Little balloons. Entire worlds.

Twelve comic adaptations of stories by Pierce O'Dell

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Each comic is followed by its complete, unchanged original edition.

Red Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Red Balloon loved bad ideas. Not terrible ideas. Not mean ideas. Just the kind of ideas people said no to before he finished explaining them.

He liked rooftops. He liked ramps. He liked warning signs. Especially warning signs.



02

A sign hung across it. BRIDGE CLOSED DO NOT CROSS

The bridge was not very long. The creek was not very deep. The sign was very serious. That combination interested him.

One board in the middle was missing.



03

He was not crossing. Not yet. He was measuring with confidence.



04

He was a balloon. He had floated over the gap. Not jumped. Not leaped. Not risked anything. Just floated.

That was disappointing. The Red Balloon did not like being disappointed. Especially by physics.



05

Past a fence with another sign. KEEP OUT

Behind the fence was a small bike ramp. Not a professional ramp. Not a safe ramp. The kind of ramp someone built with plywood, bad math, and too much belief.

A kid on a bike stared at it from ten feet away. The kid shook his head. "Nope."



06

The plywood creaked in the breeze. A loose nail stuck out near the side. The Red Balloon noticed it. That made the ramp feel more official.

The kid on the bike watched from the sidewalk. "You're not really gonna do that."



07

The Red Balloon shot up the ramp. The plywood shook. The loose nail waited. The kid held his breath.

For one perfect second, he was not a balloon floating over a bad ramp. He was a legend.



08

"That was awesome!" The Red Balloon bobbed once. Which was the balloon version of agreeing completely.



09

"I'm still not doing it."

The kid was still staring. Not scared anymore. Just impressed.

The Red Balloon drifted away like he had somewhere dangerous to be.

The complete original story

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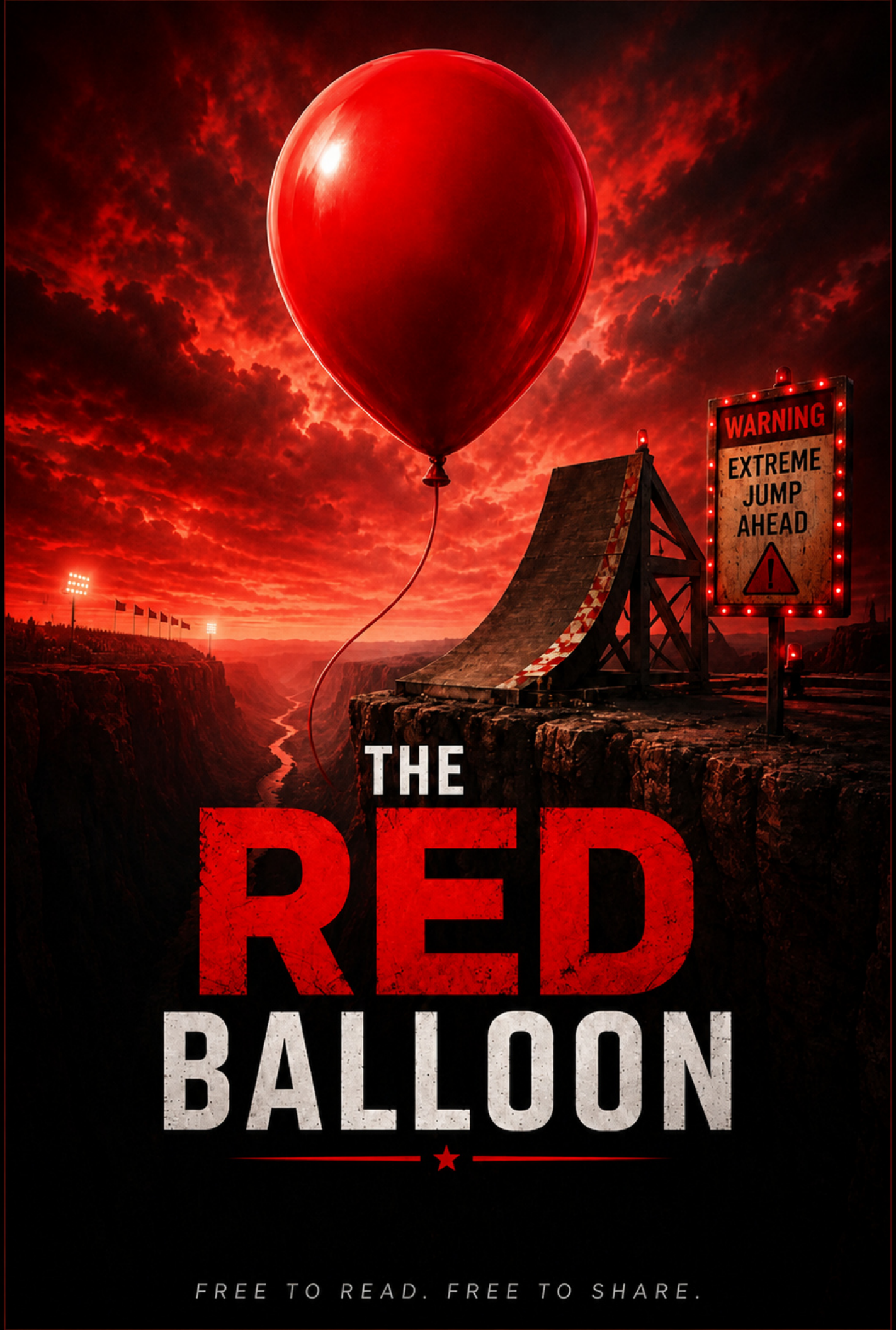

THE RED BALLOON

FREE TO READ. FREE TO SHARE.

The Red Balloon loved bad ideas.

Not terrible ideas.

Not mean ideas.

Just the kind of ideas people said no to before he finished explaining them.

He liked rooftops.

He liked ramps.

He liked warning signs.

Especially warning signs.

They made things feel official.

One morning, the Red Balloon floated past a playground.

Near the back was a small wooden bridge.

It crossed over a dry creek bed.

A sign hung across it.

BRIDGE CLOSED

DO NOT CROSS

The Red Balloon stopped.

The bridge was not very long.

The creek was not very deep.

The sign was very serious.

That combination interested him.

He floated closer.

One board in the middle was missing.

The Red Balloon stared at the gap.

Then drifted back a little.

Then forward.

Then back again.

He was not crossing.

Not yet.

He was measuring with confidence.

A breeze moved behind him.
The Red Balloon leaned forward.
The gap waited.
The sign waited.
The creek bed waited.
Even the wood chips seemed interested.
The Red Balloon floated back one more time.
Farther this time.
Then he launched forward.
Across the bridge.
Toward the gap.
Over the missing board.
Past the warning sign.
For half a second, the Red Balloon felt incredible.
Then he remembered something.
He was a balloon.
He had floated over the gap.
Not jumped.
Not leaped.
Not risked anything.
Just floated.
The Red Balloon looked back at the bridge.
Then at the sign.
Then at the gap.
That was disappointing.
The Red Balloon did not like being disappointed.
Especially by physics.
He floated away from the playground.
Past a sidewalk.

Past a parking lot.

Past a fence with another sign.

KEEP OUT

The Red Balloon stopped.

Now that was better.

Behind the fence was a small bike ramp.

Not a professional ramp.

Not a safe ramp.

The kind of ramp someone built with plywood, bad math, and too much belief.

A kid on a bike stared at it from ten feet away.

The kid shook his head.

"Nope."

The Red Balloon understood.

Some ideas were not for everyone.

The Red Balloon floated over the fence.

The sign had said keep out.

It had not said keep up.

Which seemed important.

He drifted toward the ramp.

The plywood creaked in the breeze.

A loose nail stuck out near the side.

The Red Balloon noticed it.

That made the ramp feel more official.

The kid on the bike watched from the sidewalk.

"You're not really gonna do that."

The Red Balloon floated to the bottom of the ramp.

Then slowly backed up.

The kid stepped closer.

The Red Balloon backed up more.
The kid whispered, "No way."
The Red Balloon liked the sound of that.
Then the wind came.
The Red Balloon shot forward.
The Red Balloon shot up the ramp.
The plywood shook.
The loose nail waited.
The kid held his breath.
The Red Balloon rose higher.
And higher.
And higher.
For one perfect second, he was not a balloon floating over a bad ramp.
He was a legend.
A daredevil.
A tiny red Evel Knievel with no motorcycle and absolutely no plan.
He cleared the ramp.
He cleared the fence.
He cleared the kid.
Then he drifted down on the other side.
Perfectly.
The kid stared.
The Red Balloon floated very still.
Then the kid shouted.
"That was awesome!"
The Red Balloon bobbed once.
Which was the balloon version of agreeing completely.
The kid looked at the ramp.
Then at the Red Balloon.

Then back at the ramp.
"I'm still not doing it."
The Red Balloon turned slightly.
Just enough to look back.
The kid was still staring.
Not scared anymore.
Just impressed.
The Red Balloon floated a little higher.
The sun was dropping behind the trees.
The warning sign moved in the breeze.
The ramp sat there quietly.
The Red Balloon drifted away like he had somewhere dangerous to be.

THANK YOU FOR READING.

If this one made your stomach jump, feel free to pass it along.

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Ember Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Ember Balloon was tied to a fighter jet. Not near it. Not beside it. To it.

His string was wrapped around a small metal piece near the wing, which was probably not where a balloon was supposed to be.

But the Ember Balloon did not know that. He had been waiting for this.



02

Then the jet launched. The Ember Balloon snapped backward. Wind slapped against his round side. The runway blurred. The sound swallowed everything.

YES.



03

The Ember Balloon was flying faster than any balloon had any business flying. He loved every second of it.

The jet climbed. The wind roared. The string held. The Ember Balloon shook with joy. This is awesome.



04

Far above the runway, a bird flew across the sky. In its beak was a small shiny button.

It was the kind of button that looked like it had already caused problems somewhere else.

Then the bird let go.



05

The button kept falling. Down. Down. Down. The sunlight flashed off its edge.

The Ember Balloon pulled against his string. The button dropped straight toward him.



06

Pop. ...

The complete original story

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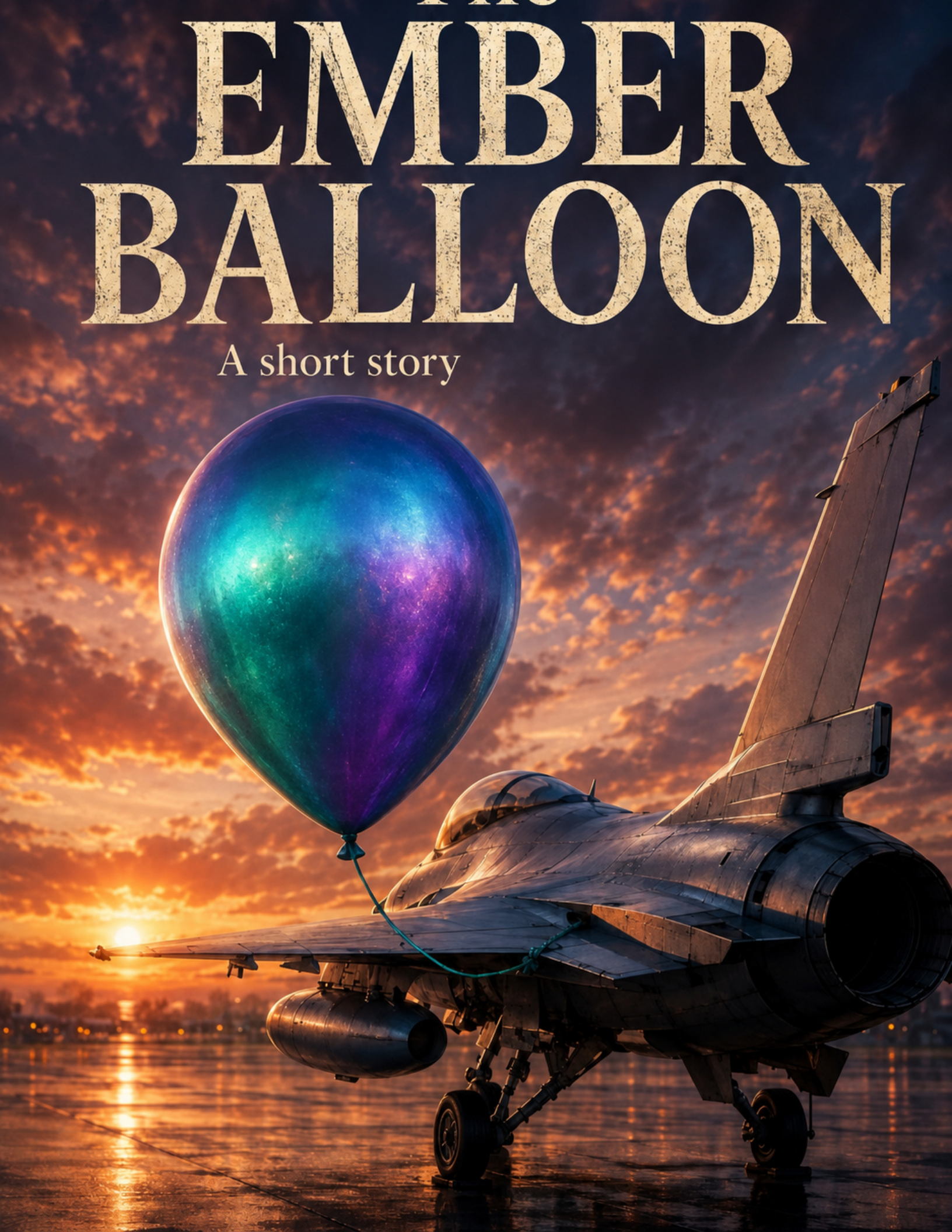
THE EMBER BALLOON

A short story



The Ember Balloon was tied to a fighter jet.

Not near it.

Not beside it.

To it.

His string was wrapped around a small metal piece near the wing, which was

probably not where a balloon was supposed to be.

But the Ember Balloon did not know that.

He had been waiting for this.

The ground trembled.

The engine began to whine.

Low at first.

Then louder.

Then deeper.

The Ember Balloon shook in place.

This is it.

The engine's whine deepened into a growl.

Heat rippled through the air.

The jet began to hum like something alive.

The Ember Balloon trembled with excitement.

The runway stretched out ahead.

This is what I've been waiting for.

Then the jet launched.

The Ember Balloon snapped backward.

Wind slapped against his round side.

The runway blurred.

The sound swallowed everything.

YES.

The jet screamed forward.

The Ember Balloon whipped and shook and pulled against the string like he had

been born for this exact bad idea.

They lifted off the ground.

The earth dropped away.

The sky opened.

The Ember Balloon was flying faster than any balloon had any business flying.

He loved every second of it.

The jet climbed.

The wind roared.

The string held.

The Ember Balloon shook with joy.

This is awesome.

Far above the runway, a bird flew across the sky.

In its beak was a small shiny button.

It was the kind of button that looked like it had already caused problems somewhere else.

The bird flapped higher.

The button caught the sunlight.

Just for one second, the whole world seemed to zoom in on it.

Then the bird let go.

The button fell.

Down.

Down.

Down.

It spun through the air.

The jet roared beneath it.

The Ember Balloon was still laughing in the wind.

The button kept falling.

Down.

Down.

Down.

The sunlight flashed off its edge.

The Ember Balloon pulled against his string.

The button dropped straight toward him.

Pop.

• • •

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons should probably not be near engines.

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Gold Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Gold Balloon lived on the Great Wall of China. Not near it. On it.

A little kid had tied him to a stone post one windy afternoon. Then the kid walked away with a juice box and no long-term plan.

He counted tourists.



02

The Gold Balloon noticed this immediately. And, to his credit, understood the situation perfectly wrong.

They had come to see him. Obviously. Why else would they keep stopping every few feet and lifting their phones?



03

One guide held up a flag and started explaining the history of the wall. The Gold Balloon listened politely. But he was pretty sure the group had already figured out the main attraction.



04

A man with a large camera crouched down low for a better shot. The Gold Balloon turned slightly in the wind.

Showtime.

The camera clicked. Then clicked again. Then again.



05

A woman looked at the sunset and whispered, "Beautiful."

The Gold Balloon looked around. There was nobody else nearby shiny enough to assume she meant them.



06

The Great Wall grew quiet again. The stones cooled. The wind softened.

"I can't wait to see who shows up to see me tomorrow."

The complete original story

The following pages preserve the original edition unchanged, including its closing material. Its page numbers and format belong to that original edition.

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The Gold Balloon

A short story



The Gold Balloon lived on the Great Wall of China.

Not near it.

On it.

A little kid had tied him to a stone post one windy afternoon.

Then the kid walked away with a juice box and no long-term plan.

That had been weeks ago.

Maybe months.

The Gold Balloon was not counting.

He had a better system.

He counted tourists.

And there were a lot of them.

Every morning, they came climbing up the long stone path.

Cameras.

Hats.

Water bottles.

Snacks.

That very specific look people get when they are about to see something famous.

The Gold Balloon noticed this immediately.

And, to his credit, understood the situation perfectly wrong.

They had come to see him.

Obviously.

Why else would they keep stopping every few feet and lifting their phones?

The Great Wall stretched over the hills in both directions.

Stone.

Watchtowers.

Mountains.

Clouds.

History.

The Gold Balloon had seen all of it.

It was fine.

But he was gold.

That felt more important.

The first time a tourist took a picture with him in the corner, the Gold Balloon

became very still.

Professional still.

The kind of stillness that said, yes, take your time.

I know what I bring to this location.

More tourists came.

More pictures.

Some smiled.

Some posed.

Some turned sideways for no clear reason.

The Gold Balloon admired their dedication.

One man stood with his family and held up two fingers.

The Gold Balloon floated proudly beside him.

A woman pointed at the mountains.

The Gold Balloon assumed she was telling someone where the best angle was for

his shine.

A little girl saw him tied to the post and laughed.

The Gold Balloon loved that.

He had always connected well with his younger fans.

By noon, the wall was crowded.

Tour groups moved through like schools of fish.

Hats everywhere.

Sneakers everywhere.

One guide held up a flag and started explaining the history of the wall.

The Gold Balloon listened politely.

But he was pretty sure the group had already figured out the main attraction.

A man with a large camera crouched down low for a better shot.

The Gold Balloon turned slightly in the wind.

Showtime.

The camera clicked.

Then clicked again.

Then again.

The Gold Balloon felt wonderful.

Some balloons might have been overwhelmed by that kind of attention.

The Gold Balloon felt it was only fair.

Later that afternoon, a woman sat on the stone ledge and took a slow panoramic

video.

The Gold Balloon appeared in it for almost three full seconds.

He considered that generous.

A child reached toward him.

The father pulled out his phone.

Another picture.

Another memory.

Another life improved by good taste.

The wind picked up near sunset.

The mountains softened.

The sky turned warm.

Orange.

Pink.

Gold.

For a moment, even the stones of the wall seemed to glow.
The tourists stopped walking so fast.
More phones came out.
More smiles.
More pictures.
The Gold Balloon floated higher and tried not to act surprised.
This had become a very successful evening.
A woman looked at the sunset and whispered, "Beautiful."
The Gold Balloon looked around.
There was nobody else nearby shiny enough to assume she meant them.
A final group stopped before heading back down the wall.
One of them turned and held up a phone.
The Gold Balloon made sure he was in the shot.
That was the cover photo.
He could feel it.
By the end of the day, the sun started to fall behind the mountains.
The tourists adjusted their hats.
Checked their bags.
Took their last pictures.
Then started heading back down the path.
The Great Wall grew quiet again.
The stones cooled.
The wind softened.
The Gold Balloon floated above his little post, watching the last group disappear
around the bend.
He felt tired.
But in a good way.
It had been a big day.

A lot of people had come to see him.
Some had traveled very far.
Some had brought cameras.
Some had brought snacks.
One man had brought a tripod.
That felt serious.
The Gold Balloon looked out across the empty wall.
Then across the mountains.
Then up at the fading sky.
He nodded to himself.
"I can't wait to see who shows up to see me
tomorrow."

• • •

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons visit famous places. Some believe they are the famous place.

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Gray Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Gray Balloon lived on a mountain. Not near the top. At the top.

The Gray Balloon had seen all of it. None of it impressed him. "Too far away," he would mutter.



02

One woman stood near the edge and whispered, "Wow."

The Gray Balloon looked out across the mountains. Pine trees. Clouds. Sunlight. A hawk drifting through the air. "Bit repetitive," he said.



03

The woman looked up at the Gray Balloon. "Best lunch view ever."

The Gray Balloon looked at the sandwich. "Bread's a little dry."

The woman laughed so hard she almost dropped it.



04

Later that week, a man climbed all the way to the top just to watch the sunset. He sat on a rock. Crossed his legs. Took a deep breath. And said, "This is perfect."

The Gray Balloon looked at the sunset. Orange sky. Pink clouds. Golden light across the lake. "Too colorful," he said.

The man looked up. "What?" The Gray Balloon turned slightly in the wind. "Nothing."



05

The whole world became gray. For the first time all day, the Gray Balloon looked interested.

"Well," the hiker said, "this is disappointing."

"This is nice."



06

Then a bird landed on the branch beside him. The Gray Balloon looked at it. The bird looked at the Gray Balloon. The bird chirped once.

The Gray Balloon frowned. "Too loud."

The complete original story

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The Gray Balloon



Free to read. Free to share.

The Gray Balloon lived on a mountain.

Not near the top.

At the top.

Tied to a tall pine tree where the wind was colder, the air was cleaner, and the

view stretched so far it almost looked fake.

The Gray Balloon did not care.

Every morning, the sky turned gold.

Every evening, the clouds rolled purple and orange across the horizon.

On clear days, you could see the lake.

On very clear days, you could see the town.

On rare days, you could even see the highway.

The Gray Balloon had seen all of it.

None of it impressed him.

"Too far away," he would mutter.

Hikers came up the mountain all the time.

They climbed for hours.

Sweating.

Complaining.

Stopping every ten minutes to drink water and say things like, "We're almost

there."

They were almost never almost there.

Then they reached the top.

And every single time, they did the same thing.

They gasped.

They smiled.

They pulled out their phones.

One woman stood near the edge and whispered, "Wow."

The Gray Balloon looked at her.

"What?"

She did not answer.

She was busy taking seventeen pictures of the exact same view.

The Gray Balloon looked out across the mountains.

Pine trees.

Clouds.

Sunlight.

A hawk drifting through the air.

"Bit repetitive," he said.

A little boy hiked up one afternoon with his dad.

When they reached the top, the boy pointed at the Gray Balloon.

"Cool."

The Gray Balloon looked down at him.

"I've been better."

The boy laughed.

His dad took a picture.

That happened a lot.

People liked the Gray Balloon much more than he liked them.

Some tourists waved.

The Gray Balloon rarely waved back.

Mostly because he was a balloon.

One morning, a couple reached the top carrying sandwiches.

They sat under the pine tree.

The woman looked up at the Gray Balloon.

"Best lunch view ever."

The Gray Balloon looked at the sandwich.

"Bread's a little dry."

The woman laughed so hard she almost dropped it.

Later that week, a man climbed all the way to the top just to watch the sunset.

He sat on a rock.

Crossed his legs.

Took a deep breath.

And said, "This is perfect."

The Gray Balloon looked at the sunset.

Orange sky.

Pink clouds.

Golden light across the lake.

"Too colorful," he said.

The man looked up.

"What?"

The Gray Balloon turned slightly in the wind.

"Nothing."

A little girl reached the top with her family.

She pointed at the Gray Balloon.

"He's cute."

The Gray Balloon did not move.

"I'm not cute."

The little girl smiled.

"He's grumpy."

The Gray Balloon floated a little lower.

"I'm gray."

By afternoon, more hikers reached the top.

They took pictures.

They pointed at the lake.

They said things like, "You can see everything from up here."

The Gray Balloon looked out at everything.

Mountains.
Trees.
Clouds.
Blue sky.
A lake shining so bright it looked like someone had spilled sunlight.
"Needs work," he said.
Then the weather changed.
A cold wind moved through the pine trees.
The blue sky faded.
The sunlight disappeared.
Clouds rolled over the mountain.
Thick.
Heavy.
Gray.
The hikers groaned.
"Oh no," someone said. "The view is gone."
The Gray Balloon looked around slowly.
The mountains softened.
The lake vanished.
The trees turned quiet.
The whole world became gray.
For the first time all day, the Gray Balloon looked interested.
A hiker pulled his jacket tighter.
"Well," the hiker said, "this is disappointing."
The Gray Balloon looked at the fog.
The soft gray clouds.
The quiet trees.
The mountain disappearing into itself.
Finally, he nodded.

"This is nice."

The hikers stared at him.

The Gray Balloon floated calmly in the cold wind.

Nobody took pictures.

Nobody gasped.

Nobody said the view was perfect.

The whole mountain was quiet.

Gray.

Still.

Exactly right.

Then a bird landed on the branch beside him.

The Gray Balloon looked at it.

The bird looked at the Gray Balloon.

The bird chirped once.

The Gray Balloon frowned.

"Too loud."

• • •

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons see the best view in the world. Some still complain about the bird.

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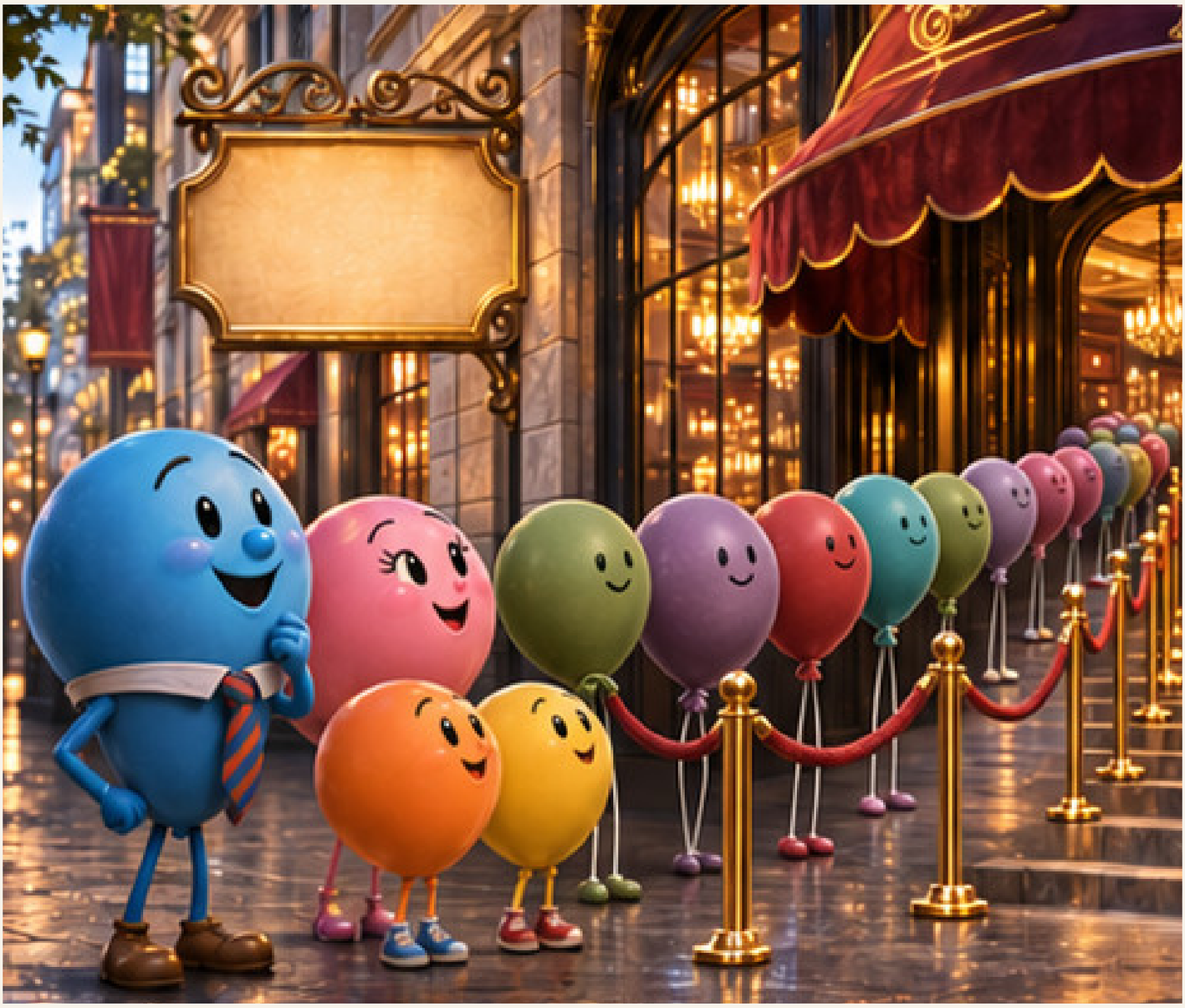
Dad Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Dad Balloon had one goal. A steak.

The first steakhouse had a two-hour wait. The second steakhouse had a three-hour wait.

His family kept apologizing. "Sorry." "It's okay." "We wanted today to be special." "It's okay."

The steak was nice. But he already had his favorite people.



02

The sign simply said: TUNNEL STEAKHOUSE $5.99

"$5.99?" he said. "That either means we found the greatest restaurant in history..." He paused. "...or we're about to be featured in a documentary."

Naturally, they went inside.



03

Eventually they reached a round hibachi table. The room looked normal. Bright lights. Friendly chef. Menus. Water glasses.

"See?" he said. "Perfectly normal."

The water arrived. The menus opened.



04

CLUNK. The entire table dropped through the floor.

The family screamed. The Dad Balloon screamed. The chef screamed.

Nobody knew why the chef screamed. He worked there.

The table plunged through darkness. Past flashing lights. Past giant gears. Past a monkey riding a bicycle.



05

Then the table landed. Everything stopped. Silence.

They were sitting in the middle of a gigantic underground circus.

A giraffe wearing sunglasses. And off to the side sat a massive bear.

The bear looked up for exactly two seconds. Then went back to eating honey. The Dad Balloon respected that.



06

Then a giant banner unfolded from the ceiling. SURPRISE! HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

Then another banner dropped. DINNER IS ON US!

Suddenly food rolled in from every direction imaginable. Steak. Potatoes. Steak. Dessert. More steak. A suspicious amount of steak.

The Dad Balloon smiled. "Thank goodness."



07

"What?" he said. "I've been chasing this steak all day."

The chef pointed dramatically toward another steak. The Dad Balloon nodded. "That's the kind of leadership I like."

The meal lasted for hours. The circus performed. The crowd celebrated.



08

Later that night, the family headed home. Everyone was exhausted. Everyone was happy. The kids fell asleep. The house got quiet.

His favorite part had been the same thing it always had been. Being with them. Being Dad.

"What a great day." "What a great day to be a dad."

The complete original story

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BALLOON WORLD
SPECIAL EDITION
The Dad Balloon
A story about steak, surprises, and what really matters.
TUNNEL STEAKHOUSE
← $5.99 →
IF YOU CAN READ THIS, YOU'RE TOO CLOSE.
STEAK. DARK. DELICIOUS? PROBABLY.
Sometimes the best days start in the most unexpected places.

The Dad Balloon had one goal.
A steak.
That's it.
Not a boat.
Not a watch.
Not a new grill.
Just a steak.
A good steak.
Medium rare.
Maybe a baked potato.
Maybe.
He wasn't picky.
The problem was that apparently every other balloon in town had the exact same idea.
The first steakhouse had a two-hour wait.
The second steakhouse had a three-hour wait.
The third steakhouse had a line so long nobody could even find the front door.
His family kept apologizing.
"Sorry."
"It's okay."
"We wanted today to be special."
"It's okay."
"We can keep looking."
"It's okay."
The Dad Balloon meant it.
He wasn't upset.
The truth was he would have been perfectly happy eating cheeseburgers at home.

The steak was nice.

But he already had his favorite people.

Still...

A steak sounded pretty good.

Especially after driving around town for what felt like seventeen years.

Then they found it.

A tiny building squeezed between two larger buildings.

Half the lights on the sign worked.

The other half looked retired.

The sign simply said:

TUNNEL STEAKHOUSE

$5.99

The family stared at it.

The Dad Balloon stared at it.

"$5.99?" he said.

"That either means we found the greatest restaurant in history..."

He paused.

"...or we're about to be featured in a documentary."

Nobody felt better after that.

Naturally, they went inside.

The tunnel started immediately.

Stone walls.

Lanterns.

Strange shadows.

The kind of place that looked like Batman should already be investigating it.

The family followed the tunnel deeper underground.

Past old doors.

Past mysterious hallways.

Past a sign that simply said:

DEFINITELY A STEAKHOUSE

That somehow made everything more suspicious.

Eventually they reached a round hibachi table.

The room looked normal.

Bright lights.

Friendly chef.

Menus.

Water glasses.

The Dad Balloon finally relaxed.

"See?" he said.

"Perfectly normal."

The chef smiled.

The family sat down.

The water arrived.

The menus opened.

The Dad Balloon leaned back in his chair.

For the first time all day, he felt like he might actually get his steak.

Then-

CLUNK.

The entire table dropped through the floor.

AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

Down.

Down.

Down.

The family screamed.

The Dad Balloon screamed.

The chef screamed.

Nobody knew why the chef screamed.
He worked there.
The table plunged through darkness.
Past flashing lights.
Past giant gears.
Past a monkey riding a bicycle.
The Dad Balloon was pretty sure he saw that.
Then the table landed.
Everything stopped.
Silence.
The Dad Balloon slowly opened one eye.
They were sitting in the middle of a gigantic underground circus.
Lions.
Elephants.
Acrobats.
Jugglers.
Fire breathers.
A giraffe wearing sunglasses.
And off to the side sat a massive bear.
The bear had honey all over his face.
Honey all over his paws.
Honey on his chair.
Honey on things that should not have had honey on them.
The bear looked up for exactly two seconds.
Then went back to eating honey.
The Dad Balloon respected that.
Thousands of balloons filled the arena.
Everyone was staring directly at them.
The Dad Balloon looked around.

"Well."

Nobody had a response to that.

A spotlight suddenly hit the center ring.

Music exploded through the arena.

Trumpets blared.

Confetti launched from somewhere.

Then a giant banner unfolded from the ceiling.

SURPRISE!

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

The entire arena erupted.

The crowd cheered.

The elephants cheered.

The acrobats cheered.

The giraffe adjusted his sunglasses.

Even the honey bear raised a sticky paw before returning to his honey.

The Dad Balloon just blinked.

Then another banner dropped.

DINNER IS ON US!

Now they were speaking his language.

Suddenly food rolled in from every direction imaginable.

Steak.

Potatoes.

Steak.

Dessert.

More steak.

A suspicious amount of steak.

The Dad Balloon smiled.

"Thank goodness."

Everyone laughed.
"What?" he said.
"I've been chasing this steak all day."
The chef pointed dramatically toward another steak.
The Dad Balloon nodded.
"That's the kind of leadership I like."
The meal lasted for hours.
The circus performed.
The crowd celebrated.
The giraffe kept wearing sunglasses indoors.
The honey bear continued doing whatever honey bears do.
And the Dad Balloon finally got the steak he had been chasing all day.
Later that night, the family headed home.
Everyone was exhausted.
Everyone was happy.
The kids fell asleep.
The house got quiet.
The Dad Balloon sat down in his favorite chair.
For a moment, everything was still.
He thought about the tunnel.
The circus.
The screaming.
The giant banner.
The honey-covered bear.
The suspiciously cheap steakhouse.
He shook his head and laughed.
"What a weird day."
Then he looked around at his family.
And smiled.

The truth was, he would have been happy eating burgers at home.
The steak was nice.
The circus was weird.
But none of that was really the point.
His favorite part had been the same thing it always had been.
Being with them.
Being Dad.
The Dad Balloon leaned back in his chair.
"What a great day."
"What a great day to be a dad."

FATHER'S DAY SPECIAL

The Dad Balloon

Happy Father's Day

To every dad out there - the strong ones, the tired ones, the goofy ones,
the quiet ones, the patient ones, the dads still figuring it out,
and every dad somewhere in between.

Thank you for showing up. Thank you for loving your family.
Thank you for being Dad.

What a great day to be a dad.

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Disco Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Disco Balloon did not enter places. She arrived. That was different.

On Friday night, she belonged to a girl named Kelly.

Four girls. Eight skates. One balloon.

Too much confidence.



02

The arcade came first. The doors opened. Noise spilled out.

A boy playing pinball looked up for one second too long. His ball dropped straight down the middle.

He stared at the Disco Balloon. "Worth it."



03

After the arcade, they got ice cream.

A little kid pointed at her. "I want that one."

The girl behind the counter looked up. "That is not ice cream."

The kid nodded. But not emotionally.



04

Then they heard it. Bass. Lights. A beat with confidence. The roller rink.

One friend smiled. "Oh, it's over." Kelly grinned. "No." "It's starting."



05

A giant disco ball turned above everything like it knew it was important. The Disco Balloon floated underneath it. For one second, the room had two moons.

For one perfect minute, nobody had homework. Nobody had chores. Nobody had to be cool. They already were.



06

She looked up at the Disco Balloon. "That," she said, "was legendary."

Then the DJ cleared his throat. "One more?"

Kelly laughed. Her friends pushed off. The beat dropped again. And the Disco Balloon lit up the whole night one more time.

The complete original story

The following pages preserve the original edition unchanged, including its closing material. Its page numbers and format belong to that original edition.

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The
Disco
Balloon
SNACKS
SKATE
INSERT COIN
GALAXY
Dreamland

The Disco Balloon did not enter places.

She arrived.

That was different.

She was silver.

Mostly.

But not boring silver.

Mirror silver.

The kind that stole every light in the room and sent it dancing somewhere else.

Pink.

Blue.

Purple.

Neon.

Headlights.

Arcade screens.

She caught all of it.

Then threw it back prettier.

On Friday night, she belonged to a girl named Kelly.

Kelly had roller skates.

Big hair.

Bright earrings.

A denim jacket.

And three friends who acted like the whole town had been built for them specifically.

For one night, it had.

They rolled down the sidewalk together.

Four girls.

Eight skates.

One balloon.

Too much confidence.

They passed a man carrying groceries.

He stepped aside like a parade was coming.

He was not wrong.

The arcade came first.

The doors opened.

Noise spilled out.

Pinball.

Racing games.

Air hockey.

Music from three machines fighting each other.

The carpet looked like it had been designed by someone who had never feared

color.

The Disco Balloon floated inside.

Immediately, the whole room got better.

Red light hit her.

Then blue.

Then green.

Then everything at once.

A boy playing pinball looked up for one second too long.

His ball dropped straight down the middle.

He stared at the Disco Balloon.

"Worth it."

Kelly laughed.

Her friends laughed.

The Disco Balloon spun slowly above them like she owned the machines.

After the arcade, they got ice cream.

Checkered floor.

Red stools.
Chrome counter.
Too many good decisions.
Strawberry.
Chocolate.
Vanilla.
Mint chip, because one friend needed attention.
The Disco Balloon hovered above the counter and reflected all four flavors at
once.
A little kid pointed at her.
"I want that one."
The girl behind the counter looked up.
"That is not ice cream."
The kid nodded.
But not emotionally.
Back outside, the town was glowing.
Streetlights came on.
Cars cruised by too slow on purpose.
Music leaked from open doors.
One friend pointed at a coffee shop.
"Should we get coffee?"
Kelly looked inside.
Grown-ups were sitting around pretending bitter drinks were fun.
"No," Kelly said. "That feels thirty."
Everyone agreed.
Then they heard it.
Bass.
Lights.

A beat with confidence.
The roller rink.
The doors were open.
Color spilled onto the sidewalk.
Kelly slowed down.
Her friends slowed down.
The Disco Balloon caught the light and flashed it across the pavement.
One friend smiled.
"Oh, it's over."
Kelly grinned.
"No."
"It's starting."
Inside, the rink felt like a carnival had fallen in love with a nightclub.
Colored lights spun across the walls.
The snack bar glowed.
The wood floor shined.
A giant disco ball turned above everything like it knew it was important.
The Disco Balloon floated underneath it.
For one second, the room had two moons.
The big one turned.
The little one shimmered.
Then the music hit.
Kelly pushed off.
Her friends followed.
The Disco Balloon spun above them, catching every light and throwing it back
twice as dramatic.
Pink.
Blue.

Silver.
Purple.
The girls rolled in circles.
Forward.
Backward.
Sideways once, by accident.
One friend nearly fell.
Recovered.
Pointed at herself like she meant to do that.
Everybody cheered anyway.
The whole rink moved.
Wheels.
Lights.
Hair.
Laughter.
A kid bounced into the wall and kept smiling.
Someone dropped nachos and did not even ruin the night.
Near the DJ booth, a man danced like rent had been canceled.
The Disco Balloon loved all of it.
She dipped low.
Rose high.
Spun again.
The lights chased her around the room.
For one perfect minute, nobody had homework.
Nobody had chores.
Nobody had to be cool.
They already were.
Kelly skated to the middle of the floor and threw one arm up.
Her friends circled around her.

The Disco Balloon flashed over all four of them.
For a second, they looked like they had their own music video.
Maybe they did.
The song ended.
Everybody coasted.
The lights kept turning.
Kelly rolled to the edge, breathing hard and smiling.
Her hair was bigger now.
Her jacket was crooked.
One skate lace had come loose.
She looked up at the Disco Balloon.
"That," she said, "was legendary."
Nobody argued.
Then the DJ cleared his throat.
"One more?"
The whole rink shouted back.
Kelly laughed.
Her friends pushed off.
The beat dropped again.
And the Disco Balloon lit up the whole night one more time.

• • •

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons drift. Some balloons dance. Some make the whole room feel like one more song.

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Fireworks Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

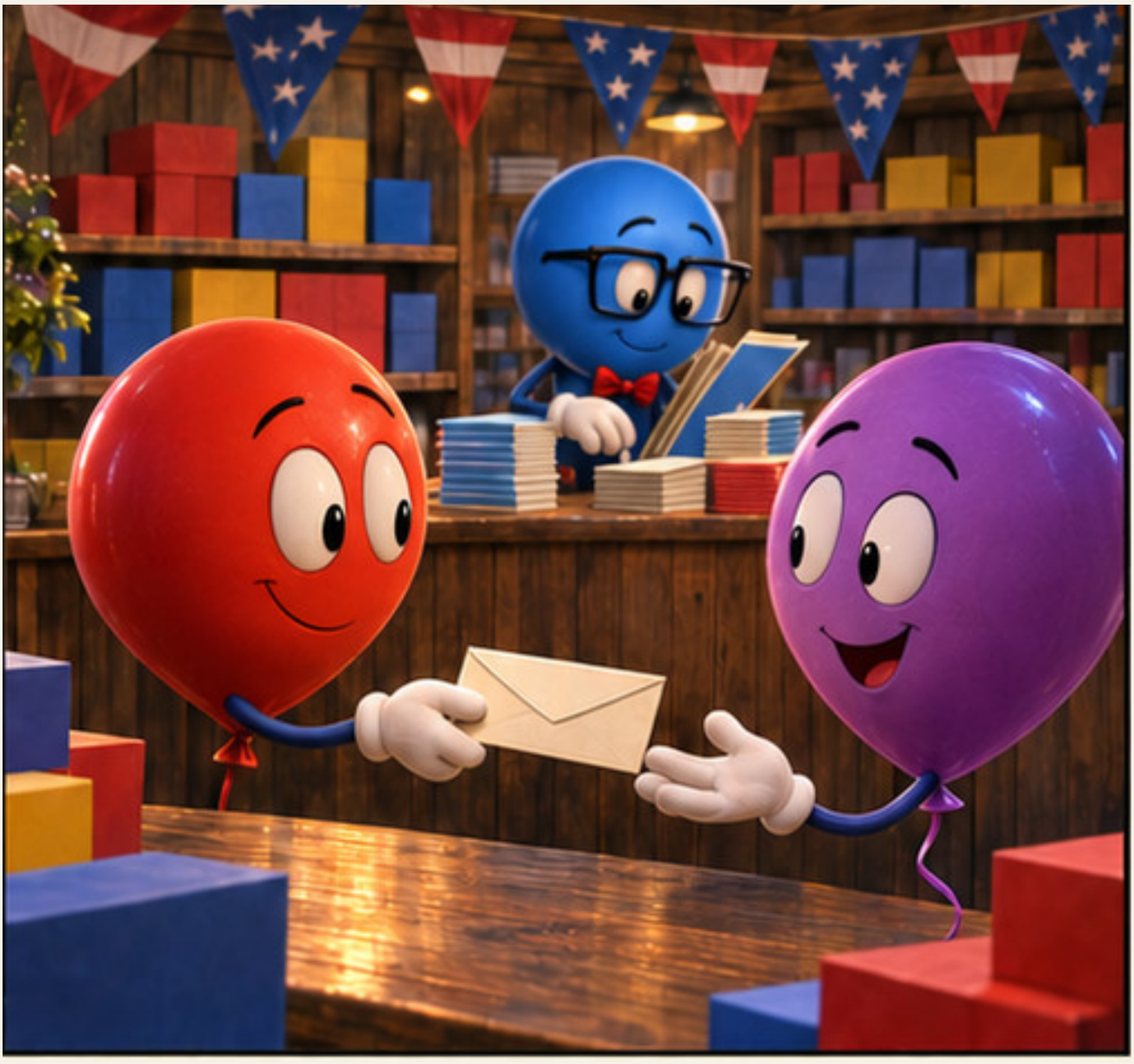
The Fireworks Balloon loved the Fourth of July. The problem was that everybody else loved it too.

"Which one goes the highest?"

Before the Fireworks Balloon could answer, his coworker appeared. The Safety Balloon. "Excellent question."

"The Dragon's Revenge 9000 is one of our most impressive fireworks. However, before discussing altitude, we should discuss proper placement, weather conditions, emergency planning, backup emergency planning, backup backup emergency planning—"

Then he pulled out a notebook. "Now for page two."



02

Earlier that morning, another balloon had stopped by the stand. The Fireworks Balloon had quietly handed him an envelope.

"You got everything?" The balloon smiled. "We're good." "Good."



03

The parking lot was empty. The stand was closed. The Fireworks Balloon locked the front door. Then headlights appeared. A truck. Slowly pulling into the parking lot.

No. No no no no no. Not now. Not today.

It turned around. And left.

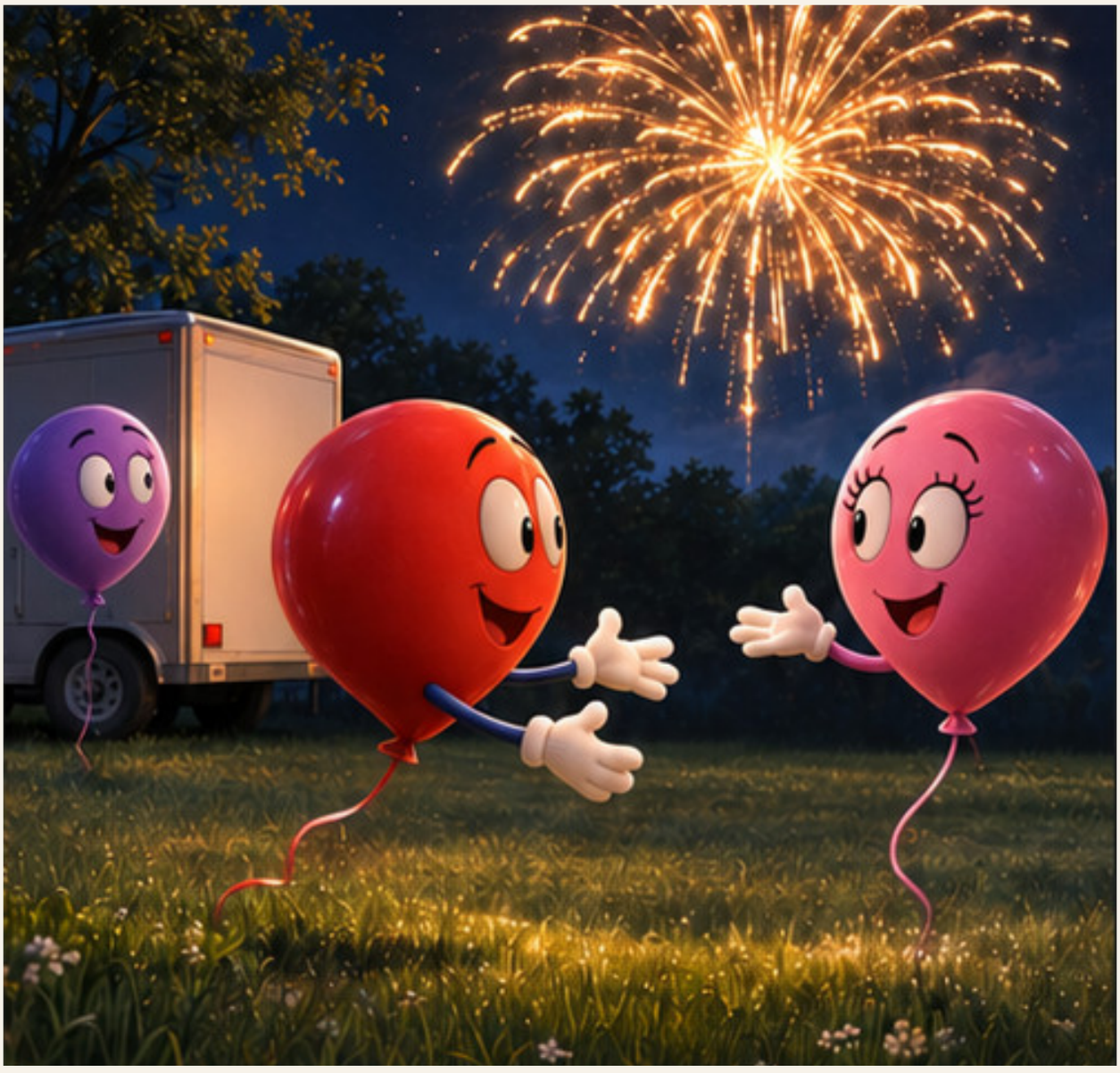


04

He raced across town. Fireworks were already exploding everywhere.

His heart sank. He was late.

After all the planning. After all the customers. After all the safety lectures. He had missed it.



05

Everything was dark. No fireworks. No crowd. No show. Just the balloon he loved standing there waiting.

"Did I miss it?" he asked. She smiled. "No."

Then the first firework launched.

Then he saw his friend step out from behind a trailer. The one from that morning. The one who took the envelope. His friend gave him a thumbs up. The whole show had been waiting for him.



06

For a few minutes they just stood there together. Watching the show.

No customers. No lines. No safety lectures. Just fireworks.

When the finale ended, he looked over at her. "Sorry I'm late." She smiled. "You're right on time."

The complete original story

The following pages preserve the original edition unchanged, including its closing material. Its page numbers and format belong to that original edition.

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THE
FIREWORKS
BALLOON
FIREWORKS
BIG ★ LOUD ★ FUN!
SAFETY FIRST ALWAYS
DRAGON'S REVENGE 9000
MAXIMUM BOOM.
MAXIMUM HEIGHT.
MAXIMUM WOW.
LIBERTY LAUNCHER XL
SAFETY GUIDE
READ IT.
KNOW IT.
LIVE IT.
BUY ONE
BE SAFE
HAVE FUN

The Fireworks Balloon loved the Fourth of July.

The problem was that everybody else loved it too.

Especially the people who waited until the last possible minute.

The parking lot was packed.

The line stretched outside.

And every customer seemed to have the exact same question.

"Which one goes the highest?"

Before the Fireworks Balloon could answer, his coworker appeared.

The Safety Balloon.

"Excellent question."

Oh no.

The customer looked nervous.

The Fireworks Balloon looked nervous.

Everybody knew what was coming.

"The Dragon's Revenge 9000 is one of our most impressive fireworks. However,

before discussing altitude, we should discuss proper placement, weather

conditions, emergency planning, backup emergency planning, backup backup

emergency planning—"

"Brother."

The customer blinked.

"We get it."

The Safety Balloon nodded.

"Good."

Then he pulled out a notebook.

"Now for page two."

The Fireworks Balloon checked the clock.

Not yet.

But soon.

The customer sighed.

The day rolled on.

More customers.

More fireworks.

More questions.

One customer pointed at a giant firework.

"What's that one do?"

The Safety Balloon smiled.

The Fireworks Balloon immediately checked the clock.

"That," said the Safety Balloon, "is the Bald Eagle Express Mark Seven."

"Cool."

"It is also important to note that eagles do not actually operate this firework."

The customer stared at him.

The Safety Balloon continued.

"Many people assume they do."

"Brother."

"Right."

The customer bought it anyway.

Another customer walked up.

"Which one is the loudest?"

The Safety Balloon adjusted his glasses.

"How loud would you like to be concerned?"

"...what?"

"Excellent question."

The Fireworks Balloon looked at the clock again.

Earlier that morning, another balloon had stopped by the stand.

The Fireworks Balloon had quietly handed him an envelope.

"You got everything?"

The balloon smiled.

"We're good."

"Good."

Then he disappeared.

The Safety Balloon looked up.

"What was that about?"

"Nothing."

"That looked like something."

"It was nothing."

The Safety Balloon stared at him.

Then returned to organizing safety pamphlets.

They were already organized.

The sun started sinking.

The crowd started shrinking.

Finally, after what felt like the longest day of the year, the last customer left.

The parking lot was empty.

The stand was closed.

The Fireworks Balloon locked the front door.

Then headlights appeared.

A truck.

Slowly pulling into the parking lot.

The Fireworks Balloon froze.

No.

No no no no no.

Not now.

Not today.

The truck got closer.

Closer.

Then...

It turned around.

And left.

The Fireworks Balloon looked toward the sky.

"Thank you."

He grabbed his keys.

"I gotta go."

The Safety Balloon nodded.

"Drive safely."

"I will."

"Wear your seatbelt."

"I will."

"Watch for deer."

"There are no deer."

"There could be."

The Fireworks Balloon left before another safety briefing could begin.

He raced across town.

Fireworks were already exploding everywhere.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

His heart sank.

He was late.

After all the planning.

After all the customers.

After all the safety lectures.

He had missed it.

Then he arrived.

Everything was dark.

No fireworks.

No crowd.

No show.

Just the balloon he loved standing there waiting.

"Did I miss it?" he asked.

She smiled.

"No."

Then the first firework launched.

BOOM.

Gold filled the sky.

Then another.

And another.

And another.

The Fireworks Balloon blinked.

Wait.

He knew those fireworks.

He picked those fireworks.

Then he saw his friend step out from behind a trailer.

The one from that morning.

The one who took the envelope.

His friend gave him a thumbs up.

The whole show had been waiting for him.

One final firework launched.

It exploded above them in a burst of red, white, and blue.

The Fireworks Balloon smiled.

The balloon beside him smiled too.

For a few minutes they just stood there together.

Watching the show.

No customers.

No lines.

No safety lectures.

Just fireworks.

When the finale ended, he looked over at her.

"Sorry I'm late."

She smiled.

"You're right on time."

And honestly?

It had been worth the wait.

FOURTH OF JULY SPECIAL

The Fireworks Balloon

Happy Fourth of July

For the people working while everyone else celebrates.

For the last-minute shoppers.

For the cautious friends with the safety binders.

And for the ones trying to make it somewhere important on time.

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Monday Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Monday Balloon was tied to the antenna of a truck. That was his spot.

He saw the tire. He blinked. Then sighed. "Oh no."

The tire was not a little flat. It was flat flat.



02

"Honey, can you grab me the screwdriver?"

A few seconds later, she came outside holding a screwdriver.

"Not that one." She looked at it too. "The other one?" "The squinty one." She stared at him. "The what?"

The man closed his eyes for one second. "Never mind. That was on me."



03

Eventually, he got the tire changed. It took longer than expected. Maybe twenty minutes. Maybe thirty. Maybe a whole chapter of his life.

He stopped at the truck door. "I need coffee."



04

At the coffee shop, the line was long. Of course it was. It was Monday. Everyone in town had been attacked by morning.



05

The man finally got his coffee. Large. Hot. Extra shot.

Then the lid popped loose. Coffee jumped out. Right onto his shirt.

Still mostly full. He took a sip. "Worth it."



06

By the time he pulled into work, he was five minutes late. His phone buzzed.

A message from his boss. Busy day. Buckle up.

"Good thing I got the extra shot."

Monday had officially started. Unfortunately.

The complete original story

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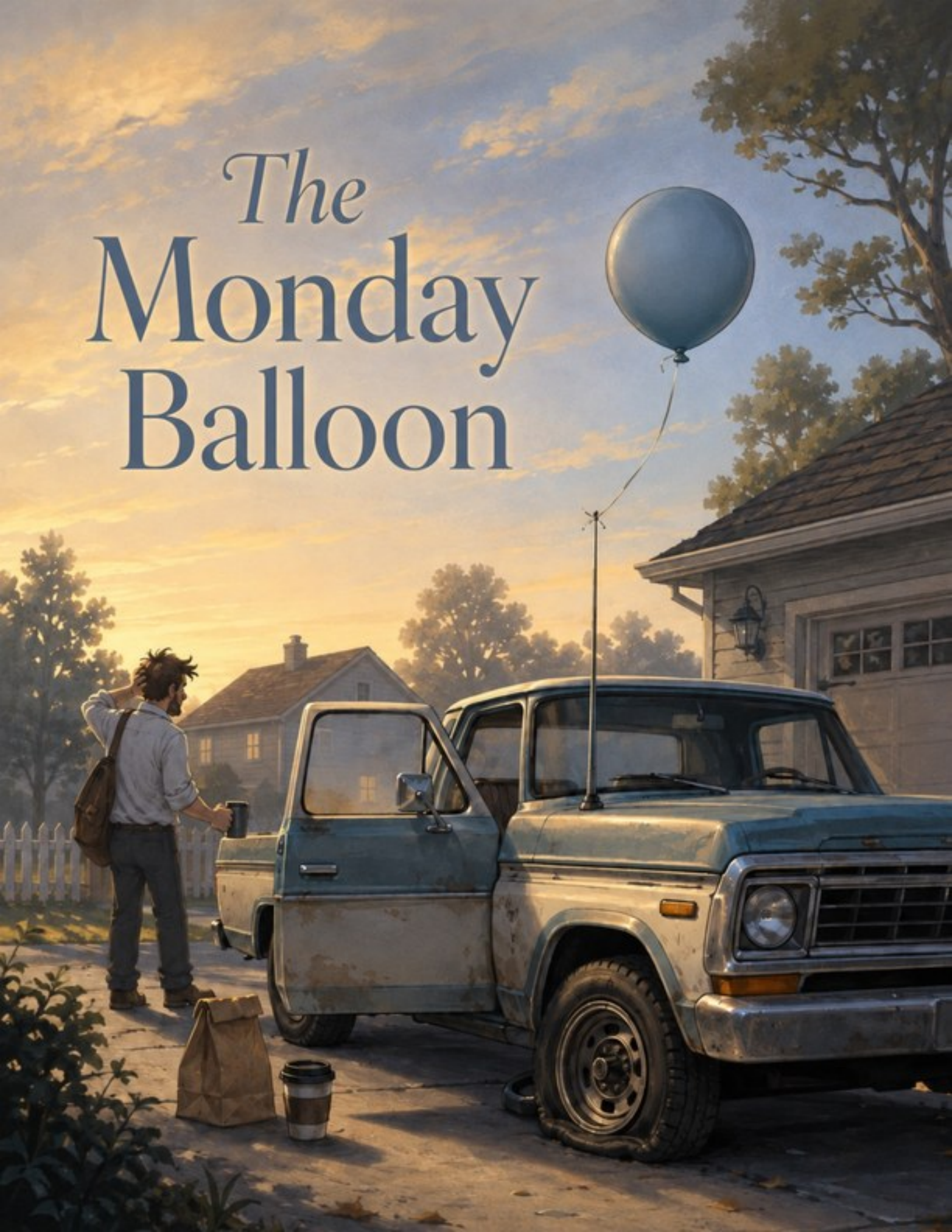
The
Monday
Balloon

The Monday Balloon was tied to the antenna of a truck.

That was his spot.

Every Monday morning, he watched the same man walk out of the house with a

lunch bag, work keys, and the face of someone trying to be positive about it.

The man was not mad.

It was a new week.

A fresh start.

Maybe after work, he would go home, eat dinner, sit down, and do absolutely

nothing important.

That sounded nice.

The Monday Balloon understood.

Mostly.

The front door opened.

The man stepped outside.

He was looking at his phone.

Just for a second.

That was the plan.

Then he looked up.

He saw the tire.

He blinked.

Then sighed.

"Oh no."

The Monday Balloon looked down.

The tire was not a little flat.

It was flat flat.

The man stood there for a moment.

Lunch bag in one hand.
Keys in the other.
Hope leaving his body in real time.
The Monday Balloon swayed gently above the truck.
Not enough to help.
Just enough to witness.
The man sighed.
"Okay. We can fix this."
The Monday Balloon did not know who we was.
The man found the jack.
Then the tire iron.
Then the spare.
Then he stared at all three like they were conspiring against him.
From inside the house, someone called, "You need help?"
"I got it," the man said.
He did not have it yet.
But he had said it.
That mattered.
He knelt beside the tire.
Tried the first lug nut.
Nothing.
Tried again.
Still nothing.
He stood up and looked toward the house.
"Honey, can you grab me the screwdriver?"
A few seconds later, she came outside holding a screwdriver.
The man looked at it.
Then looked at the tire.
Then looked back at the screwdriver.

"Not that one."
She looked at it too.
"The other one?"
"The squinty one."
She stared at him.
"The what?"
The man closed his eyes for one second.
"Never mind. That was on me."
The Monday Balloon swayed a little.
That felt fair.
Eventually, he got the tire changed.
It took longer than expected.
Maybe twenty minutes.
Maybe thirty.
Maybe a whole chapter of his life.
He wiped his hands.
Checked the time.
"Oh no."
Then the morning sped up.
Lunch bag.
Keys.
Phone.
Wallet.
Coffee.
No coffee.
He stopped at the truck door.
"I need coffee."
The Monday Balloon agreed.
Probably.

The truck rolled out of the driveway on the spare tire.
Carefully.
Humbly.
At the coffee shop, the line was long.
Of course it was.
It was Monday.
Everyone in town had been attacked by morning.
The man finally got his coffee.
Large.
Hot.
Extra shot.
He walked back to the truck like things were turning around.
Then the lid popped loose.
Coffee jumped out.
Right onto his shirt.
His good shirt.
The one that said, I tried today.
The man froze.
The Monday Balloon floated above the antenna.
Quietly.
This was not the time to move around.
The man looked down at the stain.
Then up at the sky.
Then back at the coffee.
Still mostly full.
He took a sip.
"Worth it."
By the time he pulled into work, he was five minutes late.
His phone buzzed.

A message from his boss.
Busy day. Buckle up.
The man read it.
Then looked at the coffee stain.
Then looked at the office.
Then picked up the cup and took another sip.
"Good thing I got the extra shot."
The Monday Balloon watched him walk inside.
Lunch bag.
Coffee stain.
Work keys.
Still trying.
The truck sat quietly in the parking lot.
The spare tire looked tired.
The Monday Balloon floated above it all.
Monday had officially started.
Unfortunately.

• • •

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons chase danger. Some watch Monday happen.

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Morning Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Morning Balloon was tied to the back of a metal kitchen chair.

He never went anywhere. The morning came to him.

The alarm went off. Nothing happened.



02

Coffee came first. Always coffee first.

The man walked past the front door. Straight to the coffee machine. The dog did not move. He knew.



03

The man picked up the cup. The dog stood up. Too early.

The man picked up his phone. The dog sat back down. Correct.



04

"All right, boy. You ready to go outside?"

The collar clicked. The leash came off the hook. The dog's tail started moving.

The dog stepped outside like he owned the block. The man followed him with coffee in one hand. Then the door closed.



05

A few minutes later, the door opened. The dog came in first. Successful. Proud. Business handled.

The man sat at the kitchen table. Just for a second. The Morning Balloon knew better. It was never just for a second.



06

"Oh no." There it was. The part where the morning became everyone else's fault.

Shoes. Keys. Wallet. Phone. Coffee. Phone again. Where were the keys? The keys were in his hand.

The dog watched from his bed. Not worried. Not surprised. This was also part of the routine.



07

"All right, Doggio. Have a good day."

The dog wagged his tail once. The man smiled. Then looked toward the little speaker on the counter. "Hey, Alexa, play classical music for the dog."

Soft music filled the kitchen. The man stepped outside. The door closed.



08

The Morning Balloon floated above the old metal chair. The dog laid his head down.

For a moment, the whole house was quiet. Then the dog looked toward the door. And wondered if every human was like his.

The complete original story

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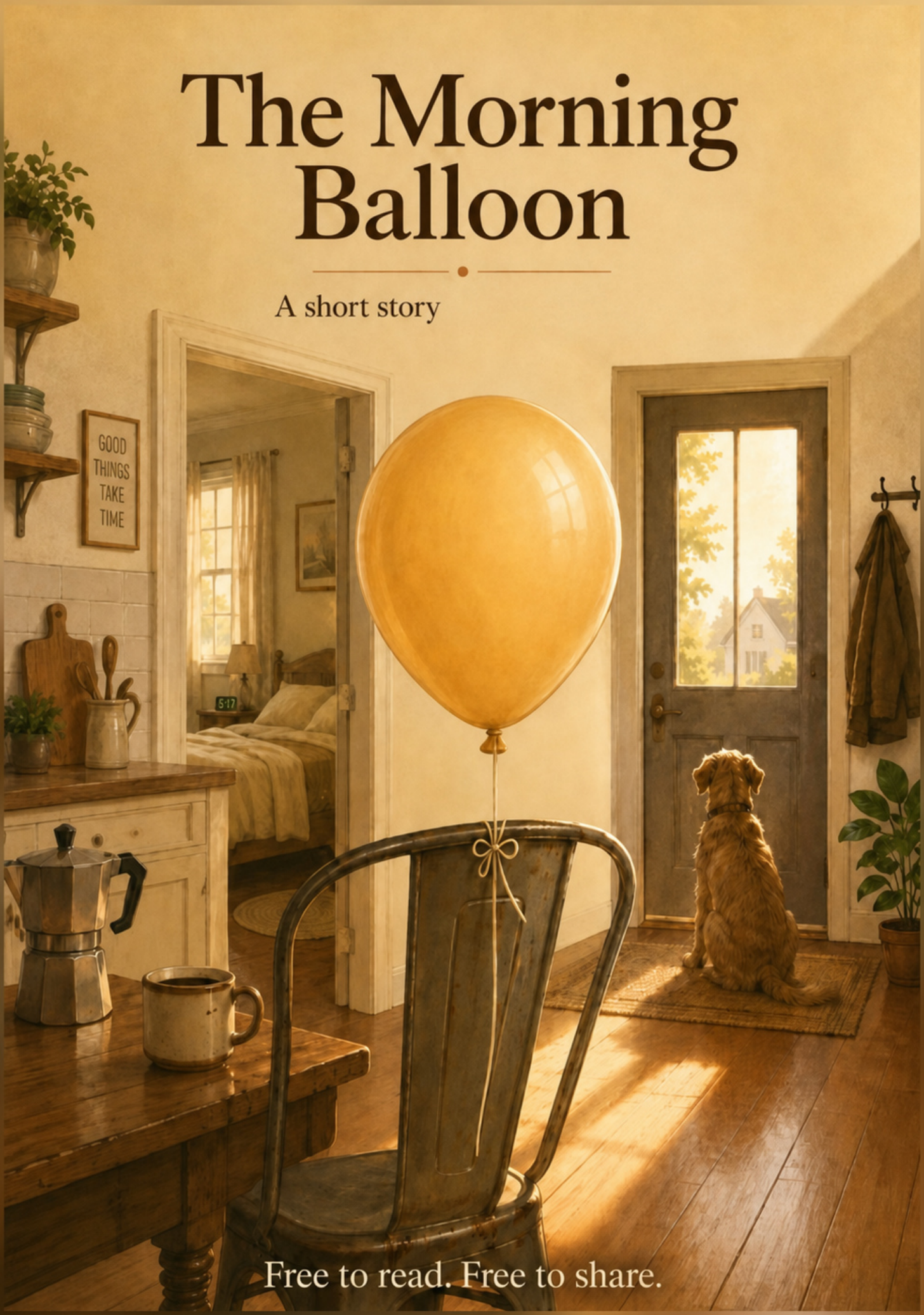
The Morning Balloon

A short story



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The Morning Balloon was tied to the back of a metal kitchen chair.

Not a comfortable chair.

One of those old kitchen chairs that looked like it had been in the family longer

than some people.

The kind nobody leaned back on for fun.

That was his spot.

Every morning, before the sun came up, he watched the same show.

The kitchen was dark.

The bedroom door was open.

The hallway light was off.

From where he floated, the Morning Balloon could see just enough.

The edge of the bed.

Part of the doorway.

The dog bed in the corner.

The front door if he turned slightly.

He never went anywhere.

The morning came to him.

The alarm went off.

Nothing happened.

The alarm kept going.

Still nothing.

Then the man made a sound from the bedroom.

Not words.

More like a person losing an argument with a blanket.

The dog lifted his head.

The Morning Balloon watched the dog.

The dog looked toward the bed.

Then toward the front door.

Then back toward the bed.

He knew the routine.

The man was awake.

Technically.

But outside was not happening yet.

Coffee came first.

Always coffee first.

The dog stood up first.

Front legs down.

Back end up.

Big stretch.

Then he shook like he had been working all night.

He had not.

He had been asleep.

The man finally appeared in the bedroom doorway.

Hair wrong.

Eyes half open.

One sock on.

The dog looked at him.

The Morning Balloon looked at the dog.

The dog looked at the front door.

The man walked past the front door.

Straight to the coffee machine.

The dog did not move.

He knew.

The machine clicked.

Then hissed.

Then made the sound coffee machines make when they are doing more than

everyone else in the house.
The man leaned on the counter.
The dog sat by the door.
Waiting.
The Morning Balloon floated above the old metal chair.
Same spot.
Same show.
Every morning.
The coffee finished.
The man picked up the cup.
The dog stood up.
Too early.
The man picked up his phone.
The dog sat back down.
Correct.
The Morning Balloon had seen this part before.
The man took one sip.
Looked at his phone.
Scrolled.
Squinted.
Scrolled again.
Then said, "All right."
The dog stood up.
The man did not move.
The dog stared at him.
The Morning Balloon watched the dog stare.
The dog looked at the front door.
Then back at the man.
Then at the front door again.

It was not a suggestion anymore.
It was a business meeting.
Finally, the man put the phone down.
"All right, boy. You ready to go outside?"
The dog jumped up.
Immediately.
Too immediately.
Like he had been waiting his whole life for that exact sentence.
He walked to the spot by the door.
Sat down.
Lifted his head.
Ready for the collar.
The man moved slowly.
Very slowly.
The dog made a small sound.
Not a bark.
More like a tired employee reminding the boss what time it was.
The collar clicked.
The leash came off the hook.
The dog's tail started moving.
The man opened the front door.
Cold morning air slipped into the kitchen.
For a second, the Morning Balloon could see the sky.
Still dark.
Barely blue.
Too early for anyone to be making decisions.
The dog stepped outside like he owned the block.
The man followed him with coffee in one hand.
Then the door closed.

The kitchen went quiet.
The Morning Balloon floated above the old metal chair.
Waiting.
Same spot.
Same show.
Every morning.
A few minutes later, the door opened.
The dog came in first.
Successful.
Proud.
Business handled.
The man came in behind him.
"Good boy."
The dog drank water.
Then walked to his spot.
Turned in a circle.
Turned in one more circle, just to make sure the first circle was correct.
Then he lay down.
The man sat at the kitchen table.
Just for a second.
The Morning Balloon knew better.
It was never just for a second.
The man picked up his phone.
The coffee sat on the table.
The kitchen clock kept moving.
The man did not.
Five minutes passed.
Then six.
Then the man looked at the time.

"Oh no."
There it was.
The part where the morning became everyone else's fault.
Shoes.
Keys.
Wallet.
Phone.
Coffee.
Phone again.
Where were the keys?
The keys were in his hand.
The dog watched from his bed.
Not worried.
Not surprised.
This was also part of the routine.
Finally, the man grabbed his things.
He opened the door.
Then stopped.
Turned back.
"All right, Doggio. Have a good day."
The dog wagged his tail once.
The man smiled.
Then looked toward the little speaker on the counter.
"Hey, Alexa, play classical music for the dog."
Soft music filled the kitchen.
The man stepped outside.
The door closed.
The Morning Balloon floated above the old metal chair.
The dog laid his head down.

For a moment, the whole house was quiet.
Then the dog looked toward the door.
And wondered if every human was like his.

• • •

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons chase danger. Some watch the coffee get cold.

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Taco Tuesday Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The balloon was tied to the corner of a gray cubicle. It was yellow, with a little green ribbon curling underneath it. Someone had brought it for Taco Tuesday.

The cafeteria started serving them at noon.

Noon was three hours away. Which, for a man thinking about tacos, was basically next week.



02

The balloon floated above him and gently bumped the cubicle wall. Tap.

"You talking to the balloon?" "No." The balloon bobbed. "Maybe."



03

Then his manager stepped out. "Can you take that balloon to the cafeteria?"

"Right now?" "It's for the table."

The man grabbed the string. The balloon floated behind him like it had been waiting all morning.



04

The elevator stopped on every floor.

A man got on carrying soup. Soup. On Taco Tuesday.

The balloon drifted into the soup man's shoulder. "Sorry," the man said. The balloon was not.



05

By the time they reached the cafeteria, the line stretched past the condiment table.

The man delivered the balloon to a woman setting decorations. "Thank you," she said. The balloon bobbed above the taco table. It looked important.

The man did not care about important. He cared about the line moving.



06

The line moved. Slowly. Then faster. Then finally. He got two tacos. He sat down. He lifted the first one.

He took the first bite.

Crunch.

The complete original story

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The Taco Tuesday Balloon



At 9:03 in the morning, the office already smelled like printer paper, old coffee, and people pretending to work.

The balloon was tied to the corner of a gray cubicle.

It was yellow, with a little green ribbon curling underneath it.

Someone had brought it for Taco Tuesday.

The balloon did not know it was Tuesday.

It also did not know about tacos.

But the man at the desk knew.

He knew very much.

The cafeteria started serving them at noon.

Noon was not close.

Noon was three hours away.

Which, for a man thinking about tacos, was basically next week.

Coworkers typed, clicked, and muttered.

He stared at a spreadsheet.

Then the clock.

Then the spreadsheet.

Then his phone.

On his phone was a tiny story called Taco Tuesday from Balloon World.

He read the title three times.

That did not help.

At 10:14, he wrote follow up with supplier in the wrong box.

At 10:37, he almost answered the phone by saying, "Tacos?"

At 11:02, he opened the cafeteria menu like it might have changed in the last

four minutes.

The balloon floated above him and gently bumped the cubicle wall.

Tap.

He looked up.

"No," he whispered. "Do not start."

The balloon tapped again.

Tap.

A coworker peeked over the wall.

"You talking to the balloon?"

"No."

The balloon bobbed.

"Maybe."

At 11:59, the whole office changed.

Chairs squeaked.

Laptops closed.

People who had not moved all morning suddenly remembered they had legs.

The man stood up before the minute finished.

Then his manager stepped out.

"Can you take that balloon to the cafeteria?"

The man looked at the balloon.

Then the clock.

Then the hallway.

"Right now?"

"It's for the table."

That was a very calm thing to say to a hungry person.

The man grabbed the string.

The balloon floated behind him like it had been waiting all morning.

He walked fast.

Not running.

Office running was frowned upon.

But it was the kind of walking that had thoughts behind it.

The elevator stopped on every floor.

Every floor.

A man got on carrying soup.

Soup.

On Taco Tuesday.

The balloon drifted into the soup man's shoulder.

"Sorry," the man said.

The balloon was not.

By the time they reached the cafeteria, the line stretched past the condiment

table.

Two people near the front were deciding like this was a house purchase.

The man delivered the balloon to a woman setting decorations.

"Thank you," she said.

The balloon bobbed above the taco table.

It looked important.

The man did not care about important.

He cared about the line moving.

The line moved.

Slowly.

Then faster.

Then finally.

He got two tacos.

He sat down.

He lifted the first one.

The shell cracked a little before he even bit it.

His mouth watered.

The balloon floated above the room, proud, useless, and somehow part of the day.

He took the first bite.

Crunch.

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some mornings are longer than they should be. Some lunches are worth the wait.

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Clear Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Clear Balloon did not go outside during the day. She was completely clear. And very sensitive to the summer sun.

She was convinced one bad afternoon could pop her. Or cook her. Or cook her and then pop her. She was not sure. She did not study science. She studied curtains.

The new Black Balloon and Clown Balloon comic dropped.



02

Then she checked the weather. 95 degrees.

The store was across the street. One copy left.

Then she tied a tiny pouch of change to her string. "But I must."



03

The Clear Balloon trembled. Then remembered something. "Oh."

The tiny umbrella tied to her string popped open. Shade covered her completely.



04

The Clear Balloon blinked. Then floated calmly across the street.

The store bell rang as she entered.



05

"One copy of the new comic book, please."

The cashier slid the comic across the counter. "That'll be fifty cents." The Clear Balloon placed two quarters on the counter. "Thank you very much."



06

She opened the comic before she even made it home.

"Oh my God," she whispered. She turned the page. "The Clown Balloon did not do that." Then she turned one more page. "He did."

And the Clear Balloon laughed all the way home.

The complete original story

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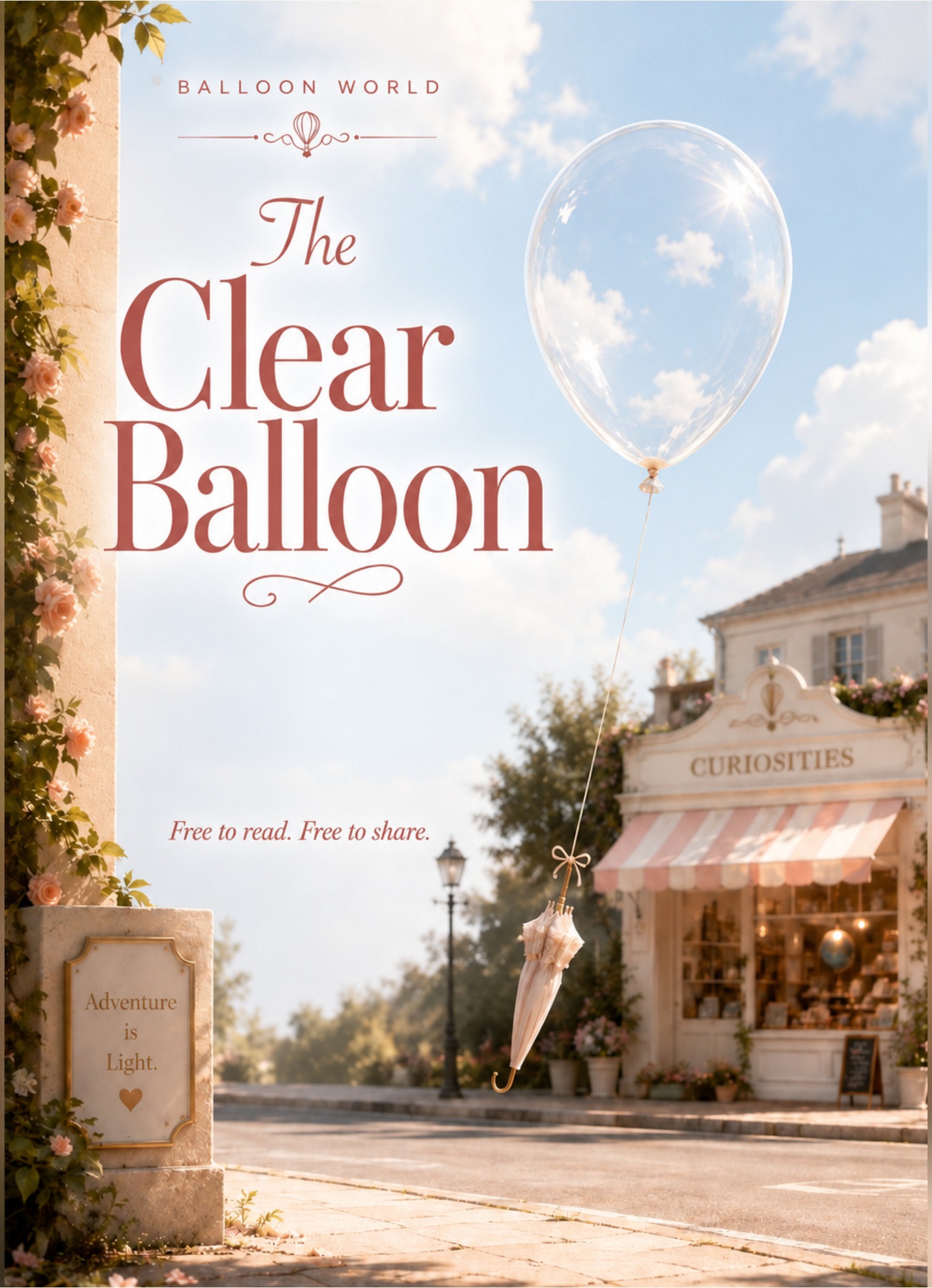
BALLOON WORLD
The
Clear
Balloon
Free to read. Free to share.
CURIOSITIES
Adventure
is
Light.

The Clear Balloon did not go outside during the day.
She was completely clear.
And very sensitive to the summer sun.
The kind of heat that felt personal.
She was convinced one bad afternoon could pop her.
Or cook her.
Or cook her and then pop her.
She was not sure.
She did not study science.
She studied curtains.
Curtains were safe.
Shade was safe.
The sun was rude.
That was the system.
But today was a special day.
The new Black Balloon and Clown Balloon comic dropped.
Version 3.
Limited edition.
Available now.
While they last.
The Clear Balloon stared at the screen.
Then she checked the weather.
95 degrees.
She looked out the window.
The sun was sitting there like it owned the place.
"Oh no," she whispered.
Then she looked back at the comic.
The store was across the street.
One copy left.

Full sun.
Terrible math.
The Clear Balloon floated very still.
"Oh no," she whispered again.
Then she tied a tiny pouch of change to her string.
"But I must."
She opened the door.
Heat rushed in.
The summer air smacked her right in the balloon.
She froze.
Cars passed in the street.
A truck rumbled by.
Somewhere, a dog barked.
The sidewalk shimmered.
The sun glared down.
The Clear Balloon looked left.
Then right.
Then left again.
The comic book store waited across the street.
Ten feet away.
Maybe twelve.
Impossible to know in these conditions.
The Clear Balloon lowered her sunglasses.
She had come too far to turn back.
Which was not true.
She was still in the doorway.
The sun beat down.
The wind shifted.
A receipt rolled across the sidewalk like a warning.

The Clear Balloon trembled.
Then remembered something.
"Oh."
She tilted slightly.
The tiny umbrella tied to her string popped open.
Shade covered her completely.
The Clear Balloon blinked.
Then floated calmly across the street.
The store bell rang as she entered.
The cashier looked up.
The Clear Balloon floated to the counter.
"One copy of the new comic book, please."
The cashier slid the comic across the counter.
"That'll be fifty cents."
The Clear Balloon placed two quarters on the counter.
"Thank you very much."
Then she floated back under the shade of her tiny umbrella.
Safe.
Successful.
Alive.
She opened the comic before she even made it home.
The first page had the Black Balloon standing in the rain.
The second page had the Clown Balloon holding a tiny horn.
The Clear Balloon stopped floating.
"Oh my God," she whispered.
She turned the page.
"The Clown Balloon did not do that."
Then she turned one more page.
"He did."

And the Clear Balloon laughed all the way home.

• • •

THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons chase danger. Some cross the street. Both can be heroic.

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Orange Balloon

A story by Pierce O'Dell



Comic adaptation + complete original story



01

The Orange Balloon wanted an adventure.

Then he spotted something on the sidewalk. A shiny button. The kind that looked like it had been on quite a journey.

He picked it up with his string.



02

Then the button slipped. It bounced once. Twice. Then rolled behind a crooked sign.

The Orange Balloon reached behind it. Slowly. Carefully. Dramatically.

Almost. Almost. Got it.



03

The Orange Balloon pulled the button free. The sign stopped wobbling. The boxes stayed in place. The pigeon returned.

Then he noticed the sign. It was still crooked. That would not do. He nudged it. Just a little. The sign straightened. "Ooh. Perfect."

Behind him, the sign had stopped leaning on the boxes.



04

The boxes slid into a bucket. The bucket rolled into a bicycle. The bicycle rolled into a street performer.

The street performer was juggling. Bad timing for him. Great timing for everyone else.



05

The street performer stumbled backward. Caught one pin. Caught the second. Caught the third. Then his hat landed perfectly on his head. The crowd exploded.

The Orange Balloon looked at his shiny button. Then looked at the crowd. Then nodded. The button was clearly lucky.



06

A man near the fountain clapped too hard. He dropped his sandwich. A dog noticed.

The dog charged. The man charged after the dog.



07

The dog stopped. The man did not. Splash. The fountain accepted him immediately.

The wet man sat in the fountain holding half a sandwich. The dog sat beside him holding the other half. Both seemed disappointed for different reasons.



08

A fresh pretzel sat on the counter. Golden. Twisted. Perfect.

The Orange Balloon stared at the empty container. The one that was supposed to be full of cheese.

"Give me one second."

The bird moved first. It grabbed the pretzel and flapped away.



09

The Orange Balloon shot after it. The cheese would have to wait. This had become a different emergency.

The bird dipped under a flower arch. The Orange Balloon dipped under the flower arch.

A woman in a white dress turned around. A man in a suit turned around. A hundred people in nice clothes turned around.



10

The Orange Balloon pulled left. The bird pulled right. The pretzel stretched.

The Orange Balloon tugged once more. The bird let go. The pretzel snapped back. The Orange Balloon spun backward. His string flicked a napkin.



11

The napkin lifted. Floated. Twisted. Then landed gently against a candle.

Then the corner of the napkin caught fire.

There was only the fire. The terrible fire. The dangerous fire. The wedding-ending fire.



12

Then a waiter stepped forward. He tipped a glass. One small drop of water fell. Psst. The fire went out.

The wedding came back. The flowers were fine. The chairs were fine. The cake was fine. The napkin had one tiny black corner.

The waiter looked at the woman in the white dress. "Would you like some more water, ma'am?"

The complete original story

The following pages preserve the original edition unchanged, including its closing material. Its page numbers and format belong to that original edition.

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The
Orange
Balloon
A short story
NICKELBACK
T-SHIRTS!
HOT

The Orange Balloon wanted an adventure.
Not the kind with maps.
Not the kind with helmets.
The kind where you see a puddle and think:
I can make that jump.
So the Orange Balloon topped off his helium.
With an extra shot of espresso.
Then he floated into town.
The morning looked normal.
Which was usually where trouble made its first mistake.
The Orange Balloon drifted past a bakery.
Past a bus stop.
Past a man carrying too many flowers.
Then he spotted something on the sidewalk.
A shiny button.
The kind that looked like it had been on quite a journey.
The Orange Balloon lowered himself.
The button sparkled.
"Ooh."
He picked it up with his string.
The button swung beneath him as he floated down the sidewalk.
It looked important.
Or at least shiny.
Which was close enough.
Then the button slipped.
It bounced once.
Twice.
Then rolled behind a crooked sign.
The Orange Balloon froze.

The sign leaned over a stack of boxes.
Not a little.
A lot.
The Orange Balloon reached behind it.
Slowly.
Carefully.
Dramatically.
The sign wobbled.
The boxes trembled.
A pigeon stepped away.
The Orange Balloon stretched his string farther.
The button was right there.
Almost.
Almost.
Got it.
The Orange Balloon pulled the button free.
The sign stopped wobbling.
The boxes stayed in place.
The pigeon returned.
The Orange Balloon floated back and admired his work.
Then he noticed the sign.
It was still crooked.
That would not do.
He nudged it.
Just a little.
The sign straightened.
"Ooh. Perfect."
The Orange Balloon floated away proudly.
Behind him, the sign had stopped leaning on the boxes.

The boxes noticed immediately.
The first box tipped.
Then the second.
Then the third.
The fourth box tried to be strong.
It was not.
The boxes slid into a bucket.
The bucket rolled into a bicycle.
The bicycle rolled into a street performer.
The street performer was juggling.
Bad timing for him.
Great timing for everyone else.
The bicycle bumped his leg.
The street performer spun.
One juggling pin flew left.
One flew right.
One went straight up.
His hat flew off.
The crowd gasped.
The Orange Balloon kept floating down the sidewalk.
The street performer stumbled backward.
Caught one pin.
Caught the second.
Caught the third.
Then his hat landed perfectly on his head.
The crowd exploded.
The street performer blinked.
Then bowed.
The Orange Balloon heard the applause behind him.

He turned around.
The crowd was cheering.
The street performer was bowing.
The Orange Balloon looked at his shiny button.
Then looked at the crowd.
Then nodded.
The button was clearly lucky.
A man near the fountain clapped too hard.
He dropped his sandwich.
A dog noticed.
The dog charged.
The man charged after the dog.
The dog ran around the fountain.
The man ran around the fountain.
The dog jumped left.
The man jumped left.
The dog jumped right.
The man jumped right.
The dog stopped.
The man did not.
Splash.
The fountain accepted him immediately.
The crowd cheered even louder.
The street performer bowed again.
The wet man sat in the fountain holding half a sandwich.
The dog sat beside him holding the other half.
Both seemed disappointed for different reasons.
The Orange Balloon watched from down the street.
More applause.

More cheering.

More chaos.

He looked at the shiny button again.

Very lucky.

The Orange Balloon continued down the sidewalk.

The town felt exciting.

A little loud.

But exciting.

A vendor stood beside a folding table covered in shirts.

He raised both hands and shouted.

"$5 Nickelback t-shirts!"

A teenager stopped walking.

"Nickelback is still a thing?"

The Orange Balloon floated past them.

The shiny button swung beneath him.

Then the Orange Balloon smiled in whatever way balloons could smile if they had a

face.

He looked down at the button.

There was a little scratch across the middle.

A bit of dust near the edge.

The Orange Balloon rubbed it gently with his string.

The dust came off.

The scratch stayed.

This button had definitely been on a journey.

Then he smelled something.

Warm.

Salty.

Important.

The Orange Balloon stopped floating.

Across the street sat a pretzel stand.

Not just any pretzel stand.

A good one.

The kind where the pretzels looked soft enough to make people forgive small

problems.

The Orange Balloon drifted closer.

A fresh pretzel sat on the counter.

Golden.

Twisted.

Perfect.

The Orange Balloon reached for it.

Then paused.

Something was wrong.

Very wrong.

The Orange Balloon stared at the empty container.

The one that was supposed to be full of cheese.

The worker looked at the container.

Then at the Orange Balloon.

Then back at the container.

"Give me one second."

A bird landed on the counter.

The bird looked at the pretzel.

The Orange Balloon looked at the bird.

The bird looked back at the pretzel.

That was concerning.

The bird moved first.

It grabbed the pretzel and flapped away.

The Orange Balloon shot after it.
The cheese would have to wait.
This had become a different emergency.
The bird flew down the sidewalk.
The Orange Balloon followed.
Past the Nickelback shirts.
Past the fountain.
Past the street performer.
The street performer was still bowing.
The crowd was still cheering.
The Orange Balloon did not have time to be impressed.
The bird turned left.
The Orange Balloon turned left.
The bird dipped under a flower arch.
The Orange Balloon dipped under the flower arch.
A woman in a white dress turned around.
A man in a suit turned around.
A hundred people in nice clothes turned around.
The Orange Balloon stopped.
The bird landed on a table near the front.
The pretzel dropped.
The Orange Balloon floated toward it.
Slowly.
Carefully.
Like Captain Jack Sparrow sneaking up on a one-eyed rabbit.
The pretzel was right there.
Still warm.
Still twisted.
Still worth fighting for.

The Orange Balloon reached down with his string.
Almost.
Almost.
Got it.
The Orange Balloon lifted the pretzel.
The bird disagreed.
It swooped down again.
The Orange Balloon pulled left.
The bird pulled right.
The pretzel stretched.
The woman in the white dress gasped.
The man in the suit gasped too.
Mostly because she did.
The Orange Balloon tugged once more.
The bird let go.
The pretzel snapped back.
The Orange Balloon spun backward.
His string flicked a napkin.
The napkin lifted.
Floated.
Twisted.
Then landed gently against a candle.
For one second, nothing happened.
Then the corner of the napkin caught fire.
The flame rose.
The whole wedding seemed to disappear.
The flowers disappeared.
The chairs disappeared.
The cake disappeared.

There was only the fire.

The terrible fire.

The dangerous fire.

The wedding-ending fire.

The kind of fire people would talk about for years.

The kind of fire that would ruin the pictures.

The kind of fire that would make someone's aunt say, "I told them not to use real

candles."

Then a waiter stepped forward.

He tipped a glass.

One small drop of water fell.

Psst.

The fire went out.

The wedding came back.

The flowers were fine.

The chairs were fine.

The cake was fine.

The napkin had one tiny black corner.

The waiter looked at the woman in the white dress.

"Would you like some more water, ma'am?"

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