

until the storm passes over."

She set a candle on a little table in the back room. She brought two cans of beer and some cheese from the refrigerator, and took a loaf of bread from under the counter. "You said that you'd forgotten to eat lunch. Perhaps this will help."

As I drank the beer and gratefully munched on bread and cheese, we resumed the conversation which nature had so rudely interrupted.

"You must excuse my asking," I said, "but is there no other man you could have put on your wedding cake?"

She shook her head. "I'm not married; I took care of my ailing father until he was buried last month. And the romances of my youth, as I remember them, would look young and foolish dancing with a gray-haired bride," she added as an afterthought.

She got up, fetched two more beers from the cooler. "The rain will be wonderful for the flowers. Pity you didn't make the post office in time. Where do you live?"

I told her my address. It would take an hour's quick walk to get home.

"It's like this," she said. "We'll look at the matter straight. If you go back home tonight, you'll get drenched to the skin. You might catch yourself a wicked spring cold, or even the pneumonia. And you said there's no one to look after you." She spoke with an intense seriousness that would have been laughable six hours before. But I did not laugh.

"The best think we can do," she continued, "is to make you comfortable here. I have a little room in back, and some extra bedding. If the rain doesn't let up, we'll fix you a place to sleep."

To my surprise, I agreed.

I am writing by candlelight at the little table. June brought me another beer before going to her room to get out of her uniform. She evidently opened a window in back, and the air is breezing in, cool, moist, and exhilarating. It is still raining, though not quite so hard.

It is almost eleven now. In an hour, this remarkable day will be over.

But the beer has me swirling.

It is enough to send a man to bed.

## Clouds

Jane Cox

SINCE the beginning of time, the clouds which drift majestically over and around the earth have exercised a profound influence upon the lives and thoughts of men. The ancient Greeks, according to Greek mythology, worshipped Zeus, the god who, when angry, would gather the clouds together and hurl bolts of lightning smashing to the ground. In the *Koran*, it is written that "God gently driveth forward the clouds, and gathereth them together and then layeth

them upon heaps." This is obviously a reference to what scientists of today call cumulus cloud formations. Another observation by early man of the effect of clouds upon the heavens is in H. G. Bohn's *Handbook of Proverbs*, where we find it written that "One cloud is enough to eclipse all the sun." A heavy overcast of the sky by a cumulo-nimbus cloud before a violent thunderstorm is probably what was described. Clouds are even a part of Biblical miracles; it is recorded of Christ, "that as they were looking, He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Finding expression for the world of cloud beauty in the ever-changing sky has continued down through the ages.

A cloud to today's scientists, however, may take on a different meaning from these in form and substance as well as in significance. Scientists have defined clouds as "a mass of condensed vapor, either liquid or solid, hanging in the air at some height from the earth." Looking at clouds, we know that there are two kinds, the detached or solitary clouds, and the widely extended or attached pattern that covers a large portion of the sky.

There are three forms that clouds take, either stratus, cumulus, or cirrus. This differentiation in form is simple to remember, for *stratus* sounds like *straight*, *cumulus* like *accumulated*, and *cirrus* like *icy*. This is precisely what these clouds are—straight sheets, accumulated lumps, and icy formations. A stratus cloud is really an elevated fog. It is a dense sheet that hovers over the earth about fifteen hundred feet from the ground. As seen from above, the stratus cloud-scape is similar to a seascape, being a solid mass of rolling waves of vapor. If all the world seems dull and sultry and the sky threatening and gray, the earth is being covered by a sheet of stratus clouds.

Cumulus clouds have been called the "wool pack" or the "clouds with the silver lining." These white-peaked, billowy masses of summer clouds are beautiful to behold. Their low altitude makes them the best known cloud form; their fair-weather appearance makes them best loved among men of the sea and air. A form of the cumulus, the cumulo-nimbus, occurs when a cold front meets a warm front, producing a cloud that becomes a monstrous chimney with a fierce updraft. Showers of rain or snow generally fall from the base of this cloud. Nothing can be more magnificent and beautiful, and at the same time more awful and menacing than is the cumulo-nimbus or thunderhead.

At the top of cloudland are the cirrus clouds, which can be recognized by their delicate white composition and fine texture. On a fine, clear day, far up in the sky, one can see these hair-like wisps. They are called "mares' tails," their tufted structure being composed entirely of ice particles. Before dawn and after sunset the effect of the sun shining upon such ice is spectacular. Cirrus clouds reflect light before any other cloud form, thus setting the heavens ablaze in pink-red splendor. By using apparatus for distillation, scientists in the laboratory are able to change the substance of a cloud to a liquid

or solid form and back again to a vapor. In very arid parts of the United States, a new scientific method of creating rain by dropping dry ice through cloud formations has been used to cause precipitation and thus aid farmers.

An artist, in contrast to a scientist, may use a cloud formation as a backdrop against which to place a landscape. Cezanne, in his "View of Auvers" (1897), which is a small village near Paris, used clouds to give depth to his landscape. Pierre Auguste Renoir used cumulus clouds spaced far apart to give the impression of a bright, almost clear sky in his "Pont Neuf" (1872), which is a street scene of Paris on a hot summer day. Vincent Van Gogh in his "Landscape with Olive Trees" (1889), depicted probably the most mysterious, as well as grotesque, clouds ever to appear in a landscape painting. The clouds are yellow, blue, and white, and have the texture of palette-knife strokes, although it is agreed among experts that Van Gogh accomplished the weird effect by brush alone.

To writers, clouds have always implied many themes, some exhilarating, others tragic; but poetic use of clouds differs from that of Greek mythology, science, or art. At least, the poet's expression of what he has felt makes it appear that this is true. Ruskin described the sky as "sometimes gentle, sometimes awful, never the same for two moments together; almost human in its passions, almost spiritual in its tenderness, almost divine in its infinity." Early fall, the wake of summer, inspired Bryant to write:

Beautiful cloud! with folds so soft and fair,  
Swimming in the pure quiet air!  
Thy fleeces bathed in sunlight, while below  
Thy shadow o'er the vale moves slow;  
Where, 'midst their labor, pause the reaper train.

When Lord Byron viewed a terrible thunderstorm, he was moved to write of the angry clouds:

Chill and mired is the nightly blast,  
Where Pindus' mountains rise,  
And angry clouds are pouring fast  
The vengeance of the skies.

The cloud has been a god to the ancient Greeks, a substance for definition and analysis to the scientists, and a source of inspiration to the artist and poet.