



How Bozo the Button Buster Busted All His Buttons When a Mouse Came

Carl Sandburg
North American

5 min read

One summer evening the stars in the summer sky seemed to be moving with fishes, cats and rabbits. It was that summer evening three girls came to the shanty of Hatrack the Horse. He asked each one, “What is your name?” And they answered, first, “Me? My name is Deep Red Roses”; second, “Me? My name is The Beans are Burning”; and last of all, “Me? My name is Sweeter Than the Bees Humming.”

And the old man fastened a yellow rose for luck in the hair of each one and said, “You ought to be home now.” “After you tell us a story,” they reminded him. “I can only tell you a sad story all mixed up to-night,” he reminded them, “because all day to-day I have been thinking about Bozo the Button Buster.” “Tell us about Bozo the Button Buster,” said the girls, feeling in their hair and fixing the yellow roses. The old man sat down on the front steps. His eyes swept away off toward a corner of the sky heavy with mist where it seemed to be moving with firetails, fishes, cats, and rabbits of slow changing stars. “Bozo had buttons all over him,” said the old man, “the buttons on Bozo fitted so tight, and there were so many buttons, that sometimes when he took

his lungs full of new wind to go on talking a button would bust loose and fly into the face of whoever he was speaking to. Sometimes when he took new wind into his lungs two buttons would bust loose and fly into the faces of two people he was speaking to. “So people said, ‘Isn’t it queer how buttons fly loose when Bozo fills his lungs with wind to go on speaking?’ After a while everybody called him Bozo the Button Buster. “Now, you must understand, Bozo was different from other people. He had a string tied to him. It was a long string hanging down with a knot in the end. He used to say, ‘Sometimes I forget where I am; then I feel for the string tied to me, and I follow the string to where it is tied to me; then I know where I am again.’ “Sometimes when Bozo was speaking and a button busted loose, he would ask, ‘Was that a mouse? Was that a mouse?’ And sometimes he said to people, ‘I’ll talk with you— if you haven’t got a mouse in your pocket.’”

“The last day Bozo ever came to the Village of Cream Puffs, he stood on the public square and he was all covered with buttons, more buttons than ever before, and all the buttons fitting tight, and five, six buttons busting loose and flying into the air whenever he took his lungs full of wind to go on speaking.

“When the sky began to fall who was it ran out and held up the sky?” he sang out. ‘It was me, it was me ran out and held up the sky when the sky began to fall.’ “When the blue came off the sky, where did they get the blue to put on the sky to make it blue again? It was me, it was me picked the bluebirds and the blue pigeons to get the blue to fix the sky.’ “When it rains now it rains umbrellas first so everybody has an umbrella for the rain afterward. Who fixed that? I did—Bozo the Button Buster.’ “Who took the rainbow off the sky and put it back again in a hurry? That was me.’

“Who turned all the barns upside down and then put them right side up again? I did that.’ “Who took the salt out of the sea and put it back again? Who took the fishes out of the sea and put them back again? That was me.’ “Who started the catfish fighting the cats? Who made the slippery elms slippery? Who made the King of the Broken Bottles a wanderer wandering over the world mumbling, “Easy, easy”? Who opened the windows of the stars and threw fishes, cats and rabbits all over the frames of the sky? I did, I did, I did.’ “All the time Bozo kept on speaking the buttons kept on busting because he had to stop so often to fill his lungs with new wind to go on speaking. The public square was filled with piles of buttons that kept busting off from Bozo the Button Buster that day. “And at last a mouse came, a sneaking, slippery, quick little mouse. He ran with a flash to the string tied to Bozo, the long string hanging down with a knot in the end. He bit the knot and cut it loose. He slit the string with his teeth as Bozo cried, ‘Ai! Ai! Ai!’ “The last of all the buttons busted loose off Bozo. The clothes fell

off. The people came up to see what was happening to Bozo. There was nothing in the clothes. The man inside the clothes was gone. All that was left was buttons and a few clothes. “Since then whenever it rains umbrellas first so everybody has an umbrella for the rain afterward, or if the sky looks like it is falling, or if a barn turns upside down, or if the King of the Broken Bottles comes along mumbling, ‘Easy, easy,’ or if firetails, fishes, cats and rabbits come on the sky in the night, or if a button busts loose and flies into somebody’s face, people remember Bozo the Button Buster.” When the three girls started home, each one said to Hatrack the Horse, “It looks dark and lonesome on the prairie, but you put a yellow rose in my hair for luck—and I won’t be scared after I get home.”

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com