

# The Little White Cloud



By Ron Aaron

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In a country called Far Off Land, there is a very high mountain; perched at its top is a little white cloud. People say that the cloud is a very good cloud, very useful to have around. But how can it be that a cloud is either good or bad? Well, maybe you will be able to understand if I tell you my story, one of many, about "The Little White Cloud."

In Far Off Land at the base of Far Off Mountain, there is a village by the name of Far Off Village. The people of the village know for sure that the cloud, their very own cloud, as they call it, at the summit of the mountain is a very good cloud. They know, because the cloud always gives them the rain they need for their crops in the fields. Occasionally though, the cloud is not there on top of the mountain. "It is not here," the villagers would say. "It is probably off on one of its good deeds again."

The Little White Cloud always manages, though, to get back on time for the needs of the village.

Where does the cloud go? Well, there is no way anybody in the village could possibly know, but when it returns they often hear from people in the surrounding countryside that it – the cloud – has been for a visit and has done a good deed. The Cloud does not always come down the mountain to do good deeds in the villages of Far Off Land. Sometimes it even does its good deeds in more distant lands. But its main responsibility is always to the people in the village at the foot of the mountain.

The people in distant areas heard about the village and its good cloud, and how it always helps out in times of need. They've heard of course, that the crops of the village were always the best in the land. In fact, the name of the village, its mountain, and its cloud had become so famous that eventually all the other countries surrounding the Far Off Land had heard about it too.

The most well known story was about a wealthy landowner.

One day, not so long ago, there came to the village a man who was obviously very wealthy. His pockets were stuffed with money, and the moment he arrived in the Far Off Village he started giving it away. It was unbelievable... as if it was nothing for him to throw money away. This was a very unusual thing for anyone to do, especially in the Far Off Village.

Not that the people in the village were miserly or anything like that. Heavens forbid! No, it's just that there were no wealthy people in the village; and every penny earned by the farmers was hard earned. Money was certainly not something to be thrown away like this stranger was doing. Indeed it was very peculiar. No wonder the village elders looked upon this seemingly generous man with great suspicion.

When the strange and wealthy man had distributed all the money from his pockets, he went to the boot of his very big and shiny yellow car. From the boot of his beautiful car he took out a pair of brand new rubber boots and put them on his feet.

For the villagers surrounding the wealthy man things were getting more and more curious – they were flabbergasted. Talking amongst themselves they were all asking the same questions:

"Who is this man?"

"What is he doing here in our village?"

"What does he want of us?"

A servant accompanying the wealthy man, tended his every need. The servant would not and did not answer any of the villagers' questions as to what they were doing here. The wealthy man and his servant then proceeded to walk out of the village and into the village fields, followed by a crowd of ever more curious villagers. He took great care keeping to the strips around the fields. He walked and he walked, occasionally asking people who owned this field: who owned that one. As time went by and the days became hotter he was left with just a few followers; the others went home for their siesta. Not one of those following saw him write anything down. He didn't need to; he had an excellent memory. Eventually, hot and sweaty, the wealthy man went back into his car, and without saying a word to anyone, he drove off.

That same evening and the days following, all the people of the village could talk about was the strange and very wealthy man and his most unusual arrival amongst them.

Three days after the wealthy man had driven off; a group of builders came to the village. There was a supervisor who was the man in charge. Everyone could see that he was the boss, because although he wore work clothes, they were immaculately clean.

He asked one of the villagers: "Where does the Jim-Jim family live?"

After having the house pointed out to them, the workers, led by the supervisor, walked up the mountain slope to reach it. The Jim-Jim house was the highest of all houses the mountainside. Whereas most of the villagers tended their fields down in the valley below, the Jim-Jim family lived in a house outside of the village, and their fields were almost the only ones on the upper reaches of the mountain and here the fields were very stony, and where it was much harder to grow crops.

The supervisor knocked on the door of the Jim-Jim's house, was let in, and after what seemed to all of those watching a very long time, came out. He then sat down and ate breakfast with his workers.

Shortly after the supervisor had sat down with the workers to eat, the Jim-Jim family suddenly appeared. With great haste they could be seen going in and out of their house. Every time they emerged from the house people saw them carrying some of the household belongings and loading them on to the family cart. All of their worldly belongings, everything they had was loaded onto the cart. Having finished loading the cart they harnessed their big old workhorse. Then, with tears streaming down their faces, they proceeded to walk slowly through and out of the village. Friends and neighbours of the Jim-Jim family accompanied them all the while asking them, beseeching them: "Where are you going? Why are you leaving your home, your fields?"

The family just lowered their eyes in shame and continued walking. Without saying a single word they left the village.

When the Jim-Jim family had finally disappeared from sight, the villagers turned around and went up the hill to the Jim-Jim's old house, intent on asking the workers and the supervisor: "What is going on? Why is the family leaving? What have you done to them?"

To the villagers complete astonishment the workers were already in the process of breaking up and tearing down the old Jim-Jim house.

"What are you doing? Leave the house alone! Who gave you permission to do such a thing?" the villagers demanded.

The supervisor stepped forward and patiently explained that the previous family had sold their house to a new owner.

"A new owner! Who is this new owner? What right does he have?"

The supervisor answered.

"You have all seen him, he was here just a few days ago looking at the village, and seeing what was for sale."

"Prove it to us, that the house was sold! They would never do such a thing, not the Jim-Jim's."

To which the supervisor pulled out of his impressive satchel a large and impressive scroll, a document proving the sale of the house and land, and at the bottom father Jim-Jim had scrawled his name.

Astounded the village elders muddled it over. "Must have been the eccentric rich man who was in the village a few days earlier" was their conclusion.

Dismayed and confused, the villagers went back down the hill animatedly talking amongst themselves about this unexpected, worrying, and ominous turn of events. What would anyone of means, need with a poor village such as this?

The next day, very early in the morning, another family left. Leaving their house and fields, they also had sold out to the rich man. When asked why, all they could say was that they couldn't refuse the rich man's very generous offer.

Within the next two weeks six other families sold out to the rich man. Since his first arrival, the wealthy man had not been seen even once in the village. All the buying and selling was done through his supervisor.

The wealthy man came to the village for the second time only two months later when the Jim-Jim's old house had been torn down thoroughly, and in its place was a completely new house.

The new structure was a grand and fine-looking mansion – much bigger than the previous house. It was three stories high... No other house in the whole region was so high, and it had a veranda all around it. It certainly was a very impressive house.

The wealthy man's name was Scun Blackfield. He had a wife and ten children. Of the three girls, the youngest was three years old, and the oldest – who was also the oldest of all the children – was nineteen. The girls were all terribly spoiled and lazy. The seven boys were all like monsters. Whereas the girls hardly ever left the house and the surrounding garden, the boys very soon learnt their way around the village and surrounding fields. Not long after they had arrived, the boys were given the name "the terrible seven" because they spent most of their time vandalizing, stealing and fighting, without a word of reproach from their father.

"And what about children's mother?" You may well ask.

Mrs. Scun Blackfield was like a scared little mouse. Her tyrant husband kept her in a state of continuous fear; she quivered at the very sight or sound of him. She had almost no say in her unruly children's upbringing. Her husband forbade her to do anything about it, and the children simply grew up wild.

The very first thing Scun Blackfield did after moving into his new house was to cut down all the trees up the mountainside.

When he was asked why he did such a thing, he replied:

"I will do as I wish. And what I wish is to be able to see the mountaintop from my veranda without the stupid trees spoiling the view. If I could, I would also blow away that silly little cloud that spoils my view of the mountaintop. Who knows, maybe I will find a way to do that also."

To the villagers the cutting down of the trees was a bad, bad omen; the thought of removing their Little White Cloud was just pure blasphemy – just too bad to contemplate.

All of a sudden the villagers found they had to deal with all sorts of problems, problems that didn't exist before. They came to realize that trying to talk reason to Mr. Scun Blackfield didn't help. Most of the time he ignored them completely.

The villagers came to the conclusion that the newcomer to their village was absolutely mad. They were wrong. He was simply a very bad and wicked person.

After Scun Blackfield had finished cutting down all the trees up the mountainside, he brought into the village fields a big tractor. Nobody in the village before this had owned a tractor. No one could afford such a thing.

With his new tractor he proceeded to dig up all the paths that separated all of his newly purchased fields. By doing that, he joined all the little fields he had bought into one great big field. He ploughed up all the crops that were left on his new field and planted sugarcane on all of it.

Scun Blackfield's workers dug long ditches to catch much of the water that ran off the mountain and diverted it on to his one huge field.

When asked why he did such an unfriendly thing, that up till now everybody in the village respected each other's water rights, all he would answer was, "Don't bother me with your silly problems. If you want water dig your own ditches."

The villagers were now suddenly left without enough water for their own crops.

Although "The Little White Cloud" often came down the mountain and spread its rain over the villager's fields, most of the time, it rained or snowed on the mountaintop. And the streams that ran down the mountain slopes irrigated the fields.

The villagers were all terribly upset and angry. But what could they do? If their fields were to dry out they could quite possibly go hungry or starve. They were willing to put up with his naughty children, and his joining up of what for ages had been little fields, his bad manners and arrogance. But his hogging all the water running off the mountaintop was just too much for them.

A delegation of the village elders approached him, to try one last time and reason with him. But again but he would not listen. In fact, he laughed at the villagers and said, "Stop bothering me with your petty troubles."

As if they didn't have enough work in the fields, the villagers now had to dig ditches and try to divert for themselves water to their fields. It wasn't so simple because Scun Blackfield had diverted most of the streams and rivulets running down the mountainside. What was left, the rest of the village had to manage to survive with, and of course it wasn't enough for all the villagers.

According to legend "The Little White Cloud", seeing the villager's plight, decided it could not stand idly by anymore and that it had to intervene.

The villagers' plight was getting worse day by day, and there was nothing they could do... except perhaps take the law into their own hands. But this was something very few of them contemplated. Most if not all of the villagers were a peaceful live-and-let-live type of people.

Thus, one day "The Little White Cloud" came rolling down the mountain. It was the dry season, but even in the dry season usually enough rainwater would run down the mountainside for all the villagers' needs. But this time most of the lesser streams trickling down the mountain had dried up or dwindled to almost nothing worthwhile. The cloud, moving very slowly over the villagers' small fields, let down out of its fluffy interior enough rain to irrigate all the villagers' small fields. The cloud ignored the one big field belonging to Scun Blackfield. The cloud then slowly made its way back up the mountain to sit back at the summit.

Of course the bad farmer Scun Blackfield did not do any of the farm work himself. For this he had lots of hired workers to do his work for him, and he treated them very strictly. He saw what had happened... how the cloud had ignored his field. He was furious, but he wasn't to be deterred so easily. He improved his ditches to such an extent that they caught all the irrigating water that ran off the mountainside and onto the villagers' fields.

And so again after several days, the villagers were suffering without enough water for their crops.

Much of the time "The Little White Cloud" would let go of its rain on the mountaintop so that all Mr. Scun Blackfield had to do was improve his ditches. Or so he thought.

The next time "The Little White Cloud" came down from the mountaintop it blew a scorching hot wind onto Scun Blackfield's field. The crops in the field dried up, and so did the ditches. The trouble was, some of the wind came off his field and onto the surrounding villagers' fields, and so again they all suffered. This definitely wasn't good enough.

"Will this never end?" The villagers kept asking themselves.

Understanding the villagers' plight, "The Little White Cloud" from its perch at the mountain summit again intervened. Only this time, when it rained it rained too much... so much rain, that all of irrigation ditches quickly became either blocked up with gravel and boulders or washed away. The villager's lot was hard enough anyway, but now with everyone cleaning out or repairing their irrigation ditches they were becoming increasingly more desperate, and exasperated with the situation.

Again the bad farmer refused to see that these events were of his causing, and he refused to listen or mend his ways. To make things even worse for the villagers, his terrible seven sons, increased their harassment and vandalizing, making the villager's life unbearable. The boys would think nothing of crossing someone's field and trampling down his crops. Often, they would block the villagers' ditches by rolling in big rocks, just for the fun of it. Worst of all, they always seemed to be looking for a fight with the village children. It got to such a state that most of the villagers would not let their children go out alone without a parent nearby.

Finally "The Little White Cloud" intervened one more time and this time it came tearing down the mountainside at a tremendous speed, and as it went it grew bigger and bigger. The cloud changed its shape, changed its colour and from its interior there came a terrible howling noise. The noise was so loud it could be heard everywhere. It turned from a lovely white fluffy cloud, into dark menacing grey and coal-black cloud, which appeared as if it was about to burst. By the time it arrived above the Scun Blackfield house it was an enormous, threatening, and very frightening cloud. The villagers from down below working in their fields saw the cloud grow into an enormous doughnut shape.

Suddenly booms of thunder and tremendous amounts of lightning came piercing out of the cloud's interior. The lightning that streaked from the all-threatening cloud hit the ground all around the house. The whole of Scun Blackfield's household, his wife, children and the servants, were terrified and fled the house screaming in fear. Down the mountainside they fled until they came upon the villagers who were grouped together in the middle of their fields. They had gathered together to watch the drama unfolding up there above them. The Blackfield household threw themselves to the ground crying, begging the villagers for their mercy and protection.

They implored the villagers: "Please take us in, and protect us from this cloud."

In spite of everything this family had brought upon them the village people, who were good people, took pity on the family and promised to take them in and protect them.

High up on the mountainside only one person had not fled the all-threatening cloud. It was the head of the family, Scun Blackfield. Defiantly he stepped out of his brand new three story house, raised his shotgun, and aiming up in towards the centre of the cloud he screamed out the most terrible, horrible and frightening words: Words that no one in the village dared repeat. He then shot off his gun right up into the pouring by the buckets underbelly of "The (not so) Little White Cloud." The noises of the clouds anger, Scun Blackfield screaming in defiance and finally the boom of the old gun were joined together into one indescribable roar.

Suddenly and almost immediately after the gun had gone off, there was a silence... a complete and utter silence. It fell upon the mountain, the fields, and the whole surrounding area like an enormous blanket. Everything seemed to stop. Time seemed to stand still. Not even the crickets in the fields could be heard. The defiant farmer, the villagers below, all and everyone for that small moment in time, froze. Looking up at the frightful scene from down below, all the village people were scared out of their wits. No one had ever witnessed such an event. No one could move; all were frozen with fear. There was nowhere to hide.

It was – one villager said – as if the cloud was about to burst.

"It was like a wounded elephant, and we had nowhere to run to. There was no way to guess which way it would charge," said another.

The people looking up at the terrifying scene didn't have long to wait. All of a sudden dozens, no hundreds maybe even thousands of lightning bolts streaked out of the cloud tearing up the ground all round Scun Blackfield and his new house. The noise was even greater than before. The lightning looked like a continuous and blinding wall of flame around the house and its owner. Scun Blackfield and his house disappeared from sight behind that terrible wall of fire.

For those down below, watching from the fields, the lightening was the most terrifying of scenes, as if taken from hell itself. But the noise, if possible, was even worse. They felt their heads splitting from the noise. It was so painful, so unbearable that they all had to put their hands over their ears. Had they not, for sure they would have been deafened for life.

No one watching could tell for how long this hellish scene went on.

All of a sudden, the noise, the flames, and the pandemonium stopped. Just like that.

Next thing the villagers saw was that the "Little White Cloud" had almost instantaneously changed back to its original shape and colour. Then slowly, calmly and noiselessly, the cloud made its way back up to its perch at the mountain summit.

The villagers and the remainder of the Scun Blackfield family and servants tentatively climbed the hill to see what had become of the house and its owner. Both had disappeared completely. Astounded, they all stood around an enormous pit, which was all that was left of the house and its owner.

Already one of the irrigation ditches was emptying its contents into the hole in the ground, thus forming a pond.

Time went by, and with a few changes, the Far Off Village returned to normal.

With a little help from her neighbours, Mrs. Scun Blackfield did wonders with all that was left of Mr. Scun Blackfield... his thick and heavy belt. The belt, which she began to use immediately, brought about a change – no, a reform – in her wild and spoilt children. Even the wildest of her boys calmed down. Mrs. Scun Blackfield became the true head of the family, and her children quickly learnt to love and respect their mother.

Mrs. Scun Blackfield sent out letters to all the villagers who had left after having been being bought out by Mr. Scun Blackfield, imploring them to come back to the village. In her letters she said she saw no reason why after what had happened, they could not come back to live in the village as before. Also, that she was more than willing to help them if they should decide to return.

And return they did. One after the other, they all arrived back in the village. They took back their little fields and renewed the paths between them. Just two families did not have a house to go to; hers and the Jim-Jim's. So Mrs. Scun Blackfield helped them rebuild their houses. She was ever a good-hearted person. So with the money she had managed to grab, just before she and her children escaped from the wrath of The Little White Cloud, she did as much as possible to make amends with the villagers.

The pond became very important in the village life, because it helped meet the irrigation needs of the village when The Little White Cloud was away on one of its good missions. The Jim-Jim's house was rebuilt next to the pond and they became 'Guardians of the Pond.'

**The End.**

