

Clear Water had good weather throughout the first day that he spent away from the little people of Yopitlaag. From the time that he first flew up into the sky and began traveling by the wind to find big people until late in the afternoon the sky had remained clear, and the sun's warm rays had kept the air just warm enough so that his wings didn't freeze. Still, by late afternoon, Clear Water had not been able to get near any big people.

Surely, he had seen great roads with many of the big people's cars moving on the roads. And he had seen at least three large villages, and many, many of the big people's lodges. But traveling by the wind proved to be profoundly unpredictable, and all of Clear Water's attempts to land widely missed their mark.

First, after he had been in the air for about two hours, he saw a great road, and he saw many of the big people's cars moving on the road. I will land here, thought Clear Water, and find a way to ride on one of those cars to a big person's lodge. But when Clear Water folded his wings in an attempt to drop out of the sky, he just kept right on going. The breeze he was in was too strong for him to drop out of. And then Clear Water remembered. I am not heavy like a leaf. But my traveling now, just like a leaf ride. For the only thing I can decide when traveling by the wind is where I start from.

This realization made Clear Water feel a little uneasy. Thank God the weather is good today, thought Clear Water, for I don't know how long I'm going to be up here. But what could he do? Well, he thought, I may as well wrap myself in my bearskin robe and get comfortable.... And so Clear Water traveled by the wind, wrapped up in his bearskin robe, looking very much like a small seed pod.

After only twenty minutes of traveling curled up in a ball, Clear Water suddenly began to drop. The wind had momentarily died. He fell almost straight down. He saw he was headed for some woods on the side of a small ridge. There were no big people's lodges around. I need to think, thought Clear Water. So he remained in a ball, and continued to fall until, after glancing a few times off some tree branches, he came to rest in a pile of leaves.

Soon Clear Water flew up into the sky again. He had a new plan. He would try flying just at the top of the trees. Maybe if he started out low in the sky, he could remain low, and avoid getting carried away by a breeze too strong to drop out of.

But Clear Water was in the air no more than five minutes before a sudden updraft caught him and carried him way, way up into the sky. Soon he saw another great road below him, with many of the big people's cars moving on it, but from where he was the road looked like a piece of string, and the cars, like little ants. And, rather than traveling in one direction now, Clear Water thought that he was being blown first one way, then another, and then straight up. Then the wind would die, and he would fall quite a ways before the wind caught him and began carrying him again. Finally, after nearly four hours of being in the air, the wind again died long enough for Clear Water to fall from the sky. Still, Clear Water again landed in some woods on a hill that was no where near any big people.

Clear Water was beginning to get tired. And hungry. The sun was low in the sky by this time, and the air was getting colder. Soon Clear Water would need to make a temporary shelter. But the air was still warm enough to travel in, and Clear Water could not be sure that he would get another chance. If the

air becomes cold like it usually is during the winter season, thought Clear Water, not only will my wings freeze from flying, but so will I. And so Clear Water flew up into the sky for the third time that day.

The sun began to set in the west, and the day began to turn into night, and soon Clear Water saw something very peculiar from where he was up in the sky. He saw what he thought were large fires. The fires burned near the lodges of the big people, and near the roads. He saw many, many fires. But he hardly saw any smoke at all. I will want to find out what kind of wood they burn, he thought. Then, if I ever get back to Yopitlaag, we will use that kind of wood, and not have so much smoke all the time. Then he thought about Yopitlaag again. How did I ever get so far from home?

Clear Water traveled by the wind for about two hours, again being carried over places where he would've like to land. But nothing he did caused him to lose altitude when he was in a strong breeze, and the strong breeze that he was now in lasted and lasted, until Clear Water was traveling in the wind when the sky was completely dark, and when stars were easily visible through the clear, cold air. Clear Water began to freeze. He wrapped himself in his bearskin robe. But the chill in the air still penetrated. I need to come down now, he thought, somehow....

Suddenly, a strong wind from the northwest blew over a ridge, and the collision of wind currents caused Clear Water to spin wildly. He tried to remain in a ball, but he became so disoriented that he began to panic, and suddenly he needed to know where the ground was. He uncovered his head and tried to see, but all he saw was sky, darkness, sky, darkness. He began to feel faint. He held on to his bearskin robe. Then he felt himself

dropping from the sky. Suddenly a strong gust of wind caught him, and caused him to move at a dangerously high speed. He felt himself glancing lightly off tree branches, then-- a collision.

When Tom woke up, it was already dark outside. He reached over and shut off the light beeping of his alarm clock. 7:00 p.m. Huh? he thought. Is it morning or night? Then he remembered. He had come home from Mary's, and decided to lie in bed and read for a while. And then he had felt sleepy, and so he set his alarm to make sure he didn't sleep too long. God, what a lazy day. First, sleep until 11:00 a.m. in the morning; then nap for three hours in the afternoon. O-o-a-r-g-h! Tom stretched. Well, let's see if I can wake up here... I've got a birthday party to go to. He got up and staggered into the bathroom. Soon, the hot water from the shower and some lavender Dr. Bronner's soap helped him feel awake again. "I love to laugh, ha ha Ha Ha, loud and long and clear HO! HO! ..." he sang in the shower....

By 7:00 p.m. he was on his way over to the professor's. Again he did not have far to go; the professor and his family lived in a big house right behind the house where he was renting. And really, he thought, no one coming to the professor's tonight has far to go. He could walk; Mary was going to walk, as she only lived four houses down from him; and Stanley, Laura, and Story would probably walk too, because they only lived at the other end of Green St. Tom looked up at the night sky. No stars. And a wind that came from the south slightly moved the hair sticking out of his hat. The air was cold, but not real cold. All the good signs. And before he left he had checked the weather report on the radio. Winter snow watch in effect. A warm front coming from the south will collide with the cold air mass that's

been sitting here for days now, and boom! Tom smacked his hands together-- instant blizzard. Who cares if it all may melt tomorrow? Tonight they expected at least six inches of snow, starting around 10:00 p.m. Looks like good timing, he sung to himself... gonna get snowed in tonight....

He walked up on to the professor's front porch and rang the doorbell. Kate answered the door. "C'mon in, Tom."

"Well," said Tom, stepping inside, "you sure do look good with your hair down like that."

"Thanks," said Kate. "You're the first to arrive--there's the closet there for your coat... if you don't mind hanging out for just a bit, I've got to go upstairs and finish a few things, and Jack and Alan are still getting ready. But the kids ought to be down soon."

"Sure. I'll just watch the tube or something," said Tom.

And so Kate went down the hall to go back upstairs.

Tom hung up his coat, his hat, and his scarf in the closet, and then looked around the front room. Just to the right of the front door, there were two old comfortable armchairs, one that was kind of in the center of the room. In between the two chairs was a small table to set things on. Then there was the Christmas tree, still standing in the front window to the right of the door. And then the TV just to the left of the tree, and back in the corner. An old but nice Persian rug covered the middle part of the old wood floor, and led up to the brick fireplace. There was a small fire flickering in the fireplace. The temperature inside the house was just right comfortable. Not too warm, not too cool. Tom felt content. He continued to look around.

On his left, as he stood in front of the hallway closet, was one of those heavy old fold out couches that looked worn, but still comfortable. Above that on the wall was a large framed print of waves crashing in on a rocky shoreline, and light just coming through the clouds and glancing off the water. He always liked to see that painting. What a great front room painting!

Then, on the right of the couch was a wooden magazine holder full of magazines, and, next to that, a small end table, with a regular old table lamp on it. And then again, straight in front of him, the fireplace.

But then Tom noticed something else... some little figures on the mantel above the fireplace. He walked over to take a close look.

All of the little people he saw were about an inch high, and were lightweight. They looked like miniature stuffed animals, and were wearing colored felt cloth. They were somewhat crudely made, and they were not real close to being realistic, but for that very reason Tom thought they were cute, and he liked them.

On the right side of the mantel, there was old Santa, with a large toy bag hoisted on his back, getting on to his sleigh. The sleigh was made of wood, and was painted, but the reindeer that were hooked up in front of it were made just like Santa. Behind, and a little to the right of Santa, and resting against the chimney brick, was the front of a small house, also made of wood and painted, and Mrs. Claus was standing outside the front door waving to Santa.

In the center of the mantel was the manger scene. The manger was made of wood and painted. Inside a little Mary was sitting on some yellow felt strips that looked like straw, and holding a teeny tiny bundle of white felt. Inside the white bundle was a flesh colored piece of felt, with a face painted on it. Joseph was also inside the manger, standing near where Mary was. Standing outside the manger and facing in were the three wise men, standing together as if they were singing Christmas carols.

On the left side of the mantel was... what was that? There was a castle made of wood and painted, with a drawbridge that was open and lying down flat. In front of the drawbridge,

a tiny king and a tiny queen sat in tiny thrones, apparently sleeping. On either side of them were tiny heralds with long trumpets, who were leaning against the high backing on the thrones, also sleeping. In front of the king and the queen was something like a cot, and on it lay a princess, also sleeping. Then, surrounding all this was bits and pieces of real bush branches and twigs, stacked about two inches high. At the front of this scene, and really right on the edge of the mantel, stood a prince with a sword in hand, apparently trying to chop through the tangled branches... and wake the princess. Of course! Sleeping Beauty.

Nice work, thought Tom. I wonder who made those things....

Just then, Jennifer and Brian came into the room from the back hallway.

"Hi, Tom," said Jennifer, "Do you want to see my new guitar?" She had it in her hands. "And Dylan has a harmonica."

Dylan then put his harmonica to his mouth and blew: "Hrrr, eah."

After about ten minutes, Stanley, Laura, and Story arrived. They had decided to walk. And if the big snow did come? They would stay. The professor and Kate had assured them that there would be room for everyone.

"I really kinda hope we do get a blizzard," said Kate, smiling.

Finally, at just about 8:00 p.m., Mary arrived. She had finished the painting just in time, and used her electric blow dryer to get it to dry. And so she had decided to bring it, and she had it covered up with a large dark blue piece of cotton cloth, so no one could see it.

"Where can I put this?" she asked Kate, as she took her coat off.

"Well... hmmm... I really don't think I'd feel safe about it unless we put it upstairs in our bedroom. Is that okay?"

Mary said that it was.

The professor had spent the last twenty minutes in the kitchen, browning the ground beef, and now everything was ready for dinner. So everyone crowded into the small dining room through a door just to the right of the front door. Then, after some general commotion and rearranging, everyone sat down around the long dining room table. With little Story on Laura's lap, and little Dylan on Kate's lap, everyone just fit.

The table was filled with bowls of freshly browned ground beef, shredded cheddar cheese, diced onions, chopped lettuce, diced tomatoes, sprouts, homemade taco sauce, and two plates loaded with empty taco shells. Everyone had a plate in front of them, silverware, and a paper towel for a napkin. There was a tray, behind where Tom was sitting, that had on it five bottles of dry white wine that had been cooled. The stereo was on a radio station that was playing some classical string quartet music. Both doors to the small dining room were open for ventilation.

When everyone became settled in their place, the professor, who was sitting on Tom's right near the door to the kitchen, asked Jennifer to turn down the stereo.

The professor cleared his throat. Everyone got quiet.

"This is a very fine moment," said the professor.

He paused.

Story said, "Mom, can I have a taco now?"

"Not yet, honey," said Laura. "Shhh." She put her finger to her mouth.

"Tom," continued the professor, "I'm glad you had a birthday."

Loud cheers, whistles, and applause.

Then silence again.

"Now," said the professor, "before we eat, Stanley has asked if he could say Grace. Can we all hold hands?"

Everyone held hands.

And then Stanley said: "Grace."

There was muffled laughter, and a few groans.

Then Stanley said:

Love must be in me and you
Just like a dream that has come true
Because if Love does not exist
How did we get into this?

Everyone then stopped holding hands, and looked around.

Then the professor said, "Okay, let's eat. Everyone help themselves."

And then the commotion began. Here, could you take this? Did everyone get sauce that wanted it? Could you pass me the ground beef? Does anyone know where the tomatoes are? Here, Story, let me wipe that up for you... And while all this was going on, Tom circulated the wine--which he thanked Grandpa Jack for-- and he made sure everyone's cup got refilled when it was empty. The professor asked Jennifer to turn the stereo back up, but just enough so that it could be heard, and he went into the kitchen for more food when something ran out, or to refill the water pitcher. Everyone ate with hearty appetites, and a variety of conversations went on all at the same time. The dinner was the professor's birthday present to Tom, and Tom thanked him warmly for such a fine gift.

The dinner lasted for nearly an hour, and by that time three bottles of wine were finished. Jennifer, Dylan, and Story had long since left to go play in the front room, or watch TV. Now, the professor saw that the time was ripe, and he started clearing away plates and bowls, so he could put away the leftovers. As he was doing this, he said, "Kate says no

more wine until the dishes get washed--" but everyone knew that he was joking. Still, a general commotion began, and soon everything was cleared off the table. Stanley asked permission to handle the dishwashing, and Kate dried and put away, while the professor stored the leftovers. The rest of the group remained in the dining room, involved in general conversation and drinking.

By the time cleanup was over, it was nearly 10:00 p.m. Story and Dylan were starting to get tired, and Kate and Laura were in the kitchen discussing the possibility of putting them to bed in Dylan's room when shouts began to come from the front of the house.

"Hey, everyone, it's snowing outside!"

By the time Kate and Laura got to the front room, Tom and Stanley were outside on the porch watching the snow fall, and Kate felt the cold air that had come in when the storm door was opened.

Meanwhile, the excitement and the snow and the cold air had worked to revive the three year olds, Story and Dylan, and they were now anxiously waiting to find out what everyone was giving Tom for birthday presents.

"Mary," said Kate, "see if you can get the boys back inside. We're going to give Tom his presents now."

Then Kate started to bring some extra chairs into the front room. But when everyone began settling themselves in the front room for giving Tom his presents, some people chose to sit on the floor. So no extra chairs were needed. Finally, the ceremony began, with the professor presiding.

"I have been informed," said the professor, who was by now doing a parody of himself, "that there is some kind of order to the presentations that we are going to have here. Could

someone tell me what the order is?"

"I'd like a tuna and cheese sandwich, on rye," said Stanley.

"That reminds me, does anyone want more wine?"

Kate motioned for the professor to continue.

"Okay, I have a motion to continue... will someone second that motion?"

Whistles and howling.

"It's Tom's birthday today...." said the professor.

Loud cheers and whistling.

"... and we all have something we would like to give him-- Mary, you're first, right?-- Okay, the first gift Tom will receive will be from Mary. Mary?"

Mary walked into the center of the room on to the Persian rug, and stood in front of the fireplace, facing everyone. She was holding her painting, which was still covered by the dark blue cotton cloth.

She waited for silence.

Then she said, "Tom and I first met at a summer gathering near a mountain called Sam's Knob, just off the parkway about forty miles southwest of Asheville. Tom, this painting is for you."

She took the dark blue cotton cloth away.

"Wow," said Tom.

Everyone looked in silence. The painting was 12" by 16", and was of a place in the mountains. She must have climbed Little Sam's Knob to get that view, thought Tom.

The lines and details of the painting were done with ink, and made it look like an old Chinese landscape done on a handscroll. Some watercolor had been used, but there were areas where nothing was drawn or colored. There was glass over the painting and a thin wooden frame around the edge.

On the left side of the painting was a large mountain, with two bald peaks, close together. Above the mountain, and

along the top of the painting, there were a few areas of blue color to indicate blue sky. At the base of the mountain, to the right, and near the middle of the painting, there were a few trees with colored leaves. A few trees with colored leaves were also on the ridge in the distance in the upper center of the painting. Just to the right of the upper center there was a small grove of pine trees.

Below the distant ridge, in the center of the painting and more in the foreground, a stream lined with colored trees and bushes formed an easily visible S curve, and finally joined another stream at the bottom of the painting. The stream at the bottom of the painting had only small curves in it, except for another small S curve on the right. On the side of the large mountain there were some small bushes. There was also a small hillside of grass and bushes to the right and above the stream with the smaller S curve. Near where the stream with the large S curve joined the stream at the bottom there was a clearing, and in the clearing a small fire was burning, with smoke that was just visible curling up from it.

Above the small hillside of grass and bushes on the right, and near where the stream with the large S curve had its source, there was a four line poem, done with calligraphy in small, but still legible lettering. This poem partially obscured the right side of the distant ridge in the painting. The poem:

A Dream of Love Come True

Our times together are so like a dream
that alone now I wonder was that really me
because my memory of it seems to be
a Dream of Love I've not yet seen

Everyone found something to like in this beautiful painting, and marveled at the dream-like feeling that seemed to come from the painting.

"Did you write the poem, too?" asked Stanley.

"Yes," answered Mary.

Tom got up from his chair and they kissed each other, lightly but with great feeling.

Loud cheers and whistling.

"Okay, now," said the professor, "I understand that Stanley will make the next, er, presentation? Stanley?"

Stanley reached down into a grocery bag at his feet and pulled out a cold bottle of champagne.

"This one is for now. And this one," he said, pulling out another cold bottle of champagne, "is for ringing in the New Year."

"Thanks," said Tom. "Should I open one now?"

"Well, if you do, I'll drink some," said Stanley.

"And I wouldn't mind a shot," said Grandpa Jack.

"Maybe you can open it outside," said Kate.

So Tom opened the door, and everyone saw, heard, and felt the blizzard. Some snowflakes even got blown through the door as Tom went out. The main door swung open to the right, against the dining room door, so everyone could see Tom outside through the storm door. He quickly undid the wire around the plastic cork, and pulled it off a little. Then the cork popped and went flying out into the yard.

Tom came back inside. "We'll have to finish this one," he said. "The cork's gone."

When everyone was settled again, and the champagne was going around, Stanley spoke up again.

"The champagne is from both of us," indicating Laura. "This is from me." And he handed Tom a small flat package with a bow on it.

Tom opened it. The present was a picture of the beach and the ocean. In the middle of the picture, at some distance away, there was a long haired man in cutoffs and a t-shirt standing with his hands on his knees and bending down. Next to him was a young boy, maybe three years old, who was just standing. Both were at the edge of the water, looking out at the ocean. This picture was framed in a small blue mat.

"It's a picture I took one when I had a camera. There's a poem on the back too."

Tom looked at the poem:

Coincedence

If through the forest of time we go
and look to know what is there in
the chancing of events we see
the way we sift the evidence

"Wow," said Tom. "Thanks. I'll pass it around so everyone can look."

Then the professor said, "Laura's next."

Laura gave Story, who was on her lap, to Stanley. Then Laura got her violin out. She stood on the Persian rug in front of the fireplace facing Tom, who was in the armchair away from the wall.

"This one is for you." she said.

And, although Laura did not consider herself a fine and practiced violinist, she played a very warm version of "Sweet Lorraine" on the violin, in the style of Stuff Smith.

When she finished, everyone clapped and cheered.

Then Tom said, "Thank you, Laura."

And Stanley said, "A toast, to warm music, played by a beautiful woman." And everyone drank from their cup.

"Next," said the professor, "is Grandpa Jack!"

Grandpa Jack rose out of his chair, and moved to the center of the room. He was not a big man, but he was tall, and his white hair and mustache gave him a presence that reminded Stanley of Father Time.

Grandpa Jack cleared his throat. "Tom," he said, "This is a sad song with a happy ending, that I dedicate to my wife Clara, who has already departed from this world."

Grandpa Jack then whistled a low note twice, tapping his right foot each time, and then began:

Loch Lomond

By yon bonnie banks and yon bonnie braes
where the sun shines bright on Loch Lomond
oh we twa ha'e passed sae mony blithesome days
on the bonnie bonnie banks of Loch Lomond

Oh! ye'll take the high road, and I'll take the low road
and I'll be in Scotland afore ye
But sad is my heart until we meet again
on the bonnie bonnie banks of Loch Lomond

I mind where we parted in yon shady glen
on the steep steep side of Ben Lomond
Where in the purple hue the Highland hills we viewed
as the morning shined out from the gloaming

Oh! ye'll take the high road, and I'll take the low road
and I'll be in Scotland afore ye
But oh my true love we'll never meet again
on the bonnie bonnie banks of Loch Lomond

The wee birdies sing and the wild flowers spring
And in sunshine the waters are sleeping
For now that my heart knows its home ere ever more
I meet you in every love's meeting

Oh! ye'll take the high road, and I'll take the low road
and I'll be in Scotland afore ye
But here's for the love that brings me once again
to the bonnie bonnie banks of Loch Lomond

Since the refrain was one everyone knew, Grandpa Jack got loud and enthusiastic accompaniment when he got to that part. Still, no one was certain of the last two lines of the refrain, and there was some confusion during Grandpa Jack's singing. But the accompaniment only encouraged him, and by the last refrain, he had raised his voice a bit, and was really opening up. When he finished, there was loud cheers and clapping.

"That was great fun, Jack," said Tom. "Thanks."

"Yeah, can we do it again?" said Stanley.

"Now, now," said the professor "One of our distinguished guests," and he slyly but obviously indicated Dylan, "is up past his bedtime, and ought to give his present now. This next present is given by Kate, Jennifer, and Dylan."

Kate got Dylan off of her lap and began opening her guitar case, which was leaning against the wall on her right. Jennifer dug a folded piece of paper out of her pocket. Grandpa Jack handed Dylan his harmonica, which Jack had been keeping ready at hand for this moment. Then Kate scooted a small stool over on to the Persian rug and sat down on it, facing Tom and holding her guitar. Jennifer stood on her left. Dylan stood on her right.

"You guys ready?" asked Kate.

Jennifer and Dylan nodded.

"Happy Birthday, Tom," said Kate, and she began strumming, and then gently elbowed Dylan. He blew a few notes on the harmonica. "Hrr, eah." Then Kate stopped her strumming, and her and Jennifer began singing, with Jennifer reading the words from a songsheet. They sung:

Old Folks at Home

Way down upon de Swanee ribber, far, far away,
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber, dere's wha de old folks stay
All up and down de whole creation, sadly I roam,
Still longing for de old plantation, and for de old folks at home

All de world am sad and dreary eb'rywhere I roam;
Oh! Lawdy how my heart grows weary, far from de old folks at home

All round de little farm I wander'd, when I was young,
Den many happy days I squander'd, many de songs I sung
When I was playing wid my brudder, happy was I,
Oh! take me to my kind old mudder, dere let me live and die

All de world am sad and dreary eb'rywhere I roam;
Oh! Lawdy how my heart grows weary, far from de old folks at home

One little hut among de bushes, one dat I love,
Still sadly to my mem'ry rushes, not matter where I rove,
When will I see de bees a humming, all 'round de comb?
When will I hear de banjo tumming down in my good old home

All de world am sad and dreary eb'rywhere I roam;
Oh! Lawdy how my heart grows weary, far from de old folks at home

Right before they began a verse, or began the chorus, Kate would strum the guitar, and then remind Dylan to play his harmonica. Then when they started singing she had to stop him. Halfway through the second verse, she gave up trying to stop Dylan at all, and so he just played when he felt like it, and it sounded just fine. Especially since the trio were getting background vocals from most everyone else-- but only in unintelligible phrases and sounds. No one but Kate and Jennifer really knew anything but the chorus.

When the song was over, there was clapping and many loud cheers.

Then the professor said, "We still have one more person who would like to present a gift to Tom. Okay, Story."

Story was sitting at Stanley's feet, leaning against the couch. He looked at Tom, and said, "Mom said we could teach you how to play Ha-Ha."

"Great," said Tom, "Let's play. How do we start?"

And then Laura said, "We need one person to lie down on the floor--uh-- over here near the fireplace. Stanley, why don't you be first? Then we need someone else to lie here, with their head on Stanley's stomach."

"I'll do it," said Jennifer.

"Then," Laura continued, "we need someone else to lie here, with their head on Jennifer's stomach..." and so Laura arranged everyone until they were all lying on the floor with their head on someone else's stomach-- except for Stanley at the beginning.

"Now," said Laura, from where she was lying, "Stanley, you say Ha. Then Jennifer, who is second, says Ha Ha. And Mary, you say Ha three times, and so on. The object of the game is to go from the first person to the last person, and have each one say their number of Ha's, without anyone laughing."

By now everyone was laughing, and each person's stomach jiggled, bouncing the head of the person next in the line.

Stanley kept saying, "Okay, let's really try this now," but as soon as everyone would get quiet, someone would start laughing again.

Finally, everyone was quiet.

Then Stanley said, "Ha."

That's as far as they ever got.