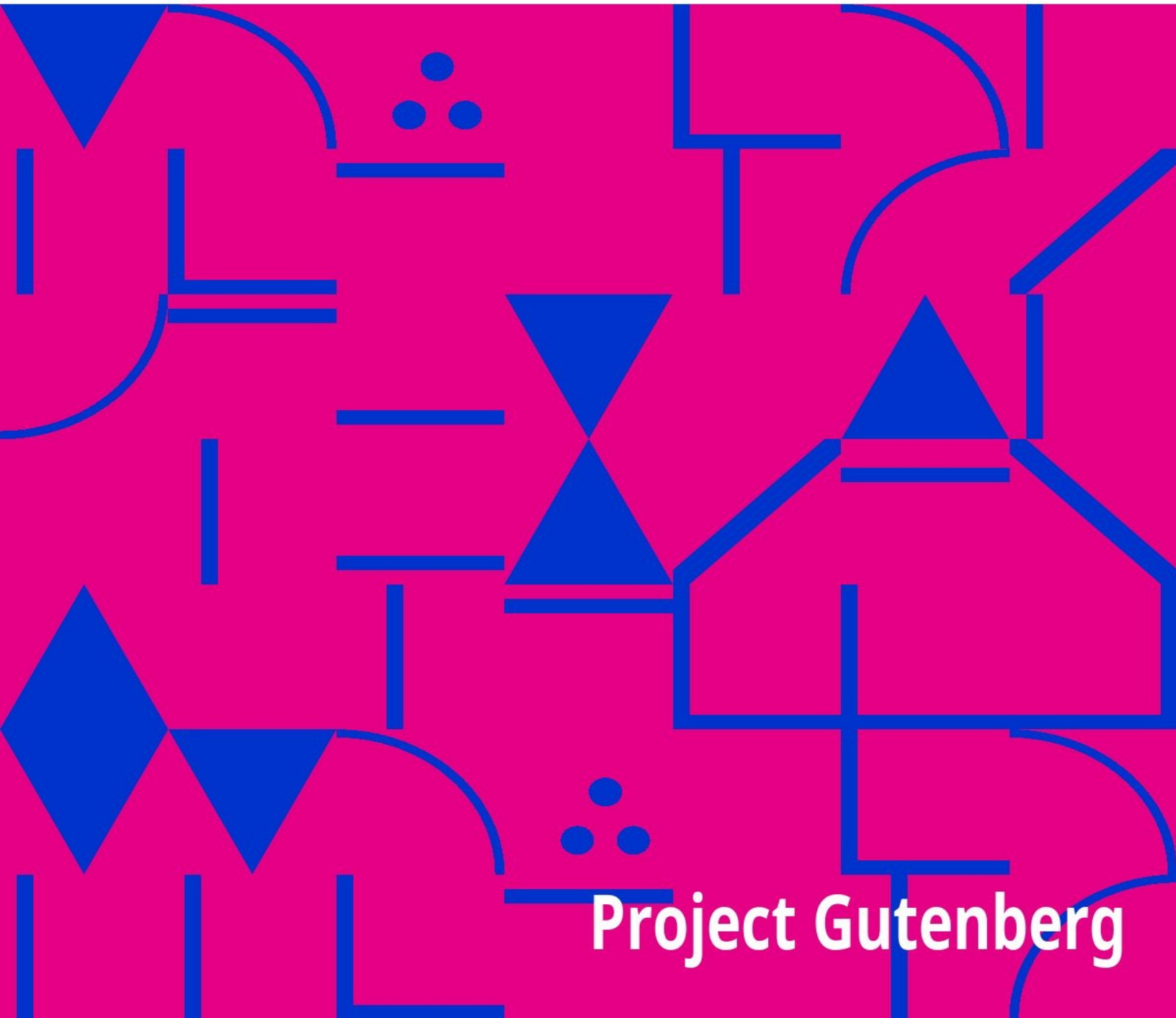
Six Little Bunkers at Grandma Bell's

Laura Lee Hope



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SIX LITTLE BUNKERS

AT GRANDMA BELL'S

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

AUTHOR OF "THE BOBBSEY TWINS SERIES," "THE BUNNY BROWN SERIES," "THE OUTDOOR GIRLS SERIES," ETC.

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Six Little Bunkers at Grandma Bell's

THEY SAW HIM LIFT FROM THE WATER A BIG FISH.

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SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT GRANDMA BELL'S

CHAPTER I

ALL UPSET

"There! It's all done, so I guess we can get on and start off! All aboard! Toot! Toot!" Russ Bunker made a noise like a steamboat whistle. "Get on!" he cried.

"Oh, wait a minute! I forgot to put the broom in the corner," said Rose, his sister. "I was helping mother sweep, and I forgot to put the broom away. Wait for me, Russ! Don't let the boat start without me!"

"I won't," promised the little boy, as he tossed back a lock of dark hair which had straggled down over his eyes. They were dark, too, and, just now, were shining in eagerness as he looked at a queer collection of a barrel, a box, some chairs, a stool and a few boards, piled together in the middle of the playroom floor.

"The steamboat will wait for you, Rose," Russ Bunker went on. "But hurry back," and he began to whistle a merry tune as he moved a footstool over to one side. "That's one of the paddle-wheels," he told his smaller brother Laddie, whose real name was Fillmore, but who was always called Laddie. "That's a paddle-wheel!"

"Why doesn't it go 'round then?" asked Violet, Laddie's twin sister. "Why doesn't it go 'round, Russ? I thought wheels always went around!" Vi, as Violet was usually called, loved to ask questions, and sometimes they were the kind that could not be easily answered. This one seemed to be that kind, for Russ went on whistling and did not reply.

"Why doesn't the footstool go around if it's a wheel?" asked Vi again.

"Oh, 'cause—'cause——" began Russ, holding his head on one side and stopping halfway through his whistled tune. "It doesn't go 'round?"

"Oh, I got a riddle! I got a riddle!" suddenly cried Laddie, who was as fond of asking riddles as Vi was of giving out questions. "What kind of a wheel doesn't go 'round? That's a new riddle! What kind of a wheel doesn't go 'round?"

"All wheels go around," declared Russ, who, now that he had the footstool fixed where he wanted it, had started his whistling again.

"What's the riddle, Laddie?" asked Vi, shaking her curly hair and looking up with her gray eyes at her brother, whose locks were of the same color, though not quite so curly as his twin's.

"There she goes again! Asking more questions!" exclaimed Rose, who had come back from putting away the broom, and was ready to play the steamboat game with her older brother.

"But what *is* the riddle?" insisted Vi. "I like to guess 'em, Laddie! What is it?"

"What kind of a wheel doesn't go 'round?" asked Laddie again, smiling at his brothers and sisters as though the riddle was a very hard one indeed.

"Pooh! *All* wheels go around—'ceptin' *this* one, maybe," said Russ. "And this is only a make-believe wheel. It's the nearest like a steamboat paddle-wheel I could find," and he gave the footstool a little kick. "But all kinds of wheels go around, Laddie."

"No, they don't," exclaimed the little fellow. "That's a riddle! What kind of a wheel doesn't go 'round?"

"Oh, let's give it up," proposed Rose. "Tell us, Laddie, and then we'll get in the make-believe steamboat Russ has made, and we'll have a ride. What kind of a wheel doesn't go around?"

"A wheelbarrow doesn't go 'round!" laughed Laddie.

"Oh, it does *so*!" cried Rose. "The *wheel* goes around."

"But the *barrow* doesn't—that's the part you put things in," went on Laddie. "*That* doesn't go 'round. You have to push it."

"All right. That's a pretty good riddle," said Russ with a laugh. "Now let's get on the steamboat and we'll have a ride," and he began to whistle a little bit of a new song, something about down on a river where the cotton blossoms grow.

"Where is steamboat?" asked Margy, aged five, whose real name was Margaret, but who, as yet, seemed too little to have all those letters for herself. So she was just called Margy. "Where is steamboat?" she asked. "Is it in the kitchen on the stove?" and she opened wide her dark brown eyes and looked at Russ.

"Oh, you're thinking of a steam *teakettle*, Margy," he said, as he took hold of her fat, chubby hand. "The teakettle steams on the kitchen stove," went on Russ.

"But we're making believe this is a steamboat in here," and he pointed to the barrel, the boxes, the chairs and the footstool, which he and Rose had piled together with such care. For it was a rainy day and the children were having what fun they could in the big playroom.

"I want to go on steamboat," spoke up the sixth member of the Bunker family a moment later.

"Yes, you may have a ride, Mun Bun," said Rose. "You may sit with me in front and see the wheels go around."

Mun Bun, I might say, was the pet name of the youngest member of the family. He was really Munroe Ford Bunker, but it seemed such a big name for such a little chap, that it was nearly always shortened to Mun. And that, added to half his last name, made Mun Bun.

And, really, Munroe Ford Bunker did look a little like a bun—one of the light, golden brown kind, with sugar on top. For Mun, as we shall call him, was small, and had blue eyes and golden hair.

"Come on, Mun Bun!" called Russ, who was the oldest of the family of six little Bunkers, and the leader in all the fun and games. "Come on, everybody! All aboard the steamboat!"

"Oh, wait a minute! Wait a minute!" suddenly called Vi. "Is there any water around your steamboat, Russ?"

"Water? 'Course there is," he answered. "You couldn't make a steamboat go without water."

"Is it deep water?" asked Vi, who seemed started on her favorite game of asking questions.

Russ thought for a minute, looking at the playroom floor.

"'Course it's deep," he answered. "'Bout ten miles deep. What do you ask that for, Vi?"

"'Cause I got to get a bathing-dress for my doll," answered the little girl. "I can't take her on a steamboat where the water is deep lessen I have a bathing-suit for her. Wait a minute. I'll get one," and she ran over to a corner of the room, where she kept her playthings.

"Shall I bring a red dress or a blue one?" Vi turned to ask her sister Rose.

"Oh, bring any one you have and hurry up!" called Russ. "This steamboat won't ever get started. All aboard! Toot! Toot!"

Vi snatched up what she called a bathing-dress from a small trunkful of clothes belonging to her dolls, and ran back to the place where the "steamboat" floated in the "ten-miles-deep water," in the middle of the playroom floor.

"Now I'm all ready, an' so's my doll," said Vi, as she climbed up in one of the chairs behind the big, empty flour barrel that Mother Bunker had let Russ take to make his boat. "Gid-dap, Russ!"

"Gid-dap? What you mean?" asked Russ, stopping his whistling and turning to look at his sister.

"I mean start," answered Vi. "Don't you know what gid-dap means?"

"Sure I know! It's how you talk to a horse. It's what you tell him when you want him to start."

"Well, I'm ready to start now," said Vi, smoothing out her dress, and putting the bathing-suit on her doll.

"Pooh! You don't tell a steamboat to 'gid-dap' when you want *that* to start!" exclaimed Russ. "You say 'All aboard! Toot! Toot!'"

"All right then. Toot! Toot!" cried Vi, and Margy and Mun, who had climbed up together in a single chair beside Vi, began to laugh.

"I know another riddle," announced Laddie, as he took his place inside the barrel, for he was going to be the fireman, and, of course, they always rode away down inside the steamboat. "I know a nice riddle about a horse," went on Laddie. "What makes a horse's shoes different from ours?" he asked.

"Oh, we haven't time to bother with riddles now, Laddie," said Rose. "You can tell us some other time. We're going to make-believe steamboat a long way across the deep water now."

"A horse's shoes aren't like ours 'cause a horse doesn't wear stockings—that's the answer," went on Laddie.

"All aboard!" cried Russ again.

"All aboard!" repeated Laddie.

"Oh, let's sing!" suddenly said Rose. She was a jolly little girl and had learned many simple songs at school.

"Let's sing about sailing o'er the dark blue sea," went on Rose. "It's an awful nice song, and I know five verses."

"We'll sing it after a while," returned Russ. "We got to get started now. All ready, fireman!" he called to Laddie, who was inside the barrel. "Start the steam going. I'm going to steer the boat," and Russ took his place astride the front end of the barrel, and began twisting on a stick he had stuck down in one of the cracks. The stick, you understand, was the steering-wheel, even if it didn't look like one.

"All aboard! Here we go!" cried Laddie from down inside the barrel, and he began to hiss like steam coming from a pipe. Then he began to rock to and fro, so that the barrel rolled from side to side.

"Here! What're you doing that for?" demanded Russ from up on top. "'You're jiggling me off! Stop it! What're you doing, Laddie?"

"I'm making the steamboat go!" was the answer. "We're out on the rough ocean and the steamboat's got to rock! Look at her rock!" and he swung the barrel to and fro faster than ever.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Rose. "It's all coming apart! Look! Oh, dear! The barrel's all coming apart!"

And that's just what happened! In another moment the barrel on which Russ sat fell apart, and with a clatter and clash of staves he toppled in on Laddie. Then the chairs, behind the barrel, where Rose, Vi and Margy and Mun were sitting, toppled over. In another instant the whole steamboat load of children was all upset in the middle of the playroom floor, having made a crash that sounded throughout the house.

CHAPTER II

DADDY BUNKER'S WORRY

"Dear me! What's that? What happened?" called Mother Bunker from the sitting-room downstairs. "Is any one hurt, children? What did you do?" she asked, as she stood, with some sewing in her hands, at the foot of the stairs, listening for some other noise to follow the crash. She expected to hear crying.

"Is any one hurt?" she asked again. She was somewhat used to noises. One could not live in the house with the six little Bunkers and not hear noises.

"No'm, I guess nobody's hurt," answered Russ, as he climbed out from the wreck of the barrel. "Get up," he added to his brother Laddie.

"I can't," answered Laddie. "My leg's all twisted up in the soap-box." And so it was. A box had been put on one of the chairs, and Mun Bun and Margy had been sitting on that. This box had fallen on Laddie's leg, which was twisted up inside it.

"But what happened?" asked Mother Bunker again. "You really mustn't make so much noise when you play."

"We couldn't help it, Mother," said Rose, who, being the oldest girl, was quite a help around the house, though she was only seven years old. "The steamboat turned over and broke all up, Mother," she went on.

"The steamboat?" repeated Mrs. Bunker.

"I made one out of the flour-barrel you let me take," explained Russ. "But Laddie rocked inside it, and it all fell apart, and then the chairs fell on top of us and Mun and Vi and Margy all fell out and——"

"Oh, my dears! Some of you may be hurt!" cried Mrs. Bunker, as she heard a little sob from Mun Bun. "I must come up and see what it is all about," and, dropping her sewing, up the stairs she hurried.

There were six little Bunkers, as you have probably counted by this time. Six little Bunkers, and they were such a jolly bunch of tots and had such good times,

even if a make-believe steamboat did upset now and then, that I'm sure you'll like to hear about them.

To begin with, there was Russ Bunker. Russell was his real name, but he was always called Russ. He was eight years old, and was very fond of "making things."

Next came Rose Bunker. She was only seven years old, but she could do some sweeping and lots of dusting, and was quite a little mother's helper. Rose had light hair and eyes, while Russ was just the opposite, being dark.

Violet, or Vi, aged six, was a curly-haired girl, with gray eyes, and, as I have told you, she could ask more questions than her father and mother could answer.

Then there was Laddie, or Fillmore, a twin of Vi's, and, naturally, of the same age. Just how he happened to be so fond of asking riddles no one knew. Perhaps he caught it from Jerry Simms, who had served ten years in the army, and who never tired of telling about it. Jerry was a not-to-be-mistaken Yankee who worked around the Bunker house—ran the automobile, took out the furnace ashes and, when he wasn't doing something like that, sitting in the kitchen talking to Norah O'Grady, the jolly, good-natured Irish cook, who had been in the Bunker family longer than even Russ could remember.

Jerry was a great one for riddles, too, only he asked such hard ones—such as why does the ginger snap, and what makes the board walk?—that none of the children could answer them.

But I haven't finished telling about the children. After Laddie and Violet came Margy, aged five, and then Mun Bun, the youngest and smallest of the six little Bunkers.

Of course there was Daddy Bunker, whose name was Charles, and who had a real estate office on the main street of Pineville. In his office, Mr. Bunker bought and sold houses for his customers, and also sold lumber, bricks and other things of which houses were built. He was an agent for big firms.

Mother Bunker's name was Amy, and sometimes her husband called her "Amy Bell," for her last name had been Bell before she was married.

The six little Bunkers lived in the city of Pineville, which was on the shore of the Rainbow River in Pennsylvania. The river was called Rainbow because, just before it got to Pineville, it bent, or curved, like a bow. And, of course, being

wet, like rain, the best name in the world for such a river was "Rainbow." It was a very beautiful stream.

The Bunker house, a large white one with green shutters, stood back from the main street, and was not quite a mile away from Mr. Bunker's real estate office, so it was not too far even for Mun Bun to walk there with his older sister or brother.

The six little Bunkers had many friends and relatives, and perhaps I had better tell you the names of some of these last, so you will know them as we come to them in the stories.

Mr. Bunker's father had died when he was six years old, and his mother, Mrs. Mary Bunker, had married a man named Ford. She and "Grandpa Ford" lived just outside the City of Tarrington, New York. "Great Hedge Estate" was the name of Grandpa Ford's place, so called because at one side of the house was a great, tall hedge, that had been growing for many years.

Grandma Bell was Mrs. Bunker's mother, and lived at Lake Sagatook, Maine. She was a widow, Grandpa Bell having died some years ago. Margy, or Margaret, had been named for Grandma Bell.

Then there was Aunt Josephine Bunker, or Aunt Jo, Mr. Bunker's sister. She had never married, and now lived in a fine house in the Back Bay section of Boston. Uncle Frederick Bell, who was Mother Bunker's brother, lived with his wife, on Three Star Ranch, just outside Moon City in Montana.

And now, when I have mentioned Cousin Tom Bunker, who had recently been married, and who lived with his wife Ruth at Seaview, on the New Jersey coast, I believe you have met the most important of the relatives of the six little Bunkers. You see they had a grandfather, and two grandmothers, some aunts, an uncle and a cousin. Well supplied with nice relatives, were the six little Bunkers, and thus they had many places to visit.

But I'll tell you about that part later on. Just now we must see what happened after the steamboat broke to pieces because Laddie jiggled himself inside the barrel, when Russ was sitting on the outside of it.

"Are you sure none of you is hurt? You look so!" cried Mother Bunker, as she saw the confused mass of children, barrel staves, box, footstool and chairs in the middle of the playroom floor.

"I'm all right," said Laddie, as he pulled his leg out from where it was doubled up in the box, and stood up straight.

"So'm I," added Russ. "Did I fall on you, Laddie?"

"Yep—but it didn't hurt me much."

"My dear Mun Bun!" said his mother, pulling the little boy out from under a chair. "Are *you* hurt?"

Munroe Bunker was going to cry, but when he saw that Margy had no tears in her eyes, he made up his mind that he could be as brave as his little sister. So he squeezed back his tears and said:

"I just got a bounce on my head."

"Well, as long as it wasn't a bump you're lucky," said Russ with a laugh.

Vi pulled her doll out from under the pile of barrel staves. The doll's bathing-dress was torn, but Rose said that didn't matter because it was an old one anyhow.

"What made it break?" asked Vi as she did this. "Did somebody hit your steamboat, Russ? Or did it just sink?"

"I guess it sank all right," Russ answered, laughing.

"Well, what made it?" went on Vi.

"Oh, my dear! Don't ask so many questions," begged Mrs. Bunker.

"I got a new riddle," announced Laddie, as he rubbed his leg where it had been a little scratched on a box. "It's a riddle about a wheelbarrow and——"

"You told us that!" interrupted Russ.

"Well, then I can make up another," Laddie went on. He was always ready to do that. "This one is going to be about a barrel. When does a barrel feel hungry?"

"Pooh! There can't be any answer to that!" declared Russ. "A barrel can't ever be hungry."

"Yes it can, too!" cried Laddie. "When a barrel takes a roll, isn't it hungry? A roll is what you eat," he explained, "I didn't think that riddle up," he added, for

Laddie was quite honest. "Jerry Simms told me. When is a barrel hungry? When it takes a roll before breakfast—that's the whole answer."

"That's a very good riddle," said Mrs. Bunker with a smile. "But I haven't yet heard what happened."

"Didn't you hear the noise?" asked Rose with a laugh. "It made a terrible bang."

"Oh, yes, I heard *that*," answered Mrs. Bunker. "But what caused it?" she asked anxiously.

Five little Bunkers looked at Russ, as the one best fitted to tell about the upset.

"We had a make-believe steamboat," explained the oldest boy. "Laddie was inside the flour barrel you let me take. He was the fireman. I sat outside the barrel to steer. But Laddie jiggled and wiggled and joggled inside the barrel and ——"

"I had to, Mother, 'cause I was making believe the steamer was on the rough ocean where the water is ten miles deep," interrupted Laddie. "So I rolled the barrel and joggled it and——"

"And then it fell in!" added Rose. "I saw it."

"I *felt* it," remarked Russ, rubbing his back. "But it didn't hurt me much," he added.

"I guess the barrel was so old and dry that it couldn't hold together when you two boys got to playing with it," said Mrs. Bunker. "Well, I'm glad it was no worse. At first it sounded as though the house was coming down. You had better play some other game now."

"Oh, the rain has stopped!" cried Rose, looking out of a window. "We can play out in the yard now."

"Yes, I believe you can," said her mother. "But you must put on your rubbers, for the ground is damp. Run out and play!"

With shouts of glee and laughter the six little Bunkers started to go outdoors. It was a warm day, late in June, and even the rain had not made it too cool for them to be out.

As the six children trooped out on the side porch they saw their father coming up

the walk.

"Why, it isn't supper time, and daddy's coming home!" exclaimed Rose.

"What do you s'pose he wants?" asked Russ.

"Maybe he heard the barrel break and came up to see about it," suggested Laddie.

"He couldn't hear the barrel break away down to his office," said Russ.

Just then Mrs. Bunker, from within the house, saw her husband approaching. She went out on the porch to meet him.

"Why, Charlie!" she exclaimed, "has anything happened? What is the matter? You look worried!"

"I am worried," said Mr. Bunker. "I've had quite a loss! It's some valuable real estate papers. They are gone from my office, and I came to see if they were on my desk in the house. Hello, children!" he called to the six little Bunkers. But even Mun Bun seemed to know that something was wrong. Daddy Bunker's voice was not at all jolly.

His loss was worrying him, his wife well knew.

CHAPTER III

GRANDMA'S LETTER

While the other children, being too young to understand much about Daddy Bunker's worry, ran down to play in the yard, Russ and Rose stayed on the porch with their father and mother. They heard Mrs. Bunker ask:

"What sort of papers were they you lost?

"Well, I don't know that I have exactly lost them," said Mr. Bunker slowly, as though trying to think what really had happened, "I had some real estate papers in my desk at the office. They were about some property I was going to sell for a man, and the papers were valuable. But a little while ago, when I went to look for them, I couldn't find them. It means the loss of considerable money."

"Perhaps they are in your desk here," said Mrs. Bunker, for her husband sometimes did business at his home in the evening, and had a desk in the sitting-room.

"Perhaps they are," said the father of the six little Bunkers. "That is why I came home so early—to look."

He went into the house, followed by his wife and Russ and Rose. Mr. Bunker stepped over to his desk, and began looking through it. He took out quite a bundle of books and papers, but those he wanted did not seem to be there.

"Did you find them?" asked his wife, after a while.

"No," he answered with a shake of his head, "I did not. They aren't here. I'm sorry. I need those papers very much. I may lose a large sum of money if I don't find them. I can't see what could have happened to them. I had them on my desk in the office yesterday, and I was looking at them when Mr. Johnson came along to see about buying some lumber from the pile in the yard next to my office."

"Perhaps Mr. Johnson might know something about the papers," suggested Mrs. Bunker.

Her husband did not answer her for a moment. Then he suddenly clapped his

hands together as a new thought came to him, and he said:

"Oh, now I remember! I left those papers in my old coat."

"Your old coat!" repeated Mrs. Bunker with interest.

"Yes. That old ragged one I sometimes wear at the office when I have to get things down from the dusty shelves. I had on that coat when I was holding the papers in my hand, and then Mr. Johnson came along. I wanted to go out in the lumberyard with him, to look at the boards he wanted to buy, so I stuck the papers in the pocket of the old coat."

"Then that's where they must be yet," said Mrs. Bunker. "Where is the coat?"

"Oh, I always keep it hanging up behind the office door. Yes, that's it. I remember now. When Mr. Johnson came in and I went out to look at the lumber with him, I stuck the papers in the inside pocket of the old, ragged coat. And then I forgot all about them until just now, when I had to have them. I'll hurry back to the office and get the papers out of the pocket of the coat."

"May we come with you?" asked Russ.

"Please let us," begged Rose.

Mr. Bunker, who did not seem quite so worried now, looked at his wife.

"Take the children, if you have time," she said. "At least Rose and Russ. The others are playing in the sand," for that's what they were doing. Vi, Laddie, Margy and Mun Bun were digging in a pile of sand at one end of the yard.

"All right, come along, Little Flower, and you, too, Whistler," said Mr. Bunker, giving Russ a pet name he used occasionally.

The two children, delighted to be out after the rain, went down the street with their father, leaving their smaller brothers and sisters playing in the sand. Russ and Rose felt they were too old for this—especially just now.

"Did you hear what happened to us?" asked Russ, as he walked along, holding one of his father's hands, while Rose took the other.

"What happened when?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"When I made a steamboat partly out of a barrel," went on Russ. "It got broken when Laddie was inside it and I was outside. But we didn't any of us get hurt."

"Well, I'm glad of that," said Mr. Bunker with a smile.

"And Laddie made up a funny riddle about the barrel" went on Rose. "Jerry told it to him, though. It's like this—'Why does a barrel eat a roll for breakfast?'"

"Why does a barrel eat a roll for breakfast?" repeated Mr. Bunker. "I didn't know barrels ate rolls. I thought they always took crackers or oatmeal or something like that."

"Oh, she hasn't got it right!" said Russ, with a laugh at his sister. "The riddle is, 'When is a barrel hungry?' and Laddie says Jerry told him it was when the barrel takes a roll before breakfast."

"Oh, I see!" laughed Mr. Bunker. "Well, that's pretty good. Now I have a riddle for you. 'How many lollypops can you buy for two pennies?'" and he stopped in front of a little store with the two children—one on each side of him.

Russ looked at Rose and Rose looked at Russ. Then they smiled and looked at their father.

"I think we can find the answer to that riddle in here," went Mr. Bunker, as he led the way into the candy store, for it was that kind.

And Russ and Rose soon found that they could each get a lollypop for a penny.

"You used to get two for a cent," said Russ. "But I guess, on account of everything being so high, they only give you one."

"Well, one at a time is enough, I should think," said Mr. Bunker, as they went out of the store. "If you had two lollypops I'd be afraid you wouldn't know which one to taste first, and it would take so long to make sure that you might grow old before you found out, and then you wouldn't have any fun eating them."

"Oh, you're such a funny daddy!" laughed Rose.

They walked down Main Street, and soon came to Mr. Bunker's real estate office. He hurried inside, followed by the children.

Mr. Bunker looked behind the door in the little room where he had his desk. The office was made up of three rooms, and in the large, outer one, were several clerks, writing at desks. Some of them knew the two little Bunker children and nodded and smiled at them.

"Where's that old coat of mine I sometimes wear?" asked Mr. Bunker of one of his clerks, when the office door had been opened but no garment was found hanging behind it.

"Do you mean that ragged one?" asked the clerk, whose name, by the way, was Donlin—Mr. Donlin.

"That's the one I mean," said Mr. Bunker. "I stuck some real estate papers in the pocket of that coat yesterday when I went out to the lumber pile with Mr. Johnson, and now I want them. I must have left them in the pocket of the old, ragged coat."

"If you did they're gone, I'm afraid," said Mr. Donlin.

"Gone? You mean those papers are gone?"

"Yes, and the old coat, too. They're both gone. If there were any papers in the pocket of that old coat they're gone, Mr. Bunker."

"But who took them?" asked the real estate man, much worried.

"Why, it must have been that old tramp lumberman," answered the clerk. "Don't you remember?"

"What tramp lumberman?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"It was this way," said Mr. Donlin. "After you went out to the lumber pile with Mr. Johnson—and I saw you had on the old coat—you came back in here and hung it up behind the door."

"And the valuable papers were in the pocket," said Mr. Bunker. "I remember that."

"Well, perhaps they were," admitted the clerk. "Anyhow, you hung the ragged coat behind the door. And just before you went home for the night an old tramp came in. Don't you remember? He was red-haired."

"Yes, I remember that," said the children's father.

"Well, this tramp said he used to be a lumberman, but he got sick and had to go to the hospital, and since coming out he couldn't find any work to do. He said he was in need of a coat, and you called to me to give him your old one, as you were going to get another. Do you remember that?"

"Oh, yes! I certainly do!" cried Mr. Bunker. "I'd forgotten all about the tramp lumberman! And I did tell you to give him my old coat. I forgot all about having left the papers in it. I was so busy talking to Mr. Johnson that I never thought about them. And did the tramp take the coat?"

"He did, Mr. Bunker. And he said to thank you and that he was glad to get it. He went off wearing it."

"And my papers—worth a large sum of money—were in the pocket!" exclaimed Mr. Bunker. "I never thought about them, for I was so busy about selling Mr. Johnson the lumber. It's too bad!"

"I'm sorry," said the clerk. "If I had known the papers were in the old coat I'd have looked through the pockets before I gave it to the tramp."

"Oh, it wasn't your fault," said Mr. Bunker quickly. "It was my own. I should have remembered about the papers being in the coat. But do you know who that tramp was, and where he went?"

"I never saw him before," replied Mr. Donlin, "and I haven't seen him since. Maybe the police could find him."

"That's it! That's what we'll have to do!" cried Mr. Bunker. "I shall have to send the police to find the old lumberman; not that he has done anything wrong, but to get back my papers. He may keep the coat. Very likely he hasn't even found the papers. Yes, I must tell the police!"

But before Mr. Bunker could do this in came the postman with the mail. There were several letters for the real estate dealer, and when he saw one he exclaimed:

"Ah, this is from Grandma Bell! We must see what she has to say!"

Daddy Bunker opened the letter, which was written to him by his wife's mother —the children's grandmother—and when he had read a few lines, he exclaimed:

"Oh, ho! Here is news indeed! Good news!"

"Oh, what is it?" asked Russ. "Did grandma tell you in the letter that the tramp lumberman left your papers at her house?"

CHAPTER IV

FOURTH OF JULY

Daddy Bunker looked at his little boy and girl. And, on their part, Russ and Rose looked at daddy. They were thinking of two things—the letter from Grandma Bell and Mr. Bunker's real estate papers that the tramp lumberman had carried off in the old coat. Russ and Rose didn't know much about real estate—except that it meant houses and barns and fields and city lots. And they didn't know much about valuable real estate papers, but they did know their father was worried about something, and this made them feel sad.

"Has grandma got your papers?" asked Russ again.

"Oh, no, little Whistler," answered Mr. Bunker with a laugh. "She doesn't even know I have lost them."

"But what's the letter about?" asked Rose.

"It's a letter from Grandma Bell inviting us all up to her home at Lake Sagatook, in Maine, to spend part of the summer," answered Mr. Bunker. "Grandma Bell wants us to come up to Maine, and have a good time."

"Oh, can we go?" cried Russ, and, for the moment, he forgot all about his father's lost papers.

"Oh, won't it be fun!" cried Rose. "I love Grandma Bell!"

"Yes, I guess every one who knows her does," said Mr. Bunker, for he was as fond of his wife's mother as he was of his own, who was the children's Grandma Ford.

"When can we go?" asked Russ.

"Oh, it's too soon to settle that part," answered his father. "We'll have to take this letter home and talk it over with mother. Then I must see if I can't get the police to find this red-haired tramp lumberman who is carrying those valuable papers around in my old coat. It's queer I never thought that I put them in the pocket. Very queer!"

"Maybe the tramp will bring them back," said Rose after a bit. "Lots of times, when people find things, they bring them back."

"Yes, that's so, he might do it, if he is honest," said Mr. Bunker. "But perhaps he isn't, and maybe he has not yet looked in the pockets of the coat. But I'll just telephone to the police, and see if any of them have seen the tramp that came to my office."

There were not many policemen in Pineville, and most of them knew Mr. Bunker. He telephoned from his office to the chief, or head policeman, and asked him to be on the watch for a red-haired tramp lumberman wearing an old coat.

"Get me back the papers. I don't care about the coat—he may have that," said Mr. Bunker.

The chief promised that he and his men would do what they could, and some of the policemen at once began looking about Pineville for the tramp.

"But I guess maybe he has traveled on from here," said Mr. Bunker, as he came away from the telephone. "I'm afraid I'll never see my valuable papers again."

"Will you be so poor we can't go to Grandma Bell's?" asked Russ. That would be very dreadful, he thought.

"Oh, no, I won't be as poor as that," answered Daddy Bunker with a smile. "We'll go to see Grandma Bell all right. But I would like to get those papers."

He told the clerks in his office and some friends of his about his loss, and they promised to be on the lookout for the tramp. Then Daddy Bunker took Rose and Russ back home with him, along Main Street, in Pineville.

"Did you find them?" asked Mrs. Bunker anxiously, as she saw her husband coming up the walk toward the house. "Did you get your papers?"

"No," he answered. "I forgot that I had given the old coat to a tramp, and the papers were in one of the pockets," and he told his wife what had happened at the real estate office.

"And we got a letter from Grandma Bell!" exclaimed Rose as soon as she had a chance to speak.

"And we're going to see her—up to Lake Sagatook, in Maine," added Russ.

"No? Really?" cried Mrs. Bunker in delight. "Did you get a letter from mother?" she asked her husband.

"Yes, it came to me at the office," he answered, giving it to his wife.

"Do you think we can go?" she asked, when she had read the letter.

"Why, yes, I guess so," slowly answered Mr. Bunker. "It will do you good and the children good, too. We'll go to Grandma Bell's!"

"Oh, goody!" cried Russ, and he began to whistle a merry tune. Rose started to sing a little song, and then she said:

"Oh, but I must go in and help set the table!" for she often did that, as Norah had so much else to do at meal-time.

"All right, Little Helper!" said Mother Bunker with a smile. "We can talk about the trip to grandma's when we are eating supper."

Some of the other children heard the good news—the loss of the real estate papers did not bother them, for they were too little to worry; but they loved to hear about Grandma Bell.

"And I'm going to take some fire-to'pedos!" exclaimed Laddie. "I'm going to shoot 'em off for Fourth of July at grandma's."

Daddy Bunker shook his head.

"I think we'd better have our Fourth of July at home here, before we go," he said. "That will be next week, and we can go to Maine soon afterward. Grandma Bell doesn't like fire-crackers, anyhow. We'll shoot them off before we go."

"Goody!" cried Laddie again. Anything suited him as long as he could have fun. "We'll shoot sky-rockets, too. What makes 'em be called sky-rockets?" he asked, "Do they go up to the sky?"

"You go and ask Jerry Simms about that," suggested Mr. Bunker. "Jerry can tell you how they shot signaling rockets in the army. Trot along!"

Laddie was glad to do this. He liked to hear Jerry talk.

"Maybe he'll tell me a riddle about sky-rockets," said the little fellow.

Russ sat down on the porch and began whittling some bits of wood with his

knife.

"What are you making now, Russ?" asked his father, while Mrs. Bunker went in to see that Rose was setting the table right, and that Norah had started to get the meal.

"I'm making a wooden cannon to shoot fire-crackers," the boy answered. "You can put a fire-cracker in it and light it, and then it can't hurt anybody."

"That's a good idea," said Mr. Bunker, "You can't be too careful about Fourth of July things. I'll be at home with you and the other children on that day, to see that you don't get hurt."

"Are you sure Grandma Bell wouldn't like to have us bring some shooting things down to her?" asked Russ.

"Oh, yes, I am very sure," answered his father with a laugh. "Grandma Bell doesn't like much noise. We'll have our Fourth before we go."

"That'll be fun!" said Russ, and he went on whittling at his cannon. His father did not really believe the little boy could make one, but Russ was always doing something; either whistling or making some toy.

At supper they talked about the fun they would have at Grandma Bell's. It was quite a long trip in the train, and they would be all night in the cars.

"And that'll be fun!" cried Russ. "We can all of us sleep when the train is going along."

"Can we, Daddy?" asked Laddie. "Really?"

"Oh, yes, they have sleeping-cars," said Mr. Bunker.

"Do the cars sleep?" asked Laddie, his eyes opening wide in surprise. "Oh, that's funny—a sleeping-car. And—and——Say! maybe I can think up a riddle about a sleeping-car," he added.

"You'd better think about drinking your milk, and getting good and fat, with rosy cheeks, so Grandma Bell will like to kiss them," said Mother Bunker with a laugh. "Don't think so much about riddles or sleeping-cars."

"Maybe I can think of a riddle with a sleeping-car in it and some milk, too," said Laddie.

"Perhaps you can!" laughed Daddy Bunker. "A cow in a sleeping-car would do for that."

After the children had gone to bed—each one eager to dream about Grandma Bell—Mr. and Mrs. Bunker sat up and talked about what was to be done.

"It's too bad about those papers the tramp took in the old coat," said Mrs. Bunker.

"Yes, I am sorry to lose them," said her husband. "But perhaps the tramp may be found, and I may get them back."

Russ, Rose, and all the rest of the six little Bunkers got up early next morning.

"Is It Fourth of July yet?" asked Munroe.

"No, not yet, Mun Bun," answered Rose with a laugh. "But it soon will be—in a few days."

"I'm going to finish my cannon," said Russ.

"Come on!" called Laddie to his twin sister Vi. "Let's go down and dig a hole in the sand pile."

"What for?" she asked. Violet hardly ever did anything without first asking a question about it.

"Huh?"

"What for we dig a hole?"

"To put fire-crackers in," answered Laddie. "And when they shoot off —'Bang!'—they'll make the sand go up in the air."

"Like a sky-rocket?" asked Vi.

"Yes, I guess maybe like a sky-rocket," answered Laddie.

So down to the sand pile he and his sister went. Mun Bun and Margy played in the grass in the side yard, Russ whittled away at his wooden cannon, whistling the while, and Rose, after she had done a little dusting, made a new dress for her doll.

"'Cause I want her to look nice for Grandma Bell," said the little girl.

And thus they played at these and other things, and had a good time.

A few mornings after this Russ was suddenly awakened by hearing a loud noise under his window.

"What's that?" he cried. "Thunder?"

"It's Fourth of July!" answered his father. "Some boy must have shot off a big early fire-cracker! Get up, children! It's Fourth of July, and we are going to have some fun! Get up!"

"Hurray!" cried Russ. "Hurray for the Fourth of July!"

CHAPTER V

THE TRAMP

Such fun as the six little Bunkers had! Daddy Bunker was up before any of them, to see that little fingers were not burned by pieces of punk or stray ends of fire-crackers, and before breakfast Russ and Laddie had made enough noise, their mother said, to last all day.

"It's a good thing we decided not to go to Grandma Bell's until after the Fourth;" she said. "Dear mother never could have stood this racket."

"We like it," said Russ.

He and Laddie did, and Mun Bun did not mind it very much, though he did shut his eyes and jump when a big cracker went off.

Rose, Margy and Vi didn't like the fire-crackers at all, though they didn't mind tossing torpedoes down on the sidewalk, to hear them go off with a little bang.

Mrs. Bunker was afraid some of the children might get burned or hurt with the fireworks, and she wished they hadn't had any; but Daddy Bunker promised to stay with the little folk all day, and see that they got into no danger. And he did, firing off the big fire-crackers himself.

The wooden cannon Russ made didn't work very well. The first fire-cracker that was shot off in it burst the wooden affair all to pieces.

"But I don't care," said Russ with a jolly whistle. "It made *one* awfully good noise, anyhow."

"To-night we'll go down to the Square and see the big fireworks," said Daddy Bunker, for the town of Pineville was old-fashioned enough to have a Fourth-of-July celebration.

"And you said we could have ice cream and cake this afternoon," said Rose to her mother.

"Yes, I did," agreed Mrs. Bunker. "Norah is freezing the cream now, and she

made the cake yesterday."

"Oh, goody!" cried Laddie, clapping his hands. "Ice cream and cake. Is it chocolate cake, Mother?" he asked.

"I don't know—you'll have to ask Norah," was the answer.

"Come on, let's!" said Rose, and they ran around to the kitchen door, looking in where the good-natured cook was busy with pots and pans.

"Chocolate cake is it? Sure it's *both* kinds," Norah answered with a laugh. "It's regular thunder-and-lightning cake—you wait an' see!"

"Thunder-and-lightning cake! Oh, what kind is that?" asked Rose.

"Maybe it's a riddle," suggested Laddie.

"Oh, you're always thinking about riddles!" exclaimed Russ. "Come on, let's go out to the barn and have some fun in the hay," for Mr. Bunker kept a horse for driving customers about to look at real estate.

"What kind of fun can we have?" asked Vi.

"Come on, and you'll see," returned Russ.

By this time most of their fireworks had been shot off, though Daddy Bunker had insisted that they save a few for afternoon. And, making sure that the children did not have smoldering pieces of punk, which might set the barn on fire, Mrs. Bunker watched the six little tots run out there to have fun.

"Have you heard anything about the papers the tramp carried away in your old coat?" she asked her husband, who did not go to the office that day.

"No, the police couldn't find the man," answered Mr. Bunker. "I guess my papers are gone for good. But I mustn't worry about them; nor must you. I want you and the children to have a good time at Grandma Bell's."

"Oh, we always have good times there," said his wife. "I'll be glad to go. It is lovely in Maine at this time of year."

Out in the barn the children could be heard laughing and shouting.

"I hope they don't try to make any more steamboats out of old barrels, and get caught in the ruins," said Mrs. Bunker with a laugh, as she thought of the funny

accident that had happened in the playroom.

"Oh, I guess they'll be all right," said Mr. Bunker. "It's quiet now, so I'll lie down and have a nap, to get ready to take them to the fireworks to-night."

The six little Bunkers had played some games in the barn—sliding down the hay, pretending an old wagon was a stage coach and that the Indians captured it—games like that—when they heard Norah calling loudly to them.

"What's she saying?" asked Laddie, who had found a hen's nest in the hay and was wondering whether he had better take in the eggs or let them stay to be hatched into little chickens. "What's Norah want, Russ? Have we got to come in?"

"She says come and get the thunder-and-lightning cake," said Russ, who was listening at the barn door.

"And ice cream! She said ice cream, too!" added Vi. "I heard her!"

"Yes, I guess she did say ice cream," admitted Russ. "Come on!" and he set out on a run toward the house.

"Wait for me! Wait for me!" begged Mun Bun, whose short legs could not go as fast as could those of Russ.

"I'll wait for you, Mun," said Rose kindly, and she turned back and took the little fellow's hand.

"Maybe all the cream'll melt if we don't run," said Mun, as he toddled along beside Rose.

"Oh, no, I guess not. Norah will save some for us," said the little girl, humming a song.

And Rose was right. Norah made all the children sit down on the side porch, and she waited until Mun and Rose—the last to arrive—reached the place, before she dished out the cream. Daddy and Mother Bunker were there, too, with their dishes, and so was Jerry Simms.

"This is better than bein' in the army," said the old soldier.

"Didn't you ever have ice cream there?" asked Russ.

"Oh, once in a while. But it wasn't at all the kind Norah can make. Sure she's a

wonder at ice cream!"

"And we're going to have thunder-and-lightning cake, too!" added Rose.

"Well, I don't know what kind that is, but it sounds good on a Fourth of July," said Jerry with a laugh. "I hope it doesn't explode when I eat it, though, like a ham sandwich did once."

"Did a ham sandwich explode?" asked Russ, who always liked to hear the old soldier tell army stories.

"Well, sort of," answered Jerry. "It was over in the Philippines. I was eating my sandwich, and some of the soldiers were firing at the enemy, and the enemy was firing at us. And a shell came pretty close to where I was sitting. It went off with a bang, and a piece of the shell hit the sandwich I was just going to bite."

"It's a mercy the shell didn't hit you," said Mrs. Bunker.

"Part of it did—my hand that held the meat and bread," explained Jerry. "But it's good I wasn't biting the sandwich at the time, or I might have lost my head. However, here comes the thunder-and-lightning cake. Now we can see what it is."

Norah came out of the kitchen with two heaping plates, and, at the sight of them, the six little Bunkers said:

"Oh! Ah! Oh!"

There were six "Ohs" and six "Ahs!" as you can imagine; one for each boy and girl.

"Is this thunder-and-lightning cake?" asked Russ.

"That's what it is," answered Norah. "It's the first time I've made it in a long while. I hope you'll like it."

"Sure they can't help it if you made it!" chuckled Jerry, who was exceedingly fond of Norah.

"Go 'long with you!" she told him, laughing.

"It does look just like thunder, it's so dark!" said Russ, biting into a slice of the cake.

"And where's the lightning?" asked Rose.

"That's the pink part," answered the cook. "You see I take some chocolate-cake dough, and mix it up with white-cake dough, and then I put in some dough that I've colored pink, and mix that through in lines and streaks, and that's the lightning," explained Norah.

And when the cake had been baked in this way, and cut, each slice showed a white part, a dark brown part and a pink, jagged streak here and there, as lightning is sometimes seen to streak through the dark clouds.

"Oh, it's awful good!" cried Laddie, as he took a second slice to eat with the home-made ice cream.

"Will it make a noise like a fire-cracker?" asked Vi, who always had some sort of question ready.

"It won't make a noise unless you drop it, darlin'," said Jerry with a laugh. "Then it'll go 'thump!'"

"Don't you dare talk that way about my cake!" said Norah. "The idea of sayin' it would make a noise if it fell."

"I was only joking" rejoined the former soldier. "The cake is so light, Norah, that I'll have to tie strings to it to keep it from goin' up to the sky like a balloon!"

"Go 'long with you!" laughed Norah, but she seemed pleased all the same.

"We're going to see balloons to-night at the fireworks," remarked Rose. "Did you ever see any, Jerry?"

"Yes, we had 'em in the army."

"Did you ever go up in one?" asked Russ eagerly.

"Once," said the former soldier.

"Oh, tell us about it!" begged Laddie, and Jerry did, while the six little Bunkers sat about him, finishing the last of their cream and cake.

Then Jerry had to go to get some gasolene for the automobile, as Mr. Bunker kept a machine, as well as a horse and carriage, and the children were left to themselves. They were thinking about the fireworks they were to see in the evening, and talking about the fun they would have at Grandma Bell's, when

Russ, who got up to go down on the grass and turn a somersault, suddenly stopped and looked at a man coming up the side path.

The man was a very ragged one, and he shuffled along in shoes that seemed about to drop off his feet. He had on a battered hat, and was not at all nice-looking.

"Oh, look!" whispered Rose, who saw the ragged man almost as soon as Russ did.

"I see him!" Russ answered. "That's a tramp! I guess it's the one daddy gave his coat to with the papers in. Maybe he's come to give 'em back. Oh, wouldn't that be good!"

CHAPTER VI

MUN BUN'S BALLOON

Six little Bunkers looked at the ragged man coming up the walk toward the porch. He was a tramp—of that even Mun Bun, the smallest of the six, was sure.

"Have you got anything for a hungry man?" asked the ragged chap, taking off his ragged hat. "I'm a poor man, and I haven't any work and I'm hungry."

"Did you bring back my daddy's papers?" asked Russ.

"What papers?" asked the tramp, and he seemed very much surprised. "I'm not the paper man," he went on. "I saw a boy coming up the street a while ago with a bundle of papers under his arm. I guess maybe he's your paper boy. I'm a hungry man——"

"I don't mean the newspaper," went on Russ, for the other little Bunkers were leaving the talking to him. "But did you bring back the real estate papers?"

"The real estate papers?" murmured the tramp, looking around.

"'Tisn't any riddle," added Laddie. "Is it, Russ?"

"No, it isn't a riddle," went on the older boy. "But did you bring back daddy's papers that he gave you?"

"He didn't give me any papers!" exclaimed the tramp.

"They were in a ragged coat," added Rose. "In the pocket."

The tramp looked at his own coat.

"This is ragged enough," he said, "but it hasn't any papers in it that I know of. I guess they'd fall out of the pockets if there was any," he added. "This coat is nothing but holes. I guess you don't know who I am. I'm a hungry man and——"

"Aren't you a lumberman, and didn't my father give you an old coat the other day?" asked Russ.

The tramp shook his head.

"I don't know anything about lumber," he said. "I can't work at much, and I'm hungry. I'm too sick to work very hard. All I want is something to eat. And I haven't any papers that belong to your father. Is he at home—or your mother?"

"I'll call them," said Rose, for she knew that was the right thing to do when tramps came to the house.

But there was no need to go in after Mr. and Mrs. Bunker. They had heard the children talking out on the side porch, and a strange man's voice was also noticed, so they went out to see what it was.

"Oh, Daddy!" cried Russ. "Here's the tramp lumberman you gave the old coat to, but he says he hasn't any papers!"

"Excuse me!" exclaimed the tramp, "but I don't know what the little boy is talking of. I just stopped in to ask for a bite to eat, and he and the other children started talking about a lumberman and some papers in a ragged coat. Land knows my coat is ragged enough, but I haven't anything belonging to you."

Mr. Bunker looked sharply at the ragged man, and then said:

"No, you aren't the one. A tramp lumberman did call at my real estate office the other day, and I told one of my clerks to give him an old coat. In the pocket were some valuable papers. But you aren't the man."

"I know it, sir!" answered the tramp. "This is the first time I've been here. I'm hungry and——"

"I'll tell Norah to get him something to eat," said Mrs. Bunker, who was kind to every one.

And while she was gone, and while the six little Bunkers looked at the ragged man, the children's father talked to him.

"I'd like to find that tramp lumberman," said Mr. Bunker. "I gave him the coat because he needed it more than I did, but I didn't know I had left the papers in the pocket. You're not the man, though. I didn't have a very good look at him, but he had a lot of red hair on his head: I saw that much."

"My hair's black—what there is of it," said the ragged man. "But I don't know anything about your papers. But if I see a red-haired lumberman in my travels

around the country, I'll tell him to send you back the papers."

"That will be very kind of you," said Mr. Bunker, "as I need them very much. Do you think you might meet this red-haired lumberman tramp, who has my old coat?"

"Well, I might. You never can tell. I travel about a good bit, and I meet lots of fellers like myself, though I don't know as I ever saw a lumberman."

"This man wasn't a regular tramp," said Mr. Bunker. "He was only tramping around looking for work, and he happened to stop at my place."

"That's like me," said the black-haired tramp. "I'm looking for work, too. Got any wood that needs cutting?"

"Not now," said Mr. Bunker with a smile. "Jerry Simms cuts all my wood. But I'll give you some money, and maybe that will help you along, and the cook will fix you something to eat."

"That's very kind of you," said the tramp. "And if ever I see the man with your papers I'll tell him to send 'em back." "Please do" begged Mr. Bunker.

By this time Norah had wrapped the tramp up a big paper bag full of bread and meat, with a piece of pie. Tucking this under his arm, he shuffled off to go to some quiet place to eat.

Soon it was time to go to the square in the middle of the city, where the fireworks were to be shown. The six little Bunkers, talking over the fun they had had that day, and thinking of the good times they were to have at Grandma Bell's, walked along with their father and mother. Behind them came Norah and Jerry Simms.

"Maybe the tramp will come to see the fireworks," said Rose, who was walking beside Russ.

"You mean the red-headed one that has daddy's papers?"

"No, I mean the one that came begging at our house to-night."

"Well, maybe he will," admitted Russ. "If I was a tramp I'd walk all around and go to every place that I was sure they were going to have fireworks."

"So would I," said Rose. "I love fireworks."

"But you couldn't be a tramp," declared her brother.

"Why not?" Rose wanted to know.

"'Cause you're a girl, and only men and boys are tramps. I could be a tramp, but you couldn't."

AND THEN THE FIREWORKS BEGAN.

AND THEN THE FIREWORKS BEGAN.

And then the fireworks began, and the six little Bunkers thought no more about tramps, missing papers, or even about the visit to Grandma Bell's for a time, as they watched the red, green and blue fire, and saw the sky-rockets, balloons and other pretty things floating in the air.

If the red-haired tramp, or the one for whom Norah had put up the lunch that evening, came to the fireworks, the six little Bunkers did not see the ragged men.

They stayed until the last pinwheel had whizzed itself out in streams and stars of colored fire, until the last sky-rocket had gone hissing upward toward the clouds, and until the last glow of red fire had died away in the sky.

"Now we'll go home!" said Mother Bunker. "You tots must be tired. You've had a full day, for you were up early."

"But we've had lots of fun," said Russ, "piles of it."

"And now we'll get ready to go to Grandma Bell's, won't we?" asked Rose.

"Yes. To-morrow and for the next few days we'll be busy getting ready to go to Maine," said Mrs. Bunker.

"I want a balloon!" suddenly said Mun Bun. He had not done much talking that evening. Probably it was because he was too excited watching the fireworks. It was the first time he had been taken to the evening celebration.

"Do you mean you want to go to Grandma Bell's in a balloon?" asked his father. "Maybe you mean you're so tired you can't walk any more, and you want a balloon to ride in. Well, Mun Bun, we can't get a balloon now, but I can carry you, and that will be pretty nearly the same, won't it?"

"I want a balloon," said the little boy again, "but I want you to carry me, too. Can't I have a balloon, Daddy?" and he nestled his tired head down on his

father's shoulder. Norah was carrying Margy, but the other little Bunkers could walk.

"A balloon, is it?" said Mun's father. "Do you mean a fire-balloon?"

"No, they burn up," said Mun Bun, in rather sleepy tones. And, in truth, several of the paper balloons sent up that evening had caught fire. "I want a big balloon I can ride in," he said, "like Jerry told about. I want to go up in a balloon!"

"Well, maybe you'll dream about one," said Mother Bunker with a laugh. "And that will be better than a real one, because if you fall out of a dream balloon you land in bed. But if you fall out of a real balloon you may land in the river."

Mun Bun did not answer. He was asleep on his father's shoulder.

The next day, between times of walking around the yard looking for fire-crackers that, possibly, hadn't exploded the day before, and finding stray torpedoes, the six little Bunkers talked of the fun they had had. They went into the house, now and then, to see how Mother Bunker and Norah were coming on with the packing. For a start had been made in getting ready to go to Grandma Bell's, now that the Fourth of July was passed.

Mrs. Bunker was so busy that she did not keep as close watch over the children as usual, and it was nearly time for lunch before she thought of them.

"Norah, see if they're all in the yard, please," she said. "And count them, to be sure all six are there. Then we'll get them something to eat, and do some more packing this afternoon."

Norah looked out in the yard.

"I see only five of 'em, ma'am," she reported.

"Which one is gone?" asked Mrs. Bunker quickly.

"I don't see Mun Bun," said the cook.

Just then Rose came running into the house.

"Oh, Mother!" she cried. "Guess where Mun Bun is!"

"I haven't time to guess!" said Mrs. Bunker. "Tell me quickly, Rose! Has anything happened to him?"

"I—I guess he's all right," answered Rose, who was out of breath from running. "But he's standing under a tree up the street, and he won't come home."

"He won't come home?" repeated Mrs. Bunker. "Why won't he come home, Rose?"

"'Cause his balloon is caught. He's got hold of the string and his balloon is up in the tree and he won't come home. He says he's going to take a ride up to the sky!"

"Oh, goodness me! what *has* happened now?" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker. "Norah!" she called. "Come! Something is the matter with a balloon and Mun Bun! We must go see what it is!"

One or the other of the six little Bunkers was always, so it seemed to their mother, in trouble of some sort, and she or Norah or Jerry Simms or their father had to drop anything they might be doing to rush to the help of the child who had gotten itself into something or some place it should not have got into.

CHAPTER VII

LADDIE'S NEW RIDDLE

Norah O'Grady, the cheerful cook for the six little Bunkers, saw their mother hurrying out of the house with Rose.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Bunker?" asked Norah. "Is there a fire, and are ye goin' for a policeman?"

Firemen and policemen, aside from Jerry Simms, were Norah's two chief heroes.

"No, there isn't a fire, Norah" answered Mrs. Bunker. "But Rose just told me that Mun Bun is caught up in a tree with a balloon, and I've got to go and get him down. Maybe you'd better come, too."

"Better come! I should say I *had*!" cried Norah, quickly taking off her apron. "The poor little lad caught up in a balloon! The saints preserve us! 'Tis probably one of them circus balloons, or maybe a German airship came along and caught him up! The poor darlin'!"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Rose, as she trotted along with her mother and Norah, "Mun isn't in a balloon. His balloon is caught in a big tree and the little darlin' won't come away and——"

"It couldn't be much worse!" gasped Norah. "We'll have to get a fireman with a long ladder, 'tis probable, to get him down."

"I don't see how it could have happened," said Mrs. Bunker. "He was in the yard playing, a little while ago. The next time I looked he was gone. Where did the balloon come from, Rose?"

"Mun Bun bought the balloon!" said the little girl.

"He *bought* it?" cried Norah and Mrs. Bunker.

"Yes, it's a five-cent one. He had five cents that Jerry Simms gave him, Mun had, and he bought the balloon, and it had a long string to it, and it got caught up in a tree—the balloon did—and Mun Bun's got hold of the string and he won't come

away, 'cause if he does he'll maybe break the string and the balloon and——"

Rose had to stop, she was so out of breath, but she had told all there was need to tell.

Mrs. Bunker and Norah, who had reached the street and could look down and see Mun Bun standing under a tree not far away, came to a sudden stop.

"And then the little darlin' isn't caught up by a German airship?" asked the cook.

"No. It's just a balloon he bought with the five cents Jerry gave him," explained Rose, "and it's caught in a tree, and——"

"I see how it is," said Mrs. Bunker, and she laughed. "Mun Bun doesn't want to come away without his toy balloon. We must get it for him, Norah!"

"Sure, that we will! The saints be praised he isn't flyin' above the clouds this blessed minute!" and with Norah, now laughing also, the three of them went to where Mun stood under the tree. Caught on one of the branches overhead was a big red balloon. It was fast to a string, and the little boy held the other end of the cord.

"I can't get it down!" he exclaimed.

"Well, it's a good thing you didn't climb up after it," said his mother. "We'll get it down for you, Mun."

She took hold of the string, and Norah, finding a long stick, carefully poked it up among the tree branches until she had loosed the toy balloon. Then it floated free, and Mun Bun could walk along with it floating on the end of the string above his head.

"It's a awful nice balloon," he said. "If it was bigger I could have a ride in it like Jerry did in the one when he was in the army."

"Well, I'm glad it isn't any bigger," said Mrs. Bunker. "Small as it is, you gave us enough trouble with it, Mun."

"But Mun Bun's all right! Norah was scared about him," said the girl, hugging the little boy close to her as they all walked back toward the house.

"Where did you get the balloon?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Down at Mrs. Kane's store," answered Mun, mentioning a little toy and candy

shop on the block on which the six little Bunkers lived. They spent all their spare pennies there.

And it was in bringing his toy balloon home, on the end of a long string, letting it float in the air over his head that Mun Bun had had the accident at the tree when the blown-up rubber bag got caught in the branch. He wouldn't leave it, of course, and Rose ran to tell her mother. That's how it all happened.

"Well, come in to lunch now!" called Mrs. Bunker to the other children, who were, playing in the yard. "And don't go away from the house this afternoon. It's quite warm, and I don't want any of you to go off in the blazing sun. If you do we can't go to Grandma Bell's."

This was enough to make them all promise they would spend the afternoon in the shade near the house, while Mrs. Bunker and Norah went on with the packing of the trunks. A great many things must be taken along on the visit to Maine, when so many children have to be looked after. They used up much clothing.

"How long're we going to stay at Grandma Bell's?" asked Russ, as he left the dining-room after lunch.

"Oh, perhaps a month," his mother answered. "She told us to come and stay as long as we liked, but I hardly think we shall be there all summer."

"Shall we come back home?" asked Rose.

"I hardly know," said Mrs. Bunker. "We may go to visit some of your cousins or aunts—land knows you have enough!"

"Oh, wouldn't it be fun if we could go out West to Uncle Fred's ranch?" cried Russ.

"I'd like to go see Cousin Tom at the seashore," put in Rose. "I love the seashore."

"I like cowboys and Indians!" exclaimed Russ.

"Could we go see Aunt Jo, in Boston?" asked Laddie. "I'd like to go to a big city like Boston."

"Maybe we could go there, some day," said Mrs. Bunker. "But why would you like to go there, Laddie?"

"'Cause then maybe I could hear some new riddles. I didn't think up a new one—not in two whole days!"

"My! That's too bad!" said Mr. Bunker, who had come home to lunch, and who had heard all about Mun's balloon. "I'll give you a riddle, Laddie. Why does our horse eat oats?"

"Wait a minute! Don't tell me!" cried the little boy. "Let me guess!"

He thought hard for a few seconds, and then gave as his answer:

"Because he can't get hay."

"No, that isn't it," said Mr. Bunker. And when Laddie had made some other guesses, and when Russ, Rose and the remaining little Bunkers had tried to give a reason, Daddy Bunker said:

"Our horse eats oats because he is hungry, the same as any other horse! You mustn't always try to guess the hardest answers to riddles, Laddie. Try the easy ones first!"

And then, amid laughter, Mr. Bunker started back to the office.

"Have you found that red-haired tramp yet, Daddy?" asked Russ. "And did you get back your papers?"

"No, Russ, not yet. And I don't believe I ever shall."

"Maybe I could find him if you'd let me come down to your office," went on the little boy.

"Well, thank you, but I don't believe you could," said Mr. Bunker. "You'd better stay here and help your mother pack, ready to go to Grandma Bell's."

Out in the shady side yard some of the little Bunkers were playing different games. Mun and Margy were making sand pies, turning them out of clam shells on to a shingle, and letting them dry in the sun. Mun's red balloon floated in the air over the heads of the children, the string tied fast to a peg Russ had driven into the ground.

Russ, after having done this kindness for his little brother, began to whistle a merry tune and at the same time started to nail together a box in which he said he was going to take some of his toys to Grandma Bell's. Rose had taken her doll

and was sitting under a tree, making a new dress for her toy, and Laddie and Vi had gone down to the little brook which bubbled along at the bottom of the green meadow, which was not far from the house. This brook was not very deep or wide. It flowed into Rainbow River, and was a safe place for the children to play.

Laddie and Vi had taken off their shoes and stockings before going down to paddle in the water, and after a while Russ, stopping in his work of hammering the box to look for more nails, heard Laddie calling out in a loud voice:

"Oh, Vi! what made the boat sink? What made the boat sink?"

At the same time Vi gave a loud shriek.

Russ dropped his hammer and started to run toward the brook.

"What's the matter?" called his mother, who saw him running.

"I don't just know," answered Russ, over his shoulder, "but I guess Laddie has a new riddle. He's hollering about why does a boat sink. But Vi's crying, I think."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker, again stopping in her work of packing a trunk. "I hope those children haven't fallen into the brook!"

CHAPTER VIII

"WHERE IS MARGY?"

Led by Russ, Mrs. Bunker and Norah hurried down to the brook that ran through the green meadow. It was just like the time they ran when Rose called them about Mun's balloon.

"Did you see anything happen, Russ?" asked his mother.

"No'm, I didn't," he answered. "I was making a box to take some of my things to Grandma Bell's, and I heard Vi yell and Laddie asking a riddle."

"Asking a riddle?"

"Well, it *sounded* like a riddle," Russ answered. "He kept saying: 'What made the boat sink? Oh, Vi, what made the boat sink?'"

"I hope it *was* only a riddle, and that nothing has happened," said Mrs. Bunker.

"Maybe it'll be no worse than Mun and his balloon," said Norah. "Anyhow, I can see the two children!" and she pointed across the green meadow to the brook. "They seem to be all right."

There, on the grassy bank, was Laddie jumping up and down, and pointing to something in the water. And the something was Vi though she appeared to be out in the middle of the brook, in a part where it was deep enough to come over the knees of Russ.

"What's the matter, Laddie?" asked his mother. "Has anything happened to Vi?"

"She's in the boat, and it's sunk," was the answer. "Oh, what made the boat sink?"

"Silly boy! Stop asking riddles at a time like this!" cried Mrs. Bunker. "What do you mean, Laddie?"

"It isn't a riddle at all," he answered. "The boat did sink and Vi is in it. What made it?"

"A boat! Sure there's no boat on the brook, unless the boy made one himself," said Norah.

"I did make one—out of a box, and Vi was riding in it, but it sank," said Laddie. "What made it sink?"

Then Mrs. Bunker, Norah and Russ came near enough to the shore of the brook to see what had happened. Out in the middle, standing in a soap box, was Violet. The little girl was crying and holding out her hands to Laddie, who seemed quite worried and excited.

"She's sunk! She's sunk!" he said over and over again.

"Be quiet, silly boy!" ordered his mother, who saw that Vi was in no danger. "We'll get her out. Why didn't you wade out to her yourself, and bring her to shore?"

"'Cause I thought maybe something was out there," said Laddie.

"Something out there? What do you mean?" asked his mother.

"I mean something that made the boat sink—something that pulled it down in the water with Vi. A shark maybe, or a whale!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Mrs. Bunker. "There are only little baby fishes in the brook."

"But something made the boat sink!" insisted Laddie.

"We'll see about that when we get Vi to shore," said Mrs. Bunker. "Come on," she called to the little girl. "Wade to shore, Vi. You have your shoes and stockings off, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes, Mother."

"Then wade to shore. You're all right."

So Vi stepped out of the soap box, which Laddie had called the boat, and started for shore. The box floated down the brook, and Russ ran out on a little point of land to catch hold of it when it should float to him.

"Now you're all right," said Mrs. Bunker to her little girl, as Vi came ashore. "But what happened?"

"We were playing sailor," explained Laddie, "and I made the boat out of a box. Then Vi went for a ride, but the boat sank. What made it sink, Vi?"

"'Cause it's full of cracks and holes—that's why!" answered Russ, who had caught the soap box as it floated down to him. "Look! It let in a lot of water, and that's what made it sink," he went on, as he held out the play boat.

The bottom and sides of the box were filled with many holes, from which the water now dripped. Laddie told how he had set it afloat in the brook, with Vi as a passenger. He had pushed her out from shore, hoping to give her a nice ride, but in the middle of the stream the boat went down, and Vi was frightened—or maybe just cross because she was not getting the ride she expected. She screamed. Laddie couldn't understand why the boat sank, and called out to know. That was when Russ heard them.

"But you're all right now," said Mrs. Bunker. "And it's so warm to-day that wading in the brook won't hurt you. Only don't upset and fall in. I don't believe you can ride in your boat, Laddie. It won't float when it leaks so much."

"'Course not," said Russ, who knew something about boats. "You got to stuff up all the cracks and holes with putty, Laddie."

"All right; I'll do that," said the little fellow. "I like a boat. I'll give you a nice ride, Vi, a real long one, after I stuff up the holes."

"No, I guess I don't want to ride in the boat any more," said the little girl, who was wading in the shallow water near shore, "This is more fun."

"Well, I'll go in the boat myself," said Laddie, taking the box from his brother. "Got any putty?" he asked.

"No. But maybe Jerry Simms has," answered Russ. "He was putting a new window glass in the barn yesterday, and he had putty then."

Laddie ran off to beg some putty from the good-natured Jerry, and Vi, after paddling about a little longer in the brook, went back to the house with her mother and Norah.

"I guess I'll make me a boat, too," decided Russ. "I can fix the box for my things to-morrow."

He went to the barn with Laddie, and soon the two boys were building "boats"

out of soap boxes, stuffing the cracks and holes with putty which Jerry gave them.

Then they went down to the brook and floated the boxes. They did not sink so quickly as had the one with Vi in it, and Russ and Laddie had lots of fun until supper time.

"I'm so tired I don't know what to do!" said Mrs. Bunker after supper. "I've packed two trunks, and I've helped rescue Mun Bun from a balloon and Vi from a sinking boat that wasn't a riddle after all." And the whole family, including the six little Bunkers, laughed as they thought of the queer things that had happened that day.

"I'll tell you what we can do," said Daddy Bunker. "It's early, and there is a nice moving picture show in town. We'll all go down and see it. That will rest you, Mother."

"Oh, yes! Let's go!" cried Rose.

And so they did.

The show was very nice, and there were some funny pictures. But Mun and Margy fell asleep before the show was over, and might have had to be carried home, only Jerry Simms came along in the automobile, which he had taken down to the shop to be repaired, and they rode to the house in that.

"Are we going to take our automobile with us to Grandma Bell's?" asked Russ.

"No, it's too far," his father answered. "But we can hire one there if we need one. Grandma hasn't one, I believe."

"She doesn't like to ride in them," said Mrs. Bunker. "Mother is old-fashioned. She has a carriage and a big carry-all."

"But we'll have fun there, anyhow, won't we?" asked Russ.

"I'm sure I hope so," his father answered.

The next few days were busy ones. More trunks were packed, Russ finished making his box for his things, and Laddie started to make one also. But he couldn't drive nails very straight, and his box fell apart almost as fast as he made it.

"I don't guess I'll take one," he said. "I'll put my things in your box, Russ."

"No, you can't," said the older boy. "There won't be room. But I'll make you a box for your own self," and this he did, much to Laddie's delight.

The other children brought from the playroom so many toys they wanted taken along that Mrs. Bunker said there would be no room in the trunks for anything else if she took all the youngsters piled up for her. So she picked out a few for each boy and girl, and put their best toys in.

At last the day came when they were to take the train for Grandma Bell's. Daddy Bunker had left one of his men in charge of the real estate office for the time he was to be away.

"And will that man find the red-haired lumber tramp that took your papers in the old coat?" asked Rose.

"I hope so," answered her father.

But it was not to happen that way, as you shall see.

The journey to Grandma Bell's was a long one. To get to Lake Sagatook, in Maine, the Bunkers would have to travel all of one afternoon, all night and part of the next day. They would sleep in the queer little beds on the train.

"And that'll be a lot of fun!" said Russ to Rose.

"Oh, yes, lots!" she agreed.

At the last minute it was found that many things which needed to be taken could not be put in any of the trunks.

"Make a big bundle of them," said Daddy Bunker. "Wrap up all the extra things in a bundle and roll 'em in a blanket. We can express that as we could a trunk."

So this was done.

At last everything was ready. The trunks and the big bundle were set out on the front porch for the expressman, and when he came the six little Bunkers, and their father and mother, watched the things being put on the auto truck.

"And now we'll start ourselves," said Mr. Bunker, when the expressman had started toward the depot. "Jerry will take us all down in the auto."

With final good-byes to Norah and some of the neighbors who gathered to see the party off, Mrs. Bunker started for the car, at the steering wheel of which sat Jerry Simms.

"Are we all here?" asked Daddy Bunker. "Wait until I count noses. Let me see: Russ, Rose, Vi, Laddie, Mun Bun and——"

Just then Mrs. Bunker uttered a cry.

"Why, where is Margy?"

And where was Margy? She was not with the other little Bunkers!

CHAPTER IX

ROSE'S DOLL

Daddy Bunker, who had started to "count noses," to make sure all his family was together, ready to start in the automobile with Jerry Simms for the depot, stopped suddenly when he found that little Margy was not with the other children. At the same time Mother Bunker also saw that one of her little girls was missing.

"Where did Margy go?" asked Mrs. Bunker. "I told her not to run back into the house."

"She didn't," said Norah. "I was standing right by the door all the while, and she didn't go in."

"Maybe she went in the back way," said Russ.

"The back door is locked," returned Norah. "She must have run down the street to say good-bye to some of her playmates while the expressman was loading in the trunks."

"I'll go and look," offered Russ.

"And you look in the back and side yards, Rose," said Mr. Bunker.

Rose ran around to the back yard. A hasty look showed her that her little sister was not there, and she hurried around to the front porch to tell her father and mother.

At the same time Russ came back from his trip down the street.

"I didn't see her anywhere," he reported, "and I called, but she didn't answer."

"Where can the child be?" cried Mrs. Bunker. "Norah, are you sure she isn't in the house?"

"Positive. But I'll take a look."

Just then Russ cried:

"Here comes the expressman back again. Maybe he forgot some of the trunks!"

"No, he took them all," said Mr. Bunker. "I don't see——"

The express auto stopped in front of the Bunker house.

"Did you miss anything?" asked the man, laughing.

"Miss anything?" repeated the children's father.

"Oh! Margy! We missed her!" said Mrs. Bunker.

"Well, I guess I've got her here on my truck," went on the expressman, laughing some more.

"You have my little girl?" cried Mrs. Bunker, "How did she get into your auto?"

"That I don't know," the expressman said, "but here she is," and he lifted out the big bundle loosely wrapped in an old blanket. The bundle had in it the things that wouldn't go in the trunks. It was open at both ends, and tied with straps and ropes.

Out of one end stuck the dark, and now tangled, curls of Margy Bunker, and Margy was laughing.

"Oh, what a girl you are!" cried her mother. "How did you get in there, Margy?"

"I—I wiggled in," was the answer, as the expressman carried the bundle, little Bunker and all, to the porch. "I wanted to get my rubber ball that was inside so I just wiggled in, I did."

"Did you really find her in that bundle?" asked Mr. Bunker, as the expressman put it down on the porch, and Margy, with the help of her mother, "wiggled" out.

"Yes, she was in there," was the man's answer. "I loaded that bundle on last, I remember, because it was soft and I didn't want to crush it with the heavy trunks. It's a good thing I did, though I didn't know there was a little girl inside."

"How did you find out she was in there?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Well, I stopped my machine when I got down the street a way, to take on some more packages," answered the expressman, "and I heard a funny sound. It was like a sneeze."

"I did sneeze," said Margy, while Norah was busy smoothing the wrinkles out of her dress. "Some dust got up my nose and I sneezed."

"First I thought it was a little puppy dog, or a cat—sometimes people send animals by express," explained the driver. "But when I looked back I saw a little girl's head sticking out of the bundle, and I knew right away where she belonged. I thought you didn't want to ship her as baggage or by express, so I brought her back as fast as I could."

"I'm glad you did," said Mrs. Bunker. "We couldn't imagine where she had gone."

"What did you do, Margy?" asked Russ.

"I—I just crawled inside the bundle," replied the little girl "I 'membered I put my rubber ball inside, and I wanted it, so I wiggled inside. And when I got there I was so tired I went to sleep, I guess."

And that is just what happened. Margy had wiggled herself all the way inside the bundle, which was not wrapped very tightly. It was big enough to hold her, and neither her feet nor her head stuck out of either end.

The bundle had been put on the porch with the trunks, and Margy found it easy to crawl into it after her ball, which, with other toys of the children, had been put in the bundle at the last minute.

"Well, now we'll start off again," said Daddy Bunker. "Don't any of you children crawl into any bundles, or shut yourselves up in trunks! We all want to go to Grandma Bell's together."

The expressman once more carried the bundle to his auto truck, and found it a little lighter this time, for Margy was not snuggled up inside it. Then, after "counting noses," Mr. Bunker, his wife and the children got into the auto with Jerry Simms, and started for the depot.

"Now I guess we're all right," said the children's father, as he saw that the baggage was safely put on the train, including the bundle into which Margy had "wiggled" herself. "All aboard!"

"That's what you called when we were playing steamboat," said Rose to Russ, as they got into the passenger car.

"Yes. We had lots of fun that day, didn't we?" he asked.

"Yes. And we'll have a lot of fun at Grandma Bell's," said his sister.

As the six little Bunkers were to stay on the train all the rest of that day and night, as well as part of the next day, they did not go in an ordinary day coach. They went in one that had big, deep seats, which, when the time came, could be turned into beds, with sheets, pillow cases, and curtains hanging in front. But, until the beds were needed, the seats were used by the passengers, some riding backward and some forward.

As there were eight Bunkers, including the father and mother, they needed several beds for sleeping at night. Daddy would take Mun Bun in with him, and Margy would be tucked in with her mother.

Russ and Laddie said they wanted to sleep together, while Rose and Violet were to share a berth between them, and thus they would be as comfortable as possible on the trip.

"But it will be quite a while before the berths are made up," said Mr. Bunker to the children. "So sit beside the windows and look out."

It was lots of fun riding in the train to Grandma Bell's. The smaller children had not traveled much, and everything was new to them. Rose and Russ had been on little trips, though, so they did not so much marvel at the things they saw. But every time the train passed cows or horses in a field, went under a bridge or over one, or through a tunnel, it was something for the other four little Bunkers to wonder at and say:

"Oh!" and "Ah!"

After a while, though, they grew less excited, and sat in the big, deep seats more quietly, looking at the trees and telegraph poles that seemed to rush by so swiftly. There were a few other passengers in the sleeping-car—that is, it would be a sleeping-car when the berths were made up—and for a time the children looked at the men and women who were traveling.

"I wonder if they have any Grandma Bell to go to?" asked Vi of her mother.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," was the answer, for Mrs. Bunker was busy reading, and hardly knew what she said.

"Are they going to our Grandma Bell's?" asked Vi quickly.

"To our Grandma Bell's? No, I don't suppose that!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker, realizing that Vi was surprised. "But they have some place to go."

"I don't believe they have any place as nice as our Grandma Bell's house," went on Vi. "When'll we get there, Mother? Do you know?"

"Oh, not for a long while. Now please don't ask so many questions, Vi. I want to read. Look out of the window."

Vi did for a little while. Then she turned to her father and asked:

"How many telegraph poles are there?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered. Then, knowing that once Vi started to ask questions she would never stop, he bought her a picture book from the train boy.

"I want a book, too," demanded Laddie.

"So do I," said Margy.

"Here! Give 'em each one!" exclaimed Mr. Bunker with a laugh. "Maybe that will keep 'em quiet until bedtime."

"I don't want a book now, thank you," said Rose. "I'm going to get my doll to sleep." She had brought with her the largest doll she owned, almost as large, it was, as herself, and this she held in her arms as she sat in the seat away from the others, as the car was not crowded.

Five little Bunkers sat looking at the picture books Daddy Bunker had bought them. Mr. and Mrs. Bunker were reading papers and Rose was getting her doll to "sleep." The doll did really shut its eyes, so Rose did not have to pretend very hard that her pet was soon in slumberland.

"Now I'm going to put her to bed," she whispered, and, walking down to the end of the car ("where it'll be quiet," the little girl said to herself), she laid the doll, wrapped in a shawl, down in the deep corner of the seat.

The afternoon wore on. The little Bunkers looked at their picture books—taking turns—and again gazed out of the window. Rose thought her doll had slept long enough, so she walked down to the end of the car to get her pet.

The little girl came back with a bundle in her arms, and, sitting down beside her

mother, began unwrapping the shawl.

And then something very queer happened. There was a tiny little cry, and the bundle in Rose's arms moved! The little girl cried:

"Oh, Mother, look! Look, Mother! My dollie has come alive! It has turned into a real, live baby! Look! Oh, Mother!"

CHAPTER X

THE WRONG DADDY

Mrs. Bunker turned from her paper to look down at what Rose held in her arms. And, to the surprise of the children's mother, she saw that her little girl held, not a doll, that could open and close her eyes, but a real, live baby, which was kicking and squirming in its blankets, and wrinkling up its tiny face, making ready to cry.

"Oh, Rose!" cried Mrs. Bunker. "What have you done?"

"I—I—didn't do anything!" Rose answered. "But my doll turned into a live baby!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker. "You have—you have——"

And just then, down at the other end of the car, a woman's voice cried:

"Oh, my baby! My baby! Where is my baby? This is only a doll!"

At once the car was a scene of great confusion. Mr. Bunker ran to where Rose and her mother sat, Rose still holding the live baby. The other little Bunkers wondered what had happened.

At the other end of the car a woman rushed frantically along, holding out a doll.

"Look! Look!" she cried. "Somebody took my dear baby and left this doll! Oh, conductor, stop the train!"

Daddy Bunker seemed to be the first to understand what had happened. He hurried to Rose, and tenderly lifted up the little baby, which was now crying hard. Perhaps it knew that something had happened, or perhaps it was hungry.

"Here is your baby, madam," said Mr. Bunker to the woman. "And I guess you have my little girl's doll. It's just a mix-up—just a great, big mistake. Here is your baby!"

The woman, whose face showed delight now instead of fear and worry, clasped her baby in her arms, first handing the doll to Mr. Bunker.

"Oh, my baby! My precious!" she crooned, pressing her face close to the child. "I thought some one had taken you!"

"I—I guess I took up your baby for my doll," put in Rose. "I laid my doll down in a seat at the end of the car so she would go to sleep nice and quiet."

"That's just what I did with my baby," said the woman.

"And then I went to get my doll, and I thought she'd come to life," went on Rose.

"The seats where the baby and doll were must have been right next to one another," said Mrs. Bunker. "That's how Rose picked up your little one in mistake for her doll."

"I suppose so," the baby's mother answered with a smile. "Well, it has all come out right, I'm glad to say. But at first I was dreadfully frightened."

"It was a queer mistake," said Mr. Bunker. "Rose put her doll down to sleep in the seat right next to where the live baby was sleeping. And the seats looked so much alike, and Rose's doll was in a white shawl, just like the real baby, so that's how it happened."

"And the baby is such a little one, and Rose's doll is so big, that no wonder she didn't know the difference until she saw the real baby open its eyes," went on Mother Bunker. "Well, it was a funny happening."

The other passengers laughed and talked about it, and so did the six little Bunkers. Then it was time to go into the dining-car for supper, after which the berths would be made up, so those who wished could go to bed.

The children were all sleepy, for they had gotten up early, so they hurried through their supper. They were interested in seeing the colored porter make the beds when they got back to their own coach.

He pulled out the bottom parts of two seats, until they met in the middle. Then he fastened them together, pulled down what seemed to be a big shelf overhead, and from this recess, or closet, he took blankets, curtains, sheets, pillows, cases and everything needed for nice, clean beds.

As Mrs. Bunker was afraid the children might roll out of the upper berths in the night if the train went fast or swayed, they all had lower berths. Soon the children with their heaviest clothing taken off, were stretched out and, a little

later, lulled by the clickity-click-clack of the wheels, they were deep in slumber.

The younger children did not awaken all night, but Rose and Russ both said they did once during the hours of darkness.

"And I heard a baby cry," said Rose. "Was it the one I took for my doll?"

"I guess it was, Little Helper," answered her mother, the next morning when Rose told about it.

After breakfast, eaten at little tables in the dining car, the lady brought the baby down for Rose and all the other little Bunkers to see.

"Oh, isn't she cute?" cried Rose, "I wish we could keep her!"

"I'm glad you like her," said the baby's mother, "but I want to keep her for myself."

Once more it was daylight, and as the train rumbled on toward Lake Sagatook, the Bunkers looked from the windows, or looked again at the picture books their father had bought for them.

"When shall we be there?" asked Russ, for perhaps the tenth time. He was getting a bit tired of train travel.

"We'll get in at the station about noon," his father told him, "but we have to drive about five miles in a wagon or an auto to get to Grandma Bell's place. That is on the shore of Lake Sagatook."

"And I hope none of you fall in," said Mrs. Bunker.

"We'll get a boat," said Russ.

"And I hope it won't sink," added Vi, remembering her last boat ride.

"Oh, say! I've thought of a new riddle!" shouted Laddie. "Why don't the tickets get mad when the conductor punches 'em? Why don't they?"

"I don't know—I give up," said Daddy Bunker. "What's the answer?"

"Oh, I haven't thought of a good answer yet," said Laddie with a laugh. "I just thought of the riddle!"

And he sat by the window, murmuring over and over to himself:

"Why don't the tickets get mad when the conductor punches 'em?"

On and on rumbled the train. They were getting near the end of the trip, and the children were counting the time before they would get to the station where they could start to drive to Lake Sagatook and Grandma Bell's house, when the conductor came through the coach and told Mr. Bunker that if he changed cars, and took another train at a junction station, he could save all of an hour.

"We'll do that," decided the children's father. "We'll change at Clearwell, and get on a train there that will take us to Sagatook earlier." The name of the station where they were to start to drive to grandma's was Sagatook. The lake was five miles back in the woods.

They were soon near the junction, where two railroad lines came together, and there the Bunkers were to change. They gathered up their belongings and stood ready to get off the car in which they had been nearly a whole day.

Clearwell was quite a large place, and the station, where the two different railroad trains came in, was a big one. There was quite a crowd getting off the train on which the Bunkers had ridden, and more of a crowd on the platform.

"Follow me!" called Daddy Bunker to his wife and children. "And don't lose any of your bundles."

He was carrying Mun Bun, while Mrs. Bunker had Margy in her arms. Russ, Rose, Laddie and Vi came along behind.

Laddie stopped for a moment to look at some pictures on the magazine covers at the news stand, and then, as he gave a quick glance, and saw the others crossing the platform, and leaving him, he ran on to catch up to them.

He saw a man's hand dangling among others in the crowd, and in another instant, Laddie had grasped it. He thought it was his father's, and he called, above the noise of the crowd:

"Why don't the tickets get mad when the conductor punches 'em?"

"Eh? What's that? Tickets? A conductor? I'm not the conductor!" a voice exclaimed. "Who's this grabbing my hand?"

Laddie looked up.

He had hold of the wrong daddy!

CHAPTER XI

THE FUNNY VOICE

The man whose hand Laddie had taken hold of in the crowd, thinking it was his father's, looked down at the little fellow and smiled. And when Laddie saw the smile he felt better.

"What was it you were asking me, little boy?" the man kindly inquired.

"I was—I was asking you a riddle," said Laddie.

"What about?" the man wanted to know.

"It was about a conductor punching tickets on the train," said Laddie. "But I don't know the answer."

"First, what is the question?" the man inquired, still smiling.

"It's why don't the tickets get mad when the conductor punches 'em?" Laddie repeated.

"Hum," mused the man. "I don't believe that I know the answer to that riddle. Did you think I did?"

"Well, I—I didn't know," said Laddie slowly. "Nobody seems to know the answer to that riddle. But, you see, I thought you were my father when I took hold of your hand."

"Oh, you did!" and the man laughed and gave Laddie's hand a gentle squeeze. "Well, I thought you were my little boy, for a moment. But then I happened to think that he is away down in New York City, so, you see, it couldn't be my little boy. But are you lost?"

"Oh, no," answered Laddie. "That is, I'm not very much lost. You see, we're going to my Grandma Bell's, and we changed cars here."

"How many of you are going to Grandma Bell's?" asked the man as he stopped in the crowed and began looking around.

"My father and my mother and six of us little Bunkers," answered Laddie.

"Six little Bunkers!" repeated the man. "Is that another riddle?"

"Oh, no. But you see there *are* six of us. There's Russ and Rose, and Vi and Margy, and then there's me—I'm Laddie—and Mun Bun."

"Mun Bun!" cried the jolly man. "Is that some pet?"

"No, he's my little brother," explained Laddie. "His real name is Munroe Bunker, but we call him Mun Bun for fun."

"Oh, I see," and the man laughed again. "Six little Bunkers, on a train arrive, one gets lost and then there are five," he chanted.

"Oh, that's like ten little Injuns!" laughed Laddie, and though he had picked the wrong daddy out of the crowd of railroad passengers, he didn't feel at all lost now.

"Yes, it is a little like 'ten little Injuns, standing in a line, one fell out and then there were nine,'" the man went on. "But are you sure you are not lost?"

"Oh, no. Only a little," answered Laddie. "My real daddy must be around here somewhere."

"With the rest of the little Bunkers?" asked the man.

"Yes, I—I guess so," said Laddie, looking around for his father and mother, as well as brothers and sisters. "We came on the train from Pineville," he went on, "and we're going to Grandma Bell's. I stopped to look at some pictures by the news stand and then I——"

"And then you picked me out of the crowd for your daddy," finished the man, as Laddie stopped, not knowing what else to say. "Well, there is no harm done. And, unless I'm much mistaken, here comes your daddy now, looking for you."

"Oh, yes! That is my daddy!" cried Laddie, as he saw his father pushing his way through the crowd, looking on all sides, as if hunting for something—or for somebody. Why, to be sure, for Laddie himself!

"Better call to him," suggested the man. "I don't believe he sees you."

"Here I am, Daddy!" shouted Laddie, and, letting go of the man's hand, he ran straight into Mr. Bunker's arms.

"Why, Laddie! where have you been?" asked his father. "Your mother thought maybe you might have been left on the express train, but I was sure I saw you get off."

"I did," Laddie said. "I walked along but I picked out the wrong daddy."

"The wrong daddy?" asked Mr. Bunker, not knowing just what to think. "Is this another riddle, Laddie?"

"He means me," the man said, coming up just then. "I believe I got off the same train you did. Anyhow this little boy came along behind me in the crowd and began asking something about a conductor and punching tickets."

"That is a riddle, but the other wasn't," Laddie explained. "Only I don't know the answer."

"Well, never mind. You must hurry with me," said his father, "We missed you, and I had to come back to hunt you up. The other train is almost ready to start.

"Thank you for taking care of the boy," went on Laddie's father to the man. "If you have ever traveled with children you know what a task it is to watch out for them."

"Oh, indeed I know. I have four of my own," said the man. Then he waved his hand to Laddie, saying: "Good-bye, Little Bunker."

"Good-bye!" Laddie called to the man whose hand he had taken in mistake, then he hurried off with his father to where Mrs. Bunker and the others were waiting.

"Laddie! where were you?" asked his mother.

"He had the wrong daddy," explained Mr. Bunker.

"And he told me something like a riddle, only it wasn't," went on the little boy. "It was like the Injuns verse. 'Six little Bunkers in a bee hive, one got lost and then there were five.'"

"But we weren't in a bee hive!" cried out Russ.

"I know. The man didn't say bee hive, either," Laddie admitted. "But I don't know what it was. Anyhow he was a nice man and it was a funny little verse."

A little later the family got aboard another train, and started off on a short ride

that would bring them to Sagatook, whence they could drive to the lake where Grandma Bell lived.

This part of the railroad journey was not very long, and they rode in an ordinary day coach, and not in a heavy sleeping car with big seats.

Now and then the train passed through places where there were big trees growing.

"Are they the woods?" asked Russ with much interest.

"Yes," his father told him. "Maine has in it many woods, and there are big forests around Lake Sagatook where Grandma Bell lives. You must be careful not to get lost in them."

"I'll be careful," promised Russ.

A little later the train puffed in at a small station and there the Bunkers got out. They saw, waiting, a big automobile, though it was not as nice as the one they had at home.

"Are you the Bunkers?" asked a man standing near the automobile.

"Yes," answered Mr. Bunker. "Were you waiting for us?"

"I was. Mrs. Bell hired me to come over and get you. You see I'm about the only one that's got an auto in these parts, and as it's quite a drive through the woods for a team, Mrs. Bell thought maybe I'd better come in my machine."

"I'm glad you did," said Mr. Bunker. "There will be room for all of us in it."

"Yes, and the baggage too," said the man, who said he was Mr. Jim Mead. "When I get an auto I want one big enough for the whole family. Pile in now, children, and make yourselves at home."

"Do you know our Grandma Bell?" asked Russ of Mr. Mead.

"I should say I did!" he answered. "She and I are neighbors and good friends. Pile in and I'll soon have you out at the lake."

"Is it a nice lake?" asked Vi.

"It is indeed, little pussy," answered Mr. Mead, playfully pinching her chubby cheek. "It's the finest lake in the world. And it's as blue as his eyes," and he

pointed to Mun Bun, who was kicking the big auto tires with the toes of his shoes to see how hard they were.

"I guess we'll like it there," said Rose, as she smoothed out her doll's dress.

"I'm going to swim!" declared Russ.

"Well, pile in, and I'll soon have you at Grandma Bell's," said Mr. Mead, and very quickly the automobile was chugging along a woodland road, under tall, green trees.

"There's the house," said Mr. Mead, in about half an hour, as he pointed through the trees. The children had a glimpse of a big white house near the shore of a blue lake amid the trees, and a little later they were getting out of the machine on the drive, while a dear old lady, with pretty white hair, was kissing Mother Bunker.

"Oh, I'm glad to see you! Glad to see you—every one!" cried Grandma Bell. "I'm very glad you came. Let me see if you're all here. Daddy, mother, and six little Bunkers, that's right. Now come right in and get something to eat! I'm so glad to see you!"

And as the six little Bunkers started to go into the house, suddenly a strange voice that seemed to come from the woods cried:

"Let me out! Let me out! Take me! Don't leave me behind!"

Every one looked at every one else. Were any of the little Bunkers missing?

CHAPTER XII

RUSS COULDN'T STOP

"Mercy me!" cried Grandma Bell as she heard the strange voice. "What is that?"

As if in answer the call came again:

"Take me out! Don't leave me here! I want to go! Take me! Oh, my eye, give me some pie!"

"It's in the automobile!" said Daddy Bunker.

"But who can it be?" asked his wife.

"You must have forgotten and left one of the children under a robe, though goodness knows it's hot enough without any covering to-day," said Grandma Bell. "Are all the children here?"

Once more she counted them, naming each one in turn: Russ, Rose, Vi, Laddie, Margy and Mun Bun—six little Bunkers.

"All here—every one," said Grandma Bell. "Unless you bought a little baby on the way up."

"Oh, I almost had one!" exclaimed Rose. "I laid my doll down in a seat, and when I picked her up she was alive, but it was a lady's baby and——"

Once more the voice called from the auto:

"Take me out! Don't leave me here! Oh my eye, give me some pie!"

"There is a child in there!" said Grandma Bell "Who is it?" she asked of Mr. Mead, who had been taking some of the Bunkers' baggage into the house, and who came out just then.

"Who is what?" asked the man who had so kindly given the children a ride over from the station.

"What child is hidden in that auto?" asked Grandma Bell. "It isn't one of the six

little Bunkers, for they're all here. But there is some child in that auto."

"Why no, there isn't," said Mr. Mead. "There's nobody in my machine but——"

"Let me out! Oh, let me out!" cried the voice again.

"There!" exclaimed Grandma Bell.

A queer look came over Mr. Mead's face. Then he laughed. Once more the voice sounded.

"Let me out! Let me out!"

"Who is it?" asked Grandma Bell.

"Why that's Bill Hixon's parrot!" said the owner of the big auto. "I've got him in a cage in the back of my car. He's doing that yelling. I forgot all about him!"

"Are you sure it's a parrot and not a child in there?" asked Grandma Bell.

"Oh, sure!" answered Mr. Mead. "There he goes again. Listen!"

Again came the cry:

"Let me out! Let me out! Take me with you! Oh my eye, give me some pie!"

And this time it could be told that the voice was that of a parrot, though, at first, it had sounded like a little child crying.

"Now you keep still there, Polly," said Mr. Mead.

"Polly wants a cracker! Give Polly a cracker!" shrieked the parrot.

"I'll give you a fire-cracker if you don't keep still," said Mr. Mead with a laugh.

"Well, I do declare!" said Grandma Bell. "How did Bill Hixon's parrot get in your auto, Mr. Mead?"

"Oh, Bill's sending him over to his mother's to keep for him while he's off in the woods lumbering," said Mr. Mead. "He knew I was coming up this way, Bill Hixon did, so he asked me to bring his parrot along. I put the bird in his cage under the back-seat of the auto, and I forgot all about him, or her, whichever it is. I guess Polly has been asleep all the while until just now."

"Oh, let us see the parrot!" begged Rose. "I love to hear them talk," and she

tucked her doll under her arm and walked toward the auto.

"Be careful, he might bite!" said Mother Bunker.

"Oh, he's in a cage—he or she—whichever it is," said Mr. Mead. "Bill said the parrot was a good one, and likes children. I guess it won't hurt any to let the tots see the bird."

Mr. Mead opened a sort of little cupboard under the back seat of his auto, and brought out a parrot's cage. In it was a green bird, which, as soon as it came out into the sunlight, began preening its feathers and moving about, climbing up on the wires, partly by its claw feet and partly by its strong beak.

"Polly wants a cracker! A sweet cracker!" squawked the parrot. "Lovely day! How are you? Here, Rover, sic the cats!" and the parrot whistled as well as Russ himself could have done.

"Oh, what a nice parrot!"

"Could we keep him?"

"Doesn't he talk plain?"

"Listen to that whistle!"

"Oh, isn't she nice!"

These were some of the things the six little Bunkers said as they listened to Bill Hixon's parrot, as it moved about in the cage on the back seat of Mr. Mead's auto.

"Couldn't we keep it, Mother?" asked Rose. "I'd like it almost as much as my doll!"

"Oh, mercy no, child! We couldn't keep Mr. Hixon's parrot!" said Mrs. Bunker.

"Have you one, Grandma Bell?" asked Russ.

"No, I'm thankful to say I haven't," said Mrs. Bell with a laugh. "I like children, and I love to hear them talk and laugh; but I don't like parrots. I have a dog and a cat; so I think we'll let Mr. Hixon have his own parrot."

"I don't care for 'em myself," said Mr. Mead. "Well, I'll be getting along with this one now. I guess I've got out all your baggage."

"Yes, and thank you very much," said Mr. Bunker.

"Come on! Gid-dap! Go 'long, horses!" cried the parrot. "Give me a cracker! Go long, horses!"

"He thinks you're driving horses," said Russ.

"I don't know what he *thinks*," said Mr. Mead. "He talks a lot, that's sure. I won't be lonesome for the rest of the way. I'll let the parrot ride outside with me, I guess. He'll be sort of company for me."

"Pretty Poll! Give me a cracker! Let me out and give me a cracker!" cried the green bird.

"Here's one!" said Laddie, holding out a bit of cracker which he had left from a package his mother had bought for him on the train.

"Look out! He might bite you!" said Laddie's father.

"Bill said his bird was gentle, but, still, maybe the little boy had better be careful," said Mr. Mead. "Here, I guess I had better feed him."

He held out the bit of cracker to Polly, who took it in one black claw, and then began to bite off pieces, saying, meanwhile:

"That's the way to do it! That's the way I do it!"

"Oh, he's awful cute!" said Rose. "I wish we had one!"

"But if grandma's got a dog and a cat, maybe the parrot wouldn't like 'em," put in Russ.

"Have you a dog and a cat, grandma?" asked Rose, as Mr. Mead drove off in his auto with the parrot.

"Yes, I have, my dear."

"Oh, where are they?"

"Zip, my dog, is out in the barn, I imagine. He generally goes out there when Tom is working around."

"Who's Tom?" asked Laddie. "Is he the cat?"

"No, Tom is the hired man. Thomas Hardy is his name."

"And where's the cat?" asked Vi, looking around the front yard, as if she might see the pussy under some flower bush.

"Oh, Muffin is in the house, I presume," said Grandma Bell. "And that's where we'd better go. I guess you're all hungry after your trip, aren't you? My, but I'm glad to see you—every one!" and she smiled at the six little Bunkers through her glasses.

"And I guess they're glad, to be here—I know *we* are," said Mrs. Bunker. "They've talked of nothing but Grandma Bell's ever since we got your letter inviting us to come here."

"Well, I hope they'll like it," said the dear old lady.

"We like it already," said Russ. "Please, may I go out and see the dog?"

"I want to go, too," put in Laddie.

"And I want to see the cat," added Rose, "Is her name Muffin?"

"That's her name," said Grandma Bell. "And I call my dog Zip because he runs around so much. But you'd better rest a bit first, and eat. Then you can go out and see things."

"I want to see the lake!" exclaimed Laddie. "Can we sail boats on it?"

"Now, first of all," said Mr. Bunker, and he spoke seriously, "I don't want any of you children to go near that lake unless some of us older folk are with you. Mind! Don't go too close unless we are with you, or until you have been here a little while and know your way about. You must be careful of the water."

The children promised they would; and then, when Grandma Bell's hired girl had set out a lunch, and it had been eaten, and the children had put on old clothes, out they ran—all six of them—to have fun.

"Will they be all right?" asked Mother Bunker.

"Oh, yes. They can't come to any harm if they keep away from the lake, and that isn't deep near the shore. Don't worry about them. Let them have a good time."

And this the children seemed bent on having. They raced around, shouting and laughing. A big maltese cat came out on the porch to see what all the noise was about, and did not run away, even when all six of the little Bunkers charged

down on her at once.

"Oh, isn't she just too lovely!" cried Rose, as she caught the cat up in her arms. "She's almost as big as my doll!"

Muffin seemed to like children, and did not mind being petted. Rose, Vi and Margy as well as Mun Bun, stroked the soft fur, but Russ and Laddie soon tired of this.

"Come on, let's go out to the barn and find the dog," said Russ to his brother.

"That's what we will!" said Laddie, and away they went, Russ whistling a merry tune.

Grandma Bell's house was built on the edge of a patch of woods, with fields at the back and the lake to one side. There were some farms in that part of Maine, and about five miles from grandma's home was the village of Sagatook. It was a smaller place than Pineville.

The barn was back of the house. Once the place had been a big farm, but when Grandpa Bell died his widow sold off most of the land to other farmers, keeping the house, barn, a field or two and a patch of woods for her home. It was a lovely place, just the nicest spot in the whole world for the six little Bunkers.

"I hear a dog barking," said Laddie, as he and Russ drew near the barn.

"So do I," said Russ. "I guess that's Zip."

They went on a little farther, and saw a man standing in the barn door with a dog beside him. The dog barked, but wagged his tail, to show that he was friendly.

Russ and Laddie came to a halt, but the man waved his hand to them and asked:

"Are you some of the six little Bunkers?"

"Yes, we're two of 'em," answered Russ.

"Well, that leaves four. They're in the house, I suppose. Mrs. Bell told me you were coming to-day."

"Are you the hired man?" asked Laddie. "And is that Zip?"

"That's who I am, and that's who he is. Come and meet Zip. He's a fine dog and loves boys and girls."

Zip soon made friends with Laddie and Russ, and the boys, who felt sure they would like Tom Hardy, the hired man, ran about the barn, seeing all sorts of chances in it to have good times.

"Oh, I know we'll like it here!" said Russ.

"'Course we will," agreed Laddie.

Zip followed the boys about the barn as they poked into all the nooks and corners. Tom, as every one called the hired man, was busy about his work and paid little attention to Laddie and Russ.

It was about half an hour after the boys had gone out to the barn, and Mrs. Bunker was wondering if they were all right, when Laddie came running to Grandma Bell's house, very much excited and out of breath, crying:

"Oh, come quick! Come quick!"

"Mercy me! what's the matter now?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Russ can't stop! Russ is going and he can't stop!" panted Laddie.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RED-HAIRED MAN

For a moment or so no one seemed to know what answer to make to Laddie. He stood there, all out of breath, looking at his father and mother and Grandma Bell, who were sitting on the side porch.

"What—what did you say?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"It's Russ," Laddie answered. "He's going and he can't stop! I tried to make him, and he tried himself, but he can't stop, and he's running like anything!"

"What in the world does he mean?" asked Mother Bunker.

"Tell me about it!" said Grandma Bell.

"It's out in the barn," explained Laddie. "Russ got on something, and he can't stop running!"

"Maybe he's in a trap!" exclaimed Laddie's mother.

"If he was in a trap he couldn't run," said her husband. "I'll go out and see what it is."

The other little Bunkers were still playing with Muffin, the big gray cat, as Mr. and Mrs. Bunker and Grandma Bell hurried out to the barn.

As they drew near it they heard a voice shouting:

"Oh, make it stop! Make it stop going! I'm so tired! My legs are so tired!"

At the same time a low rumbling could be heard, like that of very distant thunder.

"Oh, what is it?" gasped Mother Bunker. "Oh, Russ, what have you done now?"

But a moment later they were all relieved to see Tom, the hired man, come to the door of the barn, leading Russ by the hand. The boy looked frightened, but not hurt.

"What was it?" asked his father.

"I got to going and I couldn't stop," explained Russ, who was breathing almost as hard as Laddie had done after his run.

"What did you get to going on, and why couldn't you stop?" his mother wanted to know.

"Oh, it was a—a sort of wooden hill," explained Russ. "I was running on it and ——"

"What does he mean—a *wooden hill* in the barn?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"It was the treadmill," explained Thomas Hardy. "I was in another part of the barn, and I guess Russ must have wandered upstairs, where we keep the old treadmill they used for the threshing machine and churn. He started to walk on the wooden roller platform, and it moved from under him. He had to keep running so he wouldn't slip down. That's what he meant when he said he couldn't stop."

"That was it," explained Russ. "I saw a funny machine upstairs in the barn, and I got on it. I didn't know it would move."

"Well, you couldn't get hurt on it, that's one good thing," said Grandma Bell. "At the same time it's better not to get on queer machines, or play with things you don't know about, Russ. The next time you might be hurt."

"I'll be careful," promised the little boy.

"What is the treadmill?" asked Vi, who had come out to the barn to see what all the excitement was about.

"It's a sort of engine," Grandma Bell explained. "You see out here, years ago, when Grandpa Bell ran the farm, we didn't have gasoline engines such as are now used in automobiles and for pumps and other farm work. So we had to use a sort of engine that one or two horses could make go. It was called a treadmill, and some were made so that even dogs, trotting on a moving wooden platform, could work a churn. We used to have one of those, but the one Russ got on was a treadmill for one horse."

"I saw it," said Laddie. "Russ wanted me to get on, but I wouldn't. He did and then he couldn't stop. He couldn't stop running!"

"That's right!" exclaimed Russ. He could laugh now, as he remembered what had happened. "Then I told Laddie to run and get somebody to help me," he added.

"I ran, but I didn't run on that funny machine," Laddie said. "And maybe I can think up a riddle about it, after a while."

By this time the rest of the little Bunkers had come out to the barn and, led by Tom, they went upstairs to see the treadmill. It was a big machine, with wheels and rollers; and a wooden platform, made of cross sticks, so the feet of the horse would not slip, was what Russ had run on. As he walked up a "wooden hill," as he called it, the slats moved from under his feet, for this is what they were meant to do when the horse should walk on them. And this moving platform of wood spun a wheel around, which, in its turn, would work a churn, a machine for threshing wheat or rye or do other work on the farm.

"But we haven't used the treadmill for years," said Grandma Bell. "I forgot about its being in the barn. Well, I'm glad no one was hurt. But be careful after this."

"I'd like to see it work," remarked Rose, so Tom Hardy got on the wooden platform and walked up the little hill it made. Then came the rumbling sound, and the faster Tom walked the faster the treadmill went around.

The weather was warm, it being early in July, soon after the Fourth, and a more delightful time of year would be hard to find during which to spend a vacation in the woods on the shore of Lake Sagatook.

"May we go down and paddle in the water?" asked Russ of his mother, after he and the other little Bunkers had wandered out to the barn and had seen Zip, the dog, and Muffin, the cat. "Mayn't we go down and wade in the lake?"

"Do you think it will be safe?" asked Mrs. Bunker of her husband.

"Well, I'll go down there and have a look," he said. "If we are to stay here for a month or so the children will have to get used to playing near the water. If it's safe we'll feel we won't have to be with them all the while."

"I think it will be safe if they keep near the shore out on the little point of land that extends into the lake," said Grandma Bell. "There is a sandy beach there, and the water is not deep. Let the children play there. You can see them from the house; so, if we look out every now and then, we'll be sure they are all right."

"Very well," said Daddy Bunker. "We'll first have a look at the lake."

"Oh, goody!" cried Russ.

"Now we can have a lot of fun and sail boats!" added Laddie. "We can have a whole lot of fun."

"I'll take my doll down and give her a bath," said Rose.

"Oh, won't water spoil your doll, my dear?" asked Grandma Bell.

"I don't mean my big one, that the lady took for her baby," explained the little girl. "I mean my small rubber doll."

"Oh! Well, I guess it will be all right to bathe her in the lake," said Grandma Bell with a laugh.

Daddy Bunker found that the sandy point, which Grandma Bell told about, was a very nice and safe place for the children to play. So, dressed in their old clothes which water and sand would not soil, they all trooped down to Lake Sagatook, and there, in the shade of the big woods, they began to have fun.

Russ and Laddie made little boats and set them adrift in the blue water. Rose and Vi played with their dolls, for they had each brought two or three of them. Mun Bun and Margy dug in the sand with sticks which they picked up on the shore of the lake.

"It's almost like the seashore," said Rose, when she came back from having given her rubber doll a dip in the lake, "only the water doesn't taste salty like when you cry tears."

"I like it here," said Vi. "I wish we could stay always."

The children were having lots of fun when, in the midst of their play, they heard the sound of water being splashed and the noise made by the oars of a boat. Looking up, they saw a rowboat not far from shore, and in it sat a big man.

And, at the sight of this man, Russ dropped the chip he was floating about, pretending it was a submarine, and, in a whisper, said:

"Hi, Laddie! do you see his hair?"

"Yes—it's red," returned Laddie.

"Well, maybe that's the tramp lumberman that took daddy's old coat and real estate papers," went on Russ. "He had red hair! Maybe this is the same one! Oh,

Laddie! If it should be!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE DOLL'S BUTTONS

For a little while Laddie and Russ watched the man in the boat as he rowed slowly toward the sandy point of land in the lake, on which the six little Bunkers were playing. The man's hair was certainly very red. The sun shone on it, and Russ and Laddie could see it quite plainly. And, too, he had on a ragged coat.

Rose and the other children were farther in toward shore, playing away. Laddie and Russ, as the two older boys of the family, thought they ought to do something toward getting back Daddy Bunker's papers.

"He's coming nearer," said Laddie, in a whisper to his brother.

"Yes," agreed Russ. "He'll soon be near enough for us to ask him if he's got 'em."

The red-haired man in the boat rowed nearer and nearer to the sandy point in Lake Sagatook. He did not seem to see the two small boys who were so anxiously waiting for him.

"What's he doing?" asked Laddie, for the man now and then would stop rowing and handle something he had in front of him.

"He's fishing," said Russ. "I can see his pole."

Laddie saw it too, a moment later. The man in the boat was a fisherman.

Pretty soon he was near enough for the boys to call to him.

"Hey!" exclaimed Russ. "Have you got 'em?"

He supposed, of course, that the man would know what he was talking about. And so it might seem, for the man made answer:

"Well, I had 'em but I lost 'em. But I'll get 'em again."

"Oh, daddy will be so glad!" cried Laddie. "Did you lose 'em out of your coat?"

The man looked up quickly.

"Lose 'em out of my coat? Why, no," he said. "I lost 'em off my hook—two of the biggest fish I've caught this day! But I'll get 'em back—or some just like 'em which will be as good. Hello, youngsters," he added with a smile. "Do you live at Mrs. Bell's place?"

"We're just visiting her," explained Russ. "She's our grandma. We're the six little Bunkers."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the man with a laugh. "That's so—there are six of you! I can see now," and he looked beyond Russ and Laddie to where Rose, Vi, Margy and Mun Bun were playing on the sandy point and having lots of fun.

"But are you fond of fishing, that you ask if I lost 'em?" the man went on.

"If you please," replied Russ, "we didn't mean to ask about your fish, though we're sorry you lost any. But have you daddy's papers?"

"Daddy's papers? I don't know what you mean," the man said.

"Aren't you a lumberman?" asked Laddie, not liking to use the name "tramp," as the man, though he did have on a ragged coat, did not seem like the lazy wanderers who prowl about the country asking for food but not wanting to work.

"No, I'm not a lumberman," said the man. "What makes you ask that?"

"Well, you look like the lumberman—only he was a tramp—that my father gave a ragged coat to," went on Russ. "And there were real estate papers in the coat, and daddy wants 'em back."

"Ha! Is that so?" asked the man, "Well, I'm sorry but I don't know anything about 'em. I never saw your father that I know of, though I do know Mrs. Bell. I live on the other side of the lake. But I come over here fishing once in a while."

"And haven't you daddy's papers?" asked Laddie.

"No, I'm sorry to say I haven't."

"But you have red hair," went on the little boy.

"Yes, my hair is red all right," laughed the man, as he ran his hand through the fiery curls on his head. "My hair is very red. Sometimes I wish it wasn't so red. But it's of no use to worry about it, I suppose. But what has my red hair to do with your father's papers?"

Then Laddie and Russ, taking turns, told about their father's clerk in the real estate office giving the tramp lumberman the old coat, and how, in one of the pockets, were the valuable papers. The boys told of the search for the tramp, and also of their trip from Pineville to Lake Sagatook.

"And so you haven't yet found the red-haired man with the papers, have you?" asked the fisherman, smiling at the two boys.

"No," said Russ, a bit sadly. "First we thought you might have 'em."

"Do you know any red-haired lumberman—one that's a tramp?" Laddie asked.

"No, I can't say that I do. But tell your father, and also your Grandma Bell, that I'll be on the watch for one. My name is Hurd—Simon Hurd. Your grandma knows me. Tell her I'll be on the watch for a red-haired lumberman. We have all sorts up here in Maine, and some of 'em have red hair, though I don't know that any one will have your father's papers. Ha! There's one I've got, anyhow!" the man suddenly exclaimed.

He dropped the oars, with which he had been slowly rowing the boat, and caught up his pole. Then, as the boys watched, they saw him reel in his line and lift from the water a big fish, which sparkled in the sun as it leaped and twisted, trying to get off the hook.

"Hi, that's a big one!" cried Russ, leaping up and down on the sand, he was so excited.

"Yes, he's as big as one of the two I lost," the man went on.

He landed his prize in the boat, while the boys and, the other little Bunkers crowded to the end of the sandy point to watch what was going on.

"I guess you children brought me good luck," said Mr. Hurd, the red-haired fisherman. "I'm going to row along now, but I'll keep my eyes open for the tramp lumberman that may have your father's papers."

"Thank you," said Russ.

The six little Bunkers watched until the fisherman was out of sight around the next point, and then they started to play again.

"I thought sure he was the one that daddy wanted," said Russ, a little sadly.

"So did I," added Laddie. He, too, was disappointed. "Maybe I could make up a riddle about a red-haired man," he added more cheerfully.

"Maybe you could," agreed Russ.

"I guess I will, too," said Laddie. "I can think of a riddle the next time."

A little later the children heard a voice asking:

"Well, are you having a good time?"

They looked up to see Daddy and Mother Bunker walking toward them through the woods.

"Oh, we're having lots of fun!" said Rose, who had been amusing Vi, Margy and Mun Bun.

"And we almost found your lost papers," added Russ.

"How?" asked Mr. Bunker.

Then the boys told about the red-haired man.

"I'm afraid my papers are gone for ever," said Mr. Bunker with a shake of his head, "I'll have to lose that money. But it might be worse. Don't worry about it any more, children."

But, though the children were too little to worry very, much about their father's trouble, Russ and Laddie could not help thinking about it now and then.

"This is a lovely place for the children to play," said Mother Bunker. "I shall never feel worried about them when they are here. The water is so shallow near the shore."

And so it was. The six little Bunkers—even Mun Bun, the smallest of them all—could wade out quite a distance from shore on the smooth, sandy bottom, and not be in danger.

All that day—except when it was time to go in to eat—the children played on the shore of Lake Sagatook. They saw boats come and go—some with fishermen in them, like Mr. Hurd, and others that carried lumber and other things from shore to shore.

"Can we go out in a boat some day?" asked Russ of his father.

"Yes, some day I'll get a boat and take you all for a row," Mr. Bunker promised.

But there were many other things to do at Grandma Bell's to have fun besides going out on the lake in a boat. There were chickens and cows to look at; there was Zip to play with, and Muffin too; and there were lovely places in the woods where they could take their lunches and have picnics.

"Grandma Bell's is the nicest place in the world!" said Rose.

"That's what!" exclaimed Russ.

And Laddie tried to think up a riddle about why Grandma Bell's house was like fairyland, only he couldn't get just the right sort of answer, he said.

One day Russ, Laddie, and Rose went out to the barn with Tom Hardy to watch him feed the chickens. He gave them grains of yellow corn.

"Where do you get the corn?" asked Laddie.

"Out of the corn crib," answered Tom. "See it over there," and he pointed to a shed, through the slat sides of which could be seen the yellow ears of corn.

"How do you get the little pieces off the cobs?" asked Rose.

"Oh, I shell the corn in a sheller," answered Tom. "Come on, I'll show you," and he took the children to the corn crib where there was a queer machine, turned by a handle on a wheel. In an iron spout Tom dropped big, yellow ears of corn. Then he turned the wheel. There was a grinding noise, and out of one spout ran the yellow kernels of corn in a stream, while from another hole dropped the shelled cob, with nothing left on it.

"That's how I shell the corn cobs for the chickens," said the hired man. "But be careful not to put your hands down the spout where I drop the ears of corn."

"Why not?" asked Rose, who was catching Vi's trick of asking questions.

"Because if you do that it might shuck the fingernails off your hand," answered Tom. "Keep away from the corn-sheller."

It was later that same afternoon when Rose, who had been out to the barn with Russ and Laddie, came running back, tears streaming from her eyes.

"Oh, Mother! Come quick!" she cried, "Come quick!"

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Oh, it's my doll!" answered Rose. "Laddie and Russ are shucking off all her buttons! Come quick!"

CHAPTER XV

LADDIE'S QUEER RIDE

When Rose, with tears streaming from her eyes, came running to her mother, Mrs. Bunker felt sorry for her little girl; but she was just a little puzzled to understand what was wrong. "Shucking off all her buttons" certainly sounded queer.

"What is it, Rose?" she asked. "What are Russ and Laddie doing?"

"They're shucking all the buttons off my doll."

"Shucking the buttons off your doll?"

"Yes. In the corn shucker, where Tom shucks the ears of corn for the chickens."

Mrs. Bunker didn't yet quite know what Rose meant, for the mother of the six little children had not been out to the corn crib, and did not know what was there.

"It's my middle-sized doll," explained Rose. "Please come and take her away from Russ and Laddie 'fore they shuck off all her buttons. Don't you know—she's got yellow shoe buttons on her dress—rows of 'em down the front and in the back. It's my messenger girl doll."

Mrs. Bunker followed Rose out to the corn crib. She began to understand what had happened. Among the many dolls Rose had was one she called her "messenger girl" doll It was about a foot tall, and the doll wore a blue dress, in color something like the suits worn by the telegraph messenger boys in the cities. To make the doll's dress more like a uniform, Rose had sewed on the back and front several rows of yellow shoe buttons, which she had cut from old tan shoes at home. The doll really had on her dress more buttons than she needed, but as some messenger and elevator boys in hotels and apartment houses have the same, I suppose Rose had a right to decorate her doll that way if she liked.

"How did it happen?" asked Mrs. Bunker, as she followed her little girl out to the corn crib.

"It was after we saw Tom shuck some corn to feed the chickens—he showed us how he did it," Rose answered.

"But what did Russ and Laddie do?"

"Oh, they went in and looked at the corn shucker. But they didn't put their hands in and turn the wheel, 'cause Tom said if they did that their fingernails would come off."

"Mercy me! I shouldn't want that to happen," said Mrs. Bunker with a laugh. "But go on, Rose, tell me what they did do?" she went on, for she saw that Rose felt very sad.

"Well, they wanted to shuck some corn," went on the little girl, "but they didn't durst do it. Then Russ saw me have my messenger girl doll, with the yellow shoe buttons down her back and front, and he said she looked just like an ear of corn."

"That wasn't very nice of him," put in Mrs. Bunker.

"Oh, well, I didn't mind," said Rose. "The yellow shoe buttons are like the grains of corn the chickens eat. One button did come off and a rooster picked it up and swallowed it." Rose was no longer crying.

"Poor rooster! I hope it won't hurt him," laughed Mrs. Bunker.

"I don't guess it will," said Rose, "'cause he crowed awful loud right after it. He must have liked it. But, anyhow, Russ said my doll looked like an ear of corn, so he asked me to let him take her to shuck off her buttons."

"And did you?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Yes'm, I did, Mother. He and Laddie put my doll in the corn shucker and they started to turn the wheel. Then I thought maybe my doll would be hurt, and I wanted her back again. But they wouldn't give her to me, so I came to tell you!" And once more the tears came into the little girl's eyes.

"Well, I'll fix it all right," said Mrs. Bunker. "Don't cry, Rose. Even if her buttons are all shucked off we can sew more on. Don't cry!"

So Rose dried her tears and hurried on after her mother out to Grandma Bell's corncrib.

As they came near it they could hear a grinding noise, and then the voice of

Laddie called:

"Oh, Russ! here come some of the buttons."

"Yes! A lot of 'em!" Russ added. "Oh, she's shucking fine, Laddie—just like an ear of corn!"

"Dandy!" exclaimed Laddie. "It's too bad Rose didn't wait to see what we were doing. This is fun!"

"I'm here now! And you just give me my doll!" cried Rose. "I told mamma on you, that's what I did!"

The grinding noise kept up for a moment or two longer, and the laughter of the two little boys could be heard. Then Mrs. Bunker, followed by Rose, went into the corncrib. Mrs. Bunker saw a curious sight.

Standing at one side of the corn-shelling machine was Russ, turning the big wheel, which went round quite easily. On the other side was Laddie, and in his hat he was catching a little stream of yellow shoe buttons that came down through the spout.

"Boys! Boys! What are you doing?" cried Mrs. Bunker.

"Hello, Mother!" cried Russ. "She shucks dandy. All the buttons are coming off, just the way Tom made the kernels of corn come off the cobs for the chickens! Look!" and he pointed to the buttons dropping from the tin spout into Laddie's hat.

"Oh, my doll! My nice doll!" cried Rose. "She'll be spoiled now. She won't have any buttons left! Oh, I—I'm mad at you!" and she cried again and stamped first one foot and then the other at Laddie and Russ.

"Oh, you mustn't do that," said Mrs. Bunker gently.

"I don't care!" pouted Rose, half tearfully. "They ought not to shuck all the buttons off my doll!"

"Are you doing that, Russ?" asked his mother.

"Yes'm. But Rose said we could, and then, after she let us take her doll, she wanted it back, and we can't get her out till she goes through the shucker and all her buttons come off. Then she'll pop out the other spout like an ear of corn."

"Here she comes!" shouted Laddie. "All the buttons are off now! But, gee! you can sew more on, Rose. And here's your doll!"

As he spoke the doll dropped from a tin spout on the other side of the machine, at the place where the shelled cobs dropped out. And there wasn't a single yellow shoe button left on the doll.

"Oh—oh, dear!" sobbed Rose. "She's all spoiled!"

"Never mind," said Mrs. Bunker. "We can sew the buttons on again. But you boys shouldn't have done it," she told Russ and Laddie. "What made you?"

"Well, we wanted to shuck something," said Russ, who was beginning to feel a little sorry for what he had done, "Tom told us not to shuck any kernels off the corn, 'cause he'd fed the chickens enough. And he said we mustn't put our hands or any sticks in the machine. But we wanted to shuck something."

"And the yellow shoe buttons on Rose's doll looked just like corn," added Laddie.

Mrs. Bunker wanted to laugh, but she did not even smile. Rose felt too bad.

"There's a wheel inside this machine, Tom told us," said Russ, "and it's got a lot of sharp points on it. And when it goes around and the ears of corn get down inside, the points on the wheel knock and pull all the kernels off.

"We didn't durst take any ears of corn, so we took Rose's doll and we put her through the sheller. Rose said we might. And all her buttons came off just like kernels."

"So I see," said Mrs. Bunker. "Well, don't do it again."

"We won't," promised Laddie. "Here's your doll, Rose," he added, as he picked it up off the floor. Every button had been pulled off in the machine.

"Oh, dear!" sighed his sister. "She's spoiled!"

"Oh, no. I'll help you make her look like a messenger again, Rose," said her mother "But you boys had better keep away from the corn-shelling machine. You might be hurt."

Russ and Laddie promised. They had not really meant to annoy Rose, but they had just not stopped to think. They did so want to see the yellow shoe buttons

pulled off their sister's doll. And that's just what happened. The doll was shaped something like an ear of corn, and the yellow buttons stuck out like kernels. And so the doll was "shucked."

After a while Rose got over feeling bad, and the next day all the yellow buttons were sewed back on the doll. And Tom kept the corncrib locked, so Laddie and Russ could not get into it again.

"But it was lots of fun seeing the yellow buttons drop out the spout," said Russ.

"And I could almost make up a riddle about it," added Laddie.

"I don't want any riddles about my doll," objected Rose. "She's too nice. I'm going to sew some yellow buttons on now, and black ones too, 'cause you lost some of the yellow ones."

"Well, we won't shuck her any more," promised Russ.

These were happy days at Grandma Bell's. Something new could be played by the children all the while. They loved it in the woods, and on the shores of beautiful Lake Sagatook.

"When are you going to get the boat, Daddy, and take us out?" asked Russ one afternoon, when they had seen the red-haired fishermen once more. He came close to the sandy point, and talked to the six little Bunkers, but he said he had not yet found the lumberman who had been given the ragged coat with Mr. Bunker's papers in the pocket.

"I'll get a boat next week," promised Mr. Bunker. "Then we can all go for a row."

"And fish, too?" asked Russ.

"Yes, we'll fish also," said his father.

But, as it happened, Laddie got tired waiting for the boat, and made one himself. At least he made a sort of raft.

He nailed some boards and pieces of wood together, and when he pushed the raft into the shallow water, near the shore of Sandy Point, as the children called their play-spot, Laddie found that he could stand up on his raft and push himself along. The raft floated with him on it, as though it were a boat. Of course the water came up over the top, but as Laddie went barefooted this did not matter.

One day he went down to the lake with a piece of clothesline. On the way he whistled to Zip, the playful dog.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Russ.

"I'm going to see if he'll give me a ride," answered Laddie.

"A ride? How? There isn't any express wagon here."

"I don't need an express wagon," said Laddie. "I'm going to make Zip be a whale, or maybe a shark, and pull me on my raft-boat."

"How can you?" asked Russ.

"I'll show you," Laddie answered.

He tied one end of the piece of clothesline to his raft, and on the other end of the line he made fast a round stick.

"Here, Zip! Zip!" cried Laddie, "Go after the stick!"

He threw the stick, still tied to the rope, into the water of the lake, as far as he could from shore.

"You run down the shore a little farther and whistle to Zip," said Laddie to Russ. "You can whistle better than I can. When Zip swims to you with the stick in his mouth he'll pull me on the raft."

"Oh, I wonder if he will!" exclaimed Russ.

Zip, the big dog, was already swimming out to get the floating stick, and Laddie took his place on the raft, which he had pushed out from shore.

"I'll have a fine ride!" said the little boy.

CHAPTER XVI

MUN BUN SEES SOMETHING

"Here, Zip! Ho, Zip! Come here!" called Russ, and he whistled to the dog, which was swimming along with the stick in his mouth.

The dog heard, and, turning toward the shore of the lake, made his way to Russ, who was standing on the little sandy beach. And, as Zip swam along, and pulled on the clothesline, which was fast to the stick in his mouth, and also fast to the raft on which stood Laddie Bunker, the little boy was given a ride.

Zip was a strong dog, and as the raft was light, and as Laddie was not heavy, the swimming animal had no trouble in pulling the queer boat after him.

"Oh, I'm having a fine ride!" shouted Laddie, as he stood in his bare feet on the raft, over which the water washed. "Come on, Russ! You can have a ride after I do."

"Will your raft hold me?" asked his brother.

"We can put some more boards on and make it," Laddie answered. "Oh, we'll have lots of fun!"

"Come on, Zip! Come on! That's a good dog!" called Russ, and the dog, which was used to swimming out into the lake and bringing back sticks that the children threw, swam on toward shore with the round piece of wood to which the clothesline was fastened still in his mouth. And of course as Zip pulled on the line he also pulled the raft along, and so gave Laddie a ride.

"Oh, it was lots of fun!" shouted the little boy, as the raft came into shallow water where it would no longer float. For Zip had reached shore by this time, and had dropped the stick at the feet of Russ. Then Zip stood there, wagging his tail, and shaking the water off his shaggy coat, waiting for Russ to toss the stick into the water again.

"Here you go, Zip! Bring it back!" cried Russ. "Bring the stick back again!" and, once more, he tossed it into the water.

"Don't you want him to give you a ride?" asked Laddie.

"Wait till we see if he gives you another one," suggested Russ.

And Zip did. Out he swam to where the piece of wood floated, still tied to the clothesline that was fast to the raft. And when Zip swam along, of course he pulled the raft after him.

"Oh, he does it! He does it again!" cried Laddie, capering up and down on the raft. "Now we'll make the boat bigger, Russ, and you can have a ride, and so can ____"

But then, all of a sudden, something happened. Laddie was doing too much capering about on the raft. Before he knew it he stepped off with one foot, and, though he tried to get back on, he couldn't.

Off he fell, right into the water, splashing down with his clothes on. Zip pulled the raft along without the little boy on it.

"Hi! What are you doing?" asked Russ.

"I—I didn't mean to! I slipped off!" answered Laddie. "But the water isn't cold."

"You're all wet, though," Russ said. "Oh, you'll get it!"

"These are my old clothes," answered the smaller boy. "Mother said it wouldn't hurt to get 'em wet."

"Did she say you could fall in with 'em on?" asked Russ.

"No," answered Laddie slowly, "I didn't know I was going to fall in, so I couldn't ask her. But I'm glad I did, 'cause it feels so nice, and he kicked around in the water. The bottom being of clean sand, there was no mud, and, as Laddie had said, he wore old clothes."

"Say, Zip is a regular steamboat engine!" exclaimed Russ, as the dog kept on pulling the raft, though Laddie had fallen off. "We'll make it bigger, Laddie, and then I can ride on it."

"Maybe we both can," said Laddie, who got up out of the water, and waded to shore.

"No, I guess the two of us would be too heavy for Zip to pull. We'll take turns," said Russ. "Come on, we'll make a bigger raft. There's lots of wood out by the

barn."

And so the boys did. Russ was stronger than Laddie, and could handle bigger boards and pieces of wood. Soon the raft was made big enough so that Russ could stand up on it and not have it sink to the bottom of the lake near the shore.

"Do you like it? asked Laddie.

"It's lots of fun," answered Russ. "I'm glad you thought of this."

"I was trying to think of a riddle," said Laddie. "It was something about what makes the lake wet when it rains, and then I saw some pieces of board floating along and I thought of a raft and I made one."

"And I'm glad you thought of it instead of the riddle," said Russ with a laugh. "You can't ride on a riddle."

"You could if a riddle was a train or a boat," Laddie said. "And I made up a riddle about the conductor punching the tickets and they didn't get mad. Don't you 'member?"

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Russ. "But come on, we'll have some more rides."

So the boys took turns having Zip pull them along on the raft until the dog, much as he liked to go into the water after sticks, grew tired and would not splash out any more.

"Well, we'll play it to-morrow," said Laddie.

"Or this afternoon, maybe," said his brother.

They tied the raft to a tree near shore, leaving the stick fast to the rope, ready for more fun.

"Mercy, Laddie, what happened to you?" asked Mrs. Bunker, as she saw the two boys come through the garden up to Grandma Bell's house. "Did you fall into the water?"

"I—I sorter—sorter—stepped in—off the raft," answered the little boy. "Oh, it was lots of fun!"

"But you must be more careful," said his mother. "Was the water deep?"

"No, Mother. It was near shore," explained Russ, and he told how Zip had given

them rides.

"Well, come into the house, and get on dry clothes," said Grandma Bell. "And, to make sure you won't catch cold—though I don't see how you can on such a hot day—I'll give you some bread and jam!"

"Oh, goody!" cried Laddie, for he knew how nice the bread and jam made by Grandma Bell tasted.

"I wish I'd fallen in," said Russ.

"Well, you may have some bread and jam also," said his grandmother, laughing. "And we'll call one, two, three, four more little Bunkers, and they may have bread and jam, too."

That afternoon and the next day the other little Bunkers had rides on the raft pulled by Zip. And when the dog got tired of splashing out in the water to bring back the stick and tow the raft, Laddie and Russ, in their bare feet, pulled it themselves, giving Rose, Vi, Margy and Mun Bun rides along the shore.

They had lots of fun, and thought Lake Sagatook the nicest place in all the world to spend part of their vacation.

Daddy Bunker and Mother Bunker liked it, too. They took long walks in the woods, and also went for rows in the boat Daddy Bunker hired.

For the children's father did as he had promised, and got a large, safe rowboat, in which they went for trips on the lake, and also went fishing. Mrs. Bunker did not care to fish, but she went along to hold the smaller children and keep them from falling out of the boat.

Several times Laddie, Russ or the other children saw Mr. Hurd, the red-haired fisherman. Each time they asked him if he had seen the tramp lumberman with the papers Mr. Bunker wished so much to get back, and each time the fisherman had to say that he had not seen the man wanted.

Once Mr. Hurd came in his boat and showed Daddy Bunker a good place to fish. Russ and Laddie went along also, and Russ caught two fishes. Laddie got only one, but as it was bigger than either of those his brother caught, Laddie felt very proud.

One day, when Laddie and Russ had gone with their father for a row in the boat,

Mrs. Bunker, who was in the house with Grandma Bell helping her sew, said to Rose:

"You might take the smaller children down to the woods by the lake and play there. It's cool and shady, and you may take some cookies, or other little lunch with you, and have a sort of picnic."

"And may we take Muffin?" asked Vi.

"Yes, take Muffin," said Grandma Bell, for the maltese cat liked to be with the children as much as they liked to have her. Zip, the dog, had gone off with Tom Hardy.

Grandma Bell put up a lunch for the children, and then Rose led them down to the shady shore of the lake, where they were to have some fun.

"I'm going to make a dress out of green leaves for my doll," said Vi.

"And I'm going to make a new bathing suit for my rubber doll," said Rose. "What are you two going to do?" and she looked at Margy and Mun Bun, who were toddling along hand-in-hand.

"We's goin' in swimming'," said Mun Bun.

"He means wading with his shoes and stockings off," said Vi. "He asked mother if he could, and she said yes."

"Did she say Margy could, too?" asked Rose.

"Yes. Both of 'em."

Soon the two smaller children were paddling about in the water near the shore of the lake, while Rose and Vi sat under the shade of trees, not far away, and sewed.

The two older girls were trying on their dolls' dresses when, all of a sudden, Mun Bun came running up from the lake, his eyes big with wonder, and after him ran Margy.

"Oh, I saw it! I saw it!" cried Mun Bun. "It's a great big bear! He came right up out of the lake! Oh, come and look, Rose!" and he ran to take his sister's hand, while Margy hid behind Violet.

"What is it, Mun Bun?" asked Rose.

"Oh, I saw something big—an animal—I—I guess it's a bear—come up out of the lake!" cried the little fellow. "Come and look!"

CHAPTER XVII

A RED COAT

When Mun Bun had said that a bear had come up out of the lake, at first Rose felt she was going to be frightened, but when she saw that her littlest brother and sister were also afraid, Rose made up her mind that she must be brave.

She looked at Vi, and Vi was a little frightened, too, but not as much so as Mun Bun and Margy.

"What was it you saw, Mun?" asked Vi, even now not able to stop asking questions. "Where was it?"

"It was a big bear, I guess," answered the little fellow.

"Pooh!" cried Rose, in a voice she tried to make sound brave. "There aren't any bears in these woods. Grandma Bell said so."

"Well, anyhow, it was a—a *something*!" said Mun Bun. "It came up out of the water and it made a big splash."

"It splashed water on me," said Margy.

"What did you think it was?" asked Vi.

"Maybe—maybe a—a elephant," replied the little girl. "It had a big long tail, anyhow."

"Then it couldn't be a elephant," declared Rose.

"Why not?" Vi wanted to know.

"Because elephants have little, short tails. I saw 'em in the circus."

"But they have *something* long, don't they?" Vi went on.

"That's their *trunk*," explained Rose. "But it isn't like the trunk we put our things in. Elephants only put *peanuts* in their trunks."

"Then what makes 'em so big? Their trunks, I mean," asked Vi.

"I don't know," Rose confessed. "Only I know elephants have little tails."

"This animal had a big tail," declared Mun Bun.

"Maybe it was the elephant's trunk they saw," suggested Vi. "Do you think it was?"

"Elephants don't live in the lake," decided Rose. Then she started down toward the shore where Mun Bun and Margy had been paddling in their bare feet.

In truth, she did not want to go very much. That was why she had done so much talking before she started.

"Where are you goin'?" asked Violet.

"I'm going to see what it is!" declared Rose.

"Oh-o-o-o!" exclaimed Vi. "Maybe it'll bite you. Did it have a mouth, Mun Bun?"

"I didn't see its mouth, but it had a flappy tail."

"I'm going to call mamma!" exclaimed Vi, "Don't you go, Rose!"

But Rose was already halfway to the shore of the lake. In another moment she called out:

"Oh, I see it! I see it!"

"What is it?" asked Mun, made brave by what he saw Rose doing, and he followed her. Vi and Margy trailed after them. "What is it?"

"It's a big rat, that's all, but it isn't the kind of rats we saw the hired man catch in a trap at the barn. It's a nicer rat than that, and it's eating oysters on a rock near the shore."

"Oh, is it *really* eating oysters?" asked Vi.

"They look like oysters," replied Rose. "Oh, there he goes!" and, as she spoke, the animal, which did look like a rat, plunged into the water and swam away, only the tip of its nose showing.

"Tisn't a bear," said Rose, "and 'tisn't an elephant."

"Then what is it?" asked Vi.

Rose did not know, but when the children went to the house and told Grandma Bell about it, she said:

"Why, that was a big muskrat. They won't hurt you. There are many of them in the lake, and in the winter the men catch them for their skins to make fur-lined coats from. It was only a big muskrat you saw, Mun Bun."

"And was he eating oysters?" asked Vi, who liked to know all about things.

"They were fresh-water clams," said Grandma Bell. "There are many of them in the lake, too. The muskrats bring them up from the bottom in their paws, and take them out on a rock that sticks up from the water. There they eat the clams."

"Well, I'm glad it wasn't a bear I saw," put in Mun Bun.

"So am I," said Mother Bunker with a laugh. "But you needn't be afraid—there are no bears here."

While this had been going on Laddie and Russ, with their father in the boat, had been having a good time. They rowed up the lake, and once or twice Mr. Bunker let the boys take the oars so they might learn how to row.

"If you are going to be around the water," said Mr. Bunker, "you ought to learn how to row a boat as well as how to swim."

"I can swim a little," said Russ.

"Yes, you do very well," returned his father. "And before we go back I must teach Laddie."

"I like to wade in my bare feet," said the smaller boy.

"Well, when you learn to swim you'll like that," replied his father. "But now let's see if we can catch some fish. I told mother I'd try to bring some home, and I guess Muffin is hungry for fish, too. So we'll bait our hooks and see what luck we have."

Mr. Bunker stopped rowing the boat and got his own fishing-rod and line ready. Russ could fix his own, but Laddie needed a little help. Soon the three, sitting in the boat, were waiting for "bites."

All at once there was a little shake and nibble on Laddie's line. He grew excited and was going to pull up, but his father whispered to him:

"Wait just a moment. The fish hasn't taken hold of the hook yet. He is just tasting the bait. If you pull up now you'll scare him away. Wait a little longer."

So Laddie waited, and then, as he felt a sudden tug on his line, he quickly lifted the pole from the water. Up in the air went the dripping line, and on the end of it was a fine fish.

"Laddie has caught the first one," said Mr. Bunker. "Now we'll have to see what we can do, Russ."

"I think I have one now," said Russ in a low voice.

Mr. Bunker looked at his son's pole. The end of it was shaking and bobbing a little, and the line was trembling.

"Yes, you have a bite," said Mr. Bunker. "Pull up, Russ! Pull!"

Russ pulled, as Laddie had done, and he, too, had caught a fine fish.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Bunker, as he took this second one off the hook. "You boys are beating me all to pieces. I'll have to watch out what I'm doing!"

"Why don't you pull up your line. Daddy, and see what you've got on your hook?" asked Laddie.

"I believe I will," his father answered. "Here we go! Let's see what I have!"

Up came his line, and the pole bent like a bow, because something heavy was on the hook.

"Oh, daddy's got a big one! Daddy's got a terrible one!" cried Laddie.

"It's bigger than both our fishes put together," added Russ.

"I certainly have got something," said Mr. Bunker, as he kept on lifting his pole up. "But it doesn't act like a fish. It doesn't swim around and try to get off."

Something long and black was lifted out of the water. At first the two little boys thought it was a very big fish, but when Mr. Bunker saw it he laughed and cried:

"Well, look at my luck! It's only an old rubber boot!"

And so it was. His hook had caught on a rubber boot at the bottom of the lake and he had pulled that up, thinking it was a fish.

"Never mind, Daddy," said Russ kindly. "You can have half of my fish."

"And half of mine, too," added Laddie.

"Thank you," said their father. "That is very nice of you. But I must try to catch one myself."

And he did, a little later, though it was not as big as the one Russ has caught.

But after that Mr. Bunker caught a very large one, and Russ and Laddie each got one more, so they had enough for a good meal, as well as some to give to Muffin.

Then Daddy Bunker and the boys rowed home, and were told all about the muskrat that Mun Bun had seen come out of the lake to eat the fresh-water clams.

"How would you all like to go after wild strawberries to-day?" asked Grandma Bell of the six little Bunkers one morning, about two days after the fishing trip.

"Oh, we'd just love it!" said Rose.

"Well, get ready then, and we'll go over to the hill across the sheep meadow, and see if we can find any. There used to be many strawberries growing there, and I think we can find some to-day. Come on, children!"

Mrs. Bunker got ready, too, but Daddy Bunker did not go, as he had some letters to write. Margy wore a little red coat her mother had made for her, and she looked very pretty in it.

Down by the brook, and along the shore of the lake they went, until they came to a meadow, around which was a fence.

"What's the fence for?" asked Violet.

"To keep the sheep from getting out," said Grandma Bell. "There are sheep in this meadow belonging to Mr. Hixon, the man who owns the funny parrot."

They climbed in between the rails of the fence and started across the sheep meadow. Grandma Bell and Mother Bunker were talking of the days when the children's mother was a little girl. Russ and Rose were walking along together, and Laddie was trying to think of a riddle. Violet walked with Mun Bun, and, for a moment, no one thought of little Margy in her red coat.

"Are you all right?" asked Mrs. Bunker, turning to look back at the children. And then she saw Margy straggling along at the rear, all by herself. Margy had lagged behind to pick buttercups and daisies.

"Come, Margy! Come on!" cried Mrs. Bunker. "You'll get lost."

"Doesn't she look cute in her red coat?" asked Rose.

THE RAM WALKED TOWARD MARGY.
THE RAM WALKED TOWARD MARGY.

And hardly had she said that when there came from a clump of tall weeds near Margy the bleating of a ram, and the animal himself jumped out and started for the little girl, whose red coat made her look like a bright flower in the green meadow.

CHAPTER XVIII

LADDIE AND THE SUGAR

"Oh! Oh, Margy!" cried Mrs. Bunker.

"Oh, the poor little dear!" exclaimed Grandma Bell. "The old ram has seen her red coat and doesn't like it! I must get her away."

"I'll help!" cried Mother Bunker. Meanwhile they were both running toward Margy, where she stood with her back turned toward the ram, picking flowers.

"You had better leave the old ram to me. I know how to drive him off," said Grandma Bell. "You take the children, Amy, and get on the other side of the fence. It isn't far," and she pointed to the fence ahead of them.

"Won't the ram hurt you?" asked Rose, who had taken Mun Bun and Violet by their hands to lead them along.

"No, I'm not afraid of him," said Grandma Bell. "I've seen him before. You see he's like a bull—or a turkey gobbler—they don't any of 'em like the sight of red colors. Run, children! Amy, you look after them," she said to Mrs. Bunker. "I'll get Margy."

Mrs. Bunker knew that Grandma Bell knew a lot about farm animals. So, calling to Violet, Mun Bun and Rose, and seeing that Russ and Laddie were on the way to the fence, Mrs. Bunker followed the two boys.

"I could throw stones at the ram," said Russ.

"So could I," added his brother. "Let's go do it!"

"No. You do as grandma told you, and get on the other side of the fence," said his mother. "Grandma Bell can take care of the ram."

The ram, which had big, curving horns, walked toward Margy, now and then stopping to stamp his foot or give a loud:

"Baa-a-a-a!"

"What's he saying?" asked Vi.

"Never mind what he's saying," said Mrs. Bunker. "Run! Don't stop to ask questions."

"I guess the ram's saying he doesn't like red coats," put in Russ.

They were soon at the fence and out of any danger from the ram. Grandma Bell was now close to Margy, who had stopped picking flowers, and was looking at the animal with his shaggy coat of wool and his big, curved horns.

"Come to me, Margy!" cried her grandmother, and Margy ran, and was soon clasped in Mrs. Bell's arms.

"Baa-a-a-a!" bleated the old ram, again stamping his foot, as he shook his lowered head.

"Oh, he's going to bunk right into Grandma Bell!" cried Laddie, on the safe side of the fence.

"I'll go back and help her drive the ram off," said Mother Bunker. "You children stay here."

"Will the old ram-sheep come and get us?" asked Vi.

"No, he can't get through the fence," her mother answered after a look around. "Don't be afraid."

By this time Margy's grandmother had caught the little girl up in her arms, and was walking away from the ram.

"I must cover your red coat up with my apron, and then the ram can't see it," said Grandma Bell. "It's the red color he doesn't like."

"'Cause why?" asked Margy.

"I don't know why—any more than I know why turkey gobblers and bulls don't like red," answered her grandmother. "But we had better get out of this meadow. I didn't know the ram was so saucy, or we should have gone around another way."

"Will he bite us?" Margy went on.

"Oh, no. He may try to hit us with his head. But that won't hurt much, as his

horns are curved, and not sharp. Go on back, Bunko!" called Grandma Bell to the ram, Bunko was his name. "Go on back!"

But Bunko evidently did not want to go back. He bleated some more, stamped his feet, and shook his head. Margy's red coat was almost all covered now by her grandmother's big apron that she wore when she want to pick wild strawberries. But still the ram came on.

"Go on, Mother!" called Mrs. Bunker to Grandma Bell. "You take Margy to the fence and I'll throw clumps of dirt at the ram."

This she did, hitting the ram on the head with soft clods of earth, while Grandma Bell hurried to the fence with Margy.

"There we are!" cried the grandmother, as she set the little girl safely down on the far side, away from the ram. "Now Bunko can't get us."

"Baa-a-a-a!" bleated Bunko. He shook his big, curved horns at Mrs. Bunker, but he did not try to run at her and strike her with his head. Perhaps he felt that, as long as the little girl with the red coat had gone out of his meadow, everything was quite all right again.

"Well, that was quite an adventure," said Mother Bunker, as they were all together again, and on their way to the strawberry hill. "Did the ram ever chase you before, Mother?"

"Oh, no, but he often comes up to sniff at my dress when I take a short cut through the pasture. But I'm not afraid of him, and he knows it. I suppose he wondered what sort of new red flower Margy was."

"I picked some flowers," said the little girl, "but I dropped 'em when you carried me, Grandma."

"Never mind. We can get more," returned Mrs. Bell.

On they went to the place where the wild strawberries grew. They brushed aside the green leaves, and saw the fruit gleaming red underneath. They filled little baskets with the berries, though I think the children ate more than they put in the baskets.

"The old ram wouldn't like it here," said Russ, as he popped a berry into his own mouth.

"Why not?" asked Vi.

"'Cause there's so much red here. He wouldn't like it at all."

"Oh, I think he wouldn't mind strawberries," said Grandma Bell with a laugh. "However, the next time we won't go through the ram's meadow. We can go back another way. Now let's see who will get the most berries. We'll take some home to Daddy Bunker!"

The children had lots of fun on the warm, sunny hillside, picking the sweet, red, wild strawberries, but if Daddy Bunker had had to depend on the six little Bunkers to bring him home some of the fruit he would have got very few berries, I'm afraid. For the children ate more than they picked. But then, one could hardly blame them, as the strawberries were good.

However, Grandma Bell and Mother Bunker saved some for daddy, so he had a chance to taste them, and he ate them at supper that night as he listened to the story of the ram and Margy's red coat.

The next day, as Laddie, Russ and Rose were out in front of Grandma Bell's house, playing under the trees, they saw a farmer going down the road with a box under his arm.

"Do you suppose he's going after strawberries?" asked Rose.

"If he is we'd better tell him to look out for the old ram," remarked Laddie.

"I will," said Russ. And then he called out loudly:

"Hey, Mr. Parker!" for that was the farmer's name. "Hey, Mr. Parker, you'd better look out!"

"Look out for what?"

"For the old ram. He chased my grandma and my sister Margy yesterday," went on Russ. "But Margy had a red coat on."

"Well, I haven't anything red on," the farmer said with a laugh. "But I'm much obliged to you for telling me. And, as it happens, I'm going right where that old ram is."

"Oh, aren't you 'fraid?" asked Laddie.

"No," answered the farmer. "The ram will be glad to see me. You see, I'm taking

him and the sheep some salt," and he showed the children that he had salt in the box under his arm. "I'm going to give my cattle some salt," went on the farmer, "and Mr. Hixon, who owns the sheep, asked me to salt them, too. So I'm going to. The ram will be so glad to see me with the salt that he won't hurt me at all."

"It's funny sheep like salt," said Laddie.

"It is. But they do," said the farmer, as he went on down the road.

It was a little later that afternoon that Russ, who had been making a toy sailboat, whistling merrily the while, wanted to go down to the lake to sail it.

"Come on, Laddie!" he called. "Let's go to the lake to sail the boat."

"Laddie went in the house," said Rose. "I'll find him then," returned Russ, and into the house he went, calling:

"Laddie! Laddie! Where are you? Come on and help me sail the boat!"

"Laddie was here a minute ago," said Jane, the hired girl, when Russ reached the kitchen in his search. "He asked me to give him some sugar in a cup."

"What'd he want of sugar?" asked Russ.

"I don't know," answered Jane. "But I gave him some and he went out in a hurry."

"Maybe he's going to make candy," said Russ.

"No, I don't believe so. He'd have to cook sugar on a fire to make candy, and you know your grandmother or your mother wouldn't let you play with fire."

"That's so," agreed Russ. "I wonder what Laddie wanted of the sugar. I've got to find him."

CHAPTER XIX

DOWN IN THE WELL

Russ went out of the kitchen and looked all around the house for his brother Laddie. He did not see the little fellow, but, on the side steps he saw some white grains of sugar, and Russ could follow them a little way. The trail led down across the brook and toward the meadow.

"He went this way," Russ thought to himself, "and he had the sugar with him. Maybe he's going out to the woods to feed the birds. Or maybe he's going to have a play party with Rose and the others. I'll find 'em and have some fun myself."

But Laddie was not with the other little Bunkers, for Russ saw Rose, Vi, Margy and Mun Bun playing under one of the trees.

"Hi, Rose!" called Russ. "Have you found Laddie?"

"No," Rose answered, "I didn't look for him."

"I saw him," said Tom, the hired man. "He went over that way," and he pointed across the brook.

"Do you mean over to Strawberry Hill?" asked Russ, for so they had come to call the place where the wild red berries grew.

"Well, yes, I s'pose you might say towards Strawberry Hill," replied Tom.

Across the brook hurried Russ, and, a little way ahead of him, he saw his brother.

"Hi, Laddie!" he called. "Wait for me! Where are you going?"

Laddie waited, and Russ soon caught up to him. But Laddie did not at once answer his older brother's question. So Russ asked again:

"Where are you going?" Then, before Laddie had a chance to say anything, Russ went on: "I know! You're going to pick wild strawberries, and put sugar on 'em."

"No, I'm not," returned Laddie slowly. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give some sugar to the sheep."

"Give sugar to the sheep?" cried Russ in surprise. "What're you going to do that for?"

"'Cause they don't like salt, I guess," answered Laddie. "I don't like salt, and I don't guess a sheep does. The farmer said he was going to give salt to the sheep, but they must like sugar better. So I got Jane to give me some, and I'm going to take it to the sheep."

"I'll help you take it," said Russ. "I should think sheep would like sugar better than salt."

Together the two little boys kept on over the meadow until they came to the field where the sheep were grazing. There were quite a number of them.

"What'll we do if the old ram runs at us?" asked Russ, as he and Laddie crawled under the fence.

"He won't run at us," said the smaller boy, who seemed to have thought it all out. "We haven't got anything red on, and he only runs at you if you have red on. Anyhow, if he does, we can give him some sugar and that will make him like us."

"Yes, I guess it will," agreed Russ.

With Laddie holding the bag of sweet stuff, the two boys walked toward the sheep. They were eating grass, but soon some of the woolly creatures noticed the two little fellows and stopped eating to walk toward them.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Russ. "Get the sugar ready, Laddie. And there comes the old ram over from the other side of the field. Save some sugar for him."

"I will," Laddie said. Then he poured some of the sugar out from the bag on the ground, and the sheep began to nibble at it.

I am not sure whether sheep like sugar better than salt or not. I should think they might, and yet salt on some things is better than sugar would be. I wouldn't like my roast chicken with sugar on it, but I do like it with salt. Anyhow, the sheep licked up the sugar that Laddie sprinkled on the grass for them.

"Let me give 'em some!" begged Russ, and he reached for the bag. Just how it happened the boys did not know, but the bag was knocked from Laddie's hand, and the rest of the sugar was spilled out on the ground. More sheep came up and soon all began eating it.

"They like it lots better'n salt!" said Laddie.

"Sure they do!" agreed Russ. "We'll bring more sugar, and we'll tell Mr. Hixon about it. I guess he'd like to give his sheep the things they like best. They like 'em to grow good and fat."

The boys were so interested watching the sheep eat the sugar, that they forgot all about the ram that had seemed so angry because of Margy's red coat. The first they knew was when they heard a loud:

"Baa-a-a-a-a!"

Then they heard a pounding of hoofs on the ground and the ram came running at them.

"Oh, look!" cried Russ. "Here he comes! We'd better get on the other side of the fence! Come on, Laddie!"

"I'm coming!" answered the little fellow. "Hurry!"

"It—it's too bad we didn't save him some sugar," panted Russ, as he and Laddie ran on. "Maybe that's what makes him mad at us."

"Maybe it is," agreed Laddie. "Hurry, Russ!" he shouted, looking over his shoulder. "He's coming closer!"

The ram was, indeed, running faster than the boys, and only that they had a start of him he would have caught them before they got to the fence, and then he might have butted them with his head.

But, as it was, Russ reached the fence first. He turned to wait for Laddie, who was a little behind him.

"And if that old ram had hurt you I'd 'a' thrown stones at him," said Russ afterward. But Laddie, with an extra burst of speed, managed to get to the fence, and Russ helped him through. The ram was so close that his head struck the rails with a bang.

"It's a good thing it wasn't us he hit," said Russ, as they found themselves safe on the other side.

"That's right," agreed Laddie. "He's terrible mad 'cause we didn't save him any sugar. I was going to, but it all spilled."

They stood on the safe side of the fence looking at the ram, which shook its head, stamped its feet, and, now and then, uttered a loud "Baaa-a-a-a-a!"

I don't really believe the ram was angry at Russ and Laddie for not giving him sugar. I think the leader of the flock thought perhaps the boys might be troubling the sheep, and wanted to drive them from the field. That's just what he did, anyhow—drive them from the field.

For a little while the boys stood watching the sheep. Those that had come to eat the sugar seemed to have licked up all there was on the grass, and they came with the others, to stand behind the ram, near the fence. They all looked at the boys.

"I guess they like us," said Laddie.

"All but the ram," said Russ. "And I don't like him."

"Neither do I," agreed his brother.

"Well, come on," said Russ, after a bit. "We can't have any fun here. Let's go and sail the boat I made. I was looking for you when Jane said she gave you the sugar. I couldn't think what you were going to do."

"I thought about the sugar for the sheep when I saw the man going with the salt," explained Laddie. "But I guess I won't do it any more—not while the old ram is in the field. Come on, we'll go and sail your boat."

The boys went back to the house and got the new sailboat Russ had made. Going down to the sandy shore of the lake with it, they found Rose and Violet sitting in the shade, playing with their dolls.

"Oh, I know what we can do!" exclaimed Russ, who was carrying the boat.

"What?" asked his brother.

"We can take the dolls—those Rose and Vi have—and give 'em a ride on the boat."

"Give Rose and Vi a ride on the boat?" asked Laddie, who had not been listening very closely. "It isn't big enough."

"'Course 'tisn't!" agreed Russ. "I don't mean *that*. I mean give the *dolls* a ride."

"Oh, yes, we can do that!" cried Laddie. "It'll be fun! Will you let us?" he called to the two little girls.

"Let you what?" asked Rose.

"Let us give your dolls a ride on the boat?"

Russ had taken a board, whittled one end sharp, like the prow, or bow, of a boat, and had rounded the other end for the stern. In the middle he had bored a hole and stuck in this a stick for a mast. On the mast he had tied a bit of cloth for a sail. And when the boat was put in the shallow water of the lake, near shore, the wind blew it along nicely.

"Oh, yes! Let's give our dolls a ride!" cried Vi.

"You can give yours a ride, but I'm not," declared Rose.

"Why?" Russ wanted to know.

"'Cause she might fall off into the water."

"I can put a stone on her so she won't fall off the boat," said Russ.

"Huh! Think I'm going to let you put a stone on my doll? I will not!" Rose exclaimed.

"I could tie her on," suggested Laddie. "I've a piece of string."

"Well, maybe *that's* all right," Rose agreed, and then she and Violet let Russ and Laddie take the dolls, which they tied on the sailboat. Then along in the little sheltered cove of the lake the boat sailed, giving the dolls a ride.

But, suddenly, there came a strong puff of wind, and the boat tipped to one side. Laddie could not have tied the string on Vi's doll very strong, for she slipped off into the water.

"Oh, your doll will be drowned!" cried Rose.

"No, she can't drown! She's rubber," answered Vi. "I'll just play she had a bath in

the lake."

"Well, it's a good thing it was your doll and not mine, that fell in," went on Rose, "'cause my doll's a sawdust one—this one is. But I have a rubber doll up at the house, a nice one.

"Go and get her!" suggested Russ. "Then I can sail the boat in deeper water and it won't hurt if it tips over with two rubber dolls on."

So Rose got her other doll, and then the children had fun sailing the boat with two make-believe passengers, who did not mind how wet they got. If the boat didn't tip over of itself, Russ or Laddie made it, just to see the dolls go splashing into the water.

The children played at this game for some time, and then Jane called them to come to lunch. At the table Laddie and Russ told about taking sugar to the sheep, and how the ram chased them.

"You mustn't do it again," their father said. "Not only that it isn't good to waste sugar by giving it to the sheep, but the old ram might hurt you. Don't do it again."

The boys promised they wouldn't, and then Rose and Vi told of their fun with the rubber dolls and the boat.

In the afternoon, when Mrs. Bunker and Grandma Bell were getting ready to go for a walk with the children, Russ came running up to the house, from down near the barn, crying:

"Oh, Rose! Margy took your rubber doll, and now she's down in the well! She's down in the well!"

"Oh, mercy sakes!" cried Grandma Bell, who heard what Russ said. "Is Margy in the well or the doll?"

But Russ didn't stop to answer. Back toward the well he ran, as fast as he could go, having picked up the rake near the fence of the kitchen garden.

CHAPTER XX

THE DOG-CART

Mrs. Bunker saw Grandma Bell hurrying down toward the barn, halfway between which and the house, was the well, and at once the children's mother began to fear that something was wrong.

"Has anything happened?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"I'm afraid there has," answered Grandma Bell. "Russ came running up to the house, and said something about a doll having fallen into the well. Then he grabbed up the rake and ran back before I could ask him what he meant."

"Oh, I do hope none of the children will try to get it out!" cried Mrs. Bunker.

Then Grandma Bell and Mother Bunker ran down to the well. There they saw Mr. Bunker with the long-handled rake fishing down in the round hole, at the bottom of which was deep water.

"What has happened?" demanded Mrs. Bunker.

"It's all right—don't be frightened," her husband told her, as he looked around. "It's only a doll that has fallen into the well. I'm trying to get it out with the rake."

"Only a doll—that isn't so bad," said Mrs. Bunker. "Whose doll is it?"

"Mine," answered Rose. She and the other children now stood about the well house. "Margy took it, Russ says, and dropped it into the water."

"I was givin' the dollie a bath," Margy explained. "The other dolls had a ride on Laddie's boat, and they felled in the water and had a nice swim, but this doll didn't have any and I was givin' her one."

"Oh, but you shouldn't have done that without asking mother," said Mrs. Bunker. "And besides, I've told you to keep away from the well. You might fall in."

"Oh, I didn't go very near," said Margy. "I—I just throwed the dollie in. I stood 'way back and I throwed her in 'cause I wanted her to have a swim like the other

dolls."

"Can you get it out?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"I think so," answered her husband. "The doll is caught on one of the buckets, halfway down the well. I sent Russ up to get the rake, for I'm afraid If I pull up the bucket the doll will drop off and fall to the bottom of the well."

All watched Daddy fishing for the doll. The rake was not quite long enough, but by fastening a stick onto the handle it could be reached down far enough so the iron teeth caught in the doll's dress, and up she came.

"Why—why!" exclaimed Margy, "she isn't wet at all."

"No," said Daddy Bunker, "she didn't get down to the water. If she had I don't believe I could have gotten her up, as the well is very deep. But don't do it again, Margy."

Rose took the doll, whose dress had been torn a little by the rake.

"I'll make believe she's had a terrible time and been sick," said the little girl, "and I'll give her bread pills."

The rake was carried back to the kitchen garden, Daddy Bunker put on his coat, which he had taken off to get the doll up from the well, and then Grandma Bell brought some pails and baskets from the kitchen.

"What are we going to do?" asked Russ.

"We are going after berries," his mother told him.

"Strawberries?" cried Laddie.

"Not this time," said Grandma Bell. "This time we are going to gather huckleberries."

"Then you must be going to bake huckleberry pies!" exclaimed Daddy Bunker.

"Well, I'll bake some if the children don't eat more berries than they put in the pails and baskets," said Grandma Bell, with a funny twinkle in her eyes.

"We won't eat very many," promised Russ. "We'll pick a lot of berries for the pies, won't we, Laddie?"

"Sure we will!"

Off to the place where the huckleberries grew went the six little Bunkers, with their mother and their grandmother.

"And I'm coming, too," said Daddy Bunker. "I'm too fond of huckleberry pie to risk having all the berries go into the children's mouths. I'll go along and pick some myself, then I'll be sure of one pie at least."

But the six little Bunkers were really very good. Of course, I'm not saying they didn't eat *some* berries. You'd do that yourself, when they grew on bushes all around you. But the children put into the pails and baskets so many that Grandma Bell said there would be a big pie for daddy, and several smaller ones for the children.

As the little party of berry pickers came back from the fields late that afternoon, Russ and Laddie, walking ahead, saw Zip, the dog, dragging along a piece of rope, fastened to a heavy bit of log.

"He's terrible strong, Zip is," said Laddie. "Look at him pull that log."

"Yes, he is strong," agreed Russ. And then he suddenly cried: "Oh, I know what we can do!"

"What?" asked Laddie, always ready for anything.

"We can make a cart and have Zip pull us in it. If grandma had a pony I guess she'd have a pony-cart, but she hasn't, so we can make a dog-cart."

"How can we do it?" asked Laddie.

"Well, you just take an old box—we saw some of the kind I want down at the grocery store—and you put wheels on it."

"Where are you going to get the wheels?" asked Laddie.

Russ had to stop and think about that part. Then he happened to remember that he had seen two wheels from an old baby carriage out in the barn. Grandma Bell had once had a woman working for her who had a little baby, and this woman had kept the carriage at the Bell farmhouse. But after a while it broke, or wore out, and when the woman and her baby went away there were only two wheels of the carriage left.

"We can take them," said Russ, "and maybe we can find two more somewhere. We'll ask daddy or grandma."

"Say, it'll be lots of fun if we can make a dog-cart!" cried Laddie. "Could we really ride in it, do you s'pose?"

"Why, yes!" answered Russ. "Zip is strong enough to pull us both. Look at him pull that log. Feel how hard he pulls on the rope!"

The boys took hold of the rope and tried to hold back on it. But Zip was so strong that he dragged them along a little way, as well as the log. And Zip growled and snarled, pretending he was very angry.

"Look out!" cried Mother Bunker. "He might bite you!"

"Zip is only playing," said Grandma Bell. "He never bites. But what are you doing?" she asked Russ and Laddie.

"We're trying how hard Zip can pull, to see if he can pull us when we make a dog-cart," explained Russ.

"Please, Grandma, may we?" asked Laddie. "And may we have the two old baby carriage wheels out in the barn?"

"Yes, certainly," his grandmother said. "But I don't know where there are any more wheels. You'll have to get along with two."

"Well, we could do that," Russ said. "But four would be better. Oh, Laddie! We'll have a lot of fun making the dog-cart!"

"That's what we will!" said the smaller boy.

CHAPTER XXI

RUSS HEARS NEWS

When Daddy Bunker heard about the plan of Russ and Laddie to make a dog-cart, he at first thought the boys could not do it.

"How are you going to harness Zip to the cart?" he asked.

"Oh, we can do it," declared Russ. "We can make a harness out of pieces of rope and some straps in the barn. And we can get a box and put some wheels on it for a cart. It'll be easy."

"But maybe Zip won't let himself be hitched up," said Daddy Bunker. He wanted the boys to have fun while at Grandma Bell's, but he did not want them to go to a lot of work making something, and then be disappointed if it did not work.

"Oh, I guess Zip won't mind being harnessed," said Grandma Bell. "Once we had a man working for us who had a small boy. This boy—his name was Bobbie—made a little cart and used to drive Zip hitched to it, and the dog pulled Bobbie all around very nicely."

"Did he? Hurray! Then he'll pull us!" shouted Laddie.

As soon as Russ and Laddie got back to Grandma Bell's house they began to look for things of which to make the dog-cart and the harness. Two wheels were all they could find, but Daddy Bunker thought they would answer very nicely.

"I'll help you make the harness," said Tom Hardy. "I guess there are enough odd straps around the barn to make a harness for two dogs."

Russ and Laddie were glad to hear Tom say this. They felt that making the harness would be the hardest part of the work. The cart would be easier; at least so they hoped.

From the grocery store, down at the "Four Corners," where Grandma Bell traded, the boys, the next day, got a fine large soap box. It was quite strong, too.

"And it's got to be strong if you boys are going to ride around behind that dog

Zip!" said the storekeeper. "He's a goer, Zip is! A goer!"

Tom helped the boys fasten the old baby carriage wheels to the box, and also helped them make a pair of shafts, just like those in between which a horse trots, only, of course, the ones for Zip were smaller. The hired man was as good as his word in the matter of a harness, and soon everything was in readiness for the first ride.

"The only thing I'm afraid of," said Mother Bunker, "is that Zip won't let himself be harnessed. He may not like it."

But the big dog did not seem to mind in the least. He came when Russ called him, and he wagged his tail when the boys showed him the soap-box cart and the harness.

"Now we're going to have some fun when you give us a ride!" said Russ, patting Zip's shaggy head.

"Bow-wow!" barked the dog, as much as to say:

"That's right! We'll have fun!"

Daddy Bunker, as well as his wife and Grandma Bell, came out to see how the first trip would turn out. Tom put the harness on Zip. The dog only sniffed at it and wagged his tail. Perhaps he thought of the time when he had been harnessed this way by Bobbie.

"Oh, it's nice! I like it!" cried Mun Bun, when he saw the home-made dog-cart with the baby carriage wheels. "I want a ride now."

"So do I," added Margy, who never liked to be left, out of anything in which her smaller brother had a share.

"You little folks had better not get in until Russ and Laddie try it," said Mr. Bunker "And they had better keep on the soft grass when they start to drive Zip."

"Why should we stay on the grass?" asked Laddie.

"So if you fall out of the cart you won't get hurt," his father answered with a merry laugh.

"Oh, we won't fall out," declared Russ. "The cart is big enough for two of us."

And the soap box was large enough for Russ, Laddie and one more little Bunker,

though two made a more comfortable load than three. Tom had nailed in a board for a seat, and really the dog-cart, though rather roughly made, was very nice.

"Get in now, and let's see how you go," said Daddy Bunker. He was holding Zip by part of the harness that went around the dog's head. To this, which was a sort of muzzle, there were fastened two pieces of real horse reins, and by these Zip's head could be pulled to the left or the right, according to which way the little drivers wanted him to go.

"He guides just like a real horse or a boat," said Laddie. Of course there was no bit in Zip's mouth, as there is in the mouth of a horse, for dogs have to keep their mouth open so much, to cool off when they are hot, that a bit would be in the way.

In the soap box Laddie and Russ took their places. Daddy Bunker handed them the lines and let go of the dog's head.

"Gid-dap!" called Russ.

"Go fast!" ordered Laddie.

"Hold tight and don't get spilled out!" begged Mother Bunker.

"We will!" promised Laddie.

Russ was driving and he didn't feel much like talking just then. He had to give all his attention to Zip.

Away trotted the dog, pulling after him the cart with the two boys in it. Over the grass he went, and when Russ saw that the dog seemed to know just what to do, and didn't show any signs of wanting to turn around and upset the cart, Russ turned his steed toward the path.

"We can go faster here, where it isn't so soft," he said.

And Zip did pull the cart along at good speed. Around and around on the gravel paths he pulled the boys, and he seemed to be having as much fun from it as they were.

"He goes very nicely," said Daddy Bunker, smiling.

"I'd like a ride in the cart myself, if I were small enough," said the children's mother, laughing.

"Yes, Zip is a good dog for the six little Bunkers to play with," observed Grandma Bell. "They'll have a good time with that cart."

"Give us a ride! Give us a ride!" begged Rose.

"Yes, can't you take some of them for a turn now?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"As soon as Laddie and I go around once more," promised Russ.

Zip didn't seem a bit tired, though he had run fast part of the time. Laddie got out and this made room for Rose and Violet, for Daddy Bunker said Russ had better stay in and do the driving.

"But I'm going to drive after a while? when I learn how," declared Rose, and they said she might.

Zip gave Russ, Rose and Vi as nice a ride as he had given the two boys, and the girls clapped their hands in glee and laughed joyously as they rattled along over the paths.

Then came the turn of Margy and Mun Bun, and they liked it more than any one, I guess, and didn't want to get out of the cart.

"But Zip is tired now," said Mrs. Bunker. "See how fast he is breathing, and how his tongue hangs out of his mouth," for the dog had been pulling the cart for over an hour. "Get out, Mun and Margy, and you may have another ride after Zip rests."

The little children loved the dog, and wanted to be kind to him; so, when their mother told them this, they got out of the cart, and Zip was unharnessed and given some cold water to drink and a nice bone on which to gnaw.

"If he was a horse he could have oats," said Russ. "But I guess he likes a bone better."

"I guess so, too," said Grandma Bell, and she smiled.

With the dog-cart, taking rowing trips on the lake now and then, going fishing, hunting for berries and walking in the woods, the six little Bunkers at Grandma Bell's had a fine time that early summer. There seemed to be something new to do every day, or, if there wasn't, Russ or Laddie made it.

"And I've thought up a new riddle," said the smaller boy one day.

"What's it about?" asked Russ.

"It's about Zip," Laddie replied. "Why is Zip like a little boy when he's tired? I mean when Zip is tired. Why is he like a little boy then?"

"'Cause he wants to sit down and rest," answered Russ.

"Nope; that isn't the answer," said Laddie, shaking his head.

"Why isn't it?"

"'Cause it isn't. I know the answer, and it isn't that. Tom helped me think the riddle up. Maybe it's an old one, but Tom said it was good. Why is Zip, when he's tired, like a little boy?"

Russ thought for a while, and then he said:

"I don't know. I give up. Why is he, Laddie?"

"'Cause his breath comes in short pants. You see when Zip is tired his breath is short—he pants, Tom told me. And a little boy, like you and me, Russ, wears short pants. So that's why Zip is like one."

"Oh, I see!" laughed Russ. "That's pretty good. I know a riddle too, Laddie."

"What is it?"

"This. What makes a miller wear a white hat?"

Laddie thought over this for a moment or two and then said:

"He wears a white hat so the flour dust won't show so plain."

"Nope; that isn't it," Russ declared.

"Is it because nobody would sell him a black hat?" asked Laddie.

"Nope. Shall I tell you the answer?"

"No. Let me guess!" begged the smaller boy.

He gave several other answers, none of which, Russ said, was right, and at last Laddie murmured:

"I give up! Why does a miller wear a white hat?"

"To keep his head warm, same as anybody else!" laughed Russ. "Tom told me that riddle, too," he added.

"Well," said Laddie slowly, as he took off his own hat to run his fingers through his hair, "that isn't as good a riddle as the one about Zip's breath coming in short pants."

"Maybe not. But it's harder to guess," said Russ.

Then the two boys, after waiting for Zip's breath to come out of short pants—that is, waiting for him to get rested—went for a ride in the dog-cart.

As they were going down the road they saw, coming toward them, a man with bright red hair. He was driving a horse and carriage.

"There's Mr. Hurd," said Russ. "He's the one we thought was the tramp lumberman that got daddy's real estate papers."

"I see him," said Laddie. "Look! He's waving to us! Let's go over and see what he wants."

Mr. Hurd was driving down a cross road, and waited for the boys to come up to him.

"Hello, Russ and Laddie!" he called, "I've got some news for you!"

"News?" asked Russ.

"Yes. Do you remember when you took me for the red-haired lumberman that you thought had your father's papers: Remember that?"

"Yes," answered Russ, "I do. But you weren't him. I wish we could find him."

"Maybe you can," said Mr. Hurd, and Russ looked at him in a queer way. What did Mr. Hurd mean?

CHAPTER XXII

OFF ON A TRIP

"Are you sure this tramp lumberman who took the old coat with your father's papers in it, had red hair?" asked Mr. Hurd as Zip came to a stop near the carriage, and lay down in the shade, for, not being a big horse, the dog could do almost as he pleased when harnessed up.

"Yes, he had red hair," said Russ. "But he really didn't mean to take the papers. I heard my father say. It was just a mistake."

"Yes, I guess that was it," agreed Mr. Hurd. "Well, your father would like to get those papers back, wouldn't he?"

"Indeed he would!" exclaimed Russ. "He and mother were talking about 'em only last night. Daddy would like to get 'em very much."

"Well," went on Mr. Hurd. "I'll tell you the news I spoke about. Do you know where Mr. Barker's place is?"

"Yes," answered Russ. Laddie let his brother do most of the talking this time. "It's over on the road to Green Pond, isn't it?" and Russ, sitting in the dog-cart beside Laddie, pointed in the direction of the place he spoke of. It was about three miles from where Grandma Bell lived. Russ had heard his father, mother and grandmother speak of Mr. Barker's place. He was a man who owned many fields and woodlands.

"That's right, Russ," said Mr. Hurd. "Mr. Barker's place is over by Green Pond. I see you know it all right. Well, now I heard yesterday that there is a red-haired lumberman working for Mr. Barker, cutting down trees for him, and getting ready to build an ice-house on the shore of Green Pond."

"Is he a tramp lumberman?" asked Russ.

"As to that I don't know," answered Mr. Hurd. "That's what your father will have to find out for himself. But he can easily do that. All he'll have to do will be to go over to Mr. Barker's place—it isn't far—and ask for the red-haired lumberman. Mr. Barker has a big place, and hires a good many men, but almost

anybody would know a red-haired lumber-jack. There aren't so many of 'em in these parts."

"And if he's the tramp that got daddy's old coat then he must have the papers," said Russ.

"Well, yes, I suppose so. Unless he's lost 'em or sold 'em," went on Mr. Hurd. "Your father said those real estate papers were worth money, so maybe the tramp that found them in the pocket of the old coat sold them."

Russ and Laddie looked sad on hearing this. Suppose, after all, Daddy Bunker should not get his papers back? That would be too bad!

"As I say," went on Mr. Hurd, "I know only what some one told me. It was another man who works for Mr. Barker. He said a red-haired lumberman came one day last week, and Mr. Barker hired him. I wouldn't be surprised if he was a tramp, for regular lumbermen wouldn't be down here this time of year. They'd be up in the woods. But, boys, you tell your father to go have a look at this red-haired man over at Mr. Barker's place."

"We'll tell him," said Russ. "And thank you."

"Gid-dap!" called Mr. Hurd to his horse, and down the road it went, the carriage soon being out of sight. Zip, the dog harnessed to the cart which Russ and Laddie had helped make, still lay in the shade. He was taking a good rest.

"Oh, wouldn't it be fine if this is the lumberman daddy wants, and he could get back his papers?" said Laddie.

"Very fine," agreed Russ. "We'd better go back and tell him right away. Maybe he'll take us to Mr. Barker's place with him!"

"Oh, maybe!" cried Laddie. "Let's hurry home."

But you can not always tell what is going to happen in this world. If, just then, a white rabbit had not scooted out of the bushes and run through the woods right in front of Zip, perhaps this part of the story would never have been written. It is certain that if there had been no rabbit to chase, Zip wouldn't have run as fast as he did. For he ran very fast.

And, just as I told you, it was because the white rabbit popped out of the bushes right in front of the dog.

"Bow-wow!" barked Zip, as he saw the bunny. "Bow-wow!" and that meant: "I guess I'd better chase you!"

And that's what Zip did. Up he sprang from the grass, and after the white rabbit he ran. The dog started off so quickly that Russ and Laddie were almost thrown out of the cart. If they had not held to the sides of the box very hard they would have fallen out. As it was they were jerked and tossed about as Zip ran after the rabbit.

"Oh, what's the matter?" asked Laddie, who had not seen the bunny. "Did a bee sting Zip?" This had happened once, and the dog had run around yelping and barking, no one knowing what was the matter with him for a while.

"No, I don't believe it was a bee," answered Russ. "It was a rabbit. Whoa, Zip! Whoa!" called the little boy, pulling on the leather lines.

But Zip did not stop. Very few dogs would, when once they had started to run after a rabbit.

"BOW-WOW!" BARKED ZIP, AND ON HE RAN, FASTER AND FASTER.
"BOW-WOW!" BARKED ZIP, AND ON HE RAN, FASTER AND FASTER.

"Bow-wow! Bow-wow!" barked Zip, and on he ran, faster and faster. He seemed to enjoy it very much.

It was a good thing the woods were not of the roughest kind just at this place, for otherwise the dog-cart would have been smashed to pieces. As it was it bumped and swayed from side to side, and Laddie and Russ had all they could do to keep from bouncing out.

"Whoa! Whoa!" called Russ, but Zip paid no attention. Nor did he care how much the little boy driver pulled on the lines. As Zip had no bit in his mouth to hurt him when it was pulled on hard, he was not going to stop. The leather muzzle around his nose did not hurt him as a bit would have done.

I don't know just how far Zip would have run after the white rabbit, if something had not happened to put an end to the chase. The rabbit, probably getting tired of being run after, suddenly darted down inside a hole. This was his burrow, or underground house, and once down in that, the rabbit knew no dog could get him.

So into his hole, as if he were going down cellar, went the bunny. And Zip, with

a howl of disappointment, saw the rabbit disappear. The dog stopped at the outside edge of the hole, and barked as loudly as he could. Perhaps he thought he was giving the bunny an invitation to come up.

But the bunny never answered. They don't bark, but they can make a funny little squeaking sound at times. This one didn't do even that.

"He's gone, Zip! You can't get him," said Russ.

"Bow-wow," answered the dog, almost as if he understood what Russ said, and as though he answered:

"Yes, he's gone, but I'll get him the next time."

"He gave us a good ride, anyhow, didn't he, Russ?" asked Laddie. "I guess he rode us 'most a mile."

"Half a mile, anyhow," answered Russ. "And oh, look, Laddie! We can see Green Pond!"

They were up on top of a hill, and, looking through the trees, they could see, sparkling in the sun, the waters of Green Pond, about two miles away.

"That's where Mr. Barker lives," said Laddie.

"And maybe the red-haired lumberman is there with daddy's papers," said Russ. "Oh, Laddie! I know what let's do!"

"What?"

"Let's go down to Mr. Barker's place and ask the lumberman if he's a tramp, and if he is the one that took the old coat. Let's do that!"

"All right," agreed Laddie. "It isn't far and Zip will ride us there and home again, so we won't get tired. If we get the papers won't daddy be glad?"

"Terrible glad! Come on, we'll go!"

And, calling to Zip to come away from the rabbit hole, Russ and Laddie in their dog-cart started on a trip which was to have a strange ending.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LUMBERMAN'S CABIN

Along the road that led down the hill, and through the woods to Green Pond, went Zip the dog; pulling after him the cart in which Russ and Laddie rode.

"I'm glad we're riding," said Laddie. "It would be awful far to walk to Mr. Barker's place at Green Pond and back again, wouldn't it, Russ?"

"Oh, I don't know," Russ answered slowly, as he guided Zip around a turn in the crooked path. "I could walk it, but your legs aren't as long as mine. I walked two miles once, with daddy."

"What'll we do when we see that red-haired lumberman?" asked the smaller boy.

"We'll ask him for daddy's old coat and the papers."

"But maybe he'll want the old coat," suggested Laddie.

"Oh, well, he can have that," Russ answered. "Daddy gave him that, anyhow. But we can ask him for the papers."

"S'posin' he hasn't got 'em?"

"What makes you s'pose so much?" demanded Russ. "Wait till we get there, and we can tell what to do."

"All right," agreed Laddie. "I can be thinking of a riddle. Maybe I could ask the lumberman a riddle, Russ. Could I?"

"Maybe. But maybe he doesn't like 'em. Some folks don't."

"I could ask him an easy one, about the miller's hat, or about why the tickets don't get mad when the conductor punches 'em."

"No, don't ask him that one," Russ said.

"Why not?"

"'Cause that one about the tickets is too hard—nobody knows the answer. You

don't yourself."

"I know I don't, but maybe the lumberman might. Maybe he'd like to answer it. I guess I'll ask him."

"No, don't do it," advised Russ. "He's a poor lumberman, or he wouldn't want an old coat. And if he's poor he wouldn't pay money for tickets, so he wouldn't know why the conductor punched 'em."

Laddie thought about this a while.

"All right," he said, finally, as Zip trotted along down the hill, and came out on a level road that led to Green Pond. "I'll make up a new riddle for the lumberman," he went on. "Or I could ask him about Zip's breath coming in short pants."

"All right, ask him that," agreed Russ. "I hope he gives us the papers."

Mr. Barker's place was on the shores of Green Pond. In fact the man owned the whole pond—or little lake, for that was what it was—and all the woods around it. His house, a very big one, stood in the woods not far from the pond, and all about the house were beautiful grounds, with roads and paths leading through them. And around the house was a high iron fence, with gate-ways here and there.

Russ and Laddie, riding in their soap-box dog-cart, came along the public road. Ahead of them they could see the big iron fence around Mr. Barker's place. They knew it, for they had driven past it the week before with Grandma Bell, when she took the six little Bunkers and Daddy Bunker and Mother Bunker for a picnic ride in the big carriage.

"There's the place," said Laddie, pointing.

"I see it," returned Russ. "Now we'll drive in and find the lumberman and get daddy's papers."

Russ guided Zip up to one of the big iron gates, and as the boys turned into the drive a man came out of a little house near the entrance and held up his hand. It was just as the policeman does in the city street when he wants the automobiles and wagons to stop, so Russ called to Zip:

"Whoa!"

The dog had learned to stop when any one driving him said this, so now he

halted and, being tired, he stretched out on the ground. His harness was loose, so he could do this.

"Where are you boys going?" asked the man at the gate.

"We want to find a lumberman," said Russ.

"A lumberman?"

"Yes. One works here and he has daddy's old coat and there are some papers in the pocket that daddy wants," Russ explained. "He's red-haired," he went on. "I mean the lumberman is, not my father."

"Oh," said the man at the gate. "So you're looking for some one. But Mr. Barker lives here and you can't go in, I'm afraid."

"We know Mr. Barker lives here," returned Russ. "We live over at Lake Sagatook—that is, we don't zactly *live* there, but we're visiting Grandma Bell."

"Oh, are you some of the little children staying at Mrs. Bell's house?" asked the gate-tender. "I heard she had company. I know her well, but I don't often get a chance to see her. So you're her company."

"She's our grandma," explained Russ. "And we are the six little Bunkers—everybody calls us that. 'Course Laddie and I are only two Bunkers—there're four more at home—Rose, Vi, Margy and Mun Bun."

"What's Mun Bun?" asked the gate-man. Nearly every one asked this on hearing the funny name.

"Mun Bun is our littlest brother," explained Russ, who was doing all the talking.

"His right name is Munroe, but we call him Mun Bun for short."

"Well, as long as you don't eat him for short I guess it will be all right," said the gate-man with a laugh.

"Is that a riddle—about eating Mun Bun?" asked Laddie.

"No. That's supposed to be a joke," explained the gate-man. "Your brother's nickname is Bun, you say. Well, a bun is something good to eat, but I hope you don't eat your little brother—joke, you see."

Russ and Laddie laughed. They didn't exactly understand the joke, but they

thought the gate-man was jolly and they wanted to be jolly too.

"So you six little Bunkers—at least two of you—came to see Mr. Barker, did you?" asked the man at the entrance.

"No, we didn't zactly come to see *him*," answered Russ. "We want to see the lumberman that took daddy's ragged coat with the papers in the pocket—only he didn't know they were there and he didn't take the coat. That was given to him."

"You want to see a lumberman?" repeated the guard at the gate, for he was a sort of guard. "But we haven't any lumbermen here."

"He's red-haired," Russ reminded him.

"Oh, I guess I know whom you mean!" said the gate-man. "There is a red-haired man cutting trees over in the woods. Mr. Barker is going to build a new dock for his boats in Green Pond, and there is a red-haired man chopping down trees for the work. He is a lumberman, I s'pose."

"And is he red-haired?" asked Laddie eagerly.

"Yes, his hair is red. I remember now. He came here one day and asked if there was any work on the place. I was going to tell him there wasn't, when one of the gardeners said the foreman was looking for a man to chop trees. So this red-haired man was hired."

"And is he a tramp?" asked Russ.

"Well, he did look sort of like that, ragged and dusty."

"And did he have a ragged coat?" Russ went on.

"I didn't notice particularly," answered the gate-man. "He was pretty much ragged all over, I guess, but I didn't pay much attention to him, as I was busy. But he certainly was red-haired."

"Oh, I do hope he's got daddy's papers!" went on Russ. "Mr. Hurd told us about the lumberman," he went on, "and we came to see him."

"Well, you can do that," said the guard at the gate. "Just follow this road until you come to the lake. This lumberman—I think his name is Mike Gannon—lives by himself in a little cabin near the place where the new dock is to be built. He said he was used to living by himself, so the foreman told him he could camp out

there. And there you'll find him, if he isn't chopping down trees in the woods. Just follow this road to the lake. Will your dog pull you there?"

"Oh, yes, Zip is a good puller," said Russ. "He gave us this ride from Lake Sagatook."

"And he ran after a rabbit!" added Laddie. "And he might 'a' got it, only the bunny went down a hole."

"They mostly do that when a dog chases 'em," said the gate-man. "Well, you just follow the road along until you come to the cabin where the red-haired lumberman lives—Mike Gannon is his name—and then you can ask him about the ragged coat and the papers. Stop and tell me about it on your way out."

"We will," promised Russ and Laddie. Then Russ called to Zip:

"Gid-dap!"

Up jumped the dog with a bark, as much as to say "Good-bye!" to the gate-man, and down the gravel drive he trotted with the cart.

"He was a nice man, wasn't he?" observed Laddie.

"Yes, terrible nice," agreed Russ. "I hope we find the red-haired lumberman."

"I forgot to ask him a riddle," went on Laddie. "I mean the man at the gate. But I can ask him one when we go back."

"If we have time," Russ said. "We can't stay too long, or mother and daddy and Grandma Bell will wonder where we are."

"That's so," agreed Laddie. "Well, we'll just find the lumberman and get the papers and take them to daddy."

Only it was not going to be quite as easy as that, the boys were to learn.

Along the pretty drive, under the trees, they went in the dog-cart. Pretty soon they came to a part of the road where the little lake came close to the roadway, and, just beyond, was a log cabin.

"There's where the lumberman lives," said Russ.

"Yes, I guess he does," agreed Laddie.

And just then, all of a sudden, Zip saw a cat out in front of the cabin. With a growl and a bark the dog began to run toward the cat as fast as he could go, pulling the cart after him.

"Whoa! Whoa! Stop!" cried Russ.

"Stop! Stop, Zip!" yelled Laddie. "Stop!"

But the dog did not hear, or would not mind. Straight at the cat he rushed, and pussy, seeing a strange dog coming, and pulling a soap-box cart in which were two boys—pussy, seeing this strange sight—arched her back and made her tail get as big as a big bologna sausage.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE OLD COAT

"Bang!"

That was the soap-box cart hitting against a tree.

"Tunk! Tunk!"

Those were the soft sounds Russ and Laddie made as they were spilled out on the grass near the lumberman's cabin.

"Bow-wow!"

That was Zip barking at the cat.

"Hiss-siss!"

That was the cat making queer noises at Zip.

"Wow-ow-ow-Yelp!"

That was Zip howling because the cat scratched his nose.

For that's just what the cat did. Zip rushed at her so fast that he banged the cart against a tree, and turned it over on its side, spilling out Russ and Laddie. And Zip, not seeming to care what happened to his little masters, kept on after the cat.

But pussy was brave, and she didn't run and climb a tree, as most cats did when Zip chased them. She just stood, arching her back, making her tail big, and sissing queer sounds until the dog came near enough, when she darted out a paw, and the sharp claws scratched Zip on the nose. Then Zip howled and sat down to look at the cat. And the cat stayed right there looking at Zip.

For a moment or two Russ and Laddie didn't know just what had happened. But they scrambled to their feet. Then they saw Zip and the overturned cart and the cat, and they understood.

"He chased a cat," said Laddie.

"Zip, you're a bad dog!" cried Russ, and he shook his finger at the pet. "Didn't Grandma Bell tell you not to chase cats?"

This was true. Grandma Bell had told Zip that, but, like boys and girls, he sometimes forgot. Zip wasn't a bad dog, and he never bit cats. He just liked to chase them once in a while.

"Are you hurt, Laddie?" asked Russ.

"No. Are you?"

"Nope. Say! but didn't Zip run fast, though?"

"Terrible fast. Faster than when he chased the rabbit."

There were a few red spots on Zip's nose where the cat had scratched him. The dog licked them away with his tongue, and looked rather silly. It wasn't very often a cat stayed to fight him.

Russ and Laddie started for the overturned cart, to set it up on the wheels again, when the door of the log cabin opened and out came a red-haired man, whose clothes were quite old and ragged. He wore a pair of boots, into the tops of which his trousers were tucked, but he had on no coat. Russ and Laddie looked particularly to see if he had a coat, but he had none.

"Hello! What's going on here?" asked the man.

"If you please, our dog chased your cat," said Russ, "but he didn't hurt him—I mean our dog didn't hurt your cat."

"I'm glad of that," said the man with a smile. "That's a good cat of mine. I haven't had her very long, but I wouldn't want a dog to hurt her. But your dog seems to be scratched," went on the man, as he looked carefully and saw some more red spots of blood on Zip's nose.

"Yes, your cat scratched him," returned Russ. "I guess Zip won't chase her any more."

"I guess not," the red-haired man agreed. "So you had an upset, did you?" he went on as he noticed the overturned cart. "Did either of you get hurt?"

"No, thank you," answered Russ. "We fell on the soft grass."

"That's good," returned the man. "I suppose you belong up in the big house,

though I haven't seen you before, and I didn't know there were any children up there."

"No, we don't live in the big house," said Russ, for the man had pointed toward the residence of Mr. Barker. "We live over at Lake Sagatook—I mean we're visiting Grandma Bell—and we came to see you. We're two of the six little Bunkers."

"Oh, you're two of the six little Bunkers, are you?" asked the man. "Well, if the other four are as nice as you I'd like to see them. You say you came to see me?"

"Yes, sir," answered Russ. "You're the lumberman, aren't you?"

"Well, yes, I used to be a lumberman when I could get work at it," answered the man standing in the cabin door. "I know how to cut down trees and all that sort of thing."

"And you have red hair," added Russ.

"Yes, you're right, I *have* got red hair," and the lumberman ran his fingers through it as though to pull out some and make sure it had not changed color.

"Is your name Mike Gannon?" asked Russ.

"That's my name, little Bunker—I don't know your first name."

"It's Russ, and his is Laddie," and Russ pointed to his brother.

By this time the cat, seeing that Zip was not going to chase her any more, had taken the arch out of her back and her tail looked like a small frankfurter sausage, and not like a big bologna one.

"Well, Russ and Laddie Bunker, I'm glad to see you," said Mr. Gannon. "And so you live over at Lake Sagatook, and not here at Green Pond. Why did you come so far?"

"To see you," answered Russ.

"To see *me*!" exclaimed the red-haired lumberman in surprise. "Well, I'm no great sight to look at, that's sure. But still I'm glad to see you. Are you sure you wanted me?"

"You're red-haired," said Russ slowly, as though going over certain points.

"That's right," said the lumberman.

"And you cut down trees," went on Russ.

"Correct."

"And were you ever a tramp?" Russ asked.

"Well, yes, you could call me that," admitted the red-haired man, speaking slowly. "I'm a sort of tramp lumberman. I never like to stay long in one place, and so I'm roving all over. You could call me a tramp."

"That's good," said Russ.

"Well, sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't," said Mr. Gannon. "It isn't so bad tramping in the summer, but in the winter it isn't so nice. You get cold and hungry."

"I meant it's good 'cause you're the very one we want to see," went on Russ, who felt quite big and grown-up, now that he and Laddie had come this far alone. "Now where is the ragged coat?"

"The ragged coat?" questioned Mr. Gannon. He did not seem to know what Laddie meant.

"Didn't you get a ragged cent from my daddy's real estate office about a month ago?" went on Russ in surprise. "It was in Pineville, where we live when we aren't visiting Grandma Bell. Did you get a ragged coat there?"

"Pineville—Pineville?" murmured the red-haired lumberman to himself, as if trying to remember. "Yes, I did tramp through there and—Hold on!" he cried. "I remember now! I did ask at an office if they had an old coat they could give me. I hadn't one worth wearing. I did get an old coat, and, as you say, it was ragged."

"Our father gave you that," went on Laddie. "Or he told one of his real estate men to do it."

"Yes, that's right—I remember now. I did beg a coat from a real estate office," said Mr. Gannon. "And that was your father's place, was it? Well, I'm glad to meet you boys. Your father was kind to me. But Pineville is a long way from here. It took me almost a month to walk it, stopping to work now and then."

"We came in the train," said Laddie, "and I know a riddle about the conductor

punching the tickets, but I don't know——"

Russ didn't want his brother to get to talking about riddles at a time like this. So he interrupted with:

"And have you got that ragged coat now, Mr. Tramp—I mean Mr. Gannon? Have you got that coat now?"

"Have I got that ragged coat, you mean?" asked the man.

"Yes. Our daddy wants it back!"

Mr. Gannon looked a bit surprised.

"Not to wear," explained Russ quickly. "He doesn't want it to wear. You can keep it, I guess. But when he told the clerk in his office to give the coat to you there were some papers in one of the pockets and——"

"Real estate papers," broke in Laddie, remembering this part.

"Yes, real estate papers," said Russ. "They were in the pocket of the old, ragged coat, and my daddy would like awful much to get 'em back. Have you got the coat?"

Mr. Gannon did not speak for a moment or two. He seemed to be trying to think of something. Then, as Russ and Laddie looked at him, and as Zip sat looking at the cat, the red-haired tramp lumberman said:

"Well, now, it's a funny thing, but I *have* got that old coat yet. It's too ragged for me to wear—it got a lot more ragged after your father gave it to me—but I sort of took a liking to it, and I kept it. I've got it yet."

"Where is it?" asked Russ eagerly.

"Right here in my cabin. Mr. Barker lets me stay here while I'm cutting down trees to build his dock. I like to be by myself. I've got the coat here. I'll get it."

He went inside and came out a moment later with a ragged coat in his hand. It was tattered and torn.

"This is the coat your father gave me," said the lumberman, "but I'm sorry to say there are no papers in the pockets. You can look yourself if you like. There isn't a paper at all!"

As Russ watched, the red-haired man thrust his hands first into one pocket and then into the others. But no papers came out. Russ looked sad and disappointed. So did Laddie.

"This is the coat all right that I got at a real estate office in Pineville," said Mr. Gannon. "But every pocket was empty when I got it. I remember feeling in them. There were no papers at all. If there were ever any in the pockets they must have dropped out before I got the coat. The pockets are full of holes, anyhow. I'm sorry!"

So were Laddie and Russ. They watched while Mr. Gannon went through each pocket of the ragged coat once more. But it was of no use. No papers were to be found.

"Come on, Laddie," said Russ in a low voice to his brother. "We'd better go back home. Good-bye!" he called over his shoulder to the red-haired lumberman.

"Good-bye," answered Mr. Gannon. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I haven't your daddy's papers."

CHAPTER XXV

"HURRAY!"

Slowly and sadly Russ and Laddie drove their dog-cart back toward Grandma Bell's house. They went slowly because it was uphill from Green Pond, and Zip was tired. He had chased after a rabbit and a cat, and he had pulled Russ and Laddie all the way. No wonder the dog was tired. So the boys did not try to drive him fast.

And the two boys were sad because, though they had found the right red-haired tramp lumberman—the same one that had Daddy Bunker's ragged coat—still the real estate papers were not in it.

"It's too bad," said Russ, as Zip walked along.

"Yes," agreed Laddie.

"I thought surely we'd get the papers," Russ went on.

"And I didn't ask him any riddle," said Laddie.

"Oh, well, never mind that," went on Russ.

"Maybe I can ask him again, though," said Laddie, brightening up. "We can have daddy take us there, and I can ask him then."

"What would daddy want to take us there for?" asked Russ.

"To see the old coat. Maybe Mr. Gannon has another, and that has the papers in."

"I don't guess so," answered Russ. "Gid-dap, Zip."

Zip didn't "gid-dap" very fast, but he kept on going. And when he came to the top of the hill, and began to trot down toward Lake Sagatook, he went faster. I think he knew he could have a good rest in the barn, and also have some hot supper.

For it was getting near to supper-time. The sun was going down in the west, and in a little while it would be dark. Already the shadows were longer, and it was

already a little dark when the boys drove through little patches of wood.

But they did not get lost, for Zip knew the way back, and soon the dog-cart was rattling up the gravel drive of Grandma Bell's house.

"There they come!" cried a voice, and there was a general rush to the porch. Daddy and Mother Bunker, with Grandma Bell, Jane the hired girl, and the four little Bunkers looked at the wanderers.

"Where in the world have you two been?" cried Mother Bunker.

"We were worried about you," said her husband.

"And we were just going to get Tom to hitch up the horse and go to look for you," added Grandma Bell.

"Were you lost?" Rose asked.

"Did the old ram chase you?" Vi wanted to know.

Margy and Mun Bun toddled down the steps to look at Zip, who had stretched out on the grass, still hitched to the cart.

"Oh-oo-o-o! His nose is all scratched," said Margy. "Does it hurt you, Zip?" she asked, gently patting him, and the dog wagged his tail.

"Did some other dog bite him?" asked Mun Bun.

"No, a cat scratched him," answered Russ.

"What cat?" the children's mother wanted to know.

"It was the red-haired lumberman's cat," Russ went on. "We went to his cabin, over at Green Pond, where Mr. Barker lives. His name is Mike Gannon—the tramp lumberman, I mean. Mr. Hurd told us about him, and we went to see him and——"

"I forgot to ask him a riddle!" broke in Laddie.

"Never mind about riddles now, my dear," said Mother Bunker softly. "Let us hear what Russ is saying."

"Did you really find a red-haired tramp lumberman?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"Yes," answered Russ. "And he had your ragged coat, but the papers weren't in

it, Daddy. And he was sorry and so were we and I'm hungry!"

"So'm I!" added Laddie, before the words were fairly out of his brother's mouth. "I'm awful hungry!"

"But what does it all mean?" asked Mrs. Bunker. "Have you two boys really been somewhere?"

"We found the red-haired tramp lumberman, I told you," said Russ, "but he didn't have those papers."

"Let me hear all about it once again," begged Daddy Bunker. He seemed as much excited as Russ and Laddie had been when they first saw Mr. Gannon.

"First let me get them something to eat," said Grandma Bell. "We had our supper—an early one," she went on, "but I saved some for you boys. You shall eat first, and then tell us your story."

"I guess Zip wants to eat, too," said Laddie. "He didn't catch the rabbit and the cat scratched him."

"I'll have Jane give Zip a good supper," said Grandma Bell. "And there is strawberry shortcake for you boys."

"Oh, goody!" cried Russ.

Laddie clapped his hands in joy.

And, taking turns, between bites, as it were, when they were eating supper, Russ and Laddie told of having met Mr. Hurd, who had spoken of the red-haired lumberman working at Mr. Barker's place.

"So we went there, and Zip chased his cat," explained Russ. "And we upset, but he was nice and he showed us the ragged coat, only the pockets were full of holes and there weren't any papers."

"Well, that's too bad!" said Daddy Bunker. "You two little boys were very kind to do as much as you did, though."

"Do you suppose, by any chance, this tramp lumberman might know something of your papers, Charles?" asked Grandma Bell.

"I'll go over and see him in the morning," said Mr. Bunker.

"May we go along?" asked Rose. "I'd like to see the cat that scratched Zip."

"He won't scratch him again," Laddie said. "They're good friends now."

"I don't want to see Zip scratched," returned Rose. "I just want to see Green Pond and the red-haired man and the cat."

"I'll tell you what we can do," said Grandma Bell. "We can all go on a picnic to Green Pond to-morrow. We'll go in the carry-all and take our lunch. I know Mr. Barker, and he'll let us eat our lunch in his woods. Then you can ask the red-haired man about the lost papers, Charles."

Mr. Bunker said this would be a good plan, and the next morning, bright and early, after the lunch had been put up, the six little Bunkers, with their father and mother and grandmother, started for Green Pond.

In a little while they were traveling along through the woods, down the same hill on which Zip had chased the rabbit. This time Zip had been left in the barn with Tom Hardy. Daddy Bunker was driving the horse.

"Here's the gate where the man told us about Mr. Gannon," said Russ, pointing out the driveway. The man on guard knew Grandma Bell, and let them go on through. They were soon at the log cabin.

Daddy Bunker knocked on the door, but there was no answer.

"I guess he isn't at home," said Grandma Bell.

"Are you looking for the lumberman—the red-haired man who cuts trees?" asked a gardener, coming along just then.

"Yes, we should like to see him," said Daddy Bunker.

"Well, he's over in the woods, chopping. I'll call him for *you*."

They all waited at the cabin, and soon there came the sound of some one tramping through the bushes along the shore of the pond. Then the red-haired man came into view.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed, as he caught sight of Russ and Laddie. "The two little Bunkers who came to see me yesterday!"

"All of us are here now—the whole of the six little Bunkers," said Russ. "And here is my father, and mother and Grandma Bell, too!"

"Well, I'm sure I'm glad to see you all," said Mr. Gannon, who had an axe over his shoulder.

"We came to see about that ragged coat," explained Daddy Bunker. "I guess my two boys told you why I wanted it. I remember you now. You are the man my clerk gave the coat to, back in Pineville, aren't you?"

"Yes, and I want to thank you. That coat seemed to bring me good luck. I got work right after you gave it to me, and I've been working ever since, though I did tramp a lot."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you had good luck," said Daddy Bunker. "But I'm sorry you didn't find the real estate papers I left in the coat pocket. They must have been in when my clerk let you have it, but perhaps they dropped out."

"I guess they must have," said the lumberman. "I never saw any of them, and I wore the coat right after you gave it to me. I'll get it and let you see for yourself."

He set down his axe outside the log cabin and went in. Pretty soon he came out again with, the ragged coat—the same one he had showed to Laddie and Russ.

"Here it is," said the red-haired tramp lumberman, as he handed the garment to Mr. Bunker, "It's just as I got it from you. I don't wear it much now, as I have another. But you'll find no papers in the pockets."

"Yes, that's the old coat I used to wear around the office," said Mr. Bunker, as he took it from. Mr. Gannon. "And I'm sure I put those papers in the inside pocket, and then I forgot all about them."

As he spoke he reached his hand down in the pocket of the old coat. The pocket must have been pretty deep, for Daddy Bunker's hand went away down. Then a funny look came over the face of the father of the six little Bunkers.

He pulled out his thumb, and his whole hand, and, instead of pulling out a plum, as Little Jack Horner did, Mr. Bunker pulled out—the missing papers!

"Look what I found!" he cried. "Hurray! The very papers I want!"

"Were they in the coat?" asked the red-haired lumberman in amazement.

"They were," said Daddy Bunker. "Away down inside the lining. They slipped through a hole in the pocket. And there they have been all this while—in the

lining of the old coat."

"And I never knew it," said Mr. Gannon. "Are you sure they are the papers you want?"

"The very ones," answered Mr. Bunker, glancing at them. "And they are worth a lot of money, too. I am very glad I found them."

"So am I," said the lumberman. "I would hate to think I lost the papers out of the old coat, even though I didn't know they were in the lining. Well, I'm glad you have them back."

"Oh, but this is good luck!" said Grandma Bell.

"And Russ and Laddie brought it to us, for they found out where the coat was," said Mother Bunker.

"But we wouldn't have known if Mr. Hurd hadn't told us," said Russ.

"And maybe we wouldn't have come, only Zip chased the rabbit," added Laddie.

"Well, it was good luck all around, and I have my papers back," said Daddy Bunker. "And now we'll go on with the picnic."

Daddy Bunker gave the lumberman some money, as his share in the good luck, and told him when he was through working for Mr. Barker to come to Pineville.

"I'll give you work there," said the children's father.

"All right, I'll come," promised Mr. Gannon. "And the next time any one gives me an old coat I'll look in the torn lining, as well as in the pockets, and if I find any valuable papers I can give them back right away."

Then he told of having tramped from place to place after leaving Pineville, wearing the old coat, until he reached Green Pond.

"It's just like a story in a book," said Rose.

"Yes, it surely is," agreed Daddy Bunker, as he put the valuable papers into his coat pocket, that had no hole in it.

Then the six little Bunkers and the others went on to a lovely spot on the shore of Green Pond and ate their picnic lunch.

"Oh, it's just lovely here," said Rose, as she gave Mun Bun another small piece of cake.

"I wish we could stay forever," added Laddie. "I like it! I can think up awful good riddles here."

"It's fun to sail boats," said Russ, as he whistled a merry tune.

"And there are so many things to see and do at Grandma Bell's house," added Vi.

"I won't throw any more dollies down the well," promised Margy, who remembered her little trick.

"That's good!" laughed Mother Bunker. "But, nice as it is, we can't stay much longer. We are going somewhere else."

"Where?" asked Russ eagerly.

"Well, we have an invitation from your aunt to spend the last of July and part of August in Boston," said his mother. "Would you like to go?"

"We love Grandma Bell, but we would like to go to Boston," answered Rose.

And what the children saw and did there you may learn by reading the next book in this series, to be called: "Six Little Bunkers at Aunt Jo's."

"We did have such a lovely time!" said Rose on their homeward way. "Didn't we, Russ?"

"Yes. And I'm glad daddy got his papers. Oh, look! There goes a bunny!" and he pointed. "Margy—Mun Bun! Look! There's a bunny like the one Zip chased," and Russ turned to the two small children.

But Mun Bun and Margy were fast asleep on the seat between Mother Bunker and Grandma Bell.

THE END

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