

Pumpkin or Mincemeat?

By Marilyn Reeves

"I don't see him out there. Do you, Jacob?"

"Naw, I don't see him, but that don't mean he ain't out there somewheres. Wanna chance it?"

"Yeah, but keep your eyes peeled. He don't bark, ya know. Jest comes up and takes a bite outta yer behind without a warning."

"Them punkins is over in the far field yonder. We're gonna have to be quick. Okay, Billy, let's go for it!"

And with that they sprinted across the property. While they were pondering which of the pumpkins looked the best – big enough to make good jack-o-lanterns but not so big that they couldn't carry them – sure enough here came Spike, streaking toward them like a phantom in the moonlight.

"Oh, shoot! Forget the punkins – head for the fence!" They barely made it over to the other side before Spike slammed up hard against the wooden fence, growling his displeasure through lethal looking fangs.

The boys headed on up the road toward home, empty handed, when suddenly the black clouds opened up with a clap of thunder so loud it shook the ground, and they were caught in a downpour of freezing rain.

But a moment later, salvation ... in the person of old Mrs. Hildebrand, who waved to them from the window of her cottage. "You boys get in here outta the rain!" she hollered. Grateful for the offered shelter, the two brothers ran toward the open door.

Mrs. Hildebrand smiled at them benevolently, her red apple cheeks dimpling, as she told them to take off their jackets and sit by the fire.

"That big old bulldog catch you snitchin' pumpkins from Mr. Slocum's backyard?"

"Yes, ma'am. He did. Guess it served us right. We shouldn't have been snitchin' punkins."

"Oh, what's the harm? That mean old man has more than he knows what to do with. But at least it brought you here, and I welcome the company. How 'bout a piece of mincemeat pie while you're waiting? Baked it fresh this afternoon."

"Sounds great, ma'am. Thank you."

While the old lady was carving out a couple of slices of pie on her big chopping block, the boys looked around the one-room cottage. There was a cot and a rocking chair at one end and the kitchen at the other. In between were shelves filled with what looked like medicine bottles holding colorful liquids, and bouquets of weeds hanging upside down from nails all around the walls.

When she returned with the pie, Jacob said, "Pardon my asking, ma'am, but what are all those bottles?"

"Oh, those are my herbal remedies that I sell to folks for whatever ails them. See all those bunches of herbs drying along the walls? That's what I make them from. So, anyway, what are you boys doing out so late at night? I should think your folks would be worried about you."

"Naw, we went to a Halloween party over at the school, so we told them we might be late getting home. Wow! This mincemeat pie is delicious. Thank you, ma'am!" Billy nodded agreement as he stuffed his face.

"My pleasure," said Mrs. Hildebrand, chuckling under her breath.

When a couple of detectives showed up at her cottage the next day looking for a pair of lost boys, she said she hadn't seen them. But would the two officers care for a piece of mincemeat pie?

"Sure, why not?" they said in unison. It was the best mincemeat pie they'd ever had, due to her secret ingredient. Little did they know they were eating the evidence.