

A surrealistic journey to find a 'missing' parent leads two young brothers into the foolery of an 'adult' world.

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## KID'S STORY

If you're going to run away from home, you've got to have a reason, and not wanting to fold your socks half-ways doubled over is as good a reason as any.

So the two of them woke up at noon while Uncle Herman was still sleeping in front of the television set, got dressed, packed up their toy guns and rocket launchers and left by the rear door.

It had been a week of parties to celebrate the end of the Great Money War and most of the people in town were still sleeping. Nobody stopped them.

They walked two miles to the old trolley tracks, turned right and headed for the biggest city in half the world. They were headed for Glory. Their names were Mobey: Older and Younger Mobey. Older was still a youngster but he was older than Younger, who was younger than Older. Older himself had once been called Younger, and sometimes he resented losing his old name to Younger.

Both of them were older than babies, but younger than full-grown. They were both boys so it was easier that way to be brothers.

"There's a lot we gotta do," Older said.

"First let's eat," Younger replied.

They laid their knapsacks on the ground where it wasn't too dirty and unrolled cans of unbaked beans and little bags of crackers and cereals.

"Let's go back and get Uncle Herman to make brunch. His brunch isn't that bad," Younger said.

"I ain't goin' back. What's the matter with you? If you're gonna be this way, forget it. That's what a nerd would say: 'Duh, lets go back an' eat breakfast. Duh, lets go back an' eat lunch. Duh, lets go back an' eat supper. Duh, lets go back an' go to bed.'"

Younger laughed.

"That way we'll never get any farther than right here."

"I'm not eaten' cold beans and crackers," Younger said.

"Fine. Let's do what the Mighty Men would do -- go to a restaurant," Older instructed.

Off the road, beside a parking lot full of mud holes was the Old Inn of the Crazy Twin, specializing in home-cooked restaurant food.

The brothers entered like Mighty Men, trudged to a booth and sat down. There was one weary train traveler sipping coffee nearby.

"This could be a mistake fellas," the train traveler said. "It took them an hour to make me a toast sandwich. I missed my train."

"Maybe they ran out of bread," Younger said.

"Maybe their toaster was set on slow," Older said.

"Maybe they didn't know how to make a toast sandwich and had to look it up in the Encyclopedia of Toast, and they couldn't read it because they forgot how," said the train traveler.

Older made a face and whispered into Younger's ear, "Don't talk to him little brother. He's a Dunce-head Nerd!"

"So where you fells off to?" asked the train traveler, getting friendlier.

"We're not talking to you because you're a Dunce-head Nerd," Younger said.

"Me? A Nerd! The Nerd of that statement?" the train traveler asked. "I am not a Nerd! Nerds don't eat toast. Not in sandwiches. Nerds eat pickles on rye bread served with butter and apple jelly. And for in between snacks they eat hand sandwiches without bread. They chew on their fingers! Look at my fingers. Have they been chewed on? I'd like an apology please."

Younger blasted him with the sonic gun. BLAM!

"Never mind," said the train traveler. "I didn't realize that you were short soldiers of fortune. I was too, once. But I never got any fortune. Only sore feet. I got tired of walking. That's when I decided to fly!" He laughed.

"There aren't any airports around here," Older said.

"Oh, I'm not flying now. No, that's what I do for a living. I fly."

"What do you fly?" asked Younger, who knew the names of a hundred and twenty-two different airplanes.

"I'm a test pilot for a model airplane company, Replica Airplanes."

The brothers made faces at each other.

"That's right. Laugh if you will. But it's my job to pretend to sit in the little tiny cockpit and imagine flying. Why, on my advice Replica canceled the X-24F. I told them, 'This plane cannot be imagined in the air at high speed. It's got a clunkiness factor of four!' So they canceled production. It's my job. I always do the right thing concerning those planes. Somebody's got to do it! And that somebody happens to be me. Right, little fella?" he asked Younger.

"I don't think I want to talk to strangers."

"But I'm not a stranger. I know who I am. I'm Yohann Nut. Captain Nut. Like my father said, and his father before him and so on to the skadey-eighth generation, 'Know who you are and you'll never be a stranger.' And I know who I am. I am a Nut! And of all the generations of my family, from weed farmers to napkin salesmen, I am the greatest Nut of them all. That's who I am. Now, who are you?"

"We don't talk to Nuts," Younger said.

"Oh, that's too bad. Was it something my Grandfather said?"

The waitress came out of the kitchen. She was a large woman with dark hair and big eyes. Her name tag said FRIEDA.

"What can I get you?" she asked.

"Breakfast without toast," said Older. "And a glass of soda. We're kind of in a hurry."

"Oh. I was in a hurry once," Frieda said. "I can't remember why. We don't serve soda until after 2:00 P.M. We have regular milk, 2% milk, 1% milk and skim milk."

"I'll take skin milk," Younger said.

"That's skim, Honey. Not skin. Milk doesn't have skin."

The train traveler laughed so hard tears formed in his eyes. "Skin milk! That's a good one... ."

"Milk does get a skin if you heat it up too long in a pot on the stove to make hot chocolate," Younger said.

"It does?" Frieda asked. "My goodness. I'll have to tell that to Arnold our cook. Now we can serve skin milk too!"

Frieda took their order and vanished into the kitchen.

"Oh my goodness," said Captain Nut. "Now I've done it! You've got to help me, I don't know what to do!"

"What's wrong?" Older asked, wondering if Captain Nut had imagined himself to be in a model airplane on crash-drive.

"I've accidentally dropped my toothpick into the coffee creamer. Now its contaminated! What shall I do?"

"Tell the waitress," Younger said.

"No, I can't do that. Tell them my toothpick fell into the cream? They won't believe me. They'll think I put it there on purpose. They'll think I'm a nut!"

"You are a Nut, aren't you?" Asked Older.

"But not that kind. I know, I'll pour the cream into the ketchup bottle. That way, they'll think the cream is all used up."

He giggled and did so, pouring all the cream into the ketchup bottle, turning the cream pink and the ketchup white. "Oh no! Now look what I've done!" Captain Nut shouted. "I've gone and purposely ruined the ketchup! Now they'll know I'm a nut. What will I do now? Tell me! I'm desperate. I know! I'll pour the ketchup-cream into my empty coffee cup! That'll save the day," he said with glee and poured the concoction into his coffee cup. "Wait! Look at this horrible mess in my coffee cup. Who can I blame it on!? My reputation is ruined. I'll never be able to eat here again. Hold on! Don't get excited! It's only ketchup, that I love smeared on my hamburgers and french fries, and cream for my coffee. I know! I'll just drink it down like this," he said, lifting the cup.

"Blaaaaaawk," he gagged and spit a mouthful onto the table. "This stuff is awful. It tasted like ketchup with cream in it! What'll I do now? Look at this terrible mess all over the table! I'll never live this down!"

"Use a napkin," Younger told him.

"A napkin? What a brilliant idea. And my father and grandfather and their

uncles were napkin salesmen. Before that my family grew weeds for a living. Nothing like crabgrass salad. Yes, I'll use a napkin!" And he ran around the small dining room taking napkins from many tables. Then he sat down.

"Well, here goes," he announced as he slurped up mouthful after mouthful of his cup of creamy ketchup, only to spurt it politely into handfuls of napkins, which arose into several untidy piles.

"There, the problem is all solved. Except... Oh no! Look at this messy bunch of used napkins, all with yuck inside. What'll I do?" Cautiously, he picked up a napkin as he considered eating it. "I wonder what flavor this has. Kind of a smooth cottony texture with yummy cream and mmmm, good ketchup. Maybe...."

"Don't do it," advised Older Mobey, beginning to lose his appetite for afternoon breakfast.

"I think you're right," said Captain Nut. "I'll just leave a nice tip for the waitress and disappear. I'm never coming back here anyway. The only reason I got here is because I fell asleep on my last train ride and missed my stop. I missed everybody else's stop too. In fact, I'm not sure where I am. Where am I?"

"In a restaurant," Younger said.

"Yes, you're right. I am! It's not only a good idea to know who you are, but where you are as well. I'm not sure why," he whispered from his table, "but I'd better leave."

In a moment he was gone.

Frieda came from the kitchen. The Mobey's watched her as she stood silently next to Captain Nut's table. She looked into the empty coffee creamer cup, the empty ketchup bottle, the coffee cup, still pink and goeey on the inside, and the pile of napkins filled with yuck on the table.

"Must have dropped his toothpick in the coffee creamer. Happens all the time," she said.

"And now, boys," she said, coming over to them with Captain Nut's 15 cent tip in her pocket, "What can I get for you?"

"Our breakfasts."

"Well, you have to order them"

"We did."

"Not from me," Frieda said.

"Yes we did. Aren't you Frieda?" asked Younger Mobey.

"Yes, I am Frieda, but don't try to change the subject. What did you order?" she asked.

"Two orders of breakfast with no toast, one with skim milk and one with regular milk," Older said.

"Hmm," murmured Frieda, "You know we also have skin milk now. It's new. Just put on the menu by Arnold the cook. Let me go check on this order you claim to have given me earlier." And she returned to the kitchen.

"By the time it's ready we'll want supper," Younger said.

"Maybe we should order supper now so it'll be ready in five hours," Older said.

"Maybe we should go someplace else," replied his brother.

"But this place is on our way. And another place might be even worse.

So they stayed and waited. Maybe it was five, maybe ten minutes later that Frieda returned from the kitchen.

"I checked to see if two orders for breakfast without toast were placed....and, uh, we have a record of one breakfast with half of a piece of toast, but that was last Tuesday. Nothing from today."

"Can we get it?" Older asked.

"Oh sure. Let me place the order," said Frieda. "Two orders of breakfast with no toast, one with skim milk and one with regular. Extra marmalade? Fried oatmeal patties? Ketchup and sour cream? Green toothpicks?"

"No,no. Just the breakfasts."

"Okay, they'll be ready in fifteen minutes!" she said and returned to the kitchen. No sooner had she entered the kitchen then she returned with a tray full of steaming bowls of hot cereal with maple sugar, flapjacks, waffles, eggs and milk. There was even toast!

"That was quick," said Younger.

"Quick? It took Arnold half an hour to put this together. Opps, he goofed! Do you see what I see?"

"Toast!" the Mobeys said.

"Right. I'll have to take this back to the kitchen and make Arnold start all over."

"Don't do that!" said Older Mobey. "Just bring the toast back."

"Or leave it. We said no toast only because Captain Nut complained it took too long to make!" said Younger.

"That's only for a toast sandwich," Frieda explained, putting the food down before them.

"You see, for a toast sandwich, we can only toast the inside of each slice half as much as the outside so they don't taste twice as toasty. Because two halves makes one. And two ones equals two, right? And Arnold screws them up trying to toast the inside of the slice half as long as the outside. Sometimes he ruins a hundred slices to get it right. But regularly toast is no problem. He hardly ever screws that up at all."

The breakfast smelled yummy and the brothers dug in. But then Frieda returned from the kitchen with another tray with more breakfast.

"Hey, what gives?" she asked. "Didn't you see the sign on the door? It says 'No BWOFF'"

"What's that?"

"No bring your own food. It kind of hurts our business. So you'll have to eat our breakfast and not the one you brought with you. How'd you keep it hot?" she asked.

"This is your breakfast we're eating. You just brought it."

"No. That one's half-eaten. I brought this one that's on the tray. It's still in my hand so I know for sure that I brought it."

"Don't you remember just bringing this breakfast two minutes ago?" asked Younger with a flapjack on his fork.

"Two minutes ago I was punching Arnold for burning the toast you said you didn't want. How come this earlier breakfast came with toast. Are you wise-guys?" she asked.

"Just bring it back to the kitchen," Older said. "Maybe someone else will want a breakfast."

"I don't think so. We never get afternoon customers. That's why we don't have a lunch menu. But I'll take it back to the kitchen and make Arnold eat it. After all, he made it, didn't he?"

The boys, with their mouths full, just nodded.

The Mobeys finished eating and grew restless waiting for their waitress to bring the bill. They shouted, 'Hello!' toward the kitchen and when that didn't work, decided to go into the kitchen for a look-see.

What they saw was amazing. First of all, there were two Friedas: they must have been twins! Second, there was a mess of burnt toast on the floor, and third, the two waitresses and Arnold the cook were standing in their underwear as they boiled their clothes in a big pot.

"We like to be clean," Arnold said.

Giggling, the two boys retreated from the kitchen door. They heard the two Friedas arguing with each other.

"I thought that was my table!"

"No, it was mine!"

"Please, ladies," said Arnold, "As long as I don't have to eat any more breakfasts today. I've had seven of them already, and I hate the way I look! I should be a shoemaker like my mother wanted."

The boys put some money on the table next to their empty plates and headed for the door. Younger Mobey stopped at Captain Nut's table and found two train tickets for Next Town.

"Look, Captain Nut forgot them."

"Why did he have two?" asked Older.

"Maybe he forgot he had the first one."

Taking the train tickets with them they left the Inn of the Crazy Twin.



On the train they shared a double seat with an older man who had a grandfatherly white beard. The train rocked and rolled gently as it sped along the tracks. Younger Mobey fell asleep.

"Couple of junior soldiers, are ya?" the man asked Older Mobey.

Older shrugged.

"My name's Comfort and I been almost everywhere and done almost everything. I travel here and I travel there. You know why?"

"Nope."

"Because in all my comings and goings I forgot to get a home. A place to return to - take it easy in. Life's tough, always tryin' to have fun. Fact is I haven't had real fun in years.

"We're on an adventure."

"Oh, I can see that. Yes, sir. I can see. All outfitted for adventure. Just like me. I left the nest about your age. Don't even recall where it was. Oh boy ...."

"Our Dad's missing. We want to find him. So it's not us that's missing. It's our Dad," Older said.

"Dad's missing? Somewhere in Big Town? Yup, it's the Money Wars. They said they're over, but don't you believe it. You can't believe stuff on television, it's for idiots. Money Wars ain't over and there's so many prisoners. Tons of 'em."

"We're gonna find him," Older said.

"And then what? Once Money's got ya, that's it. It's too strong a power. Got a hold like fifteen trucks, a train and five tanks. That's it. Say AMEN. You fellas got Moral Training?," he asked.

"We've been told, 'Good today, Regrets never'" Older told him.

"That's a wise saying. A real wise saying. But I betcha whoever said it didn't drink whiskey through a straw while floatin' a racing boat down river and all the dreams of a rumpsterstrutter in his head."

"What's a rumpsterstrutter?"

"Somebody with a head full of crazy, mixed-up, have fun ideas. Almost everybody starts out a rumpsterstrutter, before we become drones. Yes sir, oh boy, 'Good today, Regrets never.' Well, I tell you, I got a thousand regrets and

every one's a blessed memory, heaven help us. I chased happiness so hard it musta got behind me when I had my eyes closed, afraid the sheer bliss of it would overwhelm me. Now look what I got. A ticket to Big Town and the sad heart of a clown. Excuse me, I got to go blow my nose. I won't bother you no more with my meanderings. Where you gettin' off the train?"

"Next Town."

"Hmmm. That's neither here nor there. It's in the middle between both. So when you get there you'll have to go either one way or the other. Can't go both; world ain't made that way. WISH IT WERE! You watch out for the Gang-of-One when you get where you're going."

"Gang-of-One!"

"That's right. Watch out for it. And I'll give you a piece of what I call my overall advice. 'The world is not a very nice place,' but it won't get any better using that as an excuse!"

He laughed and disappeared down the long aisle of the train car. A little while later the train stopped moving. Younger woke up.

"Where are we?" he asked.

His brother didn't know. A train conductor came walking down the aisle humming as he flipped through a wad of clipped tickets in his hand.

"Excuse me," said Older. "Can you tell us why we've stopped?"

"No, I'm afraid I can't do that. If I tell you, then you'll know. And if you know then you can tell everybody else on the train. So why have a conductor if the passengers can find thing out for themselves?"

Then why don't you tell everybody" asked Younger.

"Because, son," said the conductor, "I don't know why we're stopped! No one's told me why, and I don't know whom to ask!"

"So why didn't you just say that?" asked Older.

"Now how would that look? A conductor walking through a train announcing to everyone, 'I don't know what's going on! I don't know what's going on! I don't know what's going on!' Some of these passengers are important people. Real important. They could make a few phone calls and tell my bosses, 'Get rid of that idiot-conductor who doesn't know anything.' Once we had a delay that lasted a week. Everybody forgot about us. So now I do the smart thing. I walk

to the rear of the train as I'm doing right now... and hide. It's the only smart thing to do."

The Mobeys make disdainful faces.

"You see, boys," the conductor said, "the very shortest distance between two points is not to go there at all."

He straightened his cap and briskly strode to the next car.

From out of the dirty train windows it looked even darker.

"Maybe we should go home," said Younger. "How far do you think we've gone?"

"I don't know," said his brother. "I guess I could be a train conductor."

Some of the other passengers began leaving their seats and wandering between cars either looking for the conductor or just curious as to how long the train really was. The Mobeys followed. They stepped down from the train and noticed a wide road that crossed the track a short ways behind the last car. The road looked vaguely familiar to them.

"Maybe if we start walking we can get home by night," Younger said.

They began to walk quickly. They walked for a long time. The road seemed to get narrower and the forest on either side got thicker and thicker. It seem to be getting later though the afternoon light still held in the sky. It was a long while since a car had passed them.

"I think we should run," Younger said. And they both ran. They ran so fast that the wind built tears in their eyes. They raced down the road till sharp pains hurt their sides. Then they collapsed next to the road and heaved for breath.

"Maybe we should go back..... and find the train... go to Next Town and call up from there..." Older panted.

"The train's probably left... I'm scared," cried Younger.

"Hey, don't shoot!" came a voice from the woods. A grinning man with a weird military hat trotted out from behind a bush. All sorts of cameras, large and small, dangled from straps around his neck and shoulders. Younger pointed a toy blaster at him.

"Hey, don't shoot! My medical insurance isn't paid! I'm the Gang-of-One. Call me 'Gang' for short. Or 'One' which is even shorter. I'm pretty much a nutty person, but generally harmless. I can tell you're either newcomers who are lost

or fearless explorers who are crazy like me. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. See how brilliant I am! Let me get you on video. The light may be low, but I can still videograph this very moment - for posterity. How come you guys are out of breath? Breathing exercises?"

"We ran all the way home and but didn't get there," said Younger.

"That's too bad. But that's where everybody else is. Only you're so dang young to know it! I've given up all ideas of home. I'm not sure what it is. Is home a house? An apartment? A log cabin? A boat? Or a hot air balloon full of hot air?"

"Home is where you most want to be when you're away from it," said Older.

"You're right," said Gang. "And wherever I am, I want to be someplace else. So home doesn't exist. There, I've recorded that for posterity. Let me get a few stills to highlight the mood and color... Chemical photography has so much better resolution than video pictures. That's just a fact of now."

"What do you do this for?" Asked Older.

"For?" asked Gang. "I dunno. I can only explain the what, not the for. The what is, 'I capture'. I capture everything. I record the outward appearance of every internal emotion. I don't know why, I never look at the pictures. I only think about them. If I looked and listened to all I've captured I'd only be disappointed."

"When did you start doing this?" Younger asked.

"I started as a boy, younger even than yourself."

"Where did you get the cameras?" asked Older.

"No, no. No cameras then. As kids, what do you enjoy the most, and what do you want to do when you grow up? Think! Think hard!" advised Gang.

"We enjoy playing... I'd like to be a soldier when I grow up, for real," said Older. Younger nodded.

"No, no. You're almost smart. But not quite. You see, I was a soldier and it was terribly not fun. They put me in a big kitchen and said, 'Make breakfast for three thousand men and women.' Well, you just don't put a few frozen things in the oven or toaster and walla. Three thousand people must drink five hundred gallons of coffee. At least once a meal somebody of the three thousand men and women will get sick on the floor. I've got to stop cooking seven hundred pounds of scrambled eggs to go clean it up. Then clear off a couple hundred tables and wash twelve thousand plates, glasses, cups and

saucers. And nine thousand pieces of silverware just to finish up and have them say, 'Make lunch for thirty-five hundred men and women.' More people came to lunch than breakfast. So I complained and they sent me to a war zone where people shot real bullets at me! I didn't like being a soldier at all."

"I'd like to play soldier," said Younger. "But I think I'd like to make a lot of money when I grow up."

"No, no," said gang. "I tried that too. Picture this - you are in a huge city stuffed with thieves and you stand there in the middle of the street with a basketball-sized wad of money in your two hands. Not very much fun. Not at all."

"So what are you saying?" asked Older.

"What I'm saying is that if you examine your true heart you will see that some of us who truly love to play should grow up wanting to play. It's much easier than making supper for four thousand people or trying to make money from other people trying to make money from you."

"Is that possible?" asked Younger.

"Of course not. Can you imagine the next time they have war and four thousand show up to be fed before battle only to find a happy lunatic like myself with one slice of toast on a paper plate and this hungry mob demands food? 'We have to fight and we're hungry!' and I point to the huge kitchen and say, 'Help yourselves!' Why, it would tie things up -- delay the battle. Of course it's not practical. Can you imagine the President interrupting his own news conference to play charades? 'Sounds like....' But someone has to be impractical. It might as well be me. That's why I'm the Gang-of-One. So tell me, what are you doing here?"

The brothers looked at each other. "We ran away from home. But we didn't leave first. Our Dad left during the Money Wars."

"He did?" said Gang. "That's when I left the last time. Maybe I know him. What's his name?"

"Dad Mobey."

"Sure I know him. Somewhere I got a picture of him. Somewhere.... He's probably a Prisoner of Money over in Big Town," Gang said.

"Can you find him there?" asked Older.

"Maybe, if that's where he got lost. Maybe that's where he can be found."

Gang owned an ice-cream vendor truck which was parked a short walk away.

"I got a great buy on this," Gang said. "With winter coming nobody wanted to sell ice cream. But after winter comes spring, and then summer. That's the secret to success. Be ahead of your time and wait for everybody else to catch up."

He gave the boys an ice cream bar.

"We'll be in Big Town in almost no time!" he said, yanked on the musical bells, and started the engine.

Soon the road widened again and the trees gave way to fields which gave way to swamps which gave way to mud which gave way to dirt crowded with junk.

"This may be the biggest junkyard in the whole world," Gang told them. "Eventually everything ends up here. Even your toys. Sometimes it's sad," Gang said.

They drove to a huge parking lot, parked the ice cream truck, locked it and took a train into Big Town. It was very big. That's probably why it was called Big Town. On the street artists sketched portraits for people. One artist drew all of his pictures in crayon, with his eyes closed. Every portrait looked like a naked boll weevil with a fuzzy smile. People paid twenty dollars for these silly picture.

"That's Big Town for ya," Gang explained.

Through a store window the three of them watched a hundred televisions all tuned to the Crazy Channel. On all the screens was a large picture of some serious person giving a dull speech while in the corner of the screen a little picture of a berserk man dressed like Gang-of-One made angry gesture and rude faces.

"He's an interpreter for the stupid," Gang said. "It's a feature of the Crazy Channel. Only available in Big Town.

They went to a huge building and took an elevator up to the ninetieth floor. There in the middle of a huge office was Dad Mobey, all tangled up in a long telephone cord and his shoes stuck to the carpet with bubble gum.

"Dad!" the Mobeys shouted.

"Kids!" Dad Mobey said.

They hugged and Dad lost his balance and began to fall.

"Dad, the Money Wars are over," Older said.

"They are? Why didn't someone tell me? I didn't find much money anyway," he confided.

They unwrapped Dad from the phone cord he was tangled in as Gang videotaped it.

"I can sell this to the Crazy Channel. They won't even need an interpreter for this," Gang said.

They had trouble with his shoes so they undid the laces and Dad stepped out of them.

"Too bad about those shoes, but it's an emergency!"

"Okay, folks. I've got things to do so I'll be saying 'So long'" said Gang.

They waved and Dad hung up the phone with the thirty-foot curly cord.

"I turned around too many times the wrong way," Dad explained as he studied his shoes stuck to the carpet with bubble gum. "Oh well. Let's go to dinner. I'm starved."

The Mobey brothers agreed.

The moral of the story is, while you shouldn't go to dinner in you socks unless it's an emergency, if you don't fold them neatly in your sock drawer you may have two slightly different color socks to put on your feet, as Dad Mobey had. Oh well. It's only a story.

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