

Pegasus

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Submitted: April 10, 2005

Updated: April 25, 2005

It's not what you see-it's what you believe...

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/EraRillian/13508/Pegasus>

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Pegasus

Everybody's heard of a Pegasus. Everybody's seen one too-it's just that most people don't fully understand what they're looking at. When most people think of one, they think of a flying horse. Well this is true. Pegasus's do take that shape, but rarely. Most stay in a form that normal people think of as a human. That's where they go wrong. A Pegasus is not a human. A Pegasus is not a horse. It's a being that was meant for travel. Most Pegasus's spend their whole lives traveling, which can be a long time because they are immortal. They only die from illnesses or being killed by someone or something. They don't just grow old and die. In fact, they never grow past the age of 30. Forever youthful, these are the last fantasy creatures alive. I would know because sadly, I'm one of the last ones.

When most people see me, they see only a tall young man, with long white hair and a distant expression. That's pretty much all there is to me. I don't talk much, in fact I rarely talk at all. My name is Al-Bell, but nobody calls me that. Nobody but my wife that is-and my son, neither of which I can find right now. I guess that's why I'm talking to you. Maybe because of that or because I have no purpose. At least, none that I can find.

So you wanted to know what a Pegasus is? It's me. I look normal, except for my hair, which is naturally white. Most of them remain in their human form. In fact, the only way to tell a Pegasus, is at birth. If a Pegasus is born, it will appear in the form of a human child around the age of six, but it will have a thick black horn on its forehead. For the first six years of its life, the child is unchanged and it begins to grow again at the age of seven. Once it reaches that age, it can use its other forms, meaning it can go into public because it can change into a hornless-human. It is at this time, when the child and the parents will begin their roaming again.

The reason Pegasus's are so good at traveling is they can transform into five different beings, all of which are superb at some type of movement. If you have ever heard of a centaur, it was a Pegasus. Ever heard of a mermaid? That was a Pegasus too. We have the ability to transform into a centaur for easy land mobility, a mermaid for sea mobility, a horse with wings for flight, and a human for...well come to think of it, the human form is pointless. I guess it's just there so we can try to fit in with normal people. There's also the birth form, which almost all Pegasus's use the most because that's what we really were meant to look like. That's how we were born.

I'm sorry to bore you. I hope you don't mind listening to an old man tell pointless stories. Well, maybe I don't look old but yes, I'm 756 years old. Hard to believe huh? I guess if you have the time I could tell you more. Most people don't get to hear his stuff but if you won't tell anybody, I see no harm in letting you know more about Pegasus's. Let me think a while. Trying to think 756 years back is difficult.

* * * * *

A Pegasus can have human parents, Pegasus parents, or even animal parents. It doesn't matter what creature gives birth to it, because the Pegasus is not a race but a being. It's simply a soul, born into the

world to search and to hunt for something, anything. I'm still trying to figure out what I'm looking for...

But anyway, my parents. I was born into an animal family. My mother was a small mule deer, my father, a large territorial buck. The two were always together, in a small herd of their own, just the two of them and nobody else. Had I been born a deer, it would have been a relatively nice life. The two lived in a national park and were protected from hunters, so my father was relatively old for a deer. I never knew his exact age because I couldn't communicate with him, seeing as how I was born a different creature entirely. I did know however that my mother was young, and I was probably her first child.

She had an unusually long term, about 2 years, in which I grew slowly inside of her. Pegasus's take almost three years to fully mature but I was born premature because my horn slit her uterus and killed her. Because I had the intellect of a six year old child though, I knew what a terrible thing I had done. I crawled out of her and looked up, to see my father looking horrifically down at me and the slaughtered deer. I tried to speak to him, to ask him for help, but I couldn't talk because of the blood and discharge clinging to my face and in my mouth. I reached up to him and he stepped back snorting perhaps because of the smell or the way I looked. I coughed up the fluid in my mouth and turned back to him, trying to call to him again, and stretching my hand out further. He continued to stare at me so I stood up, slowly and shakily and took a wobbly step forward. At this, he reared onto his hind legs and struck me with his front hooves, however the first sign of my powers took over. I fell back and a purple force field blared out, keeping my father at bay.

I lay shaking and afraid on the ground as he pounded away at the purple dome, shorting and shaking his massive antlers in frustration. After several failing attempts, he stopped and simply watched me, and I felt the static of the force field melt away. He continued to stare at me and I whispered to him, trying to receive comfort and love from the creature who saw me as nothing but a threat, a thing of hate. I couldn't understand but I knew that he would never love me. I knew that he never could. In silence, he backed away, never turning his back on the thing that had killed his doe and I felt the hate he showed drilling into me. I lay cold and crying as I watched him abandon me.

For the next two days, I curled up in my mother's remains. She was warm for the first day, until the night came, and wet as I was, I almost didn't survive. The next day though, I grew stronger, and I became aware of my nakedness. I huddled deep within her womb and stared wildly around me for signs of life, which came quickly. The smell of rotting flesh drew scavengers and flies, who settled themselves around her body and began to eat her. For a while, I tried to fight them off, tried to protect my dead mother, but the hungry animals didn't have much fear of me, and in time, they ignored me completely. I watched them eat my mother in agony, but there was nothing to be done. I was weak, hungry, and naked in a forest where human encounter would be slim. I needed food if I was to survive.

I wandered for about a week, hiding behind trees and trying not to be seen, because I was so ashamed of what I was. I foraged on leaves, grass, anything I could chew. Surprisingly, none of this made me sick, and I would later find out, that because I could transform into the body of a horse, I could eat things a horse would eat. During that time, I saw my father once in the distant, bugling a long, lonely pitch. I tried to mimic the noise and his massive head swung in my direction. Again, the hate oozed from him and I dipped my horned head in shame. When I looked up, he had already gone.

When I was about three weeks old, I had gone to the edge of the forest and out into the open for the first time. It was a meadow, and at the center was an old shabby looking cabin, but there was smoke curling

slowly up from the chimney, so I walked closer, sliding a hand in front of me to cover anything I wished no one to see. I slide close to the window and peeked threw. There was nobody inside but it looked warmer, and I had never been warm since my birth. After several minutes of pushing the walls and windows, I found the door and pushed my way inside.

The first thing I noticed was the warmth. It spilled over me and I hurried over to the fire. I sat down and let it wash me for several minutes, but when I had sufficiently warmed up, I got up and looked around the cabin. A set of black and white picture frames stood facing each other on a small wooden desk, and I picked one up to look at it. The people look friendly enough, but they didn't seem to be right. I reached up and touched the think horn on my head. They didn't have horns. I picked up the other picture. These people didn't either. I set both the pictures down and walked across the cabin to a dusty mirror and raised my hands to my horn again. I wasn't supposed to have this. I was different, and something told me, it was going to cost my dearly.

I pulled some of the black curly locks down across my face to try and hide the horn, but it protruded so far that I gave up and wandered back over to the pictures. The people were wearing clothes. I wasn't. I put the pictures down again and looked across the room. I red and black shirt was laying on the floor so I picked it up and slide it over my head. I found a pair of tan pants, and some socks and put those on too. The clothes clung to me in an odd way, and I realized that I was still covered in the aftermath of my birth. I stripped the clothes off and walked threw a hallway, to what I guessed would be another room.

I was right. There was a large basin and a slimy bar of soap sitting below a rusty pump. I walked over to it and pulled the faucet, then the level and watched in amazement as water spurted out. I tugged on the level and before my arms gave out, managed to get about a foot of water into the basin. I climbed in and shivered at the cold, but I was getting more and more used to being cold, so I got over the chill swiftly.

After bathing and scrubbing every inch of me I could reach, I climbed out, but I didn't know what to do with the water. I decided to leave it there and went back to the other room and the clothes I had selected. I threw them on and shivered in the wet clothes. Nobody had come into the house yet, so I sat down next to the fire and stretched out my hands, which were no longer brown, yellow, and smelly, but pink and soft. I touched them and felt for the first time like a real being. Maybe not human, but real.

I'm not sure how long I sat by that fire, but my clothes had dried by the time I heard noise coming from outside. I reached up and plastered my hands over my horn, trying to conceal it. I tugged sharply on it, as if to yank it off but it wouldn't move, and I realized, that I was going to have to find some other way of hiding it. I looked around, and found the nearest object and slid it over my horn.

The door opened and a young girl of about 12 came in, holding a stack of blankets in her arms. She shuffled about, humming softly to herself and placing the blankets around different chairs and on the large bed. She stopped when she saw me and she stared at me for some time.

"Hello." she said suddenly. "Who are you?"

I was about to answer when I remembered, I didn't have a name. I couldn't tell her who I was without a name. "Erm..." I stammered.

"Why are you wearing a cow bell on your head?" she asked suddenly, seeing the large brass object I

had slid over my horn.

“Well? Can you talk? Why are you wearing the cow bell?”

“Al bell?” I said timidly. I didn’t understand what she was asking and she was talking so fast. I hadn’t had a conversation before in my life, and I felt pushed to hard to answer her questions.

“So your name is Al Bell? That’s a funny name.” She paused and considered something, then lost interested and turned back to me. “I’m Clara.” she said proudly, and she walked over to me and stuck her hand out. The cow bell jiggled as it clicked against my horn and I waited for her to yank it off, but she never did. She just stood there, smiling at me with her hand out. I stuck mine out too and she shook it vigorously.

“Hang on,” she said. “All go get Pa.”

With that, she turned abruptly and ran out the open door. I stood, blinking after her, trying to understand her bazaar behavior. Before I could give it much thought, she came back in dragging a fat gray haired man by the hand.

“Pa, I want you to meet Al Bell!” she said proudly.

“The big man advanced on me and I cowered, my cow bell clinking softly.

“Welcome!” he bellowed, as he spread his hairy arms wide. “It’s nice to have visitors. But where are your parents? They must wonder where you are?”

I looked over at Clara for comfort and she smiled at me, that happy confused smile. I looked back at Pa. “Dead” I said. “They both died.” I looked down at the floor and could sense the two look at each other quickly. “Then consider yourself one of us!” Pa bellowed. “Clara, go get the rabbits. We gotta fatten this kid up. He’s skin, bones, and black curly hair!”

Clara rushed out and Pa moved around to the big wooden table and pulled off some animal furs.

“So kid, where’d ya come from?”

I considered my past and pushed the idea behind me. “I’m not sure. I was so young when they died and I’ve traveled so often that I can’t recall. “

Luckily for me, he did not press the matter further. “Well, you can call this home from now on, so you don’t have to worry about traveling anymore. Clara’s never been out of this park!”

Pa turned around and looked at me. “Why you wearin’ that cow bell?”

I reached up and touched it. “I just am sir. If that’s okay with you.”

Pa shrugged. “Suits me just fine, I don’t care what ya wear.”

I let me breath out and looked around the cabin more closely. It was small, only two rooms in all, and the fire had the place well heated. There were furs and animal heads all over the walls and floors, and trapping equipment lay in a heap in one corner.

“So how old are ya?” Pa asked, clearing the table once again.

“I guess I’m about six.” I said, knowing that even though I was only three weeks old, to him I appeared six.

“You’re pretty bright for a little six year old feller.” he said, not looking at me but at the table. I was about to respond when Clara came back with five dead rabbits clutched in her hands. “Got ‘em Pa!” she exclaimed proudly and she raised the rabbits in the air to show her father.

The two chatted happily to each other and Clara giggled and for the first time in my short life, I began to feel I was loved. I sank down on the bed and cried.

2 - 2

Clara and I became best friends, and though I was so much younger than her, she didn't treat me as her baby brother, but as her equal. We went everywhere together, and I soon learned more about my foster family. They were trappers, hired by the state to trap deer or wolves when the populations got too high. There were no hunters allowed in the park, so Pa and Clara and I were always busy. Everyday we would go out and bring home at least three dead animals. We ate our kills every night and sent the uneaten bits and the furs up to the park office, where they cleaned out the excess meat and shipped the pelts to a tannery. I became good at locating the targeted deer and other game because of my connection with the deer species. I had outstanding senses compared to the others, and they soon grew to appreciate me.

I felt at home with Clara and Pa. They didn't care what I did or what I looked like, which was good because I always wore the cowbell. Luckily, after the first night, they never questioned my wearing it again. Once, Clara asked if she could use it to tie around the neck of an old dog she found but I plastered my hands over it and took my head wildly. She shrugged and found an old leather strap to tie around his neck instead. The dog died several days later and I couldn't help but feel torn. When I saw the dead thing, I stood over it, sobbing quietly and trying to push its face to make it get up. Clara said it was old anyway and there was no chance that it would have survived, but I couldn't help but stay with it. It was laying in the same position my mother was when I killed her.

Apart from the dog, I never really had any deep connections with my past. A couple of times, I spotted a deer that resembled my father or mother, but I knew it wasn't them and I really didn't have much of a problem helping Clara and Pa kill them.

We all grew close, and I loved them and I knew they loved me back. It got to the point when I would start taking the cowbell off-but only at nights when they were fast asleep. I'd reach up and pull it off my horn and carefully set it on the floor next to the furs I slept on. It made me so comfortable, knowing that in their presence, I was me. I always told myself that I would leave it off until morning, but I always woke before dawn and slid it carefully back on. I loved them too much and I couldn't stand the thought of them casting me out because I was different. How different I was, I didn't know then.

I had been with the family almost seven years, when I realized, that I would start growing again soon. Clara had grown to be a beautiful young woman, and I knew that when I wasn't around, she and Pa had long discussions about why I hadn't matured a day. My mind had grown, and I was just as smart as Pa and Clara, if not smarter, but I was still living in the body of a six year old boy. It was so frustrating. Clara and I had grown apart a bit while she brought over her older friends and I watched in silence as they talked and gossiped. She always included me but I felt so small and weak next to the muscled boys she sometimes dated. Clara had grown to be very protective of me, and every time somebody tried to make me feel inferior, she always stood up for me, slapping and kicking the person who had made the remark, and she always walked back over to be and put her arms around me and hugged me tightly. "We don't care what you look like Al. You know that right? We don't care."

I tried to be brave, but I had experienced so little of life that I only felt safe when I was alone with Pa and

Clara or by myself. I still loved them, but they didn't understand. They simply excepted me because that's the way I was but I longed to be like them. I longed to remove the cowbell, to show them my horn and my ever growing powers. I longed even more to run. To travel, to run away, to find some purpose to my life. I didn't want to leave them, but I did. It was one of the hardest times for me.

As my birthday approached though, I began to fear what Pa and Clara would do. I hadn't changed a day since they first adopted me and on the day of my seventh birthday, I would begin to grow. I began to talk less and to exclude myself from the others, spending more time in the washroom. I often times filled up the tub and leaned over and just stared at the horned face that stared back at me. I loathed that face. It was costing me everything and there was no way to stop it from furthering the damage.

The night before my birthday, I went to the washroom and once again filled the tub with water. I removed the cowbell and gazed at my childish face.

"One more day..." I whispered.

Pa announced that it was time for dinner, and I slide the cowbell back over my horn and left the water in the tub, planning to bathe after I ate.

I walked over to the sink, washed my hands, pulled down a set of tin plates and stuck them on the table and waited quietly for Pa to bring dinner over. He set a big plate of elk meat on the table, a bowl of salad, and some fresh bread. We all bowed our heads and thanked the Lord, then reached to the center and helped ourselves to the food-at least, that's what the others did. I picked out a few small pieces of lettuce and a bite size piece of meat and stared at them, trying to get the nerve to eat them. I felt as though I was going to vomit.

Clara watched me out of the corner of her eye for several minutes then slammed her fork on the table and crossed her arms.

"Okay, Al. What's wrong." she demanded.

I poked my salad with the edges of my fork. "Tomorrow's my birthday." I whispered.

"Yes we know that." Pa said, not looking up from his food. "We got it taken care of."

"I'm not sure what to expect." I continued.

"Well you should." Clara said surprisingly. "You've been here long enough to know what to expect for your birthday." She paused, then a look of horror crossed her face. "Was there something special you wanted Al? It's not too dark yet, and I could run to town before the stores close."

I closed my eyes and my heart clenched. They didn't know it was me I was worried about. They were blaming themselves.

"Well?" Clara demanded. "Anything?"

I looked up from my plate. "Can we wait until tomorrow? Then I can decide?"

Clara smiled and took my head in her arms. She cuddled it and stroked my curly hair, and I listened to the cowbell jingle.

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Clara pulled off the animal furs covering me early the next morning and shoved a pile of gifts in my face.

“Rise and shine Al!” she screeched and she ran over to the stove to heat up a kettle of water. “Come on Al! Open them!”

Clara skipped over to the bed and flung the covers off and Pa groaned loudly. “Not time! Gonna sleep more...” Clara pushed him to the edge of the bed and began to pull his feet out so he was in a rather feeble standing position.

“Come on Pa, it’s Al’s birthday! We have to get the trapping done soon so we can celebrate!”

Pa groaned loudly but he got up and threw a pair of pants on over his night briefs. He walked over to the stove and pulled the kettle off, which was steaming. “Al, what do ya want to eat?” he asked sleepily.

I reached over and pulled the furs back over me. “I haven’t decided yet. Do you mind if I wash up and then tell you?”

Pa nodded and I gathered the furs around me and trotted into the washroom, trying to make sure they couldn’t see me. I filled the tub and looked in. I looked normal. Almost the exact same, except for I was a slight bit taller, but maybe only by a quarter of an inch. I breathed easily again and stripped my clothes off and climbed into the tub.

I was so carefree as I washed my face, hair and horn. I hadn’t changed very much and finally, I would begin to grow. As I watched, I thought about what I wanted to do for my birthday. I cleaned the cowbell in my bath water and smiled for the first time in days. Everything was going to be okay.

I finished washing and walked out to join the others. Clara glanced up at me and smiled. “You look happier than you have in a long time Al. I’m glad.”

I looked shyly at the floor and smiled to myself.

“Well what do you want Al?” Pa said happily, as he tossed some bacon on a frying pan.

“Just bacon and eggs I guess. I really don’t need anything special.” I sat down in my chair and waited for Pa to bring breakfast to the table.

“Here you go Kiddo!” he said as he slapped two fat eggs and a couple of strips of bacon on my plate. “Eat up!”

Breakfast that morning had never tasted better. We all laughed and joked, and Clara kept smiling at me

the way she used to when she was a child. I had returned to my normal self, and she knew it.

After we had finished eating, we packed the trapping gear in Pa's rusty blue truck and Clara and I climbed in the back.

"What are we trapping today?" I asked.

She turned to me and smiled, smoothing out her wrinkled shirt. "Deer. We just need to kill a few bucks. There's not enough Does to go around, and the bucks are becoming aggressive."

I nodded and leaned back on the rear window and felt the truck jolt along the narrow road.

Pa stopped the truck on the outskirts of the park and began grabbing gear and setting it on the ground. Clara and I got out of the car and grabbed an armful of the traps and walked to the far ends of the deer trails. I cocked my head to better hear and sniffed the crisp morning air. The deer had long since left this area. I walked over to the trail Clara was standing at.

"What do ya think?" she asked, holding up a hand to shield the rising sun from her eyes. "Anything?"

I listened and heard distantly a soft padding on the ground. "Sounds like a buck or a large doe." I said quietly. "Let's put one here."

Clara opened the foot hold trap and gently laid it on the ground, while I went back to the truck and grabbed a salt block to hang in the branches of the tree. When the work was done, we went back to the truck and found Pa, who was loading his rifle.

"Got a buck or a large doe. Don't know which." Clara said as she dropped the extra foot hold in the truck. "He should double back here pretty soon."

Pa instructed us to get back in the truck and he started the engine. We drove a few miles away, parked the car and set up two more traps. When Pa was satisfied, he drove back to the first trap and we all climbed out.

"Yup!" he said, studying the strong young buck struggling to free its foot from the trap. "He's a hell of a fine buck!" Clara and I grinned at each other and leaned against the car as Pa brought out his rifle.

"Alright big boy. Sorry, but ya got to go." he whispered to himself as he raised the rifle to his eye. He shot the buck in the forehead, and the great beast slumped forward pathetically, its skull deformed and oozing.

"That ought to do it." Pa said cheerfully and he put the gun back in the truck. "You kids stay here and wrap him and I'll go check the others."

Pa climbed back into the truck and drove off to check the other two traps. Clara and I exchanged pleasing looks and grabbed a large tan tarp and two cords of rope. We chatted happily about what we would do later in the day to celebrate my birthday as we cleaned the blood from the buck's head and placed him neatly on the tarp. Clara told me she would finish wrapping the buck if I would go check on

Pa and see if we caught the other two.

I went down to the dirt road and leaned against a tree, humming softly to myself as I waited for Pa to return. The truck came rattling down and I smiled, seeing two large bodies in the back. I waved happily to Pa and turned back down the path to tell Clara what he had caught. She beamed a smile at me when I told her the news, and we heard the heavy grunting of Pa as he pulled the two bodies down from the truck bed. I bent down to help Clara tie the tarp closed and we waited for Pa to bring other bucks.

“Got two nice ones.” he said proudly. “This one here’s maybe a year old or so, but the population will do fine without him, and this guy was in his last season.” Pa pulled the larger deer around by the antlers and threw him on the ground. It’s wide eyes pierced into me.

“NO!” I shrieked and I ran up to the dead deer’s head and cuddled it in my arms. I pressed my sobbing face into the bloody fur and rocked back and forth squeezing it tightly.

“Al! What the hell are you doing?” Clara shrieked and she raced foreword and tried to pry the deer away from me. I curled my legs around it’s neck and screamed even louder. “No, no, no, no, no!”

“Al, you need to get back to your senses boy!” Pa bellowed, and he advanced on me and for the first time since I had known him, he was angry. He grabbed the deer’s head and shook it violently and my grip on the deer’s neck failed and I crumpled to the ground with a heavy thud. Clara immediately ran and scooped me up in her arms and locked me in the front seat of the truck. She then ran back to Pa and helped him load the remaining deer into the truck bed. I waited for them with my knees jammed into my chest and I hugged them, rocking back and forth, still howling with grief. Out of the window, I saw Pa and Clara desperately trying to figure out what to do with me. Clara nodded and jumping in the back of the truck and Pa swung the door open and climbed in.

“Al,” he said, stuffing his key in the ignition. “I’m not sure what triggered that, but when we get home, I want you to explain yourself. Are we clear?”

I said nothing but sobbed into my legs as he drove off toward the cabin.

* * * * *

I had stopped crying by the time we arrived home, and fear began to set in. I had slipped. They knew that the way I behaved was the most unnatural reaction, and I couldn’t figure any way around what I had done. When I sat down at the table, Pa in a chair next to me, and Clara on the bed, I figured there was nothing I could do but tell them the truth. I started with the cowbell.

Clara and Pa watched tensely as I reached up and slide the cowbell from my horn with a slight jingly. I looked down and set it on the table. The silence hung thickly in the air.

“Oh, Al.” Clara breathed at last, and her voice was filled with pity and horror.

I glanced over at Pa. He said nothing but his eyes were popping and his mouth hung open.

"I thought you had a birthmark or something but not this." Clara said and she slid off the bed and crept forward to kneel on the floor by my feet.

I looked ashamedly away from her probing eyes and felt her reach up and touch my horn lightly. "You're not human are you?" she whispered softly. I shook my head.

"I'm a Pegasus." I said, and my voice choked and caught.

Clara's eyes softened and I saw tears form in them.

"Oh Al." she whispered again and she laid her face, which was wet with tears on my thigh.

"A Pegasus..." Pa breathed. "Not the flying horse?"

I looked up at him and nodded. His eyes opened wider and he placed his face in his hands. "A Pegasus." he whispered to himself. "But you don't look like a horse? Apart from that horn you look normal."

At his words, I reached up and placed my hand around it. "I'm not normal. I can tell you that." I looked down at the floor and tears burned my eyes. "That deer was my father. I killed my mother when I was first born. This damn horn slit her open!"

I felt Clara's hand tighten on my leg and she raised her chin from my knee. "When I first came here, I was only three weeks old."

The rage I had kept bottled up for seven years suddenly flowed over and I gripped my horn with both hands and pulled on it tightly. "For six years I wouldn't grow, I wouldn't--change! And now, you think I'm thirteen, I'm not! I'm seven and I've been trapped in this same unchanging body for seven years! I can barely stand to look at myself!"

I bent over and sobbed onto my lap, still tugging on my horn and my forehead began to grow red from the irritation.

Clara slid her hand up my arm and laid it on my hand. "Al." she said softly, and her voice was shaking from fright. "Al, it's okay. It's okay. We know now and you don't have to hide anything from us." I reached over to the table and gripped the cowbell tightly, which tingled softly under my touch. "Let go of it Al." Clara said. "You don't need to hide under it anymore." She put her hand on top of mine and I could feel it shake as she lifted my fingers away. The cowbell fell to the floor with a dull thunk and I heard it jingle softly and then it was still.

"There." Clara said, running her fingers through my hair. "That's better."

"What I want to know," Pa said, turning his great face to me, "is why you're smarter than any of us if you're only seven."

I swallowed and Clara grasped my hand tightly and gave it a loving squeeze. "When a Pegasus is born, they're given the intelligence of a six year old, just in case something happens at their births like what

happened to me.” My voice failed as I remembered my dead mother’s face. Clara squeezed my hand again and I continued. “So just in case something goes wrong, they still have the intellect to survive on their own. Even though their body’s wont grow, their minds will, so I have the body of a seven year old, but the mind of a thirteen year old.”

Pa’s eyes lifted a little to rest on mine. He nodded. “Damn smart boy.”

“But there’s something else.” I said, and I wasn’t sure how I knew what I was about to say, but I knew that it had to be said. “I have other powers.”

Clara and Pa blinked and exchanged fearful glances. Pa looked nervously at me.

“When I reached the age of seven, I gained access to my other forms.”

“Other forms?” Clara repeated. I nodded slowly. “Other forms.”

“In addition to a Pegasus being a flying horse, it’s also what people know as a centaur, and a mermaid. I can transform into all of those. In addition to that, I have command over a bit of psychic magic like force fields and other energy forms.” I trailed off and looked at the cowbell, laying motionless on the ground.

“How do you know all of this?” Clara asked after hesitating.

I shrugged. “I didn’t know until today. I guess it’s just kind of instinct.”

“Have you ever been a flying horse?” Pa asked. I shook my head. “I haven’t changed from this body at all. I’m the exact same as I was at birth, except for not as skinny and I think I grew a forth of an inch today.” My eyes softened and I could feel a prick of hope.

Clara looked over at Pa. “Anything else?” she asked him.

Pa shook his head and stood up. “Well Al, I guess we learned a lot about you today.” He paused. “This explains a lot too. Oh well, I’m gonna lay down. After news like that, I don’t think any of us should go out tonight.” Pa got up stretched up arms and yawned.

“I think I’ll lay down too.” Clara said, and she got up and kissed me not on the top of my head like she usually did, but on my horn. She smiled sweetly and wandered over to the bed she shared with Pa. I sat where I was, still shaking slightly and picked up the cowbell. I got up and put it away in the cabinet with the plates. Smiling, I closed the door and went to my pile of furs on the floor.

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Over the next few years, I never put the cowbell on again when I was with Clara or Pa. They ignored my horn and I found I could open up to them and tell them anything. The cowbell stayed tucked away in the cabinet unless we had company over, when I would be forced to stick it back on. For some reason, it didn't bother me to wear it like it used to. Maybe because Clara and Pa could accept me, so I began to accept myself.

For Clara and I, the next few years were like we were children again. We went and did everything together, and I was no longer ashamed of myself because I had started to grow, so when she had friends over, I often times joined them and found that I could be myself. Some of her friends had younger siblings my age and I made friends fairly quickly, after they got over the fact that whenever they saw me, I had a large brass cowbell protruding from my forehead.

Clara and I grew up quickly, and as the years passed, Pa grew weary and took to staying at the house while Clara and I did the trapping. Neither of us minded. It was more fun without Pa because, when it was just the two of us, we would experiment with my powers. It took a lot of concentration and practice, but eventually, I learned to summon the force fields when I wanted, not when I was in danger. I also learned how to create small energy blasts and summon lightning-something Clara found extremely entertaining. But it was my forms that she liked most of all, and it was my forms that we experimented with the most.

Before I had learned how to use them, Clara and I brainstormed every day under the shade of a tree or in the truck bed. I tried all sorts of things. Imagining being a flying horse, trying to jump off of tall structures in hopes that I'd change, and looking at pictures of the flying horses. Nothing worked. It was when my urges to travel became severe, that I found the key to unlocking my true powers.

I was ten when we went out to trap on a crisp fall morning. I had grown taller and my spindly muscles had become large for a ten year old because of the work Clara and I did hauling dead animal bodies. My black hair had become less curly. In fact, it didn't really curl at all, but a few silver hairs had sprouted around my hairline and the top of my scalp. I didn't mind these, because I knew it wasn't because I was getting old, but my true profile was beginning to take shape. Clara was 19 at the time, and she had grown more beautiful than ever. Her blonde hair was long and thick, and her soft pale skin was flawless. Had a person not been able to see the kind of work she did, they would have thought her a model.

We had finished our trapping for the day-just hares, and Clara sat down under a tree to skin them. I asked her if she wanted help but she said she had it under control if I wanted to work on my transformations again. I couldn't see the use in trying. I had spent hours on it and I never even felt the need to know how to transform. I wasn't going anywhere...

But it was times when I told myself I wasn't that my heart ached to move on.

I stared up at the midday sky. A flock of geese were flying south like they did every year. I reached my hand out and closed my fingers around the image.

Clara looked up from her work. "What is it Al?" she asked, and she wiped her bloody fingers on the grass beside her. "Longing to go with them again?"

I shook my head but didn't take my eyes from them.

"You know, if you transformed into that horse, you could go."

I didn't reply, but I knew she was right. However, I couldn't pull myself away from her. I felt such a need to stay with the family that had showed me kindness. "No, there's no use." I said, walking back to the tree. "I don't even know if I was right all those years ago. Maybe I can't transform at all."

"Oh sure you can." Clara said. "You were right about the force fields and stuff."

I nodded slowly and stared back at the geese. I did long to join them.

"Al just go." Clara said, sitting up. "If you can in fact fly, then you could come back and visit whenever you want."

I looked at her and my eyes softened. She would miss me and I knew it but she was so worried about me. I got up and walked to the edge of the clearing. I wanted to go, but how could I?

My soul ripped apart as I watched the geese fly, and I suddenly felt a tearing white hot gash run through my legs. I bent over and grabbed my heart, trying to keep conscious as the pain ripped through me. I felt it run up my spine and blast through my forehead and into my horn. This was too much for me and I toppled over, with a dull gasp.

I heard Clara sharply intake her breath and she threw the rabbit to the side, got up and raced over to me, screaming questions that I could no longer comprehend.

I raised myself to my knees and grabbed my horn with both hands. Clara squatted down next to me and put her hand carefully on my back.

"Al, what can I do, what do you want me to do?" she said and her voice shook wildly.

I gritted my teeth as the feeling of hot iron blazed against my skull and shook my head. "Back up-" I choked. "Get-away."

She looked madly around her then shot up and ran to the tree. She hid her body behind it and poked her head around to watch.

I yelled out foul words in my agony and felt the pain rip back down into my legs. They seared open and I looked down in horror to see a deep red gash. My skin began to burn and melt away, leaving a strong thick white horse leg in its place. The pain crept back up and the same process happened with my hips and stomach. My flesh burned away and I screamed as a gleaming horse torso appeared. The pain moved up to my neck and finally, my head.

The pain subsided, leaving me numb and shaken. I tried to move, but my body felt so strange to me and I stumbled sideways and slumped against a tree.

I heard footsteps but was too weak to watch what Clara was doing. I felt her wrap her arms around my stomach and press her face against me. "You're so sweaty," she commented quietly. I shivered as the last traces of pain faded from my body and my horse senses began communicating to me. Clara watched my face and wondered what she should do.

I looked back at her and tried to speak but a shrill blaring whinny escaped my gaping mouth. Clara drew her breath and staggered back, probably wondering if I was sane. I blinked my eyes and tried again, softer. This time, a gentle, almost happy snort rattled my nostrils and I saw Clara's face relax a little. I braced my legs and gradually, I stood without leaning on the tree. I swung my huge head around and my eyes blazed into Clara's.

"Al?" she whispered and she took a timid step forward. "Al, if you can understand me, shake your head up and down."

I swung my huge neck up and down in a nodding motion several times and felt my thick white mane brush and catch the wind joyfully. Clara smiled and walked up to my face. She cradled my head in her arms and smiled. "You look so amazing Al."

I pulled my face free of her clutch and turned around to look at my new body. It was massive. My shoulders and thick neck were powerful, and as I lifted one of my front legs I felt the bulging muscles underneath the skin move and twist. My hind end was just as strong. My hocks were deep set on my leg and my cannon's were all covered in thick feathers. I knew this type of horse body. It was a Friesian, what everyone thinks of as a warhorse.

Clara stood back and took my new body in. "You look very good," she said again and I saw her clutch her hands in excitement. "Do you think you can fly?"

I lowered my head confusedly and remembered I had wings. I flexed them and felt their mass weighing on my shoulders and deep into my ribs. They were about ten feet in length and each feather was almost three feet long. When I fully extended them, they were far bigger than me.

I looked at Clara and shook my mane playfully, then walked clumsily across the clearing. I looked up at the sky again and a burst of adrenalin raced through me. I let instinct take total control and my body began galloping powerfully toward the edge of the forest. With a huge gust of wind, my wings spread wide and pounded the sky. I tucked my front legs up under my chest and jumped.

The wind caught my wings, and they tilted upward. I steadied my body and tried to take control over my wings. My instincts helped guide me and I looked down at the country below me. It was so beautiful. There was not a person in sight, besides Clara, so I flew a little further, not concerned about being seen. I saw the country like I never had before. Saw the deer, the wolves, the foxes, all so small and insignificant compared to me. Some of them turned their faces to the sky and let out long howls and barks, perhaps as a warning or a hail. I tossed my mane and whinnied loud over my new kingdom, and a whole of cries met my calls. They didn't speak in a language, but I could understand them. Dominant. Ruler. King. I looked down at my kingdom, and they looked up at me.

I flew down to where Clara was waiting excitedly and landed with a pounding thud. I trotted a few steps then stopped and whinnied happily to her. She raced over to me smiling wide and threw her arms around my neck. "You were magnificent Al!" she said and she planted a kiss on my soft nose. "If it's alright, to you mind taking me up there?"

I snorted and tossed my head and she grinned. I laid down on the ground and she slid onto my back, clutching a chunk of my thick mane in her hands. I got up with a grunt and lifted my wings again to make sure I could still maneuver them with her sitting where she was. She leaned forward a bit and gripped tighter on my mane. "I ready." she whispered.

I reared low and charged off in the direction I had taken off from earlier and spread my wings wide. I jumped and felt Clara fall back with the force but she didn't lose her seat. I flew low to the ground and just took her in circles around the truck and the clearing. She looked around her and let her breath out at the amazing sight. I flew for several minutes, then, thinking I shouldn't push my luck, landed on the ground again. Clara dismounted and went on a rampage of chatting about all of the amazing things that she had seen. I smiled inwardly and I felt my heart warm with happiness. I could take off right now and leave forever, but I no longer had the desire. I loved Clara too much.

I felt the burning sensation again and my horse eyes bulged in my head. After 20 seconds, the pain left and I lay bloody and soaking on the ground. Clara was still talking, but when she turned around, she saw no the horse, but the boy. She laughed and jogged over to me.

"That was so amazing!" she stammered, and she grabbed my arm and helped me up.

I smiled at her and the blood and ooze dripped from my horn.

"I can't wait to see your other forms!"

But I knew my other forms would have to wait until I felt the urge to leave again. I had discovered the horse form, but I had no desire to leave. Perhaps in a month or two, I would see one of the others.

Seven more years passed with no signs of my other forms. Clara and I didn't mind. Often times at night, we would sneak out of the house and fly deep into the forests and over the faraway cities. Pa grew weaker during this time, and the doctors told us he had come down with lung cancer from his youthful habit of smoking. We watched sadly as his spirit failed him and after fighting for three years, he died. Clara took over the housework and I would spend the day trapping. We kept up with all of the work and bills, but Clara and I had never spent so much time apart. It felt strange coming home and seeing her there in a small dress and an apron instead of her usual jeans.

Clara was now 26 years old, and by far one of the most beautiful people in the county. It seemed every night someone would stop by the house to ask Clara on a date or to bring her flowers, and I found myself wearing the cowbell more and more. It bothered me that so many people visited her all of the time. She was a part of me and the other people just couldn't see that. Every time somebody came over, she would look at me with her misty blue eyes and her face was filled with sadness. I never could figure out what that look was for, but it bothered me that the visitors forced her to wear it.

Luckily for Clara and myself, I had become a strong young man at 17 years. My black hair was streaked with white in the front but everybody thought I had dyed it on purpose so nobody thought of it as strange. In fact, it helped us because it made me look meaner and tougher than I really was. Most men didn't try anything with Clara when I was around because they were all terrified of the strange boy that wore the cowbell, but I wasn't always around to protect her.

I had gone out for the evening to try and trap foxes, which were more active at night, and though Clara begged me to let her come with me, I made her stay home due to a slight cold she was coming down with. I left around nine o'clock and caught my fox within ten minutes, so I started home earlier than I thought I would. It was a calm, quiet night, where the only sound is the soft chirping of crickets and the beating of moth wings. I slung the fox over my shoulder and walked into the house. Clara was still up, sitting at the table and reading a book.

"Tom called." she said quietly when I opened the door.

Tom was a muscular fellow, and one of the few men Clara liked. He was always gentle with her and had never tried to take advantage of her. I nodded my head in indication that she should continue.

"He asked if he could come by. I told him it was okay, so he should be here in about ten minutes."

I nodded again and walked over to the cupboard. I withdrew the cowbell and it slid into place with a gentle clank.

Clara smiled up at me. "You don't mind him do you?" she asked.

"No" I said. "I like him a lot better than most of the other guys that come here."

Again, she smiled and I laid the dead fox by the door. "Anything to eat?" I asked her.

"There's some bread and turkey if you want to make yourself a sandwich."

I pulled the contents out of the fridge and as I was spreading the mayonnaise over the bread, there was a harsh banging on the door. Clara rose delicately to her feet and answered it.

"Tom!" she squealed, and he came in and embraced her with a bear hug. I gritted my teeth and slapped the mayonnaise loudly on my bread to let him know that I was watching him.

"Hey Al!" he sang cheerfully.

I ignored him.

He shrugged his massive shoulders and took Clara by the arm. "I brought you something" he said and he lifted up a large bag. He kissed her lightly on the cheek and I heard her giggle softly. My tense face relaxed a little bit. What did I have to protect Clara from? It was Tom. He would never do anything to hurt her and she actually loved him in return. I smiled lightly to myself and folded my sandwich in place. I grabbed a plate and walked out to the deck to sit and eat. The stars all glittered gleefully in the sky and I leaned my head back on my hands. Ten minutes passed and I started dozing when I heard a muffled cry and the scraping of shoes on wood. I opened my eyes and sat, glaring into the darkness and trying to hear better.

Something was happening, but whoever was doing it was doing a very good job of covering it up. Had I not the sharp senses of a deer, I probably would not have even noticed the subtle sounds. I quietly stood up, opened the screen door and slid inside. The sounds were coming from the washroom-almost a clicking, sliding sound. I crept closer and heard Clara whimper followed by a hasty shushing.

"Mustn't make noise now should we. We don't want little Al coming to your rescue." Tom spoke so softly that I doubted Clara had even heard him.

Again Clara whined and I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise, not in fear, but in anger. My electric powers began charging and the whole kitchen felt thick with static.

The clicking rattled one last time and I heard Tom shift his weight.

"Now," he said smugly. "You take that dress off Clara."

Clara began to cry but her sobs were muffled by what might have been a rag tied in her mouth.

"Don't make me shoot you Clara. Take it off."

Clara cried a little louder.

"Do it." Tom said and I could tell his patience was running thin.

Clara choked now and though she tried to hold back the tears, she let herself slip and a shattering burst

of sobs broke the silence.

“Shut up!” Tom yelled, and he fumbled madly with something large in his hand.

I couldn't wait any longer and I jumped around the corner, the electricity flaming around me. A purple haze filled the room and I stared madly at Tom.

“What the frack?!” Tom bellowed and he raised the rifle and fired.

I stepped in front of Clara, who had bowed her head and was sobbing into her hands, and shot my hands out in front of me. With a vibrating tsa-chan a force field flew around us and the bullet ricocheted off and smashed into the ceiling. Tom loaded again and aimed, but I slammed my hands forward and threw the force field at him. The energy blasted him back, and he crashed threw the wall and spilt out into the grass. I bowed my head and heard the cowbell fall on the floor with a clank as I took off after him, the aura around me growing. Tom grabbed his gun again and pointed it at me, but I flung my mind into his and pulled hard at his thoughts. He screamed and grabbed his head, trying to pull me away from his mind, but I persisted and switched on ever nerve ending I could find. He shrieked in pain and flung himself backwards on the ground, twisting and rolling in agony.

Behind me Clara had pulled the rag from her mouth and began screaming at me. “No Al! He knows! Now he knows! Run!” I blocked her pleas and continued to torture Tom.

She became increasingly desperate in her yelling, and finally, she began to sob shrilly. I looked back at her and the look of horror on her face.

“Please stop Al. Please don't hurt him anymore.” she begged.

I gave him one last jolt of pain and wrenched myself from his mind and watched in discussed as he wriggled and squirmed on the ground.

Clara came up to me and buried her face in my chest. I wrapped my arms around her protectively and glared at Tom. He looked up at me between his shuddering and a look of hatred and fear reflected from his glassy eyes. I held Clara in my arms as she sobbed and walked her back inside through the hole in the wall the blast had created. When I had settled her and came back outside, I saw Tom crawling and limping back to his car and out of sight.

Now that the anger had passed, I felt fear settle in as it was when Clara and Pa first found out about my being a pegasus. Tom was sure to go back to town and tell everybody, and though I knew none of them could do much to hurt me, it sickened my heart to think that Clara would have to suffer because I had lost control and tortured Tom.

I turned and walked back threw the hole. My dragging feet caught the cowbell and it clanked sharply as it flew foreword a few feet. I stooped over and picked it up, feeling it with my fingers and carried it inside. Tom would have seen my horn too.

“Is he gone?” Clara asked. She was sitting up in the bed with the covers pulled as high as they would come.

“Yeah, he’s gone.” I walked over to her and sat on the edge of the bed. “He’s gonna tell. You know that right?”

Clara nodded her head.

“I’m sorry Clara. I didn’t mean for it to go that far. What was he doing to you anyway?”

Clara looked down. “You know how he said he brought me a present?”

I nodded.

“It was a gun, a rag and some duck tape.” Her eyes were so blank I wanted to cry. “I would have called to you sooner, but with the rag I couldn’t talk. Then he said he’d shoot me if I made any noise so I couldn’t get you.” She paused. “I’m just so glad you have such good hearing AI. He would have raped me tonight had you not come in.”

She started to cry again, and I hugged her head just like she did with me when I was little. She sobbed for a couple of minutes, then pulled her head up and looked at me. “Thank you so much AI for saving me. I’m glad you did it-even if they know now.”

Even if they know now...I thought about what she said as she fell asleep in my arms. I laid her head down on Pa’s old pillow and got up to look out the kitchen window. The clinging darkness crawled into my skin and I shuddered. Tom would have gathered most of his buddies by now, and I wouldn’t be surprised if they came to the house to settle scores.

I should have killed him. I thought bitterly, but when I glanced back at Clara, I knew that I couldn’t have. She had a soft spot for others, even if she knew that sparing Tom’s life could mean losing one of ours.

The clouds overhead were slowly building and a thick haze formed over the crab grass growing in the yard. I opened my eyes wide and shut my other senses down to concentrate on my vision. No sign of life, but the world was too unchanging for my liking. I looked back at Clara again and tightened my jaw. Without waking her, I crept out the door and ran into the yard, feeling the heat and pain that channeled threw my body rip my limbs apart. My massive white wings flung open wide and I took off into the darkening sky.

It only took several minutes of flight to find what I was searching for. I was looking for Tom. I wanted to find him before he found Clara and did something horrible to her. It tore my heart out to think of leaving her behind but it hurt even more to think of her in trouble. I had made my choice, and I only had Clara in mind.

Tom was easy to spot. The creep had indeed gathered his friends, and the group was walking on the dirt road that led to the house. Most of them were carrying flashlights, and all of them were talking in hushed voices. When they turned to each other, I could see the light reflect off of metal. They had brought weapons.

I landed with a thud and transformed back into my natural form as I ran toward them. By the time I had

reached them, I was dripping with blood, shaking, and pissed off. Tom lifted his head with a jerk and blinked at me, startled that I had come out to meet him, and that I was drenched in blood.

“Tom!” I yelled. “If you want me, come and get me!” I spread my arms and stood panting at him.

He smiled and turned to his buddies. “Meet Al everybody.” he sang cheerfully. “This is the little bastard we’ve come to kill.” Tom turned to look me straight in the eye. “And when we’re done, we’re gonna rape the dog outta your sister.”

I fought back tears as I glared at them. “Over my bloody carcass.” I whispered. Tom straightened and looked down at me. “You sure talk tough for a kid.” he spat.

I narrowed my eyes. “Touch her,” I said, “And I’ll tear your mind apart. You know I can.”

Tom’s eyes widened as he fully remembered the pain I had caused him and he took a few steps forward. “I got back up this time punk! You can’t--” He stopped when he saw my horn.

“What the hell is wrong with you!” he squealed and he fell back and started to crawl away. “You’re some kind of demon!”

I smiled at him and began to slowly walk towards him. “I’m more than that.” I said, but I transferred my voice into his mind. Tom reached up and began clawing at his face.

“Oh, you don’t like that do you?” I said softly, almost mocking his panic stricken face. He began crying and yelling violently and his comrades looked at each other worriedly. I could tell by their faces they were terrified. One by one they dropped their weapons: lead pipes, kitchen knives, and even a chain saw, and ran yelling back towards the town. Tom still lay on the ground, crying helplessly and clawing at his face and the air around him.

“I’ll let you go Tom,” I said, “but you can’t come back here. I’ll know if you do.”

Tom nodded wildly and I began to trigger the flow of dopamine in his brain to ease the fright and pain he felt. Then, before I left entirely, I branded the image of torture into his memory if he were to ever approach Clara again. From then on, she would be safe.

I left Tom’s mind and returned to my own body. He sat on the ground, looking around him with a slightly entertained and confused expression plastered on his face. He laughed at some unseen object in the air and fell back, giggling to himself.

“Demon.” he said happily. “I see it! He’s a demon. Frickin’ devil thingy!”

I realized he was talking about me, and though I had protected Clara, all of the men that were here tonight, including Tom knew I wasn’t human. There was no way I would be able to return home. Tears filled eyes that had not truly cried in 17 years and I ran. I wanted to block out every memory I had had here. Clara, Pa, my mother and father, everything. I would never be able to return here, and I felt the burden of being an outcast once more.

While I dashed away uncontrollably, I felt my body change, and I knew I was taking on another form. The lower part of my body split open and a horse's end flared out. The body was much leaner than my flying horse form, and instead of being built for power, it was built for speed and agility. I had long thin legs, high hocks and thin cannons. The horse's back was high set with large, thin withers and a sleek buttocks. This body was that of a thoroughbred, and it was a rich chestnut color.

I hadn't even noticed the change until I had stopped running, hours later, and lay panting on the ground. When I tried to stand up once again, I fell sideways and turned around to stare at the bizarre body I now owned. When I went to a pool of water and looked in, a completely new face stared back at me.

The thing that shocked me the most was my face had changed, and I had lost the horn. My new face was slightly leathery looking, as if the person spent most of their time working in the sun. He was slightly handsome though, and his hair color was a beautiful shade of red. My new face was very kind looking, not something I would expect from a creature that would be considered a freak by the rest of the population, but it was gentle none the less. I stood over the water, looking at my profile for 10 minutes. I almost liked the idea of being a centaur, but I liked the opportunities it opened even more.

Because of the fact that my new face had lost the horn, it opened a new window to me. If I could somehow conceal the bottom half of this form, I might be able to interact with people--maybe even find a new life for myself. I couldn't use my natural form because I had left the cowbell back with Clara.