

Also by Rebecca Caudill

Happy Little Family Schoolhouse in the Woods Schoolroom in the Parlor Barrie and Daughter *Tree of Freedom* (Newbery Honor) Saturday Cousins House of the Fifers Susan Cornish Time for Lissa Higgins and the Great Big Scare The Best-Loved Doll The Far-Off Land A Pocketful of Cricket (Caldecott Honor) A Certain Small Shepherd Did You Carry the Flag Today, Charley? Contrary Jenkins (with husband, James Ayars) Somebody Go and Bang a Drum



by REBECCA CAUDILL

Pictures by Decie Merwin

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For Stella, Will, Cappie, and Clara through whose childhood flowed the river



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1. The Peddler

do wish we could find some way to get rich, like Althy!" said Bonnie.

Bonnie was talking half to herself, half to Debby. She was stretched on the grass under an apple tree, looking at the advertisements on the back pages of Mother's magazine. Debby was sitting near her, making a pink clover chain to wear around her neck.

Out in the orchard bees buzzed and stopped for business on each big bushy, swaying head of clover. It was late May, and the sun was warm, and the sweet smell of the blossoms clung to the air.

From the house came the sound of the organ. Sometimes the notes flowed along smoothly like the pebbly stream that skirted the orchard. That was Althy playing. Sometimes the notes balked like a stubborn donkey. That was Clarissy Huff taking a lesson from Althy.

"Althy'll surely be rich before summer's over," said Debby, tying another clover head to her chain. "She gets ten cents for every organ lesson she gives. And she's going to give nine every week."

"How much does that make?" asked Bonnie, who was six and didn't know her multiplication tables yet.

"Ninety cents," said Debby, who was eight and knew her tables straight through twelve times twelve.

"And Emmy's chickens will be hatching out any day now," said Bonnie. "Two hens setting on fifteen eggs apiece—if Emmy sells the chickens for fifty cents apiece, how rich will she be, Debby?"

That was too much arithmetic for Debby to do without a slate and pencil. She answered instead,

"You don't count your chickens before they're hatched, Bonnie."

"And Chris will get rich selling ginseng," said Bonnie. "The magazine said, 'Get rich selling ginseng.' He found a little bit in the woods yesterday."

Debby tied another clover head to her chain.

"Can't you find any advertisement in the magazine that tells us how to make money, Bonnie?" she asked.

"Here's something free," said Bonnie. Although she couldn't read words off quickly the way Debby could, she knew the word "free."

Carefully Debby laid aside her clover chain, stretched out beside Bonnie on the grass, and studied the free offer.



The advertisement pictured the State of Ohio, freckled all over with dots as if everybody from Ashtabula to Cincinnati had suddenly broken out with the measles.

"'Grand Contest! Big Prizes Free! Two Pianos! Cash! Organs! Free!" read Debby. She roared in a loud voice as she read, because the words were big and black on the page.

"We could get a piano for Althy maybe," Bonnie brightened up. "Althy wants a piano. Does it say how to get it, Debby?"

Debby studied the advertisement.

"It's just what I was afraid of," she complained after a moment. "It's just a trick. First you have to count the dots. Then it says, 'Counts must be accompanied by subscription to magazine. Fifty cents pays for one year and one count. One dollar pays for two years and three counts. You get fifty dollars extra if you have three counts. It will pay you to have three.'"

"Better look for something else," advised Bonnie. "Here's something."

Debby followed Bonnie's finger that pointed to the word "free" underneath the picture of a horse.

"Oh!" she sighed. "That's Dan Patch. 'Free picture of Dan Patch, the world's most famous racing horse!" she read. "It shows Dan flying through the air with every foot off the ground. Picture, in six brilliant colors, absolutely free with every order of stock food."

"Hmm-m-m!" said Bonnie.

She began looking again.

"What's this?" she asked, pointing to another free offer.

"'Free post cards with your name written on each one in gold,'" read Debby.

"Oh, I'd love my name in gold on a post card!" sighed Bonnie, "I'd just love it! Wouldn't you, Debby?"

"Your name on a post card won't make you rich," Debby told her. "Not even if it's written in gold." And Debby measured the length of her clover chain around her neck.

In a few moments Bonnie sat upright. Her voice tingled with excitement.

"Listen to this, Debby!" she said. "'Earn one d-o-1-1-a-r, dollar.'"

Quickly Debby laid aside the chain again and read the advertisement. "'Earn one dollar. Sell twenty of our beautiful colored pictures at ten cents each. Every home wants one. You collect two dollars. Send us one. You keep one.'"

"You don't have to subscribe to anything?" asked Bonnie.

"It doesn't say so."

"Nor buy anything?"

"No."

"Let's see it."

Bonnie read the advertisement, pointing out each word with her finger.

"And look here, Debby!" she cried as her eyes wandered farther down the page. "'Sell s-e-n-s-a-t-i-o-





"'Sensational,'" Debby said, taking the magazine and reading. "'Sell sensational new bluing! Try it yourself. Sell it to your friends. We send you twenty packages. Sell them at ten cents each. Collect two dollars. Send us one. You keep one.'"

"You don't have to subscribe to anything?" asked Bonnie.

"It doesn't say so."

"Nor buy anything?"

"No."

"What's 'sensational,' Debby?"

"I think that means whiter than snow," said Debby.

"The bluing makes your clothes whiter than snow."

"How do you get the bluing?" asked Bonnie. "And the pictures?"

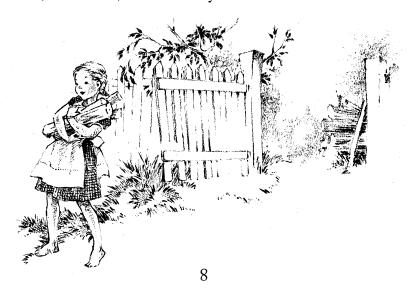
"You have to fill out the coupons with our names and address, and send for them," Debby told her. "Let's sell them together, Bonnie, shall we? I'll go to the house and fill out the coupons right now if you'll carry in my share of the stove wood. Then we can go across the river to Mr. Flinchum's store and mail the letters."

"People who don't want pictures will be sure to want bluing, won't they?" said Bonnie, her wide eyes sparkling as she got up from the grass and started toward the wood lot.

"And people who don't want bluing will likely want a picture," said Debby. "Just think, Bonnie! We'll earn two dollars. A dollar for the pictures and a dollar for the bluing. One dollar for you, and one for me."

"A whole dollar!" sighed Bonnie. "What will we do with so much money, Debby?"

"Why, when we have that much money, we'll be rich, of course," said Debby.





When Debby had filled out the coupons and addressed the envelopes, and Bonnie had carried in the stovewood, Mother said they might ride the little mare, Mag, across the river to the post office, which was in one corner of Mr. Flinchum's store. Mother gave Debby four pennies from her egg money with which to buy stamps for the envelopes.

Debby put the bridle on Mag and led her to the front gate. Bonnie held the bridle while Debby climbed to the top of the fence, mounted the mare,



and took the reins in her hands. Then Debby held Mag still while Bonnie climbed to the top of the fence and mounted behind her. In one hand Bonnie held the envelopes, while with the other she hugged Debby's waist to keep from falling off.

Down the dusty road sauntered Mag. Debby slapped her with the reins. She clucked to her, and kicked her in the ribs with her bare heels to make her gallop. But Mag only paced a few steps and slowed down to a walk.

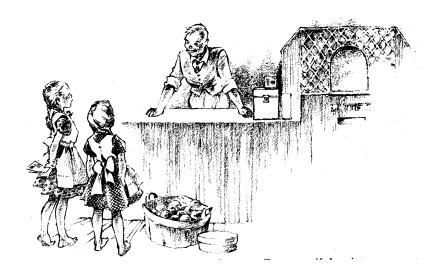
"When we earn our money, we'd better pay Mother four pennies of it for stamps," said Bonnie.

"Or we could set the supper table every day," said Bonnie.

"We already set the supper table every day," said Debby.

"We could set every day without being told," said Bonnie. "Mother would think that was special."

"We'll set it the minute we get home," said Debby. And she clucked to Mag and kicked her in the ribs again to make her gallop. But Mag only paced a few steps and slowed down to a walk. Finally, she



splashed across the river and up to the porch of Mr. Flinchum's store, where Debby and Bonnie slid off her back. Debby tied the reins to Mr. Flinchum's hitching post.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Flinchum when he saw Debby and Bonnie. "What can I sell you today?"

"We don't want to buy anything," Debby told him.

"We've come to mail some letters," said Bonnie.

"We're sending for something," said Debby.

"We're going to get rich," said Bonnie.

"Well! Well!" said Mr. Flinchum again, and this time he was really surprised.