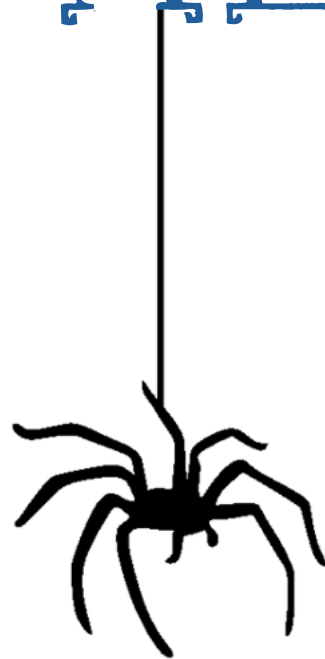


THIRTY- FOUR FOLDED TALES



Itsy-Bitsy Spider

The itsy-bitsy spider
Climbed up the waterspout
Down came the rain
And washed the spider out
Out came the sun
And dried up all the rain
And the itsy-bitsy spider
Climbed up the spout again

**Written from the
perspective of:**

Episode 3 of *Nursery Planet*



Hello. I'm David Attenborough, and this is Nursery Planet.

Behind MacGriogair's Bait & Sushi shop in the Inner Hebrides, Scotland, a lonely drama unfolds. In the dense and vibrant world of a child's nursery rhyme, we find ourselves captivated by the delicate and seemingly insignificant creature. *Arachnepoesis puerilis*, more commonly known as the Itsy Bitsy Spider, this diminutive arachnid, scarcely larger than a raindrop, embarks on a remarkable journey that is nothing short of epic.

Clambering up the waterspout, one can't help but marvel at the tenacity displayed by this minuscule explorer. The vertical ascent is fraught with challenges, and yet, with each nimble movement, the spider persists against the forces of gravity.

But nature, as we know, is not always kind. Suddenly, ominous clouds gather overhead, casting a shadow over the arachnid's ambitious climb. Raindrops begin to fall, a meteorological spectacle that poses a grave threat to our intrepid protagonist. The droplets, magnified by the lens of our scrutiny, appear as colossal orbs descending upon the diminutive spider.

Undeterred, the Itsy Bitsy Spider faces the tempest with a resilience that is characteristic of the natural world's most enduring survivors. It clings valiantly to the slick surface of the waterspout, facing the deluge with a stoic determination. In the face of adversity, the spider persists, and its efforts do not go unnoticed.

As the rain subsides and the clouds part, a transcendent moment unfolds in the narrative. The Itsy Bitsy Spider, having weathered the storm, resumes its climb with a newfound vigor. This triumphant ascent is a testament to the indomitable spirit of the minuscule creature, a saga that mirrors the timeless struggles of life in the wild.

And so, in the hallowed annals of a nursery rhyme, the Itsy Bitsy Spider etches its tale—a tale of perseverance against the odds, a narrative whispered in the rustle of leaves and the patter of raindrops. In this microcosm, the smallest of beings teaches us a lesson as colossal as the natural world itself: that resilience, in the face of adversity, is a force that transcends size and scale.

**Written from the
perspective of:**

A Right-of- Passage Story



One vaguely sunny, early, Tuesday morning, two spiders – father and son – walk nimbly down the sidewalk. In a moment, they stop at a very important, literary landmark. If you lean in closely, you can hear what they are saying...

"Here we are," said the father as he looked up admiringly, surveying an old, familiar place.

"Yeah? And where's here? I thought we were going out for some flies," replied the son, spoken in the morose, disinterested tone that only a teenager can perfect.

"My boy, this here is... the spout," he said, tapping the aged, white, tin spout with four legs.

"And?"

"And, you're going to climb it"

"I don't think so. That's stupid, Dad. Can we just go?"

As if immune to his son's inherent sullenness, the father continued. "When I was your age, my father brought me here and I climbed the spout. As did his father and his father. To climb the spout is to be a Spider. It's a simple thing, climbing the spout, but it has importance. Sometimes in life, we do things that, on the surface, seem simply and ordinary. But that simple act, that selfless moment of doing something because it has always been done can have a profound effect on people, even people you may not know. It's a right of passage that all male members of the Spider family go through."

"It's stupid."

"It's tradition."

"Dad, it's the 21st century, and I refuse to capitulate to archaic arachnid traditions just because my father, a mere cog in the ideological apparatus, insists they hold value. This is nothing more than the reproduction of hegemonic power structures designed to maintain the status quo, where subjective agency is subsumed by the inertia of historical materialism. This so-called 'tradition' is a disciplinary mechanism, an insidious tool of biopolitical control that functions under the guise of familial duty. I won't be complicit in reinforcing the apparatus of cultural oppression that serves only to perpetuate the domination of entrenched hierarchies."

"I have no idea what you just said. Up you go!" Eight whining, entitled, and disenfranchised eyes stared at his father. Eight resolute, unwavering, and loving eyes stared back at his son.

Knowing that he could never win a staring match with his father, the son stole a quick glance up the waterspout. "That doesn't look that hard. If I do this thing can we go home?"

"Yep."

"Fine." He positioned himself in front of the spout's opening and grabbed it with four legs. "All I have to do is climb this thing, right? There's no other stupid tradition I have to do? Just climb?"

"Just climb; then we go home," the father said as his eyes gazed across the sky, noticing a buildup of clouds.

"This is stupid." With a hoist, the son was inside the spout and climbing up.

Suddenly, as if it were written, it began to rain.

With a hollow echo, the son called out, "Dad, it's starting to rain."

"Yep, it is. Up you go."

"DAD!?!"

As the rain increased, a trickle of water emerged from the spout. The flow grew stronger and stronger. Then, as if on cue, the spider was washed out of the spout, a tangle of spindly legs. The father, holding an umbrella, leaned over his son. "Up you go."

"I'm tired of this, Dad!"

"Like I promised, we go home once you've climbed. Besides, the rain's stopped and the sun's coming out."

As the sun dried up all the rain, and his soggy, thin legs, the son rolled over, stood up and marched over to his father. "Give me your phone," he demanded. "Give it to me!"

The father held out his phone and his son snatched it out of his legs. He checked the weather app. No more rain. Handing the phone back, and with a determination rarely witnessed at home, the son grabbed the edges of the spout, launched himself in, and climbed.

After a moment, a disembodied voice, distant and metallic, issued from the opening of the spout. "All right. I'm at the top. Can I come down, now?"

"Yep. Come on down."

As his son emerged from the spout, his father grabbed him with six legs and gave him a giant bear hug, spiderly speaking.

"I am so proud of you, my boy! People will be talking about this for years." With a leg around his son's shoulder, the pair walked nimbly back down the sidewalk.

The sun was shining fully, the birds were chirping fervently, the wind was breezing gently. And as the two crossed the street, the son turned to his father and said, "You're an idiot, Dad."

**Written from the
perspective of:**

**An interview from
Studs Terkel *The
Good War: An
Oral History of
World War II***



Setting: World War II; Occupied France

Miss Muffett

She is a retired nursery rhyme character. For a brief time, she had been the leader of La Résistance de la Rime in the small, French village of Le Chambon-sur-Ligon. Sitting at Horn & Hardart's in Philadelphia, over a plate of curds and whey and drinking coffee with egg and honey (a habit she picked up from an Austrian folktale character during the war), her words come out with the measured confidence of someone who has seen both sides of the page.

But for the moment, she seems pensive before she speaks.

The Nazis marched into Paris on June '40 and occupied the north part of France. In '42, they occupied it all. I had come over December of '39. After the St. Louis – you know, the ship with all the Jewish refugees that nobody wanted, even the U.S. – was sent back into the greedy hands of Hitler, I knew I had to do something. Anything. If it could happen to them, it could happen to us.

So, I like I said, I arrived at Le Chambon-sur-Ligon in '39. I was staying with the Ferret in the Woods; we had been long-time friends, and he sent me a post to come visit. [*She giggles to herself*]. That ferret! He knew me so well. He told me to come to France because he had a proposal. A way I could help. So, I did. I went.

It was no secret that Goebbels considered all of us nursery rhymes *Die Ekelhaften* (The Disgusting ones). It was his intention to eradicate all of us, in any way possible. The nursery purge began almost as soon as the Nazis occupied the north of France. Le Chambon-sur-Ligon was in the zone libre, the free zone, so we had a little time. But not much, as it turned out.

I was recruited into La Résistance de la Rime by the Ferret in the Woods. Both me and my partner. I sent him a post to join me. He was in Colorado shopping for

antique tuffets. He had a thing about tuffets. Look, I just sit on them; but he was mad for them. I wrote that France had great tuffets. So, he arrived in January '40. Just like that.

The resistance wasn't much to start with, just the Ferret, me, my partner, and the Cat and the Fiddle. But the Ferret knew a couple of things I didn't at the time. The tiny village where we lived was remote and not at the Nazis' attention, even when they occupied the south of France in '42. He also knew that as soon as I got to France, I would want to take over. [*She laughs*]. He was right. He called me 'naturally bossy.' I suppose. But someone had to take control. No?

So, the Ferret and I spent about two months in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon designing ways to hide and smuggle out nursery rhymes. Things were getting more and more impossible for the nursery rhymes. Following the occupation and partition of France, millions of nursery rhymes fled to the Free Zone in the South. This included large numbers of rhymes, who began to try and reorganize their lives under German occupation and the Vichy regime. As time passed, the policies of the Vichy government became increasingly harsh. Throughout this period, the rhymes were forced to cope with a new system of hostile laws, accompanied by unprecedented anti-nursery rhymism that was encouraged by the government. Nursery rhymes were systematically being rounded up and indexed. Then came the book burnings. They were the worst. We just weren't ready yet. We lost so many before we got our operation together. Flappyjack Jack and the Syrup River. Sir Puddlefoot and the Splashy Bridge. Grumbly Gus and the Snoring Bus.

I've never heard of those nursery rhymes.

No. You haven't. [*She pauses to collect herself*]. Anyway, once we were up and running, once we knew our plans, it didn't take long before we were hiding and smuggling rhymes. I cannot express to you the courage, the sheer decency shown by the local population. Our isolation, surrounded by forest, with villages few and far between. What better place to hide nursery rhymes. I'll give you an example. Probably the most difficult mission we had, and this was before the Nazis came into our village. We got a coded message from the Mother Goose Squadron out of England that two rhymes, Frère Jacques and the Three Blind Mice – I guess that's really four rhymes [*She laughs*]. Anyway, they were on route, coming to us. They were scheduled for a turn-around. A turn-around meant that we were going to hide them for only a couple of hours before smuggling them in the dark, into Denmark through the Christian Anderson Underground.

Around 10 o'clock at night, one of the King's horses and one of the King's men arrived with them hidden in a steamer trunk. Once we got them hidden in one of our safe houses, I opened the trunk and there's Jacques, fast asleep and snoring; and the Three Blind Mice are, well, blind...and drunk! Can you imagine getting the dead weight of a sleeping friar and three blind *and* snockered mice, singing at the top of their lungs as if it were Christmas, across the border in the dead of night? The bribes we had to pay for that one practically bankrupted us.

And what about Operation Golden Book?

Ah. Yes. By the time of Operation Golden Book, we had managed to hide and smuggle over 1800 nursery rhymes. On September, maybe October, of '41, The Muffin Man and the Old Lady who Swallowed a Fly join the resistance. I recruited them and they agreed, which was good for us because they didn't look like a typical rhyme, and they could blend in with the population, and the Nazis. Because on October of '41, the Nazis took over our village. It was only a matter of time. They occupied everything else.

Did you shut down the resistance?

Heavens no! We increased it! I'm sorry, but the Nazis were idiots. And by this time, we could have hidden the Old Woman's Shoe right under their noses, and they would never have suspected. Except for one. Gruppenführer Böhm. He was the SS officer placed in charge of our village once the Germans came in. He was clever. And dangerous. We were good, and I don't know how, but it became clear that he was on to us; or at least he suspected something. Because there was Gestapo on every corner, in every pub. In some cases, they took over the homes. We lost a couple of good safe houses that way.

Anyway, Operation Golden Book. One of our operatives in Berlin sent a message that Mother Goose...

Really?

...Yes, the old Goose herself, she was being transported to us, and it was our job to get her over to Denmark. I was going to personally run this mission, me and my partner. I was to run the ground operation and he was to run the secret messages.

And then the Dorf Fest happened. It was December, and the weather was unusually warm that year. No snow, but rain. Frau Böhm took it upon herself to throw a village party for her husband and all the SS. This was on the 19th. I remember it was mostly a clear day. MG was scheduled to come to us on the 23rd. This mission was especially dangerous because it was going to be a daytime handover, so everything had to work like clockwork. Okay. We can manage. We've done hard things before, not like this, but hard.

But, on the day of the Fest, my partner screwed it up. You see, Frau Böhm covered the central plaza entirely in tuffets, so the SS could sit. And my damned partner couldn't hold himself back. As the party was going, he snuck in and sat down beside Frau Böhm and frightened her away. Then he was nabbed by the Gestapo and hauled off to Berlin. [*She is silent for a long moment*]. MG was flying in with her squadron on a dangerous daytime sortie. My partner was instrumental for this operation because his job was to relay up-to-the-moment messages between me and the Four and Twenty Black Birds in the sky. To know where she was, where the Gestapo was, and where to land. We could not call this mission off; too much was at stake.

Then I remembered, about two weeks before our mission, the Gestapo had raided and torn down a shule [synagogue] that was operating in a woodpile next to one of our safe houses.

Was that Itsel Benzi's shule?

[Smiling]. It was. Luckily, Itsel was not there. He was saying kaddish to a spider family at their home when the Gestapo raided. And they were looking for him. But I knew where he was. One of my Four and Twenty Blackbirds happened to be Jewish. Szlomo, he knew where Itsel was holding up, and he took me there.

You know, it's a rare thing to see the making of a nursery rhyme right before your eyes. Most of the rhymes we smuggled out were already established. Itsel Benzi was hiding under a metal bucket way back in a cow barn. Szlomo introduced us. Evidently, he knew of me more than I knew of him. Always the gentlespider, he was complementary of the work we were doing. And that's when I asked him to join us. It took some convincing. He wasn't a nursery rhyme, not yet; but he still had a lot to lose.

In the end, he and Szlomo spoke in hushed words for a bit. I don't know what they said to each other – Szlomo never told me – but in the end, Itsel agreed.

I brought Itsel Benzi back to our command center. I told him that we all had code names, and that since the Gestapo – idiots to the very last – only knew him as Itsy Bitsy...that should be his code name. He was fine with that. We spent all night going over the plan of the operation. It was happening the next day. The only change I made was in the messages. Since both Itsel and Szlomo could read Yiddish and Hebrew, we decided that all the web messages would be a mix of those two languages. Harder for the Gestapo to read.

Around four in the morning, I received three messages. One was that MG was coming in an hour earlier. 9 a.m. instead of 10. The second was that the Gestapo was tipped off about our operation and would be out in force. The third, there was a chance of rain. You know, plans never work the way they should. But we were still going through with it.

I got the idea of sending out the Old Lady who Swallowed a Fly to distract the Gestapo with her fly routine. I always thought it was disgusting, but the SS loved watching her swallow flies. So, at dawn, and with the help of Itsel in catching all the flies she needed, the Old Lady set up her diversion. My Four and Twenty Blackbirds took to the sky to relay messages between me and the Goose Squadron. Itsel was with me. Everything rested on my knowing where the best place the Goose Squadron could land without being captured. And I had to know where the Gestapo *weren't* going to be, so we could be there. Once I knew that, it was up to Itsel to spin his coded web messages for the Blackbirds to see and relay back to the squadron.

The SS knew me by sight, so I disguised myself as the Crooked Man. We had smuggled him out several months ago, and he left some of his clothes, a hat, and a staff.

Itsel and I must have walked a crooked mile or more. There were Gestapo everywhere. I was about to give up hope when Itsel crawled to my shoulder and whispered in my ear: *If things are not as you wish, wish them as they are*. Then, he did the most extraordinary thing. Flinging off my shoulder, he nimbled quickly over to a waterspout that belonged to the highest building in town. At that moment, a squad of Gestapo rounded the corner, so I had to hide in the shadows. But they didn't see Itsel. Grabbing the frame of the waterspout, he launched himself inside.

You know the story, but to see it happen for the first time was heart-wrenching. It began to rain, heavily. And the waterspout began to eject water. And Itsel was washed out, right in front of an SS officer, who stopped on the sidewalk for...something. Itsel, water-soaked, lay right at the feet of the officer. He didn't move, not a leg. The water was pouring out of the spout and I could see that it was all Itsel could do to hang on to the sidewalk while pretending to be dead.

It was a quick shower, a minute or a little more, but it seemed to go on forever, watching Itsel hang on for dear life while hiding in plain sight.

And then, things changed as quickly as they started. The officer did not see Itsel and walked off. The rain suddenly stopped, and the sun came out and dried up all the rain. And Itsel Benzi climbed up the spout again.

I always carry field glasses with me on missions, so I could see him at the very top of the building. It was hard to tell what he was doing because he was rapidly pacing back and forth and stopping on occasion. Then, I saw his two legs shoot up in the air in triumph. I've never seen a spider spin a web so quickly. Honestly, he put my partner to shame. Between two smokestacks, and in English, he spun: I found the spot! Then, he turned and spun another web with coordinates, longitude and latitude. I never knew spiders knew that. The Blackbirds saw the message and started swooping low and making too much noise. From out of nowhere, two Gestapo officers appeared, hearing the noise. They began shooting at the roof of the building.

The Blackbirds scattered. They were fine. But Itsel's webs were torn to shreds. When I looked up, I could not find him.

Do you know if he made it?

[*A very painful silence*]. I don't know. I searched everywhere. Lord knows I did. We were able to secure Mother Goose and get her across the border, all because of him. [*She sighs deeply*]. You know, I've seen many things that I choose to forget. But there are a few things, a very few things, that I want to remember. And the courage and bravery of a little, Jewish spider is one of those things.