

Hazel Whitmore Book 3

MISTAKEN

PROMISES

by

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GoatKeepers Press

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This novel is available in print and as an ebook. More information can be found at the author's website: <http://www.karengoatkeeper.com>.

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Chapter 1 You Will Pay

Hazel stood in front of her open locker jostled by other students going by. She read again the note she'd found on the bottom of her locker. "You will pay."

The nightmare should be over. Hatred had killed Grandmother Mary Beth and should have been buried with her after the Christmas shooting. Was it someone's idea of a sick joke? It wasn't funny.

"Hazel, it's almost time for the bell," said Lily. "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing." Hazel tossed her shoulder length golden brown hair behind her shoulders and shoved the note into her book bag as she pulled out her math book and notebook. "Let's get to class."

"Hello, Lily. How's your mother, Hazel?" asked Mr. Archer.

"She came home from the hospital last Saturday. She's doing fine."

"Rachael says she's fine too. I'm glad."

"I am too." Hazel looked over toward where the Whitmores stood. Rachael's cast was so white over her arm. Her twin sister Esther turned away, but not before Hazel saw a maze of scabs and stitches on her face.

Hazel's breath caught. Grandmother Mary Beth, Mother and Rachael had been shot. She hadn't known about Esther's face.

The Whitmores folded themselves around Rachael and Esther turning their backs toward the class. Only Linda looked at Hazel, her face a blank mask.

The bell rang.

"All right, class. Your practice problem is on the board. Let's sit down and get to work. Vacation's over."

Groans rolled around the room as everyone abruptly sat down getting out paper and pencils. Mr. Archer's lips twitched as he took roll.

"I already have homework for tonight," said Hazel to Lily as they walked into Mrs. Victor's social studies classroom.

"Me too. You'll help me with the math?"

"Sure. Call me tonight. We might have time next hour."

"Not in Health."

"That's right, we're not in Quest this semester. I'll miss it."

"Tardy bell," announced Mrs. Victor. "Everyone sit down."

By the end of second hour Hazel had more homework, although she had gotten most of it done in class. She joined Lily at the door to go back to their lockers then on to Health.

"Where do we go for Health?" Hazel asked Lily.

"There's a room down off the gym."

"Who teaches it?"

"Mrs. Stephens."

"Who's she?"

"One of the high school teachers."

Hazel and Lily moved over to the far row of desks in the room and sat down. The five Whitmore girls arranged themselves around Rachael on the other side. The rest of the seventh grade girls sat uneasily in the middle.

Mrs. Stephens looked over the students. "As long as you can be quiet and pay attention, I won't move you around."

Soft sighs whispered around the room. Hazel found Linda was looking at her again. Had she written the note? Was the note for real? Was the nightmare starting again?

“Hazel, go get your book,” whispered Lily.

Hazel leaped to her feet and went up to get a book from the bookcase. Annoyance put a bit of a frown on her face.

“You are Hazel Whitmore?” asked Mrs. Stephens.

“Yes.” Hazel hastily relaxed shoving unpleasant thoughts back in her book bag with the note.

“Book number?” Mrs. Stephens checked Hazel off and called Lily up to get a text.

“Read the book, answer the questions,” mumbled Hazel to Lily as they walked out of the room after the bell.

“At least that’s easy to do.”

“It’s the only class I’ve finished my homework for.”

“I still have two questions to go.”

The lunch room arranged itself much as Health class had. The Whitmores stayed at one table. Lily and Hazel went to their regular lunch spot on the other side of the cafeteria. Other students filled in the other tables and talked among themselves.

“Are we still doing those newspaper articles?” asked Lily.

“I guess so. Mother won’t go back to work for another week, maybe longer, according to the doctor.”

“Do we have enough money to order our chickens?”

“I think so. When is the Project meeting?” asked Hazel.

“Maybe Mr. Triplett will tell us during class today.”

“Are we still getting the Buff Orpington pullets?”

“Twelve for each of us. Father wants me to get one cockerel too.”

“What’s that?”

“A rooster. That way we can set eggs for chicks next year.”

“Maybe I should get one of those too. My chicken house is cleaned up and ready. Grandfather said we will put the brooder up this week end.”

“The pen for my chickens is done now. I don’t have a brooder, but Father says he can make one.”

Mrs. Adams greeted her students at her door. They filed in and sat in their assigned seats.

“Class, we have been offered a special opportunity. Mr. Braswell who owns the paper has offered to print and bind a book of short stories for the class.”

To Hazel’s right, Jake sank down in his seat as did his friends Billy and Luke. The former Quest girls straightened up. What would the stories be about?

“We will still be doing grammar and reading literature. The stories are extra.”

Grumbles rumbled around the room quickly dying under Mrs. Adams’ steely gaze.

“The book must be done before the quarter ends so we need to get started soon. When Mr. Braswell printed the stories about veterans for Quest, he needed two weeks to print it. The quarter ends the middle of March so we need to have the stories completely done the third week of February.”

“What kind of stories?” asked Nathan waving his hand.

“We’ll talk about that in a minute. You will do several drafts and we will critique them so you can make corrections and changes. Now, what kind of stories do you want to write?”

“Esther and I just read a book of stories about one object with different owners,” said Rachael. “Maybe we could all write a story about one object or place or something.”

“That would give all of the stories a connection,” said Mrs. Adams. “But, what genre or kind of stories?”

“Do all the stories need to be the same genre?” asked Violet shifting her waist length black hair. “Why can’t we write the genre we like?”

“That would make the book more interesting,” said Jenna.

“What’s a genre?” asked Jonathon.

“Things like history, scifi, romance,” said Kayla.

“I like scifi,” commented Nathan. “Can we do scifi?”

“Paranormal,” called Andrew. “Can I do a superhero story?”

“Is paranormal a genre?” asked Esther.

“I think it’s usually part of scifi or horror,” said Mrs. Adams.

“What about westerns?” asked Andrew.

“I want to do something funny,” said Michael. “Maybe I’ll do some kind of prank like for Halloween.”

Groans met this from victims of Michael’s last prank.

“Humor is fine,” said Mrs. Adams. “However, this is a school project so all the stories must be acceptable to our principal Mr. Weisman.”

Michael sank down in his seat.

“Can we work in pairs?” asked Kaitlyn. “I can write my own story, but I want to work with someone to fix it.”

“We’ll do some of that after you have your first drafts,” said Mrs. Adams. “I do like Rachael’s suggestion of having some unifying theme, like an object or a place, to tie the stories together.”

“I don’t think an object would work,” said Jenna. “I want to do something historical but scifi is usually future.”

“Unless it’s like a museum,” said Hazel. “Lily and I write about things in the Historical Museum, but we talk to the people alive today about them.”

“What is this museum, some sort of futuristic place?” said Linda. “That’s the only way you could get future stories, but then the rest of us would all be historical.”

“I think Jenna’s right,” said Scott. “An object, even a museum full of objects won’t work.”

“A place won’t work either,” said Kaitlyn. “Buildings don’t last for centuries.”

“They do in Europe,” said Brenden. “My sister went to France on that French class trip. She says some of the houses were built centuries ago and people still live in them.”

“Why not a street?” said Jessica.

“It could be like in a small town with both houses and shops on it,” said Violet. “Maybe a café, an outdoor café.”

“Streets change over time,” said Hazel. “Maybe there should be some old building, like that stone bank on the Courthouse square in town, that stays over the years.”

“And we could limit the time,” said Jenna. “Let’s say from two hundred years past to two hundred years in the future.”

“The building could have been a mansion in the beginning,” said Violet.

“Then the street goes in, shops get built,” said Jenna.

“Maybe the mansion is haunted,” said Andrew.

“Maybe it gets turned into a hotel,” said Scott. “Then some mysterious visitor registers and gets murdered.”

“Spies, I can write a spy story like James Bond or Bourne or something,” said David.

“Could cowboys be in the building too?” asked Jake sliding back up behind his desk.

“We’ll have to work out a history for your building tomorrow,” said Mrs. Adams. “It’s time for the bell. Bring in your story ideas tomorrow.”

“We don’t have to write our story tonight do we?” asked Jake.

“No, you just need an idea for it tomorrow so we can do a history of this building.”

At the bell the class poured out the door in various stages of excitement and gloom. The mood stayed as they sat down in Mr. Triplett’s science class. A 4-H Chicken Project meeting announcement took up one corner of the board.

“Grandfather and I can pick you up Saturday,” Hazel whispered to Lily.

“Father may want to go,” Lily whispered back.

“Chicken project members can discuss the meeting later,” rumbled Mr. Triplett. “Class, open your books and start today’s assignment.”

Lily tried to sink out of sight behind her desk to the sound of Jake’s snicker to her side. Hazel flipped her book open planning to not have homework from this class too. She glanced over at Lily and saw tears trickling down her burning cheeks.

Jake was grinning and his mouth opened. Hazel glared at him daring him to say something. Jake ran his hand through his unruly black hair and suddenly found his book very interesting, but the grin remained.

Mrs. Parker began gym class with the normal laps around the old gym. Rachael ran the laps surrounded by the other Whitmore girls, then retired to the bleachers.

“We’ll be working on basketball this quarter,” announced Mrs. Parker. “Rachael, you will be on the bleachers for now. First team is Linda, Jessica, Esther, Kaitlyn and Ladonna. Second team is Mary, Jenna, Violet, Kayla. Hazel, do you know how to play?”

“No.”

“Lily, you’ll be on the team. Hazel, you can fill in as needed. Teams, get together and assign positions. We’ll do practice drills in five minutes.”

Hazel wandered over to the second team to listen. Lily had curled in on herself again, shoulders hunched and looking at the floor with her back humped, the way Hazel remembered her doing when they first met. The team was looking at each other uncertainly.

“Who’ll be captain and center?” asked Jenna.

“Kayla plays the best,” said Mary. “Why don’t you be captain Kayla?”

“I guess. You and Jenna are the next best players so you be the forwards.”

“That leaves Lily and me as guards,” said Violet.

“What do the positions do?” asked Hazel.

“Center organizes and leads the plays,” snapped Kayla. “Forwards do most of the shooting. Guards try to keep the other team from shooting and move the ball up the court for the forwards. Didn’t your New York school do any team sports?”

“Track was the closest.”

“We’re going to get creamed,” whined Violet.

“Don’t we always?” answered Kayla. “Lily, do you know how to dribble the ball?”

“Yes,” whispered Lily.

“Practice drills,” called Mrs. Parker.

Hazel stayed with the second team through the drills trying to copy them dribbling the ball. The girls got tired of chasing the ball and sent her to sit in the bleachers. As she climbed up the bleachers to where Rachael was sitting half way up watching glumly, she thought how much the Whitmore girls looked alike. All were tall, thin, athletic, brown haired and brown eyed. Even she fit the mold with her golden brown hair and brown eyes.

“Will you explain basketball to me?” asked Hazel plopping down on the bleacher seat.

Rachael glared through a deep frown at her and started to turn away.

“Please, I do want to know. You must be pretty good.”

“Good? Esther and I are the best!”

“What position do you play?”

“We’re forwards. Esther can make three pointers most of the time.”

“What’s a three pointer?”

“Don’t you know anything?”

“Not about basketball and, if you don’t tell me, I won’t ever know much.”

Rachael started explaining about basketball. Hazel watched the drills as she explained what each drill was for. By the end of class Rachael was smiling.

“I don’t want to play,” groaned Lily on the way to the buses. “When Rachael plays, I’m extra. I’m not good at basketball.”

“Rachael was telling me about dribbling the ball. Call me tonight and I’ll tell you what she said.”

“After dinner.”

Hazel ran up the step into the bus. “You almost missed the bus,” said Mr. Watson as the door snapped shut behind her.

“You wouldn’t leave me.” Hazel laughed and slid into the seat next to Kayla.

“Was Rachael Whitmore really talking to you?” asked Kayla.

“She was telling me about basketball. She likes it a lot.”

“She and Esther are great players.”

“I’m going to tell Lily what she said about how Lily can do better.”

“Maybe that will help. Lily’s terrified of playing. None of us are happy.”

“The first team is the school team?”

“And they play rough.”

“That was a reason I heard why my old school didn’t do team sports. Instead we had gym to learn individual skills we could do later on. I liked archery.”

“Archery? Why didn’t you take that in 4-H? We need some good archers.”

“I could only do two projects so I chose cooking and chickens.”

Kayla sighed. Hazel gathered her things to get off the bus. She stepped down onto the drive in front of her Grandfather’s mobile home. His truck was gone, so he had gone to town. She checked the mailbox, then went to the right around the home and downhill on the path to her big, hundred year old story and a half house.

The house was still dirty and needed painting, but the windows were clean. At least the screen door looked new and hung on both hinges now. And the front porch had new boards making it safe to walk across. No cobwebs hung from the ceilings. Hazel, Mother and Grandfather had worked hard making the house livable again after it sat empty for almost ten years.

“Mother, I’m home.”

"I'm still in bed. Did you bring in the mail?"

Hazel walked into Mother's room and found her cats sprawled out on the bed. "Hello Mittens. Are you being good Mischief? The mailbox was empty. I'll feed the wood furnace after putting my book bag in my room. What do you want for dinner?"

"Something hot like stew or soup. Will you make some muffins?"

"Muffins go well with stew."

Hazel bounced up the stairs to her room. Tossing her book bag on the desk she looked out her window. Deep shadows were creeping across the driveway under grey clouds. Beef stew would be good tonight. Maybe raisins would be good in the muffins.

Downstairs the kitchen was soon warm and filled with the smells of stew. The cats arrived taking up residence on the chairs by the table. Hazel stopped to pet them, washed her hands and started mixing the muffins. She slid the muffin pan of batter into the oven.

"Dinner smells ready," said Grandfather walking into the kitchen a half hour later.

"You must have dinner radar," laughed Hazel. "You seem to arrive just in time every night."

"Not every night. I can miss a few more, if I'm not welcome."

"I made plenty. In fact I was just putting yours in a bowl when you got here. I'll take Mother's in to her."

"I'm getting very bored staying in bed, although the room service is nice," commented Mother. "I'm going to complain tomorrow when I go in for physical therapy. Do you want to watch a movie tonight?"

"I have homework. It may not take long."

"The teachers must be getting ready for snow days to give homework your first day back. Grandfather's in the kitchen?"

"He's eating dinner."

"You better go out and get yours."

Hazel's dinner had cooled a little. She sat down and munched on a bite of muffin.

"I'm thinking I should take you to the shooting range and teach you to fire that revolver," remarked Grandfather.

"I don't ever want to see that gun again."

"You need to know how to shoot. You almost shot me aiming at him."

Hazel looked down at her suddenly tasteless stew and put down her spoon. Why did Grandfather have to remind her about shooting now? "We have a chicken project meeting Saturday to order our chicks. I told Lily we would pick her up on the way."

"Are you still getting Buff Orpingtons?"

"Yes, and I think we have enough money from the newspaper articles to pay for them. Lily's getting something called a cockerel with her pullets. She said it's a rooster. Should I get one?"

"You don't have to, but a rooster is nice with a flock."

"Maybe I'll do that. I'll look in the catalog tonight."

"You'll stop writing those articles now?"

"We like doing them. And we need money for chicken feed. We'll keep doing them until Mr. Braswell says to stop."

"I think I'll go in and talk to Juliana for a time. Thanks for a good dinner."

Hazel choked down her stew, cleaned up the dishes, then went up to do her homework. The cats were now on her bed. She sat down to pet them. Orange tabby

Mittens kneaded her leg with her big feet with the extra toes. Black and white Mischief curled up around her hand pretending to attack it. Pulling her hand free she went over to her desk and dumped out her books.

The note landed on top of the books. Hazel looked at it, picked it up and read it again. Should she tell Mother about it? It still might be some sick joke. Mother didn't need to worry about trouble starting up again. Grandfather would insist on teaching her to shoot that gun. She folded up the note and put it in her desk drawer.

An hour later Hazel had finished her homework except for deciding on a story idea. She called Lily to see if she was done with her homework.

"I have some math problems left. Could you explain that last one? I don't see how the formulas work for that one."

Soon Lily was done with math. "What are you going to write about?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I."

"It would help to know more about the building. Maybe there was a staff downstairs, you know, like that series on television."

"Didn't someone say the building was a couple hundred years old?" asked Lily. "I wonder what it was like working in the kitchen a hundred or two hundred years ago."

"You do like history."

"Maybe I could write about a girl growing up in the kitchen learning to be a cook a hundred years ago."

"That sounds like a good idea. What can I do?"

"You have all those diaries. Why don't you do something about those?"

"Some mysterious woman like Great Aunt Hazel could arrive at the hotel," mused Hazel. "You remember she went to Paris where all those clothes came from."

"Lily, time to get off the phone."

"Ask your father about Saturday."

"Father, there's a chicken project meeting on Saturday. We're ordering our chicks. Do you want to go or should Hazel pick me up?"

"Why don't we pick Hazel up this time? What time?"

"The meeting starts at eleven."

"We'll pick her up quarter after ten."

"Did you hear? Father says we'll pick you up quarter after ten."

"That's great. See you in the morning. Rachael had some pointers for you for gym. I'll tell you about them at lunch."

Chapter 2 Guns and Memories

Despite a twinge of dread in the morning as Hazel opened her locker, school went along as normal. Every class went over the homework and assigned new questions until Mrs. Adams' class. Then chaos tried to take over the class.

"How do I come up with a story idea unless I know more about this building?" demanded Scott.

"What's interesting about some old building any way," grumbled Andrew. An undercurrent of grumbling agreement came from around Hazel and Lily from Jake and his friends.

“Where is this town and building?” asked Brenden. “If it’s around here, only boring people would stay in the hotel.”

“What about during the Civil War?” asked Violet. “Were raiders boring?”

“I guess not.”

“And we can go back two hundred years and that includes the Civil War.”

“Scott does have a point,” injected Mrs. Adams silencing the class. “It is hard to know what to write about without knowing more about the building, where it is, what it looks like. And it’s hard to describe the building without some idea of what we would like to write about. Let’s start by deciding a little more about the building.”

Mrs. Adams flipped on her computer and smartboard. A castle appeared on the screen. “This was the building at Ha Ha Tonka. It burned down, but there is a possibility for a model.”

A Southern plantation house appeared next. Then a tall brick building, square, red, lined with windows on the various floors.

“What rooms need to be in the building?” asked Mrs. Adams as pictures of old kitchens, sitting rooms, bedrooms, stairs started appearing on the smartboard. Then it went blank.

“Let’s start with the rooms. Which ones need to be in the building?”

“A kitchen,” called out Hazel. “It would need to be big if the building became a hotel.”

“Two hundred years ago there would be wood cook stoves and wood boxes,” added LaDonna.

“What about a fireplace?” asked Kayla. “How old is this building? Pioneers cooked in fireplaces.”

“That was in colonial times,” said Jenna. “They would have wood cook stoves.”

“Maybe the future would all be like in Star Trek,” said Andrew. “My brother was watching some of those shows. People walked over to these panels, punched some buttons, the panel opened and a plate of food was there.”

“Who fixed the food?” asked Violet.

“I don’t know.”

“Maybe some machine puts atoms together like those 3-D printers Mr. Triplett told us about yesterday,” said Brenden. “There’s some stash of meat atoms and the printer prints out steaks or chicken wings with them.”

“That’s sick and I just ate,” moaned Jake.

“All those famous media chefs would disappear,” laughed Violet.

“In the old building, Hazel’s right, we would need a big kitchen,” said Mrs. Adams. “It would need an outside door to bring in wood and water. It would have chimneys and stove pipe for the stoves. So the building must have a large room.”

“Plantation houses had the kitchens outside during the summer,” said Jenna.

“That would mean two large rooms, one in the house and one outside,” said Mrs. Adams.

“The outside one could become a ball room or party room like in that Great Gatsby movie you showed us last semester,” said Mary.

“It could get remodeled into something else,” said Mrs. Adams. “There were no inside bathrooms two hundred years ago.”

“And there were slaves until the Civil War and servants after that,” said Jenna.

By the end of class the building was placed in the eastern Missouri Ozarks overlooking the Mississippi River. It was a plantation house, but brick. One family lived in it until after the Civil War when they started taking in boarders for money. A small town grew up around it when it became a hotel, then changed to apartments.

“We’ll look at your story ideas tomorrow,” said Mrs. Adams just before the bell rang.

Gym period arrived. After running laps, Hazel waited. Mrs. Parker glared at her and sent her to the bleachers where Rachael was now sitting. She grabbed her latest AR reading book and climbed up to sit by Rachael.

“Hi. Looks like we’re both exiled to the bleachers again today.”

“Yeah. I want to do my homework today.”

“Lily says thanks for the suggestions. She’ll try to do them today. I brought a book.”

The two girls sat in silence for part of the hour until the floor drills fell into noisy chaos. Lily had been dribbling the ball and bumped into Linda knocking her down. Team one started shouting at Lily who slumped to the floor.

“Stand up, Lily!” yelled Mrs. Parker.

Lily sank down further putting her arms up over her head.

“Lily, stand up now!” Mrs. Parker grabbing Lily’s arm trying to pull her to her feet.

“What a dork,” said Rachael. “Why doesn’t she stand up?”

“She’s terrified by the shouting,” said Hazel. “If they would stop shouting and ask her to stand up, she would.”

“That’s stupid. She messed up.”

“Yes, she ran into Linda. Lily’s very shy.” Hazel stood up and started down the bleachers.

“You better stay here,” warned Rachael.

“Why? I’m going to get Lily up.”

“Mrs. Parker will never forgive you for showing her up.”

“But Lily will only get worse.”

“No, Mrs. Parker is mad. She’ll tell Lily to go to the locker room, take the class to the other end of the court and leave her there.”

Hazel went back and sat down next to Rachael. Mrs. Parker did exactly what Rachael predicted. Lily crept off into the locker room.

“Lily will be on the bleachers tomorrow. You better learn basketball in a hurry.”

“What do I need to know?”

Rachael explained the new drills the class was doing, then how a game was played.

“What kind of school did you go to without any sports?”

“It was a small private school. We had an old horse riding arena to use for gym so we didn’t play any of the big sports. Instead we did gymnastics, dancing, archery, things like that.”

“A horse riding arena in New York City?”

“Why not? Before cars arrived, horses did all the work. Later there was a riding track in Central Park. It’s a walking and jogging trail now.”

“Do you like to ride?”

“I wanted to learn. Father was killed. I was going to have lessons that summer, but there was no money.”

“A soldier from here was killed and the government sent his family a pile of money. Didn’t you get any?”

“Yes. An investment broker put it in a Ponzi scheme and we lost most of it. Mother couldn’t get a job. I babysat a little boy named Bobby over the summer, but that was only enough for school supplies. New York City is an expensive place to live, so we came here.”

“I read a Ponzi scheme is a kind of scam.”

“It sure is.”

“Do you miss your father? I miss Nana.”

“Grandmother Mary Beth was a very nice lady. I miss Father a lot.” Hazel blinked and turned away tossing her head a little.

“Hazel, come down here,” called Mrs. Parker.

“Have fun,” said Rachael.

Hazel climbed down the bleachers leaving her AR book on the last seat board.

“You’ll have to play in Lily’s place. We’ll spend the rest of the hour letting each team practice among themselves.”

After class Lily was out the door and to her bus before Hazel got to her locker. She wouldn’t answer the phone that night.

Lily wasn’t waiting by the door or by the lockers in the morning. Hazel wondered if she had stayed home. She was dressed in her biggest, most shapeless dress in a shade of red that clashed violently with her dark red hair and sitting hunched over her desk in math class.

“Hi, Lily.”

Lily didn’t look up or answer.

“Mistakes happen. I may do even worse today.”

“No, you won’t,” whispered Lily.

“You didn’t see me try to dribble the ball yesterday. The team thought they were playing dodge ball.”

Lily peeked at Hazel through hair hanging loose from the braids wrapped around her head. “Dribbling isn’t hard.”

“Not as long as I watch the ball. As soon as I try to walk and dribble, look out.” Hazel could see the hint of a smile.

Lily relaxed a little more as the morning went by. The hunching had disappeared by lunch. The girls discussed the next round of newspaper articles trying to remember interesting items in the Historical Museum.

“It’s too bad your father won’t pick me up early or meet us at the museum,” said Hazel. “We could pick six items out to work on.”

“I could ask.”

“Mother decided to go to work for that half day Saturday. The doctor wasn’t happy, but said she could, since it’s for only a few hours. Your father can pick us up there and take us to the meeting then home.”

“I’ll ask tonight and call you.”

The class sat down open mouthed in Communication Arts. There on the smartboard were pictures of their building as it changed over the years including an idea of what it would be like in the future. The pictures melted one into another in order then began again.

“Mrs. Hale drew these for us last night,” said Mrs. Adams. “I have copies of the pictures with floor plans on the back. You can pick out the one you will want to use for your story. Speaking of your stories, today we will work on your story ideas.”

"I don't have one," said Scott. "How do I get a story idea?"

"The girls did similar things in Quest last semester. We are going to break up into small groups for you to brainstorm ideas and help each other."

"I already know what my story is about," said Linda. "I would like to work on it."

"That's great, but today I want you to work in a group helping those who don't have an idea find one."

"If everyone in the group has an idea, may we work on our stories?"

"If everyone has an idea to work on, your group might want to help each other put plot lines together."

"What's a plot line?" asked Andrew.

"It's the series of events that might happen in your story. Sometimes they are lots of action. Sometimes they are decisions your main character must make. Every story needs these to be a good story."

Hazel and Lily found they were paired with Jake and Nathan. The four angled their desks toward each other. Jake left extra room to stretch out his long legs. Neither boy had a story idea. Mrs. Adams left a set of pictures for the group and Hazel spread them out.

"It's a stupid idea," grumbled Jake. "I don't want to write anything. Maybe I won't."

"She said you did this before," said Nathan. "You do those things in the paper. Give us some ideas."

"You don't want to write about my ideas," explained Hazel. "You need one you like to write a good story."

"Hear that, Jake? We're dead."

"No, you're not. Don't you read any of the AR books? Which ones do you like?"

"The short ones are good," laughed Jake.

"Don't you like guns, Jake?" asked Hazel. "That was a great talk you gave at the 4-H."

"I can't write about guns."

"Why not? Didn't they have guns during the Civil War? Where did they get them? Maybe you're a gun runner hiding in the mansion."

Jake straightened up. "I like the Civil War. That was when the repeating rifles came out. The North had them. The South wanted them."

"There's your story idea."

"What are you writing about?" asked Nathan.

"I have some old diaries by my Great Aunt Hazel. I was going to write about a mysterious World War I widow who stays at the hotel."

"What's Lily doing?"

"I'm writing about being in the kitchen learning to cook in the eighteen hundreds," whispered Lily staring at her desk.

"You're so right I wouldn't want to write about things like that."

"What are you interested in?"

"Mysterious happenings."

"Mother likes mysteries. But those are murder mysteries with lots of clues and a detective."

"I like thrillers, but I can't write something like that."

"Maybe there's a thief in the hotel," whispered Lily. "Things, small things keep disappearing."

“Jewelry is being stolen,” mused Nathan. “But they would search the hotel and find the thief, end of story.”

“What if the thief is a mouse or a rat?” asked Hazel. “Then they wouldn’t find the stuff and more than jewelry would disappear. I found buttons, papers, lots of things in mouse nests when we cleaned up my house.”

“I have a pet rat. Edgar’s awesome. He does steal anything he likes. Mom gets real mad at me over Edgar.”

“Everyone has a story idea now.”

By the end of the hour everyone had plot lines to go with their story ideas. Even Jake was interested in writing his story. Each of the four chose the mansion picture to go with their story, although they had to get extras from Mrs. Adams and turn in others.

Science had a lab experiment. Lily got more and more nervous as the hour went by almost ruining the experiment. “Relax, Lily. You’ll be on the bleachers today, so take a book. Or you can watch me make a fool of myself.”

After the exercise laps Mrs. Parker stood looking at Hazel and Lily. Her frown made both uneasy. Lily started to hunch over again.

“Hazel, go sit on the bleachers,” ordered Mrs. Parker. “See if you can watch what you’re doing today, Lily.”

“You’ll do fine today,” Hazel whispered to Lily before walking to the bleachers.

“You’ll be in before the end of the hour,” predicted Rachael as Hazel sat down.

Hazel shrugged and opened her book.

“What is this Central Park?” asked Rachael.

“It’s a wonderful place,” said Hazel going on to describe the different parts and taking Bobby to Belvedere Castle, the Turtle Pond, the Ramble and the playgrounds.

“That was a foul!” screamed Jenna.

“Linda did that deliberately!” yelled Mary.

“Quiet!” snapped Mrs. Parker.

Lily lay on the floor curled up, not moving. Kayla knelt down by Lily shaking her shoulder. Lily tried to sit up then fell back on the floor.

“There’s nothing wrong with her,” snapped Mrs. Parker. “She just had the wind knocked out of her. Get her up and over to the bleachers. Hazel, get down here.”

Hazel was already on her way down off the bleachers. She went over to help Lily get up. “What happened?”

“Linda rammed her in the stomach knocking her down,” said Mary. “It was deliberate. Lily didn’t have the ball.”

“Hurry up,” snapped Mrs. Parker. “It was an accident just like yesterday when Lily ran into Linda.”

“I feel sick,” moaned Lily.

“So go to the nurse’s office,” ordered Mrs. Parker.

“May I help her?” asked Hazel.

“You’re needed here for the game. Rachael, come down and take Lily to the nurse’s office.” Mrs. Parker sneered as Lily crept away with Rachael.

“What do I do?” Hazel asked Kayla.

“Try to stay out of our ways. Can’t you even shoot a basket? I know you can’t dribble.”

Hazel shrugged. Mary and Jenna patted her shoulders as they took up their positions. The practice game continued.

Later Rachael and Lily came back in and sat on the bleachers. Lily was still white, but walking normally. Tape was wrapped around her right wrist.

“The nurse thinks my wrist is strained,” Lily told Hazel on the way to the buses. “She said to put ice on it again tonight.”

“Now you’ll get to sit on the bleachers,” groaned Hazel. “I’ll have to play.”

Hazel and Lily got on their different buses for the ride home. Hazel sat down next to Kayla who spent the time trying to explain basketball to Hazel.

“Between you and Rachael, I think I know how basketball is played,” sighed Hazel. “I still don’t know how to play.”

“You’ll catch on.”

“Maybe.”

Hazel climbed down off the bus. Grandfather met her and walked down the path to Hazel’s house behind her. Hazel shivered in her jacket as a cold wind seemed to blow right through it.

“I was thinking we could go to the shooting range tonight before you start making dinner.”

“We wouldn’t have much time.”

“When do you start dinner?”

“About five thirty.”

“That’s over an hour away. Put your books away and we’ll get going.”

“I’d rather not.”

“Do you have a lot of homework?”

“No.”

“You need to do this.”

Hazel stomped up the stairs wishing Mother would tell Grandfather no for her. He had gone in to talk to her. Hazel tried to think of something she needed to do, anything.

“Hazel, hurry up,” Grandfather called up the stairs. “Juliana says it’s all right if we’re gone for an hour before dinner. There won’t be many people at the range on a Wednesday.”

Hazel walked slowly down the stairs. A cold lump sat in her stomach. She followed Grandfather back up the path to his trailer and climbed in his truck wondering if this was how it felt to walk to the gallows.

The shooting range was in a large building with a gun shop in the front part. Only the owner was there. He and Grandfather talked for a few minutes as Hazel marveled at all the bows and guns on the walls.

“The range is back here.”

Hazel followed Grandfather back to the range.

“This is the revolver. Here is the safety. When the safety is on, you can’t fire the gun.”

Hazel took the revolver. It felt so heavy in her hand. She touched the safety hoping it would refuse to go off.

“Do you see the target? The close one.”

“Yes.”

“Hold the gun with both hands. You point the gun at the target, slide the safety off. Put your finger around the trigger. Look where you’re pointing it! Squeeze the trigger.”

Hazel put both hands on the gun and lifted it up. *Grandfather Whitmore stood in front of her laughing, sneering, “Look at you shake.”* Hazel closed her eyes and fired the

gun missing the target. She stood there trembling holding the gun now pointed at the ground, tears running down her cheeks.

Grandfather took the gun from Hazel. "Go wash your face. We'll try it again."

Hazel fled for the restroom. She splashed water on her face until the tears were done and the trembling stopped. How could she do this again?

Pushing the door open Hazel walked slowly to where Grandfather and the shop owner were talking. They looked at her.

"I'm Ed Teague. I own this place. Scott says you had quite a fright a few weeks ago."

Hazel shrugged.

"I read about it in the newspaper, but maybe you can tell me about it."

Hazel reluctantly told the owner about Grandfather Whitmore arriving while she, Mother and Grandfather were in the back yard. He was carrying a rifle so Grandfather told her to run. She'd run to phone the sheriff and took the gun out of Mother's dresser drawer. Her eyes closed as she described pointing the gun at him, pulling the trigger, seeing Mother on the ground, shot. She shuddered remembering the panic at losing Mother so soon after Father was killed in Iraq.

"Scott, I was right. Now is too soon. You're right she needs to learn to shoot the gun, but later, after the memories fade."

"We'll try again in a month. Let's go home, Hazel."

"Thanks, Mr. Teague," said Hazel.

Dinner was macaroni and cheese. This was the first recipe Hazel had learned and still her favorite when she was upset. Mother came out to the table to eat for the first time since coming home from the hospital. Grandfather sat looking down at his plate, for once not mentioning having no meat for dinner.

"I feel much better," said Mother breaking the silence. "Staying in bed is nice for a few days. Getting waited on is great. But I am getting bored. The physical therapist says I'm doing fine. I'll be glad to go to the museum Saturday."

"Being bored sounds good to me," said Hazel. "I'm learning how to play basketball at school by playing it. I do everything wrong."

"I preferred volleyball," said Mother. "The games are a lot different now than when I played."

"Lily got hurt today. Linda knocked her down and she strained her wrist."

"You better be careful," said Grandfather. "Some of them are still angry with you and Juliana."

"Aren't you going to order your chickens this Saturday?" asked Mother.

"Yes. Mr. Cowan was going to pick me up. I thought we could take Lily to the Museum and he could pick us up there."

"I don't know."

"We need to pick out some items for our articles. It shouldn't take long."

"I'm not supposed to drive yet. Grandfather's truck isn't big enough for three passengers."

"Maybe Mr. Cowan can take us in early so we can stop at the Museum before going to the meeting."

"That would be a better plan this week."

Hazel washed up. Grandfather helped dry the dishes and put them away. Then it was time to start homework. The phone rang.

“Hi, Lily, I was just going to get started. Mother came out for dinner tonight, but thinks we better ride with your father Saturday. Do you think he would take us to the Museum early?”

“He wants to know how early.”

“Half an hour should be enough, don’t you think?”

“He says fine. He’d like to look around a bit while we choose items.”

“Mr. Triplett said we should bring our money. Did you look it up in the catalog?”

“Father helped. I have barely enough. We need to do more articles to pay for feed.”

“How’s your wrist?”

“It’s swollen. Father will write a note in the morning. I won’t be playing any more basketball.”

“I better learn how fast.”

“Be careful. Linda hit me hard.”

Hazel remembered the note in her desk. “I will.”

“Father says it’s time to hang up.”

“See you in the morning.”

Thursday everything went smoothly at school until gym. Lily ran laps, then went and sat down on the bleachers. Kayla had Hazel practice dribbling the ball during practice time.

“We’ll do shooting drill,” called Mrs. Parker.

“Shooting drill?” asked Hazel. “How do I shoot the ball?”

“Go last and watch the rest of us.”

Linda led off, dribbling the ball to a line in the middle of a big circle. She stopped and launched the ball at the basket. It swished in.

One by one the other girls followed as Hazel watched. Then it was her turn. She walked carefully up to the line bouncing the ball. She stopped and tried to shove the ball up towards the basket. It fell short and bounced off across the floor to the sounds of jeering laughter from the other team. Hazel felt her face heat up.

The game was even worse. Every time Hazel had to take the ball the other team took it away from her. Her team mates were jostled, but no one touched her. “You’re our best asset,” whispered one as she stole the ball yet again.

Hazel sat down on the bus next to Kayla who turned away staring out the window. Hazel sighed wishing she knew more about basketball. It was going to be a long quarter in gym.

Friday several classes announced tests for the next week. Linda raised her hand in two classes saying the Whitmores would not be in class on Wednesday. Would the teachers consider moving the tests up or back a day? One moved to Tuesday and another to Thursday.

“I wonder why the Whitmores won’t be in class next Wednesday,” Hazel commented to Lily walking to gym.

“Father said Mr. Whitmore is being arraigned that day.”

“I wonder if Mother knows. I would think she would have to be there too.”

“If you go, you can tell me what an arraignment is like.”

During gym Hazel practiced dribbling and found there was a rhythm to it. Suddenly she could walk and dribble at the same time. Kayla was delighted.

“Now, if only you could shoot the ball.”

The other team found it harder to steal the ball from Hazel during the game. She found herself getting shoved from time to time. In a way this was good as it meant she was becoming part of her team.

Chapter 3 The First Attack

Hazel bounded out of the house when Mr. Cowan pulled up Saturday morning. Today she would officially be the owner of a dozen chickens. Lily joined her looking in the catalog again at what Buff Orpingtons looked like: big, golden tan, small red combs. They compared their lists of items for articles.

Mr. Cowan wandered off into the Museum looking at the exhibits. Lily and Hazel tracked down the items on their lists narrowing it down to a single list of six items. They noted the donors' names and headed up to the office.

"Hello, Mother."

"Hello, Lily, Hazel. I see you have another list of items. I'll look up the donors' addresses for you."

Mr. Braswell came out of his office. "Hello, girls. I'm glad you aren't giving up on those articles. I keep getting people asking about those items and coming into the Museum to see them."

"It's fun and interesting to do them," said Hazel. "Thank you for offering to print that book for our class."

"Mrs. Adams was showing me the pictures of your building. Are there stories for each picture?"

"I think so. The Civil War one has several. One is Lily's. I'm doing the hotel part just after World War I."

"I look forward to reading them."

"We start editing a week from Monday."

"Girls, we need to leave," said Mr. Cowan coming into the office. Hazel noted that he wasn't as tall, but just as lean as Mr. Braswell whose hair was still black in spite of his age, nearly ninety according to Mother, so different from Mr. Cowan's dark red hair.

"I don't believe we've met," said Mr. Braswell. "I'm Klute Braswell."

"Samuel Cowan, Lily's father. We're really glad you have the girls doing those articles."

"My pleasure. Where are the girls off to?"

"They're ordering their chickens at a 4-H meeting this morning. And we'll be late if we don't start soon. I'll be back to look around some more at those interesting exhibits."

"Hazel, here are those addresses," said Mother. "Have fun at 4-H."

Mary opened the door for each project member as they arrived. The room was buzzing with excitement as the members compared their orders. Mary called the meeting to order and her father stood up to explain about entering chickens in the county fair.

"For those entering meat chickens in the fair to show and sell, your chicks need to come the beginning of June. You can enter four. Otherwise, the chicks should come in March. You can enter one pullet and one cockerel in the fair. I'll gather your orders over there, making sure each is ready to send in."

"What if I want meat chickens for me and for the fair?" asked Brian. "Can I have some sent in March and the others sent in June?"

“They would be two separate orders.”

“Brian and I both wanted to sell meat chickens at the fair,” said Nathan. “Could we combine our orders?”

“There is a special charge for small orders of chicks. It would be a good idea to combine orders and avoid that charge.”

“How many chicks?” asked Brian.

“Seventeen.”

“Who else wants to order meat chicks for June?” called Brian.

“I will,” said Belinda.

“Mary,” said Mr. Triplett, “we can get six for us.”

“Great!” said Brian. “We have enough for an order. I think I may get a couple of extra, too.”

Hazel sidled over to Lily. “Maybe we should order together. That will give us over the seventeen.”

“I guess so. We may have to trade so we each get a cockerel. Is that all right, Father?”

“We can work that out.”

“I’ll help everyone over here,” announced Mr. Triplett. He sat down at a table helping the members combine orders to meet the minimum number of chicks and collecting the money for each order.

“Is that everyone?” called Mr. Triplett. “Do I have all the orders?”

Everyone looked at each other, but no one spoke up.

“Then I will send these in on Monday. Chicks hatch on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and arrive on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. I will order them to arrive on Wednesday, March 11. Remember March can be cold so your chicks need to be taken inside. They will be all right inside until you get home from school and can put them out in your brooders. The meat chicks for the fair will arrive on June 24. You need to arrange to get your chicks from the other person for the combined orders. Any questions?”

“Should we turn our brooders on that morning?” asked Belinda.

“You should turn your brooder on the day before. That way you can check the temperature and make adjustments before you find it’s too hot or too cold and you have chicks needing to go in it then.”

“What else do I need to do before my chicks arrive?” asked Hazel.

“Get chick starter,” said Nathan. “Those chicks will be hungry.”

“I put feed and water in the dishes in the morning so they’re warm for the chicks,” said Mary.

“Do I dump the chicks in?”

“No,” said Jenna. “Well, I don’t. I take each chick and dip its beak in the water and set it down to get a drink.”

“Chicks can find things on their own, but don’t dump them in,” said Nathan. “They could get hurt.”

“How do you tell if the brooder is too cold?” asked Mr. Triplett.

“The chicks huddle up under the light,” said Nathan.

“What if the brooder is too hot?”

“The chicks stay as far away as they can,” said Jenna.

“How often do you clean your brooder?” asked Mr. Triplett.

“Every day,” answered Brian. “And my Mom says to check the food and water twice a day.”

“Are there more questions? Does everyone think they know what to do now?”

The members looked at each other. No one had another question.

“If anyone has questions before the chicks arrive, you can call me or ask at school. Otherwise we won’t meet again until March 14, the Saturday after your chicks arrive.”

“We have snacks,” said Mary. “Let’s eat.”

On the way home Lily and Hazel discussed their list of items deciding who would do each one and the order. Hazel would email the first one to Mr. Braswell in a week, so they would try to have drafts ready by Thursday to exchange for editing. Lily would email hers the end of that week, Friday, because Monday was a holiday.

“You girls have this arranged really well,” said Mr. Cowan. “I didn’t know how much work you put in on these.”

“It’s interesting,” said Hazel.

“I like to do computer research first,” said Lily. “Then I call the donor or family to find out special things about the item.”

“I like to call first unless I have no idea what an item is used for. Then I look it up first.”

“I’m impressed.”

“Do you want to stay a while?” asked Hazel as Mr. Cowan pulled up in front of the house.

“We better get home. There are several things needing doing today.”

“Lily, I’ll call you tonight,” said Hazel. “Thanks, Mr. Cowan.”

Mother was lying down on her bed when Hazel went in the house. Mittens and Mischief leaped off the bed and raced up the stairs in front of Hazel. She pulled strings for them to chase for a while then decided to check out Facebook and look up her item. She was so glad to be online at home even though it was slow. That was one good thing from Christmas.

Nothing much was going on. Hazel browsed through the postings from her classmates. She sat up and reread a post.

“Cheaters, thieves and murderers always pay.” signed Amaya H.

“It’s like the note,” Hazel mumbled to herself. “What is this Amaya up to? Is Linda trying to scare me? How will she make me pay? Maybe I don’t want to know.”

Hazel had trouble focusing on the item information. She finally had it written down in time to go down and start making dinner. She found herself staring off into space with cheaters, thieves and murderers repeating in her mind. At least broccoli in cheese sauce on baked potatoes was easy and hard to goof up. Canned fruit was equally easy.

After dinner and dishes were done, Mother put a movie on. Hazel settled into a chair to watch it, but kept finding herself wondering what this Amaya would do to make her pay. Linda had to be Amaya. She was the leader of the Whitmore girls.

Nothing new had shown up on the internet by Sunday night. The ride to school was the same as always. Classes were the same routine. Monday passed by. Tuesday passed by with a couple of tests and a 4-H meeting after school.

“Next month is my month for a 4-H presentation,” Hazel told Mother on the way to the meeting. “I thought I would do one on how to make macaroni and cheese.”

“Will you mention those variations you do like adding onions?”

“I guess so. I can’t figure out how to show how to do the steps without doing them.”

“Maybe you can do your presentation in the kitchen.”

“I can ask. That would be better. But I only have five minutes.”

“That wouldn’t be long enough to make the cheese sauce.”

“No. I guess I’ll have the ingredients to show and a pan of cheese sauce and stir in some macaroni.”

“And serve it as snacks?”

“Maybe. I’ll ask about that.”

After the 4-H meeting, Hazel checked with the leaders about her macaroni and cheese. “You’ll be like a TV chef,” said one man. Hazel’s face burned. “I’m not that good.”

“I like the idea. You can stand in the kitchen for the five minutes. I’d love some for snacks after the meeting.”

Hazel’s classes seemed empty on Wednesday with the eight Whitmore boys and girls gone out of twenty-two students. Some classes reviewed for tests on the following day. Two classes returned tests. Hazel was happy to find she aced science and missed one in Social Studies. Gym was free practice. Hazel made her first basket.

Hazel decided to cook something more complex for dinner to keep her mind occupied. She took out the ingredients for crepes with rice, chicken and mushroom filling with peas on the side. There was plenty of crepe batter left so she added sugar and cinnamon to it for dessert crepes with an apple raisin filling.

“What’s with the little rolled up pancakes for dinner?” asked Grandfather.

“They’re not pancakes. They’re crepes.”

“They look like thin pancakes to me.”

Hazel shook her head and went to call Mother for dinner. At least Mother would know they were crepes.

“Why didn’t we go to the arraignment today?” Hazel asked Mother over dinner. “All of the Whitmores went.”

“The County Prosecutor said we didn’t need to. He called me afterwards to say Mr. Whitmore let them set a court date. The judge set one in June. Mr. Whitmore says he will plead guilty so we may not have to attend the trial either.”

“I wish none of it had ever happened. We weren’t bothering him. Why would he shoot Grandmother Mary Beth, if he was angry with us?”

“I don’t know.”

“He may want to pay for his crime,” said Grandfather. “That doesn’t mean the family wants him to. You be careful.”

Twinges of guilt nagged Hazel about the note and Facebook post. She considered telling Mother as she washed dishes. She decided not to for now.

Thursday morning another note was in Hazel’s locker. “The Bible says eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. You owe me. You will pay.” She shoved the note into her book bag and went to class. If something happened, she would deal with it.

The day went by quietly. Hazel began to wonder if the note was serious or to scare her. Only one class was left for the day: gym.

Mrs. Parker sent everyone on laps. Practice went smoothly. Hazel was finding it easier to shoot the ball and hit the basket, although the ball bounced off the rim. Even the game went better. The class raced into the locker room to change.

Hazel opened her locker and stared. Ink was all over her clothes! She had her own lock. No one knew the combination except her and the office. She kept the louvers in the door covered so no liquids could be shot in after the perfume incident last semester. How did someone get into her locker?

Mrs. Parker looked the clothes over. "You'll have to wear your gym clothes home. I'll get a sack to put these in."

"Aren't you going to report this to the office?" demanded Hazel. "Someone had to get my locker combination and open my locker to do this. How did they get the combination?"

"That's enough. Things happen. Maybe the ink was in a syringe so the locker didn't need to be opened."

"I cover my locker to keep that from happening. Someone opened my locker!"

"The bell's going to ring. I'll talk to Mr. Weismann later." Mrs. Parker went into her office and came back with a plastic sack to put Hazel's clothes in.

"Won't you need to show these to Mr. Weismann?"

"I don't think so."

Hazel took the sack. It rustled in her shaking hand. She stalked out of the locker room and over to the office. Students were shoving past on their way to the buses. Mr. Weismann was somewhere outside. Mrs. Nolan told her to get to her bus. She would let the principal know Hazel wanted to talk to him first thing in the morning.

Quickly Hazel grabbed her book bag from her regular locker glad she had put her books in it earlier and ran for the bus. She slid into the seat by Kayla as Mr. Watson started the bus moving.

"What happened to your clothes?" asked Kayla. "Someone said there was ink all over them."

Hazel showed Kayla the clothes. "They're ruined. That ink will never come out."

"You're right about that."

"Mrs. Parker better report this. Someone had to get my locker combination and open my locker to do this."

"She won't."

"Why not?"

"It will cause problems. She'll tell you she reported it and it will take time to do anything. Then it will be forgotten."

"Not this. If she doesn't, I will. My clothes are ruined! I have to get a new lock and hope no one gets that combination too. There's no place else to put my clothes during gym."

"Because it happened once doesn't mean it will happen again."

"But it could. Until I know who did this, it could."

Hazel stalked down the bus aisle and got off forgetting to say good night to Mr. Watson. The plastic bag caught on some bramble thorns on the way down the path. She jerked it loose tearing the plastic. She slammed the front door closed behind her scattering her cats.

"Oh, Mittens. Mischief. I didn't mean it. I'm not mad at you." Hazel dropped her book bag and the sack on the floor calling her cats. The three curled up in a chair and she burst into tears.

Mother came home from work to find the three curled up asleep. She caught her toe on the dropped book bag, but didn't fall, surprised the jerk didn't hurt her shoulder. The ripped bag had part of the ink stained blouse hanging out of it.

"Mother, you're home. I guess I fell asleep."

"What happened to your blouse?"

"Someone opened my gym locker and poured ink on my clothes."

"How did someone get the combination?"

"I don't know. Mrs. Parker said she would tell the principal, but Kayla says she won't. Mrs. Nolan said she'd tell Mr. Weismann. My clothes are ruined."

To their disgust Hazel got up dumping the cats on the floor and picked up her book bag. The three went up the stairs, the cats racing, Hazel trudging behind them. She took the note out of the book bag and the other out of the desk. They were not hoaxes, but threats. It was time to show them to Mother.

Grandfather showed up for a dinner of canned soup, warmed up left over muffins and hot tempers. The ruined clothes were out on the plastic bag on the kitchen counter. The two notes were tossed on the table.

"What's going on?"

"Those Whitmores are starting trouble again," declared Mother.

"I don't know who wrote the notes or ruined my clothes," protested Hazel.

"Who else?"

"I don't know. Someone who wants to cause trouble?"

"Trouble is what they'll get. I'm going to school with you tomorrow."

"Mother, I can handle it."

"Not this time. Your clothes are ruined. Mrs. Parker has gone too far. Didn't you say the combination is only in her office and the main office?"

"I guess so."

"Then someone was allowed to look it up, go into the girl's locker room and get into your locker. But she won't report it."

"She might. She said she would."

"I'm going to make sure it's reported. Those were nice clothes and they are ruined. It's expensive to replace them. I want to know who did it and why."

"Mrs. Parker is a Whitmore," commented Grandfather. "You could make things worse by going after her."

"Someone needs to hold her accountable. Giving everyone but the sports teams D's is not right. What happened about Lily's wrist?"

"She's sitting on the bleachers until it heals up. She says it feels good now, but she doesn't want to play basketball so she keeps the bandage on at school."

"Are you playing basketball?"

"Yes."

"Who taught you to play? You didn't learn in New York."

"My team taught me to dribble. I sat up on the bleachers until Lily got hurt and Rachael Whitmore explained the game and how to do things. I even made a basket in the practice drill."

"What did Mrs. Parker do?"

"The same as for everyone. She had me watch, then do drills and put me on a team to play."

"How are the teams chosen?"

“The school team is one, except Rachael can’t play so LaDonna replaced her. That’s why Lily was on the other team and now me.”

“If Rachael could play, what would you and Lily do?”

“We’d run laps, do drills, then sit on the bleachers watching the game.”

“And get D’s.”

Grandfather shook his head. “If you start this, you will fight the family. You know that?”

Mother sighed. “I know it. But I’m fed up. They don’t have to like us. They will respect us.”