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Pegasus

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In the land of Lycia, with its fertile grain fields and gardens, there once came a terrible great creature which ruined the crops and laid everything waste before it.

The king of the country was in great trouble and knew not what to do. It happened that a young man seeking adventures had just come to the court, and the king bade him make ready to fight the monster. The young man - whose name was Bellerophon - was eager to succeed, but he knew that this was a dangerous undertaking.

One night, as he lay pondering how he should accomplish this great deed and bring safety to the people, he fell asleep and dreamed that Minerva (Athene) the Wise Goddess, came to him and put a golden bridle in his hand. When he arose in the morning, his foot touched something on the floor. He looked down, and there lay the golden bridle of his dream.

Minerva, he thought, must have given it to him, and must have meant to show him that she would lend him aid; but what he was to do with a bridle he did not know. He still held it in his hand as he crossed the grass to the spring. The water was bubbling from its source just as usual, but what was the wonderful creature drinking there? Bellerophon stopped, filled with astonishment and delight, and stood gazing at its beauty. It was a horse of snowy whiteness, with great, dazzling white wings; one dainty hoof was in the water and his long mane fell forward as he stooped to drink.



The moment he caught sight of Bellerophon he threw up his head with a startled look and seemed on the point of dashing away or of rising into the air on his broad wings. As Bellerophon took a step forward - the horse eyeing the golden harness in his hand - he hardly dared think he could bridle such a beautiful wild creature. Yet it seemed to him that this must be what Minerva meant him to do. When he made the attempt the horse trembled a little, but did not resist, and even allowed him to vault upon his back.

As Bellerophon sat securely in his place and the horse pranced and curved over the grass, the two were certainly a fine pair to look upon. Still more so when the horse suddenly spread his wings and the two were seen sailing through the air as easily as an eagle soars over the fields and hills. Now Bellerophon felt that, with the aid of this wonderful horse, he might hope to conquer the monster. The next day he set out with Pegasus - that was the horse's name - and they did conquer it, so that all the land was free again.

When they came back to the spring where the horse had first appeared, Bellerophon led him to the water and stood watching as Pegasus drank of the cool stream. Bellerophon knew that he must free the horse now, and let him return to his favourite abiding place high upon the mountains. There among the snowy peaks Pegasus loved to dwell, though he came down now and then to some flowery meadow to crop the young grass or to drink of the dear waters of the springs.

Bellerophon grieved to lose him, and Pegasus, too, seemed sorry that they must part. After Bellerophon had taken off his bridle the horse whinnied and thrust his nose into Bellerophon's hand, as if to tell him he would come back again. Then with a bound and a rustling of wings the wonderful creature was gone.

Pegasus did come back afterwards to help in other brave deeds, and Bellerophon and the swift-winged horse were always fast friends.

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