

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: Shelter (3/17)

When Jess opened her eyes it must have been about ten o'clock in the morning. She sat up and looked all around her. She could see dimly the opening where they had come into the woods. She looked around to see that her family was still safely by her. Then she looked up at the sky. At first she thought it must still be night, and then she realized that the darkness was caused by an approaching storm.

"Whatever, whatever shall we do now?" demanded Jess of the air.

She got up and looked in every direction for shelter. She even walked quite a little way into the woods, and down a hill. And there she stood, not knowing what to do next.

"I shall have to wake Henry up," she said at last. "Only how I hate to!"

As she spoke she glanced into the forest, and her feet felt as if they were nailed to the ground. She could not stir. Faintly outlined among the trees, Jess saw an old freight or box car. Her first thought was one of fear; her second, hope for shelter. As she thought of shelter, her feet moved, and she stumbled toward it.

It really was a freight car. She felt of it. It stood on rusty broken rails which were nearly covered with dead

leaves. Then the thunder cracked overhead. Jess came to her usual senses and started back for Henry, flying like the wind. He was awake, looking anxiously overhead. He had not noticed that Jess was missing.

"Come!" panted Jess. "I've found a place! Hurry! hurry!" Henry did not stop to ask questions. He picked up Benny, telling Violet to gather up the hay. And then they ran headlong through the thick underbrush in Jess' wake, seeing their way only too well by the sharp flashes of lightning.

"It's beginning to sprinkle!" gasped Henry.

"We'll get there, all right," Jess shouted back. "It's not far. Be all ready to help me open the door when we get there!"

By sheer good fortune a big tree stump stood under the door of the freight car, or the children never could have opened it. As it was, Jess sprang on the stump and Henry, pausing to lay Benny down, did likewise. Together they rolled back the heavy door about a foot.

"That's enough," panted Jess. "I'll get in, and you hand Benny up to me."

"No," said Henry quietly. "I must see first if any one is in there."

"It will rain!" protested Jess. "Nothing will hurt me."

But she knew it was useless to argue with Henry, so she hastily groped in the bag for the matches and handed them to her brother. It must be confessed that Jess held her breath while Henry struck one and peered about inside the car.

"All's well!" he reported. "Come in, everybody!"

Violet passed the hay up to her brother, and crawled in herself. Then Jess handed Benny up like a package of groceries and, taking one last look at the angry sky and waving trees, she climbed in after him.

The two children managed to roll the door back so that the crack was completely closed before the storm broke. But at that very instant it broke with a vengeance. It seemed to the children that the sky would split, so sharp were the cracks of thunder. But not a drop of rain reached them in their roomy retreat. They could see nothing at all, for the freight car was tightly made, and all outside was nearly as black as night. Through it all, Benny slept on.

Presently the thunder grew fainter, and rumbled away down the valley, and the rain spent itself. Only the drip from the trees on the top of the car could be heard.

Then Henry ventured to open the door.

He knelt on his hands and knees and thrust his head out.

The warm sunlight was filtering through the trees, making golden pools of light here and there. The beautiful trees, pines and white birches and oaks, grew thickly around and the ground was carpeted with flowers and wonderful ferns more than a yard high. But most miraculous of all was a miniature waterfall, small but perfect, where the same little brown brook fell gracefully over some ledges, and danced away down the glen.

In an instant Jess and Violet were looking over Henry's shoulder at the pretty sight.

"How different everything looks with the sun shining!" exclaimed Jess. "Things will soon be dry at this rate."

"It must be about noon," observed Henry, looking at the sun. And as he spoke the faint echo of mill bells in the distance was heard.

"Henry!" said Jess sharply. "Let's live here!"

"Live here?" repeated Henry dully.

"Yes! Why not?" replied Jess. "Nobody uses this car, and it's dry and warm. We're quite far away. And yet we are near enough to a town so we can buy things."

"And we're near water," added Violet.

Jess hugged her sister. "So we are, little mouse," she said—"the most important thing of all."

"But—" began Henry.

"Please, Henry," said Jess excitedly. "I could make this old freight car into the dearest little house, with beds, and chairs, and a table—and dishes—"

"I'd like to live here, too," said a determined little voice from the corner, "but I don't want to, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Henry, panic-stricken.

"Unless I can have my dinner," Benny finished anxiously.

"We'll have something to eat right away, old fellow," said Henry, thankful it was no worse. For he himself was beginning to see what a cozy home the car really would make.

Jess cut the last loaf of bread into four pieces, but alas! it was very dry. The children were so hungry that they tore it with their teeth like little dogs, but Benny was nearly crying. He did not actually cry, however, for just at the crucial moment Violet started a funny story

about Cinnamon Bear eating bread crusts out of the ash can.

"He ought to have milk," said Jess quietly to Henry.

"He shall have milk," replied Henry. "I'll go down the railroad track to the town and get some."

Jess counted out a dollar in ten dimes and handed it to Henry. "By the time our four dollars are gone, you will have some work to do," she said.

All the same Henry did not like to begin his trip. "How I hate to leave you alone, Jess!" he said miserably.

"Oh, don't you worry," began Jess lightly. "We'll have a surprise for you when you come back. You just wait and see!" And she nodded her head wisely as Henry walked slowly off through the woods.

The moment he was out of sight she turned to Benny and Violet. "Now, children," she said, "what do you think we're going to do? Do you know what I saw over in the sunny part of the woods? I saw some blueberries!"

"Oh, oh!" cried Benny, who knew what blueberries were.

"Can't we have some blueberries and milk?"

"We certainly—" began Jess. But the sentence never was finished, for a sharp crackle of dry leaves was heard. Something was moving in the woods.

