

A Piece of the Sky

by Diane D. Gillette

For the briefest moment, she was part of the sky. She hung there. Frozen. Suspended. Arms outstretched. She thought maybe she could take off flying, if she strained against gravity hard enough. She would soar into the pale blue until she reached the clouds. They would enfold her into their soft, billowy arms, where she would fall asleep. Starlight would warm her dreams, and she would awake to find she'd become a cloud herself. She would forever remain a piece of the sky — happy, content, safe — observing the world below, drifting wherever her little cloud heart guided her.

But greedy gravity still held a claim on her, and her moment ended. She was no longer frozen, waiting to become one with the sky above her, but flailing, fighting vainly for control. Limbs scrambled for a hold on anything at all. But only her eyes locked onto something solid. The face of her brother floated above her. His laughter drifted around her and eased her panic. Surely he could not be laughing if she was in danger. She relaxed and let his laughter cushion her as she entered the cool river water below, feet first, the shock of cold reminding her she was very much still part of the earth. Too solid, too human for the sky.

She forgot to gulp air before she entered the river. She broke the surface of the water and gasped, coughing, sputtering. Instinctively, she moved her arms and legs back and forth, treading water the way her father had taught her. The river was deep here. She had no interest in finding the bottom. She spat out a mouthful of the river and looked up at her brother. He remained on the bridge, maybe twelve feet up, she guessed, where she'd been standing moments before, until he had thrust his hand to her back and shoved outward. She considered throwing a rude gesture his way or shouting an obscene word from her cool sanctuary below him, but her father was already rowing out to her to pull her into the safety of their raft. His laughter echoed her brother's.

As she waited for their father, suspended in the water, gently rolling her hands and feet back and forth, she gazed into the endless blue eons beyond where her brother stood. She waited until she could launch herself into the sky for yet another moment.

