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High above the mountains, where the air is crisp and clear, sits a little workshop with windows open to the sky. There lives Master Aldric, an old cloud painter with a long white beard and a deep blue robe embroidered with silver clouds. Every morning he dips his brush into pots of sky-paint and creates soft, swirling patterns that drift across the heavens.

Nora, his apprentice, is eleven years old with freckles across her cheeks and a red headband holding back her curly black hair. She wears a paint-stained green apron and oversized boots that clomp on the wooden floor. Nora dreams of painting huge, exciting masterpieces, and she can hardly wait to begin. 'Someday soon,' she tells herself, 'I'll paint the biggest cloud in the whole sky.'

Master Aldric smiles at Nora's eagerness. 'Patience, little one,' he says, his round spectacles glinting. 'Cloud painting is like growing a garden. You must practice a little every day.' He shows her how to mix colors and how to test the wind with a wet finger. Nora nods, but her feet tap impatiently. She wants to paint now, not watch.

One sunny morning, Master Aldric goes to gather fresh paint from the mountain springs. 'Practice your small swirls while I'm gone,' he says. But as soon as he leaves, Nora grabs her brush. 'Small swirls are boring,' she thinks. 'I'll paint a giant dragon!' She climbs onto the roof and starts sweeping huge strokes across the blue.

Nora paints with all her might, but the cloud-paint splatters and blobs. Instead of a dragon, she makes a lumpy, gray mess that spreads across the sky. The sun disappears behind her creation, and the valley below turns dark and chilly. People look up and wonder why the day has suddenly become so gloomy.

Master Aldric returns and sees the thick, gray clouds blocking the sunlight. Nora's cheeks burn with shame. 'I'm sorry,' she whispers. 'I wanted to make something wonderful.' The old painter puts a gentle hand on her shoulder. 'Every painter makes mistakes,' he says kindly. 'The sky is big, and our brushes are small. Let's fix this together.'

Together they paint thin, white streaks that break up the gray. The sun peeks through again, and the valley brightens. Nora watches how Master Aldric balances light and shadow with careful strokes. 'Cloud painting is not just about making shapes,' he explains. 'It's about color, light, and movement. They must all dance together.'

The next day, Master Aldric gives Nora a special practice brush. 'Start with small clouds,' he says. 'Feel how the paint moves with the wind.' Nora tries, but her clouds still wobble and bump. She sighs. 'This is hard.' Master Aldric smiles. 'That's why we practice. Each try teaches you something new.'

Days pass, and Nora practices every morning. She learns to watch the wind and to mix just the right amount of white and gray. Her clouds become rounder and softer. Sometimes she still makes mistakes, but she no longer rushes. 'Patience,' she murmurs, 'is part of painting.'

One afternoon, Nora notices how the sky changes with the seasons. In spring it is soft and pink; in summer it is bright blue; in autumn it glows orange; in winter it turns pale silver. She wants to paint a mural that shows all these seasons at once. But how can she fit them all into one sky?

Nora asks Master Aldric for help. 'A sky mural is like a story,' he says. 'You must plan where each part goes.' They sketch ideas on paper. Nora chooses a gentle curve for spring, a bold sweep for summer, a swirl for autumn, and a soft drift for winter. She practices each part separately until her brush feels like an old friend.

Finally, the day comes. Nora stands on the rooftop with her brush ready. Her heart beats fast, but she breathes slowly. She paints a ribbon of spring green, then a burst of summer gold. She adds autumn orange and winter silver, blending them with care. The colors flow together like a beautiful song across the sky.

When she finishes, the whole valley looks up and cheers. The sky mural glows with soft light, and the seasons seem to dance together in harmony. Master Aldric wipes a happy tear from his eye. 'You see?' he says. 'Practice and patience made this possible.' Nora smiles, her freckles crinkling, and she knows he is right.

From that day on, Nora paints with joy and care. She still makes mistakes sometimes, but she never forgets the lesson of the sky mural. Master Aldric gives her a new brush with a silver handle. 'For my apprentice,' he says, 'who learned that the best creations grow slowly.' Nora hugs him tightly.

People come from far away to see Nora's seasonal sky mural. They point and smile at the way the colors shift and glow. Nora watches them and feels warm inside. She knows that every small practice stroke helped her paint something big and beautiful. And she is already dreaming of the next mural she will make.

In the workshop above the mountains, the old cloud painter and his apprentice continue to practice. Nora still wears her red headband and paint-stained apron, but now she also carries patience in her heart. And whenever a young visitor asks how to paint the sky, Nora smiles and says, 'Practice a little every day, and be patient. Your dream will come true.'