



# *The Story of Jason Squiff and Why He Had a Popcorn Hat, Popcorn Mittens and Popcorn*

## *Shoes*

Carl Sandburg  
North American

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*Easy*  
*7 min read*

Jason Squiff was a cistern cleaner. He had greenish yellowish hair. If you looked down into a cistern when he was lifting buckets of slush and mud you could tell where he you could pick him out down in the dark cistern, by the lights of his greenish yellowish hair. Sometimes the buckets of slush and mud tipped over and ran down on the top of his head. This covered his greenish yellowish hair. And then it was hard to tell where he was and it was not easy to pick him out down in the dark where he was cleaning the cistern.

One day Jason Squiff came to the Bimber house and knocked on the door. “Did I understand’ he said, speaking to Mrs. Bimber, Blixie Bimber’s mother, “do I understand you sent for me to clean the cistern in your back yard?”

“You understand exactly such,” said Mrs. Bimber, “and you are welcome as the flowers that bloom in the

spring, tra-la-la.”

“Then I will go to work and clean the cistern, tra-la-la,” he answered, speaking to Mrs. Bimber.

“I’m the guy, tra-la-la,” he said further, running his excellent fingers through his greenish yellowish hair which was shining brightly.

He began cleaning the cistern. Blixie Bimber came out in the back yard. She looked down in the cistern. It was all dark. It looked like nothing but all dark down there. By and by she saw something greenish yellowish. She so Popcorn Hat, Mittens and Shoes watched it. Soon she saw it was Jason Squiff’s head and hair. And then she knew the cistern was being cleaned and Jason Squiff was on the job. So she sang tra-la-la and went back into the house and told her mother Jason Squiff was on the job. The last bucketful of slush and mud came at last for Jason Squiff. He squinted at the bottom. Something was shining. He reached his fingers down through the slush and mud and took out what was shining. It was the gold buckskin whincher Blixie Bimber lost from the gold chain around her neck the week before when she was looking down into the cistern to see what she could see. It was exactly the same gold buckskin whincher shining and glittering like a sign of happiness.

“It’s luck,” said Jason Squiff, wiping his fingers on his greenish yellowish hair. Then he put the gold buckskin whincher in his vest pocket and spoke to himself again, “It’s luck.”

A little after six o’clock that night he stepped into his house and home and said hello to his wife and daughters. They all began to laugh. Their laughter was a ticklish laughter.

“Something funny is happening,” he said.



“His hat was popcorn, and his mittens popcorn, and his shoes popcorn.” Illustration by Maud and Miska Petersham, published in *Rootabaga Stories* by Carl Sandburg (1922), Harcourt, Brace and Company.

“And you are it,” they all laughed at him again with ticklish laughter. Then they showed him. His hat was popcorn, his mittens popcorn and his shoes popcorn. He didn’t know the gold buckskin whincher had a power and was working all the time. He didn’t know the whincher in his vest pocket was saying, “You have a letter Q in your name and because you have the pleasure and happiness of having a Q in your name you must have a popcorn hat, popcorn mittens and popcorn shoes.”

The next morning he put on another hat, another pair of mittens and another pair of shoes. And the minute he put them on they changed to popcorn. So he tried on all his hats, mittens and shoes. His hat was popcorn, his mittens popcorn and his shoes popcorn Popcorn Hat, Mittens and Shoes Always they changed to popcorn the minute he had them on. He went downtown to the stores. He bought a new hat, mittens and shoes. And the minute he had them on they changed to popcorn. So he decided he would go to work and clean cisterns with his popcorn hat, popcorn mittens and popcorn shoes on. The people of the Village of Cream Puffs enjoyed watching him walk up the street, going to clean cisterns. People five and six blocks away could see him coming and going with his popcorn hat, popcorn mittens and popcorn shoes.

When he was down in a cistern the children enjoyed looking down into the cistern to see him work. When none of the slush and mud fell on his hat and mittens he was easy to find. The light of the shining popcorn lit up the whole inside of the cistern. Sometimes, of course, the white popcorn got full of black slush and black mud. And then when Jason Squiff came up and walked home he was not quite so dazzling to look at. It was a funny winter for Jason Squiff.

“It’s a crime, a dirty crime,” he said to himself. “Now I can never be alone with my thoughts. Everybody looks at me when I go up the street. If I meet a funeral even the pall bearers begin to laugh at my popcorn hat. If I meet people going to a wedding they throw all the rice at me as if I am a bride and a groom all together. The horses try to eat my hat wherever I go. Three hats I have fed to horses this winter. And if I accidentally drop one of my mittens the chickens eat it.”

Then Jason Squiff began to change. He became proud. “I always wanted a white beautiful hat like this white popcorn hat,” he said to himself. “And I always wanted white beautiful mittens and white beautiful shoes like

these white popcorn mittens and shoes.”

When the boys yelled, “Snow man! yah-de- dah-de-dah, Snow man! He just waved his hand to them with an upward gesture of his arm to show he was proud of how he looked.

“They all watch for me,” he said to himself, “I am distinguished, am I not?” he asked himself. And he put his right hand into his left hand and shook hands with himself and said, “You certainly look fixed up.”

One day he decided to throw away his vest. In the vest pocket was the gold buckskin whincher, with the power working, the power saying, “You have a letter Q in your name and because you have the pleasure and happiness of having a Q in your name you must have a popcorn hat, popcorn mittens and popcorn shoes.’

Yes, he threw away the vest. He forgot all about the gold buckskin whincher being in the vest. He just handed the vest to a rag man. And the rag man put the vest with the gold buckskin whincher in a bag on his back and walked away.

After that Jason Squiff was like other people. His hats would never change to popcorn nor his mittens to popcorn nor his shoes to popcorn. And when anybody looked at him down in a cistern cleaning the cistern or when anybody saw him walking along the street they knew him by his greenish yellowish hair which was always full of bright lights. And so if you have a Q in your name, be careful if you ever come across a gold buckskin whincher. Remember different whinchers have different powers.

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