

This story is brought to you by Ririro.com for free. Our mission is to give all children in the world free access to a variety of stories. The stories can be read, downloaded and printed online and cover a wide range of topics, including animals, fantasy, science, history, diverse cultures and much more.

Support our mission by sharing our website. We wish you a lot of fun reading!



Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Ririro

The Box-Car Children: Housekeeping (5/17)

The next morning Jess was up before the others, as was fitting for a little housekeeper. That is, she was first if we except the dog, who had opened one eye instantly every time his little mistress stirred in her sleep. He sat watching gravely in the door of the car as Jess descended to get breakfast. She walked from the little waterfall quite a distance down the brook, looking at it with critical eyes.

"This will be the well," she said to herself, regarding a small but deep and quiet basin just below the falls. Below that she found a larger basin, lined with gravel, with flat stones surrounding it.

"This will be the washtub," she decided. "And now I must go back to the refrigerator." This was the strangest spot of all, for behind the little waterfall was a small quiet pool in which Jess had set the milk bottles the night before. Not a drop of water could get in, but all night long the cool running water had surrounded the bottles. They were now fairly icy to the touch. Jess smiled as she drew them out.

"Is it good?" asked Benny's voice. There he sat in the door of the car, swinging his legs, his arm around the shaggy dog.

"It's delicious!" declared Jess. "Cold as ice." She climbed up beside him as she spoke, bringing the breakfast with her. The other two children sat up and looked at it.

"Today, Jess," began Henry, "I will go back to town and try to get a job mowing lawns or something. Then we can afford to have something besides milk for breakfast."

Milk suited Benny very well, however, so the older children allowed him to drink rather more than his share. Henry did not waste any time talking. He brushed his hair as well as he could without a brush, rolled down his sleeves, and started for town with the second dollar.

"Glad you've got a dog, Jess," he called back, as he waved his straw hat.

The children watched him disappear around the curve and then turned to Jess expectantly. They were not mistaken. Jess had a plan.

"We'll explore," she began mysteriously. "We'll begin here at the car, and hunt all over these woods until we find a dump!"

"What's a dump?" inquired Benny.

"O Benny!" answered Violet. "You know what a dump is. All old bottles and papers and broken dishes."

"And wheels?" asked Benny interestedly. "Will there be any old wheels?"

"Yes, maybe," assented Violet. "But cups, Benny! Think of drinking milk out of a cup again!"

"Oh, yes," said Benny, politely. But it was clear that his mind was centered on wheels rather than cups.

The exploring party started slowly down the rusty track, with the dog hopping happily on three legs. The fourth paw, nicely bandaged with Jess' handkerchief, he held up out of harm's way.

"I think this is a spur track," said Jess. "They built it in here so they could load wood on the cars, and then when they had cut all the wood they didn't need the track any more."

This explanation seemed very likely, for here and there were stumps of trees and decaying chips. Violet took note of these chips, and remembered them some days later. In fact, both girls kept their eyes open, and pointed out things of interest to each other.

"Remember these logs, Violet, if we should ever need any," said Jess pointing.

"Blackberry blossoms!" returned Violet briefly, turning one over gently with her foot.

"Big flat stones!" remarked Jess, later on, as they came upon a great heap of them.

Here the track came out into the open sunshine, and broken pieces of rail showed clearly where it had joined the main track at some time in the past. And here from the top of the wooded hill the children could plainly see the city in the valley. They walked along the track, picking out a church steeple here and there, forgetting for a moment the object of their search.

"There's a wheel!" Benny cried triumphantly from behind.

The girls looked down, and with a glad cry of surprise Jess recognized a dump at the foot of the hill. They

found it not composed entirely of ashes and tin cans, either, although both of these were there in great profusion. It was a royal dump, containing both cups and wheels.

"O Benny!" cried Jess, "if it hadn't been for you!" She hugged him, wheel and all, and began turning over the rubbish with great delight.

"Here's a white pitcher, Jess," Violet called, holding up a perfect specimen with a tiny chip in its nose.

"Here's a big white cup," said Jess delightedly, laying it aside.

"Want a teapot, Jessy?" inquired Benny, offering her an enormous blue enameled affair without a handle.

"Yes, indeed!" cried Jess. "We can use that for water. I've found two cups and a bowl already. And Violet, we ought to be looking for spoons, too."

Violet pointed without speaking to her little pile of treasures. There were five iron spoons covered with rust.

"Wonderful!" pronounced Jess with rapture. Indeed, it is doubtful if collectors of rare and beautiful bits of porcelain ever enjoyed a search as much as did these adventurers in the dump heap.

Benny actually found four wheels, exactly alike, probably from the same cart, and insisted upon carrying them back. To please him, Jess allowed him to add them to the growing pile.

"Here's a big iron kettle," observed Violet. "But we won't really cook with a fire, will we, Jess?"

"We'll take it back, though," replied Jess with a knowing look. "We can pile lots of dishes in it." They could, and did, but not until after Benny had discovered his beloved "pink cup." It was a tea-party cup of bright rose-color with a wreath of gorgeous roses on it, and a little shepherdess giving her lamb a drink from a pale blue brook. It had a perfectly good handle, gold into the bargain. Its only flaw was a dangerous crack through the lamb's nose and front feet. Jess made a cushion for it out of grass and laid it on top of the kettle full of treasures. All the things, even the wheels, were laid on a wide board which the two girls carried between them.

Can you imagine the dishwashing when the gay party returned to the freight car? Children do not usually care for dishwashing. But never did a little boy hand dishes to his sister so carefully as Benny did. On their hands and knees beside the clear, cool little "washtub," the three children

soaped and rinsed and dried their precious store of dishes. Jess scoured the rust from the spoons with sand. "There!" she said, drying the last polished spoon. The children sat back and looked admiringly at their own handiwork. But they did not look long. There was too much to be done.



"Jess," exclaimed Violet, "I'll tell you!" Violet seldom spoke so excitedly. Even Benny turned around and looked at her.

"Come and see what I noticed inside the car last night!" Both children followed her, and peered in at the door.

"See, on the wall, right over on the other door, Jess."

Now, all Jess could see were two thick chunks of wood nailed securely to the closed door opposite the open one. But she whirled around and around as fast as she could, clapping her hands. When she could get her breath, however, she skipped over to the board they had carried, dusted it nicely, and laid it carefully across the two wooden projections. It was a perfect shelf.

"There!" said Jess.

The children could hardly wait to arrange the shining new dishes on the shelf. Violet quietly gathered some feathery white flowers, a daisy or two, and some maidenhair ferns, which she arranged in a glass vase filled with water from the "well." This she put in the middle, with the broken edge hidden.

"There!" said Jess.

"You said 'there' three times, Jessy," remarked Benny, contentedly.

"So I did," replied Jess laughing, "but I'm going to say it again." She pointed and said, "There!"

Henry was coming up the path.