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BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE IN THE SUNNY SOUTH

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

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THE BUNNY BROWN SERIES, THE BOBBSEY
TWINS SERIES, THE OUTDOOR GIRLS
SERIES, THE SIX LITTLE BUNKERS
SERIES, THE MAKE-BELIEVE
STORIES, ETC.

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**WITH DELIGHT AND
WONDER, THE CHILDREN
PICKED ORANGES.**

Frontispiece—(Page 203)

Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue in the Sunny South.

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CHAPTER I

THE SNOW MAN

"Oh, Bunny! what you making such a big nose for?"

"So I can hit it easier, Sue, when I peg snowballs at it."

Bunny Brown and his sister Sue were in the backyard of their home, making a big man of snow. There had been quite a storm the day before, and many white flakes had fallen. As soon as the storm stopped and the weather grew warm enough, Mrs. Brown let Bunny and Sue go out to play. And of course one of the first things they did, after running about in the clean white snow, making "tracks," was to start a snow man. [2]

Bunny was working away at the face of the white chap when Sue asked him about the big nose he was making.

"What'd you say you were going to do, Bunny?" asked Sue, who was digging away in the snow about where the man's legs would be when he was finished.

"I said—" replied her brother, as he pressed some snow in his red-mittened hand, getting ready to plaster it on the man's funny face—"I said I was making his nose big so I could hit it easier with a snowball."

"Oh, Bunny!" cried Sue, "are you going to throw snowballs at our nice snow man?"

"Of course!" replied Bunny. "That's what we're making him for! I'm going to put a hat on him, too. Course a hat's easier to hit than a nose, 'specially a tall hat like the one I'm going to make. You can throw at the hat if you want to and I'll throw at the nose."

"Oh, Bunny!" exclaimed Sue, and from her voice you might have thought Bunny had said he was going to throw a snowball at Wango, the pet monkey of Mr. Jed Winkler, an animal of which Bunny Brown and his sister Sue were very fond. "Bunny, don't hurt him!" [3]

"Pooh! You don't s'pose a snow man can feel, do you?" asked Bunny, turning to look at his sister. He had just begun to understand why it was that Sue did not want him to throw snowballs at the big white fellow when he was finished.

"Well, maybe he can't feel," said Sue, for she was really too old to have such a little child's belief. At least she felt she was too old to confess to such a feeling. "But what's the fun of making a nice snow man and then hitting him all over with snowballs? I'm not going to throw at his tall hat, even if you make one. Why can't you throw balls at something else, Bunny, like a tree or a telegraph pole?"

"'Cause I can peg at them any time," Bunny answered, with a laugh. "It's more fun to throw snowballs at a snow man and make believe he's real. He can't chase you then."

"Well, I'm not going to throw anything at our nice snow man," decided Sue, digging away with her little shovel to carve out the legs. [4]

"You don't have to," said Bunny, fairly enough. "I'll do it all, Sue."

"Well," said his sister, with a shake of her head, "you can throw at your part of the snow man, if you like, but you can't throw at my part!"

"Which—which is your part?" asked Bunny, and he spoke as though greatly surprised.

"The legs," answered Sue. "I wish you wouldn't throw any snowballs at the legs, Bunny Brown."

"All right, I won't," he promised kindly. For Bunny was a year older than his sister, and, at most times, was kind and good to her.

"You can throw at your own part as much as you like," went on Sue, "but I'm not going to have my part spoiled."

"All right," her brother agreed again. "I'll throw at his nose and high hat—after I make it—and I won't touch his legs."

This seemed to satisfy Sue, and for some time the children played in the yard, where the big snow man was being made. He was as large as Sue and Bunny could build him. First they had rolled a snowball around the yard, and, as the snow was soft and packed well, the ball grew larger and larger. [5]

Then, when it was about the size Bunny thought was right, it was left at the place where the man was to stand.

"Now we have to roll another ball," Bunny had said.

"What for?" asked Sue, who, though she had often seen snow men, had perhaps forgotten just how they were made.

"This second ball is for his stomach," Bunny said.

"What good is a stomach?" asked Sue. "He can't eat."

"He could maybe eat icicles if he wanted to," Bunny had answered. "Anyhow, the second snowball has to go on top of the bottom one and make the body. Then you cut legs out of the bottom snowball. You can cut the legs, 'cause I'm taller 'n you and I can reach up and make the face."

Sue was digging away with her little shovel at the bottom snowball to make the man's legs, and Bunny was just finishing the big nose when, suddenly, a snowball came sailing into the Brown yard and fell with a thud between Bunny and his sister. [6]

They both started, and Bunny cried:

"Did you throw that, Sue? If you did you mustn't, for 'tisn't time to start throwing yet!"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed a voice around the corner of the Brown home, and down the path came running Charlie Star, one of Bunny's playmates, followed by Helen Newton, a little girl with whom Sue was very fond of playing. It was Charlie who had laughed.

"I threw the snowball," he said. "But I only did it to make you jump. I wasn't trying to hit you, Bunny and Sue."

"All right," replied Bunny. "Want to help make the snow man?"

"Sure!" answered Charlie.

"Oh, what fun!" added Helen. "May I help?"

"You may help me make the legs," replied Sue. "Bunny says he's going to throw snowballs at his part—that's the head," she explained. [7]

"That'll be fun!" decided Charlie Star. "Come on, let's hurry up and get it finished and then we'll see who's the best shot."

"I've got to get a hat made first," Bunny stated. "It'll be a lot more fun pegging at a tall hat."

"If you could get a real one—one of the shiny black kind—it would be dandy," said Charlie.

"Well, I can make one just as good of snow," Bunny said. "Come on, Charlie!"

Together the four children played around the snow man, who was slowly coming to look more and more like himself.

"Oh, isn't he a big fellow!" cried Helen, walking off a little way to get a better view.

"Wait till I make his hat," suggested Bunny. "Then he'll look bigger, and we can hit him easier, Charlie."

"Sure, Bunny!"

"All but his legs!" cried Sue. "You mustn't hit his legs, Bunny Brown. They're my part."

"No, we won't hit the legs," agreed Bunny. "Charlie, you look for some pieces of coal for the eyes. I'm going to roll another snowball to make the tall hat." [8]

Bunny walked over toward the side of his house to find some snow that had not been trampled on, so he would have a good place to start to roll the ball that could be cut into the shape of a tall hat. Sue and Helen had about finished work on the snow man's legs, and Charlie had fitted in two chunks of black coal for eyes.

"Shall I put some of the red paper on for ears?" asked Charlie, as he was about to make the mouth.

"Snow men don't have red ears!" laughed Helen.

"My ears get red when they're cold," said Sue.

"We'll make the ears out of snow," called Bunny, who was rolling the snowball near the house. "I forgot about them. But I guess we don't need 'em, anyhow."

All of a sudden, as Bunny was bending over to give the hat snowball a final roll, which would make it about the right size, a queer noise sounded. It seemed to come from the roof of the Brown house. [9]

Charlie, Sue, and Helen looked up. They saw, sliding down the sloping roof of the house, a big mass of snow, like a great drift. It was just above Bunny's head, and the other children could see that it would slide right down on top of him.

"Look out, Bunny!" screamed Sue.

Her brother glanced up from the ball he was rolling.

"Look out for the slide from the roof!" shouted Charlie.

Bunny started to run, but it was too late. In another second down came the big mass of snow with a rush, covering Bunny Brown from sight! [10]

CHAPTER II

BUNNY'S TRICK

For a moment after the rush and fall of the snow from the roof, the mass of white flakes coming down with a swish and a thud, there was silence. Sue, Helen, and Charlie were so frightened and surprised that they did not know what to do. Then, after two or three seconds, Sue seemed to find her voice, and she exclaimed:

"Where's Bunny?"

"He—he's gone!" gasped Helen.

But Charlie understood.

"Bunny's covered up under that snow!" he cried. "We've got to dig him out. You'd better run in and tell your mother, Sue!"

This was something Sue understood. Mother was the one to tell in times of trouble, especially when daddy wasn't there. [11]

"Oh, Mother! Mother!" cried Sue, running toward the house, "Bunny is under the snow—a big pile of it!"

"And we must dig him out!" screamed Helen, remembering what Charlie had said.

Charlie, while the girls ran screaming toward the house, leaped toward the pile of snow that had slid from the roof and began digging in it with his hands.

And while Bunny is under the snow heap, from which he doubtless hoped soon to be rescued, I will take just a moment or two to tell my new readers something about Bunny Brown and his sister Sue.

Those were the names of the children. Their father, Mr. Walter Brown, kept a boat and fish dock in the town of Bellemere on Sandport Bay, near the ocean. Helping Mr. Brown at the dock was Bunker Blue, a big, strong boy, very fond of Bunny and Sue. The first book of the series is called "Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue," and in that you may read of the many adventures the children had together, and with their friends, who, besides Charlie and Helen, were George and Mary Watson, Harry Bentley, Sadie West, and a number of other children. [12]

In the town of Bellemere were other persons, more or less friendly to Bunny and Sue. I have mentioned Jed Winkler, an old sailor who owned a monkey named Wango. His sister, Miss Euphemia, was not as fond of monkeys or children as was her brother.

Uncle Tad was an old soldier, who lived in the Brown home. He was really an uncle to Mr. Brown, but Bunny and Sue claimed him as their own. In a distant city lived Aunt Lu, whom the children had once visited.

Bunny Brown and his sister Sue had many adventures besides those told of in the first book. They went to Grandpa's farm, they played circus, they visited at Aunt Lu's city home, they camped in the woods at "Camp Rest-a-While," journeyed to the big woods, took an auto tour, had rides on a Shetland pony, gave a show in the town hall, and just before this story opens they had been to Christmas Tree Cove, where they took part in many strange happenings and solved a queer mystery. [13]

They had been back from Christmas Tree Cove for some time, and now winter had set in. Then came the big storm, the making of the snow man and the slide of snow from the roof, covering Bunny Brown from sight.

"Oh, Mother! Mother! come and get Bunny out," cried Sue, as she raced toward the house.

"And bring a shovel!" added Helen, glancing back to see where Charlie was trying to get to the bottom of the pile by using his hands.

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Brown, as she came to the door in answer to the cries of the two girls.

"Oh, Bunny—Bunny—a—a—" Then Sue had to stop, for she was breathless.

"He's under the snow!" cried Helen, able to finish the sad news Sue had started.

Mrs. Brown, who had been sewing in the house, had heard the slide of snow from the roof, and had also heard the thud it made as it landed in the yard. Now she understood what Sue and Helen meant. Bunny, somehow or other, was under that snowslide.

"Oh, Uncle Tad!" cried Mrs. Brown. "Come quick! Bunny is under a snowslide from the roof! We'll have to get him out!" [14]

Mrs. Brown hurried from the house, followed by the two little girls. But Helen paused long enough to shout:

"Bring a shovel! That's what Charlie said!"

"Is Charlie under the snow, too?" asked Mrs. Brown, as she hurried around the corner of the house.

"No'm. But he's digging with his hands," Helen answered. "I guess the shovels Bunny and Sue were making the snow man with are too small to dig with."

This was so, and Mrs. Brown was thinking of turning back into the house to get the large shovel when she saw Uncle Tad coming with it.

"I'll soon dig him out," said the old soldier, as he began to work with the shovel.

"Poor Bunny!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "I can't even see him."

"The snow came down from on top," explained Charlie. "It went right over his head and everything!"

[15]

"I hope he isn't hurt," said Mrs. Brown, picking up one of the small shovels the children had been using and beginning to help Uncle Tad dig.

"I guess it won't hurt him much," Charlie said. "The snow's soft. Once I was in a snow house and the roof fell in on me and I was all covered up, but I wasn't hurt."

"That's good," remarked Mrs. Brown. "We're digging you out, Bunny," she called.

"I don't guess he can hear you," said Helen, when no answer came from beneath the snow.

"I couldn't hear when I was in the snow house," said Charlie. "My ears were all stopped up."

"We'll soon have him out," declared Uncle Tad, tossing aside big shovelfuls of the damp snow. "It's a deep pile, though."

There were now three of them digging away at the pile of snow which hid Bunny Brown from sight. Of course Uncle Tad was doing the most work, as his shovel was so large. Pile after pile he tossed aside, and he was fast getting to the bottom, when, all of a sudden there was a cracking sound, and the handle of Uncle Tad's shovel broke in the middle.

[16]

"Oh, dear!" cried the old soldier. "This is too bad!"

"And we haven't another large shovel!" said Mrs. Brown. "Walter took our second one down to the dock with him this morning!"

"Well, perhaps I can make this do," said Uncle Tad. "Though I can't work as fast as I could if the handle wasn't broken."

"Sue, and Helen, run next door and see if you can borrow a large snow shovel," called Mrs. Brown. "Don't stop to tell them what it's for, or Bunny may smother."

"Oh, no'm, I guess he won't," Charlie said, as he dug away with the little shovel that Sue had been using. "When I was under the snow I could breathe all I wanted to."

Mrs. Brown said she was glad to hear this, but, for all that, she dug as fast as she could with the other small shovel, and Uncle Tad, using the one with the broken handle, did the best he could.

Helen and Sue hurried next door to see if they could borrow a broad wooden shovel, but before they returned Uncle Tad had managed to dig down through the pile of snow until he reached the ground and the side of the house foundation—the upper part of the cellar wall.

[17]

"Why, Bunny isn't here!" cried Uncle Tad, in great surprise.

"Isn't he?" asked the little boy's mother, looking over Uncle Tad's shoulder down into the hole in the snow pile.

"There isn't a sign of him," went on the soldier. "Are you sure you saw him get covered from sight here?" he asked Charlie.

"It was right here," answered Bunny's chum. "He was rolling a snowball to make a hat for the man when down the snow slid off the roof. It covered Bunny and the snowball he was rolling."

"Oh, we must hurry!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, now growing very anxious. "He surely will be smothered, under the snow all this while!"

She began to dig again with the small shovel, and Uncle Tad was doing his best with the broken one when Sue and Helen, coming around the corner with a large shovel which they had borrowed next door, gave a sudden cry.

[18]

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"There's Bunny now!" exclaimed Sue. "Look!"

They all looked, and, surely enough, Bunny was coming up the outside steps of the cellar. He walked up as if nothing had happened.

"Bunny Brown! what trick is this?" exclaimed his mother. "What made you pretend to be buried

under all that snow and give us such a fright for, when you weren't there at all?"

"But I was there, Mother," Bunny said. "I was under the snow."

"Then how did you get out?" Uncle Tad asked. "It surely looks like a trick, Bunny Brown."

[19]

CHAPTER III

ORANGE BLOSSOMS

Bunny Brown walked from the cellarway over to where his mother, Uncle Tad, his sister, and his playmates stood. Uncle Tad and Mother Brown looked rather reproachfully at the little boy. They really thought he had played a joke on them, or at least that he had caused the other children to do so, sending them to cry that he was buried under the snow.

But Sue, Charlie, and Helen knew that Bunny had really been covered from sight under the snow. They knew there was no trick about it, though they did not know how it was Bunny appeared as if coming out of the cellar when he should have been under the snow.

"I didn't play any trick, Mother. Really I didn't," said Bunny earnestly. He had played tricks in times past, but his mother knew he always told the truth.

[20]

"Were you really under that pile of snow?" asked the old soldier.

"Yes, Uncle Tad, I was," Bunny answered. "The snow came down off the roof and covered me all up."

"Then why didn't I find you there when I dug all the way down to the ground and the cellar wall?" asked Uncle Tad.

"Because," answered Bunny, with a queer little smile on his rosy face, "when the snow piled on top of me, and knocked me down, I was right close by a cellar window. First I didn't know what to do. Then I saw the window, and I pushed on it, and it opened.

"I went through the window into the cellar. There was a box under the window inside the cellar, and I got on that and then I jumped off down to the floor.

"First I couldn't see anything, 'cause it was so dark there, but I could after a while, and I come out by the door."

"Oh, Bunny!" exclaimed his mother. "We never thought of the cellar windows! Of course I see how it could happen," she said to Uncle Tad. "The pile of snow does cover a window."

[21]

She pointed toward one end of the big pile under which Bunny had been hidden. This end did, indeed, cover one of the low cellar windows, and when the snow was shoveled away it could be seen where the little boy had scrambled through.

"Say, it was lucky the cellar window wasn't fastened," said Charlie.

"It surely was!" agreed Bunny. "I was glad when it opened."

"I didn't know we had left any of them unbolted," Mrs. Brown said. "We'll fasten it now. But don't get under any more snowslides, Bunny."

"Now we can finish making our snow man!" Bunny said, as his mother and uncle turned to go into the house.

"Yes, I guess there's no more danger of snow sliding off the roof," remarked Uncle Tad. "All that could fall has slid off."

"Don't forget to take Mr. Snyder's shovel back," Mother Brown called to the children.

[22]

They promised to return it, and then began an hour of fun with the snow man. Bunny finished making the tall white hat, and then he and Charlie threw snowballs at it and at the nose of the snow man until he was so battered and plastered that he did not look at all like himself.

Sue and Helen threw a few snowballs at the legs of the man, but they soon tired of this, for Charlie and Bunny grew so excited with their sport that there was not much chance for the girls.

"Let's go and slide downhill," proposed Sue.

"That'll be fun," agreed Helen. So, taking their sleds, the girls went to a little hill not far away, where, meeting Mary Watson and Sadie West, they had good times riding down the snowy slope.

"Well, he doesn't look much like a snow man now," laughed Charlie Star, after many balls had been thrown at the white image.

"No; his face is all gone," Bunny agreed. "What'll we do now?"

"Let's go over on the hill," proposed Charlie. "It's getting so warm that maybe the snow won't last much longer, and we don't want to miss the fun."

[23]

"It is getting warmer," Bunny agreed. "The wind's coming from the south," he added as he looked at the weather vane on the barn and saw that it was pointed to the south. "I guess they don't ever have snow down south; do they, Charlie?"

"They don't where my aunt lives," Charlie answered. "She's down in Florida—away down in the end, near Key West. She sends me letters sometimes, and she says they never have snow there. She has all the oranges she wants, too!"

"I'd like to live there!" Bunny said, smacking his lips. "I love oranges. But I'd like a little snow once in a while, wouldn't you, Charlie?"

"Oh, yes! You couldn't have any fun in winter without snow."

"I'd like to see such a place—just once, anyhow," went on Bunny Brown. And he little knew how soon he was to get his desire.

The two boys, having pelted the snow man all they wished, got their sleds and soon joined Sue and the other girls on the hill. There they had races, and coasted down in as many different ways as they could think of. Finally Bunny cried:

"Let's make a bob, Charlie!"

"No, you mustn't do that!" exclaimed Sue.

"Who said so?" demanded Bunny.

"Daddy," Sue answered. "He said I wasn't to make any bobs on the hill."

"Well, he didn't tell me not to," declared her brother.

"I guess he meant you," answered Sue. "You'd better not make a bob, Bunny Brown! You might get hurt!"

Making a bob, it might be explained, meant that two or three boys and sometimes the older girls would lie flat on their sleds. Then one coaster would take hold of the rear of the sled in front of him, and twine his feet around the front runners of the sled behind him. In this way half a dozen boys or girls could lock themselves and their sleds together and go down the hill that way.

There was danger in it because sometimes the hands or legs of some one in the middle would lose their grip, and the "bob" would come apart. Then sleds would crash together, and often the children were hurt. Sue's father had told her never to do this, for he had more than once seen children hurt at this game.

Whether he had told Bunny not to make a bob I do not know. I think if Bunny had been forbidden this fun he would not have taken part in it. But perhaps he forgot.

Anyhow, he and Charlie and some of the other lads stretched out on their sleds, making a bob as I have told you it was done, and down the hill they coasted.

All went well for some distance, and then suddenly Harry Bentley, who was in the middle, lost his hold of Bunny's sled.

"Hold on to me! Hold on to me!" cried Bunny, as he saw that he was slipping sideways.

"I can't!" Harry answered.

A few seconds later the bob came apart, some boys rolling off their sleds and others coasting down backwards or sideways. Bunny went on by himself for some little distance, and then, all of a sudden, the two last boys, who were still locked together, crashed right into the side of Bunny's sled, knocking him off and coasting on right over him!

"Oh! Oh!" cried Sue, who saw what had happened. "Look at Bunny!"

For a moment it seemed that her brother must be severely hurt, but when some of the older boys ran to pick him up, Bunny arose by himself. On his face was a spot of blood.

"Oh, you're hurt!" cried Charlie Star.

Bunny put his hand to his nose. It was bleeding, and at first he was frightened. But he did not cry.

"I—I don't care!" he said bravely. "I've had nose-bleed before. It don't hurt much!"

"Hold some snow on it," advised one boy. "That'll stop the bleeding."

Bunny did this, but as the cold snow hurt worse than the pain of his bumped nose, he soon tossed the red ball away.

"Come on, I'll take you home," said Jack Denson, one of the older boys. "Don't cry, Sue," he said, as Bunny's sister began to whimper. "He's all right."

Jack was very kind, wiping the blood off Bunny's face at times with a handkerchief, so that when the Brown home was almost reached the bleeding had nearly stopped. Sue, who had been very much frightened at first, was growing calmer, and Bunny was feeling better. As they neared their house they saw their father coming home from his work at the boat and fish dock.

"There's my father," Bunny said.

"Oh, then you'll be all right," remarked Jack. "I'll skip back then, for I've got to go to the store for my mother."

Mr. Brown stood at the gate waiting for his two children, who came along dragging their sleds.

"Why, Bunny! what's the matter?" asked Mr. Brown, when he saw the blood on his son's face.

"He played bob; and didn't you tell him not to?" broke out Sue. "An' the bob busted and he got bumped into and he was run over and he was under a drift and he crawled through the cellar window an' Uncle Tad couldn't find him an'—an'—everything!" gasped Sue, now quite out of breath. [28]

"My, you're telling all the bad news at once!" laughed her father, for he saw that Bunny was not seriously hurt and he knew that sometimes accidents will happen on coasting hills.

Mr. Brown had a box under his arm. It was a box that had come through the mail, as Bunny and Sue could see by the stamps. It looked very interesting and mysterious, this box did, and the children regarded it curiously as they walked up the path to the front door of the house with their father.

"Didn't you tell Bunny never to make a bob?" asked Sue, as Daddy Brown took his key from his pocket to open the door.

"I don't know that I did," was the answer. "Still if it is dangerous to make bobs I wish neither you nor Bunny to do it."

"Oh, it's lots of fun," Bunny said. "And my nose doesn't hurt much now. What's in the box, Daddy?" he asked. [29]

"I'll show you in a minute," Mr. Brown promised. "It is something very nice."

"Candy?" cried Sue, who had more than one "sweet tooth," I think.

"No, not candy," her father teased. "You'll soon see."

He went into the house with the children, and as soon as Mrs. Brown saw Bunny she knew what had happened; at least she knew his nose had bled.

"Did you have a tumble?" she asked.

"He was in a bob and it broke and he was run over!" cried Sue, who seemed anxious to do all the telling.

"Well, I'm glad it was no worse," said Mother Brown. "What's this?" she asked, as her husband handed her the box. "For me?"

"Yes," he answered. "Orange blossoms."

"Orange blossoms! How lovely!" cried the children's mother. "Where from?"

"Florida. Mr. Halliday sent them. He's down there on an orange farm, and I may have to go down myself."

"Down where?" cried Bunny. [30]

"South," answered his father.

"To Florida where the orange blossoms grow?" asked Sue eagerly, as her mother was opening the box.

"Well, we may get to Florida. But first I shall have to go to Georgia," answered Mr. Brown.

"Oh, take us!" cried Bunny and Sue. "Please take us!"

"We'll see," said Mr. Brown, with a look at his wife. "We'll talk it over after supper. Let's look at the orange blossoms now."

While Mother Brown was opening the box there came a noise at the side door as though some one were trying to break it open by pounding on it. [31]

CHAPTER IV

A RUNAWAY

Bunny Brown and his sister Sue, who were standing on their tiptoes to look at the orange blossoms in the box, turned quickly and glanced at the door as the pounding sounded again.

"I wonder who that can be," said Mother Brown, pausing with the box cover in her hand.

"I'll go and see," offered Mr. Brown. "It's queer they didn't go to the front door."

"Maybe it's somebody from the post-office come to take our orange blossoms away," suggested Bunny.

"What would they do that for?" Sue wanted to know.

"Cause," answered Bunny, "maybe the orange blossoms came to the wrong place and have to go to somebody else, like that letter one day." He was speaking of a time when the letter carrier left a wrong missive at Mr. Brown's home, and came later to get it. [32]

"Oh, these are daddy's orange blossoms all right!" said Mrs. Brown, as she looked at the address on the box. "They came to him at his office on the dock."

"Then who can it be?" asked Bunny, as the knock sounded again.

There came the sound of a bark as Mr. Brown opened the door, and next the children heard their father exclaim:

"Well, you poor half-frozen fellow! Come in and get warm! Go on away, dog!" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "Let Wango alone!"

"Oh, it's Wango!" cried Sue, running to the door.

"Mr. Winkler's monkey!" added Bunny. "Did he bring him over to play with us?"

"No, Wango seems to have come by himself," answered Mr. Brown, and as soon as the door was opened wider in scrambled the monkey, a stick of wood in one paw probably being what he had been pounding on the door with. From the light of the lamp, which streamed out on the side porch, the children could see a big black dog that, very likely, had been chasing and barking at poor Wango. [33]

"Go on away, dog!" cried Mr. Brown, and, stooping, he gathered up a handful of snow from a corner of the side porch and threw it at the barking animal, which then ran away.

Meanwhile Wango, the pet monkey that was a great favorite with Bunny and Sue, came shivering into the room to get warm.

"Oh, you poor thing!" cried Sue. "I'll get you my coat to put on! You're all shivery!" She started for the hall to get her garment, while Bunny petted the wet head of the long-tailed animal.

"No, Sue! Don't take your coat," called her mother. "You'll get it covered with monkey hairs. Wrap a floor rug around Wango if you like."

"I'll do that!" cried Bunny, taking a small carpet rug up from the floor. This he draped around Wango's shoulders, and the cold, shivering monkey seemed to like it.

"Well, Wango, what made you come out this kind of weather?" asked Mr. Brown, coming back to the table on which was standing the box of orange blossoms. [34]

"Maybe Mr. Winkler left the window open and he got out," said Sue.

"Don't monkeys like cold, Daddy?" asked Bunny.

"No, they come from warm, tropical countries," answered his father. "They cannot stand the cold."

"Florida is warm, isn't it, Daddy?" asked Sue, as she helped wrap the rug about Wango.

"Oh, yes, Florida, especially the southern part where oranges grow, is quite warm," Mr. Brown answered. "There is no snow there."

"Then maybe we can find some monkeys when we go down!" Sue said. "Won't that be nice, Bunny? We'll each have a monkey of our own."

"I'm going to teach mine to do circus tricks!" cried Bunny.

"Hold on! Hold on!" laughed Mr. Brown. "In the first place, there aren't any monkeys in Florida—at least none running around wild as there are in the South American jungles. And in the second place, what makes you children so sure you are going to Florida?" [35]

"You said you'd take us!" replied Bunny.

"I said I'd see," remarked his father. "Anyway, I have to go on business to Georgia, not Florida, though your mother and I may take a trip to the orange country later on."

"But if you went you'd take us, wouldn't you?" pleaded Sue.

"Oh, of course he would! Don't tease the children so!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "And what are we going to do with Wango?" she asked, for the monkey seemed quite contented now that he was in a warm, light room with his two special friends, Bunny and Sue.

"I think Jed will be after him as soon as he finds his monkey is missing," said Mr. Brown. "But let's get those orange blossoms in water, to freshen them up. Mr. Halliday said he would send me some packed in damp moss, so they would keep pretty well, but he told me to put them in a bathtub full of water as soon as I got them and they would freshen up." [36]

"These seem quite fresh now," remarked Mother Brown, as she lifted from the box, lined with moss, the fragrant orange blossoms. Their perfume filled the whole room, and even Wango sniffed in delight, at least so Bunny said.

The children were allowed to look at the beautiful waxlike white blossoms, with their glossy green leaves, and then Mother Brown carried them upstairs to immerse them in the bathtub full of water. When they had freshened up they would be put in vases.

"Oh, I'd just love to see orange blossoms growing on a tree!" sighed Sue, as she drew in a deep breath of the fragrance.

"I'd rather see oranges and eat 'em!" exclaimed Bunny. "Can I pick oranges off a tree?" he asked his father.

"Well, yes. I suppose I might as well say I'll take you and then you'll stop teasing," said Mr. Brown laughingly, as his wife came back, having left the orange blossoms upstairs. "We'll all go to Florida!"

"When?" cried Bunny and Sue, eagerly.

"In about a week, I think," their father answered. "I shall have to go to Georgia then, and after I get through my business there we can run down to Florida for a few weeks." [37]

There came a knock on the door just then, and when it was opened there stood the old sailor, Jed Winkler.

"Is my monkey here?" he asked. "Yes, I see he is," he added, as he caught sight of his pet near Bunny and Sue. "Come here, you rascal!" he went on, pretending to be cross. "What did you want to run away for?"

"Is that what he did?" asked Bunny.

"Yes," answered Mr. Winkler, as he came in. "My sister opened the windows to-day when she was sweeping or dusting or doing something like that, and she must have forgotten to lock one. Wango found it and got out. I didn't miss him until a little while ago. I hope he hasn't been into any mischief."

"Oh, no," answered Mr. Brown. "It looks as though a strange dog might have chased him after he left your house. We heard a pounding on our door a few minutes ago, and when I opened it Wango rushed in."

"There was a big, strange dog near the porch, but I drove it away. Your monkey had a stick in his hand. He probably picked it up to hit the dog with, and he used it to pound on our door." [38]

"He pounded hard, too," said Sue. "Wango pounded very hard."

"Hope he didn't hurt the door," said the old sailor.

"Oh, I think not," Mr. Brown answered. "But he was cold and shivery, so the children wrapped him up."

"Well, I'm much obliged," said Mr. Winkler. "Come along home, Wango!" he called, and the monkey leaped into his master's arms, dropping the stick, which he no longer needed. "What's that nice smell?" asked Mr. Winkler, as he started for home. "Did somebody break a bottle of perfume?"

"It's orange blossoms," explained Bunny.

"And we're going to Florida and pick oranges," added Sue. "But there aren't any monkeys there."

"Then that's the place where my sister ought to go," laughed the old man. "She hates monkeys, and I think sometimes she leaves the windows open or unlocked on purpose so Wango'll get lost. But I wouldn't want to tell her that," he went on. For Miss Winkler was of rather a sour disposition, not at all as jolly and happy as her brother. [39]

When the old sailor and his pet had gone and supper was over, Bunny and Sue sat near their father and mother, talking happily about the coming trip to the sunny South where the orange blossoms grow. The flowers had been brought downstairs and filled the rooms with fragrance.

"You'll be sure to take us now, won't you, Daddy?" asked Bunny, as he and Sue started for bed a little later.

"Oh, yes, we shall all go South," promised Mr. Brown. "But you can't make snow men or go coasting there, Bunny."

"Picking oranges will be more fun," decided the little boy.

He and Sue had happy dreams that night, and there were no visions of alligators mingled with those of orange flowers. [40]

In the night it snowed, so the next day there was more of the white flaky substance on the ground.

"This'll make good sleighing," said Uncle Tad at the breakfast table. "You children want to come for a ride with me?"

Did they? You should have heard Bunny Brown and his sister Sue exclaim in delight at this!

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Brown, as Uncle Tad went out to harness the horse to the small sleigh.

"Walter wanted me to go to the railroad depot and get some freight that came in for him," answered the old soldier. "There are some small boxes of things he needs for his motor boat. There'll be plenty of room for the youngsters."

"All right—take them along," said Mrs. Brown. And a little later Bunny and Sue were in the sleigh with Uncle Tad.

"Whoa there now! Steady, Prince!" called the soldier to the horse, for the animal seemed rather more frisky than usual.

"What makes him go so fast?" asked Bunny, for he could tell that Uncle Tad was having hard work to hold in the horse. [41]

"Oh, he hasn't been out for two or three days and he feels frisky," the soldier answered. "But I guess I can manage him all right. Sit tight, you two!"

There were many other sleighs and cutters out around Bellemere, and the air was filled with the jingle of merry bells. Bunny and Sue saw many of their friends and waved to them.

"I guess all the boys and girls'll wish they were us when we go to Florida, won't they?" asked Sue of Bunny.

"I guess they will!" he declared.

They were nearing the railroad now, on their way to the freight depot to get the boxes for Mr. Brown. There were several tracks to cross before the depot could be reached.

Suddenly, as the sleigh containing Bunny and Sue was about to cross the rails, a distant locomotive gave a loud whistle. Prince gave a jump and, a moment later, began to trot very fast.

"Whoa! Whoa there! Steady, Prince!" cried Uncle Tad, taking a firm hold of the reins. But Prince did not settle down. Instead he ran the faster, and straight for the tracks. And as the whistle of the locomotive sounded louder, Bunny and Sue knew a train was coming! [42]

"Oh, Uncle Tad!" cried Sue, clinging to Bunny.

"Keep quiet, children!" begged the old soldier. "I guess we'll be all right!"

"Is he running away?" asked Bunny.

"I'm afraid he is," answered Uncle Tad. "But I'll pull him down in a minute. Sit tight and hold fast!" [43]

CHAPTER V

OUT OF A DUSTPAN

Prince was certainly a frisky horse that morning. In spite of all Uncle Tad could do by pulling on the reins and calling soothingly to the animal, he raced with the sleigh over the railroad tracks. And the train was coming nearer and nearer. Bunny and Sue well knew what would happen if it hit them.

"Whoa there, Prince! Be a good horse!" called Uncle Tad. He pulled harder on the reins, and when he saw that unless turned, the animal might dash across the tracks right in front of the rushing train, the old soldier gave such a pull that he swung the head of the runaway horse around and guided him alongside of the tracks instead of across them.

"Look out, Uncle Tad! You're going into a big drift!" cried Bunny.

"That's just where I want to go!" said the soldier. "If I head Prince into the drift he can't run any more." [44]

And this is just what Uncle Tad did. By a hard pull on the reins he swung the horse to one side, and not any too soon, either. For as Prince dragged the sled along the tracks and into a big drift that was almost as high as the head of the animal himself, the train dashed by—the train with the locomotive that had whistled and set Prince to running away.

"Whoa, there now! Quiet! Steady, old fellow!" called Uncle Tad soothingly, as Prince saw the big drift in front of him and seemed to know that he could neither go through it nor jump over it, especially when harnessed to the sleigh.



**WITH A WHIZZ AND A
ROAR THE TRAIN SPED
PAST.**

Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue in the Sunny South. Page 44

With a whizz and a roar the train sped past Bunny and Sue in the sleigh. They were quite near it, being alongside the tracks.

Prince stamped and reared a little, but he seemed to have gotten over his first fright, and was more like himself. Usually he was not skittish nor afraid of trains or engines. But not having been out of the stable for some time and having had no exercise, he was, like many other horses, ready to run away at the first loud noise. But Uncle Tad had pulled him down to a walk and guided him into the snowdrift just in time.

[45]

"My, that train was going fast!" exclaimed Sue, as it roared on its way.

"If it had hit us it would—it would have busted us all to pieces, wouldn't it, Uncle Tad?" asked Bunny, who, being a little older than his sister, knew more about the danger they had been in.

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed the soldier, as he again spoke soothingly to Prince. "Getting in the way of railroad trains is dangerous. But we're all right now."

"Then let's go on," begged Sue. "I don't like it here. Let's get daddy's boxes and go for a nice ride where there aren't any trains, Uncle Tad."

"All right, we will," promised the old gentleman. But as he looked up and down the track, to make sure all was clear, he heard the whistle of another engine and the roar of an approaching train.

"We'll wait until this one goes past," he said, little guessing what a strange thing was to happen.

[46]

Prince pranced a little as he heard another locomotive coming toward him, but he did not try to run away again nor jump through the snowdrift.

With a roar the second train approached, gliding swiftly past Bunny, Sue, and Uncle Tad seated in the sleigh alongside of the tracks. And as the children watched for the last car they saw the rear door of it open, and a colored porter, with his white jacket on, stood on the platform.

It was a chair car, and the porter had evidently been doing some sweeping, for he held in his hands a dustpan. This dustpan he had taken to the back door to empty, and, just as his car came near the sleigh in the snowdrift, the porter threw the dust, dirt, and other things from the pan into the air.

The train was going so fast that it made quite a breeze, and this wind carried the stuff from the dustpan into the very faces of Uncle Tad and Sue. Bunny, being on the outside of the seat, did not get any dust in his face.

[47]

"Oh!" cried Sue, as she felt the swirling wind and dust.

"That porter certainly was a careless fellow!" exclaimed Uncle Tad. "That dust nearly blinded me!" The old soldier held the reins in one hand, for Prince seemed ready to bolt again, and with the other hand Uncle Tad wiped the dust from the porter's pan out of his eyes.

Bunny had a glimpse of torn papers and other refuse from the car falling into the snowdrift near the sleigh.

"I guess he didn't mean to do it, Uncle Tad," the little boy said. "He wasn't looking this way when he emptied that dustpan."

"I wish he had been!" exclaimed the old soldier. "Did you get a lot of dust in your eyes, Sue?"

"Yes," answered the little girl. "But it's most gone now."

"How about you, Bunny?" asked Uncle Tad.

"Oh, I'm all right," Sue's brother answered. "Look, Uncle Tad, there are some papers the porter threw out, too," and he pointed to the heap of refuse on the snow. [48]

"All trash, I suppose," said the soldier. "People in parlor cars throw on the floor things they don't want, and the porter has to sweep it up. Well, we'll get along now."

"Wait a minute, Uncle Tad!" cried Bunny, as the soldier was about to swing Prince around to go on to the freight depot.

"Eh? What's that, Bunny? What's the matter?" asked Uncle Tad.

"There's a nice green and gold piece of paper down there," Bunny answered. "Maybe it's some good."

"No, I don't believe so, else the porter wouldn't have thrown it out," Uncle Tad answered, as he looked at the train now a mile or more away down the track.

"Maybe it's some good," Bunny insisted. "Please let me get it, Uncle Tad. Maybe it's some old railroad ticket and Sue and I can play conductor on the train when we go to Florida."

"Well, all right, get it if you want to," agreed the old soldier. "Whoa, Prince! Whoa!" [49]

He steadied the horse while Bunny got down out of the sled, and ran to the scattered refuse from the porter's dustpan. Bunny picked up the paper. It was printed in green and gold, as he had said, and was not torn as were the other scraps of paper that had come from the chair car.

"Look, Uncle Tad!" called Bunny, holding up what he had found. "Is this a railroad ticket?"

The old soldier put on his glasses and looked carefully at the paper.

"Why, Bunny boy!" he exclaimed, "you've found something worth a lot of money—a whole lot of money. I must put this away in my pocket and show it to your father. Whoa there! Steady, Prince! Bunny has just found, what may be worth a lot of money!" [50]

CHAPTER VI

OFF FOR GEORGIA

Uncle Tad slipped into his coat pocket the paper printed in green and gold that Bunny had picked up from the refuse tossed out by the Pullman car porter. Then the old soldier turned Prince around so the horse could pull the sleigh out of the drift.

"How much money did I find, Uncle Tad?" asked Bunny.

"Well, I don't know just how much it may amount to," was the answer. "Tisn't exactly money, you understand. That paper, Bunny, is what is called a certificate, or something like that, and it's for some stock in an oil well made out to bearer, as nearly as I can tell."

"Can I have some of the money to spend?" Bunny asked. "I want to get some candy for Sue and me."

"You can't exactly *spend* this money," said the old soldier. "In the first place, it isn't yours, Bunny. You just found it, you know, and finding isn't always keeping. This oil stock certificate must belong to some one on the train. They very likely dropped it in the car, and when the colored porter was cleaning up he swept it into his dustpan and never noticed it when he threw the dirt in our faces. That certificate may be worth a lot of money, but it would have to be sold before you could get cash for it, and, besides, it isn't yours." [51]

"Whose is it?" Bunny wanted to know. "I found it, didn't I?"

"Yes, but we must try to learn to whom it belongs, and give it back," Uncle Tad went on. "They may give a reward for it, and then you would have real money."

Bunny could not understand this, nor could Sue. If you found a thing why couldn't you keep it? the little boy wondered. Also when something looked so much like money, as this gold and green paper looked like nice new bills from the bank, why couldn't some of it be spent for candy? Bunny and Sue wondered about this. [52]

But when Prince was driven across the tracks to the freight depot, and when Bunny Brown and his sister Sue were given some pennies by Uncle Tad and allowed to go to a near-by store while the boxes of motor boat parts were being loaded into the sleigh, the two children forgot all about the oil stock paper. They were more interested in getting the kind of candy they wanted.

"Wouldn't it be nice, Bunny," said Sue, as she chewed a red gumdrop, "if you'd get a lot of

money so we could spend it in Florida?"

"Course it would be nice," her brother agreed. "But where shall I get a lot of money?" and he bit the end off a stick of cocoanut candy.

"You might get it from that stiff thing you found," went on Sue. "But I don't think it's very stiff. I saw Uncle Tad bend it when he put it in his pocket."

"Oh, you mean that stiff cut," laughed Bunny, as he remembered the paper he had picked up in the snow. "Isn't it a funny name, Sue—*stiff cut*? I s'pose somebody cut the paper. But it isn't very stiff if you can bend it." [53]

Of course Bunny and Sue did not get the name just right, but then, as they didn't understand about certificates and oil stock, there is no use in worrying over the matter.

Uncle Tad and the freight man finished putting into the sleigh the different boxes for Daddy Brown's motor boat in which Bunker Blue often went out after fish in the summer, sometimes taking Bunny and Sue with him. By this time the two children came back from the candy store and got in the sleigh.

"Well, did you find any more valuable papers, Bunny?" asked Uncle Tad, with a joking laugh as he started Prince down the road.

"Nope, I didn't," answered the little boy. "But maybe I'll find some in Florida."

"You're going to the state of Georgia first, I heard your father say," remarked the old soldier.

"Are there any oranges in Georgia?" asked Sue.

"Or alligators?" Bunny wanted to know, for he had heard that there were plenty of the big, scaly and long-tailed creatures in Florida. [54]

"I don't know much about Georgia," answered Uncle Tad, "except I've heard that peaches grow there. But, of course, you won't find any of them now, as it isn't summer."

"Isn't Georgia nice and warm in winter, like Florida?" asked Sue. "And can't we get some orange blossoms there?"

"I don't believe you'll find any oranges in Georgia," answered Uncle Tad, "and it isn't as warm as the southern part of Florida, though of course Florida and Georgia, being close together, are a good deal alike. They grow lots of cotton in Georgia, and peanuts."

"Peanuts!" cried Bunny, in delight. "Oh, I'm glad! Peanuts are most as good as oranges, aren't they, Sue?"

"Yes," agreed the little girl. "But it would be nice if we had peanuts *and* oranges. 'Cause then when we got thirsty from eating peanuts off a tree we could go and pick an orange off another tree and suck the juice, and we wouldn't be thirsty any more, would we, Uncle Tad?" [55]

"No, I presume not," answered the old soldier, with a laugh. "But peanuts don't grow on trees, Sue."

"They don't?" cried the little girl. "Why not? Hickory nuts do."

"I don't know why, but they don't," said Uncle Tad. "Peanuts grow on vines, under the ground. In some places down South peanuts are called 'goobers.'"

"What a funny name!" said Bunny. "We'll have some fun in Georgia when we get there."

"Yes, you two seem to have fun wherever you go, like the lady with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes, so she had music 'wherever she goes,'" said Uncle Tad.

Prince had now quieted down, and he drew the sled along without trying to run away. A little later Bunny and Sue reached home, and Mrs. Brown was quite excited when she heard how near they had been to the rushing train.

Bunny and Sue told about the porter and his dustpan, and Uncle Tad took from his pocket the green and gold oil stock certificate.

"We'll show it to daddy when he comes home," said Mrs. Brown. "He will know what to do with it." [56]

But though Mr. Brown telephoned to the railroad office, telling about the finding of the valuable paper, which was thought to be worth much money, the owner of it could not be found.

After several days, during which Bunny and Sue had more fun in the snow, Mr. Brown told his wife that the railroad people had not even yet been able to find the person who owned the oil stock paper.

"It must have been dropped by some one who was riding in that Pullman car," said Mr. Brown. "Perhaps he dropped it and didn't know it until he got off the train. Then he may have thought he lost it somewhere else, and so didn't come back to the railroad office."

"Can't you find out who owns it by writing to the oil company?" Mrs. Brown asked.

"I could if the certificate were made out in somebody's name," her husband answered. "But it is made out to 'bearer'—that is, anybody who holds it can get the permanent certificates. This is a temporary one."

[57]

"Could Bunny or Sue?"

"Yes, and if this isn't claimed and we can't find to whom it belongs, they can sell it and get the money. But the owner may write to the oil company, even though his name isn't on the paper. In that way I may find out to whom it belongs. I'll write to the oil company myself in a few days."

But Mr. Brown had so much to do, getting ready to leave for the sunny South with Bunny and Sue that, for a time, he forgot about the oil stock certificate.

As for Bunny and Sue, they talked so much about their coming trip to the South, mentioning oranges, peanuts, and alligators—it was Bunny who spoke of the last, you may be sure—that all their little boy and girl friends were interested.

"I wish you'd send me back some oranges, Sue," begged Mary Watson. "And some orange blossoms, too. Then I could put them on one of my dolls and pretend to have a wedding."

"I'll send you lots of oranges and blossoms," promised Sue.

[58]

"And will you send me some peanuts from Georgia?" asked Sadie West.

"Lots of 'em!" promised Sue.

At last the day came when the start was to be made. Bunny Brown and his sister Sue thought it never would arrive, but finally it did, and after trunks and valises had been packed the party started for the station. The weather was cold, more snow had fallen, and it seemed that another storm would soon come.

"But in a little while we'll be where they never have any snow," said Daddy Brown.

The last good-byes were called back and forth. Bunny and Sue took their places in the parlor car—the same kind of car as that from which the porter had tossed the oil stock certificate—and the train began to move. They were at last off for Georgia and from there would go to Florida—two states of the sunny South.

As the train began to roll more rapidly out of the station there came the sound of some excitement from the narrow passageway at one end—the passage where the porter keeps his towels and soap.

[59]

"Oh, there goes Dickie!" cried a woman's voice. "Oh, Dickie, come back! You'll be hurt, I know you will! Oh, porter! don't let Dickie jump off and be killed!"

"No'm, I won't," answered the colored man. "Ah'll get yo' Dickie fo' you!"

"Maybe it's a little child!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown to her husband. "You'd better go and help her, Walter! That porter is so slow! Go and save Dickie!"

[60]

CHAPTER VII

THE PLANTATION

Mr. Brown knew how he and his wife would worry if anything should happen to Bunny or Sue, so, with this thought in mind, he hurried to the end of the car to do what he could in the rescue of Dickie.

Mrs. Brown stayed with the two children, but she was so anxious to help the woman who had called out about Dickie that she made up her mind to go to the aid of her husband as soon as Bunny and Sue were settled in their seats.

As for Mr. Brown, as he hastened toward that end of the parlor car where some one was begging the porter not to let Dickie be harmed, he saw the woman who was so excited. She was a large woman, wearing a wide-brimmed hat trimmed with many ostrich feathers which nodded and swayed as she moved about.

[61]

"Oh, Dickie! Dickie! Where did you go?" this woman cried, clasping her hands. "Why didn't you stay with me? Now you'll be killed, I'm sure you will! Or else you'll jump off the train and be left behind! Oh, porter, close the door so Dickie can't get off!"

"Yes'm. De do' am done closed!" said the colored man. "Ah'll git yo' Dickie fo' you ef you-all jest waits a minute!"

"Perhaps I can help," suggested Mr. Brown, coming up at that moment, and looking about in the narrow passageway and in the men's smoking room for a sight of some little child who might have wandered away from his mother.

"Oh, if you only can get him!" exclaimed the large woman with the big hat. "I had him in my

arms, but he jumped out—"

"Jumped out of your arms!" exclaimed Mr. Brown. "I should think he would have been hurt."

"Oh, no, he often does that," said the woman. "He always lands on his feet." [62]

"What a strange child!" thought Mr. Brown. "He must be training for a circus performer."

"He jumped out of my arms and ran in there," went on the woman, and she pointed to the smoking room, which, just then, was empty. It was a room containing several leather chairs, a leather settee across one end, and a wash basin in one corner.

"Ah'll git him in jest a minute," said the porter, who was putting some clean towels in a rack over the basin. "He must be under the long seat."

"I'll bring him out," offered Mr. Brown, getting down on his hands and knees to look under the long leather seat at one end of the smoking compartment. He remembered a time when Sue had thus crawled under a sofa at home and what a time he had to get her to come out.

"Oh, Dickie, why did you do it?" wailed the woman. "Are you sure he didn't fall off the train?" she asked.

"No'm," answered the porter. "Nobody, man, woman or chile, got off dish yeah car after it started. I shet de do' too quick for dat! But I didn't see anybody come in heah!" [63]

"This is where he came," said the woman, following Mr. Brown into the smoking room. "Oh, I do hope he is under the seat."

By this time the father of Bunny Brown and his sister Sue was able to see under the leather seat. But, to his surprise, he saw no little boy or girl there. All he caught sight of was a white poodle dog, cowering back in the corner.

"There's no Dickie here—only a dog," said Mr. Brown.

"That's Dickie!" cried the woman. "Oh, dear Dickie! are you there? I was afraid my precious was lost forever! Oh, Dickie, come out!"

Mr. Brown was so surprised that he did not know what to say. He had thought he was coming to the rescue of a little child, and it had turned out to be—a dog! And while Mr. Brown loved animals, he was a little angry to think that anybody would make as much fuss over a poodle that had crawled under a couch as would be made over a missing little boy or girl. [64]

Still Mr. Brown was too polite to say all that he felt, and so he reached his hand under the long seat, and tried to get hold of the dog's fuzzy coat.

The dog growled and barked, and snapped at Mr. Brown's hand.

"Does he bite?" the children's father asked the woman.

"Not very hard," she answered.

"Hum!" mused Mr. Brown, as he drew back and arose. "Perhaps you'd better coax him out," he said, for he had no desire to be bitten even by a little dog, as sometimes their teeth inflict a poisonous wound.

"Oh, Dickie! you wouldn't bite the nice, kind man, would you?" the lady exclaimed, stooping down and trying to peer under the seat.

"Ah'll put on mah gloves an' git him," offered the porter, who perhaps felt that the woman might give him a large tip. And, of course, Mr. Brown was very willing to let the colored man have any reward there might be. [65]

Putting on a pair of heavy gloves he used when he did rough work in cleaning the Pullman car, the porter reached under the seat and dragged forth the growling, snapping little white poodle.

By this time Mrs. Brown, hearing the loud talking out in the smoking room, thought something serious had happened. She hastened to that end of the car, followed by Bunny and Sue, who did not want to be left behind. They arrived in time to see the porter handing the woman her pet.

"Oh, Dickie!" exclaimed the wearer of the big hat, as she clasped the poodle in her arms, "oo bad 'ittle snookums!"

"Where's the child?" asked Mrs. Brown.

In answer Mr. Brown pointed to the dog, and his wife understood.

"Oh, isn't he nice!" exclaimed Sue.

"May I see him?" asked Bunny.

"In a little while," the woman answered. "Dickie is so fussed up now his 'ittle heart is beating too hard! I must cuddle him!"

She turned and walked into the next car for, it seemed, she had got into the wrong one, or, rather, her dog had leaped from her arms and had gone into the one in which the Browns had [66]

seats and the woman had followed her pet.

"Come in and see me when I get 'ittle Dickie quiet," said the woman, but even Bunny and Sue, much as they loved pets, did not like the silly fuss this woman made over her dog. So they did not go into the other car.

Mr. Brown turned and went with his wife and children up to the middle of the car, where they had their seats. As they left, the porter, with a queer grin which showed his white teeth, said:

"Golly, she suah did make a fuss ober dat dog!"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Brown with a laugh, "she did!"

"He was a nice little dog," observed Sue, "but I like a big dog better—you can have more fun with it."

"Sure!" agreed Bunny. "And poodles are so snappy."

[67]

"I'm glad you didn't pull him out, Walter," Mrs. Brown said. "I'd be anxious if he had bitten you."

"I didn't give him the chance," her husband said. "Well, now that Dickie is safe we can settle down."

And so the travelers made themselves as comfortable as possible, for they had rather a long trip ahead of them. They would be on the train all night and a large part of the next day.

"I'm glad that woman with the dog isn't in our car," said Mrs. Brown to her husband, when Bunny and Sue were contentedly looking from the windows. "She probably makes a fuss over the animal all the while."

"Yes, it's just as well for us she isn't here," agreed the children's father. "Though if it were the kind of dog they could play with it would make the time pass more quickly for Bunny and Sue."

"Oh, I think they'll manage to keep themselves amused," said their mother. "They like traveling."

Bunny and Sue certainly did, and it was a pleasure for them to look from the windows at the scenery.

[68]

No very remarkable adventures happened on the journey to Georgia. To be sure, Sue did fall out of the berth once, and her mother had to pick her up. But the little girl scarcely awakened, and as the carpet on the floor of the sleeping car was soft and thick she was not hurt in the least.

Bunny had a little accident, too. During the day he went to the end of the car to get Sue a drink, taking a folding silver cup his mother carried in her handbag. But when the little boy was half way down the aisle the train gave a swing around a curve, Bunny almost fell, and the cup closed, spilling the water all over him.

However, it was not a great deal, and as the car was warm no harm resulted. Bunny himself laughed at the happening, and insisted on going back and filling the cup for Sue. This time he brought it to her nearly full of water.

And so, with looking out of the windows, reading some of their best-loved books which they had brought with them, eating and sleeping, the time passed most happily for Bunny Brown and his sister Sue.

[69]

As mile after mile was reeled off by the train, the children began to notice a difference in the scenery.

The weather was cold, and there was much snow on the ground when they left Bellemere, and the snow continued to cover the ground for some distance. But as the train went farther and farther south the snow seemed to disappear—melting away until, when the children looked from the windows of their car toward the end of their journey, they saw green leaves on the trees.

"Oh, are we down South now, Daddy?" called Sue.

"Yes, we are in the southern part of Georgia," was the answer. "We have left winter behind us. In a little while, especially when we get into Florida, you will be in the sunny South."

"Oh, what fun we'll have!" cried Sue.

"Where are the oranges?" demanded Bunny. "I don't see any," and he looked at the trees.

[70]

"Oranges don't grow in Georgia, at least not in the open," said Mr. Brown. "Some may be raised in hothouses, but to grow them in the open air warmer weather than Georgia has in winter is needed. We shall have to wait until we get to Florida to gather oranges."

"What about peanuts?" asked Bunny.

"Oh, I think I can promise you plenty of peanuts," answered his father.

"And shall we see cotton growing?" asked Mrs. Brown. "I have always wanted to see a cotton field, with the darkies singing and picking the white, fluffy stuff."

"There is plenty of cotton in Georgia," her husband answered, "but there may be none where we are going. However, I hope you will have your wish. If we can't have oranges we may have peanuts and cotton."

"We'll not eat the cotton though, shall we, Daddy?" asked Sue.

"You won't have to unless you want to," he laughed in answer.

A little later, when Mr. and Mrs. Brown had got together their baggage, for they were near their destination, Bunny, who was looking from the window, suddenly called: [71]

"Oh, look! Here they are, picking cotton!"

Sue rushed to her window and Mrs. Brown turned to gaze out on the scene. As Bunny had said, the train was then passing through a cotton section, and in the fields on either side of the track a number of colored men, women, and children were picking the big white clumps of cotton from the bushes which grew in long, straight rows. It was a late crop.

"Oh, it's a cotton plantation!" cried Mrs. Brown. "I'm glad, for I've always wanted to see one."

As they looked out at the sight, which was a new one to Bunny and Sue, the train began to slow up. In a very few moments they could see painted in very large letters on the end of the station the word "Seedville."

"This is our station," announced Daddy Brown.

"Oh, we're going to get out right near the cotton plantation!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "I'm glad! Why didn't you tell us we were going to be so near where they pick cotton?" she asked her husband. [72]

"I didn't really know it myself," he said. "Mr. Morton, whom I am going to see, said he owned cotton land, but I did not know it was a plantation. However, we'll get out here." And Bunny and Sue were wild with delight at the new adventures which might be in store for them. [73]

CHAPTER VIII

AMONG THE COTTON PICKERS

When the train reached the station of Seedville the cotton fields with the colored pickers were out of sight around a bend in the road. But Bunny and Sue were glad they were going to stop not far away from this new and interesting sight.

As the Brown family alighted from the train at the small station, a gentleman with a broad-brimmed hat, under which his pleasant smiling face could be seen, came forward.

"Hello, Jim!" called Mr. Brown. "Well, here we are!"

"So I see, and I'm glad of it!" Mr. Morton answered. Then he was introduced to Mrs. Brown and the children. Mr. Morton was the man Daddy Brown had come to Georgia to see on business. Later Mr. Brown would have to visit Mr. Halliday at Orange Beach, Florida. [74]

"Give me your checks and I'll look after your baggage," went on the Southerner. "I have my auto right behind the station, and it's only a short ride over to my place."

"Have you any peanuts?" asked Sue.

"Yes, I grow a few," answered Mr. Morton.

"Course you don't have any oranges?" Bunny added, feeling pretty sure, from what his father had said, there would be none; but still he could not help hoping.

"No, I'm sorry to say I haven't any orange grove," Mr. Morton replied, smiling.

"Is that your cotton field we passed?" asked Mrs. Brown, pointing back toward the scene through which they had come a little while before.

"That's part of my plantation, yes," answered the Southerner. "It's quite interesting if you haven't seen it as often as I have."

A little later the family was riding toward Mr. Morton's home, where the Browns were to stay while Daddy and Mr. Morton finished their business, which would take about a week. Mrs. Morton welcomed the family, and Bunny and Sue were delighted to find that there were two children, a boy and a girl, not much older than they were—Sam and Grace Morton. [75]

"Oh, now we can have a lot of fun!" cried Bunny, when he saw these playmates. "Will you show me how to pick cotton?" he asked Sam.

"Sure," was the answer. "I help pick it myself, sometimes."

"And will you show me how to dig peanuts?" asked Sue of Grace.

"You don't have to do much digging," answered the little Southern girl, laughing. "You just pull up the vines and the peanuts stick to 'em, same as potatoes do. Course you sometimes have to dig out some that don't come up on the vine."

While Mr. and Mrs. Brown and Mr. and Mrs. Morton were talking together, the children were allowed to go to one of the near-by cotton fields. Cotton, as you know, grows on low bushes, which are planted in long rows, so the pickers may easily walk between them. In some countries the cotton bushes, or plants, last from one year to the next, but in Georgia most of the cotton grows from new bushes each year. The seeds are planted in the spring, but the picking is not finished until sometimes late in what is the winter season of the North. [76]

Of course in some parts of Georgia there are frosts which kill the bushes, and in these parts of the state the cotton must be picked earlier than in the southern part, where the Browns were.

So, though there was cold weather and snow in Bellemere, there were warm, blue skies in Georgia, and the colored men, women and children were out in the fields picking the cotton.

As Bunny Brown and his sister Sue, with Sam and Grace, reached the field of cotton, they could hear the darkies singing. Some one would start a tune, and then others would join in.

"It's jolly!" laughed Bunny, as they stopped to listen to a funny song about a mule.

"Yes, the darkies always seem to be happy," said Sam. [77]

The children from the North watched as the colored pickers pulled off the great, fluffy balls of white, stuffing them into bags or baskets which were later taken from the field on two-wheeled mule carts.

"What are all those brown things in the cotton?" asked Sue, as she looked at a fluffy clump on a near-by bush.

"Seeds," answered Grace. "The cotton clump, or boll, is full of seeds, and these have to be taken out before the cotton is baled up for the mill."

"Oh, I 'member about that!" cried Bunny. "We learned it in school. A man named Eli Whitney made a machine for taking seeds out of the cotton."

"That's right," admitted Sam. "I'll take you to the gin, as it is called, where the seeds are taken from the cotton and the white stuff is pressed into bales. You ought to see the big presses! It squeezes the cotton all up!"

"I hope it doesn't squeeze us!" laughed Sue.

"I'll keep you back out of danger," promised Grace.

The children walked through the cotton field of the plantation and were greeted by broad grins and smiles on the part of the colored folk. There seemed to be more children than grown people working in the field, and Sam said it was sometimes hard to get old pickers, so children had to be used. [78]

The darkies did not work very fast, and often, as Bunny and his sister walked along with their new friends, the hands would stop working to look at the children. This, with their habit of stopping to sing every now and then, slowed up the cotton picking.

"I'd like to go to the mill and see the cotton pressed into bales," said Bunny after a while.

"All right, we'll go," said Sam. "You've seen about all there is to see here."

As they turned away Sue suddenly called:

"Hark!"

They all listened, and Grace said:

"That's one of their banjos! They bring them to the field and play and dance."

"Oh, let's see that!" cried Sue. "It'll be more fun than going to the cotton factory!"

Bunny, too, wanted to listen to the music, so they turned aside into a part of the field where most of the cotton had been picked from the bushes. The darkies, who had finished this part of their work, were celebrating after a fashion. [79]

Some boards had been laid down, and an awning placed over them to make a place where bags of cotton were tied up to be taken to the gin. Gathered around this platform were a number of negro men, women and children. One of the men had an old banjo, and though the instrument seemed battered and broken, he managed to get some lively music from it.

"Golly, dat suah mek me want to shuffle mah feet!" exclaimed one bright-eyed colored lad.

"Why doan you shuffle 'em den, Rastus?" some one called. "Show de white folks how you kin cut de pigeon wing!"

"Oh, landy, banjo music suah am sweet!" cried an old white-wooled colored woman, with a jolly laugh.

Then the man with the banjo "cut loose," as one of his friends called it, and played such a lively tune that even Bunny and Sue said they felt like dancing. But they wanted to see what the cotton pickers did, and so they watched. Out on the wooden platform shuffled Rastus, and the way he kicked up, turned cartwheels, stood on his hands and danced around made Bunny and Sue laugh in delight.

[80]

Others of the pickers, men and women, girls and boys, danced, and then along came the driver of one of the mule carts who had a mouth organ. He added this music to that of the banjo, until quite a crowd had collected.

"My goodness!" exclaimed a voice behind Bunny and Sue when there came a lull in the fun. "Cotton picking can't be such very hard work after all!" The children turned around to see their mother and Mrs. Morton, who had come to the field.

"Oh, the darkies have to have their fun, and if we didn't let them we wouldn't get as much work done as now takes place," said the wife of the cotton planter. "Life is rather slow and easy down here."

Indeed it seemed so. After more banjo and mouth organ music, the pickers gradually went to another part of the field, and Bunny and Sue, with the two Morton children, were allowed to go to the place where the loose cotton was pressed into big bales.

[81]

Cotton, as you have doubtless noticed, is very light and fluffy. A pound of it, loose, takes up much room, and it is to save room that it is pressed into bales, or bundles. Each one weighs about five hundred pounds, and the bales are somewhat larger than a barrel, though of square shape and not round. But if the cotton were allowed to fluff out, it would take up four or five times this room.

Guided by Sam and Grace, Bunny and his sister were taken to the cotton gin and baling place. First the seeds must be taken out of the cotton. To do this the fluffy mass, as it is taken from the bags or baskets in which it is carted from the field, is fed into a machine.

The machine is like a big clothes wringer, but the rolls, instead of being made of smooth rubber, are rough, and covered with sharp iron teeth.

As the cotton passes between these toothed rollers they tear it apart, loosening the seeds, which drop down while the cleaned cotton goes to the other side of the machine ready to be baled.

[82]

The cotton seeds are used for many things, being sometimes fed to cattle in the form of meal, or from them oil may be squeezed which is almost as good to eat as olive oil.

"I want to see the cotton pushed into bales," said Bunny, and his Southern friends led the way into the factory. There were white wisps of cotton all about, clinging to the walls and ceiling of the pressing room, as well as to the colored men who were working there. Bunny and Sue did not understand much about the machinery. But they could see how the cotton was put into a sort of iron box. A big plunger then pressed down what might be called the "lid" of the box. This squeezed the big, fluffy mass of cotton into a bale, and iron straps, or wires, were put around the outside of the burlap bagging that kept the cotton clean.

Sue was standing with Sam and Grace, watching the cotton being pressed into bales, when suddenly behind them came a noise as of something falling, and a voice cried:

[83]

"Oh, dear!"

"That's Bunny!" exclaimed Sue, turning around.

She did not see her brother, but she saw some men gathered around a big heap of cotton on the floor of the gin. And, not seeing Bunny, his sister Sue had the most dreadful scare.

"Oh, Bunny's in a cotton press! He's being put into one of the bales!" she cried. "Oh, Bunny! Bunny!" and she broke away from the holding hand of Grace and rushed toward the heap of cotton on the floor, which was tumbling about in the queerest fashion.

[84]

CHAPTER IX

GATHERING PEANUTS

Sam and Grace Morton were somewhat older than Bunny Brown and his sister Sue, and they knew more about cotton gins. So when Sue cried that Bunny was being pressed into one of the white bales neither Sam nor Grace thought this could be so.

For they had been standing near the big press all the while, and they would have seen if Bunny had fallen in. But the little boy was not in sight, and something must have happened to him, or why did he cry out as he had? Sue had certainly heard Bunny's voice.

"Bunny! Bunny! where are you?" shouted Sue, as she broke away from the Morton children.

"Who yo' all lookin' fo'?" asked a big colored man, who had been rolling bales of cotton about the floor.

[85]

"My—my bro-brother!" stammered Sue, almost ready to cry. "He's in a bale of cotton!"

"Oh, nopey! Nopey, he ain't, li'l girl!" said the kind colored man. "I done see dat li'l boy jest a minute ago. He was climbin' up on a basket ob loose cotton, an' he done pulled it over on top ob him! He's under dat pile right yeah!" and he pointed to the mass of white, fluffy stuff on the floor.

"I see what happened!" exclaimed Sam, hurrying over with his sister to Sue, who stood near the pile of cotton. "Bunny's all right. You can't get hurt when loose cotton falls on you," and he laughed.

"Is—is Bu-Bunny under there?" asked Sue.

There was no need for any one to answer her, for a moment later out from under the fluffy pile crawled Bunny himself. Lumps of cotton clung to him all over, and his clothes were covered, but he was not in the least harmed.

"I—I was under there!" gasped the little fellow.

"You don't need to tell us that!" laughed Sam. "We can see for ourselves. You sure have been under the cotton."

[86]

"What happened to you, Bunny?" his sister asked, happy, now that nothing had occurred to harm her brother.

"I saw a big basket of loose cotton," he explained, "and I wanted to see how heavy it was and to find out if I could lift it. I pushed on it, and it fell over on top of me. Then I yelled."

"We heard you," said Grace.

"And I thought you were being pressed in a bale," added Sue.

"I'm glad I wasn't," remarked Bunny, as he noticed how very hard the press squeezed the loose cotton.

The colored workers picked up the fluffy stuff Bunny had spilled from the big basket, which he had pulled over on him. He had been hidden from sight in the white mass that had toppled out on the floor.

"It was just like the time when I was under the snowdrift, only it wasn't so cold," Bunny said, telling about his accident afterward. "And it was awfully ticklish!"

[87]

"Better that than a cotton press," his mother said. "You must be careful around the gin, children."

"It's all right to go to the peanut fields though, isn't it, Mother?" asked Sue. She had been eager, ever since hearing that peanuts grew in Georgia, to see how they clung to the ends of the vines, like little potatoes.

"Yes, I think visiting the peanuts will be all right, if you don't eat too many," Mrs. Brown said.

"They won't want to eat too many," said Sam Morton. "When the peanuts come out of the ground they are raw, and they have to be roasted before they are good to eat. They won't eat too many."

"Can't we roast some?" Sue wanted to know, and her mother promised that this would be done.

When the children came away from Mr. Morton's cotton press and gin, after the little happening to Bunny, the visitors could hear the darkies singing there, as they had sung in the fields.

Most of Mr. Morton's peanut crop had been gathered, as it was almost the close of the season, but some late vines were growing in one of the fields, and this was visited by the children a day or so after their arrival in Seedville.

[88]

Bunny Brown and Sue had been rather disappointed when they heard that peanuts did not grow on trees, as did chestnuts and hickory nuts, but they soon forgot this when Sam told them something about this crop, by which his father made money.

"We don't call 'em peanuts down here," Sam said.

"What do you call 'em?" asked Bunny.

"Ground nuts and sometimes goobers," answered the Southern boy. "Over in England, my father says, they call 'em monkey nuts."

"What for?" Bunny wanted to know.

"I s'pose it's because the first peanuts came from Africa, and there are so many monkeys in Africa," answered Sam.

"I wish there was a monkey here!" exclaimed Sue. "I'd like to see him eat peanuts—I mean goobers!" she added, with a laugh at the funny word.

[89]

"There's a monkey near our house at home," explained Bunny. "We could send Wango some peanuts, couldn't we, Sue?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, let's!" cried the little girl.

"Well, come on first and pick some, or dig 'em, which is what you'll have to do," suggested Sam.

What had not been gathered of Mr. Morton's peanut crop was growing in a field not far from the plantation buildings. There were no darkies gathering the goobers, as it was more important now to pick the cotton.

"Pull up one of the vines," suggested Sam to the children from the North.

You can imagine how delighted Bunny and Sue were when they pulled up by the roots one of the vines and saw, dangling on the end, some of the peanuts they knew so well.

"Oh, wouldn't Mrs. Redden like it here?" cried Bunny, as he pulled off some of the peanuts. [90]

"Who's she?" asked Grace.

"She keeps a peanut and candy store where we live," explained Sue. "And she sells lots of peanuts. If she was here she could get all she wanted."

"But she'd have to roast them, or get them roasted," said Sam. "About the only things unroasted peanuts are good for is to make peanut oil and to feed to horses. We'll take some to the house and roast them. We have a little roaster in the kitchen."

"And can we make some peanut molasses candy?" asked Bunny. "Don't you have molasses down here?"

"Oh, yes, plenty of molasses," said Grace. "We don't raise any sugar cane, which molasses come from, but they do farther South. We'll make some peanut candy."

The prospect of this delighted Bunny and Sue almost as much as did the gathering of the nuts. The children from the North looked curiously at the "goobers" they had pulled up on the vine. As Sam had said, they were not at all good to eat, needing to be dried and roasted before they would be enjoyable. [91]

For several days Bunny and Sue enjoyed themselves on the Southern plantation. One day Mr. Morton took them over a grove where a friend of his was growing pecans. These were nuts which grew on trees, and Bunny and Sue were allowed to gather and eat as many as they wished, for these nuts did not need to be baked or roasted before being eaten.

There were busy times on the cotton plantation. Much work yet remained to finish, and one day, after his business with Mr. Morton was almost at an end, Daddy Brown went with his wife and Bunny and Sue to watch the gathering of cotton by the negroes. Up to now he had not had much time to see this.

"What are they all so jolly about?" he asked Mr. Morton, as they walked through the field, the bushes of which were now almost stripped of their white tufts.

"Oh, they expect to finish work to-night and they're going to have a jubilee dance later on," was the answer. "You must come to it, for it will be great fun for the children." [92]

"Oh, yes, they must see that," said Mother Brown.

Indeed the darkies were much more musical than on the occasion of the first visit of Bunny and Sue. Several banjos were playing and also a mouth organ here and there, while snatches of songs could be heard all about the field.

Suddenly, over in the place where a number of pickers had gathered to empty their baskets into the big bin, whence the cotton was carted to the gin, there arose a great shouting.

"Whoa now! Whoa dere, Sambo! Steady now!" called a man's voice.

Then there was the shrill shrieking of women and girls, and a moment later a big mule hitched to a cart rushed toward Bunny, Sue and their friends, and on the mule's back, clinging for dear life, was a little colored boy, frightened almost out of his wits.

"Oh, look out, Bunny! Sue! Look out for the runaway!" cried Mrs. Brown. [93]

CHAPTER X

ON TO FLORIDA

The clatter of the mule's hoofs, the rattle of the cart, and the yells of the little colored boy on the animal's back made plenty of excitement in the roadway of the cotton field. But besides all this there were the calls of Mrs. Brown, the shouts and yells of the frightened colored men,

women and children, and the screams of Bunny Brown and his sister Sue.

"Good lan' ob massy!" exclaimed one big, fat, colored woman, as she dropped her basket of cotton and rushed for a place of safety. "Dat frisky li'l nigger suah will be splatter-dashed ef he fall offen dat mule's back!"

And indeed it did look bad for the small colored boy.

"Over here, Sue! Come to me, Bunny!" cried Mrs. Brown. "Walter," she called to her husband, [94]
"look out for Sam and Grace," for the Morton children were with their friends from the North.

Mr. Brown, with a quick motion, pulled Sam and Grace out of danger as the runaway mule, hauling the load of cotton, came nearer.

"Maybe Sam and I can stop him, Mother!" cried Bunny.

"Indeed and you'll do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, hurrying the children behind a row of cotton plants.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" was all the little colored boy on the back of the runaway mule could shout. "Hi! Hi!"

"Oh, can't some one save him?" cried Mrs. Brown.

"I'll try," answered her husband, who, having seen to it that Sam and Grace were safe with Bunny and Sue, started out to try to head off the mule. At the same time the shrieks of the colored women had called from a distant part of the field several strong colored men, and one of these ran toward the mule about the same time that Mr. Brown did. [95]

But there was no need of any one getting worried. Before the mule could be caught he stopped, and stopped so suddenly that the colored boy was pitched off the animal's back. Down to the ground the dusky-skinned child slipped, but, luckily enough, there was a pile of cotton here, and it was on top of the fluffy stuff that he landed.

There he sat, a splotch of black in a heap of white, and he presented such a funny picture that Sue and her brother burst out laughing. So did Sam and Grace. And then Jim, the colored boy, finding that he was not hurt, opened his mouth and shrieked in delight.

Some of the colored men came up and took charge of the mule, which they led back to the shed whence he had run away. And one of the fat black women waddled toward Jim on the heap of cotton.

"Look yeah, yo' li'l hunk ob sticky black 'lasses!" she cried. "Whut fo' you want to git on dat mule's back an' scare yo' po' mammy 'most into a conniption fit? Whut fo' you do dat, Jim St. Clair Breckinridge? Whut fo', huh?" [96]

"Ah didn't go fo' to do it, 'deed an' Ah didn't, Mammy!" said Jim, as he arose. "Ah wuz jest leanin' ober to knock a fly offen dat mule's back an' Ah slipped an' fell on him. Den he started up, an' Ah couldn't nohow git offen him!"

And this, it appeared, was how it had happened. The little colored boy was playing around the shed where the darkies emptied their baskets of cotton into a bin. There it was piled into the cart to be taken to the gin. The boy had climbed up on a pile of boxes to make himself higher, and in this position had seen a fly on the mule's back. Or at least that is what Jim said.

At any rate, whether he tried to do the mule a kindness, or whether he really intended to use the boxes as a stepping block to get up and take a ride, Jim got on the animal's back, and this so alarmed the mule that it started off, causing much excitement.

But no real harm had resulted, and no one was hurt, for the fluffy cotton was even softer to fall on than a pile of hay. Jim was taken in charge by his mother and made to help pick cotton the rest of the day. [97]

Bunny and Sue liked it so much on the plantation, watching the cotton-pickers and occasionally pulling up a few peanuts for themselves, that I think they would have been willing to spend the rest of the winter in that part of the sunny South.

"But my business here is almost finished," said Mr. Brown to his family one evening as they sat in Mr. Morton's pleasant home. "We will soon go on to Florida."

"And eat oranges!" added Sue, for she had often been thinking of that juicy fruit.

"And catch alligators!" exclaimed Bunny. The chance of at least seeing some of these scaly creatures seemed to give Bunny pleasure.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed his mother. "Now look here!" she went on, as she thought of what might happen. "I don't want you two tots going off by yourselves trying to catch alligators! Mind that!" and she shook a warning finger at them. [98]

In the evening, while the older folks were talking in the sitting room and the children were playing games, Bunny heard his father say:

"There's the oil stock certificate Bunny found, Mr. Morton."

"Oh, yes, your wife was telling us about that," remarked the cotton planter. "Let me see it."

Bunny looked up in time to see his father show Mr. Morton a stiff, crinkly green and gold paper, which the little boy well remembered.

"Didn't you yet find out to whom that oil stock belongs?" asked Mrs. Brown of her husband, while Bunny entertained Sam and Grace by telling them in a low voice how, while they were in the sleigh that day with Uncle Tad, the porter of the Pullman car had tossed the valuable paper out in a pan of dirt.

"No, so far I haven't found the owner," Mr. Brown answered. "I brought the certificate with me, for I thought perhaps the oil company might have been notified by the loser. But they write me that no one has yet notified them of the loss. So I'll have to hold the stock a while longer. It is quite valuable, the oil company says, and I must take good care of it."

[99]

He put the temporary certificate back in his pocket, and Bunny and his sister, after telling about the runaway, went on playing games with Sam and Grace.

"Well," said Mr. Brown at last, after he and Mr. Morton had looked over several business books and papers, "I think we'll be traveling on to Florida in a few days."

"We shall miss having you here," Mrs. Morton said. "I'm sure it has done the children good."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Brown. "They never before saw cotton or peanuts growing, and they have learned something."

"I want to learn about oranges!" exclaimed Sue.

"And maybe I could grow up to be an alligator hunter," added Bunny.

"I hope not that!" his mother exclaimed, laughing. "And I think it is almost time for you children to go to bed."

[100]

But just then there came a knock on the door and the colored servant, having answered it, came back to say that the plantation hands were having a sort of jubilee among themselves and had sent to know if the "white folks" didn't want to see the fun.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Morton, as he heard this message. "I was telling you that at the end of the cotton-picking season the darkies have a great time among themselves, playing and singing songs. They make hoe cakes and if they can get a 'possum they roast that with sweet potatoes. Let's go down for a little while."

"Can we come?" cried all four children, almost in one voice.

"Yes, let them come!" said Mr. Morton.

It was not really very late, though it was dark. But once Bunny and Sue, with Sam and Grace were outside, they saw, down in the direction of the darkies' cabins, some flickering lights which told of bonfires and torches.

"It looks just like a picture," said Mrs. Brown, as she walked along with her husband.

They could hear the strumming of banjos, the blowing of mouth organs, and the singing of the colored folk, whose full, soft voices made most pleasant tunes.

[101]



**BUNNY AND SUE WERE
DELIGHTED WITH THE
"JUBILEE."**

Bunny and Sue were delighted with the "jubilee," as it was called. Of course Sam and Grace had seen it before, but they always enjoyed it. There was dancing, too, and some of the capers cut by the men and boys were very funny.

"What's hoe cake?" asked Bunny, remembering that Mr. Morton had spoken of this.

"In the old days, before the war, it was a cornmeal cake baked on the clean blade of a field hoe," was the answer. "But now they are generally made in a pan or skillet, I think. A hoe cake is a sort of Johnnie cake up North."

"Here comes Mammy Jackson with some now," said Mrs. Morton, as a fat, jolly-looking colored woman approached the visitors with a large tray.

"White folks come to visit an' we got to treat 'em quality like!" chuckled the old negress. "Here you is, li'l white folks," and she presented the tray to Bunny and Sue. [102]

It was laden with all sorts of good things that the darkies like to eat, but as some of the food was rather rich, especially for eating just before going to bed, Mrs. Brown looked at what Bunny and Sue took, allowing them only a little of each dainty. It was all clean and well cooked, and Bunny and Sue thought they had never before tasted anything so good. They did not get any 'possum meat, and perhaps they would not have liked that. It takes a real Southerner to care for that dainty.

After the eating, the singing, playing and dancing went on more wild and noisy than before, but Bunny and Sue were not allowed to stay up very late. And so, rather wishing they might remain longer, they were led away, and a little while afterwards were snug in bed, listening to the faint and far-off sounds of the colored jubilee.

Two days later Mr. Brown, having finished his business in Georgia, started with his family for Orange Beach, Florida.

"We had a lovely time here!" said Sue to Grace, as they parted.

"Most fun I ever had in my life!" added Bunny. But then as he said that about nearly every place he had visited, I am beginning to think he had a very happy disposition. [103]

"Don't eat too many oranges!" Grace called to Sue, as the Southern children watched their little guests climb aboard the train that was to take them to Florida.

"I won't," Sue promised.

"And don't let an alligator catch you!" begged Sam of Bunny.

"I'll catch *them!*" declared the little fellow.

"Good-by! Good-by!" was echoed back and forth.

Then the train pulled out of the small station of Seedville, and once more Bunny Brown and his sister Sue were on their journey. And many things were to happen before they reached home again. [104]

CHAPTER XI

THE POOR CAT

Bunny Brown and his sister Sue were now going farther down into the sunny South. They had left far behind the bleak and cold of the North where there was ice and snow when they had come away. In Georgia they had found soft winds and balmy skies, but now, as they were headed into Florida, they were to find it even warmer.

Orange Beach, where Mr. Brown expected to meet Mr. Halliday and attend to some business, was in the southern part of Florida, somewhat inland from the ocean and on a river which Bunny, at least, hoped would be filled with alligators.

As for Sue, all she hoped for was to gather oranges and orange blossoms. Both children, in a way, were to have their wishes gratified.

As the train went farther south, the scenery grew more and more green, for Bunny and Sue were getting into the land where there is never any snow or ice, and only occasionally a little frost, which all orange growers dread. Sometimes, to keep a frost from hurting the orange trees, great bonfires are built in the groves and kept going all night. [105]

"Oh, look what a funny tree!" cried Sue, as the train was passing through a swampy bit of forest. "It looks as if it had whiskers!"

"Oh, isn't it funny!" echoed Bunny. "What is it, Daddy?"

Daddy Brown leaned toward the car window and looked out. Several trees were now seen, each one festooned with what Sue had called "whiskers."

"That is Spanish moss, also called long moss," explained Mr. Brown. "It is common in Florida and other parts of the South, especially in trees that grow in the swamps, or everglades."

"What are the everglades?" Bunny wanted to know. "Are they like alligators?"

"Oh, no!" laughed his mother. "About all you think of, Bunny, is alligators."

[106]

"I don't; do I, Mother?" asked Sue. "I keep thinking of oranges!"

Mr. and Mrs. Brown laughed at this, and Mr. Brown, after explaining how the Spanish moss grew on trees, sometimes hanging down like the gray beard of a very old man, told the children about the everglades.

"The everglades are the great swamps in the southern part of Florida," Mr. Brown said. "The land there is very low in some places, and the sea water covers it at times. The everglades are lonely places, part forest and partly covered with tall grass."

"Alligators, too?" asked Bunny, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, I think alligators are there," Mr. Brown said. "But no oranges," he added, before Sue could ask that question. "It is too swampy to raise oranges, though now an effort is being made to drain the swampy everglades and make them of some use. We aren't going to that part of Florida, however; at least not on this journey."

There was so much of interest to see on this trip to the sunny South, and so much to ask questions about, that Bunny and Sue thought the journey one of the most delightful they had ever taken.

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While Mr. Brown looked over some business papers, among which Bunny had a glimpse of the valuable oil certificate, and while Mrs. Brown read a magazine, the children looked from the windows of their car at the scenes and landscapes that flitted past so rapidly.

"We're going to change cars in a little while," said Mr. Brown to his wife and children, as he put his papers back in his pocket.

"Are we at Orange Beach?" Bunny asked, ready to start out and hunt alligators at a moment's notice if need be.

"Oh, no," his father answered. "Orange Beach is another day's travel. But this is as far as this railroad runs and we have to get off and take another train. The place where we will get off is only a small station in a little town, but there is a man there I want to see on business."

"Will you stay there long?" asked Mrs. Brown.

[108]

"No, only a few hours, while waiting for the next train to take us on to Orange Beach. You will have time to get something to eat—you and the children, while I see Mr. Parker. The name of the place is Clayton, and it is the next station," said Mr. Brown, looking at a timetable he carried.

Bunny and Sue were delighted to ride in railroad trains and look out at the scenery, but they were also glad to get out once in a while, to "stretch their legs," as Bunny said. In fact, the children were always glad of a change, and now that they heard they were to alight from one train, get lunch in Clayton, and proceed in another car they welcomed whatever might happen during that time.

"Clayton! Clay-ton!" called the trainman, as the cars began to go more slowly when the brakes were put on, and Bunny and Sue, with their father and mother, began to gather up their hand baggage in readiness to alight.

Clayton was a small town in Florida, and except that everything was as green and sunny as it would have been in Belleme in the middle of summer, the village was not very different from many country towns of the North. Yes, there was a difference, too. There were a large number of colored people about—children and men and women—and many of the animals seen drawing carts and wagons were mules instead of horses. One or two small automobiles were to be noticed, but there was not such a busy scene as would have been noticed in a Northern town.

[109]

"Now," said Mr. Brown to his wife, when she and the children were gathered about him on the station platform, "I think this will be the best plan. You and the children get lunch in that restaurant over there, while I go uptown and see Mr. Parker. By the time you finish your lunch and I get back, you will not have long to wait for the train that will take us to Orange Beach. It comes in here at this station."

"But where will you get lunch?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"With Mr. Parker," was the answer. "I can eat and talk business at the same time, and get through sooner. That looks like a nice enough little restaurant over there. I hope they will have something you and the children can eat."

[110]

"I am not very hungry," Mrs. Brown said. "We ate so many good things at Mrs. Morton's that I must have gained several pounds."

"I'm hungry!" exclaimed Bunny, anxious lest there be no lunch.

"So'm I!" echoed his sister.

"I guess there'll be enough for you," his father said, with a laugh. "Take them over, Mother, while I see if I can hire one of these easy-going colored boys to drive me uptown."

There were one or two ramshackle old carriages with bony horses harnessed to them standing about the station, and in one of these Mr. Brown was soon on his way up the street toward the main part of the village.

"Come on, children. We'll see what there is for lunch," Mrs. Brown said.

She led the way over to the small restaurant near the railroad. She found that it was clean and neat, something of which she had been a little doubtful from the outside.

A white man kept the restaurant, but he said he had an old colored "mammy" for a cook, and then Mrs. Brown knew she and the children would get something good to eat. [111]

They had chicken and waffles, as well as other good things, and in spite of the fact that she had said she was not hungry, Mrs. Brown managed to eat a good lunch. As for Bunny Brown and his sister Sue, I really am ashamed to tell you how much they ate and how many things they passed their plates for "more."

But traveling always makes children hungry, doesn't it?

"May we walk up and down the street a little while?" asked Bunny of his mother, as she went back to the station with him and Sue after lunch. "We want to see things while we're waiting for daddy."

"Yes, but don't go far away," Mrs. Brown answered, as she took her seat on the bench in the shade. "I don't know just what time the train for Orange Beach is due."

Bunny and Sue promised not to stray away, and then, hand in hand, while their father was off uptown on business and while their mother was dozing sleepily on the station bench, the children wandered along the street which extended beside the railroad tracks. [112]

On the rails were a number of freight cars, several of the kind called "box," because they look like big boxes on wheels. Bunny and Sue crossed the street and walked along the string of boxcars, looking into those the doors of which were open.

"I wouldn't like to ride in one of those cars," said Sue to Bunny. "They aren't nice, and they have no windows in to see out of."

"And no seats, either," Bunny added. "They're only for freight, anyhow."

"What's freight?" asked Sue.

"Oh, it's different things they put in cars," Bunny answered. "It's boxes and barrels and bales of cotton, I guess, for I heard Mr. Morton say he had to pay a lot of freight money to have his cotton taken away."

"Is that freight?" asked Sue, pointing to some broken boxes on the ground near a boxcar, the door of which stood open.

"I guess it was once, maybe," Bunny answered. "Those boxes come in a freight car, but they took the stuff out. Let's go and see if there's anything left in the freight car." [113]

Forgetting that they had promised their mother not to go far away, Bunny and Sue wandered down the track and soon stood beside a car out of which some empty boxes and barrels had been thrown. And as they neared the car they heard, coming from within it, the mewing of a cat.

"Oh, there's a pussy!" cried Sue, who heard it first.

"Where?" asked Bunny.

"In that freight car, I think," his sister went on. "Oh, there it is!" she cried, pointing.

Bunny looked in time to see a small cat peering from the door of the car. The door was about four feet from the ground, and the little pussy seemed to think this was too far to jump down.

"Poor little pussy!" said Sue kindly. "I guess it's hungry and lonesome, Bunny! Let's get it and take it to mother."

"All right," Bunny agreed. "But we'll have to get up on a box or barrel to reach it."

Neither Bunny nor Sue was tall enough to lift the poor cat down from the open door of the freight car. And it did seem to be the kind of cat one would call "poor," for it was very thin, and was crying as if hungry or perhaps lonesome. [114]

"Maybe it's been shut up in the car a long time," Sue said.

"We'll get it down and feed it," said Bunny, pulling a box from the pile over toward the freight car, so he could climb up through the wide, sliding door. [115]

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGE RIDE

"Let me help you!" begged Sue, when she saw what her brother was doing. "I'll help you move the box."

Bunny Brown was glad to have his sister's help, and the two children half carried, half dragged the empty packing box over to the freight car.

"Oh, it's gone!" cried Sue in disappointed tones, as Bunny shoved the box under the wide, open door.

"What's gone?" asked the little boy.

"The poor, hungry pussy! It ran away and now we can't feed it!"

"Hum!" exclaimed Bunny, who was also disappointed. "I guess—"

"Oh, there it is!" suddenly cried Sue, pointing, as the little cat—for it was only half grown—thrust his head around the edge of the door. [116]

"Keep still now, pussy, and we'll get you," begged Sue, as if the cat knew what she was saying. The cat certainly heard, and perhaps it did understand something of what the children were trying to do, for they spoke very kindly. And let me tell you that dogs and cats can easily tell the difference between kind and cross speaking.

While the little pussy looked down from the door of the freight car at the two children, Bunny managed to scramble up on top of the wooden box. From there he could easily get inside the car. He did not think he would have to do this, however, and he did not want to, for the inside of the car looked very dark and "scary." Bunny could not see to either end, for the car was rather long.

But as the little boy climbed up on the box and reached out his hand to grasp the kitten, the little cat, with a sad "mew!" backed farther inside the big car.

"Come on, pussy!" called Bunny gently. "I won't hurt you!" [117]

"We'll give you some nice milk," added Sue, standing on the ground near the box. "Let Bunny get you!"

But this the strange cat did not want to do. Back into the car it ran, just as you have very often, I suppose, seen a strange cat or dog run away from you, until it made sure you were going to be kind.

By this time Bunny had leaned far enough inside the car to be able to notice that it was not quite so black and "scary" as he had at first thought. He could see each end easily now, and in one far corner was the little cat, rubbing up against the sides of the car, as if it wanted to be petted, but was afraid to let the children do it.

"I guess I'll have to go in after it," said Bunny.

"All right," agreed Sue. "I'll come and help you," and she scrambled up on the box just as Bunny drew his legs up over the edge of the car and went inside.

Mrs. Brown, from her place on the station platform, could look down the tracks and see the line of freight cars which extended alongside the street. She had seen Bunny and Sue walking in this direction, but she did not imagine they would get inside a car. If she had seen Bunny scrambling in after the cat she would have run down to make him come out. [118]

But she did not see this, for she had closed her eyes and was dozing a little in the warm air of the sunny South. Nor did Mrs. Brown see Sue climb up on the box after her brother.

As soon as Bunny went inside the car to get the cat Sue followed, and there the two children were, inside the big boxcar, while pussy was mewing sadly at one end, wanting to be petted and fed, but just a little afraid.

"We'll get it now," said Bunny, as he saw Sue in the car with him. "You go one side and I'll go the other. Then we'll catch it and take it to mother."

"Maybe it'll scratch me," suggested Sue, for she had been scratched by pet kittens more than once.

"No, I don't think it will," said Bunny. "Come up easy, so you won't scare it."

Walking a little way apart down the length of the freight car, in which they could now see very well, Bunny Brown and his sister Sue approached the pussy. They held out their hands and hissed through their lips, for they thought cats liked that sound. If it had been a little dog in the freight car the children would have whistled, and the dog, very likely, would have run to them, wagging its tail. [119]

If Bunny and Sue had whistled they might have frightened the little pussy, so they just made soft sounds through their lips, and walked toward the small cat.

But when Bunny and his sister did this the pussy ran and hid as far back as it could in one end of the car, as if afraid.

"Oh, we won't hurt you!" exclaimed Sue.

"We just want to get you and take you out so we can feed you," explained Bunny.

But the pussy did not seem to understand.

"You go one way and I'll go the other," suggested Bunny. "We can catch it between us."

"Like we did chickens at grandpa's farm once," agreed the little girl. She remembered how she and her brother had once thus closed in on some hens and a rooster that had got out of the chicken yard.

[120]

"That'll be a good way," Bunny said.

But when they tried it, he coming in toward the pussy from the right and Sue from the left, the little cat just scampered between the children with a "mew!" and there it was at the other end of the car!

"Oh, it's playing tag!" laughed Sue.

"I guess it is," agreed Bunny. "Come on, little cat!" called the boy. "We have to go home pretty soon. We can't stay here all the afternoon."

"Oh, Bunny, how funny!" laughed Sue. "We aren't going *home!*"

"Well, we're going on to Florida, and that'll be home for a while," said the little fellow. "Anyhow we've got to be going pretty soon or mother will be looking for us. Come on now, we'll try again."

Once more they walked carefully toward the other end of the freight car, whither the pussy had gone. But again the furry animal dashed between Bunny and his sister, keeping out of reach of their eager hands.

"I don't b'lieve it wants us to catch him," said Sue.

[121]

"I don't b'lieve so, either," agreed Bunny.

But they did not give up trying, though the more they raced after the little pussy the livelier that animal seemed to become, until Bunny and Sue were getting quite tired.

Then, suddenly, when they were in one end of the car trying to corner the lively little cat, there came a jar and a jolt to the car.

"What's that?" asked Sue, a bit frightened.

"Something bumped into us," Bunny answered. "I guess maybe it was the engine." Then, as the children felt another bump, which shook the whole car and them also, and as they heard a banging noise and the tooting of a whistle, Bunny exclaimed: "Oh, an engine is hitching on our car! We're going to have a ride!"

Before Sue could say anything the car suddenly became dark, for the sliding door on the side, by which Bunny and his sister had entered, slid shut with another bang.

"Oh, Bunny!" cried Sue, this time in great fright. "We're shut in here!"

"Yes," agreed Bunny, trying hard to be brave and not cry as he felt Sue was going to do. "I guess we are!"

[122]

"Oh, Bunny!" exclaimed his sister, "what'll we do?"

Bunny did not know just what to answer.

"Mew!" cried the little kitten, somewhere in the dark car. In fact, it was so dark that neither Bunny nor Sue could see the other, and they could not tell where pussy was.

There came another bang and rattle, a loud noise, and then Bunny Brown and his sister Sue felt the car rolling away. A locomotive was pulling it, giving the children a strange ride.

[123]

CHAPTER XIII

NUTTY, THE TRAMP

Bunny and Sue were so surprised when they found that they were being hauled away in the closed and dark freight car that for a time after their first startled cries they said nothing. They remained standing hand in hand in the middle of the dark, empty space, swaying to and fro as the train bumped over the uneven rails.

"Oh, Bunny!" gasped Sue in a little whisper, "where do you s'pose we're going?"

"I don't know," he answered. "But it's somewhere. We're having a ride, anyhow."

This was true enough. They were moving along quite swiftly now, but not nearly so smoothly or so comfortably as when they had ridden in the parlor car or the sleeping car.

"Will mother and daddy come?" asked Sue, her voice a bit shaky because she was half crying. [124]

"I—I don't guess they will," her brother answered. "Daddy is uptown, seeing a man, and mother was on the station bench when we crawled in this car to get the cat."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sue, and then she tried to peer through the gloom to see Bunny. At first, after the door had slid shut, she could only dimly see where her brother stood, even though she had hold of his hand. But now, as her eyes became used to the darkness, she could make out that Bunny was standing close beside her.

What had happened was this. The children had climbed into an empty freight car that was standing on a siding, as the extra tracks around a railroad station are called. The freight had been taken from the car some days before, and, being empty, it was needed to be loaded again.

A switch engine, which was "picking up empties," as the railroad men call it, had backed down the track and had been fastened to several cars in addition to the one containing Bunny Brown and his sister Sue. The railroad men, of course, did not know that the children were in the car. And they knew nothing about the pussy cat. They supposed the freight car was empty. [125]

The freight engine, in backing down the track to be coupled, or fastened, to the cars, had banged into them rather hard. This hard bang had slid shut the sliding door, making Bunny, Sue, and the cat prisoners.

"Oh!" suddenly exclaimed Sue after a period of silence.

"What's the matter?" asked Bunny, for, having hold of his sister's hand, he could feel her jump.

"Something rubbed up against my legs," she answered.

"It's the cat!" exclaimed Bunny.

"Oh!" cried Sue again, and this time there was happiness in her voice. She leaned down and felt around her legs. Her hand touched a warm, furry back. "It is pussy!" she cried. "And kitty let me pick him up! Oh, Bunny, it's purring like anything!" Sue exclaimed.

"I guess it's lonesome, too, and maybe don't like to ride in a freight car, so it's getting tame," Bunny said. And perhaps this did explain it. [126]

"I can pick him up!" cried Sue in delight. And, a moment later, she had the pussy in her arms. Surely enough the little fluffy fellow was no longer afraid of the children. It wanted to be near them for company, and it snuggled down in Sue's arms, while Bunny reached over in the dark and softly stroked the animal.

All this while the freight car was being hauled farther and farther away from the railroad station.

"I'm going to sit down," said Sue, and she did, taking her place on the floor of the car with her legs stretched out, making a lap for the cat. Bunny, whose eyes were also becoming used to the dark, could see what Sue was doing, and he sat down beside her, reaching over now and then and petting pussy. The little cat seemed quite content now, and if it was hungry it did not cry.

"Maybe I could open the door so we could get out," suggested Bunny, after a bit. [127]

"You couldn't get off this car while it was moving, even if you could open the door," Sue stated. "Don't you 'member mother said we should never get on a trolley car when it was moving, or get off?"

"Yes," admitted Bunny. "I 'member that. But I'm not going to get off till the car stops. Only I'll see if I can get the door open, so we'll be all ready to get off when it does stop."

With this in mind Bunny arose from his place on the floor of the swaying freight car beside Sue and the kitten in her lap, and tried to make his way over to where some cracks of light showed around the door. There were two sliding doors to the car, one by which the children had entered, and another opposite. But this last showed no light around the edges, and Bunny rightly guessed that this one was fastened more tightly than the one that had slid shut.

It was one thing for Bunny to say he would open the door, but it was quite another thing to do it. For by this time the engine was puffing away down the track at good speed, and the little fellow soon found that it was very hard to walk across the empty freight car. It swayed from side to side, much more so than an ordinary railroad coach, and a great deal more than a Pullman car. [128]

But if it was difficult for him to walk in a regular passenger car, it was much harder in the swaying freight car. And when he tried to make his way to the door he was nearly thrown off his feet.

"Oh, Bunny, look out! You'll be hurt! What are you going to do?" asked Sue, for she could see her brother fairly well now.

"I'm going to open that door!" grunted Bunny. The reason he grunted was because he sat down suddenly. He had been swayed right off his feet.

"You can't do it!" Sue said. "Don't get hurt, Bunny!"

"I won't," he answered. "But we've got to get out of this car, and I've got to get that door open! I know what I can do," he went on. "If I can't walk over I can crawl. I did that when I was a baby."

Bunny Brown was a smart and brave little fellow, and, as he said, when he found he could not walk upright, because the car swayed so, he made up his mind to crawl. And crawl he did, across the rough, splintery floor of the old car. Once he stuck a sliver into the palm of his hand. He cried "Ouch!" but the rumble of the wheels was so loud that Sue did not hear him, and Bunny was glad of it. [129]

He stopped, pulled the splinter from his hand, and then bravely went on again, crawling over the swaying car. At last he reached the door, and as there were projections on the side, by which he could hold himself, Bunny managed to stand up.

"Now I'm going to open the door, Sue!" he called to his sister. "And when the train stops we can get off and go back to mother and daddy."

"Yes, I guess we'd better do that," Sue answered. "They'll get worried about us."

Holding to a wooden brace on the side of the car with one hand, Bunny tried to push back the heavy, sliding door with the other. It went a few inches, letting more light inside the car, but there the door stuck. And it was, perhaps, a good thing that it did. For if the door had opened suddenly the little boy might have been pitched out, for the train of empty freight cars was now moving swiftly. [130]

Bunny pulled and tugged so hard that he fairly grunted.

"What's the matter?" asked Sue, hearing him.

"I—I can't get this door—open!" gasped her brother.

"Oh, well, never mind," she said. "Maybe some of the trainmen will come along and let us out."

"How can they come along when the train is moving?" Bunny wanted to know.

"Didn't you ever see 'em run along on top of the freight cars?" asked Sue.

"Yes. But this door is on the *side*—not on *top*," her brother answered. "I've got to get it open if we want to get out!"

He pulled and tugged again, but it was of no use. The door had opened a little way, making a crack through which Bunny could see the sunny fields, the trees, the telegraph poles, and the fences gliding past. But the crack was all too small for him or Sue to squeeze through. [131]

"I guess we'll have to wait," Bunny said at length, as he crawled back to the side of his sister.

"You can hold pussy a little while," she said to him. Bunny was very glad to do this, and the little cat snuggled down on his legs, while he gently stroked the soft fur.

On and on rumbled the freight train, clicking and clacking over the rails, and making a roaring sound when it crossed a bridge. Suddenly, above the other creaking, jolting sounds another noise sounded. It was like a groan.

"What's that?" asked Sue, reaching over and grasping Bunny by the arm. She could see him plainly now, because the door was open a wider crack.

"What's what?" asked Bunny, who had been trying to make the pussy stand up on its hind legs.

"That noise," went on Sue. "Didn't you hear it?" [132]

Both children listened, and above the noise made by the clacking wheels they did hear a groan! Or was it a grunt?

"Oh!" cried Sue, almost crawling into Bunny's lap. "What is it?"

"I don't know," the little boy answered, and he was beginning to feel as frightened as was Sue.

Again a noise, somewhere between a grunt and a groan, sounded through the car, and the children also heard a movement. Bunny glanced in the direction of it, and saw what at first he had taken to be a bundle of rags moving in one dark corner.

"Who's there?" boldly cried Bunny, holding Sue's hand.

"Why, I'm here," was the answer. "I'm Nutty, the tramp. Who are you? My, I've had a fine sleep!" the voice went on, and it was rather a jolly, good-natured voice Bunny thought. "Such a fine sleep as I've had!"

There was the sound of grunting, yawning, and stretching. Then the voice cried in surprise:

"Why, we're moving!" [133]

"Yes," answered Bunny, wondering who in the world Nutty, the tramp, might be. "The train is

going!"

"Well, well! And to think I slept through it!"

Bunny and Sue could see the ragged bundle in the corner getting up. It came toward them, and in the light that came through the crack in the freight car door the children saw that their fellow traveler was a very ragged man—a regular tramp in fact.

On his part Nutty, as he called himself, stared with surprised eyes at Bunny Brown and his sister Sue.

"Two kids!" cried the tramp. "Bless my ragged gloves! Two kids!"

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CHAPTER XIV

A QUEER PICNIC

Bunny and Sue did not know just what to make of this ragged tramp who was traveling in the freight car with them. It was not, of course, the first time they had seen a tramp—they were plentiful enough around Bellemere at times, and often they had come begging for food at the back door of the Brown house. Bunny and Sue had often seen their mother feed the poor men, and some of them were quite jolly, and joked about their bad luck.

This tramp, "Nutty," he had called himself, was one of the jolly kind, the two children decided. Nutty now came from the corner where he had been sleeping and stood in the light that came through the door Bunny had slid back a little way.

"What in the world are you doing here?" asked Nutty, as he again stretched out his arms, showing the rags and patches of his torn coat.

[135]

"We came in to get the kitten," answered Sue.

"What, my kitten? My Toddle?" cried the tramp. "You wouldn't take little Toddle away from me, would you?"

"Oh, is that your kitten?" asked Bunny Brown. "We didn't know. We thought it was a stray pussy that had got up in the freight car and couldn't get out. We climbed up in to take it to our mother so it could have some milk, and then the train started."

"Oh, ho! So that's how it happened?" asked Nutty. "I wondered how you two kids got here. I knew you couldn't be tramps. But Toddle is my kitten all right. I call him Toddle because that's about all he can do in the way of a walk. He toddles on his four little legs," and Nutty laughed, which made Bunny and Sue feel better.

"Yes, Toddle is my kitten," the queer tramp went on. "I picked him up the other day in the fields. I guess he was lost—a tramp like myself. I put him in my pocket—it's got some holes in it, but none of them quite big enough for Toddle to fall through—and I've kept him ever since. He was with me when I crawled into this car to go to sleep."

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"Were you in this car when we got in after the cat?" asked Bunny. "We didn't see you."

"For a good reason," the tramp answered. "I didn't want any one to see me. The railroad men don't like us tramps, and when they find us in the cars they put us out. I crawled away back in the darkest corner I could find and curled up. I must have looked like a bundle of rags."

"You did," Bunny answered. "That's what I thought you were."

"It's the safest way to look when a railroad man is searching for you," Nutty answered, with a laugh. "Well, I'm on my way again," he added. "The engine must have backed down, coupled on to the freight cars, and hauled them off while I slept. Where are you children going?"

"We—we don't know," answered Bunny Brown, and then he and Sue felt a wave of lonesomeness coming over them. They wanted their father and mother, and the children knew they were being carried farther and farther away from their parents as the train jolted along. They knew daddy and mother would be much frightened, too.

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"Where is your mother?" asked Nutty, the tramp.

"She was sitting on a bench at the station when we climbed into the car to get the kitten," explained Sue.

"She didn't see us," added her brother.

"And where is your father?" Nutty wanted to know.

"He's up in the village seeing a man," said Bunny. "We're going to Florida to get alligators—"

"And oranges!" broke in Sue.

"Yes, and oranges," admitted Bunny. "And we stopped off here to change trains and get

something to eat."

"Hum!" mused Nutty. "Speaking of something to eat, where's Toddle? That kitten must be hungry."

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"Here it is!" exclaimed Sue, stooping down and picking up the little cat which was purring around her legs.

"Come on, Toddle, I'll give you some milk," said Nutty, holding out his hands for his pet.

"Oh, have you got milk here?" eagerly asked Bunny.

"Well, I've a little in a bottle that I have been saving for Toddle," the tramp answered. "But if you are thirsty I can give you a drink of water. I've got some nice, clean water in a bottle."

"I'm thirsty," said Sue, in a low voice.

"And I'm hungry!" exclaimed Bunny Brown. "But I don't s'pose you have anything to eat, have you?" he asked, hopefully.

"Ha! That's just what I have!" exclaimed the tramp. "If you'll come with me, back to my corner where I left my things, we'll have a little picnic. I don't want to make a light so near this crack in the door. Some railroad men at the stations we pass might see us, and then I'd be arrested."

"What for?" Bunny wanted to know.

"Oh, for being a tramp!" laughed the ragged man. "But come to my corner and we'll light up."

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"How can you make a light?" Sue asked, for she did not exactly like the looks of the dark corner.

"I have some ends of candles," answered Nutty. "Come, we'll have a little picnic—I'll invite you kids and Toddle to the feast!"

Bunny and his sister wondered what the tramp could give them to eat, but they were both hungry and thirsty, though it was not so very long since lunch. So, with the tramp carrying Toddle, the children followed to the corner where Bunny had first seen what he thought was a bundle of rags.

"Stand still a minute now, kiddies," said Nutty kindly, as Bunny and Sue reached the dark corner. "I'll make a light." He put Toddle down on the floor, and the end of a candle, stuck on top of an old tomato can, soon made the place fairly light. On the floor in the corner were some tin boxes and a few bottles, one of which held a little milk, as the children could see. The other seemed to have water in it, but what was in the tin boxes the little boy and girl could only guess.

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"We'll feed Toddle first," said Nutty. "He's so little, and he doesn't know how to wait. Here you are, pussy!" he called, and then into a tin box, that once had held sardines, Nutty poured some milk from the bottle. Eagerly the little cat lapped it up, while Bunny and Sue watched in the flickering light of the candle.

"Well, now I guess he feels better," the tramp remarked, as Toddle began to clean his face with his red tongue, using his paws for a washrag. "Do you kiddies like nuts?" the ragged man asked.

"Do you mean peanuts?" asked Sue.

"Those and pecans," went on the tramp. "I've got lots of nut meats. That's why they call me Nutty—because I eat so many nuts. But they are good and make a fine meal. Besides, they don't cost anything, for the nut growers don't mind if I take a few nuts. Sometimes I do a little work for them, but mostly I'm a tramp. Anyhow, that's all I've got for you to eat now—plenty of nuts. We'll have a picnic on them."

[141]

It surely was a strange scene! Bunny Brown and his sister Sue in that freight car with Nutty, the tramp, and Toddle, the kitten, a flickering candle giving light as the ragged man set out his store of nuts. That is what the tin boxes held—a goodly store of nut meats.

"I crack 'em with stones and pick 'em out in my spare time," said Nutty, as he opened the tin boxes. "I have plenty of spare time," he added, with a laugh. "Now, children, I haven't any chairs to invite you to sit on, but I guess it will be safer on the floor. The car rocks so. Sit down and eat. Nutty provides the nuts!"

"Could I please have a drink?" asked Sue.

"Oh, yes! I forgot about that!" exclaimed Nutty. "Nuts make you thirsty, too. Well, I filled my bottle of water at the railroad tank just before I got into this car, so it's fresh. I'll give you a drink."

From a large bottle he poured water into a battered tin cup which was among his possessions.

"It's clean," said Nutty, as he passed the cup to Sue. "Your mother would not be afraid to let you drink it. I'm a ragged tramp, but I keep clean."

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And indeed the water in the cup was clean and fresh, and Sue drank eagerly, as did Bunny. Then, their thirst satisfied for a time, the children sat down to the strange picnic. They called it at the time and afterward—the "Freight Car Picnic."

Nutty was kind and good to the children, though he was a ragged tramp, and after their first feeling of fright was over, Bunny and Sue had quite a jolly time.

And when you are hungry nuts make a very good meal. In fact, nuts are a form of food. Squirrels and other animals can live on nothing but nuts and fruits, and though growing boys and girls need more than this, they could live for some time on nuts alone.

"I'm a great nut eater," explained Nutty, as he helped Bunny to more pecans from the tin box. "I tramp around this part of the South, and gather nuts wherever I can. That's why the other tramps call me Nutty. When I was young I used to eat a lot of meat and potatoes with bread and butter. But now I eat nuts." [143]

"Did you ever eat cake?" asked Sue, as she munched some brown peanuts, for Nutty had roasted peanuts among his store.

"Cake? I haven't heard that word for years!" laughed Nutty. "I don't believe I'd know a piece of cake if I saw it hopping up the road to meet me. Nuts are about all I need, now I'm getting old. Have some more!"

He did have a lot of nuts, and Bunny and Sue had good appetites for them. Toddle, the pussy, nestled in Sue's lap and purred. And the freight train rumbled on and on.

Where were Bunny and Sue going? [144]

CHAPTER XV

LEFT ALONE

Some thought of where the train might be taking them must have come into the minds of Bunny and Sue for, after they had eaten as many of the nuts as they wanted and had had another drink of water from Nutty's bottle, Bunny asked the tramp:

"Do you know where we are going, Mr. Nutty?"

"Why, no, I can't exactly say I do," answered the old tramp, with a smile on his face. Bunny and Sue could see him smile, for the candle gave a good light. "Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"I want to go to my mother and daddy," answered Sue. "I want to go with them to Florida so I can pick oranges."

"And I want to see alligators," added Bunny. "Do you think daddy and mother will come along on the next train?" he asked. [145]

Nutty, the tramp, shook his head.

"I don't know what to think about you children," he said. "It's plain to me that your mother doesn't know where you are, or your father, either. And by this time your mother must be worried because you haven't come back to her where she's waiting on the station platform. About how long ago was it you climbed into the freight car to get my kitten?"

"About an hour," answered Bunny, after a little thought.

"Oh, it was five hours," said Sue, who did not have so good an idea of time as had her brother. "It was maybe six hours and I want my mother!"

She seemed on the verge of tears, and Nutty, understanding this, quickly said:

"Let's give Toddle some more milk!"

"Oh, let me feed him!" begged Sue. And as she poured some milk from the bottle into the sardine tin and watched pussy lap it up, the little girl forgot her tears.

"When do you think the train will stop?" asked Bunny, after he had watched Sue feed the little kitten. [146]

"Oh, pretty soon now, I guess," answered the old man. "Are you getting tired?"

"A little," Bunny answered. "I don't like this car."

"I don't, either!" joined in Sue. "It hasn't any nice seats, and there isn't any carpet on the floor."

"And you can't look out any windows," added her brother.

"No," agreed Nutty, with a laugh. "Freight cars aren't very good places from which to see scenery when you travel. But I'm glad there aren't any windows. If there were the railroad men could look in and see us, and then they'd put me off."

"What for?" Bunny wanted to know.

"Well, because I'm a tramp, for one thing. And because I haven't any ticket for another. I'm

sort of stealing a ride, you know, and the railroad men don't like that. If they saw me they'd put me off."

Without saying anything Bunny arose and started across the swaying car toward the partly opened door—the door which showed a crack of light, though the crack was not big enough to let Bunny or Sue squeeze through. [147]

"Where are you going, Bunny?" asked Nutty.

"I'm going to stand by this door," answered the little boy, "and maybe a railroad man will see me and put me off. That's what I want to do—I want to get off this train!"

"Yes," said Nutty, in a kind voice, "I suppose that is what you want to do—get off. And you ought to be sent back to your mother. I wish I could help you. But I'm afraid."

"What you 'fraid of?" asked Sue, petting Toddle.

"Well, I'm afraid of what the railroad men, and maybe a policeman, might do to me if they found me in here with you two children," went on the tramp. "They'd think I was trying to kidnap you, and they might send me to jail."

"We could tell them you were good to us," said Bunny. "And that you gave us nuts and water to eat." [148]

"And I'd tell the men about how you took care of the pussy," said Sue.

"Yes, I know you would be kind," the old man remarked. "But, for all that, the railroad men might think I was a bad man and arrest me. You'd better come away from that door, Bunny. You might fall out. And besides, I'd rather a railroad man wouldn't see you—just yet."

"But can't we ever go back to our mother and daddy?" asked Bunny, as he walked over and sat down beside his sister and Nutty.

"Oh, yes, I'm just trying to think of a way to help you," the old tramp answered. "Let me think a minute."

Bunny and Sue had often heard their mother say this, and they knew she wanted to be quiet and not have them talk when she was trying to make up her mind about something they had asked her. Thinking Nutty would want the same silence, Bunny and Sue talked only in whispers while Nutty was "thinking."

At last Nutty said:

"I think I have it now. This train ought to stop pretty soon at a water tank to give the engine a drink. When it does then you children can get off." [149]

"That'll be nice!" exclaimed Sue.

"Will our mother be there?" Bunny wanted to know.

"Well, yes, maybe," answered Nutty, though, really, he did not think so. Still it might be that Mrs. Brown had seen the children climb into the freight car, and she may have had a glimpse of the engine backing down, coupling to the string of cars and starting off with them.

From the station agent Mrs. Brown could find out where the freight train would first stop, and, by taking a fast express train, she could arrive ahead of the freight. So it was possible for her to be waiting to greet Bunny and Sue when they got off the freight. But, for all that, Nutty did not believe this. He just said it to make Bunny and Sue feel better. And while this was not just right and honest, Nutty, who was only a poor tramp, probably did not know any better.

"I wish the train would stop pretty soon," sighed Sue. "I'm getting tired and I want my mother. But you have been good," she quickly said. "And I like Toddle." [150]

"And the nuts were dandy!" exclaimed Bunny.

"I'm glad I had plenty," said the old man. "Now," he went on, "you children sit here quietly with Toddle, and I'll go to that door and look out. When I see a place where I think the train's going to stop I'll call you. But don't come until I do, and keep well back away from the crack in the door, so no train men will see you."

Bunny and Sue did not want to get their friend in trouble, so moved back into the corner, taking the kitten with them. The little animal seemed to like Sue very much, and purred contentedly in her lap.

Nutty arose and walked over to the partly opened door of the freight car. Bunny and Sue, seated in a distant corner, could not see the tramp very well, but, if they could have watched him they would have seen Nutty opening the door wider, inch by inch.

It had slid shut, as I have told you, when the engine suddenly pulled the freight car along, and though a small crack remained open Bunny was not strong enough to slide the door all the way back and make the opening wider. But Nutty, being stronger, had no trouble in making the door slide. [151]

The old tramp had made up his mind to run away from the children. He was really afraid of

being arrested and having it said that he had tried to kidnap them, and as he knew he had no such idea he did not care to be punished for something he had not done.

So he had made up his mind to jump off the train when it slowed up, leaving Bunny and Sue alone. And that is why he sent the children to the dark corner, so they could not see him open the door. He thought if they saw him they would want to follow.

"If I can get away," said Nutty to himself, "I'll tell some of the railroad men that I saw two kids in one of the empty cars, and the railroad men will look after them. But I don't want them to find *me* here."

Slowly and carefully Nutty slid back the door, inch by inch, in order to make the crack wide enough for him to jump out when the train slowed up. He glanced toward the dark corner where Bunny and Sue were sitting, playing with the cat. The candle was still burning, but the children were some distance from it. [152]

"I'll have to leave all my things behind," thought Nutty, as he got the door open as wide as he needed. "I'll leave 'em my store of nuts and the water to drink. I'll have to leave Toddle, too."

The thought of leaving behind his little kitten made the old tramp feel rather sad. But he knew that if he picked Toddle up and gathered together his tin boxes and the bottles Bunny and Sue would guess that he intended to go away from them.

"I'll just leave everything—even the pussy," thought Nutty. "I can easily get more nuts and bottles of water. I'll jump off as soon as the train slows up a little more. I don't want to be arrested as a kidnapper."

Watching his chance, and noticing that the train was moving quite slowly now, Nutty thrust himself half way out of the crack. He glanced toward Bunny and Sue. They were trying to make the kitten stand up on his hind legs, and did not see the tramp. [153]

"This is my chance!" thought the ragged man, with a last, kind look toward the children. "I'm sorry to leave you all alone," he went on, "but it's better so. And I'll send help to you if I can."

A moment later he jumped from the moving freight car and landed on the ground, running along a little way, and then darting into some bushes beside the track so no railroad men would see him.

"There! I'm safe!" thought Nutty. "Bunny and Sue will be all right, too, I hope!"

And the little boy and girl, left alone in the freight car, were being carried farther and farther away, for the train did not stop. As soon as Nutty had leaped off it started up again. [154]

CHAPTER XVI

THE JOLLY SWITCHMAN

For some time Bunny Brown and his sister Sue did not know that they had been left alone. They were playing with the kitten and they supposed their tramp friend Nutty was looking out of the partly opened door, watching for a chance to get them off the train. It was not until Sue grew tired of setting Toddle up on his hind legs, only to have the kitten slump over in a heap, that she looked up and saw the door opened wider and Nutty gone.

"Oh, Bunny!" cried Sue. "Look!"

Bunny, who was taking some more nuts from one of the tin boxes the tramp had left in the corner, glanced at his sister.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nutty is gone!" exclaimed Sue. "Oh, Bunny! I guess he fell out of the door! It's open wider! Oh, poor Nutty has falled out!" [155]

Bunny made his way to the crack, and, holding to the edge of the door, he looked out. He could see that it was late afternoon, and as the sun was setting Bunny knew it would soon be night. He began to wish, more than ever, that he and Sue were with their father and mother.

"Do you see him?" asked Sue, after Bunny had had time to look up and down the railroad.

"No," was the answer. "Nutty isn't here. I guess he fell all the way out."

Sue scrambled to her feet to walk over and stand beside Bunny. She was tired of the dark car and of not being able to look from a window. That was half the fun of traveling—looking from windows.

Sue was half way across the car on her way to join Bunny when the train went around a curve, and so sudden it was that the freight car swayed and jolted, and Sue lost her balance. Down she sat on the floor, rather hard. She was not hurt, but she was surprised and she lost her breath for the moment. If Bunny had not held tightly to the edge of the door he might have been tossed out. [156]

"I guess I'd better not stand there," Bunny said, as he thought of what might have happened if he had been tossed out. He could not have got back in again when the train was moving, and Sue would have been left all alone.

"Come and stay with me," begged Sue, giving up the idea of going to the partly opened door. "We'll have to light another candle pretty soon, 'cause this one is 'most gone."

This was true. The candle-end which Nutty had lighted was burned almost to the bottom of the tin can to which it was fastened by some of the melted grease.

"Maybe there are more candles," suggested Bunny. "Let's look."

Nutty, as has been said, had left all his things behind him in a corner of the freight car. Delving in among the old bags, in which he always carried his "baggage," the children found some more nuts. There was so much of this food that they would not be hungry for another day at least, and there was another bottle of water. [157]

"But there's no more milk for pussy," said Sue.

"Well, he's got a little left in his bottle," Bunny answered. "And he can have some of our water."

"Water isn't good to eat—it's only good to drink," declared Sue.

"Maybe Toddle will eat nuts," suggested her brother.

But when they put some down in front of the cat it only smelled of them, played with them by knocking them about with its paw, and rubbed up against Sue.

"Oh, well, maybe he won't be hungry," Bunny said.

Night was now coming on, and Bunny and Sue were alone in the freight car—that is, except for Toddle, and while the children loved the kitten he was not as much company as a big dog would have been.

On and on rumbled the train. Where they were now Bunny and Sue had not the least idea. Bunny was still looking among Nutty's things for another candle-end to light when the first one should burn out, which seemed likely to happen very soon, when the children suddenly became aware that the train was slowing up. [158]

"Oh, maybe it's going to stop!" exclaimed Sue.

And then, just as the candle burned down and went out in a splutter of grease, leaving the car in darkness, the train came to a slow stop, with a creaking and squealing of brakes.

"Oh, Bunny! Bunny!" cried Sue, "now we can get off."

"Yes," said Bunny, "I guess we can."

It was easy to cross the car now, for it was not moving. Bunny hurried to the door which Nutty had left open, and the little boy looked out. In the early evening twilight he and Sue could see a patch of woods and some fields. They did not know what the place was. The freight car in which they had ridden had stopped along the way at a place where a high bank was close to the track. From the freight car to the bank was only a few feet—a distance that Bunny and Sue could easily jump. [159]

"I'll go first!" offered Bunny, and he leaped to the ground.

"I'm coming!" cried Sue, as she followed her brother, landing beside him with a thud. And then Bunny gave a little cry of surprise.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "You—you brought Toddle with you!"

"Course I did!" answered Sue. "Think I'd leave that little pussy behind in the car all alone?"

"No," agreed Bunny. "I guess it's good you brought him."

"What made the train stop?" asked Sue, as she snuggled the kitten down in her arms and stood beside Bunny. "Did Nutty make it stop, and is mother or daddy here?"

"I don't know," Bunny answered, looking up and down the track. "I don't b'lieve mother is here—or father either," he went on. "And I don't see Nutty."

"But what made the train stop?" Sue asked again.

"The engine is getting a drink of water," Bunny answered, pointing down the track to a water tower, opposite which the engine had stopped. A man was standing on the pile of coal in the tender, or back part of the engine, and from the wayside tank a big iron pipe had been pulled over the opening in the tank tender. Through this pipe a stream of water was flowing. [160]

Bunny and Sue both knew, of course, that the engine did not exactly "drink" water. But they had been told this when quite young and they still said it just in fun. Their father had told them that water was put in an engine just as water was put in the tea kettle—to boil and make steam.

"That's what the train stopped for," Bunny went on; "so the engine could get some water. And

I'm glad it stopped, so we could get off. I was tired of riding in that old car."

"So was I," Sue agreed. "It's lots nicer out here. But, Bunny," she said, "it's going to be night—how are we going to get back?" and she hugged Toddle closer to her.

Bunny, too, was beginning to wonder about this. He could see that it was getting dark. He looked down the track, and the engine whistled twice. This meant that it was going to start off again and pull the train. The man on the pile of coal in the tender pushed back the iron water pipe, and then the freight car wheels began to squeak and turn. [161]

As Bunny and Sue stood beside the track the train started to move, and soon it was pulling away, leaving the two children alone. It was a rather desolate place, with fields on one side and a patch of woods on the other. But as the train clacked on down the track, out of sight, Bunny caught a view of a small shanty, or little house, near the water tank. And as he pointed this out to Sue a man came from the little brown house and looked up and down.

"Oh, there's somebody," Sue cried, almost dropping the kitten in her excitement. "Maybe he can tell us how to get back to mother, Bunny Brown!"

"Maybe he can," the little boy agreed. "Let's go and ask him."

"Do you know who he is?" Sue asked.

"I guess he's the switchman, and he tends to the water tower," Bunny answered. At home they knew a switchman who lived in a little shanty just like this. He lowered and raised gates as trains came and went. But there were no gates here in this lonely place. [162]

But Bunny and Sue knew this person was a switchman, and as he saw them coming down the track he stared in wonder at the children.

"Well, what are you two little ones doing here?" asked the jolly switchman as he greeted Bunny and Sue. His smile was jolly, his voice was jolly, and he seemed quite a jolly person all over. "Where did you come from?" he asked.

"Off that train," answered Bunny.

"What? That freight train?" asked the switchman, who was also the water-tender. He had charge of the pump that filled the tank alongside of the track.

"Yes, we were on that freight train," Bunny answered, "and we jumped off when it stopped."

"Well, of all things!" cried the jolly switchman. "And was the cat with you, too?" he wanted to know. [163]

"Yes," answered Sue. "This was Nutty's cat."

"What, Nutty, the tramp?" cried the switchman. "Did he have you two tots?"

Bunny shook his head.

"Nutty was very good to us," answered the little boy. "He was in the car when we crawled in to get the pussy, but we didn't know it. Then the train started up and we couldn't get off. Nutty jumped off a while ago, 'cause he was afraid he'd be arrested. But we couldn't jump off until just now."

"My! My! That's quite a story!" cried the jolly switchman. "You had better come home with me, and my wife will give you something to eat. You two children must be lost! Come, I'll take you to my wife."

"Does she live there?" asked Sue, pointing to the shanty.

The jolly switchman burst into a loud laugh. [164]

CHAPTER XVII

A WORRIED MOTHER

While Bunny Brown and his sister Sue were traveling in the freight car with the pussy and with Nutty, the tramp, Mrs. Brown was left alone on the station platform, where she had sat down to rest after lunch and to wait for her husband. Mr. Brown had some business to attend to uptown, and he had to see not one man, as he thought at first, but several.

Mrs. Brown watched Bunny and Sue walk down the street alongside of the freight tracks, but she did not see the children cross to look into the open car.

Then Mrs. Brown went to sleep, or, if she did not exactly go to sleep, she closed her eyes, so she saw nothing of what went on.

Mrs. Brown was suddenly awakened from her mid-day doze on the railroad station bench by hearing a loud banging noise. The noise was caused when the engine backed down the track, [165]

bumped into the train of freight cars and was coupled to them. Then the engine started off, pulling the cars with it.

"My, I thought that was a clap of thunder!" said Mrs. Brown, sitting up and rubbing her eyes. "I'm glad it isn't," she went on, as she saw the warm, southern sun shining.

"Where did Bunny and Sue go?" she asked herself, speaking aloud, as she arose from the bench. Then she heard some voices of children on the other side of the station, and, thinking her two might be there, she walked around to the farther platform.

But there were only some colored boys playing with their marbles and tops.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, "I hope those two haven't wandered away. I hope they haven't gone toward the town, thinking they can find their father. I must look for them."

She went back to the place where she had been sitting on the bench and looked down the street where she had last seen Bunny and Sue. But the children were not there. And the freight train was almost out of sight now down the track. [166]

"Perhaps they are in talking to the station agent," thought Mother Brown. "Surely they wouldn't wander away without telling me."

But as this was between the time for trains the office of the station agent was closed. He had gone home and would not be back until it was time for the arrival of the train Mr. Brown intended taking, to go on to Orange Beach.

The door of the office was locked and the glass ticket window was closed. Inside the office could be heard the clicking of the telegraph sounders, and this, with the voices of the colored boys playing with their tops, were the only noises to be heard.

"Where can Bunny and Sue have gone?" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, getting more and more worried. "They must have wandered off. If there had been an accident on the track, I'd see something of it." She was glad there was no sign of a train having hurt any little boy or girl. In fact, except for the freight train having pulled away, there had been no other trains moving around the station since the Browns had arrived. [167]

"I'll go ask those colored boys if they have seen Bunny and Sue," said Mrs. Brown to herself.

She walked around the corner of the station, and was just in time to see one little colored boy trip another, sending him sprawling in the dust.

"Heah, yo' li'l sinnah!" cried the boy who had sent the other sprawling. "What fo' yo' tuck mah top!"

"Ah didn't tek yo' top, Sam!" answered the other, as he arose from the dust.

"Yes, yo' did!" declared the other. "Now yo' go on 'way from heah or Ah'll cuff yo' ears!"

In answer the other colored boy, the one who had been tripped, rushed at his enemy and struck him with clenched fist. In an instant the other hit back, and soon there was a lively fight. The colored boys fell down and rolled over and over in the dust.

"Here! Here! You boys mustn't fight!" cried Mrs. Brown, hastening toward them and trying to pull off the one on top, who was pounding the bottom lad with his fists. "Stop it!" [168]

"You best let 'em alone, lady," said an older colored boy, with a grin. "Dem two am always fightin', but dey don't do no harm nohow!"

"But it isn't nice to fight," said the mother of Bunny and Sue. "Get up, please, I want to ask you boys something."

Hearing this, and seeing that Mrs. Brown was well dressed and was a "white lady of quality" carrying a pocketbook out of which pennies might be handed, the fighting boys stopped. The top one got off the other, and both stood up, dusting off their ragged clothes. Neither seemed much hurt, and both were broadly grinning.

"You mustn't fight!" declared Mrs. Brown.

"Oh, we was only in fun, lady," laughed the one who had first tripped the other.

"Have you seen a little boy and girl?" went on Mrs. Brown. [169]

"White chilluns?" asked one of the black boys.

"Co'se she done mean white chilluns!" exclaimed another. "I done seen 'em get offen de train!"

"Have you seen them since?" asked Mrs. Brown. "We had lunch, and my husband went uptown. I sat down on the bench, and Bunny and Sue walked down the street. I haven't seen them since, and they aren't in sight. Do you know where they are?"

None of the colored boys did, it appeared, though hearing that two white children were missing there were soon eager volunteers to search for them.

Out and around the station scattered the colored boys, Mrs. Brown having said she would give fifty cents to the one first bringing news of Bunny and Sue.

"Oh, golly! I'se gwine to earn dat money, suah!" cried one lad.

But though the boys looked up and down the different streets, and though some even went into near-by stores, not a trace of Bunny or Sue could they find. And for a good reason—because Bunny and Sue were traveling far away in the freight car with Nutty, the tramp. [170]

Mrs. Brown became more and more worried as nearly an hour passed and Bunny and Sue were not found. The station agent came back, for it was nearly time for the other train to arrive. But he could tell nothing of the missing children.

"I must find my husband!" Mrs. Brown exclaimed, and she was just starting uptown when Mr. Brown came riding to the station in an automobile. One of the business men, on whom he had called, had brought him back in the car.

"Oh, Walter," cried Mrs. Brown, "Bunny and Sue are lost! I can't find them anywhere! What shall we do?" [171]

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRICK DOG

We left Bunny and Sue Brown standing beside the track with the jolly switchman, who laughed at the little girl's question as to whether his wife lived in the small brown shanty.

"My wife live in that little shanty?" he cried, his face all wrinkled with smiles like a last year's apple. "Why, that shack is hardly big enough for me, and when my dog comes to see me he has to stick his tail outside if he wants to wag it!"

"Oh, have you a dog?" cried Bunny.

"That I have, and a fine dog he is, too. He's at home with my wife now, in the cottage. But I'll soon take you there. My, my! but you're little children to have come alone in a freight car."

"We weren't alone," explained Sue. "Nutty was with us." [172]

"Oh, yes, I know that queer tramp," said the water-tank switchman with another laugh. "There's no harm in him, though some of the trainmen put him off when they find him stealing a ride."

"This is his cat," went on Sue, showing the pussy. "Will your dog bite it?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" exclaimed the switchman. "My dog likes cats. In fact, my wife has a cat and I have a dog, and the two animals get along very nicely together. But come along—let's see—what shall I call you?" he asked.

"I'm Bunny and this is my sister Sue," answered the little boy. "Our last name is Brown."

"Hum! That's funny!" laughed the jolly switchman. "My last name is Black, though I'm a white man."

"What's your dog's name?" asked Bunny, as he and his sister trudged along with the switchman, one on either side of him, Sue carrying Nutty's pussy cat.

"His name is Bruno," was the answer. "He's a good dog and likes children. But I'm thinking your mother and father will be worried about you. Night's coming on. They can hardly get here after you before to-morrow, and I don't believe they know where to look for you. Did they see you get into the freight car and come away?" [173]

"No," said Bunny. "Daddy wasn't there and mother was asleep."

"If I knew where your mother was I could go into town and send her a telegram, I suppose," went on the switchman. "What station was it you got off at?"

But Bunny and Sue had either forgotten or they had never heard it. It was all the same as far as telling the switchman was concerned. He did not know how to reach Mrs. Brown and she did not know where to come to get Bunny and Sue.

"I guess you'll have to stay with me all night," said the railroad man. "Lucky I've got a spare bed. My wife will be glad to see you, for she doesn't see much white company. There's lots of colored folks in the village, though."

"Do you live in a village?" asked Bunny. [174]

"Yes, it's a little town about half a mile away over the hill. I leave there every morning and come to the shanty by the water tank to stay until dark. Then I go home as I'm doing now. Sometimes my dog comes to keep me company, but he didn't come to-day."

"I hope he doesn't bother my kittie," said Sue. She was beginning to think of Nutty's cat as hers now.

"Oh, Bruno loves cats!" declared the switchman.

He led the children up a hill and away from the railroad. Looking down the road from the top of the hill Bunny and Sue could see through the gathering twilight a small village.

"Here's my house," said the switchman a little later, as he turned into a path that led through a yard and up to a white cottage. A dog ran out, barking.

"Down, Bruno! Down!" cried the switchman, who had said his name was Black. "These are friends, and you must be good to them and to the pussy."

Bruno sniffed around the legs of Bunny and Sue, and he sniffed toward the cat, though he could not put his nose on her because Sue held her new pet high in her arms. Then Bruno wagged his tail to show that he would be friends. [175]

"Hello, Mrs. Black!" called the switchman in a jolly voice to his wife, who just then came to the side door to look out. "I've brought you company for supper!"

"Company!" cried Mrs. Black, in surprise.

"Yes, two children and a cat!" laughed her husband. "Guess we'll have to put 'em up over night!"

Quickly he told of the ride of Bunny and Sue in the freight car, and Mrs. Black came out, followed by a large maltese cat, and soon made the Brown children welcome.

"Of course they shall have supper and stay all night," she said in kind tones which matched the jolly ones of her husband. "And I'll give your pussy some milk, Sue," she added.

"Thank you," replied Sue. "And do you think my mother will be here after supper?" she asked.

Mrs. Black did not answer the little girl's question, but talked about the cat. She did not want to tell Sue that it would be almost impossible for Mrs. Brown to get there before the next day. [176]

The freight car had not been a very clean place, and if you can get dirty and grimy traveling in a regular passenger coach, you can imagine how much more grimy Bunny and Sue got on their trip.

"Come in and wash," went on Mrs. Black, while her husband tossed sticks for Bruno to race after and bring back to him. It was almost too dark for the children to see the sticks as they were thrown, but the dog seemed to know where to find them.

Bunny and Sue washed in a basin, there being no bathroom in the humble cottage of the switchman. As for Mr. Black, his hands and face got so dirty from working around the pumping engine that he had to scrub himself out back of the woodshed in a tin basin.

"I like to splash a lot of water when I wash," he said. "And I need lots of room. I can't wash in the house."

"I should say not!" laughed his wife, as she got some clean towels for Bunny and Sue. "You'd spoil all the wall paper!" [177]

Mr. Black looked a very different person when his face and hands were clean and his hair nicely combed. Bunny and Sue also felt better after getting off some of the grime of their trip. A little later they all sat down to the supper table.

There was plenty to eat, and enough left over for Bruno, the dog, and for Waffles, the big cat. Toddle also had supper.

"We call our cat Waffles because he is so fond of waffles," explained Mrs. Black.

"What are waffles?" asked Bunny.

"Oh, they're a sort of pancake, but baked on an iron that makes them full of little squares," said the switchman's wife. "I'll make you some to-morrow."

"Maybe my pussy will like waffles," suggested Sue.

"Maybe," answered the switchman's wife. "Now, any time you children want to go to bed let me know. You must be tired and sleepy."

Bunny and Sue, however, were wide enough awake for the present. It was new and strange, this stopping at the cottage of a switchman whom they had never before seen. But they were beginning to feel at home. Of course they were lonesome for their father and mother, and Bunny was afraid Sue would cry in the night. But for the time being the two children were so interested in being at a new place that they did not worry much. Not half as much as Mr. and Mrs. Brown, back at the station, worried about the children. [178]

"Bruno," suddenly called Mr. Black, "go see if my paper has come!"

With a short bark, the dog, having finished eating, ran out of the room. In a few minutes he came walking back on his hind feet with the folded evening paper in his mouth.

"Oh, look!" cried Bunny.

"He's a trick dog, isn't he?" squealed Sue.

"Well, yes, I have taught him a few tricks," the switchman answered. "I'll show you what else he can do. Bruno, play soldier!" he called.

Mr. Black got a broom from a corner, and as Bruno stood upright on his hind legs the switchman put the broom over the dog's shoulder and under one paw. [179]



**BRUNO MARCHED
AROUND THE ROOM.**

Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue in the Sunny South. Page 179

"March!" cried Mr. Black, and while he hummed a tune Bruno marched around the room, with the broom for a gun.

"Oh, that's a dandy trick!" cried Bunny. "Can he do any more?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Black. "He'll go for the milk. Here's the bucket. I'll put the money in it and he'll carry it down the street to the house where we get our milk and bring back the full bucket. Come, Bruno!" he called. "Get the milk!"

With a bark, the trick dog dropped the broom and sprang to do this new trick. [180]

CHAPTER XIX

A HAPPY REUNION

Mr. Black took the pail his wife gave him, and in the bottom, wrapped in a piece of clean paper, he put some money. Then the cover was put on the pail and the handle was slipped into Bruno's mouth.

"Milk, Bruno!" called the switchman again, and he opened the door and out ran the dog.

"Will he go for it all alone?" asked Bunny.

"Yes," answered the switchman. "And he'll bring it back without spilling a drop—that is, unless some other dog chases him or unless some bad boys throw stones at him and make him run. Just wait a few minutes and you'll see Bruno coming back with the milk."

"Take the children out on the porch where it's cooler," said Mrs. Black. "I'll clear away the supper things." [181]

"Can I help?" asked Sue, for she was used to helping her mother at home.

"Oh, no, thank you, dear," Mrs. Black answered. "You go out and see Bruno do his tricks. He is quite a clever dog."

Bunny and Sue certainly thought so when a little later, as they sat on the porch with Mr. Black, they saw the dog come along with the handle of the milk pail in his mouth.

"He walks carefully so he won't spill it, doesn't he?" asked Sue.

"Yes, he is a very good dog," the switchman answered. "I don't remember of his spilling the milk more than once or twice. He did it the first time when he was just learning, and again it happened when another dog chased him when Bruno was almost home with the bucket."

"Do the people that sell milk know Bruno is going to come for it?" Sue asked, as Mrs. Black came out of the kitchen and took the pail from Bruno, who stood carefully holding it. He had not spilled a drop.

"Yes, we get our milk at Mr. Hasting's place," answered the switchman. "He keeps a cow, and they watch for Bruno every night." [182]

"Can he do any more tricks?" asked Bunny. He and his sister were so interested in the dog that they forgot about being far from their daddy and mother.

"Yes, he can dance when I play the mouth organ," answered Mr. Black.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sue. "We heard the darkies on the cotton plantation play the mouth organ and banjo and we saw 'em dance!" she went on.

"Well, I don't claim that my dog can dance as well as a plantation ducky," laughed the switchman. "But Bruno does pretty well. I'll get my mouth organ."

Bruno barked and leaped about when he saw his master come out with the mouth organ, and no sooner had the first few notes been blown than the dog, without being told, stood up on his hind legs and pranced around. He almost kept time to the music, and for a dog, he danced very well.

"Oh, I wish we had a dog like that!" sighed Bunny, when the dancing animal, wagging his tail, came to Mr. Black to be petted after the switchman stopped playing the mouth organ. [183]

"Maybe I can teach Nutty's cat to dance," Sue said.

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Black. "It is very hard to teach cats to do tricks. I've tried more than once, but I never had any luck. But Bruno is one of the smartest dogs I ever saw."

The children thought so, too, and after Bruno had done a few more tricks, such as turning somersaults, and lying down and rolling over, Mrs. Black came to say she thought it time for Bunny and Sue to go to bed.

"I only have one spare room," said the switchman's wife. "That has a large bed in it big enough for both of you. Don't you want to go to sleep now?"

Bunny looked at Sue and Sue whispered something to her brother.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Black, seeing that something was "in the wind," as she remarked afterward.

"Sue says we can't go to bed without saying our prayers," replied Bunny, "and mother isn't here—and—"

He faltered a moment, and it sounded as if he might be going to cry. There was a trace of tears, too, in Sue's eyes, and Mrs. Black, guessing that the children were beginning to feel lonesome and homesick, laughed and said: [184]

"Bless your hearts! I can hear you say your prayers as well as your mother could. I used to have children of my own, but they are grown up now. When they were your size I heard them say their prayers every night. And I've got some night dresses for you, too!"

"You have?" exclaimed Bunny. He wondered where Mrs. Black could get those, when she had no small children of her own.

"I have," said Mrs. Black. "While you were on the porch, watching Bruno do tricks, I went next door and borrowed two clean night dresses for you. They have five children at Mr. Sweeney's."

"Then if we can say our prayers and have night gowns, let's go to bed," proposed Sue. "Mother will come and get us in the morning," she went on.

"Yes, mother will come to-morrow," said Mrs. Black gently.

Soon Bunny and Sue were falling asleep in the big, clean bed, and they did not have to fall very far to get to Slumberland, either, for they were so tired they could hardly hold their eyes open to get undressed. [185]

"I wonder if their mother will come in the morning?" asked Mrs. Black of her husband, as she came out of the spare bedroom and softly closed the door.

"Well, if she doesn't I have thought of a way to get word to her and the father, too," the switchman said.

"How?" asked his wife.

"In the morning I'll have Mr. Sweeney telephone to the ticket agent at the railroad station here. The agent can tell the main office."

"Oh, yes," agreed Mrs. Black. "And then word can be telegraphed all up and down the line, and whatever station it was these children got into the freight car, there Mrs. Brown will be waiting and she'll get the word."

"That's it," Mr. Black said.

But before he could put his kind plan into operation Mr. and Mrs. Brown had already started a movement of their own looking to the finding of the lost children.

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Mr. Brown was very much surprised and not a little frightened when he met his wife on the station platform, where they had alighted to change cars, and was told that Bunny and Sue were missing.

"Where did you last see them?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Down by the line of freight cars," Mrs. Brown answered. And then she thought of something that she had not thought of before. "Why," she exclaimed, "the freight cars are gone! I remember now that the noise the engine made when it coupled on woke me from my doze. Oh, do you think Bunny and Sue are on the freight train?"

"I'm beginning to think so," answered Mr. Brown. "You say the colored boys couldn't find them around here, there has been no accident and neither Bunny nor Sue came up to the village after me. They must be in one of the freight cars and are being hauled away."

"But how could they get into one of those high cars?" asked his wife.

"Oh, Bunny can do almost anything, and Sue isn't far behind him. Probably he found a box to stand on."

[187]

"Suppose we take a look," suggested Mr. Parker, the gentleman who had brought Mr. Brown to the station in the automobile. The three of them walked down the tracks where the freight cars had stood before being hauled away.

"There's a box!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, pointing to one near the track. "It's just about high enough for a person to get from it into an open boxcar."

"And here are the marks of their feet!" cried Mrs. Brown, pointing to the very footprints of Bunny Brown and his sister Sue, made by the children in the soft dirt between the tracks. "Oh, they are in that train! How shall we get them?" she cried.

"Well, now that we know this much, it will be an easy matter to telegraph on ahead and have the train searched," said Mr. Parker. "I'll go and see the train dispatcher here."

It was now getting late, and soon the train arrived on which the Brown family should have made the remainder of their trip to Florida. But of course daddy and mother would not travel on until they had found Bunny and Sue. So they let the train go, and went to the ticket office to find the name of the first station where the freight train might stop, in order that a telegram could be sent to have it searched.

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It was quite dark when the telegram had been sent, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown were invited to stay at the home of Mr. Parker for supper, and to remain there all night, if necessary.

There were some hours of anxious waiting, and at last a telegram came back to Mr. Brown saying that the train crew of the freight had looked into every empty car, but the children had not been found. In one car, however, were some empty nut boxes and pieces of candles.

"That's the car they were in!" declared Mr. Parker.

"But where are they now?" asked the distracted mother. "Oh, where are Bunny and Sue?"

[189]

"They must have got out when the train stopped," said Daddy Brown.

"Then the thing to do," went on Mr. Parker, "is to find out the names of all the stations and water tanks where stops, were made, and telegraph there."

So after some work the railroad people found out the different regular stops the freight train had made, but at none of these places were there any traces of Bunny or Sue.

"Then a water tank stop is our only hope," Mr. Parker said. "Some of the tanks are in lonely places, and if the children got out there they would be taken in charge by the pumpman or switchman. He would have no way of telegraphing back. We shall have to wait until morning."

You can imagine that Mrs. Brown did not sleep much that night. She did not sleep as well as did Bunny and Sue. But in the morning a telegram, sent by Mr. Black through Mr. Sweeney, was received, telling just where the missing children were.

"They're found!" cried Daddy Brown, as he came upstairs to his wife's room, waving the telegram over his head. "They're all right!"

[190]

And a little later he and his wife were on the first train going to the village where Bunny and Sue had been so kindly cared for all night.

"Oh, Momsie!" cried Sue, as she rushed into the dear arms. "Oh, Momsie!"

"Well, Bunny boy, you had quite an adventure!" said his father, as he clasped the little chap close to him.

[191]

CHAPTER XX

AT ORANGE BEACH

The happy reunion had taken place on the platform of the little railroad station just outside the village where Mr. Black, the switchman, lived. As soon as telegrams had been sent and received, Mr. Black took Bunny and Sue to the station to wait for the arrival of the train carrying their father and mother to them.

Coming in a passenger car, and not on a freight train in which the children had ridden, Mr. and Mrs. Brown soon arrived at the place. And then you can imagine how happy every one was.

"But whatever possessed you two children to climb into a freight car and let yourselves be carried away?" asked Mrs. Brown, as she hugged Bunny, while Mr. Brown took Sue in his arms. [192]

"We wanted to get the kitten, Mother," Sue explained. "And he's at Mrs. Black's now, and please can't we take him with us to Florida?"

"It's Nutty's cat," objected Bunny.

"But he ran away and left him," went on Sue. "Please, Mother, can't we take Toddle with us?"

"Who is Nutty?" asked Mr. Brown.

Then, by turns, the children told the whole story, which included how they had met the queer old tramp in the boxcar.

"And you ought to see Bruno do tricks!" cried Bunny, when it came his turn to tell something.

"Who is Bruno, another tramp?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"He's a dog!" exclaimed Bunny. "And you ought to see him dance!"

"You children seem to have had a better time than your mother or I had," said Mr. Brown, after he had thanked the kind switchman for the care he and his wife had given Bunny and Sue. "We were certainly worried about you." [193]

Mr. and Mrs. Brown paid a little visit to Mrs. Black to thank her, and then it was time for the travelers to resume their journey to Orange Beach, where they expected to spend some time with Mr. Halliday, with whom Daddy Brown had business to talk over.

"Can't we take Toddle?" begged Sue again, as she held Nutty's little cat in her arms.

"No, my dear," answered her mother. "We could not take him to Florida with us."

"I'll keep him here with my dog and cat," offered Mrs. Black.

"And when I see Nutty, as I often do," added the switchman, "I'll tell him where he can get his cat again."

"Well, I s'pose he will want Toddle," sighed Sue. So the pussy was left behind.

Once more Bunny Brown and his sister Sue were on the train traveling. This time they were in a sleeping car, in which, at night, beds were made from the seats.

"This is better than riding in a freight car, isn't it?" asked Sue's mother.

"Yes," answered the little girl, turning away from the window, out of which she was looking at the scenery. "But we had a pretty good time with Nutty; didn't we, Bunny?" [194]

"Yes, we did," answered the little boy. "And the nuts were good."

There was still for the party an all night ride before the Brown family would arrive at Orange Beach, which was in the southwestern part of Florida.

"Do the orange trees grow right near the ocean, Mother?" asked Bunny, when they had been talking for some time about the place to which they were going.

"Not exactly," his father answered. "I believe oranges do not grow so well too close to salt water. At any rate Mr. Halliday's orange grove is inland a few miles. It is on the banks of a river, but the river flows into the ocean, or rather, into the Gulf of Mexico, which is part of the ocean."

"Can we go swimming?" Sue wanted to know.

"You can't if there's any alligators there," Bunny said. "Anyhow, you can't go in the water till I catch all the alligators." [195]

"If there's alligators I'm not going in," declared Sue.

"Oh, I don't believe there will be any," Mrs. Brown said, with a laugh.

And so with talk and laughter over what they might find at Orange Beach, the time passed until it was time to go to bed.

The colored porter made up the clean, white beds, and Bunny and Sue were glad enough to get

in theirs when the time came. They had slept pretty well at Mrs. Black's home, but they were still tired from their bumping, jolting journey in the rough freight car.

So soundly did Bunny and Sue sleep that even when there was a little accident they did not awaken. During the night the train on which they rode had a little collision with an empty freight car which was standing on a side track. The freight car was smashed, but hardly any damage was done to the passenger train, except that the passengers were awakened by being jolted. That is, all but Bunny and Sue. They slept through it.

"Is any one hurt?" asked Mr. Brown, as soon as quiet was restored and it was found that the express train could go on. [196]

"A couple of tramps who were sleeping in the empty freight car were hurt," the conductor said. "We've sent them to the hospital."

"Oh! Tramps!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, who heard the talk. "I hope one of them wasn't Nutty, who was so kind to the children, even though he did jump off and leave them alone. I hope Nutty wasn't hurt!"

"Nutty could hardly have got so far south as this since he left the children," Mr. Brown said. "I don't believe he was one of the tramps hurt in this collision."

Next morning, when Bunny and Sue awakened, they were told of the collision in the night, but nothing was said to them of the two tramps who were hurt for fear they might think one was Nutty. But neither was.

There was enough else to take the attention of the little boy and girl, for they were now in the real South, and they began to notice palm trees for the first time.

"They look just like pictures of cocoanut trees!" exclaimed Bunny, gazing from the car window. [197]

"Wouldn't Nutty be glad if he was here and could gather cocoanuts!" cried Sue. "Can we pick cocoanuts, Daddy?"

"I hardly think so, where we are going," Mr. Brown answered. "I think oranges will be enough for you to pick for a while."

"That and catching alligators," added Bunny, who never seemed to stop thinking of these scaly creatures, which Sue did not like at all.

On and on went the train, and the children were just about getting tired of so much travel when they saw their father and mother beginning to gather up the hand baggage.

"Are we there?" asked Bunny excitedly.

"Almost," his father answered.

A little later a trainman called:

"Orange Beach! Orange Beach!"

"Hurray! We're here!" cried Bunny.

"And I'm going to pick orange blossoms!" echoed Sue. [198]

CHAPTER XXI

GOLDEN APPLES

Orange Beach, where Mr. Halliday owned many fruit groves, was the name of a small village. It was almost as small a town as the one in which Mr. Black, the switchman, lived. But Bunny and Sue liked small places. They had seen enough of cities, having passed through many on their railroad journey.

Alighting from the train, the Brown family found Mr. Halliday waiting for them in his motor car, Daddy Brown having telegraphed to tell the time of their arrival.

"Well, you got here at last, I see!" the orange grower exclaimed, as he came up to welcome his guests.

"If Bunny and Sue could have had their way perhaps we wouldn't have come," said Mrs. Brown, with a smile. [199]

"Why not?" asked Mr. Halliday, with a smile.

"Oh, they went for a ride on a freight train," laughed their mother, and then she told of the adventure.

"I guess they have had enough nuts for a time," the fruit grower said, at the end of the little story. "I'll try them on oranges."

"May I pick some for myself?" Sue asked eagerly.

"All you want!" was the answer. "We have a big crop this year."

"And will you please show me where to catch alligators?" asked Bunny Brown.

"Oh ho! So that's what you came here for, is it?" exclaimed Mr. Halliday, with a wink at Mr. Brown. "Well, I'm sorry to say we are all out of alligators!"

"Aren't there any?" inquired Bunny, in disappointed tones.

"Not right around here," went on the orange grower. "But there are some farther down Squaw River. I'll take you down some day and show them to you."

"Hurray!" cried Bunny Brown.

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"My grove and house are a few miles from here," the orange grower said. "You'll soon be there, and I hope you'll have lots of fun."

Bunny Brown and his sister Sue felt sure that they would. They liked the sunny South very much, as a change from the cold northland where they had been coasting a few days before.

Everything was lovely and green in Florida now, though it was the middle of what is called winter in the North. Trees and bushes glowed in soft green tints, and had been washed clean in a recent rain. As the automobile bearing the Brown family and their host along a pleasant road chugged on and on, Sue suddenly exclaimed:

"What's that nice smell?"

"I hear it, too—I mean I smell it!" said Bunny.

"Those are orange blossoms you smell," said Mr. Halliday. "In some of my groves you will find both blossoms and fruit. We get so used to the sweet smell that we don't notice it, but I suppose a stranger, coming in from another place, finds it very nice."

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"I just love it!" exclaimed Sue, taking long deep breaths.

"So do I!" added Bunny, sniffing hard.

They had left the small village behind some time before, and were now on a pleasant country road, lined with trees on either side. The road twisted and turned, and in about an hour, after making a sudden turn in the highway, Mr. Halliday called out:

"There's my place!"

Bunny and Sue looked and saw a white house, surrounded by a few barns and other outbuildings set in a green landscape. All about were rows of green trees, and the sweet smell of the orange blossoms was stronger than ever.

"Oh, look at the golden apples!" cried Sue, pointing to some trees quite near the road.

"Those golden apples, as you call them," said Mr. Halliday, "are yellow oranges. I'll stop and let you pick some."

It was the first time the Brown children had ever seen the wonderful fruit growing, and they were delighted when Mr. Halliday stopped the car and they were allowed to get out. Then they saw that in between the rows of trees were men picking the oranges.

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Some of the men were up on high stepladders, so they might reach the top branches of the trees. Other men stood on the ground, from which they could easily reach up to the low limbs and pull off the ripe fruit.

The men had big cloth bags slung over their shoulders or tied around their waists, and as fast as they picked the "golden apples," as Sue called them, they were dropped into the bags. When the bags were filled the men took them to empty boxes, placed here and there amid the trees, and placed the oranges into them. Other men took the boxes away as fast as they were filled, leaving more empty ones in their places.

"Do you ship the fruit right from here?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"First it has to be sorted, graded, as we call it," Mr. Halliday answered. "Then it is carefully packed and sent up North."

Bunny and Sue had been standing quietly to one side, listening to the talk of their parents and Mr. Halliday and watching the men pick the fruit. The grove owner now turned to the children and said:

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"Go ahead! Pick as many as you like. Here, these are the best and ripest," and he led them to a tree, the lower branches of which were easily within the reach of Bunny and Sue.

With delight and wonder showing on their faces, the children picked their first oranges and ate them there in the grove, while the wind brought to them the sweet smell of distant blossoms.

"Oh, how good!" murmured Sue, as she finished her fruit.

"Best I ever ate," declared Bunny.

"Try some," said Mr. Halliday to Mr. and Mrs. Brown. "You will find oranges picked ripe from a tree taste very different from those you get up North."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Mother Brown. "They are delicious."

"Guess we didn't make any mistake coming to Florida," laughed Mr. Brown, as he, too, ate not one, but two ripe oranges.

"Well, let's go on to the house," suggested Mr. Halliday, as he walked back toward the road where the automobile had been left standing. "My wife will be eager to see you, and the orange groves aren't going to run away as Nutty, the tramp, did," and the Southerner laughed at the remembrance of the story of the travels of Bunny Brown and his sister Sue. [204]

Mrs. Halliday made her guests welcome, and when she and Mrs. Brown were chatting over a cup of tea, and while Daddy Brown and Mr. Halliday were talking business, Bunny and Sue changed into some of their every-day clothes and asked if they might walk around and see things.

"Yes," their mother told them. "Only don't get into mischief."

"And keep away from the river," added their father, for the stream which went by the name of Squaw River was not far from the house.

"Can't we just stand on the bank and look for alligators?" asked Bunny.

"Yes, let them," Mr. Halliday advised. "The river is not as big nor deep as it sounds. In fact up here it is only a shallow creek, though down below it widens and deepens. And there aren't any alligators in it." [205]

"Well, anyhow, we can look," said Bunny, hoping against hope that there would be some of the scaly lizards in the water.

So, having been cautioned not to fall in, a promise the children readily gave, Bunny and Sue started off down through an orange grove near the house to go to Squaw River. They paused only a little while to watch the men picking oranges, and then hastened on. Soon they were at the edge of a slow-moving stream which flowed this way and that between banks of overhanging palm trees, some of which were festooned with Spanish moss that hung down in clusters like the ragged beard of a very old man.

It was very quiet and still beside the river. It was shady and cool, too, after the hot sun of the open places and the orange groves, and Bunny and Sue rather liked it.

Bunny picked up a stone and tossed it into the river. It fell with a splash. [206]

"What you doing?" Sue wanted to know.

"Maybe I can scare up an alligator," Bunny answered.

"Mr. Halliday said there wasn't any," Sue responded.

Bunny tossed in another stone, and hardly had it sunk beneath the surface than Sue grasped her brother's arm, and, pointing to the river, whispered:

"Look! There's an alligator!"

Something like the long, black snout, as Bunny remembered once to have seen it on an alligator in a zoological park tank, rose into view. And there was a swirl of the water as though the reptile had switched its tail.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sue. "It's an alligator! I'm going to run!" [207]

CHAPTER XXII

THE RAFT

Bunny Brown wanted to be called a brave little boy, so when he heard his sister say she was going to run because she thought he had scared up an alligator in the river by throwing stones, Bunny thought it was time to show his bravery.

"Don't be afraid!" he called to Sue, catching her by the hand before she had time to run very far. "I won't let him hurt you!"

"How are you going to stop him?" Sue asked.

"I—I'll bang him on the nose with a stick," Bunny said, and he let go of Sue's hand as he turned around to search for the proper kind of club with which to beat an alligator.

As he did this Sue looked once more toward the river. Then she gave a cry of delight. [208]

"Oh, Bunny!" she exclaimed, "it isn't an alligator at all!"

"What is it?"

"It's just an old black log floating down," Sue answered. And that is what it was. Either the stones Bunny had thrown or some swirl of the current had loosed from the mud where it was held on the bottom of Squaw River the long black log which was shaped like the snout of an alligator. Floating half in and half out of the muddy water as it did, the log looked exactly like one of the big, scaly reptiles.

"This is no good!" declared Bunny, who was rather disappointed at not having a chance to do some hunting. "I'd like to see a real, live alligator."

"Well, I wouldn't—not until mother and daddy are with me," remarked Sue. She was no longer afraid and took turns with her brother throwing stones at the floating log.

"Let's go down a little farther where the river is wider, and maybe we'll see some alligators," suggested Bunny.

"All right," agreed Sue. "But I'm going to run if I see any."

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She need not have been worried, however, for not an alligator did they see, though Bunny threw many stones into the muddy water. Nor did they see another log shaped so nearly like one of the reptiles.

But the children had a good time wandering around among the palm trees and smelling the orange blossoms. They could hardly believe that about a week before they were wearing mittens and playing in the snow.

"We'd better go back now," Sue said, after a while. "Mother will be looking for us."

"Let's go just a little farther," proposed Bunny. "I'd like to see a little alligator. You wouldn't be afraid of a baby 'gator, would you, Sue?"

"Not if it was a little baby one, I don't guess I would," she answered.

So she followed Bunny down the bank of the slow-flowing river, where it widened out and grew deeper. And in a place where the bank curved in, making a still pool, or "eddy," as it is called, Bunny saw something which was the cause of quite an adventure which came to him and Sue a few days later.

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Bunny caught sight of some boards and logs piled together on shore, and no sooner had he seen them than he exclaimed:

"Oh, Sue! I know what we can do."

"What?" she asked.

"We can make a raft and go sailing down the river. Here's a lot of boards and logs, and I can easy make a raft. Bunker Blue showed me how, and you and I have been in daddy's boats lots of times. Let's make a raft!"

"Not now," replied Sue, holding back as Bunny ran forward. "It's time we went back. Mother told us not to stay too long."

"Well, I'll just look at the boards and see if I could make a raft of 'em, and then I'll go back with you," Bunny said.

On this promise Sue waited, and after looking at the tangled pile of boards, which seemed to have been left on shore by a flood of high water, the little fellow went back to where he had left his sister.

"It'll make a dandy raft!" Bunny reported. "To-morrow we'll make it and go sailing down the river."

However, this was not to be, for the next day Mr. and Mrs. Brown were taken by Mr. Halliday on an excursion to a distant orange grove, and Bunny and Sue went along.

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"We'll make the raft to-morrow," Bunny said.

But for one reason or another this fun had to be put off, and it was not until they had been at Orange Beach nearly a week that Bunny got the chance he wanted.

During this time the Brown family had very much enjoyed their stay in Florida. The weather was lovely, and there was much that was new to visit. While there was not the variety in an orange grove that there was on the cotton and peanut plantation, still there was much work to be done.

The children saw how the oranges, when brought in from the trees, were sorted over, the best being packed for one class of trade, and those that were not so good for another. The golden yellow fruit was wrapped in tissue paper and then the thin wooden crates were packed full, to be shipped North.

Sometimes Bunny and Sue were allowed to ride to the railroad freight depot on the load of oranges, and this trip they liked very much.

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One night, just before a strange adventure that happened to Bunny and Sue, the children were in the sitting room with their parents and Mr. and Mrs. Halliday. It was almost bedtime for Bunny and Sue.

"Did you ever hear anything more about that oil stock Bunny found?" asked Mrs. Brown of her husband.

"No, not a word," he answered. "The oil company wrote me that they had no notice from any one of the loss of a certificate. They advised me to hold it until some one claimed it."

"If you ever get any money—or a reward for it—Bunny must have the cash put in a bank for him, to keep until he grows up," said Mother Brown.

"Yes," agreed Daddy. "And I think Bunny ought to share the reward with Sue. She was with him when the certificate was found."

"Uncle Tad ought to have some, too!" exclaimed Bunny, rousing up when he heard this talk. "He gave us the ride in the sleigh."

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"Yes, I think Uncle Tad ought to have his share of the reward—if we ever get any," agreed Mr. Brown. "And if some one doesn't soon claim the oil stock I shall sell it and put the money in the bank."

"What's all this—about oil stock?" asked Mr. Halliday.

Then Daddy Brown told how the valuable green and gold paper had been thrown out of the Pullman car by the porter in his pan filled with dust.

After breakfast the next morning Bunny called Sue out on the side porch and showed his sister a cloth bag partly filled with pieces of bread, crackers and some chunks of dried cake.

"This is our lunch," Bunny said to Sue.

"What lunch?" asked the little girl.

"To take on the raft," Bunny went on. "I found the things in the pantry. They're stale, so I guess Mrs. Halliday won't mind if we take 'em. And I picked up this little orange bag. You carry that and I'll get the sharp stick."

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"What sharp stick?" asked Sue, as she accepted the bag of dried bread and cake Bunny held out.

"The sharp stick I'm going to jab at alligators if any chase us," he answered.

Sue dropped the bag of "lunch."

"No, sir!" she exclaimed. "I'm not going on that raft with you if you're going to hunt alligators, so there, Bunny Brown!"

"All right, then I won't hunt any," agreed Bunny, who did not want to go voyaging alone. "But if any come after us you'll want me to jab 'em with a sharp stick and drive 'em away, won't you, Sue?"

"Yes—yes, I guess I will," she answered. "But you mustn't hunt 'em on purpose."

This Bunny promised not to do, and then he went on to tell Sue what his plans were.

"Daddy is going riding with Mr. Halliday," said the little fellow, "and I heard mother say she and Mrs. Halliday were going to make orange shortcake to-day, so they won't want us around. We can go down and make the raft and have a sail. Won't that be fun?"

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"It will be if the alligators don't come," agreed Sue.

"I don't b'lieve any will come," Bunny answered, though in his heart he hoped they would, so he could scare them away with the sharp stick.

So Sue took up the bag of lunch and Bunny ran and got the sharp stick where he had hidden it under the porch. Bunny also had a hammer and some nails he had taken from the shop where Mr. Halliday's men put together the orange crates.

"We'll make a big raft and sail away off," Bunny said, as he and Sue, telling their mother nothing about their plans, went down to the river. They found the pile of boards and small logs in the same place they had first seen them, and Bunny, with Sue's help, began to make a raft.

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CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE ISLAND

The two children had been around boats enough to know more about water craft than most boys and girls of their age. Bunny's father, owning a boat and fish dock, where Sue and her

brother often played, had taught the youngsters something about how boats are steered. A raft, as Bunny knew, was the simplest and safest form of a boat. He also knew that a raft was only a lot of logs and boards fastened together. On it one could float or push down a little river or across a pond.

"This is nice smooth water, isn't it?" asked Sue, as she looked out over Squaw River which, as has been said, was a sluggish stream. It hardly seemed to flow at all.

"Yes, it's nice here," Bunny said. "We won't go very fast. There aren't any waves like in the ocean or our bay." [217]

Bunny and Sue had often been out with their father, Uncle Tad, or Bunker Blue on Sandport Bay at home, and sometimes on the real ocean when it was not too rough. So Squaw River seemed very small and smooth to them.

It was harder work than Bunny had thought it would be to make the raft, but he had right at hand everything he needed, from boards and small logs to hammer and nails. The hammer and nails he had brought with him. Putting the cloth bag of lunch in a safe place on the bank, Bunny began work.

He laid some logs down on the sandy shore as close to the water as he could. On top of the logs he placed boards, and these he nailed on, so they would not float away.

On top of the first layer of boards he placed others, crossing them to and fro, as he had once seen his father and Uncle Tad making a float near the dock. The float was like a raft, only it was anchored in the bay and used for getting in and out of the fishing boats.

"How far you going to sail on the raft, Bunny?" asked Sue, as she helped her brother lay in place the boards to be nailed. Sue did none of the nailing. She tried it once, but she hit her fingers and thumb instead of the nail, and she threw the hammer aside. [218]

"Oh, we'll sail down until we get hungry, and then we'll go on an island like the pirates and eat our lunch," Bunny answered.

By "sail" he meant pushing the raft along with a pole he had brought from the orange grove.

"S'posin' there isn't any island?" asked Sue.

"Oh, I guess there is one," Bunny said, looking at the raft to see if it needed any more boards to make it strong enough. "Anyhow, if we don't find an island we can go on shore. Course an island would be more fun, but we can have a good time anyhow."

"To be sure we can!" laughed Sue. "We've had lots of fun since we've come down South, haven't we, Bunny?"

"Yes!" answered the little boy. He was too busy to talk much, for he was thinking of the best plan to get his raft into the water. For the boards and logs, now nailed together, must be shoved from the shore into the river, else there could be no wonderful voyage down-stream to the "pirate island." [219]

Bunny had often seen his father move heavy boards from the shore into the waters of the bay by means of rollers. Rollers are round pieces of wood, like the rolling pin in mother's kitchen. Rollers placed under a boat make it easy to launch into the water. If you have ever seen men moving a house from one street to another you may have noticed that they used rollers. Or they may have slid the house along on big beams which were made slippery with grease or soap.

"I'll roll my raft into the water," said Bunny.

"And I'll help!" offered Sue, for she knew what rolling a boat into the water meant—she had often seen her father do it.

Getting the raft into Squaw River was not quite as hard as putting the craft together. By using a long pole Bunny managed to raise up one edge of his nailed-together boards and logs, and under it Sue slipped a round roller, which was a short piece of round tree trunk. Then when Bunny raised up the other side of the raft his sister slipped under it another roller. [220]

"Now she'll slide!" cried Bunny, as he had often heard his father or Bunker Blue say.

With his long pole Bunny now pried up on the rear of the raft. At first it did not move, and Bunny began to be afraid he and Sue would not, after all, have a voyage down the river.

But at last it slid a little bit, and then more and more, until finally it was rolling along quite rapidly. As the bank sloped down to the river like a little hill, Bunny hardly had to push or pry at all now, and a minute later the raft was floating in the water.

It would have floated away, but Bunny had tied a rope to one edge, and the other end of the rope he had fastened to a tree stump on shore, so the raft was "made fast," as a sailor would say. Bunny had been around his father's dock enough to know that when one puts a boat into the water one must make it fast or it will be lost.

"Isn't our raft nice, Bunny?" exclaimed Sue, as she saw it floating in the water. [221]

"Yes," Bunny agreed, "we'll have lots of fun! Wait till I get the lunch and we'll start."

"I want a pole so I can help push," said Sue.

"All right. You bring the bag of lunch and I'll get you a pole," promised Bunny.

Soon the two children were on the raft, each one thrusting with a pole on the bottom of the river, which was not very deep, and so shoving themselves along. In the middle of the raft was the bag of lunch—the dried bread, pieces of cake and a very much flattened piece of pie that Bunny had found on the pantry shelf.

"Oh, this is lots of fun!" exclaimed Sue, as they floated along.

"Yep!" agreed Bunny, shoving hard on his pole. "I'm glad we came to Florida."

It was very pleasant on this part of Squaw River, where it ran through the orange groves of Mr. Halliday. On either side were growing palms and other trees, some of which met overhead in a green arch, making it very shady. Only for this the sun would have been very warm—quite different from the sun in Bellemere, where there was now snow on the ground. [222]

"Our snow man wouldn't last very long down here, would he, Bunny?" asked Sue, as she began to feel quite warm from poling the raft.

"Nope! A snow house wouldn't either," Bunny answered. "But I like it here."

"So do I," said Sue. "There's lots of birds, too."

There were. Bunny and Sue could hear them flitting through the tree branches overhead, and could listen to their songs. Sometimes birds with brilliant feathers flashed into view, disappearing in the thick, leafy trees on either side of the river.

Bunny had made his raft rather strong and heavy, so that it floated well up out of the water. In fact, the top part was quite dry, and if the children had worn shoes and stockings they would have been perfectly safe. But Bunny knew that, sooner or later, water generally washes over the top of a raft, for one side or the other is likely to tip down. So he and Sue were barefooted. They had left their shoes and stockings on shore at the spot where they had launched the raft. It did not matter now whether the water washed over the top of their craft or not. [223]

On and on, down the river floated the two children. For a time nothing happened. It was as calm and peaceful as even Mrs. Brown could have wished. But Bunny and Sue wanted something to happen, and pretty soon Bunny said:

"Let's eat!"

"Oh, yes, let's!" agreed Sue, always willing to do what Bunny did.

"We'll make believe it's dinner time," Bunny went on, "and we'll let the raft float."

There was enough current in the river to carry the raft gently down, and Bunny and Sue were in no hurry.

Bunny had thought the time would come when he and his sister might want to sit down on their raft, and to keep them up out of the water he had put two empty orange crates on the craft. These made fine seats, and on one the lunch bag had been placed.

Laying their pushing poles down on top of the raft, in the middle, Bunny and Sue sat down on the orange crates and began to eat what they had brought with them. It did not matter that the cake and the bread were stale. To the children the food tasted as good as anything they had ever eaten at a party. [224]

As they ate and floated along, the raft swung this way and that, sometimes turning completely around, so, at times, the children were going backward down the stream. It was at one of these times that they felt a sudden bump and jar—almost like the time when the engine had hitched itself to the freight car.

"Oh!" cried Sue. "What's that?"

Bunny turned, gave one look and cried:

"Hurray! We're here!"

"Where?" Sue asked.

"On the pirate island! Come on! All ashore!" [225]

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ALLIGATORS

Bunny and Sue had, indeed, landed on an island in Squaw River. Or if they had not exactly landed as yet, they were soon going to. For their raft, floating downstream, had, as Sue expressed it, "bunked" on the shore of a patch of land in the middle of the stream, forming an

island.

As you learned in school, an island is a "body of land entirely surrounded by water." That's what the place was where Bunny and Sue had come. Water was all around the little patch of land, on which grew several trees.

"All ashore!" cried Bunny again, as he had often heard his father or Bunker Blue call when the fishing boats reached the dock. "All ashore!"

"Are we going to stay here long?" asked Sue, as she got up and brushed the crumbs of bread and cake from her lap. [226]

"Yes," Bunny answered, "we'll stay here all day and all night. We'll make believe we're regular pirates!"

"Oh, we can't stay all *night!*" objected Sue.

"Well, we'll stay all day, anyhow," Bunny said. "And we'll go home when it gets dark, and tomorrow we'll come back and stay all night."

"That'll be fun," agreed Sue. "Now we'll go on the island."

As yet the children were not off the raft. Their make-believe boat had grounded on one of the sandy stretches that marked the shore of the island, and there it stayed. Bunny took the mooring rope and made it fast to a tree stump on shore. He did not want the raft to float away as, more than once, some of his father's boats had floated off from the dock.

Then Bunny and Sue, taking the bag of lunch with them, went on shore—that is on the island. It was a pleasant place, with trees and bushes to make shade, and with birds to sing to them.

"There doesn't anybody live here, I guess," Sue said, as they walked about, looking on every side. [227]

"Nobody ever lives on an island 'cepting pirates," Bunny said; "and we're them."

"Maybe there are other pirates here," suggested Sue.

"If there are we'll fight 'em!" Bunny said.

"Oh!" exclaimed his sister, "mother wouldn't like to have us fight."

"Only make-believe," explained Bunny.

"Oh, make-believe is all right," Sue agreed.

Carrying their bag of lunch, the children wandered here and there over the island. It was larger than they at first supposed, and Bunny was glad of this. It was very still and quiet there, the ripple of the water, the wind in the trees, and the birds making the only sounds.

"I guess daddy and mother are away off, aren't they?" asked Sue, after a while.

"Miles and miles," Bunny answered. "Aren't you glad, Sue?"

"Ye—yes, I—I guess so," she answered, and her voice sounded so strange that Bunny was afraid his sister might be going to cry. This would never do! A crying pirate! Never! [228]

Bunny must think of a way so his sister would not be lonesome. That was the trouble now, he decided—she was getting lonesome because it was so still and quiet on the island, far away from the orange groves.

The little boy ran back to the raft and brought off the sharp stick he had placed there at the start of the voyage.

"What's that for?" asked Sue.

"For alligators," answered her brother. "I've got to have a sharp stick to drive the alligators away, you know."

"Oh, Bunny!" gasped Sue, moving closer to him, "are there alligators here—on our island?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I'm going to look for some."

"You're going to look for alligators?" cried Sue in surprise.

"Sure!" Bunny answered. "So they won't crawl up behind our backs and bite us when we're eating some more lunch."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sue. "Well, I'll help you look for some then, so we can drive 'em away!" [229]

That was one thing Bunny liked about Sue. After you had told her about a thing she was always ready to join in with you. And she was pretty brave after all.

"Shall I get you a sharp stick, too?" asked Bunny of his sister. "Then you can help drive the alligators away."

"No, I don't guess I want to," she answered. "I'll just help you look for 'em and help you drive

'em away."

"All right," said Bunny Brown.

So he and Sue began walking along the edge of the island, looking for alligators. They were in their bare feet, but the wet sand was smooth to walk on. Sue, however, made up her mind as soon as she saw an alligator to run back as far as she could. She did not want one to nip her bare toes, she decided. If she had had on shoes it might be different.

For a time no alligators were seen, though Bunny looked eagerly for them. I can not say that Sue looked as eagerly as did her brother. Perhaps she wished that no alligators would be found. [230]

But, all of a sudden, as they were walking along Sue grasped Bunny by the arm and exclaimed:

"Look!"

"Where?" whispered Bunny, for he was filled with excitement.

"Right over by that stone!" and Sue pointed ahead a little way and down the island shore. "Isn't that an alligator?" she asked.

Bunny looked long and carefully. Then he showed much disappointment as he answered:

"No, that isn't an alligator, Sue. It's just an old floating log, like the one we pegged stones at the other day. It isn't an alligator at all."

She was glad of it, but she did not say so.

"It looked like an alligator, anyhow," she remarked.

"Yes," agreed Bunny, as he tossed a stone near the black object, hitting it and thus making sure it was not alive. "It did look like an alligator. But we'll find some—come on."

However, this did not seem to be a very good day for alligators, and the children had reached the most distant end of the island without seeing any when suddenly Sue, who had wandered a little ahead of her brother, called out: [231]

"Look, there's another island!"

And, surely enough, there was a smaller one a short distance from the larger one on which the children had first landed.

"Come on! We'll go there!" cried Bunny. "Maybe there's alligators there!"

He hurried down to the strip of water that separated the two islands. Then he began to roll up his trousers as far above his knees as he could.

"What you going to do?" asked Sue.

"I'm going to wade over to that other island," Bunny answered.

"Maybe the water's deep," suggested his sister.

"Well, if it is I won't go," Bunny replied. "But I don't guess it is."

"And maybe there's alligators in the water," went on Sue.

Bunny paused and looked at the strip between the two islands, one large, on which they then were, the other smaller. Nothing seemed to be in the strip of water. [232]

"I guess it's all right," said Bunny Brown, as he finished rolling up his trousers.

Into the water he waded, and as Sue did not want to be left behind she followed, holding up her dress and skirt to keep them dry. She hurried over the strip of water, which was quite shallow, only coming to the knees of the children.

"Now maybe we'll find some alligators here," Bunny said hopefully, as he started along the shore of the second island, Sue following.

Again Sue hoped Bunny would not have any luck finding the scaly creatures, but she did not say so.

"How long you going to stay here, Bunny?" asked Sue, when they had walked almost around the small island. "I'm getting hungry again."

"Well, we'll go back pretty soon and eat the rest of the lunch," agreed Bunny. "But I wish—" [233]

He suddenly stopped what he was saying and looked sharply ahead. Sue looked also, and what she saw made her rush to the side of her brother, cling to his arm and cry:

"There they are! There are the alligators!"

"Yes!" exclaimed Bunny. "They're sure enough alligators!"

There could be no mistake about it this time. Crawling up out of the river to the shore of the small island were a number of the long-tailed, scaly creatures with the big snouts. And as one of the alligators crawled up he opened his mouth, showing rows of sharp teeth.

"Oh, I don't want to stay here!" cried Sue, in alarm.

Bunny Brown grasped more firmly his sharp stick.

"Don't be afraid!" he said. "I won't let the alligators hurt you!"

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CHAPTER XXV

MR. BUNN

Sue Brown thought a great deal of her brother Bunny, and she knew he was brave and good to her. But whether he could save her from the alligators she was not quite so certain.

"Oh, Bunny, Bunny! where you going?" cried Sue, as she felt her brother pull away from her.

"I'm going down there to drive those alligators away with my sharp stick!" he answered.

"Oh, Bunny, don't!" begged Sue. "There's such a lot of 'em!"

Bunny began to think this himself. As he and his sister watched, they saw more alligators crawling up out of the water to the warm sunny bank of the little island.

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"There's hundreds of 'em!" cried Sue.

More and more alligators kept coming out of the water. Some were large—fully fifteen feet long perhaps, with big, sharp claws, a long, rough tail, and such big mouths! Others of the alligators were small, but there were no babies among them.

The sun shone warm on the mud and sand shores of the little island and that is why the alligators climbed out there. Alligators spend about half their time under water, getting things to eat, but when the sun shines hot they like to bask in it. That is what the scaly creatures were now doing.

"Let's don't hurt alligators," begged Sue of her brother. "Let's go back to our own island."

Bunny looked at the big, glistening, black creatures, as they crawled over one another, sometimes giving flips with their tails and opening their mouths. And though Bunny was a brave little chap he knew it would never do for him to go anywhere near the alligators. As it was, he and his sister were some distance back from the shore, up near the center of the little island. The alligators did not seem to have noticed them.

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"All right," Bunny answered. "I won't hurt any of the alligators. We'll go home and I'll tell daddy and Mr. Halliday and they can come and hunt them."

"That'll be better," Sue said, with a sigh of relief.

For a little while longer the two children remained looking at the great water lizards. Then they started for the place where they had waded from one island to the other.

But when they reached this place, Sue keeping hold of her brother's hand all the way, they saw a new trouble.

"Oh, look!" cried Sue, pointing. "We can't get away, Bunny! The wading place is full of alligators!"

And so it was! While the children had been at the center of the little island, the alligators had crawled up out of the river, and many were now sunning themselves on the sand near the ford. One or two were even on the end of the larger island. And as Bunny and Sue watched, they saw some swimming around in the shallow water through which the children had waded a little while before.

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"We—we can't get back across!" Sue cried.

"No," agreed Bunny. "I don't b'lieve we can. Not in our bare feet."

Clearly it would have been dangerous to go in among those alligators. Even Bunny, brave as he was, would not dare to do this.

"Oh, how are we going to get home?" wailed Sue.

Bunny did not know what to answer.

"I want mother!" sobbed Sue. This time she was really crying. Bunny felt he must do something. He dropped the pointed stick he had intended to use on the alligators and, putting his arm around Sue, said:

"Don't cry! I'll holler for help and somebody will hear us and come and get us."

"Will they?" asked Sue.

"Sure!" Bunny answered. "Come on, we'll both call!"

The children united their voices in loud calls of:

"Help! Help! Help!"

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For a moment there was no answer. Some of the alligators seemed alarmed by the noise and scrambled back into the river. But others of the big, scaly creatures seemed to be crawling up toward Bunny Brown and his sister Sue.

"Oh, help! Help!" screamed the little girl, and Bunny joined his voice with hers.

Then, to their delight, they heard a call in answer.

"What's the matter? Who are you? Where are you?" asked a man, who, as yet, neither Bunny nor Sue could see.

"We're on the island! The alligators are after us!" Bunny answered.

"Don't be afraid! I'll be with you in a minute. They're my alligators and they got out of the pens," the man went on. This time Bunny and Sue knew where his voice came from. They looked down the stream and saw an elderly man, with white hair and a pleasant face, rowing toward them in a boat.

"Oh, take us away! Take us away!" begged Sue.

"I will," the man said. "How in the world did you children ever get here, anyhow? But don't be afraid. The 'gators won't hurt you. They'll all jump into the river!"

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And, surely enough, no sooner had the man pulled his boat close to the island, so that the keel grated on the sand, than, with great splashes, the alligators all plunged into the river.

"What made 'em go away?" asked Sue, as she and Bunny went down to the shore.

"Oh, alligators are timid," said the man, with a laugh. "Did they scare you? Well, if you had only run at them or thrown something at them, they would all have crawled into the water. But who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm Bunny Brown and this is my sister, Sue," said the little fellow.

"Well, I'm Mr. Bunn," was the man's reply, and he smiled at the children. "I raise alligators a few miles down the river. Some of 'em got away last night, and I've rowed up here to see if I could find 'em. I did."

"But they all got away!" exclaimed Bunny, for now not one of the scaly creatures was in sight.

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"Oh, I'll get 'em again," said Mr. Bunn. "They won't go very much farther up Squaw River. It's too shallow. They'll soon turn and swim down, and they can't get past my place for I have a net stretched across the river to hold 'em back. Well, I'm glad I have found my 'gators. I was afraid some one had taken them. Now shall I put you children in my boat and row you home? Where do you live?"

"We're staying at Mr. Halliday's," Bunny answered.

"Oh, at Orange Beach. Yes, I know him and I know his place. You're quite a way from there. How'd you get here?"

"On a raft," Bunny replied. "It's over on that other island," and he pointed to the larger one.

"Our shoes and stockings are away back near the orange trees," said Sue.

"Oh," laughed Mr. Bunn. "Well, I'll let you come in my boat without any shoes or stockings on. Get aboard!"

A little later he was rowing the children up the river. Sue was no longer afraid, even though she could see some alligators swimming around in the water. She felt safe in the big boat, and so did Bunny.

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"What do you keep 'gators for?" asked Bunny, when the boat was near the place where he and Sue had started out in the raft, some hours before.

"For their hides," answered Mr. Bunn. "I sell the hides, and pocketbooks and valises are made from them. But I guess there are your folks looking for you," and he nodded toward shore.

And there, on the bank stood Daddy and Mother Brown and Mr. Halliday, looking anxiously up and down the stream. Daddy Brown had the children's shoes and stockings in his hand.

"Oh, Bunny! where have you been?" cried his mother.

"We went down on a raft, and we landed on a pirate island, and then we got on an alligator island," Bunny explained.

"Alligators!" cried Daddy Brown.

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"Some of mine got away," explained Mr. Bunn. And then he told how he had found Bunny and Sue.

"Well, you had quite an adventure!" exclaimed the orange grower. "I knew Mr. Bunn had

'gators on his place, but I never thought any of 'em would get away and come up here."

"Well, I'm glad we saw some," said Bunny.

Mr. Brown thanked Mr. Bunn for having saved Bunny and Sue, and as it was near meal time the alligator farmer was invited to stay to supper. Washed and combed, with clean clothes on, Bunny and Sue sat at the table and related their adventures, while Mr. Bunn told about raising alligators.

"Do you make much money?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Well, yes, some years I do," was the answer. "But I'd like to make an extra lot this year. I've had some bad luck."

"Do you mean your alligators getting away?" asked Mr. Brown.

"No, though that's bad enough," Mr. Bunn replied. "But I was up North a few weeks ago on business, and I lost a valuable paper belonging to my nephew. It was for some stock in an oil well, and was made out to 'bearer.' If it had had his name on it I might have got it back. But as it is, I guess it's gone forever. He gave me the stock certificate to keep for him, but I guess I'm not very good at keeping things. I haven't told my nephew about it yet, but when he finds out I have lost his oil stock temporary certificate he'll be angry with me, I'm afraid."

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Bunny Brown and his sister Sue looked at one another curiously. Daddy Brown went over to a desk where he and Mr. Halliday had been looking at some papers before they missed the children.

"Did you lose that certificate in a parlor car up near Bellemere, Mr. Bunn?" asked the children's father, as he took a green and gold piece of paper from an envelope.

"Well, I remember going through a place called Bellemere," was the answer. "But where I lost the paper I don't know. I may have dropped it from my pocket in the parlor car, or somewhere else. Anyhow, I lost it, and I don't suppose I'll ever see my nephew's certificate again. He'll be angry with me."

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"Oh, no, I guess he won't," said Mr. Brown with a smile. "What company was that stock in?"

"The Great Bonanza," was Mr. Bunn's answer.

"Then here it is back again," said Mr. Brown, and he gave to the alligator farmer the paper Bunny had picked out of the snow some weeks before.

Then the whole story was told, and you can imagine how glad and surprised Mr. Bunn was. He had never expected to see his nephew's property again, and he had not told about the loss nor notified the oil company, for fear his nephew would hear of it and be angry.

"I was just going to let it go and say nothing," said Mr. Bunn. "I thought I could make enough extra on my alligators to pay my nephew back for the loss. But now I don't have to! I'm so glad I met you children!" he added. "But for that I would never have this back," and he put into his pocket the green and gold certificate. He wanted to give Mr. Brown a reward for the children, but their mother said rescuing them from the alligators was reward enough.

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"But they were my own 'gators, and, really, Bunny and Sue were in no great danger," said Mr. Bunn. "They could have scared the 'gators away."

But Mr. Brown would accept no reward, though later Mr. Bunn did send Bunny and Sue a tiny live alligator for a pet, and they kept it for some time, for it grew quite tame and would eat bits of meat from their fingers—at least from Bunny's, for Sue never learned to like their scaly pet.

Meanwhile Mr. Bunn had gone back down the river to his alligator farm. He said he would get his men together and capture the big lizards that had got away.

Bunny and Sue had many more days of fun in the sunny South, and they ate all the oranges they wanted.

But what Bunny talked about most when he and Sue reached their Northern home was the adventure with the alligators on the little island.

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Before they went home, however, Bunny and Sue went to Mr. Bunn's queer "farm," and saw hundreds of alligators where they were kept in pens. Most of those that broke away had been captured again. Mr. Bunn's nephew came down to help his uncle, and was given his oil stock certificate, never knowing how nearly it had been lost.

"Well, we must soon think of going back North again," said Mr. Brown one day, as he saw Bunny and Sue playing out under the orange trees.

"Oh, not just yet!" begged the children. "We want to have a little more fun!"

And so, while Bunny Brown and his sister Sue are having fun, we will take leave of them.

THE END

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Transcriber's Notes

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE IN
THE SUNNY SOUTH ***

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