

How Six Pigeons Came Back to Hatrack the Horse After Many Accidents and Six Telegrams

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North American

Easy
6 min read

Six crooked ladders stood against the front of the shanty where Hatrack the Horse lived. Yellow roses all on fire were climbing up and down the ladders, up and down and crossways. And leaning out on both sides from the crooked ladders were vines of yellow roses, leaning, curving, nearly falling. Hatrack the Horse was waiting. This was the morning Wiffle the Chick was coming. Sit here on the cracker box and listen,” he said to her when she came; “listen and you will hear the roses saying, “This is climbing time for all yellow roses and climbing time is the time to climb; how did we ever learn to climb only by climbing? Listen and you will hear—st. . th. .st. .th . . st. . th. .it is the feet of the yellow roses climbing up and down and leaning out and curving and nearly falling . st. . th. . st. . th. .”

So Wiffle the the Chick sat there, early in the summer, enjoying herself, sitting on a cracker box, listening to

the yellow roses climb around the six crooked ladders. Hatrack the Horse came out. On his shoulders were two pigeons, on his hands two pigeons. And he reached his hand around behind his back where his hat was hanging and he opened the hat and showed Wiffle the Chick two pigeons in the hat. “They are lovely pigeons to look at and their eyes are full of lessons to learn,” said Wiffle the Chick. “Maybe you will tell me why you have their feet wrapped in bandages, hospital liniment bandages full of hospital liniment smells? Why do you put soft mittens on the feet of these pigeons so lovely to look at?” “They came back yesterday, they came back home,” was the answer. “They came back limping on their feet with the toes turned in so far they nearly turned backward. When they put their bleeding feet in my hands one by one each one, it was like each one was writing his name in my hand with red ink.” “Did you know they were coming?” asked Wiffle. “Every day the last six days I get a tele-gram, six telegrams from six pigeons—and at last they come home. And ever since they come home they are telling me they come be- cause they love Hatrack the Horse and the yellow climbing roses climbing over the six crooked ladders.”

Did you name your pigeons with names?” asked Wiffle. “These three, the sandy and golden brown, all named themselves by where they came from. This is Chickamauga, here is Chattanooga, and this is Chattahoochee. And the other three all got their names from me when I was feeling high and easy. This is Blue Mist, here is Bubbles, and last of all take a look at Wednesday Evening in the Twilight and the Gloaming.”

“Do you always call her Wednesday Evening in the Twilight and the Gloaming?”

“Not when I am making coffee for breakfast. If I am making coffee for breakfast then I just call her Wednesday Evening.”

“Didn’t you tie the mittens on her feet extra special nice?” Yes—she is an extra special nice pigeon. She cries for pity when she wants pity. And she shuts her eyes when she doesn’t want to look at you. And if you look deep in her eyes when her eyes are open you will see lights there exactly like the lights on the pastures and the meadows when the mist is drifting on a Wednesday evening just between the twilight and the gloaming.”

“A week ago yesterday they all went away. And they won’t tell why they went away. Somebody clipped their wings, cut off their flying feathers so they couldn’t fly—and they won’t tell why. They were six hundred miles from home—but they won’t tell how they counted the six hundred miles. A hundred miles a lay they walked, six hundred miles in a week, and they sent a telegram to me every day, one writing a telegram one day and another writing a telegram the next day—all the time walking a hundred miles a day with their toes turned in like

pigeon toes turn in. Do you wonder they needed bandages, hospital liniment bandages on their feet—and soft mittens?”

“Show me the telegrams they sent you, one every day, for six days while they were walking six hundred miles on their pigeon toes.” So Hatrack the Horse got the six telegrams. The reading on the telegrams was like this: 1. “Feet are as good as wings if you have to. Chickamauga.” 2. “If you love to go somewhere it is easy to walk. Chattanooga.” 3. “In the night sleeping you forget whether you have wings or feet or neither. Chattahoochee.” 4. “What are toes for if they don’t point to what you want? Blue Mist.” 5. “Anybody can walk hundreds of miles putting one foot ahead of the other. Bubbles.” 6. “Pity me. Far is far. Near is near. And there is no place like home when the yellow roses climb up the ladders and sing in the early summer. Pity me. Wednesday Evening in the Twilight and the Gloaming.”

“Did they have any accidents going six hundred miles walking with their little pigeon toes turned in?” asked Wiffle. “Once they had an accident,” said Hatrack, with Chattahoochee standing in his hat, Chickamauga on his right shoulder, Chattanooga on his left, and holding Blue Mist and Bubbles on his wrists. “They came to an old wooden bridge. Chattahoochee and Wednesday Evening both cried out, ‘The bridge will fall if we all walk on it the same time!’ But they were all six already on the bridge and the bridge began sagging and tumbled them all into the river. But it was good for them all to have a footbath for their feet, Wednesday Evening explained.”

“I got a suspicion you like Wednesday Evening in the Twilight and the Gloaming best of all,” spoke up Wiffle. “Well, Wednesday Evening was the only one I noticed making any mention of the yellow roses in her telegram,” Hatrack the Horse explained, as he picked up Wednesday Evening and reached her around and put her to perch on the shoulder bone on his back.

Then the old man and the girl sat on the cracker box saying nothing, only listening to the yellow roses all on fire with early summer climbing up the crooked ladders, up and down and crossways, some of them leaning out and curving and nearly falling.

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