

## **Caroline Cottonsoft is born**

It was a beautiful day in Indian summer. Above the stubble-fields, under a shining spick and span blue sky, swallows were gathering to discuss their vacation trip to the south. Heavy, staggering rack-wagons were making their way out to the pastures to harvest the last cut of hay for this season, and the hard, glaring light of summer had turned into warm, caressing gold.

The dark green of the mountain forest had put on a few patches of red and yellow showing that fall was not too far away. The soil and the leaves were sponged up with rain water which, at the touch of the sunshine, evaporated from the ferns and forests and rose as white veils, lingering over the tree tops, gathering to form tiny clouds.

And so, Caroline Cottonsoft came into the world on that beautiful morning, together with a number of siblings: Little tousled baby clouds, swaying about in the gentle breeze.

First, she hesitated to leave the warm and cozy shelter of the forest. But when she felt the fresh breath of the easterly wind, and saw the endless playground in the blue sky above her, she enjoyed to be free and to have a shape of her own..

There was not that much of a shape yet, though; free of care, Caroline hustled about on the large playground of the cloud kindergarten, playing with her brothers and sisters, who, like her, had loads of fun in trying out all kinds of forms and shapes, touching each other and letting go again, frolicking about in the air, hiding under the cloud kindergarten teacher's wide, puffy skirt and then appearing on the other side in completely different looks.

Sometimes, when the cloud kindergarten teacher had a day off, the wind took her place. He was much more strict a teacher than the sweet old lady, and he took pride in teaching manners to this unruly bunch of cloud brats. He used to blow them upwards into layers of cold air, comb every single one's edges straight and even, and line them up in long rows, just like pearls on a string. All day long he would let them stand still like tin soldiers and would not allow any kind of undisciplined behavior.

Caroline did not really like those days. She felt cold and uncomfortable, lined up like this, so stiff and all dressed up. But soon she came to understand that a cloud in good standing needs to learn that kind of discipline in order to earn the freedom to roam over the wide land. And, little by little, she got accustomed.

After all, she was Cumulus, and that certainly meant something. Caroline and her family, amongst all the clouds, are closest to earth, and everything in regard to the weather, the circulation of the waters, the growing, blooming and flourishing of the trees, the flowers, and the grass is of their duty. Those are important tasks, and Caroline understood very early how big a responsibility she would have to bear once she graduated from cloud senior high. She resolved to be a great student and become a real fine Cumulus cloud.

Finally, she would not want to be like those of the Cirrus family who strolled about far up in the heights of the icy skies, and were commonly (and certainly for a reason) considered crazy, reckless and unpredictable. Those did not care about what was going on down there on the surface of the earth; those did not attend to cloud school; those did not let themselves being formed or educated; those – those were not even real clouds at all, just some shapeless hazes who often

enough paled away the blue shining beauty of the sky. Caroline would not want to be like those, not at all!

Neither did she care too much for those of the Stratus family. Those were the boring fellows, not good for anything but for keeping the dear sun away from the earth. They usually stuck together, so close that one could not be told from the other, and if they wandered, they all went in the same direction. Even the wind had capitulated to their indolence: He used to sleep through the days when the Stratus family was on duty.

No, Caroline had no business with all of those. She was a true Cumulus, and that's what she was proud to be.