

How Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz Came in the Moonshine Where the Potato Face Blind Man Sat with His Accordion

Carl Sandburg

from *Rootabaga Pigeons*

The sky shook a rain down one Saturday night over the people, the postoffice, and the peanut-stand in the Village of Liver-and-Onions.

And after the rain, the sky shook loose a moon so a moonshine came with gold on the rain-pools.

And a west wind came out of the west sky and shook the moon shine gold on the tops of the rainpools.

Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz came, two tough pony girls, two limber prairie girls, in the moonshine humming little humpty dumpty songs.

They came to the postoffice corner where the Potato Face Blind Man sat hugging his accordion, wondering what was next and who and why.

He was saying to himself, “Who was it told me the rats on the moon in the middle of the winter lock their mittens in ice boxes?”¹

And just then Dippy the Wisp and Slip Me Liz came flipping along saying, “It is a misty moisty evening in the moonshine, isn’t it?”

And he answered, “The moon is a round gold door with silver transoms to-night. Bumble bees and honey bees are chasing each other over the gold door of the moon and up over the silver transoms.”

Dippy the Wisp took out a bee-bag, took bees out of the bee-bag, balanced the bees on her thumb, humming a humpty dumpty song. And Slip Me Liz, looking on, joined in on the humpty dumpty song. And, of course, the bees began buzzing and buzzing their *bee* humpty dumpty song.

“Have you fastened names on them?” asked the Potato Face.

“These three on my thumb, these three special blue-violet bees, I put their names on silk white ribbons and tied the ribbons to their knees. This is Egypt—she has inkwells in her ears. This is Jesse James—he puts postage stamps on his nose. This is Spanish Onions—she likes pearl-color handkerchiefs around her yellow neck.”

“Bees belong in bee-bags, but these are different,” the old man murmured.

“Runaway bees, these are,” Dippy the Wisp went on. “They buzz away, they come buzzing back, buzing home, buzzing secrets, syllables, snitches.

“To-day, Egypt came buzzing home with her inkwells in her ears. And Egypt buzzed, ‘I flew and flew and I buzzed and buzzed far, far away, till I came where I met the Queen of the Cracked Heads with her head all cracked. And she took me by the foot and took me to the palace of the Cracked Heads with their heads all cracked.

“ ‘The palace was full of goats walking up and down the stairs, sliding on the banisters eating bingety bing clocks. Before he bites the clock and chews and swallow and eats the bingety bing clock, I noticed, each goat winds up the clock and fixes it to go off bling bling bingety bing, after he eats it down. I noticed tat. And the fat, fat, puffy goats, the fat, fat, waddly goats, had extra clocks hung on their horns—and the clocks, tired of waiting, spoke to each other in the bingety bing clock talk. I noticed that too.

¹ Actually, a green rat told this to the Potato Face Blind Man, in the first story of *Rootabaga Pigeons*, “The Skyscraper to the Moon and How the Green Rat with the Rheumatism Ran a Thousand Miles Twice.”

“ I stayed all morning and I saw them feed the big goats big hunks and the little goats little hunks and the big clocks big bings and the little clocks little bings. At last in the afternoon, the queen of the Cracked Heads came with her cracked head to say good-by to me. She was sitting on a ladder feeding baby clocks to baby alligators, winding the clocks and fixing the bingety bings, so after the baby alligators swallowed the clocks, I heard them singing bling bling bingety bing.

“ ‘And the Queen was reading the alphabet to the littlest of the baby alligators—and they were saying the alligator A B C while she was saying the A B C of the Cracked Heads. At last she said good-by to me, good-by and come again soon, good-by and stay longer next time.’

“ ‘When I went out of the door all the baby alligators climbed up the ladder and bingety blinged good-by to me. I buzzed home fast because I was lonesome. I am so, *so* glad to be home again.’ ”

The Potato Face looked up and said, “This is nice as the rats on the moon in the middle of the winter locking their mittens in the ice box. Tel us next about that blue-violet bumblebee, Jesse James.”

“Jesse James,” said Dippy the Wisp, “Jesse James came buzzing home with a postage stamp on his nose. And Jesse James buzzed, ‘I flew and I flew and buzzed and buzzed far, far away till I came where I met the King of the Paper Sacks who lives in a palace of paper sacks. I went inside the palace expecting to see paper sacks everywhere. But instead of paper sacks the palace was full of pink and purple peanuts walking up and down the stairs washing their faces, stitching handkerchiefs.’

“ ‘In the evening all the pink and purple peanuts put on their overshoes and make paper sacks. The King of the Paper Sacks walks around and around among them saying, “If anybody asks you who I am tell them I am the King of the Paper Sacks.” And one little peanut flipped up one time in the King’s face and asked, “Say it again—*who* do you think you are?” And it made the King so bitter in his feelings he reached out his hand and with a sweep and a swoop he swept fifty pink and purple peanuts into a paper sack and cried out, “A nickel a sack, a nickel a sack.” And he threw them into a trash pile of tin cans.

“ ‘When I went away he shook hands with me and said, “Good-by, Jesse James, you old buzzer, if anybody asks you tell them you saw the King of the Paper Sacks where he lives.

“ ‘When I went away from the palace, the doors and the window sills, the corners of the roofs and the eave troughs where the rain runs off, they were all full of pink and purple peanuts standing in their overshoes washing their faces, stitching handkerchiefs, calling good-by to me, good-by and come again, good-by and stay longer next time. Then I came buzzing home because I was lonesome. And I am so, *so* glad to be home again.’ ”

The Potato Face looked up again and said, “It *is* a misty moisty evening in the moonshine. Now tell us about that blue-violet honeybee, Spanish Onions.”

And Dippy the Wisp tied a slipknot in the pearl-color handkerchief around the yellow neck of Spanish Onions and said, “Spanish Onions came buzzing back home with her face dirty and scared and she told us, “I flew and flew and I buzzed and buzzed till I came where I met the Queen of the Empty Hats. She took me by the foot and took me across the City of the Empty Hats, saing under her breath, “There is a screw loose somewhere, there is a leak in the tank.” Fat rats, fat bats, fat cats, came along under empty hats and the Queen always said under her breath, “There is a screw loose somewhere, there is a leak in the tank.” In the houses, on the street, riding on the rattlers and the razz cars, the only people were hats, empty hats. When the fat rats changed hats with the fat bats, the hats were empty. When the fat bats changed *those* hats with

the fat cats, the hats were empty. I took off my hat and saw it was empty. *I began to feel like an empty hat myself.* I got scared. I jumped loose from the Queen of the Empty Hats and buzzed back home fast. I am so, *so* glad to be home again.”

The Potato Face sat hugging his accordion. He looked up and said, “Put the bees back in the bee-bag—they buzz too many secrets, syllables and snitches.”

“What do you expect when the moon is a gold door with silver transoms?” asked Slip Me Liz.

“Yes,” said Dippy the Wisp. “What do you expect when the bumblebees and the honeybees are chasing each other over the gold door of the moon and up over the silver transoms?”

And the two tough pony girls, the two limber prairie girls, went away humming a little humpty dumpty song across the moonshine gold on the tops of the rainpools.