



How Rag Bag Mammy Kept Her Secret While the Wind Blew Away the Village of Hat

Pins

Carl Sandburg
North American

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There was a horse-face man in the Village of Cream Puffs. People called him Hatrack the Horse. The skin stretched tight over his bones. Once a little girl said, “His eyes look like lightning bugs lighting up the summer night coming out of two little doors.” When Hatrack the Horse took off his hat he reached his hand around behind and hung the hat on a shoulder bone sticking out.

When he wanted to put on his hat he reached his hand around and took it off from where it was hanging on the shoulder bone sticking out behind. One summer Hatrack said to Peter Potato Blossom Wishes, “I am going away up north and west in the Rootabaga Country to see the towns different from each other. Then I will come back east as far as I went west, and south as far as I went north, till I am back again where my little pal, Peter Potato Blossom Wishes, lives in the Village of Cream Puffs.” So he went away, going north and west and coming back east and south till he was back again in his home town, sitting on the front steps of his little red

shanty, fixing a kite to fly.

“Are you glad to come back?” asked Peter. “Yes, this is home, this is the only place where I know how the winds act up so I can talk to them when I fly a kite.” “Tell me what you saw and how you listened and if they handed you any nice packages.”

“They handed me packages, all right, all right,” said Hatrack the Horse. “Away far to the west I came to the Village of Hat Pins,” he went on. “It is the place where they make all the hat pins for the hats to be pinned on in the Rootabaga Country. They asked me about the Village of Cream Puffs and how the winds are here because the winds here blow so many hats off that the Village of Hat Pins sells more hat pins to the people here than anywhere else. There is an old woman in the Village of Hat Pins. She walks across the town and around the town every morning and every afternoon. On her back is a big rag bag. She never takes anything out of the rag bag. She never puts anything in. That is, nobody ever sees her put anything in or take anything out. She has never opened the rag bag telling people to take a look and see what is in it. She sleeps with the rag bag for a pillow. So it is always with her and nobody looks into it unless she lets them. And she never lets them. “Her name? Everybody calls her Rag Bag Mammy. She wears aprons with big pockets.

And though she never speaks to big grown-up people she is always glad to meet little growing people, boys and girls. And especially, most of all, she likes to meet boys and girls who say, ‘Gimme’ (once, like that) or ‘Gimme, gimme’ (twice, like that) or ‘Gimme, gimme, gimme’ (three times) or ‘Gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme’ (more times than we can count). She likes to meet the gimmes because she digs into her pockets and brings out square chocolate drops and round chocolate drops and chocolate drops shaped like a half moon, barber pole candy with red and white stripes wrapped around it, all day suckers so long they last not only all day but all this week and all next week, and different kinds of jack- stones, some that say chink-chink on the sidewalks and some that say teentsy-weentsy chink- chink when they all bunch together on the sidewalk. And sometimes if one of the gimmes is crying and feeling bad she gives the gimme a doll only as big as a child’s hand but the doll can say the alphabet and sing little Chinese Assyrian songs. “Of course,” said Hatrack the Horse, reaching his hand around to see if his hat was hanging on behind, “of course, you have to have sharp ears and listen close-up and be nice when you are listening, if you are going to hear a doll say the alphabet and sing little Chinese Assyrian songs.”

“I could hear them,” said Peter Potato Blossom Wishes. “I am a nice listener. I could hear those dolls sing the little Chinese Assyrian songs.”

“I believe you, little pal of mine,” said Hatrack. “I know you have the ears and you know how to put your ears so you hear.” “Of course, every morning and every afternoon when Rag Bag Mammy walks across the town and around the town in the Village of Hat Pins, people ask her what is in the rag bag on her back. And she answers, ‘It is a nice day we are having,’ or ‘I think the rain will stop when it stops raining, don’t you?’ Then if they ask again and beg and plead, ‘What is in the rag bag? What is in the rag bag?’ she tells them, ‘When the wind blows away the Village of Hat Pins and blows it so far away it never comes back, then—then, then, then— I will tell you what is in the rag bag.’”

“One day the wind came along and blew the Village of Hat Pins loose, and after blowing it loose, carried it high off in the sky. And the people were saying to each other, ‘Well, now we are going to hear Rag Bag Mammy tell us what is in the rag bag.’ “And the wind kept blowing, carrying the Village of Hat Pins higher and farther and farther and higher. And when at last it went away so high it came to a white cloud, the hat pins in the village all stuck out and fastened the village to the cloud so the wind couldn’t blow it any farther. “And—after a while they pulled the hat- pins out of the cloud—and the village dropped back right down where it was before. “And Rag Bag Mammy goes every morn- ing and every afternoon with the rag bag on her back across and around the town. And sometimes people say to her, ‘The next time the wind blows us away—the next time the wind will blow us so far there won’t be any cloud to fasten hat pins in—and you will have to tell us what is in the rag bag.’ And Rag Bag Mammy just answers, ‘Yes, yes—yes— yes,’ and goes on her way looking for the next boy or girl to say, ‘Gimme’ (once, like that) or ‘Gimme, gimme’ (twice, like that) or ‘Gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme’ (more times than we can count). “And if a child is crying she digs into her pockets and pulls out the doll that says the alphabet and sings little Chinese Assyrian songs.” “And,” said Peter Potato Blossom Wishes, “you have to listen close up with your ears and be nice when you are listening.” “In the Village of Hat Pins that the wind nearly blew away forever,” said Hatrack the Horse. And Peter Potato Blossom Wishes skipped away down from the little red shanty, skipped down the street, and then began walking slow saying to herself, “I love Hatrack the Horse like a grand uncle—his eyes look like lightning bugs lighting up the summer night coming out of two little doors.”

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