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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Box-Car Children: Earning A Living (6/17)

Henry had all sorts of packages under his arm and in his pockets. But he wouldn't open them or tell a thing about his adventures until dinner was ready, he said. "Jess, you're a wonder!" he exclaimed when he saw the dishes and the shelf.

The big kettle was selected, and they all began to pick blueberries as fast as they could, telling Henry meanwhile all about the wonderful dump. At last the tablecloth was spread and Henry unwrapped his parcels before the whole excited family.

"I bought some more brown bread," he said, producing the loaves, "and some more milk—in the same little store where I went yesterday. It's kept by a little old man, and it's called a Delicatessen Shop. He has everything in his store to eat. I bought some dried beef because we can eat it in our fingers. And I bought a big bone for the dog."

"His name is Watch," Jess interrupted.

"All right," said Henry, accepting the name. "I bought a bone for Watch."

Watch fell on the bone as if he were famished, which indeed he nearly was.

It was a rapturous moment when Jess poured the yellow milk into four cups or bowls, and each child

proceeded to crumble the brown bread into it with a liberal scattering of blueberries. And then when they ate it with spoons! Nobody was able to speak a word for several minutes.

Then Henry began slowly to tell his tale.

"I earned a dollar just this morning," he began proudly.

"I walked along the first shady street I came to—nice houses, you know. And there was a fellow out mowing his own lawn. He's a nice fellow, too, I can tell you—a young doctor." Henry paused to chew blissfully.

"He was pretty hot," Henry went on. "And just as I came to the gate, his telephone rang. I heard it, and called after him and asked if he didn't want me to finish up."

"And he said he did!" cried Jess.

"Yes. He said, 'For goodness' sake, yes!'" Henry answered smiling. "You see, he wasn't used to it. So I mowed the lawn and trimmed the edges, and he said he never had a boy trim it as well as I did. And then he asked me if I wanted a steady job."

"O Henry!" cried Violet and Jess together.

"I told him I did, so he said to come back this afternoon any time I wanted, or tomorrow—he said he didn't care just when—any time."

Henry gave his cup a last polish with his spoon and set it down dreamily. "It's a pretty house," he went on, "and there's a big garden behind it—vegetable garden. And an orchard behind that—cherry orchard. You ought to see the cherry trees! Well, when I was trimming the edges near the kitchen door, the cook came and watched me.

She's a fat Irishwoman." Henry laughed at the recollection.

"She asked me if I liked cookies. Oh, if you had smelled them baking you'd have died laughing, Benny. Delicious! So I said I did, and she passed me out one, and when she went back I put it in my pocket."

"Did she see you?" asked Jess anxiously.

"Oh, no," said Henry confidently. "For I carefully chewed away for a long time on nothing at all."

Benny began to look fixedly at Henry's pocket. It certainly was still rather bulgy.

"When I went, the doctor paid me a dollar, and the cook gave me this bag."

Henry grinned as he tossed the paper bag to Jess.

Inside were twelve ginger cookies with scalloped edges, smelling faintly of cinnamon and sugar.

"I'm going to keep track of everything I earn and spend," said Henry, watching Jess as she handed around the cookies with reverence.

"How are you going to write without a pencil?" asked Jess.

"There are pieces of tailor's chalk in my workbag," said Violet.



Henry gave his younger sister a gentle pat, as she returned with her workbag and fished for the chalk. While the girls rinsed the empty dishes in the brook and stored away the food for supper, Henry was beginning his cash account on the wall of his bedroom. It was never erased, and Henry often now looks at the account with great affection.

Soon the girls came to inspect it. Meanwhile Benny looked on with great delight as Watch tried to bury his bone with only one paw to dig with.

"Earned, \$1.00; Cash on hand, \$3.85," read Jess aloud. Below, he had written:

Milk	.24
Bread	.10
Bread	.20
Cheese	.10
Milk	.24
Beef	.20
Bone	.05
Cloth	.10

"Cloth!" exclaimed Violet. "What on earth?"

Henry laughed a little, and watched her face as he drew out his last package and handed it to her.

"I thought we ought to have a tablecloth," he explained. "So I got a yard at the ten-cent store—but it isn't hemmed, of course."

With a cry of delight Violet unwrapped the brown cloth with its edge of blue. Her clever fingers were already evening the two ends. She was never so happy as when with a needle.

Henry set off again with a light heart. Here was one sister curled up happily against a big tree, setting tiny stitches into a very straight hem. Here was another sister busily gathering pliant twigs into a bundle for a broom with which to sweep the stray pine needles from the house. And here was Benny, curled up sound asleep on the ground with the dog for a pillow.

It was quite late when Henry returned. In fact, it was nearly seven o'clock, although he didn't know that.

Several treasures had been added in his absence. The broom stood proudly in the corner with a slim stick for a handle. The new tablecloth had been washed and was drying on the line. And Jess, who had decided to wash one garment a day, had begun with Benny's stockings. When Henry came they were being put on again with much pride by Benny himself. Violet had darned a big hole in each.

This time Henry himself could not wait to tell his sisters what he had. He passed them the package at once, with shining eyes.

"Butter!" cried Jess with a radiant face.

It was butter, cool and sweet. Nobody remembered that they had been a week without tasting either butter or meat when at last they sat down to their royal supper.

"These are trick spoons," explained Henry. "Turn them upside down, and use the handle, and they become knives."

They were knives; anyway, they were used to spread the delicious morsels of butter on the brown loaf. With dried beef, and a cookie for dessert, who could ask for

better fare? Certainly not the four children, who enjoyed it more than the rarest dainties.

"I washed the doctor's automobile this afternoon," Henry related. "Then I washed both piazzas with the hose, and tomorrow I'm going to hoe in the garden. Oh, wouldn't I love to have a nice cold swim in that brook!" Henry was hot and sticky, certainly. He looked with longing eyes at the waterfall as he finished the last crumbs of his supper.

"I wonder if we couldn't fix up a regular swimming pool," he said, half to himself.

"Of course we could," replied Violet, as if nothing were too difficult. "Jess and I know where there are big logs, and big flat stones."

"You do, hey?" said Henry staring at his gentle little sister.

"Well, why couldn't we, Henry?" struck in Jess. "Just a little below this there is a sort of pool already, only not big enough."

"We sure could!" cried Henry. "Some day I'll stay home from work, and we'll see."

Nobody realized that Henry had been working only one day in all. Anyway it seemed as if they had always lived in the comfortable home in the freight car, with Henry plying back and forth from the city each day, bringing them new surprises.

Henry went to bed that night with a head full of plans for damming up the brook. He almost shouted when he thought suddenly of Benny's wheels. He began to plan to make a cart to carry the heavy stones to the brook.

And that was when he first noticed that Watch was not asleep. He could see his eyes shining red in the darkness. It must have been around eleven o'clock. Henry reached over and patted his rough little back. Watch licked the hand, but didn't close his eyes. Suddenly he began to growl softly.

"Sh!" said Henry to the dog. Now thoroughly startled, he sat up; Jess sat up. They did not hear a sound.

"Better shut the door," breathed Henry. Together they rolled the door very slowly and softly until it was shut. Still they did not hear anything. But still Watch continued his uneasy growling.

Violet and Benny slumbered on. Jess and Henry sat motionless, with their hearts in their mouths.

"Supposing it was some other tramp," whispered Jess, "somebody else that wanted to sleep here!"

"Watch would bite 'em," whispered Henry briefly. Jess never knew what confidence Henry had in the faithful dog.

Then a branch cracked sharply outside, and Watch barked out loud. Jess smothered the dog instantly in her arms. But it had been a bark and it was loud, clear, and unmistakable.

"That settles it," thought Henry. "Whoever it is, knows there's someone in here." And the boy waited with the new broom in his hand, expecting every moment to see the door opened from the outside.

But nothing happened. Nothing at all. The children sat in perfect silence for at least a half hour, and nothing more was heard. Watch sniffed a little when Henry

finally rolled the door open again. But he then turned around three times and lay down beside Jess, apparently satisfied at last.

Taking the dog's conduct as a sure guide, Henry composed himself for sleep.

"It must have been a rabbit or something," he said to Jess.

The occupants of the freight car slept peacefully until morning.