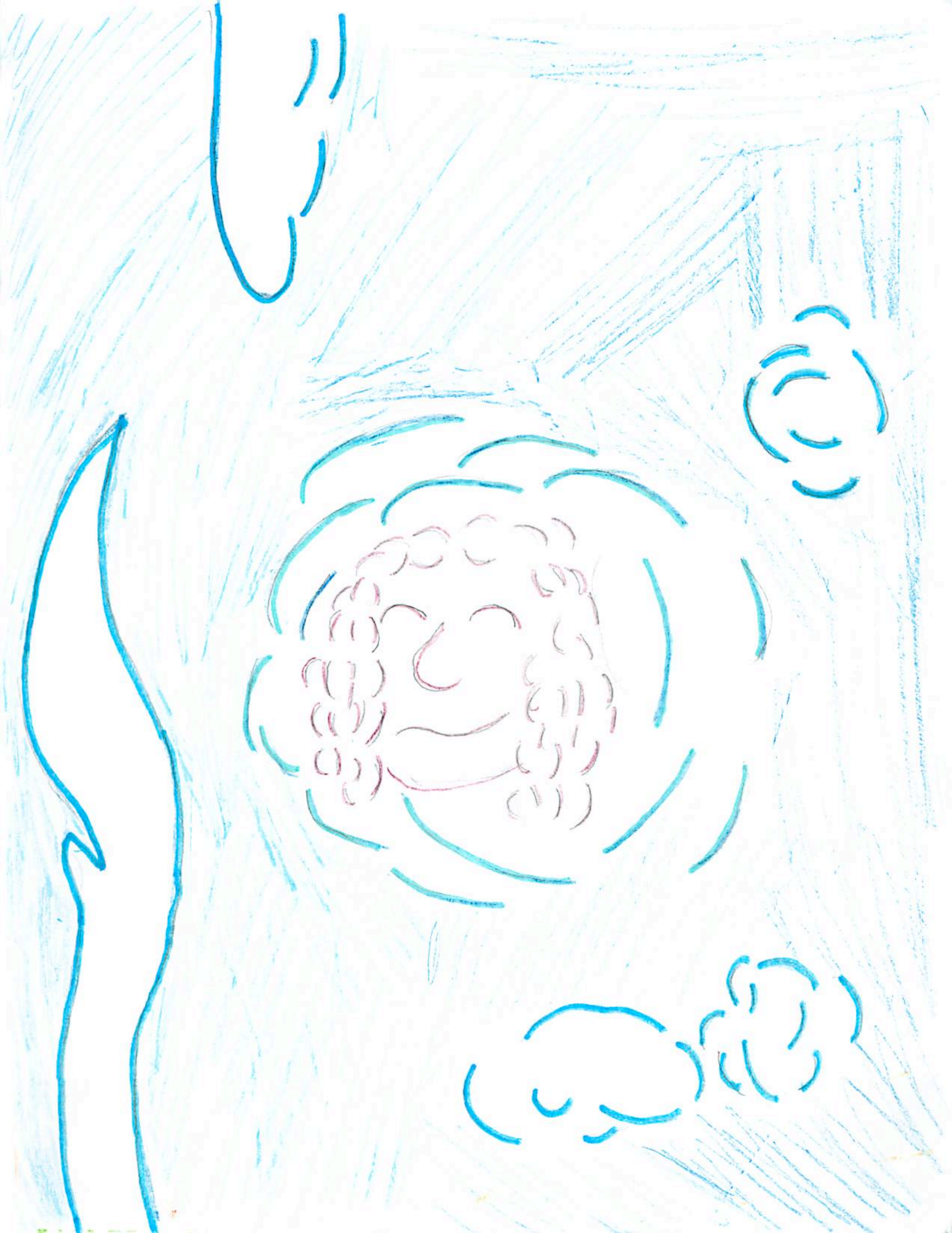


Carla the Cloud

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Carla was a cloud. She lived in the big, bright blue sky with her mommy and daddy, forty-two brothers and sisters, fifty-seven aunts and uncles and one hundred and thirty- nine cousins. Carla was the youngest in this huge family which meant she couldn't do the things older clouds could do. She couldn't make rain or hail and she couldn't move in front of the sun when it was time to be a gloomy day. These things that Carla couldn't do, didn't bother her much. She knew that she had to be patient and would grow up soon. This was also because Carla could change shape! All clouds could, no matter how small. This made Carla so happy because humans love to "cloud watch" and Carla loved being their source of entertainment.



Maddy and Jenny were two humans who really liked to cloud watch. Everyday at recess, they would head over to the grass, lie on their backs, and look up into the sky. They would see all types of things: bunnies, hearts, dogs, flowers and even dragons! What they didn't know, was that it was Carla who, most of the time, took on these shapes. To Carla, it felt like Maddy and Jenny were her friends, even though they were far away and never talked to each other.

One day, Maddy was over at Jenny's house for a play date. Jenny's house had a huge back yard, so the two friends spent most of their time out side. Suddenly, it started to rain.

"Oh, no!" Maddy exclaimed.

"But look," Jenny said pointing towards the sky.

"The sun is still out. That means there's going to be..."

"A rainbow!" the two girls shouted excitedly at the same time.

"And look there it is," Maddy said.

"Let's follow it."

"Follow it?" Maddy questioned.

"Yeah, come on. It'll be fun!"

"I don't know," Maddy said uneasily.

"What? Are you scared? It'll be fine; we'll be back before dark and who knows maybe we'll find the pot of gold. Wouldn't that be exciting?"

"Yeah, it would. But..."

"But nothing. We'll be back before my mommy even notices. Come on, we'll go through that hole in the fence," Jenny said, pointing.



“OK,” Maddy said, still unsure. And with that, Jenny grabbed her hand and the two girls slipped through the hole and were off.

Meanwhile, up in the sky, Carla had watched the two girls and she was worried. Carla too loved rainbows, but she knew that the girls shouldn't leave without telling anyone. *Well*, thought Carla to herself, *at least it's not raining anymore. Soon, the rainbow will fade away and they'll have to go home.* But just in case, Carla decided to float along and follow the girls.

Crawling through the hole put the two girls in a huge field, with lots of trees. Looking up into the sky, Jenny dashed off towards the right; through the trees.

“Wait up!” Maddy shouted ,running faster trying to keep up.

This pattern continued for quite awhile. Every so often, Jenny would look up to make sure she was going the right way, and then take off twisting and turning through the trees. Carla, unlike Maddy, had an easier time keeping up. And even though she was young, it didn't take long for Carla to figure out that they girls were getting lost. She knew she had to do something but she didn't know what.

Looking to her left, Carla noticed how close she was to the rainbow. But being that close gave her an idea. Floating closer, she landed herself on the rainbow, held her breath, closed her eyes and slid down.

Suddenly Jenny stopped, causing Maddy to run right into her.

“What, what is it?”

“I think...we're lost,” Jenny said, turning around in circles.

The two girls had reached another clearing with one single tree. There were bigger trees surrounding them and Jenny couldn't remember which way they had come.



"Oh, no," Maddy sighed. Sitting down, face in her hands she began to cry.

"Don't cry," Jenny said, sitting down next to her. "It'll be ok; we'll find our way back.

Just then the girls heard a rustling in the trees. Looking up, startled, they saw the strangest sight. There, up in the tree, was a cloud. You see, Carla hadn't thought about landing when she took off from the sky, so there she was stuck in a tree.

"Is that a...?" Maddy started

"Cloud?" Jenny finished for her.

"Yes, I am. I'm a cloud. My name's Carla and I seem to be stuck. Could you two help me?"

"Did it just say something?"

"No, that can't be. Someone is playing a trick on us," Jenny decided.

"No, this is no trick. I'm Carla, one of the clouds you watch all the time. I was up in the sky changing shape like usual, when I heard your plan. I thought I should follow you, just in case. And when you girls did get lost, I slid down the rainbow so I could help you home. I just forgot about the landing part."

"You slid down a rainbow?" Maddy asked, getting more excited.

"That is so cool!" Jenny exclaimed.

"Yes, it was so much fun!"

"But..," Maddy said getting to her feet, remembering that they needed to help Carla.

"How are we going to get you down?"



"Well, I can't come all the way down. I have to stay afloat. But if you just shake the leaves of the tree, I'm sure I'll come right out. Then I can guide you home."

"OK!" both girls said at once.

"Phew!" sighed Carla, once she was out of the tree.

"But how do we get home?"

"Oh, yes. Home. What I want you girls to do is follow me, like you were trying to do with the rainbow. Sound good?"

"Mhmm," Jenny said.

"All right," said Carla. And with that she allowed herself to float up a little higher and began slowly floating in the direction that would take the girls home.

In no time at all, Jenny spotted the hole in her fence.

"There's my house! Thank you so much!"

"You're so welcome. But please don't go anywhere by yourselves."

"Oh, we won't," Maddy said quickly.

And with that Carla floated higher and higher into the sky until she too was back home.

"Bye!" Both girls shouted, jumping up and down, waving. And with that, they scurried through the hole.

"I'm so glad we got back," Maddy said.

"Yeah, me too. I'm sorry; I didn't know we'd get lost."

"It's ok," Maddy said, giving Jenny a big hug.

And with that, both girls lay on their backs, looking up, this time knowing that they had a very special friend in the sky.



Sugar

Spice