

Chapter 4

Brownie Like Me

“I don’t think this is gonna work,” said Skeeter.

“Oh of course it is,” snapped Janey Orrick, who was her best friend and very intense.

“Don’t be such a scaredy-cat.”

“I’m not a scaredy-cat!”

“You are! I oughta start calling you ‘Scaredy’ Kitefly.”

“You do and I’ll give you something to be scared about.”

“Never mind, forget it. Hand me the knife.”

“What knife?”

“How’re we supposed to cut this up without a knife?”

“Use this,” said Skeeter, producing the backboard from a Big Chief tablet.

“Oh for Pete’s sake!”

“Try it, it’ll work. Just like on *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*”

Shaking her intense head, Janey thrust the backboard into the pan-sized brownie-slab that Skeeter had smuggled out of Gramma Otto’s deepfreeze and up to the treehouse.

“Well, I *guess* this’ll work...”

“Be careful! You’re cutting them all raggedy—here, let me—”

“*I’ll* do it! *You* load ‘em in the shoeboxes.”

Skeeter complied, though not without grumbling. “I still think we could probably get into a whole lotta trouble doing this.”

“Oh of course if you’re CHICKEN...”

“Who’re you calling CHICKEN, Miss—Miss Yellow-Bellied Jellyfish?!”

(Shrieks of eight-year-old laughter.)

“Okay! Hide the evidence while I go on the lookout,” said Janey, peeping out the front door. “Okay—coast is clear. Ready?”

“Ready!—no, wait a sec—” Skeeter smoothed her hair back, straightened her uniform, tugged her vest into place.

“Oh *quit* primping. Come on!”

“Yessir Sergeant, right away Sergeant. Your beanie’s on backwards again, Sergeant.”

“Good!” said Janey, preceding her down the ladder. “I like it like that!”

“I guess you must,” Skeeter agreed, jumping to the ground. “(Oof.) You had it on backwards when we toured the fire station, and you had it on *sideways* when we sang at the old folks’s home—”

“Oog! I don’t care what the troop leaders say, I am *not* going back there anymore. Not even at Christmas!”

“I thought you liked to sing.”

“What’s that got to do with it? Anyway, who could like singing after that time we played Musical Desks and Cathy Sue had a *nosebleed* all over mine?”

“Oh yeeeahhh,” Skeeter said reminiscently. “She really oughta quit picking it.”

“She didn’t even wipe it all up!”

“Well how could she? They sent her to the nurse’s office—”

“*Never mind*, let’s get going!... Okay. Chestnut Street. Let’s try the Hacklanders first.”

“I don’t like the Hacklanders.”

“Well neither do I, but they’ll buy anything,” said Janey. She started marching up their front walk, but Skeeter hauled her back.

“We’re gonna get arrested like a couple of crooks! We’ll end up in reform school and have to make license plates—”

“Look: we’re Brownies, right? And *these* are brownies, right? And we’re not SAYING they’re Brownie Girl Scout brownies, are we? It’s not *our* fault people jump to conclusions, is it?”

“Oh all right already. But you do all the talking.”

(Knock knock knock.)

“Hello! Would you like to buy some brownies? They’re very delicious... No, we’re not taking orders for cookies just yet; we’ll come back later about those... Thanks, Mrs. Hacklander, that’ll be fifty cents. Bye-bye...”

“WHEW!” went Skeeter, safely distant. “I can’t *believe* that worked!”

“Told you so! Told you! Lookit this—two quarters! We are going to be rolling in dough.”

“Hee hee! ‘Rolling in dough.’”

“Let’s try Amy’s house next—”

“*No*, not Amy’s! Her mom knows the Sheriff.”

“Oh will you cool it? We’re wearing the perfect disguise.”

And impeccably camouflaged they made their illicit way down Chestnut Street, up Sycamore, and over to Locust.

“Who lives here?”

“The Thorpes used to. Did you know Marilyn Thorpe? She was all the time picking on littler kids. Once at a picnic she pushed Laurie clear into Welmer’s Lake and then told Mrs. Mills that Laurie *fell* in.”

“Gosh, I sure am sorry I missed knowing *her*. So who lives here now? Let’s find out!... Hi there! Would you like to buy some brownies? We’ve got with and without nuts; they’re both extra good. Just one? That’ll be twenty-five cents... Yes, ‘the fourth part of a dollar,’ hee hee... Thanks!... GEE what a creep.” Then, elaborately nonchalant: “Say, let’s try the Scolleys next.”

“I know why!”

“You do not!”

“You wanna sell Jeff a browwww-nie!”

“I do not!”

“*Yes* you do—you wanna make him your BOYfriend! ‘Skee-ter’s in luh-uvv’—”

“You take that back, Janey Orrick! I don’t particularly care one way or the other about—what did you say his name is? ‘Jeffrey,’ is it?”

“Well *I* heard *he* thinks *you’re* cute.”

“Really? WELL! I never! You can just go tell whoever you heard *that* from that *I* think *Jeff’s* got cooties!”

(Shrieks.)

(No one answered the Scolleys’s doorbell.)

By the time the girls reached Market Square, they had accumulated four whole dollars while reducing their shoebox contents to crumbs. So on they hurried to the drugstore, outside which Ruthie Mundt—ultrasophisticated at age ten—was casually loitering.

“You two look like a couple of geeks in those getups,” said Ruthie, with wrinkled nose.

“Never mind that. Have you got the stuff?”

They went around the corner into White’s Alley, away from passers-by, to conduct their transaction. Glancing left and right, Ruthie opened a paper bag and unveiled a carton of Pall Mall Menthols.

“‘Come to the forest-fresh taste,’” Skeeter giggled.

“Five bucks,” said Ruthie.

“FIVE! You told me four!”

“Pipe down, will you? It’s five bucks, take it or leave it.”

“Laurie’ll sell us a carton for *lots* less than that!”

“So why aren’t you buying from her, then?”

“Well, hers are unfiltered,” said Skeeter. “And we’ve only got four dollars.”

“Tell you what—four packs for four bucks.”

“You must be kidding!” snapped Janey, with intensity; and she proceeded to haggle Ruthie Mundt down to \$2.50 in quarters and dimes.

“Hunh! Don’t bother me again till you’ve got some *folding* money. Okay, kiddies,

hold out your grubby little paws: two for you, two for you. And now, ta-ta—*I'm* going into the drugstore and buy some Yardley Slicker.”

“Yeah well that sounds like a raincoat!” Janey sneered after her. “Darn that Ruthie! *I* hear she puts out.”

“Puts out?”

“You know—gives tongue to guys she’s kissing.”

“EWWWGGKH!” Skeeter observed; though not without speculation as to what “putting out” to Jeff Scolley might taste like.

The girls had already done plenty of experimental smoking, despite a lack of material. Janey’s mother had been raised Mormon, and wouldn’t allow tobacco in her house; and Gramma Otto, while puffing through quite a few cigarettes, was nobody’s fool and kept them under literal lock and key.

“When we get BOYfriends, we can take *their* cigarettes,” Skeeter’d decided. “Till then we’re on our own.”

So, prematurely embosoming themselves by hiding their Pall Malls down the front of their uniforms, the girls retreated to a shady spot by the railroad tracks to strike another blow for capable maturity.

“Hey—what about matches?”

“Oh HELL!”

“*Jane-ey!*”

“Dammit, dammit, dammit to pitchforks!!”

Skeeter clapped a grubby little paw over her own stuPENdous mouth and goggled at her. “What you *said!*”

“I mean it, too! We’re never gonna learn how to smoke right.”

“No, wait a minute. We’re practically Junior Girl Scouts, aren’t we?”

“I guess. So what?”

“So we’ll smoke ‘em like Girl Scouts do! Let’s rub a couple of STICKS together—”

