

Somewhere Only We Know

Today the sun is shining and the sky is blue. I forget that sometimes. That the sky can get to be this clear, this *perfect* shade of blue.

There is no grey here.

Here there is cerulean and azure and sapphire and cyan, and all around they are landmarked by little puffs of cirro stratus and cumulus. Here at night there is indigo and violet, there is black and cobalt, and all around are flecks of glowing stars dappled all along the sky. (I know someone that can name all the stars and all the shapes the stars can make. She's very smart, this friend of mine.) Come the dawn, my world is birdsong and pink and lavender. At sunset my world is orange and red and yellow, almost like the sky is on fire (but not really, there are no fires here). Here the colors are so rich I taste them on my tongue, and are so vivid I can feel them in my bones.

Sometimes I forget that clouds don't always have to be grey. Clouds can be cotton-ball white or peachy swirls, or supple blankets of greyish mauve. Clouds are whatever I want them to be. If I want it to rain, it rains, and if I want sunny skies all day long, I can make that happen too.

I can do that because here I have wings. (I don't know what I'd do without my wings. I don't know how ponies without wings even live with themselves.) I must have really been out of it lately, because sometimes I even forget that I have wings, which is only *the* most ridiculous things *ever*. I mean, they're only attached to my body; I was *born* with wings. (Rainbow Dash, you need to get more sleep, it's making you crazy.) Flight is who I am. Speed is my middle name. (Heck, it IS my name; they don't call me *Dash* for nothin'.) The wind cuts through my coat and my mane's blown around in about a million directions, but of course I don't notice or care. I rip through the soft wet cumulonimbus and tear up soggy nimbostratus, and then sunlight streams down all around me and I trail rainbows in my wake.

I fell, this one time. A long time ago, I fell. I was sure all that'd be left of me was a splatter of fur and bone and feathers. A bloody indistinguishable smear on the grass. By all logic, at the speed I was falling, how far I was falling, that's what should have happened.

But it didn't.

Bad things like that don't happen here.

Instead I folded in my wings. I streamlined and I aimed. I pulled up and up and up until gravity let me go. I didn't fall. I just soared. Fast, fast, fast, FASTFAST FAST. There had been a monstrous clap of thunder and behind me rainbows peeled out across the sky in all directions all across town, across the country, across the world, maybe even farther. Waves and waves of color all around and everywhere. Everywhere around me and all inside of me.

That's how I feel right this minute, here in the open air. Far away from grey skies and bad vibrations. With these wings I can go anywhere. I can do anything.

The Ponyville sky is my home. But it doesn't have to be. If I got the urge, I could just up and leave Ponyville.

I could fold back my wings and make a beeline for wherever in whatever direction I felt like. I could just decide to climb up and up and up until the skyline and me shook hooves. If I wanted I could go to Hoofington or Canterlot, or to Stalliongrad or Fillydelphia or I could find a new place nopony's ever seen before.

I can do that.

I can.

But I won't.

I won't because I don't want to, because my friends are here, and there's no point in me going anywhere if they don't come too. That's how it is. It couldn't be anything else.

With a plop I land upon a cloud, soft and spongy underneath my hooves, almost like I weigh nothing at all. I poke my head through the wispy white and look down to see a little quintet of ponies, all in different pastel colors, just like I am, resting in the shade of a great tree.

The tree has windows inside of it (for some reason I don't remember why).

The ponies are all sleeping. Except one.

The pink pony is awake; she's looking up at me with a smile. Her name is Pinkie Pie and she's always smiling. I think she likes rainbows as much as I do.

"Hi, Dashie!" says Pinkie Pie. "Didja have a good flight?"

"Heya Pinkie," I say back. "How's it goin'?"

"Oh, I'm okay. But how about *you*?" She frowns, just slightly. "Are you feeling better? How's your knee today?"

For some reason, that question makes me really uncomfortable. "What the hay are you talkin' about Pinkie Pie? My legs are fine."

Pinkie blinks a couple times, and then shakes her head like she's trying to get rid of something stuck to her mane. "Oh. It's nothing, Rainbow Dash. It's just me being silly old Rinky-Dinky-Pinkie again. Don't worry about it."

So I don't. I glide down to a tree branch right above my best friends in the world and

streeeeetch in a dappled bit of sunlight. This, right here. *This* is the life.

Although... now that I think about it, my knee *does* feel a little sore... But...

No.

NO.

I'm not worrying about it.

I'm **not**.

I am relaxing here with my best friends. Nice and peaceful-like. Yessir, the one thing Rainbow Dash loves is a good nap with her buddies.

I love it here.

I wish I'd never leave.

But.

Sooner or later

a

pony

has

to...

"Wake up!"

The old mare woke with a start, scrambling to her feet. She barely avoided the boot aiming for her haunch.

"*Finally*. You been sleeping half the day away, lazy beast."

Dash pawed the ground, and gave her best snort of indignation at the gangly furless thing that had so rudely dumped her out of slumber. Weakly, a hind leg lashed out at it, even though they both knew there was no way she'd hit him. Sure enough, he evenly dodged the kick with a chuckle.

Dash gave him another snort. He wouldn't be laughing if she was just a few seasons younger. Dash would never have taken this kind of treatment lying down.

Give her a year or two of her youth back and she'd have sent him flying into the manure pile in ten seconds flat. She'd have put up a hell of a fight, given this guy a nice hoof sandwich right smack in the chest. In the chest if she was feeling *generous*. Then she'd have run off far, far back into the pasture for a graze and keep running off whenever someone came close, and *then* she'd let them catch her, but only when she was damn well good and ready. If they still insisted on coming after her, it took at least five of them and a good rope to reel her in, dodging Dash's hooves and teeth all the way. For years Dash had been the fastest pony in the stable, if not the fastest pony in

a five mile radius.

And she was *still* the fastest pony in the stable. (Of course, that was now more because she was the only pony left in this stable.)

None of the Masters rode Dash. They'd said she was too unreliable to ride, certainly not suitable to rent out. After four years of rolled over stable hands and kicks to the chest and exhausting chases from one end of the fence to the other, they eventually gave up on riding and focused on pulling instead.

The cart was arguably even worse than having a rider. At least with a rider she could still see what was going on and didn't have to deal with those annoying blinders. The cart always seemed too heavy, and the harness was always pulled too tight. Worse, Dash could never break into a full gallop with a cart attached. For one thing, it made Masters pull the rein so hard her mouth bruised. For another, the pony adjacent to her wouldn't be able to keep up; she'd be dragged along or trip and make them all crash, pony carriage, driver and all. No pony could keep her pace (well, maybe one but she was always attached to carts not carriages) so she had to constantly keep a frustratingly slow pace in order for Twilight or whoever it was she was partnered with to keep up. At least she could still have a good paddock run and lead a merry chase before they managed to hitch her up. That at least had been nice. Ironically, it had been running that had finally taken the dash out of Dash. She'd never seen the gopher hole until it was far too late and she was splayed out in the grass screaming.

Dash lifted her ruined foreleg. It still looked a little bent the wrong way, and scarred terribly around the knee. She shuddered inwardly and put her leg back down, resolving to keep from looking at it anymore. Thankfully, she was still able to trot. On good days she could even manage a decent gallop for a pony her age. But nothing like she'd been before.

Back in reality there was a tug, "C'mon now, Dash. Are you going to cooperate today?"

A halter had slipped over her head while she was busy being lost in thought. There was really no point in fighting it; Dash allowed herself to be led into the yard where the carriage waited to carry her Master into town.

Dash no longer had to pull the supply carts. The rental

business ended some time ago, so now the only thing a pony's really good for is to go into town every now and again. A long time ago, Dash would have been happy to get rid of the carts, but these days she often found herself longing for them. With the carts she at least had the company of other ponies.

Like that one mare that used to share the stall next to her. She would sometimes pull the carts with her, but more often she was the one the Master rented out or rode himself. The mare was always in good spirits, so she was easy to handle. That was likely why she was the one sold first; she was a likeable and fun mare. Dash couldn't remember many specifics about her right now, not even her name. It had been a long time since she left the stable.

She remembered the unkempt mane, though. It was the first thing anyone noticed about her, it was always bushed out in a wild and frizzy mass of fluffy curls that bounced in time with her trot. Her tail was no different, save for the fact that Dash could swear it was even fuzzier than the mane. The stable boy had constantly been picking out burrs and things out of it. That mare had gotten the strangest things caught in her mane sometimes. Not just the normal stuff like twigs or dead grass, but also things like metal washers or old eyeglasses, and one time they actually found half a bar of chocolate stuck to the end of her tail. And despite being constantly groomed and brushed, that mane would never get straight. No matter what they did, they could never get her masses of curls to cooperate. It was so strange. But it was also what made her special, just like Dash's speed or Twilight's old way of standing still and studying the leaves on the trees.

Dash flicked an ear and nickered at the thought of her old friend. She wondered what the mare was doing now. It had appeared as if the mare's new master had gotten her for his children. Dash hoped that was the case; her friend would have liked that a lot. She adored new riders to pal around with, though to be honest that mare liked pretty much everything. She could even make pulling carts fun in her odd little way.

Making her way down the road, Dash tilted her head towards the sky. There was nothing different about the sky today. It was the same even shade of slate grey it always was, broken up here and there by spatterings of black smoke trickling up into the atmosphere. Looking at the smoke reminded Dash of something... something else that could be up in the sky too, up there with

the birds and things. Come to think of it, the sky itself felt strange this afternoon. Like it should have been different, though she couldn't pinpoint how or why. The sky is the same grey it's always been; there was nothing different about it at all.

Dash shrugged it off. It's probably just an old mare's imagination. There was no point in worrying about nothing. She decided to try and cheer up. They were going into the city today, and that was something to look forward to. These days a trip into the thick of the city was rare and as the dirt road eased into cobblestone, Dash picked up her pace to a cheerful canter.

It was very grey in the city. The buildings and walls and vendor stands crowded in distressingly close. The world slowly turned into nothing but brick, stone, steel, smoke, and mortar. The choke of thousands of bodies made everything too hot, and the constant drone of noise made it hard to concentrate sometimes. The roads were too narrow, and there was a greater chance of having accidents. Dash never would have been trusted here in her younger days. A pony had to pay very close attention to her instructions or risk disaster.

Despite that, Dash loved being in the city. It gave her a chance to look at something new for once, and the danger of the city made for some decent excitement. The best thing about being in the city was Dash finally got to see other ponies besides her. Maybe she'd get to see one she knew. Maybe they'd remember her, and maybe they could even spend a little time together. That was a silly thing to think, Dash knew, because ponies in the city would be too busy to do anything like that. Still, a mare could hope.

By the time the Master had them come to a stop, Dash's spirits were higher than they'd been in ages. It was busy in town today, and knowing her Master he'd be inside for a long time. More than enough time to watch ponies. There! There was one now, carrying a girl with a basket of flowers. And there was a pair of big stallions tugging along a wagon, and over there were three silly fillies goofing around together. And over there, stuck in a glut of traffic was a carriage different from the others.

It was much bigger than the other carts and carriages, with elaborate swirly things carved into the sides and shiny with brass decorations. It looked expensive. The five ponies pulling were equally fancy, but Dash was only interested in the mare at

the head of them. Her coat was a well-groomed shining white, making a striking contrast to the four dun ponies behind her as well as the slate grey and dusty browns of the surrounding city. Bright ribbons of purple and pink had been braided into her mane and tail, and her harness was adorned with little silver bells so that with every step she jingled. She looked a little older than she had when she left the stable, but there was no mistaking her. That coat, the fancy breeding, the trademark high step, and her head held so high.

It had to be Rarity; it couldn't have been anyone else. Dash did a little prance in place and called out to her, but the pretty mare didn't seem to notice. Dash tried again and again, but to no avail. The old mare stamped in frustration. What was going on? Couldn't she hear her? Was she ignoring her?

Then Rarity called back, a dainty little chirp, and gave a flick of her tail. She didn't turn to look at her, though. That wasn't like her. Rarity always looked a pony straight in the eyes. Maybe she was just more worried about the traffic, or the driver was lenient with the riding crop, or...

The carriage pulled farther ahead, and Dash saw why Rarity hadn't moved her head. It wasn't because she wouldn't, it was because she couldn't. She was barely able to move her head at all.

Rarity wasn't holding up her head from pride, it was held there by force. Her reins drew her neck backwards and her head way, way, way up so that her neck was in an almost perfect straight line. It was there to make Rarity look fancier, but it also made her exhausted. Looking closer, her breath was labored, often coming out in little short bursts and it made her cough. Dash wondered how it was even possible to pull when a pony was strained like that, especially a light and dainty pony like Rarity. She was never built for this kind of endurance. How she managed to bear it, Dash had no idea.

The traffic was moving again. The carriages moved onward toward their destinations. Before they rounded the corner a lady peered out of Rarity's carriage, frowned, and went back in again apparently complaining of something. Dash saw a flick of Rarity's tail before she rounded the corner, and then she was gone.

Bye, Rarity.

Somewhere on Dash's left side there was a sudden movement. The mare gave a startled little jump and instinctively lashed out with her back leg. An attack! But from who? Out in the open like this it could have

been anything - a rogue dog or a wolf or a dragon or somebody with a slingshot! Well, they weren't gonna get the best of Dash! She bucked in her harness and kicked again. There was a splash and a shout.

"Ow! **Hey!**"

The mystery person stepped into view, right arm dripping wet. Dash's master scowled at her from under his wide brimmed hat. (Whoops.) He grumbled something under his breath, likely something about ungrateful ponies and set out a bucket of water before vanishing back into the brick building.

Despite almost accidentally kicking him in the shin (not *her* fault he snuck up on her like that) she was happy for the water. It was late summer and the heat in the city had been slowly building to a broil, and the clouds making everything humid weren't helping. A nice watering was just the thing she needed to be refreshed. Now, if only she had a snack to go with it. Like a nice serving of oatmeal, or apples. Thinking of apples was messing with her mind; she could have sworn she smelled apples. A lot of apples. Almost as if they were right next to... her.

Dash turned her head left to see an apple cart sitting right next to her and rolled her eyes. Stupid blinders. How did she manage to miss an entire cart and two ponies sitting right next to her? They must have pulled up when Dash was busy watching the traffic.

Looking more closely at the pair of ponies, she began to understand why she hadn't heard them. The gelding was peacefully asleep on his feet and his partner the mare looked ready for a nap herself. Steam from their sweaty coats drifted lazily about them like a fog. The size difference between them was ridiculous; the gelding was several times bigger and bulkier (maybe he was really a horse instead of a pony?) while the mare in his shadow was not only dwarfed by his height but almost looked dead on her feet.

Dash tilted her head and blinked at them sympathetically. Whoever owned them drove them hard.

The mare was probably Dash's age but looked at least twice that. Her dull coat was filthy and hung from her scrawny frame as if someone had spread a tarp over a skeleton, and all along her back and legs ran an ugly network of shiny scars. A similar pattern could be found down near the mare's soft belly, and these were still a dull red, not fully healed yet. The tired mare shifted on her cracked hooves and almost stumbled. For a

moment her legs began to violently shake, before finally, thankfully stopping. She'd probably been through a lot of owners. On her haunch Dash could see several brands overlapping. And the one at the very bottom looked... kind of like... Dash's.

Dash nervously fidgeted on her three good legs. No. There was no way. No way this pony was the same one. The mare Dash knew was full of spunk and vigor, the only pony in miles that could keep up with Dash at a full gallop. This couldn't be her old rival - she had no stubborn determination or good-natured competitiveness in her eyes.

But when the mare's ears perked up and turned to look at her, Dash could deny it no longer. Without a doubt, this was her.

Oh, *Applejack*.

Dash nickered sadly to her. For a second, Applejack lost the dull sheen in her eyes and she gave a little toss of her head, quietly nickering back. She motioned down towards Dash's legs, to her foreleg with the ruined knee, and it was Applejack's turn to look sympathetic. For some reason, that just made everything both a lot better and a lot worse.

More than anything else, Dash's heart longed for a run at that moment. A *real* run. One without halters or bridles or riders or carriages or spurs or fences or saddles. A run unhindered by some stupid busted knee or cracked hooves, the way a gallop was *supposed* to be. With Dash and Applejack and Rarity and Twilight and all of the other mares still together in their paddock, just like they all did when they were fillies seasons and seasons ago.

Dash wanted to do that so badly, but she couldn't.

So instead she just pressed her nose against Applejack's neck.

On the trip back home from the city, it started to rain. Finally. The air lost its claustrophobic heaviness and made everything smell a little bit fresher. The cool rain felt nice on Dash's coat, and the pitter-patter rhythms relaxed the old mare. It even made her forget how rainstorms made her arthritis act up.

In the stable, her Master gave her a pat on the neck for behaving today and rewarded her with a nice bucket of fresh oats.

Dash wasn't very hungry though. She'd eat them later, for now she was more interested in hunkering down for a nice, relaxing lie-down here where it's nice and soft in the clouds...

I turn over in my sleep and lazily hug a soft section of cumulus to my body. Somepony below is calling out to me. I ignore it. Sleep is nice... five more minutes, mom. But then I remember; today I've got something to do.

I open an eye and the very first thing I notice is that the sky is grey. That just won't do, this Pegasus doesn't feel like grey skies today. Today I've scheduled a nice sunny sky; I'm going to need it if I'm gonna meet Applejack for a game of horseshoes.

I fire straight shot into the air to get some height, and then splay my wings in a lazy glide, for a quick survey of the job. Nothing too hard. This sky will be clear in ten seconds flat.

I love my job. By Celestia, I really do.

The gentle softness of the clouds kiss my feathers and there's a gently little *poof* as one by one the clouds explode into little bits of water vapor.

I fly up, down, sideways, front-ways, backwards. I do barrel rolls and a rash of rapid-fire dives in and out of cottonball-white cirrus. I rip through the soft wet cumulonimbus and tear up soggy cirrostratus, and in its wake sunlight streams down all around me. A streak of rainbow slashes through the sky in my wake.

I take a moment to climb up, up, up, above the clouds.

I can see Canterlot way off in the distance – I'm going there later this year. I'm gonna meet the Wonderbolts. And my skills are gonna rock their world.

But that's later.

For now, I fold in my wings and let myself fall into a dive. The wind screams in my ears, blood rushes through my veins. At the last minute, before the ground can come into view I pull up and make a straight dash right through Ponyville.

I'm going too fast to stop and see everypony, but as I cut through, I can hear them. And like the awesome friend I am, I always answer.

"Good morning Rainbow Dash!"

"Mornin' Fluttershy! Morning, Twilight!"

"My, my. Look who's up early. For once."

"Ha-ha. Very funny, Rarity."

“Rainbow Dash! Are you still coming to Bon-Bon’s anniversary party this week? Do you feel any better this morning? You sure look better!”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world, Pinkie! You know I never miss a party. And I feel *awesooooome!*”

And it’s totally true, too. I usually feel pretty awesome (because I AM awesome) but today... I dunno, there’s just something *fantastic* about today.

I’m feeling so fantastic that I don’t even notice the tangle of branches ahead. It’s too late to turn or pull up, and I go crashing into a bunch of oranges and reds and browns and oranges and reds until finally I crash into a barn.

“Totally meant to do that.”

“Shore you did.” Applejack’s upside-down face blinks at me, half an apple still in her mouth. “Sugarcube, you ever considered just *walkin’* in here like a normal pony?”

“Pfff. Uh, **hello?**” I flip onto my hooves and give my wings a good strong flap. Several leaves scatter down from a nearby apple trees. “*Pegasus* pony here. I don’t do walking.”

“Well, let’s hope fer yer sake yer aim at tossin’ is better’n yer aim at flyin’.” She smirks, “Ah’d hate t’ embarrass you.”

Yeah, right. I don’t even dignify that with a response. Instead I let my horseshoe do the talking for me. After a second or two to aim, I rear back, toss my head and let the shoe fly-aaaaaaaand PERFECT SHOT!

“Whoo-hoo!”

Applejack shoots me a playful grin, “Not a bad pitch for a pony who works with her head in the clouds.”

It’s been a while since me and Applejack hung out like this, one on one. Our schedules are usually too tangled. Applejack, she’s almost always working the fields or pulling in harvests or planting seeds or trimming apple branches. I think Applejack works too hard. She should relax more. I know she says she loves a good day’s work, but sometimes I swear that pony almost looks dead on her feet.

But not today.

This morning, Applejack has nothing to do except have fun, play games, and smile. We oughta do this more often. I hate to admit it, but that pony can actually give me a run for my money when it comes to athletics. (Still not gonna let her beat me!) It’s impressive, but I never tell her that. Maybe I should, someday.

Today I’m hanging out with my good buddy Applejack. Maybe later we’ll meet up with Pinkie Pie and Rarity and Fluttershy and everybody else. We can make a day of it, just hanging out and goofing off together.

I’ve done a fantastic job clearing the sky.

There is no grey here.

Today the sun is shining. And my sky is a *perfect* shade of blue.