

PECAN MYSTERY

By Virginia Ryan
(Based on a true story)

"It's always fun when grandpa comes, when grandpa comes hooray!" (Children's Songbook, 20).

Katie wiped tears from her cheeks and waved goodbye as Mom drove away.

"I remember the first time I stayed at my grandparents' house," Grandpa said as they walked back to his porch. "I was seven, just like you."

Katie swallowed a lump in her throat. She loved Grandma and Grandpa, but she'd never stayed here without Mom before. "What was it like?"

"Well, my grandpa gave me special jobs to do." They sat down together on Grandpa's porch swing. A soft breeze stirred leaves in the trees.

"What kind of jobs?" Katie asked.

"Oh, I fed cackly old hens and found their eggs. I pulled weeds and carried firewood. I had a great time."

Katie smiled a little. It sounded fun to gather eggs. "Do you have any special jobs I can do?"

Grandpa grinned. "Oh yes! Last night's windstorm left a lot of sticks and pecans to pick up."

Katie looked around. Grandpa's yard was like a big park with giant pecan trees growing around the edges.

"I'll help!" Katie said.

Grandpa pushed his wheelbarrow around the yard while Katie picked up sticks and pecans. Something

caught her eye. Under a large tree was a pile of pecans stacked up as neat as could be.

"Grandpa! Look over here!" Katie shouted.

Grandpa hurried over. "Well, look at that! How many are there?"

Katie knelt down to look closer. ". . . 10, 11, 12," she counted. "Is an animal saving the nuts for winter?"

"Hmm," Grandpa said. "Let's leave them here and check again tomorrow to see if there are any more."

Katie's eyes grew large. She'd watch every day!

The next morning Katie ran to the big tree and got down on her hands and knees—11, 12, 13. There *was* one more! She checked around the yard. What animal would save up pecans one at a time?

As soon as Katie woke the next day, she ran to the tree—14! She couldn't believe it. "Grandpa, is it a bird?"

"Let's watch and find out," Grandpa said.

They sat on the porch swing and kept quiet. Robins hopped around the yard, tugging earthworms from the ground. Warblers jumped from branch to branch. Woodpeckers hammered on tree trunks.

Squirrels picked up nuts, but they carried them to a hole high in a tree.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRAD TEARE

Could Katie solve this nutty mystery before Mom came back?

No birds or squirrels came close to the pecan pile.

The next morning Katie helped Grandma and Grandpa bake puffy sugar cookies. Katie smelled the sweet vanilla as she put a pecan half in the center of each one. Once the cookies were ready, Katie grabbed some to nibble on while she hid by some bushes in the corner of the yard and watched the pecan pile.

Suddenly she saw Grandpa walking to the pile. Was he going to count the pecans? Then Katie's eyes opened wide. Grandpa took something from his pocket and put it carefully on top of the pile.

"Grandpa! It's *you*!" Katie shouted. She jumped out and rushed to hug his knees.

Grandpa raised his arms in the air. "I've been caught!" he laughed. "You solved the mystery!"

Katie jumped up and down. "It was you, Grandpa, saving up for winter!"

He nodded. "Yes, indeed. But we don't have to wait for winter. Let's surprise your mother tomorrow with a pecan pie."

"Is she coming back already?" Katie asked in surprise. Grandpa's mystery had made the time zoom by. "I can't wait to come back and visit again!"

Next time, maybe *she* would be the one to come up with a mystery. ♦

The author lives in Michigan, USA.

