

The Windplane Man

An Illustrated Chapter Book



Story by
Patricia Anne Thain

Illustrations by
Charlotte Walker-Jones

Peanut Butter Press

Dedicated to my grandchildren: Kelsey, Stuart, Braden, and Ryan.

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Peanut Butter Press
9-1060 Dakota Street
Winnipeg, MB, R2N 1P2
www.peanutbutterpress.ca

Design by Mike Newton

Edited by Richard F. J. Wood

Text typeset in Eureka
Illustrations done in watercolour

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Thain, Patricia Anne, 1928-2008

The windplane man / story by Patricia Anne Thain ; illustrations by Charlotte Walker-Jones.

ISBN 978-0-9865329-0-0

1. Manitoba--Juvenile fiction. 2. Manitoba--Juvenile literature.
I. Walker-Jones, Charlotte, 1936- II. Title.

PS8639.H35W56 2010

jC813'.6

C2010-900841-3



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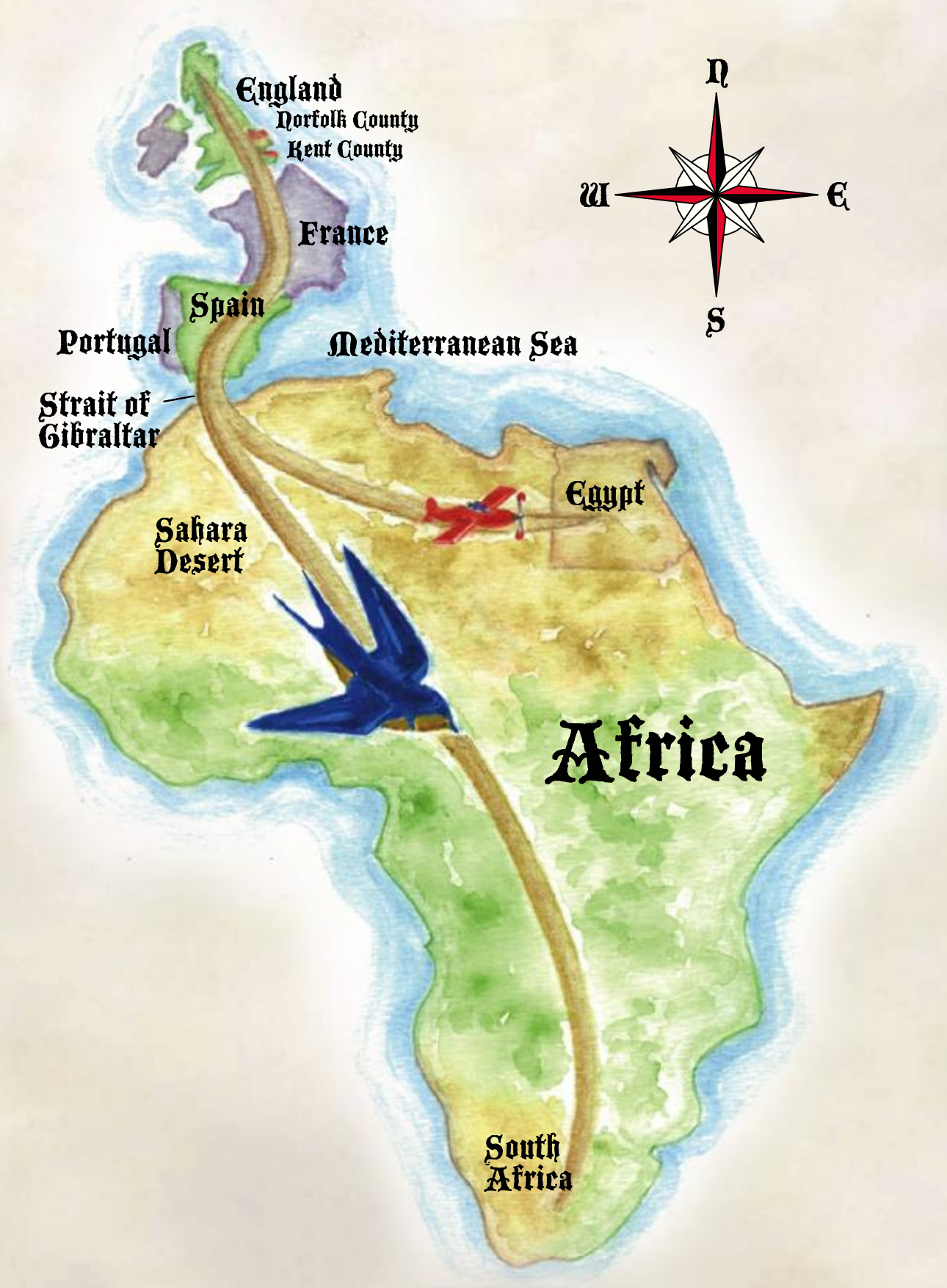
| TREES | WATER | SOLID WASTE | GREENHOUSE GASES |
|-------------|---------|-------------|------------------|
| 1 | 311 | 19 | 65 |
| FULLY GROWN | GALLONS | POUNDS | POUNDS |



Calculations based on research by Environmental Defense and the Paper Task Force.
Manufactured at Friesens Corporation

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England
Norfolk County
Kent County

France

Spain

Portugal

Mediterranean Sea

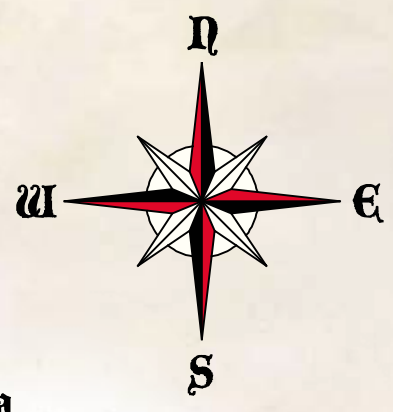
Strait of
Gibraltar

Egypt

Sahara
Desert

Africa

South
Africa





1

An Unusual Visitor

Brrrr! thought John. *How cold it is this evening. I'm glad I'm inside where it's warm and cosy.*

John was stretched out in front of the fireplace in his cottage home. His best friend, Skipper, lay beside him. Together they watched the flames as the fire crackled cheerfully.

It wasn't long before Skipper was snoring gently. Then John's eyes grew sleepy, and his head nodded a few times.

A faint humming sound caught John's attention. It seemed to be coming from outside, so he hurried over to the window. He noticed the panes, all frosty-white, with their delicate designs drawn by Jack Frost himself.

John became aware of something moving in the sky beyond the window. He pressed his nose against the pane. "What is that?" he whispered. He could not tell.

When he threw open the window to get a better look, John was surprised to see an object that appeared to be a small aeroplane. He blinked and stared hard. Yes, it was indeed an aeroplane—with tiny wings and a propeller—and it was flying straight towards the open window.



The plane came nearer. John's eyes widened as he realized that the pilot was a little man, no bigger than an elf!

Being a curious lad, John called out, "Hi there! It's cold outside. Come in where it's warm."

With that invitation, the miniature pilot and his plane floated through the window, circled in front of John, and landed on the parlour floor.

So that was how John first met Tireless, the little Windplane Man.





2

What is a Windplane Man?

In England, little windplane men can be seen high up in the air, hard at work in people's gardens. Like all windplane men, John's visitor lives at the top of a very tall pole, and when the wind is blowing, he winds his propeller round and round. Such a hard-working little fellow he is, who gets no rest at all on windy days. For there he stands, bending up and down, up and down. Each time he turns the iron handle, his little propeller goes round.

The tail of his plane is like a rudder, and as he works, he also swings from side to side. If the wind changes its mind, he moves round and round.

With the North Wind howling hard in winter, the little plane turns northwards and appears to be making a brave attempt to reach the cold North Pole. When the bitter East Wind blows early in the morning, the little pilot seems to guide his plane straight towards the rising sun. If the South Wind brings cooling breezes on a summer's afternoon, the windplane looks to be bound for southern lands. But if the lazy West Wind stirs the stillness of the evening, the little man has lost his energy and, scarcely turning his handle at all, glides into the sunset.

Strangely enough, no matter how long and hard Tireless works, he never gets tired. Perhaps he has a secret?

3

Fast Becoming Friends

John, a young English lad, lived quite near a large fruit farm in Norfolk, where plums and apples, strawberries and currants grew just as well as they did in Kent. John spent considerable time out-of-doors, for there was much to see and do. The farmer was a friend of his, and when picking time came round, John was allowed to give a hand. He enjoyed gathering the ripe fruit and watching the baskets grow heavy with their precious loads.

But now harvest was over, and although it was cold and dreary outside, it was warm and cheerful inside by the fire—where John and the little pilot were making each other's acquaintance.

"My name is John. What's yours?"

"They call me Tireless."

"What a funny name! How did you get it?"

"How do you think?"

"I suppose it's because you never get tired."

Tireless nodded in agreement.

"That's strange. Who are you?"

Tireless laughed. "Who am I? Think hard. You see me every day."

"If I see you every day, you must live on the farm."

"I do indeed. I work there."

John looked surprised. "That can't be possible! You are much too small to work."

"I'm not too small to be important," responded Tireless confidently. "How else do you think the farmer knows whether the wind is blowing and from what direction it's coming?"

"Oh!" cried John. "Now I know who you are. You're the Windplane Man—Farmer Nottingham's windplane man. You live on top of the pole in the orchard."

"That I do. Old Tom and I have been together for a long time."

John had often looked up at the little man in his wee plane at the top of the very tall pole in the orchard. In his mind, he could picture Tireless bending up and down and his propeller going round and round.

John suddenly remembered his manners. "It's a pleasure to have you visit. Please come warm yourself by the fire. I see you have no coat. You must get cold on frosty nights like this."

"I don't get cold," Tireless assured him. "My work keeps me warm, and the windier the weather becomes, the harder I work."

"Yet you don't get tired even then?" questioned John in disbelief. Tireless nodded again.

"So you don't get tired, and you don't get cold," stated John.

Tireless stopped to consider John's words.

Then the little man seated himself in front of the fire, being careful not to disturb Skipper. The young lad watched closely as Tireless warmed his hands. He smiled when he heard the Windplane Man say, "This is most unusual. For the first time in my life, I am actually cold."

"I guess that's what happens when you take a break from work," John concluded. The next thing he knew, he too was seated in front of the fire.

The two new friends fell silent, quietly enjoying each other's company and the warmth of the blaze.





4 A Bird's Eye View

All of a sudden, Skipper's legs twitched and he whimpered loudly. Tireless looked over in surprise. John explained, "Skipper's just having a dream. He's probably chasing rabbits in the orchard."

The little man's thoughts went back in time. He had often watched John and his faithful dog playing outside and enjoying adventures together.

John said to Tireless, "Do tell me what it's like living up there in the sky."

"Well," began Tireless, "it's like living on top of the world. I can look far away across the crowns of the orchard trees, and I can look down and watch everyone at work on the farm."

"Then you've seen me helping too?" piped up John proudly.

"Yes, I see you all the time." The little man's eyes twinkled. "I even remember one afternoon when a certain young lad was caught hiding amongst the branches."

John immediately looked shamefaced. It was true that he occasionally hid in trees when he should have been somewhere else. He tried to cover up his embarrassment by defending himself. "Well, grown-ups get so tiresome at times!"



Tireless was chuckling now, but not unkindly. "I also remember the day that same boy slipped and became stuck high up in an old apple tree."

John laughed in spite of himself. "And there I hung, upside down, until Tom came and unhooked me. Whew! How cross Mother was when she saw what was left of my trousers! Talking of trousers, where did you get yours? They are just like the ones I ruined that day."

Tireless almost giggled. "That's hardly surprising, considering you left most of those behind. The farmer's wife found the remains the next day, still caught on the branch. Then she happened to look up at me and decided to make me these trousers. And she gave me this fine shirt and straw hat. Now, thanks to you both, I look very smart."

John agreed. "You certainly do look handsome."



5

The Little Man's Wish

Pleased with himself, Tireless rose to his feet and danced a jaunty jig. He ended with a front flip, bowed, and then settled back down by the fire. John gave the wee fellow a pat on the back, and the two became quiet again.

It wasn't long before John's thoughts drifted off. He imagined himself as a windplane boy, and it occurred to him what an unusual life that would be. He turned to Tireless. "Don't you feel lonely and bored working up there by yourself?"

Tireless replied with a grin. "Why do you think I flew down off my pole to visit you?" Then he became serious. "That is the trouble. It can be quite lonely. And I do wish I could go places."

He shrugged his shoulders. "My friends, the birds, visit whenever they can, bringing me news from far away. Even the youngest cuckoo flies across the water and finds his way to a land where he's never been before. The swallows call it Africa. That's where they go to stay warm in the winter." Tireless sighed loudly. "It's kind of the birds to stop and tell me of their travels, but I'm always listening to their adventures. I wish I could have stories of my own to share."

He seems so sad, thought John. I hope someday his dream comes true.

Tireless continued to gaze wistfully into the fire.

John interrupted the silence. "Cheer up! You've made a good beginning today by coming down off your pole, and you must come again." He leaned in close.

"I have an idea. One of these days, we'll go on a real journey together."



Tireless beamed. "How splendid!" he cried. "But now I must get back home before I am missed. The wind had dropped when I slipped away, and the farmer had finished eating his dinner and was fast asleep and snoring. My goodness! You should hear him snore!"

John ran quickly to the window. "Well, Tom's not snoring now. You must hurry!"

Tireless jumped into his plane and was gone. John watched anxiously as his new friend winged towards the pole. If only the farmer did not look up too soon. John held his breath. The little pilot had merely a few more yards to go. Tireless reached home just in time, for when Tom raised his eyes, he saw his windplane man working away as if nothing at all had happened. "He made it," said John, breathing a sigh of relief.

"Wind's still in the north, I see," grumbled the farmer, wagging his finger at Tireless. "And I suppose you've been that way all day!"

The little man smiled to himself.

6

Ready for Anything

The next morning, John had forgotten all about the Windplane Man. But Tireless never forgot. Thinking and planning kept him happy, day after day.

Some of his bird friends stayed on the farm all winter. They were used to the cold and never thought of flying away. Such strange questions the little man asked them. And they heard him say the oddest things. "I wonder what it would be like to travel abroad by air. Would I enjoy it? Do you think I could manage a trip like that?"

The birds ruffled their feathers, shook their heads, and chirped to each other. "He wants to travel abroad? What will the Windplane Man think of next?"



Winter slowly turned into spring. March winds arrived, blustering their way from every direction, and Tireless worked without ceasing. April was calmer, giving the little pilot a bit of a rest.

Down on the ground, the farmer's wife was ever so busy, and Tireless watched her with interest as she did her spring cleaning.

That reminded him. Now was the time to inspect his plane. He was proud of its shiny red paint and took care that it always looked good and worked well.

But winter storms are apt to wear even the best of planes, so Tireless examined every part. What was that? Could it be a spot of rust? That would never do! He must ask the farmer for some oil.

And so he did. He protested and complained. "Squeak, squeak, squeak!" lamented Tireless each time he turned his handle, until at last the farmer's wife said to her husband, "My dear, that dreadful noise is getting on my nerves!"

The farmer fetched his oilcan and carried the ladder to the tall pole. He climbed slowly, for he was getting old.

Tireless nodded encouragingly. "Just a little higher," he whispered to himself.



Tom reached the top of the ladder. His windplane man waited patiently. Ah! A few drops of oil had done the trick.

"Now mind you stop your grumbling!" declared Tom. To show his gratitude, Tireless went on nodding a little longer.

Hurrah! he thought triumphantly. *I'm ready for anything.*

Tireless looked down at the cottage where John's family lived. "Maybe one of these days John will follow through on his promise to take a journey with me." Tireless sighed. "That is, if the young lad hasn't forgotten all about me. Perhaps I'll have to make another visit to his cottage."

7

John Tries to Remember

*H*olidays at last! John could hardly believe it was true. Four whole weeks, and the weather looked grand.

"There are so many things to do," John announced to Skipper. "We can go riding and fishing and climbing and exploring. I don't even know where to start!"

Skipper wagged his tail as if to say, "What are we waiting for? Let's do something fun!"

John suddenly remembered his friends on the farm. He would go round and see them soon. Perhaps Tom would let him help in the orchard. Now wasn't there something else about the farm? The lad wrinkled his nose and thought for a minute, but nothing came to mind.

So he grabbed his fishing pole, and the two adventurers were off to enjoy the day.

Late that evening, a tired but utterly contented boy crept sleepily into bed. His equally tired and contented dog claimed his usual spot at the foot of the bed. Three-quarters asleep, John was saying to himself, "I wish I could remember. It was something on the farm. Or was it someone? Oh dear! I just can't remember at all." And John drifted off to dreamland.



8

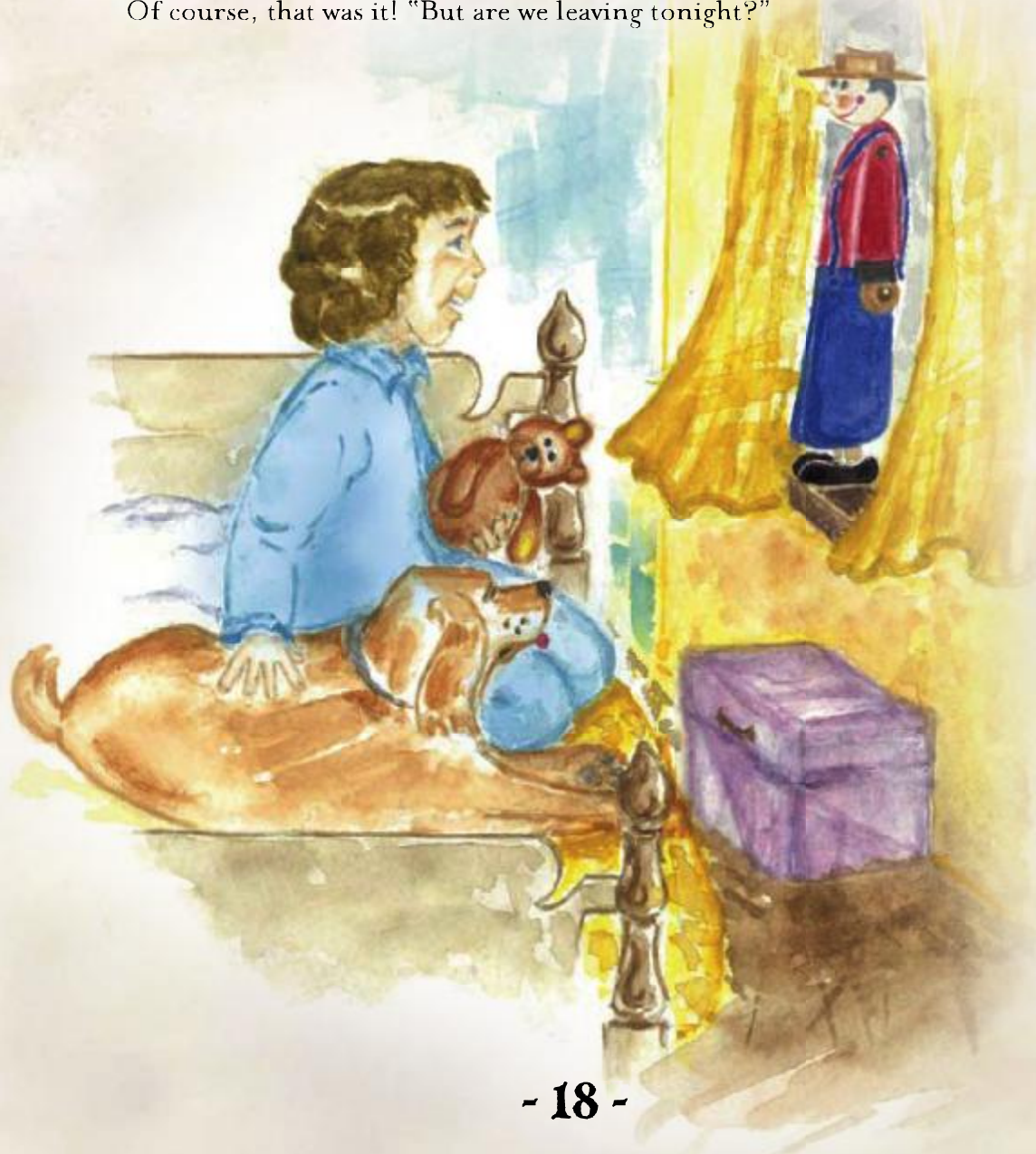
The Journey Begins

John suddenly sat up in bed. "I know what it was! The windplane and the little man too! Now what was his name?"

"They call me Tireless," said a little voice in the darkness.

"So they do!" John scrambled out from under the bedsheets. "But where are you?"

"I'm here on the window ledge. Have you forgotten our journey together?" Of course, that was it! "But are we leaving tonight?"



"We are if you get moving."

"I'm not nearly ready." Rushing about excitedly, John could not find a single thing. He stumbled and bumped into his bookcase. Several books tumbled off the shelf.

"Why don't you turn on the light?" suggested Tireless.

"How silly of me," laughed John. "There! Now I can see you better. And there's your little plane too."

But wait a minute. The plane was not as tiny as he remembered. And there was a seat big enough for him. John was confused. Had he grown smaller, or had the plane become bigger?

"Hurry up!" urged Tireless, climbing into the cockpit. "You don't need to take anything. Just hop in and we'll be on our way."

There was no time to wonder. And what did it matter? They were adventure-bound, and that was all that counted.

With a nod to Skipper, John jumped in. The dog watched from the window as the windplane disappeared into the night.

"We're off!" cheered the two travellers, gliding higher and higher.



John strained to see the landforms and buildings below. "Where are we going?" he asked. He tried hard to remember the map on his classroom wall.

The little pilot's answer did not really come as a surprise. "I thought we might try to follow the path that the swallows take on their flight to their winter home."

"That's a long way!" exclaimed John.

Tireless shook his head. "We don't have time to travel the whole distance. We can just go part of the way. Perhaps we'll meet up with my friends on their return trip. They should be on their way back now. It doesn't matter how far we get. I just want to see what lies beyond England."



"Well then, I'll leave it to you to choose the route," John agreed sleepily. "I'm feeling rather tired."

"That's understandable," said Tireless. "It is, after all, the middle of the night."

They continued to glide away from John's cottage, away from the orchard, and away from Norfolk County. Silently, they floated through the darkness towards the unknown.