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Six Little Bunkers at Uncle Fred's

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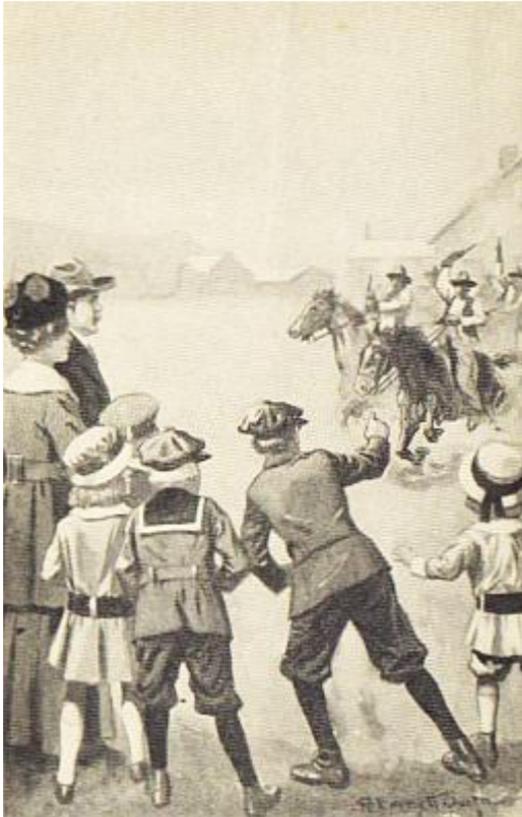
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"OH, HERE COME THE COWBOYS!"

Six Little Bunkers at Uncle Fred's. Frontispiece — (Page 74)

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SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT UNCLE FRED'S

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE RESCUE

"Can't I have a ride now, Russ? You said it would be my turn after Mun Bun."

"Yes, but, Margy, I haven't had enough ride yet!" declared Mun Bun.

"But when can I get in and have my ride?"

The three little children, two girls and a boy, stood in front of their older brother, Russ, watching him tying an old roller skate on the end of a board.

"Can't I have any more rides?" asked the smallest boy.

"In a minute, Mun Bun. As soon as I get this skate fastened on," answered Russ. "You rode so hard last time that you busted the scooter, and I've got to fix it. You broke the skate off!"[2]

"I didn't mean to," and Mun Bun, who was called that because no one ever had the time to call him by his whole name, Munroe Ford Bunker—Mun Bun looked sorry for what had happened.

"I know you didn't," answered Russ.

"I didn't break anything, did I, Russ?" asked a little girl, with dark, curling hair and dark eyes, as she leaned over in front of her older brother, the better to see what he was doing. "I rided nice, didn't I, and I didn't break anything?"

"No, Margy, you didn't break anything," answered Russ. "And I'll give you a ride on the scooter pretty soon. Just wait till I get it fixed."

"And I want a ride, too!" exclaimed another girl, with curly hair of light color, and gray eyes that opened very wide. "Don't I get a ride, Russ? And what makes the wheels make such a funny sound when

they go 'round? And what makes you call it a scooter? And can you make it go backwards? And — —"

"Oh, I can't answer all those questions, Vi!" exclaimed Russ. "You're always asking ques[3]tions, Daddy says. You wait and I'll give you a ride."

The four Bunker children—there were six of them, and you will meet the other two soon. The four Bunker children were playing up in the attic of their home. The attic was not as large as the attic of Grandpa Ford's house on Great Hedge Estate nor were there so many nice things in it. But still it did very well on a rainy afternoon, and Russ, Margy, Violet and Mun Bun were having a good time on the "scooter" Russ had made.

The way Russ made a "scooter" was this. He found a long board, one that the carpenters had left after they had made a storeroom for Mrs. Bunker in the attic, and to the board he fastened, on each end, part of an old roller skate. This gave the scooter two wheels on either end. The wheels were not very large, nor very wide, and unless you sat right in the middle of the board of the scooter you might get tipped over. This had happened several times, and when Mun Bun was on, having a ride, he not only tipped over, but he ran into a trunk that stood in the attic, and knocked off one of the skates.[4]

"Now I have to tie it on again!" Russ had exclaimed, and this had caused a stop in the fun.

"Can you fix it?" asked Margy, as she watched her brother. She wanted another ride, for the one she had had was a short one. Mun Bun was the youngest of the six little Bunkers, and they generally let him have more turns than any one else.

"Oh, yes, I can fix it," said Russ, who now began to whistle. And when Russ whistled, when he was making anything, you could generally tell that everything was coming out right.

Russ very often made things, but he did not always whistle over them. Often the things he made were such a puzzle that he could not think how to make them come out right and also think of a whistle-tune at the same time. But now he was all right, and so he whistled merrily as he put more string on the roller skate that he was fastening to the board of the scooter.

"Is it almost done?" asked Mun Bun, leaning over eagerly.

"Almost," answered Russ. "I want to look[5] at the back wheels to see if they're all right, and then you can have a ride."

Russ gave the string a last turn, tied several knots in it, and then turned the board around. As he did so Margy uttered a cry.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" asked Russ.

"You banged me with the scooter," answered the little girl.

"Oh, I didn't mean to," said Russ. "I'm sorry! You can have an extra ride for that." Russ was very kind to his little brothers and sisters.

"It doesn't hurt very much," said Margy, rubbing the elbow that had been hit when Russ swung the board around.

Russ now bent over the other wheels on the end of the scooter. He found them a bit loose, as string will stretch and really isn't very good with which to fasten wheels on. But it was the best Russ could do.

Outside an early spring rain beat against the windows of the attic. It was cold outside, too, for the last winter snow had, only a week before, melted from the ground, which was still frozen in places. But it was nice and warm[6] up in the attic, and there the Bunker children were having a fine time. The attic, as I have said, was not as big as Grandpa Ford's, but the children were having a good time, and even a smaller attic would have answered as well in the rain.

"Now I guess it's all ready for more rides," said Russ, as he put the scooter down on the floor.

"I'm going to get on!" cried Mun Bun.

"Wait until I put it straight," called Russ. "Then you can have a longer ride."

He took the board, with the roller skate wheels on either end, to a far corner of the attic. From there it could be pushed all the way across to the other wall.

Just as Mun Bun was about to take his place, so that Russ could push him across the attic floor, footsteps were heard coming up the stairs that led to the third story of the Bunker house.

Then a boy's voice called:

"What are you doing?"

"Riding on a scooter Russ made," answered Violet. "Oh, it's lots of fun! Come on, Laddie!"[7]

Laddie was Violet's twin brother, and he had the same kind of curly hair and gray eyes as had his sister.

"Did you make that?" asked Laddie of Russ.

"Sure."

"Will it hold me?"

"Sure. It'll hold me. I had a ride on it."

"Say, that's great!" cried Laddie. "We can have lots of fun on that! I'm glad I came up."

"Well, come all the way up, and stand out of the way!" ordered Russ. "The train's going to start. Toot! Toot! All aboard!"

Laddie hurried up the last few steps and took his place in a corner, out of the way of the scooter with Mun Bun on it. A girl with light, fluffy hair, and bright, smiling eyes, followed him. She was a year younger than Russ, who was eight years old.

"Oh, Rose!" cried Violet, as she saw her older sister. "We're having such fun!"

"You can have a ride, too, Rose! Can't she?" asked Mun Bun of Russ. "Go on, push me!"

"Yes, we'll all take turns having rides,"[8] said Russ. "If I could find another roller skate I'd make another scooter, and then we could have races."

"If we had two we could make believe they were two trains, and have 'em bump into each other and have collisions and all that!" cried Laddie. "That'll be fun! Come on, let's do it!"

"We'll have to get another board and another skate," said Russ. "We'll look after a while. Now I'm going to give Mun Bun a ride."

He shoved the scooter across the floor of the attic. Mun Bun kept tight hold with his chubby hands of the edges of the board, in the middle of which he sat, between the two pieces of roller skate that made wheels for the scooter.

"Hi! Yi!" yelled Mun Bun. "This is fun!"

"Now it's my turn!" exclaimed Margy. "Get off, Mun Bun."

"I have to have a ride back! I've got to have a ride back!" he cried. "Russ said he'd ride me across the attic and back again! Didn't you, Russ?"[9]

"Yes, that's what I did. Well, here we go back."

He had pushed Mun Bun to the far side of the attic, and was pushing the little fellow back again, when Laddie cried:

"Oh, I know a better way than that."

"For what?" asked Russ.

"For having rides," went on Laddie. "We can make a hill and let the scooter slide downhill. Then you won't have to push anybody."

"How can you make a hill?" asked Russ.

"Out of mother's ironing-board," was the answer. "It's down in the kitchen. I'll get it. Don't you know how we used to put it up on a chair and then slide down on the ironing-board?"

"Oh, I remember!" cried Rose.

"Then we can do that," went on Laddie. "It'll be packs of fun!"

"Well, you get the ironing-board," said Russ.

"I'll help," offered Violet. "I'll help you get the board, Laddie."

"All right, come on," he called, and the two children started down the attic stairs.[10]

While he was waiting for them to come back Russ gave Margy and Rose each a ride on the scooter. It really went very well over the smooth floor of the attic, for the roller-skate wheels turned very

easily, even if they did get crooked now and then because the strings with which they were tied on, slipped.

Up the stairs, bumpity bump, came Laddie and Vi with the ironing-board.

"Mother wasn't there, and I didn't see Norah, so I just took the board," said Laddie. "Now we'll put one end on a box and the other end on the floor, and we'll have a hill. Then we can ride the scooter downhill just like we rode our sleds at Grandpa Ford's."

"Yes, I guess we can," said Russ.

There were several boxes in the attic, and some of these were dragged to one end. On them one end of the ironing-board was raised, so that it sloped down like a hill. Of course it was not a very big one, but then the Bunkers were not very large children, nor was the scooter Russ had made very long. By squeezing them on, it would hold two children.[11]

"Who's going down first?" asked Russ, as he and Laddie fixed the ironing-board hill in place, and wheeled the scooter over to it.

"I will!" exclaimed Mun Bun. "I like to ride."

"You'd better let us try first," said Laddie. "It might go so fast it would knock into something."

"I'll go down!" decided Russ. "It's my scooter, because I made it; and so I'll go down first."

"But I made the hill!" objected Laddie. "It's my hill."

"Then why don't both of you go down together?" asked Rose. "If it will hold you two boys it will be all right for us girls. You go three times, then Vi and I will take three turns."

"All right—that's what we will," said Russ. "Come on, Laddie."

Some boxes had been piled back of the one on which the ironing-board rested in a slanting position, and these boxes made a level place on which to get a start. Russ and Laddie lifted the scooter up there, and got up themselves. Then they carefully sat down[12] on the board to which were fastened the roller-skate wheels.

"All ready?" asked Russ, who was in front, holding to a rope, like a sled rope, by which he hoped to guide the scooter. "All ready, Laddie?"

"All ready," was the answer.

"Here we go!" cried Russ.

He gave a little shove with his feet, and down the ironing-board hill ran the scooter, carrying Russ and Laddie with it. The first time it ran beautifully.

"This is great!" cried Laddie.

"Fine!" exclaimed his brother.

And then, all of a sudden, something happened. The scooter ran off the hill sideways, and started over the attic floor toward Rose, Vi, Mun Bun and Margy. They squealed and screamed and tried to get out of the way. But Mun Bun fell down, and Margy fell over him, and Vi fell over Margy, and Rose fell over Violet. So there the four little Bunkers were, all in a heap, and the scooter, with Russ and Laddie on it, running toward the brother and sisters.

"Stop! Stop it!" cried Laddie.[13]

"I can't!" shouted Russ, pulling on the guide rope. But that did no good.

"Oh, we're going to knock into 'em!" yelled Laddie.

And right into the other children ran the scooter. Russ and Laddie were thrown off, and, for a moment, there was a bumping, thumping, yelling, crying and screaming noise.

Mun Bun, trying to roll out of the way, knocked a box down off a trunk, and the box had some croquet balls in it, which rumbled over the attic floor almost like thunder.

In the midst of all this noise and confusion some one came running up the stairs. A man entered the attic, and took one look at the mass of struggling children on the floor.

"My good land!" he cried. "I wonder if I can save any of 'em! Oh, what a mix-up!"

Then the stranger started in to rescue the six little Bunkers, for they were all tangled up.[14]

CHAPTER II

UNCLE FRED

"Are you hurt? Are any of you hurt? What happened, anyhow? Did part of the house fall on you?"

The man who had run up the attic stairs went on picking up first one and then another of the six little Bunkers. For a time they were so excited over what had happened that they paid no attention to him.

But when the stranger picked Rose up and set her on her feet, the little girl took a good look at him, and, seeing a strange man in the attic, she cried:

"Oh, it's a burglar! It's a burglar! Oh, Mother! Norah! Jerry Simms! It's a burglar!"

"Hush, child! Don't shout like that or you'll have all the neighbors in!" said the man. "Be quiet, and I'll tell you who I am! Don't yell any more!"[15]

Rose stopped yelling, her mouth still wide open, ready for another shout, and looked at the man. He smiled at her and picked up Mun Bun out from under the box from which the croquet balls had fallen.

"Who is you?" asked Mun Bun.

"I'll tell you in just a moment, if you don't make such a racket," said the stranger, smiling kindly.

The six little Bunkers became quiet at once, but before I tell you who the strange man is I want to say just a few words about the children in this story, and relate to you something about the other books in this series.

To begin at the beginning, there were six little Bunkers, as I have told you. There was Russ, aged eight, a great whistler and a boy very fond of making toys, such as scooters and other things.

Next to him was Rose, a year younger.

Then came Violet and Laddie. They both had curly hair and gray eyes, and were six years old each, which makes twelve in all, you see. They were twins, and each one had a funny habit. Vi asked a great many questions, some of which could be answered, some[16] of which could not be answered, and to some of which she didn't wait for an answer.

Laddie was very fond of asking queer little riddles. Some were good, and it took quite a while to think of the answer he wanted. Others didn't seem to have any answer. And some were not really riddles at all. But he had fun asking them.

Next in order was Margy, whose real name was Margaret, just as Laddie's real name was Fillmore Bunker. But he was seldom called that. Margy was aged five. She had dark hair and eyes.

Then there was Mun Bun, or Munroe Ford Bunker, her little brother, who was four years old, and had blue eyes and golden hair.

Now you have met the six little Bunkers. Of course there was Daddy Bunker, whose name was Charles. He was in the real estate business in Pineville, Pennsylvania, and his office was almost a mile from his home, on the main street. Mother Bunker's name was Amy, and before her marriage she had been Miss Amy Bell.

Besides this there were in the Bunker family two others: Norah O'Grady, the cook,[17] and Jerry Simms, an old soldier, who could tell fine stories of the time he was in the army. Now Jerry ran the Bunker automobile, cut the grass, sprinkled the lawn and attended to the furnace in winter.

But the Bunker family had relatives, and it was on visits to some of these that the children had had many adventures. First you may read "Six Little Bunkers at Grandma Bell's." This is the book that begins the series, and tells of the visit the family made at Grandma Bell's at Lake Sagatook in Maine. There they found an old lumberman and he had some papers which Daddy Bunker wanted to get back. And, oh, yes! Grandma Bell was Mrs. Bunker's mother.

After that the children went to visit their father's sister in Boston, and the book which tells all about that, and the strange pocketbook Rose found, is called "Six Little Bunkers at Aunt Jo's."

On leaving Aunt Jo's the family paid a visit to another relative. This was Mr. Thomas Bunker, who was the son of Mr. Ralph Bunker, and Ralph was Daddy Bunker's brother, who had died.[18]

In "Six Little Bunkers at Cousin Tom's" I told you the story of the fun the children had at the seashore, and how a gold locket was lost and strangely found again.

The book just before this one is called "Six Little Bunkers at Grandpa Ford's," and there was quite a mystery about a ghost at Great Hedge Estate, in New York State, where Mr. Ford lived.

Grandpa Ford was Daddy Bunker's step-father, but no real father could have been more kind, nor have loved the six little Bunkers any more than he did. The children spent the winter at Great Hedge Estate, and helped find out what made the queer noises. And if you want to find out I suggest that you read the book.

Christmas and New Year's had been celebrated at Grandpa Ford's, and when winter was about to break up the Bunkers had come back home to Pineville. Daddy Bunker said he needed to look after the spring real estate business, for that was the best time of the year for selling and buying houses and lots, and renting places.

So they said good-bye to Grandpa Ford,[19] and took the train back home. The six little Bunkers had been in their own house about a month now, and they were playing in the attic, as I have told you, with the scooter Russ had made, when the accident happened.

Then, as I have told you, up the attic stairs rushed a strange man, who pulled Mun Bun out of the tangle of arms and legs. And Rose thought the strange man was a burglar.

"But I'm not," he said, smiling at the children. "Don't you know who I am?"

Russ shook his head.

"How did you get in here?" asked Violet. As usual, she was first with a question.

"I just walked in," said the man in answer. "I was coming here anyhow, and when I got here I saw the door wide open, so I just walked in."

"Did you come to sell something?" asked Rose. "Cause if you did I don't believe my mother wants anything. She's got everything she wants."

"Well, she's got a nice lot of children, anyhow," said the man, smiling on each and ever one of the six little Bunkers in turn. "I'll say that. She has a nice lot of chil[20]dren, and I'm very glad none of you is hurt.

"As I said, I was coming here anyhow, and when I got on the porch and saw the door open, I walked right in. Then I heard a terrible racket up here in the attic, and up I rushed. I thought maybe the house was falling down."

"No," said Russ as he pulled his scooter out from between two trunks, "it was this. We slid down the ironing-board hill, Laddie and I, and it went off crooked—the scooter did."

"And it knocked into us," said Violet. "But if you didn't come to sell anything, what did you come for?"

"Well," said the strange man, and he smiled again, "you might say I came to get you children."

"You—you came to get *us*?" gasped Rose.

"Yes. I'm going to take you away with me."

"Take—take us *away* with you!" cried Russ. "We won't go! We want to stay with our daddy and mother."

"I'll take them, too," said the man. "I have room for all you six little Bunkers and more[21] too, out on my ranch. I've come to take you all away with me."

What could it mean? Russ and Rose, the oldest, could not understand it. They looked at the man again. They were sure they had never seen him before.

"Yes," the stranger went on, "I saw the door open, so I walked in. I was glad to get out of the rain. It's a cold storm. I hope summer will soon come. And, as I say, I've come to take you away."

If the man had not smiled so nicely the children might have been frightened. But, as it was, they knew everything would be all right.