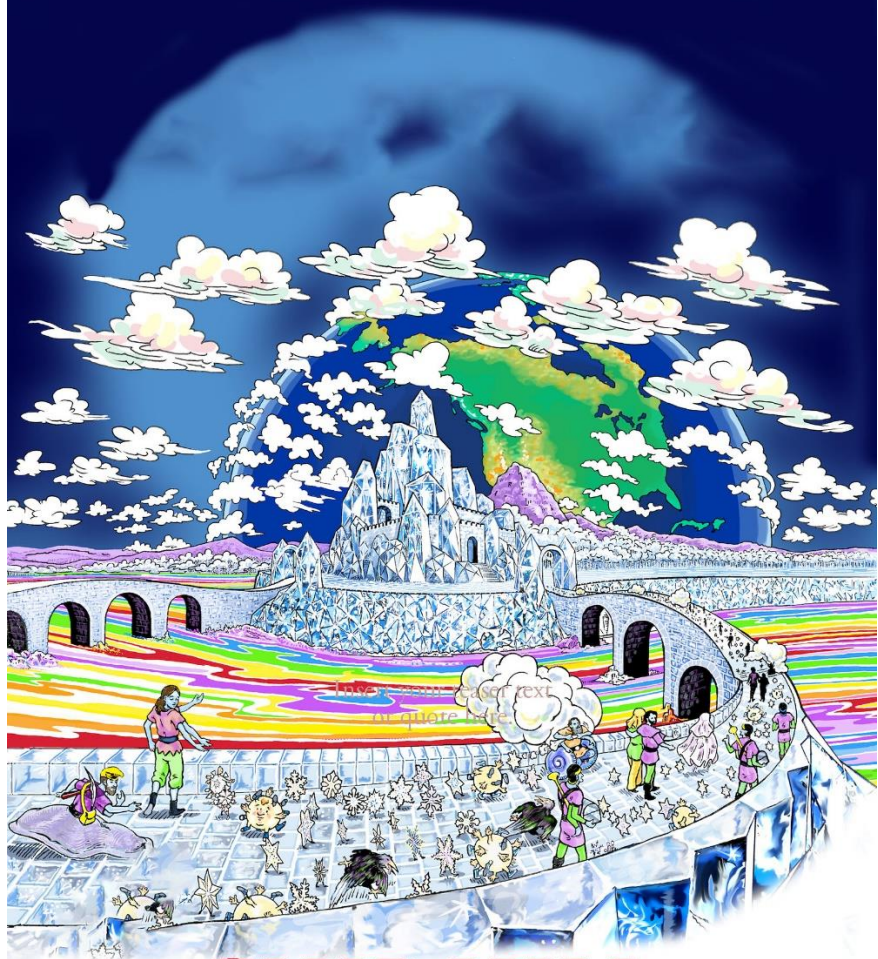


CLOUDLAND



CHIP HILL

CLOUDLAND books by Chip Hill

Volume 1

CLOUDLAND

Volume 2

RETURN TO CLOUDLAND

Volume 3

BEYOND CLOUDLAND

CLOUDLAND

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Illustrations by Michael Kelley

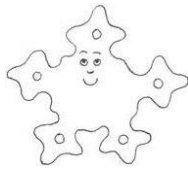
CLOUDLAND

CHIP HILL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MICHAEL KELLEY

*For my grandchildren Shiloh, Karis, Nathan,
Lorelei and Forrest*

1. Jane and Robbie



Jane and Robbie had a problem, a big problem. They had recently moved to a new town, and it seemed okay. But they just couldn't seem to make new friends.

"We're nice kids, right?" Jane asked Robbie. Before he could respond, she went on. "I just don't know what to do."

Nine-year-old Robbie sat on a bench with his legs outstretched in front of their Uncle Josh's log-style house in the woods. His older sister Jane strode back and forth in front of him, her blond ponytail flipping up every time she turned. Both kids wore sweaters in the winter

chill.

The morning sun reflected off a patch of snow here and there, which Jane stepped over as she paced. Her hands occasionally waved in the air when she spoke. She stopped and faced Robbie.

“What’s different about us?” she asked, shrugging her shoulders. “I mean, are we *really* so different from the other kids?” She stamped her foot.

Robbie crossed his arms and frowned but said nothing.

“Anyone on our street offer to play with you?” Jane asked with her arms out.

Robbie glanced up as he thought about it. “Not really, I guess,” he replied.

Jane threw her hands up. “I thought things would just work out.” She made a fist and smacked it into her palm. “But the good thing is, we’ve got some time now over winter break to come up with a plan.”

Robbie nodded his blond head several times before he repeated, “Yeah, we’ve got some time.”

A moment passed. Then both stared at each other at the same instant. “Uncle Josh!” they shouted. Scrambling up the steps and crossing the porch, they jostled each other trying to reach the door first. Robbie won and pushed open the door.

Trotting into their Uncle Josh’s living room, they found him settled in his easy chair in front of a crackling fire in the fireplace. A full white beard framed his contented face as he turned to reach for an open book on the side table. A cat was plopped down on the rug. The two children came to a stop in front of their uncle’s chair, and he looked up, smiling.

Jane cleared her throat. “Uncle Josh,” she began, “we’ve got a problem. We can’t seem to make friends at our new house.” Then, giving examples as she went, she described the situation back home. As Jane talked, their uncle’s face went from a smile, to a frown, to a more thoughtful look.

When she finished, their uncle turned to look

at Robbie.

“That about covers it,” Robbie said, folding his arms and nodding.

Their uncle gave his beard a little tug and regarded each of the children in turn. “Can’t make friends,” he repeated. “Wondering how you’re different from others,” he mused. “Well, I doubt there’s much that’s different about you children. I don’t know of course, but I bet the children in your new town have grown up together and haven’t met many new folks like you. It may just take a little longer than you thought.”

At this point he put down his book and produced a pipe, tapping with his finger in the bowl of the pipe a few times. “Yes, I’m sure you’ll find a way to connect to these other children,” he continued. “But you know what? I’ve got a story that might help, about two little ones that really *were* different, my favorite story. Would you like to hear it?”

Jane’s face brightened, and Robbie gave a

thumbs up.

“Okay, get comfortable,” said their uncle, “and I’ll tell it to you.” Both children plopped down on the rug at his feet.



Uncle Josh, Jane and Robbie

2. The Story



Freezy and Breezy had a problem, a big problem. Snowflake children, they lived in a wonderful world in the sky called Cloudland. There was no problem with that. However, they were also identical twins. *That* was the problem. “No two Snowflakes may look alike,” their parents Burr and Lacey had told them. It was apparently an old law of King Nature who ruled Cloudland.

For the umpteenth time, the twins were talking about it. “It doesn’t seem fair,” said Freezy to his brother. “It’s not like we asked to be different.” When he examined Breezy, sitting on a little square stool like a sugar cube, he saw the same white, flat body, with four pointed arms and two pointed legs sticking out. And he

saw an identical smile on the frosty white face.

Yes, *they* looked the same, but apparently no one else on Cloudland did.

Breezy floated over and studied himself in a little mirror. “Yeah, just because it’s never happened before doesn’t mean it’s wrong, does it?” he asked. “Mom and Dad say we have to keep it a secret, so people think there’s one kid, not two. It’s not fair. We can’t even go outside, one at a time, and play with the other Snowflake kids.”

Freezy looked through the window at the many Snowflake houses in the distance. “Yeah,” he added. “I guess they’re right. Someone would eventually find out we’re twins.”

“Uh huh,” said Breezy. “Mom and Dad say that Snowflakes always tell the truth, no matter what. All it would take is someone asking me about a conversation they had with you. How would I answer that?”

“Yup, just one slip up,” said Breezy, “and if King Nature finds out we’re twins, it means the

end of our family! That's the law."

They both peeked at their little door and shuddered, as if huge King Nature was on the outside trying to get in. Fear wasn't an emotion that came naturally to them, but they felt it now, imagining the powerful king they had never seen. Breezy floated over to check the lock on the door.

Usually when they talked about their problem, a sense of panic would set in and the twins would change the subject. But this time was different, at least for Freezy. "Since we're the problem, we need to fix this," he said in a hushed tone.

Breezy raised his face in surprise. "What did you say?"

Freezy repeated it and then suggested, "C'mon, let's think of something we could do about it."

"All right," said Breezy. "I'll try."

So the twins concentrated. They brought up one idea after another and discussed it. But they

found a weakness with each one and rejected it. As this discussion dragged on, the difficulties led to frustration.

Freezy kicked a book across the room. “Why is this so hard?” He whined.

But Breezy kept thinking and thinking, and then an idea occurred to him. “What if we run away and hide where no one can find us?” he asked. “The secret would stay a secret, and Mom and Dad would be safe!”