



CLASSICS TO GO

ROOTABAGA PIGEONS

CARL SANDBURG

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MAUD AND MISKA PETERSHAM

Rootabaga pigeons

**Carl Sandburg Illustrations by
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FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

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1. Two Stories Told by the Potato Face Blind Man.

People: Blixie Bimber

Blixie Bimber's Mother

The Potato Face Blind Man

A Green Rat with the Rheumatism

Bricklayers

Mortar Men

Riveters

A Skyscraper

Slipfoot

A Stairway to the Moon

A Trapeze



The Skyscraper to the Moon and How the Green Rat with the Rheumatism Ran a Thousand Miles Twice

Blixie Bimber's mother was chopping hash. And the hatchet broke. So Blixie started downtown with fifteen cents to buy a new hash hatchet for chopping hash.

Downtown she peeped around the corner next nearest the postoffice where the Potato Face Blind Man sat with his accordion. And the old man had his legs crossed, one foot on the sidewalk, the other foot up in the air.

The foot up in the air had a green rat sitting on it, tying the old man's shoestrings in knots and double knots. Whenever the old man's foot wiggled and wriggled the green rat wiggled and wriggled.

The tail of the rat wrapped five wraps around the shoe and then fastened and tied like a package.

On the back of the green rat was a long white swipe from the end of the nose to the end of the tail. Two little white swipes stuck up over the eyelashes. And five short thick swipes of white played pussy-wants-a-corner back of the ears and along the ribs of the green rat.

They were talking, the old man and the green rat, talking about alligators and why the alligators keep their baby shoes locked up in trunks over the winter time—and why the rats in the moon lock their mittens in ice boxes.

“I had the rheumatism last summer a year ago,” said the rat. “I had the rheumatism so bad I ran a thousand miles south and west till I came to the Egg Towns and stopped in the Village of Eggs Up.”

“So?” quizzed the Potato Face.

“There in the Village of Eggs Up, they asked me, ‘Do you know how to stop the moon moving?’ I answered them, ‘Yes, I know how—a baby alligator told me—but I told the baby alligator I wouldn’t tell.’

“Many years ago there in that Village of Eggs Up they started making a skyscraper to go up till it reached the moon. They said, ‘We will step in the elevator and go up to the roof and sit on the roof and eat supper on the moon.’

“The bricklayers and the mortar men and the iron riveters and the wheelbarrowers and the plasterers went higher and higher making that skyscraper, till at last they were half way up to the moon, saying to each other while they worked, ‘We will step in the elevator and go up to the roof and sit on the roof and eat supper on the moon.’

“Yes, they were halfway up to the moon. And that night looking at the moon they saw it move and they said to each other, ‘We must stop the moon moving,’ and they said later, ‘We don’t know how to stop the moon moving.’

“And the bricklayers and the mortar men and the iron riveters and the wheelbarrowers and the plasterers said to each other, ‘If we go on now and make this skyscraper it will miss the moon and we will never go up in the elevator and sit on the roof and eat supper on the moon.’

“So they took the skyscraper down and started making it over again, aiming it straight at the moon again. And one night standing looking at the moon they saw it move and they said to each other, ‘We must stop the moon moving,’ saying later to each other, ‘We don’t know how to stop the moon moving.’

“And now they stand in the streets at night there in the Village of Eggs Up, stretching their necks looking at the moon, and asking each other, ‘Why does the moon move and how can we stop the moon moving?’

“Whenever I saw them standing there stretching their necks looking at the moon, I had a zig-zag ache in my left hind foot and I wanted to tell them what the baby alligator told me, the secret of how to stop the moon moving. One night that ache zig-zagged me so—way inside my left hind foot—it zig-zagged so I ran home here a thousand miles.”

The Potato Face Blind Man wriggled his shoe—and the green rat wriggled—and the long white swipe from the end of the nose to the end of the tail of the green rat wriggled.

“Is your rheumatism better?” the old man asked.

The rat answered, “Any rheumatism is better if you run a thousand miles twice.”

And Blixie Bimber going home with the fifteen cent hash hatchet for her mother to chop hash, Blixie said to herself, “It is a large morning to be thoughtful about.”





Slipfoot and How He Nearly Always Never Gets What He Goes After

Blixie Bimber flipped out of the kitchen one morning, first saying good-by to the dish-pan, good-by to the dish-rag, good-by to the dish-towel for wiping dishes.

Under one arm she put a basket of peonies she picked, under the other arm she put a basket of jonquils she picked.

Then she flipped away up the street and downtown where she put the baskets of peonies and jonquils one on each side of the Potato Face Blind Man.

"I picked the pink and lavender peonies and I picked the yellow jonquils for you to be smelling one on each side of you this fine early summer morning," she said to the Potato Face. "Have you seen anybody good to see lately?"

"Slipfoot was here this morning," said the old man.

"And who is Slipfoot?" asked Blixie.

"I don't know. He says to me, 'I got a foot always slips. I used to wash windows—and my foot slips. I used to be king of the collar buttons, king of a million dollars—and my foot

slips. I used to be king of the peanuts, king of a million dollars again. I used to be king of the oyster cans, selling a million cans a day. I used to be king of the peanut sacks, selling ten million sacks a day. And every time I was a king my foot slips. Every time I had a million dollars my foot slips. Every time I went high and put my foot higher my foot slips. Somebody gave me a slipfoot. I always slip.’”



On the last step of the stairway my foot slips

“So you call him Slipfoot?” asked Blixie.

“Yes,” said the old man.

“Has he been here before?”

“Yes, he was here a year ago, saying, ‘I marry a woman and she runs away. I run after her—and my foot slips. I always get what I want—and then my foot slips.’”

“I ran up a stairway to the moon one night. I shoveled a big sack full of little gold beans, little gold bricks, little gold bugs, on the moon and I ran down the stairway from the moon. On the last step of the stairway, my foot slips—and all the little gold beans, all the little gold bricks, all the little

gold bugs, spill out and spill away. When I get down the stairway I am holding the sack and the sack holds nothing. I am all right always till my foot slips.

"I jump on a trapeze and I go swinging, swinging, swinging out where I am going to take hold of the rainbow and bring it down where we can look at it close. And I hang by my feet on the trapeze and I am swinging out where I am just ready to take hold of the rainbow and bring it down. Then my foot slips."

"What is the matter with Slipfoot?" asks Blixie.

"He asks me that same question," answered the Potato Face Blind Man. "He asks me that every time he comes here. I tell him all he needs is to get his slipfoot fixed so it won't slip. Then he'll be all right."

"I understand you," said Blixie. "You make it easy. You always make it easy. And before I run away will you promise me to smell of the pink and lavender peonies and the yellow jonquils all day to-day?"

"I promise," said the Potato Face. "Promises are easy. I like promises."

"So do I," said the little girl, "It's promises pushing me back home to the dish-pan, the dish-rag, and the dish-towel for wiping dishes."

"Look out you don't get a slipfoot," warned the old man as the girl flipped up the street going home.

