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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Box-Car Children: A United Family (16/17)

Mr. Cordyce had been planning this day for more than a week. He had sent his most trusted foreman to his own beautiful home, to superintend matters there. The house was being remodeled entirely, after Mr. Cordyce's own plans, and everywhere were carpenters, painters and decorators.

On the very day that Mr. Cordyce received word that it was finished, he suggested the drive.

"Do you live all alone, Grandfather?" asked Benny.

"All alone," answered Mr. Cordyce. "No company at all."

At first Benny did not consider this the exact truth. He considered a cook company, and also a butler, and a housekeeper. And when he saw the array of maids he kept perfectly quiet. The house was enormous, certainly. It was at least a quarter of a mile from its own front gate—and everywhere were gardens.

"Do you live here?" said Henry, thunderstruck, as they rolled quietly along the beautiful drive.

"You do, too, if you like it," observed his grandfather, watching his face.

The inside of the house was more wonderful than even the older children had ever dreamed. The velvet rugs were so thick and soft that no footfall could be heard. Everywhere were flowers. The great stairway with

steps of marble rose from the center of the big hallway. But it was upstairs that the children felt most at home.

Here the rooms were not quite so large. They were sunny and homelike.

"This is Violet's room!" cried Benny. It was unmistakable. There were violets on the wallpaper. The bed was snow white with a thick quilt of violet silk. On the little table were English violets, pouring their fragrance into the room.

"What a beautiful room!" sighed Violet, sinking down into one of the soft cushioned chairs.

But all the children shouted when they saw Benny's room. The wallpaper was blue, covered with large figures of cats and dogs, the Three Bears, and Peter Rabbit. There was a swinging rocking-horse, nearly as large as a real horse, a blackboard, a tool chest, and low tables and chairs exactly the right size for Benny. There was an electric train with cars nearly as large as the little boy himself.

"Can I run the cars all day?" asked Benny.

"Oh, no," replied Henry quickly. "You're going to school as soon as it begins."

This was the first that his grandfather had heard about school, but he agreed with Henry, and chuckled to himself.

"The finest schools in the country," he said. This came true, for all the children finally went to the public schools, and are they not the finest schools in the country?

In Jess' room Benny discovered a bed for Watch. It was, in fact, a regular dog's straw hamper, but it was lined with heavy quilted silk and padded with wool. Watch got in at once, sniffed in every corner, turned around three times, and lay down.

Just then a distant doorbell rang. It had such a low, musical chime that the children listened delightedly, never once giving a thought as to who it might be. But almost at once a soft-footed servant appeared, saying that a man wanted to see Mr. Cordyce "about the dog." The moment Jess heard that word "dog" she was frightened. She had never thought Watch a common runaway dog, and it always made her uncomfortable to see passers-by gaze curiously at him as he ran by her side.

"They won't take Watch away?" she whispered to Henry, her breath almost gone.

"Indeed they will not!" declared Henry. "We'll never, never give him up."

However, Henry followed his grandfather and Jess with great anxiety.

It was indeed about Watch that the man wanted to talk, and Jess' heart sank again when she saw the dog jump delightedly upon the man, and return his caresses with short barks.



"He's a runaway, sir, from my kennels out in Townsend," the man explained to Mr. Cordyce. "I have two hundred Airedales out there, and this one was sold the day before he ran away. So you see I have to turn him over to the lady I sold him to."

"Oh, no, you don't," returned Mr. Cordyce quickly. "I will give you three times what the dog is worth."

The man glanced around uneasily. "I couldn't do that, sir," he explained. "You see, it isn't a question of money; it's a question of my promised word to the lady."

Mr. Cordyce failed to "see." "She can find another dog, among two hundred Airedales, I guess," he returned.

"And, besides, you don't know positively that this is the right dog."

"Excuse me," replied the man, very much embarrassed, "he's the dog, all right. He knows me, as you see. His name is Rough No. 3. He has a black spot inside his ear." It was too true. Indeed, at the mere mention of his name the dog cocked an ear and wagged his tail. But he had seated himself as close to Jess as possible, and licked her hand when she patted him.

But it appeared that Henry could understand the man's position even if Mr. Cordyce could not. He now put in a timid word of his own.

"If the lady would agree to let the dog go, would you be willing?"

"Sure," said the man, shooting a glance at Henry.

"I almost know any one would let us keep Watch, Grandfather," said Henry earnestly, "if they knew how much he had done for us."

"I'm sure of it, my boy," returned Mr. Cordyce kindly. The fact that Henry had been the first to make headway with the dog fancier, had not escaped him. But it was clear that Jess would not be able to sleep until the matter had been settled, so the moment the man had gone, the children set out from their beautiful new home to the address of the lady who had bought Watch.

The big car purred along from Greenfield to Townsend in no time. And the whole family, including Watch himself, trooped up the veranda steps to interview the lady who held it in her power to break their hearts, or to make them very happy.

She was not terrible to look at. In fact she was quite young, quite lively, and very, very pretty. She asked them all to sit down, which they did gravely, for even Benny was worried about losing "Watchie," his favorite pillow. He could not wait for his grandfather to begin. He struggled down from his chair and dashed over to the young lady saying, in one breath, "You'll let us keep Watchie, please, won't you, because we want him so bad, and Jess didn't know he was your dog?"

By degrees the lady understood just what dog it was. "We have had him so long," explained Henry, eagerly, "it would be almost like letting Benny go away. Watch never leaves us even for a minute, ever since Jess took the briar out of his foot."

"So you are the children who lived in the freight car!" observed the lively young lady. "I've heard all about that. How did you like it?"

"All right," replied Henry, with an effort. "But we never could have done it without Watch. He stayed and looked after the girls while I was away, and he just thinks everything of Jess."

"Well," said the young lady, laughing, "I can see you're worrying terribly about that dog. Now listen! I wouldn't take that dog away from you any more than I'd take Benny! In fact, not so much. I think maybe I'd like to keep Benny instead."

Benny was apparently quite willing that she should. He climbed into her lap before any one could stop him, and gave her one of his best bear hugs. And from that moment they were firm friends. But the children always spoke of her as the "lady who owns Watch," although Mr. Cordyce paid for the dog in less time than you can imagine. It made no difference to the children that Watch was a very valuable dog. They had loved him when he had not been worth a cent; and now they loved him more, simply because they had so nearly lost him.

It was a happy and reunited family which gathered around the Cordyce dining table that evening. The maids smiled in the kitchen to hear the children laugh; and the children laughed because Watch actually sat up at the table in the seat of honor beside Jess, and was waited upon by a butler.