

The Journeyman

Nestled deep in a sandy rut, the small fox lay with his back toward the stinging sand which was being constantly pitched at him by the wind. The wind chuckled mischievously as he flung sand hither and thither. With his beady eyes tight shut, the fox waited for the wind to tire of its game, and move on, as he knew sometime it would. The desert, and all the creatures that called it home, knew this wind too well. He screamed as he darted between cacti and the rocks he had carved since before anyone could remember. He challenged the life of everything that moved, crawled or stood still. Hours passed, and the wind himself grew tired of the hot white sand. The fox crept from his den. He knew the game was up as the wind gave a last shout of laughter, and was gone.

The wind slowed as he left the desert, and turned westward. He did not disrupt and harm as he had done before, but calmed to a slow, heavy breeze that caressed the sloping hillsides. He flowed down valleys and rose above mountains. He stole moisture from rivers and lakes, and carried it with him, until at last he flowed down to the shore, and graced it with huge raindrops, falling upon ocean and trees as he moved along the coast. In the distance he saw a building, and some men on a jetty, loading many different crates of furs, gold and spices onto a vessel. They were hot with the work, and he cooled them as he bustled by. He left the boat and travelled further. Behind him the boat departed, with royal blue sails and a brass figurehead shaped like an eagle, facing out to sea. The wind enjoyed the waves that licked up when he flew faster, and the tall palms bending as if to try and follow. The wind carried leaves and birds, water and heat along with him as he graced the shores of Africa. On the fifth day, the wind grew restless, and with a hush, turned towards the open ocean, picking up speed. As he raced across open waters, white horses danced beneath him, and leapt up to touch the swift, fresh air. This wind was not angry like the wind of the desert, nor was he lethargic and heavy as the coastal breeze, but he felt spritely, and new, enjoying the expanse of the shallow turquoise sea beneath him, and the thin white clouds that rode high above. Twisting and turning, the wind danced merrily towards pitch black cliffs rising far away upon the horizon.

The wind now reached the shores of the volcanic island of Madeira. Seabirds nested on the sunburned cliffs, then launched themselves onto the buffeting back of the wind, to scout for lizards or insects warming in the sun. The island was a haven of tall, green palm trees, and the stark contrast of black sand beside blue waters. The wind, however, did not recognise this. All he thought was where he would go next, ever deciding, living solely in the future. It skipped over the land below, blanking out the wonderful goings-on of everyday life on the isle. Iguanas chased each other on hot rocks, and small mammals hurried about the grasslands with twigs and tall stalks. Fish fluttered about in the shallow lagoons. The wind brushed past, towards a single dock jutting into the sea. This was built for trading vessels to stop and restock fresh water from an underground spring, or collect exotic fruits from bushes near the shoreline. Moored up alongside was a large schooner that rested deep in the water. It was familiar, with royal blue sails and a brass figurehead, shaped like an eagle. The wind did not like familiarity, he was used to travelling to ever new places, and his love of the new made him fickle. The wind was not a constant, he was unpredictable, and he liked it very much. The wind was not going to see the boat again, following him about like that, always being where the wind went. No, the wind made up its mind to leave. Leave before the ship could pack up and catch him, so off the wind went, once again gathering speed and heading for the vast blue ocean.

The Atlantic looked infinitely deep from above. As he journeyed further out, the wind began to see how lonely this place was. It was an infinite expanse of mottled, icy water, unfathomable and seemingly endless. The wind peered down, marvelling at the creatures he saw; porpoises leaping extravagantly, jellyfish with their trailing fronds pink and red, and even a mighty blue whale calling for its mate. All these things made the wind feel small, and somewhat powerless. The wind sped up, flicking from side to side like a sea snake. The waves were brought up beneath him, and crashed as he moved away. He brought clouds to him, and the sea darkened as they congealed above and blotted the sun. It went from stark daylight to a murky darkness in minutes, and the wind intended to keep it that way, for it was his way of showing power over all; he was stronger than the water, stronger than the oceans, stronger than every landscape over which he flew.

Far off in the distance, something appeared. It was bright, bobbing up and down on the sea, with blue sails and a brass figurehead shaped like an eagle. The wind raced toward it, for how dare the ship return! How dare it follow the mighty wind! As he got close to it, the wind could see sailors scurrying around, he could hear their shouts to "Man the sails and prepare for a storm!" The wind felt mighty as he built himself into a fearsome gale. Revelling in power, he threw huge waves at the vessel, and soaked it through. More waves and a surge of water took a sailor and washed him overboard. The wind had claimed a life, and craved more. Rain lashed the deck and made it a treacherous rink, sending more men to their graves. Terrified, some of the sailors ran below decks to wait the out the storm. The rest bravely protected their ship, but the wind kept up the onslaught, and the boat tipped this way and that, sails almost touching the icy sea. At some point in the battle to stay aloft, the main mast snapped under the strain of its sodden sails draped around it, and sank into the sea, to be lost forever. The wind gave a final gust, and the boat rolled. Victory. Sailors were trapped by the torrent of water flooding the cabins, and the lucky were knocked unconscious immediately. The wind waited for any sign of life, and, upon seeing none, he calmed, and observed his handiwork; shattered wood bobbed, scraps of sail floated just under the surface, and bodies lay about like battered islands. The wind gave a final shriek, and moved on.

Ten days after wrecking the boat, the wind reached land. It had not arrived at a quaint, sandy island as it had before, but a bustling port with tall trading vessels and the stench of seafood. People carried boxes stacked high with rope and clothing. The wind flowed through alleys and up cobbled streets, cooling soldiers in bright red coats, marching past beggars and townsfolk. The wind followed these paths, until the city thinned, and he found himself in unspoiled grasslands. As a gentle breeze now, he brushed the reaching arms of mighty oak trees, and swept pollen from flowers below. He travelled northwards, and saw neither sight nor soul for days and days. Gradually, the climate cooled. The wind noted the absence of insects, and he now carried tiny flakes of snow, like small jewels, depositing them on the thin branches of spruce trees. Wolves roved the forests and hills in packs. Their coats dark against the snow.. The forests were alive, stirred by the wind as it whistled further and further towards the arctic, continuing on its unending journey, shaping earth and sea as it pleased.

Far away, in a warm, sandy hole, a small fox slept through the stifling noonday sun. He was curled nose to tail, as still as the tall rocks that rose above the dunes. Nothing moved but his whiskers, which stirred gently with his breathing as his chest rose and fell.

Key Stage 4 – First Prize
Willoughby Whittle – St Ninian’s High School