.

"I mean a little cliff of a special kind of dirt," said Mrs. Osgood. "It is not very large, but it is the only clay bank in Echo Valley. It happens to be on this property and is very valuable."

She showed the children where there was a basket of tools and molds with which they could make various things out of clay. Bert and Nan carried this between

them, and the group trudged off to the lower end of the farm.

"Oh, isn't this a nice brook?" said Flossie as they came to a small stream of water. "I'd like to play in it."

"This is where we get the water to mix with the clay," explained Mrs. Osgood. "Suppose we go on first and then if you want to come back here to play, you may."

When Flossie saw the clay bank—to her it really looked like pale brown dirt which would make good mud pies—she decided to watch Mrs. Osgood before trying anything herself.

"I need some new molds for my cheeses," the woman explained. "I used to buy wooden ones, but after I discovered this fine clay, I began to make my own earthenware ones."

From the clay bank she dug some of the fine sand-like dirt. Bert offered to help her, and in a short time they had a box full. Freddie had gone down to the stream and had brought back a bucket of water. Now Mrs. Osgood added this little by little, stirring her mixture as she would a cake. Presently she announced it was ready for molding.

"Nan, will you bring those two brown molds from the basket?" she asked. When the girl handed them to her she added, "Now, I line one of these with clay. Then I press the second one tightly against it to make it nice and smooth."

"How long will you leave it there?" inquired Bert.

"Until it sets," answered the woman. "That will be a couple of hours. Then I shall put them into the oven to bake."

"Your stove oven?" asked Flossie, "where you bake cakes and pies?"

"No, dear," Mrs. Osgood answered. "On the other side of this hill there is an old kiln—that is a kind of oven, you know—which probably was built years and years ago when this clay pit was being worked. I build a fire in it, then bake my pottery for three days."

"May I make something?" asked Freddie.

"Indeed you may. Suppose you look through that basket and see some of the cute little molds. Pick one out and make a toy for yourself."

He and Flossie ran over and carefully lifted out the molds, one by one. Flossie discovered one that looked like a doll. Freddie spied another that surely took his eye.

"It's a fire engine!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Osgood showed them how to put the wet clay into the molds. When everything was ready, they laid them in the sun to set. Mr. Osgood would come back later to build the fire and put the pottery in the outdoor oven to bake.

"I just thought of something," said Nan on the way back to the cottage. "We have a great many things for our new house, but not a single dish. Mrs. Osgood,

couldn't we make a set of dishes and surprise Mother when we are ready to move in?"

"That's a very fine idea," replied the woman. "I shall be glad to help you. Do you think you could keep it a secret?"

"Oh, yes," cried the little twins together.

"I shall have to find molds first," Mrs. Osgood said. "Otherwise it would be hard to make things like cups."

Mrs. Bobbsey had gone over to the other house, so the children did not have to be careful about keeping the secret yet. They talked freely about the new set of dishes they would make, and helped Mrs. Osgood search in her cellar for molds they could use. When they gathered them together, the children set off at once for the clay bank. Within two hours they had made enough dishes for Mrs. Bobbsey to use for an entire meal.

"Freddie, you are a sight," said Nan. "You have enough clay on you to make a soup dish. Don't let Mother see you, or you may give away the secret."

The little twin almost did give away the secret, because they arrived at the Osgood cottage at the same moment Mrs. Bobbsey did. But Nan shooed the little boy upstairs to change his clothes and wash thoroughly, so his mother did not notice how dirty he was.

"How is the house getting along?" asked Bert at the lunch table.

"Everything is coming along nicely," his mother

replied, "although one of the painters could not come today, and that delayed the work. He was going to paint your bedroom floor, Bert."

"Couldn't I do that myself?" the boy wanted to know. "Is the paint at the house?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Bobbsey. "And I see no reason why you could not do it. I bought a brush so that you won't have to touch the man's things."

The younger twins thought they would like to paint, too, but their mother decided this would not be such a good idea. Only Bert was to be allowed to work at this job, and the others would have to be content with watching him.

As it happened, they soon grew tired of seeing their older brother going swish-swash back and forth with the paint brush. Bert was having a delightful time. He had started at the door of the hall and was backing up toward the windows, foot by foot. Every few minutes he would stop and look at his work. He was very pleased with it.

About an hour later Freddie and Flossie were playing on the rope swing, which had been hung on the big apple tree near the house, when they heard an exclamation from the second floor, followed by Bert's voice, saying:

"Oh, wasn't that dumb! Now I'm in a fix!"

The little twins rushed up the stairway to see what had happened. When they came to the door of Bert's

bedroom, they stood still and looked. Then they both laughed loudly.

"Oh, Bert," said Freddie, "you've painted yourself in. You can't get out of the room without stepping on the wet paint!"

"You'll have to stay there all night," giggled Flossie, "until the paint dries."

Poor Bert! Nobody had warned him that in painting a room a person should start at the point farthest away from the door. Now he could not get out without ruining all his work.

CHAPTER XV

A GIFT TO FLOSSIE

NAN BOBBSEY had heard the commotion and rushed to see what the trouble was. The girl laughed when she saw her twin's predicament.

"Maybe you can climb out the window," she said to Bert, noticing that he was near one.

The boy turned around in the narrow space of the floor which he had not yet painted and looked through the screen. There was nothing outside for him to hold onto.

"I guess I'd better not," the young painter thought. "Oh, dear, why did I have to be so dumb?"

Nan, Freddie, and Flossie hurried down the stairway and outdoors to see if they could figure out any way Bert could get out of the bedroom without stepping on the wet paint. They looked around for a ladder, but they could not find one long enough.

"There is not even a tree near the window for Bert

to climb onto," said Freddie. Once in a game of hide-and-seek his brother had crawled out of a third floor window to a big maple and climbed down to the ground that way.

Nan stood gazing upward for several minutes; then suddenly an idea came to her.

"Bert!" she called. "We will send food up to you. And maybe a book to read."

The little twins told the scheme to their mother. She agreed that it was the best thing to do. The children hurried off to the Osgood cottage. Mrs. Osgood gave them some cookies, bread and butter, and a small bottle of milk.

"Suppose you spread some butter on this bread, Flossie," Nan directed. "And, Freddie, you get a little basket and some rope."

The little fellow scampered off, delighted to be the one chosen for this important part in helping Bert. He found a small basket with a handle on it and a piece of clothesline which Mrs. Osgood was not using.

By the time he brought them back to Nan, the girls had everything ready to pack.

"It makes me hungry to look at it," said Flossie. "Here's the book."

Nan had picked out a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*.

The children hurried back to Bert. He saw them coming, and by the time they reached him, he had un-

fastened the screen and was ready to catch the end of the clothesline.

Nan tied one end of the rope firmly around the handle of the basket. Then she coiled the other and threw it up to her twin. It failed to reach him.

Again she tried, using all her strength, but she could not throw it high enough. Then the girl realized that the clothesline was too short.

Bert was feeling in his pockets to see if he might have some string. He smiled as he felt a small ball of cord which he had put into his trouser pocket the day before.

"I've found something," he called down. "Tie the rope onto this."

The boy wound one end of the ball of cord around his fingers and let the rest of it dangle from the window. Unfortunately, it was just out of reach of Nan's hand.

"Hold me up," said Freddie eagerly, "and I'll catch hold of it."

"Can you tie the clothesline to it good and tight?" asked his sister.

"Sure," replied Freddie. "I can make good knots. You watch me."

The girl held up her small brother, and quickly he made what he thought was a sturdy knot with the rope and the string. Then he jumped down and slowly Bert

pulled up the basket. It was nearly to the window when Freddie's knot began to give way.

"Oh!" cried Nan. "Let it down, Bert! Quick!"

Her twin saw what was about to happen and quickly let out the string. Just as the knot parted, Nan grabbed the basket. The bottle of milk would have fallen out if she had not quickly put her hand over it.

"I guess I'm not so good at knots after all," said Freddie, a trifle shamefaced. "I know what to do."

Quickly he ran off and spoke to one of the carpenters. The man came back with him. It was no trouble at all for him to tie the string and the clothes-line in a good hard knot. Then the basket of food was hauled upward.

Bert started in at once to eat and read. Late that afternoon he decided the paint was dry enough to step on. Mrs. Bobbsey and the other twins waited until he finished the small section which he had not done before, and then they went back to the Osgood cottage.

"I understand that at a large farm a few miles from here a man is selling all his furniture and machinery at auction," Mrs. Bobbsey told the children. "We might find something we can use. Would you like to go there with me?"

The twins were eager to join her, so it was planned that they would leave about eleven o'clock the next morning. Everyone was up early. The children's mother went off to the new house, but the twins hur-

ried away to the clay bank with Mr. Osgood. Each of them made one more dish toward the set which they planned to give to their mother as a surprise, and the man showed them where the ones they had made the day before were being baked in the kiln.

By the time the children finished, they had to run almost all the way back to the house in order to change their clothes before their mother returned. At exactly eleven o'clock Mr. Osgood brought his automobile to the door, and the Bobbsey family climbed in. The man was going to look over the machinery at the auction sale and buy anything which he thought he or the Bobbseys could use at Echo Valley.

When the twins came within view of the farm where the auction was being held, they became excited. This was more than they had expected! There were many cars about and lots of people. A tent had been set up, and women were busy serving food to those who were waiting for things they were interested in to be put on the auction block. As the Bobbseys drew nearer, they could hear a voice calling out:

"How much am I bid? Ten dollars? Somebody make it eleven! Thank you. Now will somebody make it twelve? Twelve dollars, is it? Am I bid any more? Sold for twelve dollars!"

On the front lawn by the big farmhouse, chairs had been placed. The twins hurried forward and found front seats.

"Well, well, here are some newcomers!" shouted the auctioneer. "More customers! That's what we are glad to see. More customers!" He smiled at the Bobbseys, especially at Mrs. Bobbsey, knowing that she was the one who would do the buying. "Now, I have here," the man went on, "I have here an antique which I dare say is the rarest one in this county. A coffee cup one hundred years old! How much am I bid for it?"

The man held up a cup and saucer, the like of which the twins had never seen before. The saucer was as large as a plate, and the cup was so big across the top that Flossie was sure if she put it over her head, it would fit as well as a hat.

"Let's buy it for Daddy and surprise him," she whispered to her mother. "We ought to have an antique cup for him in our new antique house."

When the bidding began, the auctioneer looked at Mrs. Bobbsey. "You could use this nicely, couldn't you, Madam?" he said. "I am offered one dollar for it. You know this cup is worth ten times that amount. I haven't been told so, but I shouldn't wonder if George Washington himself had drunk out of this very cup!"

"I will give you a dollar and a half," said Mrs. Bobbsey.

"Two dollars," called out someone else.

The bidding went on for a few minutes, but in the end the enormous coffee cup was handed to Mrs. Bobb-

sey, who paid three dollars for it. While all this had been going on, the twins had attracted much attention. An elderly woman now came over to sit down next to Flossie.

"This little girl with the golden curls," she said to the twins' mother, "reminds me so much of my own granddaughter that I should like to give her a little present if I may."

Mrs. Bobbsey was surprised by the offer, but consented if the gift were something inexpensive. In a few moments the auctioneer brought out a child's chair. It was a pretty old-fashioned rocker, but no one seemed to be interested in bidding on it. Finally the elderly lady spoke up. "I will give you two dollars for it," she said.

No one else in the audience spoke. The man tried his best to get further bids, but in the end he had to sell it to her. When the Bobbseys arose to leave, she followed them, and as they were about to get into their automobile, she handed the child's chair to Flossie.

"Please take this with you," she said. "I give it to you instead of to my own little granddaughter. She is too far away for this to be shipped to her."

Flossie, as well as Mrs. Bobbsey, thanked her, and the chair was added to several things already in the car. Mrs. Bobbsey had bought a small table and two

chairs. Mr. Osgood had picked up a garden plow, and a fancy cheese mold for his wife.

The car was a bit crowded, but Flossie wanted to sit in her new chair instead of on the seat. Mr. Osgood re-arranged things a bit so that she might do this.

Since Mr. Osgood was eager to get home, he drove rapidly. Suddenly they came to a bump in the road which jounced all the Bobbseys from their seats. A second later there was a cracking sound, and Flossie found herself sitting on the floor of the car.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" she cried. "My new chair is broken to pieces!"

They all laughed. Mr. Osgood stopped the automobile, and again things were shifted so that Flossie might sit upon the seat. As they drove off again, the little girl noticed something lying on the floor. When she picked it up, she saw that it was a child's purse.

"Where did this come from?" she asked in surprise.

"It must have been hidden inside the seat of the little chair," said her mother. "See what is in it."

Flossie opened the catch of the child's pocketbook. Inside lay a tiny old-fashioned doll. The Bobbsey girl was delighted. Everyone knew what she was going to say, and they were not disappointed.

"She is going to be my fav'rite doll," she cooed. "Oh, isn't she cunning?"

Her family agreed that the doll was cunning, but Freddie remarked that it would have been much more

fun to have found some money in the purse. "That's what pocketbooks are made for," he said scornfully.

Nevertheless, Flossie was satisfied. As soon as they reached home, she put her newest baby alongside Barbara.

Mrs. Osgood, who had been waiting for the car to return, asked the twins if they would like to go on an errand with her. "I'm driving over to the opposite mountain to deliver some cheeses," she said. "I thought you might like to play echo over to this side. You haven't done that yet."

The children were very eager to go and set off at once with her. As soon as she had left several packages at a house across the valley, she took a road which led along the rim of the mountain. Presently they came to a woods. She stopped the car and invited the children to get out.

"This is one of the loveliest spots around here," she said. "I have often thought I should like to have a little house right in these woods."

"Can you make echoes from here?" asked Freddie.

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs. Osgood. "From almost any point along either mountain you can hear your words come back to you. By the way, do you know who guards the echo spirit?" she asked the children.

When they replied that they did not, she began to tell them the lovely old Russian legend of *Lesovik*, the echo spirit.

"The forests, the fields, and the streams are guarded by spirits called *Lesoviks*. They try to protect the forest from careless people who might burn them or ruin the trees and flowers in some way. The *Lesoviks* are able to turn themselves into any kind of form and make any kind of sound."

"Can they be men?" asked Freddie.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Osgood. "When they turn themselves into men, they usually are very old, with long hair and beards and flashing green eyes. Sometimes they're as tall as trees. They appear this way in order to frighten the bad people and make them stop what they're doing."

"Can a *Lesovik* turn himself into an animal, too?" Flossie interrupted to ask.

"He can become a bear or a wolf or any kind of animal he chooses," said the storyteller. "The *Lesoviks* guard the animals of the forest and field, as well as the trees and plants, and play tricks on people to make them stay away. One of their tricks is the echo. By being able to make any kind of sound, they can imitate what you are saying or doing. And if it's naughty, you can hear just how bad it is."

"How would you know if a *Lesovik* was coming after you?" asked Flossie.

"There's usually a rustling sound, and then the spirit appears in some form," answered Mrs. Osgood.

"I wish one would come," said Freddie, who liked

the story very much. "I'm going to do something bad," he announced suddenly, "and see what happens!" He ran off a little distance and shouted, "Ho! Ho! I'm going to burn down this whole forest!"

The others smiled, but suddenly their smiles changed to looks of horror. There was a rustling sound among the trees, and a huge brown bear appeared. It came directly toward Freddie Bobbsey!

CHAPTER XVI

THE CIRCUS PET

FOR several seconds Freddie was too frightened to move. Was this one of the Lesoviks coming to punish him for saying he would burn down the woods?

Then the little boy remembered that it was only an old Russian legend about the echo spirit. But that made it worse than ever. Here was a real bear, and it was coming straight toward him!

"Freddie!" screamed Nan. "Run!"

You may be sure the lad did just that. He leaped from the spot where he had been standing and in three seconds was alongside Mrs. Osgood and the other Bobbsey children. The whole group took to their heels, climbed inside the automobile, and closed all the doors and windows just as the brown bear reached it.

"Oh," said Mrs. Osgood, panting. "That was a narrow escape. I had no idea there were bears in these woods, or I shouldn't have brought you here."

The big animal pressed his nose against the glass and sniffed. Then he put up his front paws. What if he should break it!

"Bruno!" commanded a voice suddenly. There stood a man. He seemed to have come out of nowhere. "Get down, Bruno!"

Obediently the bear dropped to the ground, while his master walked over to the car. Mrs. Osgood rolled down one of the windows.

"I'm sorry if my pet frightened you," the man said pleasantly. "He's very gentle and wouldn't harm a fly."

"He's—he's not a wild bear then?" asked Freddie.

"Oh, no," the owner replied. "As a matter of fact, he's a circus bear. I'll have him do some of his tricks for you. That'll make up for his scaring you."

Mrs. Osgood and the twins got out of the automobile. Bruno entertained them for several minutes by walking on his hind feet, rolling over, making somersaults, and climbing a tree.

"He's a nice bear," said Flossie, clapping her hands.

"I thought he was a Lesovik," spoke up Freddie.

"What's a Lesovik?" asked the man.

Briefly Mrs. Osgood repeated the legend. Then Bert asked the bear's owner if he too worked in a circus.

"I used to," was the answer. "Too old now, like my bear. We did tricks together. Batch and Bruno

we call ourselves. My name is Batch. Years ago we did fancy things, but now we've both forgotten how. We live quietly in a little house in the woods."

The twins were excited to have met a circus man and a trained bear. They asked all sorts of questions, including how the man happened to come to Echo Valley to live.

"I had a sister who rented a place here for a short time. She wrote me that it was the loveliest spot she had ever seen, so when I was ready to retire, I thought I'd settle down here with Bruno," the man answered.

"Your sister isn't here now?" asked Mrs. Osgood.

"No," Mr. Batch replied. "My sister died a number of years ago. If you've lived around here a long while, maybe you knew her. Her name was Markham."

"Markham!" cried Bert and Nan together.

"Surely you children didn't know her," the man said in surprise. "You would have been mere babies at the time she lived here."

"We thought Mrs. Markham burned up in a fire," spoke up Freddie bluntly.

Quickly Nan and Bert told about Deborah and the fire, and how they thought she might be Mrs. Markham's granddaughter. Now it was Mr. Batch's turn to be amazed.

"I wonder if she could be," he said. "To tell you the truth, I was out of touch with my family for so

many years I didn't know what was going on. My sister had a daughter named Helen, but I don't know whether or not she was married."

"When Mrs. Markham wrote you that she was here, it seems funny she wouldn't have told you about a grandchild, if she had one," said Mrs. Osgood.

"I received only a picture postcard of Echo Valley from her. On it she said what a lovely place this was, and if I ever got near here, please come to see her," the man replied. "But the circus never got around this way, so I didn't make the visit. I'm sorry, too, for my sister died two years later."

"Who notified you about Mrs. Markham?" asked Mrs. Osgood.

"The people at the hospital," Mr. Batch answered. "It seems that my sister was left there unconscious on the doorstep. The nurses thought she had been hit by a car and been brought there, but they had no idea from where."

The twins gasped. Maybe Mrs. Markham had been injured after she had left Deborah at the Orphan Home!

"How did the people at the hospital find you?" asked Nan.

"There was a piece of paper in the pocket of my sister's coat. On it was my name and address," Mr. Batch told her. "They sent me a message, but it didn't

reach me for a long time afterward. I tried to find my niece Helen, but I never succeeded."

"Then you don't know where Deborah's parents are?" inquired Nan.

"No, I'm sorry to say," replied Mr. Batch. "And it may be that the little girl isn't related to me at all. She may belong to some other Markham, or she may not even be a Markham."

The twins felt pretty discouraged. Flossie remarked that it certainly was hard to find a tree with a family on it for Deborah.

"She 'specially needs a father and mother," the little girl declared, "'cause she has to talk the deaf language on her hands. But Nan can talk it with her," she added proudly.

"Nan?" the man asked.

The Bobbseys now introduced themselves and Mrs. Osgood. Mr. Batch said he had never heard of two sets of twins in one family, except in the circus.

"The ones I knew were boy twins and girl twins, brothers and sisters," he told them. "They were wonderful horseback riders and used to perform together."

"I wish we could do that," sighed Freddie.

The man told them several other interesting stories about circus life, and suggested they come over to his little house in the woods some time to hear more of

them. The children said they certainly would call on him.

"In the meantime, I'll find out if there was any other Markham in Echo Valley except my sister," he promised. "And don't forget, I'd like to meet this little Deborah you speak of."

He called to Bruno who had been waiting patiently while his master talked. When Mr. Batch told the animal to say "Good-bye," the brown bear put up one paw and shook hands with each of the Bobbsey twins and Mrs. Osgood in turn. Freddie was first, and he was so thrilled that he ran to the end of the line so he could do it all over again.

When the children reached home, they excitedly told their mother all that had happened during the trip to the woods. Nan asked if Daddy Bobbsey couldn't bring Deborah with him to Echo Valley when they moved into their new house.

"That is a good idea," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "Mr. Batch should see her. Suppose you write to Daddy about it tonight."

The letter was written directly after supper, then all the twins tumbled into bed. They were very sleepy, but by morning they were rested and ready for another day of fun. First they went to the new house to see the furniture which was now in place.

"I just love my room," said Flossie, "but it needs

some more things in it. Let's look in the barn for treasures," she suggested.

The four of them trooped to the building. It was so old that it had lots of peek holes. For a while the twins found nothing of special interest, but suddenly Bert called to them to come and look.

"I don't know what it is," he said, tossing aside some hay. "I guess part of the thing is missing."

"It's a loom!" exclaimed Nan. "A hand loom."

She explained to the little twins that the wooden machine was for weaving rugs, blankets, or anything else one might wish. Mrs. Bobbsey came outside to look at it. She tried the pedals and declared they worked perfectly.

"Do you know how to weave?" Flossie asked her mother, wide-eyed.

"As a girl, I did a lot of it," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "I'm afraid I've forgotten, though, how to make anything with a pretty pattern."

Mrs. Osgood, who arrived just then to see how everything was coming along, was very interested in the loom. She was an expert weaver. At once she suggested cleaning the machine and using it to make rugs for the new Bobbsey summer home.

"I'll drive to the village and get some wool, while you dust the loom off," she said enthusiastically. "Bert, you might tighten it up a bit." The twins were fascinated when, a short time later, their mother and

Mrs. Osgood tied on the warp, those long threads which run from top to bottom on the loom. While they were doing this, Nan wound several large wooden spools, pointed at each end, with different colored yarns.

"These spools are called shuttles, and go back and forth between the threads in the warp," said Mrs. Osgood. "That's how we weave."

"Can you make any pattern you want to?" asked Freddie. "Could you put a fire engine in the middle of a rug for my bedroom?"

Mrs. Osgood laughed and said she guessed she could, but first she would have to get a picture of one to copy.

"I can weave butterflies without a picture," she said. "I'll make a cream-colored rug with blue butterflies for your mother's room."

The little twins watched the work for a while, but soon they decided they would rather be doing something themselves for their new summer home.

"Let's go make some dishes," whispered Flossie to her brother, so the two ran off to the clay bank.

For several minutes they dug out the special dirt. Then they carried it in a basket to the brook, and started their work. Pretty soon they heard a bark, and Waggo came trotting up, wagging his tail.

"I'm too busy to play with you," said Flossie. She

was just finishing a bowl, which was a hard thing to make. "You'll have to play by yourself."

Waggo cocked his ears, and turned his head a little to the side as he watched the small twin set the clay bowl in its mold on the bank of the brook. Playfully he picked up the trowel she had been using.

"Drop that!" said Flossie. "I need it!"

But Waggo did not drop it. Instead he ran toward the brook. The little girl, afraid he might lose the tool in the water, jumped after him. She slipped in the mud and lost her balance.

As she went down, she accidentally kicked the clay bowl into the water. It sank to the bottom of the brook.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ANSWER ECHO

FREDDIE jumped up and waded into the brook. He reached for the mold, but there was nothing in it. What had been a clay bowl now was a misshapen lump of mud fast dissolving in the water.

"It's all Waggo's fault!" Flossie stamped her foot.

"He was only playing," said Freddie. "I'll help you make another bowl." Then he sang out, "'Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot, nine days old!'"

A little later that day all the twins helped Mr. Osgood take the baked dishes of the surprise set from the kiln and put in more which were ready for the oven. The Bobbseys looked at their work with pride.

"Oh, I hope Mother likes them," said Nan.

"We have a present for her and one for Daddy, too," spoke up Flossie. "Let's have a present party at the first dinner in our new house."

The others liked this idea, but Nan was the only one who remembered that Deborah probably would be visiting them, and there would be no gift for her. The Bobbsey girl decided to start at once making something for her little deaf friend.

"I shan't tell anyone about it," she thought. "I'll keep it a secret and surprise them."

In the end she had to tell Mrs. Osgood in order to get certain things she needed. She worked on the gift in the cellar of the cottage while the others were at the new house.

"We'll be able to move in pretty soon," said Mrs. Bobbsey one day. "I think you children can help with last-minute cleaning. Bert, suppose you tackle the cellar under the kitchen."

The boy found two lanterns that gave a bright light and went down to the place where he had discovered the jellies. This time he could see better. What a lot of dirt there was!

"I don't know where to begin," he said. "Maybe Mother would like to wash off these jelly glasses. I'll carry them upstairs, anyway."

After he had removed several jars from one of the shelves, the boy noticed something peculiar on the wall. He held up the lantern.

"It looks like a small door," he said to himself excitedly, "but how can I open it? There isn't any handle."

Bert tried pulling out the door by putting his fingers in the crack, but he could not budge it.

"It must be locked," he decided, "but where is the place for the key?"

Suddenly he gave a shout which brought the rest of the family to the cellar to see what was the matter. By this time the boy had found that a piece of wood had been stuck into a hole where there was a latch.

"I've found one of the secret closets!" he cried excitedly, reaching in to lift the latch.

With his other hand Bert pulled open the door. Inside lay a wooden box. He took it out and handed it to his mother.

"I guess this is yours," he said. "Please open it."

Mrs. Bobbsey raised the lid. Within was a complete set of table silver.

"Oh, this is beautiful!" she exclaimed. "This is a very lucky find. It is true about the secret closets. Now I have just about everything I need for the house except dishes. I suppose I can borrow a few from Mrs. Osgood for a while."

The twins looked at one another. Not one of them gave away the secret, but Flossie had to clap her hands over her mouth to keep from saying anything about the clay dishes they were making.

The chest was carried upstairs. Mrs. Bobbsey wanted to clean the silver at once, but there was no polish in the house. At this moment one of the car-

penters said he was going to the village in his car to get some nails. Nan decided to go with him to buy the polish.

When she returned a little later, she hurried down the cellar where Bert still was cleaning up. He was not working very fast, because he was hunting for more secret closets.

"Who do you think was in the village?" Nan asked excitedly.

"Who?"

"Danny Rugg! What's that mean old boy doing here?" the girl demanded.

"Are you sure it was Danny?" Bert asked. He could scarcely believe it.

"Yes, I'd know him anywhere," replied Nan. "Maybe his father took him away from Lakeport after he grabbed your knife and made Freddie have that accident."

"Did he see you?" the boy wanted to know.

"I don't think so."

"That's good," said Bert. "I don't want him around here making trouble."

But Danny had seen Nan. He was just as curious to know why the Bobbseys were in Echo Valley as they were to know why he was there.

"I'm going to find out where Bert is," the bully promised himself. "He was the cause of my coming to this old dump where there's not a thing to do!"

If the Bobbseys had heard him say that, they would have laughed. There was so much to do at Echo Valley. Something new was happening every minute. Right now something was about to happen in their very own house.

After Bert had found the secret closet, Freddie determined he would find one, too. For some time he had been searching in every room for secret places which might be plugged up with pieces of wood.

At last he came to the kitchen and stood gazing around for a possible opening. Suddenly he saw a round piece of metal in the chimney. It had been put there to cover up a hole where the stovepipe once had been.

"I'll bet there's a treasure hidden in the chimney!" Freddie thought excitedly.

He climbed up onto the kitchen stove, but was too short to reach the metal piece. The little boy got down and lifted a chair to the top of the stove. When he stood on this, he could reach very well.

"In old times people always hid things in chimneys," he said. "Now I'll—"

The little fellow tugged hard at the metal piece, but he could not get it out. He was just about to give up trying, when suddenly there was a ripping sound and something moved. The next thing Freddie knew, he had lost his balance and tumbled, chair and all, to the floor.

The metal piece had come loose from the chimney, followed by clouds of black soot. The Bobbsey boy, as well as the walls and floor, were covered with the oily dirt. What a sight everything was!

The racket brought Bert and Nan from the cellar. As soon as they made sure Freddie was not hurt, the twins tried to clean up the mess, because they knew Mrs. Bobbsey would feel bad about it.

"I'm glad the kitchen hasn't been painted yet," said Nan. "Freddie, whatever made you pull that thing out?"

"I thought there was a treasure hidden up there," the little boy replied.

Bert climbed up to make sure. He even put his flashlight into the opening, but saw nothing except more soot.

It took so long to clean up the kitchen that the children did not polish the silver or work in the cellar again that day. Mr. Osgood arrived to drive them home before they realized it was nearly their supper hour.

"Would you have time to go past the answer echo place?" asked Bert as they started out. The boy had not forgotten about this mystery and still wanted to guess what happened when a person called out a question.

"I'll take time," smiled Mr. Osgood, heading in that direction.

When they reached the spot where the big stone was, everyone got out of the car except Mrs. Bobbsey. The man suggested that Bert ask the echo a question. This time the boy tried to look in every direction at once and whispered to Nan to listen extra carefully. Then he called loudly:

"What's my father's first name?"

In two seconds the reply came in faint tones, "Ri—chard!"

"Oh, I think I know how you do it, Echo!" cried Bert excitedly.

"— do it, Echo," he heard feebly.

The boy's face fell. "I—I guess I don't know after all," he said in disappointment.

"It must be the dwarfs," declared Flossie.

"Or a Lesovik," smiled Nan. She, too, had tried hard to figure out what made the answers, but she could not guess. "Echo Valley is full of mysteries we can't seem to solve," she said.

"Never mind," said Mr. Osgood. "Some day maybe you will learn all about them. By the way, there's one you haven't been introduced to yet. I'll take you to the place tomorrow."

"What is it?" asked Freddie eagerly.

"The echo wishing well," replied the man with a twinkle in his eye.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WISHING WELL

THE next morning the twins could hardly wait for Mr. Osgood to start out. It was some time before he was ready, because boxes of cheese had to be wrapped for mailing, addressed, and put into the car. The Bobbseys helped all they could, so that no time would be wasted in their getting to the wishing well.

"I believe we can start now," said the good-natured man at last, and the children climbed into his automobile.

When they reached the village, Mr. Osgood stopped at the post office. The twins knew he would be there for a while, so they walked along the main street to look in the windows. Bert kept his eyes open for Danny Rugg, but he did not see the bully anywhere.

"I wonder if the boy Nan saw was really Danny," he thought. "Why would he be here?"

Bert tried to figure out how he might learn this. Suddenly he decided to ask in the little hotel if any people named Rugg were staying there.

"Hello, son," said the man at the desk as the Bobbsey boy walked up to him. "What can I do for you?"

Bert told him why he had come.

"Why, yes," the clerk replied. "Mr. Rugg and his son Danny have a room here. They're not in right now. Mr. Rugg is attending to some business in this territory and takes his son with him every day."

"Thank you very much," said Bert.

"Do you wish to leave a message?" asked the man.

"No, sir," replied the Bobbsey boy. "I'll probably see Danny some time."

Secretly Bert hoped he would not see the older boy, and he also would be glad if Danny did not learn that the Bobbsey family was at Echo Valley. He was sure there would be trouble if Danny should find out.

When Bert came from the hotel, he saw his twin talking to Mr. Batch and walked over to them. The bear was not with the man.

"I've just been telling your sister," the former circus man said to the boy, "that I've been inquiring around Echo Valley, and I guess my sister was the only Mrs. Markham who ever lived here."

"So Deborah could be her granddaughter!" cried Nan excitedly, "because no other house around here except hers burned down when Deborah was a baby!"

"It does look as if you might be getting somewhere on the mystery," said Mr. Batch. "I've done something else, too. I've written to the little town where my sister and her daughter used to live. I've asked the mayor to see if there is a record of Helen Markham's marriage there."

"You see, Bert, we might find out Deborah's last name, even if we don't find her parents," said Nan.

"I'll let you know as soon as I hear anything," the man promised.

Just then Mr. Osgood tooted his horn to let the Bobbsey twins know he was ready. They hurried over to the automobile and climbed aboard. The drive to the wishing well took them away from the valley and led through pleasant farm lands.

"The well is on the property just ahead," said Mr. Osgood about half an hour later.

He pointed out a large old-fashioned white house almost hidden by tall pine trees. A little distance away stood two big red barns. When he came to the driveway leading into the farm, Mr. Osgood turned in.

"I'll go tell Mrs. Bower I've brought her some cheese, and also some visitors to make a wish in her well," he told the twins as he drew up to the door and got out.

Mrs. Bower herself opened the door, and was delighted to meet the Bobbsey children. She thanked Mr. Osgood for the cheese, and said that it was the

best she had ever eaten in her whole life. Freddie, who did not care particularly for cheese, began to think that maybe he was missing something and decided that hereafter he would eat whatever was given to him without making a face.

"I hope you have your wishes all ready." Mrs. Bower smiled as she led the group along a little flagstone path back of the house.

The well stood in the center of a lovely flower garden. It was made of stone and reached about three feet above the ground. Over this was a little house with a shingled roof. A bucket hung on the side.

"You must be very careful," the woman said to the children. "You will have to lean over when you make your wishes, but do not tumble in. The well is over two hundred feet deep."

It was about twelve feet across and had very smooth sides. Of course, the children could not see the water at the bottom.

"First I will show you something quite remarkable," Mrs. Bower said. From her dress she took a straight pin. "The echo is so perfect in this well that if you will listen carefully, you will hear this pin hit the water when I drop it."

The twins stood as quietly as mice as she let the pin fall. In a moment they heard a tiny splash.

"I have never got over the wonder of that," said Mr. Osgood. "To think that we can hear the sound

of such a small article hitting that water over two hundred feet below!"

"May I drop a pin?" asked Flossie.

Mrs. Bower handed one to her, and the strange performance was repeated. Bert laughingly said that the well must be full of pins if people had been dropping them in for very long.

"For at least one hundred years," said Mrs. Bower. "But I presume the pins have worked their way down through the sand at the bottom. Now I will tell you how to make your wishes. There are two ways. You may call down toward the water, or you may write a little note and fasten it to the bottom of the bucket. This will be lowered, and the water will wash over your wish."

"Who makes the wishes come true?" asked Freddie. "Is there a dwarf or a Lesovik at the bottom of the well?"

"I really don't know," smiled Mrs. Bower. "This wishing well was here long before we bought the property. Of course, all wishes do not come true. If you wish something that is not good for you, you are not apt to have it granted."

Nan and Bert decided to write out their wishes just for the fun of seeing the bucket lowered, but Freddie and Flossie thought that would take too long. The little boy leaned over the edge and said:

"Please, Wishing Well, help me to become a Junior

policeman. I'll promise not to blow my whistle so loud it will scare our old dog Snap again and make him go off to Aunt Sallie Pry's house."

A jumble of sounds came back to the twins' ears. They could not tell whether it was Freddie's words or an answer to his wish. Flossie now took her turn. Very slowly she called into the well:

"Please give Deborah a tree with a family on it."

Mrs. Bower smiled at this. Nan told the woman the story of the little girl who had lived in the Orphan Home and did not know who her parents were. She also related what they had done thus far in trying to solve the mystery, and the woman praised the twins highly.

"That is very sweet of you, and I do hope for little Deborah's sake that you will solve the mystery. Now if you will get your notes ready, we will lower this bucket."

Both Nan and Bert put their notes in at the same time. The messages were fastened to the bottom of the bucket with thumbtacks. Then Bert turned the old iron handle which let the rope down into the well. Mrs. Bower suggested that they wait a few minutes before pulling it up, so the written wish could become part of the water.

"Once in a while a surprise comes up in the bucket," she said. While they were waiting, she showed the twins her attractive flowers, and picked a few of them

for Nan to take to Mrs. Bobbsey. Then she went back to the well. "Suppose you pull up the bucket now," she said.

What a laugh the twins had when Bert wound up the rope and set the bucket on the stone side of the well! In the water was a baby frog. Flossie started to clap her hands.

"Maybe he is the Fairy Prince," she giggled. "You remember the one who was turned into a frog. If I had another wish, I would wish that this frog would turn into a prince again."

The little frog remained a frog, however, and Mrs. Bower suggested that he probably would be happier at the bottom of the well than he would be in the garden, so Bert lowered the bucket again with its little green passenger.

"How soon will we know if our wishes are coming true?" asked Flossie as Mr. Osgood and the children walked back toward their car with Mrs. Bower.

"You mustn't stop thinking about your wishes," the woman advised. "You keep hoping just as hard as you can that you will find Deborah's mother and father for her."

"Oh, I'll do that," promised Flossie. And she meant every word of it.

The twins thanked Mrs. Bower and promised to come to see her again some time. They also invited

her to come to see their new old home. They waved to her as Mr. Osgood drove away.

When they reached a point about halfway between the village and Mrs. Bobbsey's property, Mr. Osgood stopped the car, saying that it was only half a mile's walk from here to the house. The man told them that he was going off on another errand in which they would not be interested, and that he thought perhaps their mother would want them to come back to help her at the house.

The twins got out of the automobile, thanked him for the trip, and said "Good-bye." Mr. Osgood turned down a side road, while the children trudged along the main one toward their home. They had walked for only about two minutes when they saw an old woman, apparently hunting for something in the road.

"She must have lost a package," said Bert.

"Or maybe her pocketbook," suggested Nan.

The girl was right, although it was several minutes before the twins found this out. They ran toward the old lady, but when they came up to her the children realized she could not talk. She made motions with her hands to indicate that she was looking for something, but what it was they could not understand. Suddenly Nan had an idea.

"Maybe she can speak the sign language!" the girl told herself. She tapped the elderly woman on the shoulder, because now she was paying no attention to

the children. She was excitedly kicking at leaves and small stones with her foot, trying to uncover whatever was gone.

The girl held up her hand and, as well as she could, said on her fingers, "What have you lost?"

The old lady was so surprised and delighted to find someone who could speak to her in her own language that she promptly hugged Nan. The Bobbsey twin was rather embarrassed at this. Then the woman used her own fingers to reply, but she went so fast that the girl could not understand her. She asked the woman to go slower.

The other children stood in awe. They were very proud of Nan and admired her for sticking to the business of learning this sign language. They had never thought of her using it in any way except to talk to Deborah. Now she was putting it to very good use.

"The woman says," Nan told her brothers and sister a few seconds later, "that she has lost her pocket-book. In it was all the money she has in the world. She was walking to Echo Valley from another town. When she got there, her purse was gone. She does not know where she dropped it. If she does not find it, she will not have any money to get a room or buy food."

All the Bobbsey twins were sad to hear this, and at once determined to make every effort to find the poor old lady's pocketbook. They scattered in various directions and began to hunt eagerly.

CHAPTER XIX

SECRET CLOSETS

THE Bobbsey twins were good at treasure hunting. They had looked around their own house so much, and once they had been on a real treasure hunt, so they knew exactly how to go about trying to find the lost purse for the poor old lady.

"I am sure she didn't go in that field," called Nan to Freddie, who was looking a good distance from the road. "Better come back here," she advised.

Flossie was down on her knees at the side of the road, parting little bushes with her hands. Nan was using the toe of her shoe to scatter twigs and leaves under which the purse might be hidden.

"I'm so afraid someone already has found it and taken the poor woman's money," she sighed as no one seemed to be making any progress.

Bert had disappeared. He had gone around a little bend in the road and was looking near a big tree. It

had occurred to him that possibly the elderly lady had sat down in the shade at this point to rest. Suddenly he gave a cry of delight, and pounced upon a small leather bag. Excitedly he ran back and showed it to her.

"It's mine!" she quickly spelled on her fingers to Nan. She opened it, and when she saw the contents intact, tears came to her eyes. "Oh, how can I ever thank you dear children," she said on her fingers.

Nan talked to her a little more, asking if they could help her or take her anywhere. The woman replied that she was all right now. Then she inquired how the girl had happened to learn the sign language, when she herself was not deaf. The Bobbsey twin related the story about Deborah, and at once the old woman became excited.

"Deborah!" she cried. "I taught that little girl the language of the deaf myself."

Nan translated this remark to her brothers and sister, and they asked her please to find out more. Maybe this old lady knew who Deborah's parents were! Nan asked her this, but was disappointed to learn the woman did not know.

"When the people at the Echo Valley Orphan Home realized that Deborah was deaf, they thought she should learn to speak on her fingers," the lady explained. "I applied for work, and they took me to help in the kitchen and to teach Deborah. She is a

darling little girl, and I hope that some day she will find her parents. It is a great mystery about her life."

Nan learned further that the old lady was not very strong, and therefore was unable to do heavy work, but she would like very much to have some kind of position. Nan took her name and the place where she would be staying for a while, promising to get in touch with Aunt Sallie Pry to see if the woman could go there to live and also work.

Aunt Sallie had told the girl she had an idea of selling homemade bread, pies, and cake, and if her business should grow, she certainly would want someone to help her. If this woman they had met on the road was a good cook, she would be just the person to live with Aunt Sallie. I might tell you now that this is exactly what happened a few weeks later, after Nan arranged a meeting.

When the twins reached their new house, they excitedly told Mrs. Bobbsey all about the wishing well and the poor old lady they had just met. All the children were in a hunting mood, and decided to go over the house once more to look for secret closets and other hiding places.

"Nan, will you go to the attic with me?" asked Flossie. "We have never really looked very well up there."

Her sister thought this would be fun, so the two girls climbed to the third floor. This time Nan car-

ried a flashlight and they were able to examine the place more carefully than before."

"Here's a door!" cried Flossie. "I don't know if there is a closet, but anyway, let's pull the handle on it."

She tugged as hard as she could, but nothing happened. Even when her sister helped her, the girls could not make anything pull out or push in. Nan thought that perhaps she ought to try unscrewing the knob. That was not the usual thing one would do, but the hiding places in this old house seemed to be different from all others. The knob came off easily, and Nan held the flashlight to the hole.

"I see something," she said excitedly, putting her fingers into the hole. "I guess this works like the one in the cellar that Bert found."

Sure enough, it did. She lifted the latch and opened the door easily. She and Flossie saw about a dozen pictures stacked up against the wall. They lifted out one of them and found that it was a very pretty oil painting of a farm scene.

"Ooh," said Flossie. "Let's take it downstairs. Mother will like this."

Mrs. Bobbsey did like it indeed. Furthermore, she discovered that the artist who had painted the picture was a very famous man.

"This is valuable," she said. "And there are more of them upstairs?" she asked.

Quickly she and all the twins hurried to the attic. One by one the oil paintings were carried to the floor below and examined carefully. Some of them were full of cracks, and others were so dirty that they could not tell what the picture was supposed to be. But five of them were in very good condition.

"Let's hang them up right now," suggested Freddie.

"I am afraid, dear, that there is nothing to hang them on," said his mother. "This wire on them looks pretty old, and I think it will break. We'll have to buy some picture hooks, too."

Bert offered to go to the village at once to purchase wire and hooks. To himself he thought that this would be more fun than working on the cellar, the job he was now doing. So off he went to Echo Valley and straight to the hardware store.

As he went in by the front door, he saw a figure leaving by the side door. Danny Rugg! Bert was curious to know whether the boy had seen him and was running away. Just then the clerk behind the counter spoke to him.

"Guess that boy is afraid of you," he said. "The minute he saw you coming in, he ran out of here like a streak of lightning."

"We aren't especially good friends," Bert told the clerk. "But I don't believe he is afraid of me."

Bert felt a little flattered to think the older lad

might be afraid of him. After all, he really had not settled with Danny about having caused Freddie's accident. Mr. Rugg had said he would take care of his son, but perhaps Danny still had an idea Bert would fight him.

"Well, what do you wish to buy?" asked the man. For a second the Bobbsey twin could hardly remember, because he had been so busy thinking about Danny.

"Oh, yes, we want to hang some pictures," he answered. "Will you give me some wire and hooks, and special pins to put in the walls?"

After the man had wrapped up the articles, Bert went out the side door of the store and looked around for Danny. But the boy was not in sight, and Bert was sure that he was trying to avoid him.

"He knows we're in Echo Valley," the Bobbsey twin thought. "I wish he didn't."

When Bert returned home, he heard a terrific barking. Waggo was making more noise than usual.

"What can be the matter?" the boy thought, starting to run.

As he turned a corner of the house, he saw Mr. Batch and his circus bear on the front lawn. Waggo was snapping at the animal's legs, and the bear in turn was growling viciously at the little dog. His owner was trying to quiet his pet, and Freddie and

Flossie were screaming at the little fox terrier to stop his noise.

Mrs. Bobbsey and Nan came hurrying from the house. Bert rushed forward and picked Waggo up in his arms. Mr. Batch took hold of the shaggy fur on Bruno's neck.

"Oh, I am so sorry to give you such a greeting," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "You are Mr. Batch, aren't you? I am glad there wasn't a fight between your pet and ours," she added.

As soon as the two animals knew there was no cause for them to be enemies, they quieted down and made no further trouble. Waggo even went up to the bear and they touched noses. That was their way of saying they would be friends.

"I thought you children might like to take a ride on Bruno's back," said Mr. Batch. "I understand Mr. Osgood has a camera. Maybe he will take pictures of you, and you can send them to your little friends."

The twins thought this was a grand idea. Flossie was the first to ride, and she laughed gleefully as Bruno plodded around the garden in a circle. He was so fat and shaggy that the little girl declared it was almost like sitting on a pillow.

"It's my turn," said Freddie presently, and was helped up to the big animal's back.

In the meantime Bert had hurried over to the Os-

good cottage to borrow a camera. Mrs. Bobbsey became the photographer, and snapped several pictures of each of the twins, sitting on Bruno's back.

When at last the children had had their fill and Mr. Batch was about to leave, he laughed and said he had almost forgotten why he really had come.

"I guess I'm getting old," he said. "But anyhow, I'm glad I thought of this before I left here."

The man went on to tell that he had had a letter from the mayor of the town in which Mrs. Markham had lived before coming to Echo Valley. Unfortunately, the mayor had no record of the woman's daughter Helen having been married there.

"That should not discourage us, however," said Mr. Batch. "Helen probably was married somewhere else. I admit, though, that it would be pretty hard to find out where. But if none of the other clues that you are working on bring any results, I will try writing to different places."

Flossie was particularly disappointed. "I thought we were going to get a name on the tree," she said, and when Mr. Batch asked her what she meant, she explained, "I mean the tree that's going to have Deborah's family on it."

"She means family tree," smiled Mrs. Bobbsey, and the man then remembered that this had been mentioned to him before.

"Oh, I have something else," he said. "I was search-

ing through a trunk and came across some old pictures. Here is one of Helen, taken when she was a baby. And here is another of Mrs. Markham at the age of four. Does Deborah look like either of them?"

Eagerly the twins gazed at the photographs.

CHAPTER XX

LOCKED INSIDE

"I NEVER know what babies look like," said Bert, "so I wouldn't know whether this picture of Mrs. Markham's daughter looks like Deborah or not."

"It's like my doll Barbara," spoke up Flossie. "I don't think Deborah ever looked like her."

Mrs. Bobbsey and Nan studied both photographs carefully. They held a hand first over the eyes of each face, then over the nose and mouth of the pictures. There was nothing about either the baby or the little girl of four years old to remind them in any way of Deborah.

"I'm afraid these aren't going to help us," said the twins' mother to Mr. Batch. "One by one our clues seem to fail. Oh, I do wish we would come across something that would offer some kind of proof. Mr. Bobbsey is going to bring Deborah here soon. It would be so nice to have good news for her."

Mr. Batch put the photographs back into his pocket and told Bruno that it was time for them to go home. The old bear started walking off at once. He was tired of giving rides to the children, and would be glad to get back to his own quarters to rest.

After the man had gone, Mrs. Bobbsey and the twins went on a tour of inspection of their new summer home. Just that morning three newly-woven rugs had been laid on the floors. Mrs. Osgood and Mrs. Bobbsey had worked hard on the hand loom.

"Oh!" shrieked Freddie, who had gone up to the second floor ahead of the others. "It's here! My fire engine is here!"

The other children raced upstairs to see what had made the little boy cry out in such glee. On the floor of his bedroom lay a small cream-colored rug in the center of which had been woven a red fire engine. Freddie was so excited that he declared he wanted to go to bed that night right in this room.

"But what will you sleep on?" giggled Flossie. "There isn't any mattress on your bed."

Her twin declared that he would just as soon sleep on the floor on the new rug, but Mother Bobbsey said she thought that by morning he might find the boards a little hard. She also said that Daddy was sending mattresses up, and she thought they would arrive that day.

"Then every room in the house will be ready except the kitchen," she told the children. "The workmen have just finished there. As soon as the paint dries, we can move in."

A few minutes later, a big truck drove into the grounds. The driver leaned out and asked Freddie if this was where the Bobbseys lived. The little boy said "Yes," and offered to help carry in the packages. The man laughed.

"I'm afraid you're too small yet, son," he said, "to lift mattresses and ice boxes."

Freddie had to agree to this, but he did go off to get Bert and some of the workmen to help bring in the articles. After the refrigerator had been put in place in the kitchen, Mrs. Bobbsey decided to give it a thorough cleaning. Just as she was finishing, Bert came into the room.

"We are lucky to be able to have an electric ice box in the country," he remarked. "Do you mind if I see how it works?"

"I think that would be a good idea," said his mother. "Plug it in."

Soon there was a humming sound.

"It's going to work!" said Bert. "The electricity has to be turned on a while to make ice, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said his mother. "I have just washed the inside of the box and I should like it to dry thoroughly

before closing the door. Perhaps we should turn off the electricity until later."

Bert was about to do this, when there came a shout from outdoors. He and his mother ran to the front garden to see what was going on. They found that where Nan had been working in the flower bed, Waggo had dug up a tiny box.

"It's a treasure!" Flossie exclaimed just as her mother and brother arrived.

The little girl could not get the lid off the box. Bert helped her, and at last it opened. The children gasped. Here was a treasure box indeed! Inside lay several lovely pieces of jewelry.

"Oh, Mother, here are rings and pins and everything for you!" cried Flossie.

Mrs. Bobbsey wondered whether the jewels really belonged to her. Things hidden in the house definitely did, but those buried in the garden might have been dropped there by some caller to the place.

"I'll keep the jewelry here and show it to Daddy," she said. "Maybe he can tell us how we might find out whether I own it or not."

Flossie was patting Waggo's head. "You're a good dog to find treasure, but you made an awful hole in the garden," she told him.

Nan was already trying to fill in the space and put back the little plants which the dog had dug up. The garden around the front porch of the old house looked

very nice, for the girl had pulled out hundreds of weeds.

Bert went on cutting the grass. He had been doing this when the man had arrived with the ice box. Now the boy forgot all about turning off the electricity to the refrigerator, and no one else went back to the kitchen. For an hour he and the other children and their mother worked steadily. Freddie raked up the grass after his brother, and Flossie helped Nan.

"Let's play hide-and-seek," called out Freddie finally. "I'm tired of working."

"So am I," declared his twin. "Who will be 'It' first?"

"I will," said Nan. She sat down on the edge of the porch and began to count.

The other children ran in different directions. Bert hid in the old barn, and Flossie got behind the giant apple tree. Freddie, too, had disappeared.

"Ready or not, I'm coming!" shouted Nan.

She walked around one side of the house and thought she saw a piece of Flossie's dress showing beside the apple tree. She called to the little girl, then ran toward "home." Flossie was caught!

The two of them started out to find Bert, and it was some time before Nan located him. But she finally did, back of the hand loom, which still stood in an open space in the barn.

"I wonder where Freddie can be," said Nan.

Followed by the others, she started a search. Around the house they went, and finally inside. Freddie was nowhere in sight. Finally Nan gave it up and called to her little brother to come in free, but he did not appear.

"That's strange," said Nan a few minutes later. "Surely he can hear me!"

Bert shouted. Perhaps his voice would carry farther. Still Freddie did not come. And there was a very good reason for this. The little boy was in a bad fix.

When Nan had sat down on the porch to be "It," Freddie had scooted off to find a very good hiding place. He ran here and there, but could not make up his mind. Suddenly he heard Nan call, and he knew he must hide quickly or be caught. He dashed into the kitchen. The door to the new ice box stood open.

"I can crawl in there," thought the little boy. "And Nan will have a hard time finding me."

He crawled inside and tried to pull the door shut. At first he could not do this. Then he gave it a pull toward himself, got his hand out of the way just in time, and the latch snapped down.

For several minutes Freddie thought this was fun, but then the place began to cool off. He waited a little longer, thinking that Nan would arrive any moment. But she did not come, and it was growing colder by

the second. At last Freddie decided he could not wait any longer. He would have to be caught.

The little boy gave the door a shove, but it would not open. In the darkness he felt around for the catch, but could not find one. Presently it dawned upon Freddie that this was the kind of door that locked and unlocked only from the outside. He was inside, and he could not get out unless someone should open the door.

"I can shout anyway," thought the little twin, trying not to be frightened.

With all the power he could muster, he called out loudly. Most of the sound stayed inside the ice box. His words could not be heard beyond the kitchen, and even there they were muffled.

But no one came near him. It was getting colder and colder. He wondered if his mother or anyone else would come to rescue him before he might freeze.

CHAPTER XXI

HOUSE FOR RENT

"MAYBE Freddie locked himself in one of the secret closets," said Nan. "Suppose we separate and try to find him."

"Wouldn't it be awful if he couldn't get out?" said Flossie, frightened. "Oh, I hope nothing has happened to Freddie!"

Nan went to the attic. Her little sister trailed her, too excited and worried to think where to look herself. Bert glanced into the hall closet through which he had once fallen. The trap door had been nailed shut, but the Bobbsey boy thought it was possible that Freddie had unfastened it. It was still tightly closed, however, and the nails were in place.

"Perhaps I should tell Mother that Freddie is missing," thought Bert. "But I don't like to worry her. I'll look down the cellar first," he decided.

The boy walked to the back of the house. As he

entered the kitchen, the whirr of the electric motor attracted his attention. He stopped.

"I forgot to turn off the electricity as Mother asked me to," he said to himself. "And the door to the ice box is shut. I wonder who did that."

It did not occur to him that Freddie might be inside, but he decided to open the door, for he knew his mother had left it that way. What a shock he received!

On the floor sat the little twin, huddled in a heap, with his eyes closed. He was very, very cold. And Bert was very, very frightened.

Quickly he lifted Freddie out, and laid him on the floor. Then he shouted for the others to come. The two carpenters and the painter who were working outside the house, as well as Mrs. Bobbsey and the other children, came running to the kitchen. Each one had a different idea of what should be done for the poor little half-frozen boy.

"I am sure a good rub will take care of everything," said Mrs. Bobbsey, but her voice was a little shaky.

Together she and Nan gently rubbed the little boy's arms, neck and back. In a few minutes Freddie opened his eyes and looked around. He did not try to speak. He was so happy to see his mother and the others there.

"I'll run to the cottage and ask Mr. Osgood to bring the car over," said Bert.

He dashed from the house and went as fast as his legs would carry him to the other house. The automobile was brought at once, and Freddie was taken to the cottage and put to bed. By morning the little boy was none the worse for his adventure, but he declared that never again would he try to hide too well when playing hide-and-seek.

Flossie, who had got over her fright, but who would hardly let her brother out of her sight, stated that she nearly had a snowman for a twin. This remark was repeated in the village by the mail carrier, who came once a day to bring letters to the Osgood cottage. Thus it happened that many people in Echo Valley heard about Freddie's mishap. Among these was Danny Rugg.

"So that is where the Bobbsey family is staying," he said to himself. "Now I can fix them like I have been wanting to." He grinned impishly to himself. For some time he had been hoping to find out where Bert was, without anyone in the village knowing that he was interested. "I'll go to the hardware store right now and buy those things I need to get square with him," Danny decided.

In the meantime the Bobbsey children were helping their mother with last-minute details at the house. The next day they would move in! And Daddy Bobbsey was coming, bringing with him Deborah and Dinah. The children were excited. Only Nan felt a little sad

that she did not have a better report to give to Deborah.

"I'm glad I have my gift finished for her, anyway," thought the girl. "If she has a very good time here, maybe she won't think too much about our not having found her father and mother for her."

Food had been brought by Mrs. Bobbsey. The last package to be put in place was a large paper bag of rice. Flossie insisted upon climbing up a small ladder and setting this on a shelf. Unfortunately, she did not put it down carefully, and before she could grab the package, it had fallen to the floor and smashed.

"Oh, dear," said the little girl. "I'm awfully sorry, Mother. I'll pick up all I can." She got a clean bag and scooped up the kernels which she knew would be clean enough to eat. The rest she put into a small pan.

"Let's play bride and groom with this," she called out. "We can pretend this house is their new house, and we can throw rice on them. Nan, you be the bride."

The others thought it might be fun to play this for a few minutes and then come back to their work. Mrs. Bobbsey caught the spirit of the game, and pinned a towel to the back of Nan's head to represent a veil. The children trooped outside, and the fun began. Bert was the groom, and he pretended to be running off on a honeymoon with Nan, while the little twins threw rice at them.

Then the bride and groom, after going down the garden path, turned and walked back, chatting about nothing in particular. When they got near the house, Nan reminded Bert that it was an old custom for the groom to carry the bride across the doorsill of her new home. Laughingly her twin picked her up and started through the front door. But he tripped, lost his balance, and poor Nan landed on the floor.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Bert. "I guess my bride was too heavy for me," he laughed.

The little twins giggled merrily. They wanted to take their turn playing bride and groom, but the rice had been used up, and Nan advised Flossie not to be carried across the doorsill. At this moment Mrs. Bobbsey came from the kitchen.

"I believe I shall lock up the house for the night," she said. "I know it's early, but everything is ready, so we may as well go to the Osgood cottage. It will be our last night there, and we have a good bit of packing to do."

Just as the family was finishing supper about two hours later, there came a knock on the cottage door. When Mrs. Bobbsey heard someone asking for her, she went out to see who the person might be. A man and a woman she had never seen before stood at the door.

"I think your house is charming," the woman smiled. "May we see the inside of it? If it is not con-

venient just now, we will be glad to wait a few moments."

Mrs. Bobbsey was surprised that total strangers should ask to see the inside of her new home. Before she had a chance to inquire as to what had made them come, the man said:

"What rent are you asking for the place?"

"Rent?" said Mrs. Bobbsey, amazed. "The place is not for rent."

Now the man and woman looked surprised. "Oh, was someone ahead of us?" the lady asked.

"There must be some mistake," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "My home is not for rent. Who told you that it was?"

The smile faded on the man's face. "If your house is not for rent, why do you put a sign on it to that effect?" he asked rather coldly.

"Sign?" Mrs. Bobbsey repeated his word. "I have put no sign on the house."

"Well, one is there," stated the man. "It seems to me you had better look into the matter."

He and his wife stepped from the little porch of the cottage, climbed into their automobile, and drove away. The twins had followed their mother to the door. Now all the Bobbseys looked at one another.

"The man said a 'For Rent' sign was tacked on our new home, didn't he, Mother?" asked Flossie.

"That's right, dear. I'm going right over to see what he means."

Quickly she and the twins walked to their new summer home. The man was right. Nailed to a post on the front porch was a sign:

THIS HOUSE FOR RENT
INQUIRE OF MRS. BOBBSEY AT
OSGOOD COTTAGE

"This is the strangest thing I have ever heard of," the twins' mother said. "Who would have done such a thing?"

"It must have been some real estate man in town," said Bert. "He thought he could get some money for himself by renting the house for you."

"But his name is not on the sign," objected his mother.

"That's right," said Bert. "Well, maybe there's only one man, and he takes it for granted you know who he is."

There seemed to be no explanation for the mystery, especially when Mr. Osgood told them that there was no real estate man in town. The Bobbseys went to bed, wondering about it.

Early in the morning the twins and their mother went back to the new house. Bert had torn the "For Rent" sign from the post the evening before. Therefore, they were doubly surprised when a car drove up with a woman, three children, and several suitcases. The lady asked at once for Mrs. Bobbsey.

"I am Mrs. Bobbsey," said the twins' mother.

"Oh, this place is delightful," said the woman, who now had stepped from her automobile. "I will rent it without even going inside; in fact, I will take it at any price. It is just exactly what I have been looking for. The children will be so happy here. Won't you, children?" she asked them.

Then, without waiting for them to answer, she suggested that they get out of the car and bring the suitcases to the porch.

"But my house is not for rent," said Mrs. Bobbsey.

"Not for rent?" The woman looked as if she could not believe what she was hearing. "But the notice on the bulletin board down in Echo Valley says the place is for rent."

Once more Mrs. Bobbsey and the twins gazed at one another in amazement. Someone was doing more than playing a joke on them. This was getting serious!

"I am very sorry," said Mrs. Bobbsey. "But there has been some mistake. I have no intention of renting my house at this time. Maybe at some future date I shall do so. But right now we are moving into it ourselves. It is too bad if you have been put to any inconvenience. But the place is not for rent."

Bert helped the caller back into her car, and she drove away, looking suspiciously at the Bobbseys. The woman was not convinced that there had been a mistake. She was inclined to think that Mrs. Bobbsey did

not want to rent the place to her because of the children.

In a little while Mr. Osgood came over with his automobile, and Mrs. Bobbsey took the family to Echo Valley to meet Daddy. They stopped at the town bulletin board to tear off the "For Rent" sign which someone had posted there. Then, still wondering about the mystery, they drove on to the station. To their amazement, another sign, saying the new Bobbsey summer home was for rent, was tacked up on the side of the station.

As they stood there gazing at it, the ticket agent came from the inside of the building. There was an angry look in his eyes.

"Don't you know it's agin the law to use railroad property for private use?" he yelled at the Bobbseys. "Take that sign down, and don't you never put up another!"

"But—but," said Bert.

"Don't but me!" said the man. "I'm responsible for this here building, and I ain't goin' to let nobody tack up signs. Do you understand?"

The embarrassed Bobbsey family stood there. Could they ever make this man believe that they had not done it?

CHAPTER XXII

WELCOME ARRIVALS

MRS. BOBBSEY was sure someone was playing a joke on the family, but she was annoyed by the inconvenience which it had caused the people who had come to look at the house. While she was trying to explain this to the station agent, two people came in to buy tickets. So the man went back into his office.

"There's Danny Rugg and his father!" exclaimed Bert, as the two came toward the station.

Suddenly it occurred to the Bobbsey boy that it might have been Danny who had played the trick on them. It would be just like him to try to get square with Bert for having caused him to be punished.

"I'll find out!" the twin declared.

On an inspiration he dashed up the street to the hardware store.

"Have you sold any 'For Rent' signs lately?" Bert asked the clerk breathlessly, running up to the counter.

The man scratched his head. " 'For Rent' signs? Well, let me see. Oh, yes, I did."

"Was it to Danny Rugg?" cried Bert.

"I believe it was," replied the clerk. "Yes, I sold three of them to that boy. Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"N—no," said Bert. "Except he used them to play a trick and got some people into trouble."

Without waiting for the man to make any comment, Bert ran from the store and hurried back to the station. The train had already come in. Mrs. Bobbsey and the children were hustling up the platform to meet Daddy. Mr. Rugg and his son had boarded the train, which now started away. Bert was too late to have it out with Danny.

"I'll see him when I get home anyway," the twin determined. "He can't get away with a trick like that!"

Flossie already was in her father's arms. He was smiling broadly, and saying, "How is my little Fat Fairy?" He set her down and picked up Freddie. "And how's my Little Fireman? Have you had to put out any fires since you came to Echo Valley?"

He kissed Mrs. Bobbsey and Nan. By this time Bert had reached the group and came in for a share of his father's greetings. Deborah, who had come along, was standing on the side, looking a little wistful. No doubt she was wishing that she, too, had a

mother and father. The Bobbseys made her feel welcome at once, however, and Nan began to talk to her friend on her fingers.

In the background stood Dinah, beaming upon the joyful group. She was holding a large pocketbook in one hand, and in the other a heavy package which looked suspiciously like something she had baked in the kitchen at home. Bert picked up Deborah's little suitcase and Dinah's old-fashioned valise. Then they all walked to the Osgood car.

This automobile had been crowded many times, but this time it was hopeless to try to put everyone and all the packages inside. Nan and Bert said they would walk home, and Deborah decided to accompany them.

"I love the country," she said to Nan in the sign language. "If I walk, it will be a good way to see the trees and flowers."

After the car went off, the three children trudged through the town and out onto the road which led to the Bobbsey summer home. Upon arriving, they noticed the delicious odor of a chicken dinner cooking. Dinah already had become familiar with the new kitchen!

Mrs. Bobbsey and Flossie were setting the table. It was very hard for the little girl to watch her mother putting borrowed dishes from Mrs. Osgood onto the table without giving away the secret of the new set the children had made.

These had been wrapped carefully by Nan and put into a large white box which Mrs. Osgood had given her. On the top was a card, on which she had written:

Mother, dear, this is for you.

We made it ourselves, so it's very new.

The Twins.

When the family and Deborah finally sat down to dinner, Mrs. Bobbsey saw the large package at her place. She read the card aloud, then in wonder opened the box. Her surprise and Daddy's, too, was very great. Even after the children had told them several funny stories in connection with making the dishes, they could hardly believe that the twins had made all these plates, cups, saucers, and bowls themselves.

Deborah was being very polite all this time, but she was curious to open a little package near her own plate. When the excitement over the dishes had died down, Freddie motioned to her to open her gift. None of the children but Nan knew what it was, and there were exclamations of delight from everyone as the deaf child withdrew a very pretty necklace and bracelet from the tissue paper.

"They are beautiful," Deborah spelled on her fingers. "Thank you so much. Did one of you make them?"

Nan owned up that she had, and they were passed around for everyone to see. The Bobbsey girl ex-

plained that she had cut small pieces from colored advertisements in magazines, rolled them up into tiny tubes, and then had varnished them. Finally she had strung them on a thread. From a little distance the necklace and the bracelet looked like many-colored jewels.

"This is the first jewelry I have ever had," Deborah told Nan in the sign language after she had put on her gifts.

The dinner was a happy affair, with good food and much laughter. When Dinah served the dessert, she brought in the new cup which the children had bought for Daddy Bobbsey at the auction sale. There were several merry moments as he lifted it to his lips.

"Nobody can see your face, Daddy, while you are drinking," giggled Flossie, and her father replied that he certainly would have to pay strict attention whenever he was using it and not look around the table while drinking.

Dinah's contribution to the party was a large cake. In the middle of it stood a lighted candle.

"Ah put dat candle on, 'cause dis is kind of like a birfday for de new old house," she smiled.

So that was what Dinah had been carrying so carefully from the train! The twins declared that they had never eaten better cake, and Deborah's eyes danced. She was a very happy little girl, and for the time be-

ing she had forgotten that she did not have a father and mother.

The rest of the day was spent in games. The next morning it was decided that Mr. Bobbsey would take the twins and their guest over to Mr. Batch's cottage. The circus man had given Bert directions, so they were able to walk through the woods straight to his home.

The children were very interested in Bruno's quarters. The big bear had a cave in the side of the mountain all to himself. In front of this was a fenced-in space where the pet walked around for exercise.

"Doesn't Bruno ever climb over the fence?" asked Freddie when Mr. Batch came from the house and spoke to his callers.

"Oh, no, he is too old now. The only reason I have a fence at all is so that anyone coming here will not be frightened. I will let him out, and you can play with him."

After Mr. Bobbsey and Deborah had been introduced to him, Mr. Batch unlocked the door, and old Bruno waddled out. At once he put up his right front paw to shake hands with the visitors.

"I want to ride him," said Flossie, so the circus man hoisted the little girl to the animal's back.

While the bear slowly walked around in a circle, Mr. Batch looked at Deborah.

"Does she look like anyone in your family?" Nan asked the man.

He finally shook his head. "I see no resemblance," he replied. "Your friend Deborah is a very sweet child, and I should like very much to be a relative of hers. It is too bad that no progress has been made in finding out who the little girl is."

"Daddy," called Nan, "did you hear anything from the advertisements you put in the newspapers to try to find Deborah's mother and father?"

Mr. Bobbsey walked over to the group. "I am sorry to say I did not receive a single reply," he told them. "It does seem as if we have come to a blank wall in trying to help Deborah."

It was at this moment, while no one was watching Flossie ride on Bruno's back, that a bee chose to sting the old bear on the nose. Instantly the animal forgot that he was old and that he was carrying a rider. With a howl of pain he dashed off through the woods. The little girl on his back screamed.

"Oh, Flossie!" cried Nan.

"Bruno!" thundered Mr. Batch.

But the animal did not stop. Flossie was swaying from side to side, trying her best to hang on!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PLAYHOUSE

As Flossie tried hard to cling to the back of old Bruno, who was dashing through the woods, Mr. Bobbsey and Mr. Batch started running. The others followed not far behind.

"I can't imagine what happened to the animal," said the former circus man. "He never did anything like that before."

The little Bobbsey twin now was out of sight, but the others could see the tracks made by Bruno's big paws. Bert outdistanced the rest of them. In a few moments he saw his little sister and the bear. Bruno was now standing quietly, his nose buried in the earth.

"Gee, Floss, but I'm glad you're all right," said Bert.

He helped the little girl from the bear's back just as her daddy and the others came running up. Mr. Batch spoke to Bruno. By this time the bear's nose

had started to swell, so his master knew that a bee had stung it. He told the others what had happened, and said he was mighty thankful Flossie had not been hurt.

"I'm glad, too," remarked the little girl. "Bruno went like the wind. I didn't have any reins to hold onto, so I had to pull his fur."

Freddie asked Mr. Batch if he would make the bear do his tricks for Daddy Bobbsey. After the animal had gone through them, the twins' father declared he never had seen a better performance.

"We have loads of other s'prises to show you," spoke up Flossie. "Let's take Daddy to the wishing well."

The others thought this was a good idea, so they went back to the new Bobbsey home and Bert ran off to see if they could borrow the Osgood car. In a few minutes Mr. Osgood himself drove up in it, and gave directions to Mr. Bobbsey on how to find Mrs. Bower's home and the wishing well. The group had a great deal of fun when they reached there, especially when Flossie leaned over the stone side and said:

"My wish hasn't come true yet. This time I wish you would hurry up and make my wish come true."

"What was your first wish?" her father asked her.

"That we would find a tree with a family on it for Deborah," his little daughter replied.

On her fingers Nan explained to the deaf girl that she should make a wish into the well. At first Deborah

did not understand, but after Nan talked with her a little more, the other girl leaned over the edge and held up her hand. When she had finished her wish, Nan told the others that the girl had said she hoped she would soon find her mother and father.

After she and the Bobbseys got back into the automobile again, Flossie asked her father if he would like to go on a "tour of 'spection." Her daddy laughed and said he would like to go on a tour of inspection and see all the things which his children had seen since coming to Echo Valley.

"Let's show him the place where the three echoes come back," suggested Bert, and told his father which road to take.

"That's where the dwarfs talk to you," Freddie informed him, and told Mr. Bobbsey how the little men who lived inside the mountain teased the visitors by calling back what they shouted.

"There must be three little men," decided Freddie, "because three of them answer."

When they came to the spot, they all climbed out. Mr. Bobbsey was very much impressed when he called loudly and the words came back faintly but distinctly three times in a row.

"It's too bad Deborah can't hear the echoes," said Flossie.

The little deaf girl did not seem to mind at all. She was very interested in seeing the lovely trees and

flowers which grew on the mountains on both sides of Echo Valley. She smiled as she saw a squirrel trying to take some food away from a blue jay, and getting his head pecked for his attempt to steal!

"I believe Deborah gets more out of Nature than the rest of us do," said Mr. Bobbsey. "Probably we could learn a lot from her."

Freddie told his father about the echo spirit Lesovik, and how he thought one of them had turned into a bear and was coming after him. Daddy Bobbsey laughed and said his children certainly did have many surprises for him.

"You haven't seen half of them yet," said Flossie. "We have to show you the cheese making and the clay bank and the place where Deborah's 'maybe-grandmother' used to live before her house burned down."

"Oh, yes, I should like to see the Markham place," declared Daddy Bobbsey. "Suppose we go there next."

He smiled at his little daughter. "Maybe she was Deborah's grandmother," he said. "I wish we had some way of finding out."

When they reached the farm next to their own, Deborah too became very interested in the ruins of the house. With her fingers she asked Nan to tell her the whole story. While the Bobbsey girl was doing this, the other twins wandered around. They pointed

out several things to their father, including the gnarled old tree which the fire had not touched.

"Isn't it a funny tree?" said Flossie. "It hasn't much family."

"That's right," agreed her father. "The wind has broken off a good many of the limbs."

After they had visited the Osgood cottage and the cheese house, and the brook with the special clay bank, the travelers ended their tour of inspection at their own house.

"I'll show you where I fell through to the cellar and discovered the furniture," said Bert.

"I'll show you the ice box that nearly turned me into a snowman," offered Freddie.

"I'll show you where we discovered the box of silver," said Nan.

"And—and I'll show you where the box of jewelry was hidden," interrupted Flossie, "and the place where the old, old tree was, and where Aunt Nellie is waiting for you in the closet."

Mr. Bobbsey laughed so hard at this that it was a moment before he could inquire who Aunt Nellie was. He let Flossie lead him up the stairway by the hand and introduce him to the headless dressmaking form with the long black dress on her.

"We thought she was a ghost," said Flossie.

A little later, when the twins went outside with De-

borah, they found Dinah walking around looking up at the house.

"Dis yeah am a very pretty place," the old cook remarked. "Ev'ryting so clean and shiny. But how come yo' all missed cleaning dat window up dere?"

The twins stared at a small window about halfway between the second and the third floors to which the old cook was pointing a finger. Each of them was trying to figure out which room it belonged to.

"That's funny," said Nan. "Mother and I thought we washed every window in this house. I can't figure out where that one is."

She hurried into the house, closely followed by her twin. The two of them went into every room on the second floor on that side of the building, but they did not find the unwashed window. Mystified, they raced up the attic stairs. There was no window on that side of the house.

"There must be a secret room some place!" cried Bert at last. "*Where* can it be?"

He called to the others, and a search was started for the hidden room. Every bit of wall, ceiling, and floor was examined on the side of the house where the mysterious window was. No sign of an opening or a trap door came to view.

"I'm going to try the closets," said Bert, opening the door to one in the room where he was standing. "This ought to be right under that window."

This was one place which had not been papered or painted, as it was lined with wood and had seemed clean enough to use the way it was. On the back wall Bert saw a crack. When he examined this closely, he found that it was a door. Like another in the house which he had discovered, it had no handle, but by this time Bert knew how to work the secret latches.

He pulled a wooden plug from the keyhole, inserted his finger through the secret opening, and lifted a tiny latch. At once the small door swung outward, revealing a short flight of steps.

"I've found it!" Bert cried, and the others came running to the spot.

Already the Bobbsey boy had scampered up the steps and was the first one of the family to see a most surprising sight.

"What is it?" cried Nan from the closet below.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOST IN THE STORM

EXCITEDLY the other children reached the hidden room and stared in astonishment. Even Deborah's eyes were wide with amazement.

"A playhouse with everything in it," exclaimed Nan.

The place was a complete miniature apartment, with living room, bedroom, and kitchen. The child-sized furniture even included a small piano.

For some time the children played house, but soon Nan realized that this was not much fun for Deborah, so the two girls went outdoors again. Flossie and Freddie continued their game, but Bert became more interested in trying to figure out just how this room had been built into the old house. At last he decided that it must have been formed from a space between the original building and one of the wings. The carpenters must have made a mistake in their figuring,

and later on some boy and his dad probably had built the playhouse.

It even had electricity in it, but the lights needed new bulbs. Bert went downstairs to see if he could find any which he could borrow, but there were none about. Mr. Osgood came just then, and said he was going to the next village on an errand.

"Would you like to go along?" he asked the boy.

"You'll go right past the answer echo place, won't you?" Bert asked him.

"Why, yes, I shall," replied the man. "Would you like to stop there?"

"I should like my father to hear the answer echo," said Bert. "I am sure there is some trick to the way it's done. I haven't guessed yet what it is, but I will some time," he determined.

Thus it was that Mr. Bobbsey and Bert hopped into the automobile and drove to the mysterious spot. Mr. Osgood stopped the car and they all got out.

"Daddy, suppose you ask Echo a question," suggested his son.

"Where shall I stand?" inquired his father.

"Oh, any place," replied Mr. Osgood, smiling.

Bert watched Mr. Osgood very carefully as his father shouted, "How many Bobbsey twins are there?"

"Four," the echo answered.

Suddenly the boy laughed and cried out, "Oh, now I know how it's done! Mr. Osgood, you are a ventriloquist. Why didn't I think of that before?"

The man smiled. "I knew you would catch on sooner or later, Bert. I learned to speak without moving my lips when I was just a boy about your age. I have had lots of fun doing it all my life. I'll show you how to do it if you like," he offered.

"Did you fool Mother?" asked Bert after they were in the car again.

"She guessed it right away," he replied. "We thought it would be fun to fool you children."

"You did that all right," agreed Bert. "Before we tell the others, won't you try some of your tricks at the house?"

"I should be very glad to do so," said Mr. Osgood. "I believe we can have some fun with Waggo."

When they returned to the Bobbsey home, the little twins heard a dog barking some place. They knew it was not Waggo, but they could not see another animal around. The Bobbsey pet himself was running all around, trying to locate the sound.

A few minutes later, while Flossie was standing alone near the old apple tree, a voice up above her asked the little girl how her dolls were getting along. The small twin looked upward, because she thought the person who had questioned her was sitting on one

of the branches, but no one was there. This was very strange!

A few moments later, Freddie heard someone shout faintly, "Fire! Fire!" He turned round and round to find out who had said this. No one seemed to be about, and certainly there was no fire.

All this time Bert was standing off at a little distance with Mr. Osgood. The boy was having a hard time to keep from laughing. At last the man suggested that the twin try a little ventriloquism himself. But this was the wrong thing to do. Bert was very clumsy, and gave the whole thing away.

"Oh, Mr. Osgood," cried Flossie when she realized what was going on, "you were the answer echo, weren't you? Echoes can't really answer, can they? They have to say just what you say."

"You're right," the man agreed. "Echoes will be the same as they always have been, I guess. There is really no trick about them at all."

Mrs. Bobbsey came from the house to tell her family that they were going to have a picnic supper in the woods. Later Dinah packed a basket, and Bert and his father carried it between them. The Bobbseys walked a good distance until they came to a place where there was a little stream. Here they sat down and enjoyed the sandwiches and fruit salad which the cook had prepared.

"I love it in the woods in the late afternoon," said

Mrs. Bobbsey. "The shadows are so pretty, and it is nice to listen to the birds twittering."

"They don't make so much noise at suppertime as they do at breakfast," said Flossie. "Crows make an awful noise in the morning."

Deborah seemed to enjoy herself immensely. She told Nan that the Bobbseys were the first people to take her on a picnic, and she was sorry when the twins' mother said they would have to go home. She did not give her reason for leaving so early, but she felt that a storm was coming up, and that they had best get back in plenty of time. It was not until they had reached their own house that Flossie missed a ring from her finger.

"Oh!" she said to herself. "I must have dropped it in the woods. I'd better go right back now, before it gets dark, and look for it."

The rest of the family and Deborah had gone inside and did not notice for some time afterward that Flossie was not around. In about half an hour the wind started to blow, and far off in the sky a jagged streak of lightning shone.

"I believe we'll have a heavy downpour," said Mrs. Bobbsey to Bert. "Will you go around and close all the windows, please?"

The storm came to Echo Valley faster than anyone had thought it would. In a very few minutes, the thunder was rolling loudly. Lightning played all over the

sky, and the rain poured down in sheets. The Bobbseys gathered in the living room.

"Why, Flossie isn't here," said Mrs. Bobbsey suddenly. "Where is she?"

No one knew. Freddie declared that he had been up in the secret playroom, but that his twin had not been with him. Bert felt sure Flossie was not in the house, because he had been all over it to close the windows and had not seen his little sister anywhere.

"She must have gone out to the barn," decided Mr. Bobbsey.

He put on his raincoat and dashed outside, but Flossie was not in the barn, nor was she anywhere in sight. Her father called loudly again and again, but there was no reply.

Worried, he returned to the house. When Mrs. Bobbsey realized that the little girl was not with him, she became quite upset. While they were discussing what to do next, there came a terrific flash of lightning, followed by a crash of thunder which nearly deafened them. The old house shook.

"That hit very close," said Mr. Bobbsey tensely.

"Oh, where is my little girl?" cried Mrs. Bobbsey softly. She was trying to remain brave in front of the other children. But this latest flash of lightning had rather unnerved her. "We must do something," she said.

Suddenly there were footsteps on the front porch. For a moment they all hoped Flossie had returned. It was not she, however, but Mr. Osgood, who had come in his car to see if the Bobbseys were all right. When he heard that the little girl was missing, he said he would go at once to search for her.

"I'll go with you," offered Bert. "Where do you think she might be?"

It was Nan who answered this question. She recalled having heard Flossie mumble something about losing her ring, and thought perhaps the small twin had gone back into the woods to search for it.

"In that case, she is probably lost," said Mr. Bobbsey, "and I don't like the idea of her being near the trees while it is lightning."

The rain slackened a little as the storm slowly moved away. Mr. and Mrs. Bobbsey, Mr. Osgood, Bert and Nan set out to search for the missing Flossie. Waggo insisted upon going, but he was not able to pick up the scent of the little girl's footsteps. The heavy rain had washed it away.

Carrying lanterns and flashlights, the group looked and looked, going all the way back to the picnic spot, but Flossie did not answer their calls.

"Oh, what shall we do?" exclaimed Mrs. Bobbsey in despair. "Any one of a hundred things could have happened to Flossie."

For a few moments no one spoke. Then suddenly an idea came to Nan.

"Why don't we use the echo?" she suggested. "Let's try calling to the mountain opposite. Maybe Flossie will hear our voices and answer."

CHAPTER XXV

THE TREE'S MESSAGE

MOTHER and Daddy Bobbsey thought Nan's suggestion to try using the echo to find Flossie a very good one. The storm was over entirely now, and there was not a sound except the drip of water from the trees.

"Richard, you call," said Mrs. Bobbsey anxiously.

"Flos-sie!" shouted the lost twin's father. "Where—are—you?"

Everyone listened intently for an answer. They noticed nothing but the echo of Mr. Bobbsey's words, so he repeated the cry. This time Nan thought she heard something besides the repetition of her father's call.

"I believe that was Flossie!" she said excitedly. "Please call again and tell her to shout."

Once more Daddy Bobbsey said to the opposite mountain, "Flossie—Bobbsey. Where—are—you? Shout—loud!"

Distinctly his words came back. Then from across the valley they heard very faintly:

"I'm—here. Where—are—you?"

"It's Flossie! My precious Flossie!" cried Mrs. Bobbsey, and tears of joy rolled down her cheeks. "But where is she?"

"Maybe she's on that other hill," said the twins' father. "How can we ever find her in this darkness?"

"Mr. Osgood once told us when we were on that side that a child's voice couldn't reach over here," Nan spoke up.

"That's right," agreed Mr. Osgood. "I'm sure your little girl is somewhere in the woods on this side."

"Then we aren't hearing an echo at all?" asked Mr. Bobbsey.

"I'm sure that was an echo of Flossie's voice," said Mr. Osgood. "Even though she couldn't call loudly enough for a human being on the other side of the valley to hear her, the mountain could pick up the sound, and send it back. I believe Flossie may not be a great distance from us, but the heavy growth of trees and bushes keeps her voice from reaching us directly. So the echo is doing the work."

Mr. Bobbsey shouted again, asking Flossie where she was. At last the answer came back faintly:

"By the baby birds."

"Baby birds?" repeated her father. "What does she mean?"

"I know!" cried Bert excitedly. "One day when Mr. Osgood's son was here, he took us for a walk in the woods. Flossie found a nest with little song sparrows in it."

"Can you take us to it?" asked the boy's mother eagerly. "Poor Flossie! She must be cold and wet and scared."

"We're coming!" shouted Mr. Bobbsey as Bert and Nan led the way.

The twins remembered what Dyke Osgood had told them about using marks in the forest as guides. This was harder to do now than it would have been in the daylight, but the twins pushed on through the sopping wet woods, using the lanterns to spot familiar trees or other signs.

"I think we're almost there," declared Bert about twenty minutes later. "Flossie!" he called loudly.

"I'm waiting," said a little voice from the darkness not very far ahead.

The searchers hurried forward. In another minute the lanterns shone on Flossie Bobbsey, standing by a tree near the nest where the baby birds were. Her mother clasped the child in her arms.

"My darling!" she cried. "I'm so glad you're safe!"

"Were you worried about me?" Flossie asked in surprise. "I wasn't scared a bit, except once when the lightning came close. Mr. Dyke Osgood said we

shouldn't ever be afraid in the woods—not even at night—and if we got lost, just stand still and somebody would find us.”

“You blessed child, to remember all that,” said Mrs. Bobbsey, proud of her small daughter. “And now we must go right home and get you warm.”

It was not until the next morning that the family heard the whole story of Flossie's adventure. She told how she had lost the ring and gone back for it, then decided to go on to see the baby birds again.

“It started to rain awful hard, and I couldn't see which way to go,” the little girl said. “So I stood still. It never got light again. But the birdies didn't get scared, so I didn't either. Did the lightning hit something?” she asked.

“Let's go find out,” suggested Bert. “I saw that one bolt come down on the Markham place.”

All the twins and Deborah hurried over to the next farm. What a surprise awaited them!

“The old tree!” cried Nan. “That's what the lightning hit.” Going closer, she exclaimed, “And look! There's something inside!”

The bolt had split the tree in half. One side of it lay on the ground, and near the trunk was a small box. When Nan picked it up, the cover opened. A small photograph fluttered to the ground. Excitedly Deborah grabbed it.

"It's a picture!" exclaimed Nan. "Deborah's name is on the back!"

The twins crowded around to look at it. Then quickly the children glanced through the papers in the box. Several of them they did not understand, but they could read enough to learn that the box belonged to Mrs. Markham, who had hidden it in the tree; that her daughter had married a man named Henry Condyl, and that they had a baby daughter named Deborah.

"Your name is Deborah Condyl" cried Flossie.

Of course, the deaf girl could not hear her, but there was no need of this. She had read the papers herself. Now she excitedly began to talk to Nan in the language of the deaf.

Bert said he thought they should carry the box home at once. When the children, out of breath, reached the house, another surprise awaited them. A strange man and woman were talking with Mr. and Mrs. Bobbsey.

"This is Mr. Condyl, and his wife Mrs. Condyl," said the twins' mother. "These are my tw—"

"Condyl, did you say?" exclaimed Bert, so excited that he forgot to be polite. "You're—you're Deborah's parents then?"

Mr. and Mrs. Bobbsey wondered how their son had guessed this. Quickly explanations were made on both

sides, and there was no doubt that these people, who had answered Mr. Bobbsey's advertisement in the newspaper, were the little deaf girl's father and mother.

Nan was afraid they might be disappointed to learn their daughter could not hear, but they were not surprised at all. Mr. Condry explained that both his parents were born deaf. He had always had to talk with them on his fingers. Now he turned to Deborah and told her in the sign language that he was her father and the sweet lady beside him was her mother.

"Oh, isn't it wonderful!" cried Flossie, clapping her hands and dancing around the room, while Deborah rather shyly went over to her new-found mother and hugged her.

Her father held out his arms and the girl, smiling at him, snuggled close to him. What a lovely feeling it was to have found parents at last! In a little while Mr. Batch came over, and there was a great reunion.

"Please tell us all about what happened the night of the fire at Mrs. Markham's house," Nan begged the Condys.

"There isn't much to tell," replied Deborah's mother. "My husband and I are on the stage. We thought it best to leave our baby Deborah with her grandmother Markham. The very day after we had gone away, the house must have caught on fire.

"Mr. Condry and I didn't hear from Mother in so long that we thought it was strange. So we came back here to see how things were. It was a dreadful shock, and all these years we have believed what the people in the village told us—that Mrs. Markham had never been heard of since the fire.

"Of course, we thought Deborah had lost her life, too, and we have been very sad over it. Now it is like a lovely dream come true to think we have our child with us again."

"Do you play on the stage now?" asked Flossie when Mrs. Condry stopped speaking.

"Yes, both my husband and I do," the woman answered. "We'll have to make some arrangements about Deborah going to school, because we travel all the time."

"Perhaps she can keep on living with Aunt Sallie Pry," said Nan. "Then you could see her whenever you were near by."

The Bobbsey girl explained about the place where they had met Deborah, and what a sweet person old Aunt Sallie was. The Condrys agreed the arrangement might be a very good one, and the next day they went off to Lakeport with Deborah to see about it.

The Bobbsey twins continued to talk over the mystery long after the others had gone. They wondered if any vacation ever again could turn out to be as excit-

ling as this one. But I think if you will look into the next adventures they had, called "The Bobbsey Twins on the Pony Trail," you will find that they did.

"Flossie, your wish came true," said Mrs. Bobbsey, smiling at her little daughter. "The tree that the lightning hit *did* have a family on it for Deborah."

The others laughed, and Daddy said he was glad all the mysteries of Echo Valley had been cleared up, for now they could enjoy the new summer home without anything on their minds.

"If Danny Rugg had had his way, we shouldn't be here enjoying it," declared Bert. "As soon as I get back to Lakeport, I'm going to settle with him for the trick he played on us, trying to make us rent the house."

"Are you going to fight him?" asked Freddie enthusiastically.

"No," said Bert with a wise smile, "I'll try some ventriloquism on him, and make him do things he doesn't want to. I may even try an answer echo on him!"

THE END