

Walter Crane,
'The Four Winds'
(1890).



Whistle (a pantoum)

Lawrence Wilson

Gran had a tiny, tarnished silver whistle
pitched so high that dogs couldn't hear it – but I could,
sharp and sweetly cold as an icicle in my ears
and she used it to summon the winds she wanted.

It was pitched so high that dogs couldn't hear it (but I could).
It cost Jimmy Breeds a copper penny to fly his kite.
Gran used it to summon any winds she wanted,
the sailboat captains paying a silver sixpence each on doldrum days.

Might cost you a copper penny to fly your kite?
Mum said that was all superstitious nonsense,
the sailboat captains paying a silver sixpence each on doldrum days,
but the townfolk did come, and did pay for the right wind.

Still, Mum insisted it was superstitious nonsense
but Gran would smile sideways, and blow –
the townfolk would come, and always paid for the right wind:
she promised me that it would be mine, after she'd gone.

Gran would smile sideways, and blow
and the winds would dance at her command.
She promised that it would be mine when she had gone
but no one could find it among her things.

The winds would dance at her command
when Gran blew that tiny, tarnished silver whistle –
though no one could ever find it among her things
I still hear it, sharp and sweetly cold as an icicle in my ears.