

## A Meeting at the Ice-Cream Stand

Once upon a time, three strange little men met at an ice cream stand purely by chance: Mossbeard, Halfshoe, and Muff were their names. They were all so short that the ice-cream vendor thought they were elves at first, though several other peculiar features caused them to stand out. Mossbeard had a soft, mossy beard with pretty red lingonberries nestled in it (even though they were last summer's berries). Halfshoe had cut off the caps of his shoes so that he could wiggle his toes around. Instead of regular clothes, Muff wore a big muff, from which only his head and feet stuck out.

The trio licked their ice-cream cones and eyed one another curiously.

"Excuse me," Muff finally spoke up. "I may be mistaken, but it seems to me like we all have something in common."

"I suppose it might be that we're all rather jolly fellows," Halfshoe said, nodding.

Mossbeard plucked a few lingonberries from his beard and offered them to his new acquaintances.

"It's good to snack on something sour with ice cream," he said.

"If it isn't too forward of me, then I'd like to propose that we all meet up again," Muff said. "We could make hot cocoa and have a nice little chat."

"That would be tremendously fun," Halfshoe said. "I'd invite you both over, but I don't have a home. I've just been wandering around since childhood."

"As have I," Mossbeard said.

"What an unusual coincidence!" Muff exclaimed. "It's the exact same story with me! Turns out we're all wanderers alike!"

He tossed his ice-cream wrapper into the trash bin and zipped up his muff. Namely, Muff's muff was equipped with a zipper that could be pulled open and shut. The other fellows also finished their ice creams.

"Do you reckon the three of us could maybe join up?" Halfshoe asked. "Roaming around together would be much more pleasant!"

"But of course," Mossbeard grunted cheerfully.

"What a brilliant idea!" Muff said, beaming. "That's a downright wonderful plan!"

"Then it's settled," Halfshoe said. "But we could, perhaps, have another ice cream before we set off."

Everyone agreed, so each bought himself one more ice-cream cone.

Then, Muff mentioned:

"I have a vehicle, by the way. If you don't object to the idea, then it could be a—so to say—a mobile home for all of us."

"Oh!" Mossbeard exclaimed. "How could we say no!"

"We've no objections in the least," Halfshoe affirmed. "Driving in a car is actually quite nice."

"But will the three of us all fit?" Mossbeard asked worriedly.

"It's a truck, actually," Muff said. "There's room aplenty."

Halfshoe whistled cheerfully through his teeth.

"That'll do," he said.

"Sure will," Mossbeard sighed in relief. "After all, there is an old saying that goes: 'A lot of good lambs can fit in a single barn.'"

"So, where is this barn on wheels of yours parked?" Halfshoe asked Muff.

"Out in front of the post office," Muff said. "I mailed a couple dozen letters earlier."

"A couple dozen!" Mossbeard exclaimed. "You sure do have a lot of friends!"

"Oh, no, quite the opposite," Muff smiled sheepishly. "I don't write to any friends, per say: I write to myself."



"You mean you send yourself letters?!" Now, it was Halfshoe's turn to be amazed.

"The thing is that I very much like to get letters," Muff said, "but I have no friends. I'm extremely lonely, and that's why I have to write to myself. I mail them for general delivery, I should add. I post the letters in one town, then drive to the next town, and receive them at the post office there."

"Well, that's a very unique way to correspond, in any case," Mossbeard shrugged.

"It truly is some sharp thinking," Halfshoe agreed. "Should we have another round of ice creams?" "Naturally," Mossbeard said.

"I'm not against the idea, either," Muff said. "I even reckon we could try the chocolate ice cream. It's certainly a bit more expensive than regular ice cream, but it's not worth penny-pinching in the event of such a wonderful and unexpected meeting as ours."

They ordered chocolate ice-cream cones and licked them in silence for a while.

"It's sweet," Mossbeard finally spoke. "Much sweeter than regular ice cream, even."

"Mm-hmm," Halfshoe agreed.

"It's simply wonderful pudding," Muff said.

"What was that?" Mossbeard looked at Muff in surprise. "What's this pudding you're talking about? We're eating chocolate ice cream, if I'm not mistaken."

"Oh, my sincerest apologies," Muff said, embarrassed. "It goes without saying that we're eating chocolate ice cream and not pudding. The thing is that when I get worked up, I get the names of my desserts mixed up very easily."

"So, why do you get worked up when you eat chocolate ice cream?" Mossbeard asked, flummoxed. "There's nothing to get worked up about here!"

"I don't really get worked up over ice cream, you know," Muff explained. "I'm worked up by getting to know you two. It's getting worked up in a good way, as they say. So far, I've spent my whole life feeling unspeakably lonely, and now, all of a sudden, I've found myself wonderful fellows such as you. An event like this gets you worked up whether you like it or not."

"Maybe," Halfshoe said. "But I also get worked up

by chocolate ice cream, in any case. Just look at the way I'm trembling in excitement."

He had indeed started trembling violently, and his face had even turned blue.

"You're freezing," Mossbeard realized. "You've had too much ice cream."

"I suppose so," Halfshoe agreed.

"We shouldn't have any more," Muff said, almost in a tone of alarm. "At the very most, we should only take a few along to have later. I've got a freezer installed in my truck, by the way."

"Do you, now!" Mossbeard exclaimed.

"That's wonderful!" Halfshoe cheered. "We'll take a proper supply along with us, maybe even enough for eight weeks!"

"The only problem," Muff continued, "is that the freezer only works when the truck is turned off. The electric current heats the freezer as hot as can be when you're driving."

"Hmm," Halfshoe grunted. "And the ice cream will melt then?"

"Undoubtedly," Muff confirmed.

"I suppose in that case, it'd be wiser to forego having a backup supply at all," Mossbeard said thoughtfully.

"I also believe that would be the best solution," Muff said. "Although I don't wish to force my opinion upon you."

"My toes will be frozen solid soon," Halfshoe said. "Maybe I can warm them up a little in Muff's freezer."

"Let's get going," Mossbeard said. "To tell the truth, I've been burning up with my desire to see Muff's truck for a while already."

"Thank you," Muff said for some reason.

With that, they set off.