

Reach for the Stars

He sat at his old, wooden desk and tapped his pencil against his notebook. 30 minutes were wasted, why he kept at it was beyond him. He still had 3 assignments to complete. Middle school assigned too much homework in his opinion. He had tried everything to get his imagination flowing. Looking out a window, reading a book, and even asking his 3-year-old sister before she had left for ballet class. Everyone had left to do their own, fun thing, but of course, he was stuck here doing homework. *Someone-anyone! HELP ME! I need inspiration!* He grabbed the newspaper from under his chair and looked at the headline.

Fire Destroys Neighborhood... and Families

Now, like any responsible parents, his parents had told him to stop reading such dark stories, but he couldn't stop it. They were all he read these days, well, except for things they assigned to read in school, but he had to read those. After reading for a few minutes, he put the newspaper back down and looked outside.

He saw a girl just a few years older than him, sweating heavily, jogging around the neighborhood. She had short black hair and startling blue eyes. So, he did what he often did when bored. He imagined. *What if that girl was running from a monster that no one believes is real? What if she was part of a secret camp in the woods and barely escaped with her life?* He was so caught up in his daydreams that when he heard a thump outside, he jumped. They continued for almost 2 minutes. *Ahhhh! What's out there?* Finally, he went outside, figuring it was a squirrel or something.

"Oh my god, it's a horse!" But suddenly, it didn't look so much like a horse. Huge wings unfolded from its flank and gracefully folded back in. "It's- It's," He tried to remember the name from a story he had read in school. "It's Pegasus!" he said in marvel. It had all the colors he had ever seen on a horse- and more! It was white, black, beige, and colors he would have to visit Home Depot to find the name of. Its fur was glossy and silky, so much so that it looked...magical. The horse suddenly bent down and made a small neigh. He was no horse whisperer, but he could tell Pegasus wanted him to climb on. Timidly, he put his leg over and attempted to hold on, a nearly impossible

task since Pegasus had no saddle. *He's a god*, he recalled from the passage he'd read. *Why would a god wear a saddle-even if they were related to horses?*

He was so lost in his thoughts that he nearly yelped when he realized they were flying. "I'M FLYING!" He knew he should have been be scared, but there was something about flying on Pegasus that made you feel...excited. He looked down at the city he had lived in his whole life, San Antonio. There was something wonderous about it. The boring-colored houses suddenly looked like castles, mystical and not at all the ones from his neighborhood. The autumn-colored leaves that had fallen were now whooshing around him in a fashion he had only seen in movies, one too perfect to be true. However, the trees were the most beautiful. The leaves on the tree no longer looked dead, they looked otherworldly. And the fading Smoketree trunks were an unimaginable shade of brown, similar to one on Pegasus.

He had ridden a horse before. It was tough, but fun. This ride was nothing like that. When he rode a horse, he bumped up and down, but on Pegasus it was like a car ride, smooth and a little nauseating. He loved the wind whipping at his face, the cold waking him up. He felt Pegasus' wings flapping wind around him, confusing the birds to such an extent that they ended up going backwards. It was all so surreal. He inhaled the air. On the ground it felt normal, but up here it was fresh and crisp.

Setting aside the beauty, he had so many questions going through his head, his head felt like exploding. *Why is Pegasus here? I mean, it's not like I was dying-except from boredom. I have a headache. I don't think I'm supposed to understand. In fact, I don't think anyone is. Anyone human that is. I think I better stop before...* His grip was loose on Pegasus and now he was- "Help! Pegasus! I fell off!" Pegasus dived in a way he had seen Olympic swimmers do. Within a few seconds, he was back on and holding tighter than ever. *OK. Stop thinking about that. Think about ... I don't know, the air.*

There was a certain sweetness to the air he had never smelled before, or at least noticed. It was weird that up here the world looked- and smelled- different. He knew there was pollution everywhere, but up high it was worse. Sure, you could see it, but the smell was intoxicating. It was worse than anything he had smelled before. He made a mental note to read up more on pollution. He enjoyed making up stories, but when he couldn't think of one, he liked listening and blocking his other senses. Only this time, double checking he was secure before closing his eyes.

He could hear kids playing, the wind making a sound as it passed by his ear, but loudest of all were the cars. The noise had never bothered him before, but now it was annoying him. Pegasus climbed higher, where the noise was much less loud, but he

could still hear a faint roar. His eyes popped open. He had an idea for his story now! He wanted to go back down but wasn't sure how. He awkwardly moved his head down more. Luckily, Pegasus understood and circled back, hopefully heading for his house. Soon, they landed in his backyard.

"Thank you," he said honestly. And before he could say anything else, Pegasus bowed, or the horse version of a bow, and flew off. He had a lot of questions, but he would let his mind wander later. Right now, he had a story to write. He ran into the house, up the stairs, and into his room, not bothering to turn on the light. He grabbed a pencil and started writing. Or maybe not. *Dang it! Needs to be sharpened.* He tossed the bad one on the floor, grabbed another, and then started writing.

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By Rick Riordan

A boy sat at his old, wooden desk and tapped his pencil against his notebook...

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