

Lost in the Ooze © By Ted Fink

Not far from here, or so some people say,
Across Hickory Road and the Great Mist of Whay,
In a place, a true place, very much like our own,
Was the town where I lived until I was grown.
It was a place of rare beauty and remarkable things,
Of winters and summers and autumns and springs,
Of towering mountains, and in the valley between
Lay a town that was wholesome, and honest, and clean,
With doctors and lawyers and shopkeepers who
All enjoyed what it was that they had to do.
“You take pleasure in working and gettin’ things done,
Then you dance and you sing when the work is done.”
And so the town prospered, for life wasn’t hard.
Until they found ooze . . . in Old Nickleby’s Yard.

Now, Old Nickleby’s Yard was a place you might say
Where people would gather to talk and to play.
Near the pond by the meadow on that high piece of
ground,
To the right of the oak tree is where ooze was
first found
By some kids. They had gone to the pond for a swim.
And the boy who first saw it stuck his big toe
right in.
“Hey, what’s this stuff?” he wondered, as he poked
with his toe.

And he laughed right out loud, for it tickled him so.
And suddenly he knew he had to touch it again.
And he laughed and he chuckled and he called for a
friend.

“Hey, what have you there?” His friend came to see.
“I don’t know what it is, but it feels good to me.”

Up from a chasm perhaps miles below,
Fluffy and light, the color of snow,
Gurgling and bubbling, it made its own sound
As it spread, it created a pool on the ground.
And the two boys, now in it up to their chin,
Couldn’t stop laughing, for it tickled their skin.
It made them so happy and their heads felt so light,
They continued to frolic until it was night.
Within a week of that day, there wasn’t a kid
in town

Who didn’t know ooze made a bubbling sound,
Or a kid who hadn’t told several lies
About being in ooze right up to his eyes.
Within a month of that day, their parents all knew,
And down to Old Nickleby’s pond they all drew.
In silence they stood without saying a word.
“It’s not what I thought . . . and it may seem absurd,”
Said Officer O’Toole, who was never too hasty,
“But to be quite honest, it looks rather tasty.”
And before they could grab him or take him about,
He tasted the ooze and jumped in with a shout.
“Don’t be afraid,” said O’Toole, “you’ve nothing

to fear.

I've tasted the stuff; it's the best kind of cheer!"
And with jumps and with kicks and with hoots and
with hollers,
He declared with a start, "It's worth ten billion
dollars!"

What happened that night is not easy to say,
For most of the town got carried away.
Surprised and delighted by O'Toole's sudden news,
They, too, jumped in, and got lost in the ooze.
And night after night, from darkness till dawn,
Down to Old Nickleby's Pond they were drawn,
Neglecting all else, and sleeping all day.
Within weeks the town showed signs of decay!
As things became broken, they were never repaired;
The town needed cleaning, but nobody cared!
Except for John Tuttle, who had come back to town.
He had left years before just to wander around,
And while he was gone, he would dream about home,
Of his friends, of his family, of the things he
had known.

But upon his return, he was smitten with blues
To find all his friends so lost in the ooze.
"Get on with your lives; you've got to stop what
you're doing.

This ooze is no good; it's not worth pursuin'!"
But his friends didn't listen; they were not even

nice.

And only Bob Applebaum offered advice.

“Now listen, my friend, I don’t mean to doubt you,
But while you were gone, we did nicely without you.

A factory, a warehouse—we’ll build it right here.

We’ll bottle the stuff; it’s the best kind of cheer!

There are those,” he said slyly, as if telling a

secret,

“they don’t want to sell it; they just want to keep it.

Don’t worry about town; it’s not a big thing.

Come frolic, come play. We’ll sell ooze in the

spring!”

But the things he was saying fell upon deaf ears,

For just seeing his friends filled Tuttle with fears.

Ooze had taken the spirit right out of the town

And if he didn’t do something, it would bring them

all down.

But what could he do? He was only one man.

Still, he would go to the mountains and consider

a plan.

The trails that he followed he had known as a boy,

And the sweet-smelling forest filled Tuttle with joy.

And he climbed and he climbed until he could see

The town far below, and the farm, Nickleby.

He brooded for hours in search of an answer,

For he knew that ooze was the worst kind of cancer

That spread from within, and captured the soul,

And took the essence that made real people whole.

It may start you a habit you wish you never had!

So if, by chance, you happen to see

Any ooze hereabouts—why, just let it be!

Ah, I see by your smile, you doubt what I say.

You think if you had ooze, you'd be okay.

Well, there's nothing to prove; what I tell you

is true.

Once you have ooze . . . it's ooze that has you.