

3RD PLACE WINNER FOR FICTION

THE BOY WHO WAS LOVED BY THE WIND KATHY MATTHES

There once was a boy who was loved by the Wind. It was a bittersweet love, for the boy could not see the wind, and he could not love what he could not see. Although he could see the effects of the Wind on the world around him, and he loved those effects, he did not love the Wind herself. She tried in vain to show him that she was real, but he did not yet have the eyes to see her, the ears to hear her, or the heart to love her. Nevertheless, the Wind was the boy’s constant companion and faithful friend.

Each season she would invent games to play with him. In the autumn, she would nudge the leaves from the trees and carefully shape them into multicolored patterns to inspire his imagination. When they caught his attention, she would whip the leaves into a whirlwind dance all around him and send him scurrying over hill and dale laughing with delight. She would often follow the boy to and from school and nip him here and there in a friendly game of tag. During his afternoon chores, she would bring to him all of the scents and sounds of autumn. When he was raking up leaves, she was very still and only blew stray leaves back into the pile. Sometimes she even played hide and seek by puffing up her cheeks and blowing great gusts of wind and then suddenly holding her breath. In the still, calm silence between gusts, he could almost hear her whisper “I love you, boy,” and then he would almost believe in the Wind herself . . . almost.

In the winter, the Wind would bring all the best snowflakes to the boy’s yard so he could build a handsome snowman. When he played in the yard she would often entertain him for hours by whipping snowflakes into frenzied dances or molding snow drifts into animal shapes. When the clouds threatened to snow she would put her windy arms around them so they could not until he made it safely to and from school. When storms kept the boy inside for too many days the Wind would howl and mourn all around the house, banging the shutters and rattling the windows, as if to say, “come out and play, boy,” or “please, let me in!” Sometimes, when he heard her anguished, sobbing wails, he would throw open the window to see who was weeping. Then the Wind would rush to the boy and throw her windy arms around him. He could feel the love in her embrace and, for a moment, he would almost believe in the Wind herself . . . almost.

When all the snow melted and springtime arrived the boy would spend hours and hours flying his kite. The Wind would whisk it up and away,

tipping it this way and that, fluttering the tail like a sail, letting it swoop and soar, now high and then low. Always careful to keep the kite away from the trees. When he grew tired, he would sit in the cool shade of the oak tree and sing songs or read aloud from his storybooks. The Wind delighted in these times. She would sit very still in the bough of the tree and listen intently. Sometimes, when the boy climbed the tree and sat on the highest bough, he could hear the Wind whisper her heart’s secrets in the rustling leaves. At times he could almost hear her say, “I love you, boy,” and then he would almost believe in the Wind herself . . . almost.

As the lazy days of summer unfolded, the boy loved to walk in the meadows or climb to his favorite hilltop and lay on the grass gazing at the clouds. The Wind took great delight in puffing them up into storybook shapes so the boy could dream heroic dreams. Often he would play his tin whistle and dance a jig on the hilltop. The Wind would join in the dance by gathering up all the sweet, wild fragrances of summer and sprinkling them all around the boy, like notes in a melody, or all at once like a symphony of scents. Sometimes, when the boy stood on the hilltop with his face to the Wind, she would gently soothe his troubled brow and place a kiss upon his cheek. He could almost feel her touch say, “I love you, boy.” Then, he would almost believe in the Wind herself . . . almost.

As the seasons came and went, the boy grew into a handsome youth with a heart for adventure, so he went off to sea. The Wind did what she could to prosper the boy’s work. She patiently taught him the ways of the Wind upon the sail and made his journeys quick and safe. With her help he soon became captain of a magnificent ship. The work was hard and the play was rough; it was not long before the boy learned how to drink, steal and fight like the best of them. He soon forgot about his childhood days, the effects of the Wind and her gentle ways, but the Wind did not forget the boy. Whenever she would try to remind him of her love, he would thrust away her breezy caresses with ill-tempered curses.

As each day passed, the Wind grew more and more furious at the boy’s rejection. By day, she blew hard against his sails to slow his progress. At night, the boy would hear the Wind moaning through the sails and feel her anger as she pounded the waves against the boat. In those dreadful hours, he would steel his heart against her pain. He was a man and had no need for childish

memories. But still these night terrors robbed him of his sleep.

Finally, the Wind saw how he had changed. He no longer believed that it was she who had taught him how to sail a mighty ship and prospered the work of his hands. It was she who held back the furious storms and guided his ship to port through the fog. He had taken her gifts and made them his own, and now he thought that he was a great and powerful sea captain. She had hoped that the sea would make him grow strong and wise, but instead the boy had become cruel and hard, thinking only of himself and often hurting other people. The Wind grew very, very angry and could no longer bear his selfishness and foolish pride. She had always shown her love in gentle ways, but now his calloused heart must be broken.

One night, while the boy lay asleep on his ship, the Wind raised a violent storm. She blew with all her might until she broke the masts and tore the sails from the ship. She gathered the clouds into black and threatening shapes, and wrung them tightly until they wept a torrent of tears. She churned the waves into a frenzy and made them dance all around the ship. The boy stood on -the deck, clinging to the broken mast, as wave after crashing wave battered the ship and threatened to swallow him alive. He cried out to the Wind and begged her for mercy, but she seemed deaf to his pleas. In the end, she was merciful to him, for although she crushed the ship into drift wood, she spared the boy’s life. He returned home sick in body and heart. He became bitter and angry because he thought he had lost everything—the ship, his fame and his fortune. He did not see that the Wind caused this tragedy for a good purpose, so he cursed the Wind for ruining his life. He swore that he would never forgive her for as long as he lived.

Day by day, the boy sunk deeper into despair and the Wind knew that he would die from sorrow and loneliness if she did not restore their floundering relationship. She knew that all the pleasures of the world could not give him as much joy as the time spent with her, so she tried to lure him outside to play. On one particular wintry day, she howled and moaned all around the house, banging the shutters and rattling the windows with all her might. She spoke of her love with powerful, gusty breaths, but the boy covered his ears with his hands to drown out the sound of her voice. This only made the Wind more passionate and pleading. She raged through the trees with a deafening roar until the boy finally shouted, “I hate you! I hate you and all you do! Go away and don’t ever come back!”

Suddenly, the Wind held her breath, and there was a cold, still silence. The boy slowly took his hands from his ears and listened. The Wind did not make a sound. The boy felt a great emptiness inside and called out to her, but she did not answer. He ran to the window and threw open the shutters to let her in, but she was not there to throw her windy arms around him. She did not soothe his troubled brow or gently kiss his cheek. She was gone . . . and he was alone.

All at once he was filled with fear and loneliness. He could not bear the silence of her absence. He hurried outside and called her name. He raced to the hilltop, but she was not there. He ran over hill and dale, through the forest, and across the meadows, but she could not be found. He searched all day and when the sun had set he searched deep into the night, until he could search no more. At the foot of his favorite hill the boy fell to the ground weary and broken-hearted. A great drowsiness came upon him, and he fell into a deep sleep.

He was awakened by a loud, rushing noise as a mighty whirlwind came upon him and nearly lifted him off the ground. But as quickly as it had come, it was gone. He stood up, bewildered, and climbed to the top of the hill. There, in the bright moonlight, stood the Wind in human form. She was gloriously beautiful, radiant like the sun shining in its full strength. Her white garment fluttered like a gentle breeze, but her blazing red hair flowed turbulently all about her like a harnessed storm.

At first, the boy was overwhelmed with the keenest joy, for he finally knew, without a doubt, that the Wind was real. But when he looked into her eyes, he felt the deepest dread and a great desire to hide himself from her piercing gaze. Although her eyes flashed with both a terrible wrath and a tender love, it was the love that seared his heart with guilt and condemned him for all of his misdeeds. His shame weighed so heavily upon him that he sunk to the ground and buried his face. Hot tears of sorrow and remorse fell to the earth beneath him. His grief was unbearable and, just when he thought he would die from the torment of his soul, he felt a cool breeze blow all around him. It blew away his guilt. It blew away the pain and dried his tears. It blew all of the selfishness from his heart. When his shame was gone, he felt forgiven. He jumped to his feet, ready to throw his grateful arms around the Wind, but she was no longer there. All that remained of her was a gentle breeze that soothed his brow and kissed his cheek. He stood with his face to -the Wind and heard her whisper, “I love you, boy.”

This time, he did not hesitate.

“I love you, too,” said the boy. And he believed in the Wind herself . . . always.