

turn myself into the wind."

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On the second day, the boy climbed to the top of a cliff near the camp. The sentinels allowed him to go; they had already heard about the sorcerer who could turn himself into the wind, and they didn't want to go near him. In any case, the desert was impassable.

He spent the entire afternoon of the second day looking out over the desert, and listening to his heart. The boy knew the desert sensed his fear. They both spoke the same language.

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On the third day, the chief met with his officers. He called the alchemist to the meeting and said, "Let's go see the boy who turns himself into the wind."

"Let's," the alchemist answered.

The boy took them to the cliff where he had been on the previous day. He told them all to be seated.

"It's going to take a while," the boy said.

"We're in no hurry," the chief answered. "We are men of the desert."

The boy looked out at the horizon. There were mountains in the distance. And there were dunes, rocks, and plants that insisted on living where survival seemed impossible. There was the desert that he had wandered for so many months; despite all that time, he knew only a small part of it. Within that small part, he had found an Englishman, caravans, tribal wars, and an oasis with fifty thousand palm trees and three hundred wells.

"What do you want here today?" the desert asked him. "Didn't you spend enough time looking at me yesterday?"

"Somewhere you are holding the person I love," the boy said. "So, when I look out over your sands, I am also looking at her. I want to return to her, and I need your help so that I can turn myself into the wind."

"What is love?" the desert asked.

"Love is the falcon's flight over your sands. Because for him, you are a green field, from which he always returns with game. He knows your rocks, your dunes, and your mountains, and you are generous to him."

"The falcon's beak carries bits of me, myself," the desert said. "For years, I care for his game, feeding it with the little water that I have, and then I show him where the game is. And, one day, as I enjoy the fact that his game thrives on my surface, the falcon dives out of the sky, and takes away what I've created."

"But that's why you created the game in the first place," the boy answered. "To nourish the falcon. And the falcon then nourishes man. And, eventually, man will nourish your sands, where the game will once again flourish. That's how the world goes."

"So is that what love is?"

"Yes, that's what love is. It's what makes the game become the falcon, the falcon become man, and man, in his turn, the desert. It's what turns lead into gold, and makes the gold return to the earth."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," the desert said.

"But you can at least understand that somewhere in your sands there is a woman waiting for me. And that's why I have to turn myself into the wind."

The desert didn't answer him for a few moments.

Then it told him, "I'll give you my sands to help the wind to blow, but, alone, I can't do anything. You have to ask for help from the wind."

A breeze began to blow. The tribesmen watched the boy from a distance, talking among themselves in a language that the boy couldn't understand.

The alchemist smiled.

The wind approached the boy and touched his face. It knew of the boy's talk with the desert, because the winds know everything. They blow across the world without a birthplace, and with no place to die.

"Help me," the boy said. "One day you carried the voice of my loved one to me."

"Who taught you to speak the language of the desert and the wind?"

"My heart," the boy answered.

The wind has many names. In that part of the world, it was called the sirocco, because it brought moisture from the oceans to the east. In the distant land the boy came from, they called it the levanter, because they believed that it brought with it the sands of the desert, and the screams of the Moorish wars. Perhaps, in the places beyond the pastures where his

sheep lived, men thought that the wind came from Andalusia. But, actually, the wind came from no place at all, nor did it go to any place; that's why it was stronger than the desert. Someone might one day plant trees in the desert, and even raise sheep there, but never would they harness the wind.

"You can't be the wind," the wind said. "We're two very different things."

"That's not true," the boy said. "I learned the alchemist's secrets in my travels. I have inside me the winds, the deserts, the oceans, the stars, and everything created in the universe. We were all made by the same hand, and we have the same soul. I want to be like you, able to reach every corner of the world, cross the seas, blow away the sands that cover my treasure, and carry the voice of the woman I love."

"I heard what you were talking about the other day with the alchemist," the wind said. "He said that everything has its own destiny. But people can't turn themselves into the wind."

"Just teach me to be the wind for a few moments," the boy said. "So you and I can talk about the limitless possibilities of people and the winds."

The wind's curiosity was aroused, something that had never happened before. It wanted to talk about those things, but it didn't know how to turn a man into the wind. And look how many things the wind already knew how to do! It created deserts, sank ships, felled entire forests, and blew through cities filled with music and strange noises. It felt that it had no limits, yet here was a boy saying that there were other things the wind should be able to do.

"This is what we call love," the boy said, seeing that the wind was close to granting what he requested. "When you are loved, you can do anything in creation. When you are loved, there's no need at all to understand what's happening, because everything happens within you, and even men can turn themselves into the wind. As long as the wind helps, of course."

The wind was a proud being, and it was becoming irritated with what the boy was saying. It commenced to blow harder, raising the desert sands. But finally it had to recognize that, even making its way around the world, it didn't know how to turn a man into the wind. And it knew nothing about love.

"In my travels around the world, I've often seen people speaking of love and looking toward the heavens," the wind said, furious at having to acknowledge its own limitations. "Maybe it's better to ask heaven."

"Well then, help me do that," the boy said. "Fill this place with a sandstorm so strong that it blots out the sun. Then I can look to heaven without

blinding myself."

So the wind blew with all its strength, and the sky was filled with sand. The sun was turned into a golden disk.

At the camp, it was difficult to see anything. The men of the desert were already familiar with that wind. They called it the *simum*, and it was worse than a storm at sea. Their horses cried out, and all their weapons were filled with sand.

On the heights, one of the commanders turned to the chief and said, "Maybe we had better end this!"

They could barely see the boy. Their faces were covered with the blue cloths, and their eyes showed fear.

"Let's stop this," another commander said.

"I want to see the greatness of Allah," the chief said, with respect. "I want to see how a man turns himself into the wind."

But he made a mental note of the names of the two men who had expressed their fear. As soon as the wind stopped, he was going to remove them from their commands, because true men of the desert are not afraid.

"The wind told me that you know about love," the boy said to the sun. "If you know about love, you must also know about the Soul of the World, because it's made of love."

"From where I am," the sun said, "I can see the Soul of the World. It communicates with my soul, and together we cause the plants to grow and the sheep to seek out shade. From where I am—and I'm a long way from the earth—I learned how to love. I know that if I came even a little bit closer to the earth, everything there would die, and the Soul of the World would no longer exist. So we contemplate each other, and we want each other, and I give it life and warmth, and it gives me my reason for living."

"So you know about love," the boy said.

"And I know the Soul of the World, because we have talked at great length to each other during this endless trip through the universe. It tells me that its greatest problem is that, up until now, only the minerals and vegetables understand that all things are one. That there's no need for iron to be the same as copper, or copper the same as gold. Each performs its own exact function as a unique being, and everything would be a symphony of peace if the hand that wrote all this had stopped on the fifth day of creation.

"But there was a sixth day," the sun went on.

"You are wise, because you observe everything from a distance," the boy said. "But you don't know about love. If there hadn't been a sixth day, man would not exist; copper would always be just copper, and lead just lead. It's true that everything has its destiny, but one day that destiny will be realized. So each thing has to transform itself into something better, and to acquire a new destiny, until, someday, the Soul of the World becomes one thing only."

The sun thought about that, and decided to shine more brightly. The wind, which was enjoying the conversation, started to blow with greater force, so that the sun would not blind the boy.

"This is why alchemy exists," the boy said. "So that everyone will search for his treasure, find it, and then want to be better than he was in his former life. Lead will play its role until the world has no further need for lead; and then lead will have to turn itself into gold."

"That's what alchemists do. They show that, when we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better, too."

"Well, why did you say that I don't know about love?" the sun asked the boy.

"Because it's not love to be static like the desert, nor is it love to roam the world like the wind. And it's not love to see everything from a distance, like you do. Love is the force that transforms and improves the Soul of the World. When I first reached through to it, I thought the Soul of the World was perfect. But later, I could see that it was like other aspects of creation, and had its own passions and wars. It is we who nourish the Soul of the World, and the world we live in will be either better or worse, depending on whether we become better or worse. And that's where the power of love comes in. Because when we love, we always strive to become better than we are."

"So what do you want of me?" the sun asked.

"I want you to help me turn myself into the wind," the boy answered.

"Nature knows me as the wisest being in creation," the sun said. "But I don't know how to turn you into the wind."

"Then, whom should I ask?"

The sun thought for a minute. The wind was listening closely, and wanted to tell every corner of the world that the sun's wisdom had its limitations. That it was unable to deal with this boy who spoke the Language of the World.

"Speak to the hand that wrote all," said the sun.