

The Flight to the Top of the Sky

This is a story about a little bird who was very curious. He asked his Mummy questions all the time. He said "Mummy, why did I come out of an egg? Why do you lay eggs? Mummy, why do we live in a nest in a tree? Why are trees so tall? Mummy, why do birds fly? Mummy, . . . "

Sometimes his Mummy got tired of listening to all those questions. And sometimes she couldn't answer those questions, and she just said "I don't know. It's just the way it is."

But the little bird didn't like it when his Mummy said "That's just the way it is." He said "But Mummy, why? But Mummy, why?"

And one day he said "Mummy, why is the sky blue?"

His Mummy said, "I don't know. It's just the way it is." And he said "I want to find out why the sky is blue. Mummy, why don't you find out why the sky is blue? You can fly up to the top of the sky and find out what's making it blue."

And his Mummy said "Well, I don't think I can do that, and I don't think I want to do that. But I'll tell you what. When you're a big bird, and you've learned how to fly, you can fly up to the top of the sky and you can find out why it's blue. All right?"

The little bird said, "Ooh, I want to learn how to fly."

And he practised flying and he learned to fly really soon, and his Mummy was very pleased with him because he learned to fly so quickly. And one morning he said "Mummy!" and she said "Yes, darling?" and he said "Today's the day I'm going to fly to the top of the sky to find out why it's blue," and she said "Well, you'd better eat a big breakfast then."

So he had a big breakfast. He had lots and lots of birdseed and a big drink of water.

His mother said, "Off you go, darling, have a nice flight," and he flew, higher and higher. He flew and flew and flew. There were lots of little birds. All his friends were flying all around him, and his friends' mummies and daddies. He could see the river down below, and the flowers in the fields.

He went higher and higher, and it started getting windier and colder. Soon he could see no other birds except for one great eagle. It wasn't flying the way he was flying. It had huge wings and it stretched them right out, and it wasn't flapping its wings. It was going round and round in circles. It looked like it was gliding, but it was gliding up, letting the air carry it.

The little bird was flying harder and harder. He didn't have those great big wings and he couldn't catch the thermal, but he got up as high as that eagle. It had big sharp eyes and a big strong beak. It looked a bit grumpy. But he was a very brave little bird and he said "Hello."

The eagle said "What are you doing up here? Never mind. Leave me alone. I'm busy."

The little bird said, "Excuse me, Mr Eagle, do you mind if I ask you a question?"

The eagle said, "Yes, yes, all right."

The little bird said, "You know the sky?"

The eagle said, "Yeah, I know the sky. I'm in the sky. I live in the sky. That's my job. I fly in the sky. I know the sky better than anything else. I'm the king of the sky. What about the sky?"

The little bird said, "Well, you know the way it's blue?" and the eagle said, "What's blue?"

The little bird said, "Don't you ever look up?" and the eagle said, "No, I look down. I look straight down. Do you see that little bunny down there?"

And the little bird said, "No, where is it?" because his eyes weren't as strong as the eagle's.

When he turned the eagle had folded his wings to his sides and swooped straight down. He was going so fast the little bird couldn't even see where he went.

Then there were no other birds to talk to. The little bird was flying higher and higher and it was getting colder and colder. He was finding it harder to breathe and harder to fly, because the air was getting thinner. There was so much wind. Soon he knew he would have to give up.

Then he saw a huge silver globe coming up towards him. He said "What's this?" It came up past him, and there was a basket hanging underneath. It was no ordinary basket. It was made out of metal, and it had portholes, and through the portholes he could see a man. The little bird said "Hello, hello!" and he knocked on the glass with his beak. The man was surprised to see a little bird knocking on his porthole. He said, "Goodness me. Let me open this door."

The man opened the door and he said, "Come in, come in." When the little bird flew in, the man quickly closed the door.

"What are you doing out there?" he asked.

"I'm flying up to the top of the sky," said the little bird.

"You can't fly up to the top of the sky!" said the man. "There is no top of the sky."

And the little bird said, "Yes, there is. Because when you look up you can see the big blue top of the sky. I was going up there to see why it's blue."

"So you want to know why the sky is blue, do you?" said the man.

"Yes," said the little bird.

"And you were going to fly all the way to the top of the sky to find out, even though it was making you very tired and cold?"

"Yeah," said the little bird. "I really wanted to know."

"Well, you're a very curious little bird, and you're very brave. But you don't have to go to the top of the sky to find out why it's blue, you know. You can just sit on the ground, or in a tree, and learn things about the sky and the sun and the light and the air, and think about it and work on it for a long time. I can tell you what I've learned."

The little bird said, "That'd be great. Can I come with you?"

The man said, "Yes."

And the little bird said, "Where are you going?" and the man said, "Well right now I'm going to find out things about the rain and the wind and the sun and the light from the stars. See, I have all these instruments that measure how much, and how fast, and how high, and how long, and how hard."

The little bird said, "Wow!"

The man said, "You can be my assistant."

The little bird said he would love to. So the little bird went in the balloon to study the rain and the wind and the sun and the light from the stars.

The balloon went higher and higher and a strange thing happened. Outside the sky became darker and darker. The stars all came out. But the sun seemed to grow brighter.

"Is it night time?" asked the bird.

"No," said the man. "It's still day. Look down."

Far below him the bird could see the earth, with green fields and the sunlight sparkling on the water.

"Where is the blue sky?" asked the little bird.

"The air is mostly below us," said the man. "The sky is blue only if there is air above us."

"Is that the answer?" said the little bird.

"That's part of the answer. The whole answer is bigger than that," said the man.

That night the man dropped him off near his house. "Pick you up tomorrow," said the man, and floated away.

The little bird's mother was very pleased to see him.

"Did you fly to the top of the sky, darling?" she asked.

"No, Mum," said the little bird, yawning. "There is no top of the sky."

"Oh, what a shame. Did you find out why the sky is blue?"

"I learned part of the answer," said the little bird. "But I'll find out the rest. And I got a job in a balloon."

"That's nice, darling," said his mother.

And the little bird went to sleep, dreaming about tomorrow.