



# Gaia

By  
Squeak

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# Chapter 1

The earth spun through space. Basking in the light of the sun on one side, and of the moon on the other. The eternal dance playing out as it had for untold years. The sun roaring and bright, the moon cold and aloof, while the earth sat in between, bustling with life and growth.

Below on the expansive surface of the world, in a country, in a village, in a house by the forest a yellow pegasus walked out the door to check on her animals. She was not particularly brash, nor brave, or all that strong of will. And the day was not of particular importance. Still, on that unimportant day, the unassuming pony would uncover a long held secret.

She headed toward the trees, her pink mane bouncing behind her, twin baskets draped across her back, humming merrily as she walked through the forest entrance. The two tallest trees standing on either side, like sentries, she thought, watching over all that lived there.

It was a pleasant day, few clouds hung in the sky and it was not too hot or cold, spring had recently begun. It was her favorite time of year, the fresh shoots of grass peaking up through the newly damp earth after they had cleared the snow. The flowers beginning to poke out from the dense foliage, the air smelled of nature and life. She inhaled deeply.

A squirrel scampered down from a nearby tree and situated itself in front of her curiously. It was young, she had not met this one the previous year. It was one of the forests numerous new inhabitants. She reached into her basket and pulled out a nut, placing it gently on the ground.

"Hello little squirrel," she said softly. "My name is Fluttershy, it's very nice to meet you."

It sniffed at her for a moment, turning its head to the side. Then it quickly grabbed the nut and dashed back up into the trees. Fluttershy chuckled to herself as she watched it jump nimbly from tree to tree. She loved animals more than almost anything else.

Fluttershy continued her work, laying specific foods in front of the burrows and nests of every animal. The rabbits got lettuce, the birds got seed and

the squirrels got nuts among others. She went about her day until the work was done. The animals of the forest chirped and squeaked happily as they ate. She sat for a moment, just listening. Wind rustled the leaves and moles dug through the soil, all of it added to the music of the forest. She sighed contentedly, eyes closed.

After a moment, she reached into her basket a final time. "I've got one more mouth to feed," she said smiling. "Mine."

Fluttershy laid out a blanket, on which she placed a daisy sandwich, some spring water and a cookie. She ate methodically, two bites of the sandwich, a drink of water, and repeat. As she had her breakfast, something sparkled among the bushes. It caught her eye, she paused, trying to make out what it was. She couldn't see it clearly in the shadow of the bushes, still it seemed to glow vaguely in the patches of sun that broke through the leaves. She finished her sandwich and her water. Getting up, she walked cautiously forwards, the object sparkled brighter as she approached.

Peering downwards, she saw it was a small glass ball. It looked as though it'd been there for a while. It was dirty, only a small bit of its surface shining under the grime. Inside, small slivers of green hung suspended in the clear glass. It was beautiful.

"Oh my..." Fluttershy said under her breath.

She went back to her baskets to grab a napkin, then carefully gripped the small object. She pulled, but nothing happened.

"You're stubborn, aren't you?" she muttered to herself, trying again.

Fluttershy pulled, she tugged and she heaved with all her might, but still it stayed stuck in the ground.

"I bet a strong pony like Rainbow Dash could get you out." She sighed.

"Now, what am I going to do?" She sat back on her haunches, staring at the stubborn thing. Her efforts had knocked some more of the dirt away, but otherwise did nothing. It looked even prettier in the light, almost glowing in the sun.

Fluttershy had an idea. She got up and walked towards the tree line. Searching carefully, she selected a sturdy branch and returned with it clenched between her teeth. "This should work," she said hopefully.

The yellow pony pushed the stick into the soil, making sure to position it beneath the ball. Carefully, she placed both her forehooves on the high end up the branch and pushed downwards.

The ball budged slightly.

Encouraged, she pushed harder. Placing all of her rather small weight onto the branch.

Many things happened at once, most of which Fluttershy was unaware of. From her perspective, the ground began to shake, and the ball came free with a loud 'pop!'.

Outside of her perspective, a magic old and strong began to unravel, like a dress gripped by a single thread. The world slowed on its axis and something was sent hurtling out from the core like a rocket of light, up through the crust and into the forest behind her.

Fluttershy fell onto her haunches as the shaking stopped. She looked around confused. What had happened? Was that an earthquake? She worriedly got to her hooves and dashed around, checking to see if any burrows had collapsed, or trees had fallen. Seeing no damage, she sighed with relief. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the glass ball sitting in a pile of leaves. Completely free of soil. She could see even more clearly the slivers of green suspended inside, they looked like leaves. She wandered over, picking it up, she gently brought it back to her blanket, where she poked it with a hoof.

"Oh how lovely," she said happily. "I wonder who left you in there? Are you lost?" she asked it. "I hope you're not important to anypony, I bet they'd miss you."

As she rolled it, the ball moved with an odd grace along the uneven surface of the blanket. The leaves inside almost seemed to spin and dance in the sun.

"I can't wait to show you to Angel and the others."

Suddenly, a loud boom rang out from behind her. She jumped with a yelp, quickly running to the nearest tree and hiding behind it, leaving the ball on the blanket. Fluttershy's heart hammered in her chest as she peeked out to see what'd happened.

The earth was loose and shaken in a heap around where the sound had come from. Beside it stood an earth pony. Fluttershy let out another yelp and pressed herself back against the trunk of the tree, breathing heavily.

The earth pony, a mare by the looks of it, looked around bleary eyed and opened her mouth to say something. All she managed was a few squeaks before she gave up. Fluttershy looked out again, wondering if perhaps she'd been hurt. Looking at her the second time, Fluttershy couldn't help being stunned at how beautiful she was.

It was a strange sort of beauty. She was taller and more slender than the average earth pony, standing a good head higher than Fluttershy. She was dirty, but that didn't seem to change much. Her coat was a deep brown color, offset by a light green mane and tail, which were tangled and matted, almost dragging along the ground. Her eyes were a deep green as well, and they looked curiously out from under her dirty mess of a mane. She spied Fluttershy's blanket sitting by the tree. Trying to walk over, her legs collapsed sending her tumbling onto the ground.

Fluttershy was at her side before she knew what was happening.

"Oh my!" she said worriedly. "Are you okay?" She looked the strange mare up and down, trying to see any injuries.

"Ahhh, ahhh," rasped the mare.

"You can't speak? Do you need water?"

The mare nodded.

Fluttershy quickly walked over to her saddlebag, grabbing an extra bottle of water and a few handkerchiefs she'd used to wrap the food. She bundled them together and placed them under the mare's head, gently placing the bottle up to her lips. She drank lightly for a long time, emptying the bottle before she took a breath.

"Better?"

The mare nodded again.

"Can you speak now?" Fluttershy asked, concerned.

"I...I.." she tried. The mare looked confused for a moment, her eyes looking down at her

snout oddly. She worked her jaw back and forth a few times. "I...can..." she said, sounding almost surprised. "I can...speak..."

"Good!" Fluttershy said happily. Suddenly, she remembered herself and backed up a few paces. "I'm...um...very happy you seem alright," she said softly.

"Alright" said the mare, trying the word out on her tongue. "I am...alright."

Fluttershy nodded in agreement. "What's, well....excuse my asking if it's rude, we've only just met but...what's your name?"

"Name," said the mare, smiling at the word. "Name is alright."

"Your name is....Name?" asked Fluttershy. "Not that it's a bad name if it is!" she added quickly. "It's just...well....oh dear..."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said the mare happily, trying to get to her hooves.

"Speaking is...." She looked up at the sky for a moment, trying to figure out a word. Her eyes shot wide for a moment, as though she were surprised to see it was there.

"Fun?" Fluttershy offered.

"Fun!" the mare echoed, forgetting about the sky. "Language, it's...familiar....fun!"

Fluttershy squeaked, and backed away from the mare's exuberance. She seemed to get stranger the more she spoke. "Do....you have a home?" she asked quietly.

"Home?" asked the mare. She looked around the forest, still shakily trying to stand. She

appeared disoriented until she looked at the soil below her. The mare stomped a hoof resolutely. "Home!" She grinned at Fluttershy as though she had just solved a complicated puzzle. Her stomping threw her off balance, she teetered almost falling again before Fluttershy ran over to support her. The smaller pony strained under the weight.

"I am small..." said the mare in wonderment. "There's so little to move...." she looked down at her rather slender frame.

This was the longest sentence Fluttershy had heard her put together on her own. Perhaps she would get some answers out of her after all. "You live in the forest?"

The mare shook her head. Looking at the ground, she stomped her hoof into the dirt again, leaning heavily against Fluttershy. "Home!"

Fluttershy yelped at this declaration. Her strange visitor's excitement unsettled her slightly, she always fretted about meeting new ponies. Fluttershy felt far out of her depth. She decided to try another route. "Um...do you have any family?"

The mare tried to stand on her own again. "Do I...have family?" she asked, tilting her head. She looked again to the sky. "Yes!" she said. "Family!"

Fluttershy waited for her to continue, but she remained standing there, neck craned up in the air. The yellow mare sighed, quite unsure what to do. This wasn't her area of expertise, she dealt with animals, not ponies, but she was concerned about the mare, whose name may or may not have been Name. Still, she could apparently stand on her own now and seemed fairly alright. She'd been out too long, if she didn't get home soon, Angle would be worried.

"Okay...um....Name. I really need to get home, do you need some help finding your way out of the forest?...um...I can help if you want me too...but if you don't that's fine too, if you can make it back alone."

"Alone...." the mare repeated, looking back down at Fluttershy, her smile was gone. "Alone...."

"Um...I'm sorry, is something wrong?"

The mare sniffed. "I don't want to be..." she said softly, tears at the corners of her eyes.

"Oh! Um...I sorry! Did I do something wrong? I didn't mean to!" Fluttershy floundered at the sudden change of tone.

"I don't want to be....alone." The mare sniffed again, looking at Fluttershy, her green eyes burning into hers. "Please?"



The yellow pegasus didn't know what to say. She didn't even fully comprehend what had just happened. This was too much, all she'd wanted to do was feed the animals. She wasn't cut out for this. This was a job for a more outgoing pony, like her friend Twilight or Applejack, not her. But she knew one thing, she couldn't leave a pony in need. The mare looked as though she were on the verge of tears. Fluttershy couldn't just leave her in the woods,.

"It's okay, don't cry." She put a reassuring hoof on the mare's back, at least as far as she could reach. "Come with me, I have a house just this way. We can sort this whole thing out...if you want."

The mare nodded.

"Now, before we go, I don't think I can call you Name...." said Fluttershy softly. "If it's alright, I need something to call you."

The mare looked around for a moment until her eyes fell on a daisy. "Flower!" she announced, drying her eyes. "Call me flower."

Fluttershy smiled. "Flower, that's a lovely name."

She looked curiously at the yellow mare. "You?"

"Oh!" Fluttershy turned red for a minute. "I never told you my name. That's rude isn't it? I'm sorry. My name is Fluttershy."

"Fluttershy!" Flower echoed, another smile breaking out over her face. She grabbed the startled pegasus in a hug. "Lovely name."

Fluttershy turned several shades redder in the larger pony's grip. "Um....please let go of me...not that I don't appreciate it. It's just....we should go. Angel will be worried."

Flower released the flustered mare. "Angel?" she asked quizzically.

"Oh, that's my friend. He's a bunny, he gets terribly worried if I'm out too late."

"We don't want to worry Angel," Flower said, looking rather pleased with herself. "we have to get home."

Fluttershy stared for a moment. "You must be feeling better," she remarked quietly. "Your speech is much clearer now."

Flower blinked. "I am....unskilled. I have not spoken in a..." She thought for a moment. "long time."

Fluttershy looked worried. "Have you been out here alone that long?"

"Alone...." Flower said that word again, seeming to sag under its weight.

"Oh! Don't worry! I-I'm not going to leave you alone," Fluttershy added quickly. "Here, let's get home, you don't have to tell me if you don't want too." She sat the mare down. "Um...if you'll just wait a moment. I have to get my things."

Fluttershy collected the handkerchiefs she'd made into a makeshift pillow, folding each one before gently placing them back into her basket. Once she had finished, she turned to fold up the blanket, only to find Flower standing next to it warily eyeing the cookie she'd left sitting there.

"Um...I'm sorry, did you want that?" asked Fluttershy. "You can have it, I'm not hungry."

Flower sniffed at it. "What is it?" she asked warily.

"It's...well...it's a cookie. You've never had one?"

Flower shook her head. "What is a cookie?" she asked.

Fluttershy had promised not to pry, but her curiosity was steadily growing. "Well...It's a small baked piece of dough, with things inside to make it sweet," she explained. "This is oatmeal...I think it's good, but..."

The cookie vanished, Flower chewed greedily as she ate, crumbs spilling down her face as her teeth worked oddly together.

"Do you....Like it?" Fluttershy hazarded.

Flower smiled, bits of cookie stuck in her teeth. "Have you tried this!?" she asked. "It's...." She paused. "Lovely!"

"Well...I made it this morning..." Fluttershy admitted, blushing.

"Made this?" Flower cocked her head to the side. "There's more?"

“Yes, I made a tray of them. You can have some more....I always make far too many, but Angle likes them so yo-”

“We have to get home!” Flower jerked up suddenly. “We don’t want to worry Angel!”

“Well yes but-” Fluttershy found herself being shoved towards the forest path. “Oh, but my blanket...Flower please wait....My house is that way!!...”

Flower had apparently found her legs. She quickly shoved in the direction Fluttershy pointed. The yellow pony protested meekly as she was pushed forwards. Though she eventually gave up and offered the occasional bit of direction to Flower’s exuberant pushing.

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Behind them, in the forest, the fresh green leaves of spring began to turn a sickly brown. Something dark slithered out from the hole in the earth. It quickly shifted and squirmed getting its bearings. Beneath it the grass turned dull and grey. The forest became deathly quiet, no birds sang, and no squirrels chattered. The thing quickly slithered out of sight, into the darkness of the trees, leaving decay in its wake.

# Chapter 2

There was a crash in the library.

The earth shuddered as a purple unicorn wobbled out of her study and into the library proper. She looked around in confusion as books tumbled from their shelves. Leaves fell like rain from outside, littering the floor. She quickly ran over to a small basket in the corner, nudging its contents with a hoof.

“Spike! Spike wake up! Something’s happening!”

“Huh? What is it?” the basket mumbled.

A small statue of Adam Doulasso fell from a nearby shelf onto the head of the sleeping dragon inside. He sat up with a start, rubbing his head.

“I don’t know!” yelled Twilight.

“Is it an earthquake?” asked Spike.

“I thought about that, but Ponyville isn’t anywhere near a fault line.”

Spike paused. “Does Ponyville know that?”

“This is no time for jokes!” Twilight tried to keep her balance as the shaking got worse. “This is serious!”

As she spoke the earth stopped shaking. Outside a few stray leaves rained to the ground, floating gently through the air.

“See, it fixed itself, now back to napping!”

“Spike!” Twilight jerked the blanket away from the lazy dragon. “It may be over now, but we have to figure out what caused that tectonic impaction!”

“The what?”

Twilight sighed. “The earthquake. It could be important. It’s not everyday the ground shakes beneath your hooves. What if it happens again? Who

knows what could be causing it! We need to investigate.” She grabbed a pair of saddlebags from a coat by the door. “Spike, take a letter.”

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They eventually made it to the house. Flower’s sense of direction left much to be desired. Fluttershy had discovered that ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ were out of the question and had to resort to squeaking out landmarks and pointing the way as Flower’s boundless energy propelled them around the forest. They skidded to a stop as they crossed the gate onto Fluttershy’s land. A cross looking rabbit emerged from inside the house. He marched up to them tapping his foot angrily.

“Angel, I’m sorry I’m late...I didn’t want to worry you....but I met someone in the forest.” She nodded to the tall brown earth pony behind her. “This is Flower.”

Flower looked down at the small rodent curiously. “Angel?” she asked.

“Yes.” Fluttershy said quietly. “He’s my asista-...well...not really....he’s my pe-...no not that I suppose.....He’s my friend. Yes, that’s it, my friend.” She nodded to herself.

“Hello, Angel.” said Flower.

Angel’s eyes shot wide, he looked between Fluttershy and the earth pony, bewildered, before making various high pitched squeaking noises.

Fluttershy looked on, confused. “Is something wrong?”

Angel pointed to the brown and green pony, who smiled in amusement.

“Flower?” Fluttershy guessed.

Angel poked his nose twice, signaling she was correct. He lowered one ear and waggled the other. He and Fluttershy did this often, this signal meant ‘Is’.

“Flower is....” Fluttershy continued.

Angel touched his nose again. He raised both paws above his head and brought them down around him meeting at the bottom.

“Circle?” Flower attempted. “This is...fun!”

The small rabbit shook his head. He made the gesture again.

“Flower is....big?” Fluttershy guessed. “Well she is rather tall...but um...that’s not very nice.”

Angel slapped his forehead in exasperation. He hopped over to a nearby stream, quickly returning with a pile of mud, some grass, and a walnut shell filled with water. He pointed insistently towards each, then to Flower.

“Flower....needs a bath?” Fluttershy looked at the rather bedraggled mare. “Well, yes, she is kind of dirty....Um...I’m sorry...no offence,” she added quickly

Flower just smiled.

Angel shook his head, squeaking angrily. He picked up the mud and patted it into a circle, layering the grass on top, and pouring water over it. The small rabbit pointed urgently at the small display then again to Flower.

Flower looked down at the mixture, her smile grew even wider. “Home,” she said fondly.

Fluttershy was more confused than ever. “I’m sorry Angel, but I really don’t know what you’re trying to tell me...” She squinted at the circular pile of mud, which was slowly crumbling on the ground. “It’s very pretty though. It looks kind of like a cookie.”

Fluttershy squeaked as she found herself once again being exuberantly shoved towards the door. Angel jumped out of the way as Flower dashed into the house. The word “Cookies!” echoed back as the door slammed behind them.

Fluttershy stumbled into the kitchen, trying not to fall head over tail onto the tiled floor. She fumbled for a minute trying to keep her balance. Flower stood in the doorway smiling expectantly.

“Are they in here?” she asked.

Fluttershy stood there for a moment. It’d always taken her a while to let anyone in, it was her nature. Yet in the last hour or so somepony had gone from random stranger in the woods to over for cookies before she had time

to register what happened. She fretted internally, her mind turning to the thousand little things it always did in the presence of new ponies. What must the mare think of her? Her house, her kitchen, her animals, this was far too fast. But she couldn't lose focus of the main point. It was obvious the Flower needed some help, Fluttershy couldn't just turn her out.

She would simply figure out where Flower had come from and perhaps get one of the braver ponies to take her home, Fluttershy decided. Simple as that. Then she'd be back to feeding her animals and tending the garden as usual. She worried momentarily how to pose such questions without sounding rude, but what better start than cookies? Flower's speech seemed to be getting better by the second, so if she could just find the right words she could get back to her routine.

"Um...yes, they're right over there on the counter." she nodded. "So...how about I...well...I could put some tea on....I have some lavender and chia in the kitchen....if you like tea. If you don't I have some milk. But, if you just want cookies that's fine too." Said Fluttershy, twiddling her hooves.

Flower turned her head to the side. "Tea?"

"Well, yes, tea...do you like tea?" Fluttershy asked.

"Like tea...." Flower said experimentally. "Do I like tea?" she looked at Fluttershy curiously.

"Oh...well.." Fluttershy was at a loss. "I don't know...do you?"

Flower looked at the ceiling for a minute, her face scrunched up in thought. "Do I like tea?..." she said again. Her face grew resolute. "Yes!" she announced, stomping a hoof. "I like tea!"

"That's....good..." Fluttershy said, unsure. "I'll just fetch the kettle...if you'll wait a moment." She walked over to one of the many cabinets that adorned the walls. After some shuffling she returned with a small white kettle with a sunflower on the side. Fluttershy walked over to the sink, filled it with water and sat it over the fireplace.

A small pair of bellows were attached to the floor at the front of the hearth. She stepped on it gently with a hoof. The small embers left over from breakfast sprang to life, roaring and smoking as the fire started.

Flower's face turned white. She jumped backwards, shaking terribly. "Fire!" she yelled. "Fire!" Flower tried to back under the kitchen table though she was far too big. Cups and saucers went tumbling onto the floor shattering. Flower hunched against the wall shaking like a leaf.

Fluttershy reared back in shock. Looking at the shattered plates, Flower lay huddled beneath the table, it shook as she moved, barely managing to cover her body. Fluttershy leaned under the table near Flower's side. She tried to suppress her surprise and calm the frightened mare. "It's okay," she said softly. "It's alright, nothing's going to hurt you see?" She pointed to the fireplace. "I'm just making tea. It'll be alright." Flower's eyes were closed tight, she still shook, trying to inch closer to the wall. Fluttershy reached out a hoof, placing it gently against the her side.

"I don't like fire..." said Flower quietly. "I don't like it..." Her voice began to shake.

"That's fine," She gently patted her side. "But we're perfectly safe. Okay?"

Flower nodded, her eyes still tightly shut.

"There now, " Fluttershy helped Flower out from under the table. "If you don't like fire you can wait in the living room." She gently walked her out of the kitchen. Sitting her on the couch. "Wait here alright? I'll bring the tea when it's ready."

Flower nodded, still visibly shaken.

Fluttershy tried to smile encouragingly before she returned to the kitchen and sat down to wait on the tea. Things were getting strange, Flower had reacted so fearfully to a simple cooking fire. Fluttershy knew a few ponies who weren't all that fond of fire, but none of them reacted quite like that. She looked desperately for some way to ask Flower about it. Finding nothing, she busied herself sweeping up pieces of the plates and cups that had fallen during the scare.

The kettle whistled plaintively from the fire place. Fluttershy quickly grabbed a pot holder in her mouth gentled removed it, setting it on a silver tray she had sitting on the counter. She then walked over to the glass cabinet in the corner and returned with two tea cups, each with a matching blue flower on the side. She sat them across from each other on the tray and brought it to the living room, sitting it on the table in the corner. Flower



watched with interest as she set a small bag of tea in each. "You can sit down if you like....or you could stand...whatever you're comfortable with."

Flower attempted to sit in the rather small chair at the opposite end of the table. Placing her hind legs in various positions in an effort to get comfortable. Failing this, she opted to simply sit on the floor, being more than tall enough to be able to reach her tea. She smiled at Fluttershy, who smiled awkwardly in turn.

"Thank you," said Flower. "It has been very nice to meet you." She looked away for a moment. "I am sorry about the kitchen."

The yellow pegasus blushed slightly. "Well..um..thank you...It's been nice meeting you too..Don't worry about the kitchen...really, It's alright."

Flower's smile returned. "I am glad."

Fluttershy sipped her tea. "So....if you don't mind my asking...what were you doing in the woods?"

"Doing?" Flower's face scrunched up for a moment. "I do not know. I suppose I was...sleeping."

Now Fluttershy was getting somewhere. "So you took a nap and got lost?"

"No, not lost. Found." Flower grinned.

"Oh..." said Fluttershy. "What do you mean?"

"I have been lost." Flower looked at her tea, admiring her reflection in the dark brown surface.

Fluttershy was more confused than ever. "Yes, you were lost in the forest. Lucky I found you I suppose." She smiled awkwardly.

"No, I was not lost in the forest, I was found in the forest." The slender mare poked at her tea cup experimentally.

Fluttershy decided to try a different approach. "So...then...where were you lost?"

Flower stopped looking at her tea cup and thought for a moment. "I am not sure. I was there a very long time. But now," she clicked her hooves together happily, "I am here!"

This wasn't getting Fluttershy anywhere. She felt happy that Flower seemed to be enjoying herself, but she really needed more to go on. Sipping her tea thoughtfully, she noticed that Flower had yet to take a sip.

"Do you..um...not like this kind? I have others." she offered.

Flower sniffed at the cup. "I like tea." she said. "It smells nice."

Fluttershy nodded. A silence fell over the table. Fluttershy looked for something to say. Finding nothing, she continued to sip her tea, while Flower sat there sniffing the warm smoke as it rose from her cup. Finally, after several minutes, Flower bowed her head to take a sip.

The cup went clattering to the floor as she jerked backward, her tongue hanging out.

"Hot! Hot! Hot!"

\*

In the forest, the ooze lay in wait. The grass around it lay dead or dying in pale, browning patches, the trees it brushed against turned a sickly grey, withering as their leaves fell onto the forest floor. It had slithered to the edge of the small village and watched as the ponies there went about their business, going into shops, playing in the evening light.

It quivered and bubbled. It did not like this place.

An acorn fell from one of the rotted trees. The ooze shrank away from it quickly, hiding beneath a nearby bush.

It waited.

A squirrel scampered down from the branches. It squeaked, jumping nimbly over to retrieve its lost nut. Before it reached its destination the ooze struck.

It wrapped itself around the small creature. It struggled against the thing holding it, but the ooze covered its face, soon its struggles grew weak then

stopped all together. The ooze sat for a moment, before slithering back under the bush. There was a faint sound, then a squirrel emerged. It looked normal in all respects, except that its left paw was dark purple.

The Squirrel looked towards the village, its eyes glinted against the fading light. Then it

leapt nimbly towards the nearest shop, its movements were quick and efficient. It dashed through the streets without anypony taking the slightest notice.

It hid.

It waited.

\*

Mr.Breezy hummed to himself as he walked towards his store. He sold fans and business had been slow over the winter. But he had a good feeling things would pick up now that spring had started. The second the heat began to rise he would have a line out the door, he was sure of it. Perhaps he'd be able to buy that new vest he'd been eyeing in the shop down the street. But before any of that, he'd have to make sure his store was well stocked. It would be terrible to run out if a heat wave popped up early.

As he walked up the steps towards the door his ears twitched. He turned around, thinking somepony was behind him.

The road was empty besides a few ponies getting in some last minute shopping before the stores closed. He was alone.

He shrugged; he must have been hearing things. But as he turned back to open the door he heard the sound of claws scrabbling at the stairs behind him. He whirled back around, tense and ready to face what might be there.

He relaxed when he saw a squirrel sitting there looking at him with its large beady eyes.

"Oh, well it's just'a wee little squirrel!" He said, exhaling with relief. "You gave me a bit of'a scare there little beastie." Mr.Breezy chuckled. "What're you doing out and about? You ought to be getting ready for bed."

The squirrel cocked its head to the side, still staring.

“Well, aren’t you friendly?” Mr.Breezy remarked. “I’m sorry I can’t stay and chat, little beastie, but I must be off to check my fans.” He turned, pushing open the door with a hoof. “You run along no-”

It struck. The squirrel leapt at Mr. Breezy’s face, its body turning to liquid mid flight. He tried to scream, but found the thing oozing into his mouth. It quickly covered his face snaking its way down his neck and over the rest of the body. He thrashed and fought violently but soon tired, falling to the ground. His legs still kicked and jerked, trying to gain purchase to fight back, but it was useless, he may as well have been kicking at thin air.

The ooze was cold, so unbearably cold.

Mr.Breezy suddenly felt sleepy. He tried to struggle more, but eventually his resistance ended. The ooze dragged him into the shop, the door slamming shut behind it.

There was silence for several minutes. The wind whistled through ponyville as the night continued its march. It was cold, colder than usual. The ponies climbing into their beds to prepare for sleep drew their covers up to their chins against the sudden chill.

As the night drew on the shop door opened. Mr.Breezy peered out. He looked the same besides a pair of shoes he was suddenly wearing. He smiled, looking around the sleeping village then turned, went back inside and closed the door.

He waited.

# Chapter 3

Princess Luna was uneasy as she ushered the moon into place for the night. Something didn't feel right. This was different. Her task was harder than it had been in previous nights, she was sure of it.

The Princess of the moon stood on the castle balcony willing the heavenly body into place. Luna planted her hooves on the cold stone and focused heavily on the task at hoof, straining as her concentration increased to compensate.

The moon finally came to rest. Luna slumped, exhausted. It shouldn't be this hard. She thought, It's never been this hard. She needed to talk to Celestia right away.

The castle's hallways echoed with the sound of her hooves as Luna ran. She still hadn't quite learned the layout of the large structure, having only been there a short time. But she knew it well enough to find her sister.

She arrived at the large door, skidding to a stop. She lifted a hoof and knocked sharply on the ornate wood. Luna tried not to interrupt her sister when she could, but she had a feeling this was important. After waiting several minutes she heard no answer. Luna knocked again, this time with more urgency. The sound echoed through the hallway. Still she heard nothing in return.

"Celestia?" she called. A hint of worry creeping into her voice. "Sister, I have something to tell you!" Luna knocked yet again.

Hearing no answer for the third time, she tried the door. It opened easily, swinging inwards without so much as a faint creak. Luna peeked cautiously inwards. Her sister's quarters were neat as usual, her bed perfectly made in the corner, and her books all sitting in alphabetical order on the shelves by her writing desk.

"Sister?" Luna asked, walking slowly inside. Not seeing her immediately, she walked deeper into the room. Out the corner of her eye noticed one thing was out of place, the balcony door was open. She looked down

towards the floor and saw a single pale white leg was sticking out from the doorway.

“Celestia!” Luna was quickly at her side. The Princess of the sun lay on the stone balcony, eyes wide open, staring at something.

“Do you feel it?” Celestia looked blearily at her sister.

“Celestia! Are you hurt?” Luna tried to help her to her hooves.

“No...I’m fine...but tell me Luna, do you feel it?”

Luna paused, biting her bottom lip. “Yes...something’s different.”

“There’s a chill in the air,” said Celestia, attempting to stand on her own. “I’ve lowered the sun, but it has never taken so much. Something is wrong.” She walked unsteadily into the castle. “The balance is off.”

In front of Celestia there appeared a green ball of flame. It shrank, and with a burst of magic, became a scroll of parchment. Her horn glowed as she grabbed it and sat carefully on the bed.

“...Are you sure you’re alright?” asked Luna, obviously worried.

“Don’t worry. I just need some time to rest.” She smiled weakly. “That’s all.” She squinted at the letter. “And apparently we’re not the only ones who have noticed things aren’t quite right.”

Luna looked at the scroll briefly. “Earthquakes? In Ponyville?”

Celestia nodded slowly. “Have the guards ready a carriage.” She looked towards the sky, where the moon slowly turned above. “We need to see my student.”

\*

Fluttershy lifted the washbucket over Flower’s head, dumping its contents into her mane. The brown mare sat rather morosely in the bathtub staring at her burnt tongue.

“It’ll feel better soon, it’s not that bad of a burn.” Fluttershy assured.

Flower nodded. Poking at her tongue with her hooves.

“Um....Don’t do that please...we haven’t washed those yet.” Fluttershy grabbed a bush. Flower had been dirtier than she had previously thought. Her coat being the same shade as the soil, it had been hard to judge just how much of it was there. But now that she had her in the tub she could see that it had been a long time since Flower had gotten any kind of bath. Fluttershy looked briefly out of the window above the tub. It was dark outside. She had hoped to seek help from her friends in finding out where Flower lived. But it looked as though it would have to wait till morning.

Flower swung her hooves lazily through the water as Fluttershy combed through her mane. It was terribly tangled, but Flower did not complain much as she drew the bush slowly through the knotted loops and soon Fluttershy had it straightened.

“You can step out now,” said Fluttershy laying out a towel on the floor.

Flower hopped happily from the tub and shook herself, spraying water in all directions. Fluttershy squeaked, and threw up her hooves in an effort to stay dry. When she opened her eyes she found Flower standing there, smiling at her. Fluttershy was struck by how much better she looked now that she was clean. Flower’s light green mane hung smoothly over her back, her tail reaching a small ways onto the floor. Her eyes looked even brighter unhidden by her tangled mane. “Beautiful...”

she whispered.

“Yes.” said Flower, her smile turning into a grin. “You look beautiful.”

Fluttershy’s face reddened. “Oh..oh no! Not me. I-I’m not. I mean....” She lapsed into silence.

Flower’s smile dimmed, she looked curiously at the yellow Pegasus. “You look beautiful.” she repeated.

Fluttershy floundered. “Well...not...I mean I don’t-..” She sighed, unable to keep an embarrassed smile from creeping onto her face. “Thank you.”

“You are welcome,” said Flower, her smile returning in full force.

Fluttershy wasn’t sure what to say next, silence fell heavily into the room. Flower yawned loudly, and it suddenly dawned on Fluttershy that since she

could not find out where the mare had come from, Flower would have to sleep here.

“Oh dear...” she said under her breath.

“Is something wrong?” asked Flower.

“Oh, oh no, nothing is wrong,” Fluttershy replied quickly. “It’s just that it’s that it’s nearing bedtime.”

“Bedtime...” Flower tested the word on her tongue. “It’s time to sleep?”

Fluttershy nodded. “Yes.....I suppose you’ll be staying here.”

Flower nodded in turn. “I would like that very much.”

“Alright...You’re a guest, I only have one bed. You can take it...I’ll sleep on the couch.” Fluttershy pointed to the small sofa in the living room. “Sit there. I’ll get the bed ready.”

Flower obediently did as she was told while Fluttershy walked into the bedroom. She got some fresh sheets from the bottom shelf of the wardrobe in the corner, carefully shaking it out before layering it across the mattress. Though spring had begun, she noticed there was a chill in the air, so she decided to fetch the winter blankets from the trunk on the side of her nightstand. She had two, just enough. Fluttershy layed the heavier of them over the mattress, she really didn’t mind the cold all that much, she would make do with the lighter one. After the pillows were fluffed and the creases rubbed out, she returned to the living room.

“You can go in no-”

Flower’s snoring cut her off. She’d fallen asleep on the couch, her long limbs splayed loosely off the sides of the small piece of furniture.

“Oh...” Fluttershy whispered.

She quietly grabbed the blanket she’d brought with her and draped it carefully over Flower. The mare stirred slightly, but didn’t wake up.

“Goodnight...” Fluttershy walked softly back into her bedroom.

It had been a strange day to say the least. she could hear Flower softly snoring in the living room. The yellow Pegasus was oddly comforted by this. She honestly hoped she could find Flower’s home soon, and found



herself wondering if her family was nice, or, if she in fact lived on her own. How long had she been lost? Fluttershy had found out very little during their tea earlier that afternoon. It remained a mystery. Still, she was quite confident her friends would know what to do. Twilight would probably come up with something right away. She was always level headed about such things.

\*

“Uhg!!” yelled Twilight Sparkle, stomping her way through the library door. “I haven’t been able to find anything!”

“Well, we found out that there wasn’t any damage from the quake. That’s good right?” said Spike closing the door.

Twilight sighed. “Yes, I suppose that’s good at least. I’m glad everypony was alright.” She took off her saddlebag and walked over to a large book propped open in the corner. “But none of my readings even show the slightest disturbance! It’s like it never happened! How is that possible!?”

Spike shrugged. “Maybe it’s a shy earthquake?”

Twilight rolled her eyes. “Yeah, Spike, I’m sure that’s it. Perhaps it’s just shy.” She paused. “Shy....”

“Huh?”

“Fluttershy!” Twilight whirled around. “If anypony noticed anything strange about this it would be her! She knows everything about nature. She might have noticed something we missed.”

“Good idea.” Spike peered out the window. “But it’s a bit late to go knocking on her door, don’t you think?”

“Good point.” Twilight conceded. “It’ll have to wait till morning I suppose. Did Celestia ever send a reply to the letter I sent this morning?”

Spike shook his head. “No reply so far.”

“Well, she’s probably busy.” Twilight frowned. “Looks like it’s up to us to get to the bottom of this.”

“Like detectives!?” asked Spike excitedly.

Twilight smiled. "I suppose so. In anycase, we'll head to Fluttershy's house first thing in the morning."

Spike stifled a yawn. "Yeah. Tomorrow, goodnight Twilight."

Twilight headed to her room. "Goodnight Spike" A chill blew in through the open window. They both shivered. "It's awfully cold for spring..." Twilight remarked.

\*

It liked the night, it was dark, and nopony was looking. Wearing Mr.Breezy's face it peeked out the door. The moon was full, it didn't like that, but it would have to do. It avoided what little light the moon offered and slunk towards the forest. It didn't walk like a regular pony, its steps were choppy and irregular. It wasn't used to this shape.

The thing that wasn't Mr.Breezy quietly made its way under the trees, winding through the thick foliage. It knew something was coming. They would try to stop it. It needed more power. There wasn't much time.

The thing that wasn't Mr.Breezy stopped in the middle of a clearing and scrunched up Mr.Breezy's face in concentration. The grass around its hooves withered and died. It spread further, brown shriveled leaves fell from the trees, littering the ground. Woodland creatures scattered in all directions, shrieking in terror.

Soon it was done. The thing that wasn't Mr.Breezy smiled. It would need more, but this would do for now. It turned and walked back towards the shop its face currently owned. The dead leaves crunched satisfyingly under its hooves.

It would be ready.

The air became colder.

# Chapter 4

Twilight shivered in her bed, pulling the covers tightly to her chin. The morning light streamed in through a crack in the curtains. It was oddly quiet outside, the general chatter of ponies and singing of birds usually there to greet her in the morning was nowhere to be heard. The town was silent.

It was this, not any noise in particular but the complete lack thereof that made her decide to get up. For a moment she thought she was dreaming. Then perhaps that she had gone deaf.

Twilight climbed cautiously from bed, the click of her hooves on the wooden floor told her that she could still hear, the sound echoed oddly through the silent library. She felt uneasy.

"Spike?" she asked looking around warily.

The small dragon stirred in his basket at the front of her bed. Twilight prodded him gently.

"Spike?"

"...Wah?" he muttered, his eyes fluttering open. Upon waking he quickly pulled his blanket closer to his body. "What's going on?"

"I'm not sure..." Twilight said quietly. The silence seemed invasive, less a lack of noise and more of a sound of its own, invading and smothering every other sound in the room.

Spike sat up, looking around slowly. "Why's it so cold?"

"I don't know," Twilight whispered. She looked towards the window, the sky was a pale grey, it made the buildings and fixtures of the town look muted and bleached. The trees looked ill, their leaves turning brown on the ends of sagging branches. Very few ponies walked through the square. They looked tired and bedraggled, as though something were weighing them down.

"Something is definitely wrong..." she whispered. "Spike, get out of bed. We're going to see Fluttershy right now."

“Huh? But it’s so early. Do you think she’s even awake yet?”

Twilight surveyed the landscape outside. She felt heavy. Something felt different.

“I don’t know, but If she isn’t....I think we’d better wake her up.”

\*

Something tickled the edge of Fluttershy’s nose. She turned, mumbling in her sleep, but it persisted. She twisted and wiggled in an attempt to get it off, but it clung stubbornly, tickling her nostrils. Eventually she sneezed, this knocked what little sleep that was left away and Fluttershy opened her eyes.

A large flower had flown in from the open window and landed on her bed.

“Oh my...” she said curiously. “It’s a bit early for blooms. But aren’t you lovely.” Fluttershy got out of bed and shook herself a bit. The flower was bright yellow with red speckles throughout the center. She picked it up and tucked it under her wing. “Wait till Angel sees you. We weren’t expecting flowers for at least a fe-”

Fluttershy suddenly remembered something.

“Flower!” she yelled. All of yesterday came flooding back. Finding the strange mare in the woods, taking her home, the tea, the bath, everything. She realized that right at this moment the brown earth pony was sleeping on her couch.

“Oh dear.”

Fluttershy still needed to find out where Flower had come from and get her back home as quickly as possible. Once the daily chores were finished she’d head out to find her friends, bring them in and get this sorted out.

She walked softly into the living room. Flower lay softly snoring on the couch, the blanket Fluttershy had given her tucked under her chin to chase away the unseasonably cold weather. Fluttershy made her way to the kitchen, grabbing a pair of buckets, and her saddlebag. Being very careful, she draped them across her back, and headed towards the door, the buckets clicking slightly against her flanks, despite her best efforts to silence them.

Slowly she reached for the door, grabbing the handle in her mouth, she pulled it open. It creaked slightly. Fluttershy froze.

Behind her Flower stirred on the couch, but did not wake.

Being extra careful, Fluttershy stepped outside and closed the door. She exhaled, now all she had to do was finish her chores, then they could get this mess sorted out.

Behind her she heard a buzzing sound, this was odd as the bumble bees shouldn't have come until at least mid-spring. A small one hovered in front of her nose, zig zagging through the air, she followed it with her eyes, inspecting it closely.

"Oh...hello Mr.Bee." said Fluttershy. "You're awfully early, where are you off..." her eyes came across the outside of her house. "to..."

The small hillock that made up her home was covered in flowers. It seemed as though everything had taken the chance to bloom all at once, there was hardly a speck that wasn't covered in colorful blossoms. The speckled flower she'd found in her bed was only one of many growing on her windowsill, vines clung and claimed over the walls and awnings, coiling around everything in sight, the air was thick with the smell of lavender which grew in patches along the ground, stretching all the way into the forest.

Fluttershy stood in awe. This was impossible, she could accept a few early blooms, there were always at least a couple, but she had never seen anything like this even in the most fertile seasons.

Something squeaked at her left hoof. She looked down to see Angel tapping her insistently with a hind leg.

"I know..." she said distantly "This....this is amazing..."

He squeaked a bit more incessantly, pointing towards the door.

Fluttershy came out of her daze. "Oh..excuse me, are you trying to tell me something?"

Angel pointed to the house.

“Yes, it does look beautiful doesn’t it?...it’s very strange though, I’ll have to check the soil...there must be something going on..”

Angel shook his head. He pointed to the house once more, then placed his paws under his head and made snoring noises.

“Flower?” Fluttershy guessed.

Angel nodded enthusiastically.

“Oh! You’re right!”

Angel jumped up and down with joy.

“I can worry about this later, right now I need to finish the daily chores so we can get her home. I can ask Twilight about the blooms while we’re at it.”

Angel slapped his forehead.

Fluttershy ran off towards the forest, buckets clanging as she went.

\*

The thing that wasn’t Mr.Breezy sat in the shop waiting for the sun to go down. It needed to save it’s energy. They would come soon. It would wait till dark, then it would strike, they wouldn’t see it coming, by the time they did it would be too late.

Mr.Breezy’s face smiled at the thought. It had been too long since it could move freely, far too long. It moved Mr.Breezy’s hooves walking through the store, various fans blew softly on their shelves, their gentle breezes ruffling Mr.Breezy’s mane. It smiled.

Soon the wind would stop, and things would be right, like they were before all this.

In the corner of the shop something scurried along the wall.

The thing that wasn’t Mr.Breezy moved faster than than any pony should have been able to. It reached out Mr.Breezy’s hoof, which was vaguely purple and in an instant the small creature was stuck like flypaper.

It raised the poor thing to Mr.Breezy’s eyes, examining the mouse’s struggling form. Slowly, very slowly, its struggles ceased. The mouse lay

still, only the occasional twitch signalling it was still alive at all. With a pitiful squeak it began to sink. Purple ooze climbing over it's body like living quicksand. Then it was gone.

The thing that wasn't Mr.Breezy smiled wider, it enjoyed the chase. Soon it would have the world as it's game.

It turned, looking towards the window. A few ponies milled about outside, it knew they could sense that something had changed. But they did not know what was coming, what was already here.

Its eyes locked on one pony in particular as it spied, a unicorn with a purple coat, a dragon riding on her back.

Mr.Breezy's tongue licked the air. It could feel it, something coming from this one. There was power there. Power it could use, far more than it could gain from the forest.

It began to think new thoughts.

It began to move its plans forwards.

The thing that wasn't Mr.Breezy slipped quietly out the back door.

The chase began.

\*

Flower opened her eyes, lifting her head from the couch with a yawn. She stretched, getting the cricks and creaks out of her long limbs. She looked around the house. She liked it here, it was warm and inviting. She hadn't had anything like that in such a long time, she couldn't remember when. Thinking further, she couldn't remember the last time she'd gotten a good night's sleep...It couldn't have been that long ago could it?

She banished this thought in favor of getting to her hooves. Flower looked around for the friendly mare, the one who had been so kind to her the previous day. She felt the need to do something for her in return, though she wasn't sure what.

"Ahem," said a voice.

She looked down to see the small bunny from earlier standing at her hooves frowning.

“Angel!” she said smiling. “Hello, Angel, good morning.”

“Can you hear me?” asked Angel

It didn’t occur to Flower that bunnies shouldn’t talk. She nodded.

Angel tapped a foot on the ground. “Good, then you’ve still got a bit of your old talent.....Do you know who you are?”

“I am Flower,” she said.

Angel swiveled his ears. “Besides that, you don’t remember?”

“Remember what?”

“This isn’t good...” Angel paced back and forth. “This really isn’t good.”

“What isn’t good?”

He stopped pacing and looked at her. “I can’t speak of it, we’re forbidden.”

Flower knelt down to Angel’s level. “Who’s forbidden?”

“Everyone,” he said swinging his small paws around. “Everything. I can only hint.”

Flower stared at the small rabbit for a few moments. “If it is forbidden...then that means it is not good...Right?”

Angel sighed. “Yes...”

Flower bit her lip. “Have I done something that is not good?”

Angel looked her over. “No...it wasn’t you.” he rubbed his forehead.

Flower smiled. “Then that is good, right?” she got to her feet. “Where is Fluttershy?”

“She’s outside trying to get the chor--”

Angel was knocked off his feet as Flower dashed past him out the door, it banged against the wall as she barreled through. He stood there for several



moments, staring at the flower petals that fell from the roof into the doorway.

He squeaked a few times, then hopped after her.

“Wait a minute!”

\*

Twilight walked to the edge of town towards the forest where Fluttershy lived. Spike, who in his humble opinion had been woken up far too early, lay napping on her back.

She noticed that things began to look greener as she progressed and that the heaviness in her stride seemed to fade. Maybe she'd just been sleepy?

No, that wasn't it, Twilight was a morning person, she'd always been, that might explain Spike, but not her, she was sure of it. Everything was far too strange, she'd never seen Ponyville in such a state and after the earthquake yesterday she was more than certain something was up. She just had to find out what...

A sound in the bushes caught her attention.

Twilight turned quickly towards the treeline. She'd had the odd feeling of being watched since leaving the library. At first she simply chalked it up to paranoia, but the feeling persisted and now she wasn't so sure.

Seeing nothing she continued down the path, a bit more quickly than before.

A few minutes after she was gone, the rustling in the bushes followed.

\*

Fluttershy hurried from burrow to burrow, dropping food haphazardly in front of each entrance. She needed to get back as soon as possible, there would be little socialization today.

She couldn't help but notice that the forest seemed to be under the same effect as her house. The trees were blooming terribly out of season and all manner of flowers and fruit blossomed and hung at all angles. Even the animals seemed to be acting unseasonably, she constantly apologized for

stepping on a stray tail, or almost bumping into a small creature as they followed her happily from place to place. They were unaware of her hurry and while Fluttershy wished she could stay and enjoy this sudden rush of nature, she knew something wasn't quite right. Whether it was for good or bad had yet to be seen.

Fluttershy made her way through a mental checklist as she went. She had already made it to skunks and was heading down to raccoons when she heard somepony coming up the forest path.

"Fluttershy!" was the last thing she heard before she was barreled over by an exuberant Flower. Fruits, vegetables and all manner of foods went flying into the air.

"Ow..." Fluttershy said quietly.

Angel hopped up the trail shortly. He stopped before stumbling into the pile of ponies on the forest floor, squeaking plaintively.

"Um...Flower....could you get off of me?" Fluttershy asked.

Flower untangled herself from the forest floor. "Good morning Fluttershy."

"Um...Good morning, Flower." she smiled awkwardly.

"I came to help you with your...." She paused looking for the word.

"Chores." She smiled having found it. "To say thank you."

"Oh," Fluttershy said, a little surprised. "Really...there's no need to do that. I don't mind, always happy to help." she smiled slightly. Fluttershy was unsure what to say, she was happy Flower was grateful, but this was something she'd always done alone, a morning ritual. Just her and the animals. She also wasn't sure how much help the mare would be in all honesty, and she wanted to get this done quickly. She opened her mouth to say something else, but Flower beat her to it.

"But...I want to. I want to do something. You have been so kind to me" Flower said with a small smile. "It is only right that I do something in return."

Fluttershy closed her mouth and thought for a moment. She could tell Flower really did want to help.

She looked at her expectantly.

Fluttershy sighed. What harm could it do?

“Alright, you can help.” Fluttershy relented.

“I am glad!” Flower said with a small jump. “What is it that I can do?”

“Well...” Fluttershy gestured to the borrows behind her. “I’m giving the animals their breakfast. So, you can help me put the appropriate food in front of each borrow...If that’s fine with you.”

“Yes.” She nodded happily. “I can do that.”

“Wonderful.” Fluttershy smiled despite herself and placed a few bags of food on the forest floor. “I’ll take the raccoons, you feed the rabbits.”

“I will do that.” Flower grabbed the food and walked off towards the rabbit borrows.

Fluttershy continued hurriedly around the forest, occasionally checking on Flower to see how she was doing. The brown mare carefully doled out the food grinning as she went.

“Hello little bunny,” she said placing a carrot in front of a young rabbit. It stared at her for a moment, and twitched its nose twice. “You are welcome, I am Flower. It is nice to meet you Twitch-Twitch.”

Fluttershy chuckled. “Well...That’s a funny name to give a rabbit.”

Flower looked up, confused. “I did not give it to him. That is his name, he told me.”

“...Oh.” Fluttershy paused. She thought this was strange, but Flower had acted rather odd since they’d met. It was probably nothing. “That’s nice.” Fluttershy went back to passing out food.

Flower watched her for a moment as she rushed around the forest. “You are in a hurry?” she asked.

Fluttershy nodded. “Yes,” she tossed a mouthful of acorns towards a crowd of squirrels. “I have some questions I wanted to ask my friends.”

“I can help!” Flower hopped over to Fluttershy, grabbing her saddlebag.

“...Flower? What are you doing?”

The brown earth pony shook the bag back and forth spilling food everywhere.

“Flowers!...Oh no...oh dear...oh my...” Fluttershy fretted as animals dashed from all around the forest towards the piles of food. “No! Please...those are for the ferrets...Mr. Bird, don’t eat that it’s not..Wait!...please?...Oh...”

“I will help.” Flower watched the crowd of animals. She bent down to the nearest, a family of chipmunks. “Hello,” she said softly. “Please behave. Fluttershy does not like it when you are unruly.”

The small creatures froze, staring at her for a moment. Then quietly went over to a pile of nuts and began to eat.

Fluttershy watched in amazement. Flower went to every group of animals, spoke a few words, and one by one they ordered themselves in front of the proper food and ate, with no fuss or fight. Flower then turned to Fluttershy grinning. “See? I helped”

“I....I....Um...Flower...How did you do that?” Fluttershy stuttered.

She looked confused. “I asked them. It was not hard.” She turned her head slightly. “Are you happy?”

Fluttershy looked at the animals eating peacefully beside them. “Well...yes bu-”

She yelped as she was pulled into a hug. “Then I am glad.” said Flower.

\*

Twilight walked off the forest path and onto the Fluttershy’s land. The sudden burst of green almost hurt her eyes. As she neared the house the grey, dour atmosphere she’d felt since this morning slowly melted away. She felt lighter and more like her usual self as she progressed, even Spike began to stir on her back.

She paused as she came to the cottage. Her eyes growing wide at the sight. The clinging, climbing vines and flowers that covered the small structure striking them like a psychological blow after the dreary scenery from earlier.

This was not normal.

“Fluttershy!” Twilight called. “Fluttershy are you here? I really need to talk to you. Something’s not right...” She waited but there was no reply.

Spike rolled over on her back, yawning. “Are we there ye-” he paused. “Whoa...”

“I know Spike...Fluttershy’s got a green hoof, but I’ve never seen anything like this...”

“It’s amazing!” Spike jumped off of her back. “How do you think she did it?”

Twilight stared for a while more, her unease growing. “I don’t know Spike, but I intend to find out. She must be feeding the animals, come on, let’s find her.” She turned and headed down the forest trail.

“Alright! Wait up!” Spike ran after her.

\*

The thing that wasn’t Mr.Breeze leered at the purple unicorn from the edge of Fluttershy’s land. It did not like it here. This place was strong, healthy, alive.

Mr.Breezy’s face grimaced. It had gone too far as it was. It would have to wait for her to return to the path. Where it would have the upper hand. Then it would strike.

Then it would be ready.

\*

The animals finished what little food was left, and returned to their borrows in single file. Flower smiled amiably as she watched them go, while Fluttershy looked on in amazement. When the last one had gone into its home Flower turned to her.

“Done!” she said, clicking her forehooves together.

“Um...thanks...” Fluttershy said, unsure of herself.

“You are welcome!” Flower stood up and looked towards the house. “You can look for your friends now that we are done correct?”

This shook Fluttershy from her daze. Flower was right, and she had more questions now than ever.

“Oh...yes, you’re right. Thanks again for your help, Flower...Please stay here at the house. I’ll be right back.” she headed down the path, with Flower in tow. The brown mare looked around the forest for a moment, not making eye contact.

“Um...Fluttershy?” she asked quietly.

“Yes?”

“I was wondering...if I could come with you to see your friends...” she shifted a bit on her hooves. “I have not met anyone for a very long time, and I would love to see them.”

Fluttershy hesitated for a moment. She didn’t fancy the idea of taking Flower into Ponyville, if anypony saw her she wouldn’t get a word in edgewise. Not without a large party before hand.

“Um...It would be better if you...”

Flower gave her an imploring look.

“Oh my...Well, I suppo-”

“Fluttershy!” called a voice from further down the trail. “There you are! Thank Celestia I found you.” Twilight raced breathlessly towards them, Spike not far behind. She stopped short when she saw Flower. The purple unicorn looked her over for a minute. “Who is this?”

Fluttershy opened her mouth to respond, but Flower got there first.

“I am Flower!” she walked over to Twilight, looking at her very closely. “It is nice to meet you! What is your name?”

Twilight backed up a few paces. “Um, hello, I’m Twilight Sparkle, nice to meet you too?...” she said, unsure what was happening.

“Twilight Sparkle,” Flower tried the name on her tongue. “Are you Fluttershy’s friend?”

Twilight cast a sideways glance at Fluttershy. “Yes?”

She gasped as Flower leaned over to hug her. "Then you are my friend as well, Twilight Sparkle."

Spike caught up to the three of them, he froze when he saw the strange mare hugging Twilight.

Flower dropped her immediately, and bent down to examine the small dragon. She looked at him quizzically. "Hello?" she poked him with a hoof. "I am Flower, what are you?"

"Hey!" Spike pulled back in surprised. "Don't poke me, I'm ticklish!"

Flower looked a bit more closely at Spike, examining him more warily than she had Twilight. "Lizard?" she guessed.

Spike snorted incredulously. "I'm no lizard! I'm a dragon, and the name's Spike by the way."

"Spike..." Flower's face contorted a bit at the sound of the word. "No," Flower placed a hoof on top of his head. "Lizard."

Spike was about to reply, but Twilight cut him off.

"Fluttershy, is this a relative of yours?"

"Oh no, she's not a relative. I found her in the forest yesterday.....I was actually going to talk to you about it..." Fluttershy looked back at Flower. "I was hoping you could help me find out where she came from."

"She doesn't know?" asked Spike.

Flower shook her head. "I know!" she stomped a hoof on the ground. "I am home!"

Fluttershy nodded. "I found her in the woods yesterday. She's be staying with me since then...I've tried asking, but she doesn't seem to know..."

Spike looked toward Twilight, spinning his finger in a circle around the side of his head.

Twilight nudged him sharply with a hoof, then turned to Fluttershy. "I'm sorry Fluttershy, but I think it'll have to wait for a moment. I'd be happy help

you find out later, but right now we have more important things to worry about.”

“Do you mean the early blooms?” asked Fluttershy. “It’s beautiful isn’t it? I wanted to ask you about that as well. I’m a bit worried you see, this isn’t normal.”

“It’s not just that.” Twilight pointed back towards ponyville. “Back in town it doesn’t look like early spring, it looks like late winter! Everything is dying, the trees are wilted....it just feels...wrong. Your house must have the only flowers for miles.”

Fluttershy put a hoof to her mouth in worry. “What?...How is that possible?”

“I was hoping you could tell me.” Twilight frowned. “Something is happening. I don’t know what, but I can feel it. Can’t you?”

Fluttershy shook her head. “I’m sorry Twilight, but I feel fine.”

“Hmm, and this is the only place in ponyville that seems to be okay...more than okay in fact.” Twilight looked around the forest. “There must be some correlation...” Her eyes stopped when they landed on Flower. Who was still examining Spike. “You said you found her...Yesterday morning?”

“Oh yes, while I was feeding the animals,” said Fluttershy.

“That was around the same time as the earthquake that hit Ponyville. Tell me, did you notice anything strange?”

Spike yelped as Flower poked him in the belly. Favoring this reaction, she did it again.

“Besides her.”

Fluttershy thought back to the previous day. “Well...besides Flower nothing really. I was having breakfast like I always do. Then I saw something in the bushes, it was a small glass ball. I thought it was pretty, so I went to pick it up. Right after that the earthquake hit, I checked to see if the animals were okay and after that I found Flower.”

Twilight thought for a moment. “You said that right after you picked up the glass ball the earthquake started?”



“Yes, that’s what happened.” Fluttershy said softly.

“What did it look like?”

“Well, it was clear all the way through, with a few green leaves inside. It was lovely. In all the commotion I think I left it in the forest.”

“That might be it! Or at least give us a clue as to what’s going on. You live so close to the Everfree Forest I wouldn’t be surprised if what you found was more than what it appeared to be. Can you take me to it?”

Fluttershy nodded.

As they were about to head off, Twilight froze.

“What is it?” asked Fluttershy.

“Do you hear that?” Twilight’s ears twitched.

Fluttershy strained for a minute, trying to hear anything over the chirping birds and chattering animals. “A....horn?”

“Not just any horn! That’s the Princess’s procession she’s in town!” Twilight spun in place. “Oh my! She probably got my letter! She’ll want a full report, I’m sure of it! Oh, I’m not ready for this! I thought I’d at least get a reply before she decided to come. This is such short notice!” She turned to Fluttershy, shifting back and forth on her hooves. “I need to dash to the library and get some notes. I’ll bring the Princess back, we can work on this together. You might even be able to ask her about Flower. Alright?”

Fluttershy nodded.

“Good, Spike?” Twilight looked down to find the small dragon in stitches from Flower’s constant exploratory prodding. “Go with Fluttershy to find that glass ball, it might be of importance.

Spike tried his best to get away from the curious mare. “Okay! I’m a lizard! What ever you want! Just stop!” Satisfied, Flower sat back on her haunches smiling. “Geeze. Alright Twilight.”

“Good. Back in a second!” Twilight turned, and raced down the path back to town.

“Goodbye Twilight Sparkle! Very nice to meet you!” Flower yelled after her. “She is very busy...” she remarked.

\*

Twilight hurried to the library, her hooves pounding against the dirt trail. She needed to be fast if she wanted to get her notes and catch the Princess in time. Celestia would know how to sort this all out, she was sure of it.

Suddenly, somepony came out of the bushes ahead. She almost tripped trying to stop. Dust flying around her hooves as she skidded. She turned to find a light brown earth pony with an orange mane in front of her. She knew him, he owned the fan shop in town.

““What’s your hurry, lassie?” He said slowly.

“Oh, hello Mr.Breezy, I’m sorry, I don’t have time to stop and chat. I need to talk to the Princess. She’ll be landing any minute now. So if you excuse me...”

She tried to go around him, but he sidestepped and blocked her path.

“Aw, now that won’t do, you need to slow down. Enjoy life, it’s far too short you know.” Mr.Breezy smiled.

The hair on the back of Twilight’s neck stood on end. Something was wrong.

“Um...I really need to be going now...Good advice, though. Nice to see you bye!” She raced past him down the trail before he could stop her. She looked back over her shoulder to see him staring after her, that smile still plastered on his face.

As she turned back around she ran into something solid.

She yelled as she bounced off it onto the ground. Twilight looked up to see Mr.Breezy standing in front of her, his smile somehow wider, almost unnaturally so.

“And I really must insist you be stayin’ miss. I really insist.”

Twilight’s blood ran cold. “B-but how is that possi-”

“Shhhhh.” Mr.Breezy put a hoof to his lips. “Don’t look so scared, everything’ll be fine. Just relax.”

Twilight scrambled to her hooves, and tried to run in the opposite direction, back to Fluttershy’s house. But Mr.Breezy reached forward and touched his hoof to her side.

Twilight struggled but found she couldn’t move.

“Everything’ll be fine.” Mr. Breezy said again, his smile growing yet wider, almost splitting his face in half. “It’ll all be over soon.”

His hoof lost it’s shape, and oozed it’s way over Twilight coat, making its way to her torso before she knew what was happening. She opened her mouth to scream, but the stuff covered her face in seconds. Soon she was lost beneath the living ooze, Mr.Breezy’s shape completely melting onto her.

She felt cold. So unbearably cold.

She struggled and thrashed with all her might. She tried to cast spells to free herself, but found she could do nothing.

Twilight began to feel tired, her struggles weakening, but then she thought of Ponyville, of Fluttershy and Spike just a ways down the road. And she renewed her attempts.

Still the stuff slithered and melded around her body, she couldn’t gain an inch.

Soon she found she no longer had the strength to move. All she wanted to do was sleep.

She closed her eyes, and let the darkness take her.

\*

There was a rustle in the bushes. Something stirred for a moment. There was a strange sound, and then silence.

The thing that wasn’t Twilight Sparkle walked out of the woods. It smiled, then turned and headed back towards Fluttershy’s house.