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# The Boxcar Children®



**Benny Uncovers a Mystery**

GERTRUDE CHANDLER WARNER





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**GERTRUDE CHANDLER WARNER**  
**Illustrated by David Cunningham**

**ALBERT WHITMAN & Company, Chicago, Illinois**

Miss Warner wishes  
to thank everyone  
who helped in any way  
on this book.

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## CHAPTER 1

### *No Lazy Days for Benny*

**I**t was a hot, lazy morning, that last day of July. Not a leaf stirred in the huge maple tree in the Alden front yard. Even the birds were still.

Henry Alden sat on the grass with his back against a tree trunk. He was holding a book he was supposed to read for college in the fall. But he didn't feel like reading.

His sister Jessie sat with her back against another tree, not moving. Violet was lying on the grass, propping her head up with her hands. She watched the big white clouds float slowly by in the bright blue sky.

"Well," said Henry. "I don't remember a day like this ever. I don't feel like doing anything."

"Neither do I," said Jessie without stirring. "I don't see how Benny can be playing ball."

"I'll tell you why we feel this way," Violet said suddenly. "Usually Grandfather plans a trip in the summer. We've been at the lighthouse or on a houseboat or riding in a caboose."

Just then Benny came through the hedge. He had been next door. He was wearing shorts and a shirt with short sleeves.

"See you later," Jeff Beach called after him, and Benny waved.

"How's the ballgame?" asked Jessie. "Quitting?"

"Whew! It's just too hot for me," Benny said. He sat down next to Jessie. He did not look very happy.

"Who won, Benny?" asked Henry.

"Nobody won," answered Benny. "Jeff and I were just playing catch."

Jessie laughed and said, "That isn't exciting enough for you, Ben, is it?"

"No, it isn't," agreed Benny. "But it's too lazy a day for much excitement." Then he added, "I have one piece of news. Sammy Beach has a job."

"He has!" exclaimed Jessie. "Where?"

"He's an errand boy at the hospital. He likes it and he's earning money. It sounded good when Jeff told me about it. Sammy's so busy he forgets about the heat ..."

Just then the paperboy came into the driveway with the Greenfield paper.

"Catch!" he called as he tossed the paper into the circle where the Aldens sat.

After the paperboy had gone on his way, Henry slowly unfolded the newspaper. He said, "I suppose somebody ought to take the paper into Grandfather. I'm too lazy to move."

"I'll do it in a minute," said Violet.

Benny looked at his brother and sisters. They were just sitting there, not talking, not moving. Aldens never acted this way! Benny had to do something. "You know what I think?" he asked. "I think we ought to go to work."

"Work?" repeated Henry. "You mean get a summer job? Now?"

“Yes, that’s just what I mean,” replied Benny. “If Sammy Beach is working, we can, too. I want a real job, not just doing chores and mowing the lawn.” He sat up straight. “I want to go to work in the morning and come home at five.”

Jessie smiled at Benny. “Violet and I will be busy soon. We’re going to work at the park. Violet is going to teach painting, and I’m going to be a lifeguard at the pool.”

“I forgot,” Benny said. “That’s good for you. But I want to do something now.”

Henry looked at Benny. “You work in school, Ben. You’re busy after school and on Saturdays. Why work in the summer?”

“Oh, I work my fingers to the bone all the time,” Benny said without a smile, and he held up one arm to look at. It was a strong and healthy arm. And the hand had five perfectly good fingers.

The Aldens all laughed, for they knew Benny liked to be busy, playing or working. But Benny was serious about a summer job. “Hey, let’s look in the paper for ads. We can job hunt without making a move. How’s that, Henry?”



Benny opened the Greenfield paper and looked for the page which said “Help Wanted.”

“Here we are,” he said, folding back the paper. Then Benny laughed. “I wouldn’t be very good for this one. ‘Wanted, young person to sit two hours daily with invalid.’ I know I couldn’t be quiet that long.”

“You’re right about that,” Jessie agreed.

Benny ran his finger down the ads. "Say!" he exclaimed. "Here's one for me after all. 'Wanted, someone for errands, some yard work. No driving necessary. Phone 222-1212.' "

Before anyone could stop him, Benny was on his feet and headed for the house. "Easy number to remember, just 222-1212," he called back.

"He really wants to work," said Henry. "I wonder if anyone will be home on a day like this to answer the phone?"

Inside the house Benny propped the paper by the phone and dialed the number. The phone rang five times before someone answered.

"Hello," said Benny. "Is this 222-1212? I'm calling about your ad in today's paper. My name is Benny Alden and I'd like the job."

A woman's voice said, "Benny Alden? Mr. James Alden's grandson? I'm sorry, but another boy just called and I promised him the job. Thank you for calling." And the phone clicked in Benny's ear.

Putting the phone down, Benny frowned. Who knew he was Mr. Alden's grandson, but wouldn't give a name or an address? Was it an older woman or had the voice just sounded that way? And had someone else really taken the job or didn't this person want an Alden to do the work?

Still feeling puzzled, Benny reported back to the others. "No luck," he said. "I guess you can't always get a job the first time you try."

Violet looked toward the porch and saw Grandfather Alden standing there, smiling at them. He loved to have his grandchildren make their own plans and carry them out. He only helped them if they needed him.

Now he put in a word. "Remember that Mrs. McGregor has a vacation. We'll have to be our own housekeepers while she's gone to Canada."

"Oh, yes, I know that," said Benny. "But that won't be too much to do."

Grandfather Alden laughed. Benny always wanted to be busy.

"Let's get back to the newspaper ads," said Benny. "Now where were we? Say, this may be it. 'Wanted, for the month of August only, sales clerk. Inquire at Furman's Department Store.' That sounds like something for you, Henry. You could do that."

"Well," Henry said. "That might be interesting. But that's just one job. What about you, Benny?"

"Nothing else here for me," Benny said and ran over to give Grandfather Alden the paper. When he came back to the others he said, "Maybe if Mr. Furman sees how much I want a job, he'll find something for me, too. Or maybe I can get a job at another store. I'll ask. Come on, Henry, let's go."

Jessie and Violet smiled at each other.

Benny was always like that. If he planned to do anything, he wanted to start at once.

Grandfather laughed, but Henry said, "You can't say a word, Grandfather. You are just like that yourself." And Mr. Alden had to agree.

"Yes, yes," he said, holding up his hand. "I think it's a fine plan. You'll both learn a lot, whatever you do. In fact, I'll be interested in learning about what's going on at Furman's Department Store. I've heard there are some changes planned there. Not everyone is happy about them."

Benny nodded. He didn't think any changes would make a difference to him and Henry. He said, "Let's go, Henry. Somebody else may get there ahead of us. I'd really

like to work in a department store. I just hope I'm old enough. I'm sure you will be."

"OK," answered Henry, getting up and closing his book. "We'll see which of us the manager wants. Maybe he won't want either of us. Of course, Mr. Furman knows us—for years and years. But he may want somebody older."

"Maybe he will, but I hope not," Benny said, starting toward the house.

The boys raced upstairs. They moved quickly, changing their clothes, brushing their hair. They forgot about the lazy summer day.

As the boys got ready Mr. Alden thought to himself, "When people are interested in something special, they don't notice how hot it is."

The boys got out their bikes. Henry called to Grandfather and the girls, "We'll probably be back soon. It would be pretty lucky to get a job on the first try."

"I don't think we'll be back," Benny put in. "I still feel lucky today. We may be working men in an hour or so. I'm ready to start right now."

"Come back for lunch or not, it's all right either way," said Jessie. "I'll be ready."

"Good luck," Violet called after them as the boys pedaled away.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Wanted: A Summer Job*

As they rode along, Benny said, “The girls are lucky. They already have jobs. They each have their own, but so far we just know of one job and there are two of us.”

Henry asked, “What would you really like to do if you could do anything you wanted?”

“I like the idea of working in a store,” Benny said. “I’d like to wait on customers. Maybe a hardware store would be the best place to work. Lots of people come in for tools and garden hoses and rakes. I could sell eggbeaters and cupcake tins and hammers and saws.”

Benny smiled at the thought of all the interesting things there are in a hardware store.

“Well, why not go to the hardware store first, then?” asked Henry. “Maybe this will be your lucky day.”

But Benny saw Tucker’s Grocery Store. It was an old-fashioned store and Benny knew Mr. Tucker and his wife. “I’d like to work here, too,” he told Henry. “I could make those fancy piles of apples and oranges in the window.”

“What ideas you have, Ben,” Henry said. “It’s more likely you’d have to handle cartons of eggs. You would feel terrible if you broke any eggs.”

“Maybe I wouldn’t break any eggs,” said Benny. “Mr. Tucker has known us for a long time. He’d give us jobs if he could.”

So the boys parked their bikes in front of Tucker’s Grocery Store and went inside.

“Well, hello, boys,” said Mr. Tucker. “It’s a hot day to go grocery shopping.”

Henry looked around. “As a matter of fact,” he said, “we aren’t shopping for groceries at all. We’re shopping for jobs.”

Mr. Tucker sat down on a high stool. He exclaimed, “You’re just too late! I wish you had come yesterday. I just hired a young man to help me out. I needed a helper who’s strong to put things away. No matter how often I do it, there’s more to be done. So I hired Tad Decker.”

“Well, maybe he needs a job more than we do,” said Henry.

“He does,” said Mr. Tucker. “His father has lost his job, and Tad has to work. I’m sorry about you boys, though. I’d like to have a couple of Aldens work for me if I could. Try the hardware store. Maybe Mr. Green or Mr. Spencer has something.”

“Thanks,” said Henry and Benny together. “We’ll go there next.”

“Good luck,” Mr. Tucker called.

When the boys had locked their bikes in front of the hardware store, they swung open the heavy door. They found the store empty. There was not a single customer in sight. Mr. Spencer and Mr. Green were leaning against a counter, talking in low tones to each other.

The boys knew the answer to their question before they asked it. The men shook their heads.

Mr. Spencer said, "As you can see, boys, our business is slow in the mornings. I'm sorry we have nothing for you."

"That's OK," said Benny. "Of course, we've had no experience."

"That's not the reason," replied Mr. Green. "We just don't need any more help now."

The boys said goodbye and left the store.

"Let's stop next door and see Mr. Shaw at the jewelry store," Henry said.

Shaw's Jewelry Store was a small shop with only one showroom. Mr. Shaw was in the back of the store, repairing a watch. As the boys opened the door, he pushed back the heavy blue curtain that hid his work table.

Mr. Shaw had a small magnifying glass over one eye. He pushed it up so that he could see the Aldens.

"It isn't often that you two come in," he said. "What can I do for you customers?"

"We aren't customers," said Benny. "We are looking for work."

"Sorry," said Mr. Shaw. "I haven't room for another person. I lock up the store when I go to lunch or do errands. Your best bet is Furman's."

When they were outside, Benny looked unhappy. "I didn't think it would be this hard to find a job. We should have gone to Furman's first. Someone else probably has that job by now."

"I don't think so," Henry said. "The paper just had the ad today. Let's try."

So the boys were off to Furman's, the biggest store in town. It was not like a city department store, but it had most of the things people in Greenfield wanted to buy.

Furman's Department Store filled nearly a block in the business part of Greenfield. It had been a much smaller store when Mr. Furman's father had first begun it. Now it had new sections and two floors with many different departments.

Benny and Henry headed for the office as soon as they walked into the store. They knew where the office was, on a landing halfway up the stairs between the first and second floor.

Mr. Furman was in the office. It was a square room, something like a cage because the sides were built of open metal work. Mr. Furman could see almost all of the first floor counters when he looked out. Some people said he should make the store modern and put in glass walls. But Mr. Furman liked his office the way it was. It suited him.

He had seen Henry and Benny enter the store. He thought how big the boys were. He could remember when Benny had been so small that he came to the store with a note saying what he was to buy. The store people would make sure Benny had his purchases and the right change to take home.

Mr. Furman was surprised to see the Aldens pass the downstairs counters and come up the stairs to his private office. The worried look on his face changed to a smile.

Henry rapped on the door and Mr. Furman called out, "Come right in."

Henry was just going to explain the boys' errand when Benny said in a rush, "We boys want to work until school starts. We saw the ad in the paper. Is the job still open?"



“Yes, it is,” said Mr. Furman. “I’ve had trouble filling the job because it will only last from four to six weeks at the most. I need someone who can take the place of a salesperson when the regular worker goes on vacation.”

Benny looked at Henry and smiled. The job sounded just right for Henry.

Mr. Furman went on. “There will be a lot of variety, but it can be hard to change from one department to another. I think it just might be right for Henry, though.” He stopped and seemed to be thinking. “Yes, maybe you can do it, Henry. There will be some problems, I’m sure, but ...”

When Mr. Furman did not say anything more, Henry said, “Well, Mr. Furman, I’d like to take the job. I only need to work until I go back to school. But it was really Benny’s idea to go job hunting. He’s the one who wants to be busy.”

Benny and Henry looked at Mr. Furman and waited.

There was a long pause. Mr. Furman said thoughtfully, “Benny is a little young to work here full time. I’m afraid I have no work you would take, Benny.”

“What do you mean?” asked Benny. “I’d take anything.”

Mr. Furman laughed and asked, “You wouldn’t want to be assistant delivery boy, would you?”

“Oh, yes, I would,” said Benny.

Benny and Henry both smiled at Mr. Furman.

“Then it’s settled,” said Mr. Furman. “Come back after lunch and we’ll handle the paperwork to get you hired. I’ll introduce you to some of the department managers and salespeople. You’ll be all set to start to work tomorrow morning.”

The Aldens, still smiling, left Mr. Furman’s office. Some of the people behind the counters called out hello to them. But one man carrying an electric fan scowled at the boys.

“Can’t you see you’re in the way?” he asked. “If you aren’t buying something stand

over there by the door, out of my path. This fan is heavy and my back hurts.”

Benny started to say something, then changed his mind. If he was going to work at Furman’s, he couldn’t talk back to the other workers. He’d have to learn how to get along with them. And Benny felt sure he could do that.

But Henry remembered Grandfather’s words about trouble at Furman’s and wondered.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Aldens Make An Enemy*

**I**t was just after lunch when the two Aldens met the man who had scowled at them earlier that day.

“This is Mr. Fogg,” Mr. Furman said. “Henry, you will be working with Mr. Fogg. He is the manager of the first floor. You can learn a lot from him.”

Henry said, “How do you do, Mr. Fogg?” And Benny said, “Hi.”

But there was no reply from Mr. Fogg.

Mr. Furman seemed not to notice. He went on, “Mr. Fogg is in charge of the small electrical appliances, such as steam irons and electric frypans. When we don’t need you behind a counter, Henry, you will help Mr. Fogg stock the first floor.”

“Stock the first floor?” asked Henry. He wanted to be sure he understood his job.

Mr. Furman said, “Yes, you will bring goods up from the basement. If Mrs. Lester wants boxes for jewelry, you will find them and take them up to her.”

Henry nodded.

Mr. Fogg frowned and leaned forward. “I just don’t approve of this at all,” he said. “These two boys have no experience. They will be more trouble to me than they are worth. I don’t need help like this.”

The Alden boys could not believe their ears.

Mr. Furman tried to laugh. “Oh, come on, Mr. Fogg, give them a chance! I remember when you started your first day here. You had a lot to learn, too. When something wrong comes up, we can look into the matter. But I’m sure nothing will go wrong.”

Mr. Fogg still did not smile.

Benny looked away from Mr. Fogg. He saw counters filled with things to sell. There were shoppers coming and going.

Benny said, “It must be wonderful to own a big store like this, Mr. Furman.”

Mr. Furman glanced at Mr. Fogg and then shook his head. “I guess you boys don’t know that I have sold the store. It was too much for me to handle, and I had a good offer. Of course, it’s still called Furman’s Department Store. And so far there haven’t been any big changes.”

Mr. Fogg was looking more and more gloomy. He muttered, “I suppose the new owner won’t want me with my bad back. But I know the work.”

Henry looked at Mr. Furman and asked, “But you’re still in charge of the store, aren’t you?”

“I’m just the store manager for the new owner, M.D. Squires. So far, I haven’t met the new owner because he lives in New York. I’ve only met his lawyer. I’ll say this, though, Mr. Squires has a good head for business.”

“Oh?” Henry asked, wondering how this new owner could know about his store in Greenfield when he lived in New York.

“Yes, he’s done a lot for the store already. When some new product appears, Mr. Squires knows if our store should carry it. Sometimes I’ve wanted to get something, but Mr. Squires writes and tells me to wait. More than once, I’ve learned that the product doesn’t work well, or other stores in town couldn’t sell the item at all.”

“Mr. Squires must own other stores,” guessed Benny.

“That may be it,” said Mr. Furman. “It’s hard to explain. But I have never known Mr. Squires to be wrong.”

“I don’t think it’s so strange,” Mr. Fogg put in. “But no one listens to me.”

“The new owner must be a fine person to work for,” said Henry.

“Yes, indeed,” said Mr. Furman. “Still, it isn’t like the old days.” Then he turned away from Mr. Fogg and led the boys down to the store basement. A man was unpacking goods to go on the counters upstairs.

Benny said, “I thought I knew this store very well, but I’m surprised. I was never down here before.”

“You’ll do a lot of your work here,” Mr. Furman said. “There’s always something to get or to take somewhere. Mr. Fogg can keep you busy all by himself.”

Benny didn’t like to hear this, but he said, “I never thought I would deliver things to the Greenfield people. This will be fun.” Just then he saw Mr. Fogg on the stairs. His face was angry. Benny smiled, but Mr. Fogg did not return the smile. Instead, he turned to talk to the workman.

Mr. Furman led the boys up to the first floor again. Benny felt that Mr. Fogg was following them.

As they turned around a counter and headed toward the gift and glassware department, Benny heard Mr. Fogg’s voice. He was speaking to someone Benny couldn’t see.

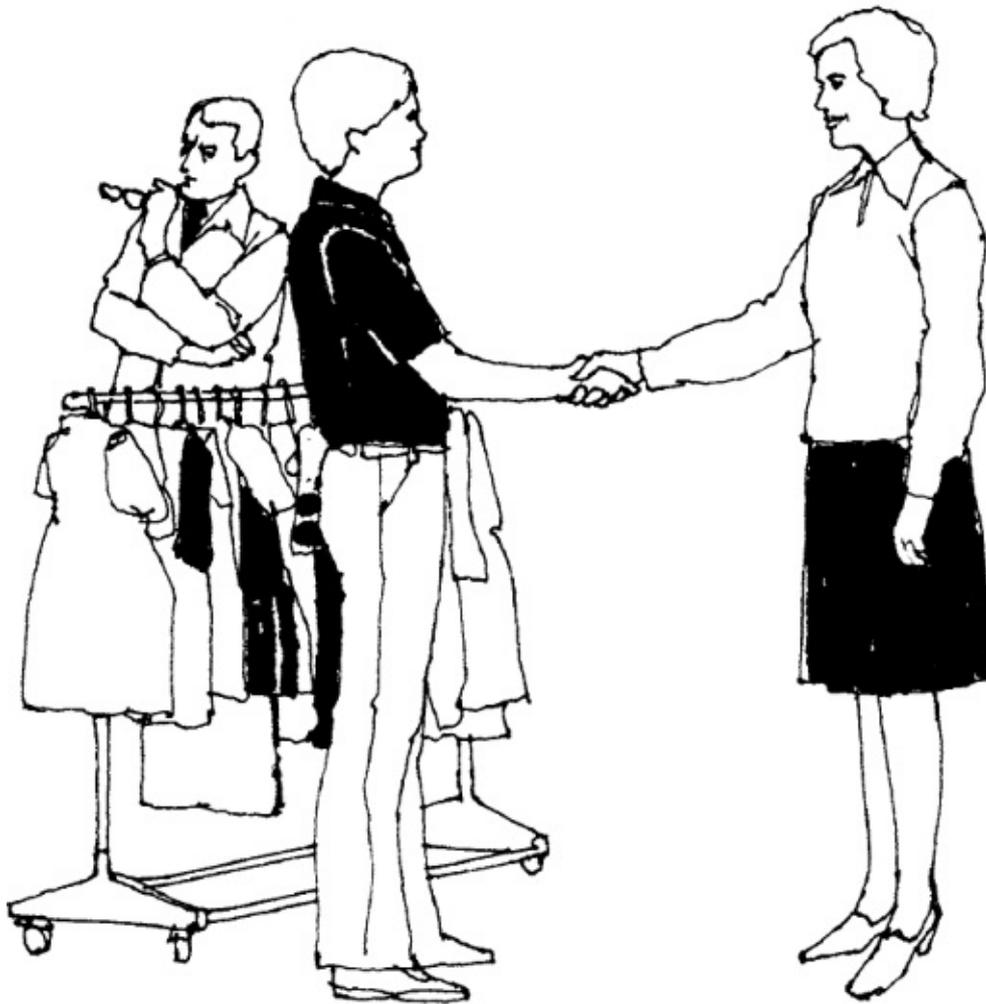
“I don’t know if those boys are good workers,” Mr. Fogg was grumbling. “I just know that they’re old man Alden’s grandchildren. It would be nice to have someone like that in your family to help you get a job. Just like that, with no trouble at all.”

Then Benny and Henry knew that they had an enemy. They had to pretend that they had not heard Mr. Fogg’s words. But they were sure that he had meant them to hear.

Well, Benny thought, Grandfather had not helped them get their jobs. They had done it on their own. He followed Henry and Mr. Furman to another part of the store. The boys and Mr. Furman went from one counter to another. Each department had interesting people to meet, and there was so much for sale.

Mr. Furman introduced the boys to the head cashier, Mrs. Lippmann. “Just call me Toni,” she said pleasantly. “Everyone calls me that.”

Toni worked in a place where she had a fine view of the front door. She kept an eye on everything that was going on.



“I’ll let Toni show you the rest of the store. Let me know if you need anything.” Mr. Furman waved as he went back to his office.

Toni introduced the boys to Mrs. Lester, who was in charge of jewelry and glassware.

“You mustn’t drop or lose anything here,” Mrs. Lester explained. “Everything is so expensive.” Then she showed the boys how much some small china figures and delicate teacups cost.

“I remember when Mr. Fogg began to work here,” Mrs. Lester said softly. “He dropped a small vase. It chipped and we had to sell it at a special price. Of course, that was a long time ago. He won’t tell you about that, though.”

Toni continued the tour. Benny and Henry went past the shiny toasters and coffeemakers in Mr. Fogg’s department, but Mr. Fogg paid no attention to Toni or the Aldens.

There were counters where things for sewing were sold and counters where combs and hairpins were on display. And there were socks for men and stockings for women—there was so much to see on the first floor alone.

Upstairs there were clothing departments for men, women, and children.

Toni led the boys back to the basement for the end of their tour. She said, “Now you know most of the store and this will mean more to you. Benny, you will pick up your

orders here. Sometimes you will go out with the regular delivery man. But we give special service to a lot of our customers. You may have to deliver small purchases by yourself.”

“That won’t be hard. I can use my bike,” said Benny.

Toni smiled. She showed the boys how the merchandise was arranged. There were aisles of boxes.

“Henry, the important thing for you to remember is that when you take stock upstairs, your list must match the list the department manager takes.”

“I’ll remember that. If the list says twelve boxes of candles, I’ll be sure there are twelve.”

“You won’t get in trouble that way,” Toni said. “But sometimes if a stockboy is in a hurry, he may think he has taken, say, six boxes of socks up to the boys’ department. But there are only five. We have to account for every box.”

“Thanks for warning me,” Henry said.

“And don’t leave things around,” Toni went on. “I hate to say it, but every store has trouble with people who take things.”

“You mean shoplifters?” Benny asked.

“Yes, even here in Greenfield. Of course, some people pick things up by mistake and just honestly forget to pay for them. A woman came in yesterday and paid for a box of notepaper she had taken by accident. She felt bad about it.”

“There’s a lot to think about in a store,” Benny said thoughtfully.

“Well, boys, that’s it,” Toni said. “Mr. Furman has some papers for you to fill out. Come in by nine-thirty tomorrow morning. The store opens a half hour later, but you’ll both have things to do.”

At dinnertime at home, Henry told his sisters and his grandfather what had happened.

“Why are you so quiet, Ben?” asked Violet.

“It’s just—just old man Fogg,” Benny exploded. “Everything is fine except for him.”

“Why, Benny, that doesn’t sound like you at all,” exclaimed Jessie.

“I can’t help it. That man is going to make it hard for Henry and me. For some reason he doesn’t like us, and he’s not keeping that a secret.”

Mr. Alden put down his coffee cup. “Well, Benny,” he began, “you and Henry must do the best work you can. That is all anyone can ask of you. You will meet many people in the store, and it is your job to be as pleasant as possible.”

“I’ll try, but it won’t be easy,” Benny said. “Grandfather, Mr. Fogg didn’t even give us a chance. He said right away that we had our jobs because we’re Aldens.”

“I see,” said Grandfather. “I think you boys will learn a lot before your summer jobs are over.”

## CHAPTER 4

### *A Mysterious Shopper*

**B**enny and Henry wondered how the first day at work would go.

That question was still on their minds as they entered the store the next morning at half past nine.

Toni was already there, sorting her change for the day.

“This is a good beginning. You’re early. I’m glad to see you both,” she said. “You’d better head downstairs, Benny. And Henry, you will be working with Mrs. Lester in the glassware and china department until the end of the week.”

The boys started off. Mrs. Lester showed Henry how to make the sales reports. She told him a little about the different kinds of china and glass.

“We try to carry as many different pieces of glassware as we can, but sometimes a customer wants something we don’t have. Then we send a special order.” Mrs. Lester showed Henry where the special order forms were kept.

“Be sure to get an OK before you send out any orders,” Mrs. Lester warned. “Mr. Fogg watches that. And there’s one more thing,” she said with a smile, “I want you and your brother to call me Doris.”

Henry was just beginning to feel comfortable behind the counter when he noticed that suddenly the store was strangely quiet. Talking had stopped, and all the salespeople were looking in one direction.

Everyone was watching a little woman who had just entered the store.

Henry could not see anything unusual about the woman. She was far from stylish. Her hair was pulled back and pinned up in a bun. Her clothes were plain. They were not the kind that anyone would look at twice. She carried a worn handbag and a large, flowered shopping bag.

Henry couldn’t decide how old the woman was. He caught Toni’s eye. She came to his counter and said, “You must want to know who that is.”

Henry nodded.

“She comes in every day. Her name is Maggie Douglas. She’s always buying something. Sometimes two and three kinds of the same thing. Benny will be busy with her deliveries, I’m sure.”

Henry and Toni watched the little woman climb the stairs to the second floor.

In a few minutes one of the salespeople from upstairs came over to Toni. “I have another ‘Maggie story’ for you. Miss Douglas just came to my counter and said she needed a blouse, a white blouse. When I asked her what size she needed, she said the size didn’t matter. It only had to be a white blouse. Now, isn’t that strange?”

Just then Mr. Fogg joined the group. He looked cross and asked, “That woman is in the store again, eh?”

The salesperson told him the story.

“You are foolish to sell a blouse to that woman,” said Mr. Fogg. “We’re going to

have trouble with her sooner or later. I'm sure of it. Why didn't she ask for a blouse in her size? She'll bring it back to the store tomorrow and say it doesn't fit. Besides, all she has to do is walk into the store and all work stops."

With that, all the workers quickly left the counter. Henry was alone with Mr. Fogg standing right before him.

"I'm a little lucky so far today," said Mr. Fogg. "At least you haven't broken any glassware yet."

Henry couldn't think of anything to say. Just at that moment two women came to the counter and Mr. Fogg walked away.

The first woman said, "I need a wedding present for my niece. I think a glass vase would make a nice present."

Henry lifted down several vases. The woman chose a small, graceful vase with a flower design.

"This is the only one in stock. I'm not allowed to sell this sample," Henry explained when he could not find another vase.

The woman looked unhappy, and Henry said, "I can order the vase for you and have it here in four days."

He took the order form from under the counter. "It's a beautiful vase," he said.

"Yes, it is," agreed the woman. "It's just what I want. You order it, and I'll be back early next week."

When the two women had gone, Henry filled out the order form for the vase. He filled in every blank and read the order over twice. He could find no errors. Doris approved the form and turned it over to Mr. Fogg.

Henry reported his first day of work to the family that evening. "I hardly saw you at all, Ben," he said. "What was your day like?"

Benny smiled. "I didn't see Mr. Fogg for most of the day. But I did meet Miss Douglas."

"What did you think of her?" asked Violet.

"I don't know. She came down the stairs to the basement. She said that she was lost. But somehow I think that she wanted to look around. She said she was happy to meet me because I'll be delivering her purchases."

Benny stopped talking for a moment and looked puzzled.

"What's the matter?" asked Jessie.

"There was one strange thing about talking with Miss Douglas. She called me by my name, 'Benny Alden.' Now how did she know who I was? We had never met before. Maybe I'll find out tomorrow when I go to Woodland Path, that's where Miss Douglas lives."

"Some of the store people don't like her," said Henry. "One of them told me she's fussy and hard to please. Others won't wait on her if they can help it."

"That Miss Douglas is a mystery," said Jessie. "Who would think there'd be a mystery in a department store?"

## CHAPTER 5

### *The Hidden House*

**I**t was Wednesday morning, and Benny was busy unpacking notebooks and writing paper. Mr. Fogg came over to him.

“I have a delivery for Miss Douglas. It’s a special order, and she’s in a hurry for it. You know where Woodland Path is, don’t you? I don’t want you to waste time.”

Toni had given Benny directions. He started out on his bike, sure that he would have no trouble. But it seemed that Woodland Path was almost impossible to find.

Benny reached the woods quickly, but finding the Path was a different matter.

“This looks like a path,” Benny said out loud to himself. He took the box from his bike carrier. He left his bike out of sight, but close to the path. He started to push tree branches and blackberry vines away from his face.

Several times Benny thought he must be on the wrong path. How could a small woman like Miss Douglas come through such a tangle?

Just as he was thinking of turning back, he saw a house. It was not at all the kind of house he had expected to see. Could Miss Douglas live here?

Benny found that the path had taken him to the back door of the house. He followed a walk around to the front of the house. There he read the words “Woodland Path” carved on a small signboard hanging from a post. He saw a lane leading through the trees. The way he had come was probably a shortcut, Benny thought.

Benny went to the front door. He had to make his delivery and get back to the store. He knocked at the screen door. He could see inside because the front door itself was open. In fact, he couldn’t help seeing inside.

What he saw amazed him. The living room was square, with a soft green carpet. Sun shining through a window lighted gold-and-white wallpaper. How could Miss Douglas dress so plainly when she lived in such a beautiful place?

Benny knocked again. He stepped back because he felt someone was watching him from behind a curtain. But no one came to the door.

“This is strange,” thought Benny. Then he was surprised to see a boy come around the corner of the house.

“She isn’t home,” the boy said, as if he knew what Benny was thinking. “Nobody’s home. You can leave the package by the door. It’ll be safe. I’ll tell her you left it. You’re from Furman’s Department Store, aren’t you?”

“Yes, but how did you know?” asked Benny. He felt taken by surprise, and he didn’t like it.

“Easy,” laughed the boy. “First, the box says ‘Furman’s’ in big letters. And second, she’s always getting things delivered here. Only the deliveryman usually comes down the lane.”

“I’ve got to get back,” Benny said, and looked at his watch. “I’m working. Thank you for helping me.”