

Sunny Boy and His Playmates eBook

Sunny Boy and His Playmates

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LEARNING TO SKATE

"Santa Claus brought them," said Sunny Boy.

He was lying flat on the floor, trying to reach under the bookcase where his marble had rolled. The marble was a cannon ball and Sunny Boy had been showing Nelson Baker, the boy who lived next door, how to knock over lead soldiers.

Nelson Baker picked up the lead general and examined him carefully.

"They're nicer soldiers than I had last year," he said. "Say, Sunny Boy, I could bring my soldiers over and we could have a real fight."

"I've got it!" shouted Sunny Boy suddenly, pulling his arm out from under the bookcase with the marble in his hand. "I *knew* it rolled under the bookcase. You can roll it this time, Nelson."

"All right," said Nelson, taking the marble. "And I guess I won't go for my lead soldiers. My mother might say I'd been over here an hour."

Nelson's mother, you see, had told him he might stay an hour at Sunny Boy's house, and something told Nelson he had already played so long with his little friend that if he went home now he would not get back.

"Get down like the Indians," urged Sunny Boy, as Nelson took the marble. "Shut one eye, Nelson."

Nelson put his head down to the floor and closed one eye. He meant to aim straight at the row of beautiful new lead soldiers, but, as he afterward explained, the marble slipped before he was ready. It shot across the floor and went crash into the glass door of the bookcase.

"What was that, Sunny Boy? Did you break anything?" asked Grandpa Horton, coming in from the dining-room, where he had been reading the newspaper. He carried the paper in his hand and his glasses were pushed up on his forehead and he looked worried.

"My marble hit the bookcase door, but I don't believe I broke it," said Nelson. "'Tisn't even cracked, is it, Mr. Horton?"

Grandpa Horton looked carefully at the glass door and said no, the marble had not been able to crack the heavy plate glass.

“But I’d play another game if I were you, boys,” he said kindly. “Have you shown Nelson all your Christmas presents yet, Sunny Boy?”

“We got only as far as the lead soldiers,” answered Sunny Boy. “Nelson wanted to play with them. But come on up in the playroom, Nelson, and I’ll show you my things.”

It was only two days after Christmas, and the presents Santa Claus had brought Sunny Boy and the gifts his mother and daddy and grandparents had given him, were all spread out on the window seat in his playroom. The two presents that Sunny Boy liked most were a little pocket searchlight and his ice-skates. The skates were double-runner ones, for Sunny Boy did not yet know how to skate.

“I’m going to learn this winter,” he told Nelson. “Grandpa is going to take me to Wilkins Park this afternoon as soon as Daddy and Mother come home from taking a walk.”

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"I can skate a little," said Nelson. "But my mother won't let me go to the Park alone. Lots of the boys go, but she never lets me. I wish we had a little private pond. Maybe we could make one in the yard, Sunny."

"Maybe," assented Sunny Boy, but he was thinking about going to the Park with Grandpa Horton and trying his new skates, and not about making a "private" skating pond in the back yard. "There! I heard the front door shut. I hope Daddy's come."

Sunny Boy and Nelson ran downstairs to find Daddy and Mother Horton in the hall, taking off their coats.

"Nelson, your mother wants you to come home," said Mr. Horton. "We saw her in the window as we passed your house. She's waiting for you. Your Aunt Caroline has come."

"Take a popcorn ball, Nelson," said Sunny Boy's mother, as Nelson began to put on his coat and hat. "And here is one for Ruth." Ruth was Nelson's little sister.

Nelson said good-bye to Sunny Boy and ran down the steps of the Horton house and up his own. It was never any trouble for Nelson or Sunny Boy to go calling on each other.

"Now we can go skating, can't we, Grandpa?" asked Sunny Boy eagerly. "I thought Nelson stayed ever so long."

"Why, Sunny Boy, how impolite you are!" cried his mother. "That isn't a nice thing to say. Suppose you should go to see Nelson and he should spend the time wishing you would go home—how would you feel?"

Sunny Boy looked uncomfortable.

"Well, he can come back after I go skating," he suggested. "Grandpa promised we could go this afternoon, Mother."

"So I did; and we'll start this minute," declared Grandpa Horton, coming out into the hall and smiling at his small grandson. "Who ever heard of a little boy with a brand-new pair of skates and ice on the pond, not going skating, Olive? Sunny Boy is just as polite as he ever was, Olive, but we have to go skating, whether we have company or not."

"Oh, Father, how you do spoil Sunny Boy!" cried Mrs. Horton, half-laughing. But she kissed them both and waved to them as they went off, the new skates dangling over Sunny Boy's arm and buckled together with a leather strap just as the big boys tie their skates.

"Can you skate, Grandpa?" the little boy asked, as they trudged along, Grandpa's rosy face and white mustache showing above a gray and white muffler and Sunny Boy's pink

cheeks and dancing eyes set off by a muffler of scarlet wool. “Will you go skating with me?”

“Why, I haven’t been skating for thirty years!” exclaimed Grandpa Horton. “I don’t know whether I have forgotten or not, Sunny Boy. But I have no skates, you see, and I shall not get any because I don’t expect to go skating often this winter. I’ll get you started, and then this winter, when we go home, Grandma and I will be able to think of you having fine times on the ice.”

Wilkins Park was several blocks from the Horton’s house, but Sunny Boy and his grandfather liked to walk, and though it was a cold day they tucked their hands in their coat pockets and walked fast and were very comfortable. The best skating pond in Centronia—indeed about the only good pond—was in the center of the Park, and long before Sunny Boy and his grandfather came in sight of the Park they saw boys and girls with skates over their arms, hurrying to the pond.

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"Hurry, Grandpa!" urged Sunny Boy. "Hurry! Maybe there won't be room for me!"

Grandpa Horton laughed and said he thought there would be room for one small boy on the pond even if half the town did want to go skating that afternoon.

"I suppose it is because there is no school," he said, as they turned in at the Park gates. "I declare, Sunny Boy, if I had thought of it, I don't know that I would have brought you today!"

For the ice-pond—and by this time they were in sight of it—was crowded with skaters. Skating in holiday week was too delightful to be neglected, and it seemed as though all the school children in the city were skating or learning to skate. There were big boys and little boys and tall girls and short girls and good skaters and poor ones. Now and then a long line of skaters, hands joined, swept down the pond, shouting.

Sunny Boy beamed. He was very glad that he had come and he wanted to sit down on the grass and put on his skates at once.

"I think we'll walk around to the other end of the pond, dear," said Grandpa Horton. "There are not so many people there, and I'll be able to walk out on the ice a little way with you till you learn to keep your balance. Don't put on your skates till we get to that white post."

Sunny Boy took his grandfather's hand and they tramped around the pond till they reached a place where there were fewer skaters. A tall policeman was telling a pretty girl that she could not leave her sweater on the bank.

"It wouldn't be there when you got back, Miss," he said. "The only wise thing to do is to carry all extras with you—that is if you want 'em."

The pretty girl skated off, carrying her sweater, and the policeman turned and saw Sunny Boy struggling to put on his skates.

"Well, I guess I know you!" said the policeman, smiling. "You go to Miss May's school, don't you?"

It was the same policeman Sunny Boy had met when all the children at Miss May's school had lost their coats before Thanksgiving (and that was exciting, you may be sure), and they were really very good friends.

"This is my Grandpa Horton," said Sunny Boy. "He and Grandma are visiting us. They came before Christmas."

Grandpa Horton and the policeman shook hands and Grandpa asked him if he thought the ice was safe.

“Oh, it’s safe enough, sir,” answered the policeman.

“Sunny Boy is so anxious to learn to skate,” explained Grandpa Horton, while Sunny Boy stood up, his new skates on his feet by this time, “that I promised him his first lesson today.”

“He’ll be all right if he stays near the edge and you keep an eye on him,” said the policeman. “Sometimes the little fellows get knocked down, if they go out in the center alone. If you tumble, Sunny Boy, don’t bump your nose, will you? You might sneeze.”

Sunny Boy laughed, and, holding tight to Grandpa Horton’s hand, he slowly slid out on the ice.

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"I feel—" he gasped, "I feel like a rocking horse!"

And indeed, if you have ever been on double runner skates yourself, you'll remember that you do feel something as a rocking horse must feel.

Grandpa Horton was very patient and he walked slowly and held fast to Sunny Boy so that he would not feel frightened. Boys and girls whizzed by them, laughing and shouting, and Sunny Boy hoped that he would be able to skate like that some day. Presently he let go of his grandfather's hand and tried to skate by himself.

"I can do it, just as nice," he was boasting when one foot went out and the other doubled up and Sunny Boy went down flat!

"Hurt?" asked Grandpa Horton, helping him up. "No one ever learned to skate without a fall or two, Sunny Boy."

"It didn't hurt me," said Sunny Boy bravely. "At least, not very much. But the ice is pretty slippery, isn't it, Grandpa? And it is hard, too."

He took hold of his grandfather's hand again, though, after this tumble, and they were both having a fine time when they heard some one shout.

"Why, it's the policeman!" said Grandpa Horton, in surprise. "I didn't realize how far out we were, Sunny Boy. He's motioning. We must go in. Hurry, laddie!"

The policeman stood on the shore, shouting and waving his arm. As the skaters heard him they began to move toward him, and in a minute there was a pushing, hurrying throng, some skating, some trying to run.

"Everybody ashore!" shouted the policeman. "Everybody off!"

A crowd of skaters rushed for the head of the pond. Sunny Boy felt his hand pulled from Grandpa Horton's and he spun around like a little top. When he stopped spinning he landed on his hands and knees and several boys almost skated into him. Grandpa Horton was nowhere to be seen!

CHAPTER II

GRANDPA HORTON IS FOUND

"Look out!" shouted a big boy. "Watch where you're going! Can't you see the little kid?"

"The ice is cracking!" cried another boy. "Look! There's water on the top now. Gee, let me get ashore!"

“Well, go on and get ashore,” said the big boy, pulling Sunny Boy to his feet. “Go on ashore! If you’re so afraid of drowning you have to walk on a kid of this size, you’d better go ashore.”

The other boy had pushed on toward the shore and he did not hear any of this talk. The crowd continued to move by, because all the skaters kept coming. Of course it would have been much wiser if they had gone ashore at different points of the lake instead of crowding together at the end where the ice was already cracking. But, somehow, people do not stop to think when anything happens, and as soon as the boys and girls—and men and women, too—who were skating on the pond saw that something was happening at one end of the pond they skated there as fast as they possibly could.

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"You'd get along faster without your skates," said the big boy, "but I won't try to take 'em off for you. We'd both be walked on while I was doing it. Come on, we'll see if these folks are in too big a hurry to let us get ashore with them."

Sunny Boy was not exactly frightened, but he felt rather queer. Grandpa Horton was gone, a strange boy had him by the hand, and many people kept shouting and making a loud noise. And now, instead of clear, smooth ice under his skates, he seemed to be walking through slushy water.

"Don't you get scared," said the big boy kindly. "We wouldn't drown if we went right through the ice. It isn't very deep right here. Look out—here we go!"

Sunny Boy cried out in surprise and a girl ahead of him screamed. The ice seemed to part and let them down gently into the coldest water Sunny Boy had ever felt. He had not known that water could be so cold!

"You're all right," the big boy assured him, "Put your arms around my neck and I'll carry you ashore. The girls make a lot of noise, don't they? Well, in one way it's a good sign—as long as they can scream we know they are not drowned."

The boy had a round, freckled face, and he grinned so cheerfully that Sunny Boy had to smile back. The boy looked blue from the cold and his coat was thin and shabby, if Sunny Boy had only noticed it, but he talked every minute and didn't complain once. He showed Sunny Boy how he wanted him to put his arms, and then he lifted him up and carried him toward the bank.

"Good for you, Bob!" called some one, as the big boy reached the shore.

"There you are," the boy said to Sunny, as he set him carefully down. "Now you take my advice and trot along home and get on dry shoes and stockings. You'll be sneezing your head off to-morrow, if you don't look out."

"But I want my grandpa!" said Sunny Boy, beginning to cry. "I lost my grandpa! Maybe he is all drowned!"

No wonder Sunny Boy cried at this sad thought. He loved his Grandpa Horton very dearly and he was named for him, "Arthur Bradford Horton." To be sure, no one ever called the little lad by that long name, for "Sunny Boy" seemed to suit him so exactly. But, of course, when he grew up and was a farmer or a traffic policeman or the captain of a sailboat—he didn't know yet which he would rather be—he would need his real name. Perhaps you know all about Sunny Boy. If so, we do not have to introduce you. But if you have not read the other books about him you will want to know that he lived with his daddy and his mother and Harriet, who had helped his mother since Sunny Boy was a tiny baby, in the city of Centronia and that Grandpa and Grandma Horton lived on

a beautiful farm, “Brookside,” where Sunny Boy and his mother had spent a month the summer before. The first Sunny Boy book, called “Sunny Boy in the Country,” tells all about this visit and the friends Sunny Boy made there and about the kite he made which got him into trouble. But that ended happily and Sunny Boy was so happy at Brookside that he might have decided to be a farmer if he and his daddy and mother had not gone to the seashore to visit his Aunt Bessie.

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“Sunny Boy at the Seashore” tells about the fun a small boy can find in the sand and of Sunny Boy’s experiences in sailing boats, and especially about the time he drifted out to sea in a rowboat all by himself. His mother and daddy, in another boat, found him, though, and Sunny Boy thought he would like to be a sea captain like the kind Captain Franklin who ran the motor-boat which caught up with him just as he was beginning to be very much afraid he was lost.

Sunny Boy knew that he could not be a sea captain before he was grown up, and long before that, the very next month, in fact, Daddy and Mother Horton took him to New York City, and, dear me, didn’t he find adventures there! He was lost twice and he took his mother shopping and he visited Central Park and the Statue of Liberty and he saw so many things that he kept remembering them long after he was home again. “Sunny Boy in the Big City” is the title of this third book, and the traffic policemen interested him so much that he thought he would put off being a sea captain till he had tried to be a policeman.

In fact the traffic policemen interested Sunny Boy so much that he taught the children on his street to play a game called “City” when he came home from New York, and in this game Sunny Boy was always a policeman. You may have read of how he played “City” in the fourth book about him called “Sunny Boy In School and Out.” It was in this book, too, that Sunny Boy made the acquaintance of the big policeman whom he had seen at the skating pond.

Sunny Boy thought of this big policeman as soon as he was safely on shore and as soon as he said perhaps his grandpa was drowned and the big boy had told him no one was drowned—“some of ’em may have been walked on a little, but no one is drowned, I tell you,” he said earnestly. Sunny Boy wished he could find this kind man in the blue uniform who might be able to help him find his grandfather.

“Where’s the policeman?” he asked, pulling at the big boy’s ragged sleeve.

“What you want the police for?” asked the boy, looking at Sunny Boy queerly. “Do you want them to chase you?”

“This policeman won’t chase me,” said Sunny Boy sturdily. “He is a friend of mine and I like him. Come on and let’s hunt for him.”

He started to walk higher up the bank and almost fell down.

“Why, I have my skates on!” he cried, in surprise, for he had forgotten them. “I guess I’d better take them off.”

He turned to ask the big boy to help him, and he wasn't there! He wasn't anywhere, for Sunny Boy looked all around. The other boy had disappeared as though he had tumbled into the lake, though Sunny Boy was sure he hadn't done that.

"Oh, dear, I wish he had waited," mourned Sunny Boy, sitting down to take off his skates. "I wanted to tell Grandpa about him, and now he's gone."

The skate straps were swollen with water and stiff and cold. Sunny Boy worked at them till his poor little fingers were blue, but he could not unfasten them. So Sunny Boy was ready to cry with cold and disappointment and loneliness when a man spoke to him. It is not strange that a little boy should feel like crying when he has lost his grandpa and his feet are wet and his hands are so cold they ache.

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"Are you lost, little boy?" he asked.

He was a short man, and he stared at Sunny Boy so hard through round, black-rimmed Spectacles that the little boy felt rather uncomfortable.

"No, thank you, I'm not lost," he answered politely. "But my grandpa is. I can't find him anywhere."

"Well, well, you don't tell me!" replied the man eagerly. "Why, I heard a grandfather saying back there in the crowd that he was looking for his little grandson. Come along and I'll help you find him."

The short man was very kind, for he knelt down and unbuckled the stubborn skate straps and tied them over Sunny Boy's arm. Then he took his hand and led him back into the crowd up to a worried-looking old gentleman.

"Excuse me, sir, I think I've found your little grandson," he said. "I discovered this little fellow over by the edge of the pond. He is looking for his grandpa."

The worried-looking old gentleman was tall and thin. He had no white mustache and no gray-and-white muffler. He was not Grandpa Horton at all.

"What ails the man!" cried this grandpa, glaring at the short man. "I am looking for my granddaughter and he brings me a lost boy!"

"Oh, my!" murmured the short man, dropping Sunny Boy's hand. "I'm sorry. I'm so absent-minded. I hardly ever get things straight. I thought you said you had lost your grandson. Excuse me," and he turned and stepped back into the crowd, leaving Sunny Boy alone again.

This other grandpa stared at Sunny Boy silently for a few minutes and Sunny Boy stared back. Then the old gentleman threw back his head and laughed and laughed. He laughed so heartily that Sunny Boy had to laugh, too, though he could not see that there was anything funny to laugh at.

"Well, poor James Ridley has made a mess of it as usual," said the old gentleman, when he could stop laughing. "I suppose, because I called Adele my little girl, he went about looking for a child. She is seventeen and able to take care of herself almost anywhere. Well, child, if I were your grandfather I'd want some one to look after you, so suppose you stay with me till we see if your grandpa is here. He wouldn't go home without you, that much I know."

Sunny Boy felt better, with a tall, kindly old gentleman to walk about with him, but he wished that they could find Grandpa Horton before his feet were too cold to walk on.

And then, just as he was sure his shoes were frozen fast to his toes, he saw dear Grandpa Horton!

“Grandpa!” he shouted. “Here I am, Grandpa! We’ve been looking all over for you.”

“And I’ve been about crazy, looking for you,” said Grandpa Horton, hurrying up to them. “Are you all right, Sunny Boy? Are you cold? Are you wet? How did you get ashore?”

The other grandfather laughed again as he shook hands with Grandpa Horton.

“He’s all right, though I suspect his feet are pretty wet,” he said. “I would have bundled him off home, but I knew you would be terribly anxious and I couldn’t pick you out of the crowd without his help. You’d better hurry, now. I’m going to get out of this crowd as soon as I find my granddaughter.”

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Grandpa Horton thanked the old gentleman for taking care of Sunny Boy and then they shook hands again and Sunny Boy and his grandpa hurried toward the Park gates.

They walked as fast as they could all the way home, and sometimes they ran a little. Grandma Horton, who had been taking a nap when they left for the Park, was downstairs in the living-room with Mrs. Horton, knitting, when she happened to look out of the window and see Grandpa and Sunny Boy coming.

"Has anything happened to you?" she cried, opening the door as they dashed up the steps. "Are either of you hurt?"

Dear, dear, there was a great deal of excitement, you may be sure, when Sunny Boy and Grandpa told what had happened at the pond. Harriet brought hot water bottles and dry shoes and stockings and hot lemonade and her best box of peppermint drops. Grandma Horton insisted on wrapping Sunny Boy from chin to feet in a hot blanket and she made Grandpa take little white pills. Mother Horton rubbed their hands and lighted the electric heater, although the room was very warm and comfortable, and put on all the wood in the fire-basket till the fireplace was ablaze with flames.

And all this loving care and attention agreed with both Sunny Boy and Grandpa Horton, for neither one of them took the tiniest bit of cold and they were all right again the next day. Sunny Boy said he knew it was the peppermint drops, and Harriet thought so, too.

CHAPTER III

Who was the big boy?

Although Sunny Boy and Grandpa were quite well the next morning, Daddy Horton said he thought they had better stay in the house till after lunch.

"It is much colder to-day. The thermometer dropped several degrees last night," Daddy explained. "I think if you wait a few hours you'll find it pleasanter out."

So Sunny Boy and Grandpa took this good advice and stayed in by the living-room fire. They again told Grandma and Mother Horton about the ice cracking, and Harriet, who was cleaning the dining-room, could not get along very fast with her dusting because she was always coming to the door to listen.

"That must have been Judge Layton, Father," said Mrs. Horton, when Grandpa described the old gentleman whom Sunny Boy insisted on calling "the other grandpa."

"I believe I did hear some one in the crowd call him 'judge,'" answered Grandpa Horton.

“He has a granddaughter, Adele, I know,” said Mrs. Horton. “And he is so proud of her he goes everywhere with her. I hope he found her and that she was not hurt.”

“Oh, no one was hurt,” replied Grandpa Horton. “There was a great deal of shouting and screaming, but a pair of wet feet was the most any one suffered, I feel sure. What is it, laddie?”

Sunny Boy had been standing quietly beside his grandfather’s chair, waiting for a chance to say something very important.

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"I wish, Grandpa—" he began excitedly, "I wish the big boy who pulled me off the ice had waited to see you. He was afraid of the policeman, or maybe he might have stayed."

"I wish I had seen him," said Grandpa Horton seriously. "He must have had his wits about him to get you out of that crowd so easily. That was what was worrying me all the time—I was afraid that a little chap like you would be knocked down by that struggling crowd."

"I wish I could see the boy," said Mrs. Horton wistfully. "I would like so much to thank him, and Daddy would, too. Don't you even know his name, Sunny?"

Sunny Boy shook his head.

"I forgot to ask him," he admitted.

"Well, never mind," said Grandpa cheerily. He did not believe, he often said, in feeling sad over things you could not help. "Perhaps we will see him again. You would know him, wouldn't you, Sunny Boy, if you should see him on the street?"

"Ye-s, I guess I would," answered Sunny Boy. "His coat was ripped in the back and where it didn't button, and he wore a blue sweater with green buttons. I would know the green buttons, Grandpa."

Grandpa Horton laughed, but Mrs. Horton and Grandma looked grave.

"I'd like to knit him a good sweater," said Grandma. "Like as not the child needs warm things to wear."

"Boys wear old clothes to skate in, of course," Mrs. Horton said. "But last night when Sunny Boy told me how rough and red his hands were and that his skate straps were tied with string, I wondered if he wasn't a boy from the River Section. He may need more than our thanks for taking care of Sunny Boy."

"We'll go out and try to find him after lunch," promised Grandpa. "Shall we, Sunny Boy?"

"Oh, yes, let's!" cried Sunny Boy joyfully. "Let's go skating again, Grandpa."

And after lunch they put on their mufflers and overcoats and caps and Sunny Boy hung his skates on his arm and they set out for Wilkins Park and the skating pond.

But first Mother had to kiss Sunny Boy and Harriet had to kiss him and they all waved their hands to him till he and Grandpa turned the corner and could not be seen from the house any more.

“We have to find the big boy, don’t we?” said Sunny Boy, trying not to gasp as the wind blew down the avenue and almost took his breath away.

“Yes, we must be on the look-out for him,” Grandpa Horton replied. “I have an idea he may be at the pond.”

But, though they looked carefully when they came to the skating pond, they could not find a boy who looked like the one Sunny remembered. The pond was crowded again with skaters and they were laughing and singing as though they had never heard of the ice cracking.

Sunny Boy put on his skates, and this time he had better luck with his lesson. Grandpa said he was doing finely. And, indeed, he did not fall down more than twice, and one of those times, as he explained, was a mistake. Another boy skated into him and “tipped him over,” Sunny Boy said. Just as Grandpa said it was time to stop, Sunny Boy looked up and saw his friend, the tall policeman, standing on the shore.

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"Hello!" called the policeman, as Sunny Boy and Grandpa Horton came close to the shore. "Thought you'd try it again, did you? Where were you yesterday during the big excitement?"

Sunny Boy sat down on the bank to take off his skates and Grandpa Horton told the policeman what had happened to them.

"Do you know, I thought about the little chap," said the policeman kindly. "I knew you were with him; but I said, suppose the crowd tears 'em apart from each other? I know what a crowd can do when it loses its head, you see. All the time I was telling girls they were not drowned, I kept one eye open for the little boy, but I didn't catch a glimpse of him. You say an older lad pulled him ashore?"

"Yes, and he ran away when I said I was going to try to find you," said Sunny Boy, standing up, now that the skates were off. "He was just as nice, but he is afraid of policemen."

"Then he is a silly boy, and you tell him I said so," answered the tall policeman promptly. "Of course a bad boy might not want to see me; but this was a mighty good lad, to my way of thinking. He has an old head on young shoulders, to get you out of such a mix-up without a scratch."

But the policeman could not tell them who the big boy was, of course; and after they went home, and found that Mother and Grandma had a bowl of good, hot, buttered popcorn for them, Sunny Boy and Grandpa continued to talk about the lad in the poor, torn coat and to wish they could find him. Daddy Horton, too, at dinner that night said he would rather find the boy than a ten dollar goldpiece.

"I'm afraid he is a lad who needs some help," he said anxiously; "and we would be so glad to do anything for him. I must see some of the men who work over in the River Section and try to get them to hunt him up."

And Mr. Horton did interest several people in his search for the big boy, but when they reported, one by one, that they could find no boy who had carried a little boy ashore at the skating pond, he began to think that perhaps the boy did not live in the River Section, after all, but in some other part of the city.

While Mr. Horton was trying to find the boy who had been so good to his little son, Sunny Boy was having great fun. There was no school, of course, during the holidays, and, after two days of skating, there came a heavy fall of snow. When Sunny Boy woke up and saw the roofs all white, his shout wakened Daddy and Mother.

"It snowed!" shouted Sunny Boy, dancing up and down in his white flannel sleeping suit. "Oh, Mother, it snowed! I can use my new sled, Mother!"

“Well, for pity’s sake!” cried Daddy Horton, pretending to be very cross. “What is all this fuss about? All over a little snow? Why, I don’t think snow is half so nice as rain!”

“Oh, Daddy!” Sunny Boy climbed into bed with his father and put his arms around his neck. “Daddy, boys with new sleds like it to snow. I’m going coasting right after breakfast.”

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"Oh, you are, are you?" said Daddy, beginning to tickle Sunny Boy. "Maybe you'll have to study spelling or something like that, instead." And then Sunny Boy began to tickle his father and they rolled and tussled and threw pillows at each other till Mrs. Horton, who was brushing her hair, declared she had never seen such a looking bed!

"No one can go coasting," she said firmly, "who doesn't get up this minute and start to get dressed!"

And then Daddy Horton jumped out of bed on one side and Sunny Boy fell out on the other and Daddy chased him into his room and they had another pillow fight in there. Sunny Boy laughed and squealed so much that Grandpa Horton came and tapped on his door and asked him what all the fun was about.

Dear, dear, Sunny Boy was so excited that he could hardly get dressed and he was going downstairs without having brushed his hair. But Mother called him back and brushed it neatly for him. Before Sunny Boy could eat his oatmeal he had to go down into the laundry where his new sled was and bring it upstairs and put it in the front hall. Santa Claus had brought him the sled for Christmas as well as the skates.

"Do you want to go coasting, Grandpa?" asked Sunny Boy eagerly.

"Well, no, I don't believe I do," Grandpa Horton replied. "You see, your daddy asked me to go down to the office with him this morning, and I think I will. Perhaps I'll come around and see you coast down once or twice, if not to-day, to-morrow. Is there a good hill for coasting in this neighborhood?"

"There is only one hill in the whole city," Mrs. Horton explained. "I suppose all the children in Centronia will be there this morning. Don't you think Sunny Boy is too little to go alone, Daddy?"

"Oliver Dunlap and Nelson Baker will go, Mother," said Sunny Boy anxiously. "All the fellows are going, Daddy."

Mr. Horton laughed and gave Harriet his cup for more coffee.

"I think Sunny Boy will be all right," he said. "I know that new sled will rust its runners if it isn't used pretty soon. Sunny must not stay a minute later than you wish him to, and if the hill is too crowded, let him come home. You can have fun with your sled in more ways than just using it for coasting, you know, Son."

"Your grandmother and I are going over to Aunt Bessie's for lunch, dear," Mrs. Horton said to Sunny Boy, who had already finished his breakfast. "Harriet will give you yours. Don't stay out on the hill longer than half-past eleven. Have you your sweater on, precious?"

“Yes’m,” nodded Sunny Boy. “May I be excused, Mother? That’s Nelson whistling for me. I won’t forget. Good-bye. I have to hurry.” And he kissed his family in great haste and ran out into the hall for his overcoat and mittens and sled.

CHAPTER IV

ON COURT HILL

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"Hello!" called Nelson Baker, as Sunny Boy came out on his front steps, dragging his new sled with him. "Did you know it snowed in the night? Can you go coasting?"

"Yes. And let's stop for Oliver," suggested Sunny Boy. "Oh, Nelson, your mother is rapping on the window for you."

"Gee, I bet Ruth wants to go coasting," said Nelson crossly. "I never wanted to do anything in my life, Ruth didn't want to, too. I think girls are just horrid!"

"Nelson!" called Mrs. Baker, raising the window, "wait just a minute, dear; Ruth wants to go coasting, too. She will be right out."

"I told you so!" groaned Nelson. "Now I can't have a hit of fun. Ruth will cry because the sled goes too fast and she'll cry because her feet are cold and she'll cry because she gets tired walking up the hill. And then she will want to come home just when I am having a good time and I'll have to bring her. I wish Mother would make her stay in the house."

Before Sunny Boy could answer him, Ruth came out. She was a pretty little girl, about four years old, and she wore a fur hat and a dark red coat with a fur collar. Her muff was tied to a string which went around her neck. She had her own sled, a little one.

"Hello, Sunny Boy," she said, smiling. "Santa Claus brought me a sled, too."

"What do you want to go coasting for?" asked Nelson, not waiting for Sunny Boy to answer. "Your feet will get cold."

"They won't, either!" cried Ruth. "Anyway, I'm going with you—Mother said I could. So there!" and she stamped her foot in its shiny new rubber.

"All right, come on then," said Nelson crossly. "What are you waiting so long for? Sunny Boy and I could have a lot more fun if you stayed at home."

Sunny Boy was so afraid Ruth was going to cry at this unkind speech that he tried to think of something to say that would make her forget it.

"You sit on your sled and Nelson and I will pull you," he told Ruth. "You can hold my sled for me."

This pleased Ruth very much, and she sat down on her sled and tucked her coat around her and stuck her fat, short little legs, in their gray leggings, straight out in front of her.

"Take my sled, too," said Nelson, forgetting to be cross. "Don't fall off, because we are going to go fast."

“Let’s play we are fire horses, going to a fire,” suggested gunny Boy. They had some automobile fire apparatus in Centronia, but the engines were still pulled by horses.

“Can you pull two sleds, Ruth?”

“Oh, my, yes,” replied dear little Ruth.

If the boys had asked her to pull six sleds she would have tried her best to do it. It did seem too bad that when she wanted to go with them and tried so hard to please them, that they so often wished her to stay in the house and play by herself. That is, Nelson did.

“Hang on,” said Nelson now, and away went the two fire horses, pulling the fire engine.

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Ruth nearly fell off when they started, for they jerked the sled, but she managed to hold on. The two sleds bumped wildly behind her, but she held the ropes tightly and never cried out even when the boys pulled her over a curb-stone and her sled tipped far to one side.

"Toot! Toot!" cried Sunny Boy, trying to whistle, and not doing it very well because it is difficult to run and pull a sled and whistle, all at the same time.

"Nelson!" called Ruth, as they bumped her down another curbstone. "Oh, Nelson! Say, Sunny Boy, wait a minute!"

"We can't stop! We have to get to the fire!" cried Nelson, panting. "When we get to the fire we'll stop."

"But wait a minute!" begged Ruth, "I want to tell you something."

The two little boys pretended to kick up their heels and snort as they had seen the fire horses do, and they would not stop. They galloped and pranced and tried to run faster. At last they had to stop to get their breath. Their cheeks were red and they were as warm as toast.

"Why—why—" stammered Sunny Boy, looking back at Ruth who sat on her sled with her hands in her little fur muff. "Why, where are our sleds?"

"I dropped the ropes 'way back on Greene Street," replied Ruth calmly. "I asked you to stop and you wouldn't."

"Well, you might have said you lost the sleds," said Nelson. "Then we would have stopped. Gee, I hope nobody took 'em! We'll have to go back."

Ruth got off her sled and walked back with the two boys. They found the sleds on the sidewalk, exactly where a sudden jerk of the sled she was on had made Ruth drop the ropes. Even Nelson could not scold his sister when the sleds were so easily found, and as they went back toward the hill he and Ruth and Sunny Boy took turns riding.

As Mrs. Horton had said, every boy and girl in Centronia was at Court Hill, the one good spot for coasting in the city. At least it seemed that every boy and girl had had a sled for a Christmas gift, or had one left from the year before, or had borrowed one from some one who had two, and all had trotted through the snow to enjoy the fun. Since there was no school, there were high school and grammar and primary grade children, as well as the little folks who went to kindergarten or to Miss May's school, the small, private school where Sunny Boy went. Nelson Baker went to public school where Sunny would go when he was a little older, Daddy Horton said.

"There's Perry Phelps and Jimmie Butterworth," cried Sunny Boy, as he caught sight of two of his schoolmates. "Look at the crowd! Oh, Nelson, see this sled coming down!"

A large sled shot by the children, filled with a crowd of high school boys and girls.

"I don't believe I want to coast," said Ruth. "I'm not exactly afraid, but I don't like it. Let's stay down here and watch them, Nelson."

"You can stay," Nelson answered. "But I want to coast. Sit down on your sled by this stone and you can watch me coast."

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But this didn't please Ruth. She didn't want to be left alone with only her sled for company. She wanted the boys to stay with her.

"You'll like it when you are used to it," urged Sunny Boy. "Come on, Ruth, there are ever so many girls coasting. You can steer as well as that girl in the green coat."

He pointed to a little freckle-faced girl who came down the hill on a shabby old sled and steered it neatly out of the way of every sled she met.

"No, I couldn't do that," said Ruth. "But I'll coast with you, Sunny. I can hang on to you."

Sunny Boy had meant to coast down the hill a few times by himself, for he had not had a sled last year and he was not sure he knew how to steer. But, of course, if Ruth had made up her mind to coast with him on his sled, Sunny Boy felt that there was nothing to do but take her.

"I'll go first! Watch me!" cried Nelson, scrambling up the hill ahead of them. He plumped himself on his sled, pushed with one foot, and away he flew down the hill.

"That looks just as easy," said Sunny Boy to himself.

He had to wait a minute to find a place for his sled in the row of coasters lined up at the top of the hill. Then he sat down and took the rope and Ruth sat down behind him and grasped the belt of his coat.

"Here, I'll start you," offered a boy, who came up behind them.

"Wait a—" began Sunny Boy. He meant to say, "Wait a minute," but the boy gave him a tremendous push and the sled slid over the hill and began to go down.

"Ow!" shrieked Ruth, closing her eyes and opening her mouth very wide. "Ow! Stop Sunny Boy! Ow! Ow!"

Sunny Boy couldn't stop. But he was steering nicely and they would probably have had a fine coast if Ruth had not grown more frightened and thrown her arms around his neck. Her elbow knocked Sunny Boy's cap over his eye and he felt himself being pulled over backward. The sled went zigzagging down the hill for a moment, then a big sled tore past it and knocked it to one side. Ruth fell off and dragged Sunny Boy with her and the sled went on down the hill alone.

Nelson had seen the spill at the bottom of the hill and he came running up to them.

"Are you hurt, Ruth?" he asked his sister. "Did another sled hit you? There's Jimmie Butterworth with your sled, Sunny Boy."

Ruth was not hurt, and neither was Sunny Boy. And tumbling off a sled when you are coasting is rather fun if you do not get frightened. Unfortunately, Ruth was frightened and she began to cry and say she wanted to go home.

"I knew you'd want to go home," scolded Nelson. "You can't go. I haven't had but one coast. Come on, and ride down on my sled."

"I don't want to ride on your sled," sobbed Ruth. "I want to go home; my feet are cold."

"Well, you'll have to wait till I have some fun," said Nelson. "What did you do with your sled?"

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"I don't know," wailed Ruth. "My feet are cold."

"Step on them and they won't be," said Sunny Boy kindly. He meant that Ruth should walk or run a little and then her feet would be warmer.

"I don't want to step on them!" Ruth cried. She was very unhappy indeed. "I want my sled. I want to go home. My feet are cold."

"I'll find your sled," Sunny Boy promised, and he went up to the top of the hill. After a little tramping around in the snow he found Ruth's sled where she had left it. No one had touched it.

Sunny Boy came running back to Nelson and Ruth, dragging the sled, and just as he came up to them he heard Ruth say: "I'll go home by myself, then."

"You can't!" scolded Nelson. "Mother said you musn't cross streets without me. And I'm not going home as soon as I get here. I want to coast. You'll have to wait till I've had some fun."

Ruth was crying now and her little nose was red from the cold. She looked so forlorn and uncomfortable that Sunny Boy's kind heart felt sorry for her. He was anxious to coast and he hated to go home before he had had any good times with his new sled, but he did not want Ruth to cry.

"I'll go home with you," he said. "You sit on the sled and I'll pull you."

"Gee, will you take her home?" asked Nelson, in surprise. "That's great! And then you can come back and we'll have packs of fun."

"All right," said Sunny Boy, though he was quite sure he couldn't come back. It would be half-past eleven, he knew, before he could get home and leave Ruth and come back to Court Hill; and Mother had said he must stop coasting at half-past eleven. So, you see, he was really very kind and good to take Ruth home and give up his own coasting fun to make her happier.

Ruth sat down on her sled and held fast to Sunny Boy's sled, and he pulled her all the way home, though she was a fat little girl and pretty heavy for one boy to pull. And as soon as they were home again and Ruth and her sled had gone into her house, Sunny Boy trotted around to the kitchen door of his house to ask Harriet what time it was.

"Half-past eleven, just," answered Harriet. "Did you have a good time?"

CHAPTER V

THE SNOW MAN

Poor Sunny Boy! When Harriet said it was half-past eleven he felt like crying himself, though of course a boy six years old doesn't cry about anything if he can help it.

"Did you have a good time coasting?" asked Harriet again. She was getting lunch ready and Sunny Boy was sure he smelled chicken soup.

"I didn't have any time," he explained sadly. "I tipped Ruth off the sled and then she wanted to come home and I had to come with her, 'cause her mother won't let her cross streets all alone."

"And I suppose Nelson wanted to stay and enjoy himself," said Harriet. "Well, never mind, Sunny Boy, next time you shall coast all morning, if I have to go along to see that no one bothers you."

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"Could I go this afternoon, Harriet?" asked Sunny Boy. "Mother didn't say not to; she just said to come home at half-past eleven."

"Yes, I know she did," answered Harriet, putting salt in her soup and then tasting it to be sure it was right. "But I don't think she wants you to play on Court Hill in the afternoon when there will be a larger crowd. I tell you what you do this afternoon, Sunny Boy: Build the biggest snow man you can in the yard and then you'll surprise your mother and grandmother when they come home from your Aunt Bessie's."

"I could s'prise 'em, couldn't I?" replied Sunny Boy, chuckling in delight. "And Daddy and Grandpa, too! Do you think I could make a very big snow man, Harriet?"

"I don't see why not," said Harriet. "You have a yard full of snow to make him out of."

Sunny Boy was hungry, but he was so eager to begin to build his snow man that he would have hurried through his lunch and skipped the bread and butter entirely if Harriet had not said that he could not go out to play at all unless he ate the things she gave him.

"Now I'm through," he declared when he had eaten even the crusts and his glass of milk was quite empty. "Now may I build the snow man, Harriet?"

"Yes indeed you may," said Harriet. "And here is the old broom I promised you, and the felt hat. Do you know how to build a snow man, Sunny Boy?"

Sunny Boy was sure he did, and he went out into the yard, where the snow was piled white and smooth and not even a path had been shoveled, and began to roll a snowball to make the snow man.

"Hello, Sunny Boy, coming coasting?" called Oliver Dunlap.

He had rung the bell and Harriet had told him Sunny Boy was in the back yard. So Oliver had walked through the house, scattering snow at every step, and out through the kitchen to the back porch where he found Sunny Boy beginning his snow man.

"Aren't you going coasting?" called Oliver again. "Come on, Sunny Boy. Nelson and Ruth have gone to dancing school and we can have heaps of fun."

"I have to build a snow man," replied Sunny Boy. "I want to surprise my grandpa. Do you want to help build him, Oliver?"

"Why, I don't mind," said Oliver. "Wait till I bring my sled in. I left it out on your front steps."

He ran through the house, and when he came back in a few moments there were four other boys with him. They brought in a good deal of snow, but Harriet did not mind; she said she would rather sweep up snow than mud, any time.

“Here’s Jimmie Butterworth, Sunny Boy,” cried Oliver, as the five lads tumbled down the steps, “and Perry and Leslie and Harry. We’ll all help you build a snow man.”

Sunny Boy was glad to see his friends, and the snow man grew very fast with six boys to work on him. First they rolled the biggest snowball you ever saw. It took pretty nearly all the snow in Sunny Boy’s yard, and he and the other boys had to go into Nelson Baker’s yard and get more snow to make a head for the snow man.

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The great big snowball made the body of the snow man and a smaller ball was his head. They made him arms, too, and stuck a broomstick through one so that he looked, a little way off, as though he were carrying a gun.

“He ought to have some face,” said Sunny Boy, when they had this much done.

“Get some coal,” suggested Oliver. “You can make eyes and a nose and a mouth with pieces of coal.”

Sunny Boy went into the house and asked Harriet if he could, have some coal to make a face for his snow man.

“Take some coal for his eyes,” said Harriet. “And here is a strip of apple skin which will make him a handsome mouth. And perhaps the boys would like an apple to eat. I’ll put half a dozen in a basket for you.”

Sunny Boy took several pieces of coal from the scuttle standing near the kitchen range and a piece of apple skin Harriet gave him and the basket of apples. The boys ate the apples right away and let the snow man wait for his eyes and mouth.

“You put in his eyes, Sunny Boy,” said Oliver, when his apple was eaten and even the core had disappeared. “You put in his eyes and I’ll fix his mouth.”

“Let me put on his hat,” begged Harry Winn, when eyes and mouth were in place. “Get out the way, fellows, and let me put on his hat.”

They all wanted to put the snow man’s hat on for him, all except Sunny Boy. He had several broken bits of coal left over and he wanted to put those down the front of the snow man so that they would look like buttons on his coat.

“I’m going to put the hat on,” said Harry.

“I’ll fix the buttons now,” Sunny Boy said happily.

Harry snatched the old felt hat Harriet had given to the snow man from Oliver, who held it. Oliver made a dash for Harry and the other boys tried to trip him. Around and around the yard they went, laughing and shouting, while Sunny Boy calmly stuck pieces of coal down the white front of the snow man and pretended they were buttons on his coat.

[Illustration: Sunny Boy calmly stuck pieces of coal down the white front of the snow man.]

“I said I’d do it!” shouted Harry, jumping for the snow man and landing half way up his back.

He meant to clap the hat on the snow man's head and jump back. But, before he could do this, the other four boys tumbled on top of him and the snow man. Over went the whole statue, and the two huge balls of snow fell squarely on Sunny Boy, just as Daddy and Grandpa Horton, who had come home from the office early, stepped out on the back porch.

Sunny Boy was too surprised to be frightened, and before he had time to wonder what had struck him, Daddy had him out and was brushing the snow out of his ears and eyes.

"Are you hurt, Sunny Boy?" asked Harry. "I didn't mean to knock the snow man over, honestly I didn't."

"There's snow down my neck," said Sunny Boy, wriggling. "But nothing hurt me. Only the snow man is all gone."

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There he lay, that beautiful snow man, in two pieces, several pieces in fact, for the balls had broken apart when they fell.

"Never mind," said Daddy Horton cheerfully. "You can easily build another snow man. And the boys will help you, perhaps tomorrow."

"To-morrow is New Year's," announced Oliver Dunlap. "I have to go to see my grandma. But I can help build a snow man the day after that."

The other boys promised to help build another snow man whenever Sunny Boy asked them to, and then, as they were going into the house, Mrs. Baker called to Daddy Horton.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Horton," she said, hurrying out with a scarf tied over her pretty hair. "My nephew just telephoned to know if he could take Nelson and Ruth bobsledding on the hill before dinner. They are at dancing school this afternoon; but I wonder if you wouldn't let Sunny Boy go. He hasn't had any fun at all to-day. This morning he came home with Ruth because she was cold and cried, and then this afternoon the snow man fell on him. My nephew is very careful, and he would be glad to take all these boys. May I tell him they will meet him at the Hill? He is on the 'phone now."

"Oh, Daddy, let me go!" cried Sunny Boy. "I never went on a bobsled. Please, Daddy."

Mr. Horton knew Blake Garrison, Mrs. Baker's nephew, and he knew he was careful and very fond of younger children. Blake was a senior in high school and had a splendid sled. It was just like him to think of his little cousins and to want to give them pleasure. So Sunny Boy was allowed to go, and the other boys went with him. They had all started to go coasting anyway, they explained to Mr. Horton, when they passed Sunny Boy's house and Oliver told them about the snow man. Their mothers would not worry, they said, if they came home by five o'clock.

"Hello, everybody!" said Blake Garrison, when the six small boys found him at the top of Court Hill. Most of them knew him by sight and he, it seemed, knew all their names. "I'm glad you didn't all go to dancing school. Do you feel like a little coast?"

"Let me steer, Blake?" asked Harry Winn.

Blake and another boy, Fred Carr, who was with him, laughed.

"I'll do the steering, Harry," said Blake firmly. "You other youngsters pile on where you please, but I'll keep Sunny Boy near me. If he fell off we might lose him entirely, he's so little."

Sunny Boy smiled, but he did not say anything. He was having a beautiful time. The six small boys got on the sled, and Blake and three other high school friends of his got

on, too. The big bob started. Sunny Boy closed his eyes. My, how the wind whistled! How the snow flew up and stung their faces! And how soon they came to the bottom of the hill and shot across the little bridge that was at the foot.

“Do it again,” said Sunny Boy to Blake.

They did it again, half a dozen times in fact, before Blake and Fred said that it was quarter to five and time to stop. Then they put the small boys on the sled and gave them a ride home. Blake said no one need say “thank you” to him, because he had had more fun than anybody!

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That evening, as Sunny Boy sat in Grandma Horton's lap after dinner and watched the fire burn merrily in the grate, he remembered that Oliver had said the next day would be New Year's Day.

"What do we do on New Year, Grandma?" Sunny Boy asked curiously.

"Oh, people come to see us," replied Grandma Horton, giving him a kiss. "And you may pass them the New Year's cakes that Harriet has baked for us. You will like that, won't you?"

CHAPTER VI

THE PARKNEY FAMILY

"Happy new year, precious!" said Mother, coming into Sunny Boy's room to put down his window the next morning.

"Happy New Year, Sunny Boy!" cried Grandpa and Grandma Horton, when they met him in the hall on the way to breakfast.

"Happy New Year, Son!" said Daddy Horton, catching him in his arms and lifting him as high as the Christmas tree which still stood in one corner of the parlor.

"Happy New Year, Sunny Boy!" cried Harriet, waving a dish towel at him when he peeped into her kitchen.

"I think New Year is nice," said Sunny Boy, when Mother said he might have two waffles for his breakfast because of the holiday. Usually Mother said that hot cakes were not good for little boys.

After breakfast Sunny Boy brought down his lead soldiers from the playroom and played with them on the rug before the fire place. This was the last day the Christmas tree would be left standing, Mother Horton said, so he liked to stay near it.

"When will it be time to pass the New Year cakes?" he asked Harriet, when she came in to bring more wood for the fire.

"This afternoon," she answered. "When the callers come."

Sunny Boy's Aunt Bessie came to dinner, which was at one o'clock as on Sunday, and Sunny Boy was very glad to see her. She brought him a little set of bells and showed him how he could play a tune on them by striking them with a wooden mallet. Sunny Boy could play "Annie Laurie" before the afternoon was over.

After dinner came visitors. They were all grown up people, and Mrs. Horton and Aunt Bessie gave them tea to drink and sandwiches from the tea wagon and Sunny Boy, in his best white flannel sailor suit, passed them the plates of New Year cakes which Harriet had baked. They were delicious little cakes with caraway seeds and pink sugar on them, and Sunny Boy had three for himself.

It was nearly six o'clock before the "company" as Sunny Boy called them, had gone. Then, to his surprise, his daddy came into the parlor with his overcoat on and his hat in his hand.

"Olive," he said to Sunny Boy's mother, "I'm going over to Dover street in the River Section for a short call. Father is going with me. We heard this afternoon of a family who are pretty hard up."

"Is there anything I can send them?" asked Mrs. Horton. "Harriet will heat up some soup and you can carry it in the vacuum bottle."

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"Let me go with you, Daddy?" begged Sunny Boy. "I can carry some New Year cakes."

"We are not going to take anything till we find out what is needed," answered Mr. Horton. "From what I've heard, I'm afraid that this family was overlooked at Christmas. The husband is out work and there are several children."

"Who are the children?" asked Sunny Boy, when his daddy and grandfather had gone. "What are their names, Mother? Are there any little boys?"

"I don't know, precious," replied Mrs. Horton, "but I think likely. Suppose you and I and Grandma go upstairs and look through the Square Box and see if we have some clothes to send them. I am pretty sure Daddy will come back and tell us that they need warm clothes."

Sunny Boy knew all about the Square Box. It stood in the hall closet next to the bathroom, and in it Mrs. Horton put all his clothes that were too small for him to wear and all the clothes her friends gave her, and her own clothes and those of Mr. Horton's that they could no longer wear. Everything was cleaned and mended before it was put in the box, and then, when she heard of some family who did not have enough clothes to wear in winter, or who needed something clean and cool in summer, Mrs. Horton could go to the Square Box and find just what was wanted.

"I hope you didn't give away everything for Christmas," said Grandma Horton anxiously.

Sunny Boy hoped so, too. He knew that his mother had sent several bundles of clothes away at Christmas time and the minister had telephoned her twice for clothes for his poor people. But Mother Horton said there were still some clothes left in the Square Box.

"Here is a good coat for a little girl and three sets of underwear for a man," she said, when they had opened the box. "And this is a warm dress for the mother, if she needs one. And if Daddy comes home and tells us he needs other things for the family, we'll get them for him."

"Are there any little boys?" shouted Sunny Boy, as soon as his daddy opened the front door.

Daddy and Grandpa Horton were covered with snow, for it had begun to snow again. They were cold and hungry, too, and Mrs. Horton said that Harriet should put the hot supper on the table and they could talk while they ate.

"I'd like to have that family up at Brookside just a month," declared Grandpa Horton, stirring his tea. "I tell you, Olive, we don't have such cases in the country. There's a man and wife and seven children, living in two rooms."

“Did they have any Christmas?” asked Grandma Horton.

“Not a sign,” said Grandpa Horton. “The man has been out of work for two months and he won’t go near the charity bureau. He has an injured arm and he ought to be under a doctor’s treatment. There’s a boy sick in bed, too, with a heavy cold, and the mother is about ready to give up. But they won’t take charity—say they’ll starve first.”

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"We built them a fire," Mr. Horton explained. "And I went out and bought them food for a good supper—told the man he could pay me when he got work. I think I can make him see a doctor to-morrow. And I must find a job for him."

"I have some clothes in the Square Box," said Mrs. Horton. "I can get more, if you will persuade them to accept such things. I don't think they ought to refuse because of the children. If Sunny Boy had no warm coat to wear I think I'd take one from any one who would give it to me."

"I could take the sick boy a New Year cake," declared Sunny Boy, who had been listening. "Is he as big as I am, Daddy?"

"I should say he was about fourteen years old," replied Mr. Horton. "I don't know but I will take you to-morrow morning, Sunny. You'll see some children who didn't get even a candy cane from Santa Claus."

Sunny Boy glanced across the hall. From where he sat at the table he could see his Christmas tree.

"I'll take them my candy canes," he said. "Mother is going to take the tree down tomorrow. I ate only two canes, Daddy, so there are enough left."

"All right," answered his daddy. "You may take the children anything you wish. That family can use anything, and we won't let them refuse our help. They'll be on their feet again the faster if they accept aid before they are all discouraged."

The next morning Sunny Boy and his grandpa had to go alone to see the poor family. From Daddy Horton's office came a telephone message that he must come and see a man on very important business before nine o'clock, and he had only time to eat his breakfast and run for a car. But Grandpa Horton promised him that he would see to the Parkneys. That was their name—Mr. and Mrs. Parkney and Bob, Joe, Elsie, Alice, Kitty, Ned, and Charlie Parkney. Grandpa Horton had the names written down on a slip of paper.

"Are you sure the sick boy hasn't anything he can pass on to Sunny Boy?" asked Mrs. Horton, a little bit worried as she tied up a bundle for them to carry. "You are sure it is only a cold?"

"Sure," said Grandpa Horton. "Positive. The poor lad is as hoarse as a crow. Got the New Year cakes and the candy canes, Sunny Boy? Then I think we are ready to start."

Sunny Boy had found seven candy canes on his Christmas tree and he had wrapped each one separately. There would be a cane for each Parkney child. Harriet had helped him make seven little packages of cakes. And, with Daddy's help, the night before he had picked out a toy for each child. He could not go to sleep until he had

chosen the toys. Though, of course, he did not have anything especially for girls, he thought they would like the games and the jack-in-the box, and Mother Horton said she knew they would.

It was lucky that Sunny Boy and Grandpa Horton liked to walk, for the Parkneys did not live near a car line. There was only one trolley line that went through the River Section, anyway, and they lived many blocks from that. Grandpa Horton carried a large bundle in one hand and a basket Harriet had packed in the other. Sunny Boy had his toys and candy and cakes.

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"Here is the house," said Grandpa Horton, stopping suddenly before a house that looked so old and dirty and shabby you would not think people could live in it. The shutters were missing from most of the windows and the door stood wide open.

"Now stay close to me," said Grandpa Horton. "It is dark in the halls, and I don't want to lose you."

It was dark in the halls and dark on the stairs. They passed many doors and they heard people talking, but they saw no one. Sunny Boy followed Grandpa till they had climbed three flights of stairs and were on the fourth floor of the house. Then Grandpa Horton knocked on a door.

"Come in," called a man's voice.

Sunny Boy clung to Grandpa Horton's coat and stared around him. They had stepped into a room that did not look like any room he had ever seen before. There were no chairs at all and only one table. A stove in one corner had a good fire in it, and a man, with one arm in a sling, sat near it, on a soap box.

"How do you do, Mr. Parkney?" said Grandpa Horton cheerfully. "This is my little grandson, Sunny Boy. He wanted to see your children and wish them a Happy New Year."

The man smiled at Sunny Boy and Mrs. Parkney came out of the other room when she heard the voices.

"I believe I'm better," Mr. Parkney declared. "And I've decided to go to the doctor as you said, Mr. Horton. Perhaps if I get this arm well and get a job, I can pay back all you've done for me."

"Why, certainly you can," said Grandpa Horton. "Or you can give some one else a lift, which will be better. Now I want to talk to you and Mrs. Parkney a few minutes. But where are the children? Sunny Boy has something for them."

"They've all gone out, except Bob, of course," replied Mrs. Parkney.

"Well, then, Sunny Boy, suppose you go in and wish Bob a Happy New Year," suggested Grandpa Horton. "Take him his candy and cakes and the baseball game you brought him."

"You come, too," whispered Sunny Boy.

"You're not bashful, are you?" laughed Grandpa Horton. "Well, I'll go with you and introduce you to Bob, then I'll have a talk with you, Mr. Parkney."

Bob Parkney was lying on a mattress propped up between two chairs, not a very comfortable bed for a sick boy. But Sunny Boy did not notice the bed. He stared at Bob and Bob stared at him.

“Well, for goodness’ sake!” cried Bob Parkney. “Where did you come from?”

CHAPTER VII

THE OTHER GRANDPA

“Why, Sunny Boy!” said Grandpa Horton, much surprised, “do you know Bob?”

“He’s the boy—” Sunny Boy began in such a hurry that he choked. “Oh, Grandpa, he’s the boy that pulled me off the ice!” he finished in one breath.

“Well, I never!” said Grandpa Horton, in astonishment. “I never thought of that, and Bob didn’t mention ice to me. Is that what gave you this fine cold, young man?”

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Grandpa Horton tried to frown at Bob, but he only succeeded in smiling. And Bob smiled back.

"I did catch a little cold," the boy admitted. "You see, my feet were sort of wet. But it's most gone now."

"I hope it is. But you're hoarse yet," said Grandpa Horton. "So you're the lad who kept his head and brought my Sunny Boy safely ashore. There are a number of folks at our house, Bob, who would like to tell you what they think of you. We looked everywhere for you the next day and for several days afterward."

"Don't let anybody come!" croaked Bob in his poor, hoarse voice. "Please, don't let 'em come, sir. It was nothing to do. I only kept the lunatics from walking on the little chap. I hate people making a fuss."

"There, there, no one shall make a fuss," Grandpa Horton promised him. "Don't tire your throat with talking. I want to have a word with your mother and father, Bob, so I'll leave Sunny Boy to entertain you. He can do enough talking for two boys when he gets started."

Grandpa Horton went into the other room, and left Sunny Boy and Bob alone. There was no chair for Sunny Boy to sit on, so he stood beside Bob and talked to him. He told him about the "other grandpa" and the funny mistake the short man who wore glasses had made. And he told Bob what the tall policeman had said about good boys not being afraid of the police.

"And he said you were good to pull me off the ice," added Sunny Boy.

"Shucks, that wasn't anything to do," said Bob. "I wasn't afraid of seeing a policeman, either. But they always tell you to get a move on or to go on where you're going, or something like that. I just don't have any use for a policeman."

"You'll get your throat tired," said wise little Sunny Boy, who saw that Bob was excited over the mention of the policeman. He sat up in bed and his cheeks were very red. "I'll show you how to play the baseball game. You don't have to talk to play that."

They were having such a good time playing the baseball game that neither one of them heard Grandpa Horton come into the room. He said it was time for him and Sunny Boy to go home, but Bob was so eager to finish an inning that Grandpa Horton said he would wait a few minutes. Bob won, and this seemed to please him very much.

"I've going to leave word at Doctor Stacy's as we go past his office," said Grandpa Horton, buttoning Sunny Boy into his coat. "He will drop in to-day to see your father and look you over, Bob. We won't try to pay you for what you did for Sunny Boy, but you must understand that you have made at least four good friends for life—Sunny Boy's

father and mother and his grandma and grandpa—and we claim the right of friends to look after you. Your father has taken the sensible view, and we've arranged matters so that you will all be more comfortable till your father's arm heals. Then, when he has a job and you're rid of that cold, you must go back to school. Sunny Boy's father may have a place in his office this summer for a boy who goes to school regularly through the winter."

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Bob positively grinned with delight as Grandpa Horton and Sunny Boy shook hands with him and said good-bye. He looked so happy that Sunny Boy asked his grandfather, when they were out in the street, if Bob wanted to go to school.

"I don't know about that," replied Grandpa Horton, "though I think he does. But Bob's mother told me he is wild to get in an office. He wants to learn to use the typewriter. The poor lad has been staying out of school trying to earn a little money since his father hurt his arm. That is why he is afraid of policemen, Sunny Boy. He is really playing hookey, though not for his own pleasure. Still, we must see that he stays in school and has a fair chance."

Though Sunny Boy was in a great hurry to get home and tell his mother and his grandma and Harriet about Bob, he was willing to wait while Grandpa Horton stopped at the doctor's office and left word with the nurse there to have the doctor stop at 674 White Street. That was the house in which the Parkney family lived.

What a lot Sunny Boy and Grandpa Horton had to tell when they reached home!

"I never heard anything so lucky in my life," declared Harriet, who always was counted one of the family. "Mrs. Horton, don't you think I ought to make some chicken soup for that boy? If he has a cold he is probably all run down and needs nourishing things to eat."

"I wonder if I would have time to knit him a sweater before we go home Friday," said Grandma Horton. "I could start it anyway, couldn't I, Olive? I would love to knit a pure wool sweater for Bob."

"I must see that he has good clothes to wear to school," said Mrs. Horton.

Grandpa Horton listened and laughed a little. He was sitting before the fire, and he held Sunny Boy on his knee.

"What would you like to do for Bob, laddie?" he asked his grandson. "If you can think of something I'll give you the money to buy it and you and I will go downtown and shop to-morrow."

"I'd like to give him skates on shoes, like the ones Blake Garrison has," said Sunny Boy promptly. "Bob's skates were old, rusty ones, and he had 'em tied on with string, Grandpa. Would skates on shoes cost too much?"

"They certainly would not!" said Grandpa Horton. "To-morrow morning we'll go down to the best store selling sporting goods in Centronia and buy the best pair of skates we can find."

When Mr. Horton came home that night he had to hear all about Bob, of course. And he was as surprised and pleased as the others had been, and at once began to plan to do something for the boy who had been so kind to his own boy.

“He must go back to school as soon as he is well, and from what Dr. Stacey tells me that will be by the time the vacation is over,” Daddy Horton said. “I stopped in at the doctor’s office on my way home to-night. We’ll persuade Bob to go back to school on the promise that he shall come into my office for the summer vacation and be taught shorthand and typing. Doctor Stacey says Mr. Parkney has overworked himself and must go slow for a year. I am trying to find him a job where he won’t have heavy work to do.”

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The next day Mother and Grandma Horton went to call on Mrs. Parkney, and they carried some of Harriet's famous chicken soup with them.

"Harriet always sends some to my friends when they are sick," explained Mother Horton to Mrs. Parkney and, of course, when she said that, no one could feel they were being offered charity.

While Mother and Grandma Horton were visiting Mrs. Parkney, Sunny Boy and Grandpa Horton went downtown to buy the skates for Bob. They spent a long time in the shop, looking at the skates and asking the clerk questions, and finally they bought a beautiful pair of skates "on shoes" of the best leather. The clerk put them in a box and told Sunny Boy he was carrying home the best skates in the store.

"I hope Bob will like them," said Sunny Boy, skipping along beside Grandpa Horton. "Oh, look, here comes the other grandpa!"

The tall old gentleman coming toward them saw Sunny Boy, and smiled. He stopped and held out his hand.

"Well, if it isn't my little ice-pond friend!" he said cordially. "Did you catch cold from those wet feet?"

He shook hands with Grandpa Horton, and Sunny Boy answered that he had not taken cold and asked if he had "found his little girl?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, Adele turned up safe and sound and smiling," replied Adele's grandfather. "By the way, I think friends should at least know each other's names. I am Judge Layton."

"I am Arthur B. Horton," answered Sunny Boy's grandpa. "This is my grandson and namesake, called Sunny Boy for convenience. I'm visiting my son, Harry Horton."

"I've met him a number of times in court," said Judge Layton. "And I am more than glad to know his father and his son. You live on a farm, I believe Mr. Horton? I think I've heard your son mention 'Brookside.'"

The two grandfathers talked about the country and about farms—Judge Layton had been brought up on a farm and had never lost his interest in farming—and Sunny Boy, waiting politely and patiently, was not exactly listening. He was playing with a piece of snow and ice and wishing that Grandpa Horton would hurry so that he could, take the skates to Bob Parkney. Then, suddenly, he heard the Judge say something that sounded very interesting.

"I need an honest man, for while the work is light the place must be well looked after," he said. "I can't get any one I'll trust. Few men with families are willing to go outside

the city limits, and there is no one to board a single man. I'd give a good deal to get hold of the right kind of man."

"Grandpa," whispered Sunny Boy, pulling Grandpa Horton's coat sleeve. "Grandpa, Daddy says Mr. Parkney should do light work."

Truth to tell, Sunny Boy had a hazy idea that "light work" meant something to do with electric lights or gas; but though it turned out that Judge Layton wanted a man to take care of a small country place he had bought that winter, Sunny Boy's quick thought proved a happy one.

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"I do believe that is the man for you," said Grandpa Horton quickly.

Then, in a few words, he told the Judge about the Parkney family. Of course nothing was settled that morning, but Judge Layton and his wife came over in the evening to see the Hortons and to learn more about the Parkneys. In a day or two the Judge went to see Mr. Parkney, and before the month was out the Parkneys were comfortably established in the farmhouse which Judge Layton insisted on putting in good order for them.

Mr. Parkney's arm was much better and Bob's cold was entirely cured by the time they moved. The four children who were of school age came into Centronia every day on the trolley car and Bob declared that nothing could keep him from going to school now that he had a prospect of learning to use the typewriter that summer. Judge Layton engaged Mr. Parkney to look after the farm during the winter and to see that no tramps came along and set fire to the barns or cut down any of the valuable trees. There was no really hard work for him to do, and he was so contented and happy that he did not seem like the same man. Mrs. Parkney was happy, too. As for the children, they thought Mr. Horton and his family were fairies.

"I never saw such dandy skates," said Bob, when Sunny Boy gave them to him. "They must have cost a heap of money. I can't say thank you right."

"Don't try," replied Grandpa Horton, with a smile. "Just think of them as a gift from a little boy who admires you very much."

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN TOYS GO TO SCHOOL

Before the Parkney family moved to Judge Layton's farm, Miss May's school had opened, the Christmas holidays were over, and dear Grandpa and Grandma Horton had gone home to Brookside. Grandma had to take the sweater she was knitting for Bob home with her to finish, but she sent it to him as soon as it was done. And a handsome sweater it was, dark gray and warm and comfortable. Bob was delighted with it.

The first day of school, after the holiday vacation, Jessie Smiley, a little girl who sat near Sunny Boy in Miss Davis' room, brought her walking doll to school with her.

"I couldn't leave Cora Florence at home," Jessie explained to Miss Davis. "Santa Claus brought her to me. I thought she could sit in a chair and wait for me, mornings."

Miss Davis shook hands politely with Cora Florence and said that she might stay. The girls were much interested in the doll, and even the boys wanted to make her walk, though of course they privately thought that dolls were rather silly things. But Cora

Florence was as large as the youngest Parkney child and wore “real” clothes that one could take off like a real child’s. Jessie spent a good many minutes taking off her doll’s hat and coat and her leggings and mittens and putting them on again.

“I brought my railroad train,” announced Carleton Marsh, the next morning.

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He unwrapped a long train of cars and an engine.

"I got 'em for Christmas," he said. "They wind up with a key and you don't have to have any track," and down on his hands and knees went Carleton to start his train.

The assembly bell rang while the train was still running around, and Miss Davis had to catch it and leave it turned upside down with the little wheels whirring around while she marched her class into Miss May's room for the morning exercises.

Several of the children brought new toys with them to school the next day. Perry Phelps carried a sand toy which was a little car that ran up and down an inclined plane when filled with sand. Jimmie Butterworth had a jumping rabbit that took a long hop when you pressed a rubber bulb. Lottie Carr brought her new doll, and Dorothy Peters even carried her toy piano, though it was rather heavy.

"My dear little people!" said Miss Davis, when she saw all these toys, "do you think you will be able to keep your mind on lessons with these delightful and distracting presents arranged around the room? Or shall I put them in the cloak room for you till recess?"

The children were sure they could pay attention to lessons and still look at the Christmas toys, so Miss Davis allowed them to put the presents under the sand table, and she said no one must touch a thing till recess. And then, goodness me, wasn't there a gay time! Jessie's doll walked and Carleton's train ran around and around, the little sand car jerked up and down its track, the rabbit hopped on top of the desks, and Dorothy's piano tinkled seven different tunes at once as seven different children tried to play on it. Miss May came across the hall to see what the class could be doing to make so much noise.

"Why, it looks like Christmas!" she said, smiling.

"Yes, and I don't know whether we can settle down after so much excitement," answered Miss Davis doubtfully. "There goes the bell. Put the toys back under the table, children, and take your seats."

Sunny Boy walked home thoughtfully. He usually walked most of the way to school and home again alone, for none of the pupils lived very near him.

"I'm going to take something to show 'em, to-morrow," he said to himself. "My ice skates and sled aren't much fun. I know what I'll do! I'll take the lead soldiers!"

He was so excited over this idea that he ran the rest of the way home and was quite out of breath by the time he reached his front door. He had to go up in the playroom and put his lead soldiers back in the box they had come in before he could come to lunch.

“What were you doing, precious?” his mother asked him, when he came into the dining-room. “Didn’t you hear Harriet calling you?”

“Yes, Mother, and I did hurry,” replied Sunny Boy. “But I have to take my lead soldiers to school to-morrow and I was putting them in the box.”

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Then he told Mother about the toys the other children had brought to school and that he was sure they would like to see his lead soldiers.

“But I don’t believe Miss Davis will be pleased,” said Mrs. Horton. “She must find it hard to teach her class when they are thinking about their toys. Do you think you ought to take the lead soldiers, dear?”

“Oh, yes, Mother, please,” Sunny Boy said. “We put them under the sand table and we don’t play with them till recess. Lead soldiers don’t make a noise, Mother, and Miss Davis will like them. She said she likes quiet toys.”

So Mrs. Horton said he might take the lead soldiers if he would promise not to play with them during school hours and if he would put them away the moment recess was over and not make Miss Davis speak to him twice.

“What you got, Sunny Boy?” asked Carleton, when Sunny Boy came into Miss Davis’ room the next morning, a box under his arm.

Sunny Boy, though he would not have said so, rather wished he had not decided to bring his lead soldiers. They were heavy to carry and it was a very cold morning, so cold that although he kept his hands in his pockets, his fingers were red and stiff when he pulled off his mittens. He had had to stop all along the way to poke the box further up under his arm, and once he had dropped it. But, never mind, now he had something to show the boys.

“I brought my lead soldiers,” he said to Carleton. “Want to see them?”

Carleton did, and he helped Sunny Boy take them out of the box and stand them up on his desk. The boys and girls came crowding around to look and the other toys were forgotten for a moment. When Miss Davis came in she found the train rushing around on the floor and the doll walking and the toy piano playing, as usual, but half a dozen boys around Sunny Boy’s desk were playing “battle” with wads of paper for bullets and pencils for guns.

“The assembly bell will ring in five minutes, children,” said Miss Davis warningly. “Put the toys away under the sand table at once. Are these your lead soldiers, Sunny Boy?”

Miss Davis looked at the soldiers and admired them and then told Sunny Boy to put them back in the box and put the box under the table.

“You may get them out again at recess,” she said, smiling.

“Could I keep the general, Miss Davis?” begged Sunny Boy. “Could I let him stand on my desk? I won’t play with him the tiniest bit; I’d just like to have him to look at.”

“Well, are you *sure* you won’t forget and play with him?” urged Miss Davis. “He is a beautiful general, isn’t he? All right, if you promise me not to play with him during school time, you may let him stand on your desk.”

So Sunny Boy put all the soldiers away except the general who rode a horse and was very handsome indeed. He stood him up on his desk and left him there while the class went into Miss May’s room for assembly. When they came back, Miss Davis sent Sunny Boy to the board to color a picture she had drawn. Sunny Boy loved to use the colored chalk, and he forgot all about the lead soldier general while he worked away at the board.

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When he had finished the picture—and Miss Davis said he had done it very nicely—it was time for the writing lesson.

“I think we will try to use ink to-day,” the teacher said. “We will take great pains and not hurry. And please be careful of your fingers.”

Whenever Miss Davis tried to teach her class to make an “M” or a “T” or some other letter in ink, it was strange, but more ink seemed to get on their fingers than anywhere else! But Miss Davis said they would learn in good time and that she had inked her fingers, too, when she was a little girl and was learning to write.

Sunny Boy took his seat to be ready for the writing lesson, and the first thing he saw was the lead general lying on his back. He had fallen off his horse!

“Though I don’t see how he could fall off,” argued Sunny Boy to himself. “He screws on the little screw in the saddle. I wonder if somebody unscrewed him!”

Carleton Marsh was beginning to hand out the papers for the writing lesson and Jessie Smiley took the box of pens from Miss Davis. It was her turn to distribute them to the children this week.

“I’ll bet Jessie did it,” said Sunny Boy, but not out loud. “I’ll bet she unscrewed the general while I was at the blackboard.”

Sunny Boy knew that Jessie was mischievous and he also knew that she could not keep her little fingers off anything that might be lying on his desk. She had mortified him very much the first week he came to school by making his camel squeak in class, and it would be just like her to play with the lead soldier when Sunny Boy was at the board and Miss Davis was busy helping some pupil.

“I’ll bet Jessie did it,” said Sunny Boy again to himself.

Just then Jessie looked at him. She smiled, an impish, naughty little smile, and then Sunny Boy knew he had guessed right. Jessie had unscrewed the lead soldier general.

“I’ll just put him back,” whispered Sunny Boy, putting out a cautious hand toward the soldier. He wasn’t going to play with him, he argued, but Miss Davis might call it playing, if she saw him.

“Here’s your pen,” said Jessie suddenly.

Sunny Boy jumped a little, for he had not heard her come up to his desk. His blouse sleeve brushed again the lead general, and what do you think happened? Splash! Down into the inkwell on Sunny Boy’s desk went that beautiful soldier, down out of sight in the messy ink!

Jessie looked startled, but she did not say anything. She walked on with her box of pens. Perhaps she thought it was her fault for unscrewing the lead soldier general, but Jessie did not like to blame herself for anything.

“This morning you may draw the initial of your first name,” announced Miss Davis. “And then you may go over it in ink. I will come around and help you, if you need help.”

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Sunny Boy was gazing down into his ink well and scarcely heard her. How could he rescue the lead soldier before he drowned? He took his best pencil and poked it down into the inkwell. Goodness, the ink was deeper than he thought, and before he knew it his fingers were stained black. Then he poked around with the pen Jessie had given him, but though he could feel the soldier at the bottom of the inkwell, he could not make the pen stick in him. Once the pen slipped and the ink splashed out on the desk. Sunny Boy wiped it up with his hands. They were inky anyway, and a little more wouldn't hurt.

He began to draw an "S" on his paper. Then he remembered that his "truly" name was Arthur like Grandpa Horton's. Sunny Boy turned the paper over and tried to draw an "A." But all the time he kept thinking of the poor lead soldier down at the bottom of the inkwell.

"That looks very nice, Carleton," said Miss Davis.

Sunny Boy looked up. She was standing at Carleton's desk in the next aisle. In a few minutes she would come to Sunny Boy's desk to see his letter. If he was ever going to get that lead soldier, it must be now. Sunny Boy took another quick glance at Miss Davis, saw that she was busy helping another child, and down went his little right hand into the ink-well!

"I've got him!" he said aloud, as he brought up the lead soldier, dripping with ink.

The class looked at Sunny Boy in surprise. So did Miss Davis. They saw a little boy with ink spots on his face and blouse, his hands as black as—well, as black as ink, and ink running in streams over his desk.

"Sunny Boy!" cried Miss Davis. "What are you doing? I thought you promised not to play with the lead soldier. Carleton, get the blotter on my desk, quick!"

Carleton got the blotter and that helped to mop up some of the ink. Miss Davis sent Jessie to get a cloth from Maria, the maid, and she used that to wipe the ink off the desk. Sunny Boy and the lead soldier she sent upstairs to the bathroom, where Maria scrubbed them both with water and a stiff little brush. Not all the ink came off, but most of it did.

Sunny Boy had to sit quietly at his desk during recess while Miss Davis talked to him. He explained that he was not playing with the soldier and Jessie was honest enough to say that she had unscrewed him from his horse, and Miss Davis said she was very glad to know that Sunny Boy had not broken his promise.

"But I think I shall have to say that there must be no more toys brought to school after this," she declared, when she had heard all about the rescue of the lead soldier general

and had kissed Sunny Boy so he might know she was not scolding him. “Toys and school do not seem to go very well together.”

And Sunny Boy’s mother, when she heard about that morning, said she thought Miss Davis was right.

CHAPTER IX

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OUT IN THE BLIZZARD

"Daddy," said Mrs. Horton at the breakfast table one morning, "what do you think about sending Sunny Boy to school to-day?"

Mr. Horton glanced out of the window. The snow was piled high on the sill and the white flakes were still falling steadily.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I don't believe the storm will be much worse, Olive. It has snowed all night, and our storms seldom last twenty-four hours. It may be a little hard going this morning, but the walks will be cleared before it is time for him to come home. And if the wind rises, let him stay at school till Harriet or some one can go after him."

Sunny Boy had listened anxiously. He loved to go to school and he did not mind the snow. Didn't he have a pair of real rubber boots and a fur cap that covered his ears? And this was the first chance he had had to go to school in a snowstorm. There had been snow, of course, but it had always snowed in the night or after school was out, or during the holidays. Now he was going to go to school while it was snowing, just as Daddy Horton had done when he was a little boy.

"I wonder if Bob has rubber boots?" said Sunny Boy to Harriet, after breakfast. She was watching him put on his boots in the hall.

"I don't know. But he won't be able to come to school to-day if he has," replied Harriet. "The suburban trolleys won't run in a storm like this. I don't think your mother ought to let you go to school when it is snowing so hard."

Mr. Horton came downstairs, putting on his overcoat. He looked rather serious. "The storm is worse than I thought," he said. "Sunny Boy, do you want to go to school very much this morning?"

Sunny Boy's lip quivered. His eyes filled with tears. Couldn't he go, after all?

"I put my rubber boots on," he said, trying not to cry, and holding out his foot for Daddy to see.

Mr. Horton loved his little son dearly and he wanted him to be happy. He saw that Sunny Boy would be sadly disappointed if he had to miss a day in school.

"All right, you shall go," he said cheerfully. "I'll take you myself, and I think we'll manage to get there. Good-bye, Mother. And don't worry about us."

Mrs. Horton and Harriet stood at the parlor windows and watched Sunny Boy go down the street, holding fast to his daddy's hand. The snow did not drive in their faces, and it did not seem very cold.

"I like it, don't you?" cried Sunny Boy, tramping along in his rubber boots and wishing that Daddy could walk to school with him every morning.

Here and there they saw a man shoveling the sidewalk, and already teams of horses and carts were standing at the street corners while gangs of men and boys shoveled snow into them.

"Where do they take the snow?" asked Sunny Boy. "Why don't they leave it on the street so people can go coasting?"

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"Well, you see, Sunny Boy, if the snow wasn't carried away, the baker's horse might not be able to bring us any rolls for breakfast and perhaps the milkman couldn't bring us any milk," Mr. Horton answered. "And the people who are cold would not be able to get any coal for their fires. The boys and girls might go coasting, but the horses and wagons and motor trucks would find it hard going. It is much wiser to carry the snow away as fast as it falls. I think it is taken out into the country and there emptied on waste land."

"I wonder if Mr. Parkney likes it to snow," said Sunny Boy, who always thought of the Parkney family when any one mentioned the country. "When can we go see him, Daddy?"

"By and by, when spring comes, if not before," said Mr. Horton pleasantly. "Now, Son, here we are at Miss May's. If it doesn't stop snowing pretty soon I shall telephone Mother to have Harriet come for you this noon."

Sunny Boy kissed Daddy and ran up the steps. Miss May opened the door for him.

"Well, Sunny Boy, you are not afraid of the weather, are you?" she said brightly. "I'm sure some of the children will not be able to come to-day. The trolley cars have stopped, Miss Davis tells me, and Lottie Carr and her sister live in the suburbs, you know."

When the nine o'clock bell rang all the children in Miss Davis' room were there, except the two Carr girls. They could not come because there were no trolley cars running and they lived too far away to walk. There were three or four little girls in Miss May's room who stayed at home, too, but nearly every one came. The children thought it great fun to scramble through the snow, and then, when they reached Miss May's, to have Maria stand them on a mat of linoleum and brush them off with a whisk broom so that they should not carry snow into the school rooms.

Miss Davis' class was having a reading lesson just after recess, when Miss May came in to speak to Miss Davis. The two teachers went over by the window to talk and the children could not hear what they said. Miss May went back to her own room in a few moments and then, to every one's surprise, instead of telling Sunny Boy to finish the story he had been reading to her, Miss Davis asked her class to close their books.

"Miss May is going to send you home earlier than usual to-day," she told them when the books were closed and the boys and girls were sitting "at attention," as she liked to have them. "She thinks the storm is getting worse, and, of course, the longer you stay the more snow you will have to plough through. I will help you put on your wraps, and then I want you to hurry home. Don't stop to play in the snow and don't build snow men or throw snowballs. Go straight home, because your mothers may begin to worry about you."

They went into the cloakroom to get their wraps, and Miss Davis had to turn on the light for them because it was so dark. The window was high in the wall, and the wind had blown so much snow against it that the room was “like five o’clock at night,” Carleton Marsh said.

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"Now remember, don't play, but hurry home," said Miss Davis, when the last legging was buttoned and all the mittens were matched. Perry Phelps lost one of his mittens regularly every day and Miss Davis always had to find it for him. "Don't stop to play in the snow till you have been home and had your lunch. You'll have the whole afternoon to play in."

It was much colder than it had been in the morning. Sunny Boy knew that as soon as he went out on the steps. But he did not know how cold it was till he and the other children turned the first corner. Then the wind struck them and Dorothy Peters cried that she couldn't breathe!

"Turn your back to it," Sunny Boy advised her, pulling his fur cap down over his ears.

But the wind seemed to blow in several directions at once. It swooped down around the children and blew stinging snowflakes into their eyes. It howled and shrieked and tore over the roofs of the houses, bringing great sheets of snow with it.

"It wasn't like this, this morning," complained Carleton, stamping his feet to warm them.

Though none of them knew it, the storm was now a blizzard and it was cold enough and windy enough and snowy enough to make grown-ups most uncomfortable, to say nothing of small boys and girls who had to walk through the storm. It was a mistake for the teacher to send the children home alone.

"I can't see where I'm going!" gasped Jimmie Butterworth, trying to wipe the snow from his face with his mittens.

Jessie Smiley stubbed her toe against something and began to cry.

"I'm so cold!" she wailed. "My nose is frozen, I know it is. And I never saw that funny fence before."

Sunny Boy looked up at the great iron fence. The snow had blown against it till it was almost covered. There was a row of ash cans set out on the curb in front of this fence and they were so completely covered with snow that poor Jessie had walked into them without seeing them.

"No, I never saw that fence, either," declared Jimmie. "Is this the way you go home to your house, Sunny Boy?"

"I don't know whose fence that is," replied Sunny Boy. "I never saw it before. Gee, doesn't the wind blow!"

The wind was blowing harder than ever and the snow seemed to be coming down faster and faster. There was not a horse or wagon or motor truck to be seen on the street,

and not even a single person. Every one who could get in out of the storm had done so. And as it was noon by this time even those whose work forced them to be out had managed to find shelter somewhere for the lunch hour.

"I want to go home!" cried Dorothy Peters, just as Ruth Baker had cried the day she went coasting with Sunny Boy and Nelson. Sunny Boy decided that all girls acted the same way.

"Well, come on," said Jimmie Butterworth, putting his hands deeper into his pockets. "Come on, Dorothy; you won't get home standing there and crying about it. Hurry up."

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The children began to walk again, but the snow blinded their eyes and the wind continued to take their breath away. Jessie Smiley fell over a curb stone and began to cry and Helen Graham, who had not said a word, sat down in the snow and declared she wasn't going a step further.

"I think we're lost and we'll be buried in the snow and never, never found any more!" she said. Helen liked exciting stories and she had heard so many she thought she could tell a few herself and, as it proved, she could.

"I don't want to be buried in the snow!" cried Jessie. "I won't be buried and never, never found any more."

"You can't help yourself," Helen informed her. "Oh-h, my feet are cold!"

"Well, I don't believe we're going home," admitted Jimmie Butterworth, working his arms up and down to get them warm. "I think we'd better walk the other way."

So they all turned around and began to walk in the opposite direction. The wind turned, too, and the snow came into their faces faster than ever.

"Look out!" screamed Helen Graham, as they stumbled across a street. "Here comes something!"

Something big and black was coming toward them out of the snowstorm. It moved slowly and Jimmie Butterworth said he thought it was a battleship.

"Who ever saw a battleship on the land?" said Perry Phelps. "I'll bet you it is a—a cow."

Perry said this hastily because he had thought at first the thing coming toward them was a motor truck, but before he could say so his quick eyes had made out four moving legs.

"It's a horse and wagon," said Sunny Boy. "Let's ask the driver to give us a ride home."

"Hey, mister!" shouted the boys as the wagon came close to them. "Let us in? Where are you going? Let us ride with you, please?"

The horse stopped, but no one answered. It seemed, tired, poor animal, and stood with its head down and winking its eyes to keep the snow out of them.

"Let us ride with you?" said Jimmie Butterworth politely. "I think some of us are lost."

Sunny Boy moved closer to the wagon. He peered in where the driver should sit. He could not see any one, and he noticed that the reins were tied around the whip handle.

"I don't believe any one is driving this horse," he said suddenly.

CHAPTER X

WHERE THE HORSE LIVED

Sunny Boy was right. The children stared at each other in surprise and the little girls forgot that their feet were cold. Who ever heard of a horse and wagon without a driver?

"Is he running away?" asked Jessie Smiley.

"Silly, of course he isn't," retorted Jimmie Butterworth. "A horse can't run away in a snowstorm. I tell you what let's do—let's get in and drive him home!"

"How do you know where he lives?" said Helen Graham.

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"Oh, I guess I can find out," replied Jimmie, though he was wondering how to find the answer to that question.

"Do you know how to drive a horse?" asked Sunny Boy.

"Well I never did, but I think I could," said Jimmie, who was a good-natured boy and quite ready to try any kind of new experiment.

"You know how, don't you, Sunny Boy?" said Perry Phelps. "You went to see your grandfather in the country, didn't you? And he has horses and things. You drive us home."

"No," said Sunny Boy, "I don't know how to drive a horse like this. Wait a minute, and I'll think."

The other children waited for him to think. Though he was the youngest in his class, they had found out that Sunny Boy was often wiser than they were and that he could be trusted to find a way to do things. Miss Davis said that Sunny Boy was her "right-hand man."

"My daddy says," announced Sunny Boy, after he had thought a minute, "that horses can go home all by themselves, so I guess this one can. But if we all got into the wagon, the girls would cry and be afraid he would run away."

"We wouldn't, either!" said Jessie Smiley crossly.

"Yes you would," Sunny Boy told her. "I think the girls ought to get in the wagon and ride and we'll stay and walk with the horse. Then he'll go home and we'll find out where he lives."

They argued a few minutes about this plan, but as no one could think of a better one, the girls, Helen and Jessie and Dorothy, climbed into the wagon and the four boys trudged along beside the horse who started to walk slowly the minute Sunny Boy called "gid-ap" to him.

He wasn't a fast horse, and it did seem as though his home must be at the very end of Centronia, for he continued to walk long after the boys were lame and tired from slipping around in the snow. The three little girls were more comfortable, for while the wagon was not warm, the cover kept the snow off them.

"I never saw much a slow horse," grumbled Jessie, putting her head out to see where they were, though it was impossible to tell because the whirling snow hid everything.

"My feet are cold!" cried Dorothy Peters.

"I don't think this horse lives anywhere," shouted Helen, so that the boys could bear her. "He's probably going out into the country and we'll all freeze and Miss May will wonder where we went, and if she does come looking for us, she'll never find us!"

Sunny Boy patted the horse gently.

"I guess you're cold, too," he said gently. "I wish I had a blanket for you Mr. Horse. Maybe there is one in the wagon."

He said "whoa" and the horse stopped. Then Sunny Boy climbed into the wagon and felt under the seat. Sure enough there was a blanket.

"What are you going to do with that, Sunny Boy?" asked Helen Graham.

"Put it on the horse," replied Sunny Boy. "I think he must be awfully cold. He's a pretty tall horse, but I guess Jimmie will help me."

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Jimmie helped him and so did Perry and Carleton, and it took them all to get the blanket spread over the horse. They got it on wrong and there was no way to fasten it, so they took turns holding it around the horse's neck as he walked. Sunny Boy held the blanket in place till his hands were cold, then Jimmie held it while Sunny warmed his hands. When Jimmie's hands were cold, Perry held the blanket, and then Carleton. The horse looked surprised at such kindness, but he did not walk any faster. He couldn't.

[Illustration: Sunny Boy held the blanket in place.]

"I guess we've walked a hundred miles," said Sunny Boy wearily, when they had trudged through the wind and snow for a long, long time.

Then, as though he had heard, the horse stopped suddenly. He pointed his ears straight ahead and then turned the wagon around so quickly that the girls inside cried out in fright. They thought they were going to be tipped out in the snow. But the horse was walking slowly up a driveway, and now he stopped again and Sunny Boy saw that he stood in front of a barn.

The barn doors were closed and the children heard a horse inside give a loud neigh. Their own horse answered.

"I'll bet he lives here," said Jimmie Butterworth.

Sunny Boy waited a minute, and then, as no one opened the barn doors, he looked around for a house. Yes, there was a house; at least there was a chimney showing through the driving snow.

"I'll go tell the folks the horse is here," he said. "You wait for me." They all wanted to come, but Sunny Boy pointed out that the horse might go off again. So Perry Phelps and Carleton agreed to hold him and keep the blanket on him, while Sunny Boy and Jimmie Butterworth went to tell the people in the house that their horse had come home.

The two little boys walked out of the drive way and started to go across the field to the house. Sunny Boy was ahead, and suddenly he went into a snowdrift up to his neck!

"Do you suppose it is as deep as that all the way there?" he gasped, when Jimmie helped him out. There was snow inside his rubber boots and down under his coat collar. But Sunny Boy seldom fussed even when he was not quite comfortable.

Luckily, it was not as deep all the way to the house, and after they had walked and stumbled and even run a little, they reached the front door of the farmhouse. Sunny Boy rapped on it, and a woman came in answer to his knock. She held a small child in her arms.

“Why, Sunny Boy!” she cried. “How did you ever get here in weather like this? Where is your mother? Come in quickly, out of the storm.”

It was Mrs. Parkney, and Sunny Boy was so surprised that before he could say a word he found himself in the warm kitchen with the seven Parkney children and Mr. and Mrs. Parkney all standing around him and Jimmie.

“Does a horse live here?” was Sunny Boy’s first question. “He’s waiting outside your barn. And the other children are there, too.”

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Mr. Parkney, who by the way looked strong and well again, soon had everything all straight. He and Bob went out to the barn and put the horse in his stall and brought back the five children. Mrs. Parkney spread a red cloth on the kitchen table, for the kitchen was cozy and warm and no amount of snow from rubber boots and little shoes could harm the linoleum floor, and began to get them something to eat.

"They must be starved, poor lambs," she said, "It is almost three o'clock."

You see, the children had been walking ever since half-past eleven o'clock that morning and had had nothing to eat since their breakfasts. No wonder they were tired and hungry.

"I don't see how you could walk away out here," said Bob Parkney, pouring milk into the bowls his mother had put out on the table. "I did it this forenoon, and I was dead tired when I got home."

"Bob walked to school, because the trolley cars were not running," explained Mrs. Parkney. "His father took the light wagon and one of the horses and went after him right after dinner to save him the walk home. But the public schools dismissed the pupils early, just as Miss May did you, and Bob had started before his father got to the school."

"And while I was in the building, asking for Bob, the horse took it into its head to walk away without me," said Mr. Parkney. "So I had to walk all the way back home myself."

"How are we to get these children home?" said Mrs. Parkney to her husband, while Sunny Boy and his six playmates were busy with the delicious home-made bread and country milk she had given them. "Their mothers will be wild with anxiety, Robert. Our telephone is out of order, or we could telephone and let them know and keep the children here over night."

"Bob and I will take them home in the sleigh," said Mr. Parkney at once. "It's an old rattletrap affair, and I don't believe it has been used for years. Still, I reckon Bob and I can make it hold together for one trip. But, Mother, find out where these little folks live before they go to sleep. I might leave the wrong child at the wrong house."

The cold and the long walk had made the children very sleepy. Sunny Boy could hardly hold his eyes open and Jessie Smiley went to sleep with her spoon in her hand. When Mrs. Parkney tried to wake her up and ask her where she lived, Jessie only opened her eyes and smiled and closed them again.

"My feet are warm now," she murmured.

"I know where she lives," said Sunny Boy to Mrs. Parkney. "I'll tell Bob. I know where all the children live, don't I, Jimmie?"

Mrs. Parkney said she would have to depend on Sunny Boy, for the others were so sleepy they almost tumbled over standing up when she tried to put their hats and coats on them.

Bob and his father went out and harnessed the old sleigh to two black horses (not the one the children had brought home, for he was tired out, of course,) and Mrs. Parkney filled bottles with hot water and wrapped hot flatirons in old cloths to keep them warm. She insisted on coming out to the sleigh and tucking away the seven boys and girls, and every one of her own children followed to watch her. Perhaps they wanted a sleigh ride, but Mr. Parkney said he would have his hands full with the load he had, and he did not want any extra passengers.

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"We'll tuck Sunny Boy up in the front seat between us," said Bob, "and then he can tell us where the different youngsters live."

And Sunny Boy did, though he was so sleepy Bob had to wake him by shaking him gently every time. They soon reached Centronia, for it was not a very long drive for two horses and a sleigh which can travel swiftly over the snow. Once in the city, Bob began shaking Sunny Boy awake and asking him where his playmates lived.

They came to Jessie Smiley's house first, and she did not wake up, even when Bob lifted her and carried her in. Mrs. Smiley wanted to hear the whole story, but Bob explained that he had more children to see safely home, and Mrs. Smiley was so glad and thankful to have Jessie back that she told Bob to hurry.

"For I know the other mothers are as anxious as I have been," she said. "We have had a terrible day. The telephone wires are all down, and my husband has been to Miss May's school and to the house of every child in Jessie's class, trying to find some trace of her. He is out hunting now."

Around and around Mr. Parkney drove, and at every house they stopped Bob carried in a sleeping child. How glad the mothers were, so glad they wanted to hug Bob, and some of them did. At last every one was safe home but Sunny Boy, and then Mr. Parkney made the horses go as fast as they could. When he stopped them at the Horton's house, both he and Bob got out and went in with Sunny Boy.

"Mrs. Horton, here's Sunny Boy!" cried Harriet, when she answered the ring at the doorbell and found Sunny Boy standing there with the Parkneys.

Daddy Horton came down the front stairs three steps at a time and grabbed Sunny. Mother Horton came running down after him, and she was so glad to see Sunny Boy that she cried just a little—the way she had cried in New York when he was lost and then found again.

She held him in her lap all the time Mr. Parkney and Bob were explaining how they came to bring him home. When Mr. Horton tried to thank them, Mr. Parkney stopped him.

"I'm only trying to do for your family one-tenth part of what you've done for me and mine," he said, though Sunny Boy was so sleepy he didn't hear him very well and had to ask Mother the next day what he had said. "There isn't anything the Parkneys, from the two-year-old to Mrs. Parkney and me, wouldn't do for you, Mr. Horton."

CHAPTER XI

MR. HARRIS BRINGS A LETTER



Sunny *boy* did not go to school the next day. There was no school to go to. Though, even if there had been, he would not have gone, because he did not wake up till half past ten, and then Mother and Harriet brought his breakfast up to him on the pretty wicker tray.

When Sunny Boy had had his breakfast, he started to dress. While he was dressing he told his mother and Harriet all the things that had happened to him and the other children the day before. He had gone to sleep almost as soon as Mr. Parkney brought him home. Of course Mrs. Horton was anxious to hear what had happened to him after school was dismissed that snowy morning.

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It had stopped snowing—Harriet said it stopped during the night—and the walks rang with the cheerful sound of shovels as men and boys went about cleaning the pavements and streets. The sun came out, too, and the outdoors was very beautiful, but so dazzling it made Sunny Boy blink his eyes whenever he looked out of the window.

“Did Miss May know we were lost?” Sunny Boy asked his mother while she was brushing his hair. He could brush his own hair, of course, but Mrs. Horton said she liked to do it for him and then she was quite sure he wouldn’t forget. “Did she wonder where we were?”

“Poor Miss May!” said Mrs. Horton. “She had a terrible day. Dear Daddy went around last night to tell her you were all safe. Come and sit in my lap, Sunny Boy, and I will tell you about it.”

Sunny Boy climbed into his mother’s lap and she moved her rocking chair near the window so that she could see the postman when he came down the street. She was expecting a letter from a friend.

“You see, precious,” Mrs. Horton began, “Daddy saw that the storm was getting worse, and he tried to telephone me to tell Harriet to go after you. But the telephone wires were out of order and he couldn’t get us; so he sent a messenger. Harriet started out at once, but, as you know, Miss May sent you home early, and by the time Harriet reached the school you were gone. She hurried home, expecting to find you here. And then wasn’t I frightened when the afternoon went by and you didn’t come! I sent Harriet down to Daddy’s office, and he came home. By and by Mr. Smiley came and one or two other fathers to ask if we knew anything about their children. Miss May started out in all the storm to look for you, and a policeman had to bring her back, for the wind was too much for her.”

“Yes, it blew like—like anything!” agreed Sunny Boy. “Did you think I was lost, Mother?”

“Yes, I did, precious. And so you were, you know,” said Mrs. Horton, kissing the back of his neck.

“There comes Mr. Harris!” cried Sunny Boy, as the postman came down the street. “Let me go, Mother. Perhaps there is a letter for me!”

Sunny Boy was always expecting letters, though he seldom wrote any. He wrote to Grandpa Horton now and then, to be sure, and at Christmas time he wrote one or two “thank you” letters to the relatives and friends who sent him Christmas presents. But, as a rule, he did not write letters, and that is probably the reason he did not receive many. Still, it is fun to expect letters, and Sunny Boy liked to say: “Any for me?” to the postman.

“Hello, you didn’t get snowed in after all, did you?” said kind Mr. Harris, smiling at Sunny Boy when he opened the door. “You had this house in a turmoil yesterday, young man.”

“What’s a turmoil?” asked Sunny Boy.

“It’s an upset,” replied the postman. “What happened to you, anyway?”

Sunny Boy explained, while Mr. Harris went through his package of letters which he carried in his hand.

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"And we came home in Mr. Parkney's sleigh," finished Sunny Boy. "Have you any letters for me, Mr. Harris?"

"Two for your mother, and a paper for your daddy," said Mr. Harris slowly. "And—let—me—see—" He began to go over his letters again, very slowly. "Let—me—see—" he said again. "Oh, here it is! I thought I'd lost it. Are you Arthur Bradford Horton? You are? Well, Sunny Boy, here's a nice, big, square white letter for you. And I'm glad the blizzard didn't blow you away."

Sunny Boy took his letter eagerly, mumbled "thank you," and ran upstairs as fast as he could go.

"Oh, Mother, look!" he shouted. "I have a letter! It's addressed to me from somebody. Did Aunt Bessie write to me?"

"Open your letter and read it," said Mrs. Horton laughingly.

Sunny Boy took the paper knife she gave him and cut the envelope as he had seen his daddy do.

"It isn't a letter; it's a Christmas card," he said in disappointment.

"Oh, no, precious, no one would sent you a Christmas card in January," declared Mrs. Horton. "See, dear, it is an invitation to a party. Oliver Dunlap is eight years old next week and he is going to have a birthday party. Won't that be fun!"

Sunny Boy was glad Oliver had sent him an invitation to his party and not a Christmas card. He spent the greater part of the afternoon writing an answer to the letter. First he wrote it in pencil, and when he had shown the pencil copy to Mother and Harriet and Aunt Bessie (who came to lunch and to see if Sunny Boy was quite well after his snow storm experience) and they had all said it was a very nice answer indeed, he copied it in ink. He had to do this five times before it satisfied him. Sunny Boy would not send a letter to Oliver with the tiniest spot of ink on it, and he was willing to do a thing over and over and over to get it right. Before he had finished putting the stamp on the envelope—Harriet said Sunny Boy shook the house when he put a stamp on a letter, and indeed he thumped it as though he were pounding with a brick—Nelson and Ruth Baker came over to see him.

"Did you get lost yesterday?" asked Nelson. "When did you get home? We only had one session in school."

Nelson went to the public school and he had to go to school in the afternoon unless the principal decided to have only one session, as he often did when it stormed.

“Are you going to Oliver’s party?” said Ruth. “We are. What are you going to take him?”

Sunny Boy could tell Nelson all about getting lost and when he came home, and he could explain to Ruth that he was going to Oliver’s party. But he could not tell her what birthday gift he meant to take Oliver, because he hadn’t thought about it.

He asked Mother, after Nelson and Ruth had gone home, and she said they would go down town some afternoon before the party and find something nice.

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The telephone man came to fix the wires that afternoon, and when Daddy Horton came home to dinner he said that much of the snow had been cleared away in the streets.

The next morning Sunny Boy started off to school and Daddy walked with him up to the steps, as he had done the snowy morning. It was very cold, but all the walks were clear and the great high walls of snow that had been piled up along the pavements made fine places for jumping boys. Sunny Boy tried several himself, and Daddy had to remind him that it was a quarter to nine, or he might have been late for school.

Every one talked about the blizzard in school. All the children wanted to hear from those who had been lost, and Sunny Boy and Jimmie and Perry and Carleton and the three little girls were kept busy answering questions. Miss May and Miss Davis asked questions, too, and even when they did get at their lessons they read snow stories and drew sleighs and horses and snow forts on the blackboard.

But after that day, Oliver Dunlap's party was the most exciting thing talked about. There might be another snowstorm but, as Oliver said, he wouldn't be eight years old again that winter.

"Oliver's party is to-morrow, and I haven't any birthday present for him yet," Sunny Boy said to his family at breakfast the day before the party.

"We'll go down town and get it this afternoon, as soon as lunch is over," Mrs. Horton promised. "I didn't mean to leave it till the last minute, dear, but I have been very busy. Hurry home from school, and we'll go and buy him something nice."

After school Sunny Boy hurried home, and he and Mother went down town shopping as soon as they had had lunch. They looked at ever so many things which might please Oliver, and finally they decided that a little flashlight he could carry in his pocket would be a good birthday gift for him. They bought it, and Mrs. Horton wrapped it up nicely and Sunny Boy wrote on a little white card, "Many Happy Returns of the Day from Sunny Boy to Oliver," and this was tied on the outside of the package.

The next day was Oliver's birthday. It happened to be a Saturday. Miss Davis said this was lucky, or she didn't know what might have happened in school. She said no one could expect children who were going to a party in the afternoon to be very much interested in learning to spell and write in the morning.

The party was to be from two to five o'clock, and Sunny Boy, in his best white flannel suit, and carrying Oliver's present under his arm, started about quarter of two for the birthday boy's house.

At the same time the door of the Bakers' house opened.

“Going to the party?” called Nelson, running down the steps of his house, followed by Ruth. “What did you get for Oliver?”

Sunny Boy told him. Nelson said he had a story book to give Oliver. Ruth had a little silver pencil, she said. Sunny Boy thought that Ruth looked very pretty, dressed all in white from her white rubbers to her white fur hat. She didn’t complain about her feet being cold, either. But that may have been because Oliver did not live very far away.

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There were about twenty children at the party, when all the guests had arrived. Mrs. Dunlap and Oliver shook hands with each, and the boys put their hats and coats in Oliver's room while the little girls put theirs in his mother's. Sunny Boy knew nearly all the children except one, a boy who seemed older than any of the others and who, whenever he had a chance, teased the girls by pulling their hair-ribbons or putting out his foot to trip them as they went past him in the games.

"That's Jerry Mullet," whispered Oliver to Sunny Boy. "He's a cousin of Perry Phelps'. I didn't know he was visiting Perry when I sent the invitations, but Mrs. Phelps called up Mother and asked if Jerry couldn't come to the party. I don't like him very much, do you?"

"Oh, I guess so," said Sunny Boy, who wanted to be polite and who liked Perry Phelps so much he wanted to like his cousin, too.

Among the games they played were several in which prizes were given to those who won the game. Ruth Baker won the spider web prize, much to her delight, for she was the youngest of the little girls, and it made her feel quite grown up to be asked to an eight-year-old party and to win a prize also.

"We are going to play the donkey game before supper," announced Mrs. Dunlap, after they had played several other games. "The donkey game is old, but Oliver thinks you will like it," went on Mrs. Dunlap. "I will blindfold you, children. You first, Jerry."

Jerry was blindfolded and turned around three times. Then he started for the picture of the donkey pinned up on the wall. A shout of laughter greeted him when he pinned the tail on one of the donkey's long ears.

Nelson Baker was next, and he pinned the tail on a leg. Helen Graham pinned it on his neck. Dorothy Peters took a long time to decide where she would stab her pin and then, after all her trouble, only succeeded in pinning the tail on the donkey's nose. Child after child went up, and not one of them pinned the tail anywhere near the place where a donkey's tail should grow.

"Now, Sunny Boy, you come and try it," said Mrs. Dunlap, smiling at Sunny Boy. "Never mind if these children do laugh. They are ready to laugh at nothing now. You pin the tail on the donkey, and then we'll go out to the dining-room and see what Kate has to surprise us."

CHAPTER XII

JERRY LOSES HIS TEMPER

Sunny Boy stood very still to have the handkerchief tied over his eyes. He was glad it was his turn, and he meant to pin that donkey's tail almost in the right place, if not the exact spot.

"There you are, Sunny Boy," said Mrs. Dunlap gaily, turning him around and around gently, three times. "Now you are ready to try your luck."

Sunny Boy tried to remember where the donkey was pinned. He walked forward slowly, taking queer little short steps. When your eyes are blindfolded, you know, you feel every moment as though you were going to step down into a hole. Suddenly Sunny Boy lifted his pin with the donkey's tail on it and made a quick jab. He was sure he had reached the picture of the donkey.

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"Ouch!" shrieked a boy's voice.

After that came a moment of perfect silence; and then, such a shout of laughter! Girls and boys seemed to be shouting together and Sunny Boy thought he heard Mrs. Dunlap laughing with them. He pulled off the handkerchief, and then he saw what they were laughing at. He had pinned the donkey's tail on Jerry Mullet!

"Oh, my! Oh, my!" laughed Perry Phelps, rolling over on the floor. "Oh, Sunny Boy, I never saw anything so funny in my life! You lifted that pin so high in the air and brought it down on Jerry's arm before he knew what you were going to do. I never saw anything so funny!" and Perry rolled over on the rug and began to laugh again.

All the children were laughing, and pretty Mrs. Dunlap had tears in her eyes because she had laughed so much. Only Jerry Mullet looked cross.

"I hope I didn't hurt you," Sunny Boy said to him. "I didn't mean to stick a pin into you."

Before Jerry could do more than scowl, Perry sat up on the floor wiping his eyes.

"What I want to know—" he said, "is Jerry a donkey?" And then he began to laugh again, and this time the children shouted with him.

They thought this was the funniest question, and they laughed and laughed and kept saying to each other: "Is Jerry a donkey, because Sunny Boy pinned the donkey's tail on him? Is Jerry a donkey?"

"I'll show you whether I'm a donkey or not," growled Jerry, frowning at them all. "I'll show you! I won't stay at your old party!"

And he dashed upstairs and into Oliver's room where his hat and coat were. Downstairs he came flying, and never stopped in the parlor to tell Mrs. Dunlap he was going or to say that he had had a pleasant time. No! Instead, Jerry opened the front door and banged it after him with a crash that shook the house.

"He's gone!" said Sunny Boy, dismayed. "He's mad!"

"I'm afraid he is," admitted Mrs. Dunlap. "And I'm sorry. He didn't have his ice-cream."

"He didn't like it 'cause I pinned the donkey's tail on him," said Sunny Boy sorrowfully. "But I didn't mean to."

"No, of course you didn't," answered Mrs. Dunlap. "Don't feel bad over that, Sunny Boy. I'm afraid we teased Jerry too much about it, though. He is a stranger here in Centronia, and we should have tried to be extra kind to him. You shouldn't have said

that about Jerry being a donkey, Perry,” she added, turning to Perry Phelps. “You must have hurt his feelings.”

Miss May often said that Perry had the best manners of any boy in her school. He did not laugh now, but he came up to Mrs. Dunlap and said he was sorry he had asked his cousin if he were a donkey.

“I should think he could take a joke,” he said. “He’s ten years old. But I’m sorry, Mrs. Dunlap, and Mother will be, too, that Jerry left your party like this. And I hope you’ll ’scuse him banging your front door.”

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Perry Phelps' mother did not allow him to bang doors. If he forgot and slammed one, he had to come back and open and close it softly five times. This helped him to remember.

"Well, I'm sorry our party is spoiled for Jerry," sighed Mrs. Dunlap. "But we'll go out into the dining-room and have supper now. Jennie Rice wins the prize for pinning the donkey's tail nearer to the right place than any other child, so she gets the first prize. Sunny Boy, of course, gets the consolation prize. Give them the prizes, Oliver, dear."

Oliver handed Jennie a tiny silver donkey on a pretty red ribbon, to wear around her neck. She was delighted and put it right on. Sunny Boy's prize was a gray donkey whose head came off and whose body was filled with small gumdrops. He thought it was a very nice prize.

They had a beautiful time at the supper table, and poor Jerry was hardly missed. They had chicken sandwiches and cocoa with whipped cream. Then came vanilla and chocolate ice cream. And there was a large slice of the white-frosted birthday cake, which Oliver himself cut, for each child.

After supper they played a few more games, and then it was time to go home. Mrs. Dunlap was almost smothered by the little girls who all tried to kiss her at once and tell her they had had the nicest time at Oliver's party. Nearly every one said-good-bye to Oliver and his mother and started down the steps at the same time.

At the first corner every one but the Baker children and Sunny Boy went a different way. They could walk home together, and that was why Mrs. Horton had said that Harriet need not come for Sunny Boy.

As they were passing a house some one tapped on the window. Nelson and Ruth's aunt lived there, and she had been waiting to see them pass.

"Your mother telephoned me you went to Oliver Dunlap's party and would go by our house on your way home," said Aunt Edith, coming out on the steps, with a coat thrown over her shoulders. "I asked her to let you stay and visit us till eight o'clock this evening. Then I'll take you home. The cat has a basketful of new kittens for you to play with, Ruth."

"May Sunny Boy stay, too, please?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Tyler, who was Ruth's Aunt Edith. "Of course, he may. I will telephone to his mother so that she will not worry about him."

"No, thank you. I have to go home," Sunny Boy said shyly. "I said I would come right home. And I want to tell Mother about the party."

“All right, dear, just as you please,” said Mrs. Tyler kindly. “You are sure, Sunny Boy, you don’t mind going the rest of the way alone?”

Sunny Boy replied that he did not mind, and Nelson and Ruth went into the house, while he trudged off down the street by himself. Presently he chuckled.

“Didn’t Jerry look funny?” snickered Sunny Boy. “I wonder what made me pin the donkey’s tail on him.”

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"Where do you think you're going so fast?" cried Jerry, stepping out from behind a barrel where he had been hiding.

"Hello!" said Sunny Boy, surprised to see him. "I'm going home. The party is all done. You missed it—we had two kinds of ice cream."

"I hope you're happy, spoiling my afternoon and making everybody laugh at me," scolded Jerry Mullet. "You're a nice kind of boy. Do you know what I'm going to do to you?"

"No, I don't," said Sunny Boy, trying to walk past him. "Let me be. I told my mother I'd come home and not stop to play on the way."

"This isn't playing," growled Jerry disagreeably. "You can't go till I say you can. Are you sorry you made everybody laugh at me?"

"I told you I was sorry I pinned the tail on you," answered Sunny Boy. "I can't help it if they did laugh. And you did look funny."

"Well, you think so now, but you won't long," Jerry said. "I'm going to wash your face in that snow and then you'll look funny yourself."

He pointed to some dirty snow that was banked in the gutter.

"You let me alone," cried Sunny Boy, trying to run past Jerry. "I won't let you wash my face. Go away, Jerry Mullet!"

Jerry reached out his hand to snatch Sunny Boy's coat, but, before he could touch him, down came a shower of snow that struck Jerry on the back of his neck and made him shut his eyes.

"Hey, you!" called a deep, hoarse voice. "Why don't you pick on boys your own size! That kid isn't half as big as you are!"

Jerry and Sunny Boy looked up. The voice came from the roof of a piazza that overhung the sidewalk. A big man in blue overalls and a red flannel undershirt, and wearing no overcoat, was shoveling the snow off the roof. He had heard Jerry scolding Sunny Boy and had seen him trying to grab him.

"The likes of you, thinking to pick a fight with a little feller like that!" said the man, scooping up another shovelful of snow as he talked. "Why, if you were my boy, bread and water for a week would be too good for you. Take that, you little bully!" And down came another shower of snow on the surprised Jerry.

“Run, kid, run!” shouted the man to Sunny Boy. “Let’s see how well you can run. I’ll look after this tormenting one.”

Sunny Boy took one look at Jerry sputtering in the snow, and then turned and ran. He ran as fast as he could, and he never stopped till he landed on his own doorstep and rang the bell. When Harriet came to the door he was so out of breath that, for several minutes, he couldn’t tell her what had happened. And then, of course, before he could make her understand about Jerry, he had to tell all about the party.

Daddy and Mother Horton had to hear about the party, too. And they said that they would rather have a little boy for their son who behaved as Sunny Boy had than a boy who acted the way Jerry Mullet did.

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"But no one likes to be laughed at, and we won't be too hard on Jerry," said Mother Horton, as she helped Sunny Boy get ready for bed. "Shall I put your donkey prize up here on the mantel shelf for you, Sunny Boy?"

Sunny Boy remembered her putting his donkey on the shelf for him, but he did not remember seeing the donkey climb down again. Yet the next time he looked at the shelf the donkey wasn't there. Then he saw it sitting on the foot of his bed, laughing. The donkey laughed so hard and opened his mouth so very wide that Sunny Boy could see the gumdrops down inside him.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the donkey. "Didn't Jerry look funny? Ha! Ha!"

"Mother says we mustn't laugh at him any more," Sunny Boy told the donkey. "You'll hurt his feelings."

But the donkey only laughed harder, and Sunny Boy began to laugh, too, and he woke up laughing to find that it was morning and that he had been dreaming about the donkey.

Sunny Boy saw Perry Phelps in Sunday school that afternoon, but Jerry had not come with him.

"Jerry is so cross!" declared Perry. "He hardly speaks to me, and I'm glad he is going home to-morrow."

And Monday, when Perry came to school, he announced that his cousin had gone home. He lived in a city fifty miles from Centronia and did not visit Perry very often.

"My father said it might snow to-day," said Oliver Dunlap, who seemed to feel very happy and gay after his party. "And if it does, let's have a snowball fight, shall we?"

Oliver had brought Miss Davis "some of the party" in a pretty paper napkin, and she said he was a very thoughtful boy and she was sure every one had had a good time Saturday afternoon.

All the boys were willing to have a snowball fight, and when a few flakes of snow began to fall at recess time, Oliver shouted that now there would be enough snow for the "bullets and things."

"Let me be on your side, Oliver?" asked Helen Graham coaxingly.

"On my side?" repeated Oliver. "There aren't going to be any girls in this snowball fight. This is just us boys."



"I think you're mean!" cried Helen. "And I will, too, be on your side. If you don't let us girls in the snowball fight, I'll go to Miss May and tell her we want the back lot to play in after school. So there!"

And now it was Oliver's turn to be provoked.

"I think girls are perfectly horrid," he said crossly.

CHAPTER XIII

BRAVE LITTLE SUNNY BOY

Miss Davis, feeding the goldfish in the largest glass bowl, overheard what Oliver said to Helen.

"Why, Oliver!" she said in surprise. "How impolite you are! How can you say such a thing to Helen? Besides, didn't you have girls at your birthday party?"

"Oh, girls are all right at parties," explained Oliver. "They always go to parties. But I don't think girls should want to be in a snowball fight, Miss Davis."

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"Miss May said the girls could have the back lot whenever they wanted it," said Helen. "And if you don't let us play with you, Oliver Dunlap, there won't be any snowball fight; you haven't any other place to play."

This was true. Oliver knew it, and Helen knew it. Boys who live in a city can not have a snowball fight in the street, lest they hit people who may be walking past. No back yard is a safe place because of the many windows that may be broken. A vacant lot, like the one behind Miss May's school, is really the only place for this kind of fun. Miss May early in the school year had made a rule that this lot should be for the girls in her school whenever they wanted it. The boys might use it, she said when the girls didn't care to play on it.

"Boys have more freedom than girls," kind Miss May had said. "They can run and climb and tumble about coming to school and going home. But little girls have to be more careful. So I think they should have the lot to play in whenever they wish."

In the spring Miss May had swings and a sand pile and a few "flying rings" put up for the children to amuse themselves with, but these, of course, were taken down during the winter. When it snowed, the lot was a large white square, and it certainly was an ideal spot for a snowball fight.

"I don't see why you don't let the girls play," said Miss Davis to Oliver. "You will probably be glad to have them in your army. Sunny Boy, don't you think the girls ought to play?"

Sunny Boy looked uncomfortable. He wanted to be polite, but he had to be truthful, too.

"Well, girls are a lot of trouble, Miss Davis," he explained earnestly. "You see, as soon as they start to play their feet get cold. And then they have to stop."

Miss Davis said yes, she could see how that would bother a general.

"But then," she said, "perhaps the girls won't get cold feet while they are in the snowball fight. They will be running about and they will be quite cozy and warm all the time, I am sure."

"Well, let 'em play, if they want to," said Oliver. "I shouldn't think they would want to play when they know nobody wants 'em."

"Then I'll be on your side, Oliver," said Helen Graham, who intended to be in that snowball fight whether any one wanted her or not.

It was snowing steadily by this time and all the children in Miss Davis' rooms were excited about the fight. Recess was over before they had chosen generals and sides, but Miss Davis, who was such a dear teacher it was no wonder her pupils loved her, said that she would allow them an extra ten minutes to make their plans.

“Then you must work ever so hard to cover the lost time,” she told them, slipping out of the room to speak to Miss May, while the boys and girls began to chatter again.

Sunny Boy was made a general for one side, and Oliver took the other. Perry Phelps and Jimmie Butterworth were on Sunny Boy’s side and Jessie Smiley and Dorothy Peters. There were three other boys and two more girls in his army, too. Helen Graham, of course, was on Oliver’s side, and Carleton Marsh and Leslie Bradin. Lottie Carr and her sister were on his side, also, and four other boys. That gave each side ten, you see.

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"I've been speaking to Miss May," announced Miss Davis, coming back to her room when the ten minutes was up. "She thinks, instead of having you children go home at noon and come back for your snowball fight, that it will be better if you have lunch here and then go out to play in the snow. Miss May will telephone every child's mother and ask permission to have you stay here, and she is going to promise that you will all be home by four o'clock. And now I want you to have the best reading lesson we have had since Christmas."

The children liked to have luncheon in Miss May's blue and silver dining-room. She invited them, one at a time, to have lunch with her, and it was always a pleasant experience. And to-day it would be great fun not to have to go home and come back again, but to be able to go right out and begin their snow battle as soon as luncheon was over.

The rest of the morning went smoothly, and Miss Davis said she was glad she had given them the extra recess, for they recited very nicely. When the noon bell rang, it seemed strange instead of going to the cloak room for coats and hats and rubbers, to go upstairs and wash their hands and faces and then come downstairs and go into the dining-room with Miss May and Miss Davis and have Maria bring in their lunch.

"I'd like to have a table like this every noon," said Miss May, smiling at the circle of little faces that went all around her big mahogany table. "We'd both like it, shouldn't we, Miss Davis?"

"I think it would be lovely!" nodded Miss Davis, squeezing Sunny Boy's hand. He sat next to her. "Think of all the questions we could answer, Miss May."

Miss May laughed and said she didn't mind answering questions at all.

As soon as lunch was over, Miss Davis helped them get into their coats and wraps and watched them march out to the back lot for their fun. Jessie Smiley wore a new scarlet sweater that came down to the edge of her dress and was so warm and snug that she said she did not need to wear her coat with it. Miss Davis said she thought she would be warm enough, too, without the coat, and she knew she could run more easily.

"Not that a good soldier runs," she explained, laughing a little as she buttoned the sweater under Jessie's chin. "But a snowball army soldier has to run, I know."

Jessie left her rubbers in the cloakroom, too, for she had her rubber boots. She had worn her rubbers to school that morning. The boots had been left in the cloakroom since the last snowstorm. Jessie wanted to wear one rubber and one boot, but Miss Davis said she thought that two boots would be better, so Jessie had taken her advice.

“Whee, there’s a lot of snow!” cried Sunny Boy, wading out into the middle of the lot, followed by his army. “We ought to get a lot of bullets made. And a fort. We must build a fort.”

Oliver took his army over at one end of the lot and set them to work making snowballs. The boys made more balls than the girls did. But then the girls were so anxious to make theirs smooth and round that they did not work very quickly. Sunny Boy soon noticed that Dorothy Peters scraped and packed and patted one snowball while he was making four.

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Finally General Dunlap shouted to General Sunny Boy and the battle was about to start when something happened that put all thoughts of a snowball fight out of the heads of soldiers and generals alike.

The battlefield, that is the back lot, you know, was directly back of Miss May's school. A large porch ran across the rear of the building and the back yard joined the vacant lot. Just as Sunny Boy waved his hand to signal Oliver that he was ready, Maria came out on the porch of the school.

"Fire!" she shouted. "Fire! The school is on fire!"

If Miss May or Miss Davis had been in the building, it never would have happened. Miss May would have telephoned the fire department quietly at the first sign of smoke and Miss Davis would have picked up the brass fire extinguisher that stood in the hall and at least have tried to put the fire out. But Miss May and Miss Davis had gone down town, believing that the children were safe and happy, playing in the snow, and Maria was alone in the house. When she saw smoke creeping out around the door of Miss Davis' schoolroom, Maria lost her head entirely.

"Fire!" she screamed, rushing out on the porch and beckoning to the children. "The school's on fire!"

But when they came rushing toward her, pellmell, she seemed to remember what she ought to do.

[Illustration: They came rushing toward her, pellmell.]

"You can't come in," she told them, as they gathered at the bottom of the porch steps. "You can't come in, because you'll get burned! The school is on fire."

She opened the door behind her and, sure enough, out poured smoke.

"My coat!" wailed Jessie Smiley. "My lovely new coat. Santa Claus brought it to me for Christmas and it has real beaver fur on the collar! Oh, oh, I don't want my coat burned up! And my rubbers are brand new, too."

"I'll get them for you," promised Sunny Boy. "Don't cry, Jessie. I know where they are in the cloakroom."

"Will you get my rubbers, too?" asked Jessie, smiling through her tears.

"Yes, I'll get everything," said Sunny Boy.

"You can't go in there, it's on fire!" screamed Maria, when he ran up the steps. "Sunny Boy, I tell you the school is burning up! Come back here!"

But Sunny Boy opened the door and ran in past her. He knew that Jessie Smiley was very proud of her new winter coat with its pretty beaver collar.

The house was full of smoke, and it made Sunny Boy choke and gasp, but he shut his eyes and felt his way to Miss Davis' room. The smoke was worse in here than in the hall, and his eyes smarted and burned as he crept slowly to the cloakroom. In there there was not so much smoke, and he had no trouble at all in pulling Jessie's coat down from the hook where it hung, and he found her rubbers on the floor. He stuffed one in each pocket. Then he started back.

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His eyes hurt so badly that, brave little boy as he was, he began to cry.

"I can't breathe!" he sobbed. "I wish I had a drink of water."

"George!" suddenly shouted a big voice in his ear. "Say, George, here he is! I've found him!"

Somebody grabbed Sunny Boy up in strong, rough arms and he was carried swiftly through the halls and out to the porch again. The children shouted when they saw him.

"Don't you know any better than to go into a house that is on fire?" said a big, rough voice that seemed to belong to the big arms.

Sunny Boy opened his eyes. It was the tall policeman! And before he could speak, with a clang and a whistle and a toot and a great deal of noise and excitement, up came the fire engines to put the fire out.

The tall policeman dipped a clean white handkerchief in water and bathed Sunny Boy's eyes while another policeman kept the children off the porch. The other policeman was the "George" to whom Sunny Boy's policeman friend had shouted. They had heard Maria screaming and had run through the alley to see what the matter was. And then George had sent in the alarm of fire while the tall policeman had come to look for Sunny Boy.

"What possessed you to go in there, anyway?" asked the tall policeman, paying no attention to the firemen running past him into the house. "What made you do it?"

"I had to get Jessie's coat," explained Sunny Boy. "And her rubbers."

CHAPTER XIV

THE EXPLORERS SET OUT

And that was what Sunny Boy said to every one who asked him why he had gone into the burning school.

"I had to get Jessie's coat and rubbers," he repeated, when the "George" policeman asked him.

And the big firemen, who soon crowded around him, and Miss May and Miss Davis, who came hurrying home, breathless, for they had seen the crowd around the school the moment they stepped off the trolley car at the corner, were given the same reason.

“Well, next time, you remember that no coat and no rubbers are worth going after when a place is on fire,” said one of the firemen, fanning himself with his helmet, for fighting a fire is warm work, you know. “There is just one thing to risk your life for at a fire,” he went on to explain to Sunny Boy and to the other children who crowded around to hear. “Just one thing, and that’s another life. Think you youngsters can remember that?”

Sunny Boy was sure he could, and the firemen began to roll up their chemical hose. They had not even unwound the big hose for, you see, Miss May’s school had not been on fire.

“Not on fire!” cried Maria, when the tall policeman told her this. “Why, I saw the smoke, and Sunny Boy was almost choked with it. Of course it was on fire!”

“No fire, Miss,” said one of the firemen, grinning. “Snow’s been accumulating on the edge of the chimney for some time, I take it, and this afternoon a chunk fell in and choked the flue. Of course the smoke poured out into the house. And the little fellow thought he was going straight into a blaze. He’s a spunky little chap, and it was a good chance to tell him, and the other kids, what not to do at a fire. Next time it might be a serious matter.”

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The firemen went away, their engines and apparatus making as much noise as when they had been coming to the fire, and by and by the curious crowd that had gathered in the street went away, too. The tall policeman and his friend George helped Miss May and Miss Davis and Maria to put down the windows which had been left up by the firemen to let the smoke out, and then they went away.

"Sunny Boy, are you quite positive you feel all right?" asked Miss May anxiously. "Do your eyes hurt you now? Don't you want me to walk home with you?"

Sunny Boy said no, thank you, he felt all right and he didn't need her to walk home with him.

Daddy Horton was home when Sunny Boy came in, for he had left his office early. So he and Mother heard all about the fire before dinner, and though Mother hugged him tightly and declared that he smelled of smoke, she said she was glad her little boy had not been afraid.

"But the fireman was right," said Daddy Horton gravely. "Coats and rubbers are not important enough, Sunny Boy, even if they were trimmed with gold fur, to risk one's life for. I hope there'll be no more fires till you are grown up and able to judge for yourself. But if there should be, remember what the fireman said. That will keep you from dashing into a blaze after foolish trifles."

Sunny Boy knew he would not forget, and then he went out into the kitchen and told Harriet about the afternoon's excitement.

"And we never had the snowball fight at all," he said. "All the bullets were made, too. Perhaps we can have it to-morrow."

But the next morning was rainy, and though there was plenty of cold weather through February which followed, not once did it snow again. There was not even much good skating, though Sunny Boy did enjoy one afternoon with Bob Parkney, who declared that he would soon be a champion skater with his new skates to help him. After that, though, it thawed and froze and thawed and froze and the Centronia Park Commission refused to allow any one on the ice. The children were disappointed in the weather, but Miss May said she was glad to see it rain. She had had enough snow, she said, till another year.

Bob stopped in once a week after school at the Hortons, to get the egg container. He brought Mrs. Horton two dozen fresh eggs every Monday morning from his mother's poultry yard, and Friday afternoon he came for the box. Mrs. Parkney was so busy and happy now that she had almost forgotten she had ever been discouraged. Judge Layton had put the farmhouse in good order for her family, and he had stocked the poultry yard with fine chickens. He said that if Mrs. Parkney would feed the chickens

and look after them till he came out in the summer, she might have the eggs to do with as she pleased. The Parkney children had all the fresh eggs to eat they wanted and there were several dozen to sell every week, and Mrs. Parkney said she felt rich with the egg money for her own.

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Mr. Parkney's arm gradually grew stronger, and he was proving such a handy man on the little farm, so willing and so capable, that Judge Layton told Mrs. Horton that he was thinking of building a new house and asking Mr. Parkney to go on living in the farmhouse and to be his farm manager.

"He's going to paint the house and the barns for me this spring and whitewash all the fences," said the judge. "There isn't anything that man can't do."

"Spring is on the way," announced Daddy Horton, one evening early in March. "I see they are having freshets out in Yardley county."

"What is a freshet?" asked Sunny Boy.

"A freshet, Son, is when a stream rises suddenly and overflows its natural course," explained his daddy. "In spring, freshets are often caused by the ice and snow melting too rapidly and draining down into the brooks and rivers. Then the stream rises, and if the banks are narrow, it overflows [Transcriber's note: overflows?] them and sometimes great damage is done. A big river may sweep away houses and cattle and send people scurrying about in boats and rafts. Centronia is not near a river, though, so it isn't likely that you'll see a freshet soon."

The news of the freshets was not the only sign of spring. At school, Miss Davis had a large blue jar filled with beautiful pussy willows on her desk, and the nature study lessons were all about the spring birds. When Bob Parkney brought Mrs. Horton her fresh eggs, he also brought her some budded twigs which he said would blossom if she put them in water.

"My, it's nice out in the country now," said Bob. "Why can't Sunny Boy come out and see us, Mrs. Horton? Ma was saying yesterday she'd like to have him come any time. He's never really seen the place, and Judge Layton is fixing it up fine. Can't he come next Saturday? I'd meet him at the trolley station."

"I'll tell you, Bob, what Sunny Boy has been teasing to be allowed to do," replied Mrs. Horton. "He and half a dozen of the boys he plays with want to take their lunches and spend a day exploring. Mr. Horton and I have suggested that they wait till it is warmer, but I am afraid they can't wait contentedly much longer, and your suggestion has really solved the problem for me."

"Oh, Mother!" cried Sunny Boy, who had been listening eagerly. "Next Saturday, Mother? Please!"

Mrs. Horton laughed as she put her twigs in a vase of water.

"You see how it is, don't you, Bob?" she said. "Well, Mr. Horton and I are not willing to have Sunny Boy go to a strange place. But if your mother is willing to let them come out

where you are, they can play around and have a beautiful time. They'll bring their own lunches, and she musn't let them track mud on her clean kitchen floor. Indeed, they'll be too busy with all outdoors, to think much about coming in the house, I suppose. But you and your father will be there, to keep an eye on them, and I shall feel so much easier. Some one will put them on the trolley car here in the morning, and if you will meet them at the corner of your lane and see that they are put on the half past four car in the afternoon, every mother will be much obliged to you."

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Bob grinned and said he would “tell Ma,” and the next morning he stopped on his way to school to say that the Parkneys would be expecting Sunny Boy and his friends the next Saturday morning.

“And tell them to wear their rubber boots, Mrs. Horton,” he said earnestly. “Such mud you never saw! Ma keeps a broom at the back door, and she won’t let us come in till we change our shoes. She hands us out clean ones. But of course it is always soft when the frost is coming out of the ground.”

Sunny Boy could hardly wait till Saturday. He and Oliver Dunlap were the ones who had teased to be allowed to go on an “exploring” trip in the country. At first they had planned to go together, without any one else, but as soon as the other boys heard of the scheme, they wanted to go, too. Nelson Baker heard about the plan, and he asked if he could go. Nelson did not see much of Sunny Boy on school days because, of course, he went to the public school and did not get home till three o’clock in the afternoon. But he and Sunny Boy were good friends, and Sunny was glad to have him go exploring with the rest.

“Bring me some pussy willows, if you find them,” said Miss Davis, when she heard what they were planning to do. “Miss May wants some pussy willows to root in water and then she will plant them in the yard and perhaps they will grow.” Sunny Boy promised to bring back pussy willows, if they found any.

Friday came at last, and that meant he could leave his rubber boots beside his bed where he could see them the first thing in the morning. Somehow, Sunny Boy never felt that he was going on a long trip till he saw the big trunk standing in the hall, waiting to be packed, and he never felt that he was going on a little trip till he could put the things he was to wear in neat piles ready to hop into.

“So you’re going exploring to-day, are you?” said Daddy Horton, when he kissed him good-bye the next morning. “Well, good luck to you, old man. I hope you have an exciting adventure. And don’t lose either of your handsome boots!”

Sunny Boy laughed and went out on the front steps to wave to Daddy.

“It feels so nice,” he said to his mother, when she came to tell him that Mrs. Dunlap had telephoned that Oliver was going to call for Sunny Boy. “I like spring, don’t you, Mother?”

“I love the spring, precious,” she answered, smiling. “Now come and get your cap and the lunch Harriet has packed for you. I believe Mr. Nelson is going to walk out to the car with you. Where are you going to meet the other boys?”

“At the corner,” replied Sunny Boy, snatching up his cap and struggling into his sweater as he heard Oliver’s whistle. “Thank you for making me the lunch, Harriet,” he cried, running toward the door. “Good-bye, Mother,” he said, running back to kiss her.

Oliver and Nelson and Mr. Baker were waiting for him on the sidewalk, and when they reached the corner where the interurban trolley car stopped to take on passengers, they found Perry Phelps and Jimmie Butterworth and Leslie Bradin and Carleton Marsh, each with a box of lunch under his arm.

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“Going to Europe?” said the conductor, as he watched them climb into his car. “Let them off at Lane’s Corners,” he repeated, as Mr. Baker told him how far the boys were going. “All right, sir. Lane’s Corners it is. All aboard.”

He pulled the bell and the car started. The seven little boys found seats together at one end of the car, and the conductor made them laugh all the way to Lane’s Corners. There were only two other people in the car, an elderly man and a man who read his newspapers and did not look up. The conductor pretended half the time that the trolley was a boat and that the boys were sailors. And then he would pretend that he was the conductor on a train and that the motorman was the engineer. It was not a long ride to Lane’s Corners and the merry conductor made it seem only a few minutes.

“Who wanted to get off at Lane’s Corners?” he called, when he had stopped the car at the big white sign post. “Why, goodness, all my passengers are leaving me! Here, lad, catch this,” he shouted to Bob, picking up Sunny Boy and pretending to toss him to Bob, who was waiting for them.

“It’s a good thing you wore boots and rubbers,” said Bob, as the trolley car went on, leaving the boys, who waved to the conductor as long as they could see him on the platform. “The mud is up to the hub of the wagon wheels.”

CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER RESCUE

A horse and wagon stood at one side of the road, and Bob led the boys over and told them to “hop in.”

“Isn’t this the horse and wagon that was lost in the blizzard?” asked Sunny Boy, scrambling up to a seat beside Bob. Indeed all the boys tried to get near Bob, and when he turned the horse’s head toward the farmhouse, there were boys on every side of him.

“Same horse, same wagon,” said Bob. “Only difference is the weather. Feel how warm that sun is?”

“Where we going?” asked Carleton Marsh.

“Down to the house, first, to pick up Father,” replied Bob. “He is going to tinker up and whitewash some of the fences this morning. And Ma said she wanted to say ‘hello’ to you all. I thought you’d like to play down along the brook, and I can drive you there, because Father wants to work on the pasture fence.”

Mrs. Parkney came out, followed by the Parkney children, when she heard Bob driving up to the farmhouse door. The road was so soft and muddy that she couldn't hear the horse's feet or the wagon wheels, but she could hear eight boys talking and laughing. That made a noise that could be heard some distance away.

"Now mind," said Mrs. Parkney, when she had spoken to the boys and her husband had come out with his tools and two buckets of whitewash and climbed into the wagon with them. "Mind! If you eat your lunch up before noon, or get hungry any time, you come up to the house and I'll fix you something good. And stop in anyway before you go home and have some milk to drink. Mud, Sunny Boy? Why, bless your heart, dear, a little mud is nothing. I wouldn't know spring had come to stay if I didn't see some mud tracked in."

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The boys thanked Mrs. Parkney, and Bob drove off. When he came to the pasture, he got out and took down three bars and then drove in across the grass, down to the brook.

"Why, it's almost like a river!" cried Perry Phelps in surprise. "Look how fast it goes!"

"Ice melting up above," said Mr. Parkney, getting out his tools while Bob tied the horse to a tree. "See the chunks of ice floating past?"

As the boys watched they saw pieces of dirty-looking ice go swirling past in the rushing water.

"Is it a freshet?" asked Sunny Boy, remembering what his daddy had told him about freshets.

"Not exactly," answered Mr. Parkney. "The water's pretty high, but I don't believe this little stream can do much in the way of a freshet. Folks around here say it carries on right powerful-like some springs, but it doesn't look dangerous to me."

The pasture land was soft and oozy, but as every boy wore either rubber boots or storm rubbers, they did not mind the mud. Perry Phelps said if they were going to explore, he thought it would be a good plan to follow the brook and see where it went.

"Go as far as you like," said Mr. Parkney. "Bob and I are going up to the house at noon for dinner, but we'll be back around half-past one. And we won't let you miss the half-past four car, because your mothers will be expecting you home on that. Go as far as you like; you won't be trespassing. The few folks that live around here are good-natured, and the next farm is vacant, anyway."

"But don't try any funny stunts, like wading in the brook," said Bob. "That water has more current than you'd expect, and it might knock you down easily. And it isn't warm enough yet to make a cold bath pleasant."

Sunny Boy had been thinking that it would be fun to wade into the brook and see how near the water came to the top of his rubber boots. But he didn't want to be knocked down and perhaps hit with a piece of the ice, so he wisely decided to follow Bob's advice and stay on shore.

The boys walked beside the brook, following its twists and turnings and climbing the fences that stood in their way, till they came to a large clump of willow trees, loaded down with pussy willows.

"Let's pick them for Miss Davis," suggested Sunny Boy.

"But then we'll have to carry them all day," said Perry.

“No we won’t. We can take them back and leave them in the wagon,” said Sunny Boy. “And then we’ll eat lunch and walk the other way. I don’t think there is much fun around here.”

Nelson Baker had a pocket knife, so he cut the pussy willows and the boys carried a large bunch back to the tree where Bob had tied the horse and wagon. But the horse was gone, and, of course, the wagon, when they reached the tree, and neither Bob or Mr. Parkney was in sight.

“They’ve gone home to eat their dinner,” said Sunny Boy. “Let’s leave the pussy willows under this tree. Mr. Parkney said he would be back by half-past one, you know.”

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"I'm starving," declared Leslie Bradin. "Come on, let's eat now. My mother put two stuffed eggs in my box."

Seven very hungry small boys may dispose of seven hearty lunches in almost seven minutes. It did take Sunny Boy and his friends a little longer, but in much less than half an hour they were through eating and had tossed the boxes into the brook and seen them rushed swiftly down stream.

"What's on the other side of that fence?" asked Oliver Dunlap, pointing to a wire fence that ran across the pasture, dipped into the brook, and continued on the other side.

"Mr. Parkney said nobody lives there," Sunny Boy reminded Oliver. "Let's explore where nobody lives. Come on, fellows!"

They ran toward the fence, intending to climb over it, but before they reached it, Sunny Boy saw something that made him cry out in surprise.

"Look, Oliver!" he shouted. "Carleton, look! See the fence in the water!"

The boys looked toward the brook. Part of the fence that was in the water had broken and hung wobbling. But what had attracted Sunny Boy's attention was a pile of ice cakes that were jammed against the fence. They were a yellowish-white, not at all like the ice cakes the iceman left in the refrigerator on summer mornings.

"It'll break in a minute," declared Nelson Baker. "Let's watch."

The boys stood waiting a few moments, and with a dull roar, the ice was forced through the fence, carrying a part of it along, and the water, as though angry at being held back, raced madly by, tossing cakes of ice on either bank. A large piece was tossed right on the toe of Sunny Boy's boot.

"There must be more ice where that came from," said Nelson. "Maybe we can find the beginning of the brook. Hurry up! Let's try to find it."

They could not run, or even walk very fast, because at every step they sank into the soft ground. But, after they had climbed the fence, they came to a little graveled walk that was drier.

"Bet you I can throw a stone farther than any of you," said Carleton Marsh.

"Bet you can't!" retorted Perry Phelps.

Then every one had to toss a stone into the brook. The water went so fast it was hard to tell whose stone went farthest, for none landed across the brook. Still, in a way this was satisfactory, for each boy was sure that his stone had won.

“Well, come on, if you’re going to explore,” said Nelson Baker. “What are you staring at, Sunny Boy?”

“Ice,” said Sunny Boy, pointing up the stream. “Isn’t that ice all over everything?”

The boys looked. A little distance away the ground seemed to be covered with cakes of ice.

“Hurry up!” shouted Perry. “It’s an ice field. We can have heaps of fun playing.”

The others hurried after Perry, and when they came to the field where the ice was they found that the brook was almost a river at this point. It had cut a wide, new gash in the bank and had overflowed, leaving mud and water and ice in great quantities and cutting the trunks of little trees that stood in the way. The boys scrambled up on the ice and pretended that they were at the North Pole.

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"I'll be the savage Eskimo and chase you white men," said Carleton.

"Are Eskimos savage?" asked Sunny Boy doubtfully. "They don't look savage in the geography book. They look fat."

"Of course they are savage," said Carleton. "Anybody who lives at the North Pole is savage. Now when I chase you, you have to jump."

Carleton made an awful face, such as he thought a savage Eskimo would make, and ran directly toward Sunny Boy, who jumped from his cake of ice to the ground. But instead of landing on the ground, he landed in water! Ice-cold water and up to his knees! And at that moment the ice on which Carleton stood began to rock.

"The brook!" gasped Sunny Boy. "It's running over again! It's inside my rubber boots!"

The boys jumped from the ice cakes on which they stood, and those who had only rubbers on were wet at once to the knees.

"We'll be drowned!" cried Perry Phelps.

Sunny Boy saw a barn in the next field, and he thought if they could only reach that they would be safe.

"We'll all take hold of hands," he said quickly. "And don't anybody let go. There's a barn up there, and we can go and stay in that. Bob will come and find us, I know he will."

The water kept rising higher and higher, and it was hard work to walk against the current. Once Sunny Boy stumbled and fell, and once Carleton lost his balance; but the others pulled them up again. When they reached the barn they found it was an old building, built very close to the brook and quite empty.

"It must have been the hay barn," said Sunny Boy, who remembered what he had learned when he visited Grandpa Horton's farm. "Sometimes hay barns are built out in the fields so it won't be so far to haul the hay. I wonder how far off the house is?"

The house had burned down years ago, but Sunny Boy did not know that. The boys were only too thankful to have a dry floor to stand on, and they huddled in one corner out of the keen March wind that blew in through the windows, for every pane of glass in the barn was broken. Every few minutes they could hear the crash of a chunk of ice against the building, and once or twice Sunny Boy thought he felt something move. The third time he saw Jimmie Butterworth looking at him.

"The barn *is* moving!" said Sunny Boy loud.

And it was. The force of the water and the ice, driving against the poor worn out foundations, had loosened them, and the old barn was actually sailing. The boys ran to the door. All around them was water, water and ice. The barn began to rock and to lean to one side a little.

"It will tip over!" cried Carleton. "We'll be drowned."

"If we shout, some one will hear us and come and get us," suggested Sunny Boy. "We'll have to yell!"

And yell they did, shouting with all the strength and power of their lungs. They had almost given up hope of making any one hear when suddenly there came an answering shout and down in one corner of the field they saw something moving.

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"It's Bob and the horse and wagon!" cried Sunny Boy. "Now we'll be all right."

"Well, you do manage to get yourselves into a pickle every time, don't you?" was Bob's greeting when he drove up. "Father sent me down to finish the fence alone and bring you up, and I couldn't imagine where you could be. Hurry up, kids, because I don't like the looks of this water. It will be coming in the wagon if it gets much higher."

Bob helped them all in and then drove slowly to the Parkney house. The horse had hard work to keep his footing in the water and ice, and he kept shaking his head as though he did not like it. But they reached the house safely, and Mrs. Parkney gave the boys milk to drink and clean dry stockings to wear as though she were used to any emergency, as indeed she was.

"I guess you've had enough exploring for one day," said Bob, as he drove the boys out to the head of the lane to get the half-past four o'clock trolley car. "If it's dull out here this summer, I mean to send for you, Sunny Boy, because excitement seems to follow you around."

The same merry conductor was on the four-thirty trolley car, and he was much interested to hear about the day's experiences. So were the mothers and fathers when the boys reached home.

The next morning Daddy Horton telephoned Mr. Parkney to ask him if the brook had done any damage over night. Mr. Parkney said that the old barn had been carried down past their farm and was completely wrecked.

"I'm glad we didn't stay in it," said Sunny Boy cheerfully. "It must have been a freshet, Daddy. Don't you think it was?"

It was a freshet, of course, and Daddy Horton said so.

After that Saturday the weather grew warmer and warmer, and Sunny Boy began to think of summer. What he did when school closed and what happened to him, we'll have to tell you in another book, to be called "*Sunny boy and his games*."

THE END