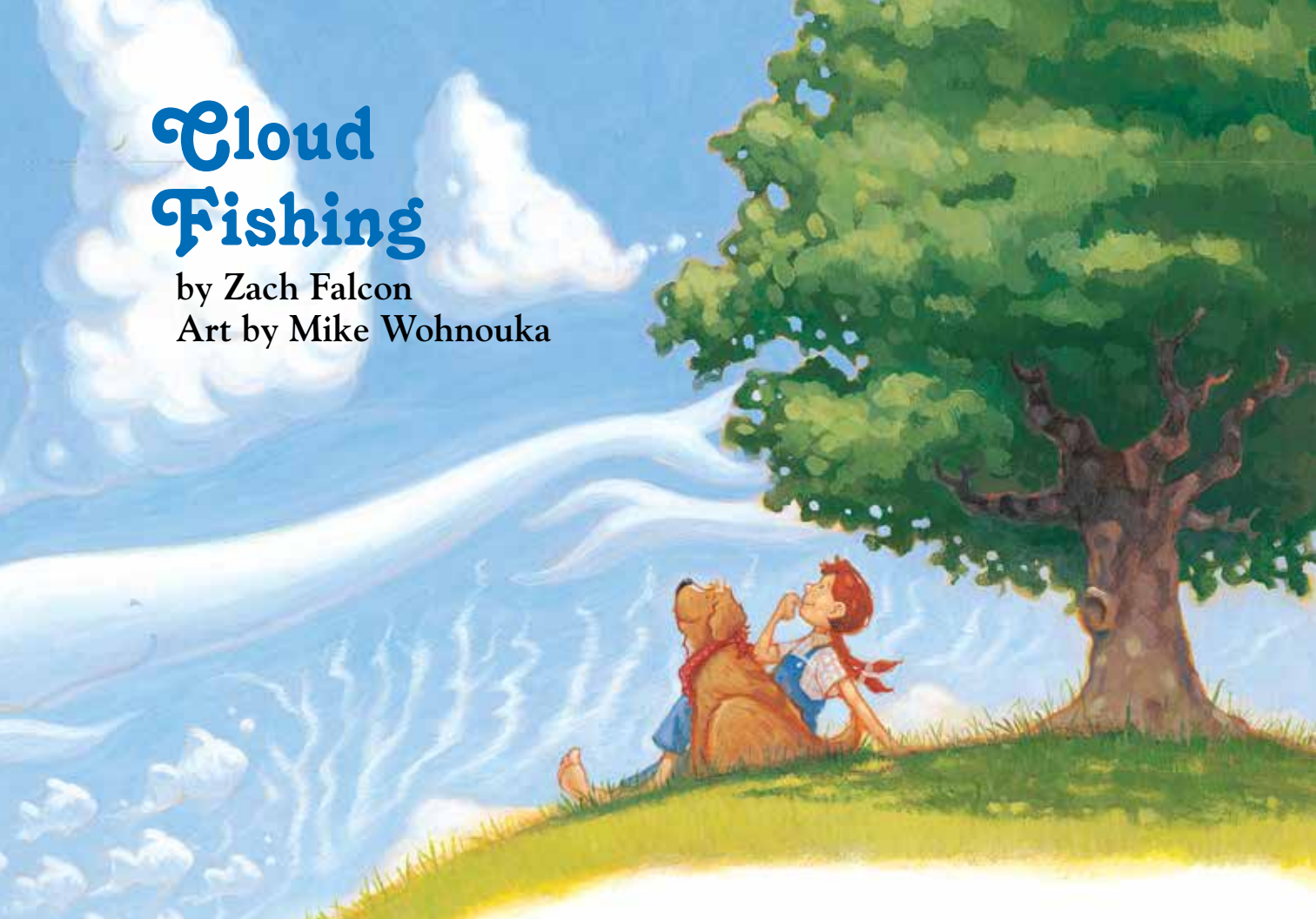


# Cloud Fishing

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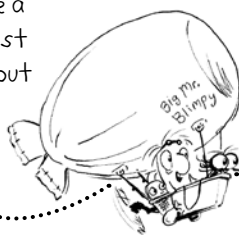


**B**AREFOOT JEAN AND her brown dog, Barley, ran to the top of the green, grassy hill. The sun shone down as she looked up into the deep sea-blue sky.

Above her sailed billowing cloud ships with tall sails unfurled. Nimbus whales breached, blocking the sun, while wisps of cirrus clouds rippled like seaweed. Jean watched as a lazy school of cloud fish drifted by, carried along the sky's gentle currents.

Jean scratched her nose, squinted her eyes, and said to herself, "I want to catch a fish."

Lil' Blimpy looks like a little whale that just breached—leaped out of the water.



Only it's leaping out of the nimbus and cirrus—types of clouds.



Barley barked excitedly as they ran down the hill, through the woods, and back to the house for supplies.

Jean found her sturdy green-and-gold kite in the closet. “If you’re going to catch a cloud fish,” Jean instructed Barley, “you’ve got to have good bait.”

From a sewing basket, she selected colorful bits of yarn and ribbon and tied them to the kite’s long tail for the bait. She found a kite string and tied it to the kite with an extra-strong knot.

With a burlap bag in one hand and her kite in the other, Jean marched purposefully, with Barley at her heels, back to the hill.

Standing at the top, Jean cast her hook into the sky. The wind lifted it higher and higher, until most of the line had been let out.

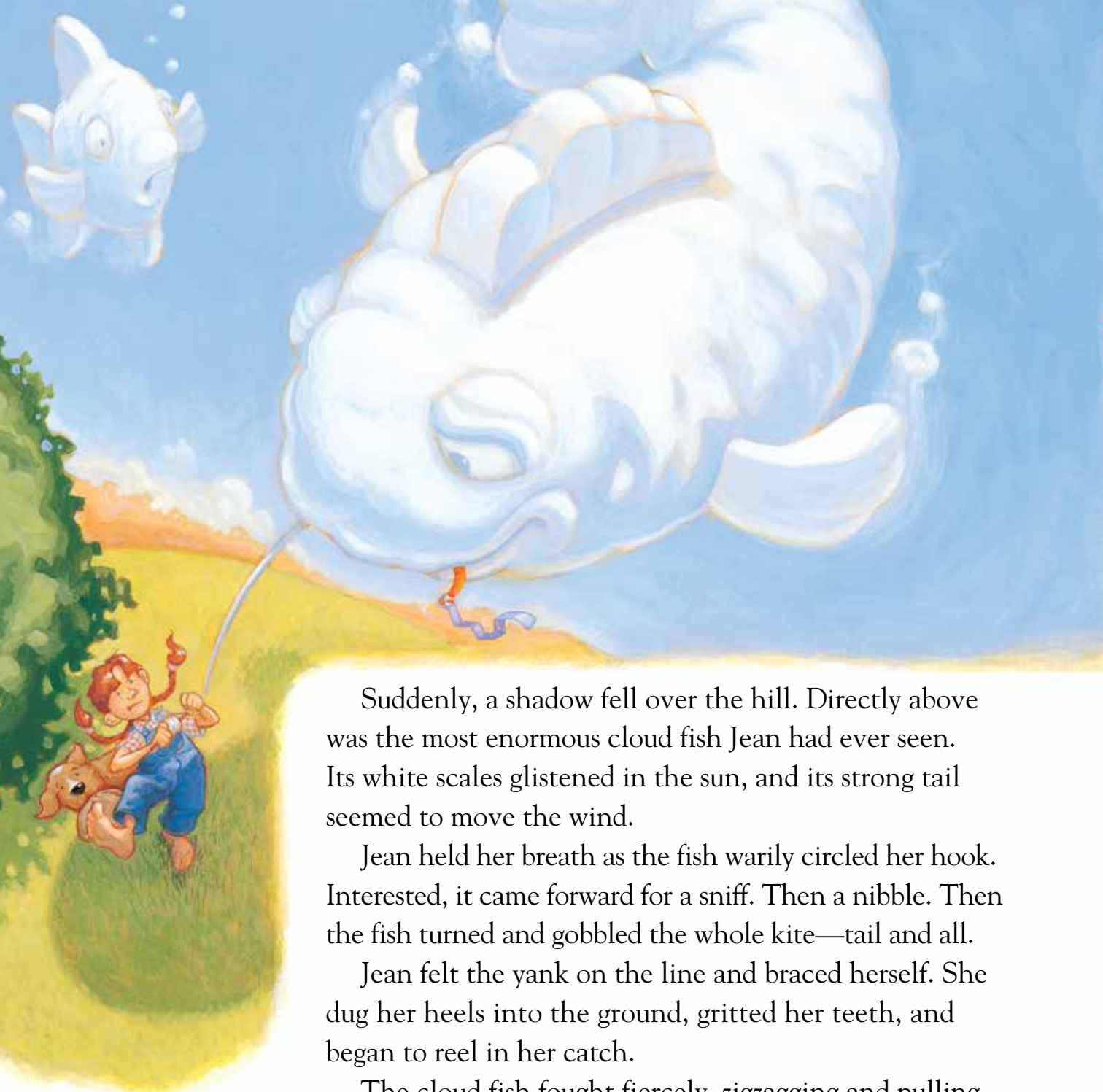
Ducking and pulling in the wind, the gold kite flashed in the sun, while the baited tail jiggled invitingly. Jean scanned the sky for her prey. Not a cloud fish in sight. She tightened the slack in her line and waited.



No better feeling than flying with wings unfurled—open. Right, Araña?

Umm . . . coming through that last cloud, this thing jiggled—moved with quick, jerky motions—way too much for me.





Suddenly, a shadow fell over the hill. Directly above was the most enormous cloud fish Jean had ever seen. Its white scales glistened in the sun, and its strong tail seemed to move the wind.

Jean held her breath as the fish warily circled her hook. Interested, it came forward for a sniff. Then a nibble. Then the fish turned and gobbled the whole kite—tail and all.

Jean felt the yank on the line and braced herself. She dug her heels into the ground, gritted her teeth, and began to reel in her catch.

The cloud fish fought fiercely, zigzagging and pulling with all its might, but it was no match for Jean. Slowly and steadily, she wrestled the fish from the sky.

Let's go, Bee Scout. We gotta catch up to the squadron.



I'm pedaling, but warily—carefully—avoiding any more clouds.



When the fish was near enough, Jean popped her kite out of its mouth and stuffed the fish into the burlap sack. She tossed the squirming sack over her shoulder, scratched Barley behind the ears, and proudly set off down the hill.

At home, Jean carried the fish upstairs to her room. She closed the door, set the sack down, and opened it carefully. After a moment, the cloud fish slowly poked its head out. Then, leaving the bag, it floated up to the ceiling. As it rose, the cloud changed shape, spreading outward, searching for an exit to the sky.

Realizing it was trapped, the cloud darkened. It rumbled, loosing a great clap of thunder. A bolt of lightning flashed and burned a hole in the carpet. Then the cloud began to rain on Jean's bed.

Barley whimpered, and Jean, who was a bit frightened herself, patted him on the head. "Maybe it's hungry," she said. "I'll fix it a snack." As soon as Jean opened the door, the cloud stormed past her into the hall.





The cloud was now a furious thunderstorm, hunting for an escape. It tore through Jean's parents' bedroom and then roared downstairs. Moving faster, the cloud spun like a tornado. Ripping through the kitchen, it shattered china and overturned the table. In the living room, the cloud knocked pictures off the wall and short-circuited the television.

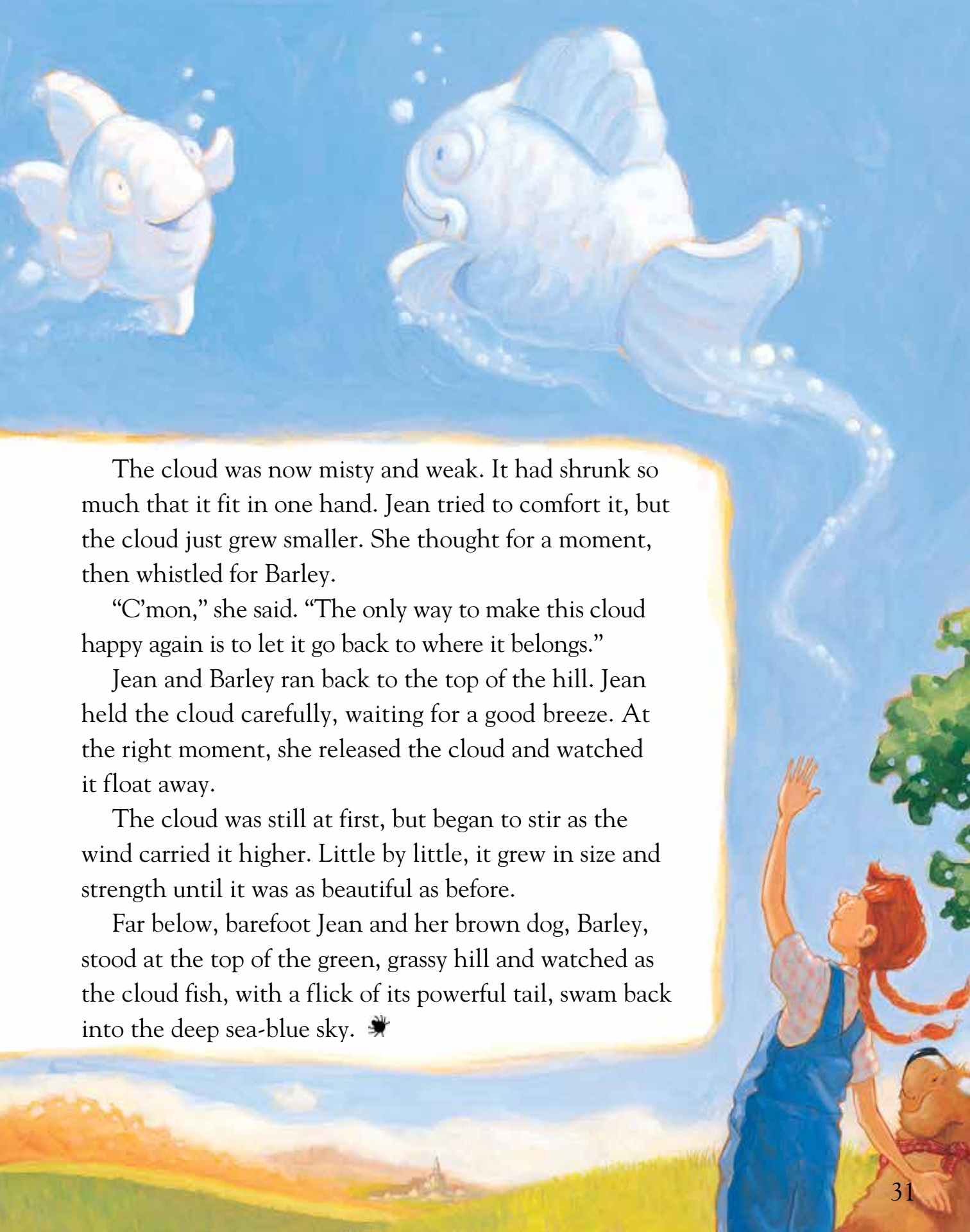
Barley, too terrified to bark, turned tail and ran down to the basement. The cloud thundered after him. Jean called Barley back up and quickly shut the door. The cloud bellowed and banged, but there was no way out.

Jean listened as the storm in her basement gradually grew quiet. Soon she could hear only gentle rain. She opened the door and tiptoed down the steps. The basement was flooded, but the cloud was nowhere to be seen. Jean and Barley stepped around the puddles, searching, until they found it behind the furnace.

Keep flying, Bee Scouts!  
We've got to find a home  
for the swarm!



To bee continued...



The cloud was now misty and weak. It had shrunk so much that it fit in one hand. Jean tried to comfort it, but the cloud just grew smaller. She thought for a moment, then whistled for Barley.

“C’mon,” she said. “The only way to make this cloud happy again is to let it go back to where it belongs.”

Jean and Barley ran back to the top of the hill. Jean held the cloud carefully, waiting for a good breeze. At the right moment, she released the cloud and watched it float away.

The cloud was still at first, but began to stir as the wind carried it higher. Little by little, it grew in size and strength until it was as beautiful as before.

Far below, barefoot Jean and her brown dog, Barley, stood at the top of the green, grassy hill and watched as the cloud fish, with a flick of its powerful tail, swam back into the deep sea-blue sky. 🐾