

The Boy and the Cloud Dragon



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Leo was a small boy with messy chestnut hair that always stuck up in a cowlick. He wore a bright yellow raincoat and red sneakers, and a little silver star hung from a cord around his neck. One windy morning, he climbed to the top of a grassy hill to watch the clouds. The sky was full of puffy white shapes, and Leo wondered what they could be.



Suddenly, a huge cloud drifted down and stopped right in front of him. It had big sky-blue eyes, small rounded horns, and a long wispy tail. The cloud was shaped like a dragon! "Hello," said the dragon, and tiny golden sparks drifted from his snout. Leo's hazel eyes went wide. "You're a cloud dragon!" he gasped. "I'm Leo." "I'm Nimbus," said the dragon, smiling.



Leo wasn't scared at all. The dragon's body was soft and fluffy, like a thousand cotton balls, with a faint rainbow shimmer along his back. "Would you like to fly?" Nimbus asked. Leo nodded so fast his cowlick bounced. He climbed onto the dragon's back, and they floated up into the sky. The wind ruffled Leo's hair, and the world below grew small and green.



"Look down there," said Nimbus, pointing with his tail. A big fluffy cloud looked exactly like a sleeping cat, curled up with its paws tucked in. Leo laughed. "It even has whiskers!" he cried. Nimbus puffed a little breath, and the cloud-cat's tail flicked. "Clouds love to show off," said Nimbus. "You just have to use your imagination to see them."



They flew higher, and Nimbus showed Leo a cloud shaped like a castle with tall towers and a wavy flag. "That's a cumulus cloud," said Nimbus. "They're puffy and white, like piles of cotton. When they grow tall, they can bring rain." Leo imagined knights and dragons inside the castle, and he waved to the cloud-flag as they sailed past. "I could live there," he said.



Next came a long, wispy cloud that stretched across the sky like a horse's tail. "That's a cirrus cloud," said Nimbus. "They're made of tiny ice crystals and float very high, where it's cold and windy." Leo shivered happily. The cloud-horse seemed to gallop across the blue, and Leo pretended to ride it, holding on tight to Nimbus's fluffy neck.



Then the sky turned gray, and big dark clouds rolled in. "Those are stratus clouds," said Nimbus. "They're flat and gray, like a blanket over the sky." A few raindrops plipped and plopped on Leo's yellow raincoat. "Don't worry," said Nimbus. "Rain helps the flowers grow." Leo opened his mouth to catch a drop and giggled.



When the rain stopped, a bright rainbow arched across the sky. "Look!" said Nimbus. "That's my favorite part." They flew through the rainbow's colors, and Leo's star pendant sparkled. "Clouds are like the sky's imagination," said Nimbus. "They can be anything you want." Leo thought about that. "So the sky is a giant drawing board?" "Exactly," said Nimbus.



They played a game: Leo would shout a shape, and Nimbus would puff a cloud into it. "A rabbit!" called Leo, and a fluffy rabbit with long ears appeared. "A boat!" he shouted, and a cloud-boat sailed by. "A dinosaur!" he cried, and a cloud-dinosaur stomped across the sky. Leo laughed until his sides hurt. "You're the best cloud dragon ever!" he said.



Leo pointed at a huge cloud that looked like a mountain. "What's that one?" he asked. "That's a cumulonimbus," said Nimbus. "It's a giant cloud that can make thunder and lightning. But don't worry—we're safe up here with me." Leo looked at the tall cloud and imagined a snowy peak. "It looks like a mountain you could climb," he said.



Suddenly, the wind grew strong, and Nimbus's wispy tail began to scatter into tiny puffs. "Oh no!" cried Nimbus. "The wind is blowing me apart!" Leo held on tight. "What can we do?" he asked. "I need to gather more cloud puffs," said Nimbus. "But I can't do it alone." Leo looked around. "I'll help!" he said. "Tell me what to do."



Nimbus showed Leo how to scoop up loose cloud puffs from the air. "Gently," said Nimbus. "Like catching snowflakes." Leo stretched out his arms and gathered soft white puffs, patting them onto Nimbus's tail. The dragon's body grew fluffy again. "You did it!" said Nimbus. "Thank you, Leo." Leo beamed. "That's what friends are for," he said.



With his tail whole again, Nimbus did a happy loop in the sky. "You saved me," he said. "Now let me show you one more cloud shape." He puffed a big, soft cloud into the shape of two friends—a boy and a dragon—flying together. "That's us!" said Leo. "Forever friends," said Nimbus, and the cloud shape glowed with a soft rainbow shimmer.



The sun began to set, and Nimbus floated back down to Leo's hill. "Will I see you again?" Leo asked. "Every time you look at the sky," said Nimbus. "And every time you use your imagination." He nuzzled Leo gently, and a tiny golden spark landed on Leo's star pendant. "Goodbye, Leo." "Goodbye, Nimbus," said Leo, waving.



Leo stood on the hill and watched Nimbus float up into the pink and orange sky. The cloud dragon grew smaller and smaller until he blended into a fluffy cloud. Leo touched his star pendant and smiled. He knew that every cloud he saw would remind him of his friend. From that day on, Leo looked at the sky differently. He saw dragons and castles and rabbits everywhere.



When Leo got home, he drew pictures of all the clouds he had seen—the cat, the castle, the horse, the dinosaur. His mom asked, "Where did you learn about clouds?" Leo grinned, showing the little gap in his teeth. "From my friend," he said. "The sky is full of wonder," said Leo, "if you have a friend and a little imagination." And every day, he looked up and smiled.