Who Hear a Windsong

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Abstract

Above the pinetops, the winds whirled in a wild ballet...
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A BOVE the pinetops, the winds whirled in a wild ballet. . . . But here below, the world was a dark temple, arched with silence, and heavy with the incense of pine.

Tippet would rather be with the winds. Here he was so very lonely. And now, so near—when he thought how near he was, his stomach felt hollow, and his long legs tried to run away with him.

Tippet, off to waken the enchanted princess, the beautiful princess doomed to sleep for a hundred years in her silver castle . . . until he came—her prince—and shattered the spell with a kiss.

For a hundred years the winds had whispered of her. Finally one day they sang in the streets of his city, and Tippet heard them. He'd been sweeping out the shop one morning—oh, a very ordinary morning, with his father muttering over a pair of red boots, and outside the door the sound of iron on iron, and carts on cobbles, and haggling women shrilling at the draper. Then there it was, the wind—a thin voice singing of the princess who dreamed in her silver castle.

Tippet leaned on his broom and listened, his goblin face solemn. Dreamily, he stood the broom in its corner and began making a little bundle—hose—some bread and cheese—

Incredulous and a little frightened, his parents stared. Such things cause talk in a town. Then the old shoemaker patted his wife on the shoulder—let him go. The boy's been working hard. Tippet smiled absently, murmured something foolish about waking a princess, and marched in awkward dignity toward the towngate.

He wrinkled his forehead anxiously. He hadn't thought about that. Suppose—suppose—his doublet and hose were a little faded, but they were of the best material; and his shoes—patched in two places, all right, and the buckles not so shiny as they'd once been, but good shoes.

Tippet faltered. He guessed the princess wouldn't want him. She'd want a prince in blue velvet, with golden chains
around his neck—tall and graceful, with hair that curled softly at his shoulders. But when she opened her eyes—Tippet touched his own face, the crooked nose, the wide mouth and narrow chin, the bump on his forehead from the low branch last night. He looked down at his skinny body. A prince for the sleeping beauty...

But the winds had sung to him. He'd heard them! He quickened his steps, and in his heart the wind-song shrilled wilder and wilder. His head throbbed with it until he was almost blind. Then his feet broke from the whisper of pine needles to the dull thud of earth, and forest-gloom fled before light. Tippet was at the edge of the forest, with fields and hills beyond him, and here, its mute mass blocking out the sun—a castle! Tired and cracked and tumbled-down, perhaps—with fallen stones at its feet—and perhaps a little smaller than he'd expected, with just four skeleton turrets—but where sunlight warmed the stone walls, they were a silver gray, and Tippet knew—he had come.

He'd planned just what to do, but somehow when the castle loomed up before him, he couldn't stroll in all dignified and princely, as he'd intended; instead, he leaped up the stairs three at a time, and into the long hall...

Now—that was strange. It had no roof. And there were no velvet-covered couches, no silver-railed stairs, no furniture at all—just a shell of something that had been.

Still—a hundred years had passed—or perhaps—perhaps the enchantment hid it all from his eyes.

Suddenly Tippet realized that the winds were silent, and only an echo tingled in his ears. He looked around him. While he stared, the castle seemed to shrink into silent desolation, as if it held no people at all, and hadn't—for many times a hundred years. Perhaps—he didn't want to think it—perhaps he was crazy. Perhaps this wasn't a castle at all, but only an ancient ruin on the edge of the forest. Perhaps there was no enchanted princess at all.

Tippet winced. In his ears the wind-song's echo mocked him. He twisted his cap a dozen different ways. Then the stiffness seemed to go out of his slight figure. Dumbly he stood, staring at the blades of grass struggling up through the cracked stone floor.

A wisp of wind touched his cheek.

"Look, Tippet... look, Tippet!"
He tried not to listen. The wind had only made a fool of him—he knew it now.

"Look, Tippet..."

His eyes crept upward—and then they glimpsed a flutter of white in the corner. Unwillingly, he edged toward it—and then he knew that the wind had not lied! She was dreaming there, in a silvery dress—long fair hair and a pale tender face... and soft lips... the most beautiful princess in the world.

For a moment Tippet only looked at her, his eyes hurting with her beauty. Gently, very gently, he touched his lips to hers, and somewhere there was a lone harp-string trembling on a sweet high note. Her eyes half opened... and smiled at Tippet... then went wide and frightened. Before he could stop her, she was up and through the castle door.

Trembling, Tippet sank down on a velvety chair. He saw the silver staircases and fifty golden couches, a hundred lords and ladies yawning politely and starting to swirl in the long bright hall, their shadows dancing on the satin-hung walls. As they whirled past Tippet, the ladies smiled and murmured, "He has come." Clocks began chiming a hundred years... the wind hummed contentedly around the turrets... and perched gracefully on his gold-wrought chair sat Prince Tippet, velvet-suited, fingering his gold chains and waiting. He had seen her eyes. The princess would come back to him soon—very soon.

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Redeployment

Edwin Sidey

The wind, cold from Arctic seas, flattened like a crouching animal as it rushed in across the barren coastal hills. Bending low under a solid gray sky, it swept over the flat plateau and hurled itself in hatred against the monotonous rows of dark green tents, tearing the smoke from a hundred stove pipes and beating it to the ground.

The sergeant heard it snarling as he lay sprawled on his cot in Tent 219. The sound sometimes rose above the low mumbling talk of the men sitting around the little stove, and, as he watched,