

The Orange Balloon

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Once upon a now there lived a balloon. He was an orange balloon, a bright orange balloon. He was so orange that people wondered. They wondered how a balloon could be so very orange. Some were impressed with how orange the balloon was, but others were not impressed. They found him too loud, too garish and definitely gauche.

"It's a matter of taste," said the orange balloon lovers, sticking their noses in the air. "You're just being snobbish."

Now the orange balloon was famous in the Kingdom of Golden Eagles. This was because he was boastful and crass, and certainly not because he was better than other people. The balloon built shiny buildings and casinos. He was proud of his phony gold palaces and they made him lots of money. And the orange balloon lied. He lied and he lied and he lied. He lied so much he forgot the truth and believed his own words. Then he told lies so truthfully that half the people believed the silly stuff he was saying.

Now it came to pass that the Kingdom of Golden Eagles had to choose a new emperor. As you can imagine, lots of people wanted to be emperor and the orange balloon was one of them. At first people laughed. "You can't be emperor," they cried. "You're rich and famous but you're just a colorful balloon. You're not real! You're nothing but hot air."

But the orange balloon didn't listen. He was too full of himself to hear anyone other than himself. He boasted and bragged and bluffed. He said that people should be afraid. He said that even though the Kingdom of Golden Eagles, the richest kingdom in the world, with an army mightier than all the other armies combined, was being invaded by outsiders. He declared that he'd build a wall, a huge wall all around the Kingdom of Golden Eagles to keep outsiders out.

"Yea!" cried his fans, forgetting that most outsiders flew into the kingdom by airplane.

As soon as the orange balloon had a bunch of people afraid and fearful he bullied the other contenders for emperor. He called them names such as Jeb the Pleb, or Loser Cruzor, things like that. Instead of becoming unpopular because of his rudeness, lo and behold, the people who believed his lies also liked calling other people names. They cheered the orange balloon on and the more hot air he spouted the more they cheered, and the more they cheered the more hot air the balloon inhaled until he was furiously famous and pumped up. It was amazing and the newspapers and TV loved it. They were making fortunes from all the excitement. To top it off, the orange balloon told his fans to punch anyone on the nose who said they didn't like him. That took care of that as far as they were concerned. "Make the Kingdom of Golden Eagles great again!" they cried, swinging their orange painted fists.

At last there were only two people running to be emperor: the orange balloon and the girlfriend of a former emperor. Of course, she and the orange balloon had been chummy in the past because they were both rich, but now they were fighting each other fiercely. The orange balloon kept huffing and puffing and strutting his stuff. The old emperor's girlfriend was not like the balloon, not at all. She, however, was wearing a pair of shoes that had been slowly filling with lead over the years. She always talked properly (ladies are not supposed to shout), didn't tell complete lies (ladies shouldn't be caught lying) and when she tried to jump up and down in indignation at the orange balloon's nonsense her lead shoes kept her from leaving the ground.

Finally the great day came. Everyone had to choose who they wanted to be Emperor of the Kingdom of Golden Eagles. Out they all came from their houses and shouted—but as soon as they called the name of their choice the orange balloon popped. Some said he popped because he lost. Some said he popped because he won and became too puffed up. Either way, he BURST!!! And whether he lost or won didn't matter for instantly the whole kingdom was covered with a thick, smelly vapor. It was so thick in places that it covered everything with brown slime. It filled the valleys and fields, it climbed the highest mountains, seeped into the deepest caves and crawled into every house and building in the land. Everyone, rich or poor, had to wade through the mess. The haters and lovers blamed each other and fought. His haters said the yuck was because of the balloon's lies; his lovers said that there had been a conspiracy to pop the orange balloon. They fought and they fought as the Kingdom of Golden Eagles stank to high heaven. Meanwhile, the rest of the world had to hold their noses and wait for the brown stuff to be shoveled aside.