



# *How Henry Hagglyhoagly Played the Guitar with His Mittens On*

Carl Sandburg  
North American

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*Advanced*  
*6 min read*

Sometimes in January the sky comes down close if we walk on a country road, and turn our faces up to look at the sky.

Sometimes on that kind of a January night the stars look like numbers, look like the arithmetic writing of a girl going to school and just beginning arithmetic.

It was this kind of a night Henry Hagglyhoagly was walking down a country road on his way to the home of Susan Slackentwist, the daughter of the rutabaga king near the Village of Liver-and-Onions. When Henry Hagglyhoagly turned his face up to look at the sky it seemed to him as though the sky came down close to his nose, and there was a writing in stars as though some girl had been doing arithmetic examples, writing number 4 and number 7 and 4 and 7 over and over again across the sky.

“Why is it so bitter cold weather?” Henry Hagglyhoagly asked himself, “if I say many bitter bitters it is not so bitter as the cold wind and the cold weather.”

“You are good, mittens, keeping my fingers warm,” he said every once in a while to the wool yarn mittens on his hands.

The wind came tearing along and put its chilly, icy, clammy clamps on the nose of Henry Hagglyhoagly, fastening the clamps like a nipping, gripping clothes pin on his nose. He put his wool yarn mittens up on his nose and rubbed till the wind took off the chilly, icy, clammy clamps. His nose was warm again; he said, “Thank you, mittens, for keeping my nose warm.”

He spoke to his wool yarn mittens as though they were two kittens or pups, or two little cub bears, or two little Idaho ponies. “You’re my chums keeping me company,” he said to the mittens.

“Do you know what we got here under our left elbow?” he said to the mittens, “I shall mention to you what is here under my left elbow.

“It ain’t a mandolin, it ain’t a mouth organ nor an accordion nor a concertina nor a fiddle. It is a guitar, a Spanish Spinnish Splishy guitar made special.

“Yes, mittens, they said a strong young man like me ought to have a piano because a piano is handy to play for everybody in the house and a piano is handy to put a hat and overcoat on or books or flowers.

“I snizzled at ’em, mittens. I told ’em I seen a Spanish Spinnish Splishy guitar made special in a hardware store window for eight dollars and a half.

“And so, mittens—are you listening, mittens?—after cornhusking was all husked and the oats thrashing all thrashed and the rutabaga digging all dug, I took eight dollars and a half in my inside vest pocket and I went to the hardware store.

“I put my thumbs in my vest pocket and I wiggled my fingers like a man when he is proud of what he is going to have if he gets it. And I said to the head clerk in the hardware store, ‘Sir, the article I desire to purchase this evening as one of your high class customers, the article I desire to have after I buy it for myself, is the article there in the window, sir, the Spanish Spinnish Splishy guitar.’

“And, mittens, if you are listening, I am taking this Spanish Spinnish Splishy guitar to go to the home of Susan Slackentwist, the daughter of the rutabaga king near the Village of Liver-and-Onions, to sing a serenade song.”

The cold wind of the bitter cold weather blew and blew, trying to blow the guitar out from under the left elbow of Henry Hagglyhoagly. And the worse the wind blew the tighter he held his elbow holding the guitar where he wanted it.

He walked on and on with his long legs stepping long steps till at last he stopped, held his nose in the air, and sniffed.

“Do I sniff something or do I not?” he asked, lifting his wool yarn mittens to his nose and rubbing his nose till it was warm. Again he sniffed.

“Ah hah, yeah, yeah, this is the big rutabaga field near the home of the rutabaga king and the home of his daughter, Susan Slackentwist.”

At last he came to the house, stood under the window and slung the guitar around in front of him to play the music to go with the song.

“And now,” he asked his mittens, “shall I take you off or keep you on? If I take you off, the cold wind of the bitter cold weather will freeze my hands so stiff and bitter cold my fingers will be too stiff to play the guitar. *I will play with mittens on.*”

Which he did. He stood under the window of Susan Slackentwist and played the guitar with his mittens on, the warm wool yarn mittens he called his chums. It was the first time any strong young man going to see his sweetheart ever played the guitar with his mittens on when it was a bitter night with a cold wind and cold weather.

Susan Slackentwist opened her window and threw him a snow-bird feather to keep for a keepsake to remember her by. And for years afterward many a sweetheart in the Rootabaga Country told her lover, “If you wish to marry me let me hear you under my window on a winter night playing the guitar with wool yarn mittens on.”

And when Henry Hagglyhoagly walked home on his long legs stepping long steps, he said to his mittens, “This Spanish Spinnish Splishy guitar made special will bring us luck.” And when he turned his face up, the sky came

down close and he could see stars fixed like numbers and the arithmetic writing of a girl going to school learning to write number 4 and number 7 and 4 and 7 over and over.

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