

LITTLE STORIES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

Joe, The Little Detective

By ANTONIO C. MUÑOZ



There are several characters in this story. Pick out the one you like best and be prepared to tell why you like him.

ONE day an old woman reported to the principal of a school that the eggs in her hen's nest had been continually disappearing. She suspected a school boy as the one doing the mischief.

"Why do you suspect one of the school boys?" asked the principal.

"Because no other persons go near my home," replied the old woman. "Sometimes they play under my house."

"Do they always go there?" again asked the principal.

"Five of them are there every day," said the old woman, "and no matter how much I threaten them with a stick, they don't pay any attention to me."

"Please give their names," requested the principal.

After the old woman had given the names of the five boys, the principal called the janitor and told him to get them from their classes.

"On my way here," said the old woman, "I went downstairs to see if the remaining eggs were there. I found out, sir, that another egg was again missing. I counted four before I ate my dinner and now there are only three. The boys were there before school began this afternoon."

Just then the janitor came back with the boys named by the old woman. They giggled and whispered to each other when they saw the old person whom they teased every day.

"I'll call the roll and don't fail to say 'Present' when your name is called," said the principal to the boys.

"Juan."

"Present."

"Pedro."

"Present."

"Felipe."

"Present."

"Tomas."

"Present."

"Pablo."

No answer.

"Pablo!" repeated the principal in a louder voice.

"Absent," responded one of the boys.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Sent out by the teacher for being tardy," said Tomas.

"Aha!" exclaimed the principal smiling a little.

"Boys," he said addressing the four before him, "why do you bother Iya Sabel every day? I mean, why do you insist on playing at her home after she has driven you away? She has been losing eggs under her house. This afternoon another one was stolen. One of you must be the thief. What do you say?"

"Not we," answered Tomas. "Pablo perhaps. You see, sir, he was tardy. Why? He must have gone back to the house of Iya Sabel after our games and ran away with the egg."

"I guess so," the principal muttered.

"Janitor," called the principal, "go and see if Pablo is in his class now. If he is there, tell the teacher that I want to see him in the office."

While this scene was going on in the office of the principal, a little boy about twelve years old was standing at the door. Nobody noticed him. He was there with a note from his teacher for the principal but he did not deliver it for the principal was busy with the old woman and the boys.

"What is it, Joe?" asked the principal.

"It's a note from Mr. Torres," the boy replied.

Just then the janitor came back with a boy who looked scared.

"Just wait a while, Joe," said the principal. "I'll be through with these boys very soon."

"Pablo," he said addressing the newcomer, "were you at the house of Iya Sabel before school began this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir, but I went home ahead of the other boys."



"You came late to school, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you came late because you went under the house of Iya Sabel and stole one of the eggs in the nest."

"No, sir."

"Why were you late then?"

"I met my mother on the way. She was carrying two big bundles of soiled clothes. I had to help her although I knew that the bell had rung. When I reached the school grounds, all the pupils were in. Mr. Torres told me to stay out until the end of the first period."

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JOE, THE LITTLE

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"Who stole the egg then?" the principal asked without addressing anybody.

Joe stepped forward and said, "Mr. Garcia, may I help you find the boy who got the egg from the nest under Iya Sabel's house?"

"Yes, Joe," answered the principal.

"I live a block away from Iya Sabel's house," Joe began. "Although I go there sometimes, I have not gone there today. If I did not come to the office this afternoon, I would not know that Iya Sabel has eggs under her house and that someone has been stealing them. I would not know that one more egg was stolen this afternoon. However, I can tell you who did the mischief."

The principal looked at Pablo with suspicion in his eyes. Iya Sabel looked calmly at the speaker. The four boys touched each other and then looked at Pablo who became the target of every eye in the room.

"You suspect Pablo judging from the way you look at him," Joe continued addressing the others. "but he has told the truth. From the window of our room, I saw him with his mother. Each of them carried a bundle."

"Who stole the egg?" asked the principal.

"That boy," Joe answered pointing to Tomas.

"You lie!" shouted Tomas.

"Yes, he lies," agreed the other three.

Joe did not pay attention to

what the boys said. Instead he looked at Tomas and said,

"There is a piece of cobweb on your hair. How did you happen to get it? The answer is clear. As soon as your playmates were gone, you ran back to get the egg and your hair caught that little piece near the nest. You were afraid you would be tardy so you went straight to school. We were on our lines when you came and you joined us. I noticed that cobweb on your hair while we were standing on our lines. I also noticed that you kept on touching something which bulged in your pocket. I thought it was a mandarin or a pingpong ball but now I am sure it was an egg—the egg that Iya Sabel lost this afternoon."

"You are a liar!" Tomas thundered as he turned his pockets inside out. "There is nothing in my pocket."

"You have had no chance to hide it outside of the schoolroom so the egg must be sleeping soundly in your desk now," said Joe.

"Janitor, go and see the desk of Tomas and get the egg if you find it there," said the principal.

The janitor came back with an egg of brownish color in his hand. Joe took it in his hand and showed it to Iya Sabel.

"Does this look like the egg you have at home?" he asked.

"Yes, it has the same color as those I have at home. Oh, it is mine! It is mine!" exclaimed the old woman.

"Thank you, Joe," said the principal. "Tomas is guilty. He stole eggs and he told a lie. For these two offenses, he will

ESTER LEARNED A . . .

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I don't want my little girl to suffer the same pain. So there, put your book down and go to bed. Remember you can read all the books you like if you have good health," advised Mrs. Cruz to Ester who had now fallen in deep thought.

Ester was convinced that after all, good health should be prized more than anything else on earth. So putting the book down, she kissed her mother on the forehead and without any complaints, she willingly went to bed.

not be admitted to his class unless he brings his father here. Tomas may now go home. The rest of the boys may go back to their classes."

The boys went out. Tomas did not say anything as he went out of the room. Iya Sabel thanked the principal and patted Joe on the shoulder. Joe went back to his class after he had given the note to the principal.

(Next month you will read more about Joe's detective work in the story, JOE'S WONDERFUL BOX.)

HELPS FOR STUDY AND ENJOYMENT

Why did Iya Sabel go to the office of the principal?

If Joe were not present, who might have been punished? Why?

How did Joe identify the guilty boy?

Why was Pablo a good son?

How was the guilty boy punished?