

Caroline Cottonsoft and the wind

Sometime in the middle of that night, Caroline woke up by the gentle touch of the wind.

"Let me show you something!" he said, took her by the hand and led her to the hillsides along the river valley where her brothers and sisters were swaying in sleep.

"When you see them sleep like this," he smiled, "it's hard to imagine what a bunch of brats they are when they're awake. But that's the way kids are, I guess." He tenderly combed a strain of hair out of her forehead.

As they reached the hills, he pushed Caroline gently over a ridge and carried her into another valley that widened towards its end. No noise was to be heard here, no movement to be seen. The world seemed to hold its breath. It was not completely dark, because from the direction where the valley opened there came a dim gleam of light that coated the meadows, the trees and the bushes with a silvery shine.

For several minutes, the wind and Caroline kept gliding towards that gleam in silence like on toe tips. When they reached the end of the valley, they suddenly found themselves at the shore of a dark and silent lake.

"Wow!" said Caroline when they halted.

Right above the opposite shore, there stood the moon. A silver path of light laid on the dark waters, wrinkled and cracked like a cobblestone street. The wind stood still by Caroline's side and the only noise to be heard was the sleepy murmuring of the waves.

After a long silence, the wind turned to Caroline:

"That's what I wanted to show you. Isn't it beautiful?" Caroline nodded. She was totally absorbed by the breathtaking view and not sleepy anymore, not at all.

"The reason why I brought you here," said the wind softly, "is not only to let you see this beauty. The moon is at the end of his forth quarter; In a few days, he will be round and full. In those nights, he likes to have some company. He thinks it fits him better to be framed by two clouds, one to his left and one to his right. Would you like to be there?"

Carol nodded. It seemed to be a high honor to make company to someone as important and as beautiful as the full moon.

"Who is going to be the other one?" she asked.

"Cyrus," answered the wind. "He was very attentive in school lately, just like you, and he deserves an incentive." Carol nodded. She loved her youngest brother very much, and she was proud to share such a prestigious task with him.

"Let's go back," said the wind.

"Can't I stay here to sleep? Please," Caroline begged, "it is so wonderful, and I would like to watch it for a while before - oh, please, please!" The wind looked at her, trying to stay inexorable.

"You will have it all night long when you'll be on escort service." He said.

"Where do you sleep, wind?" Caroline wanted to know. The wind laughed.

"Are you trying to sell me a red herring, little one?" Caroline looked as innocent as she possibly could.

"I really want to know. I want to know all about you." she insisted.

"Well - " the wind was not completely convinced yet, "I hardly ever sleep. Sometimes I lay down between the ferns in the forest and hold a little nap. But most of the time I'm on duty."

"On duty - what a strange word!" said Caroline. "I cannot imagine someone like you to be 'on duty'. Aren't you free to come and go just like it comes to your mind?" The wind looked at her with a tender smile.

"That's like it seems to be, little Caroline," he said, "but everyone who is involved in the weather system of the earth, has to obey the strictest rules you could think of. So do you, so do I, so does everybody here."

"But what is it that you have to do? I only know you as a teacher - a very strict teacher, I might add." The wind laughed silently. "What else are your 'duties'." Insisted Caroline.

"Aren't you tired, kid?" asked the wind instead of answering her question. "You've been flying around all your livelong day. You should be sleeping by now."

"I'm not tired at all," replied Caroline, "after a certain someone woke me up and showed me something so beautiful - Asides, I want to learn" she added.

"Okay, you win. But let's go back to the river valley, so we stay close to your family."

Caroline did not want to leave this place. "If we chat and talk down there, we will wake up everybody. So - " she grinned, "first you tell me, and then we'll see..." She sat down on a group of willow trees that stood there close to the lake shore.

The wind finally gave up. "Never argue with women!" he said with a resigned smile. Caroline was proud of herself.

"So, my duties - " the wind began, while she cowered into the branches of one of the trees, "Well, first of all I have to teach you children how to behave as parts of the big weather system. And that certainly is the most pleasant part of my job. Even if some of you guys are trying to be smarter than me, sometimes." He winked at the little cloud and smiled. Thank God, he thought, that she was not one of those dull and submissive dummies -

"Then, there is a lot of organization work to be done - like having you and Cyrus escort the moon on his big night. By the way, this is not such a big honor as you might think. The moon is a very particular fellow, and the older clouds just don't like to be around him. It's a pretty strenuous job."

"I don't care." replied Caroline. "At least it's a new experience I have to make. And who knows, maybe I like it!"

"Let's wait and see!" said the wind.

"Where do you go when you are not with us?" asked Caroline. "Sometimes I think you are roaming around the whole world. And then I dream of going with you."

"Don't think that is too pleasant, Caroline. It's true, I roam around the world, I have to follow the big pressure systems, take overflow air masses from the high pressure areas and carry them to the lows, keep the storm systems neatly separated that they don't mess with each other, and a lot of that kind. Besides that, I have to carry the seeds of all the plants around, so that the flowers, the trees, the grain and the grass keep growing - "

"That's what you do?" Caroline was stunned. "But that is a lot of work!" She did not really understand all the technical terms, and she felt that her sleepiness was coming back; but she enjoyed chatting with the wind - he was such an important person! "Don't you have anybody to help you?"

"Well - " the wind smiled thoughtfully, "we are a big family of winds. They all are brothers and sisters, and they all depend on each other: The Scirocco, the Bora, the Typhoon, the Hurricane, the Passat, even the Tornado - we all are part of one big family. All of us are linked to each other, and without the calmth there is no storm."

"So the Tornado is your brother?" Caroline was disgusted. "But the Tornado is evil! It spins the clouds around so that they become all dizzy and drowsy, it uproots the trees and destroys everything that's in its way!" She could not imagine her beloved teacher being related to such a bad fellow.

"Yes, he is," the wind confirmed, "he certainly is the black sheep of our family, but even he has his part to play. Sometimes, things just get out of hands, you know? Sometimes, two front systems come too close to each other, and they start spinning around, because they don't know where to go. That's how a Tornado starts. There are many competing powers in the weather system, Caroline, such as high and low pressure, cold fronts and warm fronts, positive and negative electric charges, and if two or more of those powers get too close, I have to be there to straighten things out. And if I'm late, because I cannot be everywhere at a time, my brother plays his evil and destructive game. It is a nasty job, believe me, but someone's got to do it." He looked at her weary face, and he smiled tenderly. "Basically, I am the one to equalize all the tensions in the weather system. If there is too much pressure on one side, I have to shovel the overflow air masses to the other side, where there is low pressure. The bigger the difference, the faster I have to go."

"You must tell me more of these things," said Caroline who hardly could keep her eyes open, "but for now, I think, I am too tired to understand it all."

"I can see that," said the wind, "and I am going to let you sleep right here, in this old willow tree. Sleep well, my little cloud, have beautiful dreams, and wake up with a smile."

Caroline did hardly hear his last words. She dreamed of the moon, of the lake and the valley, and in her dream, there was no storm.

The wind glided smoothly into the forest to sleep beneath the ferns.