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Why the Autumn Leaves Are Red

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Long, long ago, no one lived on the earth but animals, and every so often they held a great Council. Bear came, with his sharp claws, his shiny coat, and his big, big growl. Deer came, so proud of his antlers, which grew out of his head like trees. All the animals and all the birds gathered there.

Little Turtle came too. She was so small that she never liked to speak up. But she often wished to herself, *If only I could do some good deed! What can a creature as little as I am do? Still, I'll keep watch. Maybe someday there will be a chance for me to help my people.*

She never forgot that wish. And one day, at the Council, the chance came.

"It's so dark here," the animals said. "We have only the Snowlight to see by, and it's gloomy. Couldn't we make a light and put it up in Skyland?"

"Please let me go up to Skyland," said Little Turtle. "I'm sure I can make a light shine there."

The animals agreed, and they called Dark Cloud to carry her. Thunder and Lightning lived inside Dark Cloud. When Little Turtle reached Skyland, she took some of the Lightning, made the Sun from it, and set him in the sky.

But the Sun could not move, because he had no life, and the world below grew far too hot to live on.

"What shall we do?" the animals asked one another.

"We must give the Sun life and spirit," someone said, "and then he will travel across the sky."

So they gave him life and spirit, and the Sun began to move. Mud Turtle dug a tunnel through the earth for him to pass through. Then Little Turtle made the Sun a wife out of more of Dark Cloud's Lightning. She was the Moon. Their children were the stars, who played all over Skyland.

Little Turtle stayed on to look after Skyland, and the animals below called her *She Who Takes Care of Skyland*. She was very happy, because she was doing her good deed.

But some of the animals grew jealous, and none more than Deer, who was so

proud of his antlers. One day he said to Rainbow, "Rainbow, please take me up to Skyland, where Little Turtle lives."

Rainbow wasn't sure it would be right to take Deer to Little Turtle's house, but he said, "In the winter, when I rest on the big mountain by the lake, I will take you."

Deer was glad. He told no one about Rainbow's promise. All winter long he waited and watched near the big mountain, but Rainbow never came. In the spring, Deer spotted Rainbow beside the lake.

"Rainbow," he said, "why didn't you keep your promise?"

Rainbow made him another. "Come to me by the lake when you see me in the thick fog."

Deer kept this promise secret too, because he hoped to go to Skyland alone. Day after day he waited beside the lake. At last, one morning, thick fog rose from the water, and there was the beautiful Rainbow, stretching in an arch from the lake to the big mountain. A shining light fell around Deer, and he saw a straight path glowing with every color of the rainbow. It led through a great forest.

"Follow the path through the forest," said Rainbow.

Deer stepped onto the shining pathway, and it led him straight to Little Turtle's house in Skyland. He wandered all over Skyland, looking at everything.

Back on earth, the great Council met, and Deer was not there. "Where is Deer?" the animals asked. Hawk flew everywhere through the air and could not find him. Wolf searched the deep woods and could not find him either.

Then Dark Cloud brought Little Turtle down to the Council, and she told them how Rainbow had made a path for Deer to climb to Skyland. "There it is now," she said.

The animals looked out over the lake and saw the beautiful pathway. They had never seen it before.

"Why didn't Deer wait for us?" they said. "We should all have gone to Skyland together."

Brown Bear made up his mind to follow that path the very next time he saw it. One day, alone by the lake, he saw it shining through the great forest, and soon he found himself in Skyland. The first one he met was Deer.

"Why did you leave us?" Bear asked. "Why did you come to Little Turtle's land without us? Why didn't you wait?"

Deer shook his antlers angrily. "What right do you have to question me? I'll make you sorry you asked!" He arched his neck and lowered his great antlered head,

and his eyes blazed.

Bear was not afraid. He stood up on his hind legs, his claws sharp and strong, and his hoarse growls rang all over Skyland.

The battle between Deer and Bear shook Skyland itself. Far below, the animals looked up.

"Who will go to Skyland and make Deer stop fighting?" they cried.

"I will," said Wolf. "I can run faster than anyone."



Wolf raced along the shining pathway and soon reached the battle. He made Deer stop. But Deer's antlers were covered with blood, and when he shook them, great drops fell down, down through the air and splashed across every leaf in the forest. And the leaves turned a beautiful red.

So in the autumn, when you see the leaves turning red, you may know why. Long ago, Deer and Bear fought a great battle in Skyland, in the land of Little Turtle, who was only trying to do a good deed.

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