

THE  
**BOXCAR**  
**CHILDREN**



Four siblings, one boxcar,  
and a world of wonder in simple living

**GERTRUDE CHANDLER WARNER**

This edition published 2026  
by Living Book Press  
Copyright © Living Book Press, 2026

ISBN: 978-1-76153-218-4 (hardcover)  
978-1-76153-219-1 (softcover)

First published in 1924.

This edition is based on the 1924 printing by Rand McNally & Company.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any other form or means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher or as provided by Australian law.



A catalogue record for this  
book is available from the  
National Library of Australia

# The Boxcar Children

*by*

Gertrude Chandler Warner





## CONTENTS

1.	THE FLIGHT	1
2.	THE SECOND NIGHT	8
3.	SHELTER	15
4.	A NEW HOME	21
5.	HOUSEKEEPING	28
6.	EARNING A LIVING	35
7.	AT HOME	43
8.	BUILDING THE DAM	51
9.	CHERRY PICKING	59
10.	THE RACE	65
11.	MORE EDUCATION	73
12.	GINSENG	80
13.	TROUBLE	85
14.	CAUGHT	93
15.	A NEW GRANDFATHER	99
16.	A UNITED FAMILY	105
17.	SAFE	111



JESS SHUT THE DOOR WITH AS MUCH CARE AS SHE HAD OPENED IT

## THE FLIGHT

About seven o'clock one hot summer evening a strange family moved into the little village of Middlesex. Nobody knew where they came from, or who they were. But the neighbors soon made up their minds what they thought of the strangers, for the father was very drunk. He could hardly walk up the rickety front steps of the old tumble-down house, and his thirteen-year-old son had to help him. Toward eight o'clock a pretty, capable-looking girl of twelve came out of the house and bought a loaf of bread at the baker's. And that was all the villagers learned about the newcomers that night.

"There are four children," said the bakeshop woman to her husband the next day, "and their mother is dead. They must have some money, for the girl paid for the bread with a dollar bill."

"Make them pay for everything they get," growled the baker, who was a hard man. "The father is nearly dead with drink now, and soon they will be only beggars."

This happened sooner than he thought. The next day

the oldest boy and girl came to ask the bakeshop woman to come over. Their father was dead.

She went over willingly enough, for someone had to go. But it was clear that she did not expect to be bothered with four strange children, with the bakery on her hands and two children of her own.

“Haven’t you any other folks?” she asked the children.

“We have a grandfather in Greenfield,” spoke up the youngest child before his sister could clap her hand over his mouth.

“Hush, Benny,” she said anxiously.

This made the bakeshop woman suspicious. “What’s the matter with your grandfather?” she asked.

“He doesn’t like us,” replied the oldest boy reluctantly. “He didn’t want my father to marry my mother, and if he found us he would treat us cruelly.”

“Did you ever see him?”

“Jess has. Once she saw him.”

“Well, did he treat you cruelly?” asked the woman, turning upon Jess.

“Oh, he didn’t see me,” replied Jess. “He was just passing through our—where we used to live—and my father pointed him out to me.”

“Where did you use to live?” went on the questioner. But none of the children could be made to tell.

“We will get along all right alone, won’t we, Henry?” declared Jess.

“Indeed we will!” said Henry.

“I will stay in the house with you tonight,” said the woman at last, “and tomorrow we will see what can be done.”

The four children went to bed in the kitchen, and gave the visitor the only other bed in the house. They knew that she did not at once go to bed, but sat by the window in the dark. Suddenly they heard her talking to her husband through the open window.

“They must go to their grandfather, that’s certain,” Jess heard her say.

“Of course,” agreed her husband. “Tomorrow we will make them tell us what his name is.”

Soon after that Jess and Henry heard her snoring heavily. They sat up in the dark.

“Mustn’t we surely run away?” whispered Jess in Henry’s ear.

“Yes!” whispered Henry. “Take only what we need most. We must be far off before morning, or they will catch us.”

Jess sat still for a moment, thinking, for every motion she made must count.

“I will take both loaves of bread,” she thought, “and Violet’s little workbag. Henry has his knife. And all Father’s money is in my pocket.” She drew it out and counted it in the dark, squinting her eyes in the faint light of the moon. It amounted to nearly four dollars.

“You’ll have to carry Benny until he gets waked up,” whispered Jess. “If we wake him up here, he might cry.”

She touched Violet as she spoke.

“Sh! Violet! Come! We’re going to run away,” she whispered.

The little girl made no sound. She sat up obediently and tried to make out the dim shadow of her sister.

“What shall I do?” she said, light as a breath.

“Carry this,” said Jess, handing her the workbag and a box of matches.

Jess tiptoed over to the tin box on the table, drew out the two loaves of bread, and slipped them into the laundry bag. She peered around the room for the last time, and then dropped two small clean towels and a cake of soap into the bag.

“All right. Pick him up,” she said to Henry.

Henry bent over the sleeping child and lifted him carefully. Jess took the laundry bag, turned the door-knob ever so softly, opened the door ever so slowly, and they tiptoed out in a ghostly procession.

Jess shut the door with as much care as she had opened it, listened to the bakeshop woman’s heavy snoring for a moment, and then they turned and picked their way without a sound to the country road.

“She may wake up before morning, you know,” whispered Henry. “We must do our fastest walking before then. If we can only get to another town before they find out we’re gone, they won’t know which way to go.”

Jess agreed, and they all walked briskly along in the faint moonlight.

“How far can you carry Benny?” asked Violet.

“Oh, at least a mile,” said Henry confidently, although his arms were beginning to ache. Benny was five years old, and he was a fat, healthy boy as well.

“I think we could all walk faster if we woke him up,” said Jess decidedly. “We could each take his hand and almost carry him along.”

Henry knelt by the roadside and set the little fellow against his knee.

“Come, Benny, you must wake up now and walk!” said Jess coaxingly.

“Go away!” Benny mumbled with his eyes shut, trying to lie down again.

“Let me try,” Violet offered softly.

“Say, Benny, you know little Cinnamon Bear ran away to find a nice warm bed for the winter? Now, you play you’re Cinnamon, and Henry and Jess will help you along, and we’ll find a bed.”

Violet’s little plan worked. Benny was never too cross to listen to the wonderful stories his sister Violet could tell about Cinnamon Bear. He stood up bravely and marched along, yawning, while his big brother and sister almost swung him between them.

Not a soul passed them on the country road. All the houses they saw were dark and still. And when the first

faint streaks of morning light showed in the sky, all four children were almost staggering with sleep.

“I *must* go to sleep, Henry,” murmured Jess at last. Little Benny was asleep already, and Henry was carrying him again.

“The first place we come to, then,” panted Henry.

Violet said nothing, but she kept her eyes open.

Finally she caught Henry’s sleeve. “Couldn’t we make that haystack do?” she asked, pointing across a newly mown field.

“Indeed we could,” said Henry thankfully. “What a big, enormous one it is! I was too sleepy to see it, I guess.”

“And see how far away from the farmhouse and barn it is, too!” echoed Jess.

The sight gave them new courage. They climbed over two stone walls, got across a brook somehow with the heavy child, and arrived at the haystack.

Henry laid his brother down and stretched his aching arms, while Jess began to burrow into the haystack. Violet, after a moment of watching her, did the same.

“Here’s his nest,” said Jess sleepily, taking her head out of the deep round hole she had made. Henry lifted the child into the opening and was pleased to see that he curled up instantly, smiling in his sleep.

Jess pulled wisps of hay over the opening so that it was absolutely invisible, and then proceeded to dig out a similar burrow for herself.

“We can stay here just—as long—as we like, can’t we, Henry?” she murmured, digging with her eyes shut.

“We sure can,” replied Henry. “You’re an old brick, Jess. Get in, and I’ll pull the hay over the hole.”

Violet was already curled up in her nest, which was hidden so completely that Henry spoke to her to see if she were there. Then he wriggled himself backward into the haycock without stopping to hollow it out, pulled a handful of hay over his head, and laid his head on his arm.

Just as he did so he heard a heavy voice say, “Now, then, lass, git along!” Then he heard the rumble of a milk wagon coming down a near-by lane, and he realized thankfully that they had hidden themselves just before the first farmer in the neighborhood had set off toward Middlesex with his milk cans.

“He will say he didn’t meet us coming this way,” thought Henry, “so they will hunt for us the other way. And that will give us time to cover a lot more ground.”

He dropped asleep just as the roosters all over the valley began to answer each other.

## THE SECOND NIGHT

The roosters crowed and the hens clucked; the farmer's wife began to get breakfast, and the four children slept on. Dinner time came and went, and still they slept, for it must be remembered that they had been awake and walking during the whole night. In fact, it was nearly seven o'clock in the evening when they awoke. Luckily, all the others awoke before Benny.

"Can you hear me, Jess?" said Henry, speaking very low through the wall of hay.

"Yes," answered Jess softly. "Let's make one big room of our nests."

No sooner said than done. The boy and girl worked quickly and quietly until they could see each other. They pressed the hay back firmly until they had made their way into Violet's little room. And then she in turn groped until she found Benny.

"Hello, little Cinnamon!" whispered Violet playfully.

And Benny at once made up his mind to laugh instead of cry. But laughing out loud was almost as bad, so Henry

took his little brother on the hay beside him and talked to him seriously.

“You’re old enough now, Benny, to understand what I say to you. Now, listen! When I tell you to *keep still* after this, that means you’re to stop crying if you’re crying, or stop laughing if you’re laughing, and be just as still as you possibly can. If you don’t mind, you will be in danger. Do you understand?”

“Don’t I have to mind Jess and Violet too?” asked Benny.

“Absolutely!” said Henry. “You have to mind us all, every one of us!”

Benny thought a minute. “Can’t I ask for what I want any more?” he said.

“Indeed you can!” cried Jess and Henry together. “What is it you want?”

“I’m *awful* hungry,” said Benny anxiously.

Henry’s brow cleared. “Good old Benny,” he said. “We’re just going to have supper—or is it breakfast?”

Jess drew out the fragrant loaf of bread. She cut it with Henry’s jackknife into four quarters, and she and Henry took the two crusty ends themselves.

“That’s because we have to be the strongest, and crusts make you strong,” explained Jess.

Violet looked at her older sister. She thought she knew why Jess took the crust, but she did not speak.

“We will stay here till dark, and then we’ll go on with our journey,” said Henry cheerfully.

“I want a drink,” announced Benny.

“A drink you shall have,” Henry promised, “but you’ll have to wait till it’s really dark. If we should creep out to the brook now, and any one saw us—” He did not finish his sentence, but Benny realized that he must wait.

He was much refreshed from his long sleep, and felt very lively. Violet had all she could do to keep him amused, even with Cinnamon Bear and his five brothers.

At last Henry peeped out. It was after nine o’clock. There were lights in the farmhouse still, but they were all upstairs.

“We can at least get a drink now,” he said. And the children crept quietly to the noisy little brook not far from the haystack.

“Cup,” said Benny.

“No, you’ll have to lie down and drink with your mouth,” Jess explained. And so they did. Never did water taste so cool and delicious as it did that night to the thirsty children.

When they had finished drinking they jumped the brook, ran quickly over the fields to the wall, and once more found themselves on the road.

“If we meet any one,” said Jess, “we must all crouch behind bushes until he has gone by.”

They walked along in the darkness with light hearts. They were no longer tired or hungry. Their one thought was to get away from their grandfather, if possible.

“If we can find a big town,” said Violet, “won’t it be better to stay in than a little town?”

“Why?” asked Henry, puffing up the hill.

“Well, you see, there are so many people in a big town, nobody will notice us—”

“And in a little village everyone would be talking about us,” finished Henry admiringly. “You’ve got brains, Violet!”

He had hardly said this, when a wagon was heard behind them in the distance. It was coming from Middlesex. Without a word, the four children sank down behind the bushes like frightened rabbits. They could plainly hear their hearts beat. The horse trotted nearer, and then began to walk up the hill.

“If we hear nothing in Townsend,” they heard a man say, “we have plainly done our duty.”

It was the baker’s voice!

“More than our duty,” said the baker’s wife, “tiring out a horse with going a full day, from morning until night!”

There was silence as the horse pulled the creaky wagon.

“At least we will go on to Townsend tonight,” continued the baker, “and tell them to watch out. We need not go to Intervale, for they never could walk so far.”

“We are well rid of them, I should say,” replied his wife. “They may not have come this way. The milkman did not see them, did he?”

The baker’s reply was lost, for the horse had reached the hilltop, where he broke into a canter.

It was some minutes before the children dared to creep out of the bushes again.

“One thing is sure,” said Henry, when he got his breath. “We will not go to Townsend.”

“And we *will* go to Intervale,” said Jess.

With a definite goal in mind at last, the children set out again with a better spirit. They walked until two o’clock in the morning, stopping often this time to rest and to drink from the horses’ watering troughs. And then they came upon a fork in the road with a white signpost shining in the moonlight.

“Townsend, four miles; Intervale, six miles,” read Henry aloud. “Any one feel able to walk six more miles?”

He grinned. No one had the least idea how far they had already walked.

“We’ll go that way at least,” said Jess finally.

“That we will,” agreed Henry, picking up his brother for a change, and carrying him “pig-back.”

Violet went ahead. The new road was a pleasant woody one, with grass growing in the middle. The children could not see the grass, but they could feel it as they walked. “Not many people pass this way, I guess,” remarked Violet. Just then she caught her toe in something and almost fell, but Jess caught her.

The two girls stooped down to examine the obstruction.

“Hay!” said Jess.

“Hay!” repeated Violet.

“Hey!” cried Henry, coming up. “What did you say?”

“It must have fallen off somebody’s load,” said Jess.

“We’ll take it with us,” Henry decided wisely. “Load on all you can carry, Jess.”

“For Benny,” thought Violet to herself. So the odd

little party trudged on for nearly three hours, laden with hay, until they found that the road ended in a cart path through the woods.

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Jess, almost ready to cry with disappointment.

“What’s the matter?” demanded Henry in astonishment. “Isn’t the woods a good place to sleep? We can’t sleep in the road, you know.”

“It does seem nice and far away from people,” admitted Jess, “and it’s almost morning.”

As they stood still at the entrance to the woods, they heard the rumble of a train. It roared down the valley at a great rate and passed them on the other side of the woods, thundering along toward the city.

“Never mind the train, either,” remarked Henry. “It isn’t so awfully near; and even if it were, it couldn’t see us.”

He set his brother down and peered into the woods. It was very warm.

“Lizzen!” said Benny.

“Listen!” echoed Violet.

“More water!” Benny cried, catching his big brother by the hand.

“It is only another brook,” said Henry with a thankful heart. “He wants a drink.” The trickle of water sounded very pleasant to all the children as they lay down once more to drink.

Benny was too sleepy to eat. Jess quickly found a dry spot thick with moss between two stones. Upon this moss

the three older children spread the hay in the shape of an oval bed. Benny tumbled into it with a great sigh of satisfaction, while his sisters tucked the hay around him.

“Pine needles up here, Jess,” called Henry from the slope. Each of them quickly scraped together a fragrant pile for a pillow and once more lay down to sleep, with hardly a thought of fear.

“I only hope we won’t have a thunderstorm,” said Jess to herself, as she shut her tired eyes.

And she did not open them for a long time, although the dark gray clouds piled higher and more thickly over the sleeping children.

## SHELTER

When Jess opened her eyes it must have been about ten o'clock in the morning. She sat up and looked all around her. She could see dimly the opening where they had come into the woods. She looked around to see that her family was still safely by her. Then she looked up at the sky. At first she thought it must still be night, and then she realized that the darkness was caused by an approaching storm.

"Whatever, *whatever* shall we do now?" demanded Jess of the air.

She got up and looked in every direction for shelter. She even walked quite a little way into the woods, and down a hill. And there she stood, not knowing what to do next.

"I shall have to wake Henry up," she said at last. "Only how I hate to!"

As she spoke she glanced into the forest, and her feet felt as if they were nailed to the ground. She could not stir. Faintly outlined among the trees, Jess saw an old freight or box car. Her first thought was one of fear; her

second, hope for shelter. As she thought of shelter, her feet moved, and she stumbled toward it.

It really was a freight car. She felt of it. It stood on rusty broken rails which were nearly covered with dead leaves. Then the thunder cracked overhead. Jess came to her usual senses and started back for Henry, flying like the wind. He was awake, looking anxiously overhead. He had not noticed that Jess was missing.

“Come!” panted Jess. “I’ve found a place! Hurry! hurry!”

Henry did not stop to ask questions. He picked up Benny, telling Violet to gather up the hay. And then they ran headlong through the thick underbrush in Jess’ wake, seeing their way only too well by the sharp flashes of lightning.

“It’s beginning to sprinkle!” gasped Henry.

“We’ll get there, all right,” Jess shouted back. “It’s not far. Be all ready to help me open the door when we get there!”

By sheer good fortune a big tree stump stood under the door of the freight car, or the children never could have opened it. As it was, Jess sprang on the stump and Henry, pausing to lay Benny down, did likewise. Together they rolled back the heavy door about a foot.

“That’s enough,” panted Jess. “I’ll get in, and you hand Benny up to me.”

“No,” said Henry quietly. “I must see first if any one is in there.”

“It will rain!” protested Jess. “Nothing will hurt me.”

But she knew it was useless to argue with Henry, so she hastily groped in the bag for the matches and handed them to her brother. It must be confessed that Jess held her breath while Henry struck one and peered about inside the car.

“All’s well!” he reported. “Come in, everybody!”

Violet passed the hay up to her brother, and crawled in herself. Then Jess handed Benny up like a package of groceries and, taking one last look at the angry sky and waving trees, she climbed in after him.

The two children managed to roll the door back so that the crack was completely closed before the storm broke. But at that very instant it broke with a vengeance. It seemed to the children that the sky would split, so sharp were the cracks of thunder. But not a drop of rain reached them in their roomy retreat. They could see nothing at all, for the freight car was tightly made, and all outside was nearly as black as night. Through it all, Benny slept on.

Presently the thunder grew fainter, and rumbled away down the valley, and the rain spent itself. Only the drip from the trees on the top of the car could be heard. Then Henry ventured to open the door.

He knelt on his hands and knees and thrust his head out.

The warm sunlight was filtering through the trees, making golden pools of light here and there. The beautiful trees, pines and white birches and oaks, grew thickly

around and the ground was carpeted with flowers and wonderful ferns more than a yard high. But most miraculous of all was a miniature waterfall, small but perfect, where the same little brown brook fell gracefully over some ledges, and danced away down the glen.

In an instant Jess and Violet were looking over Henry's shoulder at the pretty sight.

"How different everything looks with the sun shining!" exclaimed Jess. "Things will soon be dry at this rate."

"It must be about noon," observed Henry, looking at the sun. And as he spoke the faint echo of mill bells in the distance was heard.

"Henry!" said Jess sharply. "Let's *live* here!"

"Live here?" repeated Henry dully.

"Yes! Why not?" replied Jess. "Nobody uses this car, and it's dry and warm. We're quite far away. And yet we are near enough to a town so we can buy things."

"And we're near water," added Violet.

Jess hugged her sister. "So we are, little mouse," she said—"the most important thing of all."

"But—" began Henry.

"Please, Henry," said Jess excitedly. "I could make this old freight car into the dearest little house, with beds, and chairs, and a table—and dishes—"

"I'd like to live here, too," said a determined little voice from the corner, "but I don't want to, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Henry, panic-stricken.

“Unless I can have my dinner,” Benny finished anxiously.

“We’ll have something to eat right away, old fellow,” said Henry, thankful it was no worse. For he himself was beginning to see what a cozy home the car really would make.

Jess cut the last loaf of bread into four pieces, but alas! it was very dry. The children were so hungry that they tore it with their teeth like little dogs, but Benny was nearly crying. He did not actually cry, however, for just at the crucial moment Violet started a funny story about Cinnamon Bear eating bread crusts out of the ash can.

“He ought to have milk,” said Jess quietly to Henry.

“He *shall* have milk,” replied Henry. “I’ll go down the railroad track to the town and get some.”

Jess counted out a dollar in ten dimes and handed it to Henry. “By the time our four dollars are gone, you will have some work to do,” she said.

All the same Henry did not like to begin his trip. “How I hate to leave you alone, Jess!” he said miserably.

“Oh, don’t you worry,” began Jess lightly. “We’ll have a surprise for you when you come back. You just wait and see!” And she nodded her head wisely as Henry walked slowly off through the woods.

The moment he was out of sight she turned to Benny and Violet. “Now, children,” she said, “what do you think we’re going to do? Do you know what I