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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Box-Car Children: Safe (17/17)

Would you ever dream that four children could be homesick in such a beautiful house as Mr. Cordyce's? Jess was the first one to long for the old freight car. "O Grandfather," she said one morning, "I wish I could cook something once more in the old kettle."

"Go out in the kitchen," said her grandfather, "and mess around all you like. The maids will help you."

Jess brightened up at once, and flew out into the kitchen, where three or four maids brought her everything she wanted to cook with.

And Benny was the last one to wish for his old home. "Grandfather," he said one day, "I wish I could drink this milk out of my own pink cup!"

This set Mr. Cordyce to thinking. He had plenty of pink cups, it is true, but none of them were as dear to Benny as his own.

"I think I shall have to surprise you children," said Mr. Cordyce at last. "But before the surprise comes, perhaps you would like to see Benny's pony." Then he led the way to the stables. He owned several beautiful horses already, and nearly a dozen wonderful cars. But nothing was half so interesting as the pony. He was very small and very fat and black. His wavy tail was so long that it nearly touched the ground. And his name

was "Cracker," because his birthday fell on the Fourth of July, when firecrackers were popping.

Benny took a short ride around the stable, being "held on" by a groom. But the second time around, he said, "Cracker doesn't need you to hold onto him, I shouldn't wonder," and trotted around with great delight, without help.

All the others sat down on the fragrant hay to watch him ride.

"What am I going to do when I grow up, Grandfather?" asked Henry.

"You're going to take my place, Henry, as president of the steel mills," replied Mr. Cordyce. "You will do it better than I ever have." (And one day this came true, just as most of Mr. Cordyce's prophecies did.)

"And what am I going to do?" asked Jess, curiously.

"All you children must go to school and then to college. Then you may do whatever you choose for a living," replied Mr. Cordyce. (This also came true.)

"Of course I have more than enough money to support us all," went on Mr. Cordyce, "but if you have something to do, you will be happier." (This not only came true, but it is always and forever true, all over the world.)

"Am I going to college tomorrow?" asked Benny, stopping his little pony in front of the group.

"Not tomorrow, Benny," said his grandfather, laughing.

"But I 'm glad you reminded me. All you children must go over to Dr. McAllister's tomorrow, and stay while the surprise comes."

"Is the surprise very nice?" asked Benny.

"No, not very," replied Mr. Cordyce with a twinkle.

"Did it cost a great deal?" asked Jess.

"It didn't cost me anything," answered her grandfather.

"The only thing I shall have to pay will be express." (He didn't tell them that the express cost him several hundred dollars.)

However, next day the children rode gladly over to see the kind doctor. They stayed until Mr. Cordyce telephoned to them that the surprise was ready. And then Mrs. McAllister and her son rode back with them in the big car.

Mr. Cordyce was as happy as a boy. He led the merry little procession out through his many gardens, past the rose garden, through the banks of purple asters. Then they came to an Italian garden with a fountain in the middle, and a shady little wood around the edge. Among the trees was the surprise. It was the old freight car! The children rushed over to it with cries of delight, pushed back the dear old door, and scrambled in.

Everything was in place. Here was Benny's pink cup, and here was his bed. Here was the old knife which had cut butter and bread, and vegetables, and firewood, and string, and here were the letters for Benny's primer. Here was the big kettle and the tablecloth. And hanging on a near-by tree was the old dinner bell. Benny rang the bell over and over again, and Watch rolled on the floor and barked himself hoarse.

The children were never homesick after that. To be sure, a dull and ugly freight car looked a little strange in a beautiful Italian garden. But it was never dull or

ugly to the Cordyce children or their dog. They never were so happy as when showing visitors each beauty of their beloved old home. And there were many visitors. Some of them were fascinated by the stories of the wonderful dishes and the shelf. And the children never grew tired of telling them over and over again.

One summer day, many years afterward, Watch climbed out of his beautiful padded silk bed, and barked until Henry lifted him into the freight car. There he lay down on the hard, splintery floor, blinking his eyes in the sun, and watching the children as they sat studying by the fountain.

"He likes the old home best," said Jess Cordyce, smiling at him and patting his rough back.

And as Benny would say, if he hadn't grown up, "That's true, I shouldn't wonder."

