



Three Boys With Jugs of Molasses and Secret Ambitions

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Easy
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In the Village of Liver-and-Onions, if *one* boy goes to the grocery for a jug of molasses it is just like always. And if *two* boys go to the grocery for a jug of molasses together it is just like always. But if *three* boys go to the grocery for a jug of molasses each and all together then it is not like always at all, at all.

Eeta Peeca Pie grew up with wishes and wishes working inside him. And for every wish inside him he had a freckle outside on his face. Whenever he smiled the smile ran way back into the far side of his face and got lost in the wishing freckles.

Meeny Miney grew up with suspicions and suspicions working inside him. And after a while some of the suspicions got fastened on his eyes and some of the suspicions got fastened on his mouth. So when he looked at other people straight in the face they used to say, "Meeny Miney looks so sad-like I wonder if he'll get by."

Miney Mo was different. He wasn't sad-like and suspicious like Meeny Miney. Nor was he full of wishes inside and freckles outside like Eeta Peeca Pie. He was all mixed up inside with wishes and suspicions. So he had a

few freckles and a few suspicions on his face. When he looked other people straight in the face they used to say, "I don't know whether to laugh or cry."

So here we have 'em, three boys growing up with wishes, suspicions and mixed-up wishes and suspicions. They all looked different from each other. Each one, however, had a secret ambition. And all three had the same secret ambition.

An ambition is a little creeper that creeps and creeps in your heart night and day, singing a little song, "Come and find me, come and find me."

The secret ambition in the heart of Eeta Peeca Pie, Meeney Miney, and Miney Mo was an ambition to go railroading, to ride on railroad cars night and day, year after year. The whistles and the wheels of railroad trains were music to them.

Whenever the secret ambition crept in their hearts and made them too sad, so sad it was hard to live and stand for it, they would all three put their hands on each other's shoulder and sing the song of Joe. The chorus was like this:

Joe, Joe, broke his toe,

On the way to Mexico.

Came back, broke his back,

Sliding on the railroad track.

One fine summer morning all three mothers of all three boys gave each one a jug and said, "Go to the grocery and get a jug of molasses." All three got to the grocery at the same time. And all three went out of the door of the grocery together, each with a jug of molasses together and each with his secret ambition creeping around in his heart, all three together.

Two blocks from the grocery they stopped under a slippery elm tree. Eeta Peeca Pie was stretching his neck looking straight up into the slippery elm tree. He said it was always good for his freckles and it helped his wishes to stand under a slippery elm and look up.

While he was looking up his left hand let go the jug handle of the jug of molasses. And the jug went ka-flump, ka-flumpety-flump down on the stone sidewalk, cracked to pieces and let the molasses go running out over the

sidewalk.

If you have never seen it, let me tell you molasses running out of a broken jug, over a stone sidewalk under a slippery elm tree, looks peculiar and mysterious.

Eeta Peeca Pie stepped into the molasses with his bare feet. "It's a lotta fun," he said. "It tickles all over." So Meeney Miney and Miney Mo both stepped into the molasses with their bare feet.

Then what happened just happened. One got littler. Another got littler. All three got littler.

"You look to me only big as a potato bug," said Eeta Peeca Pie to Meeney Miney and Miney Mo. "It's the same like you look to us," said Meeney Miney and Miney Mo to Eeta Peeca Pie. And then because their secret ambition began to hurt them they all stood with hands on each other's shoulders and sang the Mexico Joe song.

Off the sidewalk they strolled, across a field of grass. They passed many houses of spiders and ants. In front of one house they saw Mrs. Spider over a tub washing clothes for Mr. Spider.

"Why do you wear that frying pan on your head?" they asked her.

"In this country all ladies wear the frying pan on their head when they want a hat."

"But what if you want a hat when you are frying with the frying pan?" asked Eeta Peeca Pie.

"That never happens to any respectable lady in this country."

"Don't you never have no new style hats?" asked Meeney Miney.

"No, but we always have new style frying pans every spring and fall."

Hidden in the roots of a pink grass clump, they came to a city of twisted-nose spiders. On the main street was a store with a show window full of pink parasols. They walked in and said to the clerk, "We want to buy parasols."

"We don't sell parasols here," said the spider clerk.

"Well, lend us a parasol apiece," said all three.

"Gladly, most gladly," said the clerk.

“How do you do it?” asked Eeta.

“I don’t have to,” answered the spider clerk.

“How did it begin?”

“It never was otherwise.”

“Don’t you never get tired?”

“Every parasol is a joy.”

“What do you do when the parasols are gone?”

“They always come back. These are the famous twisted-nose parasols made from the famous pink grass. You will lose them all, all three. Then they will all walk back to me here in this store on main street. I can not sell you something I know you will surely lose. Neither can I ask you to pay, for something you will forget, somewhere sometime, and when you forget it, it will walk back here to me again. Look—look!”

As he said “Look,” the door opened and five pink parasols came waltzing in and waltzed up into the show window.

“They always come back. Everybody forgets. Take your parasols and go. You will forget them and they will come back to me.”

“He looks like he had wishes inside him,” said Eeta Peeca Pie.

“He looks like he had suspicions,” said Meeney Miney.

“He looks like he was all mixed up wishes and suspicions,” said Miney Mo.

And once more because they all felt lonesome and their secret ambitions were creeping and eating, they put their hands on their shoulders and sang the Mexico Joe song.

Then came happiness. They entered the Potato Bug Country. And they had luck first of all the first hour they were in the Potato Bug Country. They met a Potato Bug millionaire.

“How are you a millionaire?” they asked him.

“Because I got a million,” he answered.

“A million what?”

“A million *fleems*.”

“Who wants fleems?”

“You want fleems if you’re going to live here.”

“Why so?”

“Because fleems is our money. In the Potato Bug Country, if you got no fleems you can’t buy nothing nor anything. But if you got a million fleems you’re a Potato Bug millionaire.”

Then he surprised them.

“I like you because you got wishes and freckles,” he said to Eeta Peeca Pie, filling the pockets of Eeta with fleems.

“And I like you because you got suspicions and you’re sad-like,” he said to Meeney Miney filling Meeney Miney’s pockets full of fleems.

“And I like you because you got some wishes and some suspicions and you look mixed up,” he said to Miney Mo, sticking handfuls and handfuls of fleems into the pockets of Miney Mo.

Wishes do come true. And suspicions do come true. Here they had been wishing all their lives, and had suspicions of what was going to happen, and now it all came true.

With their pockets filled with fleems they rode on all the railroad trains of the Potato Bug Country. They went to the railroad stations and bought tickets for the fast trains and the slow trains and even the trains that back up and run backward instead of where they start to go.

On the dining cars of the railroads of the Potato Bug Country they ate wonder ham from the famous Potato Bug Pigs, eggs from the Potato Bug Hens, et cetera.

It seemed to them they stayed a long while in the Potato Bug Country, years and years. Yes, the time came when all their fleems were gone. Then whenever they wanted a railroad ride or something to eat or a place to sleep, they put their hands on each other's shoulders and sang the Mexico Joe song. In the Potato Bug Country they all said the Mexico Joe song was wonderful.

One morning while they were waiting to take an express train on the Early Ohio & Southwestern they sat near the roots of a big potato plant under the big green leaves. And far above them they saw a dim black cloud and they heard a shaking and a rustling and a spattering. They did not know it was a man of the Village of Liver-and-Onions. They did not know it was Mr. Sniggers putting paris green on the potato plants.

A big drop of paris green spattered down and fell onto the heads and shoulders of all three, Eeta Peeca Pie, Meeny Miney and Miney Mo.

Then what happened just happened. They got bigger and bigger—one, two, three. And when they jumped up and ran out of the potato rows, Mr. Sniggers thought they were boys playing tricks.

When they got home to their mothers and told all about the jug of molasses breaking on the stone sidewalk under the slippery elm tree, their mothers said it was careless. The boys said it was lucky because it helped them get their secret ambitions.

And a secret ambition is a little creeper that creeps and creeps in your heart night and day, singing a little song, "Come and find me, come and find me."

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