

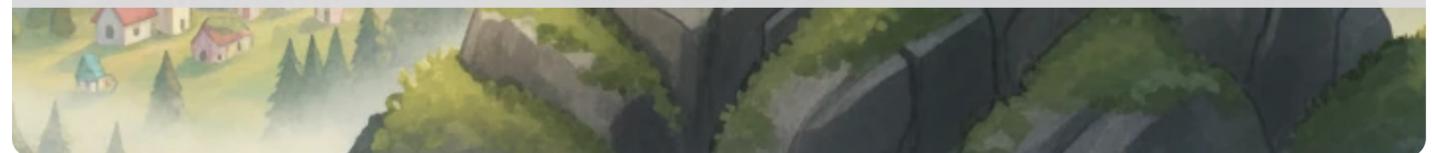
The Cloud Who Was Afraid of Heights

By L. Bright



The Cloud Who Was Afraid of Heights

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Cirrus was a small, fluffy cloud who preferred to stay nestled in the cool shadows of the jagged mountain peaks. While the other clouds drifted high into the vast blue expanse, Cirrus kept his wispy edges tucked tightly against the solid stone.



His friends, a group of adventurous clouds, called down to him from the bright upper atmosphere, their shapes glowing in the sunlight. They performed somersaults in the wind, inviting Cirrus to join their dance in the wide-open sky.



Cirrus peeked over the edge of a rocky cliff and felt his misty heart flutter with worry at the long drop to the valley floor. He turned a soft shade of nervous grey, shivering as the wind tried to coax him away from his safe, low perch.



A majestic golden eagle with wide, powerful wings landed on a nearby crag to rest and talk to the trembling cloud. The eagle spoke of the magnificent sights hidden above the peaks, where the air is thin and the world looks like a patchwork quilt of colors.



Suddenly, a warm updraft swept through the canyon, lifting the flowers and tugging at Cirrus's light, vaporous body. Panicked, Cirrus wrapped his misty arms around the sturdy trunk of an ancient pine tree, refusing to let the wind carry him away.



As the sun began to set, the mountain shadows grew long and cold, leaving Cirrus alone in the dark while his friends sparkled like gold high above. He watched them drift through the sunset, realizing that his fear was keeping him from the warmth and beauty they shared.



Taking a deep, airy breath, Cirrus slowly loosened his grip on the pine needles and allowed the gentle breeze to nudge him upward. His wispy tail flickered with hesitation, but he kept his eyes fixed on the glowing horizon instead of the ground below.



The higher he floated, the more the world opened up, revealing sparkling rivers and distant forests he had never seen before. The terrifying heights transformed into a feeling of weightless freedom, and Cirrus felt himself growing lighter and brighter with every inch he rose.



A soft rain began to fall from his edges just as the setting sun hit his mist at the perfect angle. To his amazement, a brilliant arc of red, orange, and violet erupted from his very center, stretching across the entire sky.



Cirrus stood tall and proud in the center of his own magnificent rainbow, a bridge of light connecting the earth to the heavens. He realized that by being brave enough to rise, he had become the most beautiful sight in the sky.