

The Balloon Ride

Festival Days

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By A. Nation

Published 2018

rev.i

ASIN:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank those that gave me support and tolerated my persistence in writing my story; they are by first names only as they know who they are:

Yuma Writer's on the Edge,
Shirley, Kam, John, Helen

Books by A. Nation

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For more insights how this story progressed, see my
blog at: [My Blog](#).

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My Balloon Adventure

The sun was out in this early April day as tulips and daffodils sprouted up from their beds into full bloom around my house. The warm sun peeked behind the scattered clouds this Tuesday morning when I decided to plant a few seeds in my backyard garden. I pulled on my garden gloves and tied my late Henry's heavy canvas apron around my waist. Just as I finished the second row of setting green peas into the furrow, my neighbor, Trisha Paige came over to see me.

Mickie, my black poodle, spotted her before she approached the fence gate. He barked and danced at the prospect of greeting her. She unlatched the chain link fence gate and closed it to make sure my dog didn't escape. Mickie continued to jump around her legs until he took off in a race around the yard.

I stood up from my vegetable plantings and removed my cotton gloves.

"Susan, are we ever going to have some fun this weekend," she said, approaching me.

"What kind of fun are you getting me into?" I asked.

"Balloon rides. They are holding a big hot air balloon festival over in Driggs and I want to go. Please say you'll come with me. We could have a ball and there will be lots of vendors to check out," she said, holding out a brochure for me to read.

"I don't know. Is it safe?" I asked. I retrieved the pamphlet and looked over the pictures of the colorful balloon floating against the blue sky.

"Susan. You need to live more. Please," she implored.

"All right, what time do they take off?"

I was about to turn over the brochure for the schedule when she gave me an answer.

"We have to be there by five a.m. and they take off at dawn.

"Five?" I asked, raising my eyebrows.

"We can tent out on the grounds where they lift off and they'll have a hot breakfast for us. It's included in the tickets.

"I haven't been tenting in years. I'll have to locate my old sleeping bag," I said.

The last time I saw the bag was in the basement when I had lent to one of the people that came back to Vesda with me. The world of Vesda is no more but the inside out planet still promoted memories for me.

"That's right. And don't worry about the hard ground. Larry got the kids one of those new tents that has legs ten inches high off the ground.

"What day is the festival on?"

"This Friday and Saturday. Let's go Thursday after lunch. Friday may be the least crowded day of the weekend."

"How long of a drive is it to Driggs?" I asked.

"About ninety miles or almost two hours to get there. I'll drive."

"Okay, it's a date," I said, pulling my gloves back on my hands.

Trisha smiled and headed back to her home next door.

The next day after breakfast, I busied myself downstairs looking for my sleeping bag. I'm sure it needs airing out. My little dog wandered around me hoping I was locating some food when I spotted the rolled up bag on the top shelf above my canned fruit. With the short step stool, I pulled the puffy bedding down and almost landed on my rear. But the stool stood firm as I climbed off.

"Whew, I'd better get this outside and hang it up," I muttered to myself after giving it a smell.

My dog ran up the stairs ahead of me while I bunched up the bulky fabric in my arms. The breeze outside wasn't too bad, just enough to air my bag out.

I unzipped the side and threw the open sleeping bag over the clothesline. After giving it a few swift slaps, I readjusted it until the bag hung square.

I heard Mickie barking as he ran up my porch stairs.

"What are you up to?" a familiar voice said behind me. My friend, Sally Montgomery, who lives down the street from me walked through my yard gate and latched the metal bar behind her.

"Hi. Just thought I'd air this out. Trisha and I are going to Driggs for the Balloon Festival. Want to come? We're camping on the fairgrounds Thursday night and taking off in a balloon early Friday morning," I explained just to be polite. I know she has to stay home with her four children.

"I'd love to break away but isn't that dangerous?"

"Tenting out?"

"No, silly, riding in a balloon."

"I was kidding you. No, it's probably safer than driving in your car," I replied. "Well?"

"No, I have to stay. There's a soccer game my boy is playing on Friday."

"Well, maybe next time."

We talked about the accomplishments of her kids and what my daughter Jan was doing at college.

"Well, I'd better be heading home. Have fun," she said and latched the gate behind her as she left.

That afternoon, I washed clothes and decided to walk to the grocery store. The town I live in is small and the store is only three blocks away. I no sooner strode a block from my home when I encountered Hobnobby trotting along with Fin and Cal.

"Hello, Susan," greeted Fin. His full name is Finindaddle but we all call him the shorter name.

"Just the people I need to see," I replied.

"Oh? What's up?" Cal asked.

Hobs just looked up at me from his three-foot stance. He calls himself a gnome but I just think of him as a little person.

"I'll be out of town for a couple of days in Driggs. But I'll return on Sunday. That means, no experiments in my garage, Fin," I said.

"Why are you going there?" Hobs asked.

"Trisha and I are going ballooning. It's a huge event and we have to be ready to go at the crack of dawn."

"Oh, I'd love to go ballooning," Fin said wearing a broad smile.

"Well, I don't know if they have any tickets left at the store. You can check it out," I suggested. "I don't know how much they are as Trisha treated me."

"Well, let's go and see," Fin said as he turned around. Cal spread his hands apart and trotted after his friend. Hobs stayed with me.

"Don't you want to go?" I asked him.

"Heights scare me and do you know how deep those baskets are?"

"Well, I..."

"They are three to four feet deep. I wouldn't see anything. That's all right, I've got things to do anyway," he said. He sounded to me like he was making excuses.

"I'm sure the pilot would make accommodations. After all, they take children up in the tethered balloons. Why don't you try one of those? They just go up thirty feet and come right back down," I suggested.

"I'll have to see if I can get a ticket, I suppose."

"If not, you can still come with us or Fin and watch. It's a sight to see with all those balloons floating up into the sky."

"Okay."

As soon as he said that, I grabbed his chubby hand and off we went to the store.

Just as we arrived, Fin and Cal came out of the electronic doors toward us.

"We got our tickets. They still have some left," Fin said.

"Great," I said and we entered the store. I let go of Hobnobby's hand. We found the service desk and the clerk selling the tickets.

I bought Hobs his ticket before he could protest. I know he's always short in the money department.

"I'll pay you back," he said.

"No, you won't. This is my treat. Just make sure you are ready to go at noon from my house."

"I will, thanks, Susan. Oh, I'll catch a ride with Fin if that's okay with you," he replied.

"That's fine, but if you miss them, let me know before we leave."

"I will," he said and headed out of the store.

I walked around the grocery picking up a couple of items to snack on my trip. Then I called Trisha to let her know Hobs might be joining us.

That night Hobs stopped by and let me know he has a ride with Fin and Cal.

"Do you need any snacks? I bought extra," I asked.

"No, they have enough for me. I'll see you at the festival."

I watched him return to the sidewalk in front of my house before I closed the door. Deciding that Hobs chosen company was a man thing, I looked down at my little poodle wiggling his heart out.

"Oh, who's going to take care of you?" I asked surprised I had forgotten about Mickie's needs.

First I called René, but she was also going to the balloon festival. After calling a few more friends, I was getting frantic. So I called Trisha to let her know I might have to back out.

"Trisha, I hate to do this, but I can't find someone to watch Mickie."

"Well, what about my kids?" she suggested.

"As long as you think they are responsible for feeding him on time."

"I'll send Peter over to talk to you about it. He's babysat the Montgomery kids."

"That a great endorsement and I'll be glad to pay him," I said.

"Okay, but not too much. I don't want him to think he didn't have to do much to earn the wage. Might go to his head."

"Would \$15.00 be okay? He'll have to do it for three nights.

"That will do."

We hung up and I headed to my bedroom to locate some warm clothes to wear for early Friday morning. Then I remembered the sleeping bag was still outside on the line.

By then the sun was shining high in the clear sky. When I left my kitchen for the back porch, my dog popped through the doggy door and ran over to the fence gate. Trisha's boy, Peter, was waiting for me.

This was a good opportunity to let him know about the gate.

"Peter, come in and make sure you latch the gate behind you. I can't emphasise how important it is for you to know that gate can't be left open or Mickie might try to escape."

"I'll be careful, Mrs. Edwards."

"Good, okay, here is my back door key. Come on in and I'll show you where I keep his food," I said, handing him the metal access.

"How many times a day do I feed him?"

"Just once in the morning," I said, guiding him up the porch into the kitchen.

"His kibble food is in this cabinet under the TV and in the evening, you can give him one of these treats," I said, pointing to the smaller bag.

"Got it," he replied.

"And no one but you is allowed in my house, understand?"

"Yes, Mrs. Edwards."

"Just to let you know, I may call your dad to make sure everything is okay. I really appreciate you doing this and I will pay you \$15.00 for the three days.

"Gee, thanks, Mrs. Edwards," he replied with a grin.

We returned to my porch and I said one last thing.

"I won't feed him tomorrow morning because that's too early. So you'll have to come over here before school, okay?"

"Yes, 'em."

He turned and ran back home after he made sure the fence gate was latched.

Mickie was staring at the boy and then up at me.

"You mind him, little guy," I said.

"Riiiiing." My alarm sitting on my headboard went off. After I shut it off and walked over to my window, I peeked through my curtain. At four thirty in the morning the sky is still black. After I dressed, I stuffed my pillow inside my small suitcase, closed it and grabbed my rolled up sleeping bag. I had just enough time to make me some hot chocolate to take with me. I had one of those covered steel cups with the screw on top. Then my wall phone rang.

"Are you ready?" I heard Trisha asked.

"You bet. I'll be right over."

I hung up the phone, covered my beverage, and rolled my belongings toward the front door. Mickie trailed behind me.

"No, you have to stay here. Peter will feed you. You be good," I said to his cocked head and out the front I went. I could hear him whining as I locked the door. About the time I reached my fence line, he came out of the doggy door. I had just enough time to latch the gate behind me.

Trisha had driven her car from their garage and parked in her driveway behind her house. I hurried over while my dog yapped in the back yard. She opened the trunk lid so I could load my things inside. Once I shut the lid down, I opened the passenger door and sat down.

"A little nippy out," I said, rubbing my hands.

"That it is," she replied.

She backed the car onto the street and off we drove.

We took the state highway number 26 over to Swan Valley and made a left onto the county road 31 toward Victor. Driggs lies north of Victor just before you get to Tetonia and Jackson Hole.

We exchanged jokes and funny things that happened to us. That's when the subject of my unusual friends came up.

"I know by now all the friends you came back from Vesda but I didn't understand exactly what you found under the old Ahlberg warehouse.

"Fairies and little people like Hobs, called Nissers. That was an event at my house, I hope never to relive again."

"Why? What did really happen?"

"I guess I didn't tell you everything, but there was a fire under the warehouse and in the fairyland too. Hobs made an opening through to my spare bedroom downstairs and everyone came through. They stayed the night in my basement. By the time you arrived, he had closed the hole."

"I thought Neil Weiss started the fire," she said.

"He did, but it spread into both worlds."

"Someone said something about a witch. Did you see her?"

"Did I ever, but Hobs saved the day and we put her away for good."

"Do I dare ask how?"

"According to Hobs, if a witch flies into a mirror, she is swallowed into the reflective world or something like that. Then we broke the mirror to make sure she couldn't get out."

"I remember, Officer Jacob, saying something about broken glass. So Hobs lives there now?"

"Most of the time. He stayed in the cottage over at Jack and Thyla's during the winter. Too cold underground."

"Wow. You should write a book," she said.

"Riiight," I drawled.

We had a good laugh over that.

We arrived at the fairgrounds and could see all of the giant balloons laid out on the grounds. Trisha found

a bare spot several feet from where the event would take place and others were camped.

I helped her unfold the two-person tent and we threw our sleeping bags and cases inside. We staked the legs down in case a good wind came up while we were gone. Then she pulled a fitted tarp over the whole structure.

"Now, let's go shopping," she said.

And we did.

The early next morning was clear and crisp as we collected our free breakfast the ballooning club set up under a large awning. I waved at Fin and Cal who I saw seated at the far table. We decided to join them.

"Where's Hobs?" I asked.

"He's here somewhere," Cal answered.

"He better be, I bought his ticket," I said and sat down on the wooden bench alongside the picnic table.

Coffee was available but I had forgotten to pick up mine. A short arm reached past my right hand and set a hot cup down.

"Well, there you are," I said to Hobs as he climbed onto the bench beside me. "Thank you, I was just going to get a cup. Aren't you going to eat anything?" I asked.

"I already have. When do the balloons lift off?" he asked.

"Oh, look at the time, Susan. We better get going," Trisha said, looking at the time on her phone.

"Soon. Have you found a way to enjoy the festival?" I asked him.

"I'm going with Fin and Cal, maybe," he replied.

"No maybes about it," I said.

I gulped down the warm brew a couple of times, removed myself and my trash from the table. Tossing the paper waste into the garbage with Trisha's, we headed out onto the fairgrounds.

Half of the enormous balloons lay on their sides before lighting the burners. The rest of the balloons were tethered to the ground before they would liftoff.

"Our tickets say it's the red and yellow striped one owned by John Peacock. I think that's ours over there," Trisha said, pointing to one of the balloons just rising to a vertical position. The roaring sounds around us from the high-intensity fans indicated the ballooners were getting ready. One by one the colorful bladders filled up and began lifting upward. Then burners were turned on next to the fans to heat the inside air. Once the balloon had ballast, the handlers turned the fans off. The man controlling the burner on our balloon continued to heat underneath the envelope until the basket righted itself up.

We hurried over to our balloon.

"Are you John Peacock?" I asked, pulling my mittens over my hands.

He had a sturdy build and sported a mustache.

"Yes, that I am. Are you Trisha Paige and Susan Edwards?"

"Yes, I'm Trisha," Trisha shouted above the hissing of the burner.

"Is it always noisy like this?" I asked.

"No, if we fly over livestock I can quiet it with this secondary propane valve, called a whisper valve. Hop in ladies. My partner at the controls is Thad."

We said hi to Thad but he was concentrating on his job of keeping the fire ejecting from the burner steady into the envelope of the balloon. That's the opening where the burner heats the inside air. John's other friends tied the gondola down while the three of us joined Thad and climbed into the basket. We used the little projections on the wicker sides for our feet to step on and climbed in. John motioned for us to sit on the small stools in the center of the basket. Thad held onto the burners positioned above us and gave the balloon more heat.

One of the tethers connecting to the top of the balloon already gave way. The other tether attached to the basket held tight. As our balloon began rising into a vertical position, a young man repositioned the basket to keep it upright before he would allow us to liftoff.

The crew released the second tether from the ground and John gathered the rope into our basket. We braced ourselves as the red and yellow balloon lifted us off of the ground. The only sound now was the intermittent blast from the burner to keep the balloon air hot.

The crew and the families left on the ground waved back at us as we rose higher and higher into the atmosphere.

Floating over the land, we could see the river beneath us as we drifted toward the golden fields of wheat. The breeze was low, just the right kind of day to fly in our balloon.

John, who decided to create a little excitement, pulled out an orange ball.

"What are you planning on doing with that?" I asked.

"You'll see," he replied.

Soon our large balloon floated over the walls of a church. At one end of the cement barrier was a balustrade that hung the church bell. John dropped the brightly colored ball and we watched as it fell to the earth bounding first on top of the balustrade and rolled down against the protruding bell.

The church bell began swinging back and forth chiming its sound. What a nice surprise to our float as we drifted across a field of cattle.

"Here's where Thad will use the whisper valve," John explained.

"How long will we be up here?" I asked.

"It's a cool day. The cooler it is the higher we can fly. Since the weather will warm up by nine o'clock, we'll head back in an hour.

Trisha and I ate our granola bars and enjoyed the view of the mountains nearby. John gave each of us a bottle of water.

Another balloon sailed by with Fin and Cal in the basket. We waved back at them, but I didn't see Hobs. Maybe he decided to take the tethered ride. All of a sudden, I saw Fin hold the diminutive man up to the edge of their basket. He wanted down right away. Fin set him down and their balloon drifted ahead of us.

Then we heard John talking on his two-way radio.

"What's that? Sure I'll keep a lookout," he said and clicked off the receiver.

"What's up?" We both asked.

"Loose steer. Keep a look out, ladies. It's a black one," Charlie answered.

Thad lowered our balloon a few feet and shouted, "Look at two o'clock!" he shouted and pointed to our right.

There on someone's front lawn eating a shrub was the bovine. Our pilot radioed back to his call center and we rose a little higher.

After an hour, Thad turned the balloon back toward our liftoff point but we began to descend faster than he wanted. He opened up the main valve and the blast of fire rose up into the envelope of the balloon.

"Will we have to land here?" Trisha asked.

"Hope not, but if we get short of the fairgrounds, the crew will send out a car to pick you up," John said.

Thad kept adjusting his burner output. We passed over the errant steer as it was loaded into the back of a truck bed.

Soon we spotted the fairgrounds and Thad dropped us down a couple of feet. I looked all around and saw we had joined many hot air balloons also coming in for a landing. Standard explanation point balloons of all colors filled the sky. Others included animal shapes such as pig, turkey, and a cow with wing balloons. The business ones from banks and real estate companies were also impressive.

We drifted over a few tall junipers as people were running alongside to catch the tether rope John had thrown over the basket's side. When we hit terra firma, the basket tipped some but the handlers outside righted us up.

Thad eased off the burner so the basket could lean over to one side, allowing Trisha and I to climb out.

"Wow! That was fun. Here's a tip for both of you for doing such a great job," I said, handing each of them a five-dollar bill.

"That was great. Let's go find Lunch," my friend said. We began walking back toward town.

As I stroded back to the main street of Driggs, Trisha tried to make a call home.

"Dang, I can't get service," she said.

"Let me try mine. I'm on a different wireless than you."

Sure enough, my phone rang her home.

"Here, it's still ringing," I said, handing her my phone.

"Hello? Hi, Larry. We just got out of the balloon. It was terrific. Okay, I'll let her know," she said and hung up.

"Let me know what?" I asked.

I envisioned my dog running loose across the highway or other terrible scenerios.

"Everything is fine and Mickie ate his breakfast," she replied.

I exhaled my stress as we headed into town for some serious shopping.

About the Author

A. Nation travels the west with her husband. I decided to write in a futuristic fashion creating interesting adventure stories that have a moral realization. Whether from prejudice, political crime, retribution, or enslavement, the sagas shall continue.



For more insights how this story progressed, see my blog at: [My Blog](#).

To participate in National Writing month go to: nanowrimo.org

You can purchase my ebooks through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iTunes, and others through:

[My Webpage](#)

If you want to see hot air balloons lift off and land but you can't make it to a festival, watch these youtube links:

Taking off:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6316vNQqTk>

Landing:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRgmWD_HCr4