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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Box-Car Children: A New Grandfather (15/17)

In less than an hour the town was buzzing with the news. The chauffeur told the maids and the maids told the grocery man, and the grocery man went from house to house telling that old James Cordyce had found his four grandchildren at last. In fact the biggest part of the town knew it before the children themselves.

Jess and Benny came across the lawn to select some white moonflowers for Violet's tray. They were just in time to hear Henry say, "But, Grandfather—"

"Grandfather!" echoed Jess, whirling around to gaze at them.

"Yes, Jess," said Henry eagerly. "He's the man we've been running away from all this time."

"I thought you was old," observed Benny. "And awf'ly cross. Jess said so."

"I didn't know, Benny," said Jess turning pink. To think of running away from this kind friend!

But her grandfather did not seem to mind. He stroked her short silky hair and proposed that they all go up into Violet's room with the moonflowers. There was no stopping Benny. He rushed into Violet's room, dragging his grandfather by one hand, and shouting, "It's

Grandfather, Violet, and he's nice, after all, I shouldn't wonder!"

When Violet at last understood just what Benny was trying to tell, she was perfectly happy to rest against her ruffled pillows with one hand curled about her grandfather's arm, and listen to the rest.

"Where have you been living?" demanded Mr. Cordyce at last.

The whole company looked at each other, even Dr. McAllister and his mother. Then they all laughed as if they never would stop.

"You just ought to see!" observed Dr. McAllister, wiping his eyes.

"What?" said the children all at once. "You never saw it in the daytime!"

"You don't mean it!" returned the doctor, teasing them.

"I have seen it quite a number of times in the daytime."

"Seen what, in heaven's name?" asked Mr. Cordyce at last.

Then they told him, interrupting each other to tell about the beds of pine needles, the wonderful dishes, the freight-car roof over all, the fireplace, and the swimming pool.

"That's where Violet got her bronchitis," observed the doctor, "sitting by that pool. She shouldn't have done it. I thought so from the first."

"You thought so?" repeated Henry, puzzled. "How did you know she sat by it? I'm sure I didn't myself."

"I was your most frequent visitor," declared the doctor, enjoying himself hugely.

"I hope you were our only one," said Jess with her mouth open.

"Well, I think I was," said the doctor. "The first night after Henry mowed my lawn I followed him as far as the hill to see where he lived."

"Why did you do that?" interrupted Mr. Cordyce.

"I liked his looks," returned the doctor. "And I noticed that he didn't tell much about himself, so I was curious."

"But you surely didn't see the freight car then," said Jess.

"No, but I came back that night and hunted around," replied Dr. McAllister.

"At about eleven o'clock!" Henry cried. The doctor assented.

"Our rabbit!" said Henry and Jess together.

"I made as little noise as possible when I saw the freight car. Then I saw the door move, so I thought some one was inside. And when I heard the dog bark I was sure of it, and went home."

"But you came back?" questioned Jess.

"Yes, every time I knew all of you were safe in my garden, I made you a little visit, just to be sure you were having enough to eat, and enough dishes." The doctor laughed. "When I found you had a strainer, and a vase of flowers, and a salt-shaker, and a cut-glass punch bowl, I stopped worrying."

"Didn't you suspect they were my children?" demanded Mr. Cordyce. "Didn't you see my advertisement? Why didn't you notify me at once?"

"They were having such a good time," confessed the doctor. "And I was, too. I just wanted to see how long they could manage their own affairs. It was all tremendously interesting. Why, that boy and girl of yours are born business managers, Mr. Cordyce!"

Mr. Cordyce took note of this.

"But I don't see, yet, how you knew Violet sat by the pool," said Jess curiously.

"You couldn't know that, of course," replied the doctor.

"I went up twice when I knew Henry had taken the dog down to my barn to catch rats. I hid behind the big white rock with the flat top."

"That's Lookout Rock," explained Jess, "where we used to let Benny watch for Henry. But we didn't hear you."

"No," said Dr. McAllister. "I didn't even snap a twig those times. But I had the very best time when I went with Mother."

"Have you seen it, too?" cried the children.

"I have, indeed!" returned Mrs. McAllister. "I have even had a drink from your well."

"Every one has seen it but me," said Mr. Cordyce patiently.

"We'll show it to you!" screamed Benny. "And I'll show you my wheels made on a cart, and my bed out of hay, and my pink cup!"

"Good for you, Benny," said Mr. Cordyce, pleased. "When Violet gets well, we'll all go up there, and if you'll show me your house, I'll show you mine."

"Have you got a house?" asked Benny in surprise.

"Yes. You can live there with me, if you like it," replied Mr. Cordyce. "I have been looking for you for nearly two months."

Under Mrs. McAllister's wonderful care, Violet soon became strong again. But she had been skipping around the garden for several days before the doctor would allow the visit to the freight-car house. When at last the whole party started out in the great limousine, many people looked out of their windows to watch after Mr. Cordyce and his grandchildren. Many of them knew Henry as the boy who won the race, and were glad that he had found such a friend.

But when the children reached their beloved home they were like wild things. Watch capered about furiously, taking little swims in the pool and sniffing at all the dear old familiar things. Mr. Cordyce seated himself on a rock and watched them all, exchanging a glance now and then with Mrs. McAllister and her son.

"See our 'building,'" shouted Benny, for that was what he always called the fireplace. "It burns really, too. And this is the well, and this is the dishpan, and this is the 'frigerator!'"

At last every one climbed into the car itself, and Mr. Cordyce saw the beds, the cash account on the wall, the wonderful shelf, and each separate dish. Each dish had a story of its own.

"That's more than my dishes have," observed Mr. Cordyce.

Mrs. McAllister, who knew what his dishes were, was silent.

They ate chicken sandwiches on the very same tablecloth, and Benny drank from his pink cup, and Watch couldn't understand why they went away at all. But it was a trifle cool on the hill now when the sun began to sink, and after rolling the door shut, they left regretfully.

"Tomorrow," suggested Mr. Cordyce, as they drove home, "will you all come and see my house?"

"Oh, yes," agreed the children happily, little dreaming what was in store for them on the next day and all the days to come.

