

THE
LITTLE
RED BALLOON



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THE LITTLE RED BALLOON

by
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Donald David Anderson

To
my little pupils of
Miss Mills' School



THE LITTLE RED BALLOON

ONCE there was a Prince whose name was Littleboy, and in all his rooms and rooms full of toys,—for Princes have a great many toys, you know,—the toy he liked the very best was a little red balloon. It was the only balloon he had ever seen, for his father's kingdom was in a far-away land, and the King had sent to another country for the little red balloon.



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One day when Prince Littleboy was playing with the little red balloon, letting it float out of the window, and then drawing it in again by its long golden cord, a mosquito stung his hand, and before he thought what he was doing the pain made him let go of the cord, and away floated the little red

balloon! Up and up into the sky it went and finally lost itself among the white flaky clouds.

Then Prince Littleboy cried; and while he was crying a bird flew near the window, and seeing the little Prince in such distress, it perched on a tree near by and asked what was the matter.

Prince Littleboy told the bird that he had lost his little red balloon and that it was



the only one in the whole kingdom. He said he did not care for all his rooms and rooms full of other toys, for not one of them was as dear to him as the little red balloon.

“Oh, no,” said the bird, “yours was not the only balloon in the kingdom. Little Wee Dog has one; he has a purple balloon. If you watch down by the blue gate, sometime you will see him pass with it.”

The very next day Prince Littleboy stood at the blue gate and watched everybody that passed by; but Little Wee Dog did not come.

And the second day he watched and he *watched* by the blue gate, but Little Wee Dog did not come. And the third day he watched and he watched and he *watched* at the blue gate, and what do you think he saw?

You would never guess, would you?



Well, there came marching by a Big Black Dog, and a White Curly Dog, and then came Little Wee Dog; and he was almost a puppy.

Big Black Dog was carrying a basket, and White Curly Dog was wearing a striped shawl, and Little Wee Dog was carrying a little purple balloon,— he held the string tightly in his mouth.

“Where are you going Big Black Dog?” asked Prince Littleboy.

“I am going to a picnic in Birdsnest Wood.” answered Big Black Dog.

“May I go with you?” asked Littleboy politely, looking at Little Wee Dog’s purple balloon.

Then Big Black Dog looked at White Curly Dog, and White Curly Dog looked at Little Wee Dog, and Little Wee Dog nodded. He could not let go of the string to speak, you know, or the little purple balloon would have floated away into the sky.

Then White Curly Dog nodded too, and Big Black Dog said, gruffly but kindly: “Come along, Littleboy.”

So Prince Littleboy ran to ask his mother, the Queen.

She gave him a pretty leather lunch box with a gold key, and told him to go into the pantry and fill it with good things to eat, for the picnic.



Littleboy put into it some jam, and walnuts, and some good, good cake, and a little bottle of lemonade.

Then he kissed his Queen-Mother good-bye and promised to come home at sunset. Then he ran to where Big Black Dog and White Curly Dog and Little Wee Dog were waiting, and they all four gaily set off together.

They raced across the meadow, and up a little brown path into a wood at the



edge of the
Palace grounds.

“Is this Birdsnest Wood?” asked Littleboy, and Little Wee Dog held the string of his purple balloon tight between his teeth and nodded his head.

So Big Black Dog set down his basket under a tulip tree, and White Curly Dog spread her striped shawl on the ground for them all to sit on, but Little Wee Dog just stood still and held the string of his purple balloon tight between his teeth, and looked at Prince Littleboy. What do you suppose he meant by doing that?



Prince Littleboy did not know, but he wished very much to hold Little Wee Dog's purple balloon, so he asked politely, "May I hold the string for you?"

Still Little Wee Dog did not speak, but kept looking at Prince Littleboy. And when Littleboy remembered how he had let go of the cord of his own red balloon and it had floated up into the sky, he knew what Little Wee Dog meant and he asked:

"May I tie the string to a bush for you?"

Then Little Wee Dog nodded his head and Prince Littleboy took the string from Little Wee Dog's mouth, and held it very tightly between his thumb and finger. Then he tied it to a bush so that the little purple balloon could not get loose and go soaring up

into the blue sky among the white flaky clouds. And you can imagine he took very special pains to see that it was tied securely.



"Thank you," said Little Wee Dog, after he had opened and shut his jaws once or twice, and lapped his pink tongue out and in.

"You are welcome," said Littleboy.

He was very pleasant and polite but he did not really feel at all happy. He was thinking and thinking about his own red balloon, that had slipped out of his fingers and floated away, up and up, quite out of sight. At last he said:

“Once upon a time I had a balloon too, a red balloon.”

“You had?” said Big Black Dog, looking surprised.

“You *had?*” said White Curly Dog, looking much surprised.

“*You had?*” said Little Wee Dog, looking most surprised of all. “Then where is it?”

At this, Littleboy felt very sad, indeed, and Little Wee Dog said: “Come tell us all about it.” So they all sat down on the striped shawl and Prince Littleboy told them the whole story. How, when he was holding the golden cord of his red balloon between his thumb and finger while it floated out of the window, a mosquito stung him on the hand so that he let go the cord, and the red balloon



floated up into the sky, quite out of sight behind the white and flaky clouds.

When he had finished, Big Black Dog said: "That was a pity."

And White Curly Dog said: "That *was* a pity."

And Little Wee Dog said: "Never mind, we will go up and get it."

"How can we get it?" said Littleboy. "Tell me how."

But Little Wee Dog was looking at the lunch baskets. "Wait and see," he said. "The balloon ascension comes right after lunch."

"Oh, oh," cried Littleboy, "is there going to be a balloon ascension?"

"Of course," answered Little Wee Dog, "that is what we came here for."

"Who is going up with it?" asked Littleboy.

"Just you wait and see," answered Little Wee Dog, and he pranced round and round the little purple balloon which was tied to the bush.

"We might have luncheon right away," said Big Black Dog.

"We might have luncheon right away," echoed Curly White Dog, and they both

looked at Prince Littleboy's nice leather lunch box and began to unpack their own basket.



Littleboy picked up his lunch box and was going to unlock it with his little golden key that his Queen-Mother had given him. But when he put his hand in his pocket for the key, *it was not there!* Then he remembered that he had laid it on the window-sill while he ran to kiss his mother good-bye and had forgotten to bring it with him.

“Now what shall I do!” said Littleboy.

“*What* shall he do?” asked Big Black Dog, anxiously.

“What *shall* he do?” echoed White Curly Dog.

“Send for it, right away,” suggested Little Wee Dog, jumping up.

“But whom shall I send?” asked Littleboy.



“Send Brown Snail,” said Big Black Dog.

“Too slow,” answered Little Wee Dog.

“Send Caterpillar,” suggested White Curly Dog.

“He will get overheated if he hurries,” objected Little Wee Dog.



"Then who *can* we send?" asked Littleboy, almost ready to cry.

"Why, send Grasshopper, of course," answered Little Wee Dog.

So he called Grasshopper, who happened to be hopping by, and told him to go to the Palace and get Prince Littleboy's tiny gold key to his pretty leather lunch box. Grasshopper started off: Hop! zim! hop! zim-m! all the way to the Palace, and there he found Prince Littleboy's gold key lying on the window-sill.

Grasshopper sipped a little glass of raspberry-shrub that the Queen gave him to drink after his hurried trip. Then the Queen tied the key tightly on his back, and he hopped away to Birdsnest Wood: Hop! zim!

hop! zim-m! Soon he reached the place where Big Black Dog and White Curly Dog and Little Wee Dog were sitting on the striped shawl, waiting for their picnic, while beside them, tied to a bush was the little purple balloon.

Prince Littleboy took the gold key off Grasshopper's back and unlocked his pretty leather lunch box. And out of it he took the jam and the walnuts and the good, good



cake; and last of all he took out the bottle of lemonade, and gave a tiny tumbler of it to Grasshopper for having gone on his errand for him.

Grasshopper thanked Littleboy and drank the lemonade, and then started off again to attend to his own affairs. Hop! zim! hop! zim-m! and soon he was out of hearing.

Then Big Black Dog and White Curly Dog and Little Wee Dog and Prince Littleboy all sat down and ate their luncheon. It was very good.

Now would you like to know who went up in the air with the little purple balloon? Then read the second part of this story and you will find out.

PART II.

WHEN Big Black Dog and White Curly Dog and Little Wee Dog and Prince Littleboy had finished eating all there was in Littleboy's leather lunch box and Big Black Dog's basket and had drunk the lemonade, Littleboy said again to Little Wee Dog:

"Who is going up with the little purple balloon?"

But Little Wee Dog pranced round and round the purple balloon that was tied to a bush, and said:

"Wait and see!"

So Littleboy sat down to wait. And after White Curly Dog had cleared away all the crumbs, and had shaken her striped shawl, and had set the basket and the lunch box against a tree, ready to take home, all three of the dogs put their noses together and barked and barked.

It sounded very loud and Littleboy wondered whom they were calling, but before he had time to ask he saw something shimmering in the air. And as quick as you could say "Jack Robinson," a lot of little people dressed in green stood before him and the dogs stopped barking.

"How *soon* do they start?" asked Big Black Dog, and "How *soon do* they start?" asked White Curly Dog, and "How soon do



we start?" asked Little Wee Dog, who was tugging at the string of the purple balloon tied to a bush.

"I shall have to grow a great deal before I can go," said Little Wee Dog.

Littleboy thought that would take a very long time and began to feel that he should never see the balloon ascension. But one of the little people in green (and they were *very* little people) asked the others, "Where is Feefay?"

"She is late in getting here," answered the other little people. But just at that moment there came the tiniest little lady you can think of, and she was riding, side-saddle, on a white bumble bee.

She jumped off her bee and stood by Little

Wee Dog; and beside her he looked as big as a man.

"How little do you want to grow?" she asked Little Wee Dog.

"I want to ride up to the clouds with that, please," he answered, pointing to the purple balloon, tied to a bush.

"Do you want to go too?" she asked Littleboy.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed, "if I may go back to mother at sunset."

Then the little lady reached up very high and plucked a tiny seed fern, but in her hand it looked as big as a Christmas tree. Once more she mounted her bumble bee and when he had carried her high enough, she reached over and tapped Little Wee Dog softly, three



times on the head with the fern. Next she tapped Littleboy softly on the head with the seed fern, and both of them began to grow smaller and smaller, until pretty soon they found they had grown small enough to go up in the little purple balloon.



When they turned around they saw that the little people in green had plaited a car of grass stems, and fastened it to the purple balloon, and everything was ready for the ride. So Little Wee Dog (who was *very* wee, indeed, by this time) and Prince Littleboy and three of the little people in green, got into the car, and Big Black Dog loosened the purple balloon from the bush, and off they sailed into the air, with Feefay on her bumble bee beside them, holding a tiny rope to guide the balloon.

And Big Black Dog and White Curly Dog stood at the edge of Birdsnest Wood and watched them.

They sailed and they sailed up there in the air, and it was very blue and sunny and pleasant. But by and by one of the little people in green said, "I see a big cloud." Another of the little people in green said, "I see a big cloud too;" and a third one said, "If it rains, what shall we do?"



"Ask Feefay to carry us out into a sunbeam, of course," said Little Wee Dog, without seeming to care at all, and he reached out of the car and patted the bumble bee.

So Feefay pulled the rope that guided the purple balloon, and she turned the bumble bee about, and away they went, out from under the big cloud and right into a warm, bright sunbeam, where no drops fell at all.

They sat there and laughed, in the yellow light of the sunbeam, waiting for the shower to be over. And they watched the drops fall

slower and slower out of the big cloud, until every bit of rain had fallen and then a beautiful rainbow came. When at last the rainbow faded and the big grey cloud had disappeared, they saw something else. What do you suppose it was? It was the one thing in all the world that Prince Littleboy most wanted,—his own little red balloon, floating up there in the sky, dangling its long golden cord. The grey cloud had been hiding it all the time.

Littleboy cried: "*Oh*, my little red balloon!"

And the little green people cried out: "*Oh*, his little *red* balloon!"

But Little Wee Dog said: "Feefay will help us get it." And away they went after it,

so fast that the wings of the white bumble bee went whippity-whiz, like a pin wheel.

They went so fast that they were getting quite close to the little red balloon when a breeze that happened along caught it, and it began going much faster than ever they could go. Littleboy felt sure they would never catch up with it.

But when he was feeling very sad, indeed, the same little breeze changed its mind, for it caught the purple balloon with the little green people and Little Wee Dog and Littleboy, and made them go very fast; so fast that the wings of the white bumble bee went whippity-whiz, whippity-whiz, until they buzzed louder than a spinning top. The little red balloon began to look very

near and Littleboy began to feel happy.

At last, they were right under the golden cord of the red balloon and Littleboy put out his hand, but he did not catch it. Then the little green people put out their hands, but not one of them could catch it. The Little Wee Dog waited, and finally his clean white teeth went snip! snap! and there was the golden cord of the little red balloon held fast and safe in Little Wee Dog's mouth!

Feefay on the white bumble bee clapped her hands, and all the little green people clapped their hands, while Littleboy laughed and laughed because he was so happy. But Little Wee Dog never laughed at all. He was holding his jaws tight shut on the golden cord of the little red balloon, but he wagged



his tail so fast that he nearly tipped over the grass-stem car.

Above all their laughter they thought they heard someone calling and they looked down. Sure enough, there below, on the tippy-top of the tulip tree was a red squirrel, calling loudly and searching all about with his bright eyes. After he had winked and blinked a minute he spied Littleboy, and then he sat up on his hind feet on the tippy-top branch of the tulip tree and said:



“Littleboy, Littleboy,
I’m from your home,
Your Queen-Mother told me
She wants you to come.”



Then Littleboy looked up at the sky, and, sure enough, it was almost sunset.

So while Little Wee Dog held fast to the golden cord of the little red balloon, Feefay on her bumble bee pulled the rope and guided the purple balloon back to Birdsnest Wood.

And there they found Big Black Dog and White Curly Dog waiting for them. And White Curly Dog had thrown her striped shawl around her, for the air was growing cool.

As soon as Feefay drew the balloon to the ground, the little people in green tumbled out

and scampered off, laughing. But Little Wee Dog and Prince Littleboy waited to be made their proper size again.

Feefay leaned down from her bumble bee and picked a white clover blossom, and with it she tapped Little Wee Dog three times softly on the head. Then she tapped Littleboy three times softly on the head, and they both began to grow larger until they had gone back to their proper size.

Then Little Wee Dog and Littleboy thanked Feefay for their nice balloon ride, and she rode off on her white bumble bee, throwing kisses to them.

Now Big Black Dog and White Curly Dog and Little Wee Dog and Prince Littleboy gathered up the basket and the striped shawl



and the nice leather lunch box with the gold key. Little Wee Dog took the string of the little purple balloon fast between his teeth, and Prince Littleboy took the golden cord of the little red balloon tightly between his thumb and finger, and they all started off together, trotting down the little brown path to home and mother.





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