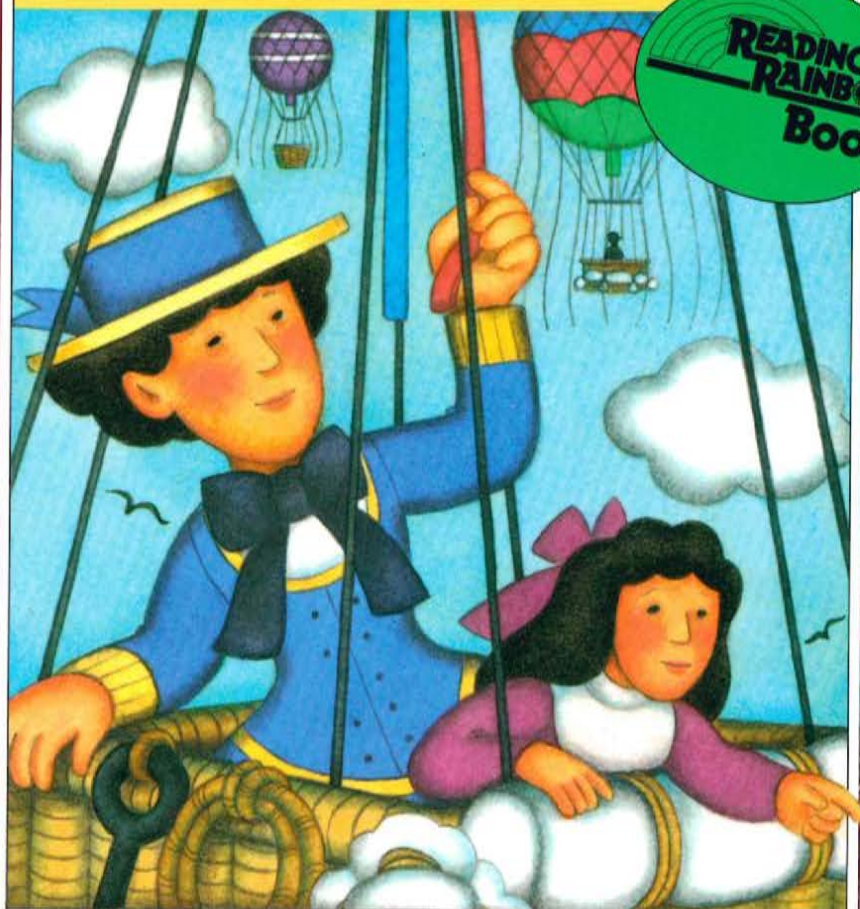


An I Can Read Book®



The Big Balloon Race

story by Eleanor Coerr
pictures by Carolyn Croll




For Julian, balloon detective

—E.C.

For Joshua and Anna

—C.C.

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THE BIG BALLOON RACE

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Summary: Ariel almost causes her famous mother to lose a balloon
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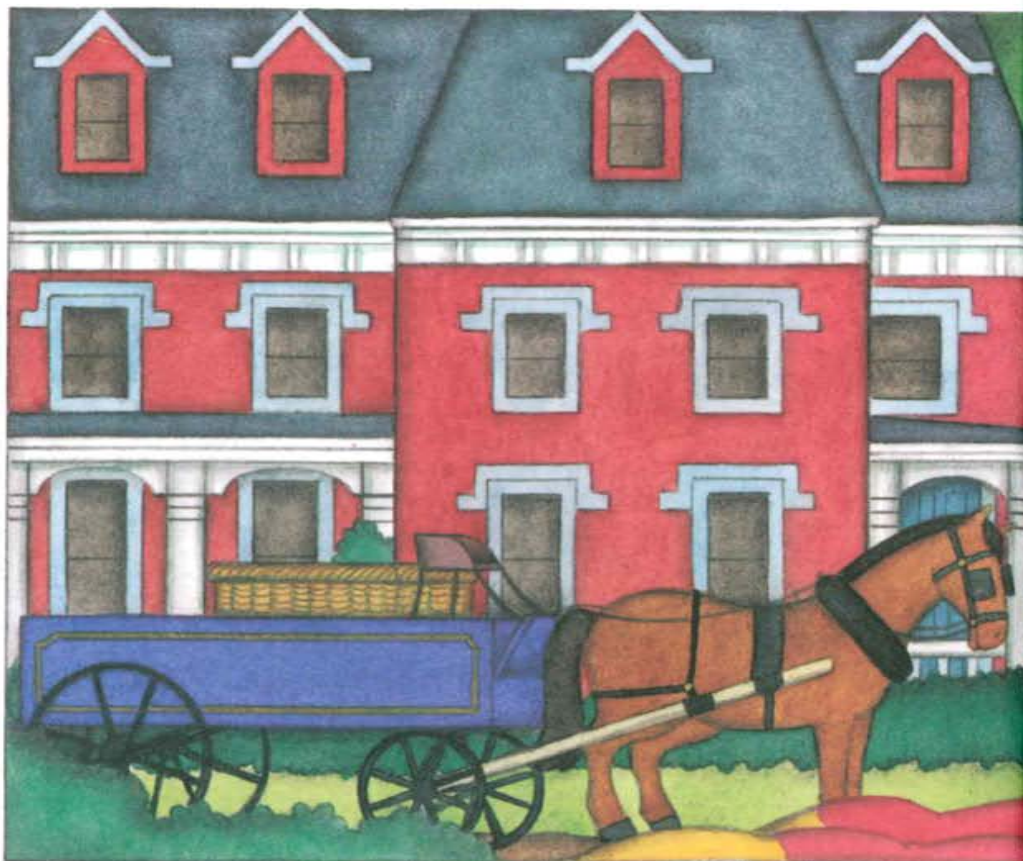
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Balloons, Balloons!

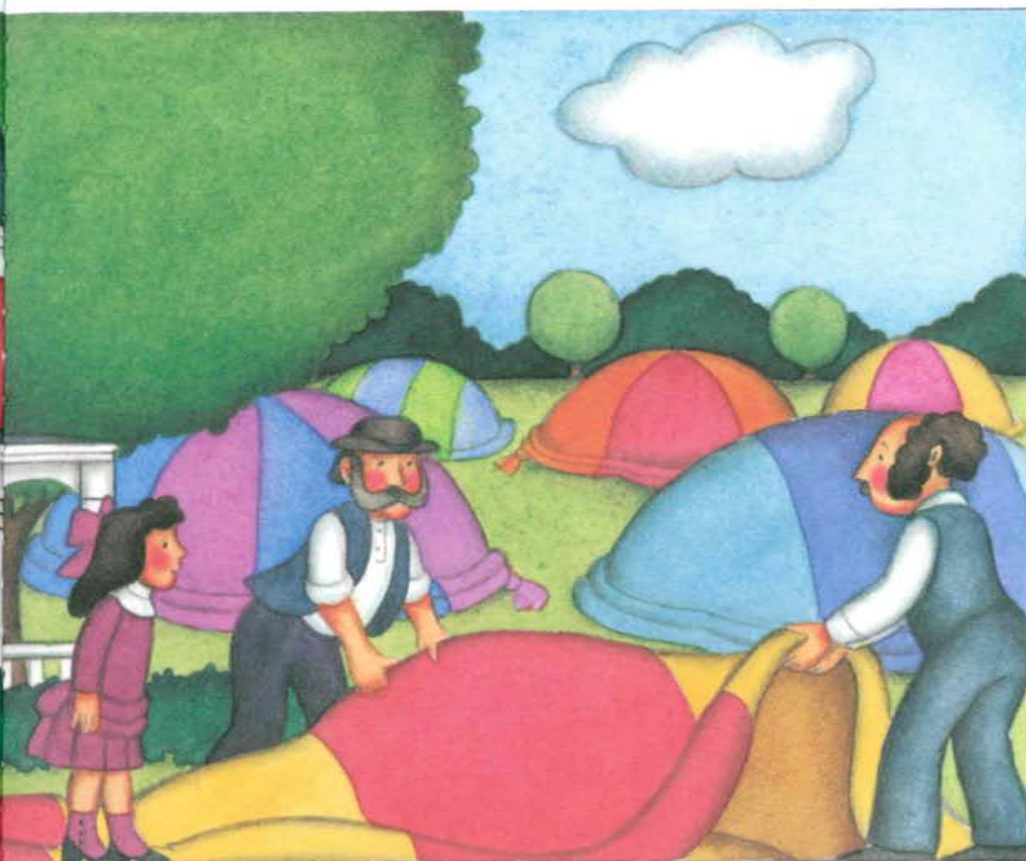
It was the day
of the big balloon race.
Ariel got up early
and hurried to her mother's room.
“Please,” she asked, “can I go up
in the balloon with you?”



Carlotta the Great
was putting on her blue dress
with the fancy gold braid.
“You are too young,” she said,
“and winning a race
is hard work.”
“But I can help,” said Ariel.
Carlotta smiled.
“You can help by riding
in the buggy with your father
to the finish line.”
“Oh, thumps!” said Ariel.
Sadly, she went outside.



Balloon Farm was a strange farm.
In the yard
half-filled balloons sat
like giant mushrooms.



People came from all over
to buy balloons
made by Mr. Myers.
Ariel watched her father
fold Carlotta's balloon, *Lucky Star*.



“I wish I could be an aeronaut
like Mama,” she said.
“When you are older,”
said Mr. Myers.

“Now it is time to go.”
Carlotta, Ariel, and Mr. Myers
climbed into the buggy.
Lucky Star followed in a wagon.

There was a great whoop-de-doo
at the fairgrounds.

Thousands of people were there
to see the balloon race.

It was a big event in 1882.

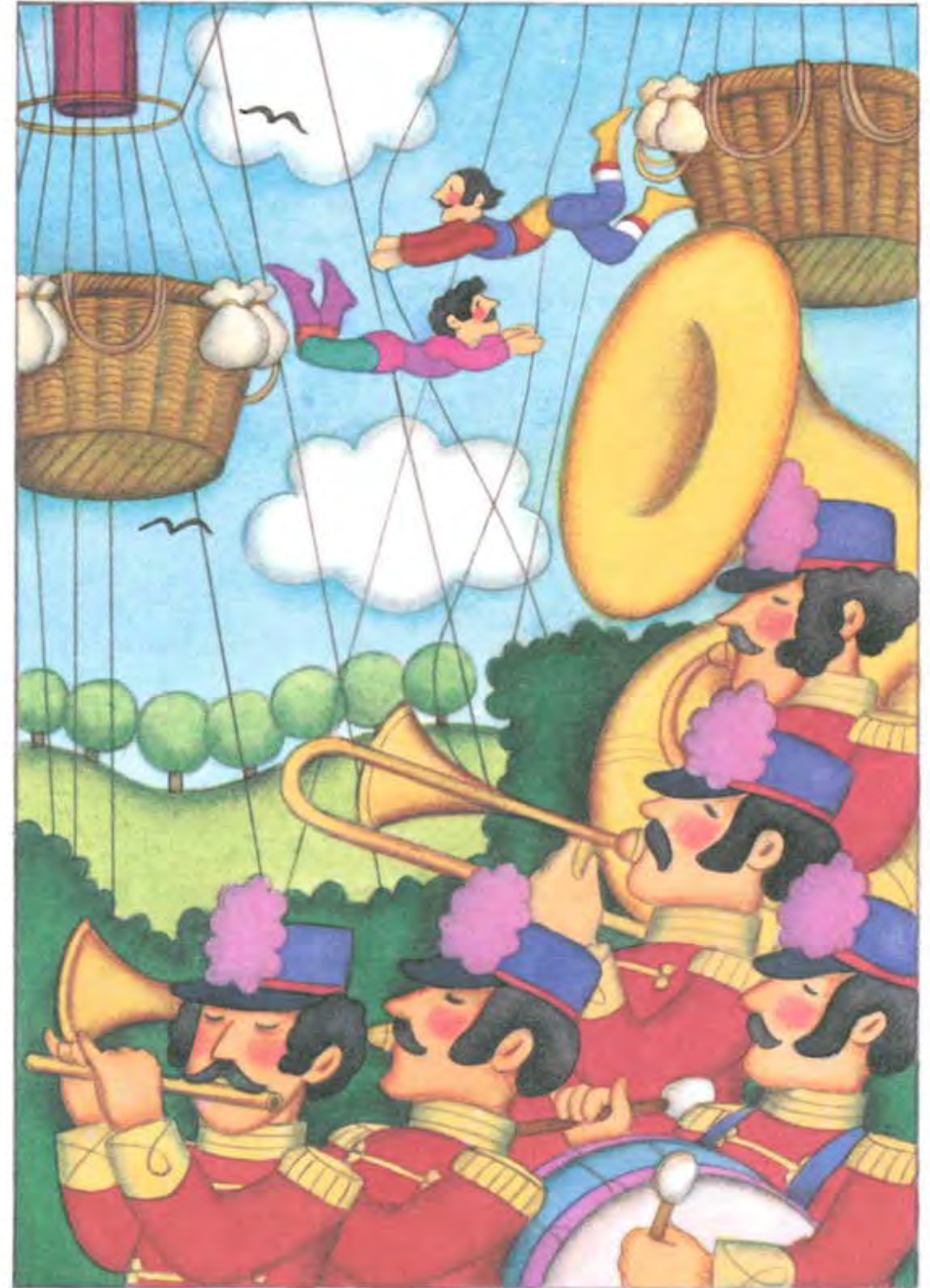
OOMPAH! OOMPAH! OOMPAH!

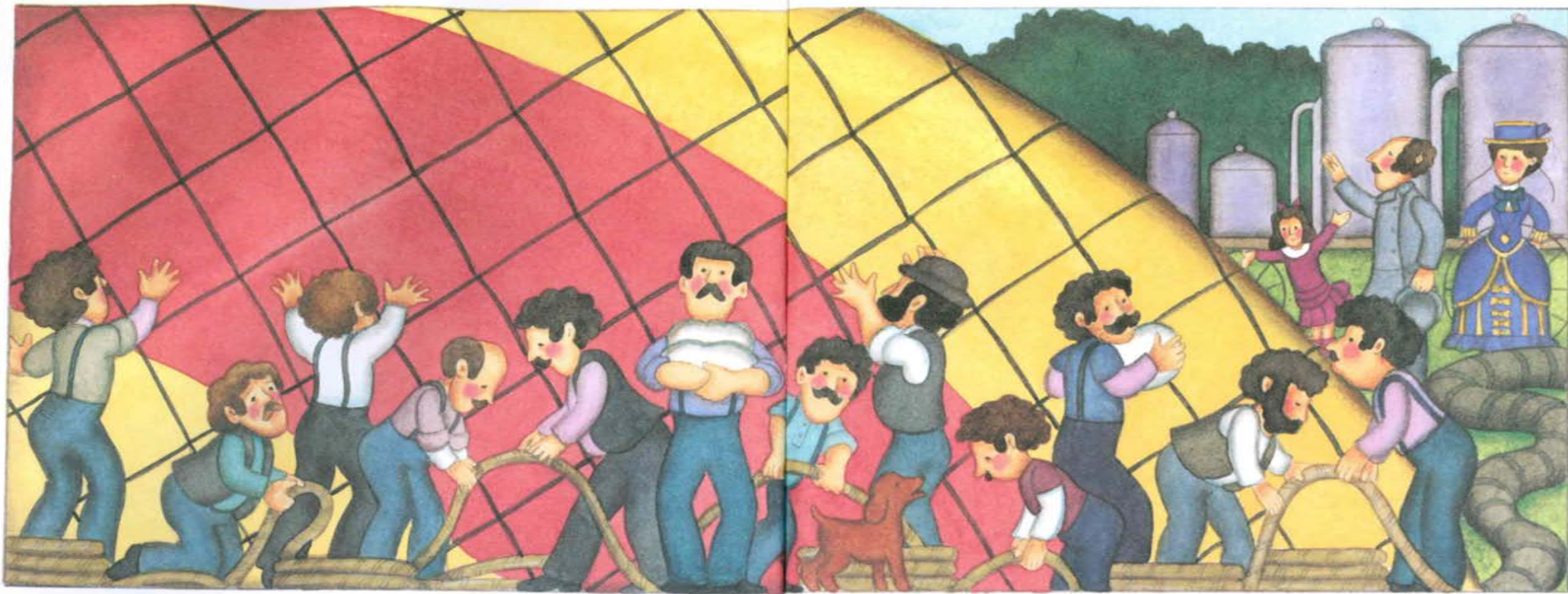
played the band.

Two balloons were already
in the air.

They were tied to the ground
by long ropes.

Acrobats swung from one basket
to the other.

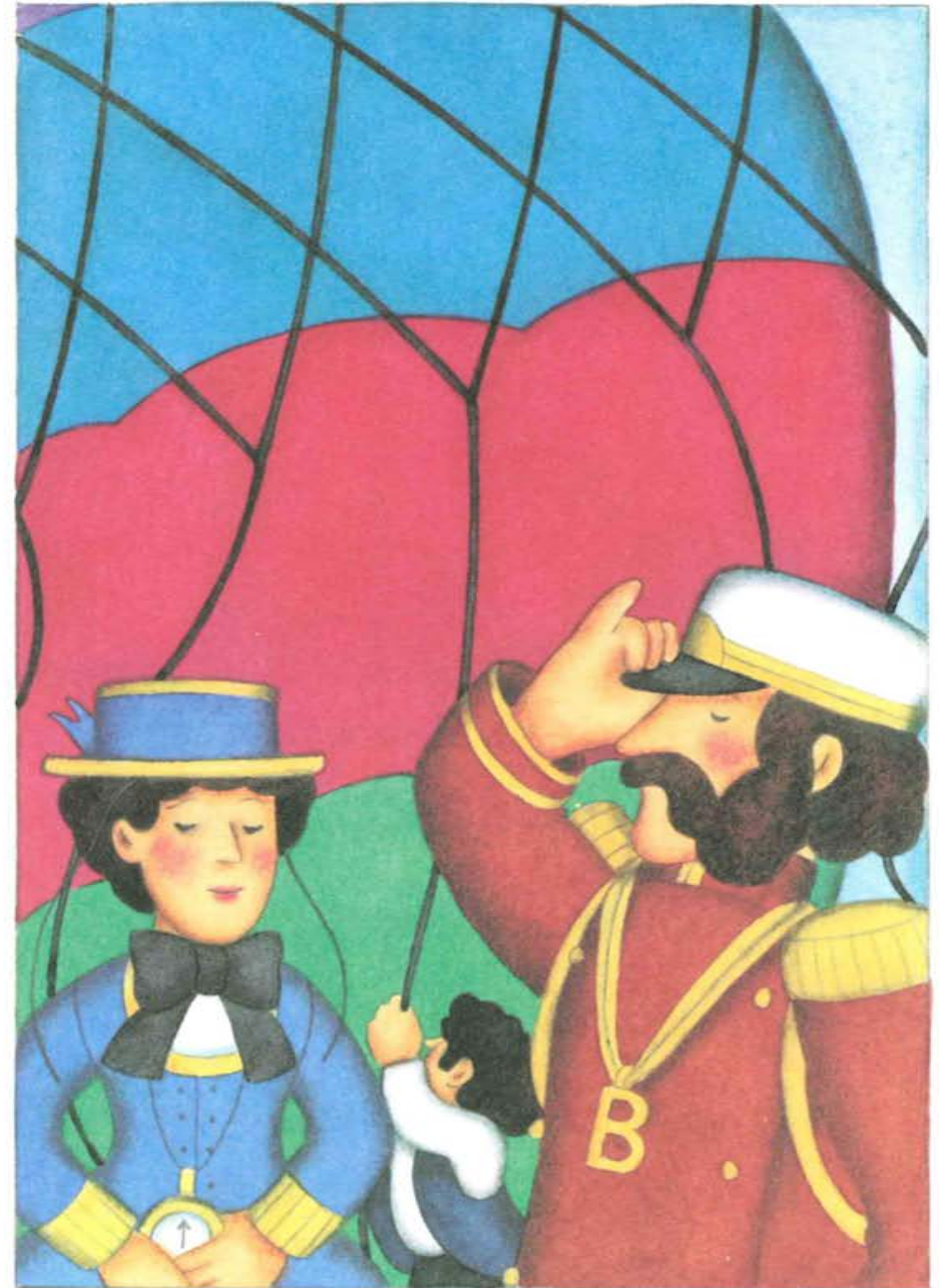


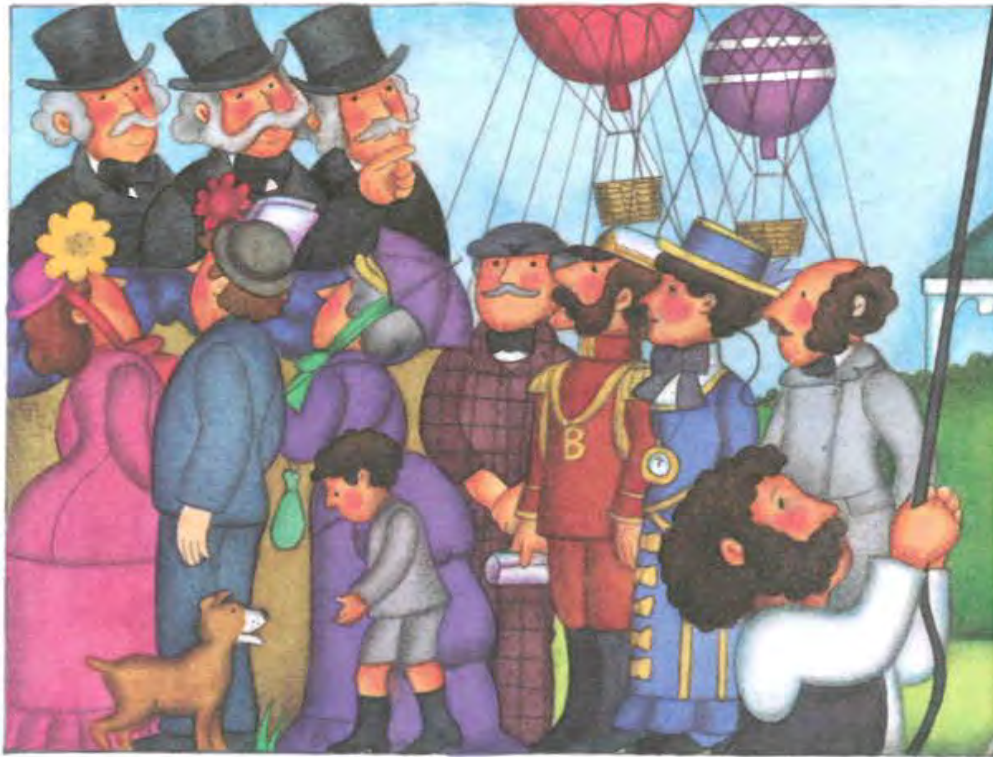


Lucky Star and its net
were spread out on the ground.
PFFFTTTTTT!
Lighter-than-air hydrogen gas
hissed into the balloon.

It slowly grew
until it was taller
than the house
on Balloon Farm.
Twelve strong men
held *Lucky Star* down.

Nearby, another balloon
grew fat and tall.
It was *Flying Cloud*,
a ball of bright colors.
Its captain, Bernard the Brave,
was the best gentleman aeronaut
in America.
Carlotta the Great
was the best lady aeronaut.
It would be a close race.





"I bet you will win,"
Ariel told her mother.
Carlotta gave her a kiss.
"You can sit in the basket
until it is time to go."
Ariel got inside the basket

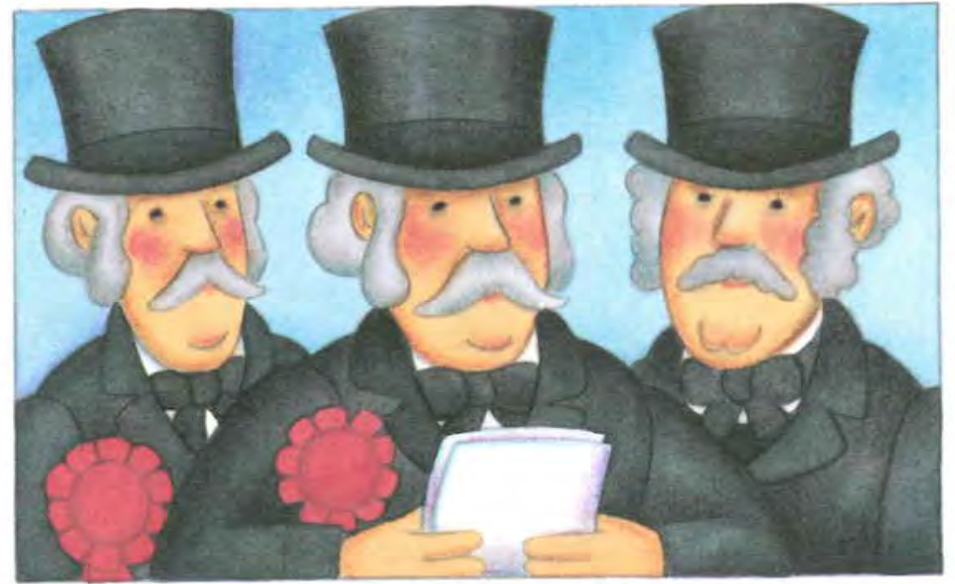


and talked to Harry the pigeon.
Harry went on every flight.
Sometimes he took messages
from Carlotta to Balloon Farm.
The mayor began a long speech.
He talked on and on.

So Ariel climbed inside
the Odds and Ends box.

It was quieter there,
and cozy and warm.

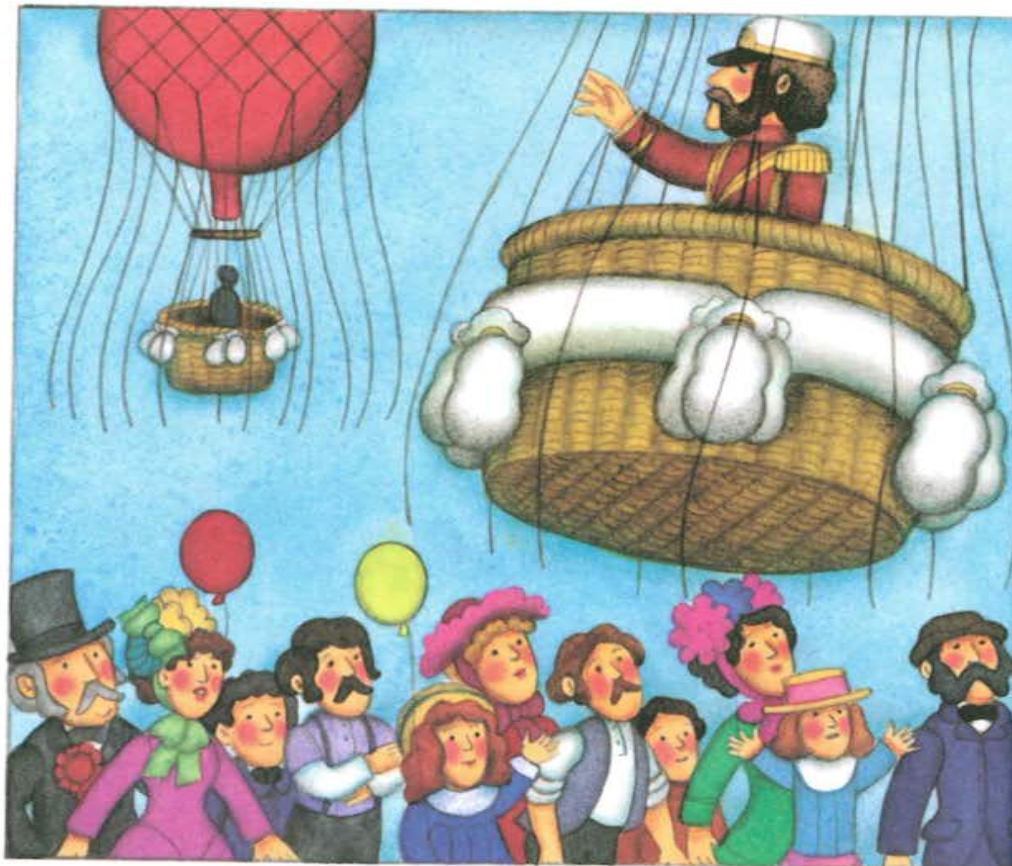
Soon she was fast asleep.



Ariel did not hear
the mayor's last words.

"There is a south wind," he said,
"so the finish line will be
the other side
of Devil's Punchbowl Lake."

Ariel did not even hear the drums.
TARUUUUUM!



The aeronauts
stepped into their baskets.
The crowd cheered.
Mr. Myers waved to Carlotta.
“Good luck!”



She waved her nobby sailor hat.
“Hands off!” Carlotta ordered.
The men let go of the ropes.
With a jolt,
Lucky Star took off.

~ 2 ~

Ups and Downs

Ariel woke up.

“What happened?” she asked.

Carlotta stared.

“Ariel! What have you done?”

she cried.

“We are aloft!”

Ariel looked over the side.

Sure enough,

they were off the ground.

Below, someone yelled, “Stop!

There is a stowaway in that basket!”





Mr. Myers waved his arms
and shouted something.
Ariel waved back.
“Oooo!” she cried.
“It’s like being a bird.”

She watched the crowd
set out for the finish line.
Some were in buggies,
some were in wagons,
and others were on fast horses.

A crosswind tugged at the balloon.

WHOOOOOSH!

Lucky Star swooped away over a farm.

Dogs barked

and ran around in circles.

Pigs squealed.

Chickens squawked.

A horse reared and galloped away.

SCRUUUUNCH!

Lucky Star's basket
scraped the treetops.





“Can we go higher?” asked Ariel.
“The balloon and ballast
are for only one passenger,”
said Carlotta.
“You are extra weight.”



She dropped one bag of sand
over the side.
Up went *Lucky Star*.
The farm got smaller and smaller.
It looked like a toy.
Then it was gone.



“Dear me!” said Carlotta.

“An updraft is sucking us into that raincloud.”

She pulled on the blue valve rope to let out some gas.

Lucky Star did not fall.

Ariel stared up into netting that looked like a spiderweb.

“Why don’t you pull the red rope, too?” she asked.

“That is the rip cord,” said her mother. “It lets the gas out all at once.”

Carlotta tied her hat snugly
under her chin.

“Sit down!” she ordered.

“And hang on!”

Ariel hugged

her mother’s sturdy legs
in their fancy blue gaiters.

Lucky Star was in the middle
of a misty, wet, bumpy cloud.
The basket went back and forth,
up and down,
then around and around.





"I feel sick," said Ariel.
"A good aeronaut keeps calm,"
said Carlotta.
"The balloon will cool
and we will go down."
She was right.

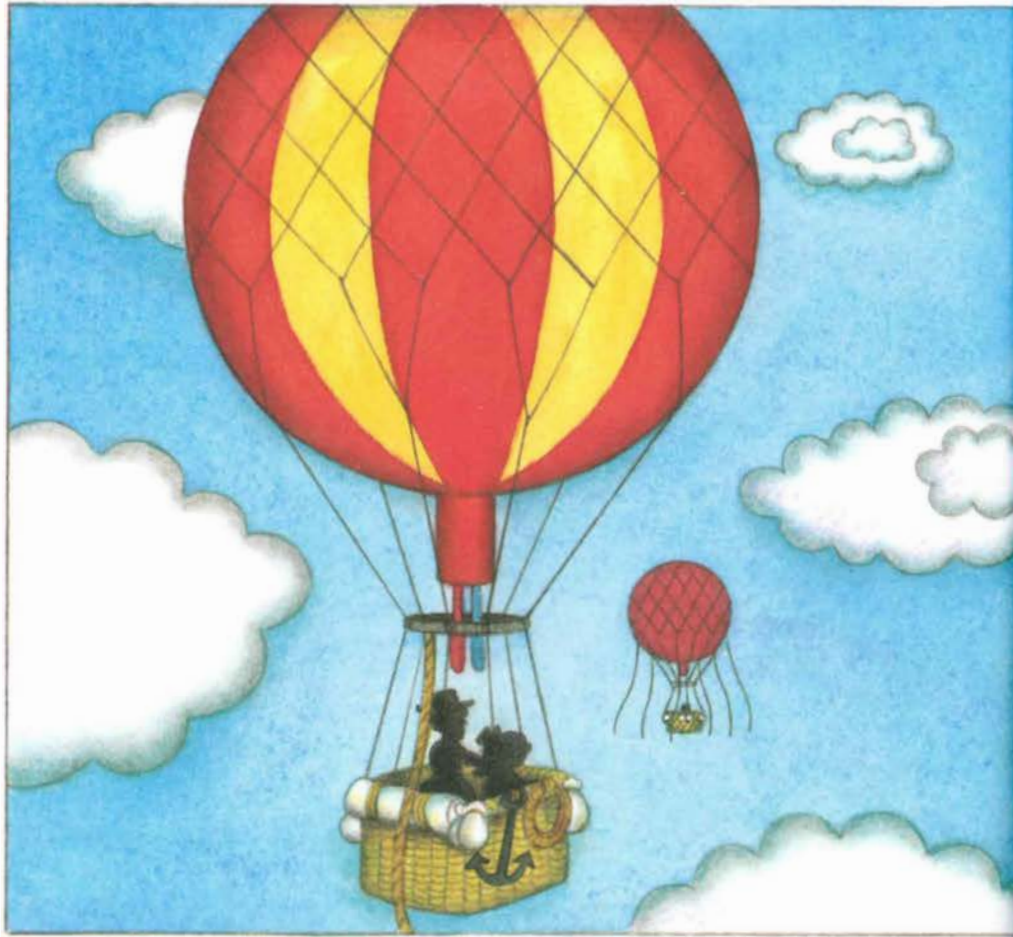


In a few minutes *Lucky Star*
was sailing away from the cloud.
Carlotta checked everything.
"Ropes and toggles
are in fine trim,"
she said.



She read the altimeter
that hung around her neck.
“We are about 2000 feet up.”

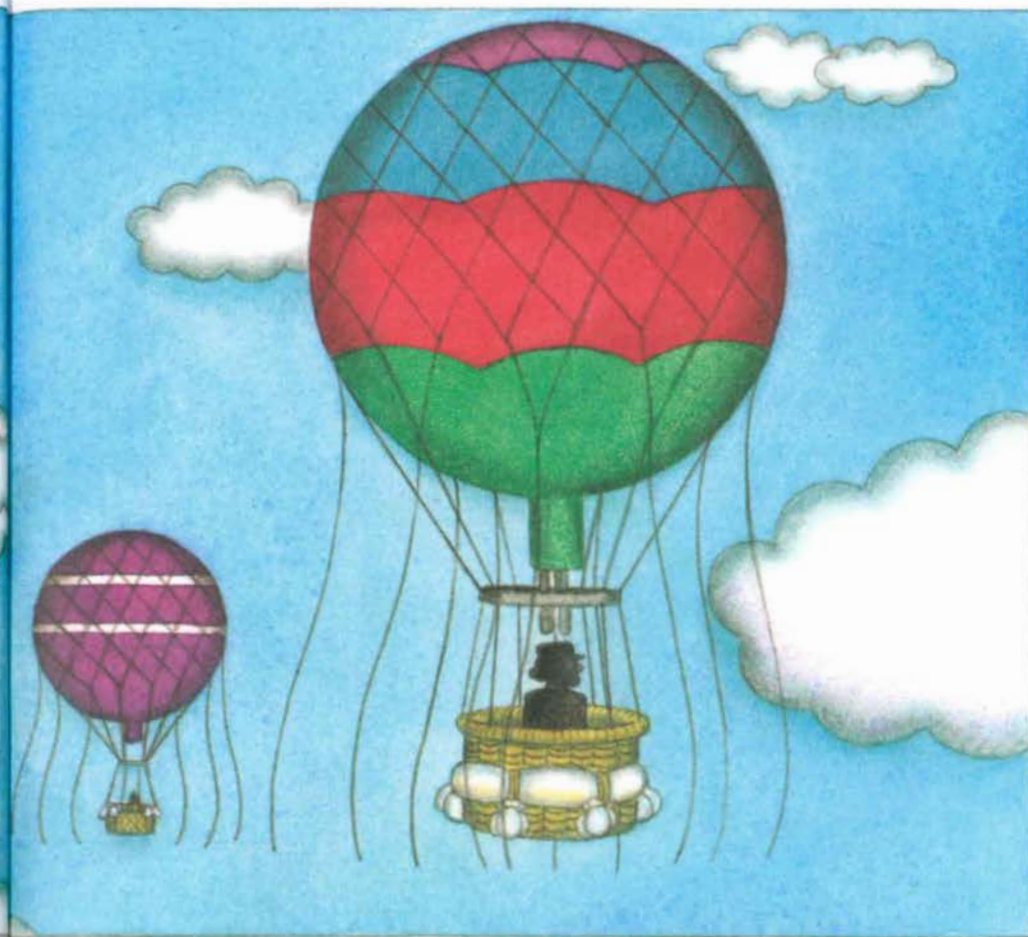
She studied the map and compass.
“We are heading south.”
“Look!” said Ariel.
“The lake is straight ahead.”



Just then they saw *Flying Cloud*.

“He is beating us,” said Ariel.

“He will win the gold medal.”



Carlotta shook her head.

“I have a few tricks yet,” she said.

“Perhaps we can find
a faster stream of air below us.”

She valved out gas.

Down...down...down
went *Lucky Star*.

It was sinking too fast—
and toward a town!

Carlotta tossed handfuls
of sand over the side.

Lucky Star moved up
and skimmed the rooftops.
People stopped whatever
they were doing and stared
at the balloon.





Suddenly wind stung Ariel's cheeks.

"Heigh-ho!" cried Carlotta.

"We found the airstream!"

It was Ariel who first saw
a spiky church steeple
coming toward them.

"Look out!" she yelled.

She closed her eyes and hung on.

Carlotta threw out more sand.

Just in time!

Lucky Star soared over the steeple.

Now *Flying Cloud* was behind.



“If we don’t hit another updraft,”
said Carlotta,
“we might win.”
Soon they were sweeping
over the lake.
“There is only a little sand left,”
Carlotta said.

“Let’s hope the wind
blows us right across.”
The air was cold.
Lucky Star’s gas cooled.
They went down.
Carlotta tossed out
the last handful of sand.
But it was not enough.



“Oh, thumps!” cried Ariel.

“We’ll crash into the lake!”

“Let’s keep our wits about us,”
said Carlotta,

“and make the basket lighter.”

Ariel helped throw out
a raincoat, rubber boots,
the Odds and Ends box,
and the anchor.

Everything went over the side
except Harry and his cage.

~ 3 ~

Ariel to the Rescue

Lucky Star wobbled
and took a giant step.

“Lean on this side,” said Carlotta.

The basket creaked
and tilted toward shore.

Lucky Star was almost there, when
SPLAAAAASH!

The basket plunked into the water.

But it didn’t sink.

The balloon kept it afloat.





“We lost the race,” cried Ariel,
“and it is all my fault.
I am extra weight.”
Ariel knew what she had to do.
She held her nose
and jumped into the lake.
The water was only up to her waist.

“Good gracious!”
said her mother.
“That was brave,
but it will not help.
Even without you,
the basket is too wet and heavy
to go up again.”



Just then *Flying Cloud*

began to come down.

“Our last chance!” cried Carlotta.

She threw the guide rope to Ariel.

“Pull!

Pull us to shore!

Hurry!”

Ariel grabbed the rope

and waded onto the beach.

Lucky Star was easy to pull

with a balloon holding it up.

“Splendid!” cried Carlotta.



She jumped out and dragged
the basket to higher ground.

A minute later
Flying Cloud landed.

“We won! We won!”
shouted Ariel and Carlotta.
They were laughing and hugging
and crying all at the same time.

Bernard the Brave
anchored his balloon to a tree.
Then he came over
and shook Carlotta's hand.
"Congratulations!" he said.
"I see that *Lucky Star* has a crew."
He wrapped Ariel in a blanket.
"Thank you, sir," said Ariel.
Bernard smiled.
"Why, it is my pleasure."
Carlotta sent Harry home
with a victory message
to Balloon Farm.





Soon the crowd arrived.
Mr. Myers rode up in the buggy.
Carlotta told him
how Ariel had helped win the race.

"Ariel," he said,
"I'm proud of you."
The mayor gave Ariel
the gold medal.



Carlotta hugged Ariel.

“I’m proud of you, too,” she said.

“Perhaps you *are* old enough to fly.”

Ariel smiled happily.

She was sure of it.

~~~~~ Author's Note *~~~~~*

This book is based on stories about the famous Myers family. Professor Carl Myers was an inventor and balloon maker. On Balloon Farm in Mohawk Valley, New York, he made balloons for his wife, the fearless and beautiful aeronaut Carlotta. She was the most expert and popular balloonist in America during the 1880's. Carlotta made more ascensions in hydrogen balloons than any other aeronaut of her time. She lived from 1849 to 1932.

Her daughter, Ariel, became a balloonist, too. She rode a "Sky Cycle" invented by her father. Ariel pedaled a dirigible inside huge tents and auditoriums across the country.