PICNIC AT THE PARK

a short story by Christian Lübke

It was a beautiful day and the sun was shining brightly. The leaves on the trees broke the light and created a relaxed atmosphere. Tim stretched out his legs and sighed.

"What a day", he said to himself. "My friends are late."

As these thoughts were leaving his mouth, a shadow covered his face. A dark cloud tried to spoil the fun and a chilly wind made him feel cold. But Tim was the last person who would let something as simple as a cloud ruin his picnic.

"If you don't move, I will make you leave", he yelled towards the cloud.

"Is that so?" The answering voice was deep and loud enough to fill a concert hall.

Tim was not sure how to respond. Did the cloud just speak? Tim had heard about a lot of weird things in his life, but never of a talking cloud. Was this even possible? Had the milk he had for breakfast gone bad? Had he hallucinated? Did someone play a prank on him? He looked around. He saw an old couple sitting on a bench. It could not have been them, right? They looked like they could not even walk without their walking sticks. Speaking with a voice that loud would have been impossible for them. A little girl, maybe 8 years old, was licking her ice cream on her way home. Little girls don't have voices that deep, it could not have been her, either.

"What are you looking for? I'm up here!", bellowed the deep voice while Tim was looking around the area.

No question, it was the cloud. Tim looked at it. It had a face. At least it looked like one. Big holes where the eyes should be and two cloud sausages forming the lips.

"Yeah, time you realize one thing, buddy: You can't fight the weather. There were many people who tried. All of them failed, of course. Zap, lighting to the face, clunk, hail to the nose. Don't even try."

The cloud's face did not move while talking.

"Listen", Tim answered. Just ten minutes ago he would have called anyone crazy who yelled at a cloud in the middle of the park. "It has been a hard day. Office tasks. Work

did not get done; my boss yelled at me. I just want to relax, sit in the sun and have a nice picnic with my friends."

"You're talking about a stressful day? Do my job for a few hours and tell me about stressful! I just came from the Pacific Ocean to get some water, so you do not dry out over here, you ungrateful prick! And do you know how much a cloud like me weighs?"

"You're just gas, you can't be too heavy."

"A cloud like me weighs tons! Try carrying that around with you all day. Not nice. Not nice at all. If I had a back I would need to rest it on a soft pillow."

"Still, floating around all day must be the most relaxing job one can have. You should be on cloud nine all day."

"Sitting at an office desk on a comfortable chair should be very relaxing, too, right? But then there are the appointments, a time schedule. Not to mention those idiots who think they can tell you how to do your job. 'Move away', they say. 'I want to have a nice picnic after work'. All while you are still working your cloudy butt off. Well, the boss told me it is time for rain. So, rain it will, buddy."

"So, life as a cloud isn't all sunshine and rainbows?" This conversation went into a different direction than expected. Then again, which topics do you expect to talk about with a cloud?

"Oh, those guys. They only show up once the work is done. And they get appreciated. People like them; make them gods. What does the cloud get? Negativity, all day long. They run away when you come, build cover from your rain. Tell you that you ruin their picnic, even though you are only doing your job."

"Sorry about that", said Tim with a hint of guilt in his voice. "I guess I wasn't thinking about your situation. Or anyone's situation."

"It's alright", the voice got a bit softer, almost friendly. "Very few consider the lives of others. Their problems make them blind to the ones around them."

"And I didn't know clouds could feel and talk. It never crossed my mind."

"That's the thing with us working in the background. Nobody notices unless they dislike what we do. Then we are the bad guys, but almost never the good guys. When have you last thought about the guy who cleans the toilets over there? The girl handing out

flyers in the streets? The people scanning your food in the supermarket? Did you notice them as people, or did you just see them as workers? Did you expect them to function flawlessly without thinking about their emotions and lives?"

"I saw them, but I didn't really notice them. But the girl in the supermarket did a great job."

"Did you thank her?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"She was doing her job; I didn't feel the need to thank her."

"You don't have to thank her, but I'm sure she would have liked it. Maybe it would have made her day. How would you feel if your boss had told you that you did a great job instead of yelling?"

"A bit better, I guess."

"When everyone could make half the people they meet feel a bit better, the world would be a happier place. More peaceful. Less people getting annoyed by an overworked cloud doing his job."

"Sorry about that, I'm sure the garden owners and farmers will like your rain."

"I'm sure they will. I know, even if they don't tell me. Even if they yell at me from time to time, I know. But it is nice to heard it out loud occasionally."

The voice sounded distant, deep in thought, not really listening to anything but its deepest emotions. As Tim was thinking about this most unusual conversation, he too fell into deep thought. What they talked about was nothing new and he wondered why he had forgotten it for so long. Why he kept forgetting about it again and again and needed to be reminded. A voice pulled him from his thought.

"Sorry, we missed a train and this girl bothered use to take a flyer. She wouldn't take a no for an answer."

His friends were walking towards him, packed with baskets and bags full of candy, food, and drinks.

"She was just doing her job, nothing to get worked up about", Tim said as they emptied their baskets.