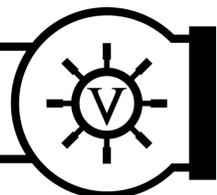


Pirates for a Day

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PONY FICTION VAULT



Trees are strange things. Their lives, if left untouched, are long and peaceful. But if they are cut down they can become an infinite amount of other things, from houses to paper. To make those things, the original, peaceful tree must be destroyed. There was no escaping it.

However, there was a secret. A secret only little ponies knew about, something the grown-ups had long forgotten. There was a way to make the beautiful trees into what you need without cutting them down and chopping them up.

It was this magical secret that transformed the big oak tree into a ship and the surrounding forest into a raging ocean.

Imagination.

A tremor of impact shook his jaw as Pipsqueak swung his sword against the tree branch.

"Take that!" he yelled triumphantly around the handle as he saw the raider fall off the side of the ship. A scream drew his attention away from his opponent. He saw Dinky had leapt down onto a lower branch on the tree and her mane had caught in a branch. He also saw that she had leapt up onto that railing and was struggling to duel one of the masked ponies! "I'll save you!" he shouted as he jumped from his branch to assist her.

Landing hard and barely maintaining his balance, Pipsqueak reached up and carefully untangled the few blonde hairs that clung to jagged imperfections in the bark. The masked pony tripped and dropped off the side into the waves below.

His fair-haired companion grinned at him. "Thanks Pip! I think that's the last of them!"

Pipsqueak nodded and laughed. "We sure showed them!" His voice was muffled so he sheathed his sword. "But we better go up to the crow's nest and make sure there are no more coming!"

With a determined nod, Dinky led the way, scrambling up the thick wooden monolith and using the many branches as hoof holds. Pipsqueak mimicked her every movement carefully. They were quite high up, but he was okay with that. It's why they chose the tree in the first place, because it was the biggest. Therefore, they had the biggest ship.

The two ponies scaled their mast quickly with practiced ease. They had served on their ship together for a lifetime, fighting other pirates and monsters. Being mighty pirates was a dangerous job, not for the faint of heart, which is why neither of them were scared when they reached the highest stable branch.

Dinky edged out as far as she dared so Pipsqueak could clamber up the final part. He looked out at the view and for a moment all thoughts of pirates and ships were washed away.

"Wow..." Dinky breathed, eyes wide as if to take as much of the view in as she could.

The Whitetail Wood stretched away from them, curving over subtle hills and caves. Endless spring leaves made a multicoloured patchwork of the land, purple, orange, red, green. It was like an ocean of colour, gently rippling in the wind as a breeze would flow across the open sea. They could see forever!

An unfamiliar feeling sunk into Pipsqueak as he stared at the incredible view. Sitting there beside his best friend as they watched the peaceful forest sway made him feel... content. He couldn't think of anywhere he would rather be, or anypony he'd rather be with. With that in mind, he smiled at Dinky and she returned it.

They had met on Pipsqueak's very first day in Ponyville. He had been so nervous and scared of everypony back then. His mother sent him out to buy some sweets to ease his anxiety while she moved their belongings into their new home, and it was as he trotted quietly through town that the grey filly crossed his path.

He had been looking at the ground and she had been looking away, so they collided in a puff of dust and shouts of surprise. The bits he was carrying spilt out across the road, shining golden flecks amongst dirt.

"I'm so sorry!" squeaked the filly, looking at the mess.

Pipsqueak forced himself to speak, swallowing his nervousness. "It's okay," he said quietly as he began picking up his money.

She rushed to help him, darting around the road. "I should've looked where I was going. I walk into things a lot 'cause I daydream and stuff. My mum says I got it from her," she rambled amiably as she finished the task and passed him the bits. Pipsqueak tried to thank her but the words caught in his throat. "Hey," Dinky cocked her head curiously, "I've never seen you before. Are you new in town?"

He nodded, words failing him. She had been the first pony to talk to him since they arrived that morning.

"Well, let me welcome you to Ponyville!" She smiled and offered him a hoof, which he shook hesitantly. "So what kinda stuff do you like?" Her friendly smile was contagious

and he couldn't keep himself from baring a toothy grin. If all the ponies in this town were like that, he was beginning to like this place.

"I like pirates!" he had declared.

Dinky giggled at his enthusiasm. "Me too! Hey, where were you going? I can help you find stuff."

"I was looking for a sweets shop to buy some... sweets." He had felt a little silly saying that.

She stuck her tongue out. "Well *duh*. C'mon, I'll take you to Sugarcube Corner." The filly had taken a few steps away before looking back with that smile he liked so much. He had hastened to follow her.

That same smile was a mirror image of the one she wore on the branch beside him. Ever friendly, ever reassuring. It drove away his anxiety every time he saw it.

"You're the best friend ever," he blurted out.

She frowned and he was suddenly worried he shouldn't have said that. But his fears were assuaged by her next words. "How can I be the best friend ever? That's you."

Pipsqueak rubbed his chin thoughtfully and Dinky did the same. Then, at the same time, they gasped with sudden realisation. "We can both be best friends!" the little ponies cried in unison. They grinned and pirate-hugged. It was a normal hug, but they both said 'Arrr' during it. That one was Dinky's idea and Pipsqueak had approved greatly.

They parted and something caught his attention. He gestured to the forest on the other side of Dinky. "What's that?" She turned and squinted through the canopy of colours. A little blue speckle reflected sunlight from beneath the trees.

"I think... it's a little lake!" she squealed excitedly.

"A lake?!" Pipsqueak had never heard of a lake in the Whitetail Wood before, and they played there all the time.

"Yeah! C'mon, we *have* to check it out!"

The feeling was mutual and the colt slipped onto a lower branch and carefully yet excitedly descended from their tree. The ponies keeping the ship afloat had moved on to

the next adventure, so the ship sunk beneath the waves of thought once more. And the tree remained.

Pipsqueak dropped to the stick-littered ground and waited for Dinky to arrive beside him. A sharp *snap* was followed by a short scream and suddenly a weight crashed into his back and drove him to the ground. The sticks and twigs scratched against his belly and he yelped in surprise.

Dinky had fallen, but only from the lowest layer of branches. Pipsqueak had served as an incredibly soft landing platform, not that he had any choice in the matter.

The filly climbed off him and helped him up worriedly. "Are you okay? I'm sorry! I was thinking about the lake and I slipped!"

Pipsqueak winced at the ache in his back. It would certainly bruise later. "I'm okay... are you? You fell..."

Dinky nodded reassuringly. "I'm fine. You sorta cushioned my fall." She looked slightly sheepish. "Sorry again."

The colt waved away her apology as he brushed dirt off his coat. "That's what best friends are for," he said. Dinky laughed but still looked like she was feeling guilty so Pipsqueak suggested, "Let's just go explore that lake, yeah? I feel fine."

Having been reassured herself, the filly led Pipsqueak into the forest in the direction of the lake. From what he had seen, it was more of an over-sized pond, but he couldn't think of a better word to call it. Only the faint reflection of sunlight off the still surface had alerted him, tucked away as it was beneath the trees.

They came upon it quickly, as it was not far from their giant oak. The little ponies crashed through a spiky thicket of bushes and stumbled to the edge of a clear little pool. It was the size of house and just as deep.

"Cool!" Dinky squeaked before she dipped her hoof in the water. "Hey, it's kinda nice. Wanna swim?"

Pipsqueak answered her by unbuckling his sword belt and leaping over her head and landing in the water, splashing the filly and soaking her to the bone. He surfaced and looked back innocently. "Oops."

"I'll give *you* oops!" Dinky shouted in mock anger, diving at him. He yelped and backed away, swimming as fast as he could to the centre of the mini-lake. Dinky growled like a monster as she pursued him. He splashed back at her and couldn't help breaking into laughter when she caught him, grabbing him around the waist and tickling him underwater. The filly giggled uncontrollably when he returned the attack, digging his hooves into her ribs.

"Oh you're going to pay for that!" she declared when he stopped. Her eyes itched from the water and she rubbed at them vigorously, but when they cleared Pipsqueak was nowhere in sight. He had submerged himself and was slowly circling around behind Dinky for a surprise attack.

Just before he launched his assault, a glint in the corner of his eye distracted him. Buried underneath some dirt and underwater weeds, something golden flashed. His eyes widened and he quickly surfaced, sucking in air. Dinky spun around, bracing for the attack but was instead met with the colt's excited expression. "I saw something shiny down there!" he gasped.

Her eyebrows rose instantly. "Really?! Is it treasure?" In moments she was as energised as him.

"I don't know, let's go look!" Pipsqueak regained his breath and together they dove beneath the water once more.

Their vision was blurred but there was no mistaking the glint this time. They swam down furiously and tore at the weeds. They came apart quickly and revealed a little brown pouch with a hole torn in it, revealing a tiny speck of yellow inside. The two little ponies exchanged a look of pure amazement and Dinky quickly scooped up the pouch. They returned to the surface as quick as they could manage, bursting through into fresh air again.

What followed was a torrential flow of high-pitched gibberish as one of their fantasies came true. The pair rushed to the side of the lake and climbed out. Not even the suddenly freezing wind dampened their spirits.

Dinky dropped the pouch on the ground and two yellow discs clinked out onto the dirt. For a brief moment, the ponies stood in absolute shock and disbelief. Then, simultaneously, they leapt into the air and hugged each other.

"Treasuuuure!"

When they parted, they immediately dropped to the ground and began inspecting their loot.

"They are gold doubloons!" Pipsqueak squeaked.

"No, they're galleons!" Dinky countered.

The colt slapped a hoof to his face. "A galleon is a ship, Dinky."

"Yeah," she held the coin up to his face, "And what does that look like?"

On the side facing Pipsqueak there was a mighty ship carved with all the sails unfurled, caught in a great wind. "Wow. That's so cool!" he shouted, taking the coin into his own hoof.

"I know right? The other side is just a star." Dinky picked up the other coin. Pipsqueak glanced at the other side momentarily, but it was the ship that held his attention. He could almost see the sails rippling in the wind, the waves crashing against the bow as it charged through the water.

His best friend held the pouch open for him. "The sun's gonna go down soon, Pip. Let's take them back to Ponyville so they don't get lost." Reluctantly, the colt relinquished his coin into the brown container that Dinky carefully gripped in her teeth. Pipsqueak put his sword belt back on, the metal buckle very cold against him.

They began to walk back in the direction of their homes, shivering slightly as the wind rolled over their wet fur. As they trudged between trees and around shrubs, they pondered the origin of the coins.

"Maybe a pirate king hid his hoard there but most of it got stolen?" Pipsqueak offered.

"What would a pirate king be doing so far from the ocean?" Dinky shook her head. "I think somepony used the lake as a wishing well."

The colt sighed dejectedly. "But that's *boooringgg!*"

The filly raised her head high, trying to look like a Canterlot pony. "Well, sir, I'm just being rash-on-al."

"Huh?"

"It means I'm making sense and you're not." She stuck her tongue out and giggled, ruining the high-class image. Pipsqueak rolled his eyes and chuckled, head still swirling with images of pirate kings and chests full of gold.

Their discussion continued even as the sky faded into a warm orange and they arrived at Ponyville as the sun kissed the horizon. There were still many ponies out and about, some just enjoying the view, others running last-minute errands. Dinky started to look agitated.

"What's wrong?" asked Pipsqueak as they came to a stop in the middle of the town.

She bit her lip worriedly. "My mum doesn't like it when I stay out past sunset."

"You can just say you were at my house," he suggested.

"I suppose... but I really should go home. I don't like making her worry."

Pipsqueak thought that was rather sweet of his best friend. "Alright then. What should we do with the coins?"

She hesitated for a moment and then placed the pouch on the ground, nudging it towards him with one hoof. "You take them. You've loved pirates your whole life, I only started when you got here."

Though he was touched, he didn't think that was the best solution. "But without you, we wouldn't have found them."

"Well... what do you want to do then?"

He thought for a moment and then his eyes lit up with brilliance. "I've got it!" He kicked open the pouch and slid one coin over to Dinky. "We each get a coin! They can be..." he racked his brain, "Super special pirate best friend coins!"

Dinky beamed and quickly rushed forward to pirate-hug him. He returned it with enthusiasm and they started laughing, drawing a few amused looks from passersby. When they parted, their ribs ached from mirth.

"I'll see you tomorrow, super special pirate best friend!" Dinky shouted as she trotted away waving the gold coin.

"You bet!" Pipsqueak raised his doubloon in a salute.

The grin hurt his cheeks but it never left his face even when Dinky had long vanished from sight. For a day, they had been real pirates. They found real treasure! It was as if everything he wished for had come true. And it was all thanks to Dinky.

He looked at the coin fondly once more, rolling it between his hooves. The mighty vessel seemed to rock with the motion, like it was in a tiny golden ocean. Pipsqueak squinted and looked closer. Two little carvings he had missed before now stood out in the sunset light.

There, on the bow of the ship, were two little ponies.