

## Growing Pains by Peter

The day drew to a close in Fillydelphia, Equestria's bustling industrial city. Scattered winds blew newspapers across the empty streets. Families sat around tables eating their dinners, conversing about their days at work and school. Voices could be heard rising in one apartment, as was often the case.

The yellow pegasus always hated when her father got like this. He'd start drinking as soon as he got home and before dinner was ready, he'd start yelling. Always yelling. Had she done something wrong? Was he mad she wasn't a good flyer? He'd tried to teach her and she always tried to please her father. She remembered a time when her mother would stand up for herself, before he had gotten violent. Back then, they would both yell. She sat at the table, silent, it didn't stop him from shouting though. She sat, listened and prayed he would tire himself, as he often did, before he got physical. She was still sore from last night.

Her mother sat beside her, looking down at Fluttershy with unwarranted hate. It was because of this filly that she was trapped here, caged by her own misguided doings. She married him when she was young, too young. Although, he was different in his youth, very different. He was fresh out of college and ready to take on the world, he hadn't lost a job and he hadn't started drinking. They were going to explore the world together, they never thought they'd have a child. Looking up, she felt a wave of shame flow through her heart. Why did she have these feelings for her only child? She hated herself even more for them, she deserved to be with this man.

"Listen to your father." the words stung the young filly's heart. What had happened to her mother to make her side with him? She looked up to her with reddened eyes and whimpered "Yes, ma'am" before heading to her room, grabbing the riding crop from the hall on the way. She sat on her bed, her short mane descending over her eyes, and cuddled her plush rabbit. It was brown with black buttons for eyes, stitches and patches scarred his front and back but she loved him all the more for it. He reminded her of herself, in some way. The door opened.

She always got weird looks at school. Nobody teased her, in fact, nobody even spoke to her, save for a few scoldings from the teachers. She never paid attention, she was always staring out the window or where a window would be if there wasn't one. She was smart, but she didn't apply herself to anything. She was making her way through life in her head, it was safe there. Maybe it was for the best she had no friends, they might ask questions about her bruises.

She always thought of running away. Who wouldn't? But where was she to go? She could never live on her own and he would come looking for her. No, it was better she stay and take what came at her in stride, dealing with issues as they arose and not thinking of what would be tomorrow. She'd have gone on this way for her entire youth had it not been for a chance occurrence one day at the market.

Usually, she loved shopping trips. Her father would be sober and they'd spend the day in public, in front of eyes of watchful ponies. This time however, he wasn't sober. He'd lost another job and had started drinking before breakfast. They walked through the streets, picking out vegetables and baking supplies, her father arguing with anyone who confronted him regarding his sobriety. He was causing quite the commotion, his wings unsheathed themselves and he began to flap violently the more upset he became. A concerned mare approached Fluttershy and asked her if she'd be alright. "Don't you answer that question!" Her father was yelling now. "Darling, are you alright? Answer me, don't be afraid!" She looked up, eyes welling with tears. Thoughts rushing through her mind, was this her chance? Could she be free? It took all the courage in her soul, but she did it. "No."

She would never see him again after that. Beating a filly in public, while drunk no less, and then turning on a group of bystanders? He was subdued by the crowd. Her mother gave her up for adoption and now she was being sent to live with her new foster parents in Cloudsdale. She had little to bring with her, an old skirt, a few books and a dusty old rabbit.

Things were better now. She wasn't afraid to come home. She still struggled in school though and she

had yet to make a single friend. Her foster parents were concerned. Were they doing something wrong? She never spoke to them. She never spoke to anyone, she sat in class and dreamt the days away. "Maybe she's still afraid of her biological father?" her foster mother confided to her foster father. They were in the kitchen, she listened from the hall. "I think it's that damned bunny she's always carrying with her." he seemed agitated. "She needs to let it go and grow up!" Fluttershy squeezed the rabbit close to her chest. "I'm going to take it away from her today."

She didn't sleep that night, she cried. She cried every last ounce of pain away and then some. It didn't help her, she'd lost the only companion she ever had. Her foster father looked at her coldly. "I know it hurts, but you will thank me eventually." He threw the rabbit head into the trash and picked up the body, doing the same. Maybe she did need to grow up... she would be done with school soon. She'd have to move out on her own and here she was crying over a plush rabbit. She glanced into the trash bin. Glazed buttons returned her dead stare.

The years that followed were uneventful, empty. She never did make any friends all through her high school career. Her grades improved, if only slightly. She felt hollow and her work reflected it. She grew further apart from her foster parents until the day she graduated. She didn't say goodbye or wish them well. She didn't ask for money or advice. She left. She left them the same way her own parents left her, alone and without warning. Maybe it was selfish of her, to forsake those who had given up so much for her, but they got their child support checks from Canterlot, they got their community recognition and their pats on the back. And now they got one more thing, they got her out of their manes. She got what she wanted as well, to be alone.

She moved to a small town, on the borders of Equestrian territory, called Ponyville. It was quaint, nothing like the bustling city streets of Fillydelphia or the buzz of the airways of Cloudsdale. She never liked Cloudsdale, there was all too much flight for her tastes. The village was on the edge of the Everfree forest and was populated mostly with earth ponies, humble and strong. She could settle in here. The house she bought was covered in grass, it blended into the rolling hills beside it quite well, as she had done with all of those around her in her youth. Here, she could be free to do as she pleased, without the odd looks and questions of the town folk. She'd have had trouble deciding what she'd do for bits, had it not been for one chance encounter while she was moving her belongings into her home.

There was much to be done before she could settle in comfortably. Box after box she carried into her home, the delivery company had offered to help her, but she didn't trust their wall-eyed representative. So, alone, she toiled, into the late hours of night. When finally she was done, she decided to go for a quick stroll to explore her new surroundings. It was on this stroll that she saw a rabbit. White as snow, save for red stains across its legs. Images of mangled toys and cotton strewn across the floor rushed into her head. Not again, she thought. She brought her hoof close to it, before realising the critter was dead. She was too late. Had she accepted the help of the delivery company she could have saved this poor beast. She decided to give it a proper burial. As she picked up the corpse, a much smaller rabbit hopped from behind a stump. It looked at her, as she held the bloody body. It looked at her with the same fear she had looked upon her own father with. She dropped the body and moved towards the baby rabbit.

It didn't run, maybe it was afraid, maybe it had lost hope and given up. She knew it thought she'd killed his mother, she could see it in his eyes. But she'd been given a second chance, and she was not about to squander it. A second chance to save a life, to be happy, to be forgiven. What to name her saviour? What title could be worthy of this poor soul, this... Angel. Maybe, someday, this rabbit will look at her with love, it will look back to this day and realise how she cared for it so, maybe someday she will look upon her own past, and forgive. Someday.