

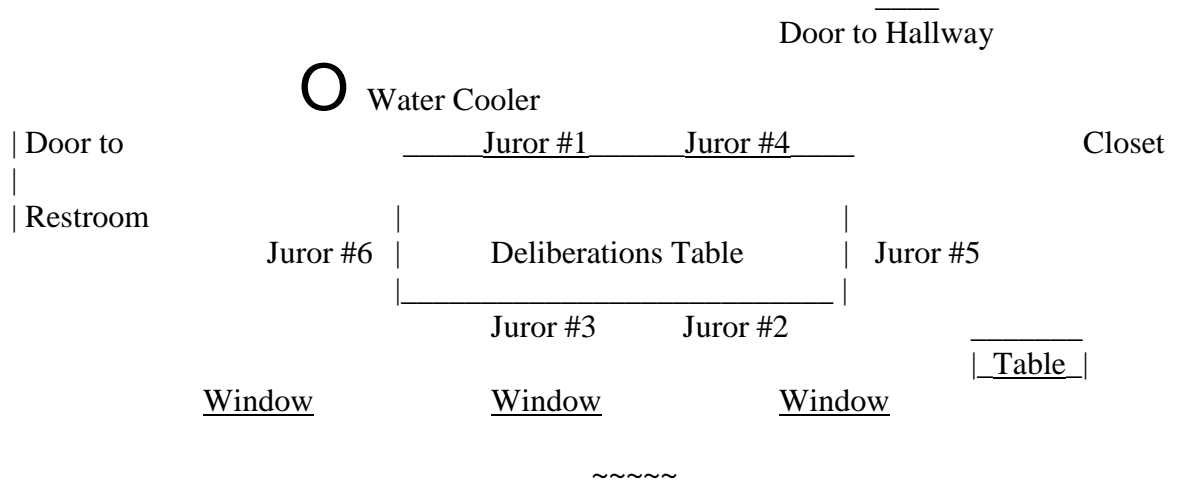


6 Angry Mares

By Jelly

Table of Contents:

Act 1	3
Act 2	15
Act 3	27



Act 1

“Unauthorized Use of Harmful Curse: one of the most serious charges tried in our criminal courts. You’ve heard a long and complex case, gentleponies, and it is your duty to sit down to try and separate the facts from the fancy. One citizen of Equestria is cursed. Potentially forever. The future of another citizen is at stake.

“If there is a reasonable doubt in your minds as to the guilt of the accused... then you must find her not guilty. If, however, there is no reasonable doubt, then she must be found guilty. As you know, if she is found guilty, there will be no chance for leniency, by dual order of Princess Celestia and Princess Luna. She will be banished from Equestria. Forever.

“Whichever way you decide, the verdict must be unanimous. I urge you to deliberate honestly and thoughtfully. You are faced with a grave responsibility. Thank you.”

The judge waved a hoof at the seventh and eighth ponies at the end of the jury. “The alternates may now be excused. Thank you for your time.” The alternates glanced at each other before one grabbed his walking stick and started heading out the courtroom door. The other followed.

A small purple dragon with green spikes stood up in front of the jury box, visibly uncomfortable in his uniform. Sounding exceedingly bored, he said: "The jury will retire."

Almost hesitantly, the six mares began to rise. They filed out of the jury box, only a few of them making eye contact with the defendant one last time. The zebra at the defense table stared straight back, eyes unwavering.

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"Ah think she's guilty," said Juror #4, conspiratorially. She adjusted her hat dangerously over her eyes, and seemed to be ready to spit on the ground before thinking better of it. "Ain't never seen such an open 'n shut case. Can hardly believe those fancy lawyers can talk so much. Just hours of talkin' 'bout nothin'."

Juror #2 nodded, filling her cup with water from the cooler. "Totally," she added, tossing the refreshment back before refilling her cup. "Guess they must feel entitled." She paused. "Got any foals?" she asked casually.

"Nope," said Juror #4. "Got a younger sis', though. Almost like *havin'* a kid."

"Hehe. I know what you mean." She pulled out her wallet. Some sort of badge shined in it, but she instead pulled out a less-than-pristine photograph. On it was a picture of an energetic orange pegasus with a shock of purple hair. "Not *my* foal, but sometimes it feels like it. She gave me this picture the day she got her cutie mark." She pointed a hoof and beamed proudly. Across the photograph, written in italics, was the phrase '*Thanks for believing in me!*'

On the other side of the room, Juror #3 was trying (without much success) to open one of the windows. Juror #5 stepped in and opened it with the barest hint of magic. "Gum?" she asked, holding out a hoof.

"Oh! No, that's okay. Gum just reminds me of alligators." Without further explanation, and satisfied with the open window, Juror #3 turned around and sat in the chair directly in front of her.

The door to the restroom opened and Juror #1 entered the room, her face positively sparkling with beauty. "Terribly sorry if I've kept you ladies waiting," she began. "I was, ah, freshening up."

Chairs scraped as everypony took their seats. Juror #5 remained standing, though, determined to take control from the start. "All right girls! Now we're not supposed to actually discuss the case until we've elected a Forepony. Therefore, I propose we each introduce ourselves, and cast secret votes—"

"I nominate Miss Fuss-Budget here," said Juror #4 without looking up, waving a lazy hoof towards the purple unicorn she had just interrupted. She was leaning back in her chair, decidedly comfortable.

"Second," said Juror #2.

"All in favor?" There was a chorus of murmured assents, save for the pony who had just been nominated. "All 'posed?" Silence. "Then it's settled. Let's get a move on, folks; I got a family ta get back to."

Juror #5 plopped down, a little stunned at how quickly the voting had precipitated. And more than a little annoyed that it had happened without her approval. "Right," she said, trying to think of what to say. After blinking twice, she magically floated up a hefty stack of papers, and coughed into a hoof. "I took the liberty of taking a few notes during the trial, and I also made a checklist of every piece of evidence that was admitted. I think we should start by going over everything on the list."

The cowpony grunted. "Howsabout we all just vote now and see what happens? If we all already agree, then there's no sense in wastin' our time."

"Second," said Juror #2.

Juror #3 immediately slid a strip of paper folded in half into the center of the table. The letters "*i-u-G*" were clearly visible through the paper, having been written in bright pink.

“*Fine*” sighed Juror #5, slumping a bit in her chair. She started tearing up a piece of paper into strips. “Everypony go ahead and write down what you think and—”

“Just a minute, sugarcube. Why can’t we just vote out loud? I trust we’re all honest folk here. What’s the sense in keeping votes secret? Ain’t like we’re supposed to keep our ‘pinions to ourselves.”

The purple unicorn’s face reddened slightly. “Because we don’t want to pressure anypony into making up her mind before she’s made up her mind. And last I checked, *I’m* the Forepony, and *I* say we should use secret votes.”

Juror #4 raised her hoofs in mock surrender, and settled her chair back to the ground. She very openly and hastily wrote “G-U-I-L-T-Y” in all capital letters on the strip of paper that had been handed to her and she pushed it into the center of the table, without bothering to fold it.

The white unicorn sitting beside the orange earth pony barely held back a look of disgust at the display of rude behavior. She positioned a hoof to keep her paper secret while she daintily dipped a quill (using her magic) in a bottle of ink supplied by the courthouse.

Juror #5 collected the ballots as they were tossed into the center of the table. She gave them a little shuffle before clearing her throat. “Guilty.” Juror #4’s paper fluttered to the table. “Guilty.” The paper with pink writing followed. “Guilty. Guilty. I don’t know. And guilty.

“Looks like we’re undecided.” She gathered up the papers again, and put them in an envelope that was already labeled “Vote #1.”

“Whoa,” said Juror #2. “*What?* Seriously, ‘I don’t know?’ That’s not even a real vote.” She hovered over her seat, hoofs crossed. “Who put that in there?”

Juror #6 started to slide down in her chair at the same time the Forepony stood up. “That’s not how secret voting works. We’re not supposed to know who voted what.” The purple unicorn sealed the envelope and set it beside her stack of papers, as if for emphasis.

“Ah thought you said the point o’ secret votes was so nopony would feel pressured into votin’ guilty,” countered Juror #4. “An’ seeing as we’ve voted now, there’s no point in keepin’ the votes secret no more.”

Juror #2 settled back down in her seat as Juror #5 was still blustering for a response. “It doesn’t matter,” Juror #2 said sulkily. “It was obviously *her*,” she said, pointing to the now empty chair at the head of the table.

Juror #3 popped her head underneath the table and smiled at the cringing pegasus on the floor. “Hi!” she said, practically bubbling. “Are we making an igloo?” The pegasus merely curled herself up into a tighter ball of pink and yellow. She might have responded, but it was too quiet to hear.

A white hoof gently prodded Juror #6’s shoulder. “Come now darling,” the voice said. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of.” She gave a winning smile. “We want to hear what you have to say.”

Juror #6 slowly unfurled herself and peaked over the edge of the table.

“So why did you vote ‘I don’t know?’” demanded Juror #2, on the offensive. This earned her a couple cross looks from the others at the table.

The pastel pegasus cringed, but kept her head visible. “I don’t know,” she squeaked.

Juror #2 sighed. “I can’t even hear you. Speak louder.”

“*I don’t know*,” she repeated, slightly faster.

“LOUDER!”

There was an inhalation of breath. “*I DON’T KNOW!*”

Juror #2 facehoofed and lay her head down on the table. “*Great*. You don’t know why you voted that you don’t know. That’s just *fantastic*. ”

“Speaking of fans, it sure is hot in here,” piped Juror #3, cutting over a remark Juror #5 was about to make. “This must be like the hottest day of

the year! And we don't even have air conditioning!" She gestured to the fan above the table that was clearly broken. "I think we should build an igloo." She suddenly blew her nose into a pink handkerchief.

There was an uncomfortable silence. It didn't seem like the conversation had anywhere to go.

"Ah reckon there's nothin' wrong with sayin' ya don't know when ya rightly don't know," said Juror #4, breaking the tension. "It's an honest answer. May as well go over the evidence like Miss Forepony says, and we'll see what happens. Better 'n just sittin' here."

Juror #5 gave a surprised smile. After being conversationally snubbed several times already, it was a happy change to have the attention suddenly thrust back on her. "An excellent idea! We can go over every detail." A scroll with unchecked boxes floated beside her. "So. The *first* witness—"

"Hold it," interrupted Juror #2. "Going over *six hours* of evidence is going to take forever." There was a mumble from the unicorn to her right that six hours of evidence would take at most six hours to go over, but the pegasus didn't acknowledge it. "Let's stick to the *important* stuff. We should just go around the table and have everypony say why they think she's guilty. Then we can see if she" – pointing at Juror #6 – "has anything to say."

"Suits me," said Juror #4. "Ah'll start." She pushed her hat up and scanned the ponies in the room.

"Somethin' like this doesn't happen by accident. Accordin' to tha testimony, there ain't a unicorn spell in existence that can explain what happened. If there was an equivalent unicorn spell, I'd be havin' some serious doubts, but as things stand, it *had* to be a zebra curse. And the only zebra who coulda done it was her. Ain't like there's a heap o' zebras 'round Ponyville, and there was zero evidence to put any other zebras anywhere close to the crime scene." She leaned back in her chair, signaling she was through.

The room turned to Juror #1. "Mmm," she said primly, and somewhat noncommittally. "The timing is especially important, but I will boil this down



to four points. First. The day before the... incident... was discovered, the defendant was at the victim's house. Second, it is uncontroverted that while at the victim's house, the zebra was heard shouting 'Curse you pony, now it is too late; you have doomed us both to a terrible fate!'

"Third. When she ran off after the shout, she was positively identified by a second neighbor. This neighbor not only recognized her for her stripes, but also because for her *cutie mark*; something that is unique to every pony. And fourth: nopony else was ever seen at the victim's house between the shouting that night and the next morning when she discovered she was cursed. You simply *cannot* tell me this is all a coincidence."

Juror #6 was skipped (being the sole dissenter) and the attention shifted to Juror #3. "Isn't it obvious?" she said. "This is exactly the sort of thing zebras do. They're a menace!" She stood up, hoofs on the table. And she started to sing. "She's an *evil enchantress* and she does *evil dances*! And if you—"

"Now hold on," said the Forepony. "Stick to the evidence, please. I don't remember anything about evil dancing." She started sifting through her notes just in case.

The pink pony sat down with a *harrumph*. "She's guilty. I know her kind. It's always secrets and lies. You can't believe a word they say. You all know it. The sooner she's banished the better."

"Whoa there, Nelly," piped in Juror #4. "What a terrible thing ta believe. Since when is dishonesty a... group characteristic? You have no monopoly on the truth. And besides, she didn't even testify. Even if she's never spoken an honest word in her life – which Ah sincerely doubt – it don't make a lick o' difference in this case."

"All right, all right," said Juror #2. "We don't need a sermon." Still, she gave the pony beside her an odd look before speaking her piece.

"Since it was brought up, the fact that she *didn't* testify is what really gets me.[1] When she was arrested, she didn't say a word. Taken to jail? Not a peep. Apparently she hasn't spoken *at all* since it happened. If that doesn't say 'guilty conscience,' I don't know what does." She looked finished, but then her eyes lit up again. "Oh yeah. And she even went

back to the crime scene the next morning, for Celestia's sake! Probably to mess with the evidence. *Not* cool.”

Juror #5 was last. “Uh. I guess you girls pretty much covered it,” she said, marking off several checkboxes on a separate list, though not all of them. She looked up to Juror #6. “So what doubts do you have? Let’s discuss them.”

The pegasus recoiled. “I... don’t know. She just seemed... nice. I don’t think she deserves to be banished.”

“Nice!?” erupted Juror #3. “*Nice?* I bet she can shoot spiders out of her eyes! Did you even see them? They glow in the dark!” She leaned over the demure pegasus, eyes bulging.

“Spiders,” deadpanned Juror #1. She rolled her eyes and pulled out a stylish paper fan from her pack and magically put it to work.

“Spiders,” repeated Juror #3 with emphasis, as if daring anypony to oppose her.

“Welllll,” started Juror #4, “s’long as we’re talkin’ ‘bout doubts, there’s been one thing I keep getting’ hung up over. I ain’t saying it’s enough for a *reasonable* doubt, mind ya. Just something that’s been puzzlin’ me.” She paused, and the room was silent save for the enchanted fan.

“Where’s the motive?”

When no pony answered immediately, she continued. “Why’d she do it? At worst, this was a contract tha’ went south. But s’far as I can tell, it ain’t like this zebra’s ever cursed anypony b’fore. So why now? What does she stand ta gain? It don’t make sense.”

“What makes you think she needs a reason?” countered Juror #3.

“I suspect she was just angry,” said Juror #1. “For two reasons. First. Here she is at the victim’s house, after having been working on the contract for weeks. She still has not been paid; not a single bit up-front! She needs the money, and clearly deserves the money. And then she

finds out the contract is broken. Anypony would be rightfully upset in such a situation.

“Second. Not only can we deduce that she was angry merely based on the factual circumstances, but she was heard shouting – not talking – about cursing the victim. This was obviously a crime borne of passion.”

“There you have it,” said Juror #2. “There’s the whole case.”

“But,” squeaked Juror #6, finding her voice. “Didn’t the, uh, victim say she’s had contracts with the zebra before? And in the past, they always worked out their problems?” She looked around for askance with a weak smile.

“That’s ‘xactly right, sugarcube,” said Juror #4. “And that’s part o’ my problem in seeing a motive.”

“So, uh... if they’ve always worked things out before, I really don’t think she’d resort to cursing. She just seems... nice.”

“Dear, you said it yourself,” said Juror #1, remaining coolly detached. “This isn’t the first time they’ve had problems with contracts. Maybe this was just one breached contract too many. Everypony has a breaking point.” She paused. “And in fact, that raises a third—”

“But,” said Juror #6. “Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt. But I think this is important.” Juror #1’s fan started flapping a bit faster, but she held her tongue.

“Thanks. I’m not sure this was even a very important contract. And I certainly don’t think the zebra actually needed the money. I think maybe she was just trying to be nice. She’s just like anypony else... trying to live her life. She’s obviously had a rough one.” Her voice gained a little strength. “She’s apparently the only zebra in Ponyville; it must be hard. No family. She lives alone in the Everfree Forest. We don’t even know if she has any real friends. And I just don’t feel right saying she’s guilty, and banishing her forever, when I’m not sure.”

“*Heeere* we go,” said Juror #2. “Again with the niceness. You’re a bleeding heart, you know that? ‘Nice’ ponies can still do bad things.”

“Not an important contract?” added Juror #1. “This was apparently a *huge* contract!”

“But... but suppose it wasn’t! The only pony saying it was a big, huge, super-important contract is the victim. Maybe she, uh... skewed... the details because she knew the zebra wasn’t going to say anything?”

“What do you mean *suppose* she lied? What’s the point of having witnesses at all, then?” said Juror #2, aggressively.

“Oh. Gosh, I don’t know. I’m just saying it’s possible.”

“Possible,” said Juror #1. “But not very probable.”

A cloud of silence descended over the table.

“I don’t know,” offered Juror #5, taking the opportunity to speak without interruption, and lining out her thoughts. “We shouldn’t *not* consider it.” Her face scrunched at the double negative, but she was undeterred. “Maybe she was lying. Maybe—”

“Okay. Fine. Whatever. Suppose she *did* lie,” argued Juror #2. “So what? What does that *prove*? What does it *mean*?” She gave a small sneer. “Maybe she lied about the contract. Maybe everything she said was a lie.”

“Well, maybe it was!” shouted Juror #5, slightly losing her temper.

“Right, maybe it was! And even *if* it was, that doesn’t change the fact that the zebra cursed her. We don’t even have to take her word for it. There are *two* witnesses to corroborate it. They don’t have stakes in this trial; *they* have no reason to lie. I mean, what the hay! One explicitly *heard* the zebra cursing her, and the other *identified* her as she ran from the house. You can’t dispute that.” She raised her hoofs in frustration. “It’s so *obvious*!”

“If” said Juror #5, “*if* the victim was lying about the importance of the contract, then isn’t it at least *slightly* more likely that the zebra didn’t really curse her? Right now we’re not talking about the other witnesses.”

“No,” said Juror #2, steadfast. “No, I don’t think it is. I can hardly believe this is even a point for debate. She *said* she was going to curse her, and then *she did* curse her. Blam! Case closed.” She pounded one hoof into the other.

“Now we *know* that’s not necessarily true,” spit Juror #5. “Before this trial, I didn’t even really *believe* there was such a thing as a curse. They’re certainly not commonplace. But the point is, ponies say things like ‘curse you!’ all the time, and they don’t really mean it.”

“You’re joking,” said Juror #2. “She’s joking, right? If somepony says she’s gonna curse you, she’s gonna curse you. It might not be with fancy zebra incantations, but she’ll curse you in her own special way. Ruin the wheel of your cart. Salt your crops. Slander you. Whatever it takes.”

“And do you honestly think somepony would *shout* that they are going to curse you when they *know* how easily they can be overheard? I suspect she’s smarter than that.”

“Ponies don’t exactly think rationally when they’re under stress or angry,” said Juror #1.

“Smart?” said Juror #3. “She’s one of *them*. And an enchantress! For all we know, maybe she *has* to yell to curse ponies! And then she ran away immediately after the curse when she realized everypony heard her, because she didn’t want to get caught!” She let the point sink in. “And worse, she even cursed *in rhyme*. If that doesn’t prove it was a curse, then I don’t know what does.”

There was a hushed silence before a very quiet voice spoke up:

“Songs rhyme.”

Juror #3 stopped short, face reddening. Her pink hair was now drooping limply on one side of her face, as she rounded on the pegasus. “WELL SHE WASN’T EXACTLY SINGING, WAS SHE?”

Juror #6 shuddered, and blinked back tears. No pony spoke. The room definitely felt very different now than it had when they first entered.

"I'm sorry," the pegasus finally squeaked. "I didn't mean to make you mad." She stood up and looked at the ponies in the room, wincing slightly. Then she walked slowly, and stopped beside the water cooler. "Maybe... I have a proposition."

She lowered her head, and chose her words carefully. "How about ... how about the rest of you vote again? I won't vote this time. If you all vote guilty, then I'll vote guilty, too. Like I said, I just really don't know, but if you're all convinced, then maybe I'm wrong."

"Finally, she talks some sense," said Juror #3. Again, she was the first to throw in a folded scrap of paper into the center of the table. And again, the letters "*i-u-G*" were clearly visible. It was as though she had prepared the scraps ahead of time.

This time, the voting was not nearly as quick. Even Juror #4 shielded her paper before writing on it, despite having been the most open about votes from the beginning. As the ballots were tossed into the center of the table, the Forepony collected them before adding her own to the mix. "Here are the votes," she said.

# Act 2

“Guilty. Guilty. Guilty.” Juror #5 stopped, and read the next ballot very slowly. “Not guilty. And guilty.”

“Boy, how do you like *that*,” said Juror #3, standing up and slamming a hoof on the table.

“And now the chicken flaps her wings,” said Juror #2 in disgust, her own wings bristling.

“All right, *who* was it?” said Juror #3. “I think we have a right to know.”

“Excuse me,” interjected the Forepony. “This was a secret ballot. We agreed on this earlier. If the voter wants to remain secret—”

“What do you mean?!” shouted Juror #2, genuinely upset now. “There are no secrets in here! And I know who it was.” She shoved her hoof into the Forepony’s shoulder.

“What’s the matter with you?” she continued, condescendingly. “You come in here and you vote guilty with the rest of us and then this slick preacher pulls a stunt to try and tear your heart out with stories about the poor zebra, all alone in Ponyville, so misunderstood. So you change your vote, completely ignoring the facts. If that isn’t the most *sickening*—”

“N-now hold it—” stuttered the Forepony.

“Hold it!? We’re trying to banish a guilty zebra from Equestria—anypony, and I mean *anypony* who does what she did doesn’t belong here. And all of a sudden you’re paying attention to fairy tales?”

“Please, I just want to say something. I have always believed that a pony is entitled to have unpopular opinions. We all have the *right* to disagree.”

“Fine, then you disagree. Why did you change your vote?” Rather than answer, Juror #5 simply glared.

“She ain’t got nothin’ to tell ya,” said Juror #4 from underneath her hat. “She didn’t change her vote. I did.”

Juror #2 *flumped* into her chair, slack-jawed. “*What?*” she managed, voice cracking.

“Perhaps you’d like ta know why.”

“Not really,” said Juror #3 huffily.

“Let her talk,” said the Forepony, visibly trying to calm herself from being shaken so badly.

“Thank ya kindly.” She pointed at the mute pegasus still facing the wall.

“This pony chose ta stand against us. That’s her right. It takes a good deal o’ courage ta stand alone; even if ya believe somethin’ very strongly.

“And despite that, she left the verdict up to us. She bet tha farm, hopin’ for support. And I gave it to her. I want ta hear more. Ah still think the zebra’s prolly guilty. I’m almost plum sure of it, s’matter of fact. But it ain’t right to have somepony banished when the vote isn’t unanimous. That ain’t how things’re done. It ain’t how things’re done in a family, and it ain’t how things’re done in the legal system, either. The vote is four to two.”

Juror #2 leaned towards the Forepony. Under her breath, and with a sheepish grin, she said: “Look, I was a little... excited. You know how it is. I... I didn’t mean to get nasty. Nothing personal.” Rather than reply, Juror #5 started writing on a piece of a paper, openly ignoring the apology. She was clearly breathing through her nostrils, not trusting herself enough to open her mouth. It turned out she was writing “Vote #2” on a second envelop, which she put she slid the five ballots into before sealing.

“Fine,” said Juror #3. “You want to talk? Let’s talk. If the zebra didn’t curse her, then who did?”



“Technically,” said Juror #1, “that’s not a question we should be asking. We’re not concerned with *who* did it, but rather whether the zebra is *the one* who did it.”

“Well *who else* could have done it?” asked Juror #2. “I don’t mean to be rude, but if we can agree that *no pony else* could have done it, then it *logically* must have been her.”

“Could...,” started Juror #5. Her eyes widened and she thought to herself before speaking. “Could... what if the victim cursed herself?”

“Of all the—”

“What are you—”

“*Ridiculous!*”

“Hay now, let’s not get—”

“Can you do that?”

“—*stupid* ideas, that—”

“—going on about? How—”

“*Utterly* preposterous!”

“—our overalls in a twist.”

“**GIRLS!**”

“—and I said ‘*Oatmeal*, are you crazy?’”

“Girls,” repeated the Forepony, slightly quieter but clearly excited. “Please, just listen. I know it might sound a bit crazy. But. The victim was a unicorn. And we know she was angry – especially with the zebra.”

Juror #1 looked like she was about to say something, but the Forepony raised a hoof. “And we all know ponies don’t exactly think rationally when they’re angry.” Juror #1 snapped her mouth shut after having her own words used against her.

“Now,” she continued. “I’ve lived in Canterlot most of my life. I went to magic kindergarten there. I didn’t really think about it before; I guess that’s something I’d rather forget. But I *do* know that spells don’t always work the way you want them to. Especially when you’re angry. Or, uh, startled by something.”

“And what do *you* know about it?” said Juror #2. “You said it yourself; maybe unicorns in *kindergarten* have problems. Hay, us pegasi have trouble flying when we start out at flying school, too. But it’s not like you’re going to forget how to do it once you’ve learned it.”

“I didn’t say unicorns *only* have problems when we’re in kindergarten,” the Forepony retorted. “I speak from experience.” She pointed to her left flank. “My cutie mark actually symbolizes magic. My *special talent* is quite literally magic. And yet... sometimes, even *my* spells don’t work the way they’re supposed to.”

“And sometimes,” added Juror #6, “I can’t get myself to fly. When I’m scared.”

“*Ugh*,” said Juror #2. She started massaging her temple. “This is stupid. We’re not *getting* anywhere. So what if the two of *you* have problems? That doesn’t mean the *victim* has ever had any problems.”

“Don’t mean she didn’t,” said Juror #4, reasonably. “Nopony asked. Maybe somebody should’ve.”

“Well nopony *did*. And besides, what does it matter? Why would she curse herself?”

“She might not have done it on *purpose*,” said the Forepony. “Accidents happen, don’t they?”

“Why wouldn’t she just say it was an accident, then? You’re just spinning theories. The zebra’s counsel didn’t even make these sorts of arguments. What are you, her lawyer?” She squinted. “Whose side are you on?”

“I don’t believe I have to be a lawyer for one side or the other,” said Juror #5. “I’m just asking questions.” There was a short span where nopony talked.

“I dunno,” said Juror #4, again first to break the silence. “She *mighta* cursed herself on purpose.”

“And *why* would she do that? Why would she lie? What has she got to gain?” asked Juror #3.

“Might be she just wanted a little attention,” said Juror #6.

“*Attention?* Seriously, *attention?!*” Juror #2 flew up to the ceiling, commanding the room’s attention. “That’s it. You keep coming up with these bright little sayings. Why don’t you send one in to the Equestria Daily? Maybe they’ll publish it for you.”

The cowpony suddenly jumped to her feet, and in a flash there was a lasso around Juror #2’s neck. She yanked, and the pegasus was sprawled on the table. There were several shouts, but one voice was clearly distinct over the others.

“You take that back,” Juror #4 growled. “You take that back right now. You oughta have more respect. You say stuff like that to her again,” she threatened, “and Ah’m gonna lay you out.” With a quick flick of the hoof, the lasso was back in her possession. She started twirling the rope back into a circle, and she hung it on her flank before sitting down again.

Juror #2 glared from her fallen position. She scooted herself off the table as nonchalantly as possible. Brushing invisible dust from her shoulder, she settled herself in her chair, but said not a word. Her wings were slightly erect from barely contained anger.

“Now go on, sugarcube,” said Juror #4. “You were sayin’?”

Juror #6 just cringed in her chair. “Nothing,” she managed.

The cowpony sighed. “Look, I didn’t mean ta scare ya. But Ah reckon you have a point. Ponies do things fer attention all the time, even when they don’t realize it when they’re doin’ it.”

“What do you mean, darling?” asked Juror #1. “I *a/ways* know when I want attention.”

Juror #4 sighed again, this time more deeply. “Let me put it this way. No. Actually, let me tell ya a story. When I was younger... well hay, I still do. Let me start over.” She took a moment to collect her thoughts.

"I grew up on an apple farm. I've been a farmer all my life, s'matter of fact. It ain't easy work, and the hours're long. It's farmers like me that keeps food on tables.

"S'far as I can tell, ponies don't really give much thought to where their supper comes from. They don't rightly unnerstand the work that goes into turning a tiny seed into a meal. An' most prolly never will.

"I know what it's like to be plum ignored. Most every day during sellin' season, y'all can find me hawkin' mah apples in my old cart near Sugarcube Corner. Of course I get customers, and they'll talk it up with me 'casionally; that ain't mah point. But it's a rare day when somepony talks to me... just to talk to *me*. To most everypony, I'm just a vendor on tha street, plyin' mah trade. And in a way, that's entirely right. But in another way, that's entirely wrong.

"Now. I know I'll never be a famous pony. There'll never be a statue made of me. There'll never be a book written about me. Ah'll rarely, if ever, be quoted. The only recognition I get is in tha family. Even then, it's just for doin' what's already expected of me. And most o' tha time, that's just fine.

"But. A few years ago, Ah think I let it get to me. My big brother was hurt to work, my little sis' was too small to work, my Granny was too old to work, and we were deep into Applebuck Season. So I told myself I was gonna buck every last apple offa every last tree at Sweet Apple Acres."

"Dear, I'm not sure I see where this is going," said Juror #1, gently.

"I'm gettin' there," said Juror #4. "The problem with that plan... was that on some level, I think I knew I couldn't do it. I just didn't want ta admit it to myself. So I worked late into the night. I started losin' sleep. I wasn't eatin' right. I basically made myself miserable fer no good reason. At the time I just attributed it ta stubborn pride.

"Of course, ponies noticed. It's easy to ignore somepony if they're always tha same. It's easy to ignore somepony if they never seem ta stand out. But it ain't so easy to ignore when the perky salespony you see most

every at the market is suddenly exhausted, fallin' asleep in the middle of conversations, runnin' into signs and trippin' over rocks..."

"And it later occurred to me that maybe – *maybe* – I had sorta wanted to be noticed all along. Maybe somepony would offer to help? Maybe somepony would show concern? Maybe somepony would appreciate the work I do? Somethin'. Anythin'. I just had to go to... a bit of an extreme."

She coughed, and pulled her hat back over her eyes, blushing silently.

"So..." said Juror #3. "You're trying to get us to believe the victim is lying about the curse just for attention?"

"Well, I don't rightly know," replied Juror #4. "Ah'm just sayin' it's *possible*. That unicorn never mentioned havin' a single friend. In fact, pretty much the only thing she *did* talk about was how many contracts she always has. Seems t'me like she's probably always so focused on her business that she hardly has time to make friends. And that can be a real sad thing. Imagine the attention she's gotten since this whole thing's happened. Ya see?"

Juror #1 bit her lip, thinking to herself. "There might be some truth in that."

"I can't believe this," moaned Juror #2. "Ponies don't curse themselves for attention. Why, I've got a fan who follows me where ever I go. I mostly just ignore her; she can be pretty annoying. She's done a lot of stupid things to get me to pay attention to her, sure. But something like this? No. I'm not buying it."

"I don't see how any of this makes a difference," said Juror #3. "I thought we said earlier that there isn't a unicorn spell in existence that can explain what happened to her. So it's *impossible* that she cursed herself, even if she wanted to."

"That's right," said Juror #2, turning to the pink earth pony. "You're absolutely right."

"*That* might not necessarily be true," said the Forepony.

“*What.*” Juror #1 did not look amused. “You *were* listening to the evidence, weren’t you? They must have gone over it a hundred times. *Three* expert witnesses. All of them saying the same thing. And nothing to the contrary.”

Juror #5’s eyes shifted to the giant stack of notes beside her. “Yes. But I don’t quite buy that evidence. Observe. Watch that water cooler over there in the corner.”

A red magical aura surrounded Juror #5’s horn. She closed her eyes. “Now,” she said, “I’ll need to concentrate for a few seconds, but you punch me exactly when I say.”

“*What?*”

“Just do it; you’ll see.”

The water cooler started expanding, and shrinking back. The water inside started bubbling. It seemed to grow a few black tendrils. Juror #5 was visibly straining under the effort, her eyes now shut tightly.

“I’m not sure this is legal...” started Juror #1, but she was interrupted with a loud:

“***Now!***”

Juror #2 socked the purple unicorn in the gut, and the water cooler simultaneously transformed with a *\*pop\**.

“Oh, it’s *hideous!*” shrieked Juror #1. The cowpony gave a low whistle. Juror #6 fell off her chair and backed away, towards the nearest window.

A red balloon escaped from somewhere under one of Juror #3’s arms, and zipped about the room releasing air with a whining ***Bzz-zzzZZzz-zzzt.*** And then it died on the table.

“Ow,” said Juror #5, clutching her stomach feebly. “You didn’t have to punch *that* hard.”

“Hehe. Sorry. I didn’t know how hard you wanted it.” Then she looked over at the... thing... in the corner. “Yeesh.”

Gently sitting down, Juror #5 said, “I think I’ve made my point.”

Juror #6 timidly raised a hoof into the air.

“Psssh,” said Juror #3. “It doesn’t look anything *like* what happened to that poor unicorn. And I suspect what you did just now can be undone.”

“Probably,” said Juror #5. “But what I did was combine three different spells all at once. Anypony who doesn’t know what I was trying to do would have a tough time reversing it. Right now, I’m probably the only pony who could change it back, except maybe for Princess Celestia or Princess Luna. And even then, I might not be able to, because I made sure I was interrupted... so even *I’m* not exactly sure what happened.”

“Big deal,” Juror #2 scoffed. “You just said that you had to combine three spells *and* get punched in the stomach just for *that*” (gesturing to the monstrosity) “to happen. And like you said earlier, your *special talent* is magic. The victim in this case is just your average unicorn. She probably can’t do twenty percent of the stuff you can do, even when she screws up.”

“That’s as may be, but—”

“*I* most certainly could *never* make anything that dreadful,” added Juror #1.

“Also, you *just* said that it can probably be reversed,” said Juror #3. “But that unicorn? Even Princess Celestia couldn’t change her back. She’s probably cursed forever unless some zebra un-curses her. Not that any of them *would*.”

Juror #6 raised her hoof slightly higher.

“I said it can *probably* be reversed; I don’t actually know.”

“You *do* realize that if it can’t be changed back, that you just broke the law,” opined Juror #1.

"I am well aware," responded Juror #5. "It's no matter. Water coolers are inanimate objects, and if necessary, I will pay for its replacement. We have bigger issues to deal with here."

"I don't know what you're trying to prove," said Juror #2. "So you ruined a water cooler. Good going. Now suppose you tell me why in Equestria anypony would even risk doing something like that to herself. *You* didn't even do it on yourself; you used a *water cooler*. And not only were you focusing on a water cooler, but you had to be *interrupted* just for it to work. Are you seriously suggesting that some *random* unicorn somehow had the ability to cast *three spells at once*, she needed to cast them *all at herself*, and that on top of it all, she was *interrupted* at just the right moment? Oh, and that the zebra in the room just *happened* to be talking about curses at the same time?

"Think about it! If these wild theories are enough to find that zebra not guilty, then apparently nopony is ever guilty of *anything*. Because you can *always* spin some crazy yarn that nopony's thought of. Just because you can think it, it doesn't make it reasonable. The judge told us from the very start that we're supposed to separate the facts from the fancy. Well, as far as I'm concerned, you've gone well *beyond* the facts and well *into* fanciful tales.

"And anyways, how do *you* know what happened? You weren't there!"

"That's right," said Juror #5. "I wasn't there. And neither were you."

Juror #6 put her hoof down and finally spoke. "I'd like to call for another vote," she said.

"What good is *that* going to do? You can't seriously..."

"A vote has been called for," said the Forepony. "And I don't think we need to keep these votes secret any more. All for not guilty, raise your right hoof."



Juror #6 and Juror #4 did as they were told. The rest of the room didn't move. "One, two," counted the Forepony. And then she raised her own hoof. "Three. The vote is three to three."

"I *can't* believe this," said Juror #2. "*You.*" She pointed at Juror #6. "You come in here with your heart bleeding all over the floor about this poor zebra, and you keep making up these wild stories. And somehow you've got some softhearted old mares listening to you. Well, *I'm* not. I'm getting real sick of this."

She looked around. "What's the matter with you ponies? This zebra is guilty! She's got to be banished! We're letting her slip through our hooves here!"

"Slip through our hooves?" said Juror #6. She stood up, some flare in her eye. "Are you her banisher?"

*"I'm one of them!"*

"Perhaps you'd like to banish her yourself?"

"This zebra? You bet I would!"

"Then I'm sorry for you."

"*Oh.* Don't you start that with *me.*"

"What it must feel like to... *want* to banish her."

"... shut up."

"That's *terrible* of you."

"I said, *shut up.*"

"You're a sadist."

**"SHUT. UP."**

“You want to see her banished because you personally want it. Not because of the facts.”

“**SHUT UP!**” And just like that, she was flying across the table, her hooves outstretched towards Juror #6. Just as quickly, there was a lasso around her waist. Juror #3 and Juror #1 each stood up, and started holding back the struggling pegasus, pushing her down onto the table. From the looks of it, the Forepony was also ready with a spell, her horn faintly glowing.

“*LET ME GO! LEAVE ME ALONE!*” Juror #2 snorted, smoke coming out of her nose. “*Curse you,*” she spat, now pinned. “*Who do you think you are? I’m a **Wonderbolt**. Or didn’t you know?*” She flashed a badge from her wallet. “You can’t talk to *me* like that.”

“You... you don’t really mean you’ll curse me... do you?”

# Act 3

Juror #2 inhaled deeply, her eyes narrowed into slits. And then she exhaled. Closing her mouth, she gave a roll of a shoulder to dislodge one of the hoofs holding her down. Somehow sensing that the moment was over, the others reluctantly let her go.

Quietly seething, the pegasus fluttered off of the table and to the open, center window. She stared outside at the courthouse steps, and did not say a word.

Thunder rolled.

"Sounds like we're in fer some rain," remarked Juror #4 after a long silence. "Didn't remember that was scheduled fer tonight."

Juror #3 blew her nose into her kerchief. She wiped her brow and leaned across the table towards Juror #1. "Don't you ever sweat?" she asked quietly, but incredulously.

"No, I don't." Juror #1 turned up her nose ever so slightly, and her enchanted fan angled with her. "Magic."

"Uh," said Juror #5, after another awkward silence. "If no pony has any suggestions, there are a few points we haven't really touched on."

Juror #3 groaned. "What's the use? We're not getting anywhere; *I'm* not going to change my vote. There's no way we're all going to agree." She looked up slightly towards the ceiling. "Let's just declare ourselves a hung jury. Let that zebra take her chances with some other jury. This party is *over*."

"Mmm," said Juror #1. "I honestly *don't* see how the three of you can possibly vote for acquittal. You've brought up some interesting points, I'll admit. But nothing that has lodged any *reasonable* doubts in my mind. Let's look at the facts.

“First. The zebra was overheard shouting ‘curse you’ at the victim the night before the victim discovered she was cursed.”

“But—”

“Yes, I know what you’re going to say. Alternative explanations aside, this is still an important fact. Second. No pony else was seen at the victim’s house between the shout and the following morning when the victim notified the authorities. Third. We know she was angry; she probably cursed the unicorn because she was lashing out of that anger. Fourth. Despite the... display... we saw earlier, it is *highly* unlikely that this curse was caused by anything other than zebra magic. Fifth—”

“Since yer bringin’ it up,” said Juror #4 slowly, “there was never actually any evidence sayin’ that zebras’re actually capable of bringin’ about that sorta curse.” She looked around. “They only argued that a unicorn *couldn’t* do it.”

“Hunh,” said Juror #5. “That’s true.” She absentmindedly started shuffling the envelopes labeled “Vote #1” and “Vote #2.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said Juror #3. “Of *course* it was a zebra curse. What else could it have been? There are no other explanations.” She glanced at the grotesque in the corner of the room, and quickly corrected herself. “No *believable* explanations. This is exactly the sort of things zebras do.

“And this one isn’t even your ordinary zebra. She lives in the *Everfree Forest*. The *Everfree Forest*,” she repeated. “All sorts of stuff we can’t explain happens there. The weather *creates itself*. The plants grow *on their own*. The animals *care for themselves*. Everything about it is unnatural. You think a zebra living there for *years* hasn’t learned a thing or two? If anything, living there has probably made her *worse*. She must know all sorts of curses we’ve never heard of before!”

“Not fer nothin’,” said Juror #4, “but we don’t *know* if she knows any curses. That was never proven. But we *do* know she’s never cursed no pony before. And truth bein’ told, I’ve never heard of a zebra cursin’ *anypony* before, ‘cept in fairy tales. How do we even *know* zebras can curse ponies?”

Juror #3 spluttered. "You think Princess Celestia would even let this trial happen if zebras can't use curses?"

"Maybe the Princess doesn't know if zebras can use curses, either."

Juror #2 spun around from the window and muttered something under her breath. "Suppose you talk us all out of this," she said. "And that this zebra really *can* use curses. And that she really *did* curse that unicorn. Are you saying that just because we don't *know* if zebras can use curses... that this one can just get away with it?"

"Suppose you talk us into voting guilty. And that zebras really *can't* use curses. Are you saying that it's still okay to banish her?"

"How can you *doubt* it?! What else could it *be*?!"

"Fifth," cut in Juror #1, firm yet shaky. "*Fifth*. The zebra came back the next morning."

"To destroy evidence, that's right," added Juror #2.

"Now wait just a minute," said Juror #4. "Exactly what evidence might she have destroyed? I never really followed that argument from earlier."

"Why..." said Juror #1. "The uh... the contract, of course, darling. No contract, no motive."

"Sugar, every neighbor *knew* those two had a contract. The zebra had been workin' on it for *weeks*. Try again."

"Maybe she came back to finish her off," said Juror #3 darkly. "No victim, no case."

"Or *maybe*," said Juror #5, "she came back because she had no idea the unicorn was cursed at all. And she was just at the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Maybe she came back to help."

“*Help*,” said Juror #3 sarcastically. “Help? You know what? You know *what*? The real crime is being committed right here in this room.” She stood up, nostrils flaring.

“In case you haven’t noticed, the only thing we’re deciding here is the fate of some... some *zebra*. Wicked! A wicked enchantress! She’s *evil*! She lives in the Everfree Forest... doing her *evil* stuff! Why, she’s so evil...”

Juror #4 pushed back her chair. And then she stood up and walked to a corner of the room.

“Where do you think you’re going? Listen to me. You look a zebra in the eyes... you look *that* zebra in the eyes... she’ll put you in trances. I saw.” She pointed to Juror #6. “This one... your ringleader... was looking that zebra in the eyes most of the trial. You want to know why that zebra didn’t testify? Because she was laying a spell. She had to concentrate. How else could anypony possibly believe she’s innocent?”

“What, because she’s ‘*nice*’? We all know about zebras. We’ve been told about them all our lives. They’re different – they’re *evil*. It’s all they know. Whoever heard of a nice zebra?”

Juror #5 stood up. And she walked to another corner of the room.

“You better *listen* to me,” Juror #3 raged, wagging a hoof. “We’ve *got* her. Do you really want... do you really want one of *them* wandering the streets? Free to do anything she pleases? I don’t want anything to do with her.

“Sure, she’s done some good things. I’m the first pony to say that. She *has* to help ponies sometimes to... to keep up her front. But the instant somepony does something she doesn’t like? *Blam*! Cursed. And that’s just *this* time. Just like any of them would do. You think things are going to get better if we let her go free?”

Juror #6 and Juror #2 simultaneously stood up. They shared a quick glance, and walked to the two remaining corners of the room.

“What’s going on here? Where are you going? I’m speaking my piece here!”

She desperately leaned across the table to Juror #1, the only pony still seated in the room.

“You know how it is, don’t you? Us ponies... we don’t *mean* anything to zebras. We’re just... there. Things to them. There to be cursed. There to be *killed*. They don’t care. For all we know, zebras probably *eat* ponies like us. Throw us in stews. There’s not a *one* of ‘em that’s any good. You better *watch out*. Take it from me. This zebra on trial—”

Juror #1 artfully grabbed her fan from the air, closed it with a flourish, and set it on the table. “I’ve had enough,” she said, dangerously quiet. “If you open your mouth again... I’ll personally sew it shut.”

Juror #3 moved her lips, but made no sound. She looked around the room. But there were no eyes for her to meet. Her lower lip trembled slightly.

Very, very slowly she walked to a small table next to one of the windows. She walked almost as though she were a zombie. Staggering, she pulled out the chair. It screeched, and it was the only sound in the room. She looked around the room once more. And then she slumped into the chair.

As she lay her pink head down over a hoof, there was another rumbling outside. And it started to rain.

The four ponies in the four corners of the room made their ways back to their respective seats. The sounds of the downpour muffled their hoofsteps on the wooden floor.

“So,” said Juror #5, all business. “Where were we?”

“We were discussing why the zebra came back to the house,” said Juror #1. “And I don’t think we can come to any firm conclusions on that point. She could have come back to make sure the curse took hold. She could have come back to burglarize the house. She could have come back for any reason you like. Maybe a good night’s sleep let the guilt sink in.”

“That reminds me of somethin’,” said Juror #4. “Why is it the curse took a whole night to... uh... manifest in the first place? Wouldn’t a curse be more quick-like?” She blushed. “I’m afraid I don’t know much ‘bout this sorta thing, so I’ll have to defer to y’all.”

“Well,” started Juror #5 with a scholarly tone, “not all spells are instantaneous. Some can be activated or triggered by a phrase, a movement, a certain event... But now that you’ve brought it up, that actually is a bit odd.” She put a hoof to her chin. “In fact, that’s *quite* odd. If she laid the curse at the same time she was shouting, you would think the effect would have been immediate. I wish I had some of my books with me...”

“She was probably just thinking ahead,” said Juror #1, somewhat dismissively. “By delaying the effects of the curse, it makes it harder to pin on her. Naturally.”

Juror #4 scrunched up her face, thinking hard. “Ah’m... not sure that fits in with yer theory. If she was really as angry as you’ve been trying to get us ta believe – angry enough to yell and alert the neighborhood, and angry enough to resort to something as drastic as a curse when she’s never cursed anypony before – then what’re the chances she’d be able to think ahead an’ delay the curse like that? Doesn’t add up.”

Juror #1’s head bobbed back reflexively, considering the point. “But... then hrm. I’m not quite sure how this makes sense.”

“Might be it doesn’t make sense because she didn’t do it,” suggested Juror #4. “If she was really angry, the curse woulda happened immediately. If she was cool and calculating, she wouldn’ta yelled. Either way, it doesn’t make sense.”

“I wonder why she said the victim had ‘doomed’ them both,” said Juror #5. “If she really cursed her, then that part doesn’t really make sense.”

“Maybe something bad happened to both of them.”



“You mean... like they both touched something that was cursed? And it ‘doomed’ both of them in a different way?” postulated Juror #5. “I *really* wish I had my books. I can hardly remember anything about enchantments. And I certainly haven’t read much about *evil* enchantments.

“But... if there *was* some weird cursed thing that cursed both the victim *and* the zebra... then that might actually explain why the zebra never said anything, and didn’t testify. Maybe she *can’t*. It’s like the ultimate joke: being the only one who knows about something, yet being unable to do anything about it.”

“What do you think?” asked Juror #6 to the white unicorn.

“I... I’m not sure what to think.”

“What does it matter if the curse was delayed? Who knows what the zebra was thinking?” said Juror #2. “Just because she was mad doesn’t mean she isn’t smart. We don’t know. And why are we suddenly talking about cursed objects? How can *anypony* know any of this?”

Juror #4 smirked. “Ah think that’s the point.”

“So... do you still not have a reasonable doubt?” asked Juror #6 to the white unicorn, gently.

“/ think she’s guilty!” said Juror #2.

“Anypony agree?” She looked again at Juror #1.

Juror #1 wiped sweat off of her brow. “No,” she said, after a time. “No. I’m convinced. Not guilty.”

“What about you in the corner?” asked Juror #4, raising her voice to be heard. “Settin’ aside yer personal feelings on zebras, d’ya *honestly* think she’s guilty?”

The pink earth pony sniffled, her head still on her table. And she shook her head ‘no.’

“Then the vote is five to one in favor of acquittal,” said Juror #5.

"I guess that means you're alone," said Juror #6.

"I don't care whether I'm alone or not," retorted #2. "I have a right."

"You have a right, yes."

All eyes were on Juror #2.

"Well, I told you. I think she's guilty. What else do you want?"

"Why do you think she is guilty?"

"I *gave* you my arguments! I've been arguing the whole time!"

"We're not convinced. Go over them again. We have time."

Juror #2 curled her lip slightly, and looked at Juror #1. "Listen. What's the matter with you? You're the one who's been leading the right charge. You made all the arguments. You can't turn *now*. That zebra's got to be banished!"

"I'm sorry," said Juror #1. "There's a reasonable doubt in my mind now."

No pony spoke.

"*Well*. You're not going to intimidate *me*. I'm *entitled* to my opinion. It's gonna be a hung jury. That's the end of it!"

After a silence, Juror #4 said quietly: "It takes a good deal o' courage ta stand alone; even if ya believe somethin' very strongly."

And at that, Juror #2 snapped. She was up in the air instantaneously. "I don't get it. I just *don't* get it. How can any of you *possibly* think she's not guilty?" Her wings flapped angrily. "*Everything* points to her being guilty. I mean... we were all in the same courtroom! We all heard the same evidence! Everything in the case just piles up against her!"

She picked up Juror #1's hefty stack of notes, eliciting a small gasp from the purple unicorn. "Pages of guilt! Literally *pages*! This is like a book of guilt! *Every single thing* says she's guilty!"

Nopony spoke.

"What's the matter with all of you? You're all just bleeding your hearts out onto the floor, feeling sorry for this zebra, completely ignoring how guilty she is!

"She *yelled* the curse! What does it matter if she was angry or cunning or both? We don't know! You can't prove it!

"And what's this business about whether zebra's can use curses? We don't know! But nopony proved otherwise! And how can you seriously believe a unicorn could have done it? Just because a unicorn whose *special talent* can do something similar, it doesn't mean just any pony from the street could! You think that mare cursed *herself*? Or that some unexplained *thing* cursed her? What a tale!

"And the witnesses! We all know she was there! Nopony else was!

"And what about the contract? You think she wouldn't do anything about that? What else can explain it!?"

Nopony spoke.

"So what if we don't know everything? If we could know stuff like this for sure, we wouldn't have to have trials! I don't need to explain everything just to show she's guilty! How can you *possibly* believe anything else?"

Nopony spoke.

"***YOU'RE DRIVING ME CRAZY!***" She suddenly threw the stack of notes at a wall with all of her strength. They exploded in a cloud of white paper, pages floating all over the room.

And nopony spoke.

With a huff, Juror #2 pulled out her wallet, intending to reach for her Wonderbolts badge. But in the act, a crumpled picture fell out and onto the table.

She absentmindedly picked it up. "How can you believe...", she started. Before she could stuff the photograph back in her wallet, she looked down. And she stopped.

The photograph had a picture of a cheerful orange pegasus with purple hair, resplendent with a newly-earned cutie mark. Written in italics on the picture was the phrase: '*Thanks for believing in me!*'

Juror #2 looked intently at the photograph. Her lower lip started to tremble. She looked up and around the table.

No pony spoke. The rain pattered outside the window.

"Oohhhhhhhhhh," wailed Juror #2. She crumpled onto the table, photograph in her hooves. Beneath her breath, she said:

"Not guilty."

Starting to cry, she repeated: "Not guilty. Celestia help me, not guilty."

And no pony spoke.

Silently, the group stood up except for Juror #2. The Forepony knocked gently on the door to alert the guard that the deliberations were finished.

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Juror #6 looked out into the rain, on top of the courthouse steps. As she was about to step forward, there was a voice behind her:

"Hold up, there!" Juror #4 galloped over, and slowed as she approached. She doffed her hat respectfully. "That was some mighty fine work up there. What's your name?"

“Fluttershy.”

“Ah’m Applejack.” The two looked at each other. “Well...,” said Applejack, “... s’long.”

“So long.”

And they both stepped out into the rain.