

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: The Flight (1/17)

About seven o'clock one hot summer evening a strange family moved into the little village of Middlesex. Nobody knew where they came from, or who they were. But the neighbors soon made up their minds what they thought of the strangers, for the father was very drunk. He could hardly walk up the rickety front steps of the old tumble-down house, and his thirteen-year-old son had to help him. Toward eight o'clock a pretty, capable-looking girl of twelve came out of the house and bought a loaf of bread at the baker's. And that was all the villagers learned about the newcomers that night.

"There are four children," said the bakeshop woman to her husband the next day, "and their mother is dead. They must have some money, for the girl paid for the bread with a dollar bill."



"Make them pay for everything they get," growled the baker, who was a hard man. "The father is nearly dead with drink now, and soon they will be only beggars."

This happened sooner than he thought. The next day the oldest boy and girl came to ask the bakeshop woman to come over. Their father was dead.

She went over willingly enough, for someone had to go. But it was clear that she did not expect to be bothered with four strange children, with the bakery on her hands and two children of her own.

"Haven't you any other folks?" she asked the children.

"We have a grandfather in Greenfield," spoke up the youngest child before his sister could clap her hand over his mouth.

"Hush, Benny," she said anxiously.

This made the bakeshop woman suspicious. "What's the matter with your grandfather?" she asked.

"He doesn't like us," replied the oldest boy reluctantly.

"He didn't want my father to marry my mother, and if he found us he would treat us cruelly."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Jess has. Once she saw him."

"Well, did he treat you cruelly?" asked the woman, turning upon Jess.

"Oh, he didn't see me," replied Jess. "He was just passing through our—where we used to live—and my father pointed him out to me."

"Where did you use to live?" went on the questioner. But none of the children could be made to tell.

"We will get along all right alone, won't we, Henry?" declared Jess.

"Indeed we will!" said Henry.

"I will stay in the house with you tonight," said the woman at last, "and tomorrow we will see what can be done."

The four children went to bed in the kitchen, and gave the visitor the only other bed in the house. They knew that she did not at once go to bed, but sat by the window in the dark. Suddenly they heard her talking to her husband through the open window.

"They must go to their grandfather, that's certain," Jess heard her say.

"Of course," agreed her husband. "Tomorrow we will make them tell us what his name is."

Soon after that Jess and Henry heard her snoring heavily. They sat up in the dark.

"Mustn't we surely run away?" whispered Jess in Henry's ear.

"Yes!" whispered Henry. "Take only what we need most. We must be far off before morning, or they will catch us."

Jess sat still for a moment, thinking, for every motion she made must count.

"I will take both loaves of bread," she thought, "and Violet's little workbag. Henry has his knife. And all Father's money is in my pocket." She drew it out and counted it in the dark, squinting her eyes in the faint light of the moon. It amounted to nearly four dollars.

"You'll have to carry Benny until he gets waked up," whispered Jess. "If we wake him up here, he might cry."

She touched Violet as she spoke.

"Sh! Violet! Come! We're going to run away," she whispered.

The little girl made no sound. She sat up obediently and tried to make out the dim shadow of her sister.

"What shall I do?" she said, light as a breath.

"Carry this," said Jess, handing her the workbag and a box of matches.

Jess tiptoed over to the tin box on the table, drew out the two loaves of bread, and slipped them into the laundry bag. She peered around the room for the last time, and then dropped two small clean towels and a cake of soap into the bag.

"All right. Pick him up," she said to Henry.

Henry bent over the sleeping child and lifted him carefully. Jess took the laundry bag, turned the doorknob ever so softly, opened the door ever so slowly, and they tiptoed out in a ghostly procession.

Jess shut the door with as much care as she had opened it, listened to the bakeshop woman's heavy snoring for a moment, and then they turned and picked their way without a sound to the country road.

"She may wake up before morning, you know," whispered Henry. "We must do our fastest walking before then. If we can only get to another town before they find out we're gone, they won't know which way to go."

Jess agreed, and they all walked briskly along in the faint moonlight.

"How far can you carry Benny?" asked Violet.

"Oh, at least a mile," said Henry confidently, although his arms were beginning to ache. Benny was five years old, and he was a fat, healthy boy as well.

"I think we could all walk faster if we woke him up," said Jess decidedly. "We could each take his hand and almost carry him along."

Henry knelt by the roadside and set the little fellow against his knee.

"Come, Benny, you must wake up now and walk!" said Jess coaxingly.

"Go away!" Benny mumbled with his eyes shut, trying to lie down again.

"Let me try," Violet offered softly.

"Say, Benny, you know little Cinnamon Bear ran away to find a nice warm bed for the winter? Now, you play you're Cinnamon, and Henry and Jess will help you along, and we'll find a bed."

Violet's little plan worked. Benny was never too cross to listen to the wonderful stories his sister Violet could tell about Cinnamon Bear. He stood up bravely and marched along, yawning, while his big brother and sister almost swung him between them.

Not a soul passed them on the country road. All the houses they saw were dark and still. And when the first faint streaks of morning light showed in the sky, all four children were almost staggering with sleep.

"I must go to sleep, Henry," murmured Jess at last. Little Benny was asleep already, and Henry was carrying him again.

"The first place we come to, then," panted Henry. Violet said nothing, but she kept her eyes open. Finally she caught Henry's sleeve. "Couldn't we make that haystack do?" she asked, pointing across a newly mown field.

"Indeed we could," said Henry thankfully. "What a big, enormous one it is! I was too sleepy to see it, I guess." "And see how far away from the farmhouse and barn it is, too!" echoed Jess.

The sight gave them new courage. They climbed over two stone walls, got across a brook somehow with the heavy child, and arrived at the haystack.

Henry laid his brother down and stretched his aching arms, while Jess began to burrow into the haystack. Violet, after a moment of watching her, did the same. "Here's his nest," said Jess sleepily, taking her head out of the deep round hole she had made. Henry lifted the child into the opening and was pleased to see that he curled up instantly, smiling in his sleep.

Jess pulled wisps of hay over the opening so that it was absolutely invisible, and then proceeded to dig out a similar burrow for herself.

"We can stay here just—as long—as we like, can't we, Henry?" she murmured, digging with her eyes shut.

"We sure can," replied Henry. "You're an old brick, Jess. Get in, and I'll pull the hay over the hole."

Violet was already curled up in her nest, which was hidden so completely that Henry spoke to her to see if she were there. Then he wriggled himself backward into the haycock without stopping to hollow it out, pulled a handful of hay over his head, and laid his head on his arm.

Just as he did so he heard a heavy voice say, "Now, then, lass, git along!" Then he heard the rumble of a milk wagon coming down a near-by lane, and he realized thankfully that they had hidden themselves just before the first farmer in the neighborhood had set off toward Middlesex with his milk cans.

"He will say he didn't meet us coming this way," thought Henry, "so they will hunt for us the other way. And that will give us time to cover a lot more ground." He dropped asleep just as the roosters all over the valley began to answer each other.