Pegasus' Promise

A tale of unity and peace

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Let our imaginations fly to another time, when Pegasus,
a majestic horse with wondrously large wings, lived side
by side with humans and had many adventures.

Chapter 1

There once was a beautiful, winged horse called Pegasus. Perhaps you've heard of him? For many years, this majestic creature spent his days gliding effortlessly across beautiful blue skies or playing in storm clouds and dodging thunderbolts, often on his way to fight monsters alongside heroes. But today, Pegasus was flying slowly, his wings flapping sadly. If you looked a little closer, you would see that he was crying; his tears falling towards the earth where people lived.

Pegasus, a lifelong traveller, had lived on an ancient continent all his life. Over time, the communities of people living there came together to form lots of different countries. Some were big, others small; some had sandy deserts, others sparkly glaciers; some had flower-filled fields, others majestic mountains; and some had short square buildings, while others had tall buildings with spiky spires. These buildings were constructed to suit the climate of each land, built from wood, with intricate designs and patterns. Each country spoke a unique language, and Pegasus loved to hear these as he flew from place to place.

With all these differences, you would think that the people living in these countries had nothing in common. But you'd be wrong. In every country, children laughed in the streets on their way to school, farmers worked in the fields, writers wrote books and musicians made merry music for people to dance to. Everywhere, people bought and sold delicious food and colourful trinkets at bustling street markets, and in the evenings, everyone went home to be with their families and loved ones. Pegasus found all the countries beautiful, and he loved to visit them all.

So why was Pegasus crying?

It was because of what he was seeing from the sky. As he flew over the continent he loved so much, he saw that something terrible had begun.

Even though the people had much in common, there were some misunderstandings between them because of their differences. They lost trust in each other and began to grow suspicious and afraid of one another. Troubles between the countries had grown and now they were declaring war on each other. The once vibrant, joyful communities that lived there were torn apart, as families fled and armies grew. People stopped working, schools closed and farmers abandoned their fields. The remnants of bombed buildings loomed in heavy smoke. Uniformed soldiers stood guard everywhere, but no one felt safe.

High above, Pegasus couldn't believe his eyes. All he saw was pain and suffering. What could he do? How could he help? He didn't understand why the people had turned against each other. Hopeless, he closed his eyes and wept. He couldn't bear it any longer, and so at that moment he decided to leave his beloved continent. He flew far away from the cities, from the mountains and the fields, from the glaciers and the deserts, until he finally descended into a deep, dark forest. Landing by a quiet river, he folded his wings and made a promise to himself: 'I will never spread my wings again. I wish to escape the pain of the war that is destroying my beloved continent.' Pegasus wandered in the forest for years, never coming across a single person. His only companions were the animals.

One morning, as he was walking to the river, he discovered a large white bull drinking some water. Beside the bull stood a mysterious girl with black hair and dark eyes. She was wearing a beautiful dress with swirling colours and bright patterns, and when she moved, it seemed as if tiny stars floated around her. The colours of her dress reminded Pegasus of the many vibrant communities of the countries he'd left behind. The girl peeked over the bull's neck as he bent to drink again. She looked at Pegasus and smiled.

'Good morning, Pegasus,' she greeted him as if she knew him. 'We've come to rest here for a bit and to drink some water.'

Surprised, Pegasus answered: 'You know who I am? It's been so long since I last saw a human being, I thought you might all have forgotten about me, but I'm very happy to see you.'

Before he could ask her who she was or what she was doing in the forest, the mysterious girl exclaimed: 'Really? But how have you not seen anyone?'

'People don't usually come this deep into the dark forest,' he answered. 'They're too busy fighting and destroying everything they've built. That's why I'm here, to get as far away from the war as possible.' He looked away.

'But, Pegasus,' the girl said gently, 'the war is over.'

'It's over?' Pegasus couldn't believe his ears. He pranced around as he exclaimed: 'But how?! This is great news!' He remembered fondly the friendliness and joy of the continent before the war, and he longed to go back. He expected the girl to join in his excitement, but instead, she looked at him solemnly.

'Yes, the war is over. But people have changed: they are scared and disappointed. Their houses have been destroyed and they are afraid that war will break out again. They have lost hope.'

Pegasus recognised the feeling of hopelessness, it was a scary, lonely feeling. He knew he needed to act. 'I remember a time when the countries lived side by side in peace. I want to remind people of those times and help them to reunite,' he said decisively.

The girl nodded in agreement. 'Can you think of a way to bring the people together after war?' she asked him.

Pegasus stood silent for a moment, deep in thought, while a small group of curious forest animals gathered around to watch him and the human newcomer. 'Peace will only be possible if people find something that they all care about, something that will show them what they have in common. I will help them!' he said, suddenly spreading his enormous wings with determination. The animals gasped in awe; they had never seen him spread his wings before.

The girl nodded. 'If people work together for a common purpose, they'll see what needs they share, they'll build trust and they'll learn not to fight with

each other, but instead to negotiate when they have disagreements. What's more, people will discover that they're stronger when they're united. What a good idea Pegasus!'

Pegasus replied: 'I will leave this forest today and go to them. Thank you for coming here and telling me about the end of the war. It sounds like there is much work to be done.'

'I wish you all the best,' said the girl, 'I would love to join you, but Bull and I will only slow you down on your mission. Instead, I insist that my closest friend, Dove, should accompany you. I'm sure you'll make an excellent team.'

Dove, who had been perched in a nearby tree, flew down to Pegasus and landed gently on the ground in front of him. 'Hello, Pegasus, I look forward to working together.'

The girl climbed onto the bull's back and smiled. 'I know you'll succeed.'

The bull slowly broke into a run and began to charge away. 'You haven't told me your name!' Pegasus called to her.

'Europa!' she called back, as they vanished from sight, leaving a trail of fading stars behind them.

Pegasus felt bewildered. Why did the girl disappear so suddenly, and how was he supposed to convince the people to unite and live in peace?

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The story you're listening to is fictional, but maybe you've noticed a few elements that can be found in real life?

The continent of Europe was named after Europa, a princess from Greek mythology. According to the myth, Zeus, the god of the sky and thunder, fell in love with her. He transformed himself into a white bull and took her off to the island of Crete to live with him.

Europe is one of the world's seven continents. Geographically and culturally diverse, it covers 44 countries and is home to over 700 million people. There are plenty of beautiful places with fascinating histories and culture. Many of the world's famous scientists, inventors, artists, composers, as well as popular entertainers and successful sportspeople, were born in Europe.

But the story of Europe is not only about great achievements. There are also many things we are not proud of. Throughout the centuries, European countries have fought terrible wars against each other. These wars were usually about power and property, or religion. In the 20th century, two big wars broke out on the continent and ended up involving other countries all around the world. That's why they are called 'world wars'. The wars killed millions of people and left Europe poor and in ruins.

Europeans were exhausted from the loss and destruction, and they were scared for the future. Could anything be done to prevent war from happening between their countries again? Could their disagreements be resolved by means other than fighting? Let's listen to the next chapter to see what happens in the story of Pegasus.

Chapter 2

Pegasus stared at the point on the horizon where the girl had disappeared. Although he still had lots of questions, he knew there was no time to waste. He spread his wings and, with Dove by his side, he circled over the forest one last time, bidding farewell to his animal friends before setting off on their journey. Soon, they could see big cities in the distance, and small villages below them. Smoke was no longer rising from the buildings, but neither was laughter or music. The atmosphere was serious: people were sitting about solemnly with their heads hanging low.

'It's terrible to see these countries and their people in such a sorry state. We must give them hope and guide them towards long-lasting peace,' Pegasus said, thinking aloud.

'We must first find out what people care about,' replied Dove.

From afar, they saw a group of people sitting by a small cottage at the foot of a mountain.

'Let's go down and try talking to them,' suggested Dove. 'If we travel from place to place and talk to enough people, we might be able to find something that's important to everyone.'

Pegasus landed gently nearby and trotted towards the group, with Dove flying beside him. The people got to their feet, startled by the winged horse that had appeared in the sky.

'Don't be afraid,' Pegasus called out, approaching more slowly. 'We're here because we want to talk.'

The people looked at their unexpected visitors uncertainly.

'Are you Pegasus?' asked a woman, her eyes wide in disbelief.

'I am,' he confirmed.

'We haven't seen you flying in the skies for years! We thought you'd left forever.'

Pegasus bowed his head as if to say sorry. 'I left when the war broke out, but I was so glad when I heard it had ended. I returned as quickly as I could, and in fact, I have come here to help you build a more peaceful future.'

A man spoke up. He had a sceptical look on his face. 'The wars have ended, yes. But I am not sure that you could find a way to make lasting peace.' Others in the crowd murmured in agreement.

'Peace across our lands would be a dream come true,' said the woman from earlier, 'but right now we are dealing with other types of problems. Our homes have been destroyed and we don't have the wood we need to rebuild them. We know how to do it,' she said, motioning to a large saw and workbench that had been used to slice trees into long planks of wood, 'but the forests have burned down. There are no trees for us here.'

'Because there is no wood, we also cannot make fires to cook our meals and heat our homes,' said another person.

'This is where some of us worked before the war,' said the sceptical man from earlier, pointing to the mountain behind him. 'It used to be a plantation of trees that we carefully managed to provide wood to our entire city, but now it's gone.'

An old woman spoke up: 'Without wood, we cannot rebuild anything. We just want to get on with our lives in peace. But the war has completely used up and destroyed the things we need to support ourselves.'

Pegasus and Dove listened carefully to the people. There was a lot to think about. When everyone had finished sharing their concerns, Pegasus and Dove thanked them, and continued their journey.

Across all the countries they visited, people wanted the peace to last, but they also spoke about how difficult it was to find wood to rebuild their homes, cook their food and keep warm.

'This might be what unites people,' said Dove one day, when they were flying to another city.

'What exactly?' asked Pegasus.

'Trees and wood.'

'Wood will bring peace?' Pegasus asked, confused. 'Are you saying that a boring thing such as a piece of wood will bring peace to the people?'

Dove smiled wisely. 'Remember that we said that we would try to find what's important to everyone? Wood is important, because without the right kind of wood, people cannot create tools, build houses, cook their food and heat their homes.'

Pegasus understood, but he felt that wood wasn't the only thing that people found important. 'Everywhere we went, people also said that they wanted no more fighting. That means they also think peace is important.'

Dove agreed. 'If we can get people from the different countries to work together to grow their trees and cut down wood, people will unite around this activity, and they might see that they have other things in common too. This could be the start of maintaining the peace between their countries.'

Pegasus' eyes lit up with excitement. 'If there's peace in one area, it could inspire peace in other places, and people will learn how to work together on many different matters!'

'We need to gather the leaders of these countries together and explain our idea that working together to grow trees and cut wood could be the way towards preventing war,' said Dove.

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Pegasus' and Dove's idea of uniting the peoples of their world by sharing a resource like wood echoes a story that happened in real life.

Just like the war in the story, the wars in Europe brought about terrible destruction and killing. Europe was left in ruins. The leaders of the European countries needed a good plan to stop such dreadful things from happening again. A Frenchman called Jean Monnet thought hard about this and realised that there were two things a country needed before it could make war: iron for producing steel to make weapons, and coal to power factories and railways. Europe had plenty of coal and steel: that's why European countries had been able to make weapons and go to war. So, Jean Monnet suggested a plan that had never been tried before: if you could persuade the two old rivals, Germany and France, to work together for their coal and steel production, war between them would become harder as they learned to see beyond their differences. Jean Monnet talked about this idea to his friend Robert Schuman, who was a minister in the French government. Robert Schuman thought it was a brilliant idea and he announced it in a speech on 9 May 1950. This was the beginning of the peace project that's now called the European Union.

Do you think Robert Schuman was worried about the way people would react to the plan to unite Europe? Do you think it was easy for the countries of Europe to unite? Let's see how it all plays out for Pegasus' and Dove's plan.

Chapter 3

In the following weeks, Pegasus, with the help of Dove, gathered the leaders and people from the different countries together. It was quite a sight when everyone was finally in one place. Pegasus' heart leapt with excitement when he saw them all together. It reminded him of the time before the war. Their languages and cultures, the look of their clothes – they were different, but they also had so much in common. Everyone wanted happiness and peace for their families. It was beautiful to see them together again.

'Dear people,' Pegasus began, 'thank you for coming here today. We've invited you to this meeting to suggest that if your different countries all work together to grow trees and harvest wood, then lasting peace will be possible.'

'Growing trees will prevent war? How so?' asked one of the leaders in disbelief.

'If every country grows trees that flourish in their environment, and you all agree to exchange the wood you grow across your borders, then you will all have equal access to these essential materials. This will reduce tensions between your communities, and it will encourage you to have open, friendly dialogues; to negotiate with each other, rather than fighting. What's more, some wood is strong, and better for building houses, some wood is very dry, and better for starting fires to cook food and keep warm, and other wood is colourful, and it's beautiful when carved into trinkets like the ones you used to sell in your markets before the war. By exchanging the wood that you grow with the wood of your neighbours, everyone will learn how to share. No country will become stronger than the others, and everyone will prosper,' explained Pegasus.

'But every country is different, and everyone speaks their own language,' objected one leader. 'How will we work together?'

Pegasus was about to answer, when suddenly, an old woman spoke up from the crowd: 'I remember the days when people from the different countries traded with each other. We found ways to communicate, and we even became friends, despite our differences. So, it's possible!'

'Yes, I remember it too!' exclaimed another person. Others in the crowd echoed these words.

'Peace is possible!' added others.

'Yes! We want peace! We want peace!' shouted the crowd.

Pegasus felt relief and joy when he heard this. After the crowd had quieted down, Pegasus gave one last word of advice to the different countries: 'Peace and working together will not happen all at once, but by taking small steps you'll build real trust and care between you' ([1]).

That day, there were great celebrations, as word spread that the people had chosen to work together for peace.

The people united their efforts and began to share their stockpiles of wood with each other, working together to manage this precious material that they all relied on. At first, people were reluctant and a little bit scared. Yet, as time went by, they grew to trust each other, and they saw that their neighbours also wanted to live peaceful, happy lives. They realised that life is best lived together, not as enemies, but as friends. Pegasus' dream of the people working together to create peace, prosperity and unity began to take shape. The things that they once fought over were now the things that brought them together.

One day, many years later, Pegasus and Dove were flying together, looking down at the countries below. They saw that the people were doing much better: the damage from the war had been repaired, new trees were planted and the countries were filled once more with bustling towns and cities. Children were playing in schools, and people were dancing, creating, working

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([1])   Version of an excerpt from the Schuman Declaration.

and sharing with one another. The different communities were getting along and helping each other. Their idea had slowly taken hold, and the countries had even decided to remove the borders between them, because people loved to visit each other and learn each other's languages, leading to many new friendships being made. Pegasus smiled happily as he thought back to Europa, the girl in the colourful dress who he met by the river all those years ago. How proud she would be!

Pegasus turned to face Dove as they soared in the sky. 'The countries are now united in diversity,' he exclaimed. 'We did it!'

'Yes, it's beautiful to see,' Dove nodded her head, 'but the people must not get complacent. These things are hard won and can be threatened if they lose sight of why they came together in the first place.'

Dove and Pegasus slowed their pace, both quiet in reflection. Suddenly Pegasus turned to Dove: 'Even though new difficulties might arise in the future and challenge the peace we see today, I have faith that the people will find strength in unity and work together to find new solutions to the problems they face.'

Dove smiled warmly in agreement, and they continued on their way, filled with renewed hope.

The peoples in the story you just listened to were finally able to find a practical way – namely, sharing the production of wood – in order to achieve peace between them. Similarly, in real life, Europeans successfully achieved peace by pooling their steel and coal production together. This would be the start of the European Union, referred to as the EU.

Just as in the story, the message of peace and solidarity spread from a few countries to many countries. The union created between the countries of Europe started with six countries and expanded until it included the 27 countries that are part of the union today.

In the European Union, people respect each other's cultures and each other's languages. Just because we are part of one union, does not mean we lose those things that make us unique. Different from the past, we celebrate our differences and learn from each other, while being united. The European Union adopted a flag with 12 yellow stars in a circle, to symbolise this unity and cooperation.

The European Union also has its own anthem and a special day on which we celebrate the peace that we have achieved. The European Anthem is called 'Ode to Joy'. It is based on the famous composer Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The day of celebration is called Europe Day and is celebrated on 9 May. Remember when we spoke about Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman earlier? Robert Schuman gave his speech on 9 May, and that is why we celebrate peace and unity all over the European Union on this day.

Today, you can see the how Europeans work together in several ways. Many European countries use the same currency, called the euro. Be on the lookout for Europa and the white bull that are printed on some euro coins and banknotes! In addition, people from the European Union can work, study and travel in each other's countries, without doing unnecessary paperwork or without needing special permission.

The story we heard about Pegasus and the war across the continent has a happy ending, but unfortunately, in our world, there are still places where people fight. Like Pegasus, we have a role to play, making sure that the principle of 'united in diversity' continues on and on, so that, hopefully, more people will be able to live together in peace and enjoy each other's differences. Let us create the next chapter of our story, with peace and prosperity for all as the goal!

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