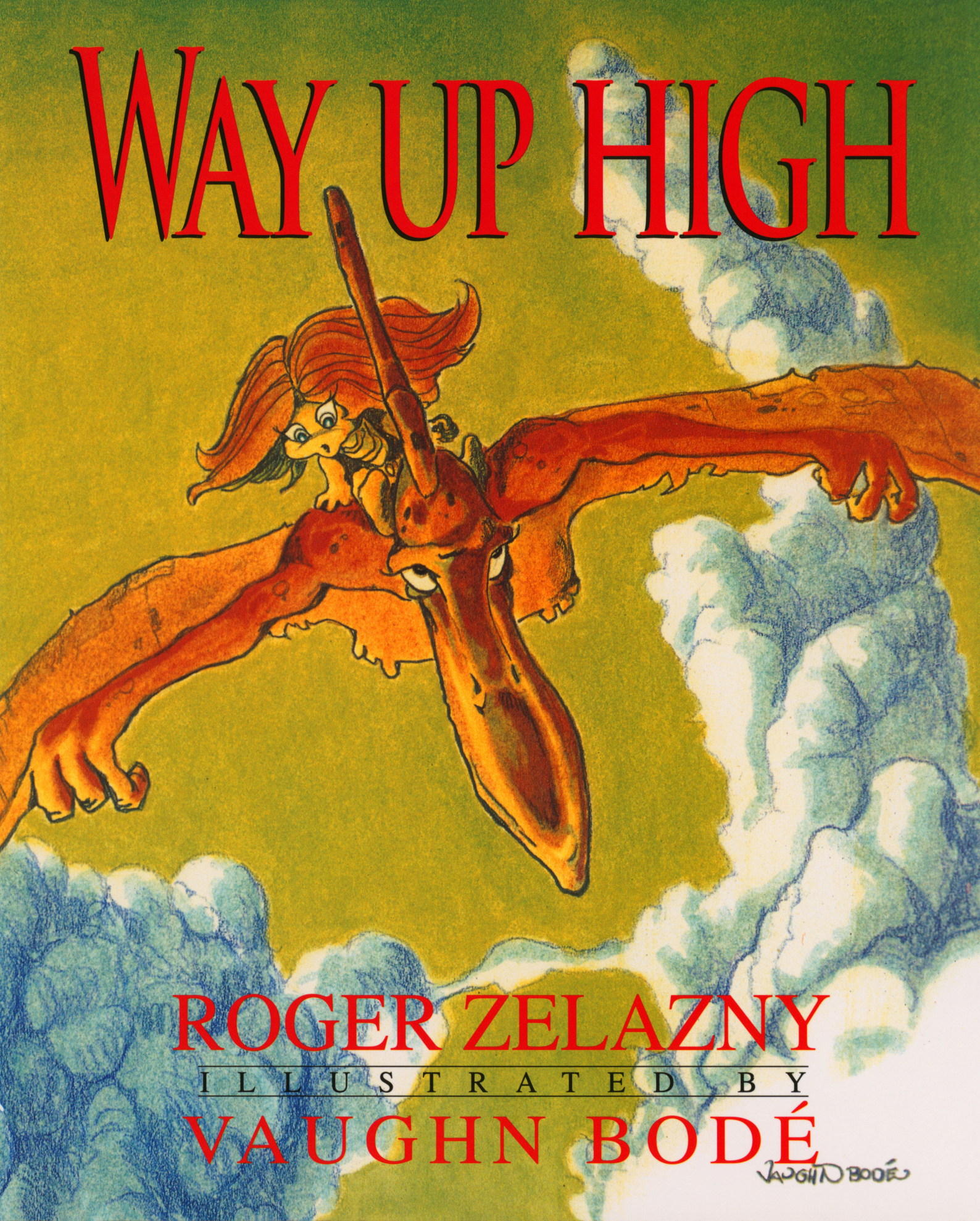
WAY UP HIGH



ROGER ZELAZNY

ILLUSTRATED BY

VAUGHN BODÉ

ISBN-1-880418-00-2 $40.00

WAY UP HIGH

Written by Roger Zelazny
Illustrated by Vaughn Bode

"But are you magic?"

"Sort of," he said. *"In the way that the sun making you feel warm and good is magic, in the way that the wind blowing past you when you spread your wings and soar is magic . . . The kind of magic everyone's got . . . Your own way of seeing things. Mine is the pterodactyl way."*

When Susi cut through the old orchard, shady and secret and out-of-the-way, she was alone. Then, on a fine, warm, sunny day during the last week of school she met Herman, a lonesome Pterodactyl sunning himself on a rock. So began an extraordinary summer of friendship, adventure, discovery and . . . magic.

"Drink in the night," he said. *"Breathe deeply. Look at the world all laid out before you, sparkling through the dark. It is your world, warm-blooded Susi, not mine."*

Take flight with Susi and Herman for an adventure never to be forgotten . . . one that will leave you filled with joy and touched with sadness.

This Deluxe Edition, limited to 1000 copies, is signed by Roger Zelazny.

Book design by
Thomas Canty and Robert K. Wiener.

DONALD M. GRANT, PUBLISHER, INC.
P.O. BOX 187
HAMPTON FALLS, NH 03844

VAUGHN BODE, whose life was an ever-changing exploration into self and universe, once said of himself — "I AM THE CRAWLY CATERPILLAR, WHO IS THE COCOON, WHO IS THE BUTTERFLY, ALL AT ONCE. RIGHT NOW . . . Real Magick flashes all around us throughout our so-called 'mundane world.' . . . Magick is with us all the time, like flashing lightning bugs in the heavy-watered Summer night air. It flys around us, connecting, and linking immeasurable thoughts and things with LIGHT SPEED LOVE. IT'S IT." Winner of a Hugo award, contributor to *National Lampoon, Cavalier* magazine, *East Village Other, Underground Comix*, subject of the Futuropolis book *Bode*, illustrator of countless comics, book covers, and magazines, Vaughn Bode died tragically in 1975. Jeff Jones says of his long-time friend "His early work was as personal as his late. He was one of the few people I ever met who really believed in himself and what he was doing."

During a term as Secretary/Treasurer of Science Fiction Writers of America, Roger Zelazny was contacted by Vaughn Bode about placing a membership application. The two eventually met and, admiring each other's work, joined forces in the creation of *Way Up High* and *Here There Be Dragons* as they appear here. (Roger had written the two stories in the late 1960s and found Vaughn's work ideally suited to his text — "Vaughn really liked drawing kinky reptiles and lizards" so the illustration of Bell/Belkis was a natural). Originally, Jack L. Chalker of Mirage Press planned to publish both titles. He persevered but, for reasons too complex to mention here, eventually brought the project to Donald M. Grant, Publisher, Inc. At long last, the wonderful collaborations of Zelazny and Bode are available.

WAY UP HIGH ZELAZNY • BODE





WAY UP HIGH

This illustrated first edition is limited
to 1,000 copies for sale.

This is copy _____



ROGER ZELAZNY

WAY UP HIGH



ROGER ZELAZNY

ILLUSTRATED BY

VAUGHN BODÉ

DEDICATION

This book is for Shannon

WAY UP HIGH

Copyright © 1992 by Roger Zelazny
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FIRST EDITION

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SUSI MET HERMAN in the orchard she cut through on her way home from school. It was a very old orchard, and it *looked* quite old, too. This is because no one took care of it.

There had once been a house nearby, a house in which there lived people who had wanted the apples which grew in the orchard. The people moved away though, the house was torn down and the orchard went wild.

There were big dead branches lying all over the ground, and lots of live ones all twisted together overhead, like a roof. By the middle of the summer the grass was always very long, dandelions and daisies and milkweed plants waved all about and there were wild blackberry bushes growing in between the trees. All of this made it very shady and secret and out-of-the-way.

Even in the month of May, when all these things had not yet grown quite as tall and as thick as they could, it was still a secret place because nobody else cut through it but Susi. No one else knew the one path through the stickers where you would not scratch your legs. Not one of her friends went home in the same direction as Susi.

So, this is why she was all alone when she met Herman, on that fine, warm, sunny day during the last week of school.

She walked through the stickers, carefully, and she went around a big tree with branches reaching down almost to the ground–and there he was.

He was sitting on a rock with the sun shining down on him, and his eyes were closed.

She almost did not notice him, because he was the color of an old tree and because he sat there without moving.

But Susi knew that there had not been a big old tree there before.

So she stopped and she said something.

She said, "Oh!"

Herman opened one eye and looked down at her.

"Hello," he said.

"Oh!" she repeated, and then she said, "Hello," because, after all, he had said it to her.

"You have a beak," she observed, looking up at him. "Are you a bird?"

"No," he told her. "I am too big to be a bird."

"I read about Condors in school," she said. "They are very big birds who live in South America, and they can fly all day high up over the Andes


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Mountains."

"So can I," said Herman, opening his other eye and unfolding his wings (which he had been holding wrapped around him so that he looked like a big old tree).

His wings were brown and they looked as if they were made of leather. They were as big as flaps on the tents down at the Fair.

"So can I," he repeated. "I can fly all day and all night and all the next day—higher than they can fly—and I'm bigger than Condors, too."

"And you are not a bird?" she said.

"Do you see any feathers on me?" he inquired.

"No," she answered, looking very closely. "But you have a beak, and wings. . . ."

"An airplane has wings, but that does not make it a bird. A catbird *meows,* but that does not make it a cat," he said, "and seals bark, but that does not make them dogs."

"Then you are a bat," she decided. "A big bat. Bats don't have feathers."

"I am NOT a bat!"

"All right, then," said Susi, stepping back so

that she could see better into his high, brown eyes. "All right, then," she said. "What are you?"

"I am a pterodactyl," he replied, turning his head so as to show her his better profile. "More specifically, an unrecorded sort of pteranodon. But pterodactyl will do nicely enough."

"A *what?*" asked Susi.

"A pterodactyl."

"Pter-o-dac-tyl," she said, slowly. "What's that?"

"Obviously," said Herman, sniffing slightly, "it is something that is better than birds and bats, because it is bigger and stronger and can fly higher and faster."

"You are bragging," she said.

"I am not! It's true!"

"Even if it is true," she decided, "you are still bragging."

"No, I am stating facts. If those facts happen to prove something good and wonderful about me, it is not bragging. It is being honest."

"It is still bragging," she said, "at the same time."

"I can't help it if I am good and wonderful," he

explained. "It is just the way that I am. If I said anything else, I would be lying."

"All right," she told him, "you are good and wonderful."

"Thank you." His beak opened a little, in something like a smile. "Thank you, little girl. What is your name?"

"Susi," she said, "and I am *not* little."

"Anything smaller than a horse is little to me," he replied. "My name is Herman, and I am very pleased to make your acquaintance."

"I think I had better be going now," she told him, "or I will be late."

"Oh, don't go yet, please. Stay and talk with me awhile."

"For a minute or two more perhaps," she decided. "Why are you sitting on that rock?"

"Because I am a reptile and I am cold-blooded. I like to sit in the sun because it feels good and warm."

"A reptile?—Like a snake?" she asked, moving back away from him.

"Hardly," he replied.

Then, "Snakes!" he said, sniffing. "Dirty little crawlers on the ground—that's what snakes are. I am a creature of the heights. I soar. I know the freedom of the skies. I break apart clouds and I chase the moon down the night. . . ."

"Don't snakes like to lie in the sun, too?" she asked him.

"Well—yes."

"Why is that?" she wanted to know.

"It is because they are cold-blooded and they want to be warmed."

"Like you do?"

"It is only a matter of coincidence," he said, "that they like some of the same things as pterodactyls."

"But you also said that you are cold-blooded—just like snakes."

"Ah, but that is where the resemblance ends," he replied. "They are earthbound slithers under rocks—and no relatives of mine. No!"

"What does cold-blooded mean? Is it like 'cruel'? I have heard people say cold-blooded when—"

"No, not at all. Not at all. It is a technical term referring to those creatures such as myself—and certain others—whose blood is always about the same temperature as it is outside. When the doctor takes your temperature, it bothers him if it is not what it should be. This is because it should *always* be around the same because you are warm-blooded. If it is much higher or lower than usual, you are probably sick.

"Mine changes all the time," he finished, "but best of all I like it warm."

"That is all very interesting," said Susi. "I had better be going now. . . ."

"No. Please don't go," said Herman. "I want someone to talk to. I am lonesome."

"I will be late if I don't leave soon. Aren't there any other pterodactyls around for you to talk to?"

"No," he said. "They are all far away. Even my father and mother are on a trip."

"Father and mother?" she asked. "Are you a little pterodactyl?"

"I'm big for my age," said Herman, closing his beak with a loud *click.*

"But you are not all grown up yet?"

"Well, not quite no, not yet," he answered.

"How big is your father, then?" she asked.

"Have you been to the Fair, downtown?"

"Yes."

"Did you ride on the big merry-go-round?"

"Yes."

"Well, I guess my father could carry it away in his claws if he wanted to."

"Oh my!"

"But he wouldn't want to. He has no use for merry-go-rounds."

"I am afraid I am going to be late," said Susi. "Really, I had better go now."

"I will take you home," said Herman, "so that you will not be late—if you promise to come and talk with me tomorrow."

"I don't know if I should. . . ." she began.

Herman's shoulders went a little lower, and she thought she saw a big tear forming in the corner of his eye.

She did not want him to be sad, so she said, "All right, I will stop here and talk to you tomor-

row."

"Good!" said Herman, opening his beak wide and spreading his wings. "Good! I will take you home now. Where do you live?"

"I live in the house with the blue roof at the end of the street on the other side of those trees," she told him, pointing that way. "But you don't have to . . ."

. . . But before she was finished speaking, Herman had picked her up gently in his claws and with a flap of his great wings carried her high into the air.

The air came rushing all around her. She tried to say something, but the wind carried her words away.

Then she realized that her eyes were tightly closed.

She opened them.

Down below, the orchard seemed quite small, like a little green picture. All the houses were like toys on a floor.

"Herman! *Please* take me back down!" she cried. "We are too high!"

"No, we aren't," he answered. "We are not high

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at all. I can take you much higher if you would like."

"I wouldn't like," she answered. "I want to go home! My house is that little doll's house at the end of that tiny street—the one with the blue roof. You said that you would take me there."

"All right," he sighed, "I just thought you might enjoy flying some first. I was wrong. I am sorry. I can see that you do not enjoy it. . . ."

"It is not that I don't enjoy flying. It is just that I will be late, and my mother will ask me why I am late, and I will tell her that I went flying with a pterodactyl named Herman, and she will stop my allowance for a week or something, because she does not like me to tell lies."

"But you would not be telling a lie," said Herman, swooping lower.

"I know that," she said, "and you know that, but I have a feeling that that's about as far as things would go."

"Hmm," hummed Herman, circling above the house, "I do believe that you are correct. I had forgotten something my mother once told me: People think that pterodactyls are extinct. That is what she said. I had never met any people though, and I forgot.

"All right, we are going to land now," he said. "I will set you down behind your garage. The next time we go you can ride on my back, if you would like. You must promise to hold on tightly, though."

"I will," she agreed, all out of breath.

"There will be a next time, won't there?" he asked.

And almost before she had realized it, she had said, "Yes."

She ran to the corner of the garage. Then she turned and looked back at him. He was still standing there, watching her. He looked very sad.

His beak was opened, as if he were about to say something. Then he closed it again and remained silent.

"Good-bye, Herman," she said.

"Good-bye, Susi."

"I'll see you tomorrow," she added.

Then she ran the rest of the way to the house and went inside.

After dinner that night, as she lay on the floor looking up at the ceiling, she said to her father, "What is a pterodactyl?"

Her father lowered his newspaper several inches and looked at her over the top of it.

"A what?" he asked.

"A ptero-dac—tyl. With big, brown leathery wings, and a beak like a bird's—only he can fly higher and faster and farther than birds."

"A pterodactyl . . ." he repeated. "That's what I thought you said. Are you reading about them in school?"

"Well—I probably will some day."

"Mm," he mmed. "A pterodactyl is—or rather was—a big flying reptile that lived back in prehistoric times, back when there were dinosaurs and big tall ferns and giant trees. That was in the days when the world was warmer and swampier, and there were no people around yet."

"Are they cold-blooded—the pterodactyls?"

"Yes, I believe they were."

"Like a snake?"

"Yes, they were related to snakes and turtles and crocodiles and other creatures whose blood was that way."

"He lied to me!" she said.

"Who lied to you?"

"Herman—Oh!"

"A friend of yours? He lied about pterodactyls?"

"Yes. He said he–they—weren't related to snakes at all."

"Oh. Well, that's nothing to really be angry with him about. He probably didn't know for sure."

"He knows."

"It is hardly a matter of great concern," he said, raising the newspaper again. "I would be willing to forgive anyone who lied to me about pterodactyls."

"I suppose I will. But why do people think pterodactyls are extinct—now?"

"Because they are," he replied.

"But why?"

"Because they died with all the other reptiles when the world got colder. Warm-blooded creatures came along and were smarter and more adaptable —"

"But turtles are still around—and crocodiles, and—snakes," she said, "and they are cold-blooded. You said so."

"Well, I guess it is because they are smaller and they could find more places to crawl into—places where they could keep warm—and they didn't need as much food as the larger reptiles."

"But couldn't the pterodactyls fly away to some place where it is warmer and where there is more to eat?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" he said, and then he tried to read his paper again.

After a long while, she asked him, "Where do you think they flew to?"

"South America," he answered.

"*Where* in South America?"

"The jungles of Brazil," he said. "They're still unexplored."

"I'll bet that's where he's from. . . ." she decided.

* * *

The next day she ran all the way from the schoolyard to the orchard, so that she could have more time to talk to Herman.

She arrived all out of breath, and she scratched her leg a little, even though she knew the path

through the stickers.

Herman was sitting on the same rock as before, looking as if he had not moved at all since the first time she had seen him there.

"Hello, Herman," she said.

"Susi!" He opened both his eyes quickly. "You *did* come! I knew you would."

"I promised."

"Is that the only reason you came?"

"No," she told him, "I wanted to see you again."

"Good. Oh good!" he replied. "Do you want to fly with me?"

"Not just yet," she answered, "I'd like to talk some more,"

"Surely," he agreed. "What would you like to talk about?"

"Pterodactyls lived way back in prehistoric times, didn't they? Back when there were dinosaurs and giant ferns and real big trees? Back when the world was swampier and there were no people around yet?"

"That is essentially correct. Those were known as the Good Old Days."

". . . And then the world got colder and food got harder to find."

"Yes. We still talk about the days when we were the aristocracy, when we traveled first class and everyone else walked. Came the revolution though, and we were no longer on top."

"What revolution?"

"Of the Earth," he replied. "It changed somehow, I guess, and the days grew colder. The big trees fell down and the giant ferns died. The swamps dried up and the ice came moving down across the land in big sheets."

"That sounds terrible! What did you do then?"

"We flew away."

"To South America?"

"Why yes, that's right."

"To the jungles of Brazil?"

"How did you ever guess?"

"Just did."

"You warm-blooded ones are very clever at guessing things," he acknowledged. "Yes, that is what we did. Would you like to go flying now?"

"Yes," she told him. "May I ride on your back this time?"

"Of course. I'll get down low, and you climb on."

He did that, and she got onto his back.

"Mind that you hold tight to my neck now," he instructed her. "I don't want to go chasing you all the way down the sky."

"Don't worry," she said. "I won't let go."

He launched himself into the air, and this time she did not close her eyes. She kept them open and watched everything getting smaller and smaller beneath them as they rose higher and higher.

"How high are we?" she asked.

"Not very high yet," he answered. "See, there is an airplane coming, and it is higher than we are. Let's chase it!"

"All right. But don't hurt it."

"I won't. I just want to play."

His huge wings beat against the air, out on both sides of her, and Susi felt a fresh rush of wind against her face. It was a good feeling. Herman had very big muscles in his shoulders, so she felt that he was strong. She had ridden horses before, and

she had always trusted the horses because they were strong and they always seemed to know what they were doing. She felt the same way about Herman. She felt safe with him.

So she held on about his neck and enjoyed the ride.

They were as high as the airplane now . . . .

Then they were higher than the airplane.

She watched its big propellers spinning in the air. It was coming in their direction, and soon it would pass beneath them.

Then Herman dived at it.

"Herman!" she screamed.

"I'm only playing," he assured her.

They shot down past the airplane, and Herman almost touched the tip of its long, shiny metal wing with his own long, brown leathery one.

She tried to think what would have happened if they had touched.

As they flashed by, she watched the airplane. In the windows on that side there were faces, like pale portraits with glass covering them over, all hung there and facing them as they went by, and all of

them wearing startled expressions.

"You frightened me!" said Susi. "I thought we were going to hit it!"

"I told you I was only playing," Herman said.

". . . And you frightened all those people inside."

"Not really," he explained. "It livened up their lives for a moment. Already they are forgetting what they really saw. Some will say we were a flying saucer and some will say that we were a flock of geese, or a little airplane that got off its course and came too near their flight lane. Whatever they think, they will never know for sure. So we have given them each a little mystery to ponder, for a time. 'What did I really see?' they will ask themselves. 'Certainly not a pterodactyl, because they are extinct—and even if it were a pterodactyl, what could it be doing with a little girl riding on its back?' And they will never know, not really. It is always good to have some mysteries to think about. It keeps you from getting the feeling that life is simple and explainable. I have, therefore, done all of them a great service by flying past their plane."

"When you put it that way," said Susi, "you make it sound all right.—But can we go back down now? I still have to get home on time."

"All right. Why do you always have to be home

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'on time', though? What is 'time' to you?"

" 'Time' is when you have to be at a certain place before certain things happen, and if you are not there then you are late and everyone is mad. Tomorrow is Friday though, which is the last day of school, and after that comes Saturday. Saturday I can play with you all day, instead of just for a little while. Then we will have the whole summer vacation ahead of us."

"Oh, fine!" said Herman. "Let's take a trip!"

"Where to?"

"I don't know. Is there anyplace special that you would like to go?"

"I don't know. We have the whole summer, though."

"Yes, we do . . ." he replied, swooping down to a landing behind the garage.

* * *

Saturday they went on a picnic, on a little island in the middle of a big lake. Susi did not know exactly where it was, except that it was far away. Herman ate six ham sandwiches while she watched, and then he flew out over the lake to catch fish, because he was still hungry.

He would circle and circle, peering down into the water. Then he would dive, like a rock suddenly falling. His great beak would strike the water first, like a spear. Then moments later he would come flashing back up out of the lake, wet and glistening, with a fish held tightly in his beak. In a moment, the fish would be gone and then he would climb into the air and begin circling again.

After a time, he returned and landed on the beach beside her.

"My, you eat a lot!" she said.

"When you are big, you have an appetite to match," he replied.

"How much do full-grown pterodactyls eat?" she asked.

"Oh, a great deal. In fact, they spend most of their time looking for food."

"Isn't that kind of tiresome?" she asked.

"Not if you enjoy eating," he said.

"I don't know that I'd enjoy looking for food all the time."

"Well," he answered, "when you enjoy something, you also come to enjoy the questing of it. I'd say half of one's life is spent looking for the things

one enjoys—and perhaps that is the half that is more enjoyable."

"The questing?"

"The questing."

"What shall we do now?" she asked.

"Let us go sit in the sun and feel warm and good."

"All right."

". . . Because whenever one quest is fulfilled, that is the best thing to do before you begin another," he finished.

They sat in the sun for a long while, feeling warm and good, until finally Herman yawned, covering his beak delicately with the tip of his wing.

Then he stretched, and he was like a great dark flag unfurling.

"Shall we go for another flight?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"Then climb aboard." he bowed down.

And they were off.

High into the air they climbed, and Susi felt like a skyrocket or a roman candle going off on its way

to the moon, only it was still daytime, and she knew she would not fall back again, but come down gently.

They flew out across the lake and over the big hills beyond it. Then they climbed higher and higher, until the air grew a little chilly, even for a Saturday afternoon at the beginning of June.

Then Susi asked, "How high are we?"

"Higher than I have ever taken you before," Herman replied, "but not really high, as pterodactyls see it."

Susi looked down.

The road was a tiny yellow ribbon and the trees were like the tops of young carrots, just sprouting. The fields looked as if they had been painted green, rather than being all full of grass.

They swept onward, and he took her even higher.

There were rivers like little silver threads, and the bridges going across them were like tiny roller skates, to fit a doll perhaps. The roofs of the houses, all colors, were like the little rows of stones you line up on the beach.

Still they went higher, and small wisps of white,

like smoke, fled past them.

"What are those?" she asked.

Herman turned his head.

"Pieces of clouds," he answered. "There's a whole one up ahead."

She looked.

"It's just like fog!" she protested.

"Of course. That's all that clouds are—fog that is way up high."

"But I thought that they were like pillows, or cotton candy."

"They look that way from down below," he admitted, "but they are really fog that just won't stay put."

He turned in his course and flew through a cloud.

Suddenly, it was like walking to school on a damp morning—like wearing boots and walking along and not being able to see the telephone poles on the other side of the street.

"How do you know where you're going?" she asked.

"I just know," he said.

"Like radar?"

"Yes, like radar," he told her. "There! We're out!"

And suddenly there was sun again, and the cloud was down below them.

They flew over cities and mountains and plains. They flew over swamps and forests and lakes.

Finally, they came to a place where men sent rockets with tails of fire screaming into the air. The rockets would shake the atmosphere as an earthquake shakes the earth, then pass on up into the places where there is no air.

"Can rockets go higher than pterodactyls?" she asked.

"They go higher then pterodactyls need to go," he answered.

"Can they go faster?"

"They go faster than pterodactyls want to go."

"Then they can fly better."

"But they can't catch fish," said Herman. "They have no quests of their own. They do not enjoy sitting in the sun."

"Is it that important to do those things, if you can fly high and fast?"

"Yes," said Herman.

So they flew on, until at last they came to the ocean.

"What is all that water?" she asked.

"That is the ocean," said Herman. "There is more of it than there is land to the world. Sooner or later all things come to rest in it, rolling beneath the sun in big blue waves."

"Let us go back now," she said. "I am afraid."

Herman turned and headed back.

* * *

Almost every day they went flying. Susi's father mentioned one night that there were unusual footprints behind the garage, but since he did not ask her what they were, she did not tell him that they were pterodactyl prints. After that, though, Herman always took her back to the orchard and she walked home.

Herman made his home in the orchard. Susi thought about this for a long while. Then one day in the middle of July, after she had known him for going on to two months and felt that she could ask

a personal question, she said, "Herman, why aren't there any other pterodactyls for you to play with?"

"I told you that they are all far away," he said.

"Yes. But if that is true, why are you here?"

"What do you mean 'if that is true'? Do you think I lied to you?"

"Well, you fibbed to me about not being related to snakes."

"Oh, that. They are such distant relatives that we don't really count them any more."

"But they are still relatives. My father said so."

"You told him about me?"

"No, no," she said. "I'm keeping your secret. But I asked him about pterodactyls one night and he said that they are related to snakes—and turtles and crocodiles."

"We seldom acknowledge the turtles or crocodiles either."

"That's not very nice. In fact, it's rather snobbish."

"All right! So I'm a liar, I'm a snob! Don't trust me any more!"

"I didn't mean it that way. Really I didn't. Don't be hurt, Herman. It's just that I've been wondering where your mother and father and all the other pterodactyls are—and why they went away and left you all alone."

"I told you they are far away."

"In South America."

"Maybe."

"In the jungles of Brazil?"

"Perhaps. Maybe I flew away from home. Maybe *I* left *them.* What difference does it make? We've had fun together, haven't we?"

"Yes."

"Then what difference does it make?"

"I don't know. It's just that I was curious."

"It is a pterodactyl matter entirely, and it has nothing to do with people," he said. "You wouldn't understand."

"Are there many of you down there?"

"Let's talk about something else, or go for a flight."

"All right, let's fly."

So they did.

They flew over such wondrous places—shipyards and harbors, campuses and railroad yards, amusement parks and farms where men worked in the fields—that she forgot all about her questions.

They flew over ships on the ocean and flew past airplanes in the sky. They raced freight trains down hills and across the plains. They flew over churches and reservoirs, and they passed above a Boy Scout encampment on a hillside, and none of the bird watchers in the camp could identify Herman.

Sometimes she would take her storybooks to the orchard and read them to Herman. He liked the ones about the princes who were turned into frogs, and best of all he liked the one about the little mermaid. He made her read it to him three times.

"But it is so sad," she said.

"I know, but I like sad things," he told her.

"Are you magic?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Are you really a prince who has been turned into a pterodactyl, or anything like that?"

"No," he said. "I am a pterodactyl. That's all."


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". . . Of course, if you were enchanted, you couldn't tell me about it. That could be part of the enchantment."

"True, I suppose. But I am not," he said. "I am a pterodactyl, pure and simple."

"But are you magic?"

"Sort of," he said. "In the way that the sun making you feel warm and good is magic, in the way that the wind blowing past you when you spread your wings and soar is magic, in the way that flying high and seeing everything and going through clouds and seeing that they are only wandering fog is magic. That's all. The kind of magic everyone's got, probably even snakes: Your own way of seeing things. Mine is the pterodactyl way."

"Is that really magic?"

"It is the only magic."

"Then what's my magic?"

"I can't tell you. You must learn it yourself. Everyone has to find his own."

"When will I learn it?"

"I can't tell. But you will, I know that."

"Can we fly some more now, Herman?"

"Read me another story first," he said.

* * *

Soon it was August.

Everything in the orchard had now grown as tall and dense as it could grow. The blackberry bushes were as thick as a wall, and their once green thorns were as hard and sharp as needles now, and dark, the color of wood.

The apple trees all had fruit, and Susi would eat it as she sat in the sun with Herman. He did not like it especially, himself.

And as August wore on, she began to wonder again. To wonder about how a pterodactyl had come to live, all alone, in this orchard. To wonder why he was there, and all alone.

She did not ask him again, though, because she knew he would not tell her. She simply went on wondering. She remembered, however, that he had once said, "You warm-blooded creatures are very clever at guessing things." Perhaps he wanted her to guess.

No, she did not think so. He wanted her to forget the questions. "It is a pterodactyl matter entirely," he had also said.

So she let it rest at that and went on reading to him and going for flights with him.

Soon it was near to the end of August, and the time was drawing near when she would be returning to school. This made her feel a little sad, because she would miss the long summer days with Herman. She knew, somehow, that she would never have another summer such as this one. And this made her sad.

The nights began to grow a little chilly, as they sometimes can in August—in a sort of preliminary shivering of the year as it thinks about the winter that lies ahead.

It made her feel a little afraid, sort of like the time she had looked down at the ocean over Herman's shoulders, and seen it there, all big and blue and moving, and nowhere any end to it. Would all the blackberries, wild roses and the apple trees somehow come to rest in it one day, rolling beneath the sun in its big blue waves, as Herman had said? She wondered. She wondered if this whole summer would rest there one day. No, she decided. It would continue to go on as memories in her head.

But the nights were chilly, especially chilly for August. And each morning she noticed that it took Herman longer to wake up and want to move around. He sat in the sun longer and longer.

She remembered about him being cold-blooded, which meant that his blood was the same temperature as it was outside. So at night he must get very cold, she thought. What will he do when winter comes?

* * *

Then, the last week of her vacation, Herman said to her, "Will you go flying with me tonight?"

"Tonight?"

"Yes, after it gets dark."

"I don't know . . . I'd have to sneak out. I don't think I should."

"It is very special," he said. "Please do it. Bring a sweater, because it will be cold. Please come."

"All right . . ." she agreed.

And that night she lay awake in bed until the house was still and dark. Then she got up and dressed as quietly as she could and went outside.

Herman knew she would be afraid to go all the way to the orchard in the dark, so he waited for her behind the garage.

She climbed onto his back and asked him, "Where are we going?"

"For a last flight," he said, and he sprang into the air, flapping his wings.

Then they were high and going higher.

"A last flight?" she said.

"Yes."

They flew far. How far they flew, she never really could tell.

But she had never flown at night before. The sky was like black silk with little drops of water sprinkled all over it. Each star shone as it had never shone before, when she looked up at them all from down on the ground.

She looked back down, and she was higher than she had ever been before.

The city down below was like the stars up above—little points of light with only blackness in between.

She clung tightly to Herman and looked up again.

"I see the stars," she told him, "and they are beautiful."

She took a deep breath.

". . . And the air is so clean and good."

"Yes," he replied, beating his wings faster.

". . . And the city below—oh, the city below!—it is so beautiful too, Herman!"

"I wouldn't know about cities," he told her.

"Yes, it is. It is beautiful."

"People build cities," he said. "Pterodactyls do not. So I will have to take your word for it. Did you never notice that it was beautiful before?"

"No," she said.

"Then I think you are beginning to find your magic."

"Really?"

"Yes, and I am glad for you."

"You said that this is our last flight?"

"That is correct," he told her.

"Why?"

"Drink in the night," he said. "Breathe deeply. Look at the world all laid out before you, sparkling through the dark. It is your world, warm-blooded Susi, not mine."

"What do you mean?"


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"Nothing, but that you should look and enjoy. Understanding comes later."

They flew on, and on and on.

Then he turned in his flight and headed back in the direction from which they had come.

It took a long while, and Susi was sleepy despite the chill and the excitement of the flight, so she knew that it was late, very late, well past her bedtime.

Finally, they were circling above her backyard.

Then they dropped, down, down, down, and landed gently behind the garage.

The moon was just risen in the sky, and a big, round, and cream-colored moon it was.

She climbed down from Herman's back and faced him.

"Now will you tell me," she asked, "what you meant by 'last flight'?"

"I must go," he said, "now. I thought that I could remain longer, but the weather grows too cold too soon. I cannot stand cold weather. I must fly south, like the birds do."

"To South America?"

"Perhaps."

"Why 'perhaps'? Why is it such a big secret? Why don't you tell me where you are going, and where the other pterodactyls are?"

"It does not really matter," he said, "honestly. So good-bye, Susi. The time is come."

"Don't go, Herman! I will miss you!"

"And I will miss you too, Susi. But I must go."

"Will you come back, next summer?"

He spread his wings.

"Of course I will, Susi. Good-bye."

Then the thing she had been wondering about, the thing she had been trying to guess at, to figure out, all summer long—suddenly came to her.

She blurted it out without thinking it over. If she had had time to think, perhaps she would not have said it. But then again, perhaps she would.

"You're the last, aren't you, Herman? You're the very last pterodactyl in the whole world," she said. "Aren't you?"

He did not answer, but he rose into the air with one downward sweep of his great wings. Then he was as high as the treetops.

"*Aren't* you?" she called out. "Isn't that right? You're the only one left!"

He circled the yard high above her, and a single drop, like a drop of rain fell upon her cheek.

Then his wings made a great wind, and he was so high that he was almost the size of a bird against the stars.

"I love you, Herman!" she called out. "Honest I do! Please come back! Come back next summer!"

Then he was so small that she could barely make him out. Then he was gone.

She watched the sky for a long while, feeling little and weak and sad. Something very big and strong, which could fly higher and faster and farther than birds, and which could have been quite terrible if it had chosen to be—with its big beak and its claws—was gone away now.

And she felt that it was forever and that she would never see Herman again.

She watched until she realized how cold it was and how very sleepy she had become.

Then she went inside quite quietly, and she went upstairs to bed.

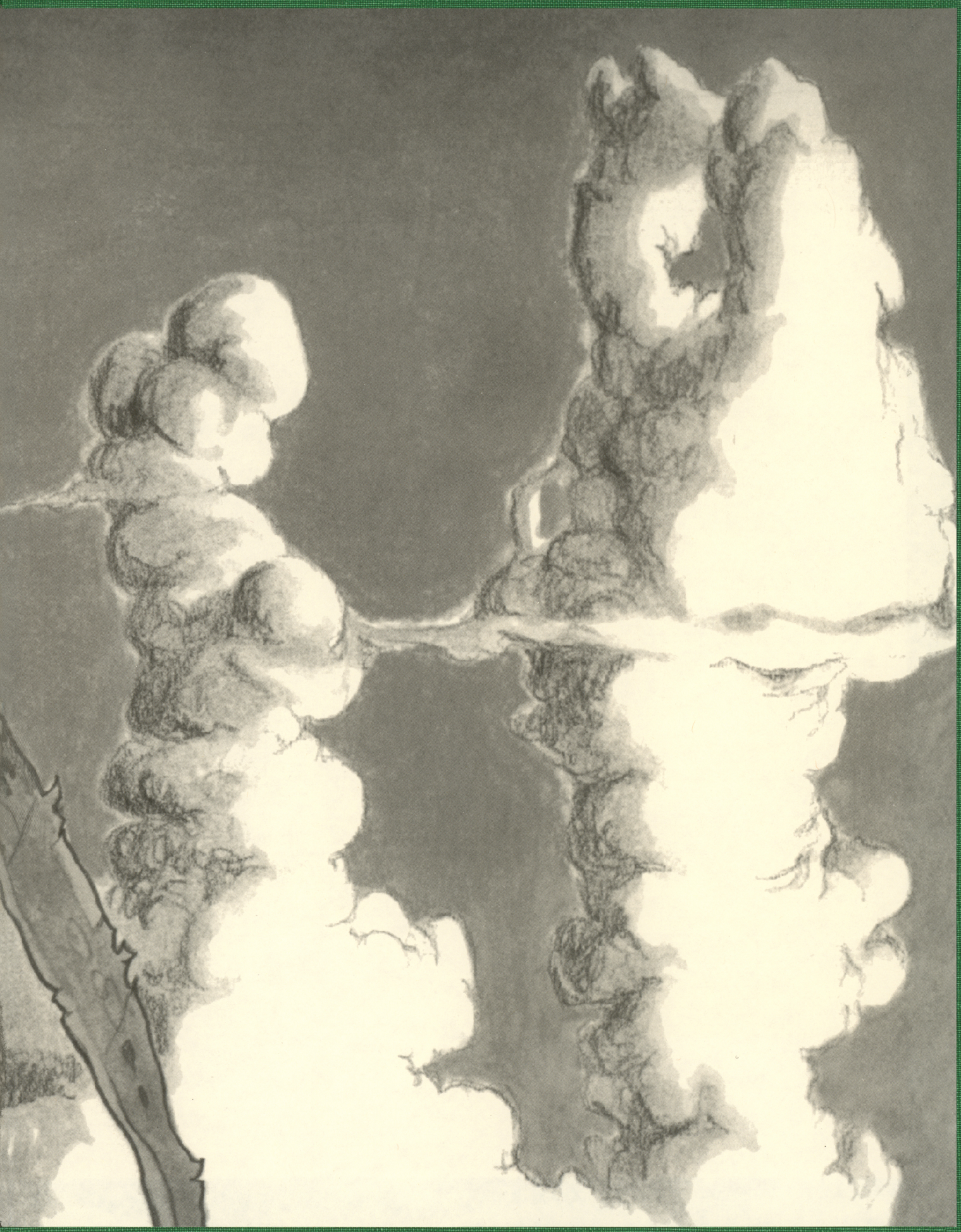
And that very same night she dreamed that she

had found her magic at last.

In the morning she cried.


JAVIER CODE





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