

THE GIFT OF THE STARS

Southwind was five years old when his grandmother took him out into the dark to look at the stars. At first this was exciting. But soon looking up into the sky gave Southwind a sore neck. As well, he grew tired of looking at stars.

“What are stars, grandmother?” he asked.

“Babies,” his grandmother answered.

Southwind looked back up. The stars looked like sparks. But babies they must be. Had his grandmother not said so? So many babies. They filled the entire sky.

A star fell. Southwind gasped. “Oh! Grandma! The baby is going to get hurt!”

“Don’t fret grandson. The baby won’t get hurt. It will fall gently as a feather into someone’s arms. Someone’s going to receive a wonderful gift tonight. It will make them happy.” Southwind’s grandmother explained.

“What kind of gift?”

“Some woman is going to get a baby that will make her happy,” Southwind’s grandmother said.

Southwind looked back up into the sky. Not a word did he say. His mind was too small, too young to understand how stars and babies and gifts could be the same thing.

To help Southwind understand, his grandmother told him, "One time you were a little star and you came down as a baby to your mother and to your father and to all of us. You made us all very happy. If ever a star falls near you, take it. Take it home! Look after it. It is a great gift that will make you happy."

"Will I get a baby, grandmother?" Southwind asked.

"No," Southwind's grandmother said. "Only girls get babies. Boys get different kinds of gifts. You'll get a gift."

In that moment Southwind wanted a star to fall nearby so that he could take it up, bring it home and look after it. But none ever fell nearby. Always they fell far away. Always they were gifts for somebody else but not for him.

For five years Southwind watched stars with his grandmother. Then he stopped going with his grandmother. Looking at stars was boring.

Three more years went by. His grandmother fell ill.

One night Southwind went out to the knoll where his grandmother used to watch the stars. Before Southwind got to the crest of the little hill, a star fell and it fell just the other side of the hill, where there was a pond.

Southwind ran up the knoll and then down the other side to the edge of the pond. But there was nothing in the pond, nothing but white flowers that he'd never before seen. There was no gift. He turned to go back home.

"Take me. Take me home. I am medicine. I will make your grandmother well!" a voice said. The little voice came from the middle of the pond. But there was no one there.

Again and again the voice called, "Take me! Take me home with you."

At last Southwind entered the water, waded out to the middle of the pond. In front of him was the white flower that called out. "Take me! Take me home! I am medicine. I am your gift."

Southwind was about to yank the flower from its stalk when it screamed, “No! All of me! All of me!”

But it was not an easy thing to lift the flower from its bed. To do this Southwind had to go underwater many times to dig the long root of the flower from its muddy bed. When he finally dug the flower out, Southwind took it home.

With the flower Southwind’s father made a medicine. They gave it to the old sick woman. The medicine made her better.

Some months later Southwind and his grandmother were standing on the knoll studying the stars. He said to her, “No’okomiss, the flower gift that I received; it was really meant for you, wasn’t it?”

“In a way it is. But it was meant for everybody. But that’s the way all human gifts are.”

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