Swoopy

Dycie Stough*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1948 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress). http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
Swoopy

Dycie Stough

Abstract

ONCE THERE was a little boy cloud. His name was Swoopy. Swoopy was probably the sweetest little cloud in the sky. Everyone loved him dearly—except the other little clouds. He had a sweet mop of curly hair that fell over one of his dear, bright blue eyes...
ONCE THERE was a little boy cloud. His name was Swoopy.

Swoopy was probably the sweetest little cloud in the sky. Everyone loved him dearly—except the other little clouds.

He had a sweet mop of curly hair that fell over one of his dear, bright blue eyes. His hands were pudgy and usually smeared with blue where he had grubbed around in the sky too much. He used to follow his mother around and ask her all sorts of questions until in despair she would turn him out to play.

Some days when Swoopy's mother would mix up a batch of rainbows and slide down them to the ground. He was very fond of sliding down rainbows because when he hit the ground he could turn all yellow and roll up into a ball and ordinary humans would think he was a pot of gold. Then when the humans reached out to take him he could go POUF and disappear. His daddy scolded him about things like that and said that Swoopy was a bad cloud—but he would look earnestly at his daddy and say, "Daddy, what lovely blue eyes you have—" and he was never punished.

One morning Swoopy had saved a moonbeam and made it into a hoop to roll in the sky. It had been very stormy the night before and lightning had punched holes in the sky. When Swoopy's mother looked around for him and saw the sky all cut up she took him aside by his fluffy little ear and made him sit in the corner all day. Swoopy didn't mind and whistled and hummed to himself until his daddy came home that night.

His daddy said, "Mother, why is Swoopy being punished?"
“He was very bad,” she said. “See all the holes and ruts in the sky?”
“Yes.”
“Swoopy did that with his hoop!”
“No, Mother. You’re wrong,” Daddy replied. “I did that last night during the storm—it was so dark that I couldn’t throw the lightning very straight.” Swoopy just laughed and laughed. It was so funny. He cackled and howled he was laughing so hard—“That’s a joke on you, Mommy!” and he laughed until he was almost sick and the tears were coming to his eyes. Swoopy was like that—he just couldn’t be punished.

Swoopy could change shape more times and into more shapes than any other cloud in the sky. He used to go out in the morning and crawl under the trees until some human came by and then POUF—he’d dissolve into mist and get the human all lost. He thought that was the most fun, and when he was tired of being mist he’d go POUF again and dissolve back into the sky. His favorite pastime was seeing how long he could get. He would stretch and stretch and stretch until his head was at Zanzibar and his feet were at Baraboo! Sometimes then he would snap back into the shape of a giraffe or an elephant or a dog or almost anything he could think of. The other little clouds were astonished at the funny things Swoopy could do. His mother kept telling him that someday he’d get stuck stretched out if he weren’t careful. But Swoopy never listened.

One morning when Swoopy was out stretching he had stretched and stretched—longer than he had ever stretched before, and where he floated over France some little human boys saw him and shouted at each other. He thought that was funny, and he loved audiences so much that he went right down to the tree tops so the little boys could see better. He swished his feet and curved his spine—just to show off.

All of a sudden he felt the trees tickling his feet, and he curled around to see where they were and tried to move—but he just couldn’t budge. He pulled and he tugged and made spirals in the sky. He tried to turn a somersault, but he just couldn’t move. His feet were caught fast in the tree. He looked through all his pockets and tried to find his jack knife—but he’d left it at home that day. He tried to go POUF—he tried to change his shape—he grunted—he snorted—he twisted—he turned—but he just stayed caught in the tree.
Pretty soon, Swoopy started crying. The whole sky was dark. He was so sad and he just didn't know what to do. He sniffed and cried, but couldn't even find a handkerchief to wipe his nose. He called, "Mommy, Mommy!"

And then he called—"Daddy, Daddy!" Just then his daddy came along and saw him caught in the tree. He heard Swoopy. When he finally saw poor little Swoopy he scolded him and scolded him in a deep, deep voice that sounded like thunder. Swoopy cried and cried. He said he'd never show off again and always be a good little cloud. Finally his daddy took a streak of lightning out of his knapsack and cut the tree off his little son's foot. When the lightning touched Swoopy's foot he started to swell up. Soon he was almost as big as his daddy.

"Daddy," he wailed. "What's happening to me?"

His daddy said, "Son, it's about time that you grew up. That's what is happening. From now on, my boy, you will have all the responsibilities of a good cloud. You will carry a knapsack full of lightning and a bag of rain. You'll be in charge of showering the dry country and gathering up water from your mother's mixing bowls. You know where they are—all the lakes and oceans and streams. Never again will you run loose to play pranks. From now on, Swoopy, you are a grown-up."

Swoopy looked at his daddy and knew that he might never see him again. And now that he was grown-up he could never go home—because clouds don't have time when they are big. Tears almost dripped over Swoopy's eyelids but he stopped them just in time. (There had been enough rain in France for that day.) He wanted to ask his daddy if he couldn't just stay little—and then decided he couldn't do that. So he stood up very straight and said, "Yes, Daddy, I'll help YOU now." He said it very proudly, even though his voice had begun to change and was so deep it frightened him.

A big fat beam of sunshine came from behind his daddy and shone right on Swoopy. His daddy gave Swoopy his own knapsack and dissolved saying, "Goodbye, son. Do all the good you can for the world, and when your son is grown up give him this knapsack."

Swoopy felt good all over. The sun shone. The sky was blue as could be. And Swoopy drifted away majestically—even though there was a rainbow close by.