

# Apple Bloom

By NoRatCat



# Table of Contents:

Prologue	3
Chapter 1	5
Chapter 2	15
Chapter 3	26
Chapter 4	34
Chapter 5	43
Chapter 6	59
Chapter 7	68
Chapter 8	77
Chapter 9	88
Chapter 10	96
Chapter 11	105

# Prologue

She gazed about, her eyes scanning all about the village. The equines scurried about their daily lives, this little backwater they called Ponyville. Through her gaze, she could see all the races, earth, pegasus, and unicorn ponies. However the adults were of no concern to her. Only the children held her interest.

They milled about like mice, engaging in all such manners of activity. She saw two little fillies, their air high class and snooty. They held high opinions of each other, the cutie marks depicted upon their flanks illustrated a very well to do air.

Not them.

A new pair garnered her eye's attention, two young colts, one short and squat, the other tall and lanky.

Definitely not them.

Another reached her eye, a young filly delicately preparing peppermint candies. Her hand waved in a dismissal. These children were happy, content with their lives. Something she didn't need. There had to be one miserable child, just one. Her gaze moved out of the boundaries of Ponyville. Then it stopped. There it sat, a farm, apple orchards surrounded it, far as the eye could see. The bright demeanor of its appearance belied another emotion, one that carefully hid.

Unhappiness. It belonged to one. Grinning to herself, she quickly went to work.

The window opened without as much as a creak. From outside the starry void, a doll flew through. It held the image of a baby earth pony, her body a lime green with a brown colored mane, held up in a pretty red ribbon. It gave off an illusion of an apple pie.

Grasping the doll, she undid its stitches, letting the stuffing rain down upon the floor. She undid everything, the buttons, and the mane leaving nothing

but a deflated sack. With a thrust, she turned the sack inside out, the under color a pale olive. First came the stuffing, refilling it until it filled out the figure. The needle dove in and out sewing the mouth up into a friendly looking grin. The stringed mane hair she sewed back into the body. This time she went for a brighter design, a brilliant crimson color.

Almost perfect but missing a detail, the eyes. The drawer opened, revealing a selection of buttons, some big, some small, various colors, but he went for a traditional color, black of course.

The buttons were sewn into the doll and at last her creation was complete. The window opened upon her command and casually she tossed it, back into the starry void. The window shut behind it just as quietly as it had opened.

And so she sat, and she waited, but there was still more to be done. A mother's work was never done.

# Chapter 1

The weather in Ponyville could be considered dreary today. Overcast filled the skies, only tiny hints of blue peeking through, and the small rays warmed whomever they were lucky enough to hit, if only for a few moments. None of the Pegasus ponies, particularly Rainbow Dash could do anything about it. The source of this impromptu weather resulted in an accident at the factory in Cloudsdale. Apparently it would have to run its course, but citizens were told to expect random weather for a while. The pony inhabitants went about their daily business, seeing no cause for alarm because of a bunch of clouds.

One such place was a farm outside the town, Sweet Apple Acres, the number one source of apple and apple goods throughout Equestria. The members of the Apple family were hard workers, owing their success to gritting through tough times such as this, rain, snow, sleet and hail. It sounded like a mantra from a post person, or pony in this world's case. But that is how it went in the life of a farmer. The heads of this particular branch of the family orchard were busy even now. Well save for two. One due to age, while the other because of being too small.

The latter looked out her bedroom window. Apple Bloom sighed. A strand of her pinkish mane fell out of place. With a thrust of her head, she put it back into place. She made certain this time her pink ribbon kept the hairs perfect. A few droplets hung slid down the window from the small shower the other day. This dreariness matched the boredom she felt. If only her siblings weren't so busy. One would think this bad weather would at least excuse them from work, but she had to be born into a family of farmers. Hard work and the Apple Family name went hoof in hoof.

Seeing nothing else, she soon left her home to see if there was something interesting to do, mostly in regards to her brother and sister, starting of course with the latter. It didn't take long for the young earth pony to find her elder sister.

There bucking the trees for its crop was Applejack. Applejack was easily identified by her orange body and blond ponytailed mane, but mostly it was her cowpony hat. She never took it off, save for bed and meal times. The

mare would give a mighty buck, and the apples would fall into the baskets. She would take a break each time they fell, then immediately get back to work. Nothing could break her concentration.

"Hey Applejack!" the aforementioned halted. One thing could stop her, a younger sibling that is.

Applejack momentarily distracted from her day's work to see her little sister staring up at her with her big eyes.

"Hello Apple Bloom." she greeted, her voice only containing a hint of annoyance, but she hid it well for fear of hurting her sibling's feelings.

Two seconds of silence followed before Apple Bloom spoke again. "Sooooo, watcha doin?" she asked knowing the question was obvious.

Applejack bucked another apple tree. "Well Ah'm bucking this here tree." Applejack spoke in her drawl, something that all members of her family shared.

"Can Ah help?" Apple Bloom asked.

Applejack gave her sister a look. "Ya might wanna stay out of this little sis, Ah got it handled."

Apple Bloom let out pout. Her sister had been grumpy ever since the weather mishap, especially when she got caught in the rain, coming inside soaking wet to the bone. That or the combination of working in such conditions could make anyone cranky.

"Come on sis! Ah can help! With the two of us we can get it done twice as fast." to further her point, Apple Bloom attempted to buck, only to cause no effect to the bark. Applejack provided a much better example, actually managing to knock a few apples from the branches.

"Stubborn little." Applejack muttered as she noticed a few still hung above. Stubborn would be correct as they wouldn't budge no matter what.

Apple Bloom noticed her sisters growing frustration. "How about a little break sis?" she suggested. "Maybe the two of us could do something?"

"Kind of busy little sister."

"Come on just a little one?"

"Ah said no."

"But all this work is turning you into a cranky old mule!"

"Ah said no!" Applejack's voice raised a fraction. Immediately she noticed the shocked, borderline hurt expression upon her sister's face. "Look Apple Bloom." she softened both her face and her voice. "Ah'm really sorry, but we've got a big harvest and Ah have to get it down before the weather acts up again." She attempted to reason. "Why don't you go see what Big Macintosh is doing?"

Apple Bloom felt her hurt vanish, but a sigh escaped her. "Fine." dejection radiated from her. Slinking off, Apple Bloom left her sister alone, and went to find her eldest sibling. In the field she saw a red, orange maned stallion plowing the field.

"Big Macintosh!" Apple Bloom called as she pranced over to her brother, who didn't stop even after his name was spoken.

"Working hard Big Mac?" Apple Bloom asked cheerfully.

Big Mac shifted the straw in his mouth to the side. "Eyup." he replied with his catchphrase. The filly trotted alongside her elder brother, matching his movements.

"Say, you've been working hard, how's about a little break?" Apple Bloom suggested, hoping to deter her brother to spend time with her.

"Nope." was Big Mac's brisk reply.

Apple Bloom lowered her brow. "It could be real quick. We could go into town, maybe get a treat at Sugar Cube Corner." to be honest, that last bit was more towards herself. Apple Bloom could really have gone for a slice of cake about now.

"Nope. Supper'll be done a few hours, you know that." Big Mac replied.

"Please! Just for a bit." Apple Bloom put on her best look.

"Nope."

"For ten minutes?"

"Nope."

"Five minutes?"

"Nope."

"One minute?"

"Nope."

Apple Bloom's look fell with a disappointed brow. "You're going to keep saying nope aint ya?"

Big Macintosh shifted his straw again. "Eyup."

Apple Bloom gave a frustrated cry. Her siblings may have been too busy, but there was still one other member of the family.

"Granny Smith!" she called the moment she stepped into the house. "Hey ya wanna?" The question began and ended the moment she found her grandmother. There she sat, an old, wrinkled green mare, Granny Smith, the eldest member of the Apple Clan. A snore parted from the seniors lips, her neck tilting a tad.

Apple Bloom frowned. "Oh right." a part of her knew her grandmother wouldn't be available, but she merely grasped at the metaphorical straw.

"That tears it!" the little filly declared, storming out of the house. As the door slammed behind her, the sound awoke a certain mare.

"Wha?" Granny Smith blinked her eyes open, but in moments she closed them again. "Circus mice." she muttered before she lapsed back to sleep.

XXX



Down the path, Apple Bloom stormed. She had walked this path many times. After all, it was the only way from her home to Ponyville, and the way to school each weekday. Hopefully she would find some excitement there, she needed some seeing as her family was too busy with their own duties. honestly though, Apple Bloom loved her family, but sometimes she felt a tad out of place. Well, very little moments. However it was times such as these where she truly felt out of place. They were all apple farmers. It showed upon their cutie marks, something all adult ponies had. Applejack had three red apples, Big Mac had an apple half and Granny Smith had an apple pie. Where as Apple Bloom? Well as a certain pair of school bullies would say, she was a blank flank. She had tried to find her talent in apple's as her family, but that didn't turn out so well. In fact the first day she mostly just terrified the customer's with her overeagerness. In fact, Mr. Whoof still seemed wary of her whenever they crossed paths. Yet, Apple Bloom found solace in her blank flanks, for she wasn't the only filly around without a cutie mark. Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo, a unicorn and pegasus pony respectively. Together, the three of them formed the "Cutie Mark Crusaders." their mission: To discover their talents and earn their cutie marks. Seeing as there was nothing else to do, Apple Bloom figured it was time for another meeting between the three of them. After all, she would rather spend the day with her friends.

XXX

"Sick!" Apple Bloom exclaimed disappointedly. Sweetie Belle was first on her list, so therefore required a trip to the Carousal Boutique, Ponyville's number one stop for fashion. Besides, she knew Sweetie Belle was staying with her sister Rarity for a week, and it was Rarity who answered the door.

Unfortunately, Apple Bloom received some news she didn't want to hear. "Yes, I'm sorry to say Sweetie Belle has caught some kind of bug." The older white unicorn answered.

Apple Bloom's fell down in disappointment. "Ya mind if Ah see her?" the filly asked. Even if they couldn't hang out, she could at least visit her friend.

Rarity, seemed to hesitate for a moment. The sophisticated mare obviously didn't enjoy the thought of being in the same house with germs, but she cared for her sister and in Sweetie Belle's state, a visit from a friend could cheer her up. "Well I don't see why not." Inside, Apple Bloom could see an

unfinished dress in the middle of the room. Rarity must have been working before she came in. Near the stairs, her cat Opal sat. The white fluff ball briefly looked up from her nap, only to give a small hiss at the approaching filly. Apple Bloom shot the cat a dirty look before following Rarity upward.

"Sweetie Belle?" Rarity called. I've brought one of your friends to see you."

Apple Bloom trotted into the room. "Hey Sweetie, Ah heard you weren't feeling well so Ah wanted." Apple Bloom stopped when she got a good look at her friend.

Sweetie Belle looked terrible. Her mane was frazzled, and her eyes drooped low. A trail of snot dipped down from her reddened nose. A soft moan escaped her as she blew her nose loudly.

"Cheer you up." Apple Bloom finished.

Sweetie Belle blearily looked up to see her friend. It brought a small grin to her face. "Doh, hey Apple Bloom." a stuffiness permeated her voice. However her smile broke away as her face started to twitch. "ACHOOO!" Sweetie Belle let out a sneeze. Another tissue followed as she blew her nose once more.

A look of concern crossed Apple Bloom's face. "Golly, you must really be sick." She realized moving closer to her friend's bedside.

"Dyeah dye think it was da-da." Sweetie Belle's face began to spasm in a twitch.

Unfortunately, Apple Bloom realized what was about to happen too late. "DACCHOOOOOO!" Apple Bloom let out a yelp as her face was sprayed with...well.....it didn't need to be said.

"Weather." Sweetie Belle finished. "Dorry Apple Bloom." she sniffed.

Apple Bloom wiped away the gunk. "No problem."

Needless to say, Apple Bloom left, mostly because she knew Rarity wouldn't want to risk more germs contaminating her house, or rather two sick ponies, but Apple Bloom felt fine.

"Well that didn't work out." Apple Bloom spoke to herself. "But Ah guess Ah should see Scootaloo." she added with a hint of optimism. Her Pegasus friend would always be up for fun, doing maneuvers on her scooter.

Unfortunately, Apple Bloom would be disappointed again. Apple Bloom made it to Scootaloo's house, and her friend answered the door, but when the orange pegasus stepped out, she immediately noticed the white bandages wrapped around her wings.

"Scootaloo what happened?" Apple Bloom said after her initial "hello", but didn't bother asking "Ya wanna hang out?".

Scootaloo dug at the ground with her front hoof. "I hurt myself on my scooter." A flush of embarrassment colored her face. Beneath her breath, she muttered something about a rock and a wall eyed pony commonly known as Derpy Hooves.

Needless to say, the meeting of the Cutie Mark Crusaders would not come to pass. With a sulk, Apple Bloom trotted along the village streets. So far this day had been a bust. Her family was too busy; her friends were either sick or hurt. She didn't want to sound selfish, but being a very young child, she had moments of such. Then something caught her eye. Amidst the ponies who bustled about, she got a particular hint of purple, but it wasn't of a flank, but scales. Sure enough it was Spike. The baby dragon dug at the base of his and Twilight's home. Curiosity peaking, Apple Bloom trotted closer.

"Spyke?" she pronounced in her accent. "What are ya doin?" Close as she was, she could see the dragon appeared to be looking for something.

Craning his head back, he gave a friendly grin at the young pony. "Oh hey Apple Bloom. Crazy weather we're having eh?"

"Yeah." Apple Bloom muttered.

The dragon went back to work, whatever he was doing.

"Um? Are ya looking for something?" Apple Bloom asked.

Spike didn't answer, only giving a few mutters of "Know you're here, where are ya?" and so forth. "Ah ha!" Spike exclaimed happily.

"What?" Apple Bloom inquired, poking her head in closer. When Spike turned though, she wished she hadn't.

"Check out the size of this thing!" Spike exclaimed.

The moment Apple Bloom saw it she yelped, taking a few steps backward. "Eww! Gross!"

In Spike's claws, he held a long, slimy looking slug. "Oh man! Take a look at this! Twilight told me these things like damp weather." Spike held up the gastropod with pure awe in his green eyes. Apple Bloom had never hung out with Spike much. Sure they talked, but mostly whenever Twilight or Applejack, or any of their friends were in company together. Honestly though, she wasn't getting a good impression of the dragon.

"Here. You want to see?" Spike asked, holding out the slug to Apple Bloom.

Apple Bloom gave a disgusted glance at the creature. "No thanks."

"Aww come on. It's not so bad, actually kind of cute." stated Spike.

Cute? A slug? Apple Bloom didn't hold the same sentiments. "Actually Ah think Ah should be headin home now." The filly excused herself, wanting to move away as quickly as possible. About now, home seemed more fun, and it probably would be dinner soon.

"Wait hold on! I almost forget." Spike called to her. Before Apple Bloom could ask, Spike darted inside, Twilight's library home. Apple Bloom tapped her hoof impatiently, but soon Spike exited. "I wanted to return this to you." said Spike.

Apple Bloom looked curiously at what held in the dragon's claws. It was a doll, but not just any doll. It looked exactly like her. Right down to every detail. Her color, her mane, her bow, even her blank flank. The only difference were the buttons in place of eyes.

"Where did ya get this?" Apple Bloom asked with a raised eye.

"In that old building near your farm." Spike answered.

"Old building?"

Spike pointed in the direction where said building would have been. "Yeah, I heard a story from Snips and Snails about it being haunted by some kind of ghost. But then again it was Snips and Snails so it probably wasn't true, and I know Twilight says ghost's don't exist, but hey you can't blame a dragon for being curious." Spike explained in a long winded sentence. "So I went there to check it out and I found your doll. So here ya go." Spike handed the doll to Apple Bloom.

Apple Bloom didn't take it though, not at first. Raising her other eyebrow, she admitted, "This aint my doll."

Spike was surprised by this bit of news. "Really? I just thought it was, it looks just like you. Real shame, I was kind of hoping it was so that way Rarity could see me give it to you." Spike flashed a dreamy grin. "I'm so sure she would think I'm the quite the little gentledragon." Spike's crush on Rarity was no secret, not that he tried to make it a secret. Of course being as young as he was, and the species barrier, it would rather difficult.

Apple Bloom felt a chill, not from the air, but emotionally. Someone put a lot of detail into this doll, somebody who had a good look at her she imagined. Staring into it's button eyes, she asked. "Where did ya say ya found this?"

XXX

Deep within the Everfree Forest, sat a hut. Inside a bubbling pot of liquid sat in a cauldron. Before it stood a female zebra, her neck decorated with a gold chocker and her cutie mark that of a spiral sun. Many would ask why one would live in the Everfree Forest, a place not directly under pony control, but for Zecora, it suited her. Partially because of her days when she was feared by the Ponyville denizens as an "evil enchantress." Of course those were simply assumptions and superstitions on their part. Those days had passed, and now she could walk freely without shopkeepers locking their doors and windows at the site of her. Yet, she still remained within the Everfree Forest. Besides, it was the best place to gather herbs. Mixing up potions was her talent, something many would agree with. However, this was no potion she brewed, nor was it a stew. In her mouth she carried something she gathered. A jar of dirt it was, dug up from a secluded area near Sweet Apple Acres. Pouring the contents into the brew, Zecora mixed it well.

Commenting in her native tongue, she noticed the change of color within.

Something was amiss in Ponyville. It became noticeable, the moment she moved in. Least, only she could sense it. Zebras had a sixth sense for such matters. She couldn't put her hoof on it, but something wasn't right. The dirt she gathered did not come from hallowed ground.

# Chapter 2

Dilapidated, old, decrepit, and no, that wasn't one way to describe Granny Smith. In the present case, it referred to the building. Apple Bloom hadn't noticed it before, it stood far enough from her home, and secluded enough that nobody would notice it. The house itself looked just like the ones back in Ponyville, only far grander, similar to Rarity's place. Although that may have applied back when it was new, by now the paint had dried and peeled away. No more windows hung, more than likely due to time and wear breaking them. A side of the upper floor had caved in, making that room inhospitable, if the room underneath even remained.

Sure looked like a haunted house. Perhaps Snips and Snails weren't lying? Then again, anything that came out of the mouths of those two colts could be taken with a pinch of salt.

Apple Bloom reminded herself of that. It helped keep the fear at bay. She had come here alone. Last she left Spike, he was still interesting himself with that slug. How one could find such a thing interesting went beyond the filly. Then again, Spike was a boy.

Looking onward, Apple Bloom gulped. "Ya think Ah should go in Little Me?" Apple Bloom asked.

Whom she asked rode upon her back, the little doll. She didn't know what else to do besides take it. Apple Bloom felt curious, yet she still wondered who would model a doll after her? The whole thing was baffling. Childish curiosity would be the only reason she came to this place.

And so her curiosity got to her, that and the doll. She made the doll nod a "yes", and inside they went. The ancient door creaked open, not so loud as Apple Bloom was careful to step inside. A musty smell hit her nose, gazing inside she could see the white of many cobwebs dotting the room. It must have been a nice room back in the day, the whole house even. A living room to the side, complete with an ancient furniture, and a kitchen on the other side.

Though that was then, this was now. Now everything looked like a derelict waste. Everything lay broken, shattered, generally not the most ideal of living conditions. Many could agree, Apple Bloom certainly did. Working her way down the hall, she noted the many pictures that hung, some of them happy. In the distance, she could see a staircase, or what was left of it, a part of the above ceiling had crashed onto it, destroying the steps, and preventing no way upward. Dust kicked up at her hooves, it made her legs close in together, for fear of any critters that may be scurrying about. All the while, the little doll rode upon it's back, bouncing occasionally.

The staircase lay within a separate room, Apple Bloom thought it could have been a study of sorts, or at least a room with a fireplace, kind of redundant seeing as there was a living room just behind her. Not much standing, a few end tables, bare book cases, all sorts of things that the young filly didn't really take care to note. The wall's were just about bare, all dim and worn. It all followed a similar pattern, until she noticed something, far in the back. The pattern that the wood followed seemed disrupted. A hint of discoloration drew Apple Bloom in. She felt the doll upon her back fall off. Ducking her body lower, she could see the discoloration. Her knack of exploration, attributed to being a child, led her to what seemed to be a rusty old door latch. Sure enough, it was attached to a door. small enough to fit a child.

"Wonder where this leads?" she asked herself. With her hoof, she scrapped off any rust that she could and attempted to open the door. Much as she pulled, nothing budged. Noticing the key hole, she realized it was locked.

A sigh of defeat escaped her. Looks like the adventure had come to an end. Boring for her. Moment she turned around though, she noticed something peculiar.

The doll was gone.

Funny, she had felt it drop, so by logic it should still be there. "L-little Me?" Apple Bloom called. A chill ran up her spine. Maybe the ghost stories were more than just little pony tales. A whimper scratched her throat as her head darted around for any spokes. Then she saw it. A flash of color and there it was, the doll!



The chill vanished halfway, for the question remained. "How'd y'all get over there?"

From the way the doll sat, it looked as if it was pointing to something. Apple Bloom followed its hoof to see something just a few feet away, right underneath an end table. Curiosity peaking again, Apple Bloom reached under and pulled out a long metal object. It was a black key, and at the end it held a curious shape, which was that of a black button. Although she wasn't concerned with the craft, Apple Bloom put two and two together. Key, plus locked door equaled....well she went to school after all.

Her adventurous spirit welled up inside her once more. Taking the key, she found it a perfect fit for the keyhole. It turned with a metallic click. A creak gave away, the door opened, Apple Bloom's little heart beat faster in anticipation.

Then it fell, when she saw nothing but a brick wall behind it.

"Really?" Apple Bloom frowned.

Closing the door, she dropped the key, and picked up her doll.

It was time to go home.

XXX

Certainly enough, a rainstorm had followed, luckily the Apple family had made it home before they were caught in the downpour. If anything, a hot meal would make this day better. Apple Bloom actually looked forward to that. That is until she saw what they were serving.

"Beets?" questioned the young filly. This usually wasn't their choice of family meals. Bur here it was.

"Well, Ah thought we might try something different tonight, besides, beets are good for a growing filly." Applejack spooned some more onto her sisters plate.

"Big Macintosh replied with a simple "Eyup." Apparently he agreed with his younger sister.

Granny Smith said nothing, she merely dozed in and out, going into her meal whenever she managed to stay awake.

"So Apple Bloom? How was your day?" Applejack attempted to open up a nice conversation, noticing her sister's mood, and partially because she wanted to make up for her sour mood from earlier.

"Boring." she responded.

"Oh, well didn't ya spend any time with your friends?" Applejack continued.

Apple Bloom grimly took a bite of her beets, trying to manage the taste. "Sweetie Belle is sick, Scootaloo got hurt, and Spike was busy playing with a slug. And y'all were too busy for me." Apple Bloom made certain to add that part.

"Well excuse us for trying to keep food in your belly and make a living." Applejack was very proud of the work she did, as was the rest of the family. "Ya know, a lot of little fillies would be happy to have your life." Applejack scolded.

Apple Bloom muttered "Ya aint my momma."

"What was that?" Applejack caught only a faint trace.

"May Ah be excused/" Apple Bloom didn't give her sibling time to answer, she left the table and headed off to bed.

Applejack almost said something, but put the words away, save for a disappointed sigh. At this moment, Granny Smith finally awoke, fully that is. Her eyes looked about, still seeing if she was in the same place. Her eyes fell upon her youngest grandchild, or rather what was on her back. A little doll, the spitting image of Apple Bloom.

*"Hey Smith. Look what Ah found."*

A voice crept out from the recesses of her mind. Something old, and partially forgotten.

"Something wrong Granny?" Big Macintosh asked, noticing the slight distress upon his grandmother's wrinkled visage.

Granny Smith shook her head just a bit before she answered. "No, i-it's nothing."

With that said, the family resumed their meal.

XXX

Apple Bloom flopped upon her bed, snuggling under the covers, "Well, here ends another boring day." she spoke aloud.

Indeed today had been boring, as if some overpowering, outside force made everything go wrong for her. The only thing she could do now was sleep.

"Goodnight Little Me." Apple Bloom yawned to her little doppleganger.

The doll, being a doll, said nothing. It simply sat there upon the bed as the young filly slept. Simply sitting so quietly, almost as if it was watching it owner.

XXX

*"Dear little filly, come and play."*

*The door sat there, silent.*

*"We'll have treats, toys, and games to play."*

*A creak gave way. It started to open.*

*"Come to my parlor, leave your world behind."*

*Slowly and steadily it opened.*

*"Here you shall be loved, a family who will show attention only to you."*

*At last it fully opened, and light filled the room*

*"I'm waiting for you, my dear, sweet, Apple Bloom."*

XXX

Apple Bloom awoke with a start. Eyes opening wide, she saw nothing but a darkened room. That dream, she didn't know how to explain it.

"Those beets must have made my stomach funny." Apple Bloom reasoned, although that could have been her distaste for them which brought her to that theory. The voice, she couldn't put her hoof on it, but she knew one thing, that door she recognized. Inside her mind, she felt a little voice prodding her. It said one word.

"Go."

So she did. Apple Bloom left her bed that night, making her way through the house, trying best not to make a sound. Whatever was driving her, she didn't know. But her sense of adventure was in control now. The night air felt cold, the moonlight managing to peek through the openings in the clouds. The rain had stopped, lucky for Apple Bloom. The filly remembered the path well.

"I'm a big pony." she told herself.

Apple Bloom kept chanting that and before she knew it, she had made it back to the house. Working her way past the door, and down the darker hallway, she kept the chant going as she went down the darker hallway. Before she knew it, she was in the room, and there it was, the door. Right near it, was the key, still laying there from where Apple Bloom had dropped it. Picking it up with her teeth, Apple Bloom stared inventively at the door. A small gulp slid down her throat as she put the key into the hole and turned it. A metallic click gave away as the door opened.

But there wasn't a brick wall behind it this time.

A light flashed before her eyes as she saw a strange, glowing tunnel appeared before her. Apple Bloom widened her eyes in surprise at the sight. An unknown breeze hit her face as she looked down it. At the very end, she could see a similar looking door. With curiosity peaking, she dropped the key where it was, and went down the tunnel. It felt soft, spongy almost. The light felt so warm and welcoming, that could have been why she entered it. The door wasn't locked, with a simple push it opened, and Apple Bloom stepped inside.

"What?" the moment she stepped through, she noticed something peculiar about her surroundings. The room she entered appeared normal, but something was familiar about it.

Before she could look further, a wonderful smell wafted through the air. "MMM, what smells so good?" Apple Bloom wondered. She followed the smell down a hall, as she did she couldn't put her hoof upon it, but something about this place seemed so familiar, if with a happier demeanor. The smell ended at a kitchen, and the familiarity didn't cease. She recognized this kitchen right away. This was her kitchen! The door had led her back to her house strangely. Then she noticed the pony that was busy in the kitchen.

"Applejack?" certainly it was Applejack, her back turned as she prepared the wonderful smelling meal. "What are y'all doing here?"

Then Applejack turned around. "Oh Apple Bloom, you're here!"

From that moment, Apple Bloom knew one thing, this mare wasn't her sister. Oh she had Applejack's body, even her hat, but there were two distinct differences which tipped the young filly off. Firstly the voice, it lacked the drawl every member of her family possessed. In fact, it sounded like Applejack if she didn't have said drawl. Though most of all, it was the eyes, in place of them were a pair of black buttons.

"You're not mah sister." Apple Bloom put her feelings into words. "Are those?" her mind froze as her eyes stopped upon the button eyes.

"You mean buttons? What do you think?" the mare asked, tapping one of her buttons with a hoof. "The color may not be flashy, but black is traditional." the mare further spoke.

Apple Bloom's mind was still trying to process everything that was happening. "Who are you?" the question was simple enough.

The mare smiled warmly at the filly. "Why I'm your other mother sweetie." the mare paused as she considered what she had just said. "No, that won't work, call me your other sister sugar cube." the mare seemed pleased with that title.

Apple Bloom still found the words frozen in her throat. This couldn't be happening. Then the smell came once more, more appetizing as the aroma filled the kitchen.

"Dinner will be ready soon." said the strange mare, the Other Sister. "Now go get your other brother and other grandmother. They should be in their studio working on their new pieces.

Wait, Other Brother and other Grandmother? That would mean.

"Go on hurry up dear. We don't want the food getting cold" urged the Other Sister.

Stunned as she was, Apple Bloom didn't say a word. Merely she gave a bewildered look, and left the room, following where the mare pointed. Apple Bloom found herself in another room. When she entered, she noticed two main features. Firstly a grand looking piano sat in the room. Secondly, there were several easels and paintings framed upon the wall. But what she noticed were the two ponies, an old mare and a young stallion near the piano and paintings respectively.

"Granny? Big Macintosh?" upon hearing Apple Bloom's voice, the two ponies whirled around.

"Well bust mah hide! It's Apple Bloom!"

"Hello there sport! How y'all doin?"

Apple Bloom immediately noticed these weren't her grandmother or brother. They both had the same button eyes as the Other Sister. They both held these grins, as if seeing her was the happiest moment in their lives. Apple Bloom didn't know what to say, the Other Granny Smith held those honors.

The old mare, moved with a vigorous youth, far much more than her counterpart. "Oh my stars! Y'all are so thin, they feeding you well deary?"

"Um well." Apple Bloom started to speak.

"Hey Apple Bloom! Check out my latest masterpiece!" the Other Big Macintosh called to her.

Apple Bloom trotted over to her doppelganger brother slowly and cautiously. But what she found there made all caution vanish from her system. Turning the easel around, Apple Bloom got a good look at the painting.

"That's me!" she announced happily.

Indeed, before her eyes, was a painting of her. Right down to every detail, save for the flowers border lining the painting.

"So what do ya think?" asked the Other Big Mac.

Apple Bloom turned to her somewhat brother with an enormous grin on her face. "Ah love it! It's the best painting Ah've ever seen in mah whole life!"

The Other Big Mac ruffled the young one's head making her giggle. "Glad y'all are happy with it."

"If y'all want to hear some art, listen to this!" the Other Granny Smith turned to the piano. A bright, fast tune played as she jammed on the keys. Apple Bloom sat entranced by the piano tune. For one of her age, the Other Granny Smith was able to make a great tune. The tune ended with two definite keys.

Apple Bloom clapped at the display. "That was great, but she wanted me to tell y'all that dinner is ready."

The Other Granny Smith grinned at that prospect. "Well bout time, Ah'm as hungry as a horse.

"Well we are horses, well ponies actually." the other Big Macintosh corrected.

Apple Bloom giggled at that.

XXX

If the day could get any stranger, it did just about now. Dinner looked amazing. Apples, mashed potatoes, apple pie, apple fritters, buttered corn and rolls, carrots, oats, the list went on.

"Is something wrong sugar cube?" the Other Sister, or Other Applejack (either phrase worked), asked.

Apple Bloom returned to reality. "Oh no, Ah—Ah just don't know what to say. This is all...different." she admitted. At last she dug into her meal, which her Other family watched. The moment she took her first bite, her eyes went wide, the taste was absolutely incredible. Apple Bloom ate heartily of what was on her plate.

"Mmmmm! This is good." she exclaimed between mouthfuls.

The Other Big Mac chuckled. "Well sis here is the best cook darn cook there is."

"Didn't get it from me, I can say that." grinned the Other Granny Smith.

The Other Sister bashfully waved a hoof at the praise. "Thirsty?" she turned her attention back to Apple Bloom.

The little filly nodded her head as her mouth was too full to talk.

The Other Sister clapped her hooves together. A squeak came from beside Apple Bloom. Turning, she could see dinner cart. Attached to it was a pair of mechanical hands. On one it grabbed a cup, while the other poured a liquid into a container. Shocked by the scene a tad, Apple Bloom took a gulp.

"Yum a milkshake!" she cried excitedly, gulping down more. "Extra hay." she muttered.

"Well I hope you saved some room for dessert sweetie." said the Other Sister.

Apple Bloom looked up from her drink. "Dessert?"

"Sure. ice cream, cake." the Other Sister listed. "Anything you'd like."

"We could even have smores." the Other Big Mac suggested.

"Can't have smores without a campout." the Other Granny Smith offered another suggestion.



Apple Bloom was about to answer, when a yawn escaped her. Shaking her head, the young filly looked briefly out the window. A bright night sky lay outside. That was when she remembered.

"Thanks. That all sounds fun, but Ah better be getting back, it's getting late and mah other family is waiting." Apple Bloom excused.

"But we're your other family dear." the Other Sister responded to that.

"Ah meant my other, other family. Mah sister who treats me like a baby sometimes, my brother who goes....eyup....and mah granny...who needs a new.....hip." now that she said that, she realized how dull it sounded.

The Other Sister rose from her chair. "There's no need to leave Apple Bloom, you're room is right here."

Once more, Apple Bloom found herself being led to another room. She memorized the path well, for this was the same way she went towards her room, in her other house that is. But what lay behind the new door, wasn't her old room. No, it was far grander. This bedroom looked like it was made for a princess. The bed had pink drapes, apple themed pictures deputed upon them.

"Hello Apple Bloom!" tiny voices squeaked below her. At her feet, stuffed bunnies frolicked by, in fact, all the toys were alive. To trains moved on their own, moving along no tracks, stuffed animals of various kinds. They all pranced and played around the pony's hooves. Apple Bloom hopped into bed, snuggling under the covers. So soft and velvety they felt. In no time, she fell asleep. Her other family stood at her bedside, eyes on her.

"Good night." they all chorused.

XXX

Apple Bloom's eyes fluttered open. Within her mind, faint memories played within her head. A dinner, a fun room, and button eyes. As her mind fully awoke, she recalled everything. Her heart soared, then fell in one crescendo. Her room looked the same before that wonderful dream began.

Yet it felt so real.

# Chapter 3

What happened last night. It couldn't have been just a simple dream. At least Apple Bloom thought so. But she had awoken in her normal, everyday bed, not the luxurious splendor that she had fallen asleep in. The kitchen of the Apple family was filled of such tales from the youngest member.

"It was so amazing! Applejack you were there! Only it wasn't you, ya had these button eyes! And Big Macintosh painted this great picture of me, and Granny Smith! She was all lively and she could play the piano and stuff and wow!" Apple Bloom exclaimed with excitement. "It was so great." she added that part with a slight sigh.

Applejack had listened to her sibling's dream with half hearted enthusiasm. It had become half hearted when Apple Bloom had mentioned how much of a great cook the "Other Applejack" was. Not that she was jealous of a fabrication of the mind, well um...well Applejack insisted she wasn't jealous.

"That's some dream ya had little sis." Big Macintosh replied in his same drawl.

Apple Bloom sighed again. "It's so strange, it felt so real."

"Well that's thing about dreams, ya know when Ah was about your age, Ah dreamt Ah could fly." Big Macintosh mentioned.

Apple Bloom looked at her brother with surprise. "Really?"

"Eyup. Felt so real too, that is until Ah hit the floor. Woke me right up."

That made Apple Bloom giggle, her brother's grin signified that was his intent. The smile was broken when Applejack arrived.

"Sorry to be a spoiler, but y'all got some work ahead of ya big brother." the mare reminded.

The crimson stallion cricked his neck and left to go do his day's duties. Applejack had her own work she had to do. Nothing apple related for the

time being, a little personal project of hers, something she felt another would want to help her with. "Say Apple Bloom? How'd y'all like to help your big sister out with something important?"

Apple Bloom's face tweaked with curiosity and interest. Her sister needed help with something? Honestly that interested her very much. After being denied work in the orchard. Apple Bloom would be more than willing to help. "Sure! what ya need?"

If only Apple Bloom could read narration. Then she would know what she was working on.

"Picture album?" the filly looked at the stack of photographs upon the table. "Applejack!" she whined.

"Come on please Apple Bloom, Ah been wanted to do this for a while now and well hey! Ya could maybe find your cutie mark this way!"

Apple Bloom narrowed her eyes. "Seriously? A cutie mark for putting pictures together?"

She wasn't buying it. Applejack didn't even bother trying to rationalize that. "Please sis? Ah could really use the help."

Apple Bloom just followed her sister's lead after that, going into the various photo's and putting them in a proper place within the album. Some of them she admitted were rather humorous, such as one depicting a red faced Rainbow Dash at a Pinkie Pie party.

"Someone spyked the punch." Applejack explained.

Apple Bloom looked at another picture showing the same party, only with Applejack's face reddened. Applejack quickly hid that one away, her face blushing this time from embarrassment. Apple Bloom continued to look through the photographs, when one caught her eye, particularly because unlike the rest, it was black in white.

"Who's the filly in the picture?" that was another thing she had noticed. "She kind of looks like me." indeed, within the picture was a young filly. Despite having slightly shorter hair, this filly could very well be Apple Bloom's twin.

"Why that's Granny Smith when she was about your age." Applejack answered.

This surprised Apple Bloom. "Granny? Really? Wow! She looks so young." Apple Bloom exclaimed. Ever since she was born, a wrinkled visage was all she saw of her grandmother. The child version of her sat near the entrance of what she assumed to be Sweet Apple Acres. A bright smile and a shining glint in her eye, very different from the Granny Smith of today. It was amusing in its own way. Yet there was something else that drew her to this picture. For standing next to the younger Granny Smith, was another filly, this one, a dead ringer for Smith.

"Hey Applejack? Who's that filly?" Apple Bloom asked.

Applejack had gained a smile upon her sister's discovery of their Granny's younger days, only now that smile faded away.

"That's Granny Smith's twin sister." Applejack solemnly replied. "She'd be our great aunt."

"A sister?" Apple Bloom repeated. This was news. "Well where is she now? How come we've never heard of her?"

Applejack's solemn tone matched her expression. "Ah asked the same thing when Ah was your age. Ta be honest with ya, nopony knows. One day, when she and Granny Smith were just fillies, her sister just disappeared."

Apple Bloom's eyes widened. "Disappeared?"

"Her folks looked high and low for her, but there wasn't a trace, eventually they just gave up hope." Applejack continued.

"But what about Granny Smith? What does she say? Does she miss her sister?" Apple Bloom asked.

Applejack turned in the direction Granny Smith currently snoozed, or at least the room. Even from here, the faint sound of a snore could be discernible.

"If you'd ask her, she would just get silent, stare out the window, and insist someone stole her sister." Applejack finished her story with a sad note.

Apple Bloom almost did ask her grandmother that question, but she decided against it. She couldn't recall a moment where Granny Smith was sad, and she didn't want to. The two sisters finished the photo album without much dialogue, but Applejack busied herself with more work afterwards, leaving Apple Bloom on her own once more.

The young one busied herself with another walk, no destination in mind, just walking. The weather unfortunately still held it's gloominess. It made her wonder if the weather crew shared in Rainbow Dash's laziness? Well it could simply be that the mess was too big to handle in a day.

"Come on you can do it!" Apple Bloom heard a voice far off along the trees that lined her path. Curious, she strode over, through the large towering pines, if they were pine trees that is. Amidst the brown and green, she saw a view of purple, accompanied by green spines.

"Spyke?" Apple Bloom found this a repeat of yesterday's meeting.

Certainly enough, it was the dragon. "Oh! hey Apple Bloom." Spike enthusiastically greeted, As before, the dragon seemed to be centering his attention to something.

Apple Bloom had a guess, to what it involved. A little further in, Apple Bloom found herself correct. "Don't tell me." she muttered.

"That's it, just a little more." Spike cheered on a certain slimy creature, just as he was the day before.

"Is that the same slug from yesterday?" Apple Bloom inquired, noticing the creatures size.

Spike proudly smiled and picked up the slug, placing it upon his scaly shoulder. Apple Bloom stuck her tongue out at that. "Yep! What can I say? I grew attached to the little guy, so he's my new pet now."

"Pet?" Apple Bloom held considerable disgust and disbelief.

"Yeah I mean, Rarity has Opalence, Pinkie Pie has Gummy, Fluttershy has Angel, and your sister has Winona. So I figured why not me?" that made some sense.

Apple Bloom didn't find it any less disgusting however, particularly when Spike removed the slug from his shoulder and held it up the pony. "I'd like you to meet Wybourne. Wybourne this is Apple Bloom."

Apple Bloom stared right at the twitching eye stalks of the slug. Lowering one eye she had just one thing to say towards the creature. "Hello Why-were-you-born."

Spike immediately caught on to the insult. "Hey! That's not nice!" Spike pulled back his pet, petting it in a comforting motion. "It's okay Wybourne, Apple Bloom is a girl, she doesn't understand how undeniably awesome you are." Spike soothed. "Who's a good slug? Who's a good slug?" the dragon cooed, scratching the slug under its belly.

This didn't look any less odder for Apple Bloom. "Say did you check out that building?" Spike spontaneously asked.

That made Apple Bloom's thought drift. All this time and she hadn't thought about the abandoned building "What? Oh that place. Yeah but it wasn't anything special." Apple Bloom didn't want to add the detail of the dream again. Besides, a dream was a dream, nothing more, nothing less.

"Last two days have been boring." if Apple Bloom wanted to say anything, it would be about her day.

"I know what you mean." Spike commented his own addition. "Half the time I'm nothing but a messenger, I mean I eat breakfast, using the bathroom, and then I belch up a scroll." Spike made a motion with his mouth. It incited a giggle from Apple Bloom. "I mean we haven't gone done anything in a while, sometimes I wish something big happened. Like....an evil centaur tries to turn all the ponies into monsters! Or an evil witch wants to capture them to make a potion! Or.....hmmmm.....An evil kraken tries to drown Equestria!" Spike listed all these fantasies, great adventures stemming from his own imagination. "But what are the odds of that happening?"

Apple Bloom had to admit to herself, those were creative. "Well Ah did learn something new today." Apple Bloom remembered.

"Oh like what?" Spike grew slightly curious.

In her mind however, she felt hesitant to speak. "Ah just found out mah granny had a twin sister."

"A twin?" Spike voiced back. "So where is she now? She twice removed or something?"

"Nah, she just disappeared one day when she was mah age." answered Apple Bloom.

Spike's mind processed this information. It wasn't everyday someone told you their grandmother had a long lost sibling. "Maybe she ran away? I mean with twins there's got to be some rivalry. That or one of them is evil."

Ignoring the "evil" comment, Apple Bloom thought back to one other possibility. "Mah granny thinks her sister was foalnapped."

"URP!" a massive belch interrupted Apple Bloom. Right next to Spike's feat lay a scroll. A look of pure disappointment crossed the young dragon's face. "I gotta go, Twilight's expecting this from the princess." making sure Wybourne was safely onboard, he waved goodbye. "Later Apple Bloom!"

Apple Bloom politely waved her hoof in response, but she gave a disgusted glance at Whybourne. "Boys," she muttered. Sometimes she didn't understand them.

CRUNCH!

Apple Bloom turned her head. Was there someone there? Her eyes looked about, but found nothing.

XXX

Zecora mentally told herself to be more careful. She hadn't meant to spy on the young ones. Originally she had set out to locate some herbs, particular ones that grew around this area. By pure chance she had found the pair, but she stayed when the subject of a missing child sprang up.

Such a thing seemed out of place in these parts. Ponyville gave off an air of happiness and tranquility, no darkness or sadness hanging over. This

particularly applied to the Apple family. Although she had only been acquainted with two members of the family, she could see a tightly bonded family when she saw one. Running away didn't seem to really fit. A possibility maybe, but something in her gut told her that wasn't the case. Perhaps she was simply overanalyzing it, but it all traced back to that building.

Something wasn't right about that place. The ground held a stain, her brew had told her so. It almost felt.....evil. Perhaps she should watch that place more closely. Putting up her hood, she moved on.

XXX

*He felt a twitch, something new, his claws , he didn't have those before.*

*"Hold still my new little doll." he heard a voice.*

*"Who are you?" he asked. That was something else that was new, he couldn't talk before.*

*There came a giggle. "I am your creator, your mother."*

*Something swished behind him, a tail. A stitch followed with new additional limb and sense. The final one being sight. Two buttons were sewn in, and then at last, he was complete.*

*At last she had another little doll, to draw another in.*

XXX

Apple Bloom couldn't sleep. Too much weighed heavily on her mind. The rest of the day had gone on normally, nothing much to note. She didn't ask her grandmother with regards to her missing sister. From what Applejack told her, that was something the old mare didn't need. Yet there was something else that held more prevalence in her mind than that.

Right about now, she really wanted to get to sleep. Her reason? To dream again. But not of simple things, but of grand dinners, and of a fun family.

It all had felt too really to be a dream. Of course, many ponies probably thought of really good dreams. But there was a substance to the one she



had. Something in her mind prodded at her, like an incessant gnat biting under her skin.

An hour had passed since she had gotten into bed. There would be only one way to stifle her mind's urging. By obeying it.

The previous night's wanderings etched into mind. Carefully stepping, not making a creak, don't wake granny, out the door, and down the path. Back in her room, the doll of Apple Bloom sat. It's black eyes fixated on the spot where Apple Bloom once was. Suddenly, it's head gave a droop, and a glint shined in its eyes.

Outside, Apple Bloom traversed. A soft rumble came from above, a roar of thunder. A few droplets hit her face. This further served to hasten her pace. Right before the rain increased in its pattering drop, she spied the ancient creak of the door. Its hinges squeaked as the wind blew against it. Her little mind filled with fear, as the stormy setting intensified, but she made it inside as she shut the door. Swiftly she scurried, down the darkened hallway. The fear itself vanished away the moment she made it in the room. A warmth spread over her body, filling her soul and warming her body.

A breeze ran past her cheek, accompanying it was the warmth. They caressed her, moving her head to its source, a tiny door, below it, was an oh so familiar key. Eyes growing large like saucers, the filly swooped up the key and opened the door.

If her eyes could grow any bigger at that point, they would have fallen out of her head. Below her lay a blue tunnel, the warmth and love flowing up from it.

"Ah knew it was real!" Apple Bloom exclaimed, right before she excitedly entered inside to see the wonders that awaited her.

# Chapter 4

The path felt warm underneath her hooves. Apple Bloom hurried along, not sparing a moment. If this really was a dream, she wanted to make the most of it. Apparently the dream played out the same. Apple Bloom stepped through the door, finding herself in another room much like her own, but somehow grander.

Apple Bloom's face lit up with glee. "This is just like" A wonderful smell cut Apple Bloom off. She was about to say "before". Going on the "before" concept, the young filly worked her way through the hall and to the kitchen. The dream was one hundred percent more accurate, for she saw the same orange colored mare, an exact replica of her sister, save for a key detail.

"Apple Bloom! You've come back." the button eye of the Other Sister gleamed with delight.

The eyes of Apple Bloom glanced all around. It was here, this was it, the kitchen, the house, the button eyes. "thank you." she whispered to nopony in particular, happy that Celestia, or Luna, or any divine force for putting fate in her favor.

"Now honey I need to ask you something." the Other Sister's word returned Apple Bloom to the present. "What do you like better in your pancakes? Blueberries? Or chocolate chips?" It was here Apple Bloom noticed the state of the kitchen. The countertops were laden with mixing bowls and egg beaters. Several bowls were filled with fruit, while one held the aforementioned blue fruit, and the other the chocolaty treat.

Apple Bloom felt a spark of hunger. The wonderful smell came from the fruit. "Oh um." the pony started to think hard on that. What would make the perfect pancakes?

"You know what? How about both?" suggested the Other Sister. Scooping up the blueberries and the chocolate chips, she added them to the batter.

"Can they have cinnamon?" Apple Bloom asked, offering her own suggestion.

The Other Sister smiled warmly. "Almost forgot. Thank you my little sugar cube." Taking her hoof, she ruffled Apple Bloom's head. The young one giggled under her other sister's touch.

"Well I'm afraid dinner won't be ready for a while." explained the Other Sister. "But why don't you help your brother with the bucking?"

Bucking? That would mean apples. "Y'all have apple trees?"

A chuckle came from the older mare. "Why of course we do sweetie. This is an orchard after all. But don't spoil your appetite on them." she added a little warning, but not in a chiding notion, for she still smiled. "Oh who am I kidding? Eat as many as you want sugar cube!" the mare playfully allowed

"But Ah eat apples all the time back home." Apple Bloom responded.

"Yes but ours are better." proclaimed the Other Sister. Somehow, Apple Bloom didn't think that proclamation sounded prideful. It almost sounded like a fact. "Run along now." she didn't have time to delve into it further. The Other Sister urged her out the door into the outside.

Apple Bloom felt the air from the door behind her. But her eyes grew wide at what she saw. The landscape, this was Sweet Apple Acres, yet it wasn't. It made sense that this was the "Other" Sweet Apple Acres. The surrounding farmland looked very much the same, only...Apple Bloom couldn't really describe it as anything but "better". The grass, the path, and even the fenceposts all held a certain shine to it. A much better quality than the ones in her world.

Her hooves trotted upon the ground before her. A vast night sky hung above, a bright moon came into view illuminating the stars that surrounded it. All of this awe struck the filly. Her trots slowed down as her mind took this all in. For some reason, she felt compelled to turn around. So she did. Her awed eyes grew a fraction. There before her was the Apple Family home. Like the rest of the farmland, it held a brighter shade and a tint to it.

"Wow." was all Apple Bloom could say.

Her legs started to move again. Remembering what the Other Sister had said, she headed into the direction of the apple orchards. A gasp escaped her lips. At her hooves, flowers sprang up with each step she took. In a

rapid succession they went, accompanying her trek. Their sudden appearance only excited her, spurring her to move. Fast she traveled, ahead she could see the orchards. From nowhere, animals darted around the greenery. Rabbits wiggled their noses at the passing ponies, hummingbirds flitted about. All this delight followed her as she made it to the orchards.

There they were, the apple trees. They looked much akin to their real world counterparts. Despite the brightness they held, there didn't seem to be a great difference between them. Particularly in the apples. They were the same red color, yet the Other Sister had said they were better. Then again, everything was better here.

"Well howdy there, Apple Bloom!" Apple Bloom turned at the joyous voice. It was the Other Big Mac. The buttoned eyed stallion turned his head towards the filly with a grin. Surrounding him were several baskets, perfect for holding apples. "Just in time, Ah need my number one apple buckler to help me."

"But Ah've never bucked apples before." Apple Bloom admitted. "Well actually ah tried and Ah wasn't very good at it." many bruises had proven that.

The Other Big Macintosh waved a hoof. "Ah it's easy, ya just got to find the right spot." the other Big Macintosh patted one of the trees. He patted in several spots, like he was looking for something. He at a spot that was just at his leg length. Turning around, he gave the bark a mighty kick. On cue, several apples fell from the tree and into the basket.

"Here Apple Bloom," the Other Big Macintosh gestured towards the basket. "have a bite."

Apple Bloom had tried enough apples to memorize their taste. Not that she didn't like apples, she did like them. After all, they had kept her family in business since before she was born. However, these apples seemed to call to her. The moon managed to shine through the leaves and branches. For a moment, Apple Bloom could see herself reflected upon the red. Curiously she took one apple, and bit into it.

Immediately, her eyes winded as far as they could. "Candy Apples!"

Yes! They were actually candy apples. Candy apples that grew from a tree. Apple Bloom finished off the apple with vigor. Once she was finished, she went for another one, finishing it off just as quickly.

"Woah there! Don't want to fill up before breakfast." the Other Big Macintosh cautioned. "Besides, sis needs these, but we could use another basket." the stallion pointed to the empty apple basket.

Apple Bloom took that as her cue to try her hand at apple bucking. Gleefully trotting over to the basket, she did what her other brother did to the other tree. Tapping her hoof upon the bark, she searched for a perfect spot to buck. Although she had no idea which spot to buck. She merely picked one that she could reach and kick. Her kick wasn't as mighty as her other sibling's, but there was a great shake from the branches. Looking up, Apple Bloom's eyes practically bugged out as apples, too many apples to fit in one basket, fell upon her in a great big heap.

Seeing this, the Other Big Macintosh didn't seem worried. With a whistle, the wildlife that inhabited this other world sprang from their hiding spots. Every rabbit and bird helped to move the apple pile, while the rest moved the basket away to its intended destination.

"You alright?" the Other Big Macintosh asked.

Apple Bloom opened her eyes. Looking herself over, she found there wasn't a single scratch on her. Despite the fact that she had just been buried, Apple Bloom looked up with a grin. "Never better!" she chirped.

XXX

*He had never felt so nervous before. Well, he had never been nervous, this was the first time due to him not being created long. The house stood before him, a great looming abode. He had to pal this right, he had to play his role, he couldn't screw up.*

*She wouldn't like that.*

*He had to play his role, he had to be her friend.*

*What was she like though? That made him even more nervous. He would just have to play it right. Just act like she told him, act like the way he was made.*

XXX

Breakfast for dinner. Who would have thought it? That was Apple Blooms thought's exactly. Turns out mixing blueberries and chocolate chips together with the syrup drowned pancakes, was a genius idea. That and the hay browns and candied apples were perfect side dishes. All of it washed down with with a nice glass of milk.

"Enjoying your breakfast Apple Bloom?" asked the Other Big Macintosh.

Apple Bloom responded with an enthusiastic "mmm hmm!", seeing as her mouth was filled.

The Other Sister smiled as Apple Bloom continued her meal. "I'm so happy you like it Apple Bloom. I prepared it especially for you."

This dinner went perfectly as far as Apple Bloom was concerned. Yet she had a question as she swallowed. "Where's Granny Smith? The other one Ah mean."

"Well sweetie, she's preparing for the rodeo." answered the Other Sister.

"Rodeo?" Apple Bloom repeated.

"Hmm hmm, and you've been invited kiddo!" added the Other Big Macintosh.

This prospect excited the filly. "Wow! Ah've never been to a rodeo before!"

Just then, a knock rapped upon the back door. "Oh, that must be your little friend." the Other Sister rose and went to answer it.

Apple Bloom looked up from her almost empty plate. "Mah friend?" she asked confusedly.

The Other Sister opened the door, revealing who was behind it. Apple Bloom got up from her position at the table to see who this "friend" could

be. To her surprise, a young purple dragon stepped into the kitchen. "Spike?" Apple Bloom exclaimed. Spike was the only purple dragon she knew. Actually, Spike was the only dragon she knew. Immediately, she spotted the one difference, that told her this wasn't the Spike she knew. He had buttons for eyes.

"Hello there. How are you this fine evening?" the Other Spike politely asked.

Apple Bloom blinked at the dragon. Immediately, she would see the difference in personality. "Um hi....Ah'm fine." Apple Bloom answered.

The Other Spike looked both at the Other Sister and the Other Big Macintosh. "Good even sir and madam. You're both looking lovely this evening." Once he was done, he turned his attention once more to Apple Bloom. "Apple Bloom, I hear you're going to the rodeo. Do you mind if I joined you?"

Apple Bloom noticed something else peculiar. This Other Spike had a nice smile painted upon his face. Almost as if he were in a permanent state of happiness. "Sure....you know your different than the Spike Ah know." observed Apple Bloom.

The Other Sister placed a hoof upon the Other Spike's scaly shoulder. "Well I thought you might like him better this way, so I tweaked him a bit." the Other Sister explained.

Tweaked? Apple Bloom wasn't sure what that meant exactly, but a more polite Spike? She would take that any day.

"Now hurry along you two." the Other Sister urged. "You don't want to miss the rodeo."

XXX

Apple Bloom and the Other Spike walked side by side. Apparently he knew the way to the rodeo. Actually it wasn't that far from the farm. Occasionally she kept giving a glance towards the buttoned eyed dragon.

"Do I have something on my face?" the Other Spike asked.

Apple Bloom realized he had seen her. "Oh nothing, Ah just." she still couldn't shake the differences between this Spike and the one she knew. "Y'all don't like slugs do you?" she just had to ask that question.

The Other Spike gave her a quizzical look. "Slugs? Yuck! No way! I can't stand them." the dragon shivered at the very thought of those slimy gastropods.

Apple Bloom was sure relieved. Now she was certain there wasn't an Other Wybie the slug. Correction "Why-were-you-born".

Just outside the farm, slightly past it, there stood a large series of bleachers. Apple Bloom and Other Spike walked through an opening in between. The pair seated themselves and Apple Bloom let out a tiny gasp. Before her, was a large arena. A big, dirt covered area, the perfect place for a rodeo.

"Want one?" Apple Bloom turned, and noticed that the Other Spike was holding out a candied apple. In fact, there was a whole basket beside them that she didn't notice. This must have been where the animals had taken the second basket. Apple Bloom gleefully took one and took a bite. It was just as good as before.

"HOWDY!" a loud, but aged voice called out from nowhere. Suddenly, everything became dark. Odd seeing as they were outside. Furthering the oddness, spotlight appeared from nowhere. "WELCOME TO THE ONE AND ONLY GRANNY SMITH RODEO!" the spotlights stopped right in the center, revealing none other than the Other Granny Smith. The old mare no longer wore her shawl, replacing it with a red colored scarf. Atop her gray head, was a large cowpony hat. The buttoned eyed version of her grandmother twirled a lasso around before she spoke again. "THIS SHOW IS DEDICATED TO OUR SPECIAL GUEST, APPLE BLOOM!" The spotlights fell from the Other Granny Smith, to Apple Bloom herself. The little filly waved a sheepish hoof as applause resounded through the empty seats. Odd as they were empty.

"WELL NOW! LET'S GET THIS SHOW ON!" it finally dawned on Apple Bloom that the Other Granny Smith's voice was being amplified, just as if she was speaking through a microphone.



On the other side of the arena, a gate opened up. Right before the dragon and pony's eyes, several baby calves stampeded out. The Other Granny Smith sprang with the same youth and vigor she had shown yesterday. Twirling her lasso, Apple Bloom watched as the Other Granny Smith lassoed the legs around the baby cows. With a twirl and a spin, she pinned the mall together into one big pile.

"Wow!" Apple Bloom cheered, even the Other Spike joined in. "She musta done that in five seconds!" Apple Bloom wasn't sure on the exact time, but it certainly felt fast.

The show wasn't over yet. A great snorting and stomping creature emerged from the gate. A great, big bull. Apple Bloom gasped, grabbing onto the Other Spike's arm. The bull locked eyes with the Other Granny Smith. The Other Granny Smith simply stamped her front hoof in response. The bull charged with full force.

"She's just standing still!" Apple Bloom felt herself at the edge of her seat.

The bull continued to charge, and the Other Granny Smith wasn't budging. Closer the bull came.

"It's going to hit her!" Apple Bloom started to shake the Other Spike. The poor dragon thought his buttons would fall from his head.

Then, right at the split moment, the Other Granny Smith leapt up, her lassos twirling in midair. She landed perfectly upon the bull's back, her lasso finding its way around the bull's muzzle. The beast tried to buck the old mare off, but she wouldn't budge. After a while, the bull started to halt in its kicking and bucking. Then, it stopped completely.

"WOO HOO!" Apple Bloom's cheers filled the area. The Other Granny Smith took a bow. She had done her job, and that was seeing Apple Bloom happy.

The rest of the night followed the same. Apple Bloom found the whole situation familiar. After a long day, she was curled up in her glorious other bed. The other versions of her family, and the Other Spike, stood by her side.

"Good night my little sugar cube," the Other Sister pecked Apple Bloom upon the cheek. Soon, she lapsed into dreamland. Just as the night before.

# Chapter 5

*You did well my little doll.*

*He sat there listening to her words of praise.*

*"I really did good?" he innocently asked.*

*"Very much so, she was so happy and content. She enjoyed every minute."*

*That made him happy for two reasons. One, he had completed his task, two, he made the young filly happy. Something about her smile just lit him up inside, filling him with immense joy.*

*A smile crossed his face, but it fell in that instant. "Do you really have to do it?" his question passed his lips without hesitation. Or maybe he should have been hesitant. Slowly he could hear her steps. "Can't you pick someone else?"*

*Upon his scaly shoulder, he felt something. "Now, now my dear little doll, remember what I told you." he winced as something dug in like a knife. "Smile."*

*Reluctantly, he did.*

XXX

The next morning, Apple Bloom did what she did the last time, tell of her experience.

"It was so cool!" the little filly exclaimed excitedly.

The rest of the Apple family didn't really pay much mind to the excited youngster. Granny Smith was asleep per usual. Big Macintosh and Apple Jack simply went about their daily duties, half listening to their little sister's dream talks.

"Granny Smith, the other one Ah mean, she was roping everything and those candy apples!" Apple Bloom rolled her eyes back in ecstasy. "How come we don't grow candy apples?"

Applejack was the first to respond. "Apple Bloom, those dreams are filling yer head with silly notions."

Big Macintosh didn't have such blunt feelings on the matter. "Well we probably would make more if weupped our produce." although he knew candy apples didn't grow on trees, being the mathematical one, he knew that perhaps a few changes would bring in more money. "Eyup." he concluded.

Applejack on the other hand, didn't think so highly. "Horsefeathers! We've been selling plain, ordinary apples since our great grandad ran this place and that's how it's going to stay." Well that only applied to non ceremonial selling. The siblings didn't argue with each other, for they both know it would go around in circles. "Look we still got a lot to do around here big brother, so I suggest ya get to work."

Big Macintosh shrugged and went to his daily chores. Apple Bloom frowned. Same old morning, her brother too busy and her sister being a hard flank. Apple Bloom expected to be left out once again, same old, same old.

"Apple Bloom?" Applejack turned to her sister, right before she left.

The filly looked to her sibling, noticing the slightly warmed expression upon her face. "Ah was wondering, would y'all like to sell the apples with me?" Applejack seemed hesitant in her question.

Apple Bloom herself felt a tad hesitant. For the past two days, things had been tense between she and her sister. Was this her way of trying to make it up? "Um..." Apple Bloom scratched the ground with her front hoof, "sure."

XXX

Ponyville was still held in the grim weather that had overtaken the town for the past two days. Amongst the passerby's that actually came out this day, grumbled about the weather conditions. Occasionally, a rainbow streak

zipped past the gray clouds. Apparently, even Rainbow Dash managed to shake off her usual laziness to perk up the skyline.

"Fresh apples! Come and get your delicious and nutritious apples!" It seemed like one mood wasn't dampened today. Applejack called out her usual slogans. Simple everyday business. Like any other day. A few ponies stopped by their stand to purchase the red fruit. Applejack kept her smile plastered on. Nobody would want to buy from an unhappy vendor, it was common knowledge. Business seemed to come and go. One moment they would be receive customers, and then it would subside.

Nevertheless, Applejack kept it open. Someone would want apples at some point.

"This is boring." Apple Bloom sighed. Her head hung low and her posture illustrated her feelings. "Why'd you make me come out here?"

Applejack sighed herself. "Ah didn't. Ah asked you and ya said yes." she corrected.

It didn't help to improve Apple Bloom's mood. Everything moved so slowly around her. Everything was the same old routine. "Hey Applejack? Can Ah get something at Sugar Cube Corner?" she casually asked.

"Apple Bloom, y'all spoil your appetite, we're going to have a nice lunch after this." Applejack countered.

Once more, it only worsened the filly's mood. "If my other sister was here, she would buy it for me." she grumbled, utmost certain that would be the case.

Applejack grumbled herself. "Well she's just a dream, and Ah'm real."

"Well a dream is better than this." Apple Bloom suddenly proclaimed.

A few tense moments of silence followed before Applejack spoke again. "Look sis, A'm really trying here, Ah know I've been a sourpuss recently." it was an attempt at an apology.

Apple Bloom didn't respond at first. She couldn't think of anything to say really. Well save for one thing. "Can Ah go?"

Sighing to herself, Applejack answered. "Fine."

At that point, Applejack was the only person at the stand. Apple Bloom had another destination in mind. This place held no joy recently, but she one that did.

XXX

Apple Bloom stormed through the woods. So many thoughts raced through her head. Perhaps she was too much of a brat to her sister? After all, she had tried to make amends. But, stubbornness ran in the family. Apple Bloom was no exception. The path she had memorized well. A habit engrained into her head after doing it twice in a row. The leaves hardly crunched. Too much moisture clung turning them into wet little slappers. Apple Bloom ignored all that, for she saw something up ahead.

The abandoned house stood out like a welcoming sign. At least, it was welcoming to Apple Bloom.

"Well well. It would seem within this gloom," Apple Bloom halted. The voice came so suddenly, it made some hairs stand on end. Turning her head around, she spotted a hooded figure stepping from behind a tree. Despite being concealed mostly by the hood, a striped muzzle revealed itself as the hood flipped back. "I have found you little Apple Bloom." the zebra finished her rhyme.

"Zecora?" Apple Bloom asked, surprised at the zebra's sudden appearance. "W-what are you doing here?" a nervous stutter peppered her lips. She had hoped to go without being seen, perhaps out of fear of someone finding her little secret. If any other pony found out, they may want to have it for themselves. Celestia forbid if Silver Spoon and Diamond Tiara found this Other World.

Zecora's eyes directed towards the house. Apple Bloom swallowed; somehow she had a hunch that was why Zecora was around. But for what reason?

"I was simply looking for plants, when you happened to cross my glance." answered Zecora. "So if I may ask, why are you treading near this grass?"

It was amazing how she could rhyme like that. Least Apple Bloom thought so. But she wondered if perhaps it grew tiresome to do so all the time, every time?

"Oh...well Ah....hmmm." Apple Bloom tried to think of a lie and think of it quick. "Ya see." her hoof dug at the ground before her in uncertainty. "My doll! Ah was playing here the other day and Ah lost my favorite doll." that excuse had to work.

Upon that, Zecora raised her eye in suspicion. "Doll?" was her only response, no follow up rhyme to mention it. Although Apple Bloom thought she heard the faint mumble of "the gall". If Zecora was suspicious, nothing came of it. All the zebra concentrated on was the house ahead. Apple Bloom noticed something. Zecora's face turned dead serious. More she looked at the house it seemed, the more serious her face became. It was more than that however. Zecora backed away just a bit. Her face flinched in the stone set seriousness it had given itself. If Apple Bloom didn't know any better, it would seem as if Zecora was afraid of the place.

"Beware, for your eyes I would not bet." The rhyme started. "What you say, may not be what you get." The zebra then departed off into unknown parts.

Was that a warning? Apple Bloom asked herself. It would certainly seem that way, yet what could there be a need for a warning? It went over the filly's head. Did Zecora know what lay inside the house?

Those were all interesting questions, but Apple Bloom had other things in mind. Going inside was like a routine to her. Down the hall, into the room, past the table, and crawling under, all of these steps led to the door. Right beside it, Apple Bloom spied the key. Just like the two times before, she took it in her mouth, and opened the door.

Immediately, her face was hit with a wave of warm air. A blue glow illuminated everything. All of it was real, she just knew it. With a happy grin, she descended down the tunnel and past the door ahead.

"I'm here!" Apple Bloom called happily. Her ears and eyes waited for any sign of her other family. But no sound came, nor did any sign of their flanks cross her sight. Instinctually, Apple Bloom went to the one place she just knew would have life, the kitchen. Stepping inside, she did find something was there.

"Wow." Apple Bloom awed. Her eyes shined and sparkled. A whole plethora of treats awaited her. Cupcakes, brownies, muffins, and candy apples, why it was enough to feed a whole party, the spread at Diamond Tiara's cutecianera didn't hold a candle.

While the young filly was staring in delight at the sweets, a purple head poked itself from behind the sugar pile. "Hello Apple Bloom!"

Apple Bloom gave a yelp at the sudden appearance. "Spike?" the other one of course. In fact, she probably was more surprised by the button eyes. Perfect as this world was, she still couldn't get used to them.

"What are you doing here?" Apple Bloom asked the doppelganger dragon.

The Other Spike grinned. "I was waiting for you."

If the eyes were not off putting enough, the grin certainly was. "Ya mean, y'all were sitting her all this time?"

"Yes I have."

"Before Ah got here?"

"Of course."

The dragon certainly was loyal. Apple Bloom had to give him that. A little too loyal. It almost was creepy in its own way.

"By the way, Ms Applejack wanted me to give you this." the Other Spike pushed a box over to Apple Bloom. Opening it she found two things inside. First, was a letter.

*Dearest Apple Bloom.*

*I hope you enjoy this lunch I've prepared, please eat as much as you like.*

*Also, your friends Scootaloo and Sweetiebelle have invited you to their show.*

*Have fun.*

*Sincerely, your Other Sister.*



Sweetiebelle and Scootaloo were here? Well, Apple Bloom assumed they were their other versions. Under the letter was a flyer of some sort. The big flashy words and letters drew her in.

*Sweetiebelle and Scootaloo's*

*SUPER AWESOME*

*Extremely sensational*

*Magic Stunt show!*

*Open today, tomorrow and next day*

*And so forth*

*P.S. No zebras or cats of any sort.*

A duel magic and stunt show? It sounded interesting. But first thing was first, Apple Bloom was hungry and lunch was waiting right there. Just as she was about to take a bite out of them so delicious looking cupcake, she noticed something, she was the only one eating. The Other Spike simply sat there looking at her.

"Don't you want any Spike?" she asked the dragon.

The Other Spike waved a claw. "No thank you, it's all for you." he declined.

That was it; the dragon seemed perfectly fine with her enjoying herself, while he just sat there. This Spike may have been a perfect gentledragon, but it wasn't an excuse for her to be impolite.

"Spike, Ah want you to have some." Apple Bloom urged.

The Other Spike looked with uncertainty. "But.....It's yours. I shouldn't."

"Spike!" Apple Bloom chided in a similar tone a parent would a child. "It's okay. Ah don't mind."

Uncertainly looking at the food pile, one of his claws reached for a cupcake. Acting as if he was doing something naughty, he swiftly took a bite. He seemed surprised by the taste of it all. The sweetness spread through his

face as he chewed. In no time, he polished off the confectionary delight in no time.

"It's good." he announced and continued eating.

Smiling, Apple Bloom joined him.

The meal passed with not much conversation. When the two children were done, they prepared to leave.

"Boy that was so good." Apple Bloom exclaimed.

The Other Spike licked the traces that clung to his claws. "Yes. It was very delicious."

Suddenly, Apple Bloom gave a large burp. "Excuse me." she blushed. She had not forgotten her manners.

The other Spike simply smiled. "You certainly ate a lot."

"Yeah Ah know, and Ah don't even feel full." Apple Bloom realized. Something else she noticed, the food. Her belly showed no sign of increase, not even from the large amount she ate. Strange, the food would sate her hunger, but she felt nothing inside. It was the same the last two times she ate in this world.

"We better hurry or we'll be late for the show." the other Spike urged.

Whatever thought's Apple Bloom had were soon pushed aside. The pair trotted along the path. Just as before, flowers seemed to sprout beside them.

"So where exactly are we going?" inquired Apple Bloom.

The Other Spike pointed ahead. "Over there."

In the distance, well not that far of a distance, a large stadium sat. More like a dome actually. "That wasn't there yesterday." Apple Bloom realized.

"I know. Ms Applejack just had it made." answered the Other Spike.

Momentarily, Apple Bloom stopped. All of that built in a single day? Well Apple Bloom didn't really care that much about it. Being as young as she was, she simply chalked it up to magic. Magic wasn't a huge stretch of imagination. Just look at the unicorns, they were chalk full of magic. The pair reached the stadium and entered the open door. Inside, the path was dark. The only way for Apple Bloom to guide herself was the tell tale footsteps of the Other Spike. It was a slight drag of the claws upon the velvet. Yes, there was velvet carpeting.

The path winded into a large stand of seats. They were of the same velvety style of the carpets, which by now in the more lightened area, could be shown as a red color. The seats all directed towards a large gap in the stage, a very large darkened gap. It was almost like looking into a great big void. Awe inspiring as this was, this place seemed too large. Sure it was big outside, but inside, it looked absolutely gigantic.

"I've saved you a seat up front." the Other Spike announced. Apple Bloom joined him up at the front. Anticipation filled the filly. What could be in store for her this time?

All of a sudden, a bright light filled the black void before her very eyes. Like an exploding star, Apple Bloom had to shield her eyes from the sheer brightness of it all. The glow began to die and when Apple Bloom opened her eyes, she exclaimed a simple "wow".

A large series of loops, ramps, and rings all situated about the stage, stretching high and tall above. A puff of smoke appeared right at the front of the stage. When it cleared, a white filly stood in the center. It was Sweetiebelle, the other one that is. She held the same button eyes as the rest of the other versions, only her's were of a yellow color. Additionally, the Other Sweetiebelle was dressed in a traditional magicians cape and hat. Purple, just as her hair, or at least the striped parts.

"Welcome one and all to this sensational show!" the Other Sweetiebelle announced. A wide series of sparkles and flashes accompanied her speech. "Tonight we shall dazzle you! Fascinate you! Mesmerize you! Astound you! Enter-"

"Get on with it already! While we're still young here!" high above upon a ramp, stood a young pegasus filly on a scooter. By process of elimination, this would have to be the Other Scootaloo. She looked very much like her

Ponyville counterpart, same blank flank, same color coat, even had Scootaloo's safety helmet. Like the Other Sweetiebelle, her button eyes were a blue color.

The Other Sweetiebelle could see her performance partner was growing impatient. "Right um... very well. Before we begin, we need a volunteer from the audience. Now who could it be?" the Other Sweetiebelle looked over the crowd of almost empty seats. Despite there being only two people present, the button eyed filly seemed to be having some difficulties deciding.

"No...hmmm...maybe." she mumbled

"Oh come on! Just pick her already!" the Other Scootaloo shouted impatiently.

The other Sweetiebelle immediately pointed a hoof at no one other than, "Apple Bloom! Come on up!"

Apple Bloom let out a tiny gasp. "Me?" looking to her side, she could see the Other Spike urging her to go on. There wasn't any other chance for this, so she wouldn't pass it up. Trotting up upon the stage, another puff of smoke caught her by surprise. When it cleared, a chair stood in it's place.

"Please have a seat." instructed the Other Sweetiebelle.

Apple Bloom did so. Seating herself upon it, she watched Other Sweetiebelle's horn glow. The young filly waved her hoof around. On that command, the chair began to shake, and before Apple Bloom could say anything, she found the ground getting smaller and smaller. It wasn't that, she was getting higher.

"What the?" she cried as she noticed herself floating high in the air.

With another puff of smoke, the chair vanished. Despite that, Apple Bloom still found herself floating. Frantically, her legs kicked around as she tried to grab onto something. But she would find nothing.

"Scootaloo if you would please." the Other Sweetiebelle announced.

The pegasus pony flashed a daring grin. "Finally!" using her hoof for propulsion, the scooter sped down the ramp, fast and furious as it twisted and turned at the many angles and twists. At last it came to a huge gap. The other side stood far away, a mistake would spell certain doom. In-between this all was Apple Bloom. The Other Scootaloo sped down. She was almost to the ramp. Her scooter had gained much speed as it descended. The speed served as an asset as she cleared the jump. While she was in the middle, of her grand jump, she grabbed hold of Apple Bloom.

"Hold on tight!" Scootaloo instructed.

Apple Bloom certainly listened. The scooter landed upon the opposite side. The Other Scootaloo sped along the ramps as fast as she could. Apple Bloom held on to dear life. They were going so fast, she could feel her cheeks parting away leaving nothing but a forced grin. The Other Scootaloo simply grinned deviously as she went over more ramps and around loops. Somehow Apple Bloom managed to hang on, right before another leap.

Just below, the Other Sweetiebelle waved her hoof. From nowhere, a series of rings appeared between the ramp gap. With another wave of the hoof, the rings suddenly exploded in fire. The flames illuminated within Apple Bloom's eyes. They grew larger as did they. Wait! They were getting closer! Apple Bloom frantically looked at her other friend. She couldn't be?

It dawned on Apple Bloom that indeed she was.

Before she could protest, the scooter sped off the second ramp and through the flames. Yet, they were not burnt. The Other Scootaloo maneuvered through the rings without touching the flames. Apple Bloom held tight as she avoided them, only poking her head up as they cleared the jump. More twists and turns followed. Apple Bloom had no idea where they were going, but they were going fast. Everything passed on in a blur. All the little filly could see was a turn, a turn that lead into another ramp. Only, there wasn't a place to land.

What came next was another blur. The Other Scootaloo continued along her path. There was no intent on stopping. The small scooter leapt over the ramp turning in midair. Apple Bloom continued to hold, but suddenly, a nudge pushed her. She found her self falling, gravity pulling her down below. Her tiny mind froze. It still remained that way as she felt a brief

pause in the fall. Slowly she found herself gently drifting down. Her hooves planted upon the ground. Her hair was a frazzled mess from the fall. The Other Scootaloo skid across the ground in her descent. A perfect landing.

"TA DA!" the Other Scootaloo and Sweetiebelle announced.

Apple Bloom simply stood there in complete stultification. Her left eye twitched and a quiver danced upon her lips. No tears fell from her eyes however. Her quiver grew larger and her eye continued its ticks.

Apple Bloom let out a cry. One word that summed up her emotions.  
"WOOHOO!"

XXX

"That was so amazing! Scootaloo was like whoosh! And Sweetiebelle was all ZAM with her magic!" Apple Bloom excitedly chattered as she retold the events from her day.

The Other Spike sat by her side, always the eager listener. The dragon had said nothing after they left the show. He merely kept that smile going. It stayed glued to his face. However, at the corner of his lips, the glue began to peel.

"So Apple Bloom? You had fun right?" the Other Spike timidly asked.

Apple Bloom flashed a bright grin. "You bet! Ah've never had so much fun in my little old life!"

"Do you like it here?" the dragon asked.

Again, Apple Bloom's grin could practically be its own sun. "Course I do!"

One last question. "Do you like me?"

"Course I do ya silly little dragon! Y'all are much more fun than the real Spike."

Apple Bloom noticed something the moment she mentioned the word 'real'. The fading smile showed itself upon Other Spike's scaly visage. "Are y'all alright?" the filly asked her friend.

When he heard that question, the Other Spike flashed a brief look of horror. "You didn't see me frown okay? Please don't tell anyone." he begged, keeping his voice low. When his request spurred a quizical look upon the filly's face, the Other Spike quickly followed with, "I'm fine, just...just glad you had fun heh." he added with a laugh.

Apple Bloom paid it no mind. In the distance she saw the shape of the Other Sweet Apple Acres. Waiting at the door was the Other Sister and the Other Big Macintosh.

"Did you have fun sugarcube?" the Other Sister asked.

Apple Bloom pranced at the mares hooves. "Ah sure did! This place is great! Ah never want to leave!"

Hearing that made the Other Sister smile. As she and the Other big Macintosh escorted Apple Bloom into the house, she turned to face the Other Spike. What she saw made her own smile fade. The Other Spike looked up at her. His forced smile was turned upside down. The dragon wrung his claws together as he gazed up at the pony. In his eyes he held a pleading look. It was almost as if he was begging her not to do something. But his pleads fell deaf upon the Other Sister. Instead, she merely took a hoof and with a motion said one thing, "Smile".

With that motion, the Other Spike quickly responded. Although this time, his smile was more half hearted than anything. When he heard the door close behind him, his smile returned to a frown. After all, he was nothing but a puppet doing his job.

XXX

"You know Apple Bloom. You could stay here forever if you wanted." the Other Sister said immediately upon entering the house.

"Ah could?" Apple Bloom responded with disbelief.

"Sure could kiddo!" the Other Big Macintosh added. "We could play games, pick apples, anything ya want!"

That made Apple Bloom think. The prospect of staying in this world interested her greatly. It was no secret she loved it. She loved every bit of

this world. The toys, the games, the food, but most of all she had a family who had time for her. That and a Spike that didn't hang around with slugs. But she had to ask herself, could she really leave her old life behind?

"There is one little thing you have to do." the Other Sister added.

So there was a catch.

Apple Bloom seated herself at the table, as did her other family. The Other Sister nudged something towards her. "For you my sugar cube." It was a gift box neatly wrapped with a ribbon.

Apple Bloom took the present with glee, nudging it open. Inside wasn't a toy nor a fancy new hat. What she saw made her formally happy position fall into a one of pure question. It was a needle and thread. Next to it was pair of black buttons.

"You know we don't have to go with black, you could pick a different color if you wanted." the Other Sister offered. "We could go with yellow, blue, or even red like your ribbon!" she gave the choices with glee.

As she listened to this, Apple Bloom tried to rationalize what all of this could mean. They had said she needed to do something to stay here. But what could a needle and thread have anything to do with it? Her eyes fell upon something: the eyes of the Other Sister. Something in the back of her mind stirred. Back and forth she transferred her own eyes to the buttons. The stirring grew into a suspicion. Everything in this world held something in common: the button eyes. All except one person that is...her.

At last, the suspicion became realization.

"NO WAY!" Apple Bloom forcefully pushed the box away. "Y'all aren't putting buttons in my eyes!"

"Oh but sweetie you have to if want to stay." the Other Sister reminded.

It didn't help improve Apple Bloom's shock.

"Don't worry kiddo, ya won't feel a thing." the Other big Macintosh reassured. "Although you might bleed a bit-oof!" the stallion's face contorted in pain.



The Other Sister's face broke away from her usual cheeriness. Annoyance, anger, pretty much any expression that said 'shut up'. Then she noticed Apple Bloom was staring at her.

"Well it's up to you sugar cube." quickly she put on her former face.

Apple Bloom rose from the table. The other versions of her family were swift to follow. She noticed the other Big Macintosh was walking with a limp in his leg. Almost as if he was kicked. The pretty picture was starting to fade away. No it had long gone past faded. As of now, Apple Bloom didn't mind the prospect of not staying here.

"Ya know Ah think Ah'm going to hit the hay." Apple Bloom faked a yawn when she noticed their surprised or dismayed looks.

Yet the Other Sister replaced it with a smile. "Alright sweetie." tapping the young filly's nose with her hoof she added "I know you'll make the right choice."

Apple Bloom nervously smiled.

XXX

The moment she entered her other room, Apple Bloom quickly shut the door. Her eyes looked about searching for a way out.

"What's wrong Apple Bloom?" the toys at her feet asked. "Don't you wanna stay?"

Apple Bloom dashed away from the living dolls as fast as she could. There was only one way out of this world. She had taken it twice. Covering herself under the blanket she chanted repeatedly to herself.

"Go to sleep. Go to sleep."

She continued that chant in her head as she tried to force herself into slumber. She lost track of the time but soon she felt her eyes grow heavy. Or maybe she simply tired herself out. Her sleep wasn't very peaceful. The events of the day played back in her mind. First it started off joyous and then becoming soured with the ending bits. When she awoke, she was

more than happy to throw off the covers and find herself back in her old room.

Yet, she wasn't in her old room. To her dismay, her other room stared back at her. Fear gripped Apple Bloom. It looks like they wouldn't take no for an answer.

# Chapter 6

Zecora's words had rung true. What she had seen wasn't what she expected. The pretty picture that this place had painted now peeled away into an ugly underside. The moment she realized she wasn't back in her real room, the young filly stormed out of her other bedroom. Down the stairs and to the kitchen she went. She found nopony was there, that left two other places. First was the living room. The door out of this place was behind there. Apple Bloom reached for the door but her hopes were quickly dashed as she the living room door would not budge. The kitchen was a no go so that left one other place.

Her little hooves stormed against the wooden floor. "Where is she!" Apple Bloom demanded the moment she stepped into the art studio. The Other Granny Smith was nowhere to be found. Only the Other Big Macintosh lay within.

"Where's the other sister!" Apple Bloom demanded hotly again. "Ah wanna go home!"

The stallion's body language was far different from earlier. When Apple Bloom first met him, the Other Big Macintosh was excitable, fun loving, and generally a joy to be around. Now she could sense a strange sense of sadness. Not just from the stallion but the entire room as well. The paintings that hung on the way drooped, almost as if they were about to fall off.

"Mustn't talk, mustn't speak when sis isn't around." the Other Big Macintosh spoke in a blank tone. He sat at a picture painting nothing really. He only smeared colored lines upon the easel. The joy that went with him was dead.

Apple Bloom didn't have time for this. "Fine! If you won't help me, I'll find the Other Spike." the filly was certain the dragon would be of more use. "He'll help me."

"Won't do any good." suddenly the other Big Macintosh swirled around. His button eyes dead locked on Apple Bloom. "He puuullllled a saaaaaaaaad

face!" the stallion's mouth sunk low as he spoke. The tone of his voice darkened into a hiss. Apple Bloom backed away in fear. "Sister didn't like that." the Other big Macintosh stamped his hooves forward but quickly stepped backwards as if he realized what he was doing. "Mustn't talk, sister mother not here." he droned continuously and went back to his painting.

Apple Bloom's mind didn't know what else to do. So her instincts told her. She ran, and she ran fast. The front door slammed open as she bolted out. She didn't know where she was going. All she knew was that she wanted to escape this world. Her little legs carried her wherever her instincts commanded her. No, it was her fear that commanded her. Past trees and orchards she ran. Everything still held that brightness to it. The moon shone down on her casting shadows that danced about. Her eyes looked to and fro as the shapes and figures. She wanted to go home. She wanted her grandmother who constantly slept, she wanted her brother who seldom spoke, she wanted her sister who treated her like a baby. She just wanted everything back!

Just then her surroundings changed. But it wasn't a way out. It was nothing.

"Huh?" she muttered. The tree's had disappeared. Now all that could be seen was a white nothing. Apple Bloom trotted a few steps forward. Her wide eyes danced about in confusion. This didn't make sense. What was this place? It was as if this world had only what she wanted to see. There was a little hope that perhaps this world had an Other Ponyville. But that would mean other versions of its denizens. Apple Bloom's walk soon ended as she felt land against her hooves. The Other Sweet Apple Acres loomed above. Her face fell. They wouldn't let her go. She wouldn't let her go. Apple Bloom had no other alternative. She had to reach that door. The only problem was the way leading to it was locked. Apple Bloom didn't really have a lot of options. She would have to try something, anything at this point. Tugging at the door knob wouldn't help. She would have to apply force. Charging at full speed, she rammed her hooves into the door. Not a budge, it only knocked her down with an "oof". She tried again, this time nothing.

"Come on Apple Bloom!" she told herself. "You're an apple!" that was true, and members of the Apple Clan didn't give up. Preparing herself, she looked just like a bull waiting to charge complete with a snort. The moment

Apple Bloom collided with the doorway, it burst open. A flash of pride welled up inside her. But it was competing with the pain that coursed through her little body as she hit the floor.

"Ow." she muttered. Then again maybe the pride wasn't deserved. That door felt as if it opened intentionally. Whatever the case, Apple bloom could see the door before her. All she had to do was reach it and she would be home free.

Unfortunately for her, luck wasn't on her side. She hadn't noticed it at first, but next to the doorway was a dresser of sorts, a rather large bulky dresser which suddenly began to move. With each movement it took, Apple Bloom noticed certain 'qualities', insect qualities. The dresser had antenna along with a pair of orb like eyes attached to its head. The bug dresser seated itself right in front of the door. Clearly there would be no escape.

"You're being awfully difficult my little sugar cube." Apple Bloom knew that voice. Turning around she could see her. Sitting delicately upon a revolving couch was the Other Sister. The mare put one leg over the other as she lounged. "Why would you want to leave? You have everything you could ever want here?" she asked.

Apple Bloom certainly wasn't in the mood. This creature wouldn't let her leave and she wouldn't let this slide. With a determined expression she stormed over towards the Other Sister. "Ah wanna go home to my real family! I want my real brother! My real granny! And my real sister!" Her real sister. She wanted Applejack more than ever. Every time the Other Sister called her "sugar cube", the more she realized she hated it coming from her mouth.

"Is that any way to speak to your big sister?" the Other Sister asked. Her voice striking an indignant tone.

Apple Bloom's face became dead serious. "You...aint...my...sister." she stated that with the utmost seriousness.

The Other Sister likewise became serious. "Apologize this instant young filly." her voice dropped low.

The only response Apple Bloom gave was "No!" Her body motioned in a sulk. After all, she was a child.

"I'm going to give you till the count of three. And when I'm done I expect an apology." The Other Sister warned. Apple Bloom didn't budge nor alter her disposition. The Other Sister's expression darkened upon her warning.

"One." The mare rose from her seat but oddly she stood upon her back leg. Apple Bloom heard a sound just then. It was like something was stretching itself with a sickening squelch. It was coming from the Other Sister.

"Two." Apple Bloom watched the Other Sister closely. Her eyes transfixed upon her altering form. The mare's body began to grow. The pony shape became elongated and lanky. Something began to form along the body. The coat was changing color at least in some parts. Before Apple Bloom's eyes, a spotted black dress formed along the Other Sister's new body. The front legs were no longer legs but rather arms now. The hooves split apart into long, spiny black fingers. The lower legs remained as they were hooves and all. Yet she looked as if she were a walking devil. Lastly the muzzle shrank back as her hair became long and matted.

Apple Bloom's eyes trailed the falling hat as it hit the ground.

"THREEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

Her eyes snapped back to the Other Sister only to see her approaching hand. A sharp pain coursed through Apple Bloom's head as the Other Sister grabbed her by the mane.

"Ow!" Apple Bloom cried. "Let go!"

The Other Sister dragged the young filly down the hall with a scowl upon her face. All the while, Apple Bloom kicked up a storm as she tried to escape the creatures grasp.

"You're hurting me!" Apple Bloom screamed.

Her protests and pleas went unheard. Before the Other Sister stood a mirror located at the end of the hall. The next thing Apple Bloom knew, she was being thrown right at the mirror. Apple Bloom shut her eyes but there was no collision though, for she fell right into it. Apple Bloom felt the cold hardness of stone underneath her. Opening her eyes, she could see the stern look of the Other Sister.

"You may come out, when you've learned to be a good little foal." the Other Sister's body vanished into the wall leaving Apple Bloom alone.

The young filly felt cold as a damp air surrounded her. This place, it felt sad. Apple Bloom pounded her hooves against the stone wall. Her desperation to leave drove her, but it would be of to no use. Whatever magic the Other Sister possessed, Apple Bloom didn't have.

Just as her fear began to sink in, a sound reached her ears. It was a faint whisper of a wail. For Apple Bloom it was just as if a storm made the branches rustle against her window.

"W-who's there?" Apple Bloom whimpered. Whirling around, she took in her surroundings.

They perfectly comprised her feelings. Dark, gloomy, foreboding, and cold. There were nothing but stone walls and floors. Puddles of water were scattered about. This place looked more like a prison than anything. At the very end Apple Bloom noticed something. It was a blanket. But that wasn't the odd part. Underneath it was a faint glow. Curiously, Apple Bloom trotted over. Her eyes were drawn to the strange light. Part of her wanted to leave it as it was, while another half told her this was a way out.

*"Mustn't talk, mustn't speak, lest the Beldam will hear us."* a voice came from underneath. The voice was that of a young filly's.

"The Beldam?" Apple Bloom repeated the word. "Ya mean the Other Sister?" there could be no other reference.

Stripping the blanket away, Apple Bloom gasped. Underneath were three little ponies. Apple Bloom noticed from their appearance, they were about the same age as her. Yet these ponies were not normal ponies. Normal ponies didn't have translucent blue flanks. The three were each a different pony race, an earth pony, a pegasus, and a unicorn. The youngsters briefly glanced up at Apple Bloom before hiding their heads once more. She caught something before they did. They all had button's sewn in their eyes.

"Who are y'all?" Apple Bloom asked. Her question turned into a gasp as the ponies did something she didn't expect, float. Now it dawned upon her, they were ghosts.

"*I don't remember my name.*" the pegasus pony spoke. He was a young colt, his wings were tattered and his mouth carved into a whimper. "*But in my head, I can still see my true mama.*" the pegasus ghost floated about almost in a strange dance of loss.

"Why are ya here?" Apple Bloom's next question came with a faint whisper.

The three ghost ponies all said one word in unison. "*The Beldam.*"

Apple Bloom took a look at the remaining two ghost ponies. Both were fillies. One was a unicorn lass, her face contorted in a scream. Perhaps the last thing she saw frightened her so much? The last child was an earth pony. Apple Bloom's face locked upon the ghost filly. Something about her mane, her face, her...bow...it all looked so familiar.

"*She spied on us through the doll's eyes.*" the earth pony recited. Immediately Apple Bloom caught the trace of an accent. An all too familiar accent. It was almost like...

"*And saw that were weren't happy.*" the voice of the pegasus lad interrupted her thoughts

The unicorn lass floated beside Apple Bloom. "*So with treats, toys and games, she lured us away.*"

"*But w'all wanted more,*" the accent came again.

"*So we let her sew the buttons.*"

Apple Bloom's eyes widened in shock as the children began to circle her.

"*She gave us all we wanted.*"

"*She said she loved us.*"

"*But she locked us here in the dark.*"

"*And she ate our lives.*"

The ponies finished their tale. Apple Bloom had remained silent throughout it all. The only thing that changed were her expressions. She wasn't the first. There were others and she was staring right at them. This fate...it



could have happened to her. Or rather it will happen if she didn't do something. Inside, Apple Bloom felt something stir within. Frightened as she was, she came to a conclusion.

"She aint doing this to me." the filly spoke softly to herself.

Easier said than done, Apple Bloom knew her words were held no strength. She still was trapped here. She had to escape...somehow.

*"Maybe you can help us miss?"* the ghost ponies emerged again. The unicorn pony was the first to speak.

Apple Bloom had walked back to the wall in all of this. "But how can Ah help? W-what could Ah possibly do?"

*"If you find our eyes maybe y'all can set us free."* the earth pony answered with her accented voice.

*"Find our eyes miss! Please!"* the pegasus pony pleaded.

Apple Bloom stepped back even farther as the children gave their pleads. Sympathy was what she felt. So much she felt she didn't know what else to say besides "Ah...ah'll." but before she could finish, something reached out from behind the wall and dragged her in. The moment she saw the light of the hallway, Apple Bloom gave a mighty buck for one her size. She bucked whatever had grabbed her. A picture frame fell to the ground as something collided with the wall. Apple Bloom held a look of pure fury upon her brow, but it fell when she saw who had grabbed her.

"Spike!" or rather the Other Spike.

The button eyed dragon looked up at the filly, one of his claws against his chest from where Apple Bloom had bucked him.

"Oh Spike Ah'm so sorry! Ah didn't-"

"SHHHHH!" the Other Spike silenced her.

Apple Bloom kept quiet.

"We have to get you out of here! She'll be back any minute." the dragon motioned for Apple Bloom to follow him. Apple Bloom followed the young dragon through the hallway and into the living room. Luckily, they found the room completely empty. There was no trace of the Other Sister. The Other Spike and Apple Bloom hurried to the insect dresser pushing it on its side.

"Apple Bloom is that you?" from some part of the house the Other Sister called.

Quickly the pair opened the door. Gazing inside, Apple Bloom could see no glow. The tunnel was nothing but a brown cob web filled corridor.

"Apple Bloom! How dare you disobey me!" the Other Sister bellowed.

The Other Spike urgently pushed the young pony towards the door. "Hurry or she'll find you!"

"What about you!" Apple Bloom asked with concern. "Can't you come with me?" the dragon was risking a lot by helping her. She didn't know exactly how, but she somehow knew that.

The Other Spike looked at the young pony seeing the pleading and concern in her eyes. His button eyes darted away with uncertainty. Above them came a creak. The Other Sister was getting closer. Before she could protest, the Other Spike pushed her inside and closed the door. Stunned by the action Apple Bloom almost turned back.

"APPLE BLOOM!"

That voice quickly got her running. Her little hooves scurried along the path. All of a sudden, it began to shake and shift. Apple Bloom hurried along all the while trying to make it to the door above her.

"YOU CANNOT!"

The path continued to shake. For a brief moment Apple Bloom lost her grip.

"GET AWAY! FROM ME!"

That was the last thing Apple Bloom heard as she bolted to the outside. Her eyes looked around until it caught sight of a familiar looking key.

Taking it in her mouth, Apple Bloom locked the door behind her. The filly fell upon her back breathing heavily. This place. The musky smell that hung in the air. She knew where it was...The old house! She had made it!

Apple Bloom's legs moved as fast as they could carry her. She scurried down the hallway towards the door and escaped into the outside. The fresh air was like a godsend against her flank. Her mane swung in the breeze as she tasted the air. She only thought of one place.

"Applejack! Big Macintosh! Granny Smith!" she called as she bolted inside the door of the real Sweet Apple Acres. Her true home. Apple Bloom excitedly looked through the rooms expecting to be greeted by her family.

"I'm home!" she called again. Up the stairs she went to the bedrooms. But when she went up there, she found nothing. Going back down she gave a second sweep. Several sweeps to be precise. However, there was no trace of anyone. Confused, she went outside. Perhaps she had missed them on her way in? But outside she could find nothing at all. The apple baskets were left unattended. Even Big Macintosh's plow was just left there.

Apple Bloom felt fear well up in her tiny chest. "Where is everypony?" she asked.

# Chapter 7

*Smack!*

*The pain coursed through his body.*

*Wack!*

*It came again with a slap. His little body skid across the ground. He tried to lift himself up with all of his strength. The ground trembled as she approached him, her hooves were gave off a sound like thunder. At least from his point of view.*

*"Tell me my little doll." she hissed.*

*Before he could move he felt her hand wrap around him. Her cold button eyes met his as she held him up to her view. "Why did you help her escape? HMMM!" before he could answer, she threw him at the wall. Another spike of pain ran up his spine as he fell to the floor. Goodness, it hurt so much. Yet he didn't have a scratch on him. He supposed he was durable like that. All of them were. It wasn't as if he had any real organs or bones to think of.*

*"S-s-she's my friend, I wanted to help her." came his honest response.*

*She looked down at him in apparent from within her came a laugh. A cruel mocking laugh that echoes through the room. "Friend? Oh my poor little dragon, you are simply nothing more than a doll I made," she explained. "all your feelings of friendship towards that filly are simply ones I put into you. You were simply to play your role and lull her in." her voice dripped with venom as she glared down at him.*

*The dragon curled himself up into a cowering ball. Was that it? Was everything he felt fake. Maybe it was, she had created him after all. That was it. He hadn't been born. He was simply created. Sticked up by her to do her bidding. He broke his balled position looking at one of his claws. IF he wasn't real, then what were the scales made of? What of the rest of his body?*

*"Well you did perform your job admerably," He heard her coming again.  
"but I'm afraid I'm going to have to punish you now."*

*His eyes looked up and what he saw made him cower even more. Within her hand she held a needle and thread. Her smile grew into an insane wickedness. It wasn't just the escape. He had broken another of her rules. It had been broken before and it was broken now. He wasn't smiling.*

XXX

Apple Bloom felt numb. If numb could be considered the correct term. But she didn't now how else to describe her emotions. She had looked high and low, covered every inch of the barn and orchards. Nothing. With nothing else to do, she trotted to Ponyville. She asked everyone in town, including the fellow holders of the elements of harmony. She had asked the same question to them and everyone she came in contact with.

Each and every time she received the same answer "They hadn't seen them."

So Apple Bloom trotted up the path to her home. But she knew one thing was for certain. Her family was gone.

Slowly she trotted along the path. There was no other place besides home. An empty home wasn't any home at all. During her questioning search, she had left out one detail, a detail that weighed heavily on her mind.

"Hey Apple Bloom!" She heard the cheerful tone from above. Sitting high upon a tree branch was Spike. And of course, sliding upon the tree branch with him was Wybourne. Apple Bloom's melancholy expression was interrupted by a brief mask of disgust at the appearance of the slug.

"Hey Spike. What are you doing here?" Apple Bloom's depression etched in her voice.

Taking his slug upon his shoulder, he slid down the tree landing without any trouble. "Oh Twilight has some new "house rule"." Spike frowned. "Apparently she didn't think Wybourne was so cool and Owlicious tried to eat him." Spike covered Wybourne protectively. "Poor guy was so scared. So I'm trying to find someplace to keep him."

The affection Spike displayed towards the creature never ceased to confuse the filly. "Why don't ya just keep him outside?"

Spike's face flashed in horror. "And expose him to the elements! No way!" he started to scratch Wybourne underneath his slimy underside. "Like Rarity, Wybourne is a delicate creature who deserves the best." With a grin that he only reserved towards the aforementioned mare, he held up Wybourne to his face. "And I can't deny this guy anything. Who's the best slug in the world? You are! You are!"

Within this out of character display, Apple Bloom widened one eye, and narrowed the other. Suddenly her depression was far off.

"You know I was thinking of using that abandoned building Snips and Snails mentioned."

Suddenly Apple Bloom's narrowed eye widened to match to the other one.

"You know turn it into our own special hideout or something."

Spike was jolted from his fantasy when Apple Bloom tacked him. While covering Wybourne he glared up and was met with Apple Bloom's own gaze. "No! Don't go in that place! It's dangerous!"

Now Spike was starting to get confused. "You mean like rotting boards or something?" His response was only more ranting.

"First she lures you in with all this great food and stuff and gives you whatever you want. It all looks perfect but it's really all a trap." Spike attempted to worm his way from under the filly, but was met with another force of the hooves. "Oh mah gosh, the ghost ponies! They're still trapped in there!"

The dragon cocked a confused eye. "Ghosts?"

Apple Bloom didn't bother with the dragon's emotions; she was too lost in her own. So much pondering played out in her mind. "Mah granny's sister. She had to be one of them."

"One of who?" Spike's confusion continued to grow. Suddenly he felt another thud against his chest.

"The doll! That's how she spies on ya!" Apple Bloom's realization grew as she came to that conclusion

*Through the little doll's eyes.*

At last Apple Bloom removed herself from Spike. The dragon still kept a protective claw over Wybourne. "Um yeah Apple Bloom. I can see you are a little stressed out, so I'll leave... leave you alone." Spike slowly began to turn away back towards Ponyville.

"Wait! Spike you have to listen to me!" Apple Bloom charged towards the dragon pleading with her hooves upon his chest. Her emotions were starting to run wild. Spike definitely could see that and in all honestly it frightened him.

"Uh yeah Apple Bloom I gotta go. Oh what's that? I think I hear Twilight calling me, bye!" Spike announced before running off.

The dragon ran off without ever looking back. Apple Bloom on the other hand wasn't finished. Depression, anger, confusion. Every one of these swirled around together into a deadly bitter shake. "None of this would have happened if ya'll hadn't given me that stupid doll!"

Spike was far beyond ear shot when she said that. Apple Bloom found herself alone once more.

XXX

The Apple family home was eerily silent. Save for the trots of one. Apple Bloom went through every room. Starting with the kitchen, then with the living room, and finally the bedrooms, she stood there for all but three minutes each, soaking in the solitude. Celestia's sun soon fell underneath the hills giving way for Luna's moon. Apple Bloom didn't bother with dinner that night. Instead he curled up underneath her covers.

Images became so vivid she could almost see them right before her eyes. Big Macintosh working hard in the fields, Granny Smith sleeping in her rocker, and Applejack being her usual self, bossy yet caring, always treating her younger sister like a baby, but somehow Apple Bloom missed that.

Apple Bloom cried herself to sleep that night. Her tiny body shook and her tears drenched her pillow. Her family admittedly annoyed her at times. But she didn't want this.

XXX

*Wipe Wipe*

*Apple Bloom shot awake at the sound. Darkness surrounded her.*

*Wipe Wipe*

*There it came again. One by one she trotted.*

*Wipe Wipe*

*Where was it?*

*Wipe Wipe*

*Something was there.*

*Then right before her stood a mirror. Frost covered the glass. An icy chill spread around the filly causing her to shiver.*

*Wipe Wipe.*

*Something appeared in the mirror rubbing against the glass. It was a hoof.*

*Wipe Wipe*

*The fogginess cleared up revealing an orange leg, furthermore an orange body. Behind it was a yellow mane topped off with an ever present hat. Behind it came coats of red and green all faded with the cold that surrounded them. Their eyes looked pleadingly at the young filly.*

*And then Apple Bloom woke up*

XXX

A sweat ran down her forehead as the dream ended. Panicked, Apple Bloom leapt out of bed. Her tiny head looked frantically around. Then she



stopped as she noticed something peeking from underneath. Kneeling down she saw a pair of eyes staring back at her. Button eyes; no not just that, doll's eyes. It wasn't just any doll. It was the little doll version of her staring back at her.

*She spied on us through the doll's eyes.*

*And saw that we weren't happy.*

*So with treats, toys and games, she lured us away.*

*Lured us away*

*Lured us away*

Apple Bloom's formally frightened eyes filled with rage. Her family wasn't just missing, they were stolen. With a cry she grabbed the doll tearing it apart bit by bit leaving nothing but filling upon the floor and torn fabric. With a look of determination, Apple Bloom stormed out of the house. She had places to go.

XXX

Going to Ponyville would have been the smarter choice. After all, Twilight, Pinkie Pie, Rarity, Fluttershy, and Rainbow Dash, were the fellow wielders of the elements of harmony. Just like her sister. They would certainly want to know the full story. Apple Bloom nearly told them it. But something inside her wanted to keep it silent. Okay, that went against her better judgment. But in a way, this was entirely her fault. She opened the door, she fell into the Other Sister's....the Beldam's trap. She had been the one who almost willingly abandoned her old life. A part of her wanted to escape from the responsibility. The responsibility of being the one to seal her familie's fate. Perhaps it was for these reasons that she choose to tread into the Everfree Forest. There was one other she knew could help her. Well honestly she didn't know, she just had a very good hunch. From her encouter the following day, she knew that this one would help her.

She just hoped she was awake. Apple Bloom pounded her hoof against the wooden door. She did it several times when no immediate answer came. When she was about to do it once more she heard a clip clopping. The door creaked open and a black and white face stared back at her.

"Why little one, why are you here when there is no sun?" Zecora asked.

The night especially in Everfree Forest was definitely unsafe for a young filly. The zebra ushered the pony inside.

"So tell me little flower, what brings you here at this hour?" Zecora used the term flower due to the filly's name. After all, a flower bloomed.

Apple Bloom didn't know where to begin. But she tried. She poured out every little detail starting from the bare facts to just about everything else. It all came out similar to how she had ranted to Spike. Although now she had time to calm herself to a degree. Zecora took it in rather well. As Apple Bloom finished her tale, she stared intently towards a boiling pot filled with a brew she had been working on.

"Your tale so sad and full of woe. And alas, you have nowhere to go." Zecora spoke in her tongue. "But when I stepped foot on that unholy ground, I knew things were not sound."

Apple Bloom blinked. "Wait, ya knew about everything?" she asked.

The zebra shook her head. "Not everything child. But the evil I suspected there has gotten wild." Once more it was amazing that the zebra could rhyme so flawlessly. "But I may ask you, what will you do?"

The question immediately fell upon the filly. It was so sudden yet appropriate. Something in Zecora's eyes told she knew more than she let on. Apple Bloom thought hard on that. Indeed this all was on her. If she hadn't gone in that house none of this would have happened. While at first glance it seemed as if the zebra was selfish in placing all of this on a child, but something in her eyes told the filly she knew more than she let on. But if anything Apple Bloom knew she had to do this herself. It wouldn't sit right with her if someone else cleaned up her mess.

She knew what she had to do. "Ah'm" her words hesitated in her mouth. There was a small selfish, childish part that told her to just sit back and let someone else go through with this. But being the strong willed pony she was, she cast that aside. "Ah'm going after mah family!" The filly boldly declared. This surprised Zecora somewhat, but it seemed to be appropriate.

"Well then, I shall say this quest shall be your test." Zecora went to the back of her hut digging within. In her mouth she pulled out a saddlebag. From the way the bag drooped in her muzzle, it held something within. "Perhaps on your journey, you will be helped from some items of my native country."

Again the rhyming amazed Apple Bloom. Curious about these items, Apple Bloom peeked inside. All she found however was a strange triangular shaped jewel. The other was a glowing glass jar. Looking closely at it, Apple Bloom could have sworn it held a ... no it couldn't be.

"How are these supposed ta help me?" Apple Bloom turned her attention away from the jar.

Zecora opened her mouth to speak but was cut off by the young filly. "On second thought, nevermind. Ah'll just figure it out for mahself."

Although this seemed like a random interval of progression, Zecora had one thing to say. "The creature of whom you speak, a word of caution if you please." Apple Bloom stopped at the zebra's speech, "You may very well be able to break her chain if you were to challenge her to a game."

"A game?" The filly repeated.

The zebra grinned. "The kind of creatures of similar breed would seem very keen to such a thing."

That advice absorbed into the filly's brain. She wasn't sure how it would affect anything, but it would be a useful gambit. Everything seemed settled. It all was prepared. Apple Bloom stared out the open doorway into the darkness of Everfree Forest. Turning back with a smile, she said. "Thank ya Zecora." Without another word, she strode outside. Zecora remained looking at the little filly with an accomplished smile. She had sensed great evil within that house. Yet the evil wasn't her's to slay. No it would seem fate favored the young filly. The spirits told her so. Her kind was taught to belie in such things from a young age. And she certainly believed so. Along with fate.

XXX

Apple Bloom stromed through the Everfree Forest with a goal in mind. The goal centered upon the house before her. Dilapidated, old, worn and evil. Apple Bloom fought back a gulp as she entered. Stepping through the old doorway, down the hallway, and into the living room. The room held a cold feeling as she searched for the tiny key. It was right where she had left it. On the ground right next to the accursed doorway. Taking it in her mouth, she opened the door and was met with the familiar feeling of warmth. Yet it felt cold in a way. Taking the key, Apple Bloom situated it in her mane. She wouldn't let it out of her grasp so easily.

The path itself had lost its sheen. Treading down it didn't fill her with joy as it had before. But something she saw did fill her with joy.

"Apple Bloom?"

She stopped. The voice was familiar. So familiar she didn't need to ponder on who it was.

"Applejack?"

"Apple Bloom, can ya hear me?" The voice was coming from the end of of the path.

"Applejack!" Apple Bloom cried with excitement. The little filly ran down the path as fast as she could. Soon she made it towards the end stepping into the Other Sweet Apple Acres.

Apple Bloom looked about for any trace of her sister. "Applejack?" she called again.

Suddenly the door slammed behind her. A dark shadow cast over her.

"So glad you could make it sugar cube." Apple Bloom turned around, staring into the gaze of the Beldam.

# Chapter 8

Apple Bloom stepped backwards as the creature's long bony arm reached down towards her. Yet it didn't swipe at her nor grab. Well she grabbed at something. Apple Bloom felt the witch pull at her mane until something gave. The filly looked up with wide eyes as the key dangled from the Beldam's black, pointed fingertips.

"We can't have you running around with this now can we?" The Beldam held the key up high sticking inside the keyhole and locking it. Then to Apple Bloom's amazement, she opened her mouth and swallowed it.

There would be no escape now.

The Beldam's expression changed to pure sympathy in that instant. "You poor little dear, your family just up and left you all alone like that."

"They didn't leave me! You took them!" Apple Bloom shouted.

The Beldam turned her back to the young pony. "Did I? Maybe they grew bored of you?" she suggested.

Apple Bloom didn't respond. The thought did cross her young mind...for about ten seconds. Her family would never do that. They loved her. The Beldam could pick up on that.

"Fine," the creature sighed, "so I did." She twirled around to face her young captive. "What of it?"

Apple Bloom took a full glance at the Beldam's current form. She had long shed the form of her sister, mostly that is. She still held the transformed state she had taken from before. The orange skin stretched against the elongated body. The only remainder of the pony form were the hooves. The rest of the body however seemed like a poor imitation. Maybe it was the length of the body or perhaps just the lingering equine features. Something seemed out placed.

"You poor thing you must be hungry." The Beldam spoke in a soothing tone. "Now to come to the kitchen for breakfast dear." the last request was spoken more like an order.

Before Apple Bloom could bravely retort, the creature sauntered out of the room. "Well...that didn't go like Ah planned." Apple Bloom had expected to dash in and save her family from the so called Other Sister. But so far that plan had yet to be realized. The key was gone and she had no way of getting home.

For a moment she felt defeated. She was trapped once more. So what else could she do? At the moment there didn't seem to be an option. The only other option was breakfast and that more than likely was a trap. Had she come this far to fail? That thought occurred to her just as long as the possibility of her family abandoning her: ten seconds.

So therefore that failure was nonexistent.

Her brave face returned.

She would see this to the end. Even if that meant going to the kitchen. So she did.

As bravely as she trotted she couldn't help but feel a slight fear in the air. It felt as if the walls were watching her. Then again, maybe they were. As she neared the kitchen she could hear a faint humming. Memories of her first arrival played back in her head. She kept going despite the seemingly cheerful melody. She wouldn't be fooled this time.

Just as before she could see the Beldam preparing some kind of meal giving off the cheerful undertone. As stated before, she wouldn't be fooled.

"So you've decided to join us sugar cube." The Beldam greeted cheerfully.

Apple Bloom hated that phrase. At least coming from a certain mouth. Reluctantly the filly took a seat at the table. A clang of porcelain broke her serious look of determination.

"Eat up."

Below her was a simple meal of hay browns, waffles, and fruit. The Beldam really had pulled out all the stops. Next to the plate however she noticed a box. Unsurprisingly there was a needled and thread next to a pair of black buttons.

Apparently the button eyes were not up for discussion.

"Like I said Apple Bloom, you're being awfully difficult. This could be so easy." the Beldam chided. "But now your here so we can discuss your living arrangements. she added that line with a giggle.

Apple Bloom didn't find it funny. She knew the Beldam would not let up. This meal would have one result and it lay beside the needle. That is unless she did something. She had one ace up her metaphorical sleeve. Would it work? She didn't know. But what choice did she have?

"Actually, Ah was wondering if we could play a game?" Apple Bloom posed the question.

A curious thing happened just then. The Beldam stopped. "A game?" a glint appeared in one of her button eyes. "What sort of game?" she asked curiously. The witch turned around slowly advancing towards the filly.

"Well...Ah." Apple Bloom felt a twinge of intimidation as she watched the creature's steps. "thought it could be a game where you hide something and Ah try to find it." Apple Bloom presented the notion of the game.

The Beldam held a consideration in her face. Her mind went over the details and Apple Bloom attentively watched. "And what would happen if by some chance you win this game?" the Beldam inquired. "What would be at stake?"

For a moment Apple Bloom grinned. Zecora's idea had worked! She hid the grin away; now it was time to do what her sister did when haggling with a customer. Putting on a straight face, she gave the details. "If Ah win you have to let me go," that was part one, "but not just me, my family too and the dead ponies you trapped here." Apple Bloom kept her "business" face plastered on, trying her best to imitate Applejack. "Take it or leave it!" Apple Bloom added with emotion in her voice.

The Beldam had her back turned the entire time as Apple Bloom explained the game. Then at last she turned around. "Now what happens if you lose?"

That was a good question. As much as Apple Bloom didn't want to think of losing, she did have an idea that would sink this whole thing in. "If Ah lose, then Ah'll stay and let you sew the buttons."

As Apple Bloom's voice grew low, the Beldam's smile grew larger. "I have to say sugar cube, I'm intrigued; you have a deal." the Beldam agreed at last.

Apple Bloom had succeeded. Although happy as she felt she still had one thing to make certain. "Ya promise y'all do what ya said if Ah win?"

A creak gave away, an almost metallic sound as the Beldam raised her right hand. "I swear on my right hand." The creature offered her hand to the pony. Apple Bloom was confused for a moment at the action but realized what it meant. Taking her hoof, the Beldam grasped it and they shook. The deal was solidified.

"Hmm you better get started." the Beldam suggested with a chuckle.

Indeed she should. Problem was Apple Bloom had no idea. "Wait! Can ya give me a hint?" Although the quest had begun, Apple Bloom had no idea where to look.

The Beldam could see that as well. "Very well." she spoke as she turned, her body moving in symmetry with her words. "In three wonders I've made for you." she moved her hands over Apple Bloom's eyes. "I have hidden three things for you to find." she moved her hands away as she finished.

"That's it?" Apple Bloom asked. "How am Ah supposed to understand that? Can't ya give me another hint?"

A smirk crossed the Beldam's face as she tapped her button eye. "Oh dear if I gave away everything the game would be no fun." The smirk grew larger as she placed her hands on her hips. "Any more and we would have to call the whole thing off." That sentence made Apple Bloom understand what the button tap meant. Semi vague as it was, the filly had nothing else to go by.



"Fine." Apple Bloom sighed with a slight defeat in her voice. Turning her head, contemplated everything. "Ah'll do it."

The smirk shrank. "The game starts....now." that was the last thing the Beldam said. Apple Bloom turned around for more but found no trace of the Beldam. She was alone. Getting up from the table her hooves made the only sound as she trotted out the door and into the outside. Although she had no idea what "three wonder" could be, she figured it had to be something.

"Come on Apple Bloom think." she told herself. "Three wonders? What in the hay does that mean?"

Her tiny mind wrapped around the word "wonders". It had to relate to something. She had mentioned three. Something inside her clicked. Besides the house, she had been to three other places in this world. At last the gears inside turned the clock that was her brain. The rest of the gears followed in suit as she gazed towards the apple orchard. Best place to start.

Her trots to said orchard were not filled with joy as before. She would not be filling her belly with the succulent candy apples that hung from the branches. Something else was here and she sure as heck had to find it. Easier said than done for she didn't know what she was looking for. Her mind first drifted to the apples. Perhaps they could be what she sought. That or her appetite was craving sweets. Apparently this would be another thinking situation.

Really she had no way of finding anything. She had no tools or even magic to help her. Then she remembered she did have something in her knapsack. Setting herself down, she rummaged through the gifts Zecora had given her. All she had was the glass jar. Looking at the contents she knew those wouldn't be any help and she certainly didn't want to open it. Then there was the little green triangle. Apple Bloom gazed at it as it fell to the ground. She attempted to pick it up but it proved rather hard with her hooves Each time she would try to grab it, it would slip and fall upon the grass. At last she managed to trap it in between her two hooves and held it up for examination.

"Just what exactly is this thing supposed to do?" she asked herself. About now she wished she had asked Zecora but she didn't want to sit through

another rhyme. It was a curious little thing, green like an emerald with a hole in the center. Apple Bloom held it closer to her eye and peeked through the hole. Suddenly she saw a glow.

"Whoa!" she exclaimed at the suddenness. Holding it close again, she peered through the hole once more and realized this was no ordinary trinket. Through the hole Apple Bloom saw an entirely different world. Everything was lit in an emerald glow. It made her wonder where Zecora found such a thing. Presumably she must have picked it up before she settled in Everfree Forest.

"Wow." Apple Bloom remarked with a childish joy at the wonder. Her eye trailed thought the jewel vision but then stopped when she noticed a certain illumination. Settled just between a branch, there was a round shiny object. It glowed far more brilliantly than the surrounding orchard. Taking the triangle away, she put it inside and trotted over to the tree. Sure enough situated in the branch was some kind of ball. It was too far up to make out, but a little buck could set it loose.

Apple Bloom smiled proudly to herself. "Apple Bloom ya outdid yourself!" a bold exclamation but she felt elated enough to do so.

"I wouldn't do that little un." Apple Bloom halted at the voice. It sounded like an all too familiar baritone mixed in with a growl. Behind she could hear trots against the grass; deep, heavy ones. A gust of hot air hit her backside creeping up her neck. Slowly she turned around and gasped.

"Nice to see ya again sis." the Other big Macintosh greeted. What Apple Bloom saw however was not the carbon copy of her brother. Besides the change in voice, there was also a change in body shape. His already large frame had bulked up considerably. His coat and mane had turned into a shaggy dressing of fur. Just past the hair, Apple Bloom could see the button eyes peeking through the crazy mop. Then she noticed the teeth or rather fangs that hung out as he spoke.

"What ya doing here girly? Ya snooping around?" his hooves practically thumped against the ground. Apple Bloom trotted backward in fear. "Hee...you've been a bad girl...sister says Ah gotta give you your medicine." he flashed his fangs again. Drool dribbled down into a slowly forming puddle.

Apple Bloom didn't want to find out what this kind of "medicine" was. The Other Big Macintosh didn't give her a chance. The demon pony charged forward like an angry bull. Apple Bloom turned tail and ran with as much strength her little legs could carry her.

Behind she heard the thumping of her demonic false brother.

"Where y'all going? No place to run honey. Besides, the family just wants to say hello." the demon pony spoke.

Apple Bloom didn't bother stopping. That is until she tripped. She didn't hit the ground hard but it hurt. She cursed silently figuring she must have hit a rock. Suddenly she heard a sound from behind. It wasn't the thumping of hooves. It sounded more like digging.

"Told ya they were coming. Aunt Brown Betty wants to see how big y'all gotten." the Other Big Macintosh grinned.

Apple Bloom could see she hadn't tripped over a rock. From the ground, several colored bumps emerged. The bumps shoed themselves in full now. They were heads, pony heads that is. These ponies however were not healthy so to speak. Their coats were horribly discolored, patches of skin even missing revealing muscle and bone. One thing they all had in common were the black pair of buttons for eyes. That wasn't the worse of it though. All of these ponies, they were doppelgangers of the Apple family. Her cousins, aunts, uncles, they were all there.

"Well howdy Apple Bloom!" a zombified Braeburn greeted in a raspy voice. "Been a while since Ah seen your bright face! Ya'll should come on down to AAAAAAPAAAAALOOOOOOOSA!"

"Oh Apple Bloom come over here so Aunt Apple Brown Betty can see you!"

"Hey cousin how's it going? Why don't you come over here?"

Their voices all mixed in together. The sight was frightening to the child. She turned to run, but was cut off by the rest of the herd. Decayed as they looked, they were still fast enough to surround the filly. Apple Bloom frantically turned her head looking for any sign of escape. Yet there were none available. She was boxed in. In the back the Other Big Macintosh grinned wickedly.

Apple Bloom hoped for a miracle at this point. Luckily one answered. From out of nowhere, a flash of purple landed in front of Apple Bloom leaping from the branches it seemed. In it's hands, it held a long stick, more than likely a branch.

"Spike!" Apple Bloom cried happily. Indeed it was the Other Spike. The tail, scales, and green spines were a dead giveaway.

The Other Spike swung the branch in the faces of the zombified pony. Whilst they tried to avoid it, Apple Bloom followed after the dragon knowing that was his intent. Through the tron they went. Apple Bloom could feel then snapping at her tail. Their dead bodies brushed up against her as they ran. Relief washed over the filly as soon as she could see the apple trees clearly. Now if she could just head back to that tree. Suddenly it came again, the thumping. She looked to see a red bulk literally charging through the crowd of zombies. The Other Big Mac held a furious look on his face as he emerged. He looked intent to kill any that got in his way.

The Other Spike turned around.

"Why did ya stop!" Apple Bloom asked.

The Other Spike said nothing and merely pointed towards the area they had just come from. Or at least behind the crowd of death.

Before Apple Bloom could question him further, the dragon was off. With branch claw, he dove right at the large earth pony. The Other Big Macintosh bit down hard on the wood attempting to wrest it free. The dragon however wasn't ready to just give up though. Apple Bloom did not waste in taking her chance. She ran as fast as she could. She remembered where she had fled from. The zombified Apple clan chased after her. They were fast, but not fast enough to deal with an adrenaline filled earth pony. Apple Bloom looked about the numerous trees that surrounded the area.

"Which one was it!" Apple Bloom asked to herself.

Her eyes darted around for anything out of place. In the dark it was hard, but she managed to spy something at last. There it was, just in-between the branches. Apple Bloom rammed herself forward as she bucked the tree with her hind legs. Nothing doing apparently. The thumping came once

more. The Other Big Macintosh thundered through the zombies again. Apparently family didn't matter in fake terms.

Apple Bloom bucked again and again, then finally it shifted.

"Almost there little sis!" the Other Big Macintosh roared.

Apple Bloom became more frantic in her bucking. Each kick moved it closer and closer and closer. And then it rolled right off. As soon as it landed, Apple Bloom put both hooves atop it.

*Crack!*

The sound came out of nowhere. The moment she had touched the ball, something began to spread. A strange whiteness spread like an infection. The white ness quickly covered the whole Orchard. From every square inch. It was as if everything had died.

*"Thank you miss! You found my eye!"* Apple Bloom was startled by a sudden voice. It was coming from the ball. The ball in question was actually a false apple. A very small apple that is. There was a face that appeared. The face of the ghost pegasus colt. So this was it? A ghost eye? Apple Bloom had to smile, she was actually helping those poor ponies as she promised. The face then disappeared. Opening her sack, she deposited the ghost eye inside for safe keeping.

Accomplished pride welled up inside her. She had passed part one of the game. But still there were two wonders left. Suddenly she remembered something. "Spike! Ah better go agghh!" Apple Bloom nearly screamed. Staring right in front of her was the Other Big Macintosh. Frozen in place that is. The copy of her brother was stuck in his position just as dead and white as the land. Apple Bloom sidestepped him and travelled back towards where she had run from. The entire fake Apple clan was frozen just as she expected.

"Spike?" Apple Bloom called. "Spike?" There was no sign of the dragon. Apple Bloom continued to search for him. It was discomforting to walk through the frozen bodies but she sucked up her fear. Just then past the immobile form of Braeburn, Apple Bloom saw a limping purple figure. "Spike!" She trotted happily toward the dragon. The Other Spike didn't

budge when he heard his name called. He just stood there, his branch broken in two.

"Spike! You saved me! Thank you so much! Ah would have been done for if you hadn't come!" Apple Bloom knew how to react when a dashing hero saved her. At least Sweetiebelle said that was what her sister Rarity told her.

Apple Bloom noticed something about the dragon. Something she hadn't noticed before in the tense situation. He was wearing a mask. Closer inspection she recognized the pattern of the shape. It was one of the oven mitts she had seen in the kitchen now stretched to accommodate the face.

"Spike?" Apple Bloom reached for the mask pulling it away before the dragon could stop her.

Immediately she dropped it. Spike's face was held up in a smile; literally held up. His face had been stitched up into a perpetual smile.

Amidst her shock, Apple Bloom asked. "Spike what happened?"

Spike attempted to speak, but his face the way it was he could only get out some form of unformed gibberish.

"Did she do this to you?" Apple Bloom asked.

Spike tried to speak again, but she caught the confirmation. Giving him a look of sympathy, Apple Bloom bit down on one of the threads pulled it out then with the other one. With his face free, the Other Spike rubbed his sore cheeks.

"Better?" Apple Bloom asked.

Spike nodded. "She didn't like I helped you so she punished me." the dragon replied with a frown.

"Punished you? You mean your face?"

A clattering reached her ears. Along with a whimper from the Other Spike. At his feet were a small pile of purple scales; his scales. They had fallen from Spike's right claw along with bits from his arm. Underneath was

nothing more than withered pink flesh. Withered was right. The claw itself began to shrink even further. Spike swiftly hid it behind his back.

Apparently the punishment had shown itself. Apple Bloom found it nothing short of cruelty. How could anyone do this to a child? Heck the Other Spike was younger than herself and the real Spike. Just how twisted was the Other Sister? Sympathy rising, she proposed an idea. It came so sudden she didn't know if it would work.

"Spike please come with me. Ah'm trying to save everyone she trapped here." Apple Bloom explained. The Other Spike listened attentively. "Maybe if Ah win, you can come with me."

The idea sounded half comforting at best. Neither of them knew if it would work. Then there was the matter of the punishment. Would it be on a limit? Again, neither of them knew. The Other Spike held the same worries as the filly, but that didn't matter to him. All that mattered was helping her.

"Okay." At last he grinned. So did Apple Bloom.

# Chapter 9

She soaked the darkness in. The fire cast a small glow within the room. The darkness suited her. It always held her, comforting her, soothing her. Her black eyes looked about her parlor. Moments ago she had felt something, a loss. Although she couldn't see it, she knew the full moon had changed. So the filly had actually gotten one. In all honesty she had half expected her to win. She had to admit, Apple Bloom was far more resilient than the others she had ensnared. The last three had given in so easily to the luxury offered to them. Yet not this little pony. Something about her reminded her of her last visitor.

How many years had it been?

Thinking back, they had the same look, the same twang in the voice. Although one had been lime green, the resemblance was more than just by appearances, close as they were.

What was her name? Oh she had forgotten, but it had something to do with apples.

*Apple Bloom*

It made sense now. She wondered why she didn't see it before. Maybe it had been fate providing a bounty. A light chuckle parted from her lips. Perhaps she should have faith in her dear little sugar cube. Two more eyes to find, and the night was still young.

Something more comfortable would be needed to properly greet her little guest.

So her body began to contort and shed away the half equine form. One should be true to oneself after all.

Up above, a shadow crept over the moon.

XXX



Apple Bloom and the Other Spike hadn't said a word to each other since they had left the orchard. Frankly she didn't know what to say to the fake dragon. No, fake wasn't a nice word to say. Spike was just as real as anypony else, even if he was copied off someone she knew. The dragon kept up with her hiding his arm all the while. But she knew what it truly looked like: pink and shriveled. She would have asked how it felt, but she didn't want to seem rude. She had better manners than that. But the childish part of her mind egged her on.

*Come on ask him! Don't be yellow!*

If Scootaloo was present, she would have probably asked him right away. Sweetie Belle would probably have been more polite.

*No don't ask him! It's not polite!*

The more her mind wrestled, she found the two voices starting to resemble her two friends. Of course she found herself listening more to the one that sounded akin to Sweetiebelle. Her mind thought back to their other versions. It made her wonder...would they obey the Other Sister just as the Other Big Macintosh? It raised a good question. They were all created by the witch so there was reason to think they would obey if given the command. Although that left out the Other Spike. He didn't seem to be the kind to betray. Something about his concern seemed genuine. Thinking back to when everything in this world became clear, the Other Big Macintosh slowly collapsed into insanity, while the Other Spike defied his creator's orders. But it made her wonder all the same. Would he turn on her? The risk seemed great, especially seeing as they were close now. Though whenever those thoughts crept into her head, they would disappear just like that.

He wouldn't betray her, her gut told her so.

"We're here." The Other Spike spoke for the first time since they had set out. Before their eyes was the rodeo. Granny Smith's rodeo to be precise.

When Apple Bloom thought of the possibilities of the "three wonders", she had remembered how mesmerized she had been by the rodeo. If that wasn't a wonder than she didn't know what was. Her little hooves nearly trotted herself over to it, but stopped at that moment. Her eyes trailed to the Other Spike's arm, the one he was trying his best to hide. Apple Bloom

could still see the faint outline of the pink under flesh. Or rather the withered remains of it. Again the question of the arm sprang up in her mind. Once more she ignored its calling. Politeness reigned over her.

Still she had to ask though. "Spike?"

The dragon looked up at her.

"Do y'all still want to come with me? Ah mean, ya could stay behind if ya want." A silly question, contradictory even seeing as she had asked him to come along. It may have been selfish then, partially, but she was in a desperate state. She had nearly been killed by zombified versions of her family that would make anypony want help (or so she assumed).

The Other Spike forged a perfect smile. "Of course I do! I don't want to leave you."

That had to make her smile. He was a determined little reptile. It spurred a ponder of how he would react to meeting the real Spike and vice versa. That had the potential for comedy. But this wasn't the time for such things. This was a serious matter. As the pair strolled towards the rodeo, Apple Bloom could feel the loss of joy in the air. The atmosphere of this jolly location was washed over in the tide of gloom. It made sense considering the circumstances.

A brisk wind briefly blew past the field. Dirt and dust kicked up into tiny twisters. What horrors awaited them inside? The filly could only imagine it and the imagery wasn't good. Most certainly the ghost eye would be hidden around a fantastic, challenging trap.

Apple Bloom found herself wrong. Both counts to be precise.

There it was, situated upon a barrel, was the ghost eye. It was too far away to make its appearance, but she knew from the round shape what it was.

"Well this is easy." Apple Bloom commented confidently.

She trotted up towards the barrel with hope in her step.

"Apple Bloom wait!" the Other Spike called. The dragon looked around worriedly with his button eyes. In his moment of worry, he had pulled out his withered arm then quickly retracting it the moment he noticed he did so.

Apple Bloom paid the warning no heed as she continued to trot forward.

*"Going somewhere deary?"*

Apple Bloom stopped dead in her tracks.

Right on cue came the cold wind against her mane. Running up her neck and down her spine. The chilling voice held a tone of familiarity. It held an echo in its underlining rasp, but the voice linking it had a corrupted version of the joyous drawl she had known both outside and inside this world. Turning around, she noticed a strange cloud covering the rodeo grounds. The wind kicked it up sending more twisters in their wake.

Behind the twisters, she could see the Other Spike with a worried tone etching his scaly face.

"Spike!" Apple Bloom called as the wind continued to speed up more dirt. She closed her eyes as it spread.

*Crish Crish.*

The sound came over the wind. To Apple Bloom it sounded just like when Big Macintosh plowed the fields. Only it had a metallic undertone to it. Apple Bloom kept her eyes peeled for anything. As much as she wanted to close it, she kept them open, forced herself even.

*Crish Crish.*

The sound came again. Amidst the dust, she could see a glint the glint vanished for a moment, and then it came again.

*"Oh don't be scared deary; Granny just wants to take a peek at you."*

The voice rasped in its hideous tone. She couldn't shake what it was. Her mind tried to think up a possibility to who it belonged to. Honestly she didn't think she could handle her possibly correct assumption.

## *Crish Crish*

Apple Bloom could feel a breath followed by a swish of the wind. Something was behind her, observing her, watching her. As she turned her head, she could feel whatever it was had vanished. Then she felt it in front of her only to turn and find herself facing thin air.

*"Granny has such big eyes. All the better to see you with."*

The movement grew closer and in the dust, she could see two black buttons. The metal glint shone through clawing at the ground. Yes they were claws; claws where there were once hooves. The dust continued to blow as a long shape slithered through. The shape was long and lime green, but it held the appearance of scales instead of a flank. Before Apple Bloom could react, it came into full view moving right up in front of her face. Face to face she met her grandmother. Or rather the other version of her. Just like the Other Big Macintosh, she too had changed. No longer did she have the shape of a pony. What she could see was described only as a reptile of sorts. Almost like a snake. A long neck of scales and ridged stood out like plates against the neck the face of the Other Granny Smith had become just like a serpents. The same applied to the rest of the body. The legs however were like the skinny legs of a centipede. At the end were the hooves, split apart into three knives clawing at the ground. The demonic pony dragged her way across the field. As she did, Apple Bloom could make out the rest of her body. The legs were of the same manner of the one she could clearly see. The same pattern and design complete with the knife feet. The button eyes peeked out from underneath the matted, long gray mane.

A cold breath hit her face as the Other Granny Smith opened her mouth to say something. When she did, Apple Bloom could see rows of sharp teeth behind the gums. *"Granny's got big teeth, all the better to eat you with my dear."*

A bead of sweat ran down her face. The monster version of her grandmother, it reminded her of a story she once read. But that story involved a wolf and some pony in a red hood. The Other Granny Smith reared her head back to strike. Of course it gave Apple Bloom the chance to duck just as the serpentine head dove. It didn't last forever as the Other Granny Smith was quick to act. Quick and deadly that is. Apple Bloom ran

with much fear carrying her along. The monstrous grandmother whirled around and whirled underneath. Apple Bloom could feel the air against her body as she trotted underneath the beast. While she ran she caught a glimpse upward and noticed the plating didn't apply to the underside which was tender looking.

*"Don't run deary. Granny just wants a look at you!"* The voice echoed in the back of her head. It only made her run faster. But it wasn't fast enough even after she made it back into open air. The Other Granny Smith simply twirled around using her sinuous body to maneuver herself around. Apple Bloom found herself back to square one. Another snapping of the jaws made her leap upward and duck as the claws came next. The monster's long body served as a great means for movement. Apple Bloom didn't have much to react to herself. In moments she found herself coiled within. As much as the filly struggled, she couldn't break free.

"Ungh! Uh!" she grunted. A blast of air hit her face as she stared into the eyes of the Other Granny Smith.

*"Don't struggle deary. You'll only make Granny mad."* The creature warned.

Her mouth opened again showing off the silvery fangs. Slowly she leaned in, it made the stories of monsters under the bed seem all too real. Apple Bloom couldn't find anything she could use. Well there was something. Although the monster was plated, she noticed something she had noticed underneath.

*"Well here goes nothing."* she thought and so she dug in.

At that moment, the Other Granny Smith let out a wail as her granddaughter of sorts bit down hard into her bare underbelly. In the grip of pain, she uncoiled herself to sooth the reddened area, marred by the teeth marks. It proved an unwise endeavor as Apple Bloom took that moment to run. Where she ran was obvious.

*"NO!"* the Other Granny Smith cried out in horror. Despite the pain, she resumed her chase snatching at Apple Bloom with her knifed claws.

Apple Bloom felt like her chest was on fire as she ran, but she kept going and when she saw her moment she dove. Her tiny body crashed into the

barrel, not the most graceful of landing nor even where she wanted to go, but she found what she was looking for knocked within reach.

*CRISH! CRISH!*

The sound became louder as the demonic granny weaved herself ever closer. With wide, frightened eyes, Apple Bloom placed a hoof upon the round object. It was a round red ball, actually more like the nose one would find on a rodeo clown. Yet she knew its true nature: a ghost eye.

The Other Granny Smith let out a shriek, but that was it. The shriek ended right then and there as her whole body stiffened and froze. The dust storm that had reigned since they had begun instantly died. Just as the apple orchard, a strange cracking sound came and in moments, everything, including the Other Granny Smith was covered in the deathly color. Apple Bloom felt a heavy fire in her chest. That had been a push for her, but she had made it.

*"Be careful girl, the Beldam won't relent."*

Apple Bloom looked to the clown nose to see it had taken on a glow. The image of the unicorn filly stared back with her button eyed gaze. Then she vanished. With a wide grin, Apple Bloom deposited the ghost eye along with its fellow. Two down, one to go. Strangely she found herself quickly reacting to this all. She had nearly been killed by another copy of a family member and she hardly seemed fazed. Although it could mean she was growing used to this place...that worried her. But really her only worry that she cared more about was someone.

"Spike!" she called as she noticed the limping purple shape.

Apple Bloom trotted over to the copy dragon but skid to a halt with a gasp. A pitter patter of scales fell to the ground the moment she did. More than just a pitter patter, a whole pile fell to the ground. The Other Spike hadn't just lost a limbs worth, he had lost practically his entire lower body leaving only his right leg scaly. The rest revealed only the same pink flesh which withered upon exposure to the open air.

"Apple...Bloom," The Other Spike wheezed out a breath, "I'm sorry... I couldn't... see. I would have... helped if... I could." then he collapsed.

"Spike!" Apple Bloom rushed to his side helping him up.

Above unnoticed by the little pony, the shadow over the moon grew larger. From her hidden perch the Beldam smiled as she felt the pain her little puppet dragon was in. Apple Bloom would have to learn that no action goes unpunished. Although Apple Bloom wasn't the one being punished.

The game still had one more round.

# Chapter 10

The fire burned brightly in the dark room. The Beldam's hands stitched the new doll carefully. A tune hummed from her throat with each verse tuning with the needle and thread. A simple little project to pass the time. Stitch by stitch, thread by thread, in with the needle and out with the needle. The Beldam gazed at her new little creation. Its button eyes stared up at her.

"Poor little doll. So weak and fragile." She cooed to the doll, the perfect replica of the purple dragon, her latest "son", a disobedient "son" to be precise. She really should have put more care when she programmed him. Really she put too much into the whole friendship aspect. In a way he was a fulfilling his design, but now he had deviated from what she had planned.

This wouldn't do, but she had made precautions for his disloyalty. Even if she didn't know it, Apple Bloom was helping with said punishment.

"If only you had remained obedient." sighed the Beldam.

Casually, she tossed the doll into the fire. A crackle of embers engulfed the doll, its black eyes staring up the whole while.

XXX

"Am Ah goin to fast for ya Spike?" Apple Bloom asked worriedly.

The Other Spike wheezed out a breath before he responded. If he could even respond that is, he was in terrible shape since they left the rodeo. Apple Bloom wanted to look away but could not find the strength nor the pull to do so. The Other Spike had lost a great number of his scales. So much that his entire lower body looked like a withered pink mess. The only scales that remained were his head and left arm. He had tried to walk only to collapse onto his feet or if they could even be called feet any longer. So Apple Bloom had taken it upon herself to carry the dragon. It was no real trouble at all strangely. She was still a young filly, so she wouldn't be able to carry anyone at this point, or rather shouldn't. However, the Other Spike was so light. That alone worried her.



They had visited two wonders, so that left one more. Going on from her last visits to this world, she knew of one place she had yet to visit. The filly stopped as she saw the stadium looming in front of her. The last ghost eye lay inside. Once she got it then she would be out of this place with her family in tow.

Just as she was about to embark forward, a wheeze upon her back made her come to a decision. "Spike you wait out here okay?"

The Other Spike opened his mouth to protest but found himself shushed. "Look, y'all aint in no condition to walk." Said Apple Bloom.

The filly gently deposited the dragon upon the grass making sure he was comfortable. Again, Apple Bloom wanted to look away but could find herself unable. Perhaps it may have been because she was a kid. Kids like her seemed to always be interested in the weird and the unknown, and this certainly fit weird, weird but sad as well.

The Other Spike raised up his still scaly arm.

"A...Appl.....Apple...B....B....B.....loom." He pathetically called out.

"Shhh, just relax. Ah'll just get the last eye and we can go back to mah world." Apple Bloom smiled at her companion and he smiled back.

Turning around, she trotted inside the stadium. The Other Spike forced his head up feeling the strain his weakened body was undergoing. He wanted to tell her, goodness knows he wanted to, but he couldn't. If she knew the truth, she would give up everything, racking herself with guilt. Then the Beldam would have won.

"Good luck." He wheezed.

This was the best thing he could do for her.

XXX

Just as she expected, the stadium was dark. She couldn't even see her own hoofs. Trot by trot, she stumbled occasionally bumping into something yet managing to keep herself on the carpeted path. How was anypony supposed to find anything in here? Was this her test? Trying to find the eye in the dark? Apple Bloom had the answer to that. At least in regards to

seeing where she was going. Still remembering her pack, she pulled out the emerald colored seeing eye Zecora had lent her. Positioning it in the same way she had back in the other apple orchard. Holding it up, the familiar emerald view lit up the room. She could make out the chairs now raveled in the darkness. But what got her attention was the round shining object upon the stage.

*"Hu hu \*sniff"*

Apple Bloom heard a strange sound coming from ahead. There was a bright flash as a spotlight illuminated the stage. There standing upon a pedestal was the round object, another ghost eye no doubt. Apple Bloom would have lit her face up in joy that is if she hadn't seen the Other Sweetie Belle hunched over. Her tiny filly body shook while a series of snuffles followed. It dawned on Apple Bloom that she was crying.

"Sweetiebelle?" Apple Bloom asked not even hiding her concern.

"You don't want to stay with us do you?" The Other Sweetiebelle sobbed.

A look of guilt flashed across Apple Bloom's face. "Well that's true but-"

"Why? What do you have at home?" The Other Sweetiebelle asked. "Just ponies who ignore you, give you chores and rules. Here you and play all day, we'll have fun, why would you want to go back?"

The questions filled Apple Bloom with guilt. The way they were poised by the Other Sweetiebelle seemed innocent and sad. If the crying wasn't evident enough that is. Apple Bloom found it hard to say what she said next.

"Ah'm sorry, but Ah don't belong here." She stamped her hoof with affirmation. "Ah have to go back to my real home."

The Other Sweetiebelle sniffled again. "I get it, me, we, this whole place isn't real enough for you." Anger began to creep within the false filly's voice. The Other Sweetiebelle turned her head. As with the last two fabrications of her family, Apple Bloom found it the same with the fabrication of her friend. Initially, Apple Bloom believed the Other Sweetiebelle to be sweating as her face shined in the light. A trickle ran beaded down her forehead. Then another followed, and another, and another. Then it dawned on Apple

Bloom, it wasn't sweat. The Other Sweetiebelle's face began to sink and started to grow transhumant. The "sweat" then flowed from other orifices, her ears, her nose, her mouth. Just then the Other Sweetiebelle began to heave her head back.

"Ah! Ah! Ah! Choooooooooo!" The Other Sweetiebelle let out a mighty sneeze. A massive bubble formed in front of her face as she did. The bubble only grew larger as she sneezed twice more. The bubble then started to melt as did the rest of her body. It slowly spread, growing larger into a gelatinous blob. The snot blob (as Apple Bloom could tell it easily was snot from the way it oozed) spread around the stage. Apple Bloom backed away from the grossness of it all, but now here eyes indeed went wide as they gazed at the ghost eye slowly sinking into the body of the Other Sweetiebelle. Apple Bloom almost cried out until she felt something hot breath against her back.

*"Going someplace Apple Bloom?"* The voice echoed behind her with the voice of many within it.

Apple Bloom gazed up to see a massive creature leering down at her. It was big, tall, and held a reptilian appearance not unlike a dragon. Yet this dragon had a very sickly, skeletal body, the bones were outlined through the skin. The creatures back held a pair of torn wings, useless for flying. Its eyes were the same button pair she had seen before. There would have been no need for an introduction. There was only one other who resided in this part of the Other World.

"Scootaloo." Apple Bloom whispered. The Other Scootaloo that is.

Opposite to her, Apple Bloom heard a squish and turned her attention back to the transformed Other Sweetiebelle. The filly snot blob shifted a portion of its body to resemble a head. Her buttons eyes gleamed with the slimy substance. *"You can't leave us Apple Bloom. We're the Cutie Mark Crusaders after all!"*

*"That's right! On the quest to find out who we really are!"* The Other Scootaloo mocked using the lyrics from the talent show.

Per usual, Apple Bloom's mind told her to run. This time was no exception. Both monsters lunged at her, and she dodged but not without a bit of slime hitting her face. The Other Sweetiebelle dove first followed by the Other

Scotaloo. The dragon pony was covered in her slimy friend but she didn't seem to care, she merely got up and charged after the little filly. Apple Bloom did what she had done twice before, run that is. Her goal was simple, grab the eye and then everything would be fine. She could see the eye on front of her just within reach. Before she could even act upon her thoughts, a claw swiped at it sending it flying into the stands. The Other Sweetiebelle smirked at what she had just done.

"No!" Apple Bloom cried but simply ran towards the seats. There would be no time to dally so she ran as fast as she could. The moment she touched the ground however, she felt something over her. Looking up, she noticed the overlapping shape of the Other Sweetiebelle. A sickening gloop followed as she smooshed her way into the floor. Apple Bloom tried to run, but she found it hard. She gave a pull in her back leg as a cold, wet feeling covered it.

*"Please don't go Apple Bloom! I wanna play!"* The Other Sweetiebelle pleaded as her body tugged furiously upon Apple Bloom's right hind leg.

Apple Bloom tried to break free but the Other Sweetiebelle did her very best to drag her in. Another thundering crash followed as the Other Scotaloo leapt down onto the floor smashing into several chairs leaving nothing but splintered wood. With a pull, Apple Bloom managed to free her leg. Her mind racing frantically, she dove underneath one of the still standing row of chairs. Behind she could hear the glooping followed by more crashes. She crawled and dug underneath rows as she felt the overwhelming presence of her fake friends. Her eyes darted around for any sign of the ghost eye, but found it impossible within the darkness. Her little hooves clattered against the floor as she attempted to reach out for anything.

*"You can't hide from your friends!"* Bellowed the Other Scotaloo.

Looking to her right side, she saw a sea of snot spill forth. A pair of button eyes swirled around to view the frightened filly. To her left she saw the snarling mug of the Other Scotaloo. Frankly she found herself trapped. Slowly they began to advance. Apple Bloom knew she had no chance. Without much thought in her mind, she mindless moved her hooves forward.

"Come on! Come on!" She screamed as she felt for anything.

The Other Cutie Mark Crusaders moved even closer. Apple Bloom crawled and felt but only touching the cold, hard floor. Crunch and slither the monsters went. The closer they got, the faster Apple Bloom went. But she found nothing each time. Desperation moving her, she became frantic, frantic and hopeless at the same time. She was like a fish out of water, a cat up a tree, a pony who had just touched something round, something that wasn't ground.

Something that wasn't ground?

With a spring of what appeared to be hope, Apple Bloom leapt forward, as did the Other Sweetiebelles and Scootaloo. Although their leaps were ones of desperation, for their very existence hinged upon this moment. Unfortunately, their existence ended right then and there. Apple Bloom placed both hooves upon the ghost eye and then everything went gray.

XXX

The Other Spike felt a constriction in his chest. It was as if someone had just stabbed him in the lungs. A crackle came from his side and spread up to his head. He could feel the feeling growing along with the cracking sound. It became more painful with each surge it brought. He knew what this meant.

Apple Bloom had succeeded.

*Crick Crack!*

More scales fell. They fell right off his arm.

*Crick Crack!*

Some fell from his forehead.

The pain spread becoming more and more of a sting. But then it started to fade. In fact, Spike could feel himself getting lighter, as if everything around him was fading. His vision started to blur, the trees night sky becoming fuzzy.

*Crick Crack! Crick Crack!*

With a pitter patter they fell. Her started to feel lighter and lighter as if he were air. Yet somehow, he didn't care. He had helped someone in need, someone he cared about. But most of all he now realized.

He had helped his friend. Those were his last thoughts.

XXX

The light from the ghost eye filled the dark room. Apple Bloom looked away for a moment from the brightness. However it died as an image appeared inside. Apple Bloom looked down at the now ethereal blue eye. Like the other two it held the appearance of a ball. Several paths of leather stitched together making it look impossible to bounce. But from the firmness, the filly concluded it wasn't that sort of ball. But she didn't care about that, what mattered was the image within the ball. Looking up at her was the ghost earth pony filly.

*"Y'all need to hurry! Her web is starting to unravel!"*

Apple Bloom was about to question her but the image faded. Wasting no time, Apple Bloom tossed the ghost eye into her bag. A grin spread across her face for she knew she had one the last test. Her smile faded momentarily when she glanced around. The entire room had turned dead gray, including the Other Cutie Mark Crusaders. Their faces were frozen in fright. More so because they had failed. Apple Bloom felt some degree of pity towards these creatures. They were slaves more or less with no choice in the matter in regards to choice. But for once, Apple Bloom felt happy, she had won and so she trotted outside. The night sky had never comforted her so, at least in this world that is.

"Spike!" She called out to her traveling companion. "Spike!" She called again. But no answer came. "Spike?" Concern began to creep into her voice. Walking over from the stadium entrance, she headed toward the last place she left him.

"Spike? Spi-" Her voice stopped as she saw what was at her hooves.

There was no trace of the dragon but a single scale. Horror filled her eyes as she noticed the crack starting to form. It spread from the edge and spread until the whole scale crumbled into nothing, just like a dead leaf.

Apple Bloom knelt down. She was too late; she couldn't keep her promise to him. That promise of course was bringing him back to her world. But how did this happen she wondered? When they started, he had appeared fine save for the mutilation the Other Sister had inflicted upon him. Then the scales had started to fall. Each and every time they traversed, his condition had steadily gotten worse. Each time they got a ghost eye that is.

The ghost eyes?

Oh Celestia! Apple Bloom didn't know why she didn't see it before! There would be no denying it, this was her fault. The ghost eyes were connected to the Other Spike. In all honesty Apple Bloom wondered why the Other Sister hadn't killed the Other Spike for helping her escape. That seemed to be a real lapse in logic for the otherwise crafty witch. This must have been what she wanted, another way to discourage the filly.

So far, it worked.

Apple Bloom felt the tears fall down her face. A sob hiccupped in her throat. Back and forth it went bobbing up and down. Her emotions and spirit drained into a mere puddle. Not even that, but a small trickle of a stream. Then could it even be considered that? In any case, Apple Bloom felt like a rotten apple core left in the sun for days. The Other Spike had been there for her, defended her, protected her, and she had just gotten him killed. Friends didn't get friends killed.

Her sobs grew larger but with a subdued hush to them. Apple Bloom truly felt alone.

"Spike." She whispered staring up at the sky with reddened eyes.

The stars looked down at her in all their false glory. The moon shined the brightest of them all. At least what the shadow didn't cover. A shadow had formed over the moon turning it into a crescent shape. Staring at it, Apple Bloom felt a cold tear drip down. As the shadow formed, Apple Bloom could make out four holes. They were just like a button.

Button.

The earth pony's red eyes squinted with anger. It reminded her of the one who was truly behind everything. Standing to her feet, Apple Bloom held her head up high and her tear stained eyed wide.

"Listen here ya evil witch! Ah'm not scared of you, ya hear!" Apple Bloom declared. There would be no use in giving up for the filly wouldn't. All the ghost eyes had been accounted for, but there still remained one obstacle.

The Beldam awaited, and so did the rest of the Apple clan.

Apple Bloom kept along the path, trotting with triumph in each step. So much had been risked to get this far. Apple Bloom couldn't give up now. The house lay in the distance; the sheer mockery of it infuriated Apple Bloom. No witch got away with stealing her family. The only guide was the moon. At least, it had been. Somehow, the moonlight had grown dimmer. Looking up, Apple Bloom noticed that the shadow had covered the moon completely. A black shadow of a button overlapped the celestial body, the fake representation of Luna's symbol.

Then everything fell apart...literally.

A great rumble overtook the Otherworld. Apple Bloom had no idea what was happening, but she ran as fast as her little legs could carry her. The rumble continued, great cracks in the earth formed, the entire world had started to crumble.

So this was what the filly meant, the Beldam's web, this world she had set up to trap her in was no starting to reveal itself for what it truly was. Apple Bloom could see the door in front of her. Behind she knew there was nothing waiting for her, again literally. The rumbling continued forcing Apple Bloom to run faster. The door laid right in front, just a littler farther. Her front hooves pushed against the wood and she trotted inside closing it behind her.



# Chapter 11

The house felt very cold inside. Apple Bloom noticed that right away. Even after she had discovered the truth of this other world, the false Sweet Apple Acres still held some warmth to it. Now it felt cold, cold and dead. The death inside reflected the scenery. The walls chipped the wallpaper peeling. An overcast of darkness had overtaken her surroundings. It would seem the web truly was unwinding. As the outside had fallen, so was the inside apparently. In her mind she could feel the fear starting to creep in. Somehow she trotted forward. It had to end, she couldn't dally. Her hooves carried her down the hall and towards the living room. It had grown so dark she had a hard time seeing her own hooves. Though there was no need for Zecora's seeing eye, something inside guided her steps. The creak of a door reached her ears as her hoof pushed it open. A green glow reached lit up her eyes shining in the darkness. The light came from the fireplace illuminating the furniture. As she trotted she noticed the warped condition the chairs, tables, and cabinets were in. Warped could be the only way to properly describe them. Hardly had it seemed normal the way they looked.

*SLAM!*

The door shut behind her as soon as she got inside making her gasp at the sudden rush of air. Hesitantly she trotted along. "*Ah'm a big pony, Ah'm a big pony.*" she thought to herself. That kept her going through the scary room. She neared the fireplace, her tiny head turning around for any sign of life.

"So you've come back."

The familiar voice made her come to a halt. Although she hadn't noticed it before, a large shadow lay still upon the couch. Somehow the fire had lit up that particular area. The shadow revealed itself rising up into a looming figure...the Beldam. No longer did she show any trace of an equine form. Her skin had smoothed into a pale tone. The pony nose had been replaced with curved pointy protrusion of the skin. Her hair no longer held the held the shape and color of Applejack, it instead held was black as night in a matted down yet messy fashion. Her body still was long; in face she seemed taller than she had been. A black polka dotted dress adorned her

body. It fit perfectly against her lithe figure. In the back it spread out like a fan and went up into a large pointed collar. Underneath the dress was the same pale skin. Unlike the face, the skin if it could be called. It appeared to be bone, pure white bone. The boniness applied to the arms and the legs which showed underneath the dress. Both sets of limbs were long and spiny, like an insect, that or perhaps an arachnid. Going back to the arms, the fingers came next. Though they were not bone, instead they were needles. Even both hands were made of metal. Apple Bloom stared long and hard at the face, or rather the button eyes that bore down upon her. Then she noticed something else about the creature's facial features, several cracks formed as if she were a porcelain doll.

Apple Bloom gulped as a cold seat ran down her face. The Beldam rose in all her horrific glory. Goodness was she always that tall? It seemed as if she had grown taller than last time.

"So? Where's your little friend?" The Beldam suddenly asked. "Did something happen to him?" Apple Bloom immediately remembered the Other Spike. The dragon had sacrificed his very existence to keep her safe. His success had saddened her, but that sadness turned to anger as she noticed the smirk upon her captor's face; A smirk at the very death of her own creation and Apple Bloom's friend.

Apple Bloom furrowed her brow. "Ah beat your tests." She spoke with seriousness.

The Beldam clasped her metallic hands together remembering the goals she had set for the little filly. "Ah yes, that's right; the ghost eyes." The green flames reflected upon the black buttons, the eyes that would be Apple Bloom's lest she finished one last thing. "So where are they?"

Holding out her side pack, Apple Bloom held it out to the Beldam. "Hold on a minute!" Apple Bloom took the pack away just as the Beldam snatched at it, narrowly missing. "We still have one loose end, don't we?"

The Beldam narrowed her eyes. This certainly was a clever little filly, much smarter than the other three whom she had drawn here. "I suppose we do, you still have to find your real family." Crossing into a defiant smirk, she quipped. "So? Where are they?"

Apple Bloom flashed her own smirk. "Easy." She remarked. Reaching into her bag, she reached in and pulled out the emerald Seeing Eye. However, right before Apple Bloom could put it on, it vanished from her hoof.

"We can't make things too easy for you can we?" The Beldam asked. Twirling along one of her needle fingers was the Seeing Eye.

"No!" Apple Bloom cried in fear as the witch flung it into the fire. The Beldam turned around chuckling as the embers sparked from the mystic object. Apple Bloom felt at a loss. Without the Seeing Eye, she wouldn't be able to find her family. They would have been anywhere within this place. In the midst of her fear, a small hum reached her ears. It was coming from her bag. While the Beldam was still entranced by the fire, Apple Bloom peeked inside to see the three faces of the ghost ponies appearing within the eyes.

The image of the earth filly spoke. "Be careful, even if y'all win she ain't gonna let ya go."

Apple Bloom believed that. The Beldam for all intents and purposes still held the upper hand. Frankly when they first started this game, Apple Bloom never trusted the Beldam. This Other Sister had taken her family away and willfully killed off her own creations just to get what she wanted. She had no trust, no friendship, nothing that Equestria stood for. Then there was the matter of her family, she had to get them out but she had no idea where they were. She was trapped and the only way out was the door. It remained locked behind her. The only key lay within...she had an idea.

"Ah know where mah family is." Apple Bloom blurted almost without thinking.

The Beldam turned her head curiously. "Hmm? You do. So where are they?"

Apple Bloom had never felt so nervous in her entire life. "T-t-there right over there, behind that door."

The Beldam glanced over towards where the pony pointed her hoof. "Oh are they now?" The witch strode over to the door flashing an evil grin as she did so. Apple Bloom almost breathed a sigh of relief, but avoided that for fear of alerting the creature. She had distracted her for the moment but

she still had no idea where her family was hidden. Without so much of a thought, she trotted over to the fireplace. There had to be something she could use. Briefly glancing at the fire, she found herself momentarily entranced by it.

*Wipe Wipe*

There it came, the sound.

*Wipe Wipe.*

She had heard that sound once before, in a dream not so long ago. Searching for the source of the sound, Apple Bloom noticed something just beside the fireplace. It was small end table, and situated upon it was a snow globe. Curious, Apple Bloom trotted over to it.

*Wipe Wipe*

The sound came again. Apple Bloom could see her tiny face reflected off the glass of the snow globe. Staring inside, Apple Bloom could not make out anything discernible, just fake white snow. Closer she looked however, that changed. Just like she did in the dream, she could see three different colors staring back: Orange, red, and lime green. They all belonged to a trio of shivering ponies.

Apple Bloom's face lit up. It was her family!

Right before the revelation could fully take effect, Apple Bloom was alerted by a cough behind her. Looking back, the witch held out her palm as the key to the door coughed out of her mouth. Looking back at Apple Bloom, she flashed a smirk.

Nevertheless, Apple Bloom still held a new form of confidence. "Look they'll be there, just like I told ya."

Amused, the Beldam chuckled. "You're wrong Apple Bloom." She said in a sing song fashion. Taking the key, she stuck it into the keyhole and twisted. When she opened the door, there was nothing. "See? They're not there."

Apple Bloom knew that, but now her plan was starting to come together. Or rather her plan she had just thought up of in the last minute or so. That

would hardly seem reasonable for a filly her age, but hey she was in a desperate situation so going by adrenaline and stress levels... the simpler version would be she thought up a plan quick in this desperate moment. There was still one item Zecora had lent her before she departed on this rescue mission. Taking the jar out, she set it down upon the ground.

"Now, It's your turn to stay here forever." The Beldam rasped as she turned around with a sewing needle in hand. Her grin faltered as she noticed the jar at the filly's feet.

Apple Bloom stared defiantly at her. This would be the last stare the Beldam would see. "No...Ah...ain't!" With a mighty thrust of her back leg, Apple Bloom bucked the jar as hard and fast as she could. It soared through the air, the force that several generations of apple buckers sending it on its course. The glass shattered against the wall and its contents spilled out. Apple Bloom hadn't believed her eyes when Zecora showed them to her. She was certain Pinkie Pie had driven them out of Ponyville with her own well...Pinkie Pieness. But here they were, a small group of parasprites. The insects had an insatiable desire to consume, and the Beldam happened to be in their way. The tiny critters swarmed the witch, gnawing and biting at her bony frame. The witch grunted as she clawed at the little pests. She could feel them swarming up her body right to her face. Apple Bloom took the moment to grab the snow globe, place it in her bag, dash right towards the open door, and grab the key in her mouth right from the keyhole.

The Beldam clawed at her face in her attempts to get the parasprites off her body. All she succeeded in doing though was clawing her own eyes out. As the buttons fell, the Beldam seethed with a sightless rage. "YOU HORRIBLE CHEATING FOAL!" Then everything fell apart. As the witch lost her composure, the whole room collapsed. The floor boards, walls, furniture, everything dissolved into a white void.

Apple Bloom felt herself fall. Letting out a scream, she found her descent halted as she fell into something solid yet springy. The void was not entirely empty for some kind of net had been cast. But it wasn't a net, it was a spider web. Now her web had truly unraveled.

"WHERE ARE YOU!" The Beldam screeched.

Apple Bloom turned her head to see the witch moving about her web. Her head darted in all directions as she searched for the little filly. The Beldam was like a wild animal, deranged and turning her head about. She would move about, the web shaking with her own movements. It dawned on Apple Bloom, the Beldam couldn't see her. Wasting no time, Apple Bloom crawled up the web as fast as she could.

"YOU SELFISH BRAT!" The Beldam's rage had not gone unquenched. Without sight, she was lost in her own trap. That is until she sensed the vibrations of the web. Laughing triumphantly to herself, the witch attempted to move about the web, yet without sight she still held a disadvantage. Apple Bloom moved with all of her might as did the Beldam whose haphazard movements made it harder for her to even maneuver properly. Apple Bloom clambered as fast as she could, never looking down for fear of being caught. Below she could feel the Beldam coming steadily closer. The little pony climbed and climbed and climbed right until her hooves felt the hard ground. The moment she saw the open path, she quickly dove inside.

"YOU DARE DISOBEY YOUR ELDER!" The Beldam screeched. Apple Bloom responded to that statement with a feeling that completely emphasized her feelings: A kick to the face.

Turning the key around, Apple Bloom stuck it into the keyhole and pushed hard. "*Come on close!*" She urgently thought. Behind the wooden frame the Beldam hissed and her metal hand attempted to claw its way in. Mustering whatever hidden strength she had, Apple Bloom pushed harder and harder, giving it all she had. Suddenly, she felt a push give way and followed by two sounds. The first was that of the door closing, the other was a metallic plink. Apple Bloom's eyes trailed down beside her to see something that nearly made her gasp. The Beldam's hand had been completely severed. There was no time to dawdle though; she still had to lock the door. Turning the key, she quickly hid it away in her bag.

**"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! APPPPPLLEEEEE  
BLOOOOOOOM!"** Apple Bloom scampered away at the sound of the shriek. The tiny filly ran up the path as fast as she could, all the while she heard a pounding behind her.

**"DON'T LEAVE ME! DON'T LEAVE ME!"** The Beldam screamed. The creature had lost all restraint in her voice; it didn't deter Apple Bloom who simply kept crawling ahead, never looking back. All the while, the pounding grew louder. **"I'LL DIE WITHOUT YOU!"** That was the last voice Apple Bloom heard as she shut the door behind her, the one on the outside. Taking the key, she locked it just as she had done to its twin. A loud pound against the wood knocked the young pony down. For a moment she remained still, awaiting for whatever happened next. A few seconds...nothing, several seconds more...again nothing. Swiftly taking the key, she deposited it in her bag.

Immediately she bolted right out of the room, past the hall, and out of the old dilapidated house. Apple Bloom ran through the dense series of trees to the one place that lay on her mind: home, her true home. But she wondered, what was waiting for her there? Honestly she had an idea, or rather a hope. But what if it was gearing up to be one disappointment? Those thoughts didn't matter, not when she saw the familiar barn house up ahead. With a smile, she bolted into the real Sweet Apple Acres.

"Ah'm home everypony!" Apple Bloom greeted excitedly. The filly perked her ears up for any affirmation she wasn't alone. "Applejack! Big Macintosh! Granny Smith!" She called again. Once more she heard nothing. The hope that had been springing in her heart slowly began to shrink. But how? She had won the game. Looking into her bag she found a distressing sight that made her hope absolutely vanish. The snow globe was gone! But how? Apple Bloom didn't understand, she had won the game, gone through so much and now it all had failed.

"Apple Bloom?" Apple Bloom departed from her despair when she heard the voice followed by several, patters of hooves. In the hallway, two adult ponies entered. One was mare with an orange coat, a cowpony hat atop her blond mane. The other was a sturdy looking stallion; his coat has bright red as an apple.

Apple Bloom's face lit up in happiness as she tackled the mare. "Applejack! Big Macintosh! Y'all are okay!"

Applejack and Big Macintosh stared down at their youngest sibling with confusion etched on their faces. "Okay? Course we are, we've been home all day." Applejack answered.

"Eyup." Big Macintosh added.

Apple Bloom looked up with her own confusion. "But don't y'all remember? You were trapped in that snow globe, you Big Macintosh and Granny Smith."

Applejack put her hoof to her sister's forehead. "Ya feelin alright sugar cube? Like Ah said, we've been here all day and Granny Smith has been napping in her rocker." A loud snore came from the adjacent room along with the creak of a wooden chair.

"Maybe ya should lie down?" Big Macintosh spoke concernedly towards his little sibling.

"Nah, ah'm fine. Ah'm just glad to be home." Apple Bloom hugged both of her siblings which only made them more confused. "Ah'm sorry for being such a pest lately Applejack. Ah haven't been the most grateful little sister."

Applejack was surprised by that statement, but returned it with a smile. "Well it's not like Ah've been treating you nice like little sis, how's about I make it up with an Apple Pie tonight?"

Apple Bloom looked up at her sibling with a small plead in her eyes. "Can we have ice cream with it?"

XXX

Desert had been wonderful. An apple Pie with a hint of cinnamon and a side of ice cream. "Boy howdy that was good." Apple Bloom praised the good meal. Suddenly a loud burp broke her lethargic position. The filly chuckled, "Applejack."

The mare blushed. "Who? Where that come from?" Her face still had traces of pie crumbs.

Big Macintosh tucked Apple Bloom into the covers as did Applejack fluff her pillow.

"Comfortable?" Big Macintosh asked.



Apple Bloom snuggled into the covers. "Yup, nice and snug!" The Stallion smiled at his sibling, happy to see her happy. "So, Ah guess y'all will be working tomorrow huh?"

"Not so much little sis, we've bucked most of the apples and Ah heard from Rainbow Dash that they cleared up most of the weather, so Ah was thinking we'd have a little get together with our friends tomorrow."

Now that was something Apple Bloom liked to hear. A yawn escaped from the filly. That told the family it was time fore Bed. Making sure their sibling was perfectly comfortable the left. Applejack took one moment to peck her sister on the cheek.

"Goodnight mah little sugar cube."

"Love ya big sis."

The sisters exchanged their love for each other as a family. The door shut and so did the light. Apple Bloom was alone in the darkness of her room, but it was a comforting darkness. This was her home, not a fake imitation. Although it wasn't grand, her toys didn't have the shine and prestige as some others did, but it was hers and no one else's. This was good enough for her. Right before she fell into the comforts of slumber, Apple Bloom took a look under her pillow. Three objects stared back at her, for she had put them there. The ghost eyes had been freed and hopefully along with their owner. Apple Bloom put the pillow down and rested her head. Soon sleep overtook her, as did a dream.

XXX

*Apple Bloom found herself in a pastel void. A myriad of colors surrounded her on all sides. It was lovely and amazing all at once. The tiny filly looked up to see three golden shapes floating above. The shapes drew closer showing themselves as ponies. Apple Bloom had met them before, but they had been tortured spirits. Now, they were lovely angels with shining halos atop their heads.*

*"Ya'll did a fine thing for us." The earth pony filly spoke. She looked like a normal filly now, no frown or hint of sadness. The resemblance towards Apple Bloom and her grandmother as a filly was now fully uncanny.*

*"Thanks to you, our souls are free." The pegasus colt no longer had tattered wings nor a frown. What was before Apple Bloom was a young colt at last free to spread his wings. The unicorn filly was the same. The look of terror that once marred her face before was now gone replaced with a bright and happy glee.*

*Apple Bloom felt very proud of herself. Although she had yet to earn her cutie mark, she still had accomplished something great. Perhaps helping ghost's was her special talent? "Well, Ah'm just glad it's all over. The dumb ol' witch can't get anypony now."*

*Just then, frowns of uncertainty appeared on the angel ponies faces. "Well ya did save us..." The earth pony filly trailed off.*

*"But you're still in danger!" The unicorn filly warned. "The Beldam still wants you and she won't rest until you're hers."*

*Apple Bloom widened her eyes in fright. "B-b-but how? Ah closed the door, there's no way she can escape."*

*"The key." Said the earth filly. "So long as it's in Equestria, the Beldam can still escape."*

*It wasn't over. Even after all she had done, she had not been free from the creature's grasp. The pride that had so recently swelled up in her had come crashing down.*

*"Don't worry miss, you still have a chance. You're still alive." Reassured the pegasus colt.*

*The three angels floated down to the filly. Although intangible, their closeness consoled Apple Bloom in a way. Slowly, her smile started to return.*

*"Please, tell mah sister Smith Ah miss her." The earth filly asked.*

*And then the dream ended.*

*XXX*

Apple Bloom awoke with a start. Steadily she breathed, her body in a cold sweat. Removing her pillow, she was pleased to see the ghost eyes were not there. At least that chapter had been closed, but the danger still was present. The Beldam could still escape and she had the key that she would use. Bolting out of her bed, the filly grabbed her bag, looking inside it to see the key still remained much to her relief. She wouldn't let this happen to anypony else. Not so long as this member of the Apple family had anything to say about it.

XXX

*Apple Bloom.*

The old house had been silent since the filly had escaped. Lifelessness had returned to the abandoned hovel. Until now that is. A green glow illuminated the room coming from the small hidden door. A great raking followed as metal scratched against wood. Something crawled out from underneath and skittered across the floor. The Beldam's hand knew its target guided by the thoughts of its master.

*You won't escape from me Apple Bloom. YOU... ARE... MINE!*

XXX

The night air had never been so creepy before. Apple Bloom watched the shadows of the trail, making certain that nothing jumped out at her. When she left Sweet Apple Acres, she hadn't put a plan together, all she knew was she had to get rid of the key somehow. First, she had thought about maybe dumping it down a well, but she didn't think Ponyville had any deep enough. No, it would seem the Everfree Forest would be the place. Somehow she knew its only denizen would have some way of helping her. But first, she had to pass a grove of trees along the way. Said trees were awfully close to a certain house.

*Clink!*

Apple Bloom halted. "Who-who's there?" She fearfully called, but there was no answer. Must have been her imagination playing tricks on her, nothing more. She continued along with her goal set in mind.

*Clink!*

There it came again. Apple Bloom hastened her trots.

*Clink! CLINK!*

The sound had grown louder. Apple Bloom kept her eyes and ears peeled for anything. The moon parted through the clouds shedding some light upon the path. More shadows cast from the influence of the celestial body. Then there was a glint. Apple Bloom caught it just out of the corner of her eye. Right above on a tree branch, something waited. It had kept its patience long enough and it sprang. Luckily, Apple Bloom was faster. The filly dodged as another metallic clink signaled the arrival of the predator. The hand of a monster that is.

It couldn't be, but it was. The Beldam's hand scurried across the ground like a hungry pest towards Apple Bloom. Apple Bloom turned tail and ran. Behind her, she heard the metallic scratching. In her head, she heard a voice.

*It's like I said my little sugar cube, you can't escape from me.*

Apple Bloom would defy that warning. She ran without a clear path ahead of her. With the fear of the chase upon her, Apple Bloom randomly ran through the thicket. Her run went uninterrupted until something hard hit her. Dazed for a moment, the filly immediately saw a purple figure grumbling something unintelligible.

"Spike?"

The dragon got up at the sound of his name. Rubbing his sore side he griped "Geez, can't you watch where you're going? Man, you farm ponies really are sturdy." Spike's complaints went unheard as Apple Bloom embraced the dragon in a hug.

"Oh Spike, Ah'm so glad to see you!" Apple Bloom's memories of the Other Spike still remained. Seeing the real thing brought those memories to surface.

Spike felt a blush across his face. "Um, uh sorry...yeah." Spike stammered, uncertain of what to make of it.

Apple Bloom came to a realization. "Wait, what are y'all doing out here?"

Before the dragon could answer, his face fell upon what approached.  
"What the heck is that!"

Apple Bloom couldn't answer herself as she felt the cold metal touch against her coat. The Beldam's hand pounced upon her, scratching and grasping at her body. Spike stood dumbfounded at the sight. He watched as Apple Bloom fought back with all of her might, but the hand still held the upper...hand. "Spike! Help!" Apple Bloom pleaded finding herself unable to escape.

Spike looked around for anything that could aid him. Strange as this event was, he knew trouble when he saw it. "Hang on Apple Bloom!" Spike looked around. Perhaps a stick? No that wouldn't work, he needed something heavier. Then it hit him. Or rather he nearly broke off one of his foot claws on it. It was a rock, a strong sturdy looking one. Apple Bloom struggled against the detached limb, but still to no avail.

"Apple Bloom, stay down!" Suddenly something hard and fast struck the hand with a great shatter of metal. At her side, Apple Bloom saw the hand break apart against the force of the rock. Still not wanting to take any chances, Apple Bloom scooped up the pieces in her bag.

"Quick tie it up!" Apple Bloom directed to Spike.

Still not understanding, Spike obeyed and tied a tight knot around the bag making sure it remained closed.

"Are you okay?" Spike asked.

Apple Bloom dusted herself off. She had a few scratches but nothing too bad. "Yeah, thanks. Ah was almost a goner, but y'all saved me." The filly fluttered her eyes causing a second blush to redden the dragon's purple face.

"Uh, it was nothing." Spike hid his blush. "But what are you doing out this late?" He asked.

Apple Bloom raised one of her eyes. "Ah could ask you the same thing. Ya are a baby dragon after all."

Spike fell silent when asked about his reason. With the danger passed, Apple Bloom noticed the dragon's eyes; they were red and puffy, as if he had been crying.

"Wy-Wybourne's dead. I was burying him." Spike admitted.

Apple Bloom gave a tiny gasp. "Ya mean your slug?"

Spike nodded. "I brought him inside to get him something to eat; Owlwiscious wasn't inside so I thought it was safe." The dragon sniffled. "I just set him down for a moment, I didn't know the book would fall over." Another sniffle escaped him, as did a tear.

"I-I wanted to bury him here...he really liked this place for some reason." Spike sniffled.

Although how a slug could actually communicate such a feeling as fondness for a certain place, Apple Bloom knew for certain Spike had truly loved that slug. Slimy and disgusting as Wybourne may have been, but Apple Bloom sympathized with the young dragon. Once more, Apple Bloom embraced the dragon in a hug. Spike hadn't been the only one who had lost a friend. The two of them hugged underneath Luna's light. All the while they thought of the two who had been lost this day.

XXX

Zecora stirred her special brew carefully. All the while, Apple Bloom and Spike watched with anticipation.

"Is it done Zecora?" Asked Apple Bloom.

Zecora continued her stirring examining the fumes that rose. "The perfect temperature I do presume. Please bring it over Apple Bloom."

Gladly, Apple Bloom handed the zebra the bag. Zecora dunked the bag in which sizzled, the contents dissolved instantly, both the key and the Beldam's hand.

"Thanks Zecora." Apple Bloom breathed a sigh of relief, glad that the ordeal was done at last.

"It was my pleasure, I may make some more for good measure." The zebra spoke in her rhyming speech. The word choice both amazed and confused the pair. Seeing as it was late, Apple Bloom and Spike exited the hut and set along the path back home. For Spike, Ponyville, for Apple Bloom, Sweet Apple Acres.

"So you were telling the truth about all that other world stuff huh?" Asked Spike.

"Yup. It's all true." Apple Bloom confirmed.

The dragon had felt he had missed a lot. "It would take a long time to explain it to me now right?"

Apple Bloom nodded. "Ah could tell ya tomorrow, we're having a get together up on the farm. Ya'll can come if ya want?"

Spike thought about it for a moment. "Count on it! Besides, Rarity is busy taking care of her sister and I don't want to catch anything."

It was here the two bid their farewells and went their separate ways. The only one not content currently stewed in her own little world. The Beldam sat and waited but in time, she soon perished. Either from the lack of nourishment from a child's soul or because she had no one else to love besides herself.

One little filly had triumphed against her, and now she was forever locked from the outside world.

So she died, and no one wept.

XXX

Apple Bloom shut the door carefully as she stepped inside. She trotted the same way up the stairs. The wooden steps creaked ever so slightly. For now, all she wanted was the curl up in her bed and dream her cares away.

"Apple Bloom?" A voice startled her just as she reached the last step.

In the darkness of the hallway, a lime green coat walked toward the filly. "Granny Smith?"

"What are you doing out of bed deary?" The old mare asked her granddaughter.

Apple Bloom tried to think up a reasonable excuse. "Uh, the bathroom?"

Granny Smith neither looked suspicious or as if she bought the excuse. What was surprising was the fact she was awake after spending most of the following days sleeping. "Ah'll tuck you in." Granny Smith led her youngest grandchild to her bedroom. Apple Bloom found herself once more tucked in by a loving member of her family. Just as her siblings had done earlier, the filly was given a kiss goodnight. With a creak of her ailing hip, the old mare turned to go back to her own room.

"Granny?"

Smith stopped. Another creak of her hip followed as she turned to face her granddaughter. "Hmm?"

"Do you mind if Ah tell you a quick bedtime story?"

For the first time in many years, a small unrest in Smith's heart was no put at rest. The unrest revolved around one who had been dear to her heart, one who had vanished without a trace. Thanks to Apple Bloom, she felt at piece.

~~~ The End ~~~