

Caroline Cottonsoft learns about humans

"Humans?" Caroline asked with a blank look - "what is that?"

"Well - " aunt Charlotte answered slowly, "that are - that is something that lives down there on the ground."

"Like the animals in the woods?" Caroline asked eagerly, because she wanted to show that she already knew a lot about the world.

"Yes, something like that." Aunt Charlotte smiled. The she turned serious again. "Quite like that. But not so nice. And not so harmless." She gently pushed her little niece ahead towards the rest of the family. Caroline tended to dawdle when she had things on her mind .

For a while they flew in silence. Caroline looked at the wide land spreading out below her. There were fields and meadows, neatly laid out, forests with clean edges, straight roads and paths between some villages and a small river reflecting the sunlight in all the colors of the rainbow. Everything looked very proper and organized, a little bit boring, too -

"What do you mean by: 'not so harmless as the animals'?" she turned to aunt Charlotte whose last remark had kept spinning around in her head.

"Tell me more about humans, will you? What do they do? What do they look like? And why do they put these silly things on the mountains?"

Aunt Charlotte contracted her outer edges a little bit. "I don't know for sure, Caroline, "she answered. "I have not seen too many of them yet. It's hard to see them from up here - they are pretty small, you know? They look a little bit like trees, only that they are able to move around." She held in for moment and then continued: "You can best see them when there are many in one spot. And then you can hear them, too."

She pointed to her left where the silhouette of a city could be discerned in the distance. "Over there, for example, there live many of them close together."

"There? But - " Caroline looked at that gray thing on the horizon, stunned - "You mean, they live there? I always thought that there is nothing but stones and desert, because there are almost no trees. Why would they live there? It's not nice at all!"

Aunt Charlotte slowly shook her head. "There was a time when there were trees. But then they put those big gray stone things in their place where they hide in day and night, and the trees and the plants retired from there."

"How strange!" Caroline looked at her auntie. "You are not kidding me, by any chance?"

"No, Caroline, what do you think!" Aunt Charlotte laughed. "I want you to learn all these things, how it is on the earth. We, the Cumulus, are the most concerned with what is going on down there. After all, everything humans do affects our lives immediately."

"Then - can't you take me over there? I would love to take a closer look at it! Please!" But aunt Charlotte looked serious.

"Not now, Caroline. We have to stay close to the others. Asides - "she added, "I'm sure you would not like it. It stinks, and you get dirty when you fly over it. It is not really a good place for a Cumulus."

"But - look there!" Caroline pointed to a factory at the outskirts of the city, where thick yellow-white clouds came creeping out of a smokestack. "There are so many of us! It can't be that bad, after all!"

"But those are no Cumulus, stupid!" aunt Charlotte replied. "Those are stinky, ordinary smoke clouds, full of sulphur, soot and dirt! They raise a big stench, and they don't care where they unload the garbage they carry along. It's a nasty rabble, yack!" Charlotte Cottonsoft shook in disgust.

Caroline did not ask further. In the mean time, they had rejoined the family, and aunt Charlotte returned to her place at the end of the group.

Caroline let herself slowly drift over to her siblings, gave Cecil a loving but firm push in his side when she passed by him, and spent the rest of the day playing and dancing with her younger brothers Christopher, Cyrus, Charlie, and Claude, and with her sisters Clara, Cecilia, Cindy, and Cheryl. The wind, too, joined the kids and frolicked around with them until, at the end of the day, they all fell into their beds along the river valley, dead tired.

"Tomorrow I'll fly to see humans", Caroline resolved before she fell asleep. "I want to find out if they really are as bad as aunt Charlotte told me, or if - maybe - "

But before she could finish that thought, Caroline was sound asleep..