

FICTION

Laura Lee Hope

Six Little Bunkers at Grandpa Fords



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FICTION

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SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT GRANDPA FORD'S

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

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

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"WE GOT HIM UP, BUT WE CAN'T GET HIM
DOWN," CRIED LADDIE.

Six Little Bunkers at Grandpa Ford's. Frontispiece--([Page 45](#))

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By **LAURA LEE HOPE**

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Six Little Bunkers at Grandpa Ford's

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MAN ON THE PORCH	1
II. GRANDPA FORD	13
III. SOMETHING QUEER	23
IV. RUSS MAKES A BALLOON	31
V. THE BIG BANG NOISE	44
VI. OFF TO GREAT HEDGE	54
VII. MUN BUN TAKES SOMETHING	63
VIII. A BIG STORM	73
IX. AT TARRINGTON	85
X. GREAT HEDGE AT LAST	95
XI. THE NIGHT NOISE	105
XII. UP IN THE ATTIC	113
XIII. THE OLD SPINNING WHEEL	125
XIV. COASTING FUN	137
XV. JINGLING BELLS	145
XVI. THANKSGIVING FUN	153
XVII. RUSS MAKES SNOWSHOES	163
XVIII. ON SKATES	172
XIX. THE ICE BOAT	182
XX. ANOTHER NIGHT SCARE	192
XXI. MR. WHITE	200
XXII. AN UPSET	208
XXIII. IN THE CABIN	219
XXIV. CHRISTMAS JOYS	227
XXV. THE GHOST AT LAST	237

SIX LITTLE BUNKERS

AT GRANDPA FORD'S

CHAPTER I

THE MAN ON THE PORCH

"Oh, Daddy, come and take him off! He's a terrible big one, and he's winkin' one of his claws at me! Come and take him off!"

"All right, Mun Bun. I'll be there in just a second. Hold him under water so he won't let go, and I'll get him for you."

Daddy Bunker, who had been reading the paper on the porch of Cousin Tom's bungalow at Seaview, hurried down to the little pier that was built out into Clam River. On the end of the pier stood a little boy, who was called Mun Bun, but whose real name was Munroe Ford Bunker. However, he was almost always called Mun Bun.

"Come quick, Daddy, or he'll get away!" cried Mun Bun, and he leaned a little way over the edge of the pier to look at something which was on the end of a line he held. The something was down under water.

"Be careful, Mun Bun! Don't fall in!" cried his father, who, having caught up a long-handled net, was now running down a little hill to the pier. "Be careful!" he repeated.

"I will," answered the little boy, shaking his golden hair out of his blue eyes, as he tried to get a better view of what he had caught. "Oh, but he's a big one, and he winks his claws at me!"

"Well, as long as the crab doesn't pinch you you'll be all right," said Daddy Bunker.

There! I meant to tell you before that Mun Bun was catching crabs, and not fish, as you might have supposed at first. He had a long string, with a piece of meat on the end, and he had been dangling this in the water of Clam River, from Cousin Tom's boat pier.

Then a big crab had come along and, catching hold of the chunk of meat in one claw, had tried to swim away with it to eat it in some hole on the bottom of the inlet.

But the string, to which the meat was tied, did not let him. Mun Bun held on to the string and as he slowly pulled it up he caught sight of the crab. As the little fellow had said, it was a big one, and one of the claws was "winkin'" at him. By that Mun Bun meant the crab was opening and closing his claw as one opens and closes an eye.

"Hold him under water, Mun Bun, or he'll let go and drop off," called Daddy Bunker.

"I will," answered the golden-haired boy, and he leaned still farther over the edge of the pier to make sure the crab was still holding to the piece of meat.

"Be careful, Mun Bun!" shouted his father. "Be careful! Oh, there you go!"

And there Mun Bun did go! Right off the pier he fell with a big splash into Clam River. Under the water he went, but he soon came up again, and, having held his breath, as his father had taught him to do whenever his head went under water, Mun Bun, after a gasp or two, was able to cry:

"Oh, Daddy, Daddy, don't let him get me! Don't let the crab pinch me!"

Daddy Bunker did not answer for a moment. He was too busy to talk, for he dropped the long-handled crab net, ran down to the pier and, jumping off himself, grabbed Mun Bun.

Luckily the water was not deep--hardly over Mun Bun's head--and his father soon lifted the little fellow up out of danger.

"There!" cried Daddy Bunker, laughing to show Mun Bun that there was no more danger. "Now the crab can't get you!"

Mun Bun looked around to make sure, and then, seeing that he was sitting on the pier, where his father had placed him, he looked around again.

"Did you--did you get the crab?" he asked, his voice was a little choky.

"No, indeed I didn't!" laughed Mr. Bunker. "I was only trying to get you. I told you to be careful and not lean too far over."

"Well, I--I wanted to see my crab!"

"And the crab came near getting you. Well, it can't be helped now. You are soaking wet. I'll take you up to the bungalow and your mother can put dry clothes on you. Come along."

"But I want to get my crab, Daddy!"

"Oh, he's gone, Mun Bun. No crab *would* stay near the pier after all the splashing I made when I jumped in to get you out."

"Maybe he's on my string yet," insisted the little fellow. "I tied my string to the pier. Please, Daddy, pull it up and see if it has a crab on it."

"Well, I will," said Mun Bun's father, as he jumped up on the pier from the water, after having lifted out his little boy. "I'll pull up the string, but I'm sure the crab has swum back into the ocean."

Both Mun Bun and his father were soaking wet, but as it was a hot day in October they did not mind. Mr. Bunker slowly pulled on the string, the end of which, as Mun Bun had said, was tied to a post on the pier. Slowly Mr. Bunker pulled in, not to scare away the crab, if there was one, and a moment later he cried:

"Oh, there is a big one, Mun Bun! It didn't go away with all the splashing! Run and get me the net and I'll catch it for you!"

Mun Bun ran up on shore and came back with the long-handled net Mr. Bunker had dropped. Then, holding the string, with the chunk of meat on it, in one hand, the meat being just under water, Mun Bun's father carefully dipped the net into the water and thrust it under the bait and the crab.

A moment later he quickly lifted the net, and in it was a great, big crab--one of the largest Mr. Bunker had ever seen, and there were some big ones in Clam River.

"Oh, you got him, didn't you!" cried Mun Bun, capering about. "You caught my terrible crab, didn't you, Daddy?"

"Well, I rather guess we did, Mun Bun!" exclaimed Mr. Bunker. "He is a big one, too."

Mr. Bunker turned the net over a peach basket, and the crab, slashing and snapping his claws, dropped into it. Then Mun Bun looked down at him.

"I got you, I did!" said the little boy. "My daddy and I got you, we did."

"But it took a lot of work, Mun Bun!" laughed Mr. Bunker. "If I had to jump in and pull you out every time you wanted to catch a crab I wouldn't like it. But he surely is a big one."

Mun Bun and his father were looking at the crab in the peach basket, when a voice called:

"Oh, what has happened to you? You are all wet!"

Mun Bun's mother came down to the pier.

"What happened?" she repeated.

"Look at the big crab I caught!" cried the little fellow. "Daddy pulled him out for me."

"Yes, and it looks as if Daddy had pulled out something more than a crab," said Mrs. Bunker. "Did you fall in, Mun Bun?"

"No, I didn't zactly fall in. I--I just slipped."

"Oh," said Mrs. Bunker. "I thought maybe you'd say the crab pulled you in."

"Well, he pretty nearly did," said the little fellow.

"He leaned too far over the water," explained Mr. Bunker to his wife. "But I soon got him out. He's all right."

"Yes, but I'll have to change his clothes. However, it isn't the first time. I'm getting used to it."

Well might Mrs. Bunker say that, for, since coming to Cousin Tom's bungalow at Seaview one or more of the children had gotten wet nearly every day, not always from falling off the pier, but from wading, from going too near the high waves at the beach, or from playing in the boats.

"Oh, look at Mun Bun!" cried another voice, as a little girl ran down the slope from the bungalow to the pier. "He's all wet!"

"Did he fall in?" asked another little boy excitedly.

"Oh, look at the big crab!" exclaimed a girl, who, though older than Mun Bun, had the same light hair and blue eyes.

"Did you catch him, Mun Bun?" asked a boy, who seemed older than any of the six children now gathered on the pier. "Did you catch him?"

"Daddy helped me," answered Mun Bun. "And I fell in, I did!"

"That's easy to see!" laughed his mother. "Oh, did the mail come?" she asked, for she saw that the oldest boy had some letters in his hand.

"Yes, Mother," was the answer. "Oh, look at the crab trying to get out!" and with a stick Russ, the oldest of the six little Bunkers, thrust the creature back into the basket.

There were six of the Bunker children. I might have told you that at the start, but I was so excited about Mun Bun falling off the pier that I forgot about it. Anyhow now you have time to count them.

There was Russ, aged eight years; Rose, a year younger; and then came Laddie and Violet, who was called Vi for short.

Laddie and Vi were twins. They were six years old and both had curly hair and gray eyes.

You could tell them apart, even if they were twins, for one was a girl and the other was a boy. But there was another way, for Vi was always asking questions and Laddie was very fond of making up queer little riddles. So in case you forget who is which, that will help you to know.

Then came Margy, or Margaret, who was five years old. She had dark hair and eyes, and next to her was the one I have already told you about--Mun Bun. He was four years old.

While the six little Bunkers were gathered around the basket, in which the big crab Mun Bun had caught was crawling about, Daddy Bunker and his wife were reading the letters Russ had handed them.

"Then we'll have to go back home at once," Mrs. Bunker said.

"Yes, I think so," agreed her husband. "We were going at the end of the week, anyhow, but, since getting this letter, I think we had better start at once, or by to-morrow, anyhow."

"Oh, are we going home?" cried Rose.

"Yes, dear. Daddy thinks we had better. He just had a letter--- Be careful, Mun Bun! Do you want to fall in again?" she cried, for the little fellow, still wet from his first bath, had nearly slipped off the edge of the pier once more, as he jumped back when the big crab again climbed to the top of the peach basket.

"Come! I must take you up to the house and get dry clothes on you," said Mun Bun's mother to him. "Then we must begin to pack and get ready to go home. Our visit to Cousin Tom is at an end."

"Oh, dear!" cried the six little Bunkers.

But children, especially as young as they were, are seldom unhappy for very long over anything.

"We can have a lot of fun at home," said Russ to Rose.

"Oh, yes, so we can. It won't be like the seashore, but we can have fun!"

There was much excitement in Cousin Tom's bungalow at Seaview the next day, for the Bunkers were packing to go back to their home in Pineville, Pennsylvania.

"We are very sorry to see you go," said Cousin Tom.

"Indeed we are," agreed his pretty wife, Ruth. "You must come to see us next summer."

"We will," promised Mr. Bunker. "But just now we must hurry back home. I hope we shall be in time."

Russ and Rose, who heard this, wondered at the reason for it. But they did not have time to ask for, just then, along came the automobile that was to take them from Cousin Tom's house to the railroad station.

Good-byes were said, there was much laughter and shouting; and finally the six little Bunkers and their father and mother were on their way home.

It was a long trip, but finally they reached Pineville and took a carriage from the depot to their house.

"How funny everything looks!" exclaimed Russ, for they had been away from home visiting around, for some time.

"Yes, it does look funny," agreed Rose. "Oh, I see our house!" she called, pointing down the street. "There's our house!"

"Yes," answered Russ. "And oh, look! Daddy! Mother! There's a man on our porch! There's a man asleep on our porch!"

The six little Bunkers, and Daddy and Mother Bunker looked. There was, indeed, an elderly man asleep in a rocking-chair on the porch.

Who could he be?

CHAPTER II

GRANDPA FORD

Eagerly peering from the carriage in which they had ridden from the Pineville station, the six little Bunkers looked to see who the man was on their porch. He seemed to be asleep, for he sat very still in the rocking-chair, which had been forgotten and left on the porch when the family had gone away.

"Do you know him, Daddy?" asked Rose.

"Maybe he is from your office," said Laddie.

"Maybe he's the old tramp lumberman that had your papers in the old coat, Daddy," suggested Russ.

Mr. Bunker hurried down from the carriage, and walked up the steps.

As he did so the old man on the porch woke suddenly from his nap. He sat up, looked at the Bunker family, now crowding up on the steps, and a kind smile spread over his face.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "I got here ahead of you, I see!"

"Why, Father!" cried Mr. Bunker.

"Oh, it's Grandpa Ford!" exclaimed Rose.

"Grandpa Ford!" fairly shouted Russ, dropping the valise he was carrying, and hurrying to be clasped in the old gentleman's arms.

"Grandpa Ford!" cried Laddie and Vi together, just as twins often do.

"Yes, I'm Grandpa Ford!" said the old gentleman, smiling and kissing the children one after the other. "You didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"Hardly so soon," said Mrs. Bunker. "But we are glad! Have you been here long?"

"No, not very. I came on a day sooner than I expected, and as I knew from your letters that you would be home to-day, I came here to wait for you."

"I'll get the house open right away and make you a cup of tea," said Mrs. Bunker. "You must be tired."

"Oh, no, not very. I had a nice little nap in the chair on your shady porch. Well, how are you all?"

"Fine," answered Mr. Bunker. "You look well, Father!"

"I am well."

"Do you know any riddles?" asked Laddie.

"Do I know any riddles, little man? Well, I don't know. I might think of one."

"I know one," went on Laddie, not stopping to hear what his grandfather might say. "It's about which would you rather be, a door or a window?"

"Which would I rather be, a door or a window?" asked Grandpa Ford with a laugh. "Well, I don't know that there is much difference, Laddie."

"Oh, yes, there is!" exclaimed the little fellow. "I'd rather be a door, 'cause a window always has a pane in it! Ha! Ha!"

"Well, that's pretty good," said Grandpa Ford with a smile. "I see you haven't forgotten your riddles, Laddie."

"Now you ask me one," said the little boy. "I like to guess riddles."

"Wait until Grandpa has had a cup of tea," said Mrs. Bunker, who had opened the front door that had been locked so long. "And then you can tell us, Father," she went on, "why you had to come away from Great Hedge. Is it something important?"

"Well, it's something queer," said Grandpa Ford. "But I'll tell you about it after a while."

And while the Bunker home is being opened, after having been closed for a long vacation, I will explain to my new readers who the children are, and something about the other books in this series.

First, however, I'll tell you why Daddy Bunker called Grandpa Ford "Father." You see Daddy Bunker's real father had died many years before, and this was his stepfather. Mr. Bunker's mother had married a gentleman named Munroe Ford.

So, of course, after that her name was Mrs. Ford, though Daddy Bunker kept his own name and called his step-parent "Father."

Grandpa Ford was as kind as any real father could be; and he also loved the six little Bunkers as much as if he had been their real grandfather, which they really thought him to be.

Now to go back to the beginning. There were six little Bunkers, as I have told you, Russ, Rose, Laddie, Vi, Margy, and Mun Bun. I have told you their ages and how they looked.

They lived in the town of Pineville on Rainbow River, and Daddy Bunker's real estate office was about a mile from his home. Besides the family of the six little Bunkers and their father and mother, there was Norah O'Grady, the cook, and there was also Jerry Simms, the man who cut the grass, cleaned the automobile, and sprinkled the lawn in summer and took ashes out of the furnace in winter.

The first book of this series is called "Six Little Bunkers at Grandma Bell's." In that I told of the visit of the children to Lake Sagatook, in Maine, where Mrs. Bunker's mother, Grandma Bell, lived. There the whole family had fine times, and they also solved a real mystery.

After that the children were taken to visit another relative, and in the second book, "Six Little Bunkers at Aunt Jo's," you may find out all that happened when they reached Boston--how Rose found a pocketbook, and how, after many weeks, it was learned to whom it belonged.

Next comes the book just ahead of this one, "Six Little Bunkers at Cousin Tom's." The children came from there to find Grandpa Ford on their porch.

Cousin Tom Bunker was Daddy Bunker's nephew, being the son of a dead brother, Ralph. Cousin Tom had not been married very long, and soon after he and his wife, Ruth, started housekeeping in a bungalow at Seaview, on the New Jersey coast, he invited the Bunkers to visit him.

They went there from Aunt Jo's, and many wonderful things happened at the seashore. Rose lost her gold locket and chain, a queer box was washed up on the beach, Mun Bun and Margy were marooned on an island, and there were many more adventures.

"Did you know Grandpa Ford was coming to visit us when we got home?" asked Rose of her mother, as she helped set the table.

"Yes, that was what he told us in the letter that came the day Mun Bun fell off the pier. It was Grandpa Ford's letter that made us hurry home, for he said he would meet us here. But he came on sooner than we expected, and got here ahead of us," said Mrs. Bunker.

By this time the house had been opened and aired, Norah had come from where she had been staying all summer, and so had Jerry Simms, so the Bunkers were really at home again. Grandpa Ford had been shown to his room, and was getting washed and brushed up ready for tea. The six little Bunkers, having changed into their old clothes, were running about the yard, getting acquainted with the premises all over again.

"Now I guess we're all ready to sit down," said Mother Bunker, for, with the help of Rose and Norah, the table had been set, tea made and a meal gotten ready in quick time. Norah and Jerry had been told, by telegraph, to come back to help get the house in order.

"I'm terrible glad you came, Grandpa Ford," said Mun Bun, as he sat opposite the old gentleman at the table.

"So'm I," said Margy. "Are you going to live with us always?"

"Oh, no, little Toddlekins," laughed Grandpa Ford. "I wish I were. But I shall soon have to go back to Great Hedge. Though I may not go back alone."

"Is that a riddle?" asked Laddie eagerly.

"No, not exactly," said Grandpa Ford with a laugh.

"I know another riddle," went on Laddie. "It's about how do the tickets feel when the conductor punches them. But

I never could find an answer."

"I don't believe there is any," said Grandpa Ford.

"Don't you know *any* riddles?" asked Laddie.

"Well, I might think of *one*, if I tried real hard," said the old gentleman. "Let me think, now. Here is one we used to ask one another when I was a boy. See if you can guess it. 'A house full and a hole full, but you can't catch a bowlful.' What is that, Laddie?"

"A house full and a hole full, but you can't catch a bowlful," repeated Laddie.

"Is it crabs?" asked Mun Bun. "I helped catch a basketful of crabs, once."

"No, it isn't crabs," laughed Grandpa Ford.

"I give up. What is it?" asked Laddie, anxious to hear the answer.

"It's smoke!" said Grandpa Ford with a laugh. "A house full and a hole full of smoke, but, no matter how hard you try, you can't catch a bowlful. For, if you try to catch smoke it just rolls away from you."

"A house full and a hole full--but you can't catch a bowlful," repeated Laddie slowly. "That's a good riddle!" he announced, after thinking it over, and I guess he ought to know, as he asked a great many of them.

They had a jolly time at the meal, even if it was gotten up in a hurry, and then, just as the children were going out to play again, Daddy Bunker remarked:

"You haven't yet told us, Father, what brought you away from Great Hedge."

"No, I haven't, but I will," said Grandpa Ford.

Great Hedge, I might say, was the name of a large estate Grandpa Ford had bought to live on not a great while before. It was just outside the city of Tarrington, in New York State, and was a fine, big country estate.

Grandpa Ford looked around the room. He saw Russ and Rose over by the sideboard, each taking a cookie to eat out in the yard. The other little Bunkers had already run out, for it was not yet dark.

"As soon as they go I'll tell you why I came away from Great Hedge," said Grandpa Ford in a low voice to Mr. and Mrs. Bunker. "It's something of a mystery, and I don't want the children to become frightened, especially as they may go up there," he went on. "I'll tell you when they go out."

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING QUEER

Russ Bunker took a cookie from the dish on the sideboard, handed one to Rose, and then the two children went out on the porch. Rose was just going to run along to find Vi, who had taken her Japanese doll to play with, when Russ caught his sister by her dress.

"Wait a minute, Rose."

"What for?" she asked.

"Hush!" went on Russ. "Not so loud. Didn't you hear what Grandpa Ford said?"

"I didn't listen," admitted Rose. "I wanted to see if there were any molasses cookies, but they're all sugar. What was it?" and Rose, too, talked very low.

They were now out on the side porch, under the dining-room windows, which were open, for, as I have said, it was warm October weather.

"He said there was something queer about Great Hedge, where he lives with Grandma," went on Russ. "He didn't want us to hear, 'cause I heard him tell Daddy and Mother so. But we can hear out here if we listen. Let's keep still, and maybe we can tell what it is."

"But that won't be nice," protested Rose. "Mother said we shouldn't peep through keyholes, or listen behind doors."

"There isn't any keyhole here," said Russ. "And we're not behind a door, either."

"Well, but----" But Rose could think of nothing else to say. Besides, just then, she heard her grandfather's voice. He was speaking to Mr. and Mrs. Bunker, and saying:

"Yes, it certainly is very strange. It's quite a puzzle to me--a riddle, I suppose Laddie would call it. But I don't want the children to know anything about it."

"There, you see!" exclaimed Russ in a whisper. "It's only a riddle he is going to tell. We can listen to it, and have some fun. We won't tell what the answer is when he asks us. We'll make believe we don't know."

"Well, if it's only a riddle, I guess it's all right to listen to it," agreed Rose.

So the two eldest Bunker children crouched down on the side porch, under the dining-room windows, and listened to the talk that was going on inside. Of course this was not right, but they did not know any better, especially after Grandpa Ford spoke about a "riddle."

And so it came about that Rose and Russ heard what it was not intended they should hear.

"You know," went on Grandpa Ford, as Russ and Rose listened outside, "that I bought Great Hedge Estate from a Mr. James Ripley, who lives near here."

"Yes, I know that," said Daddy Bunker. "Well, you like it, don't you, Father?"

"Quite well. Your mother likes it, too. It is a large farm, as you know, and there is a big stretch of woods, as well as land where I can raise fruits and vegetables. There are meadows for grazing, and fields for corn, hay and oats. Great Hedge is a fine place, and your mother and I like it there very much.

"We were a bit lonesome, at first, as it is large, but we hope to get over that part in a little while.

"What brought me down here is to see Mr. Ripley, and find out something about the place he sold me. I must find out something about Great Hedge."

"Here is where the riddle comes in," said Russ in a whisper to his sister. "We must listen hard now."

"What do you want to find out about Great Hedge, Father?" asked Daddy Bunker. "Do you think you paid too much for it?"

"No, I got it very cheap. But there is something queer about it, and I want to find out if Mr. Ripley can tell me what it

is."

"Something queer?" repeated Mrs. Bunker.

"Yes, a sort of mystery," went on Grandpa Ford. "It's a puzzle to me. A riddle I should call it if I were Laddie. By the way, I hope the children don't hear me tell this, or they might be frightened."

"No, they have all gone out to play," said Mrs. Bunker. "They can not hear you."

"So there is something wrong about Great Hedge, is there?" asked Daddy Bunker. "By the way," he went on, "I have never been there, but I suppose it is called that because it has a big hedge around it."

"That is it," said Grandpa Ford. "All around the house, enclosing it like a fence, is a big, thick hedge. It is green and pretty in summer, but bare and brown in the winter. However, it keeps off the north wind, so I rather like it. In the summer it shades the house and makes it cool. Yes, the hedge gives the name to the place.

"But now I must tell you what is queer about it--the mystery or the puzzle. And I don't want you or the children to be alarmed."

"Why should we?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Well, most persons are frightened by *ghosts*," said Grandpa Ford with a laugh.

"Father, you don't mean to tell me you believe in *ghosts*!" cried Daddy Bunker.

"Of course not!" answered his stepfather. "There aren't any such things as ghosts, and, naturally, I don't believe in them. But I know that some people do, and children might be frightened if they heard the name."

"Do you hear what he says?" whispered Rose to her brother.

"Yes. But I'm not frightened. Are you?"

"Nope. What's a ghost, anyhow, Russ?"

"Oh, it's something white that comes in the dark and scares you."

"Well, it isn't dark now," went on the little girl, "so we're all right. And at night, when it is dark, we go to bed, so I don't guess we'll see any ghost."

"No, I guess not. But listen!"

Grandpa Ford was speaking again.

"Of course I don't believe in ghosts," he said, "and I only use that name, speaking about the queer things at Great Hedge, because I don't know what else to call them. Your mother," he went on to Daddy Bunker, "calls it the same thing. We say the 'ghost' did this or that. In fact we laugh over it and make fun of it. But, all the same, it is very strange and queer, and I should like to have it stopped, or explained."

"Do you think Mr. Ripley can stop it or explain it?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"I should think he could," said Grandpa Ford. "Mr. Ripley owned Great Hedge a long while before he sold it to me. He ought to know all about the queer, big old house, and why there are so many strange noises in it."

"Is the noise the ghost?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"That's part of it."

"What's the other part?" Daddy Bunker queried.

"Well, it mostly is queer noises," said his stepfather. "I'll tell you how it happened from the very beginning--the first night your mother and I stayed at Great Hedge. It has been going on for some time, and at last I thought I would come on here, see you, have a talk with Mr. Ripley, and then see if we could not clear up the mystery. In fact, I hope you'll go back with me and help me solve the riddle.

"You and your wife and the six little Bunkers. I want you all to come up to Grandpa Ford's. But now I'll finish telling you about the ghost."

"Please do," begged Mother Bunker with a laugh. "I have always liked ghost stories. It is very jolly when one finds out what caused the queer noises and sights. Let's hear about the ghost!"

"All right," went on Grandpa Ford. "I'll tell you about our first night at Great Hedge. It was just about twelve o'clock--midnight--when, all of a sudden----"

At that instant a crash sounded out on the porch.

"Mercy!" cried Mother Bunker. "What can that be?"

She and Daddy Bunker rushed from the room, Grandpa Ford following more slowly.

CHAPTER IV

RUSS MAKES A BALLOON

"What is it? What's the matter?" cried Mother Bunker as she opened a door leading on to the porch, where she had heard the crashing noise. Those were the first things the mother of the six little Bunkers always asked whenever anything unusual happened.

"What is the matter?" she cried.

Then she saw. Lying on the porch, under the hammock, was Russ. He was huddled in a heap, and he was doing his best not to cry. Mrs. Bunker could tell that by the way his face was wrinkled up. Near him stood Rose, and she looked startled.

"What's the matter?" repeated Mrs. Bunker. "Are you hurt, Russ?"

"No'm--that is, not very much. I--I fell out of the hammock."

"Yes, I see you did. What made you? Did you swing too high? I've told you not to do that."

"What does it all mean?" asked Daddy Bunker, while Grandpa Ford looked on. "Were you trying to do some circus tricks in the hammock, Russ?"

"No. I--I was just climbing up, like a sailor when he goes up a rope, you know, and----"

"I call that a circus trick!" interrupted Mr. Bunker. "I wouldn't try those, if I were you, Russ. You aren't hurt much this time, I guess, but you might be another time. Don't try any tricks until you get older."

"Well, it wasn't exactly a trick," explained Russ, and then he saw Rose looking at him in a queer way and he stopped.

"As long as you're all right it's a blessing," said his mother.

"I thought the house was falling down," remarked Grandpa Ford with a laugh.

"Oh, you'll get used to all sorts of noises like that, Father, if you're very long around the six little Bunkers," said his stepson. "As soon as we hear a louder noise than common we rush out. But we have been very lucky so far. None of the children has been badly hurt."

"I hope they'll be as lucky as that when they come to my place at Great Hedge," said Grandpa Ford.

"Oh, are we going to stay with you, Grandpa Ford?" cried Russ, forgetting all about his pains and bruises, now that there was a prospect of a new place to go to.

"Oh, what fun!" exclaimed Rose. "I'm going to tell Laddie and Vi!"

"No, don't, please, Rose," said her mother. "It isn't settled yet. We haven't really decided to go."

"Oh, but you must come if I have to come down with my big hay wagon and cart you up!" said Grandpa Ford. "But we'll talk about that later. I'm glad neither of you two children was hurt. Now here is five cents each. Run down and buy a lollypop. I imagine they must be five cents apiece now, with the way everything has gone up."

"No, they're only a penny apiece, but sometimes you used to get two for a cent," explained Russ, as he took one coin and Rose the other. "Thank you," he went on. "We'll get something, and give Mun Bun and Margy a bit."

"And Violet and Laddie, too," added Rose.

Russ looked at the five-cent piece in his hand as if wondering if it would stretch that far.

"Send the other children to me, and I'll give them each five cents," said Grandpa Ford with a laugh.

"Then we can all go to the store!" said Rose, clapping her hands. "They have lovely five-cent grab-bags down at Henderson's store."

"Well, don't eat too much trash," said Mrs. Bunker. Then, turning to Grandpa Ford, she said: "Now we can go back in the house and you can finish what you were telling us when Russ fell out of the hammock."

"I didn't zactly fall *out* of it," the little boy explained. "I wasn't in it. I was climbing up on one side, and I--I----"

"Well, you fell, anyhow," said his father. "Please don't do it again. Now we'll go in, Father."

Russ and Rose were left standing on the porch, each holding a five-cent piece. Russ looked at Rose, and Rose looked at Russ.

"We didn't hear what the ghost was at Great Hedge," said the little girl.

"No," agreed Russ. "He was saying that, 'all of a sudden,' just like in a story, you know, when----"

"When you fell all of a sudden!" interrupted Rose.

"I couldn't help it," declared Russ. "If you'd had the mat, I wouldn't 'a' made any noise."

"Oh, well, let's go and spend our five cents," suggested Rose. "And we can tell Laddie and Vi and Margy and Mun Bun to go for theirs. We'll have to wait for them to go to the store with us, anyhow. Mun Bun and Margy can't go alone."

"All right, you go and tell 'em," returned Russ. "Shall I go and listen some more at the window?"

"No, I guess not," said Rose. "They might see you."

For it was in listening at the window that Russ had fallen. As he had partly explained, he had climbed up the hammock, as a sailor climbs a rope.

The hammock swung on the side porch, but when it was not in use it hung by one hook, rather high up, and by twisting it together it could be made into a sort of rope. Russ and Rose, as I have told you, had been listening under the porch window to what Grandpa Ford had been telling about the queer happenings at Great Hedge Estate.

Just as he reached the point where he was going to tell about the strange noise at midnight, Russ decided he could hear better if he were higher up, and nearer the window.

The hammock had been left hanging by one hook, after Laddie and Vi had finished swinging in it a little while before, and up this Russ climbed.

But his hands slipped, and down he fell, making a good deal of noise. Of course if Rose had put the mat under him, as he had told her to do, there would not have been such a racket.

"And now we sha'n't ever know about the ghost," said Russ, just before his sister hurried off to tell the others that Grandpa Ford had a treat for them.

"Yes, we shall," said the little girl.

"How?"

"We'll wait till we get there. We're all going, 'cause Grandpa Ford said so. When we get to Great Hedge we can find the ghost for ourselves."

"Yes, maybe we can," agreed Russ. "Anyhow, I'm not going to climb up any more hammocks. It hurts too much when you fall." And he walked from the porch, limping.

Then, after Russ and Rose had gone away, Grandpa Ford told Mr. and Mrs. Bunker more about the strange doings at his house, which was surrounded by the great hedge. And the old gentleman ended with:

"And now I want you all to come out there with me and help solve the mystery. I want you, Son," and he turned with a kindly look to Mr. Bunker, "and I want your wife and the six little Bunkers."

"Maybe the children will be afraid of the ghost," said their mother.

"We won't tell them anything about it," said Grandpa Ford with a laugh. "They'll never know a thing about it."

If he had only seen Russ and Rose listening on the porch under the window!

"Well, as long as they don't know about it, I don't see that they can be frightened," said Mr. Bunker. "As you say, it is queer, but maybe Mr. Ripley can explain the queer noises and other things."

"Maybe he can," agreed Grandpa Ford. "That's what I came on to see about, and I'll take you all back with me."

"But it will soon be cold weather," objected Mother Bunker.

"All the better!" laughed Grandpa Ford. "There is no nicer place in the world in winter than Great Hedge. The big hedge made of what are almost trees, keeps off the cold north wind. We always have plenty of snow up in New York state, and the children will have no end of good times. You must all arrange to come back with me."

"Well, I suppose we'll have to," said Mrs. Bunker. "But we won't say anything to the children about the ghost."

"Unless they find it out for themselves," remarked Daddy Bunker. "And if they do I don't believe it will frighten them much. Laddie will, most likely, make up a riddle about it."

"He certainly is good at them," said Grandpa Ford with a chuckle.

Meanwhile Russ and Rose had told the good news to the other little Bunkers--that is, the news about the five-cent pieces.

"Oh, come on down to the store! I know what I'm going to buy!" exclaimed Laddie, when they all had their money.

"What?" asked Vi. "Some candy? Oh, let's all buy candy and then we can have a play-party with it!"

"I'm not going to buy candy!" exclaimed Laddie.

"What are you going to get?" Rose asked.

"A toy balloon," Laddie answered. "I'm going to see how far up I can make it go."

"How are you going to get it back?" asked Russ.

"I'll tie a string to it. I know how to do it. And if your doll wants a ride, Vi, I'll give her one in my balloon. I can tie a basket to the balloon and put your doll in it--in the basket, I mean."

"Oh, no!" cried Vi. "Rose's doll went up into the air in a balloon like that once, when we were at Aunt Jo's, and it was a good while before she got her back. I'm not going to lose my doll."

"Well, I'll send my balloon up, anyhow," said Laddie.

"I guess I'll get a balloon, too," said Russ. "Then we can have a race."

"Aren't you going to get any candy?" asked Rose.

"No, I don't guess so," answered Russ. "Maybe Grandpa Ford will give us more money for candy to-morrow."

"I'll give you a little of mine if you let me hold your balloon," said Vi to Laddie.

"Then I will."

"So will I," said Rose to Russ.

Down to the toy and candy store they went, and while four of the six little Bunkers got sweets, Russ and Laddie each bought a five-cent balloon, that would float high in the air. They had lots of fun playing with them, and Rose and Violet kept their words about giving their brothers some candy in exchange for the treat of holding the balloon strings part of the time.

After a bit Mun Bun and Margy went back to the house with Vi and Rose. Laddie and Russ remained in the side yard, flying their balloons.

"I know what we can do!" suddenly exclaimed Russ.

"What?" asked his smaller brother.

"We can make a big balloon."

"How?"

"I'll show you. Come on."

"All right."

Russ, letting his toy balloon float over his head, while Laddie did the same, went out to the barn back of the house. It was not really a barn any longer, as Daddy Bunker kept his automobile in it, but it looked like a barn, so I will call it that instead of a garage.

"How are you going to make a balloon?" asked Laddie as he saw Russ tie his toy to a picket of the fence.

"You wait, I'll show you. First you go in and get the big clothes basket. Don't let Norah see you, or she might stop you. Bring me out the clothes basket."

Laddie did as he was told. As he came back with the basket, which was a large, round one, Laddie said:

"Do you think we can fasten our two balloons to this and go up in it?"

"No, I'm not going to make my balloon that way," Russ answered. "You'll see. Come on into the barn. We have to go upstairs."

Overhead in the barn was a place where hay had once been kept for the horse. There was a little door in the peak of the second story, to which the hay could be hoisted up from the wagon on the ground below. The hay was hoisted by a rope running around a wheel, or pulley, and this rope and pulley were still in place, though they had not been used in some time.

Into the rather dark loft of the barn went Russ and Laddie. They had climbed up the ladder, as they had done oftentimes before.

"It's dark!" Laddie exclaimed.

"I'll make it light," announced Russ.

He opened the little door in the front of the barn, and then he and Laddie could look down to the ground below. Russ loosened the pulley rope and let one end fall to the ground.

"That's how we'll make our balloon," he said. "We'll fasten the rope to the clothes basket, and pull it up like a balloon. Won't that be fun?"

"Lots of fun!" agreed Laddie.

It was about half an hour after this that, as Mother Bunker was beginning to think about supper, she heard, from the direction of the barn, a shrill yell for help.

"Oh, I can't get him down! I can't get him down!" was the cry.

"Dear me! Something else has happened!" cried Mother Bunker. "Come on, Norah. We must see what it is!"

CHAPTER V

THE BIG BANG NOISE

It did not take Mrs. Bunker long to see what the matter was this time. As she came in sight of the barn she beheld the clothes basket dangling about half-way to the roof, swinging this way and that from one end of a rope.

On the other end of the rope Russ and Laddie were pulling, while in the clothes basket, his little face peering over the side, was Mun Bun.

"What are you doing? Let him down!" cried Mother Bunker, for Mun Bun was crying.

"We can't get him down!" shouted Russ. "The balloon won't come down!"

"Balloon? I don't see any balloon!" cried Mrs. Bunker. She thought, perhaps, as sometimes did happen, a balloonist from a neighboring fairground might have gone up, giving an exhibition as was often the case in the Fall. But all the balloons she saw were the toys Russ and Laddie had tied to the fence.

"Where is the balloon, and what do you mean by pulling Mun Bun up in the basket that way?" she asked.

"Mun Bun's in the balloon!" cried Russ.

"We got him up, but we can't get him down," added Laddie. "The rope's stuck."

And that is just what had happened. I think you can guess the kind of game Russ and Laddie had been playing when the accident happened? They had tied the clothes basket to the rope running over the wheel. The pulley had been used when Mr. Bunker kept a horse, for pulling the hay up from the ground to the second story of the barn.

Then, with the basket tied to the rope, Laddie and Russ had taken turns pulling one another up. The rope went around several pulleys, or wheels, instead of one, and this made it easy for even a small boy, by pulling on the loose end, to lift up quite a weight. So it was not hard for Russ to pull Laddie in the basket up to the little door of the hay-loft. Laddie could not have pulled Russ up, if Russ, himself, had not taken hold of the rope and pulled also. But they had lots of good times, and they pretended they were going up and down in a balloon.

Then along came Mun Bun.

"I want to play, too!" he cried.

"We'll pull him up!" said Russ. "He's light and little, and we can pull him up fast!"

So Mun Bun got into the clothes basket, and Russ and Laddie, hauling on the rope, pulled him up and let him come down quite swiftly.

"Oh, it's fun!" laughed Mun Bun. "I like the balloon!"

And it was fun, until the accident happened. Then, in some way, the rope became caught in one of the wheels, and when Mun Bun was half-way between the ground and the second story of the barn, there he stuck!

"We'd better holler for mother!" said Laddie, as Mun Bun, looking over the edge of the basket, began to cry.

"Maybe we can get him down ourselves," said Russ. "Pull some more."

He and Laddie pulled as hard as they could. But still Mun Bun was stuck in the "balloon."

"I want to get down! I want to get down!" he cried.

Then Laddie and Russ became frightened and shouted for their mother.

"Oh, you poor, dear little boy!" said Mrs. Bunker, as she saw what the matter was. "Don't be afraid now. I'll soon get you down."

She looked at the rope, saw where it was twisted so it would not run easily over the pulley wheels. Then she untwisted it, and the basket could come down, with Mun Bun in it.

"I don't like that old balloon!" he said, tears in his eyes.

"Well, Laddie and Russ mustn't put you in again," said his mother. "Don't cry any more. You're all right."

And, as soon as he saw that he was safe on the ground, and that the clothes basket balloon wasn't going to take him up again, the little chap dried his tears.

"What made you think of that game to play?" asked Mrs. Bunker of Russ and Laddie, when she had seen to it that they took the clothes basket off the rope.

"Oh, we thought of it when we saw our toy balloons go up in the air," said Russ. "We had a race with 'em, and Laddie's went higher than mine. Then he said wouldn't it be fun to have a real balloon. And I said yes, and then I thought of the rope at the barn and Norah's clothes basket and we made a hoister balloon, and Mun Bun wanted to go up in it, he did."

"And we pulled him, we did, and he got stuck," added Laddie. "I guess I could make up a pretty good riddle about it, if I thought real hard."

"Well, please think hard and don't get your little brother into a fix like that again," said Mrs. Bunker.

Of course Russ and Laddie promised that they wouldn't play that game any more, but this was not saying they wouldn't do something else just as risky. They were not bad boys, but they liked to have fun, and they did not always stop to think what might happen when they had it.

"What'll we do next?" asked Laddie, as they carried the clothes basket back to Norah's laundry.

"Well, we could----" began Russ.

Just then the supper bell rang.

"We'll eat!" cried Laddie. "That'll be lots of fun."

And after supper the six little Bunkers were too tired and sleepy to do anything except go to bed.

"But we'll have lots of fun at Grandpa Ford's," murmured Rose as she went up to her room.

"Yes," agreed Russ. "We'll have lots of fun, and we'll hunt around and find----"

Rose gave her brother a queer look and cried:

"That's a secret!"

"Oh, yes, so it is! That's a secret!" agreed Russ.

"What's a secret?" asked Vi, not too sleepy to put a question, if it was the last thing she did that day.

"Oh, we can't tell!" laughed Russ. "Wait until we all get to Great Hedge, and then we'll all hunt for it."

"Hunt for the secret?" asked Vi.

"Yes," answered Rose.

"Mother, Russ and Rose have a secret and they won't tell me!" exclaimed the little questioning girl. "Please make 'em!"

"Not to-night, my dear," said Mrs. Bunker. "Besides, if it is their secret it wouldn't be fair for you to know."

"But I want to, Mother!"

"We're not going to tell!" exclaimed Russ.

"Come now! Go to bed, all of you!" cried Daddy Bunker. "You'll have plenty of fun, and secrets, too, if you go to Great Hedge."

"Oh, then we must be going!" cried Rose, and Vi was so excited about this that she forgot to ask any more about the secret.

Mrs. Bunker thought it was only some little joke between her two older children. If she had known what they had heard out on the porch that afternoon she might have talked to them before they went to sleep. But Russ and Rose hid in their hearts what they had heard about the ghost of Great Hedge.

It was fully decided on the next day that the six little Bunkers and Daddy and Mother would go, shortly, with Grandpa Ford to his big estate in the country, just outside of Tarrington, in New York state. Russ and Rose listened

carefully to see if they could hear any more about the ghost, but neither Mr. Ford nor Mr. Bunker mentioned it. And Mother Bunker was so busy, with Norah, getting the things ready for another trip, that she did not speak of it, either.

"My!" exclaimed Norah, as she helped sort out the clean clothes, "these six little Bunkers are getting to be great travelers. First they go to Grandma Bell's, then to Aunt Jo's and then to Cousin Tom's, and now to Grandpa Ford's. I wonder where they'll go next?"

"There's no telling," said Mrs. Bunker. "But we must take plenty of warm clothes along for them this time, as it will soon be cold weather and winter."

"I love to be in the country in the winter," said Rose, who was helping her mother. "You can have such fun snowballing."

"And making snow men and snow forts," added Russ, who came in to get a piece of string for something he was making. He went out whistling, and soon he and Laddie were heard pounding away on the back porch.

Russ was not happy unless he was whistling, or unless he was making something, just as Laddie was very fond of asking riddles.

"I guess maybe I got a riddle, now," said the little chap who was Violet's twin.

"Is it about Mun Bun and the balloon basket?" asked Russ.

"No, it's about why is a cat like a kite."

"It isn't," said Russ. "A cat isn't anything like a kite."

"Yes, it is, too!" declared Laddie. "They both have tails."

"Oh, well. But some kites don't have any tails," said Russ. "I know a boy, and he knows how to make kites that go up without any tails. So that riddle's no good!"

"Yes, it is!" insisted Laddie.

"Why is it?"

"Cause some cats haven't got tails either."

"Oh, there are not any cats without tails."

"Yes, there are! You go and ask Mother. She showed me a picture of one the other day. I think it's called a Banks cat, 'cause maybe it lives in a bank, and it doesn't have any tail so it can't get caught in the door. You go and ask Mother if a kite isn't like a cat 'cause they both have tails, and some kites have no tails and so haven't some cats."

"I will!" exclaimed Russ. "I'll go and ask Mother if there's ever a cat without a tail!"

Away the two boys started, but they had not reached the house before, out in the street in front, they heard a loud bang, a most awfully loud bang. At the same time they heard their Grandpa Ford crying:

"Whoa! Whoa there! Don't run away!"

"Oh, what's that?" asked Laddie.

"We'll go and see!" exclaimed Russ; and the two boys set off on a run.

CHAPTER VI

OFF TO GREAT HEDGE

Russ and Laddie saw Grandpa Ford holding the bridle of a horse harnessed to a light carriage, in which sat a pretty young lady. The horse was trying to rise up on its hind legs, and Grandpa Ford was doing his best to make the animal stand still.

Not far away was a large automobile, and smoke was coming from the back of this, while a man, who seemed to have just gotten out of the car, was hurrying toward the prancing horse.

"I guess he's all right now, Miss," said Grandpa Ford. "When that automobile back-fired, and made such a bang, it scared your horse."

"I never knew him to be afraid of an auto before," said the young lady. "But then I never heard one, before, make such a loud bang."

"Nor I," returned Grandpa Ford. "It was enough to scare any horse."

"And I am very sorry it happened," said the man who had gotten out of the car. "My machine is a new one, and it does not run just right, but this is the first time it ever made such a racket. I thought I was going to be blown up, and I guess your horse did too, Miss. I'm very sorry for the fright I caused you. I'll not start my auto again until you drive on. Then, if it should happen to back-fire again, your horse will not mind it so much."

"Thank you," the young lady said. "But I do not want to drive on right away. I came to see you," she announced to Grandpa Ford.

"To see me?" and Mr. Ford was quite surprised. "You drove up here to see me?"

"Yes, if you are Mr. Munroe Ford." And the young lady smiled pleasantly.

"Yes, that's my name," said Mr. Bunker's stepfather. "And if you don't believe me you can ask these boys," and he pointed to Russ and Laddie, who were staring at the pretty young lady. "Only," went on the old gentleman, "they would probably say I was 'Grandpa Ford,' and so I am, to them."

"That's who he is," declared Russ.

"He's grandpa to all us six little Bunkers," added Laddie. "We thought it was a big cannon," he went on, speaking about the noise.

"I seem to have stirred up some excitement," remarked the man who owned the new automobile. "I had better get away from here before I have the police after me," and he laughed, to show he was only joking. Of course it was not his fault that the automobile made so much noise.

"If you are not going to drive on, to get out of the way of my machine, where your horse won't hear any more explosions, I think I had better drive on myself. I'll go as quietly as I can," he said.

"And I'll hold her horse," offered Grandpa Ford. "As long as she has come to see me, and is going to stay, I'll see that her horse doesn't run away."

"You know how to manage horses," said the automobile man. "I don't. But I can run an auto."

"Yes, I've been among horses for a number of years," replied Grandpa Ford. "I have three or four on my place, Great Hedge. I'd rather drive a horse than an auto. But won't you get down and come in, if you want to see me?" asked Grandpa Ford of the young lady.

"Thank you, no. I'm only going to stay a few minutes, Mr. Ford," she answered. "I feel almost like calling you Grandpa Ford myself," she added. "You look just like a grandfather I used to have."

"Call me that as much as you please," laughed Grandpa Ford. "But what shall I call you? I don't remember meeting you before." And he led her horse to a hitching post, where he tied the animal fast. By this time the loud-banging new automobile had rolled around the corner into the next street, luckily without making any great noise.

"I am Mabel Ripley," said the young lady. "You called to see my father, the other day, about the Great Hedge place he sold you, but Daddy was out. However, he got the message you left, and he sent me over to-day with an answer. It's

about the gh----"

"Ahem!" loudly and suddenly exclaimed Grandpa Ford. "I rather think, Miss Ripley, you had better come into the house where you can talk to me alone," he said, with a quick glance at Russ and Laddie. "Little pitchers have big ears, you know."

"Oh, yes, I understand!" exclaimed the pretty young lady. She, too, looked at Russ and Laddie in a strange way, smiling the while. "You don't want the little pitchers to know anything about it?" she asked.

"Not yet," answered Grandpa Ford. "It's a sort of secret, you know. I think it will all be easily explained, but I wanted to ask your father about it, since, as he sold me Great Hedge, he would know more about the house than I do, he having lived there so long."

"I lived there, too," said Miss Ripley with a smile. "Well, as long as the banging auto is gone, I think my horse will stand all right, so I'll come in and tell you all I know, and all my father knows, about the place, and the strange things you heard. I'll go in where the little pitchers can't be filled up," and again she smiled at the two boys.

"Is that a riddle, Grandpa Ford?" asked Laddie, as Miss Ripley started toward the front porch.

"Is what a riddle, Laddie boy?"

"About little pitchers and big ears."

"Oh! No, not exactly a riddle. I'll tell you about it some other time. Here is five cents each, for you and Russ. Run along now while I take Miss Ripley into the house."

"Will you tell me one thing before you go in?" asked Laddie, as he slipped into his pocket the nickel his grandfather had given him, while Russ did the same.

"If your question isn't a hard riddle I'll try to answer it," said Grandpa Ford. "Let me hear it."

"It's about kites and tails and cats," explained Laddie. "Isn't there a cat that hasn't a tail, and isn't it a Banks cat?" asked Laddie. "I made up a riddle why is a cat like a kite because it has a tail. And some kites haven't any tails, Russ says. But mother showed me a picture of a Banks cat. And don't they call 'em that because maybe they live in banks and haven't any tails so they won't get shut in a door? Will you answer that question, Grandpa?"

"Really, Laddie boy, I should say there were almost a dozen questions there!" laughed Grandpa Ford. "But I'll answer only one now. About the cats. There is a kind called Manx, and that sounds like banks, I suppose. Manx is an island, near England, and cats that come from there have no tails--or at least they have only little short ones that you can hardly see. I guess when your mother told you about the Manx cats you thought she said 'banks.' But now run along and have some fun."

Grandpa Ford turned up the walk with Miss Ripley, and Laddie and Russ heard her say:

"Father sent me over to tell you not to be alarmed, as he doesn't believe it is anything. He'll come out and help you look for whatever it may be, if you want him to."

"Oh, the six little Bunkers and their father and mother are coming with me," said Mr. Ford. "The six little Bunkers don't know about the strange goings on, as yet, but their father and mother will help me hunt for the----"

That was all Russ and Laddie heard, for their grandfather turned a corner in the path then, and his voice was not so loud.

"I wonder if they're talking about a riddle," said Laddie.

"I don't guess so," returned Russ. He knew, or thought he knew, what Miss Ripley and Grandpa Ford were talking about. It was the "secret" about which he and Rose had heard something.

But it was not yet time to tell Laddie anything about it. Russ wished Rose had been with him to hear what Miss Ripley said. Rose might know what it all meant.

"But we'll wait until we get to Great Hedge," thought Russ. Then to Laddie he said: "Come on, we'll go and spend our nickels."

"All right," agreed the little boy. "But I was pretty near right about the Banks cat; wasn't I?"

"Pretty near," agreed Russ.

When Russ and Laddie reached home again, after a trip to the store, they found Miss Ripley had gone. And then, for a time, Russ, as well as Rose, forgot about the "secret," as the whole family, six little Bunkers and all, were so busy packing up to go away.

At last, after some weeks, the day came. The trunks and valises had been packed, the house in Pineville had been shut for the winter, the water being turned off so it would not freeze, and everything was all ready for the winter visit to Grandpa Ford at Great Hedge.

"Good-bye, Norah! Good-bye, Jerry Simms!" called the six little Bunkers, waving their hands to the cook and man. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" answered Jerry and Norah. "Come back as soon as you can!"

And so they started for Grandpa Ford's. And not even Russ and Rose, who guessed a little of the "secret," knew all the strange things that were to happen at Great Hedge.



CHAPTER VII

MUN BUN TAKES SOMETHING

The trip to Grandpa Ford's was to last all day. The six little Bunkers, with their father and mother, had taken the railroad train about nine o'clock in the morning, and they would reach Tarrington, in New York State, about five in the evening.

"And one of my men will be at the depot to meet us with a carriage," said Grandpa Ford. "We'll drive over with horses, though I have an auto on my place. But I like horses better."

"Will there be room enough for all of us in the carriage?" asked Russ.

"Oh, yes. I sent word to bring the biggest carriage I have. It has four seats, and I guess I can pack you all in."

Having found out this much Russ was satisfied. He looked at Rose and nodded, as they sat together in the railroad train. Russ had feared that, as there were so many of them, some might be left behind after Tarrington was reached. And he wanted to get to Great Hedge as soon as he could, to begin to find out why there was something strange in or about the big house.

"Well, now we can settle down for a long ride," said Mrs. Bunker, as she "counted noses," to make sure all her children were with her and her husband.

It was quite cold, but the car was warm and the six little Bunkers looked out of the windows, and enjoyed the trip. They always liked to travel.

"It looks like snow," said Grandpa Ford to the conductor, when it was time to collect the tickets.

"Yes, I came down from New York State the other night," said the railroad man, "and we were having quite a flurry then. Shouldn't be surprised if we ran into a big blizzard before we reached Tarrington."

"Oh, I hope not," said Grandpa Ford. "I don't want any big blizzard until I get the six little Bunkers safely home at Great Hedge. Then it can snow as much as it likes."

"I hope it snows a lot," said Mun Bun. "I like snow."

"So do I, when I'm at home in my warm house," said Grandpa Ford. "But too much snow isn't any fun. Can you make a snow man, Mun Bun?"

"A little one," he answered. "If you helped me I could make a big one."

"I will!" promised his grandfather with a laugh. "We'll make a big snow man and a snow house and have all sorts of good times."

"What's snow made of?" asked Violet, who had been pressing her nose against the car window, looking out at the telegraph poles that seemed to whiz past so quickly.

"It's frozen rain," said Daddy Bunker.

"Who freezes it?" went on Violet. "Does the ice-cream man freeze the rain to make snow?"

"No, it freezes up in the air--in the clouds," her father explained.

"Well, what makes it come down?" went on Violet. "Rain comes down 'cause it's heavy. Once a raindrop splashed in my eye and it felt terrible heavy. But snow isn't heavy at all. It's light like a feather. What makes snow and feathers fall when they aren't heavy, Daddy?"

"Oh, now, my little girl is asking too many questions," said Daddy Bunker with a laugh. "Some time, when you are a little older, I'll tell you why it is that things fall, whether they are heavy or light. Things even lighter than snowflakes fall as easily as a chunk of lead, but, as you say, a snowflake is like a feather. It falls from side to side, like a leaf, and not as fast as a drop of rain. But I do believe we shall have snow soon," he went on. "The storm clouds are beginning to gather," and he looked up at the sky.

"I don't mind traveling in the snow, but I don't like it in the rain," said Mother Bunker. "And we must expect snow, as it will soon be winter."

The six little Bunkers amused themselves in different ways in the car, as the train puffed on, over hills and through valleys, to Grandpa Ford's home at Great Hedge. As Daddy Bunker had said, the clouds were gathering, and they seemed to hold snow, which might soon come down with a flurry.

"But it can't hurt us," said Mun Bun, "cause we're in the train."

"I have a new riddle," announced Laddie, after a while.

"Have you?" asked Grandpa Ford. "Well, let's hear it. I'll try to guess it."

"Why is a train like a boy?" asked the little fellow.

"That's a funny riddle!" exclaimed Russ. "A train isn't like a boy at all. It's too big and it isn't alive."

"Well, it goes," said Laddie; "and anything that goes is almost alive, anyhow."

"Is that why you made a riddle about a train and boy?" asked Grandpa Ford. "A train is like a boy because it goes. Is that it, Laddie?"

"Nope! It's 'cause a train can whistle and so can a boy," said the little chap with a laugh. "Isn't that a good riddle?"

"A train doesn't whistle," declared Russ. "It's only the engine that whistles. Isn't that so, Grandpa?"

"Well, the engine whistles, of course. But the engine is the main part of the train. If it wasn't for the engine there wouldn't be any train, so I guess Laddie's riddle is all right there. A train-engine is like a boy, because it whistles. There it goes now."

As he spoke the engine gave several loud, shrill blasts.

"What makes it do that?" asked Violet. "What makes the engine whistle? Was it 'cause Laddie asked that riddle?"

"You children will make Grandpa Ford sleepy with your questions and riddles," observed Mrs. Bunker to Laddie and Violet. "Please be quiet now, and let him rest."

"Oh, I don't mind," said the old gentleman. "I love the children, and I like Laddie's riddles and Vi's questions. Only don't ask me such hard ones that I can't answer," he went on.

Margy was in the seat with her mother, playing with one of the Japanese dolls that had come ashore on the beach at Cousin Tom's, as I have told you in the book just before this one.

"My doll wants a drink," suddenly announced the little girl. "She's awful thirsty."

"You probably mean you are," laughed her mother. "Rose, will you take Margy to the water tank and get her a drink? Be careful, and hold on to the arms of the seats so you don't fall down. It isn't far."

"I wants a drink, too," announced Mun Bun. "I'm going to drink it myself, too," he announced, "and not give it to any doll."

"Well, Rose can take both of you," said Mrs. Bunker. Rose was a real "mother's helper," and often looked after the two smaller children in such things as getting them drinks of water. The tank was at the end of the car, not far from where the Bunkers were sitting.

Mr. Bunker bought a picture book for Laddie, from the train boy who came through the car every half hour or so, and the little riddle-chap curled up in his seat to look at this.

Russ, with some bits of string, some little sticks he had in his pocket and some paper, was making "something," though just what it was not even he seemed to know. Violet got in the seat with Laddie to look at his picture book. At the same time she may have been thinking up more questions to ask, for all I know.

Mr. and Mrs. Bunker sat together now, near Grandpa Ford, and they talked together in low voices. Russ was too busy with his string and sticks to listen, though, if he had, he might have heard something more about the queer secret.

As for Rose, who shared part of the secret with him, she was taking Margy and Mun Bun to get a drink.

"Ladies first," said Rose to her little brother, when he would have reached for the cup she filled. "Ladies first, Mun Bun. Let Margy have a drink before you."

"Does her doll have to drink, too?" asked Mun Bun. "Is she a lady?"

"She just makes believe drink," said Margy. "I'll give you the cup as soon as I take some, Munny Bunny." Sometimes Margy called her little brother that for fun.

Margy was very thirsty, and wanted two cups of water. But then the cup was not a very large one. Next Mun Bun had to have some, and he tried to drink three cupfuls. But the last one was a little too much for him, and he spilled part of it on himself.

"But I don't care," he said. "It's only like when it rains, or when the water splashes on you when you go in bathing. Only this water isn't salt, like that down in the ocean at Cousin Tom's," he added.

"It's a good thing it isn't salt, or you couldn't drink it," said Rose, as she wiped the water drops off Mun Bun with her handkerchief. "Now come on back to your seats," she went on. "I guess I'd better take you alone first, Margy. Then I'll come back for you, Mun Bun. The train is so jiggily I can't lead you both."

The cars were indeed swaying, for the train was going faster now, and around curves, which always makes it hard to walk along inside a railway coach.

"Stay here, by the water tank, Mun Bun," said Rose. "I'll take Margy to her seat, and then come back for you."

"All right," agreed the little boy. "I'll wait for you."

Now at this end of the car the train boy had left his basket, in which were a number of toys, that he walked up and down the aisles with, selling. He had left the basket there, in a vacant seat, while he went back into the baggage-car to get a magazine for which a lady had asked him.

Mun Bun saw the basket of toys. There were picture books, little dolls, prettily colored boxes, jumping-jacks--things that fathers and mothers might like to buy to amuse their children with on a long railway journey.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mun Bun, as he turned and saw the train boy's basket of toys. "Oh, my! I'm going to have something!"

Then Mun Bun, reaching in his hand, which was, of course, not right to do, took something from the basket, slipped it around behind him, as he saw Rose coming, and toddled up the aisle to meet her.



CHAPTER VIII

A BIG STORM

"Why didn't you wait for me, Mun Bun?" asked Rose, as she caught her little brother just as he was about to topple over in the aisle, from the swaying of the train. "I told you to wait for me. You might be hurt coming up by yourself!"

"I was in a hurry," explained Mun Bun. He gave one hand to Rose, but the other he held behind his back. In it was the thing he had taken from the train boy's basket.

Once more the six little Bunkers were in their seats, looking out of the windows. The train was puffing along, bringing them nearer and nearer to Grandpa Ford's, though it would still be some hours before they reached Tarrington.

"There!" Russ suddenly exclaimed. "I have it all done!" and he whistled a merry tune, as he turned in his seat and held up something for the others to see.

"What is it?" asked his father.

"It's a buzzy-buzzer," answered the boy. "Look, it goes around this way."

He put the loops of two strings over his thumbs, and pulled his hands apart. Then two pieces of cardboard, strung on the strings, began to whirl about very fast.

"Why, that's like a pin-wheel!" exclaimed Grandpa Ford.

"I call it a buzzy-buzzer," laughed Russ. "I was going to make a wind-mill, but I didn't have enough things here in the train. I'll make you a wind-mill when we get to Great Hedge, Grandpa."

After a while a colored man, dressed in a spotless white suit, came through the car, calling:

"First call for dinner in the dining-car! First call for dinner!"

"What does he mean--first call?" asked Violet, who, as usual, was the one who asked the first question.

"He means that dinner is now ready in the dining-car," said Mr. Bunker. "You see the car is rather small, and every one can't eat at once. So they take turns, so to speak."

"I wish we could eat first," sighed Vi. "I'm terrible hungry!"

"So'm I," said Margy.

"Me, too," added Mun Bun. He had gone back to his seat, after taking something from the train boy's basket, and he had cuddled up by himself. What he had he showed to no one, and now, when he heard that dinner was ready, he stuffed something down between the edge of the seat and the side of the car next the window.

"This is my seat," Mun Bun announced, "and please don't any one take it when we come back! I got something hid here."

No one paid much attention to him, as it had been decided that they would all go into the dining-car at the first call, and they thought every one else was thinking of that, too.

So the Bunkers and Grandpa Ford walked out of the coach in which they had been riding, to the second car ahead, where dinner was being served at little tables. It took more than two tables to seat the six little Bunkers, their father, their mother, and Grandpa Ford, but soon they were all settled, and the colored waiter, in spotless white, just like the one who had called out that dinner was ready, began to serve the hungry folks.

You may be sure the six little Bunkers were hungry. In fact, they were always that way, except, perhaps, just after a meal, or when they were asleep. Though it was not the first time these little travelers had eaten in dining-cars, and on boats, they always liked the fun it was to sit and eat, and see the trees, fences, and telegraph poles seemingly go whizzing past the windows.

"Have you had enough?" asked Daddy Bunker in about half an hour, as he looked around at his boys and girls. "Anybody want any more?"

"Could I have more pie?" asked Russ.

"Well, a small piece, yes," answered his mother.

"I want a piece, too," declared Laddie. "I didn't have hardly any. Mun Bun reached over and took half of mine."

"I'll have the waiter divide a piece between Russ and Laddie," said Mr. Bunker. And when this had been done, even the two hungry boys announced that they were satisfied. Then back to the other car the Bunkers and Grandpa Ford went.

Now at home, almost always after dinner, the two youngest of the six little Bunkers went to sleep. Mother Bunker called it taking a "nap," and almost always Mun Bun and Margy, and sometimes Laddie and Violet had one.

In a little while Mrs. Bunker noticed that the heads of Margy and Mun Bun were nodding as they sat in their seats.

"I'm going to have those children lie down," she said. "Mun Bun, come over and sit with me. I'll cuddle you to sleep. Margy, you can go with Daddy."

"I want to stay here," said Mun Bun. "I've got something in my seat, and I don't want anybody to take it."

"I want to stay too!" exclaimed Margy. "I want to see what Mun Bun has."

Mr. Bunker turned the seat in front of the two smaller children over so a sort of bed could be made for them with a pile of coats and valises. Soon Mun Bun and Margy, side by side, were having a fine sleep, and the train rumbled on.

Margy's doll was perched up on the seat in front of her, and Margy said her doll was "sleeping" too. But this doll slept with her eyes open.

Violet was looking at the picture book Laddie had finished with, and Laddie was trying to make a buzzer, as Russ had done. For Laddie had broken the one his brother had made for him.

Rose and Russ were sitting together, and for the first time in some days, they had a chance to talk about the ghost at Great Hedge.

"What kind do you s'pose it'll be?" asked Rose.

"Oh, the regular, scary kind," Russ answered.

"I hope it won't be too scary," said Rose.

"I'll be with you when we try to find out what it is," went on Russ. "Boys are never afraid of ghosts or--or anything."

"Oh, I won't be afraid--not if you're with me, anyway. Isn't it fun to have a secret? And they don't know we heard about it!" Rose added. "Won't they be s'prised if we find the ghost?"

"I guess they will," agreed Russ. "Maybe they're talking about it now," he went on, for his father and mother, with Grandpa Ford, several seats back, were talking earnestly together, as Russ could see. Just what they were saying the two oldest Bunker children did not know.

But, as a story-teller, or a writer of books, can sometimes be in two places at once, and listen to all sorts of talk, without the people who are talking knowing anything about it, I will tell you, as a special favor, that Mr. and Mrs. Bunker and Grandpa Ford really were talking about the "ghost," at Great Hedge.

"So neither Mr. Ripley nor his daughter, whose horse nearly ran away when she came to see you, could tell what all the queer doings meant at Great Hedge, could they?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"No. They said they never heard any queer noises when they lived at the place before they sold it to me," answered Grandpa Ford. "But your mother and I have heard many strange noises, and we can't account for them.

"Of course," went on Grandpa Ford, "I don't believe in ghosts. But I know we hear the strange noises, and we don't know what they mean. Your mother is annoyed by them. She has an idea, too, that perhaps there is a secret way for some one to get into our house, and that perhaps some persons go in at night, after we are in bed, and make noises."

"But why would any one do that?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Well, it may be some folks who would like to scare me away so they could buy Great Hedge for themselves," said Grandpa Ford. "The place is valuable, and Mr. Ripley sold it to me very reasonably, because his wife and little boy died there and he did not like to stay in the place that reminded him of them so much. So he sold."

"So he never heard the queer noises," said Mr. Bunker musingly.

"He says not. And neither did his daughter, Mabel. But Grandmother Ford and I hear them often enough, and so I thought I'd come down, and get all you Bunkers, to have you help me either find out what it is, or drive the ghost away," and Grandpa Ford smiled.

"Tell us, over again, what sort of noises they are," said Mother Bunker. "I have been so busy the last few days, getting ready to travel, that I hardly remember what you said. Were the noises like yells or groans? Or were they just hangings?"

"Well," began Grandpa Ford, "on some nights the noises are like----"

And just then there came a sudden pop, as of a pistol, and a loud cry from Margy. She sat up in her seat and fairly shouted:

"Now you stop, Mun Bun! Stop shooting my doll! Mother, make Mun Bun stop!" cried the little girl. "He's got a gun, and he shot my doll, and he knocked her off the seat, and maybe she's killed."

"Mun Bun with a gun! What do you mean?" cried Daddy Bunker, jumping up from his seat. "What are you doing, Munroe?" he asked, a bit sternly.

The two youngest children had awakened while Grandpa Ford was telling about the ghost at Great Hedge. Of course they did not hear about it, nor did Rose and Russ.

"I have a popgun, and it shoots a cork," explained Mun Bun, as he held up what he had aimed at Margy's doll. "It didn't hurt, 'cause it only shoots a cork," he said.

"But you shot my doll, and knocked her over, and maybe she's broken!" sobbed Margy.

By this time Mrs. Bunker had reached the seat where the little girl and her brother had been sleeping. The mother picked the Japanese doll up from where it had fallen to the floor of the car, and said:

"Don't cry any more, Margy. Your doll isn't hurt a bit. But Mun Bun mustn't shoot at her any more, with corks or anything else. Munroe Ford Bunker! where did you get the popgun?" his mother asked, as she saw that he really did have a small one.

"Out of the basket," he answered. "When Margy and I went to get a drink of water I saw the popgun in the train boy's basket, and I took it out. I thought maybe I'd want to shoot at a snow man me and Grandpa are going to make, so I kept the gun. Daddy can give the train boy a penny for it. I hid it in the seat. Then I saw Margy's doll on the seat in front, and she was asleep--Margy was--and I shot at the doll, but I didn't mean to make her fall."

"Oh, dear! Such a boy!" cried Mrs. Bunker. "To take the gun without asking! Here comes the boy now. You must give it back."

"Oh, let him keep it," said Grandpa Ford. "I'll buy it for him. We may want to shoot the snow man," he said with a laugh.

So Mun Bun got his popgun after all, though, of course, he did not do right in taking it from the train boy's basket. Nor was it quite right, I suppose, to shoot Margy's doll. But Mun Bun was a very little boy.

However, the train boy was paid, some other toys were bought, and then, as Grandpa Ford, some time later, looked from the train window, he exclaimed:

"Ha! Here comes the snow! I think we are in for a big storm!"

And with great suddenness the train was, almost at once, shut in by a cloud of white snowflakes, like a fog. The swirling white crystals were blown all about, and tapped against the glass of the windows, as if they wanted to come in where the six little Bunkers were. But the glass kept them out.

"How is it out--cold?" asked Grandpa Ford of a brakeman who came in an hour or so later, covered with white flakes.

"Very cold, sir, and growing more so. I'm afraid we'll run into a bad storm before we reach Tarrington. It's snowing worse all the while."

And so it was.

"Is this the blizzard?" asked Violet.

"Pretty close to it," answered Grandpa Ford.

Just then the train gave a sudden jerk, rattling every one in his seat, and came to a stop.

CHAPTER IX

AT TARRINGTON

"Are we there?" cried Laddie, as he slid out of his seat and turned to Grandpa Ford. "Are we at Great Hedge?"

"Well, if we are, the train must have run into it, and got stuck fast," answered the old gentleman with a smile.

"What made it bump so?" asked Violet.

"I think we must have hit a snow bank, or else some of the rails and switches are stopped up with snow," answered Daddy Bunker.

It was getting quite dark, because of the snow clouds outside, and the electric lights of the train had been switched on. Every one in the car where the Bunkers rode, and, I suppose, in each of the other cars of the train, had been well shaken up when it stopped so suddenly. But no one had really been hurt.

"Perhaps we had better see what it is," said Daddy Bunker to his stepfather. "Perhaps the train can't go any farther, and we can't get to Tarrington."

"Oh, can't we go to Grandpa's?" asked Rose, looking as if she could not bear to have such a dreadful thing happen. "I want to go!"

"If the train can't go we can get out and walk," suggested Russ. "I like to walk in the snow. If I had some lawn tennis rackets I could make snowshoes for all of us, and we could walk on them."

"But you haven't any tennis rackets," observed Laddie. "And you can't get any on the train, lessen maybe the boy that had Mun Bun's popgun has some."

"They don't play lawn tennis in winter," said Rose.

"Hush, children, dear," begged Mrs. Bunker, for they were raising their voices as they talked. "We want to hear what the trainman says."

"What happened that made us stop so quickly, and with such a bump?" asked Grandpa Ford, as the railroad man came in covered with the white flakes. "Was there an accident?"

"A little one," the man answered. "But we'll soon be all right. The snow clogged and stopped up a switch, and the engineer was afraid he would get on the wrong track, so he put on the brakes quickly and made a short and sudden stop. But we are going to dig away the snow, and then, I think, we can go on again."

"We want to go to Grandpa Ford's," spoke up Violet, as she stood close to the trainman. "Will the train take us there?"

"It will if the snow will let us, little girl," was the answer, and many passengers in the train laughed at Vi's funny question.

The brakeman hurried out, and some of the men passengers, putting on their heavy overcoats, went with him. It was too dark outside for any of the six little Bunkers to see anything that was going on. But by placing their faces close against the windows of the car and holding a hand on either side of the face to shut out the light in the car, they could see a little way into the darkness outside.

"It's snowing hard," reported Russ.

"I like it," said Rose. "We can have some sleigh rides, and coast downhill."

"And build snow men," added Violet, giving a little wriggle of pleasure.

"And snow forts, and have snowball fights!" exclaimed Laddie.

Mun Bun and Margy were eating some cookies their mother had saved for them, so they didn't say anything, just then.

"Could you ever make a snow man that would talk?" asked Vi, when she and the others had tired of looking out at the swirling flakes.

"Course not!" exclaimed Laddie. "That would be like a riddle."

"I could make a snow man talk," declared Russ.

"You could not! How could you?" asked Laddie.

"I could scoop out a hollow place in his back and put a phonograph inside, and when I wound it up the snow man would talk."

"The phonograph would freeze inside a snow man," said Laddie.

"No, it wouldn't. If it did I could build a little fire and melt it," Russ went on. "Maybe I'll do it, too; that is, if I can find a phonograph."

"But if you built a fire to thaw out the phonograph it would melt the snow man," said Rose.

Russ seemed to be puzzled by this.

"Well, I'd do it somehow," he declared. "I'd just build a little fire, and that wouldn't melt the snow man very much."

Back into the car came trooping some of the men who had gone out to see the switch and rails clogged with the snow.

"Are we able to go on?" asked Grandpa Ford of one of these men.

"I think so," was the answer. "The snow has been shoveled away from the switch, and the engineer is going to try again. But it is a bad storm, and I doubt if we get through to-night."

"Won't we get home to your place, Grandpa?" asked Laddie.

"It's hard to tell," answered the old gentleman. "But, if worst comes to worst, we can stay on the train all night. We can sleep here and eat here, but perhaps we can get almost to Tarrington, and drive in a big sled the rest of the way."

"Where can you get a sled?" asked Violet, always ready with a question.

"Oh, I can hire one, if I can't get my own," said Grandpa Ford. "I told one of my men to meet us at the depot with a big carriage. But when he sees it snowing, as it is now up at Great Hedge, he'll take out the sled, I'm sure."

"I like to ride in a sled," said Rose. "It's such fun to cuddle down in the fur robes."

"Have you got fur robes, Grandpa?" Vi inquired.

"Oh, yes, plenty of them," he answered. "But I hope we'll get to Tarrington," he added in a low voice to Mr. and Mrs. Bunker. "I would not want to drive in an open sled through this cold storm with the children."

"They wouldn't mind it," said Daddy Bunker. "If they were well-wrapped they would like it."

"I suppose I should have waited until warmer weather to bring you to Great Hedge," went on Grandpa Ford. "But I wanted to have the children with me, and so did their grandmother. She hasn't seen them all together for some time. So I just thought I'd bring you in the winter, and not wait for summer."

"And I'm glad you did," said Mother Bunker. "We'll be all right, once we get there."

"Another reason why I wanted you at Great Hedge," went on Grandpa Ford, "is that I want you to help me find out about those queer noises, and what makes them. If there's a----"

But just then Grandpa Ford saw Rose and Russ looking at him in a queer and interested way and as if they wanted to hear what was being said, so he stopped with:

"Well, you know what I mean."

"Yes," said Daddy Bunker. "We know."

"I know what they were talking about," said Russ in a whisper to Rose, a little later.

"What?"

"About the ghost. Grandpa has a ghost at Great Hedge, and he wants to find it. We'll find it for him, Rose."

"Yes, but we mustn't tell any one else about it," and Rose nodded toward Mun Bun and the others.

"No, we won't tell them," agreed Russ. "We'll hunt all by ourselves, and s'prise Grandpa and Grandma."

The passengers were now settled in their seats again, and pretty soon the train started off once more. It did not go as fast as at first, because there was so much snow on the tracks. But there were no more sudden stops, and soon a brakeman came through the coach and said he thought everything would be all right.

"Will we get to Tarrington?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"Yes, I am pretty sure we shall," was the answer.

The train did get to Tarrington, though not without some trouble and one or two more stops to clear snow out of the switches. And when Tarrington was reached it was quite late. It was dark, and cold, and snowing hard.

"I don't know about going on to my place to-night," said Grandpa Ford with a shake of his head as he looked at the six little Bunkers. "I'm afraid it will be a long, cold drive for them."

"Wrap them up in robes and we'll try it," said Daddy Bunker. "Is your sled here?"

"Yes, my man is here with a strong team of horses and the big bob sled. He says the roads are pretty good, but it is very cold. Well, we'll try. And, if we can't make it, we'll come back and stay at the hotel here all night."

They were in the Tarrington station now, where it was nice and warm and light. Outside it was dark and cold and snowing hard. But the children did not mind.

"We'll soon be at Grandpa's!" chanted Laddie.

"And have some bread and jam!" added Violet. "What's jam made of?" she asked quickly. "Has it got honey in to make it sweet?"

"No time for questions now," said Mother Bunker. "Save them until we get to Grandpa's."

"I'm hungry!" wailed Margy. "I want something to eat!"

"So do I!" added Mun Bun.

"There's a lunch counter in this station," said Grandpa Ford. "If you want to we can get the children something to eat here, and perhaps we'd better, before we start on the long, cold drive. It may be late before we get to Great Hedge."

"Yes, I think it best to get something," agreed Daddy Bunker. "I'll go and see what there is to eat."

Daddy Bunker started toward the lunch counter, but at that moment there was a loud crash, a breaking of glass, and a voice cried:

"Now you've gone and done it! You busted it, an' spilled 'em all!"

CHAPTER X

GREAT HEDGE AT LAST

"Oh, what has happened now?" exclaimed Mother Bunker as she looked around the depot to see if any of the children was in mischief. She noticed Rose and Russ, Laddie and Vi, and Margy. But Mun Bun was not in sight.

"Did he fall out of a window?" asked Violet.

"Mercy! I hope not," cried Mrs. Bunker.

Then they all heard Mun Bun's voice saying, rather tearfully:

"I--I didn't mean to do it. I only wanted a cake!"

"Well, you busted it, an' now somebody's got to pay for it!" came another voice, and one that was rather angry.

Daddy Bunker hurried around to the other side of the ticket office, and the others, including Grandpa Ford, followed. There, standing near the lunch counter, with a broken bowl at his feet, and cakes scattered around him, stood Mun Bun. In front of him was the young man who had charge of the station lunch counter.

"Oh, Mun Bun!" sighed his mother.

"Why, Mun Bun! what happened?" asked his father.

"He happened--that!" exclaimed the young man. "He pulled it over, off the counter, and it smashed. And look at the cakes--all spoiled."

"Not all spoiled," said Mun Bun. "I can eat 'em, an' so can Margy. We're both hungry!"

"Did you pull over the bowl of cakes?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"Yes," admitted Mun Bun, "I did. I reached up to get one, and the bowl tipped over on me and they all spilled."

"And the bowl broke," said the lunch-counter young man.

"I'll pay for it, Tom," said Grandpa Ford, who seemed to know the young man. "That'll be all right. I'll pay for the bowl and the cakes, too. Some of them are all right. They fell on this newspaper."

And this was true. Mun Bun had reached up, standing on his tip-toes, to get a cake out of the bowl. As he said, he was hungry, and while Daddy Bunker and Grandpa Ford were talking about getting the children something to eat, Mun Bun had wandered off by himself, found the lunch counter, and started to help himself. But he was not quite tall enough, and the glass bowl had fallen with a crash.

The cakes had scattered out, but, as Grandpa Ford had said, some of them had fallen on a clean newspaper which some one had dropped on the depot floor just before the accident.

Grandpa Ford, Daddy Bunker and Tom, the lunchman, picked up the clean cakes and put them in another bowl. The broken pieces of the smashed bowl and the cakes that had gone on the floor were also picked up.

"Well, now that we're all here, we might as well get the children something to eat," said Grandpa Ford. "Tom can give them hot milk and cakes, and we grown-folks can have some hot coffee to get us ready for the ride out to Great Hedge. Tom, can you take care of this big family?"

"Oh, I guess so," was the answer, and the lunchman was not angry now, for he saw he would lose nothing by what Mun Bun had done.

The six little Bunkers ate well, for the other five, as well as Mun Bun, were hungry. Then, when the grown-ups had been fed, and the broken bowl paid for, Grandpa Ford went out into the storm to tell his man, who was in charge of the horses and sled, that the party was ready to start. The horses had been kept waiting under a shed so they would be out of the storm.

"Oh, that sounds just like Santa Claus!" cried Margy, as the sound of jingling bells was heard outside the depot.

It seemed rather hard to leave the cosy, bright, warm station at that hour of the night and start out into the darkness and storm. But the children did not mind it. They were too eager to get to Great Hedge and see Grandpa Ford. That is,

most of them were. Perhaps Mun Bun and Margy were a bit too sleepy to care much what happened.

"But we can cuddle them down in the straw in the bottom of the sled, cover them with blankets and let them go to sleep," said Grandpa Ford, as he noted the blinking eyes of the two youngest Bunkers. "They'll go to sleep and be at Great Hedge before they know it."

"How can you find it in the dark?" asked Vi.

"Oh, the horses know the way," answered the old gentleman. "Come on."

"I'm going to make up a riddle about a horse," began Laddie. "I have it almost made up. It's about what kind of a tree would you like to drive."

"You can't drive a tree!" exclaimed Russ. "All you can do is to climb it, or cut it down. So there!"

"Yes, you can!" insisted Laddie. "You can drive my riddle kind of tree."

"You can not! Can you, Mother?" appealed Russ. "You can climb a tree and cut it down, and that's all you can do to it, isn't it?"

"You can sit in the shade of it," said Rose.

"Oh, yes, well, but that doesn't count!" said Russ.

"Anyhow it's a riddle," went on Laddie. "What kind of a tree would you like to drive?"

"We haven't any time for riddles now," said Mother Bunker. "Come along, children, Grandpa is waiting!"

And, with Laddie's riddle still unanswered, they went out into the darkness and the storm.

At first it rather took away the breath of the children--that is, of the four oldest. Mun Bun was carried by his mother, while Daddy Bunker took Margy in his arms. Thus they were cuddled up so the cold wind and snow could not blow on them. Grandpa Ford wanted to carry Violet from the depot out to the waiting sled, but she said she was big enough to walk.

The sled stood near the depot platform, and the lights from the station shone on it, so it was easy to tuck the children in. Down in the warm straw, and under the warm blankets, the six little Bunkers were placed, until no cold wind nor snow could get at them.



DOWN IN THE WARM STRAW AND UNDER

**THE BLANKETS THE SIX LITTLE
BUNKERS WERE PLACED.**

Six Little Bunkers at Grandpa Ford's. --Page 100

"Well, I guess we're all ready, Dick," said Grandpa Ford to his hired man, who was to drive. "Think we can make it?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Ford," was the answer. "The horses are anxious to get home, and the roads aren't as bad as they'll be in the morning."

"Well, when we get to Great Hedge we can stay there a long time," said Grandpa Ford. "Go ahead, Dick."

"Go 'long, horses!" called Dick, at the same time cracking his whip. Of course he did not hit the horses with it. He just snapped it in the air over their backs.

Away they sprang, with a jingle of bells, their feet making no noise in the soft snow. Away they went, and on down the road which was white with the crystal flakes that sparkled in the light of a lantern that was hung underneath the big sled.

"How long a drive is it?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Oh, about half an hour," answered Grandpa Ford. "We'll be there before you know it. It's downhill, and the horses are anxious to get to their warm stable."

And this seemed to be true, for the animals, with the jingling bells around them, raced bravely along. Mun Bun and Margy fell asleep almost at once, it was so warm and cosy in Grandpa's sled. But the other children peered out now and then from beneath the robes. However, they were soon glad to pull their heads in again, for it was very cold.

The drive, too, was longer than Grandpa Ford thought it would be, as one of the roads was so blocked with a drift that the sled could not get through, and they had to drive around it.

"But we'll get through!" said Grandpa Ford.

On and on they went. It was a long, cold ride, but it came to an end at last. Russ, peering up over a blanket, saw, down the road, a large, black patch, and from it a light seemed to glow.

"Is that another railroad station?" he asked.

"No, that's Great Hedge," answered Grandpa Ford. "The black part you see is the hedge around the house, and the light comes from a lantern I have outside. Here we are at Great Hedge at last!"

The sled turned into a driveway and stopped beneath a sort of covered porch.

"Whoa!" called Dick to the horses.

A door opened, letting out a glow of warm, cheerful light.

"Are the six little Bunkers there?" asked a voice.

"Yes, every one, and the two big Bunkers, too!" answered Grandpa Ford. "Come on, children! Here's Grandma Ford all ready with that bread and jam for you!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" sighed Rose. "I was getting hungry again."

"So was I," admitted Russ.

"Now I'm going to finish my riddle," declared Laddie, as he untangled himself from the robes.

"And we can begin to hunt for the ghost," whispered Rose to Russ.

"Yes," he whispered back.

Mun Bun and Margy were awakened and carried in the house. Oh, how nice and warm it was after the storm!

"Have you really got bread and jam?" asked Vi.

"Yes, indeed, my dear, I have!" laughed Grandma Ford, hugging and kissing her, and then hugging and kissing, in turn, the other five little Bunkers.

"Wait till you hear my riddle," began Laddie. "What kind of a tree would you like----"

And just then a loud noise sounded through the house. It was as if a giant had uttered a deep groan.

"O-u-g-h-m!"

Grandpa and Grandma Ford looked at each other. So did Daddy and Mother Bunker. And Rose leaned over and whispered to Russ:

"That's the ghost!"

CHAPTER XI

THE NIGHT NOISE

Outside of Great Hedge the wind howled and the snow whirled about in white flakes. Inside it was warm, light and cosy. But the queer noise which had sounded, and which had seemed so to startle the grown folk, came from inside, and not outside. At least that is what Rose and Russ thought.

"It's the ghost!" said Rose again.

"Nonsense!" laughed Daddy Bunker. "What do you children know about ghosts? There aren't such things. There never has been a ghost and never will be one. That was the wind."

"Maybe it was," agreed Russ, who was not quite as ready as his sister was to think of ghosts.

"Of course it was!" exclaimed Grandma Ford. "The wind often howls that way in winter. And now come over where it's warmer, and I'll get you all some bread and jam. You must be hungry, aren't you?"

"I am," said Mun Bun. "I went to get some cakes in the depot, and I----"

"Yes, and he pulled over the whole bowl full and it broke," said Margy, interrupting Mun Bun's story. "And the man was awful mad!"

"But we ate the cakes, anyhow," added Mun Bun. "They fell on a paper and most of 'em were clean. Have you got cakes, Grandma?"

"Bless your heart! Lots of 'em. But I don't believe cake will be good for you at night; especially after you've had some, as you did at the depot. But bread and jam and a glass of milk won't hurt you, and you shall have that. Do any of the rest of you want anything to eat?"

"I do!" cried Vi. "Where do you keep your things to eat, Grandma? Have you got a big pantry?"

"I guess Vi is afraid you won't have enough," laughed Mrs. Bunker.

"Oh, I laid in a big stock of food when I heard the six little Bunkers were coming," said Grandpa Ford.

Neither Russ nor Rose said anything then about the ghost. But they saw that their father and Grandpa Ford were talking together in one corner of the room.

"Maybe they're talking about that," whispered Rose.

"Yes," agreed Russ, also in a whisper. "But let's get something to eat, and then we can hunt by ourselves. You're not afraid, are you, Rose?"

"No. Are you?"

"I--I guess not! No, I'm not afraid," and Russ spoke more firmly now. "It's so nice and light here I'm not a bit afraid," he went on.

Grandma Ford led the six little Bunkers out to the dining-room, where the table was already set waiting for them. There seemed to be plenty of bread and jam on it, and other things, too.

"Can't I tell my riddle now?" asked Laddie when they were all seated at the table and had eaten something. "Don't you want to hear it, Grandma?"

"Yes, of course I do, my dear. What is it?"

"What kind of a tree would you rather drive?" asked Laddie. "That's the riddle. Russ says you can't drive a tree, that you can only climb it or chop it down, or burn it up."

"And I said you could sit in the shade of it," added Rose.

"Well, all of those things can be done to trees," said Grandma Ford with a smile, as she gave Mun Bun some more bread and jam. "I think I should like best sitting in the shade of a tree. But what is your riddle, Laddie?"

"Oh, you have to guess it!" exclaimed the little fellow. "I ask you the question and you have to answer it. That's what a riddle is for. Now, I ask you, what kind of a tree would you rather drive?"

Grandma Ford thought for a moment, and then said:

"A dogwood tree if it wouldn't bite."

"Is there a dogwood tree?" asked Laddie.

"Yes," answered Grandma Ford. "And very pretty blossoms it has on it, too. Is that the answer to your riddle?"

"No'm," answered Laddie. "It's a horse chestnut tree. That's the kind you'd rather drive, wouldn't you? A *horse chestnut!*" and he laughed gleefully.

"Well, I guess that would be the most proper sort of tree to drive," said Grandpa Ford, who came in just then with Daddy Bunker.

"And I'll take my dogwood tree along to run under the wagon that your horse chestnut is pulling," said Grandma Ford.

"What makes some dogs--the kind with black spots on--trot under wagons?" asked Vi. "Is it so they won't get rained on?"

"I guess that's as good a reason as any," said her father.

So the six little Bunkers ate their supper--rather a late one, for the storm had delayed them--and then they sat about and talked for a while. Grandma Ford asked the children all about themselves, where they had been visiting and so on, and they told her about having been to Grandma Bell's, to Aunt Jo's, and to Cousin Tom's.

"It was warm while we were at all those places," said Rose. "And now it is winter."

"I guess you'd say so if you looked outdoors!" exclaimed Russ, who came back from having peered from a window. "It's snowing terrible hard."

"Then we can make lots of snow men!" exclaimed Laddie. "That will be heaps of fun."

"You'll have to be well wrapped up when you go out," remarked Grandma Ford. "It is colder here than it is during the winter at your home, so put on your coats every time you go out."

"The place for them to go now is to bed!" said Mrs. Bunker. "Mun Bun and Margy are asleep in their chairs this very minute, and Vi is almost asleep. Come, children, off to bed with you!"

Outside it was darker than ever, and still snowing and blowing hard. But Grandpa's house at Great Hedge was the nicest place in the world.

"Did the horses go to bed?" sleepily asked Mun Bun as his mother carried him up.

"Yes, they're in bed and asleep long ago. And that's where you will soon be yourself."

The children's rooms were close together, some of them sleeping in the same apartment. And Mr. and Mrs. Bunker had a room down at the end of the hall, so that they could go to any of the six little Bunkers who might call in the night. Often one of the four smaller ones wanted a drink.

Russ and Laddie had a room together, and so did Rose and Vi, and before the two older Bunker children went to bed Rose whispered to her brother:

"Shall we get up and hunt for the ghost when the others are asleep?"

"I don't guess we'd better do it to-night," he answered. "I'm too sleepy. Besides we don't know our way around the house in the dark. We'll wait until to-morrow."

"All right," agreed Rose. This suited her. She, too, was ready for bed.

Daddy Bunker and Grandpa Ford did not, of course, go to bed as early as did the children. And Mother Bunker was going downstairs to talk to Grandma Ford as soon as Margy and Mun Bun were sound asleep.

One after another the six little Bunkers got into bed and, though the two smallest were asleep almost at once, the others turned and twisted a little, as almost every one does in a strange bed. But, finally, even Rose and Russ, in their rooms, were in Slumberland, lulled by the whistle of the wind and the rattle of the snow against the windows.

Russ thought it must be the middle of the night when he was suddenly awakened by a loud noise. It was a banging sound, as though something heavy had fallen to the floor. Then came a rattle of tin and a splash of water, and the voice

of one of the little Bunkers cried:

"Oh, I fell in! I fell in! Somebody get me out!"

CHAPTER XII

UP IN THE ATTIC

Russ leaped out of bed and ran into the hall, where a light was burning. The Bunkers always burned one, turned low.

"Mother! Daddy!" cried Russ. "Come on, quick! The ghost has got one of us! Come quick!"

For a moment no one answered his call, and then he heard, from the room where Mun Bun had been put to sleep, the sound of crying.

"What's the matter?" asked Russ, trying to make his voice sound brave. "Are you hurt, Mun Bun? Or Margy?"

"I--I fell in and I'm all wet," sobbed Mun Bun.

"Oh, Daddy! Come quick!" fairly shouted Russ. "The ghost pushed Mun Bun in, and he can't get out!"

Feet were heard coming upstairs. Then a voice asked:

"What is the matter? What has happened now, Russ? Are you hurt?"

"No, Mother!" answered the oldest Bunker boy. "But I guess it's Mun Bun. It sounds like him, and I guess the ghost has him!"

"Nonsense! There are no ghosts! Don't cry, Mun Bun," Mrs. Bunker went on, as she hurried up the stairs. "I'm coming, and so is Daddy Bunker! You'll be all right."

"But I'm all wet!" sobbed Mun Bun. "I--I guess I fell in the ocean, and I can't get out!"

"You're dreaming that you're back at Cousin Tom's," laughed Mrs. Bunker, as she turned up the light and went into the room where Mun Bun and Margy slept. "You're dreaming, and--Oh, you poor little dear!" she cried, as she saw what had happened. "You have fallen out of bed!"

And that is just what happened. Mun Bun, being in a strange bed, had rolled too near one edge, and had fallen out. That was the bumping, banging noise Russ heard.

"But what made the splash?" Russ asked as he came in to see his mother lift Mun Bun from the floor, and put him back in bed.

"That was when he upset a tin cup of water I had put in a chair near his bed, so it would be handy when I wanted to give him a drink in the night," said Mrs. Bunker. "It splashed all over Mun Bun, and that made him think, I guess, that he had fallen into the water. Did it, Mun Bun?" she asked.

"I--I guess so," he murmured. "I thought I fell into the water, 'cause I was all wet. I didn't like it."

"I don't blame you," said Mrs. Bunker. "Now I'll put a dry nightgown on you, and you can go to sleep again. I'll put a chair by the bed so you won't roll out again, and I'll set the water on the bureau.

"Now, don't make any more noise, Russ, or Mun Bun, and wake up Margy," went on Mrs. Bunker. "She is sleeping too nicely to be awakened." Mun Bun's little sister, though in the same bed with him, had not heard him fall out, knock over the tin cup of water, and call out that he had fallen in. She slept through it all.

Mun Bun was soon dressed in a dry garment, the water on the floor was mopped up, and the light turned down again.

Then the six little Bunkers at Great Hedge quieted down and slept all the way through until morning.

But that same night, when Mother Bunker went downstairs, after having put Mun Bun back to bed, she said to her husband and Grandpa and Grandma Ford:

"What do you suppose has got into Russ to be talking about a ghost?"

"Is that what he said?" asked Grandpa Ford.

"Yes. When he was awakened by Mun's falling out of bed the first thing he called to me was that the ghost had got Mun. I don't understand where the children heard anything about such a thing."

"Nor I," said Daddy Bunker.

"We mustn't let them get the idea that anything is wrong here at Great Hedge," went on Grandpa Ford. "It might frighten them, though, of course, it is nothing like a ghost. I can't imagine where they got the idea, but we must not speak of it again in front of them.

"I do wish we could find out what it is that makes such a queer noise. Your mother and I," he said to Daddy Bunker, "have heard it many times, and now, the first night you are here, it sounds again."

"But only once," said Mr. Bunker, "and that may have been the wind, as we said it was."

"No, it wasn't the wind," declared Grandpa Ford. "For I have heard the same moaning sound when there was hardly any wind. The wind has died down now. It is quieter. I think the storm has stopped, or soon will."

He went to the window to look out, and, as he did so, there sounded through the house a deep, dull groan. It seemed to fill many rooms, and for a moment Daddy and Mother Bunker and Grandpa and Grandma Ford looked at one another. Then they listened to see if any of the children were awake. But upstairs all was quiet.

"There it goes again," said Grandpa Ford.

"I heard it," answered Daddy Bunker. "I wonder what it could have been?"

"The wind," said Mrs. Bunker in a low voice.

"But the wind has stopped blowing," remarked Grandma Ford.

"Oh, well, we'll find out what it is soon," said Daddy Bunker. "Don't let it worry you. We came here, Mother dear, to help you hunt for the queer noise, and that's what we'll do."

The grown folks listened, but the noise did not sound again, and then, as it was getting late, they all went to bed. Nothing disturbed them until morning.

"Hurray! It's stopped snowing!" cried Russ as he ran to the window and looked out. "Now we can make a snow man."

"And a snow fort!" added Laddie.

"And slide downhill, I hope," said Rose. "I wonder if Grandpa Ford has any sleds we can take?"

"He said there were some," declared Vi. "I asked him last night. And there are skates, too. I asked him that."

One might depend on Vi to ask the questions.

"Then we'll have lots of fun!" said Russ. "Come on, now, we'll get our breakfast and then we can go out and have fun."

"I want to go out and see where the horses slept," remarked Mun Bun. "Did any of them fall out of bed, I wonder?"

"No," said Grandma Ford with a laugh. "Horses have beds that are right on the floor. They are made of straw, and the horses can't fall out. But you shall see for yourself. Come, now, while the cakes are hot. And we have maple syrup to eat on them."

"Oh, hurray!" cried Russ. "I love buckwheat cakes!"

And you should have seen the breakfast the six little Bunkers ate! No, on second thought, perhaps it is just as well you didn't see it, for it might have made you hungry. But I'll tell you this much: It was a very good one.

"Now we'll go out and have some fun!" cried Russ, as they left the table. "Shall we make a snow man first, or a fort?"

"A man!" cried Mun Bun.

"A fort!" called Laddie.

"Wait just a minute, all of you," said Mother Bunker. "I don't want any of you to go out just yet."

"Oh!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Oh, Mother!"

"Why?"

Thus, one after another, cried some of the six little Bunkers. They were all much disappointed.

"Oh, I'm going to let you go out and play in the snow all you like," said Mother Bunker quickly, "only I want you to wait until I can unpack your rubber boots and leggings. Then you won't get wet. So just wait an hour or two. That won't hurt you."

"And while you are waiting you can play up in the attic," said Grandma Ford with a smile. "I think you will like it there. Our attic is very large and there are a number of old-fashioned things in it with which you may play. The Ripleys left a lot of things behind. There are old trunks, and they are filled with old clothes that you can dress up in. There is a spinning wheel and candle-moulds, there are strings of old sleigh bells. And there are some things that I used to have when I was a girl. I moved them here from our old home. Don't you think you would like to play up there?"

"Oh, of course we would!" cried Rose. "We can take up our dolls!"

"And have a play-party!" added Violet.

"And dress up and play go visiting," added Margy.

"I'm going to make something!" cried Russ, with a jolly whistle.

"I'll think up some new riddles!" declared Laddie.

"What are you going to do, Mun Bun?" asked his grandmother, for the little chap had said nothing as yet, just listening to the others.

"I--I'm not going to fall out of bed!" he answered, and then he wondered why all the others laughed.

"Well, trot up to the attic," said Grandma Ford, "and have all the fun you want. Don't be afraid of playing with things, for I don't believe you can hurt them. Then your mother and I will be getting out your rubber boots, and you may play in the snow this afternoon."

With whoops and shouts of delight the six little Bunkers trooped up to the attic. As Grandma Ford had said, it was a large one. It was over about half the house of Great Hedge Estate, and the house Grandpa Ford had bought from Mr. Ripley was a big one.

There were many rooms on the first floor, more on the second and some on the third. Then came the attic, highest of all, and in this attic were stored the things thought to be of no use any more.

As Great Hedge was in the country, though not many miles outside the city of Tarrington, there were country things in the attic, such as a spinning wheel, two of them, in fact, candlesticks, candle-moulds and so on. You all know that a candlestick is something in which to stick a candle so one may carry it around. In the olden days, before we had electric lights, gas or even kerosene lamps, the people used to read and work by means of candles.

A candle is a stick of tallow, wax or something like that, with a string, or wick, in the middle, just as rock candy has a string in the middle. Only you light the string in a candle, and you throw away the string in a stick of rock candy.

Candle-moulds are tin tubes, just the shape of candles, and into these tubes was poured the melted wax or tallow to make the light-givers.

Up into the attic tramped the six little Bunkers. From the windows, high up, they could look across the snow-covered fields. They could see the trees, now bare of leaves, and the great black hedge around Grandpa Ford's house. The big chimney of the house was hot and that kept the attic fairly warm.

"You wouldn't think a ghost could get in, would you?" asked Rose of Russ in a low voice.

"Maybe it was here already," suggested Russ. "An attic is a good place for ghosts. Let's look for one here."

"But don't let the others know," cautioned Rose, motioning to Mun Bun and Margy, Laddie and Vi.

"No," agreed Russ.

He and his sister began to look about the big attic. As Grandma Ford had said, there were many things with which to play and have fun.

"Oh, Russ!" cried Laddie. "Here are two spinning wheels. Couldn't you make something of them--a steamboat or an auto or something?"

"Yes, I guess I could," agreed Russ. "Let's see if they turn around easy."

He and Laddie were trying the spinning wheels, whirling them around, when there came a sudden cry from Margy. They turned to see her standing in one corner of the big attic, and, the next moment, she seemed to vanish from sight, as if she had fallen down some big hole.

"Oh, Margy! Margy!" cried Rose. "Where are you?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE OLD SPINNING WHEEL

For a moment there was no answer to the cry Rose gave when she saw her sister disappear from sight. The other children, frightened by Rose's scream, gathered about.

"What's the matter?" asked Russ, who was whirling one of the spinning wheels, while Laddie spun the other.

"Margy's gone!" exclaimed Rose. "She's gone, and maybe----"

"Where'd she go?" asked Russ. "Come on, Laddie, we'll find her."

Before Rose could answer Margy spoke for herself by uttering loud cries and sobs. They seemed to come from a dark hole in the attic, but the little girl herself could not be seen by her brothers and sisters.

"Oh, get me out! Get me out!" screamed Margy. "I don't like it here! It's dark!"

The five little Bunkers were puzzled. It was worse than some of Laddie's riddles. They could hear Margy, but they could not see her. She had gone into a dark corner and that seemed to be the last of her.

"Oh, what shall we do?" asked Rose.

"We better go for Daddy or Mother or Grandpa," said Russ.

"I'll go," offered Laddie.

But there was no need, for just then up the attic stairs came Mrs. Bunker and Grandma Ford. They knew right away that something was the matter.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Margy's gone, and we can't find her, but we can hear her," explained Rose.

She need not have said the last, for Margy was still screaming:

"I want to get out! Take me out! It's terrible dark here!"

"Oh, the poor child's in the nut cubby-hole!" cried Grandma Ford. "Of course it's dark there! Wait a minute, my dear, and I'll get you out," she said.

Grandma Ford quickly crossed the attic. Then she stooped over in the dark corner, reached down, and lifted something up and there was--Margy!

The little girl was carried into the light, crying and sobbing; but, as soon as she found out there was nothing the matter with her, and that she was with her mother and grandmother and brothers and sisters, she stopped crying.

"What happened to you, Margy?" asked Russ.

"I--I don't know," she answered. "I just slipped like once when I rolled downhill."

"She fell into the nut cubby-hole," explained Grandma Ford. "There are many nut trees on Great Hedge Estate, and the Ripley family used to gather the nuts and store them here in the attic to dry. But the rats and mice used to take a great many of the nuts, so they built a sort of big box down in a hole in the floor. The hole was there anyhow, being part of the attic. But it was lined with tin, so the mice could not gnaw through, and the nuts were stored in it.

"I meant to tell you children to look out for it, as it is like a hole in the floor, though it is not very deep, and one end slopes down, like a hill, so you slide into it instead of falling.

"But I forgot about it, and I forgot that the cover has been off the nut cubby-hole for some time. So Margy, walking in the dark corner, slid into this hole."

"That's what I did," said the little girl. "I slid just like going downhill."

"That's why she disappeared so suddenly," went on Grandma Ford. "The tin, being smooth, didn't hurt her a bit, as she slid. And it is very dark in there. But after this I'll keep the cover on, so no more of my little Bunkers will get into trouble."

By the gleam of a candle which she lighted, Grandma Ford showed the children the nut cubby-hole into which Margy had fallen. Then the cover was put on so there was no more danger.

"And now you may go out and play in the snow," said Mrs. Bunker. "I have unpacked your rubber boots and old, warm coats, so run out and have some fun."

Laughing, shouting, and whooping, the six little Bunkers ran out to play. It was their first sight of Great Hedge in winter by daylight, and Russ and Rose paused for a moment after getting out of doors to look at the big house, on all sides of which was the tall hedge.

"It's a terribly big house," said Russ to his sister as they tramped on through the white snow. "I wonder what part the ghost lives in, don't you?"

"I thought he was up in the attic, and took Margy," said Rose.

"So did I, at first," admitted Russ. "But I don't guess he stays there. I guess the ghost lives down cellar. We'll hunt for him after a while, and Grandpa Ford will be glad we found him."

But it was now such a fine, sunny day outside, after the storm, that the six little Bunkers thought of nothing but having fun. They raced about in the snow, threw soft balls of it at one another, and then went out to the barn.

Dick, the hired man, was there feeding the horses, and the children saw the animals that had pulled them over the snow from the railroad station the night before.

There were several small sleds in the barn--some that Grandma Ford had bought when it was decided that the six little Bunkers would visit Great Hedge Estate--and they were just the proper toys for the six little children. Soon they were coasting down a small hill which Dick showed them and also helped trample down smooth for them. For snow on a hill has to be packed hard and made smooth before one can coast well.

"Let's have a race!" cried Russ, as he and Laddie had their turn riding down the slope.

"All right, I can beat you!" Laddie shouted. And he would have done so, too, only he guided wrong, and his sled went into a bank of snow, upsetting and tumbling him off.

"But I like it!" he shouted as he got up and shook the snow from him.

"When are you going to make the snow man?" asked Vi. "I want to see a snow man. And are you going to put a phonograph inside him, Russ, and make him talk?"

"I am if I can find a phonograph little enough," said Russ.

But Russ did not wait for that. With Laddie to help him, he rolled two or three balls of snow. It was soft, for the sun was now warm, and the snow packed well. The snowballs were put together, and thus the snow man was started. The six little Bunkers then made arms and legs for him, stuck pieces of coal in for buttons on his coat and for his eyes and nose and mouth, and then Dick gave them an old hat to put on the snow man's head.

"Now he won't catch cold," said Dick, when the hat had been stuck on.

"Could he catch cold?" asked Vi. "I don't see how he could, 'cause he's cold already. He makes my hands cold," and she showed her little red fingers.

"Well, if you hear him sneeze come in and tell me," said Dick with a smile. "If a snow man sneezes that's a sure sign he's catching cold. So listen if you hear this one go 'a-ker-choo!' That means we'll have to get the doctor."

"I guess that's only a joke, like some of Laddie's riddles," remarked Russ, when Dick had gone back to the barn.

"I'm going to make up a riddle about a snow man, but I haven't got it thought out yet," said Laddie. "Come on, Russ, let's make a snow fort."

The snow man being finished, the two older Bunker boys let the smaller children play with it, and throw snowballs at it, trying to knock off the old hat, and Laddie and Russ started work on the fort.

They had great fun at this, and made quite a big fort, getting inside it and throwing snowballs at a make-believe enemy on the outside.

All that day and the next the six little Bunkers played around Great Hedge, having fun in the snow. Sometimes Mother and Grandma came out to watch them. Grandpa Ford and Daddy Bunker went to town in a cutter, with the merry

jingling bells *on* the horse, and Daddy went home for a week on business.

Nothing more was said about the ghost for several days, and even Russ and Rose seemed to forget there was such a make-believe chap. They coasted downhill, played, and had fun in the snow and were very glad indeed that they had come to Grandpa Ford's.

Then, about a week after their arrival, there came a cold, blustery day when it was not nice to be out.

"Let's go up to the attic and make something with the old spinning wheels," said Russ to Laddie. "Maybe we can make an airship."

"All right," agreed Laddie. "Only we won't sail up very high in 'em, 'cause we might fall down."

Rose was out in the kitchen, watching Grandma Ford make an apple pie, and Rose was singing away, for she was trying to make a pie also—a little one with pieces left over from her grandmother's crust.

Up to the attic went Russ and Laddie, and Mun Bun followed them.

"I want to come and watch you," he said, shaking his pretty, bobbed hair around his head.

"Shall we let him?" asked Laddie.

"Oh, yes, he can watch us," said Russ, who was always kind to his little brother.

Grandma Ford had said the boys could play with the spinning wheels if they did not break them, and this Russ and Laddie took care not to do.

"First we must make 'em so both wheels will turn around together at the same time alike," said Russ.

"How are you going to do that?" Laddie asked, while Mun Bun sat down in a corner near the big chimney to watch.

"Well, we'll put a belt on 'em, same as the belt on mother's sewing-machine. Don't you know? That has a round leather belt on the big wheel, and when you turn the big wheel the little wheel goes. Same as on our tricycle, only there are chains on those."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Laddie.

They found some string and made a belt of it, putting it around each of the two big spinning wheels. Then, by turning one, the other, at some distance away, could be made to go around.

"This is just like an airship!" cried Laddie. "We'll make believe this is the engine, and we'll go up in it."

This the boys did, even pretending to take Mun Bun up on one trip. Then they played other games with the spinning wheels, making believe they worked in a big factory, and things like that.

By this time Laddie and Russ had forgotten about Mun Bun, and the little fellow had wandered off by himself to the place in the attic where the strings of sleigh bells hung. He had fun jingling these. Then Russ and Laddie found something else with which to play. These were the candle-moulds. Leaving the spinning wheels, with a number of strings and cords still fast to them, the two older boys began to make believe they were soldiers with the candle-moulds for guns.

"I'll be a soldier and you can be an Indian," said Russ to Laddie. "I must live in a log cabin, and you must come in the night and try to get me, and I wake up and yell 'Bang! Bang!' That means you're shot."

"All right, and then I must shoot you, after a while."

"Sure, we'll play that way."

So they did, and had fun. They aimed at one another with the candlestick moulds and shouted so many "bangs!" that the attic echoed with the noise.

Then, suddenly, as they stopped a moment for breath, they heard the voice of Mun Bun crying:

"Oh, stop pulling my hair! Stop pulling my hair! Oh, it hurts!"

Russ and Laddie looked at one another in surprise. Neither of them was near Mun Bun, and yet they could see the little fellow standing close to one of the spinning wheels, and his golden hair stuck straight out behind him, just as if an unseen hand had hold of it and was pulling it hard.

"Oh, stop! Stop! You hurt!" sobbed Mun Bun. "Let go my hair!"

But who had hold of it?



CHAPTER XIV

COASTING FUN

Russ and Laddie said, afterward, that they were much frightened at what happened. They were really more frightened than was Mun Bun, for he was not so much frightened as he was hurt. He thought some one had crept up behind him and was pulling his hair, as often happened when some of the six little Bunkers were not as good as they should be.

"Let go my hair! Stop pulling!" cried Mun Bun.

"We're not touching you," said Laddie.

"Is any one there?" asked Russ, looking to see if any one stood back of his brother.

But he could look right through the spokes of the spinning wheel, near which Mun Bun was standing, and see no one except his little brother. And the bobbed, golden hair of Mun Bun still stuck straight out behind him, as stiff as if the wind were blowing it, or as if some one had hold of it.

"Make 'em stop pulling my hair!" begged Mun Bun again. And then, as he moved a little to one side, Laddie saw the spinning wheel turn and he cried:

"I know what it is!"

"What?" asked Russ. "Do you see 'em? Is it Margy or Vi?"

"Neither one," answered Laddie. "It isn't anybody."

"Nobody pulling Mun Bun's hair?" asked Russ. "Then what's he hollering for?"

"'Cause the spinning wheel's pulling it. Look! He's caught in one of the spinning wheels, and his leg is tangled in one of the string belts we left on, and he made the wheel go around himself."

Russ dropped his candle-mould gun and ran over to his little brother. Surely enough it had happened just as Laddie had said.

The golden hair of the little boy had become tangled in the slender spokes of the spinning wheel, some of which were a bit splintery.

As I told you, when Russ and Laddie finished making believe the wheels were an airship, they left some strings on them. By pulling on these strings the spinning wheels could be made to go around. And that was what Mun Bun had done, though he did not know it.

At first he did not feel it when, leaning up against one of the wheels, his hair got caught. Then his legs became entangled in one of the strings, and, as he stepped out, he pulled on the string and the wheel began to spin.

Of course that stretched his hair tightly, and it felt exactly as if some one were pulling it, which was the case. Only it was the spinning wheel, and not a ghost or any person.

All ghost stories will turn out that way if you wait long enough. Every time it is something real which makes the funny noises or does the funny things. For there are no ghosts.

"Wait a minute, Mun Bun, and I'll fix you!" cried Russ. "Stand still. The more you move the more you pull your own hair."

"I'm not pulling my hair," said Mun Bun. "Somebody behind me is pulling it."

"It's the spinning wheel," said Laddie with a laugh.

Then, when they had untangled Mun Bun's hair, they showed him how it all had happened. He had really pulled his own hair. Of course, he was not hurt very much, for only a little of his hair had stuck to the wheel.

"I can make a riddle up about this," said Laddie when Mun Bun was free once more.

"How?" asked Russ.

"Oh, I don't know just yet, but it'll be something about how can you pull your own hair and not pull it. And the

answer will be a spinning wheel."

"Can I make the spinning wheels go 'round?" asked Mun Bun, who wanted to have some fun after his trouble.

"Yes, you can play with 'em," agreed Russ. "That is, with one of 'em. I'm going to take the other and make it ring the sleigh bells."

"How can you?" asked Laddie.

"I'll show you," answered Russ.

He took the strings off one wheel, letting Mun Bun play with that, and then tied more strings on the second wheel. He also fastened a string of bells on the wheel, and then, standing in a far corner of the attic, and pulling on the string of jingling bells, Russ could make them tinkle and ring.

"This is fun!" cried Laddie, and he and his brother enjoyed themselves very much, and so did Mun Bun. The attic was a great place to have jolly times.

"And I don't believe there's any ghost up there, either," said Russ to Rose that night. "First I thought it might be him pulling Mun Bun's hair, but it wasn't. There's no ghost there."

"I'm glad of it," said Rose.

The weather became somewhat warmer again, and the six little Bunkers could play out in the snow. The hill back of the barn was worn smoother and smoother, and it made a fine place for coasting.

"Let's take our dolls out and give them a ride," said Vi to Rose one day. "They haven't had a sleigh ride for a long while."

"Yes, we'll give 'em a ride," agreed Rose.

"My doll wants a ride, too," said Margy.

Russ, Laddie and Mun Bun were making another snow-man, which was to be a regular "giant," so the girls had the coasting hill to themselves. They took two sleds, for Vi wanted to go by herself. But Margy was almost too little for this.

"You shall ride down with sister," promised Rose. "I'll take care of you."

"And I can hold my doll, can't I?" asked Margy.

"Oh, yes," agreed Rose.

They had brought to Great Hedge with them the Japanese dolls that had come ashore in the box on the beach at Cousin Tom's, and these the three girls took out with them to coast downhill. They had made new clothes for the dolls, as the Japanese dresses were hardly warm enough for the cold weather at Grandpa Ford's.

Reaching the hill, Vi took her place on her sled, holding her doll in her lap, and then, holding to the sled rope, she began pushing herself to the edge of the slope, at the same time calling:

"Gid-ap! Gid-ap!"

"You don't say 'gid-ap' to a sled," objected Rose. "That's only for a horse when you want it to go."

"Well, I want my sled to go, and that's the same thing," declared Vi. "Why can't I say it if I want to? Gid-ap!" she went on, not waiting for an answer to her question. Very often Vi asked questions to which there was no answer.

"Come on, I want a ride like Vi!" exclaimed Margy.

"All right, you shall have it," answered Rose. "And you may say 'gid-ap' to our sled, too, if you like."

"All right--gid-ap!" cried Margy, and then Rose pushed the sled on which she and her little sister sat to the edge of the hill, and down they coasted.

The three little Bunker girls had great fun on the hill. Now and then Dick, who was working around the barn, would come out to watch them.

"Don't you want a ride?" asked Rose, for a few days before Dick had let her sit on the back of one of Grandpa's horses, and had ridden her around the big barn.

"Oh, I'm afraid my legs are too long for those sleds," laughed the hired man. "I'll have to get a bigger one."

"You can hold my doll if you want to," offered Vi. "I'm going to coast like the boys do, and I can't hold her."

"Well, you had better leave your doll in the barn," said Dick. "I might lose her if I took her."

Vi stretched out face downward on the sled, to ride "boy fashion," and, of course, she couldn't hold her doll that way. So she left the toy in a warm place in the hay in the barn.

Rose, Vi and Margy had great sport coasting on the hill, and they were thinking of going in and getting some of Grandma Ford's good bread and jam when Margy cried:

"Oh, my doll! Where's my doll? She's gone. She went sliding downhill all by herself, and now she's gone! Oh, dear!" And Margy began to cry.



CHAPTER XV

JINGLING BELLS

Dick came running out of the barn.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Are any of you hurt?"

But as soon as he asked that he could see that none of the three little Bunker girls was hurt, for they all stood on the hill beside the two sleds.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick again, for he could see that Margy was crying, and crying hard.

"She's lost her doll," explained Rose. "I guess it dropped in the snow. Could you find it for her? It's a Japanese doll, and we got her out of the ocean."

"Out of the ocean!" exclaimed Dick. "Well, if you got her out of the ocean I suppose I can get her out of a snow bank. For I guess that's where your doll is now, Margy. Don't cry! I'll try to find her."

Dick loved children, and, as it was rather lonesome at Great Hedge, he was very glad the six little Bunkers had come with their father and mother to stay until Spring.

"Where did you lose your doll, Margy?" asked Dick, stooping down and leaning over the little girl, who was crying so hard now that she could hardly see on account of her tears.

"Oh, I--I--don't know," she sobbed. "I--I had her in my arms, and I was giving her a nice ride and, all of a sudden, I didn't have her any m-more."

"I guess she slipped out when you went over a bump, or something like that," said Dick. "But, as I said, if you found her in the ocean, I guess we can find her when she's only in a snow bank. I never saw the ocean. Is it very big?"

"Terrible big," answered Rose. "We were down at Cousin Tom's, and a box was washed up on shore and some Japanese dolls were in it. We each have one--all except Russ and Laddie, 'cause they're too big to play with dolls. But now Margy's is lost. But we've two more home, Margy, 'cause there were half a dozen in the box, and you can have one of them."

"Don't want them!" exclaimed Margy. "I want my own doll that I had on the sled. Where is she?" And Margy cried harder than ever.

"We'll look," said Dick.

He went into the barn and came out again with a big wooden rake. In summer the rake was used to clean the lawn. But now it was to be used in the snow.

"You little girls go up to the top of the hill and sit down on your sleds," said Dick. "Or, better still, go into the barn, like the robin in the song, and keep warm. Then I'll look for your doll, Margy."

Then, with the long, wooden rake the man began "combing," as Vi called it, the snow along the hill. There was no need to look in the middle, where the sleds slid down, for there the snow was packed hard, and anything, even smaller than a good-sized Japanese doll, could be seen easily. But Dick raked on each side in the soft snow.

Pretty soon he cried:

"Hurray!"

"Did you find it?" asked Vi.

"Yes, this time I have it!" replied Dick, and he held up to view Margy's lost doll. She had fallen into the soft snow, and was not hurt a bit.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Margy.

After the snow had been brushed off the Japanese doll, Margy hugged her close in her arms.

"I'm never, never, never going to lose you again!" cried the little girl.

"And we're much obliged to you for finding her," said Rose to Dick.

"Oh, yes, I forgot. Mother said I was always to say thank you, and I do!" exclaimed Margy. "I could give you a kiss, too, if you wanted it," she went on, "and so could my doll."

"Well, I'd rather have one from you," laughed Dick. "But I haven't shaved to-day, and my face is rather whiskery."

"My father's face is like that lots of times--I don't mind," said Margy, so she kissed Dick and was very happy.

Then, after some more coasting, during which time the dolls were left in the barn, the three little Bunker girls went back to the house.

"Ready for bread and jam?" asked Grandma Ford. "That was always what I used to want when I came in out of the cold, and I think you want the same."

"Yes, please, we do," said Rose.

"Oh, yes, please!" added Vi.

"I lost my doll," said Margy, "but Dick raked her up and I did give him a kiss."

"That was nice!" laughed Grandma Ford.

As she was spreading the bread and jam for Rose, Margy and Vi, in came Russ, Laddie and Mun Bun, leaving, of course, the snow man outside. And you can easily guess what the boys wanted.

Bread and jam!

That's just it, and you may go to the head of the class. I wish I had some bread and jam to give you for guessing right, but I haven't.

The next day when Daddy Bunker, who had come back from business, and Grandpa Ford went out to the barn to look at one of the horses that had a cold, Russ and Laddie followed. On the way they passed a small house, or pen, such as chickens are kept in, and from it came a loud:

"Gobble-obble-obble!"

"What's that?" asked Mun Bun. "Is it a hand-organ monkey?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Grandpa Ford. "That's our prize turkey, and do you know what he says?"

"Did he say anything?" asked Russ.

"Oh, indeed he did!" said Grandpa Ford with a laugh. "You see I understand turkey talk, and this bird just said: 'Thanksgiving is coming, and then I'll be gobbled-obbled-obbled!' That's what he said, and it's going to come true. That's going to be part of our Thanksgiving day dinner."

"I like turkey," said Russ. "Is Thanksgiving coming soon?"

"Next week," his father told him. "You want to get up good appetites between now and then."

"I'm hungry now," said Laddie, though how he could be, having only had breakfast a little while before, I don't know. But lots of children are that way.

There was plenty to see and do around Great Hedge Estate, and after the six little Bunkers had peeped in at the big Thanksgiving turkey, they played around the barn a bit and then romped in the snow.

In the afternoon Grandpa Ford hitched a team of horses to a big sled--the same one that had brought them from the station--and took them all for a long ride, the bells merrily jingling all the way. They stopped in the city of Tarrington on the way home, and bought some things Grandma Ford wanted for the Thanksgiving dinner.

Coming home in the afternoon, the children went up to the attic to play again, taking some apples with them to have a play party.

"Oh, Grandpa Ford's is just a lovely place!" exclaimed Rose that night as she and the others were going to bed.

"And we didn't hear any more funny ghost noises," said Russ in a low voice. "I guess the ghost has gone, Rose."

"I guess so, too. I didn't hear Daddy or Mother or Grandpa or Grandma say any more about it."

That night Mun Bun awakened, and called to his mother to give him a drink of water. As it happened Rose and Russ

were also awake, and Margy, hearing her brother ask for water, wanted some, too. So there were several of the Bunkers awake at once.

Just as Mrs. Bunker was giving Mun Bun his drink, there suddenly sounded through the dim and silent house the loud ringing of a string of sleigh bells.

"What's that?" called Grandma Ford from across the hall. "Is some one stopping out in front?"

"I'll look," said Grandpa Ford. It was bright moonlight, and he could see plainly. "No one there," he said.

The bells jingled again, more loudly.

"They're up in the attic!" cried Russ. "Some one is ringing the bells in the attic!"

CHAPTER XVI

THANKSGIVING FUN

By this time it seemed as if every one in Grandpa Ford's house at Great Hedge was awake. Even Mun Bun and Margy sat up in bed, after having had their drinks, and listened.

"There certainly are bells jingling," said Mother Bunker.

"And they are in this house, too," added Grandma Ford, as she came out in the dimly-lighted hall, wearing a dark dressing-gown. "I thought, at first, it might be a sleigh-riding party out in front. Often they stop to ask their way."

"No sleighs out in front that I can see," remarked Grandpa Ford. "Where do the bells seem to you to be?" he asked Daddy Bunker.

"Up in the attic!" called Russ from his room. "That's where they sound."

"I believe he is right," said Grandma Ford. "I have a good ear for sound, and that jingling is certainly up in the attic. Father, you'd better take a look."

"Aren't you--aren't you afraid?" asked Rose, rather hesitating over the words.

"Afraid of what?" inquired Grandpa Ford.

"Well, it's so dark up in the attic," went on Rose, and Russ, hearing what she said, knew what she meant. It was the ghost Rose was thinking of, and not the dark.

"I can take a light," said Grandpa Ford. "Then it won't be dark. But you mustn't be afraid in the dark. It can't hurt any one."

Just then the bells gave a very loud jingle, just as if some one had hold of the string and was shaking it hard.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rose.

"I'm goin' to sleep!" announced Mun Bun, and he covered his head with the bedclothes.

"So'm I," said Margy, and she did as her little brother had done, snuggling under the covers.

Rose and Russ heard their father ask Grandpa Ford:

"Did this ever happen before?"

"No," answered Grandpa Ford. "We have heard many strange noises at Great Hedge, noises we thought were caused by--well, you know what I mean," and he nodded at Mr. Bunker to show that he did not want to use the word "ghost."

Of course, Russ and Rose, being in bed in different rooms, could not see this nod, but they guessed what Grandpa Ford meant.

"Well, we'd better go up and see what it is," said Daddy Bunker. "We can't sleep with all that jingling going on," and even as he spoke the bells rang out again.

"I'll get a light," said Grandpa Ford. "A lantern will be best. There is always more or less breeze up in the attic, and a candle or lamp might blow out. Come on."

Daddy Bunker and Grandpa Ford went up into the attic, while the six little Bunkers, two of them with their heads under the covers, waited to hear what would happen. So did Mother Bunker and Grandma Ford.

The two men were heard tramping around in the attic, and then, suddenly, just as the bells gave another jingle, there was a loud laugh.

"There! It's all right," said Mother Bunker. "They've found the--the--whatever it was," she said quickly. "And it must be funny, for hear them laugh."

Down came Daddy Bunker and Grandpa Ford. Grandpa Ford carried the lantern, and Daddy Bunker had something in his hand.

"Here's what caused all the trouble!" he said, and he held out something round and red.

"An apple!" cried Russ, who had come out in the hall to see.

"Just an apple," went on Daddy Bunker. "This apple made all the noise, or, rather, was the cause of the bells jingling."

"How could an apple make bells jingle?" asked Laddie. "Is that a riddle, Daddy?"

"Well, almost, you might say. This is how it happened. When Grandpa Ford and I got up to the attic, we saw the string of sleigh bells hanging from a nail, where you children must have left them when you last played with them. But we couldn't see any one near them who might have rung them, and there was no one in the attic, as far as we knew.

"Then, even as we stood there, waiting and looking about, I saw the string of bells move, and then they jingled, and, looking down on the floor, I saw a big rat trying to carry this apple away in his mouth."

"Oh, Daddy!" cried Rose, "how could a rat carrying an apple away in his mouth, make the bells ring?"

"Easily enough," her father answered. "The apple was tied on a string, as I suppose some of you children left it when you got through playing this afternoon. And the other end of the cord was tied to the string of bells. That was also more of your play, I suppose.

"The rat came out of his hole in the attic, smelled the apple on the floor, and tried to drag it into his cupboard. But the string held it fast, and as the rat pulled and tugged he made the sleigh bells jingle; for every time he pulled the apple he pulled the string, and every time he pulled the string he pulled the bells."

"And is that all there was?" asked Grandma Ford.

"All there was," answered Grandpa Ford. "Just a rat trying to have a nice apple supper made the bells ring."

"Well, I'm glad I know what it was," said Mother Bunker. "If I hear a noise in the night I like to know what it is and where it comes from. Now I can go back to sleep."

"So can I," said Rose.

And the other little Bunkers said the same thing. As for Mun Bun and Margy, as soon as they heard that everything was all right they uncovered their heads and went to sleep before any one else.

"Well, well! To think what a little thing can puzzle every one," said Grandpa Ford to Daddy Bunker, as the grown folks went back to their rooms. "Maybe we'll find that the other noises are made just as simply as this one was."

"Maybe," agreed Daddy Bunker. "But of late we haven't heard that groaning noise much, and maybe we shall not again."

"I hope not," said Mother Bunker.

The grown folks did not know that, half asleep as they were even then, Russ and Rose heard this talk. And the two older Bunker children made up their minds to find the ghost--if there was one--or whatever sounded like one.

The next day the children all went up to the attic and saw the string where one of them had left it tied to the bells. Daddy Bunker had taken off the apple.

"I wish we could see the rat!" exclaimed Laddie.

"I don't," said Rose. "I don't like rats."

"I guess I've a riddle about a rat," said Laddie after a pause.

"What is it?" asked Russ. "I can guess it, easy."

"No, you can't!" declared his brother.

"I can so!"

"You can not!"

"Well, let's hear it," demanded Russ.

"It's when is a rat not a rat?" asked Laddie. "That's the riddle. When is a rat not a rat?"

"It's always a rat," said Rose.

"Do you mean when a cat is after him?" asked Russ, trying to guess the riddle.

"No," answered Laddie. "That isn't it. I'll give you another guess."

Russ tried to think of several other reasons why a rat was sometimes not a rat, but at last he gave up.

"This is it," said Laddie. "A rat isn't a rat when he's a bell-ringer; like the one in the attic was last night."

"Yes, that's a pretty good riddle," agreed Russ, after a bit. "Some day I'm going to make a riddle. Now I'm going to make snowshoes."

"How do you make them?" asked Laddie.

Russ was going to tell his brother, and take him out to the barn to show him, when Mother Bunker called up:

"Who wants to go for a ride with Grandpa?"

"I do! I! Take me! I want to go!" came in a chorus.

"Well, he has room for all of you, so come along. He's going to Tarrington to get some friends to come out to the Thanksgiving dinner, and you six may all go along," said Mother Bunker.

So the six little Bunkers had another fine sleigh ride, and came back to Great Hedge with fine appetites. They also brought back in the sled with them Mr. and Mrs. Burton, old friends of Grandpa Ford, who generally spent the Thanksgiving holiday with him.

For the next few days there were so many things going on at Great Hedge that if I only told about them I'd fill this book. But, as I have other happenings to relate to you, and the ghost to tell about, I will just skip over this part by saying that every one, even down to Mun Bun, helped get ready for the Thanksgiving dinner.

Such goings-on as there were in Grandma Ford's kitchen! Such delicious smells of cake and pie and pudding! Such baking, roasting, boiling, frying and stewing! Such heaps of good things in the pantry!

And then the dinner! The big roast turkey, and celery, and a big dish of red cranberries, and other good things!

"I got the wish-bone!" cried Rose, as she finished her plate.

"Let me help pull it with you, when it gets dry!" begged Russ, and then, in a whisper, he said: "If I get the wish I'll wish we could find the ghost."

"So'll I," said Rose.

After dinner the children played games in the house, as it blew up cold and blustery and was not nice to go out in the snow. Rose had put the wish-bone over the kitchen stove to dry, and, late in the afternoon, she and Russ went out to get it to break, and wish over it. The one who held the larger part could make a wish.

"Snap!" went the wish-bone.

"Oh, I have it!" cried Rose. "I'm going to wish!"

And just then, all of a sudden, a loud, hollow groan sounded throughout the house.

CHAPTER XVII

RUSS MAKES SNOWSHOES

"There it goes! There it goes again!" cried Rose, and, forgetting all about having gotten the larger end of the bone, so that she had the right to make a wish, she dropped it and ran toward the sitting-room.

The rest of the six little Bunkers and the father and mother, with Grandma and Grandpa Ford and their guests, were gathered in the sitting-room after the Thanksgiving dinner.

There was no doubt that they all heard the noise. It was so loud, and it sounded through the whole house in such a way that every one heard it. Only Mun Bun and Margy and Violet and Laddie did not pay much heed to it. They were playing a game in one corner of the room.

"Did you hear it?" asked Russ, as Rose ran over and crouched down beside her mother.

"I heard a noise, yes," answered Mrs. Bunker quietly.

"We all heard it--and there it goes again!" exclaimed Grandpa Ford.

"O-u-g-h-m!" came the awful sound.

"It's the wind," said Grandma Ford.

"The wind isn't blowing," said Daddy Bunker. "It must be something else. There is no wind."

There was a little, but not enough to blow the snow about. It had been blustery--so cold and blowy, in fact, that the six little Bunkers could not go out to play. But now the sun had gone down, and, as often happens, the wind died down with it. The night was going to be still and cold.

"No, I don't believe it was the wind," said Grandpa Ford. "It's the same noise we heard before. We must try to find out what it is, Charles," and he turned to Daddy Bunker.

"It's the ghost! That's what it is!" exclaimed Russ. "We tried to find it, Rose and I did--but we couldn't. It's the ghost!"

"Nonsense! What do you know about ghosts?" said Mother Bunker, and she tried to laugh, but it did not sound very jolly. "There aren't any such things as ghosts," she went on.

"Well, I got the big end of the wish-bone," said Rose, "and I was just going to wish that I'd find the ghost when, all of a sudden, I heard it!"

"Now see here, you two!" exclaimed Daddy Bunker, speaking to Russ and Rose, while Laddie and Vi, with Mun Bun and Margy, were still at their game. "You mustn't be talking about such things as ghosts. There isn't any such thing, and you may scare the younger children."

"How did you hear about a ghost at Great Hedge?" asked Grandpa Ford curiously.

Russ and Rose looked at each other. The time had come to tell of their listening under the window, and they felt a little ashamed of it. But they had been taught to tell the truth, no matter how much it hurt, and they must do it now.

"How did you know about a ghost?" asked Mother Bunker.

"We--we heard you and Grandpa Ford talking about it--the time he came to our house," confessed Russ. He felt that he, being the oldest, must speak first.

"We listened under the window," added Rose. She wanted to do her share of the telling.

"That was very wrong to do," said her mother. "But, of course, I know you didn't mean to do wrong. Still, as it happened, no great harm was done, but you should have told me about it at the time. It was not right to be so mysterious about it, nor to have it as a secret. You two children are too small to have secrets away from Father and Mother, unless they are little ones, like birthday surprises and the like. Now, don't listen under windows again."

"We won't," promised Russ and Rose, who then told the whole story.

"But is there a ghost?" asked Russ, as the strange noise sounded again.

"No, of course not," said Daddy Bunker. "But, since you have heard part of the story, you may as well hear all of it."

Seeing that the four smaller children were busy at their play, and would not listen to what he said, Daddy Bunker drew Russ and Rose up on his lap and began:

"You remember when Grandpa Ford came to see us, he said he wanted to take us back with him, and, if we could, have us help him find out something queer about Great Hedge, which he had bought from Mr. Ripley. The 'something queer' was that, every now and then, noises, such as you heard just now, sound through the house. Grandpa Ford and Grandma Ford couldn't find out where they came from, and neither Mr. Ripley nor his daughter knew what made them.

"Of course," went on Daddy Bunker, "some people, when they hear a strange sound or see a strange sight, think it is a ghost. But there is no such thing."

"We thought it was a ghost made Mun Bun's hair stick out and be pulled," confessed Rose, "but it was only the spinning wheel."

"Now, to go on with my story. As the queer noises kept up, Grandpa Ford came to get me, to see if I could help him. I am in the real estate business, you know--I buy and sell houses--and he thought I might know something about the queer noise in his house. I have bought and sold houses that people said were haunted--that is, which were supposed to have ghosts in," laughed Daddy Bunker. "But I never saw nor heard of any spirits."

"Did you find out what made this noise?" asked Russ.

"No, we haven't yet, but we take a look every time we hear it," said his father. "That is what we are going to do now. So, after this, don't be afraid when you hear it. It is something in the house that makes it--not a ghost or anything like that. We'll find it sooner or later, Grandpa Ford and I."

"May we help?" asked Russ.

"Please, Daddy?" cried Rose.

"Well, yes, I guess so, if you want to," answered his father slowly. "If you hear the noise, and it sounds anywhere near you, look around and see if you can find out what makes it. Don't cry 'ghost!' and scare the others."

"We won't," promised Rose. "And maybe we'll be lucky and find it."

"I hope you will," put in Grandma Ford.

"It sounded like a cow mooing," remarked Russ.

"Yes, it did," agreed Grandpa Ford. "At first I thought it was a cow that had got into the cellar. But I couldn't find one. Then I thought it was boys playing a trick on us, but I heard the noise in the middle of the night, when no boys would be out. I don't know what makes it, but I'd like to find the ghost, as I call it, though I'm not going to after this. That isn't a good name. We'll just call it 'Mr. Noise.'"

"And we'll help you find 'Mr. Noise!'" laughed Russ.

Laddie came from where he was playing with a new riddle, and, while they were laughing over it, the groaning noise sounded again.

"Listen, all of you, and see if you can tell where it is," said Grandpa Ford.

Russ and Rose listened. So did Laddie and Violet; but Mun Bun and Margy kept on playing with their dolls.

"It's a tree rubbing against the house outside," said Russ.

"I thought so at first," said Grandpa Ford, "but there are now no trees that rub. I cut off the branches of those that did."

Each one thought it was in a different room, but a search showed nothing out of the way. They were all very much puzzled.

"It's worse than one of Laddie's queer riddles," said Daddy Bunker, when he and Grandpa Ford came back from having searched in several of the rooms.

They listened for a while longer, but the noise was not heard again, and then it was time to go to bed. The wind sprang up again and the clouds seemed to promise more snow. And, surely enough, in the morning, the white flakes were falling thick and fast.

"They'll cover up our snow man," said Laddie to Russ.

"Never mind. I know how we can have more fun," said the older boy.

"How?"

"I'll make some snowshoes for us, and we can walk without sinking down in the snow."

"How can you do that?"

"Oh, I'll show you. I started to make 'em before, but I forgot about it. Now I will."

And, when breakfast was over, and the four older children had been warmly wrapped and allowed to go out to play in the storm, Russ led Laddie to the barn.

"We'll make the snowshoes there," he said. "I have everything all ready."

Laddie saw a pile of barrel staves--the long, thin pieces of wood of which barrels are made, where his brother had stacked them. Russ also had some pieces of rope, a hammer and some nails, and some long poles.

"What are they for?" asked Laddie, pointing to the poles.

"That's to take hold of and help yourself along. It's awful hard to walk on snowshoes--real ones, I mean. And, maybe, it'll be harder to walk on the barrel kind I'm going to make."

Then Russ began making the snowshoes.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON SKATES

You have probably all seen pictures of regular snowshoes, even if you have not seen real snowshoes, so you know how much like big lawn-tennis rackets they look. Snowshoes are broad and flat, and fasten on outside of one's regular shoes, so a person can walk on the soft snow, or on the hard crust, without sinking down in.

The Indians used to make snowshoes by bending a frame of wood into almost the shape of a tennis racket--except it had no long handle--and then stretching pieces of the skins of animals across this.

"But I'm not going to make that kind," said Russ.

"What kind are you going to make?" asked Laddie as he watched his brother.

"Oh, mine's going to be easier than that."

Russ took a long, thin barrel stave, that was curved up a little on either end. To the middle of the stave he tacked some pieces of rope and string.

"That's to tie the shoe to your foot," he explained to Laddie.

In a little while, with his brother's help, Russ had made four of the barrel-stave snowshoes--a pair for himself and a pair for Laddie.

"Now all we have to do," said Russ, "is to tie 'em on and walk out on the snow. We won't sink down in, as we do with our regular feet, and we can go as fast as anything."

"Won't we fall?" asked Laddie.

"We'll hold on to the poles. That's what I got 'em for," said Russ.

In a short time he and his brother had fastened the barrel staves to their shoes, winding and tying the cords and ropes, and even some old straps around and around. Their feet looked very queer--almost like those of some clown in the circus. But Laddie and Russ did not mind that. They wanted to walk on the home-made snowshoes.

"Come on!" called Russ, as he shuffled across the barn floor toward the door, from which led a big stretch of deep, white snow. "Come on, Laddie!"

"I--I can't seem to walk," the little fellow said. "I keep stepping on my feet all the while."

This was very true. As he took one step he would put the other snowshoe down on the one he had moved last, and then he could not raise the underneath foot.

"Spread your legs apart and sort of slide along," said Russ. "Then you won't step on your own feet. Do it this way."

Russ separated one foot from the other as far as he could, and then he shuffled along, not raising his feet. He found this the best way, and soon he was at the barn door, with Laddie behind him.

"Come on now, we'll start and walk on the snow, and we'll s'prise Daddy and Mother," cried Russ.

He did manage to glide over the snow, the broad, long barrel staves keeping him from sinking in the soft drifts. Laddie did not do quite so well, but he managed to get along.

The boys held long poles, which helped to keep them from falling over, and, at first, so uneven was the walking that they might have fallen if it had not been for the long staffs.

"I'll make snowshoes for all of us," said Russ, as he and Laddie went slowly around the corner of the barn. "Then we can play Indians, and go on a long walk and take our dinner and stay all day."

Together they walked around the barn. They were getting used to the barrel-stave snowshoes now, and really did quite well on them. Of course, now and then, one or the other's fastenings would become loose, and they would have to stop and tie them. Laddie got so he could do this for himself.

"It's like when your shoelace comes untied," he said. "Did the Indians' laces come untied, Russ?"

"I guess so. But now come on. We'll go to the house and get some bread and jam."

Russ and Laddie started out bravely enough, and they were half-way to the house when Russ said:

"Oh, let's see if we can get across that big drift!"

This was a large pile of snow, made by the wind into a small hill, and it must have been many feet deep--well over the heads of the two small boys.

"Maybe we might get hurt there," said Laddie.

"No, we won't!" cried Russ. "Come on."

Russ was part way to the top when something happened. All at once one leg sank away down, barrel-stave snowshoe and all, and a moment later he was floundering in the snow, and crying:

"Hey, Laddie, I can't get out. I can't get out. Go and call Daddy or Grandpa! I can't get out!"

"Are you hurt?" asked Laddie.

"No. But my foot is stuck away down under the snow, and I can't pull it out."

"I'll go!" cried Laddie.

He never knew how fast he could travel on the home-made snowshoes until he tried. Up to the side porch he shuffled, and, not stopping to unfasten the pieces of barrel on his feet, he called out:

"Mother, come quick! Russ is upside down and he can't get his leg out!"

Inside the house Mother Bunker and Grandma Ford heard the queer thumping sound on the porch.

"I wonder what that is?" said Grandma Ford.

"Maybe it's our friend that makes the queer noises, making a new one," answered Mrs. Bunker.

Then they heard Laddie calling:

"Oh, come quick! Russ is upside down and his leg is stuck and he can't get it out! Oh, hurry, please!"

"Mercy me!" cried Mrs. Bunker. "Something has happened!"

Out of the door she rushed, with Grandma Ford after her, and when they saw Laddie, with the barrel staves on his shoes, his mother asked:

"What has happened? What have you done to yourself? What are those things on your feet?"

"Snowshoes that Russ made," was the answer. "He's got some on his own feet, but he fell into a snow bank and he can't get out and he's hollerin' like anything!"

"Oh, that's too bad!" cried Grandma Ford. "But if he fell into a snow bank it's so soft he won't be hurt. But I'll get Grandpa to dig him out."

But Daddy Bunker and Grandpa Ford had gone to town in the sled. But Dick, the hired man, was at home, and he came to help Mother Bunker and Grandma Ford.

"I'll get you out, Russ! Don't cry!" shouted Dick, as he ran up with his long rubber boots on. These were so high that he could wade into almost any snowdrift. "Don't cry, Russ!"

"I'm not cryin'," answered Laddie's brother. "I'm only hollerin' so somebody'll come and get me. My foot's stuck!"

And that is just what had happened to him. He had stepped into a soft part of the drift with one foot, and had nearly turned a somersault. Then the long barrel stave, tied fast to his shoe, became caught crossways under the hole in the snow, and Russ couldn't pull his foot out.

He could not stand up, and so had to lie down, and one leg was out of sight down in the hole.

"I'll soon have you out!" cried Dick.

He was as good as his word. Reaching down in, he loosened the barrel-stave snowshoe from Russ's foot, and soon pulled the little boy up straight. Then he carried him to the porch.

"I wouldn't go in deep places with those queer things on my feet any more," said Grandma Ford.

"No, we won't," promised Russ.

So, when the snowshoe was again tied on his foot, he and Laddie shuffled about where the snow was not too deep. They had lots of fun, and the other little Bunkers came out to watch them. Mun Bun wanted a pair of the barrel-stave snowshoes for himself, but his mother said he was too little; but Russ made some for Rose and Vi.

Two days later, when the six little Bunkers got out of bed, they found that the weather had turned warmer, and that it was raining.

"Oh, now the nice snow will be all gone!" cried Rose.

"And we can't make any more snow men and forts," added Russ.

"But you can have fun when it freezes," said his father.

"How?" asked Laddie.

"You can go skating," was the answer. "There is a pond not far from Grandpa Ford's house, and when it freezes, as it will when the rain stops, you and the others can go skating."

"I can skate a little," announced Russ.

"So can I," said Laddie. "Did we bring any skates?"

"Yes, we packed some from home," replied his mother.

"I want to skate!" exclaimed Mun Bun.

"You can have fun sliding, you and Margy," said Rose. "And I'll pull you over the ice on a sled."

This satisfied the smaller children, and then, as the weather was so bad that they could not go out and play, the six little Bunkers stayed in the house and waited for the rain to be over and the ice to freeze.

They played around the house and up in the attic, and, now and then, Russ and Rose found themselves listening for the queer noise. They didn't call it the "ghost" any longer. It was just the "queer noise."

But they did not hear it, and they rather wanted to, for they thought it would be fun to find out what caused it.

After two days of rain the snow was all gone. The ground was bleak and bare, but the six little Bunkers did not mind that, for they were eager for ice to freeze.

Then, one morning, Daddy Bunker called up the stairs:

"Come on out, everybody! The freeze has come! The pond is frozen over, and we're all going skating!"

"Hurray!" cried Russ. "This will be more fun than snowshoes!"

Little did he guess what was going to happen.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ICE BOAT

"Now you must all eat good breakfasts," said Grandma Ford, as the six little Bunkers came trooping downstairs in answer to their father's call. "Eat plenty of buckwheat cakes and maple syrup, so you will not be cold and hungry when you go out on the ice to skate."

Russ, Laddie and the others needed no second invitation, and soon there was a rattle of knives, forks and spoons that told of hungry children eating heartily.

The house at Great Hedge was warm and cosy, and the smell of the bacon, the buckwheat cakes and the maple syrup would have made almost any one hungry.

"Are we all going out skating?" asked Rose, as she ate her last cake.

"Yes, I'll take you all," said Daddy Bunker. "Dick went over to the pond, and he says the ice is fine. It's smooth and hard."

"Is it strong enough to hold?" asked Mother Bunker. "I don't want any of my six little Bunkers falling through the ice."

"Nor I," added Daddy Bunker. "We'll take good care that they don't. Now wrap up well. I have skates for all but Margy and Mun Bun. I'm afraid they are a bit too small to try to skate yet, but we'll take over sleds for them."

"Russ and I are going to have a race!" boasted Laddie. "And if I win, you've got to guess any riddle I ask you, Russ."

"I will, if you don't make it too hard," said the older boy with a laugh.

As Daddy Bunker had said, there were skates for Russ, Rose, Laddie and Vi, these having been brought from home. Russ and Rose had learned to skate the winter before, and Laddie had made one or two attempts at it. He felt that he could do much better now. Violet, not to be outdone by her twin, was to learn too. Of course, the children could not skate very far, nor very fast, but they could have fun, and, after all, that is what skates are for, mostly.

"Could we take something to eat with us? We may get hungry," said Russ, as they were about to start.

"Bless your hearts! Of course you may!" exclaimed Grandma Ford.

She put up two bags of cookies, and then Daddy Bunker, thrusting them into the big pockets of his overcoat, led the children out into the crisp December air.

It was cold, but the wind did not blow very hard, and the six little Bunkers were well wrapped up. Over the frozen ground they went to the pond, which was back of Grandpa Ford's barn. It was a pond where, in the summer, ducks and geese swam, and where the cows went to drink. But now it was covered with a sheet of what seemed to be glass.

"What makes the ice so smooth?" asked Vi, as she leaned down and touched it.

"Because it freezes so hard," answered her father.

"Well, the ground is frozen hard, too," said the little girl. "But it isn't smooth."

"That's because it wasn't smooth before it was frozen," said Mr. Bunker. "When cold comes it freezes things into just the shapes they are at the time. The ground was cut up into ruts and furrows, and it froze that way. The pond of water was smooth, as it always is except when the wind blows up the waves, and it froze smooth."

"Would my face freeze smooth?" asked Violet, trying to look down at her nose.

"I hope it doesn't freeze at all," her father told her with a laugh. "But if it did your nose would be all wrinkled, as it is now."

"Then I'm going to smooth it," said Violet, and she did.

Russ could put on his own skates, as could Rose, but Laddie had to have help. Then the three children began gliding about the ice, their father watching them.

"Don't go too far over toward the middle," he warned them. "Dick said he thought it was safe there, but it may not be. Stay near shore."

The children promised that they would, and they had great fun gliding about on the steel runners.

Then Daddy Bunker put the skates on Vi and held her up while he taught her how to take the strokes. It was very wobbly skating, you may be sure.

Finally, however, she began to do very well for such a little girl and for such a short time. But after a while she said she was tired.

"Very well, Vi," said Daddy Bunker, "you sit on one sled and take Mun Bun in your lap. Margy can sit on the smaller sled, and I'll fasten the two together with ropes. Then I can pull both."

And Daddy Bunker did this. Over the ice along the shore he pulled the sleds with the three children on them, while Rose, Russ and Laddie skated about not far away. Finally Laddie called:

"Come on, Russ! Let's have a race! Let's see who can skate all the way across the pond first!"

"Oh, you mustn't skate across the pond!" exclaimed Rose. "Daddy said we must stay near the edge."

"But the ice is smoother out in the middle," said Russ. "It's all humpy and rough here, and you can't skate fast. I want to go out in the middle!"

"So do I," added Laddie. "Come on, Russ. I'll race you, but you ought to give me a head-start 'cause you're older than I am and you can skate better."

"All right, I will," said Russ. "I'll let you go first, Laddie."

"Oh, I'm going to tell Daddy you're going out in the middle and across the lake!" cried Rose. "He said you mustn't!"

"All right, go on and be a tattle-tale if you want to!" exclaimed Russ.

Now, of course, it wasn't nice of him to speak to his sister that way, and it wasn't right for him to go where his father had told him not to go. Of course Rose didn't want to be a tattle-tale, but still it was better to be that than to let her brother do what he intended. So, while Russ and Laddie got ready for their race, Rose skated, as quickly as she could, to the other end of the pond, where her father was giving Violet, Mun Bun and Margy some of Grandma's cookies, which they had brought along.

"Come on, now! One, two, three! Race!" cried Russ, after he had let Laddie get a little start of him.

Away the boys skated, toward the middle of the pond. At first Laddie was ahead, but Russ was the better skater and soon passed him. Russ was near the middle of the pond when suddenly there was a loud crack.

Russ heard it and tried to stop himself and turn back. But he was going quite fast, and before he could slow up the ice in front of him cracked open. He saw a stretch of black water, and then, with a yell, into it splashed poor Russ.



**BEFORE RUSS COULD SLOW UP, THE ICE
IN FRONT OF HIM CRACKED OPEN.**

Six Little Bunkers at Grandpa Ford's. --Page 188

"Oh, he's fallen in! Russ has fallen in!" shouted Laddie, who had seen what had happened. And he suddenly tripped and sat down, sliding slowly along, or he, too, might have gone through the hole in the ice.

It was a good thing Rose had run and told her father what her brothers were going to do, for Mr. Bunker was already half-way to Russ when the ice broke.

"I'll get you! I'll get you!" called Mr. Bunker to Russ. "Rose, you look after the others, and I'll get Russ out. The pond is not very deep, and I'll soon have him out!"

Mr. Bunker ran out on the ice right toward the hole where the black water was. Russ had not fallen in head first, luckily, and now stood with the water about up to his waist.

The ice broke under the weight of Mr. Bunker, and into the water he splashed, but he did not mind. Laddie had quickly crawled away from the vicinity of the hole, and he now went back to where Rose was looking after Margy, Mun Bun and Violet.

"I've got you, Russ!" cried Mr. Bunker, as he caught the scared boy in his arms. And then, wet as both of them were, Mr. Bunker managed to get up on ice that was firm enough to hold him, and hurried to the bank, carrying Russ with him.

"I must get you home as soon as I can, and take off your wet clothes," he said. "You must be terribly cold. Laddie and Rose, take off your skates and follow after me. Bring Mun Bun and Margy, and tell Vi to come. Hurry now. Russ, I told you not to go out in the middle, where the ice might break."

"I--I'm sorry, Daddy!" shivered Russ. "I won't do it any more."

And I am glad to say he did not.

Of course Mother Bunker and Grandma Ford were excited when Daddy Bunker came racing in, all dripping wet, with Russ, also soaked through, in his arms. But Grandmother Ford and Mother Bunker were used to accidents. Dry clothes were put on, the two shivering ones sat by the fire and drank hot milk, and soon they were all right again.

The hole in the ice froze over in a little while, and the ice became so thick that even the grown men could go out in the middle of the pond. Then there was no danger of the children's tumbling in, and they were told they might play

wherever they liked.

Russ and Laddie had another race--one that was finished, and Russ won, so he did not have to guess Laddie's riddle.

"If I had beat you," said Laddie, "I was going to ask you why is an automobile tire like a snake."

"Pooh, that's easy to guess," said Russ. "'Cause it's round and fat."

"Nope," said Laddie. "It's 'cause a snake hisses and so does an auto tire when the air comes out."

"Oh!" said Russ.

They were all in the house, after dinner, when Dick came in to ask Grandpa Ford about something that needed fixing in the barn. The hired man saw the children sitting about with nothing particular to do, and said:

"How would you like to come for a ride in my boat?"

"Where?" asked Russ eagerly.

"On the pond," answered Dick.

"The pond is covered with ice!" said Russ. "Is that a riddle? How can you sail a boat on a pond that is covered with ice?"

"I'm going to sail an ice boat," answered Dick. "Want to come down and see me, and have a ride?"

CHAPTER XX

ANOTHER NIGHT SCARE

You can easily imagine what the six little Bunkers said when Dick asked this question about his ice boat.

"I want to come!" cried Russ.

"I want a ride!" shouted Laddie.

"Shall we get wet?" asked Rose.

"Oh, no, not in an ice boat," said Grandpa Ford. "I've seen Dick sail one before. An ice boat is like a big skate, you know. It just slides over the ice. You may take some of the little Bunkers for a ride in your ice boat, Dick, if you'll be careful of them."

"I'll be very careful," promised Dick. "Come along!"

With shouts and laughter the six little Bunkers got ready to go down to the pond with Dick, and ride in his ice boat.

I presume that not many of you have seen ice boats, so I will tell you a little about them. Those of you who know all about them need not read this part.

As Grandpa Ford had said, an ice boat, in a way, is like a big skate or sled. It slides over the frozen ice of a pond, lake or river instead of sailing through the water, as another boat does. And an ice boat really has something like skates on it, only they are called runners. Perhaps I might say they are more like the runners of a sled.

If you will take two long, strong, heavy pieces of wood and fasten them together like a cross, or as you fasten kite sticks, you will see how the frame of an ice boat is built. On the ends of the shorter cross-piece are fastened the runners that slide over the ice. On the end of the longer cross-piece is another runner, but this one turns about from side to side with a tiller, like the tiller of a boat that goes in water, and by this the ice boat is steered.

Where the two sticks cross the mast is set up, and on this is fastened the sail, and between the sail and the tiller is a sort of shallow box. This is the cabin of the ice boat, where the people sit when they are sailing over the frozen pond.

"My ice boat is only a small home-made one," said Dick, "and I can't take you all at one time. But I'll give you each some turns, and I hope you'll like it."

Down to the edge of the pond went the six little Bunkers with Dick. Grandpa Ford and Daddy Bunker went, too, to see the ice boat.

Dick's ice boat was large enough to hold him and two little Bunkers at a time, and first he said he would take Russ and Mun Bun, for Russ could hold on to his little brother.

"I have to manage the sail and steer the boat," explained the hired man, "and sometimes we go pretty fast. Then you have to hold on as tight as you can. But you'll not spill out, for the ice is smooth."

Russ and Mun Bun took their places on some pieces of old carpet that Dick had put in the cabin of his boat. It was not like the cabin of any other boat, for it was open on all sides. Really all it could be called was a shallow box.

"All ready?" asked Dick.

"All ready!" answered Russ, holding tightly to Mun Bun.

Away they sailed over the ice, turning this way and that, and they went so fast that, at times, it almost took away the breath of Mun Bun and Russ. But they liked it, and laughed so gleefully about it that Laddie and Violet were eager to have their turn.

They, too, liked the ride on the ice boat, as it glided across the frozen pond. The wind blew on the sail, and made the ice boat go fast.

Then came the turn of Rose and Margy. At first Margy thought she would not go, but when they told her how much Mun Bun had liked it, and when Mun Bun himself had said he wanted to go again, Margy let Rose lift her in.

"Here we go!" cried Dick, and away glided the boat. Back and forth across the pond it went, and Rose laughed, and so did Margy. She found she liked it very much.

"Could I have another ride?" asked Russ after a bit.

"I guess so," agreed Dick. "I'll take you and Laddie this time. The wind is stronger now, and we'll go faster--too fast for the smallest ones, maybe."

"I like to go fast!" exclaimed Russ. But he went even faster than he expected to.

As Dick had said, the wind was blowing very strong now, and it stretched the sail of the ice boat away out. Dick had all he could do to hold it while Russ and Laddie got on board.

"All ready?"

"All ready!" answered Russ.

The boat swung around and away it whizzed over the ice. Russ and Laddie clung to the sides of the box-like cabin, and Russ had fairly to shout to make himself heard above the whistling of the wind.

"This is fast!" he called in Laddie's ear.

"Yes, but I like it," said the smaller boy. "I'm going to make up a riddle about the ice boat but it goes so fast as soon as I think of anything in my head I forget it."

"It's fun!" exclaimed Russ. "When I get bigger I'm going to make an ice boat that goes----"

But what Russ intended to do he never finished telling for, just then, there came a stronger puff of wind than before, and Dick cried:

"Lookout!"

Just what they were to look out for Russ and Laddie did not know, but they soon discovered.

The ice boat seemed to tilt up on one side, "as if it wanted to stand on its ear," Grandpa Ford said afterward, and out spilled Russ, out spilled Laddie, and Dick, himself, almost spilled out. But he managed to hold fast, which the two boys could not do.

Out of the ice boat the lads tumbled. But as they had on thick coats, and as they did not fall very far but went spinning over the frozen pond, they thought it was fun.

Over the ice they slid, just as a skater slides when he falls down, and finally they stopped and sat up.

"Huh!" grunted Russ.

"That--that was fun, wasn't it?" asked Laddie.

"Lots of fun!" agreed Russ. "I wonder if he did it on purpose?"

"Let's ask him to do it again," suggested Laddie.

But the spill was an accident. Dick had not meant that it should happen.

"As for giving you more rides," he said, when he had brought the boat back to shore, "I don't believe I'd better. The wind is getting stronger, and there might be a real accident next time. Some other day I'll give you more rides."

"Oh, Dick, please!" pleaded Violet. But Dick said he was sorry, but they would all have to wait for a calmer day.

So the little Bunkers had to be satisfied with this, and really they had had fine fun, and all agreed that Dick's ice boat was just grand.

Back to the house they went, and, as it was nearly time to eat, they did not come out again until after the meal. Then there was more skating, and some fun on the ice with sleds, until it was time to come in for the day.

"What'll we do to-morrow?" asked Rose, as she and the other little Bunkers were getting ready for bed.

"If it snows we can go coasting," said Russ.

"Well, it looks and feels like snow," said Grandpa Ford, who came in from the barn just then, having gone out to see that the horses and cows were all right.

The grown folks sat about the fire after supper, talking and telling stories while the children were asleep in their beds.

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Bunker.

"What is it?" asked her husband.

"I thought I heard one of the children," she answered.

And just then, through the house, there sounded, as from some distance away, the rattle of a drum.

"Another queer noise!" exclaimed Grandma Ford in dismay. "What will happen next?"

CHAPTER XXI

MR. WHITE

Rattle and bang-bang and rattle sounded the noise of the drum in Grandpa Ford's house, and yet, as the grown folks downstairs in the sitting-room looked at one another, they could not imagine who was playing at soldier. And yet that is what it sounded like--children beating a drum.

"Are any of those little ones up?" asked Mother Bunker. "Could they have gotten out of their beds to beat a drum?"

"I didn't know they had a drum with them," said Daddy Bunker.

"They didn't bring any from home," returned his wife.

"There is an old drum up in the attic," said Grandpa Ford. "It used to belong to Mr. Ripley, I think. Could Russ or Laddie have gone up there and be beating that?"

"The noise has stopped now," remarked Grandma Ford. "Let's go up and see which of the six little Bunkers did it," and she smiled at Mrs. Bunker.

It took only a glance into the different rooms to show that all six of the little Bunkers were in bed. Margy and Mun Bun had not been awakened by the drumming or the talk, but the other four were now waiting with wide-open eyes to learn what had happened.

"There it goes again!" exclaimed Daddy Bunker.

Surely enough the rub-a-dub-dubbing sounded again, this time more loudly than before, because the grown folks were nearer the attic.

"We must see what it is," said Grandpa Ford.

"We surely must," at once agreed Daddy Bunker.

As he and Grandpa Ford started up the stairs to the attic the drumming noise stopped, and all was quiet when the two men went into the attic. It was not dark, as Daddy Bunker took with him his electric flashlight, which he flashed into the different corners.

"Where is that drum you spoke of, Father?" he asked of Grandpa Ford.

"I don't see it now," was the answer. "It used to hang up on one of the rafters. But maybe the children took it down."

Daddy Bunker flashed his light to and fro.

"Here it is!" he cried, and he pointed to the drum standing up at one side of the big chimney, which was in the center of the attic. "The children did have it down, playing with it.

"But I don't see what would make it rattle," went on Daddy Bunker. "Unless," he added, "a rat is flapping its tail against the drum."

The noise had stopped again, but, all of a sudden, as Grandpa Ford and Daddy Bunker stood looking at the drum, the rattle and rub-a-dub-dub broke out again, more loudly than before. The drum seemed to shake and tremble, so hard was it beaten.

"Who is doing it?" cried Grandpa Ford.

Daddy Bunker quickly stepped over where he could see the other side of the drum, which was in the dark. He leaned over, holding his flashlight close, and then he suddenly lifted into view a large, battered alarm clock, without a bell.

"This was beating the drum," he said.

"That?" cried Grandpa Ford. "How could that old alarm clock make it sound as if soldiers were coming?"

"Very easily," answered Daddy Bunker. "See, the bell is off the clock, and the hammer, or striker, sticks out. This is shaped like a little ball, and it stood close against the head of the drum.

"I suppose the children wound the clock up when they were playing with it up here and when it went off the striker

beat against the head of the drum and played a regular tattoo."

"Yes, I can see how that might happen," replied Grandpa Ford. "But what made the drum beat sometimes and not at others. Why didn't the alarm clock keep on tapping the drum all the while?"

"Because," said Daddy Bunker, as the clock began to shake and tremble in his hand, "this is one of those alarm clocks that ring for a half minute or so, and then stop, then, in a few minutes, ring again. That is so when a person falls asleep, after the first or second alarm, the third or fourth may awaken him.

"And that's what happened this time. The old alarm clock went off and beat the drum. Then when we started to find out what it was all about, the clock stopped. Then it went off again."

"Another time Mr. Ghost fooled us," said Grandma Ford, when her husband and son came down from the attic.

"Did any of you children have the alarm clock?" asked Mother Bunker, for the four oldest Bunkers were still awake.

"I was playing with it," said Russ. "I was going to make a toy automobile out of it, but it wouldn't work."

"I had it after him, and I wound it up and left it by the drum," said Laddie. "But I didn't think it would go off."

But that is just what happened. Laddie had set the clock to go off at a certain hour, not knowing that he had done so. And he had put it down on the attic floor so the bell-striker was against the head of the drum.

"Well, it's a good thing it didn't go off in the very middle of the night, when we were all asleep," said Mother Bunker. "We surely would have thought an army of soldiers was marching past."

"And it wasn't any ghost at all!" exclaimed Rose, as the grown folks turned to go downstairs.

"No, and there never will be," said her mother. "All noises have something real back of them--even that funny groaning noise we heard."

"But we don't know what that is, yet," said Russ.

"Go to sleep now," urged his mother, and soon the awakened four of the six little Bunkers were slumbering again.

The next morning they all had a good laugh over the drum and the alarm clock, and Laddie and Russ had fun making it go off again. The clock was one that had never kept good time, and so had been tossed away in the attic, which held so many things with which the children could have fun.

"Want to help us, Rose?" asked Russ after breakfast, when the children had on their rubber boots, ready to go out and play in the snow.

"What you going to do?" she asked.

"Make a snow man," Russ answered. "We're going to make another big one--bigger than the one the rain spoiled."

"It'll be lots of fun," added Laddie.

"I'll help," offered Rose.

"Comin', Vi?" asked Laddie.

But Violet, Mun Bun and Margy were going to coast on a little hill which Dick had made for them, so the three Bunkers began to make the snow man.

As Russ had said, they were going to make a large one. So big balls were rolled and moulded together, and after a while the pile of white flakes began to look like a man, with arms sticking out, and big, fat legs on which to stand.

"Grandpa said we could have one of his old tall silk hats to put on Mr. White," said Russ. "That will make him look fine."

"Who is Mr. White?" asked Dick, who was passing at that moment.

"The snow man," answered Laddie. "That's what we're going to call him. 'Pleased to meet you, Mr. White!'" he exclaimed with a laugh, as he made a bow.

Soon Mr. White was finished, with the tall hat and all. There were pieces of black coal for buttons, while some red flannel made him look as if he had very red lips. A nose was made of snow, and bits of coal were his eyes.

"Let's make a Mrs. White!" exclaimed Rose. "And then some little White children, and we can have a whole family," she added.

"Oh, yes, let's do it!" cried Laddie.

"All right," agreed Russ.

But just as they were going to start to make Mrs. White they heard a cry from the spot where the other children were coasting.

"Oh, Mun Bun's hurt!" shouted Rose, and, dropping her shovel, she ran toward the hill.

CHAPTER XXII

AN UPSET

Russ followed his sister over the snow to the place where Dick had made the little hill. If there was trouble Russ wanted to help, for, though Rose was the "little mother," Russ felt he must do his share to help her.

They found that Mun Bun had rolled off the sled in going down a little hill and had toppled into a snow bank.

"But that didn't hurt you!" said Rose, laughing as she picked him up. "There, sister will kiss the place and make it better. You only got a little snow up your sleeve, and it makes your arm cold."

"But I bumped my head, too!" sobbed Mun Bun.

"Well, I'll rub that and make it well," said Rose, and she did.

"But I'm hungry, too," added Mun Bun.

"Oh, I can't rub your hungry away," and Rose laughed so merrily that Mun Bun stopped his crying and laughed too. So did Margy.

"What makes us get hungry?" asked Violet, as Mun Bun let Rose brush the snow from him. "What makes us?"

"It's when something tickles us in our stomachs," answered Laddie. "I know, 'cause I feel that way right now. I wish I had something to eat."

"So do I," said Margy. "My stomach doesn't zactly tickle, but it's hungry."

"Well, I'll go and ask Grandma for some cookies," offered Russ. "She always has a lot in a jar, and they taste awful good. I'll be back in a minute."

Away he ran to the house which was surrounded by the great, high hedge, and soon he came back with both hands and his pockets filled with sugar and molasses cookies.

"I brought two kinds," he said, "'cause I thought some of you would want one kind, and I might want both kinds."

The making of the snow man and the coasting down the little hill stopped while the children ate their cookies, and then, after a while, Russ said:

"Well, we must finish the White family."

"What's that?" asked Violet, brushing some cookie crumbs off her jacket.

"Oh, it's a snow family we're making," explained Rose. "There's Mr. White and Mrs. White and we're going to make some little White snow children."

"Like us six little Bunkers?" asked Mun Bun.

"No, I guess not so many as that," replied Laddie. "That would take us all day. We'll just make two children, a girl and a boy."

"Oh, I'm going to help make the White children!" cried Vi.

"Let's go an' watch 'em!" called Margy to Mun Bun. "We've had enough coasting, haven't we?"

"Yes," said Mun Bun. "We'll make some snow mans ourselves."

With the smaller children dragging their sleds and following them, Russ and Rose and Laddie and Vi went back to where they had left Mr. White standing. There he was, very fine and brave-looking with his tall silk hat on his head, his coal-black eyes glistening in the sun, and his row of black buttons also shining.

All at once, as Russ, who was in the lead of the procession of children, looked at the snow man, he cried:

"Oh!"

"What's the matter?" asked Rose.

"Did you hear some funny noise?" questioned Violet.

"No, but look at Mr. White!" cried Russ. "He took off his hat and made a bow to me!"

"Why, Russ Bunker!" gasped Vi.

"Took off his hat?" cried Laddie.

"Made a bow to you!" exclaimed Rose. "Why, how could he? Mr. White is only a snow man. He isn't alive!"

"Well, he made a bow just the same!" cried Russ. "You just watch, and he'll do it again!"

Eagerly the children watched. Mr. White did not move. He just stared at them with his black eyes, smiled at them with his red cloth lips, and the tall, silk hat upon his snowy head never moved.

"You're fooling us, Russ!" exclaimed Laddie.

"No, I'm not--really!" Russ declared. "I saw him take off his hat and wave it at me."

For a moment the six little Bunkers stood in a row and looked at Mr. White. Then, just as naturally as if he had been used to doing it all his life, Mr. White's tall, black silk hat came off his head, was lowered before the children and was put back again. This time they all saw it.

"Oh, look! Oh!" exclaimed Rose.

"Why--why----" and that was all Laddie could say as he stood with his mouth wide open, he was so surprised.

"You made him do it, Russ!" exclaimed Violet.

"I? How could I make him do it?" Russ demanded.

"It's one of your tricks. You pulled a string and made his hat come off. It's a trick!"

"Well, maybe it is a trick, but I didn't do it," declared Russ. "I haven't got any string fast to his hat. And, anyhow, if I did, maybe I could pull his hat off with a string, but I couldn't pull it back on again, could I?"

"Well, maybe not, but you did it!" insisted Vi.

"No, I didn't!" said Russ. "You watch and I won't move my finger even, and maybe Mr. White will take his hat off again."

"Did you know he was going to do it?" asked Rose, as she looked at the snow man carefully.

"No, I didn't know anything about it," said Russ. "I was walking along with you all, just now, and, all of a sudden, I saw the hat come off. First I thought the wind blew it, and then, when I saw it wave at me, and go back on his head, I knew somebody did it--or--or maybe he did himself."

"But he couldn't, 'cause he's a snow man," insisted Laddie. "And I helped make him and you didn't put any phonograph or any machinery in him. You didn't, did you, Russ?"

"No, not a thing. He's just a snow man."

"Then he couldn't do it!" declared Rose. "But maybe it was Mr. Ghost! No, it couldn't be that 'cause he only makes a noise, and, anyhow, there isn't any such thing. But what is it?"

"Look! He's doing it again!" cried Vi.

Surely enough, the snow man once more took off his tall silk hat, and waved it toward the children. Then it went back on his head again, but this time it was not quite straight. It was tilted to one side, and gave him a very odd look.

"Ho! Ho! Isn't he funny!" laughed Mun Bun. "I like that snow man. I'm going to see what makes him take off his hat!"

"No, don't!" cried Rose, catching hold of her little brother's arm as he was about to run toward Mr. White.

"Why not?" Mun Bun wanted to know.

"'Cause he might--something might--oh, I don't want you to go!" exclaimed Rose. "I guess we'd better go and tell Daddy."

They stood for a moment looking at the snow man who had acted so strangely.

Suddenly the tall silk hat was straightened on Mr. White's head, and then, once more, it was lifted off and bowed to the six little Bunkers.

"Oh!"

"Come on!" cried Russ to Laddie after a moment. "Let's see what does it."

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

"If it is, it's a funny one," said his brother.

They started for Mr. White, and, all at once, off came the hat again, and then, suddenly, there was a loud a-ker-choo sneeze!

"Oh, he's alive! The snow man has come to life!" cried Rose. "I'm going to the house."

But just then, out from behind the big snow image, with the tall hat in his hand, stepped--Grandpa Ford. He was laughing.

"I tried to stop that sneeze, but I couldn't," he said. "It came out in spite of me."

"Oh, was that you, Grandpa?" asked Rose.

"Did you hide behind the snow man?" questioned Russ.

"And tip his hat?" Laddie demanded.

"Why didn't we see you?" inquired Violet.

"My! what a lot of questions," laughed Grandpa Ford. "Yes, I played a little joke on you. I hid behind the snow man, which was so large I could keep out of sight. I hid there when I saw you coming toward it, and I thought it would be fun to make you think it was alive. So I made him bow with the tall hat."

"But we didn't see your arm," said Russ. "How did you do it? Did you put your arm up inside the snow arm of Mr. White?"

"No," answered his grandfather. "I wound this white scarf around my arm, and it looked so much like the snow man himself that you couldn't see when I moved. Did I fool you?"

"Yes, you did--a lot!" admitted Russ.

"It was better than a riddle," said Laddie.

Then Grandpa Ford showed how he had hidden himself behind Mr. White, and, wrapping his arm in a white scarf, which he wore around his neck in cold weather, Mr. Ford had reached up and lifted off the hat and put it back. The white scarf hid his arm, and it looked exactly as if the snow man had made bows.

"We thought maybe he was alive!" laughed Rose.

"Well, I was going to have him throw snowballs at you in another minute," said Grandpa Ford with a smile, "but I had to sneeze and spoil my trick."

"But it was a good one," said Violet.

"Now, we'll make the rest of the snow family of White," said Russ. "And if Dick or anybody comes along we'll play the same trick on them that Grandpa played on us."

"Well, you can finish making Mr. White's family later," said Grandpa Ford. "I came out now to see if you don't all want to come for a ride with me. I have to go to town for some groceries, and also go a little way into the country to see a man. Do you want to come for a ride?"

Well, you can just imagine how gladly the six little Bunkers answered that they did. They forgot all about the snow people, except to tell Daddy and Mother Bunker about Grandpa's funny trick, and, a little later, they were in the big sled filled with straw, riding over the snow.

Merrily jingled the bells as over the drifts the horses pranced. Down the road they went to the store in Tarrington, where Grandpa Ford bought the things Grandma had sent him after.

"Are we going home now?" asked Russ, as the sled turned down a country road.

"No, not right away," answered his grandfather. "I have to go over to Glodgett's Mills to see a man, and after that we'll turn around and be home in time for supper. It looks like more snow, and I want to get you back before the storm."

Out on the country roads, where the snow was deep, went the horses, jingling their bells and pulling the sled full of children after them.

"Get along, ponies!" cried Grandpa Ford.

And then, all of a sudden, something happened. The sled went into a big drift, which was deeper than Grandpa Ford thought. A moment later there was an upset, and the six little Bunkers were spilled out into the snow.



CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE CABIN

"Whoa! Whoa there, ponies!" cried Grandpa Ford, as he jumped off the seat and held tightly to the reins. "Whoa!"

Grandpa's horses were kind and gentle and well-trained. They did not try to run away, but stood still after the sled was upset in the snow bank.

Russ was one of the first to get to his feet. He rolled out of the drift, shook himself as a dog does coming out of the water, and then looked about him.

"See if the others are all right!" called his grandfather to him. "I'll hold the horses. Get out Margy and Mun Bun and the others."

Russ, though not very big, was a sturdy young chap, and, seeing Mun Bun's legs sticking out from under a pile of blankets, he pulled on them. And, as Mun Bun was still fast to his legs, when Russ pulled on them he pulled his little brother out into view.

"Hi! Quit that! What you doin'?" Mun Bun wanted to know.

"I had to get you out," said Russ. "Where's Margy?"

Margy did not answer in words, but she did by crawling out from where she had been sitting next to Mun Bun.

Then out came Laddie, Vi and Rose, and all the six little Bunkers were accounted for.

"That drift was deeper than I thought it was," said Grandpa Ford. "The sled went up one side of it and just toppled over. It spilled you all out nice and easy."

And that is just what had happened. The sled had gone over on one side so slowly and gently that no one was caught under it. The six little Bunkers had been toppled out, still wrapped in the blankets in which they had ridden from Great Hedge.

"What are we going to do?" asked Russ. "How are we going to get home, Grandpa?"

"Well, I'll see about that in just a minute," answered Grandpa Ford. "I don't believe anything is broken. But I'll have to get help to lift the sled right side up again. Whoa, now, ponies!"

The horses, which Grandpa Ford called "ponies," just for fun, were turning to look at the overturned sled. The six little Bunkers stood in a row, also looking at what had happened.

"It wasn't the ponies' fault, was it, Grandpa?" asked Violet.

"No, dear. It was mine. I shouldn't have driven them into the bank of snow. But I thought it was soft so the sled runners would sink down in it. However, it was hard, and upset us. But we'll soon be all right. Whoa, now, ponies!"

The big basket of things Grandpa Ford had bought at the store for his wife had been spilled out of the sled when the upset came. However, nothing was damaged, and the children helped him pick up the scattered things, while Russ held the horses.

The animals had not fallen down when the sled upset, and were not tangled in the harness, so they did not try to run away. The reason for this was that the front runner of the sled, to which was fastened the tongue, or long pole, on either side of which the horses ran--the front runner, I say, remained straight on the ground. The sled seemed to have broken off from this front part in turning on its side.

"Yes, it's broken," said Grandpa Ford as he looked at the sled. "I shall have to get it mended before I can drive home again. It's too bad, but I'm glad none of you is hurt."

He let Russ hold the horses, which stood very still, and the small boy was very proud of having charge of the animals. Down the road stood a small house, which looked something like a log cabin.

"Could you get the sled fixed there, Grandpa Ford?" asked Russ, pointing to the cabin.

"No, I hardly think so. I need to go to a blacksmith shop for a bolt to use in place of one that is broken. But I know what I can do. I can leave you children in the cabin until I come back."

"Leave us there all alone?" asked Rose.

"Oh, no," replied Grandpa Ford. "Mr. and Mrs. Thompson live there. I'll leave you with Mrs. Thompson. She is very good and kind. She'll look after you. I'll get Mr. Thompson to help me turn the sled right side up, and then I'll go to the blacksmith shop and get a new bolt in place of the broken one."

"Will you have to walk?" asked Russ.

"No, I'll ride one of the horses."

"Oh! Could I ride the other?" begged Laddie eagerly.

"I'm afraid you're too little," said Grandpa Ford. "Besides, I want to ride fast on the back of Major. And if you rode on Prince, which is the other horse, he might jiggle you off into a snow bank."

"I think all you six little Bunkers had better stay at Mr. Thompson's cabin until I come back," went on Grandpa Ford. "I won't be any longer than I can help, and when I get the sled fixed we'll all ride home. I won't make my trip to the country as I was going to, as it will be too late."

"Can we get something to eat at the cabin?" asked Margy. "I'm hungry."

"Oh, I guess Mrs. Thompson has something to eat," laughed Grandpa Ford.

Grandpa unhitched the horses from the overturned sled and then started to drive them toward the cabin, which was the only house for some distance on that road. The six little Bunkers followed, the highway being well-packed with hard snow, so that walking was easy.

As the procession, led by Grandpa Ford driving the horses, approached the cabin, a door opened and a man came out.

"Had an accident, did you, Mr. Ford?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the children's grandfather. "My sled upset in a drift and spilled out my six little Bunkers. I also broke a bolt, and I shall have to ride to the blacksmith shop to get another. I was wondering if the children couldn't wait in your house until I came back."

"Of course they may!" exclaimed a motherly-looking woman, coming to the door behind her husband. "Bring them in, every one, and I'll give them some bread and milk. I have cookies, too, for I just baked to-day."

"I'm glad of that!" exclaimed Laddie, and the grown folks laughed at him because he said it so earnestly.

"Come right in!" went on Mrs. Thompson. "Are you cold?"

"Not very, thank you," answered Rose. "We had lots of blankets in the sled, and we didn't get much snow on us."

"Well, sit up by the fire, and I'll get you something to eat," said Mrs. Thompson.

"I'll put one of your horses in the stable while you ride to the blacksmith shop on the other," said Mr. Thompson, putting on his hat and overcoat, to go out where Grandpa Ford was waiting.

"Now, you'll be all right, little Bunkers!" called their grandfather to them, as he started away on the back of Major, who had been unharnessed. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Mr. Thompson took Prince to his stable. There was a small one back of the cabin. I have called it a "cabin," though it really was a small house. But it was built like a log cabin, and was much smaller than the house at Great Hedge. It was clean and neat, and on a table covered with a bright red cloth, in front of a glowing fire in the stove, Mrs. Thompson set out some cups, some milk, a plate of bread and some cookies.

"Now come and eat," she said to the six little Bunkers.

They were just drawing up their chairs, and Russ was wondering how long his grandfather would be gone, when, all at once, a hollow groan sounded through the cabin.

"Umph! Urr-rumph!"

It was a most sorrowful and sad sound and, hearing it, Rose cried:

"Why, there's the ghost again! Oh, it's come from Great Hedge down to this house! There's the ghost!"

Again the hollow groan sounded.



CHAPTER XXIV

CHRISTMAS JOYS

Russ, who was about to take a bite out of a cookie that Mrs. Thompson had given him, stopped with the piece half-way to his mouth. He looked at Rose with wide-open eyes.

The other little Bunkers also looked at their sister, who had left her chair and was standing in the middle of the room.

"What did you say, my dear?" asked Mrs. Thompson.

Before Rose could answer again came a queer, hollow, groaning noise, that sounded, the children said afterward, "as if a sick bear had hidden down the cellar and couldn't get out."

Just what sort of noise a sick bear makes I don't know, for I never heard one. But this noise at any rate, must have been very strange.

"Umph! Umph! Urr-rumph!" it went.

"There it is!" cried Rose. "That's the ghost! It sounds just like the noise at Great Hedge, doesn't it, Russ?"

"It--it sounds something like it," Russ had to admit. "But there isn't a ghost--Daddy said so."

"A ghost, child! I should say not!" cried Mrs. Thompson. "Of course there is no such thing."

"But what makes the sound?" asked Russ. "Don't you hear it?"

"I hear it!" exclaimed Laddie.

"So do I," said Violet.

Mun Bun and Margy probably heard it, also, but they were too busy finishing their bread and milk to say anything. Probably they knew that Russ and Rose, who always looked after them, would take care of the strange noise.

"Oh, *that* noise!" exclaimed Mrs. Thompson, as once more the hollow groan sounded, throughout the house. "You weren't afraid of that, were you?" And her eyes began to twinkle, then she laughed.

"A--a little," admitted Rose.

"It sounds like the cur'us noise at Great Hedge," added Russ.

"Well, I didn't know you had a curious noise at your grandfather's place," went on Mrs. Thompson. "First I ever heard of it."

"Oh, yes, there's a ghost there, only it isn't a ghost 'cause there's no such thing! Daddy said so!" exclaimed Rose. "But we got----"

"We've got a funny noise there," said Russ, breaking in on what his sister was saying. "It sounds like your noise, too."

"Well, there's nothing so very curious about this noise," laughed Mrs. Thompson. "That's only my husband playing on the big horn he used to blow when he was in the band. He hasn't used it much for years, and can't blow it as well as he used to. But that's what the noise is. Every once in a while he takes a notion and goes up into the attic and blows on the horn. I imagine he did it this time to amuse you children. I'll ask him.

"Jabez!" she called up the stairs that led to the small second story of the house. "Jabez! Is that you blowing the old bass horn?"

"Yes, Sarah, that's me," was the answer.

"Only I can't seem to blow it just right. Something appears to have got stopped up in the horn, or else maybe it's frozen. It doesn't blow like it used to."

"I should think it didn't!" laughed his wife. "Stop your tooting, and bring the horn down where the children can see it. Some of 'em thought it was a ghost, such as they have at Great Hedge. Did you ever hear of a ghost there?"

"Oh, I've heard some talk of it," answered Mr. Thompson, and now the six little Bunkers could hear him coming

downstairs. He seemed to be carrying something large and heavy.

"Why didn't you tell me about it?" asked his wife. "I like ghost stories."

"Oh, this isn't really a ghost," quickly explained Rose. "It's just a queer, groaning sound, and it comes in the middle of the night sometimes, and my daddy and grandpa can't find out what it is."

"Maybe it was Mr. Thompson blowing his horn," suggested Russ. "It sounded like that."

"Well, I'm sorry my playing sounds as bad as that," laughed Mr. Thompson, and then he came into the room where the children were, carrying a large brass horn, the kind that play the bass, or heavy, notes in a band. Putting his lips to the mouthpiece Mr. Thompson made the same "umph-umph!" sound that had so startled the children at first.

"Does that sound like the ghost?" he asked Russ.

"Just like it, only louder," was the answer.

"I wonder what it can be at Great Hedge," said Mrs. Thompson. "I should think it would scare you dreadfully," she went on.

"Why, no," answered Rose. "But we want to find out what it is. So does my daddy and Grandpa Ford. We're going to help him, Russ and I, only every time we hear a funny noise it turns out to be Mun Bun falling out of bed, or an alarm clock beating a drum or something like that."

"Mercy sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Thompson. "You must have great goings-on at Great Hedge!" She laughed when Russ and Rose told her of the different queer noises, each one turning out to be something that was only funny and easily explainable.

"Well, I'm sorry I startled you," said Mr. Thompson. "I sometimes take a notion to go off by myself and blow the old horn as I used to in the band when I belonged to it years ago. That wasn't here; it was in another village. But I had no idea I sounded like a ghost."

"Oh, it--it sounded nice after we knew what it was," said Rose, thinking Mr. Thompson's feelings might be hurt if they said they didn't like his horn.

"Well, I'll not blow it again while you're here," he said. "And now, unless I'm mistaken, I think I see your grandfather coming back. He'll soon have the sled fixed."

The six little Bunkers rushed to the window and saw Grandpa Ford riding down the road on the back of Major. Prince had been left in Mr. Thompson's barn. In a little while Russ and Rose were telling their grandfather about the queer noise of the bass horn.

"I never heard you had a ghost at Great Hedge," said Mrs. Thompson to Grandpa Ford.

"Well, I call it a ghost for want of a better name," he replied. "It's just a noise, and I thought we would find out what it was before this, but we haven't. However, we don't worry about it. What do you think of my six little Bunkers?"

"I love them--each and every one," said Mrs. Thompson. "Let them come over and see me again."

"I will," promised Grandpa Ford.

"And I promise I won't play the horn for you," added Mr. Thompson, laughing.

He helped Mr. Ford fix the big sled, and soon it had been turned right side up, the horses were again hitched to it, and the children, after bidding their new friends good-bye, got in, and away they drove again, the merry bells jingling.

"Well, I wish we could find out what the queer noise is here at Great Hedge as easily as you children found out what the one was at the cabin," said Grandma Ford, when Russ and Rose and Laddie and Vi, by turns, had told her what had happened when Mr. Thompson blew his horn.

"Did the ghost sound while I was away?" asked Grandpa Ford.

"Yes, and louder than ever," said Mother Bunker. "We looked all over, but we couldn't find out what made the sound."

"Maybe it was Santa Claus," said Violet. "He's coming here, and maybe he's trying the chimney to see if it fits him."

"We thought of that before," said Rose. "But the noise sounded long before Santa Claus comes around. I'm sure it

couldn't be him."

"But he's coming, anyhow," said Violet. "Grandpa said so, and I hope he brings me a new cradle for my doll."

"I want a new pair of skates," said Russ. "Mine are getting too small."

"I want a ship I can sail in the Summer, and a bigger sled," came from Laddie.

And so the children began to talk about Christmas, and what they wanted Santa Claus to bring them.

The weather was now cold and blowy and blustery, with a snowstorm nearly every day. But the six little Bunkers went out often to play, even if it was cold. They had lots of fun.

Now and again the queer noise would sound, but, though each time the grown folks went to look for it, they could not find it. It seemed to sound all through the house, almost like the blowing of Mr. Thompson's horn, only not so loud.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Grandpa Ford after one night's search, when nothing had been found, "this surely is a mystery!"

"I could make a riddle about it, only I'd never know the answer," said Laddie. "And a riddle without an answer is no good."

"That's very true!" said his grandfather, laughing.

The days passed. Christmas came nearer and nearer. There was to be a tree at Great Hedge, and the children were also going to hang up their stockings. Grandpa Ford and Daddy Bunker went out into the woods and cut the tree, which was placed in the parlor, and the doors shut.

"It wouldn't do for any of you to go in there from now on," said Mrs. Bunker. "You might surprise Santa Claus, and he doesn't like to be surprised."

Finally came Christmas Eve. The children listened to the reading of Bible stories as they sat before the fire, and then went early to bed so "morning would come quicker."

But, in spite of the fact that they wanted to go to sleep, it was some time before the older ones dropped off into Slumberland. Then, in the middle of the night, it seemed, there sounded throughout the house the sound of a horn being blown.

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Rose, suddenly awakening and sitting up in bed. "Is that--is that the----"

"It's the horn of Santa Claus!" cried Mrs. Bunker. "Wake up! It's Christmas morning!"

And so it was.

CHAPTER XXV

THE GHOST AT LAST

"Merry Christmas!" called the six little Bunkers.

"Merry Christmas!" answered Grandpa and Grandma Ford and Daddy and Mother Bunker. "Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas!" called Dick as he tramped in from the barn, all covered with snow.

And such a jolly Christmas as it was! If each of the six little Bunkers did not get exactly what he or she wanted, all got something just as good.

There were toys, dolls, sleds, games and picture books. There was a magic lantern for Russ--something he had long wanted. There was a toy airship, that could be wound up and would fly, for Laddie. This he had wished for many times.

And the grown folks were not forgotten. There were fur-lined slippers for both Grandpa and Grandma Ford, a gold pin for Mother Bunker, and a new shaving set for Daddy Bunker. Dick had some new neckties, a pipe, and a pair of rubber boots.

"Just what I wanted!" he exclaimed.

And I wish you could have seen the Christmas tree! It was a beautiful one, and covered with colored balls that sparkled red, green, blue, and yellow in the candle light. It was wonderful!

"I wish I could try my new skates," said Russ. But this was a vain wish, as the ice on the pond, as well as the ground, was covered with snow.

"But we can have lots more rides now, 'cause I got my big new sled, and you can all take turns on it," said Laddie. "And, oh, I've thought of a new riddle!" he cried. "Why would your dress be good to go fishing with, Mother?" he asked.

"Why would my dress be good to go fishing with?" repeated Mrs. Bunker. "It wouldn't, Laddie. I wouldn't want to soil my nice dress by going fishing in it."

"Anyhow, what's that got to do with your new sled?" asked Russ.

"Nothing," answered Laddie. "Only I just happened to think of this riddle. Why would Mother's dress be good to go fishing with?"

"Well, why would it?" asked Grandma Ford. "I want to hear the answer, because I have to go out into the kitchen and see about getting the dinner. Why would your mother's dress be good for fishing with, Laddie?"

"Cause it's got hooks on," he answered with a laugh. "I heard her ask you to hook it up this morning. Isn't that a good riddle?"

"Very good," answered Grandma Ford. "Now see if you can think of one about roast chicken, as that's what we're going to have for dinner. Get good and hungry, all of you."

"Better go out into the air and play a while," suggested Daddy Bunker. "That will give you good, healthy appetites."

So the six little Bunkers went out to play. It was not very cold, but Grandpa Ford said it looked as though there would be more snow.

"Then we can make more snow men!" shouted Russ. "And maybe I'll make an ice boat, too, when the snow melts so we can go on the pond."

Out in the snow rushed the six little Bunkers, and they had fun playing near the big hedge which gave Grandpa Ford's place its name.

When the children were romping about, sliding down a little hill they made, and tumbling about in the snow, along came Mr. Thompson.

"Merry Christmas!" he called to Russ, Rose and the others.

"Merry Christmas!" they answered.

Mun Bun and Margy, who had been making a little snow man all by themselves, stopped their play and walked toward the house.

"Where are you going?" asked Russ.

"I'm going to ask Grandma for a cookie," explained Mun Bun. "I'm hungry."

"So'm I," added Margy.

"Don't eat before dinner," advised Rose. "Save your 'hungry' for the roast chicken."

And Grandma Ford told the little ones the same thing, but they insisted that they wanted a cookie each, so she gave them one apiece, but they were rather small.

"Because," said Grandma, "I want you to eat my nice, brown, roast chicken."

And Mun Bun and Margy did. For, when dinner time came, they had as good appetites as any of the others. Every one seemed to be hungry, and, for a while, the sound of the clatter of the knives, forks and plates was louder than the talk.

After dinner they sat about the open fire on the big hearth in the living-room, and cracked nuts. Or, rather, Grandpa Ford cracked them and the children ate them.

"Wouldn't it be funny," began Russ, "if we should----"

And, just then, there suddenly sounded throughout the house that strange, groaning sound.

"O-u-g-h-m!"

It seemed louder than ever, and, for a moment, every one was startled. Mun Bun and Margy ran to their mother.

"Come on!" called Grandpa Ford to Daddy Bunker. "We must find out what that noise is. It has been going on long enough, and now to have it come when we are all so happy at Christmas time is too much! We must find where it is."

"Can't we help hunt?" asked Russ.

"Yes, let us, Mother, won't you?" added Rose.

"But what is it?" asked Laddie. "What makes the funny groaning noise?"

"Maybe Mr. Thompson is blowing his horn," said Vi.

The groaning noise kept up longer this time than ever before. Every few minutes it would echo through the house. Sometimes it sounded as though upstairs, and again down in the cellar.

"We'll try the attic," said Grandpa Ford.

He and Daddy Bunker went up there. Grandma Ford and Mother Bunker stayed in the sitting-room with Mun Bun and Margy.

"Come on!" called Russ to Rose. "Let's go and look."

Rose followed her brother.

"Want to come?" she asked Violet and Laddie.

"Yep," the twins said exactly together, just as twins should, I suppose.

Russ, Rose, Laddie and Vi walked slowly through the different downstairs rooms. In each one they listened. In some they could hear the noise more plainly than in others. Finally they came to the kitchen.

"It sounds plainer here," said Russ.

And, just then, the groan sounded so near at hand that Rose jumped and caught Russ by the arm.

"O-u-g-h-m!"

Again the groan sounded.

"It's over in there!" cried Laddie, pointing to a large storeroom opening out of the kitchen. The door of this room was open, and the noise, indeed, did seem to come from there.

"Let's go in!" suggested Russ, and he started toward it.

"Maybe you'd better call Grandpa and Daddy, and let them look," said Vi.

Just then Mother Bunker and Grandma Ford, followed by the two smallest children, came into the kitchen.

"Oh, we've found the ghost!" cried Rose to her mother. "It's in the storeroom! Listen!"

The two women listened. The groan sounded very plainly, and did seem to come from the room off the kitchen.

Grandma Ford walked in. All was quiet for a moment, and then the noise sounded again.

"I've found it!" cried Grandma Ford. "I've found the ghost at last!"

"What is it?" exclaimed Mother Bunker.

"I don't know exactly what makes it," said Grandma Ford; "but the noise comes out of this rain-water pipe under the window of the storeroom. We'll call Daddy Bunker and Grandpa Ford and have them look. But come in and listen, all of you."

With their mother the six little Bunkers went into the storeroom. Just as they entered the groan sounded loudly, and, as Grandma Ford said, it came from a rain-water pipe that ran slanting under the window.

"That's the ghost!" cried Mother Bunker. "No wonder we couldn't find it. We never looked here before."

And when Daddy Bunker and Grandpa Ford came down out of the attic, where they had not been able to find the "ghost," though they heard the sound of it faintly there, they were told what the six little Bunkers had discovered with the help of Grandma Ford.

"Yes, the noise comes from the rain-water pipe," said Grandpa Ford, when he had looked and listened carefully.

"What makes it?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"Well, the pipe is broken, and partly filled with water from the rain or melted snow. There are also some dried leaves in the pipe. One end has sunk down and the wind blows across that and makes a hollow, groaning sound, just as you can make by blowing across the open mouth of a big, empty bottle. That was the ghost--the wind blowing across the broken water pipe."

"Yes, that is what made it," said Daddy Bunker, when he had taken a look and had listened again. "The sound comes loudest when the wind blows."

"The noise sounded, sometimes, when the wind didn't blow," said Grandpa Ford, as he took the pipe apart, "because of the dried leaves that were in it. The leaves became water-soaked, and were in a lump. Then, when this lump slid down it made a sort of choking sound like a pump that runs out of water. The wind blowing across the pipe, and the wet leaves sinking down, made the queer noises. I'm glad we've found out about them."

"But what made it blow all through the house?" asked Mother Bunker.

"Because there are rain-water pipes, or drain pipes, from the gutters on all sides of the house," explained her husband. "The pipes are connected, and the sound, starting in the broken pipe under the window in the storeroom, vibrated all around the house from the attic to the cellar. That ends the ghost, children."

And so it did, for when that pipe and some others were mended, and fastened together after being cleaned out, no more groans were heard. And so the "ghost" at Great Hedge was found to be nothing more than all ghosts are--something natural and simple.

"Now I can make a riddle about it," said Laddie. "I can ask why is a ghost like an umbrella?"

"Why is it?" asked Violet.

"'Cause it hid in a rain-water pipe. 'Course that isn't a *very* good riddle," admitted Laddie. "Maybe I'll think of a better one after a while."

"Well, it's good enough this time," laughed Grandpa Ford. "Now the ghost is 'laid,' as they call it, we'll have lots of fun at Great Hedge."

And so the children did. The Christmas holidays passed and New Year's came. The snow melted, and there was a chance for more skating and for rides in the ice boat. Russ kept his word and made one, but it upset more times than it sailed.

"I wonder what we'll do next Winter," said Rose, as she and Russ were sliding downhill one day.

"Summer comes before next Winter," he said. "Maybe we'll go visiting again."

And where the children went and what they did you may learn by reading the next volume of this series, to be called: "Six Little Bunkers at Uncle Fred's." He had a ranch out West and---

But there, I'll let you read the book for yourselves.

"Oh, but we're having lots of fun here," said Laddie that night, as he sat trying to think of a new riddle. "Lots of fun."

"And the best fun of all was finding the ghost that wasn't a ghost," said Russ.

And I think so myself. So, having been on many adventures with the six little Bunkers, we will leave them for a while.

THE END

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