

***The Twenty-One Balloons* by William Pène du Bois**

When released, my balloon instantly and gracefully rose to a height of sixteen hundred feet, and kept this altitude as a swift wind carried me out over San Francisco and over the Pacific Ocean. Before taking off, I had lain down on my balloon mattress on the floor of my basket house and held tightly to two handles attached to the floor to bolster myself against the shock of a quick ascension. The first jolt was quite a large one, but as soon as the *Globe* reached its cruising altitude, which seemed to take only a minute or two, my flying basket house was as calm and easy to move around in as if it were on the ground.

I swallowed several times to clear my ears because they felt stuffed up while the balloon was climbing fast. I got up off my mattress, straightened some books which had fallen from their shelves, and walked out on my porch to have a last look at San Francisco. It was a clear sunny afternoon, and I must say the city beneath me looked most beautiful. I noticed quite a few people looking up at me. Evidently the actual sight of my giant balloon and basket house was considerably more exciting to see than pictured in the newspaper stories. I even noticed crowds of people running down the streets in the same direction that I was flying, so absorbed at looking up at me that they kept bumping into other people at street intersections. There was considerable confusion and even what appeared to me to be a street fight. This was most flattering.

In less than ten minutes, I was out over water and watching the coastline disappear from view. Several sea gulls were following the *Globe* as it flew off over the Pacific. Some of them rested occasionally on the balustrade around my porch, making my balloon descend a little; some of them rested on the silken surfaces of the balloon itself, which gave me some

cause to worry. I knew the cloth, which was specially prepared and made to withstand tremendous punishment of all kinds, wouldn't be damaged by the gulls. But the sight of the birds, their sharp claws extended, coming in for a fast landing on my huge balloon, scared me to death.

Mariners have often told me that they consider sea gulls to be good luck and always feed them by throwing garbage overboard. I didn't have any garbage at that early stage of my trip and couldn't afford to spare any of my precious food for feeding birds so I had to risk misfortune and let the gulls go hungry.