

## MANURE MEASLES (For Boys)

I'm a city boy, through and through. Born and raised in the concrete jungle. I've always like the city, but my mama has a hankering to live in the country. Not a farm, necessarily; just a few acres of land with clean, fresh air and her own vegetable garden.

When I was five, we were invited to visit Mam's great-aunt Minnie, who lives in a small rural town in Wisconsin. Aunt Minnie paid our train fare, and Mama and I spent two weeks breathing clean, fresh air. Mama loved it. I was bored silly.

I was bored, that is, until the day I met Ham Bone. Ham Bone was two years older than I and he lived in the farmhouse at the edge of Aunt Minnie's town. We met quite by accident when we both reached for the last Fudgsicle in the freezer case of Davidson's Grocery. Home Bone beat me to it. Then he asked me my name and where I lived and I asked his name and where he lived and when he said he lived on a farm, I asked if I could go home with him and see the cows. He seemed surprised by that request, but he said it was OK with him.

When we got there, the cows were out to pasture, which was disappointing, but at the far end of the barn, just on the other side of a low fence, there was the biggest, deepest, most wonderful-looking puddle I'd ever seen. It was brown and thick and it glistened in the sunshine.

"That's some puddle," I said to Ham Bone.

He looked at me like I was a retardo. "That's manure," he said. "Pig manure."

"Manure." I repeated the word slowly, rolling it on my tongue. It was an excellent word, a fitting name for such a fine puddle. I wondered what kind of splash it would make if I threw a rock in the pig manure puddle.

"Try it and find out," Ham Bone said.

I found a small rock on the ground, carried it to the edge of the puddle, climbed the fence, leaned over and dropped the rock. Plop! It sank out of sight, with a satisfying plunk. I looked around for a bigger rock and found one the size of a baseball. Once again I climbed the fence and dropped the rock. This one not only made a fine, schlurpey sound as it sank, it also made the manure splash into the air, splattering brown dots on my shoes.

By then, I was addicted. I searched for gibber and bigger rocks, while Ham Bone egged me on. Finally I found one that measured almost a foot in diameter. I could barely lift it. Somehow I managed to hoist it onto one hip and, dragging my foot behind me, I made my way to the puddle, struggled up the fence, leaned over and let the rock slide in. It made a deep, resonant Ker-plunk! Droplets of manure came flying upward, onto my face, my hands, my hair. Big brown circles dotted my clothing and dripped from my arms.

I grinned at Ham Bone. "I have the manure measles," I told him.

Ham Bone doubles over with laughter, like it was the funniest thing he'd ever heard in his life. All the way back to Aunt Minnie's house, I kept chanting, "I've got the man-u-er meas-sles. I've got the man-u-er meas-sles."

Aunt Minnie took one look at me and screamed. Mama made me take two baths while she washed all my clothes. She kept saying she'd brought me to the country to breathe clean, pure air and why was I bent on contaminating myself?

We came home the next day and I was glad to be back in the city.

Still today, I sometimes sit in my car looking out the windshield and pretend that, instead of a traffic light on the corner, there is a big, thick, brown puddle of pig manure, just waiting to have a rock dropped in it.