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about 10,100 words

THE ELEVATOR FAMILY TAKES A HIKE  
by  
Douglas Evans

## Contents

Chapter One	3
Chapter Two	7
Chapter Three	11
Chapter Four	16
Chapter Five	20
Chapter Six	25
Chapter Seven	28
Chapter Eight	31
Chapter Nine	35
Chapter Ten	39
Chapter Eleven	42
Chapter Twelve	45
Chapter Thirteen	48
Chapter Fourteen	51

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“Hup! Hup! Hup!”

The Wilsons hiked along the forest trail. Their backpacks bounced against their backs and their canteens bumped against their khaki shorts.

“Hup! Hup! Hup!” they chanted with each step.

With sweat dripping from under his blue bandanna headband, Walter Wilson led the way.

“Hup! Hup! Bracing afternoon!” he said.

He hooked his thumbs under the suspenders that ran over his large belly. “Smell the pine! Hear the bird sing! Breath in the fresh air!”

Winona Wilson hiked close behind her husband. She enjoyed calling out the names of wildflowers she spotted along the trail.

“Indian paintbrush,” she said, in a small meadow. “Cow parsnip.... Solomon’s seal... blue-bead lily.... a large-flowered bellwort... no, no that’s just a candy wrapper.”

Winslow Wilson, age ten, hiked next in line. “Dad, my feet ache; my back aches, and my shoulders ache,” he complained.

“To enjoy the Great Outdoors you must take the bumps that come with it,” Walter called back to him.

“You mean like poison ivy bumps, mosquito bites, and toe blisters,” said Winslow. “I have them all.”

Whitney Wilson marched behind her twin brother. “Why can’t we stop and set up camp right here, Dad?” she said. “This spot looks the same as the spot we just past.”

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat. The family’s scruffy gray dog threaded in and out among the hikers. “*Ruff! Ruff!*”

“Just a bit farther,” said Walter. “Only the best place will do for this family. Hup! Hup! Hup! Only the best.”

“Marsh marigold,” Winona recited. “Red trillium.”

“Hup! Hup! Hup!” went the others.

The trail entered a forest of fragrant cedar trees and led the Wilsons up a hill. Soon they emerged into a landscape studded with tree stumps and low bushes. The vista was grand. As far as they could see was a carpet of evergreen and shiny lakes.

“The summit is just up ahead,” said Walter. “I bet there’s a splendid campsite on top.”

“This is called Mt. Baldy,” said Winona. “And now I know why.”

“The top looks as bald as an egg,” said Whitney.

“All the trees have been logged off it as though it’s gotten a haircut,” said Winslow.

The trail rounded a large rock and the Wilsons halted. There atop Mt. Baldy’s round, bare summit stood a tall steel structure. On top sat a small cabin. A metal ladder led from the ground to a trap door in the cabin floor.

“Excellent!” said Walter. “A gem of a place!”

“A cabin in the sky,” said Winona. “And the base of the tower is surrounded by black-eyed Susan.”

“That reminds me of the little cabin that we stayed in at the beach,” said Whitney.

“That cabin was also on top of a tower only this one is much taller.”

“So why is this cabin here?” asked Winslow.

“It’s here for the Wilsons to stay in,” said Walter, with his head tilted far back. “Small and cozy, just the way we like it.”

“And it looks like no one has rented it yet for the night,” said Winona.

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat.

A broken sign hung cock-eyed on the bottom of the ladder. It read:

NO TRE

“That must be the name of this cabin,” said Whitney. “*No Trees*. The last two letters

are missing. A fitting name since all the trees around here are nothing but stumps.”

“All in favor of staying in *No Trees* tonight say *aye*,” said Walter.

“Aye!” all four Wilsons chorused.

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat.

“Then it’s settled,” said Walter. “This cabin in the sky will be our new home. Up we go.”

Still wearing his backpack, Walter began climbing the ladder. *Clang! Clang! Clang!* The rungs rang with each step he took. “Hup! Hup! Hup!”.

Winona picked some black-eyed Susan flowers growing near the base of the tower and started up as well. *Clang! Clang! Clang!*

Winslow followed. *Clang! Clang!* And then Whitney. *Clang!*

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat, who watched his family go up and up.

At the top, Walter pushed open a trap door, and the four Wilsons climbed into the cabin. They plopped their backpacks on the wooden floor and turned in circles. The four walls were nothing but glass.

“Fantabulous!” said Winslow. “A three- hundred and sixty-degree panorama.”

“I can see miles of forest and millions of lakes from up here,” said Whitney.

“Look, there are a nice table and stools and plenty of shelf space for cooking,” said Winona, and she placed her wildflowers in a jar on the table.

Walter wiped his brow with his forearm. “We’re on top of the world, Wilsons,” he said. “Only the top for this family. Only the tiptop will do.”

## Chapter Two

Standing in the middle of the little cabin on top of the tall tower, the four Wilsons removed their air mattresses from their backpacks.

“Here’s the game,” said Walter. “The first one to blow up a mattress gets dibs on where to sleep in the cabin tonight.”

Walter, Winona, Winslow, and Whitney held the air valve of their mattress up to their mouths.

“On the count of three,” said Walter. “One, two...” His cheeks ballooned as he began blowing.

At once, the twins and Winona started to blow, too.

Walter’s mattress rose the fastest, until he went “*Paaaaah!*” and plopped down on a stool breathing hard.

Winona took the lead, but Winslow puffed and puffed and passed her. Victory was nearly his when a bald eagle flew passed the northern window and drew away his attention. Now Whitney sucked in a lungful of air and let it go. “*Ta-daaa!*” she said, holding up her filled mattress in triumph. “I’ll take the upper bunk tonight.”

“Windbag,” said Winslow.

Whitney placed her air mattress on a wide shelf in the back of the little cabin. The others arranged theirs in rows on the wooden floor. They each spread out a sleeping bag and put their flashlights and pajamas in the drawer under Whitney’s shelf.

Finally, Walter reached into his backpack and pulled out a knitted sampler.

He hung it from a nail above the northern window. The words stitched in the cloth read:

Home Sweat Home.

“There we go,” he said. “Home Sweat Home hangs wherever the Wilsons spend the night.”

“The twins knitted that in second grade before they could spell very well,” said Winona.

The twins rolled their eyes.

“You’ve said that every night this camping trip,” said Winslow.

“And every night last vacation,” said Whitney.

“Now you’re both school spelling bee champions,” said Winona proudly.

Walter looked out the window and saw Cat looking up toward the cabin. “Poor pooch,” he said. “Only bad thing about this cabin in the sky is that Cat can’t join us.”

“I’ll go down and set up his pup tent,” said Winslow. “I don’t think Cat would want to sleep anywhere else.”

“And I’ll bring Cat some Wilsons’ Special Trail Mix for dinner,” said Whitney. “That always makes him happy.”

Excellent idea,” said Walter. “Our dog Cat deserves only the best.”

Once down the ladder, Winslow set up Cat’s blue nylon pup tent, and Whitney poured some trail mix— a mixture of granola, raisins, sunflower seeds, M &M’s, and a secret Wilson ingredient—into Cat’s plastic dinner dish.

Back in the little cabin, Walter started the camp stove, and Winona prepared macaroni and cheese for dinner.



While they ate, the family watched a big buttery sun disappear out the western window.

“Sunset number seven on this hiking trip,” said Whitney.

“Best sunset we’ve seen since we stayed in that little cabin on top of that construction crane,” said Winslow.

“And in the morning we can watch the sun rise from the eastern window,” said Winona.

“Campfire time,” Walter announced.

“Everyone, down the hatch!”

One by one the Wilsons dropped through the trap door. Walter brought matches and lighter fluid. Winona brought a pot with popcorn kernels in it, but without a lid.

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat as his family approached.

After collecting firewood, Walter sprinkled on an ample amount of lighter fluid. He threw on a match and *Phoom!*

“Instant campfire,” he said.

Winona placed the lidless pot of popcorn kernels in the fire. “Time to play popcorn catch,” she said. “Whoever catches the most kernels wins.”

A short while later—*Pop! Pop! Pop!*—and fluffy white popcorn came flying from the pot. Despite their sore legs, the four Wilsons danced about the fire catching the flying puffs.  
*Pop! Pop! Pop!*

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat, and he caught a kernel in his mouth.

When the popping stopped the Wilsons counted the kernels in their hands.

“I caught twenty-one,” said Winslow

“Seventeen,” said Winona.

“Three,” said Walter. “But they’re the best ones.”

“And the winner is me,” said Whitney. “Thirty-four!”

“Brava!” the other Wilsons said together.

The four Wilsons sat cross-legged around the crackling fire to eat their popcorn. The night was moonless, and the stars twinkled especially brightly. The steel tower, a black and bony skeleton, rose into the darkness beside them. Winona had left a candle burning in the little cabin on top, making the place particularly inviting.

Walter pointed toward the northern sky. “There’s the Big W constellation,” he said. “The Big W that stands for Wilsons.”

“*Hooo-liii! Hooo-liii!*” A loon yodeled from the lake near the base of Mt. Baldy

“*Yip, yip, yeow!*” called a timber wolf from some distant hill.

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” Cat replied.

While the family studied the stars overhead, Winslow played campfire tunes on his harmonica—*Kookaburra*, *Kumbaya*, and *John Jacob Jingle Himmer Schmidt*. Last of all, he played *Taps*.

Without a word, Walter stood and started up the ladder to the little cabin. “Night, Cat.”

“Night, Cat,” said Winona, following him.

“Night, Cat,” said Whitney going third.

Winslow stuck his harmonica in his pocket and kicked some dirt on the fire. “Night, Cat,” he said, and he started up the ladder as well.

*“Ruff! Ruff!”* went the dog, before he curled up inside his pup tent.

## Chapter Three

Early the next morning the world below *No Trees* came alive with the sound of birds.

*Chick-a-dee-dee-dee! Twit-twit! Peter-peter!*

Walter sat up on his air mattress to listen more closely.

*Chip-chup-pee! Chet-chet-chet! Po-ta-to-chip!*

To the east, the sun was peeking above an L-shaped lake. Below, scattered clouds formed swirly patterns over the green land.

“Rise and shine everyone,” said Walter.

“Early birds are getting the worms.”

Whitney sat up stretching his arms. “I feel on top of the world this morning,” she said.

“Bird calls sure beat the buzz of mosquitoes that woke me up yesterday,” said Winslow

At that moment a woman’s voice came from the base of the tower. “Here, birdies! Where are you, birdies? Here birdie, birdie, birdie.” She spoke unusually loud, as an actor would from a stage. “Where are you two-toed towhees and yellow fickle finches? I’d loved to spot you. Come here spotted soprano sparrows and sore-throated warblers.”

Walter peered out the window and saw a heavyset woman standing by Cat’s pup tent. She wore a blue T-shirt with the words I’M FOR THE BIRDS across the front. A white terrycloth hat covered her curly gray hair, and she held a pair of binoculars to her eyes.

“Where are you birds?” she said. “Here nutty nuthatches! Let me find you, yellow

bluebirds.”

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat.

Walter opened the trapdoor and called down,

“Top of the morning to you, madam! What’s up down there?”

The woman looked upward. “Oh, hello,” she said, in her booming voice. “I’m a birdwatcher doing some bird watching. I’ve heard that Mt. Baldy is known as an excellent spot for birds.”

As she spoke a new sound filled the air, a high sharp whistling.

The woman’s eyes widened. “Goodness!” she shouted. “Is that a wooden woodpecker I hear, or is it a curly curlew?”

Winona leaned over the trapdoor next to Walter. “Sorry, that’s just my tea kettle whistling?” she called down. “Please come up and join us for a cup of hot cocoa.”

“Guests are always welcome wherever the Wilsons stay,” said Walter. “There’s an excellent bird’s-eye view from up here.”

“Oh, that sounds delightful,” said the woman, and as she climbed the ladder, she continued talking in her booming voice. “Bird watching hasn’t been good this morning. Mt. Baldy is known for a large variety of birds, but I’ve only spotted one kind so far, a Minnesota raven, and that was nibbling on a dead skunk in the middle of the road.”

Soon the four Wilsons sat in a circle with the woman, cradling mugs of cocoa.

“I’m Walter Wilson,” Walter said. “And this is my wife, Winona; my son, Winslow, and my daughter, Whitney. We just moved into *No Trees* last night.”

“Pleased to meet you,” said the woman. Her loud voice resounded off the walls of the little cabin. “My name is Robin Twitcher, and I’m a post office worker at a post office in the Twin Cities. Last January I decided to quit my job and do a Big Year.”

“A Big Year?” said Walter.

“A Big Year?” said Winona.

“A Big Year? Fantabulous!” said Winslow.

“A Bird Year is when birders see how many different birds they can find in a single year in North America,” said Whitney.

“The record is 735 different birds,” said Winslow.

“That’s right,” the woman said in her booming voice. “But my Big Year has been frustrating so far. The year is half over, and my bird count is only thirty-five different birds. I don’t know what my problem is. Every time I go to a lake, woods, or meadow where other birders are spotting dozens of birds, I end up seeing only one or two.”

The four Wilsons exchanged glances.

Walter leaned toward Winona and whispered, “This lady seems like a rare bird herself.”

At that moment Winslow pointed out the window behind Robin Twitcher. “Well, there’s a bird for your Big Year Bird List,” he said.

Robin and the others turned to see a large white-headed bird soaring straight toward *No Trees*. It carried a twig in its long curved beak.

“Ohhwheeeee!” Robin screamed. “A bald eagle!”

“A bald eagle on Mt. Baldy,” said Whitney.

"I've seen those on dollar bills," said Walter.

"I think it's building a nest on our cabin's roof," said Winslow.

"That's bird thirty-six for your Big Year list," said Winona.

"How thrilling!" Robin called out. "I only have 709 birds to go to break the Big Year record."

The four Wilsons grew silent, watching the sunrise. They each took a sip of cocoa and listened to the birdwatcher talk.

"I had worked at the post office for twenty years," she said loudly. "Often I saw postage stamps with pictures of birds on them. I saw so many bird stamps over the years that I can now identify almost any bird in North America."

Still, the Wilsons remained quiet, staring out the window of the little cabin. The bald eagle had glided off the cabin's roof and now returned with more twigs in its yellow beak.

The boisterous woman broke the silence.

"But I must be going," she said. "These early morning hours are the best for birding, and I have so many birds to spot to break the Big Year record."

"Stop in any time, Robin," said Walter. "Visitors are always welcomed where the Wilsons stay."

"And good luck with your Big Year Bird list," said Winona.

The birdwatcher grabbed her terrycloth hat and binoculars and started down the ladder.

"Here birdie! Here birdie!" the Wilsons heard her call out as she descended. "Where

are you lickadee chickadees and H-I jays? Come to Robin all you red rock-and-roll wrens.”

“Walter, should we have told Robin why she’s not spotting any birds this morning?”

Winona asked.

“No, I think she’d miss the sound of her own voice,” Walter replied. “She may not add many birds to her Big Year Bird list, but she won’t be startling any black bears along the trail either.”



## Chapter Four

After breakfast, Winona aimed the binocular at the trail leading up Mt. Baldy. “We’re about to have another visitor,” she said. “A man wearing a brown uniform and a round Smokey the Bear hat.”

“Excellent,” said Walter. “Perhaps he could tell us more about this *No Trees* cabin. Perhaps he’ll let us stay here another night.”

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” Cat called a short while later.

Soon a voice called from beneath the cabin’s trapdoor. “Forest ranger! Forest ranger!”

The door swung open to reveal the head of a young man with a mustache. His forest ranger’s sat upon a mop of curly blond hair.

“Ranger Roger here,” the man said crisply.

The Wilsons watched the man rise into the room. A brown backpack hung on one shoulder.

“Greetings, sir,” said Walter. “Guests are always welcome in *No Trees*. Care for a cup of cocoa?”

The ranger squinted at the Wilsons. Without a word he opened his backpack and took out a cell phone, a laptop computer, and several other electrical devices.

“You people aren’t supposed to be here,” he said.

“Oh dear, we didn’t know checkout time was so early,” said Winona. “We’ll pack up at once.”

The ranger raised the cell phone. "You folks aren't going anywhere," he said. "I must report you to headquarters."

"Why that's very kind of you, Roger," said Winona. "Please ask if this cabin is available for another day."

In the meantime, Winslow and Whitney had been admiring the ranger's electrical equipment.

"Fantabulous!" said Winslow.

"You seem to have all the latest high-tech gear," said Whitney.

For the first time, Ranger Roger smiled. "Oh, yes, I like carrying the latest of everything," he said. "With this smartphone I can talk to anyone anywhere, and with this laptop computer I can search the Internet and find out any information I want. I also have a solar-powered satellite phone and an electronic emergency transmitter. I'm the most high-tech ranger in the forest service."

"Only the best!" said Walter.

"You seem prepared for anything," said Winona.

Again the ranger raised his cell phone to call headquarters. But when he checked the screen his face fell.

"No bars, no signal," he said. "I guess we're out of cell phone range up here. No problem. I'll just use my solar radio phone to report you."

"Fantabulous," said Winslow.

"What will they think of next?" said Whitney.

The ranger picked up the radio from his backpack. But as he turned the solar panels

toward the window to catch the sunlight, a cloud floated in front of the sun, casting a shadow over *No Trees*.

“Great bother,” Roger said. “No sunlight means no power for this radio. No problem. I can still use my laptop computer to send an e-mail message. It has the latest satellite technology.”

The ranger booted up his laptop computer. But before he could write his e-mail message, the screen went dark.

“More bother,” he said. “I forgot to charge the battery.”

“Do you have any more fancy devices in your backpack?” said Walter.

The ranger shrugged his green shoulders. “Just my high-tech water bottle, but the nozzle is broken, so I can’t get any water; my super five-way flashlight, but the bulb burned out, and my never-fail GPS that never fails to lead me up a dead-end road.”

“Then why don’t you sit down and enjoy the fine vista with us?” said Winona.

For the first time, Ranger Roger looked out the window. He sat on a stool and said, “I’ve forgotten what a beautiful view it is from up here. The last few times I was here I was so busy looking at my computer and I-Phone screens I never bothered to look out.”

The ranger sat quietly a moment, staring eastward. Finally, he slapped his knees and stood again. “But I don’t have time to dilly-dally.”

“Leaving so soon?” asked Walter.

“My forest service hybrid-electrical Jeep is parked at the trailhead, with a short circuit in the battery,” he said. “I must get back before that goes completely dead, too.”

“So how are we to know if we must check

out?" asked Winslow.

"I want you people to stay right here," Ranger Roger said. "I'll just need to drive back to headquarters and file a report the old fashioned way, by hand."

"So *No Trees* can be our home for another day," said Walter. "That suits us well."

The ranger puffed out his cheeks like a chipmunk.

"Very well, then," he said. "I'll see you in a few hours. But be careful up here. A large thunderstorm is forecasted for later today."

## Chapter Five

After the ranger left, the Wilsons continued admiring the sunrise out the eastern window. After fifteen minutes, they shifted their stools and stared out the southern window. A quarter-hour after that, they faced west and then north. After an hour, they faced east again.

“I could never tire of this view,” said Walter.

“It’s as if this little cabin were put here just for sightseeing,” said Winona.

“Look at all the lakes,” said Whitney. “I don’t think I can count them all.”

Meanwhile, Winslow aimed the binoculars toward the lake at the base of Mt. Baldy. “I spy a canoe on the lake and two mooses by the lakeshore.”

“The plural of moose is meese as in geese,” said Walter. He grabbed the binoculars from Winslow and pointed them toward the trailhead. “And I spy Ranger Roger standing by his Forest Service Jeep. It’s not running yet.”

Winona grabbed the lens and held them to her eyes. “The plural of moose is moosies,” she said. “And I spy a young boy kneeling in a clearing. What’s he doing?”

“The plural of moose is *moose*,” said Whitney. She grabbed the binoculars and pointed them eastward. “And *I* spy...I spy a girl sitting on top of a tall cedar tree.”

She passed the binoculars back to the other family members, so they could confirm what she saw. The cedar treetop in the distance was at the same level as they were. Sure enough, a girl of about twenty sat

on a small platform anchored high up the tree trunk.

“That must be Arbor Timber, the famous tree-sitter,” said Winona.

“That’s Arbor, all right,” said Winslow. “I wonder how long she’s been tree sitting in that tree.”

“Tree sitting?” said Walter. “Is that like babysitting?”

“No, Arbor sits in trees to prevent loggers from cutting them down,” said Whitney.

“Poor dear, she must be lonely,” said Winona.

The four Wilsons waved their arms. To their delight, the woman in the tree waved back at them.

“She sees us,” said Whitney.

“Let’s go visit her,” said Winslow.

“Excellent idea,” said Walter. “Let’s go meet this girl who sits in trees.”

“I’ll bring her some hot soup,” said Winona.

The Wilsons climbed down the ladder and hiked off Mt. Baldy in the direction of the tall fir tree.

The twins carried paperback books to send up to Arbor, and Winona carried a canteen full of chicken noodle soup. Cat trotted behind the family, wagging his long, scruffy tail.

Shortly they came to the tallest cedar tree in the area. A large cloth banner reading HUG YOUR TREES hung from its wide trunk. Below the banner, someone had painted a large white X.

The Wilsons tilted their heads far back. High up in the cedar branches was the

wooden platform. Arbor Timber sat on the platform with her barefooted feet hanging over the sides. She wore a green hooded sweatshirt and green cargo pants.

At first, the Wilsons couldn't make out what the girl was saying. When they stepped closer to the tree, they realized she was reciting a poem

*"I think I shall never see,  
A poem as lovely as a tree.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only Nature can make a tree."*

Now the Wilsons noticed a man sitting at the base of the tree. He had a bushy red beard and wore a flannel shirt. Wide suspender held up his baggy blue jeans and a silver hard-hat covered the top of his head. By his side lay a chainsaw.

"That was beautiful, Arbor," the man called out. "Will you recite another one?"

At this point, Walter cleared his throat and the man turned toward him.

"Arbor, we have company," he said.

The four Wilsons waved to the man and then waved to the girl in the tree.

"We're the Wilsons," said Walter.

"We're the ones who waved to you from the little cabin on top of Mt. Baldy," said Whitney.

"That's a pretty cool treehouse you have up there," said Winslow.

"I bet the view is as good as ours," said Whitney.

"Yes, there are trees as far as I can see," Arbor called out. "All except that ugly area that has been logged off."

"Oh, let's not go through that again, Arbor," the man in the hard-hat said. "Logging is

my job.”

He turned toward the Wilsons. “My name is Paul,” he said. “Trouble is, I’m one of the lumberjacks Arbor is protesting against. Trouble is, the Mt. Baldy Logging Company has hired me to sit right here, morning, noon, and night to keep an eye on her. The minute she comes down, I’m supposed to saw down this tree.”

“But I’m never coming down until the Mt. Baldy Logging Company promises to save this tree,” Arbor called from her platform.

Paul removed his hard hat and ran his fingers through in curly red hair. “Trouble is, Arbor and I have been talking so much, we’ve grown very fond of each other,” he said. He raised his voice to say, “I’ve never met such a courageous and poetic woman in my life.”

“And I’ve never met a more caring and compassionate man,” Arbor called down.

“So you see the problem,” Paul told the Wilsons. “Trouble is, if Arbor comes down I would have to cut down my tree or lose my job.”

“And as long as I stay up here,” said Arbor, “I can never be with Paul.”

“Ah, a real lover’s dilemma,” said Walter.

“You’re really up a tree on this one,”

Winslow said.

“Well, we brought you some warm soup, dear,” said Winona. “Maybe that will help clear your head a bit.”

A white bucket on the end of a thick rope plopped to the ground by the Wilsons’ feet. Winona put the thermos inside, and the twins dropped in their books. The bucket rose toward the wooden platform.



“Thanks,” Arbor said. “Smells yummy.”

Paul sat down again and sighed. “Yes, I’d marry that woman if we could figure out some way for her to come down,” he said to the Wilsons.

“Yes, it’s hard to put down roots when your heart’s desire is up a tree,” said Winona.

“But keep your chin up, young man,” said Walter. “Now we’ll leave you two lovebirds alone and return to our little cabin in the sky.”

## Chapter Six

On the way back to *No Trees*, the Wilsons picked blackberries and blueberries along the trail.

"We'll make a fruit salad for lunch," said Winona. "I'm sure Ranger Roger will be hungry by the time he returns."

"I also spotted a hazelnut tree," said Whitney. "And some wild strawberries."

"And I saw some edible mushrooms," said Winslow.

"We'll have a feast," said Walter. "Only the best."

As the family foraged for the fruits and nuts, they heard a *click click* sound.

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went Cat.

The four family members looked toward a small clearing and saw a shirtless boy of about sixteen squatting by a lean-to shelter made of white birch bark. He wore only gym trunks, and his back was badly sunburned. He held two sticks, one against the ground. He rubbed the second stick briskly up and down the length of the first.

"Greetings, young man," Walter called out. "We're the Wilsons from *No Trees* cabin on top of Mt. Baldy."

The teenager looked up and sneered. "People," he said under his breath. "I can't escape them. Go away!"

"It's nice to have so many neighbors," said Winona. "Arbor and Paul and now you."

"Who needs neighbors," said the teenager,

and he continued rubbing his two sticks together

“Are you trying to start a fire?” Winslow asked.

“Duh,” came the reply.

“Care to borrow a match?” asked Whitney. “We have plenty of extra.”

The teenager again sneered at the Wilsons. “A match would be cheating,” he said.

“I’m living off the land, the natural way. Everything I do out here in nature must come from nature. I made a natural shelter, and I’ll gather natural food.”

“Naturally,” said Walter. “So how long have you been out here in nature, young man?”

“Since yesterday,” the boy said. “And my name isn’t *Young Man*. It’s *Nature Boy*.”

The boy continued rubbing his sticks. Even from where they stood, the Wilsons could hear his stomach growl.

Whitney popped a blueberry into her mouth. “Have you had anything to eat today?” she asked.

“I’ve set a rabbit snare and put a fish trap in the lake,” said the boy. “Soon I’ll have all the food I can eat.”

“Why don’t you join us for lunch, *Nature Boy*?” said Winona. “We’re making a fruit salad.”

The boy looked toward the Wilsons with hungry eyes. Again his stomach grumbled. “That would be cheating.”

Winslow bit into a blackberry and said, “It’s all natural and everything.”

“Nah,” said the boy. “I came all the way up here to be on my own, doing things my

own way with nature.”

“Then good luck to you, young man,” said Walter.

“But feel free to visit *No Trees* anytime you’d like,” said Winona.

The boy shook his head. Then, without another word, he turned his attention back to the fire building.

“I think Nature Boy will soon be visiting us, Walter said, as the Wilsons headed up the trail again.

“Yes, I’ll set aside some fruit salad for when he does,” said Winona.

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat.

## Chapter Seven

Winslow put his two palms together and blew through the space between his two thumbs. Out came a deep warbling sound—“*Whoo-hoo-wooo!*”

“That one of the northern loon’s calls,” he said. “A loon has twelve different calls.”

A moment later, a reply came through the trees. “*Whoo-hoo-wooo!*”

“Well, done, Winslow,” said Walter. “The bird is answering you.”

Winslow made the call again and again came the reply. “*Whoo-hoo-hoo-wooo!*”

“Let’s go to the lake and see if we can see the loony bird,” said Walter.

“Keep calling Winslow,” said Winona. “We’ll follow the replies.”

Winslow called again, and the Wilsons walked in the direction of the answer.

“*Whoo-hoo-wooo!*” went Winslow a third time.

“*Whoo-hoo-woo-woo!*” went the loon.

After Winslow’s next call, the family stood on the rocky shores of a small lake. No loon was in sight. Instead, not far from shore floated an aluminum canoe. A blond woman sat in the bow, fishing. A blond girl sat in the middle with white earbuds in her ear, and in the stern sat a blond man with his hands cupped to his mouth. He made a loon call.

“*Whoo-hoo-woo-woo!*”

The woman in front pointed to Winslow. “There’s your loon, Andrew,” she said. “You were calling to that boy, and he was calling back to you.”

“If you’d concentrate on fishing, Anne, instead of nagging me you might catch some

fish for dinner,” the man answered.

“I could catch some fish if you could steer this canoe,” Anne snapped back.

“I could steer this canoe if you would help me in front,” said the man.

The man and woman grabbed paddles and stroked them through the water. The canoe started going in circles.

“You’re paddling the wrong way, Andrew,” said the woman.

“No, you are paddling the wrong way, Anne,” said the man.

“Can’t you head us straight?” said Anne.

“Can’t you paddle faster?” said Andrew.

Meanwhile, as the canoe kept going around and around and the man and woman kept arguing, the girl in the middle pushed her earbuds more firmly in her ears.

“Greetings, happy campers,” Walter called from the shore. “We’re the Wilsons from *No Trees* cabin.”

The man and woman looked over and stopped paddling.

“We’re the Andersons from St. Paul,” said the man. “I’m Andrew, and this is my daughter Anna and my wife Anne.”

“But I can’t say we’re happy campers,” said Anne. “Andrew can’t do anything right. He can’t steer a canoe. He can’t build a fire, and he can’t drive our camper very well.”

“It’s you who can’t do things right, Anne,” said Andrew. “You can’t fish right. You can’t cook right, and you can’t set up the equipment right.”

“And you can’t find good campsites or gather good firewood,” said Anne.

“And you can’t start the camp stove or start the camp lantern,” said Andrew

Walter exchange shrugs with his family. "Why don't you park your canoe and join us for lunch?" he called to the Andersons. "You'll find us on top of Mt. Baldy."

"Sorry, we can't," said Andrew.

"Why can't we?" said Anne.

"Can't you just take my word for it that we can't," said Andrew.

"No, I can't."

"I don't see why you can't."

Again the Wilson family shrugged at each other. They turned, and with the Andersons still arguing and their canoe still going around and around, they headed back up the trail.

## Chapter Eight

*"Brooooooooooom!"*

By the time the four Wilsons were climbing the ladder to *No Trees*, the sky had darkened. Zigzags of lightning shot down from a tall dark cloud in the northern sky. Seconds later deep thunder rumbled over Mt. Baldy.

"Sounds like someone is bowling," said Walter.

"We're in for a big thunderstorm tonight," said Winona. "Just as Ranger Roger predicted."

More lightning flashed.

"One-Mississippi, two-Mississippi, three-Mississippi," Whitney and Winslow counted together. "Four-Mississippi, five-Mississippi."

Thunder sounded again.

"The storm is about a mile away," said Whitney.

"The sound of the thunder took five seconds to reach us after the lightning," Winslow explained. "And sound travels about one mile in five seconds."

"I hope Nature Boy will be OK," said Winona.

"I hope Arbor has enough sense to get out of that tree, and the Andersons can paddle to shore before more lightning strikes," said Walter.

"And what about Robin Twitcher?" said Winslow.

"And Ranger Roger?" said Whitney.

"I suspect we'll have a few guests for lunch," said Walter.



While the Wilsons watched the storm approach, they prepared the fruit salad. Winslow cleaned the berries, and Winona shucked the nuts. Walter sliced the mushrooms, while Winona made mint tea from the mint leaves she found.

“We’ll call this the *Wilson’s Wilderness Salad*,” said Whitney.

A bolt of lightning lit up the little cabin and more thunder sounded. *Brooooooooooom!* The tall pines surrounded Mt. Baldy swayed back and forth like so many children doing stretching exercises in PE.

Winona pushed the wooden table to the center of the room. On it, she set their aluminum camping plates and plastic cups. She lit two candles and placed them among pinecones they had collected during their hike.

Meanwhile, outside the little cabin, the wind quit, and the trees stopped swaying.

“The calm before the storm,” said Walter. “This storm will be a whopper.”

“Best show in town,” said Winona.

The four Wilson sat by the northern window to watch the action. As the first drops of rain spotted the glass, there came a knock on the trap door.

“Ah, our first guest has arrived,” said Walter. He pulled the door open, and on the top rung of the ladder stood Ranger Roger.

“Greetings, sir,” Walter said. “Come on in. Come on in.”

“I couldn’t get my hybrid Jeep started,” he said. “Then the lightning blocked out reception on the Jeep radio when I tried calling for help. I’m beginning to wonder about all the high-tech equipment I have.”

“Well, it’s warm and dry in *No Trees*,” said Winona. “Come join us. We can have a

very low tech evening together.”

No sooner had Walter shut the trap door than someone else knocked on it. This time the head of Robin Twitcher rose through the opening. She wore a yellow rain hat with a blue bill in front and a yellow raincoat. She looked like a large canary.

“Oh, thank goodness, you’re still here, Wilsons,” she said loudly. “This weather is for the birds. I hope you don’t mind me dropping in...I mean dropping up like this.”

“The more the merrier,” said Walter.

When the woman was standing inside the cabin Whitney asked her. “Did you check off any birds on your Big Year bird list, Robin?”

“Only one; a small yellow owl,” the woman said, in her booming voice. “I don’t know what the problem is.”

As Robin talked, another head rose through the trapdoor opening.

“Nature Boy!” Winslow exclaimed.

The boy, wearing only a torn T-shirt and gym shorts, stood on the ladder shivering.

“Get in here at once, Nature Boy,” said

Winona.

“Before you catch your death of cold,” said

Walter.

The boy held out a cold hand, and Walter pulled him into the little cabin. Winslow handed him some sweatpants and a sweatshirt from his backpack that he put on.

“No more Nature Boy for me,” he said. “My real name is Sam.”

“You must be hungry, Sam,” said Winona.

The boy nodded. “Cold, hungry, but most of all, after talking with you a while ago, I’m lonely.”

“Well, you’re welcomed here,” said Walter.

At that moment another knock came on the trap door. Walter opened it to see Andrew, Anne, and Anna Anderson staring up at him

“Mind if we come in,” said Andrew. “I can’t believe this storm.”

“And I can’t believe we made it to shore in that canoe,” said Anne.

Anna, who still wore her white earbuds, said nothing.

“Climb on up,” said Walter. “We have quite a crowd in here already.”

After the Andersons entered the little cabin the group mingled and chatted excitedly about the approaching tempest.

“I’m worried about Arbor,” said Winona. “She might get blown right off her platform in this wind.”

“That girl is stubborn and determined,” said Ranger Roger. “I doubt she’ll leave her tree without some coaxing.”

“I have an idea,” said Winslow, taking a flashlight out of his backpack. He aimed the flashlight beam toward Arbor’s tree and began flashing Morse code.

“I said PARTY, BRING PAUL, THE WILSONS,” Winslow said when he was through.

The entire group stared anxiously toward the treetop.

A reply came.

“She said *OK!*” Winslow announced, and Ranger Roger, Robin, Sam, the three

Andersons, and the four Wilsons all cheered.

## Chapter Nine

No sooner had Arbor and Paul knocked on the trap door than the storm hit full force. Blasts of wind shook *No Trees*, and rain hammered its roof.

With water running down her green poncho, Arbor stood in the center of the cabin. “Thanks for the invite, Wilsons,” she said. “I was getting seasick up there in the swaying treetop.”

Paul removed his silver hardhat and stood beside Arbor. “I would have climbed up there and dragged her down if she hadn’t come down by herself,” he said.

“Good, we’re all here,” said Walter. “Time to eat.”

The guests stood around the table, and Winona spooned out the fruit salad, while the twins poured the tea.

When everyone was served, Walter raised his aluminum cup into the air. “I propose a toast,” he said. “Here’s to a wonderful afternoon with all the Wilsons’ wilderness friends.”

“Hear! Hear!” went the guests, clinking cups together.

Meanwhile, the storm continued to boom and blow outside the four windows. At times the little cabin shook. No one, however, seemed to notice. Everyone was too busy enjoying the feast and conversation.

“Do you know last year Paul was the state lumberjack champion,” said Arbor. “Tree climbing, log rolling, and log sawing. Paul does is all.”

Paul looked at Arbor and blushed. “Do you

know Arbor once sat in a redwood tree in Northern California for over six months. As a result, that tree became part of Redwood National Park.”

“You know, Wilsons,” said Andrew Anderson. “I can’t believe you enjoy staying in this cramped tower. Our RV camper is bigger than this room.”

“We’re a tightly-knit family,” said Walter.

“We just need enough space to stretch our feet,” said Winona.

“One of our best vacations was staying on a farm,” said Winslow. “The farmer let us sleep in a little cabin beside the barn.”

“We woke up to one-hundred clucking chickens,” said Whitney.

Next, Ranger Roger said to Robin Twitcher, “Robin, you said you spotted one bird this morning...a yellow owl.”

“Yes, it wasn’t in my bird book,” said Robin. “And I never saw it on any postage stamp.”

“Could you describe it?” the ranger asked.

“It was a small owl, about six inches tall,” said Robin. “It was all yellow with black squares covering its back.”

Ranger Roger plopped down on a stool. “Amazing,” he uttered. “That sounds like a checkered owl.”

“Is that a rare bird?” asked the woman.

“Rare?” said the ranger. “The checkered owl is thought to have been extinct since 1927. The last known one was stuffed and is displayed at our visitor’s center.”

“But I’m sure what I saw,” Robin shouted. “The cute thing remained on a tree branch

while I called to it. It didn't fly away like all the other birds I spy."

"More proof of your sighting, Robin," said Ranger Roger. "The checkered owl had no ears. It was deaf. As soon as the storm clears I must get back to headquarters and report your find."

All this while, Anna Anderson had remained silent, listening to music on her iPod. Now she yanked out the white earbuds from her ears and said her first words, "Battery died."

"I know how that goes," said Ranger Roger.

"The Wilsons don't need batteries to make music," said Walter. "We use lung power. Winslow, take out your harmonica and let's dance."

"I can't dance," said Andrew Anderson.

"I can't either," said Anne Anderson.

Ignoring this, Walter and Winona pushed the table and stools to one side of the room. Winslow grabbed his harmonica. He began playing the *Bee Barrel Polka* while Whitney tabbed out the polka beat on a stool as if it were bongos.

"*Yeeehaaaaa!*" Walter whooped. Then he grabbed Winona by the waist, and they began dancing the polka around the room.

Paul took Arbor by the hand, and they danced as well. Ranger Roger bowed to Robin Twitcher and they also started whirling around the room, as did Sam and Anna Anderson.

"*Yeeehaaaaa!*" Walter repeated, and everyone laughed.

"Come on, Andrew and Anne," Winona called, to the only two who were not dancing.

“Anyone can polka.”

Finally, Andrew shrugged and grabbed Anne by the hands. Soon they too were gliding around the floor with the others. Around and around the five couples went, laughing and singing.

Winslow and Whitney played the *Beer Barrel Polka* four more times before switching to the *Chicken Dance*. Now the dancers flapped their elbows like chickens and stomped their feet on the wooden floor. None of the partiers noticed that outside the cabin the storm had passed, and a big yellow sun was shining in the western sky.

It was after sunset before the guests departed. Robin and Paul said they must return to their tree before either the conservation groups or the logging company discovered they were missing, and Robin offered to drive Ranger Roger to the forest service headquarters.

“Lightning storms often set off forest fires,” the ranger said. “I’ll be spending the night looking for any sign of a fire. Nowadays the forest service uses modern airplanes and infrared scopes to detect any hot spots on the ground.”

“Thanks for the great evening, Wilsons,” said Andrew Anderson. “We’ll be hiking back to our big RV camper on the far side of the lake.”

“We’ll leave the canoe on this side of the lake for the night,” said Anne. She hugged Anna. “We don’t want any more arguments.”

“And I’ll head back to my lean-to,” said Sam. “I hope the storm didn’t blow it away.”

“Farewell, neighbors,” Winona called through the trapdoor as their guests descended.

“Come back soon,” said Winslow.



“We’ll do more dancing,” said Whitney.

“We’re lucky to have such wonderful friends in the area,” said Walter. “Only the best!”

## Chapter Ten

In the morning, bird songs again awoke the Wilsons. The sun was just peeking above the eastern horizon when Walter climbed out of his sleeping bag. He faced the northern window and held the binoculars to his eyes.

“I spy the two mooses across the lake,” he said. “They’re standing outside the Anderson’s big camper.”

Winona looked out the southern window.

“That’s two meese, as in geese,” she said. “And I spy Ranger Roger’s Jeep still in the parking lot.”

Whitney rose from her sack and looked east. “The plural of moose is *moose*,” she said. “And I spy Arbor sitting on her tree platform, and Paul sleeping on the ground below her.”

Winslow faced westward. He was silent a moment before saying, “And *I* spy...*I* spy *smoke!*”

The other Wilsons turned and saw it, too. Ribbons of smoke rose among the pine trees on top of the western ridge.

Walter searched the area through the binoculars. “Wilsons, we must take action,” he said. “I see flames but no fire crews.”

“But how can we report the fire without a radio?” asked Winslow.

Walter turned a circle, looking out every window. After a moment of thought he said, “Wilsons, it’s time for some neighborly teamwork. The Andersons across the lake are

near the road to the ranger station, so we must get a message to them quickly.”

“But how?” said Winona.

“How?” said the twins together.

“Here’s my plan,” said Walter. He held up one finger. “A...Winslow will send a message to Arbor in her tree, telling her about the fire.” He held up another finger. “B...He will tell Arbor to give the message to Paul who should run to Sam’s shelter.” A third finger went up. “C...Sam and Paul should paddle the Anderson’s canoe across the lake and tell the Andersons.” He raised a fourth finger. “And D. The Andersons should drive their camper and inform Ranger Roger about the blaze.”

“Fantabulous,” said Winslow. “I need a mirror for the signal.

“It’s like a relay race,” said Whitney. “This should be fun.”

Winona handed Winslow a mirror, and he began flashing the message in Morse code across to Arbor’s treetop.

“S-0-S...F-I-R-E!” Winslow recited, and he continued wobbling the mirror in the sunlight.

Walter stood watching Arbor through the binoculars.

“Good, she’s received the message,” he reported. “Now she’s calling down to Paul.” He lowered the lens. “Good, now Paul is sprinting toward Sam’s campsite.” The binoculars moved northward. “Good, now Sam and Paul are running toward the canoe on the lakeshore. They’re pushing the canoe into the water and.... Good, they are now paddling like crazy across the lake! Good.”

Winslow looked out the western window. "They must hurry," he said. "The fire is spreading up the ridge. It's heading straight for the cabins on top."

Walter moved the lens to the right. "Good. Sam and Paul have made it to shore. They're talking to Andrew Anderson...Good, they're all getting into the big camper and the camper is driving off."

"The relay worked, Walter," said Winona.

"So far so good," he said. "Now we hope the fire crew gets here soon."

With the fire clawing closer and closer to the cabins, the Wilsons kept their eyes on the forest road, waiting for a fire truck to arrive. Twenty minutes later, however, instead of seeing a truck, they heard an airplane.

A small plane was flying low over the fire. One after the other eight people dressed in orange jumpsuits leaped out. Eight white parachutes popped open, and the eight jumpers landed on the ridge not far from where the fire raged.

"Smokejumpers!" Winslow shouted.

"Firefighters with parachutes!" said Whitney.

"They should be able to make a fire break before the cabins and stop the fire," said Winona.

"Mission accomplished, Wilsons!" said Walter. "Time for breakfast!"

## Chapter Eleven

All morning the Wilsons watched the smokejumpers battle the fire. Finally, around noon, the fire was under control. Not long afterward, the Wilson heard a knock on the trap door.

“Excellent, we have company,” said Walter.

He opened the trap door and saw the top of a silver hardhat. The hat tipped back to reveal the grinning face of a young man with a few days’ growth of whiskers. Although the face was covered with dirt and soot, Walter recognized the man at once.

“Gavin!” he cried.

The other Wilsons rushed to the trap door.

“Gavin!” they shouted as one, and they practically dragged the man into the room.

There is stood, Gavin, the bellhop from the San Francisco Hotel, where the Wilsons had rescued Lizzy Chronicle from kidnappers and had been dubbed the *Elevator Family*.

“Hello, Mr. Wilson, Mrs. Wilson,” Gavin said. “Sure good to see, Winslow and Whitney. How are you all?”

“We’re excellent, young man,” said Walter. “What's up?”

“We’ve been on smoke spotting duty all morning,” said Winona.

Gavin nodded. “When I heard a family named the Wilsons was staying in this abandoned tower, I was sure it had to be you,” he said. “So I stopped by to say hello.”

Winslow looked over Gavin's orange jumpsuit. “So you’re a smokejumper now,

Gavin?" he asked.

"We're you one of those people who parachuted out of that plane?" asked Whitney.

"Sure was," said Gavin. "And if the Wilsons weren't up in this tower to report the fire, those cabins would surely have been destroyed. That's for sure."

"Yes, the Wilsons again rise to the occasion," said Walter.

"So how did you end up in Minnesota fighting fires, Gavin?" asked Winona.

"Smoke jumping is my summer job," Gavin said. "That's how I'm paying for college."

"You told us that you wanted to become a teacher," said Winslow.

"Sure, and if I'm lucky, next year I'll be teaching in my own classroom," Gavin said.

"And do remember Cathy, who ran the flower stall in the hotel lobby."

The four Wilsons nodded and leaned closer to hear the gossip.

"Well, she's now training to become a nurse, and...we are engaged to be married."

"Bravo!" the Wilsons shouted together.

"And I sure hope the whole Wilson family can come to our wedding," said Gavin.

"You were the ones who brought us together."

"Of course, we'll come," said Winona. "We wouldn't miss it for the world"

"Only the best, I'm sure," said Walter.

Cat started barking again from the bottom of the ladder.

"Excellent," said Walter. "More guests."

The four Wilsons waited for the now-familiar clanging sound of someone climbing the tower's ladder, but it never came. Instead, Cat continued to bark.

Walter looked out the window. "Ah, we do have guests," he said. "A small furry one."

The others looked toward the ground and spotted a brown bear cub drinking from Cat's water dish.

"Poor thing," said Whitney. "That cub seems to have lost his mother."

"That happens a lot after a fire," said Gavin.

"Cubs get separated from their parents. The best thing to do is to leave it alone. I'm sure Mama and Papa bear are wandering around right now looking for their baby bear."

"But he must be hungry," said Winona. "We can give him some Wilsons' Special Trail Mix."

"I'm sure that can't harm the little guy, but keep an eye out for the parents when you're around him," Gavin said. "That's for sure."

The four Wilsons and Gavin clanged down the ladder with a Ziploc bag full of trail mix. At the bottom, Whitney poured some of the snacks in Cat's supper dish and stepped back. At once the cub hurried toward the food and began eating.

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went Cat.

"Well, I sure better be getting back to the fire area and check for hot spots," said Gavin. "Don't want anything flaring up later on."

"And you can be sure the Wilsons will be on the lookout, Gavin," said Walter.

"Give our regards to Cathy," said Winona.

"And we'll see you at the wedding, young man," said Walter.

"Sure thing, Mr. Wilson," said Gavin. "And I'll be on the lookout for a small, cozy place where the *Elevator Family* can stay during your visit."

## Chapter Twelve

Soon after Gavin left, Ranger Roger appeared on Mt. Baldy's summit.

"I've come to give you Wilsons a big thanks from the forest service," he said. "Last night our modern smoke-spotting plane with its high-tech infrared ground heat detector wouldn't start." so if you hadn't been in this tower, that fire on the ridge would never have been spotted. You saved many acres of forest and twenty cabins."

"We couldn't have reported it without the help of our wilderness neighbors," said Walter. "Only the best."

"Care for a cup of cocoa, Ranger Roger?" said Winona. "You look down in the dumps."

The ranger blew out his cheeks. "Well, I also have some bad news to deliver. It concerns Arbor in her tree. It appears that the forest service has hired Removal Mike."

Both Whitney and Winslow gasped.

"They couldn't have," said Whitney. "Why him? Is there no other way?"

"I thought Removal Mike only works out West," said Winslow.

"No, he'll be here tomorrow morning," said Ranger Roger, shaking his head. "And then who knows what will happen."

Walter waved his hands. He blurted out, "Will someone *please* tell me *who* is Removal Mike person. And *what* does this man remove?"

"Removal Mike is an expert at removing tree sitters, such as Arbor from trees," said Whitney.



“No matter what tree-sitters try—chaining themselves to tree limbs, locking themselves to tree trunks, or climbing to the highest tree branch— Removal Mike has a way of removing them,” said Winslow.

“His removal rate is one-hundred percent,” said the ranger. “Arbor Timber doesn’t stand a chance to save her precious tree against this man.”

The group grew quiet for a moment.

“If there were only some way of stopping Removal Mike from getting to Mt. Baldy,” said Winslow.

“If we stop him now, he’ll just come later,” said Ranger Roger. “Mt. Baldy Logging Company has the timber rights to all the trees around this mountain and no single tree-sitter is going to stop them from logging wherever they want.”

“But there must be another way to stop the logging company,” said Winona.

“There is,” said Winslow. “If there were a protected species of animal living in the area.”

“That’s right,” said Whitney. “I read that environmentalist saved stands of redwood trees in California, because an endangered bird, the spotted owl, nested in them.”

Ranger Roger’s eyes widened. “That’s right, Whitney!” he shouted. He began dancing the polka around the room. “You’re brilliant Winslow!”

Walter gave his family a look. “Perhaps our ranger friend here has tapped the beer barrel already today,” he said.

Ranger Roger stopped dancing. “No, don’t you remember? Robin’s checkered owl!”

he said. "Because of the fire, I had forgotten all about it. If there is indeed a checkered owl in the area, it certainly belongs on the endangered species list, and if it *is* on that list, logging would be prohibited around Mt. Baldy."

"Fantabulous!" said Winslow. "We gotta find Robin and have her tell us where she spotted the bird."

"Robin is staying at the Mt. Baldy Hotel," said Ranger Roger. "I'll fetch her right away."

Things happened quickly after that. Within the hour, Ranger Roger returned to the summit of Mt. Baldy with Robin Twitcher in tow. The Wilsons met them at the bottom of the ladder. Walter, with his binoculars clutched in both hands, was ready for the bird hunt, but finding the checkered owl was simple.

Even before the birders had taken a step, Robin shouted, "There it is! There's my pretty yellow owl."

She was pointing to a small bird perched on top of Cat's pup tent. The owl hopped down onto

Cat's dinner dish and began eating the Wilsons' Special Trail Mix just as the bear cub had done.

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went Cat.

Walter held the binoculars to his eyes. "That birdie has checkers on its back and doesn't seem to hear Cat barking! That must be the bird in question."

"And it sure likes our trail mix," said Winona.

Ranger Roger pulled out his smartphone and took a picture of the bird

“Good thing my phone battery worked this time,” he said. “That’s the checkered owl all right, the first live one seen in over eighty years.”

“That little birdie will save the trees around here,” said Whitney.

“And Robin, you will soon be a famous birder,” said Winslow.

“I’ll send this picture to my conservationist friends to verify the bird’s identification,” said Ranger Roger. “You can tell Arbor she can come down from her tree. No one can cut it down now.”

“And she and Paul can be together,” said Winona.

A bird in hand, helps two in the bush,” said Walter.

Then everyone laughed and hugged and slapped each other on the back.

## Chapter Thirteen

The next morning, along with the sound of chirping birds, the groan of an airplane engine woke the Wilson. The family watched a seaplane with pontoons the size of canoes attached to its bottom circle *No Trees* twice before landing on the lake at the base of Mt. Baldy. Through his binoculars, Walter saw two men, one of them Andrew Anderson, climb from the plane.

“Up and at ‘em, Wilsons,” Walter said. “It’s our last morning here in *No Trees*, and we’re about to have more guests.”

As the Wilsons ate oatmeal for breakfast, a small crowd gathered below the tower—Andrew Anderson, his companion, Ranger Roger, Robin Twitcher, Arbor, Paul, and “Nature Boy” Sam.

Soon two large men, looking out of place in business suits and neckties, joined the group.

“It’s quite a meeting down there,” said Winona. “Everyone seems riled up about something.

“Must be about Robin’s bird,” said Winslow.

“It’s wonderful how such a small thing like the checkered owl can cause such a stir,” said Whitney.

The Wilsons, one after the other, clumped down the metal ladder. At the bottom, the visitors gathered around them.

Ranger Roger nodded toward the slender man standing with Andrew Anderson.

“Walter, this is Virgil Green, from the Wilderness Society,” he said.

“Andrew flew Mr. Green up here post haste, so we can get the checkered owl on the endangered species list.”

“Greetings, Wilsons,” Virgil Green said.

“Since the ranger sent us the photo of the checkered owl, the Wilderness Society, the Audubon Society, and every other green society have been excited.”

Now Ranger Roger gestured to the two large men in suits. “And these men are lawyers who represent the Mt. Baldy Logging Company,” he said.

One lawyer stepped forward. “All the logging companies, hunting clubs, and mining companies are alarmed by this bird discovery,” he said.

“We’re here to see this little owl for ourselves, to make sure the photo wasn’t a hoax,” said the other lawyer.

“But it might take days to find that bird again,” said Robin.

“Maybe I should go back up my tree,” said Arbor.

“Nonsense,” said Wilsons. “We don’t need to find that owl. That owl will find us.”

“All we need to do is put some of the Wilsons’ Special Trail Mix in our dog’s food dish,” said Winona. “Winslow, you can do the honors.”

While Winslow poured some trail mix into Cat’s dish, the group stepped away from the tower. Almost at once the deaf, yellow owl flew onto the top of the pup tent

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” went Cat.

“Fantabulous!” said Winslow.

“Amazing,” said Virgil Green. “There it is. The owl that the world thought was

extinct.”

“Then it’s official,” said Ranger Roger. “This area is officially off-limits to logging, hunting, and mining.”

“And I’m putting up the money to buy this land for the Wilderness Society,” said Andrew Anderson. “From now on, it’s off-limits to all development.”

The two lawyers frowned.

“Well, that little owl is certainly cute,” said the first lawyer.

“And to tell you the truth, I’ve always enjoyed hiking up here with my family,” said the second lawyer. “I hated the thought of all these trees being cut down.”

“But since this area is a protected area, shouldn’t there be someone posted here to see that it’s protected,” said Walter. “I nominate, ‘Nature Boy’! I nominate *Sam!*”

“Excellent idea,” said Ranger Roger. “What do you think, Sam? Would you be willing to stay in this tower and watch over this area?”

Sam raised his arms in glee. “Would I?” he said. “Naturally!”

Next, Walter turned toward Arbor and Paul who were standing side by side holding hands. “And what about you two?” he asked.

“I’ll be looking for another tree to sit in,” said Arbor. “Another tree to protect from getting cut down.”

“And I’ll be at the base of that tree giving Arbor all the support she needs,” said Paul.

“Well, I need to fly Mr. Green back to the twin cities,” said Andrew Anderson.

“Wilsons can I give you a lift back to civilization?”

“Certainly not,” said Walter. “We Wilsons are a hardy lot. We will hike out on our

own.”

## Chapter Fourteen

After lunch, the Wilsons rolled up their sleeping bags and packed their backpacks. While the twins swept the floor, Walter took down the HOME SWEAT HOME sampler from the wall.

“This little cabin with a view has served us well,” he said. “I hope the next place **HOME SWEAT HOME** hangs is just as special.”

The news about the yellow-checkered owl spread quickly. Birders with binoculars, cameras, and scopes were already arriving on Mt. Baldy.

Once news reporters caught wind that the family who reported the forest fire was none other than the famous *Elevator Family*, they also flocked to the mountain. All morning long Walter answered questions about his family’s latest adventures.

“Just doing our duty,” he told them. “And we had a high time doing it.”

Around noon, Ranger Roger returned to *No Trees* and announced, “We now have a name for our new wilderness area. We’ll call it *The Elevator Family Bird Refuge*.”

“Anything that’s for the birds is all right with the Wilsons,” said Walter. “Only the best. Only the best for this family.”

Finally, in the early afternoon, it was time for the Wilsons to leave. One by one, with their backpacks bouncing upon their backs, they clanged down the metal ladder. Walter was the last one out, and he closed the trap door.

“Farewell, *No Trees*,” he said. “It was a



pleasant stay.”

With Walter in the lead, the four Wilsons stood in single file at the bottom of the ladder. After Winslow took down Cat’s pup tent, Walter held up a hand.

“Ready, Wilsons,” he called out. “Forward ho, we go.” He swung his arm forward.

“Hup! Hup! Hup!”

“*Ruff! Ruff!*” called Cat, running on ahead.

“Hup! Hup! Hup!” the others chanted, as they trooped down the mountain.