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FLYING

Today is the day I have been waiting for since I met Bellerophon. Today is the day he is going to let me ride his winged steed Pegasus.

I wait on a hill a little ways from my father's palace, pacing. It is hard to stand still knowing what is coming. I realize as I make another turn in the grass that I am no longer sure whether I'm still looking forward to flying. After all, if men were meant to fly, wouldn't the gods have given us wings like the birds?

But I have no more time to think about it, for I see Bellerophon riding my way. He's astride a magnificent white horse. As they get closer, I see his wings are folded against his sides, like a bird. The closer they get, the more I can see. The wings are far larger than any bird's, covering the horse's entire side. They are soft and seem to shimmer in the bright sunlight that touches them on this clear day.

"Philonoë!" he calls, beaming as he rides toward me. In a moment, he is beside me and he asks, "Are you ready?"

I nod once, unable to speak because of the sudden fluttering in my stomach.

"Then give me your hand," he says. Leaning down, he grasps my hand and carefully pulls me up behind him. I slip my leg over Pegasus's back. The feeling of the horse's warm body and firm muscles beneath my legs is unfamiliar.

I quickly slide my arms around Bellerophon's waist, gripping him tightly. Bellerophon laughs lightly, then turns Pegasus and urges him into a brisk gallop. Surprised by the speed, I grip Bellerophon even more firmly.

"Don't worry," he calls back to me, patting my hands wrapped around his waist.

"We're going to go up now," he tells me. I give his waist a squeeze in acknowledgment.

Pegasus extends his wings. They stretch far out to either side of me, feathered and silvery white. I think they are glorious, so strong and beautiful at the same time. They begin to ply the air. I had thought we were going as fast we could, but, amazingly, Pegasus gains speed. The wind begins to sting my eyes, causing tears to stream down my face. I close my eyes, unable to keep them open in the biting wind.

As I sit still, clutching Bellerophon with my eyes closed, I feel

Pegasus gather himself under me. Then he springs up. No longer do I feel his hooves pounding the ground. I hear only wind whistling past my ears. I feel only his wings beating the air.

Taking a quick breath, I open my eyes. Far, far below me are my father's lands. The people and animals are so small they become mere dots on a vast green carpet.

"Amazing!" I exclaim.

"Isn't it?" Bellerophon calls back, a smile evident in his voice.

I close my eyes again, just feeling the wind fly past me. I sit behind Bellerophon, astride a winged horse, and revel in the glory and freedom of flying.

As we soar, I think how lucky birds are; they are the gods' favorite creatures, while men are simply their afterthought.