

## READER'S THEATER

# Pie-Biter

by

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Narrator 1	Tea carrier	Men in avalanche
Narrator 2	Gang boss	Cook
Hoi, Pie-Biter	Dynamiter	Spanish Louie
Ah Choy	Sleepy Kan	

Narrator 1: Long ago, before space shuttles or jets, Americans dreamed of trains. Fierce, black, fire-eating trains that would carry people and treasures from coast to coast. To make this dream true, railroad companies sent to China for workers.

Narrator 2: Hundreds, thousands of men crossed the Ocean of Peace to build the iron road America needed. Among them was Hoi, a boy with smiling face atop a body thin as a bamboo pole.

Narrator 1: Work on the iron road was hard and dangerous. The hours between morning and evening rice stretched long and hungry. Hoi's smile disappeared, and he became too weak to work. One day he complained.

Hoi: My stomach is shouting for food.

Tea carrier: A cup of tea will quiet its growling.

Hoi: But a cup of steaming hot tea could not satisfy me.  
I need rice!

Gang Boss: You cannot hold a bowl, chopsticks, and pick axe too.

Narrator 2: Hoi thought a moment.

Hoi: No, But I can hold a pie in my left hand and swing the axe with my right.

Gang Boss: Pie?

Hoi: Yes, American pie.

Narrator 1: Hoi ate all kinds of pies, peach, pumpkin, vinegar, carrot, or gooseberry. But his favorites were Dutch apple, huckleberry, and lemon. His friends renamed him Pie-Biter.

Narrator 2: Pie-Biter's body thickened, becoming as hard as the rails he laid. And when a job needed extra strength, the men called for him.

Dynamiter: Pie-Biter, lower me over the cliff so I can drill a hole for explosives!

Men in Avalanche: Pie-Biter, dig us out!

Gang Boss: Pie-Biter, lift that fallen pine!

Narrator 1: Then, after three years of labor, the rails from West and East met.

Gang Boss: The iron road is finished. There's no more work for us here.

Narrator 2: While the company bosses celebrated, the men made plans.

Tea Carrier: My parents are old. I will take my savings and sail for home.

Dynamiter: I will follow new gold strikes north.

Cook: I will start a boarding house, then send for my wife and children.

Gang Boss: And you, Pie-Biter, what will you do?

Pie-Biter: I will buy a train.

Narrator 1: Pie-Biter laughed at the men's astonished faces.

Pie-Biter: A train of horses that can pack supplies into camps far from the iron road.

Dynamiter: But you know nothing of horses.

Pie-Biter: I will learn.

Narrator 2: Pie-Biter asked for a job with Spanish Louie's pack train.

Pie-Biter: I will cook in exchange for lessons about horses.

Narrator 1: Spanish Louie shook Pie-Biter's hand.

Spanish Louie: Alright. Agreed.

Narrator 2: At first, Pie-Biter found himself tangled in harness, halters, and pack ropes.

Narrator 1: The horses fooled him by puffing up their bellies when he tried to tighten their cinches. Then their packs slipped, sometimes tumbling into deep canyons.

Narrator 2: Finally, after many months, Spanish Louie spoke the words Pie-Biter had been working and waiting for.

Spanish Louie: There's nothing more I can teach you. You're ready to run your own pack train.

Narrator 1: Pie-Biter bought ten short-backed horses with thick bodies and strong, sturdy legs. He ordered two boxes specially made, one for either side of his saddle. Then, into each box, he stacked eight pies.

Narrator 2: He was ready to go. Except for one thing. He had no freight.

Spanish Louie: No one trusts a greenhorn.

Pie-Biter: But I am a good packer. You said so yourself.

Narrator 1: Spanish Louie pointed to the merchants.

Spanish Louie: You must make them believe.

Narrator 2: Pie-Biter took out a pie and munched it thoughtfully.

Pie-Biter: How can I prove I am a good packer if the merchants don't give me a chance?

Narrator 1: He finished the pie and reached for another. Then another. And another.

Narrator 2: When he had eaten all sixteen pies, Pie-Biter said to Spanish Louie.

Pie-Biter: The three biggest pack trains in this town are yours, Ah Choy's and Sleepy Kan's. If all of you go on holiday at the same time, the merchants will have to use me to carry their freight.

Spanish Louie: I will be happy to take two week's rest, but how will you persuade Ah Choy and Sleepy Kan to stop packing too?

Pie-Biter: I have a plan.

Narrator 1: Dressed in his best, Pie-Biter called on Ah Choy.

Pie-Biter: Good news! China's armies have won many battles against the barbarians.

Ah Choy: What has that to do with me?

Narrator 2: Pie-Biter unrolled a long paper heavy with seals of office and said.

Pie-Biter: The Emperor instructs us to celebrate the victories with two weeks of rest.

Ah Choy: But I have hundreds of pounds of rice and flour and sugar that I have promised to deliver.

Narrator 1: Pie-Biter shook the paper.

Pie-Biter: You dare disobey an order from the Son of Heaven?

Ah Choy: No, of course not. The....the merchants can wait.

Narrator 2: Next, Pie-Biter called on Sleepy Kan and repeated the same instructions. Sleepy Kan yawned and said.

Sleepy Kan: I willingly obey the Emperor.

Narrator 1: Without Spanish Louie, Ah Choy, or Sleepy Kan, the merchants had to hire Pie-Biter. And for the next two weeks, his horses forded streams and scrambled over boulders while Pie-Biter munched his favorite pies and the canyons echoed with songs. He did not lose so much as one egg.

Narrator 2: When Ah Choy discovered he had been tricked, he was furious. But Sleepy Kan laughed.

Sleepy Kan: There's plenty of work for us all.

Narrator 1: Over the next fifteen years, Pie-Biter's string of horses doubled, then trebled. He became a rich man with many hired helpers.

Narrator 2: But he nibbled at pies without enjoyment. He did not sing.

Spanish Louie: What is wrong, my friend?

Pie-Biter: I am lonely for my father and mother and brothers. I want a wife and a son of my own.

Narrator 1: The next day, Pie-Biter led his pack train to Spanish Louie's.

Pie-Biter: My horses have served me well. Now they will serve you. I am going home.

Narrator 2: Then he bought a one-way ticket on a steamship bound for China. He ordered fifty pies to be delivered on board.

Narrator 1: No one in America saw or heard from Pie-Biter again. But for many years, travelers from China spoke of pie shops in villages and market towns.

Narrator 2: And the flavors they served were Pie-Biter's favorites.

