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The Boxcar Children®



The Woodshed Mystery

GERTRUDE CHANDLER WARNER





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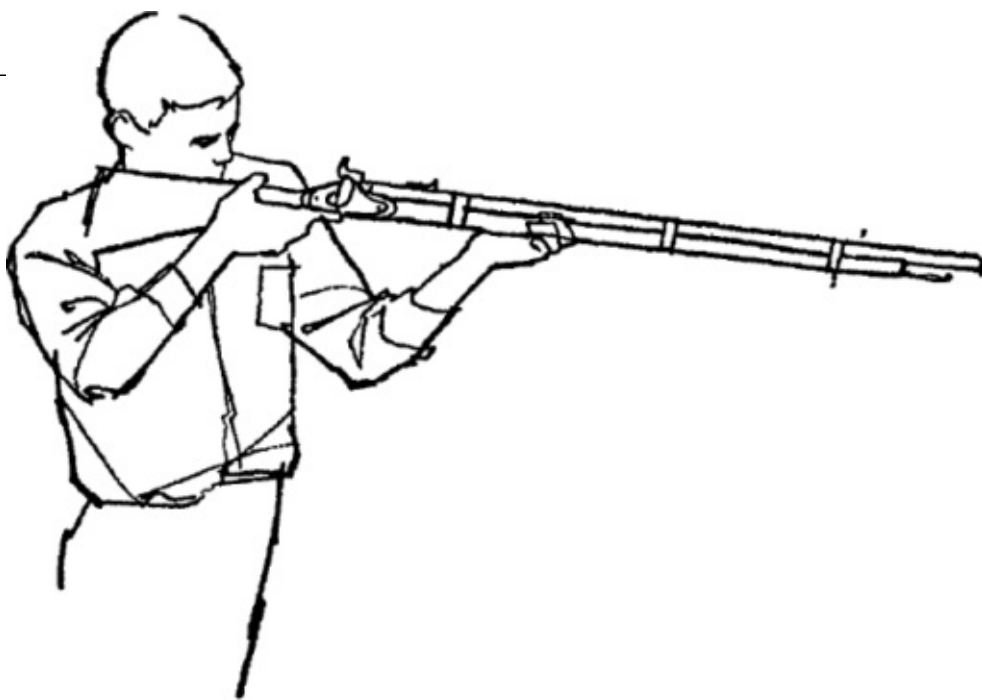


The Woodshed Mystery

GERTRUDE CHANDLER WARNER
Illustrated by David Cunningham

ALBERT WHITMAN & Company, Chicago, Illinois

To all readers everywhere,
including Guam, who have written to me
about the Boxcar Children,
this new mystery is dedicated.



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A Farm for Sale

The telephone gave a long, loud ring. Supper was over. Benny Alden was going through the hall. He answered it.

“Telephone, Grandfather!” shouted Benny. “It’s for you. Long distance.”

Mr. Alden came to the telephone and said, “Hello. Oh, yes.”

Then he said nothing for a long, long time. Benny and his sister Violet couldn’t help listening.

At last Grandfather said, “That’s just fine, Jane!”

“It’s Aunt Jane!” Violet whispered to Benny.

Benny nodded, and a smile spread over his face.

“Just wonderful, Jane,” said Grandfather again. “Yes, I do. Yes, I think it is a fine idea. Yes, Jane. I’ll think it over and call you very soon. No, Jane, I won’t be long, maybe a day or two. Yes, I know you like to do things fast. You are like Benny.” Grandfather winked at Benny.

At last Grandfather said, “Good-by, Jane. See you soon.”

“See you soon?” said Benny. “Are we going out West to see Aunt Jane again?”

“No, she is coming here,” said Mr. Alden.

“Oh, my, my!” said Benny.

“Yes, that’s what I say too,” said Grandfather. “Oh, my, my, my! Now you four children get together and we’ll talk this over. Benny, you find Henry.”

“And I’ll get Jessie,” said Violet. “She is up in her room.”

The four Aldens—two girls and two boys—lived with their grandfather in a big house. Henry was in college. Jessie was a senior in high school, and Violet was just ready for high school, too. Benny still went to grade school. In a few minutes the four young Aldens were sitting with Mr. Alden in his den.

Grandfather looked around and smiled. “This is the big news,” he said, laughing. “Aunt Jane wants to come East to live in New England again. She wants me to buy a farm for her, right away quick.”

“Quick like a fox,” said Benny.

“Right,” said Grandfather. He laughed again.

“Why does she want to move?” asked Jessie. “She has such an exciting place to live on Mystery Ranch.”

“Well, you see Jane and I were born in New England on a farm,” said Mr. Alden. “We all moved to the West. I should say Jane was about eighteen when we went. I was younger than Jane. After awhile she wanted to come back and go into business. But Jane wouldn’t. She said she would stay and run the ranch alone.”

“Stubborn,” said Benny.

“I remember,” said Jessie. “That is what made the trouble between you and Aunt Jane.”

“Yes, she was too proud to give in. She found she couldn’t run the ranch alone. So she almost starved to death.”

“Wasn’t it lucky we went out there when she was sick?” said Violet. “We found such a lovely aunt.”

“Well, yes—she is lovely now,” said her grandfather, smiling. “Now I am going to surprise Jane. Maybe I can buy the very farm where we used to live! She would like that.”

“Oh, wouldn’t that be wonderful!” cried Jessie. “We could go up to the farm and get everything”

ready. Do you suppose we'll have to get chairs and tables and beds? We could get in food and make the beds. We'd love to do that."

"What fun that would be!" said Violet. Her eyes were very bright.

"When are you going to try, Grandfather?" asked Benny.

"Well, my boy, I am going to surprise you, too. I'm going to start this very minute. It's only just after supper."

Benny hugged Watch, the dog, and jumped up and down with him. Watch did not like this very well. But he loved Benny, so he did not make any fuss.

"Now just hand me that telephone, Henry," said Mr. Alden.

"Whose number are you going to call?" asked Benny. "How do you know what to call?"

"I don't," said Mr. Alden. But he made a call just the same. He called the village store.

"Nobody will be in the store as late as this," said Henry.

"Don't be too sure," said Mr. Alden. "In the old days the storekeeper lived in the store. Maybe he still does."

Sure enough, a loud voice answered. The children could hear every word.

"Hello," said Grandfather. "Are you the manager of the store?"

"Well, I guess so," came the answer. "It's my store."

"Do you know anything about the old Alden farm up on the hill?"

"Do I? Of course I know the Alden farm up on the hill! I live right here in this town."

"Yes, I know. Do you know if the farm is for sale?"

"Yes, 'tis. I must say 'tis. That farm is running down. Get it cheap. Furniture, too."

"Who is selling it?" asked Grandfather.

"Well, I guess I am. It hasn't brought me any luck. Who wants to buy it?"

"I do. I used to live there with my sister Jane when I was a boy. I am James Alden."

"Don't tell me!" said the man. "I remember Jane Alden well. And you too, I guess. Long time ago. And you want to buy that farm back?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I'll make you a fair price. All the land and the house and the barn and the hen-coops and the woodshed. Some furniture, too. Glad to get rid of it."



“I’ll buy it,” said Grandfather.

“*What?*” cried the man.

“We can settle on the price when I see you,” said Grandfather again. “By the way, tell me your full name.”

“Well, my name is Elisha Morse. But I’m so surprised I don’t know my own name for sure. You’re coming here to *live?*”

“No, but my sister Jane is.”

“Well, well, well! This telephone call is costing you a lot of money. Better hang up.”

“All right,” said Grandfather. “We’ll be driving up soon to see my new farm.”

“It ain’t new. It’s old,” said the man.

“It’s new to me. I just bought it,” said Grandfather. “Good-bye and thank you.”

Grandfather leaned back and laughed. He hung up the telephone. “Quick like a fox, Benny?” he said. “Is that what you wanted?”

“Grandfather, you are simply wonderful,” said Benny.

“Well, I had a bit of luck, I should say,” said Mr. Alden.

Everyone agreed. But it was Jessie, not Grandfather, who began to make plans right away.

Making Plans

“What day is this?” said Jessie. “Friday. Couldn’t we go tomorrow and see the place Grandfather?”

“That is just what I was thinking,” said Mr. Alden. “We could stay all day Sunday and get back for the last week of school. Of course Henry is home for the summer already.”

Violet said, “I think you are the very kindest man in the world!” She took his hand in both of hers. “You spend all your time trying to make us happy.”

“Well, well. Thank you, my dear. But you children spend all your time making me happy, too.”

“Oh, let’s talk about the farm, Grandfather,” said Benny. “Do they have animals?”

“What do you think, Benny?” asked Jessie. “Nobody lives there. I don’t think Aunt Jane wants any animals. She just wants to come East.”

Henry nodded at his sister. “I think Aunt Jane wants to be near you, Grandfather. I think she feels safer.”

“Maybe you are right, Henry,” said Mr. Alden. He laughed again. “Maggie is coming with Jane. Remember Maggie who has stayed with her for so long? Then Sam and his wife will come and stay this summer anyway. And I am sure Jane will bring her dog Lady.”

“That’s good,” said Jessie. “Maggie knows what Aunt Jane needs. They will all take care of Aunt Jane. She ought to have a man in the house.”

“Yes, and Sam is a very good man,” said Mr. Alden. “I don’t think Jane will run the farm. But she wants to live there. I’d like to start early tomorrow morning. Do you think you could be ready, Benny?”



“Me?” cried Benny. He went over to his grandfather and put his hand on his knee. “I’ll get up any time you say. Three o’clock in the morning. Or two, or four, or even midnight! Any old time.”

“How about five?” said Mr. Alden looking at Benny.

"Fine," said Benny. "Don't we have to take a bag if we stay overnight?"

"Yes, each of you must take a bag. We won't stay at the farmhouse. But we can find a motel maybe."

"A motel!" said Benny. "That's neat."

"Let's go and pack, Jessie," said Violet. "I can hardly wait to see Aunt Jane."

"Aunt Jane won't be there," said Mr. Alden.

"No, I know that," said Violet. "But I'd like to hurry and get ready for her."

"We all seem to be in a great hurry," said Benny. "Will Aunt Jane fly?"

"Yes, I think John Carter can go out for her. Then she will not worry about a thing."

"Oh, you mean our nice Mr. Carter!" cried Jessie. "He can do anything. Aunt Jane will be safe with him."

Jessie was right. John Carter was trusted with many things by Grandfather. He even flew Mr. Alden's private plane.

"Now I think I'll go and pack my own bag," said Grandfather, getting out of his chair. "Good-night everybody."

"Good-night?" shouted Benny. "It's only half past seven. Are we going to *bed*?"

Everybody laughed at Benny's surprised look.

"I am," said Grandfather, "and you'd better. Just pack your things first. Remember we start at five. And that means breakfast before five."

"Can we take Watch?" asked Benny.

"Yes, take Watch. It won't be a long trip."

The Aldens had the same suitcases they had taken to Blue Bay. They all knew how to pack very well. It did not take long to decide to take plain clothes. They knew they would need them on a farm.

"We won't dress up at all," said Jessie. "Just take shorts and slacks and flat shoes."

"We always take flat shoes," said Henry. "Everywhere we go we take flat shoes."

"Oh, Henry, don't tease," laughed Jessie. "I know boys do."

When four o'clock in the morning came, Benny was fast asleep. He did not hear the alarm clock. Violet went into his room and shook him gently.

"No," said Benny. "No! It isn't morning yet. It's too dark."

"You said you'd get up at midnight or four o'clock. Any old time," said Violet.

"It's different now," said Benny.

Violet laughed. She put on all the lights and Benny got out of bed.

The family ate a big breakfast of bacon and eggs, cereal and toast and orange juice. Then they piled into the big station wagon. Henry drove. It was a beautiful spring day. The woods were just beginning to look green. The fields were covered with dandelions. Birds sang in the trees as the sun came up. The family went along the smooth turnpike on the way north.

"We should get there by nine o'clock," said Grandfather. "I'll tell you where to turn, Henry."

A little later he shouted, "Here we are, Henry! Turn here! See the white church over there? And the other building is the town hall. And there is the old store! How small it looks! It used to look big."

They were delighted to find the store so easily. Everyone got out of the car and went into the store.

"My gracious me!" said the man behind the counter. "I bet you're James Alden. I'm Elisha Morse."

"I remember your name, Elisha," said Grandfather. He shook hands.

For several minutes the two men talked about the sale of the farm. Then Mr. Alden wrote out a check and gave it to Mr. Morse.

"I don't think you're going to like your farm," Mr. Morse said as he put the check away. "The road"

leaks.”

“Can’t it be fixed?” asked Mr. Alden.

“Sure. Only it will cost money. I’d do it for you if I had the money.”

“Would you fix it yourself?”

“No. My son is the handy one. He could put on new shingles.”

“You get him if you can,” said Grandfather. “We’ll go right up to the house. Ask your son to come up and see me. We must certainly have the roof fixed.”

“Good,” said Mr. Morse. “Here’s the key to the back door. My son will come in soon to see what was in the store.”

Mr. Morse came out and watched the Aldens get back into the station wagon. He said nothing. The car began to move. Still Mr. Morse said nothing. But when the car had rolled down the drive, he called, “There’s a lot of other things the matter with that farm! You won’t like it!”

But the Aldens were on their way to the farm on the hill and Henry did not turn back.

Grandfather Takes Over

Now why in the world did Mr. Morse call to us after I got started?" asked Henry.

"Well, that's the way people are up here," said Grandfather. "I remember now. You have to get used to it. They have all the time there is. Never in a hurry."

"I suppose I should have gone back," said Henry.

"No," said Grandfather. "We'll wait now and see the house. Then we will find out what's wrong. These people are the best people in the world. They will do anything for you. You just wait and see. They can even hurry if you tell them why."

Violet looked at Jessie and smiled. They loved to see their grandfather so happy. He was looking around him at the little village.

"See!" he said. "There's the old Bean farm!"

"Bean farm?" said Benny. "Do they raise beans?"

"Oh, no. Mr. and Mrs. Bean used to live there. They had two sons," said Mr. Alden. "I remember the Bean boy who was just about my age. In mischief all the time. Good looking boy, but always in trouble." Mr. Alden threw his head back and laughed. "I remember Jane liked him pretty well. Very well, I mean. She always stood up for him."

"What became of him?" asked Benny. "Did he grow up bad?"

"I don't know, Benny. That's a long story. You see he got into trouble with an old gun up here. The next day he was gone. Nobody ever found him. Jane felt pretty bad. I think Jane might have married him."

"He ran away?" asked Henry.

"Yes, I suppose he did. Later on, we heard he ran away to sea. He got a job on a ship and went around the world. Anyway, nobody knows where he is now. He may be dead. Probably is dead."

"Aunt Jane would be sorry," said Violet.

Mr. Alden looked at his gentle granddaughter. "Yes, Jane would be sorry. Nobody ever knew when he got that gun."

"Did he shoot anybody with it?" asked Benny.

"No. He shot at the big trees to scare people. Queer thing happened. He started a forest fire. Oh, what a fire that was! The house almost caught on fire. But the neighbors put it out. In the morning the house was gone."

"What was his first name?" asked Jessie.

"Now what was his name?" said Grandfather. "I have forgotten. It was a long time ago. I was a boy myself."

"It's a nice house," said Henry.

"Yes, but not as nice as our farmhouse. Ours was built in 1750. There are four big chimneys. You can see the date on the front chimney, I think. It used to be there. There! Look over there! That's the old house!"



Mr. Alden was so excited that the children were excited too. They looked toward the top of the hill. There stood an enormous white farmhouse. Two large elm trees stood beside the house. Behind the house was a great red barn, and behind the barn was a field and then woods.

“I don’t see anything bad about the house,” said Jessie. “It needs paint, maybe. But it looks all right to me.”

“The roof leaks,” said Benny.

“Wait and see,” said Henry. “I think that if Mr. Morse said we wouldn’t like it, something must be wrong with it.”

“There’s the 1750 on the chimney,” cried Benny. “Painted white.”

Henry turned the station wagon again and there they were, right by the back door of the house. They all got out of the car. They stood and looked at the house. Then Henry put the big key in the back door and turned it.

“The door key works anyway,” he said. He pushed the door open.

“I’ll go in first,” said Mr. Alden. “Then you children follow. Nobody has been here for a long time. The house looked cool and dim inside.

First they found themselves in a back pantry. Next came the old kitchen.

“Oh, look!” cried Jessie. “What an enormous fireplace!”

“I could lie down in that fireplace!” shouted Benny.

“Don’t,” said Jessie. “And look at the old brick ovens on both sides.” She opened the doors.

“Say!” exclaimed Benny. “That must be where they baked bread.”

The kitchen was a big room. Next everyone went into the sitting room. The carpet was dusty, but not too worn. The chairs and tables were covered with dust.

The Aldens turned to the left and came to the long hall. The front door was at one end of the hall. On the other side of the hall was a parlor and a bedroom. The Aldens walked quickly through the rooms. There would be time to explore them later.

“I suppose there are four bedrooms upstairs,” said Jessie.

"Oh, let's go upstairs," said Benny. "Maybe there is something wrong up there."

"I can't see anything wrong downstairs," said Henry. "It's only dirty and dusty. A fireplace in every room. Think of that!"

"Upstairs, too," said Grandfather. "That's how we kept warm. There were no heaters in those days."

Upstairs they went. There were the four bedrooms. No bathroom.

"We simply can't stay here, Grandfather," said Jessie, the good housekeeper. "It is too dirty."

"Oh, no! We will stay at a motel as I said. Maybe we can *get* somebody to clean this place up."

"We could do it," said Benny.

"No, it will take a strong woman to do this. And maybe a man would be still better," said Mr. Alden. He looked around thoughtfully.

"There's a man at the back door," said Benny. "I can see his car."

They all went down to find a tall young man getting out of a car.

"Are you Mr. Morse's son who can fix the roof?" asked Benny.

"That's right, son," said the man. "Call me Sim. I'm Simeon Morse."

"Oh, that'll be neat!" shouted Benny. "When Sam comes we'll have Sim and Sam!"

"And who is Sam?" asked Sim.

"He is coming with my sister," said Mr. Alden. "You'll get along fine with Sam. He and his wife are going to handle the farm work for my sister. Now I want you to tell me the truth, young man. What is the matter with this house?"

Sim stood on one foot and then the other. He was very nervous.

"Well, I'll tell you the truth. I *don't* know."

"You don't know? Then what makes you think there is any trouble here?"

"I don't know that, either," said Sim.

Grandfather sat down in a kitchen chair and leaned forward. "Now, Simeon," he said. "You sit right down here. I want to know just what's going on. Your father says there is something strange about this place. And you think so, too. What makes you think so? After all, I used to live here and nothing seemed so mysterious then."

Sim looked at Grandfather for a moment. Then he said, "But your family left, just the way all the others have. Nobody stays."

"But what is it that makes you think this?" Grandfather asked.

"Kind of silly," said Sim.

"Never mind that. I want to know what it is, silly or not."

"Well," said Sim, "maybe you know the Bean family? Used to live over in that next house?"

"I certainly do."

Sim went on. "There used to be an older boy there who found a gun some place."

"I know," said Grandfather. "I have forgotten his first name."

"Andrew," said Sim.

"That's right! Andrew it was! We called him Andy and his father didn't like it. Andy Bean! How could I forget that? Now what's the story?"

"Well, that Andrew was wild. He made a lot of trouble. And that gun set this whole place on fire. They put the fire out, but Andrew never showed up again. *Never*. His brother got the farm."

"Well, what's the matter with this house? That was long ago."

Sim looked at Mr. Alden. "You want the truth of it? Seems as if nobody ever got along very well here after that. Bad to worse. People tell all kinds of stories. They say that Andrew found the gun here and somebody was hiding here and gave it to him. Somebody up to no good."

“Now who could that be?”

“I don’t know. It was a terrible long time ago.”

“What kind of a gun was it?” asked Henry.

“Yes! That’s a good question. We’ve got that gun over to my father’s house right now. It’s an awful old gun. The kind they used in the Revolutionary War. Long time ago.”

“I should like to see that gun very much,” said Mr. Alden.

“See it any time,” said Sim. “Ask my father.”

Mr. Alden looked at Henry and Jessie. “I think there is some story about this gun. And we need to find out what it is!”

“Oh, boy!” cried Benny. “And now we’ll have some fun. When my grandfather really gets going, things *happen*.”

“I bet,” said Sim. He smiled at Benny.

“Now, Sim,” Mr. Alden went on, “is this house dangerous? Can’t it be fixed and cleaned up?”

“Sure,” said Sim. “Nothing wrong with the house itself, I guess.” He scowled.

“I thought you said there *was* something wrong with the house!” cried Mr. Alden.

“It’s just what people say and how they feel about this place. Bad luck. The *house* is all right. I guess we ought to put a heavy post in the cellar to make the floor safe. Fix the roof. Fix the windows. Paint a little. You could live here OK.”

“Well, you’re a fine friend,” said Mr. Alden. “I’m glad we found you. Can you get some help and start right to work on this place? Today?”

“Today? Well, I don’t know about today.”

“Why not?” asked Grandfather. “Are you busy somewhere else?”

“Well, I guess I could leave. I’m just fixing my tractor. Do that any time.”

“What about help?”

“I guess the neighbors would help. They are glad Miss Alden is coming back here. May change the old place’s luck.”

“You mean the neighbors know already?” asked Grandfather.

“Oh, sure. Knew that last night. Everybody knew it last night.”

“Well, news goes around fast,” said Grandfather. He laughed. “I remember it did when I lived here. You get your help because I don’t know the people yet. Start right away. I will give you some money to buy paint, wood, and that beam for the cellar.” He counted out some money for Sim to use.

“You folks can’t live here now,” said Sim, looking at the four children.

“Oh, no. We thought we could find a motel.”

“Yes, you can. Right down the road, about four miles. It’s a nice motel. Got a carpet on the floor and a TV and everything.”

“Oh, Sim,” said Jessie, “how about a bathroom in this house? Can you put in a bathroom?”

“Where did you want a bathroom?” asked Sim.

“I thought two,” said Jessie. “You could easily take a piece of the big hall. One upstairs and one downstairs.”

“Right, Jessie,” said her grandfather. “Anybody around here put in a bathroom?”

Sim scratched his head. “I always wanted to put in a bathroom,” he said. “Costs too much, though.”

“Well, you go ahead,” said Mr. Alden. “Get all the men you need. The thing is, I want this done as soon as possible. Jane wants to move right away this minute.”

“She’s changed some, I guess,” said Sim. “My father says she used to move slow. And you were the fast one.”

“Right,” said Mr. Alden. “Jane has changed a lot. We both move fast now, Sim. Tell your father.”

“No fear,” said Sim. “I tell him everything.”

While Mr. Alden and Sim talked, Violet and Benny went exploring.

Violet found a path through the uncut grass of the yard. It led to the front door. There she found some big, flat flagstones, warm in the sun.

Benny ran toward the barn. He poked his head through the crack left by a sagging door. The barn was dark and empty. An old lantern hung on a peg beside a broken harness. Nothing moved. “Spooky,” Benny thought to himself.

Suddenly it seemed a long time since their early breakfast. Benny ran back to Grandfather. “I’m hungry,” he said.

“Again?” asked Grandfather. “Have you forgotten that breakfast?”

“I have myself, Grandfather,” said Violet. “I wish we could have a picnic and not go to the motel for lunch. This is such a nice yard.”

“You call this a nice yard?” asked Sim. “You ought to see it when the grass is cut. Looks good.”

“Look at those enormous flat stones by the front door,” said Violet. “We could take a chair out there for Grandfather and have a fine picnic.”

Mr. Alden always listened to Violet. “Well,” he said, “let’s go down to the motel and get some sandwiches, and ask them to fill our Thermos bottles. Could we get sandwiches at the motel, Sim?”

“Well, you could,” said Sim. “But my wife would love to make you some chicken sandwiches. She makes ’em fine.”

“Neat!” cried Benny.

“Could make some *egg* sandwiches, too,” said Sim.

“We’ll be right down,” cried Benny.

“I’ll go down and tell her,” said Sim. “And I’ll call up some of the neighbors and tell them about this job.”

“Ah!” said Grandfather. His eyes were shining.

“Ah!” said Benny. For a minute he looked just like his grandfather. Sim looked at them both. He saw how much they wanted the house fixed. He said to himself, “They want that house fixed quick and it will be fixed quick.”

The Potato Pit

You go on ahead, Sim,” said Mr. Alden. “We’ll follow if you are sure your wife wants to make sandwiches for us.”

“Yes, I’m sure,” said Sim. “We got lots of milk, too. We can fill up your Thermos bottles.”

“We’ll drink more milk than that, Sim,” said Henry. “There are four of us, you know. I could drink a quart myself right now.”

“Let’s have one Thermos of coffee for Grandfather,” said Violet, who always thought of Grandfather.

“You can have all the milk you want,” said Sim. “We have forty cows.”

They all went out the back door.

“Don’t lock the door,” said Sim. “Just leave it.”

He got into his car. The family got into the station wagon and off they went. This time they went to the red house nearest the store. Sim took them into the kitchen. His wife smiled when she saw them coming.

“Ma, can you make some chicken sandwiches? This is Mr. Alden and his grandchildren. They want a picnic lunch.”

“How do you do, Mrs. Morse,” said Grandfather, shaking hands. “You are very kind to do this for us.”

“Glad to,” said Mrs. Morse. “I made bread yesterday so I have six loaves.”

“Oh, homemade bread!” said Benny. “What a picnic!”

“Make some *egg* sandwiches too, Ma,” said Sim. “These children seem to be half starved. I’ll get the cans of milk.”

“Why do you call her ma?” asked Benny. “Isn’t she your wife?”

“Yes, she’s my wife. But I call her ma because we have six kids.”

Mrs. Morse began to chop up chicken in a wooden tray. “You have courage,” she said, “to move into that old house.”

“Why?” asked Benny. “It isn’t *haunted*, is it?”

“No, it isn’t haunted,” said Mrs. Morse. “But nobody in this town would live in it.”

“Why not?” asked Grandfather. “I’d really like to know.”

“Well, I can’t tell you why. But there is something mysterious about it. I never did know what it was.”

“That’s the funniest thing!” said Jessie. “Nobody seems to know.”

“Did something happen a long time ago?” asked Henry.

Mrs. Morse looked up. “Yes, that’s exactly right! It happened so long ago, nobody remembers. But they remember there was *something*.”

“Who is the oldest person in this town?” Henry asked.

“Oldest person? Let me think. That would be Grandpa Cole. He’s almost a hundred years old. But he can still see to read and he can walk with a cane.”

“Maybe he would remember something he heard when he was a boy,” said Jessie.

“Maybe he would. That’s right. I never asked Grandpa Cole,” said Mrs. Morse. She began to crack

eggs and take off the shells.

Benny's eyes grew wide with surprise.

"Oh, those eggs were hard-boiled already!" cried Benny. "I thought they would run out when I saw you crack them."

"Yes, I always have cold eggs for my family. They like cold hard-boiled eggs for breakfast."

"Well, I don't," said Benny. "I like cold *eggs* for a picnic. And for breakfast I like them hot and soft-boiled."

Mrs. Morse laughed. "Most people do," she said. "I've got a funny family."

She was an excellent cook, though. Soon she took out a big basket with a handle. She began to wrap the sandwiches in waxed paper. She put them in the basket. "You like pickles?" she asked.

"Oh, we love pickles!" said Benny. He looked up. He expected to see a bottle of pickles. But there were no pickles. The pickles were as long as his hand.

"My, those are superman pickles," he said. "One will be enough. It looks just like a cucumber."

"Pickles are cucumbers, Benny," said Jessie.

"Well, I never knew that," said Benny.

"I have some cookies, too," said Mrs. Morse. "You'd better have some cookies for dessert."

They were big round white cookies with a hole in the middle. They were brown around the edges. How good they smelled!

"There you are," she said at last. She shut the cover of the basket. "Good luck!" She gave a Thermos of coffee to Jessie.

Henry took the basket and thanked her. Grandfather paid her. That is, he tried to pay her. But she gave the money right back. "No," she said, "I love to do something like that. It was a pleasure."

Mr. Alden knew she meant it. So he said he would always remember it, and each one of the four children thanked her again.

Off they went in the station wagon, back to the farm. They took the basket to the big flat stones by the front door. Henry found a chair for Grandfather. The rest sat on the warm stones. Out came the sandwiches, the eggs, the pickles.

Mrs. Morse had put in some paper cups for milk, and one beautiful cup and saucer and a spoon for Mr. Alden. "That's good!" said Grandfather. "I like my coffee in a cup."

"Not a paper cup," said Benny.

"Right. No paper cup for me."

On top of the basket was an enormous bone for Watch. He took it and went off with it. Everyone was eating cookies when they heard a car coming. Watch began to bark. He ran right over to the children, but he wagged his tail.

"Now who is that?" asked Jessie.

"I bet it's the man to fix the roof," said Benny.

He was right. A thin man with white hair stopped his car and got out. He looked at the children and Mr. Alden. He had a load of shingles in the back of his car.

"Are you the man to fix the roof?" Benny asked.

"Yep," said the man.

"Have you got a long ladder?" asked Henry.

"Nope."

"I suppose you have to wait for Sim to bring a ladder," said Grandfather.

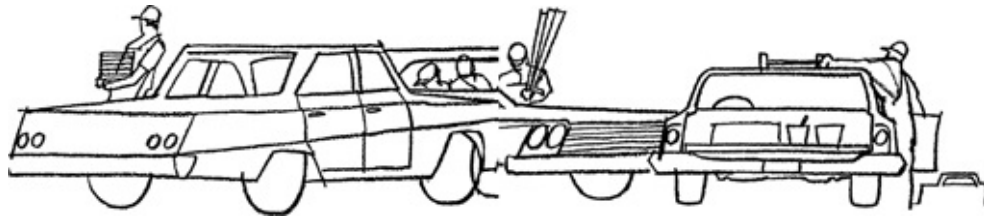
"Yep," said the man. He began to take the shingles out of his car.

Grandfather smiled. "Will you tell me your name?"

"Yep. It's Delbert King. But call me Del."

Benny said, "You heard my Aunt Jane wants to come here to live? Quick like a fox. How long do you think it will take to shingle this roof?"

"I don't know," said Del. He took out a big box of nails. Another car came slowly up the drive.



"Now who is that?" said Jessie.

"I bet it's another man to work on the house," said Henry.

"Look," said Violet. "There are three men in that car. Grandfather, you can turn a whole town upside down in no time!"

Then Sim came back too. He had another man with him. Now there were six men.

Grandfather said to Sim, "Let's go into the house and see what to do first." Everyone followed. Watch went along, wagging his tail.

The boards in the floor were very wide.

"Some of this just needs cleaning," said Sim. "The last people left it in pretty good shape."

"I thought nobody had lived here for a long time," said Benny.

"No, a family moved in and stayed about six months a while ago. Then they went back to New York. They didn't like the country," said Sim.

One of the men looked at Benny and said, "Why do you want to live here anyway?"

"We don't," said Benny. "It's my Aunt Jane. She used to live here. And Grandfather, too. This is Grandfather. He used to live here when he was a boy."

Grandfather looked at the workman. "What's the matter with the house?" he asked.

"I don't know," said the man. He stood on one foot and then the other. He looked at Sim. "Always something queer about this place. Lots of stories."

"Tell me one," said Grandfather. "Just one story."

"Well, there was an old gun."

"Yes, we've heard about that gun!" said Grandfather. "Sim has it at his house."

"No, it's at my father's house," said Sim.

"Well, I shall see it soon," said Grandfather. "What about the gun?"

"They say it came from this house," said the workman. "I guess it was a musket. It was a long time ago."

"Same story," said Grandfather. "I am going to fix up the house just the same. Fix the windows. Fix the roof. Put in bathrooms. Put in hot water. A furnace. How long will that take?"

"Well, three weeks," said Sim. "We've got a lot of men."

Violet said, "School will be out, and we can come up and stay awhile."

"We'll find out what the matter is," said Benny. "I bet it's *nothing*. Just stories people tell."

The men looked at Benny and laughed. "Maybe it's nothing, son, but I bet it's *something*."

"Well, if it is, my grandfather will find out," said Benny.

"That's the truth," said Sim. "He will."

The men went out and put ladders up to the roof. Some of the men stayed inside and began to build

a fire in the stove.

“Are you cold?” asked Henry. It was a very warm day.

“No, we have to heat water from the well,” said a man.

The workers had big kettles and soon there was plenty of hot water. The men began to wash the floors and walls.

After awhile the Aldens tired of watching the work. They went down to the cellar.

“Oh, what a place!” cried Benny as his eyes grew used to the darkness. “I can believe this cellar was here during the Revolution.”

“A dirt floor with rocks coming through,” Henry said as he looked about. “I suppose people kept vegetables down here in the winter.”

“Right, Henry,” said Grandfather. “We kept potatoes in that pit. We called it the potato pit. I remember it very well. I used to come down here and get two dozen potatoes for dinner. We had so many men working on the farm then.”

The four young Aldens went over the rocks to look into the hole. It was quite deep. It was lined with stones and plastered.

“No potatoes,” said Benny.

They all laughed, and Violet said, “Imagine finding a potato from Revolutionary days!”

“Well,” said Grandfather with a smile, “I can’t say that I remember the Revolution. But we kept potatoes there. And probably that was always the place for potatoes.”

“Maybe the mystery is in the potato pit,” said Jessie. She looked over the edge again.

“No, I don’t think so,” said Mr. Alden. He started to go upstairs. “I lived here a long time. There was nothing in that pit but potatoes.”

“I wonder if the mystery is in the big fireplace in the kitchen,” said Violet. “Let’s look in those ovens.” They went upstairs to the kitchen.

“Let’s get in,” said Benny. It was a fine idea. Benny could get into the ovens and stand up. There was an oven on each side of the fireplace.

But not a clue was to be found.

“Well, I think we had better find that motel,” said Mr. Alden. He looked at his watch. “We will have to have three rooms.”

“Oh, I hope they will take dogs,” said Benny. “Some motels won’t take animals.”

The men had finished washing the floor in the sitting room.

“Oh, how lovely this looks!” cried Jessie. “Wait till we get up some white curtains!”

The men looked at her.

“A fine job, men,” said Grandfather. “When you get through, just walk out. No need to lock the door, so Sim tells me.” He smiled at every man.

“That’s it,” said Henry to himself. “I can see why people enjoy working for Grandfather. He always looks right at them and smiles.”

An Old Flintlock Gun

The Aldens found a fine motel. The man said he would take Watch if they tied him up. Watch did not like this at all, but he lay down by the beds.

After breakfast on Sunday morning, Henry said, "The men won't be working Sunday of course. So this is just the time to go and see that old gun."

They drove back to the store. The store was shut, but Mr. Morse saw them coming. He went down to let them in.

"I bet you came to see the old gun," he said. "Come right upstairs. I live alone because my wife died many years ago."

When they were all sitting down, Mr. Morse went to a shelf and took down a queer gun.

"Well," said Benny, "that is the funniest looking gun I ever saw. Does it work? Will it shoot?"

"Oh, yes, it will shoot. But I don't know how to shoot it myself. It is called a flintlock. They use guns like this in the Revolution."

"I think I know how it works," said Henry. "Just let me take it a minute. See, here is a pan. You put the gunpowder in that pan. Then here is a flint. The flint makes a spark when you pull this trigger. That sets fire to the powder."

"I bet it makes a terrible bang," said Benny.

"Yes, it does. I have read about them. I think the one who shoots it might get hurt himself," answered Mr. Morse.

Grandfather said, "Elisha, where did you get this gun?"



“I got it from the Bean family. After Andy skipped out, they didn’t want to see this gun. They were going to throw it away. So I said to give it to me. It’s been on that shelf ever since. Going on fifty years! I never clean it any more.”

Then Henry gave the gun to Jessie. She said, “This ought to be in a museum.”

Henry said, “Now who did you say was the oldest person here? Grandpa Cole?”

“I didn’t tell you about Grandpa Cole. Must have been my son.”

“It was Sim’s wife,” said Violet. “She said he was almost a hundred years old. Where does he live?”

“Could we go and call on him?” asked Mr. Alden. He never wanted to waste words.

“Well, you could. He’d sure be surprised. Nobody ever calls on him now. He’s too old. He just talks about the past,” said Mr. Morse.

“Well,” said Grandfather, “we want him to talk about the past.”

“He will,” said Mr. Morse laughing. “Go back on this road, past your own farm, and Grandpa Cole lives in the next house. A little white house with a white fence around it.”

The station wagon was soon on the road again. They went past their own house with the ladders stuck up on the roof. Then they saw the small white house with the white fence. They all got out.

“I hope we won’t scare him,” said Benny. “So many strangers.”

Mr. Cole was not scared. He was very much pleased. He came out in the yard and told them to sit down on the benches. A nice motherly lady came out and helped him into an easy chair.

"We won't stay very long, Mr. Cole," began Grandfather.

"Call me Grandpa," said the old man.

"Very well." Grandfather Alden smiled. "We want to ask you some questions, but we don't want to tire you."

"You won't tire me. Stay as long as you can," said Grandpa Cole. "I don't get many visitors, and I like visitors."

"That's good," said Benny. "This is very important."

"What's that?" asked Grandpa Cole. "Important? What can I tell you?"

Grandfather began again. "I know you have heard the story of the old gun that Andy Bean had."

"Yep. An old flintlock. He set a big fire with that flintlock, and then he skipped out."

"Well, this is what we want to know," said Mr. Alden leaning forward. "Where did that gun come from?"

"Where did that gun come from? Well, that's easy. It came from the farmhouse you just bought for yourself! Somebody gave it to Andy. Now that's another story. I don't know exactly who it was, but it was somebody hiding in your house!"

"Hiding? Why?" asked Benny.

"I don't know that, and I'm sure Andy's brother who has the farm doesn't know either. He wouldn't talk about it anyway. But I can tell you who does know."

"Who?" cried everybody at once.

"My brother. He is only 92 years old and I am 99. He was younger than I was, and he would remember better."

"What is his name?" asked Henry.

"Well, Cole. Only he is John Cole and nobody calls him grandpa."

"Where is he now?" asked Jessie eagerly.

"In New York. He lives in the city in the winter. He comes up here in the summer. He'll be here in a few weeks. Maybe in a few days. I lose track of the time."

Violet said to Jessie, "Maybe he'll be here when we come up to stay. Then we can ask him. That will be after Aunt Jane comes, too."

Grandpa Cole didn't know anything more. But as Henry said, every little bit helps.

The Aldens thought Grandpa Cole was beginning to look tired. It was time to go.

"Well, thank you," said Mr. Alden. He got up and shook hands with the old man. "The children will come up soon to get the house ready for my sister Jane."

"Yes, I heard all about it," said Grandpa. "I hope she gets along all right in that house." He shook his head.

"We're going to live there too this summer," said Benny. "We're going to visit Aunt Jane."

"Come and see me," said Grandpa Cole.

As they rode back to their own farm, Mr. Alden said, "I think we might as well go home now. We can't do anything more."

"Don't you have to talk to Sim and tell the men what to do?" asked Benny.

"No, I told them already," said Grandfather.

So the family said good-bye to their new friends and went back home.

In a few weeks Grandfather had a telephone call that the house was done. Jessie and Violet were ready with curtains for the windows. They had sheets and blankets and towels and lots of other things.

It took many trips to load the station wagon. And when everything was packed in, there was hardly room for Watch to ride along.

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