

Cloudflight's wings barely made a sound as he soared through the huge open sky, effortlessly drifting through the clear, cloudless night. The waning moon hung high in the sky, surrounded by pinpoints of twinkling light. He took another deep breath of cool air as he flew up above the earth like a bird, paying no heed to the otherwise unforgiving pull of gravity.

It was that time of the year again, and the recent tryouts for the Equestria Games meant that it was no longer possible for Cloudflight to practise during the daylight hours. Rainbow Falls was now filled to the brim with eager competitors, causing Cloudflight to rearrange his training schedule. However, he wasn't about to complain – after all, it wasn't every day he got to see Equestria's best pegasi in action with his own two eyes.

As a weatherpony for the Rainbow Falls area, Cloudflight was able to witness everything that happened from up above. He had hardly been able to concentrate on taking care of meagre clouds because of all the talented ponies that had been practising, just like him, lap after lap, flight after flight. Three of the Wonderbolts were representing Cloudsdale, and he didn't even need to glance at them to know that they would qualify without a single hitch.

However, he was worried for the other speedy pony: Rainbow Dash. She was playing as one-third of the Ponyville team, along with some other... not-so-gifted ponies. Cloudflight was hardly one to talk, since he was among the first ponies to quit Flight Camp, but these other ponies seemed like the sort of pegasi that wouldn't even be accepted into Flight Camp, not even considered.

Cloudflight wheeled round the back of one of the many rainbows that gave the Falls its name, small flecks of colour spattering his white coat. Ever since he was a tiny colt, he had flown at least a lap of the entirety of Rainbow Falls. The other pegasi were very understanding of his hobby, and if there was an unusually large number of clouds bothering the Falls on any day, they would let him take some time off to fit in his daily training.

His aim was not to be fast. Cloudflight had never been a speedy one, and although he had tried at first, he had quickly realised that it was not meant to be. He decided to try long-distance flight, and thus had started by attempting to fly around Rainbow Falls. It was a struggle at first, but eventually he managed to complete a single lap. As he grew older, he began to test his limits, pushing himself to fly further and further. When he started finding it easy to do the target amount of laps, he simply increased the number. He was currently doing nine laps a day.

He had nearly completed the final lap now, and Cloudflight was beginning to feel the strain. Beads of sweat trickled down his skin, but the stallion didn't let it bother him. A little perspiration was nothing compared to the sheer exhilaration of shaking off all his tethers to the ground, along with everything else on it. Even though it couldn't last, flying never failed to give Cloudflight a sense of freedom.

The circumference of Rainbow Falls was two or three miles. Legend had it that prolonged

exposure to the rainbows that Cloudsdale created had devastating effects, most commonly corrosion. The Falls had eaten away at the rock surrounding the small village and cut it into an odd circular shape. The course of the Falls were diverted after this discovery, so that the village wouldn't suddenly crumble into the ground one day with nothing to support it. At least, that was what everypony claimed.

Cloudflight could see the finish now. His house was perched right at the edge of the village, so he used that as a start and end point. With a burst of sudden adrenaline, his wings beat up and down more powerfully than ever, his fluffy blue mane flattened by the air streaking past him. Despite his exhaustion, Cloudflight was smiling broadly. Angling himself downward, he aimed directly for the house.

His aim was immaculate. When Cloudflight was only mere metres away from his house, he suddenly braked, spreading his wings out wide to catch the air. The sudden drop in velocity made him feel slightly dizzy for a moment, but he soon recovered. He had tried doing a running landing once. No matter how nauseous his usual technique made him feel, it was far better than any other way.

Cloudflight took a minute to catch his breath. His head was pounding, but he was beaming. There was no better feeling than accomplishing his daily test. He shook his wings out gently, trying to return some feeling into them. The fact that it had been an exceptionally cold night, coupled with the strenuous exercise of flying such huge distances, had made his whole body go numb. He took his time walking the short distance back towards his house.

"What's it like to fly?"

The high-pitched voice of a young filly cut through the otherwise silent night. Cloudflight winced at the sudden interruption and continued walking. He was surprised to hear a young pony out so late at night, but he let her be.

"I'm talking to you!"

Cloudflight looked over to the source of the voice in irritation, and was taken aback to see a pale pink earth pony staring at him from not too far away. Her purple and blue mane fell partly over one blue eye. "I said, what's it like to fly?" she repeated, annoyed.

"What do you mean?" Cloudflight said, hesitant to shatter the quietness with his voice, even though the little filly had already done it multiple times.

The filly in question rolled her eyes, and she began to advance towards him. "You were flying real fast up there just now, and I wanna know what it's like."

Cloudflight looked at the filly warily. She was standing worryingly close to him, and Cloudflight

felt oddly scared. He didn't know who this filly was.

"Go back to bed," he said forcefully. "Don't you have school or something?"

"School's cancelled. Qualifiers, remember?"

"Oh. Yeah."

There was an odd pause. "Well, aren't you going to tell me your name?" the filly asked eventually.

"I'm... Cloudflight," the pegasus said. "What's your name?"

"Rose Gardens," the filly replied without missing a beat. "So tell me. What's it like to fly?"

Cloudflight looked into Rose's eyes, and was surprised to see something beyond her initial carefree attitude. She was looking at him with intense concentration, and although Cloudflight might have just been imagining it, he could almost see wonder in her eyes.

This filly would never know the feeling of bolting through the air at unimaginable speeds, flying to great heights and looking at ponies going about their usual days like tiny miniature figures. She would never feel the wind caress her feathers like a hoof stroking her gently, never feel the power of an extra pair of limbs working hard to keep her aloft, never sit back on a cloud like it were a soft pillow. Sure, there were spells that could help wingless ponies achieve flight, but it couldn't be the same. No spell would change an earth pony into a pegasus. This filly would never know what it was like to live.

"It's..." Cloudflight searched his mind for the right words. How could he explain how it felt to plummet thousands of feet and not have an ounce of fear? How could he explain how it felt to experience such unfathomable joy?

"It's... nothing special." And with that, Cloudflight left the filly standing alone, with the cool breeze ruffling her mane gently.