



Chapter 23

“Something is going on here and we plan to get to the bottom of it sooner or later. Two sets of jacks are missing, now Hannah’s camera, and many of you are not aware, but Mr. Dupries’ Swiss army knife was stolen last evening during game time.”

Wide-eyed kids looked at each other. This was major. Somebody was going to be in really big trouble.

“A Swiss army knife and a camera are not easy to hide, so someone is removing things from tents somehow unobserved. Once again, I want to remind you to not touch someone else’s property. Live by the Golden Rule and treat other people the way you’d want to be treated. None of us want to have our things stolen, so don’t be a thief and take anything that doesn’t belong to you.” He paused long enough for the silence to have an effect on the fifth graders and adults. Someone was intentionally spoiling their fun.

He took a deep breath and began talking in a happier tone of voice. “Okay, let’s get on to our afternoon game because I hear dinner is going to be extra special.”

Delicious smells from the cooking pots were floating through the air. Whistles and cheers went up for the cooks.

“I think this next game will not be new to you. Probably most of you have already played it but didn’t realize it is an old game.



It's called Nine Pins. So that you wouldn't see what was going on, I had rangers set up the game on the other side of the Visitor's Center. Follow me."

Off trooped one hundred thirty students and adults, single file, behind Ranger Moore. They felt like soldiers in the Civil War.

Much to their amazement, as they turned the corner on the walkway, it looked like they were at an outdoor bowling alley. Those who had bowled before figured they were going to do quite well and let it be known to those around them. Ranger Moore smiled at everyone's expressions.

"Nine Pins is very similar to our ten-pin bowling. Children in the 1860s used wooden balls to knock down wooden pins, very much like we do today. Except, it was played outside and grass makes it more difficult to knock them down. As with regular bowling, when it's your turn, you'll each get two tries to knock down the pins. Teachers will be counting pins and keeping score. Someone will be down by the pins setting them back up in the V-shape. We are still competing North against the South, so you will be matched South Carolina against Pennsylvania, New York against Georgia, and Michigan against Virginia. You will have smaller teams of ten per side and it will be the best two out of three games. You have five minutes to set up your teams and then I'll blow my whistle."

Teachers broke down their classes into three teams of ten and matched them up with ten members from the opposing state. Ben and Bekka hadn't met many from Virginia except Ashley and



C.P., so they guessed which ones might be good at Nine Pins. Their dad told them it was called ‘sizing up the competition’. They didn’t want any surprises, but it happened. Ashley looked like she couldn’t roll a ball very far, but when she did, it went straight as an arrow, heading for the first pin every time. C.P. proved he was as good at bowling as he was at spitting watermelon seeds.

“I don’t think the North stands a chance if everybody on their team is as good as they are.” Bekka squirmed close to Ben, not wanting anyone else to hear her comment.



“Yeah, I think we are in for it again,” he agreed. “Let’s give it our best shot.”

One by one the teams took turns, knocking down and then missing the pins. The boys seemed to be able to hit more of them,



but the girls put forth a little extra effort, and kept up quite well. It was neck and neck. Since there were no electric score keeping signs, no one but the teachers knew who was ahead. Kids from the North really wanted that traveling trophy to be on their side of the flagpole tonight, while kids from the South wanted to keep it right where it was—on their side. Everyone was having a great time. They wouldn't have been had they been able to see what was going on over in the tents.