



How Hot Balloons and His Pigeon Daughters Crossed Over into the Rootabaga Country

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*Advanced
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Hot Balloons was a man who lived all alone among people who sell slips, flips, flicks and chicks by the dozen, by the box, by the box car job lot, back and forth to each other. Hot Balloons used to open the window in the morning and say to the rag pickers and the rag handlers, “Far, far away the pigeons are calling; far, far away the white wings are dipping in the blue, in the sky blue.”

And the rag pickers and the rag handlers looked up from their rag bags and said, “Far, far away the rags are flying; far, far away the rags are whistling in the wind, in the sky wind.” Now two pigeons came walking up to the door, the door knob and the door bell under the window of Hot Balloons. One of the pigeons rang the bell. The other pigeon, too, stepped up to the bell and gave it a ring. Then they waited, tying the shoe strings on

their shoes and the bonnet strings under their chins, while they waited.

Hot Balloons opened the door. And they flew into his hands, one pigeon apiece in each of his hands, flipping and fluttering their wings, calling, “Ka loo, ka loo, ka lo, ka lo,” leaving a letter in his hands and then flying away fast. Hot Balloons stepped out on the front steps to read the letter where the light was good in the daylight because it was so early in the morning. The letter was on paper scribbled over in pigeon foot blue handwriting with many secrets and syllables. After Hot Balloons read the letter, he said to himself, “I wonder if those two pigeons are my two runaway daughters, Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz. When they ran away they said they would cross the Shampoo river and go away into the Rootabaga country to live. And I have heard it is a law of the Rootabaga country whenever a girl crosses the Shampoo river to come back where she used to be, she changes into a pigeon—and she stays a pigeon till she crosses back over the Shampoo river into the Rootabaga country again.”

And he shaded his eyes with his hands and looked far, far away in the blue, in the sky blue. And by looking long and hard he saw far, far away in the sky blue, the two white pigeons dipping their wings in the blue, flying fast, circling and circling higher and higher, toward the Shampoo river, toward the Rootabaga country. “I wonder, I guess, I think so,” he said to himself, “I wonder, I think so, it must be those two pigeons are my two runaway daughters, my two girls, Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz.”

He took out the letter and read it again right side up, upside down, back and forth. “It is the first time I ever read pigeon foot blue handwriting,” he said to himself. And the way he read the letter, it said to him:

Daddy, daddy, daddy, come home to us in the Rootabaga country where the pigeons call ka loo, ka loo, ka lo, ka lo, where the squirrels carry ladders and the wildcats ask riddles and the fish jump out of the rivers and speak to the frying pans, where the baboons take care of the babies and the black cats come and go in orange and gold stockings, where the birds wear rose and purple hats on Monday afternoons up in the skylights in the evening.

(Signed)

Dippy the Wisp, Slip Me Liz.

And reading the letter a second time, Hot Balloons said to himself, “No wonder it is scribbled over the paper in pigeon foot blue handwriting. No wonder it is full of secrets and syllables.” So he jumped into a shirt and a

necktie, he jumped into a hat and a vest, and he jumped into a steel car, starting with a snizz and a snoof till it began running smooth and even as a catfoot.

“I will ride to the Shampoo river faster than two pigeons fly,” he said. “I will be there.” Which he was. He got there before the two pigeons. But it was no use. For the rain and the rainstorm was working—and the rain and the rainstorm tore down and took and washed away the steel bridge over the Sham- poo river. “Now there is only an air bridge to cross on, and a steel car drops down, falls off, falls through, if it runs on an air bridge,” he said.

So he was all alone with the rain and the rainstorm all around him—and far as he could see by shading his eyes and looking, there was only the rain and the rainstorm across the river —and the air bridge. While he waited for the rain and the rain- storm to go down, two pigeons came flying into his hands, one apiece into each hand, flipping and fluttering their wings and calling, “Ka loo, ka loo, ka lo, ka lo.”

And he could tell by the way they began tying the shoe- strings on their shoes and the bonnet strings under their chins, they were the same two pigeons ringing the doorbell that morning. They wrote on his thumb-nails in pigeon foot blue handwriting, and he read their hand- writing asking him why he didn’t cross over the Shampoo river. And he explained, “There is only an air bridge to cross on. A steel car drops down, falls off, falls through, if it runs on an air bridge. Change my steel car to an air car. Then I can cross the air bridge.”

The pigeons flipped and fluttered, dipped their wings and called, “Ka loo, ka loo, ka lo, ka lo.” And they scribbled their pigeon feet on his thumb-nail—telling him to wait. So the pigeons went flying across the Shampoo river. They came back with a basket. In the basket was a snoox and a gringo. And the snoox and the gringo took hammers, jacks, flanges, nuts, screws, bearings, ball bearings, axles, axle grease, ax handles, spits, spitters, spitballs and spitfires, and worked.

“It’s a hot job,” said the snoox to the gringo. “I’ll say it’s a hot job,” said the gringo answering the snoox. “We’ll give this one the merry razoo,” said the snoox to the gringo, working overtime and double time. “Yes, we’ll put her to the cleaners and shoot her into high,” said the gringo, answering the snoox, working overtime and double time. They changed the steel to air, made an air car out of the steel car, put Hot Balloons and the two pigeons into the air car and drove the air car across the air bridge.

And nowadays when people talk about it in the Rootabaga country, they say, “The snoox and the gringo drove the air car across the air bridge clean and cool as a whistle in the wind. As soon as the car got off the bridge and over into the Rootabaga country, the two pigeons changed in a flash. And Hot Balloons saw they were his two daughters, his two runaway girls, Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz, standing and smiling at him and looking fresh and free as two fresh fish in a free river, fresh and free as two fresh bimbos in a bamboo tree. He kissed them both, two long kisses, and while he was kissing them the snoox and the gringo worked double time and overtime and changed the air car back into a steel car.

And Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz rode in that car—starting with a snizz and a snoof till it began running smooth and even as a catfoot—showing their father, Hot Balloons, where the squirrels carry ladders and the wild- cats ask riddles and the fish jump out of the rivers and speak to the frying pans, where the baboons take care of the babies and the black cats come and go in orange and gold stockings, where the birds wear rose and purple hats on Monday afternoons up in the skylights in the evening. And often on a Saturday night or a New Year Eve or a Christmas morning, Hot Balloons remembers back how things used to be, and he tells his two girls about the rag pickers and the rag handlers back among the people who sell slips, flips, flicks, and chicks, by the dozen, by the box, by the box car job lot, back and forth to each other.

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