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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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## The Box-Car Children: Trouble (13/17)

The days went merrily by for the freight-car family. Hardly a day passed, however, without some exciting adventure. Mrs. McAllister, finding out in some way that Violet was a clever seamstress, sent home fine linen handkerchiefs for her to hem. Each one had a tiny colored rose in the corner, and Violet was delighted with the dainty work. She sat sewing daily by the swimming pool while Benny sailed wonderful boats of chips, and waded around to his heart's content.

The freight-car pantry now held marvelous dishes rescued from the dump; such rarities as a regular bread knife, a blue and gold soap dish, and half of a real cut-glass bowl.

Henry proudly deposited thirty-one dollars in the savings bank under the name of Henry James, and worked eagerly for his kind friend, who never asked him any more embarrassing questions.

Benny actually learned to read fairly well. The girls occupied their time making balsam pillows for the four beds, and trying to devise wonderful meals out of very little material. Violet kept a different bouquet daily in the little vase. She had a perfect genius for arranging three purple irises to look like a picture, or a single wood lily with its leaves like a Japanese print. Each day

the children enjoyed a cooked dinner, filling in the chinks with perfect satisfaction with bread and butter, or bread and milk, or bread and cheese. They named their queer house, "Home for Tramps," and printed this title in fancy lettering inside the car.

One day Jess began to teach Benny a little arithmetic. He learned very readily that two and one make three. "I knew that before," he said cheerfully. But it was a different matter when Jess proposed to him that two minus one left one.

"No, it does not left one," said Benny indignantly. "It left two."

"Why, Benny!" cried Jess in astonishment. "Supposing you had two apples and I took away one, wouldn't you have one left?"

"You never would," objected Benny with confidence.

"No, but supposing Watch took one," suggested Jess.

"Watchie wouldn't take one, neither," said Benny. "Would you, doggie?"

Watch opened one eye and wagged his tail. Jess looked at Violet in despair. "What shall I do with him?" she asked.

Violet took out her chalk and printed clearly on the outside of the freight car the following example:



2 - 1 =

"Now, Benny, don't you see," she began, "that if you have two things, and somebody takes away one, that you must have one left?"

"I'll show you myself," agreed Benny finally with resignation. "Now see the 2?" He actually made a respectable figure 2 on the freight car. "Now, here's a nice 1. Now, s'posen I take away the 1, don't you see the 2's left right on the car?" He covered the figure 1 with his chubby hand and looked about at his audience expectantly.

Jess rolled over against a tree trunk and laughed till she nearly cried. Violet laughed until she really did cry. And here we come to the first unpleasant incident in the story of the runaway children.

Violet could not stop crying, apparently, and Jess soon made up her mind that she was really ill. She helped her carefully into the car, and heaped all the pine needles around and under her, making her the softest bed she could. Then she wet cloths in the cool water of the brook and laid them across her little sister's hot forehead.

"How glad I am that it is time for Henry to come!" she said to herself, holding Violet's slender brown hands in her cool ones.

Henry came promptly at the usual time. He thought she had a cold, he said. And this seemed likely, for Violet began to cough gently while the rest ate a hasty supper.

"We don't want to let her go to a hospital if we can possibly help it," said Henry, more troubled than he cared to show. "If she goes there we'll have to give her name, and then Grandfather will find us surely."

Jess agreed, and together the two older children kept changing the cool cloths on Violet's aching head. But about ten o'clock that night Violet had a chill. She shivered and shook, and her teeth chattered so that Jess could plainly hear them. Apparently nothing could warm the little girl, although she was completely packed in hay and pine needles.

"I'm going down to Dr. McAllister's," said Henry quietly. "I'm afraid Violet is very ill."

Nobody ever knew how fast he ran down the hill. Even in his famous race, Henry hardly touched his present speed. He was so thoroughly frightened that he never stopped to notice how quickly the doctor seemed to understand what was wanted. He did not even notice that he did not have to tell the doctor which way to drive his car in order to reach the hill. When the car reached the road at the base of the hill, Dr. McAllister said shortly, "Stay here in the car," and disappeared up the hill alone.

When the doctor returned he was carrying Violet in his arms. Jess and Benny and Watch were following closely. Nobody spoke during the drive to the McAllister house as they flew through the darkness. When they stopped at last, the doctor said three words to his mother, who opened the door anxiously.

The three words were, "Pneumonia, I'm afraid." They all heard it.

Irish Mary appeared from the kitchen with hot-water bottles and warm blankets, and Mrs. McAllister flew around, opening beds and bringing pillows. A trained nurse in a white dress appeared like magic from nowhere in particular. They all worked as best they could to get the sick child warmed up. Soon the hot blankets, hot water, and steaming drinks began to take effect and the shivering stopped.

Mrs. McAllister left the sick room then, to attend to the other children. Henry and Benny were left in a large spare room with a double bed. Jess was put in a little dressing room just out of Mrs. McAllister's own room. Upon receiving assurances that Violet was warm again, they went to sleep.

But Violet was not out of danger, for she soon grew as hot as she had been cold. And the doctor never left her side until ten o'clock the next morning. Violet, although very ill, did not have pneumonia.

At about nine o'clock the doctor had a visitor. It was a man who said he would wait. He did wait in the cool front parlor for over half an hour. Then Benny drifted in.

"Where is the doctor?" asked the man sharply of Benny.

"He's nupstairs," answered Benny readily.

"This means a lot of money to him, if he only knew it," said the visitor impatiently.

"Oh, that wouldn't make any difference," Benny replied with great assurance as he started to go out again. But the man caught him.

"What do you mean by that, sonny?" he asked curiously.

"What's he doing?"

"He's taking care of my sister Violet. She's sick."

"And you mean he wouldn't leave her even if I gave him a lot of money?"

"Yes, that's it," said Benny politely. "That's what I mean."

The visitor seemed to restrain his impatience with a great effort. "You see, I've lost a little boy somewhere," he said. "The doctor knows where he is, I think. He would be about as old as you are."

"Well, if you don't find him, you can have me, I shouldn't wonder," observed Benny comfortingly. "I like you."

"You do?" said the man in surprise.

"That's because you've got such a nice, soft suit on," explained Benny, stroking the man's knee gently. The gentleman laughed heartily.

"No, I guess it's because you have such a nice, soft laugh," said Benny changing his mind. The fact was that Benny himself did not know why he liked this stranger who was so gruff at times and so pleasant at others. He finally accepted the man's invitation and climbed into his lap to see his dog's picture in his watch, feeling of the "nice soft suit," on the way. The doctor found him here when he came down at ten o'clock.

"Better go and find Watch, Benny," suggested the doctor.

"Perhaps some day I'll come again," observed Benny to his new friend. "I like your dog, and I'm sorry he's dead." With that he scampered off to find Watch, who was very much alive.

"I expected you, Mr. Cordyce," said the doctor smiling, "only not quite so soon."

"I came the moment I heard your name hinted at," said James Cordyce. "My chauffeur heard two workmen say that you knew where my four grandchildren were. That's all I waited to hear. Is it true? And where are they?"

"That was one of them," said the doctor quietly.

"That was one of them!" repeated the man. "That beautiful little boy?"

"Yes, he is beautiful," assented Dr. McAllister. "They all are. The only trouble is, they're all frightened to death to think of your finding them."

"How do you know that?" said Mr. Cordyce, sharply.

"They've changed their name. At least the older boy did. In public, too."

"What did he change it to?"

Dr. McAllister watched his visitor's face closely while he pronounced the name clearly, "Henry James."

A flood of recollections passed over the man's face, and he flushed deeply.

"That boy!" he exclaimed. "That wonderful running boy?"

Then events began to move along rapidly.