

## **The Three Mosquitoes**

*When Daniele was in the third grade, we sat down to write a classic picture book story. I told her the trick to writing was to take a story you already knew, and then just change things around. So my role in this was to prompt her. She kicked out all the details herself – like switching mosquitoes for bears/musketeers. It was a good collaboration.*

Once upon a time, there was a family of mosquitoes that lived in an upside down tuna fish can next to a red brick under the back porch of a big house.

There was a mama mosquito named Marsha, a daddy mosquito named Hector, and a teeny tiny baby mosquito that everybody just called Buddy. Buddy was one of a litter of 300 other baby mosquitoes who hatched together and swam as tiny transparent larvae in a pool of stagnant water in an old cracked birdbath.

But never mind all that. Today was a beautiful sunny day, and the three mosquitoes planned a picnic.

Mama Mosquito packed a thermos of ice-cold dog blood, a clotcake with blood icing, some jello salad with red and white blood cells, and a big bowl of scabs to munch on.

Papa spread the checkered tablecloth on a dandelion leaf and they all sat down to eat. "Man, am I starved!" he said.

Just then, the sky darkened, and the mosquitoes heard what they thought at first was thunder. Worse yet, a huge round disk came zooming out of the sky and crashed into the grass only inches away from them, sending them and their picnic sprawling.

"Martians, run for your lives," cried Papa Mosquito, hiding under a blade of grass.

"No, Hector, it's those awful creatures we saw last week, by the rhododendron," Mama Mosquito said. So huge, she thought to herself -- and so hideous.

Sure enough, three lumbering figures blotted out the sun. "Follow me, Mama and Buddy," said Papa, as he took to the air. "We've got to make way for these things."

But before they could fly to the safety of the drainspout, they were all hit by a giant wet ball of something yucky and minty-smelling. The three mosquitoes tumbled to earth, trapped in the sticky ball.

"Oh, Hector, what is this horrible stuff?"

"By gum I'd sure like to know," said Papa Mosquito.

Buddy shot up into the air, turned himself around, and began to dive, down, down, down toward the unwelcome invaders.

"No, buddy," Papa said, grabbing Buddy in midair by the proboscis, making Buddy do several somersaults before coming to a stop.

"Why not, Papa?"

"Because we're better than that, son," Papa said. "It's all fine and good for these poor brute creatures to stumble onto our picnic. They don't know any better. They're animals. But we are mosquitoes, and those of us in the order diptera must live up to a higher standard. Understand?"

"Oh, I guess so," said Buddy, snapping his claw. "But they were really asking for it."

Mama mosquito beamed. "I'm so proud of both of you." And they all three huddled in a great big mosquito hug.

Buddy said, "Say, I know where there's several drops of rancid milk under the swingset. And half a chocolate chip!"

"Now you're talking," Papa said, winking a compound eye and putting one wing around his son.

"I'll whip up a batch of blood pudding," said Mama. "It won't take but a jiffy!"

And as they flitted home, still trailing threads of sticky gum, Buddy called out, "Are we mosquitoes or what?"

And they had never been happier.