



# White Demure

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# Chapter 1

## She's Sick!

Twilight Sparkle smiled as she took a deep breath of the fresh air around her. To her, and most others, the day was absolutely gorgeous. The sky was clear and blue, there was a light breeze to cool everypony off from the warm sun, and ponies of all creeds and colors were walking through the town of Ponyville, going about their usual business and having fun.

"Isn't today just lovely, Spike?" Twilight asked as she turned her head to the baby dragon on her back.

"It is pretty nice, Twilight. Perfect weather for a relaxing nap." He replied, a smile creeping on to his face.

"Well, there's no real time for napping yet, Spike. Can you go over today's checklist for today once more, just in case we missed something?"

"Sure. Let's see..." He said as he held the relatively short list of tasks for the day, "Delivered two pastry recipe books to Pinkie Pie."

"Check." The unicorn said with a smile.

"Helped Fluttershy take care of a new batch of critters and brought her some supplies to help make the job easier in the coming weeks."

"Check and check."

"Tried and failed to teach Rainbow Dash the complex mathematical formulas needed to calculate just how fast she can fly horizontally or vertically."

The purple mare giggled at that one, "Yup. Check that too."

"Alright! Other than some chores at home, that covers pretty much everything we have to do today outside of the library! And thank goodness, I'm starving."

"Oh Spike, you ate two hours ago!"

"Yeah, exactly! It's been forever and I could go for a nice snack."

Twilight Sparkle giggled at the baby dragon's eating habits, but let them slide, as he was still a growing boy, and needed the energy. "Well, I suppose that wraps up most of the day for us. It's about noon now, so... How about we take a hour off the schedule today, since we're a little ahead?" She asked, wanting to give the both of them a nice break.

"That's sounds great! How about we go to that restaurant with the great crispy hay fries?" He asked excitedly.

"Sure, why no-" She began before being interrupted by a sudden shout.

"Twilight Sparkle! There you are! Heavens you are hard to find sometimes." Rarity said, after suddenly appearing in front of her while she wasn't looking.

Twilight blinked in shock at the sudden outburst, and was most curious as to why her friend seemed a little panicked. She was panting heavily, as if she had been running, something that the white unicorn hated to do because of the possibility of getting sweaty. Her eyes seemed shaky as well, which was strange for her usually calm and collected demeanor. Most startling of all, however, was that the fabulous pony actually had a hair out of place. This must be serious.

"What's wrong, Rarity?" Twilight asked.

"I'm... actually not entirely sure. From what I gathered, Applejack is having a serious problem and is down at Redhart's Clinic right now. She managed to catch Rainbow Dash on her way there, who then passed the information on to me as she went to find the others. I was told that if I saw you, darling, I should tell you to get there immediately, just in case they need your knowledge."

"Oh my... that does sound really serious. Alright! I'll do it! Spike, do you mind traveling with Rarity for a bit? I can't run that well with you on my back." She said, already levitating Spike up off of her back.

"Sure. No problem! Don't have to ask me twice to spend some time with Rarity." Spike said, already swooning over the fabulous unicorn.

Once her companion was no longer on her back and safely on the ground, Twilight took off down the road. Her speed wasn't great by any means, but she was getting several looks from ponies wondering where she was going in such a hurry. After a few twists and turns through the streets of Ponyville, the bookworm pony finally found herself in front of the local clinic, a nice place run by Nurse Redhart.

"Where is Applejack?" Twilight called out as she ran inside, "I was told she might need my help!"

"Oh, Twilight, there you are! Please, come this way, it's quite urgent." Replied Nurse Redhart as she started to run to one of the rooms in her clinic.

"So what's the matter with Applejack." The unicorn asked just as they entered the room.

"Ain't nothin' wrong with me, Twi. It's Apple Bloom... she's sick, and Ah don't know with what." Said Applejack, who was standing by the bed with her family, tending over a very sick looking Apple Bloom.

Twilight gasped as she saw the sick little filly. She looked horrid, moaning in discomfort periodically as she breathed heavily. Worst of all, her body was completely covered head to hoof in dark green spots, something the unicorn had never seen before, "What happened to her?"

"Ah don't know! Two days ago, she was fine. Then yesterday, it seems like she had a cold, nuthin' major, so Ah told her ta stay in fer than day. Then... about an hour ago, Ah got worried when Ah didn't hear a peep from her. At first, Ah figured she was just tired from tha cold, but then Ah got worried enough ta go and check up on her, and... she was like this." She said, running a hoof over Apple Bloom's mane gently.

"I'm so sorry to hear that, Applejack, here, let me have a look."

"Please." The farmpony replied, taking a step back to stand next to her big brother, who put a large, comforting hoof on her shoulder.

With both the request and the space she needed available to her, Twilight stepped forward and started to look over the sick filly, "Nurse Redhart, have you had any luck with this?" She asked as she looked for anything that might remind her of anything she's seen in her books.

"Sadly, no. I've consulted all of my staff, my own knowledge, and my medical books, and there's no record of it anywhere! I know I don't have the most comprehensive series of literature, so hopefully you can help with that, Twilight Sparkle." Replied Nurse Redhart.

"Very strange... And I'm sorry, everypony, but I don't recognize it like this... Maybe if we move her to my library, I can do some more intensive research... Or find a spell that just might snap her out of it." She said, looking to everypony in the room, hoping to hear something positive.

"I'm not sure about that, Twilight, but if the patient's family says it's okay..." The nurse replied.

All eyes immediately turned to Applejack. Despite being younger than Big Macintosh, she was the voice of the family, having taken charge at an early age, thanks to a strong air of leadership when it came to her kin. The farm mare looked around nervously for a moment, not exactly enjoying being put on the spot when she was worried sick, but for her family, she had to make the decision, "Ah say... Let's head ta yer place, Twi. If it'll help give ya ideas or fix 'er faster, then we're gonna do it!"

"Alright." Twilight said with a nod. "Big Macintosh, you have a much gentler hoof than your sister; no offense Applejack."

"None taken, sugarcube."

"I'm going to be heading over to the library right away to start collecting all of my books, the ones I think might be most related to this. While I do that, can you carefully carry Apple Bloom to the library so that I can start my experiments?" The unicorn asked.

After a moment of thought, Big Macintosh nodded, "Eeyup."

"Great. I'll see you there." She replied.

Once things were set in motion, her horn began to glow, and in a flash of light, she vanished from the clinic room, teleporting away to her home.

Immediately the bookworm pony got to work, magically lifting books off of the shelf she searched for all forms of medical books and references to obscure illnesses. Her stack of books began to grow the more she searched, but so too did her frustrations as she knew that some of the tomes were missing, or at least misplaced.

"Spike!" She called out, "I need your help!"

However, the only response she got was silence.

"Oh... That's right. I left him with Rarity. I guess they just haven't gotten back yet." She said, musing to herself.

Just as she was getting back to her book collecting, the door to her library opened side, and revealed a backwards walking Applejack. "Careful now, big brother. Keep 'er steady." She said as she backed in to the main room.

Behind her, or rather, in front of her, was Big Macintosh, with the handle of a wicker basket clenched between his teeth. Inside of the basket was Apple Bloom, looking just as sick as she had been in the clinic. She was wrapped loosely in blankets, enough to keep her warm and at the same time giving her room to move and breathe.

The red stallion carefully brought his littlest sister in to the library, and set her gently in to the middle of the room. Behind him, Rainbow Dash, Rarity, Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy, Granny Smith, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo filed in to the room, making the place quite crowded. Still, it gave a sense of calm and security to most everypony to be surrounded by so many caring friends.

"Oh, it's good to see that you all made it. I'm still going through my books, but they're a little messy... Hey, Rarity, where's Spike?" Twilight asked.

"Oh, well, he was needed in Canterlot. He received a message directly from the Princess. It seemed important enough to whisk him away right then and there." The white unicorn replied.

The bookworm pony sighed, "That's just great. I'll just have to make do without him." She said.

"Have ya found anythin' yet, Twi?" Asked Applejack.

"No, not yet, but, bare with me here, it shouldn't take me much longer to find something."

The orange earth pony gave her a nod before sitting back down next to her sister, brother, and grandmother, the family staying close to the sick filly. A somber air hovered around the room, one that made even Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash stay quiet and still. The only sound that could be heard was the shifting of books and the occasional moan from Apple Bloom.

The minutes ticked on as Twilight Sparkle searched through her vast repertoire of tomes both mundane and magical. Soon enough, the first step of her search was finally complete. In front of her stood a tall stack of books, two dozen in number, covering all of the healing magic and illness reference guides that she had access to. It was going to be hard to search through all of them, but she had an idea, "Okay, I think I might be missing a few, but these are all I can find right now. It's going to take me some time to get through them all."

"How long d'ya think it'll take, sugarcube?" Applejack asked, worried about what might happen if they took too long.

"I just got an idea that will hopefully make this a snap to get through. So don't worry! I'll have this solved in no time!" She said confidently, giving everypony in the room a nice boost of confidence.

With a grunt, Twilight levitated all of the two dozen books in to the air, lining them up for form a wall of books in front of her. With a flick of her horn, every book in front of her suddenly opened up to the first page, and her eyes began to scan the pages before her.

And so, she read. Taking in dozens of pages at a time, each of the books flipping their pages simultaneous with a small burst of magical energy from her horn. However, as time went on, book after book started to be tossed aside, the thinner volumes running out of pages for her to read first, while the thickest of the tomes were the last to go.



Everypony in the room waited on baited breath as Twilight flipped through the final, biggest book of them all. The unicorn's face bore a look of utter frustration as she reached the last few pages of the time. Finally, with a sigh of defeat, the purple pony fell to her flank and let the last book drop, her head hurting slightly from the small overuse of magic and heaving reading.

"I'm sorry everypony... I'm not seeing anything in these books... And with Spike away in Canterlot, I can't get him to send a message to the Princess about this. She'd know what to do, but it could take days to get a normal letter there..."

"Well, what in tha hay are we gunna do now?" Applejack asked.

"I got it!"

Everypony in the room froze as they heard somepony shout. All at once, all eyes turned to Pinkie Pie, who was currently holding a book in her mouth. Specifically, the book entitled Super Naturals.

"What about this? Why didn't you read this one?" Pinkie asked.

"Super Naturals? Well, I've already read that book three times over, Pinkie. And quite recently too, so I know there's nothing in there that can help..." Twilight Sparkle replied, her head hanging low for a moment. However, seconds later, her eyes started to widen and her head raised as she got an idea, "But..."

All eyes were on her now, everypony looking towards her expectantly as idea ran through her head.

"But what?" Pinkie asked.

"Oh Pinkie Pie! You're amazing! You've just given me the perfect idea!"

"Well don't leave us hangin' sugarcube! What d'ya got in mind?"

"Zecora! She knows more about obscure illnesses and medicines than anypony I know! She should be able to tell us about this. We need to go and see her right away." She said, a smile filled with determination covering her face.

"Now why in the hay didn't Ah think of that? Apple Bloom and Zecora are great friends, Ah'm sure she'll help out if we tell her about this." Said Applejack, smiling for the first time since she discovered her sister feeling ill.

"Alright! Just leave it to me! I'll fly over to Zecora's in a flash and get back with whatever she gives me for Apple Bloom!" Said Rainbow Dash suddenly, already in the middle of flying towards the door.

However, just as she was leaving, she found herself unable to move. A tear welled in her eye as she felt the very distinct and very painful sensation of several of her tail hairs being pulled out. Luckily, she stopped well before she ended up with bald flank, and turned around to see that half of her tail was covered in Twilight's magical glow, holding her in place.

"What's the big idea, Twilight! That hurt! And I have to get going to see Zecora." Dash complained.

"Not without a note from me you aren't. I need to write down all of Apple Bloom's symptoms and make a little sketch of her, just so that Zecora knows for sure what's wrong with her. If you rush there now and just give her a loose description, she might give you the wrong medicine and make things worse."

At her friend's words, Rainbow Dash deflated slightly and hovered back down to the ground, her tail being freed from the magic as she did so, "Sorry..."

"It's fine, sugarcube. Don't fret about it. You were just tryin' ta help." The farmpony said, patting the blue mare on the back with a hoof.

"Don't worry Rainbow, you'll have your moment to shine here in a few minutes. Just let me get my quill and some parchment to write on."

As the others waited patiently, the purple unicorn brought out her writing tools and began to scribble everything she knew down on to the paper. Information about the symptoms, such as a fever and exhaustion dotted the page. She made sure to make special mention of the dots covering the filly as well as their specific color as well. Finally, she draw a small sketch of Apple Bloom, trying to get an accurate placement of the spots in as little

time as was needed, and after nearly fifteen minutes of quick writing, the parchment was complete.

"Alright, here you go, Rainbow Dash. Take this to Zecora and explain the problem to her. You should be able to spot her hut from the sky pretty easily, so it won't be a problem for you to get there and back in no time." She said as she levitated the rolled up piece of paper over to the blue pegasus.

Dash gave a quick salute as her task was laid out before her, "You can count on me!"

With that, she grabbed on to the floating scroll with her teeth and flew off, this time unimpeded by unicorn magics. With a gust of wind and a streak of rainbows, she took to the skies, flying as fast as she could towards the Everfree forest.

"Humph. How uncouth. She should at least pick up after herself." Said Rarity, levitating up a few rainbow colored hairs off the floor and bringing them over to the garbage basket.

"Fussin' about that at a time like this, Rarity?" Applejack asked, slightly perturbed at the unicorn's actions.

"It helps to keep me calm, dear Applejack. You should find something to help you do the same." Came the rather curt reply.

Applejack sighed as she turned to the door, watching the shrinking streak of rainbow as it traveled in to the distance.

"Don't worry, Applejack... I'm sure that Zecora will be able to help." Twilight said as she placed a hoof around her friend's shoulders.

"Yeah! She'll be super fast and get back soon and Apple Bloom will be better in no time at all! And in the mean time, your friends will be here to help out as much as we can." Chimed in Pinkie Pie.

"Umm... I don't know how I can help, but I can be here for moral support, at least. If you want me to, that is..." Added Fluttershy, speaking for the first time since arriving.

"Ah shucks girls... that sure means a lot. But right now, Ah ain't tha one that needs yer help."

"We know, Applejack... But it'll be alright. Don't worry, Rainbow Dash will be back soon and then everything will be okay." Said Twilight, trying her best to comfort her friend.

"Ah hope yer right, Twilight... Ah hope yer right." Replied Applejack, her eyes turning back to the skies as her face grew more and more somber.

*'Rainbow Dash... Please. Hurry...'*

# Chapter 2

## The Threat of White Demure

Rainbow Dash tore through the skies over Ponyville, a large streak of rainbow trailing in her wake. She garnered many looks from the ponies below, and while this would be a very welcome thing normally, right now, she ignored it. She had a job to do after all.

Dash had never liked the Everfree Forest, from its strange creatures to its untamed weather, it just plain creeped her out. She was very thankful that this time, she didn't have to actually walk through the forest, instead easily able to just fly above it, looking at the ground below her as she searched for Zecora's hut.

The building was hard to spot from the air, however, and while she had easily gotten to the Everfree, she was stuck trying to find her destination.

*'Ugh... Come on, Dash. You should remember this! The others are counting on you...'* She thought to herself, gazing down at the forest below.

Since her initial high flying pass didn't work, she decided to fly low this time, starting from the path they first took to get in to the Everfree during the Poison Joke incident. The problem was that the path was kind of fuzzy to her, as she was upside-down and crashing for most of the trip. At the very least, she knew what the hut looked like, and hoped that she'd be able to spot it this time around.

Her eyes scanned the scenery beneath her, but the canopy so thick she could only scarcely see the forest floor. She cursed the forest even more for this, hating that she might be spending more time doing this than it would have taken her to get to Canterlot and back.

So much for a shortcut.

It wasn't until her second low pass over the forest that she finally caught sight of a few familiar landmarks, specifically some of the still broken trees she had crashed through during her last trip here. The sight of any kind of sign that she was on the right track was a very welcome one, causing a

smile to spread across her face. However, in her jovial excitement, she failed to notice the black mass behind her.

At least, until she heard a cacophonous choir of cawing crows coming from behind her.

Her head turned immediately, and she gave a muffled yelp as she just barely dodged a few crows that seemed to want to start pecking at her. She wanted to yell at them, but the scroll between her teeth was preventing her from saying much. So instead, she smacked one of them upside the head in hopes that they'd learn.

That just seemed to make them mad, however, as the murder of crows didn't take lightly to one of their own being hit. The flock of birds began to swarm all around her, her vision filling with more shadows and feathers than she had seen in her life. She flailed her limbs around wildly, trying to scatter the birds to get them away from her, but they remained undeterred, and started to peck at her head and flanks.

"Ow!" She cried out in a muffled voice.

Her patience was running thin, and the pain from the small pecks was driving her nuts. She had to lose the birds as fast as she could, and with a quick glance to the forest below, she knew where she had to go to get out of there. She took a quick dive towards the ground, creating a hole in the mass of crows for all of a few seconds before they gave chase.

Rainbow Dash pierced through the canopy, and pulled up just before she hit the ground and swerved through the trees that had just become her obstacles. She took a quick glance behind her for a split second, and grinned as she saw that her plan had worked. The crows were now getting stuck in the trees, and having to funnel through the narrow passages that were available. Still, her pursuers didn't let up, and she could only go so fast before it became too much and she crashed in to a tree again.

The blue pegasus ducked and twisted through the trees and their crooked and creepy branches. On more than one occasion she was struck by a wayward vine that sent her tumbling in the air, but her expertise in the realm of stunt flying always helped her to recover and keep ahead of her pursuers. But try as she might, she just couldn't lose them.

It was when she was starting to become desperate for a solution that she finally found one, or rather, one found her.

"Stay you back you swarm of crow! What you despise is something I know! Leave my friend be, or you shall suffer the wrath of me!"

Dash instantly recognized the voice, and a smile grew on her face as she saw who could help her. At least, she hoped so.

It was then that she heard the sound of a glass being smashed against the ground, the distinct noise barely recognizable over the cawing of the crows. A moment later, a horrendously foul smell assaulted her nose, causing her to stop dead in her tracks, drop the scroll, and pinch nose with her fore-hooves.

"Augh! What in the world is that awful smell! Euch... I think I just tasted some of my breakfast..." She said, bringing up her hind legs to cradle her now upset stomach.

"I do apologize, oh Rainbow Dash, for acting so very rash. To make the birds flee I used a special brew, one to make a smell that shouldn't have offended you. It seems that it is despised by all things with wings, oh what interesting discoveries your visit brings." Said Zecora, a satchel filled with who knows what draped over her back.

Rainbow coughed heavily as she continued to pinch her nose, "I guess so... Ugh, okay, one sec." She replied before suddenly spinning in place.

The wind created from her spinning blew away the noxious fumes away, leaving her nose clean of any horrible scents. "Phew... That's better... Hey! They're gone!" She said, looking around, noticing that the crows had finally fled the area.

"I saw you flying by, chased by a flock most fowl, and sprang in to help before you threw in the towel. That smell offends birds worse than it does you, something I am sorry for, too."

"It's fine... Oh! Horseapples! Where is it, where is it?" Dash asked, suddenly looking around frantically for the scroll she had dropped. "Mmm-Aha! Here it is!" She said, hovering down and picking up the parchment between her hooves.

"For why have you come here to see me? To give me an invitation from Pinkie?" Zecora asked, looking curious to the paper Dash was holding.

"Not an invitation, Zecora. Something far worse. Here, this is for you. Apple Bloom is sick and we just can't find out why. We were going to try heading to Canterlot for help, but we figured you might be both faster and better with strange diseases." Explained Dash.

"Apple Bloom is sick? Oh that simply will not do. Give me the note, and I will tell you if I can make a curative brew." The zebra replied, pointing to a patch of ground in front of her.

The blue pegasus obliged, rolling out the scroll at Zecora's hooves, allowing the forest dweller to read it over. The zebra's eyes scanned the paper, making sure she got every detail, and as she went on, her eyes widened, ending with a gasp as she saw the image drawn by Twilight.

"What is it, Zecora? Do you know what it is?" Dash asked.

"I believe I do, and I have a great fear. Come with me now, for doom might be near!"

Without another word, the two of them went in to a full gallop towards the hut. It wasn't far, and within a minute the two of them were bursting in to the forest home, and immediately Zecora went about searching through her personal books. She eventually settled on a thin volume that she opened right away and began to read. After finding the part she seemed to want, she started to run back and forth between her supplies and the book, collecting some in a pile, and biting her lip when returning to the book empty handed.

Rainbow, meanwhile, sat in the room anxiously, giving the Everfree dweller her space and silence. She seemed to know what was going on, and Dash was not about to get in the way of that, even though it left her with nothing to do.

She was just as worried as the others about this, despite her brave face. She never really knew Apple Bloom, having only interacted with her a few times, but she was Applejack's little sister, and if one of her friends were distraught, so was she.



Soon enough, Zecora stopped moving back and forth from the book, gave it one last read over, and sighed, "Things are not well, troubles I am afraid to tell."

"Why, what's wrong?" Dash asked.

"I have found the illness that afflicts Apple Bloom and yet, the ingredients I need are not in my cabinet. If we do not hurry, the green will grow, and then turn white as snow. When that happens, the disease will spread, and all of Ponyville will be... I dread." She lowered her head for a moment before reading it again, "But in my book there is a cure, for this disease known as White Demure."

"You do? That's great!" Rainbow said, feeling much better now that she knew there was something that could fix this, especially after hearing that it could take out Ponyville.

"But as I have said before, certain ingredients I have no more. Three of them I require, to fix this event most dire. I shall write what I need upon some paper, as well as where to get it sooner than later. Deliver it to Twilight and she will know what to do. Now I shall write, I need only a minute or two."

Rainbow Dash gave a nod to the zebra and watched as she started to write. Minutes later, Zecora wrapped up the parchment and brought it over to her, "Thanks, Zecora. I'll get this back to the girls as fast as I can, we'll get you what you need to fix Apple Bloom."

"I do hope so, oh speedy Rainbow. Now hurry up, you must go!"

The blue pegasus didn't need to be told that twice. She gave a quick salute and grabbed the scroll before zooming out of the hut, knocking over a few jars in the progress. This trip was going to be much easier than the last, thankfully, as all she needed to do was fly straight up, catch sight of Ponyville, and fly off unimpeded towards the library.

Moments later, she was accompanied by a technicolor streak as she burst into the library, all eyes suddenly turning towards her. She took a quick look around the room, and upon spotting her, she spit the scroll towards Twilight, "Catch! That's what Zecora gave me."

"What is it, sugarcube?" Applejack asked.

"From what Zecora said, that I could understand anyway, Apple Bloom is sick with something really, really bad, and in a week, it'll spread to the rest of Ponyville."

"And... What'll happen ta mah sister?"

"She... She won't make it, Applejack." Said Twilight, who had already begun to read the scroll.

The farmpony's eyes widened and started to mist over with tears, "What? But... But there's gotta be somethin' we can do!"

"Zecora said there was a cure, but, she's missing some of the ingredients. That's what that's for." Rainbow said, pointing to the piece of paper Twilight Sparkle was reading.

"Well, what in tha hay does it say, Twilight? I'll search under every stone, every mountain, and through every danged forest in Equestria if I haveta."

"I'm reading it over now, Applejack. Just give me a... Ah. Here we go. Okay, from what I'm reading here... Apple Bloom seems to have caught something called White Demure. It's a very deadly disease with a very specific cure. It's highly resistant to magic once it has infected somepony, but the zebra eventually found a natural cure for it. It's very rare, which explains why it's not in any of my books, either. Let's see... She needs three more ingredients in order to make the cure." Explained Twilight Sparkle.

"Well? What are they and where are they?" Asked Applejack.

"It says here that we need three plants. One is a flower that she drew with some colored ink, found in the Everfree Forest, another is a plant called Mandragora Sonales, which she actually buys here in town. And the last is a special kind of flower that grows where the air is thin and the temperature cold. She suspects some can be found on... Oh boy, Mount Marebrum."

All of the ponies in the room started to look towards one another, knowing just how far away and how tall Mount Marebrum is.

"Well... That last one will be no sweat! I can fly over there and back in less than a day! And she said we had a week, right?" Rainbow asked.

"No, five and a half days. She started to get sick over a day ago... So that's some time wasted now." The farmpony said glumly.

"Well... Still! As I said, only a day. And the trip in to the Everfree Forest shouldn't take much longer. Then, we can all take a trip to the store and buy that Mandra... Uhh... That one plant, and we'll be in the clear!"

"While I agree with you, Dash, I'm afraid you aren't thinking this through all the way. Mount Marebrum is far away, and while I believe you can make it there and back in less than a day, there is a massive problem with the cold. It's freezing up there, enough to give you hypothermia in minutes if you're unprotected. Not to mention all the searching you'll have to do. Then, the flower from the Everfree... The only instructions I have here is that it's at the very edge of the forest, way, way farther than any of us has ever gone. That could take days all on its own..." The purple unicorn explained, bowing her head lightly.

"Well then darling, what do you suggest we do?" Rarity asked, speaking up for the first time in a while.

"I think that we should split in to teams. Specifically, teams of two, so that no pony is left behind." Twilight said.

"Hey! That means only the six of you will go. What about us? I wanna go with Rainbow Dash!" Scootaloo piped up, speaking for the first time since coming to the library.

"I'm sorry, girls, but you're too little to go. And besides, you should stay here to help take care of Apple Bloom with Granny Smith." She said, looking to the aging mare, and getting a nod in return, "And Big Macintosh can keep watch over all of you as the responsible adult he is. Right, Big Mac?" She asked, looking to the large red stallion.

"Eeyup."

After a bit of thinking, Scootaloo sighed and acquiesced to the concerned request.

"Perfect. Now le-" The studious unicorn began, before being interrupted.

"Well, why do I have to take a *anypony* else with me. I can do this on my own!" Dash said heatedly.

"Simmer down there, sugarcube. None of us are sayin' ya can't, but it could be real dangerous up there. Havin' somepony ta watch yer back might be a good idea." Said the farmpony.

Dash glared at her athletic rival for a moment before giving up, crossing her hooves over her chest and sitting down upon her flank with a loud thump.

"Okay... Let me work this out. We need one team for Marebrum, one team for the Everfree, and then one for the trip to the store. Now, that might not be as easy as it sounds. Zecora put in her note that her monthly shipment didn't come in, which means you might have to go outside of Ponyville to find it." Twilight explained.

"Well, as I cannot fly, and I would very much prefer to avoid getting covered in who knows what in the Everfree forest, I would like to volunteer for the trip to the store." Said Rarity, raising a hoof.

"Alright. So that's one for the store, and one for the mountain. Umm... Fluttershy?" The purple unicorn asked, turning to the shy pegasus.

Fluttershy let out a small squeak as she was singled out, but she swallowed her nervousness and replied, "Yes, Twilight?"

"Considering how far away it is, and how high it is, I think that you should go with Rainbow Dash. You're the only other pegasus here, and Dash needs a partner. While Dash is good at getting there and back, you'll be better at actually harvesting the plant we need, as well as dealing with any critters that might be up there. Do you think you could go with her, Fluttershy?"

The yellow pegasus retreated back a little, nervously shuffling her hooves on the floor, "Oh, I don't know... I mean... It's soooo far and so very high... I'm... I'm sure I... Umm..." She said, fumbling for an excuse.

"Please Fluttershy. We need ya fer this... Mah sister needs ya fer this." Applejack said, walking over to the scaredy pony and placing a hoof on her shoulder.

"Oh... Umm... Alright then. I'll go..." Said Fluttershy, giving in to the request to help her friends.

"Great, thanks a lot, sugarcube." The farmpony said before giving her a hug.

"Okay. So, we have the mountain team all set. Okay... With the Everfree forest, since we don't have anypony who can fly going that way, I'll have to go, to teleport me and my partner over gaps and the like. Besides, I know the forest... A little. I've been in there more times than anyone in this room. Except for maybe Fluttershy."

"Oh, well, yes. I do go in a lot, but never very far... Only to catch up with bunnies or chickens that try to explore a little too much." Replied the pegasus.

"Okay. So I'm going to the forest and... Pinkie. I still don't know how they work, but those predictions of yours should be able to tell us whenever a monster or something pops up. Plus, you're pretty fearless, and can keep a relatively cool head regardless of the dangers involved, which would be a huge help for me." Twilight said, looking to her hopeful companion to be.

"Okie dokie lokie! I can't really control my Pinkie Sense, but I'm sure it'll be going off like crazy when we go in there!" She said, smiling brightly and giggling happily, like she always did almost all the time.

After a moment of thinking, Applejack finally pieced together what that arrangement meant, "Hey! Now wait a gosh darn minute here. That means Ah'm goin' with Rarity to tha blasted store! I should be goin' in to tha forest with ya instead of Pinkie Pie! No offense, Pinkie."

"It's okay!" Chirped Pinkie Pie.

"Applejack, look... I know you want to go and do something hard and dangerous to save your sister, and maybe save myself or Pinkie Pie from danger, which we both appreciate. But, you've only been in the Everfree Forest once before, and I for sure need to go because of my magic. And I

would feel safe with Pinkie Pie around and her Pinkie Sense, to warn us of danger. I'm sure you could fight off anything that came our way, but if we could avoid them altogether, that really would be for the best. And... and who knows? The trip to the store or... whatever might come after might be something more your speed?" Twilight offered, trying to placate her friend.

Deep down, she knew that while Applejack wanted to help, her despair and worry might cause a lot of problems down the road. Not to mention she'd rather not see any kind of creature in the forest, and Pinkie's strange ability should be able to help with that. She also figured that the farmpony might benefit from something light to do to ease her mind. She'd probably be the first back and first to find her ingredient, which should give her a boost of hope that she probably needed.

"But... but... oh shoot, sugarcube. Fine... Ah... you win." Applejack said, giving a sigh. She had already realized what Twilight was thinking, but she still hated the fact that she wasn't going to be doing much in the way of hard work. This was her sister, after all, and she wanted to do *something*, but, this time, she would bow to the wisdom of her friends.

"Thank you, Applejack. I know that it'll be hard for you, but in the end, I'm sure that it will work out for you. Don't worry. We'll get through this, together." The studious pony said, trying to cheer up her friend.

One by one, the others gave their support in their own ways, all of them telling her to keep her hopes up, and that none of them would let her down. All together, they wrapped her up in a big group hug, each doing their part to comfort her.

"Ahh shucks, girls... thanks a lot fer this. Ah still want to go and do somethin', but, I think it might work out better if Ah listen to all y'all."

"Perfect, then. We have our teams planned out!" Twilight Sparkle cheered. "Now we just need to get our supplies together. I'll stay here to start gathering my things. Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy, wait around for a minute, I'll draw up the description of the herb you need according to Zecora's letter. You shouldn't need much else, just about a day or two worth of food, and some very, very warm clothes." Said Twilight.

"Oh, I have just the thing! I've been working on some winter clothing ahead of time for the rush I just know will come. I'll go get it ready now! Oh, and

Applejack, darling, just come meet me at my boutique when you finish here. The both of you as well, Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash." Rarity said, a big smile on her face as she thought about what kind of dress to fit her pegasi friends with.

"Alright, Rarity. Ah'll meet ya there. Just wanna look over my sis one last time before we head out." The farmpony said.

"Certainly Applejack. Take your time." Replied the white unicorn.

"I'll be right over, just as soon as I get that note from Twi." Added Rainbow Dash, who was now hovering above the door to give her friends room to move in the crowded library.

"I'll umm... I'll be there too, after Rainbow gets the note." Said Fluttershy.

"Alright. So it's settled, ladies. All of you; do what you need to do to prepare, you too Pinkie Pie. Try and get some food to take along with us, if you don't mind. I'll get together some basic survival gear for the trip, stuff that should help us get to where we need to go." Said Twilight.

From there, they all gave nods and sounds of agreement, and everypony, except for the studious unicorn and those watching over Apple Bloom, split up and made their leave. With only five and a half days left to find the cure, they all worked as fast as they could to get prepared for their respective journeys.

It was going to be tough for all of them, but for Apple Bloom's sake, and for the sake of all of Ponyville, they were ready to face anything.

# Chapter 3

## Twilight and Pinkie Pie, One

While in the library, they conversed for a short while longer, making their plans before parting ways. The Cutie Mark Crusaders, Big Macintosh, and Granny Smith stayed behind to try and be there for Apple Bloom in her time of need. Twilight and Pinkie Pie remained behind as well, as the purple mare had to gather her supplies, and since her pink friend was to be her partner on this trip, she hung around as well.

"Alright, Pinkie, do you know of anything over at Sugar Cube Corner that you need to take with you? Some food from there would be nice. And what should I take? I've never gone this far in to the Everfree Forest before. I don't know what I should bring! Maybe I should just take everything?" Twilight said, rambling a little as she thinks of all the possible dangers and what she'll need to get out of them.

"Hmm... nope! Well, except for the food. Ooo! I should bring some cakes and sweets and treats galore!" Pinkie chirped as she responded to Twilight Sparkle's initial question before bouncing around the room.

"Umm... Maybe just enough to fill your saddlebags, Pinkie Pie. If you take too much, it'll just slow us down." Twilight replied, trying to calm the hyperactive pony down a bit.

The unicorn then turned around, looking out at the pile of things she'd been gathering since she started to prepare for this trip, and brought a hoof to her face as she realized that the advice she just gave her friend applies to her as well. With that thought in mind, she goes about resorting her things, separating the necessities from the things she just didn't need.

"Aww! Oh well! I'll be back in a jiffy, Twilight, then we can go off together and save Ponyville! ...again!" Pinkie said, giggling brightly before zooming out of the door in a blur of motion.

Twilight Sparkle watched as Pinkie Pie left the library, leaving her alone with her thoughts. Not completely alone, due to the others in the room, but they were still so very silent that they might as well have not been there.



Now that she had time to think without any large amount of panic, she started to rationalize the events that were taking place here. She wondered just how and where Apple Bloom had caught this illness. From what she could tell, it was going to be really bad, and it was going to be spreading if it lasted too much longer. Such an epidemic would be devastating to Ponyville, and she only hoped no one brought it to any of the neighboring villages and towns.

Not only that, it was probably going to be a good idea to try and find where this disease came from in the first place. She was going to have to figure out a way to find its source, and then try and put a stop to it so that it didn't get out of control; but with her being preoccupied with getting a cure for Apple Bloom, she didn't know what to do.

With Spike gone, getting a message to Princess Celestia would be very time consuming, as the local postal service only went out that far a few times a week. In the end, however, she figured that it wouldn't hurt to at least send a message, no matter when it arrived. Twilight looked around for a moment, making note of the time on the clock, and then she trailed her eyes over to her scrolls and quill.

The unicorn took her quill and scroll and began to scribble down a letter to the princess, wanting to get all she knew about the disease across in the message before she sent it. After checking it over twice to make sure it was satisfactory for her princess, she quickly wrapped up the scroll and went outside, her eyes turning to the sky the moment she stepped out her door.

Ah, right on time.

"Derpy!" Twilight shouted, catching the attention of a certain grey mailmare flying in the sky.

Suddenly disturbed from her route, Derpy Hooves, Ponyville's resident mailmare, turned her good eye towards the source of the voice, only to find a floating scroll with a bit attached to it in front of her face.

"Sorry to bother you, Derpy, but do you think you can send this to Canterlot? Sorry about not having it in an envelope, but I did write the address on the side for you, and there's a bit for the service fee too."

The blond maned pony gave a bright smile as she nodded to Twilight, "I'll get your letter there! Won't I, Mr. Letter?" She said, a bright smile on her face as she grabbed on to the letter before continuing on her route.

"Thank you, Derpy!" She shouted, "Well, that's done. I can't get a letter there any faster until Spike gets back, so now all I can do is focus on getting Apple Bloom that plant."

While wishing that there was more that could be done right now, she walked back in to her library, wanting to get back to packing her things.

"Heya, Twilight! Are you ready to go? Cause I am! Oh, this is going to be so much fun! Last time was so much fun too, lots of action and you falling off cliffs!" Pinkie Pie shouted to Twilight as she came in.

Jumping from fright, the purple unicorn saw that Pinkie Pie had somehow gotten inside the library while she wasn't looking for only a minute or two. Not only that, she was surrounded by cakes and treats of all kinds, not to mention two very stuffed saddlebags hanging off of her back, with not only sweets bulging out of it, but also various party favors and invitations.

"Pinkie! But how did you? Ugh... never mind, I know I shouldn't ask. I've learned my lesson on that. Anyway, Pinkie, you can't take all that! I told you it would slow us down if you took too much!" Twilight said, scolding her friend.

"Oh, don't worry silly, this is just a snack to help us get our tushies moving! Have some!"

Twilight sighed as Pinkie proceeded to push some of the sweets towards her before diving in and devouring her own small mountain of candy. Thinking it might be a good idea to eat anyway, she levitated a few of the sweets to munch on as she spoke. "Alright, Pinkie, I just need to sort through my things, and then we'll leave for the Everfree Forest."

"Okie dokie lokie! I'm all ready to go, just as soon as I finish these delicious pies!" Pinkie said, giggling delightfully as she continued to eat her stack of treats.

Twilight gave a nod to Pinkie Pie as she turned back to her stack of things. With her magic, she started to sort out the things she needed from the

things her imagination made her think she wanted. As she reduced her pile of travel gear from a immovable mountain to something that would fit inside of her saddlebags, she continued to glance curiously to her pink friend, her logical mind still trying to understand how she worked.

Once her bags were full, she levitated them in to the air and placed them on to her back. They were heavy, but as she tested them by walking towards the group of sulking ponies in the room, she came to believe she could handle the weight. "Alright, everypony. The others have already left to prepare, and Pinkie Pie and I are just about ready to go. Don't worry, the six of us together will get everything Apple Bloom needs to recover, and once my letter reaches Canterlot, the Princess is going to help us find and contain whatever did this to her. You have my word." She said, believing her own words and doing her best to cheer up the sorrowful bunch.

It seemed to work ever so slightly, with the young ones raising their heads and the sincerest of hopes crossing their small faces, a look that nearly broke Twilight's heart. If she needed any more motivation to go and get that plant, this would be all that she needed. "Pinkie Pie! Are you ready?"

"Hmm?" Said Pinkie, looking up all of a sudden, her face coated in frosting. With a quick wave of her tongue, she slurped her face clean and smiled, "Ready as I can be! So, does that mean you're ready to go now? That's great! I was just getting bored!"

"Well, while I can't say it's going to be fun, it's going to get rid of your boredom at least." Twilight replied, "Alright then, let's..." She gulped, "go to the Everfree Forest."

Twilight Sparkle and Pinkie Pie stood in front of the daunting entrance to the Everfree Forest. The pink mare remained absolutely fearless in front of the terrors within, but her purple friend was looking a little more frightened. Recently, she had stopped having troubles of any kind reaching Zecora's house, but according to the little drawing the zebra had given Rainbow Dash, this plant was clear across the forest, in places she'd never even seen before. Taking a deep breath, she prepared herself for the long journey in to the dangerous woods.

"Come on, Twilight! We gotta get moving if we wanna get that plant in time." Pinkie Pie said, suddenly several feet in to the forest already, eager to get this adventure under way.

"Ack! Pinkie, wait up! We have to stick together!" Shouted Twilight, trying to catch up to her pink friend.

Together, the two of them entered the Everfree Forest, taking the path that had once led them towards the Palace of the Royal Pony Sisters, where they had faced off with Nightmare Moon. According to the vague directions in Zecora's note, the two would have to pass by, or even through, the castle once more, the area marking their halfway point in to the forest. The six of them had been through so much in their first journey to the castle, and now there were only two of them. Twilight was afraid of what might happen to them.

"So... anything yet?" The purple mare asked.

"Hmm..." Pinkie let out as she focused, stopping and frowning as she scanned every part of her body for some signs of change or twitching, "Nope! Not a twitch to be felt! Sorry Twilight, but I can't control it, so I guess we just have to hope it happens when we need it! La, la la, la la!" The pink mare finished, trotting away without a care in the world.

A small feeling of dread passed through Twilight Sparkle as she realized that Pinkie Pie was right. Last time they came in to the forest, her Pinkie Sense hadn't activated at all, and even after that one particularly sensitive day or two, she didn't have all that many twitches from day to day. The unicorn gulped hard, hoping that today her senses would be extra sensitive; they were going to need it.

"Alright, well... you let me know the moment you feel anything, alright? There's a lot of dangerous things in the forest, and we can't afford to be surprised by any of them." Twilight said before continuing on in to the murky fog of the woods.

The two continued to walk through the forest side by side, Pinkie Pie bouncing with a large smile on her face, and Twilight trying to keep up with her. The purple mare's eyes were darting every which way, looking for some sort of danger that would jump out at them for whatever reason. She knew that the last time they were here, most of their problems stemmed from Nightmare Moon trying to stop them from getting to the Elements of Harmony, but her presence also kept a lot of the creatures away out of fear of the dark alicorn. Now, they didn't have that nuisance or protection, and that worried the bookworm.

All of a sudden, Twilight heard a familiar sound coming from nearby. She turned her head towards her companion, and saw that Pinkie was getting one of her twitches. Not only that, but it looked to be the worst kind of twitch. Her entire body was vibrating intensely, the pink mare's eyes wide open as she took in the information her sudden spasm delivered to her. The studious pony gave a hard gulp as she watched her friend shake around, finding a breath held in her lungs as her companion stopped.

"Woah..."

"W... what was it, Pinkie Pie?" Asked Twilight.

"I dunno! I've only felt his kind of twitch once before, and it was really vague then, and just as vague now. It's not as big as the last time, but it's definitely a doozy!"

"That's what I was afraid of... is it close? Is it going to happen soon?"

"I'm not sure... but it definitely feels like it's coming from the other side of Black Snooty's castle! It's going to happen there for sure! I wonder what its gonna be? Oh, I can't wait to see it!" Pinkie Pie said, her cheerful smile returning to her face.

"Past the castle? Then... right in our way... I just hope it's only as simple as what your last doozy turned out to be." Twilight replied, hoping that at least the journey to the doozy wouldn't be as hard as the last one.

After the exchange, Twilight Sparkle and Pinkie Pie continued walking down the small path they once walked over a year ago, keeping an eye out for danger. Things were quiet in the forest; not a single sound could be heard save for the bouncing of Pinkie, the clip clopping of Twilight, and the worried breaths that the purple mare was letting out.

"It's just so quiet... why aren't there any noises? The forest wasn't nearly this quiet the last time we were here..." The bookworm said as her eyes darted around, ever searching for danger.

"Hmm..." Pinkie tried reply, but her shudders returned. "O-o-o-oh m-m-m-my, it's get-t-t-ing close!" She waited a moment for her shudders to stop before continuing, "Oh, there, it stopped again. But it's starting to get

worse! Whatever it is, we're getting close..." She finished, her brow furrowing in thought.

"Well, whatever it is, I-" Twilight began, only to have her words halted suddenly by a loud crashing sound coming from in front of them.

From the side of the path, a few trees were knocked to the side as a hulking figure, standing at double the height of any pony, rippling with muscles, and sporting a coat of black fur suddenly burst out in to the path. Once it was completely out in the open, it turned its head, or rather, heads, to look to the two ponies it had found. All three of its heads began to growl fiercely, hunger shining in all six of its eyes.

Pinkie Pie was frozen on the spot. Normally, she was good at dealing with fear, but when faced with giant, multi-headed monsters, she suddenly froze up. Twilight, on the other hand, began to scream.

"Ahhhhh! I-it's a cerberus! I d-didn't think those existed anymore! Pinkie! Run!" She said, shouting to her companion, shaking her to get her moving.

The cerberus advanced on the ponies, getting ready to pounce on the two potential meals. The purple pony prodded Pinkie over and over, but the pink pony simply wouldn't move on her own. As she noticed the great beast ready to pounce, she realized she had to act now, or neither of them would make it.

Twilight Sparkle shut her eyes tightly, her horn beginning to glow. The beast lowered itself for the pounce. The unicorn placed a leg around the frightened earth pony. The cerberus pounced in to the air. The magic became focused, and a fraction of a second before those large teeth met their mark, the two ponies vanished in to thin air.

The cerberus crashed in to the ground as it's prey suddenly vanished. Fifty yards behind it, Twilight Sparkle and Pinkie Pie suddenly reappeared in a flash of light, the pink pony shaking her head and looking around, while her purple friend put a hoof to her head. The unicorn had mastered teleporting herself, but teleporting anypony else with her still made her dizzy. It took her a quick moment to regain her senses, but luckily for her, she had the time to spare.

"Ugh... okay. Pinkie! Now is the time to run! Go!" She shouted, trying to get her friend to focus.

"Wha? Oh! Right!" Pinkie replied, her shock fading and her fear powering her legs to run.

Together, they fled as fast as their hooves could take them, running away from the great beast behind them. They managed to get quite the head start, but the cerberus had recovered, and was now making chase. Its hulking size slowed it down, but it was still slightly faster than what it was chasing, and it gained more and more distance with each passing moment.

"Oh no! What are we going to do? I haven't recovered from the last teleport yet and it's gaining on us!" Twilight shouted, panic lacing her voice.

"I don't know! I have-" Pinkie suddenly stopped her words, but not her legs, and let out a large gasp. "There! That's what's going to save us!"

The purple mare looked forward, trying to see what her companion was talking about, "But... all I see is the river! That'll doom us even sooner!"

"No, silly! Come on! I'll show you!" Her friend replied, before dashing on up ahead.

The cerberus was a mere forty yards behind them when they finally reached the river. Twilight was full of panic, her thoughts racing on how to get out of this. As she was still recovering, a two pony teleport was out of the question, and she couldn't very well leave her friend behind. However, to her surprise, Pinkie suddenly dunked her head in to the water, and from the mumbles and bubbles, seemed to be shouting something in to the river.

Her eyes opened wide as she realized what the pink pony was up too.

The cerberus was only a few more leaps and bounds away, but it suddenly halted in its tracks as it saw something rise up out of the water. A massive, purple sea serpent suddenly came in to view, water splashing over the area in its wake. The beast saw the giant creature's eyes lock on to it a mere moment before it took a deep breath and leaned forward, letting out a massive roar that shook the ground beneath it. The three-headed hound stood motionless in shock for a moment, before its ears flattened, its heads lowered, and it turned tail and ran away, whimpering in to the dark forest.

Twilight's mane went from soaking wet to standing on end as she was splashed, then frightened by the massive roar. After shaking her head to get her head straight, she looked up to the sea serpent and broke out in to a smile, "Steven! You saved us!"

"Oh my, that tickles the throat..." Steven said as he rubbed his throat for a moment before noticing Twilight. "Oh, why of *course*, Miss Sparkle! A gentleman would never let a lady come to harm! When I heard Miss Pie's cry for help, I just knew I had to come to your aid!"

Twilight smiled wide. They had kept in contact with the fabulous sea serpent on occasion after they had first met. The river that ran through the Everfree Forest spread out in to the rest of Equestria, so while this was his home, he left to go visiting on rare occasions. "So that's what you were doing, Pinkie. I had no idea what you were up to until you started yelling in to the river."

"Well duuuh! What did you think I was doing? Trying to see if I could sleep with the fishes? I just knew Stevie had to be here! I knew he'd help us. Thank you, Stevie! You're the best!" Said Pinkie, praising the large purple serpent.

"Oh it was no trouble at *all*! I'd gladly do it again if it meant my friends were safe. But, I just have to know, why are you two here? It's ever so dangerous, and with only the two of you, it must be simply *horrid*!"

"Well, it has been so far. But we've still got a long way to go yet, and we can't stop now. Apple Bloom is sick, and we're trying to find some medicine for her, but the only place where we can get it is far on the other side of the forest, quite a distance past the castle. And, while I thank you, Steven, and it's great to see you again, I have a favor to ask. Do you think you could get us to the other side of the river? We're in a big hurry." Said Twilight, having calmed down enough to think straight and want to get back on track.

"Oh my! That's Miss Applejack's little sister, isn't it? Well! I simply cannot interrupt you further! Hop on, and I'll take you across in no time at all!" He said as he puffed out his chest in pride, before leaning down and allowing the two ponies to hop on to his hands.

Since there was only two of them, instead of making a bridge for them, he simply decided to pick them up and carry them over; much easier for him.



As the two hopped on, the pink one spoke, "Thank you, Stevie! When we get back from this, I promise to throw you a 'Best Sea Serpent Ever!' party, and I'll invite everpony in Ponyville to come and see how great you are!"

"Oh, you are too kind, Miss Pie. Now, off you two go! Be careful now!" Steven replied, having already put the ponies down on the other side of the not so wide river.

"Thank you again, Steven, and I'll make sure to get you a nice gift for your party." The purple mare said as she hopped off of the hand, giving one last look behind her to wave a hoof in goodbye.

Steven waved goodbye to the two, receiving a couple of waves in kind, the pink pony's being much more energetic and bouncy. Now that they were out of immediate danger, the two ponies moved on, leaving their water bound friend behind with the intent to reward him another time. From what she remembered of their journey through here a year ago, this was going to be the easiest part of their trip, a straight shot to the castle; as long as the bridge was still holding up at least.

"Hey, Pinkie Pie. Are you still getting that twitch?" Twilight asked, wondering if whatever they were destined to see was still there.

Her companion took a moment to pause, put a hoof to her chin, and frown in thought, "I'm not sure... maybe! I haven't gotten the twitch in almost ten minutes now. But, I'm still confident in my Pinkie sense. Whatever I felt should still be there." She said, going back to her normal bounce.

"Well, I hope that, whatever it is, it's going to be good news at the very least. Come on, we need to keep moving if we want to get back in time. We'll probably be the last ones back, but we shouldn't keep them waiting too long at least."

"Okie dokie lokie, Twilight! Lead the w-w-w-w-ay!" Replied Pinkie Pie, her body being hit by a sudden burst of the shudders.

"Oh my..." Was all Twilight said as she looked first to her friend, then ahead towards their destination.

It took them some time, but they eventually did reach the chasm, and were dismayed to find that the bridge had collapsed, either from age or some

pesky animal. Twilight knew the castle was a stone's throw away now, with only this large scar in the earth in their way, and beyond that... she feared what they might end up meeting, but she wouldn't give up, no matter what.

# Chapter 4

## Applejack and Rarity, One

Applejack waited impatiently for Rarity to finish her task. After having left the library, in order to get things prepared for the various trips required to get the plants for Apple Bloom's cure, the white mare, herself, and their two pegasus friends all went to the unicorn's boutique in order to get the fliers a set of warm clothing. The only trouble was the nitpicking of the dressmaker.

"No... Those simply do not go with your eyes, Fluttershy. Here, let me try a different shade." Rarity said, removing the fabric from the pegasus' side and fetching another piece.

"Oh umm... but we have to... oh alright..." Fluttershy replied shyly, wanting to address the urgent matter, but at the same time, not wanting to disappoint her spa buddy.

"Come on, Rarity! Hurry up! We need to get going; right now!" Rainbow Dash shouted, hopping up and down in her impatience.

"Shush, these things take time! We have to make sure you two are warm and snug, and look fabulous at the same time. Now, let me work!" The white mare said, taking on a haughty tone of voice.

The farmer pony sat off to the side of the room, watching the scene as she gritted her teeth together. As the lot of them continued to bicker, her anger grew and grew. While her sister was in danger, they were all messing around with clothing, and it was grating on her terribly. After Rarity decided to try yet another color of fabric, Applejack caved, unable to take it anymore. She had to put her hoof down.

And put it down she did, enough to shake the entire boutique, coupled with an attention grabbing bang. "Alright! Ah can't take none a this no more! Rarity! Give them a set ah warm clothes raight this instant! My lil' sister's sick as all get out, and yer here pickin' out fashion and silly fru fru nonsense! Can't ya see how important this is!" Applejack shouted, panting lightly after her tirade.

After a moment, however, she calmed, "Please, hurry up, would ya? We ain't got a lot ah time." She said, looking to the white mare with the most pathetic, helpless look she had ever let her face bear.

Rarity was taken aback, as were the other two, at the sudden outburst. But what hit her the most was the look on Applejack's face, a look that told her just how distressed the orange mare was about everything that was happening to them. She hung her head in shame, realizing just how bad her behavior was at a time like this, "I'm... oh, I'm terribly sorry, Applejack. You're absolutely right! I can't fathom how you feel right now, and I apologize for wasting time. Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, front and center, please." She said, apologizing and getting back on track.

The two pegasi obeyed the white mare, one out of inability to say no and the other because she had a feeling this would get them moving faster. With a flourish of magic, thick cloth flew from the shelves and enveloped the yellow and blue mares, covering the two of them in the fabric needed to make their clothing. After a few quick and precise snips, followed by a flurry of needles and thread, they found themselves wearing a matching set of thick, red parkas with hoods, made from several layers of fabric to help block the wind and keep them warm. They didn't look fabulous, but they'd get the job done.

"There, that should do. It's thick, so it should keep you warm. And I've used multiple layers of fabric that can fold out should you need a blanket. Your wings might get cold, however, since I don't think I can cover them without robbing you of your ability to fly. These are probably the second ugliest things I've ever made, but they'll get the job done. Now, off with you both!" Rarity said, commenting on her work before shooing the two pegasi out the door.

"You don't have to tell me twice! C'mon, Fluttershy, let's get a move on." Rainbow Dash said, quickly zipping out of the door and in to the sky.

"Oh, umm, alright. Thank you, Rarity. And don't worry, Applejack, I'm sure we'll find what Zecora needs to help Apple Bloom." Said Fluttershy.

"Thanks, sugarcube. Now you run along now, don't keep Dash a waitin'." The farmer pony replied with a nod.

Giving a small smile, Fluttershy turned to the door and made her way out, leaving Rarity and Applejack alone in the boutique.

"Well, I believe we should get going then. I know for a fact that there's only one store in Ponyville that sells medicinal herbs, so we should start there, see if we can figure out how to get some of the herb before week's end." The white mare said.

"Yeah, Ah'm thinkin' yer raight about that. Ahright, let's get goin' then. Ah got some bits at tha barn if'n we need it, and thankfully that ain't too far away. We should be the first ones back... which makes me nervous. Or rather, Ah know Ah'll be a nervous wreck waitin' on the others."

"Oh, don't worry about the bits, I'll take some from here and you can pay me back some other time. As for the wait, well, I'll do what I can to keep you sufficiently distracted to the best of my abilities. It's the least I could do."

"Well that's mighty kind of ya, sugarcube. Alright, let's get a move on."

Rarity gave a nod to Applejack before levitating a nearby set of saddlebags on to her back, a fashionable accessory that she always kept stocked with a few bits just in case. This time, she was finished much more quickly, believing she needed little for a simple trip to a local store. "All ready! You can lead the way, if you like."

"Mah pleasure."

Together, the two of them left the boutique behind and made their way in to town. As much as Applejack wanted to run as fast as her legs could take her, she knew she was better off taking her sweet time. The more time she spent doing this, the less time she'd have to spend standing around feeling useless and worried.

"So, I ain't never been to the store. What's it like?" The farmpony asked, trying to stir some conversation to help keep her mind off things.

"Oh, it's just a small place, owned by the most wonderful of doctors. He's quite the handsome stallion and intelligent too, from what I've seen. He knows all manner of curatives and is quite well versed in languages. I once went in to buy some cough medicine for Sweetie Belle and he was reading

a book written in some strange text that I'm sure could baffle even Twilight! Though, I'm not too sure on that last part." Rarity said, giggling lightly as she gossiped.

"Well, that's mighty dandy then. If'n he's a smart one then he should know just what we need and how ta get it."

"Oh, I'm sure he can. Oh! Look, there's his shop now." The unicorn said, pointing a hoof towards one of the smaller shops on the outskirts of the small town.

The place looked simple enough, with a colorful sign hanging out front with a picture of a ginseng root on it. The inside was a little dim, lit only by a single candle and the light pouring in from the windows. Various plants hung in the windowsill in order to get precious sunlight and keep growing, while the front of the shop housed several plant gardens.

The orange mare admired the scenery for only a brief moment before growing serious and making for the door. Since it was a shop, she didn't bother knocking and simply opened the door, barging inside.

"Hello? Anypony home?" She called out, not seeing anypony behind the counter.

"What? Oh, just a moment!" Came a voice from what could only be a back room.

Moments later, a brown earth pony, with wild brown hair of a darker shade, and an hourglass cutie mark stepped out in to the open, a smile upon his face. "Oh! Customers, hello there." He said with a hint of an accent.

"Ah was told yer tha doctor that owns this place, that raight?"

"Oh, yes indeed! My name is Doctor Whooves, but you can call me Doctor."

"Just... Doctor?"

"Yes. Just Doctor, or The Doctor if you prefer. So, what can I do for you?" He asked.

Shaking her head, Applejack got her thoughts straightened out, "Err, raight. You see, my lil' sister's real sick, and we need a plant to help fix her. Our friend, Zecora, said she orders it from you, but it was late or somethin'? Know anything about it?"

"Oh my, I'm sorry to hear that. Let's see, Zecora... oh yes, that wonderful Zebra! Yes, I know just what she orders. Her whole shipment was late this month, something mucked up in shipping from my supplier. She gets the rare stuff that can't grow around here, you see, so I have to order it in. Remember the name of the plant you needed?" He asked, his mind already narrowing down the possibilities.

"It... it was... oh consarnit! Rarity, do you remember which is was?" Applejack asked.

"Why yes, as a matter of fact I do. I believe it was called Mandragora Solanales. At least, that's what Twilight called it before we left." Rarity replied.

"Mandragora Solanales... ah, yes, I remember that one. Part of Zecora's package for sure. Well, I can't get any here, but if you really need it fast, I can tell you where to get some easily enough."

"Ya can, where?" The farmer pony asked, excitement filling her voice.

"Well, from the source, where I get all my special order plants. Orange Pharmaceuticals in Manehattan, it's one of their many business endeavors." He replied.

"Manehattan? Oh! That's just wonderful! I've never been there before, but I've heard it's such a big city! Not quite as fancy as Canterlot, but filled to the brim with sophistication!" Gushed the unicorn.

Applejack, meanwhile, merely stared ahead blankly for a few moments; until she brought up a hoof to her face and groaned.

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"You can't be serious! You mean that..." Rarity said, trailing off.

Sighing, Applejack responded, "Yes, Rarity. Ah used ta live in Manehattan for all of a month or so. And yes, it was with mah Aunt and Uncle Orange,

who just so happen ta be tha owners of that there blasted medicine comp'ny that has tha plant we need."

"Now that is quite the coincidence, my dear. But how come you never told me you've ever been in Manehattan?"

"Cause Ah had an awful time there, even if it did lead to mah cutie mark. Ah felt so outta place it wasn't even funny, Ah had ta be somepony Ah wasn't, and I was so darn homesick... So Ah don't like ta bring it up unless somepony asks me or somethin'."

"Well, for a pony like you, I can see that being a problem. You and high class don't seem to... mix. But, that's just part of what makes you unique and wonderful, so don't get me wrong, Applejack." Rarity hastily added, smiling to her friend.

The two had gotten along better and understood each other a little more after the sleepover at Twilight Sparkle's house; however, they still butted heads on occasion, due to them being from such different worlds. Applejack appreciated Rarity's attempt to be nice about the whole thing, and while the unicorn's gushing had been bothersome, it proved to be a good distraction to keep herself calm.

"Yeah, Ah know that now fer darn sure. Ah'm not lookin' forward to seein' that place, but fer Apple Bloom, Ah gotta do it, no matter what!" She said, taking a pause to stand tall and proud for a moment.

Rarity smiled to Applejack and admired her conviction to her family and loved ones, feeling thankful for having such a friend. "Well, then we best be moving faster then, hmm? If I'm right, the train to Manehattan is leaving in an hour, and with the station being so far out of town, we've quite a ways to go. I'm just glad I brought my hat to help keep me cool and not get all euch... sweaty."

Applejack chuckled slightly at her friend's strange obsession with cleanliness as she thought about the last hour. The two had experienced very different reactions to learning that they had to go to Manehattan, and it was lucky for them that the daily train had not left yet. Since it was a long trip, they had decided to split up for a short time to get supplies. While Applejack just filled her saddlebags with apples and bits, Rarity brought a



whole new outfit and sun hat for the occasion. With only a little over an hour to spare, the two made their slightly hurried way to the train station.

"...jack? Applejack! Snap out of it, we're here!" The unicorn said, prodding the side of the orange mare's head.

"Bwuh?" The farmer blinked and shook her head, "Oh uh... mighty sorry, Rarity. Ah was getting all worried about Apple Bloom again."

The white mare merely smiled, "It's alright. In any case, I hope I can keep your attention while on the train so that you needn't dwell on your worries for the entire trip. It's a three hour ride and we still need to get tickets and get seated. You know the hassle we went through the last time we took a train! Though, that was mostly due to your tree..." She said, thinking back on it.

"Heh... yeah, sorry about that. But that tree was mighty important ta me. But anyway, let's go get them tickets and sit down. Ah haven't had a wink ah sleep in... well, only about ten hours, but it's bin a harsh ten hours." Applejack said, her head hanging low to the ground for a moment as she sighed.

"Well, no worries. Hmm... how about I help keep your mind off things for a little while, and help talk you to sleep. I have a lot of preparing to do if I want to I want to look presentable for Manehattan, so I'll probably use your nap time to sneak off and get ready!" Said Rarity, giggling happily about all of the sights she planned on seeing after they'd acquired the plant.

"Alright. Sounds like a plan ta me."

Together, the two walked up to the podium and bought a pair of round trip tickets. At 10 bits each, it dipped a bit in to each pony's traveling funds, but being the top business ponies in Ponyville, they had the bits to cover it. According to the round trip ticket, they had up to three days before it expired, but Applejack was hoping to be back in just one. She knew they'd have to spend the night, which made Rarity quite happy, but she hoped that it was only the one night.

The two waited another fifteen minutes in line to get on to the train, looking around the area as they did so. This was a central hub station for a lot of the smaller towns, and sent trains in two directions; one train went even

deeper in to the outlying regions of Equestria to places like Appleloosa, while the other went to Manehattan, where ponies could grab a second train if they wanted to get to Fillydelphia, Canterlot, and a couple of other major cities.

Once on board, they rechecked their tickets and found they had a booth all to themselves; it was quite roomy, big enough to allow them to walk around a little, and two couches facing one another, each big enough to accommodate two ponies. Applejack took her seat near the window, leaving the other couch for Rarity, and set her saddlebags down on the floor to get comfy.

"Alraight... time ta try not worryin' fer three hours..." The orange mare said as she sighed lightly, hating not being able to move around but having no choice in the matter.

"Fret not! As I've said, I'll do what I can to keep your attention until you fall asleep. Now... is there anything you'd like to talk about, or shall I just go on about whatever comes to mind?" The white pony said, wanting to give her friend some peace of mind in whatever way she could.

"Well uh... Hmm... anythin' happen to you today? Besides, you know, this." Applejack said, unsure of what to really say.

"Well yes, this is quite the event, isn't it? Hmm..." Rarity pondered deeply, tapping a hoof to her chin, "Oh! Well, you were at Twilight's at the time, but a strange thing happened earlier today with Spike."

"Spike? Oh, right. I almost fergot about the lil' fella. Where'd he run off to, anyway?" The curious mare asked.

"Well, it was just after Rainbow Dash dragged Twilight across town..."

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Rarity put a hoof to her mane in order to keep steady in the wake of Rainbow Dash, coughing a little as dust flew up in to her face. "Oh my, that pony could do with a little more grace."

"Well, I guess they'll handle that. Should we head after them now, Rarity?" Spike asked, quite pleased with being able to ride on his crush's back, at least for a little while.

"I do believe we should, Spike. You can get off now, I won't be running very fast, since the situation is going to be in good hooves." She said, feeling a twinge of worry, but feeling better as she feels her friends have it handled.

"Oh uhh... alright then." The baby dragon said, sighing as he obeyed the unicorn's wishes and starting walking alongside of her.

At least he was still close to her.

"I hope that all of this is resolved quickly. I've never seen Applejack so worried in all the time I've known her, and it's troublesome to see such a strong willed pony like her so... Umm... Spike, are you alright?" She asked, looking to the baby dragon.

Spike had both of his hands over his mouth as if he were gagging on something, and a moment later, a loud, flaming belch erupted from his throat. Soon after, the flame condensed, and in a flash of light, the flame transformed in to a scroll. "Oh! It's a letter from Princess Celestia!"

Rarity looked on, thinking the act quite disgusting, but at least it served as a reliable postal service. "Oh really now? What does it say, Spike?" She asked curiously.

Lifting up the scroll, he unfurled it and began to read:

*Dear Spike, "Oh! It's for me! Oh, umm..."* Clearing his throat, he continued.

*Dear Spike,*

*An emergency has come to my attention, and I urgently need you here in Canterlot. I will be casting the emergency return spell a few minutes after you receive this letter, so please, be ready.*

*Princess Celestia.*

"Well, that was awfully brief for a letter from the Princess. It must be terribly urgent..." Rarity said, a look of dread covering her face.

"Yeah, she usually writes quite a bit. And she's even busting out the return spell. I hope I can help with whatever it is that's going on there." He said, starting to look worried himself.

"What is this return spell, if I may ask?"

"Well, it's a special spell that uses her link to me. Normally we just use the link to send letters back and forth, but the return spell is more powerful. It can bring me right to her from anywhere in Equestria. I've only used it once before."

"A teleportation from such a distance? My, that *is* some powerful magic in the works. Well, I wish you the best of luck then."

"Thanks, Rarity." He replied, "Oh! I feel it coming now. Back up a bit, Rarity, don't want you getting caught in it by accident." He said, trying to sound macho.

Rarity giggled slightly as he displayed and backed away. "Alright, Spike. Now you make sure to do a good job. We can't have Equestria in danger, and I do hope it isn't."

"I hope so too..." Spike said before taking a large breath.

A few twinkles of magical energy began to appear around him as he gathered his breath. Once he seemed to be ready, he began to spin in place before letting out a burst of green fire. The flames started to surround him, and soon, much like his scrolls, he was turned in to magical green smoke that took off in to the skies, supposedly towards Canterlot.

Rarity stood there, blinking for a moment as she processed the short spectacle she had just witnessed. This was now two possible emergencies in one day, and it was starting to make her frazzled. She took a moment to gather her thoughts before heading back to the Library. She'd have to inform Twilight of Spike's sudden disappearance.

Even though she took her time, it had only taken her a few minutes to reach Twilight's house, and when she entered, she could feel the weight in the air.

"Oh! Rarity! You're finally here. Where's Spike?" Twilight Sparkle suddenly asked, being the first to notice her entrance.

The unicorn could see quite a few ponies huddled around a very sick looking Apple Bloom almost immediately upon entering the room. This was

the weight she felt, the weight of dread from everypony in the room. Quickly, she came to a decision and began to speak, "Oh well... Spike got a letter from Canterlot, and was asked to go there. I'm not sure why, but the Princess seemed eager to get him there pretty quickly. So he umm... left to go meet his carriage. It shouldn't be anything to worry about, my dear."

Rarity had a big, innocent smile on her face as she rambled off the little lie. She didn't want to impact these worried ponies with even more bad news, and besides, if Celestia was on the job, it shouldn't be a problem and nothing for them to worry about.

"Really? That fast? Well, I suppose if he's needed... Come on in, I'll tell you what happened."

The white pony gave a nod as she entered, "Of course... please, tell me why everypony looks so sad."

"...and she told me the story. But, well, you know this part, and the rest of it as well." Rarity said, finishing up her story.

Once she had stopped telling her tale, making sure not to tell Applejack the part about her lying, she was finally able to hear a noise coming from the farmpony. She hadn't noticed, but as she recanted her tale, she'd lost track of her friend and merely looked to the walls and the sky, having been enraptured by her own words. The noise she heard, while offensive in any other setting, put a smile on her face.

It was the sound of Applejack snoring.

"You sleep tight, Applejack..."

With her friend asleep, Rarity decided to watch over her for a just a little longer. Once she was satisfied that the farmer was indeed resting peacefully, she took out her supplies and began to dress herself up for the big city.

"Manehattan, here I come!"

# Chapter 5

## Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash, One

"Ugh! Finally! Now we can get moving." Rainbow Dash said, sighing as she and Fluttershy trotted away from Rarity's boutique.

"Oh, well, it wasn't all that bad. She just wanted to help you... and we did get these nice outfits." The yellow pegasus said, her face taking on to a smile as she admired her new cold weather clothes, liking them despite Rarity's harsh critique.

"Yeah, there is that. Considering how high up I think we're going, these clothes should keep us from freezing our flanks off." Dash said as she looked over her parka, "Too bad they can't cover our wings, that's going to be bad once we reach the mountain... Anyway, I'm ready to go. I have all my things in my cloud home, so I can grab that in no time. What about you?"

"Oh I umm... I almost forgot about all of the animals! I have to find somepony that'll take care of them... I'm sorry Rainbow Dash." The shy pegasus said, lowering her head.

"What? Unnngh... But we have to hurry Fluttershy!" The blue pegasus shouted.

When she saw that Fluttershy cowered slightly at her words, she softened her expression a bit and sighed, "Sorry. All this is just getting to me, I guess. Alright. I'll go and get my things; you go and find somepony to watch your animals. And try to be quick about it."

"Oh, yes, alright. I'm so sorry, Rainbow. I'll try and hurry up... so I'll be going now; If that's alright with you, that is..."

Rainbow Dash groaned in frustration and decided to just fly off without a response. The pegasus took to the clouds, leaving her friend to deal with whatever she needed to do. She was anxious to get under way, not wanting to waste any time, not with the emergency she just witnessed.

The blue mare looked out on to the horizon from her high vantage point, but even from up in the sky, she could only just see the peak of Mount Marebrum, which was good, because that served as a beacon to their destination. The bad part was the fact that it was still miles and miles away, and while she felt confident she could make it on her own, she had to take Fluttershy with her, and she feared the yellow pegasus couldn't handle it. But, while she didn't want to get slowed down, nor did she want her oldest friend in danger, she knew that she needed a partner in this, just in case something went wrong; somepony had to get the flower back to Zecora after all, no matter what.

After she reached her cloud home, Dash immediately flew inside and began to pack her things. She wanted to travel light, so she only packed enough food for two days, her goggles, and a big blanket to keep her warm in case the parkas just weren't enough if they had to spend a night on the mountain for whatever reason. With everything that she thought she needed in her bags, she tossed them on to her back and hopped a few times to judge the weight.

"Alright, not too heavy. Perfect for a long distance flight. I just hope Fluttershy is up for it." Dash said to herself.

Once she felt ready, it was a quick flight over to Fluttershy's cottage, where she hoped to find the yellow pegasus. Thankfully, her hopes were realized as she saw the pink maned mare talking to one of the local ponies. As she touched down, she started to hear their conversation.

"...see, I need to go and help, so, if you don't mind, could you, umm... watch my animals for me, for just a little while? Pretty please?" Fluttershy asked.

The earth pony with carrots as her cutie mark just gave a laugh, "Oh, don't worry about it, Fluttershy! I owe you one after you saved my garden a few weeks back. This is the least I could do for you. So you do what you need to do, and I'll make sure your animals are okay for when you get back."

The pegasus received a smile, and gave one in return, "Thank you so much, Carrot Top! This is going to help us so much!"

"Glad I could help!"

"Hey, Fluttershy!" Came the familiar voice of Rainbow Dash.

The blue pegasus watched as her friend jumped in fright before turning around, "Oh! Rainbow Dash, you've made it just in time. Well, almost. I still have to pack a couple of things, but I have an animal sitter now, so it won't be long."

"Alright, perfect. Just remember, you have to pack light for this. We're going a long way, so we can't be getting too tired on the way there and not have the energy to get back, alright?" Asked Rainbow.

"Oh, alright. I'll make sure to do that. Oh, and Carrot Top, you can come in with me so I can show you around a bit." Replied Fluttershy.

After she received a nod from the earth pony, the two disappeared in the cottage for a while, leaving an impatient Rainbow Dash outside.

The blue mare wanted to be doing something, and without many options, she began to do some preflight stretches. She normally didn't need them, but the feeling of the muscles in her wings stretching out helped to calm her down, and prep her for an extremely long flight. Her limbs soon became as limber as they could be, and just in time, as moments later Fluttershy has left her cottage, a couple of bags on her back as well.

"Finally! There you are, Fluttershy. So, got everything you need? Ready to go?" She asked, her words spilling out rapidly.

"Yes. I have what I need in case of an emergency. I'm ready to go now. Thank you for waiting Rainbow Dash." Fluttershy replied, giving a bright smile to her fellow pegasus.

Dash looked at the peaceful smile for a moment before returning it, "Alright, great! Come on, we should get moving now. I think we should fly as high as we can and do some shallow angle gliding, like they taught us in flight school."

"Shallow angle? But won't that take longer than proper flight?"

"Yeah, but... I wanna make sure it's something you can handle. You barely fly more than a few feet off the ground anymore, so it'll be easier on you. And besides, it'll conserve our strength just in case. I may be the



weathermare around Ponyville, but I don't know what the weather's going to be like on our way to the mountain, it might surprise us."

"Oh, I'm sorry... I wish I wasn't going to be a burden to you..." The yellow mare said, lowering her head.

"Oh! Uhh... hey! Don't worry about it, Shy. It'll be nice to have the company, and besides, it's always good to have somepony watching my back."

"Really? Well... alright then. I guess we should get started. It's a long way, isn't it?"

"It is, but it's nothing we can't handle in a few hours... maybe eight, if the wind is against us. Alright, so, you remember your gliding training, right?"

Fluttershy gave a nod, "Yes. It was one of the things I was alright at. Gaining height was always my biggest problem, but I've gotten over that now." She said, standing tall for a moment of pride.

"Great! Well, let's go then."

With that, the two pegasi took off in to the skies. As much as Fluttershy didn't like going too high, having a friend nearby made it easier, especially with no danger around. Once the air began to thin, they stretched out their wings and glided through the air currents, the two now on a straight course for Mount Marebrum.

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It had been hours now since the two of them had taken flight. They chatted casually amongst themselves as they glided to their destination, attempting to pass the time with idle gossip on from Fluttershy, and flight tips from Rainbow Dash. While the blue pegasus only paid mild attention to the casual chatting, the yellow pony soaked in every bit of information Dash was telling her. Despite the knowledge, however, the shy pony still found it hard at times, especially as the hours passed.

Out of the corner of her eye, Rainbow noticed exhaustion was starting to fill her friend's expression, "Hey, Fluttershy, are you alright over there? You're looking tired."

"Oh, I am? Well... I haven't flown this long before in my entire life. It's a lot harder than I imagined it would be. My wings are feeling really stiff too... I'm sorry if I'm slowing you down, Rainbow Dash."

"Hey, don't sweat it... hey, look, if you're getting tired, we can touch down for now, take a break. I'm seeing some nasty storm clouds up ahead anyway, and I don't think either of us wants to get caught in that."

"Alright, well umm... do you want to find a spot for us? If you don't mind, that is..."

"Sure! No problem! I'll have us a spot to sit in no time at all."

Rainbow Dash smiled to Fluttershy, receiving one in kind, before she flew down to the ground. She knew Fluttershy wouldn't be far behind, so rushing ahead was not that big a deal, and it gave her more time to find a clearing for them to rest in. The forest was thick below them, but after a bit of search, it wasn't long before she found a nice and open spot for them to take a break.

"Hey! Fluttershy! Down here! This is a good spot for a break!" She shouted.

As she looked above, she saw Fluttershy descending, "Alright! I'm coming!"

Dash's eyes widened as she saw her friend get a wing cramp. The overused muscles were wracked with a spasm, the feathered appendage going rigid, and the yellow pegasus began to fall. Acting quickly, she tried to get to Fluttershy before she hit anything, but she winced as she saw the shy pony scrape her side against a branch. Luckily, she managed to catch her falling companion before she hit the ground, "Woah! I got you, don't worry!"

Fluttershy was whining softly, both from the wing cramp and from the sudden hit to her side, so without knowing what to do, Rainbow lowered the pegasus down to the ground and tried to lay her down as softly as possible.

"I didn't know you were that worn out, you should have said something." Dash said, a small frustration in her voice.

"I... I didn't want to slow you down..." Replied the injured pony.

Almost instantly Rainbow Dash's frustrations melted in to sympathy, and her face softened as she pulled back the parka to look at the scrape "Well, it's no big deal. A little rest and your wings will be good as new. And the scrape doesn't look that bad, but it's going to mess up your coat until it grows back..."

Fluttershy felt the pain begin to dull after a few moments, the initial sting making way for a throb as endorphins flowed through her. She turned her head to look at the damage done, just to be sure, and sighed in relief, "Alright... it's not that bad, at least. I won't be holding you back for too long... I'm sorry about all this, I wish I was a better flier..."

"Don't worry about it, not all of us can be as awesome as I am at flight. And beside, I was getting hungry anyway."

"Oh, alright." She replied, before looking to her injury again, "Hmm... but first, do you think you can do me a small favor, that is, if you want." She asked, her shyness still taking hold of her even to this day, though much less than when she first met her friends.

"No problem, what is it?"

"Well, in my bag, I brought some ointments, just in case. Do you think you put some of the stuff in the white bottle on to my scrape? I don't want it to get infected, and this will make it heal faster."

"Is that all? Well, with some reasons like that, I can't say no. Just hold on, let me get it."

The blue mare popped open her friend's bag with a quick flick of her nose, her eyes now trained on the contents of the bag. "Hmm... blue, green, purple... you sure packed a lot of st- Oh! White! Here we are."

"I brought enough medicine just in case. The blue ointment is for cuts, the green is for the colds or the flu, and the purple helps fight hypothermia."

The rainbow maned pegasus held the bottle of white ointment between both of her hooves as she pried the cork out with her teeth. With a pop, the stopper came loose, and she spat it on the ground, "Jeez, sounds like you came prepared for anything, I just brought some food and an extra blanket."

"Oh, well, that's good. I don't think I packed enough food for the whole trip, I didn't think it'd take this long..."

"No sweat, I can share. We might be hungry for when we get back, but then we can stuff our faces while we wait for Zecora to brew up a cure." Rainbow Dash said as she put poured some ointment on to Fluttershy's scrape.

The yellow mare winced slightly, but soon let out a sigh of relief, "That feels much better... thank you, Rainbow Dash." She said, turning her head away from the blue pegasus and resting her head on her forelegs.

"No sweat. I think that should be enough... maybe... I have no idea."

"It's umm... it's fine. Just be sure to re-cork the bottle, or it might spoil."

"Oh, sure."

Dash did as she was asked, and after she re-corked the bottle, she even placed it back in to Fluttershy's bag. "There... now we can take a break. We can share what I have first before we go in to what you have."

Oddly enough, she only got a nod in return this time, but she took it in stride, thinking that her fellow pegasus was too exhausted to do much else. She walked over to her bag and she opened the one she had stuffed with food. Inside was mostly just apples and junk food she had gotten from Applejack and Sugar Cube Corner a few days back, just quick things to eat while on the go. Since she now knew she had to conserve what supplies they had, since it was supposed to feed two ponies now, she only brought out a pair of apples for the both of them to share. She tucked hers under her wing, and brought the other over to her friend, setting it down on the ground as she released it from her teeth.

"Here, it's not much, but it's something for now at least. We can eat again in a few hours. I have half a dozen more apples and some cakes from Sugar Cube Corner. We'll call this a snack break and eat something bigger later. Sound alright?" She asked.

However, she got no response, "Fluttershy?"

Rainbow Dash walked over to the yellow pony, and started to look her over closely to make sure she was alright. As she walked around the pegasus to look at her face, she suddenly knew just what was wrong.

Fluttershy was asleep.

"Jeez... you must've been really tired." A pang of guilt rang through her chest as she fully realized this, "If I had'a known you were this tired, I would have stopped sooner..."

The information continued to weigh in on her, and her head lowered ever so slightly, "Sorry, Fluttershy. Maybe I should start paying more attention to ponies other than myself... I'll make sure you get better. Keep resting up." She whispered.

The blue mare ceased speaking after that, and merely sat down, took the apple from under her wing, and enjoyed her meal in the peace of the forest, letting her friend get the rest she needed, and deserved.

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It was hours later when she felt something moving beside her. It was also at this point that she realized she had fallen asleep as well. Looking to see what it was, she found that Fluttershy had rolled over in her sleep and an errant hoof gently fell on to the blue mare's side. Dash chuckled lightly before scooting away slowly, not wanting to wake her friend just yet.

Rainbow Dash got up and performed a few basic stretches, mostly to get the out the kinks she gained from sleeping on an uneven bed; it was a harsh transition from the clouds she was used too. Once she finished, she decided it was time to get moving again. It was the evening now, and they had a lot of ground to cover still, especially if they wanted to make it back in time.

"Alright, Fluttershy, time to wakey wakey..." She said as she moved over to her friend's side.

When she didn't get a response, she raised a hoof and poked at the shy pony for a moment. Still nothing. Quickly becoming impatient, she started to shove and shake her friend gently, just to wake her, "Shy! Wake up!"

The sudden burst of stimulus seemed to do the trick, causing the yellow pegasus suddenly jumped in fright, her eyes shooting open as she dove in to a bush, a loud squeak escaping from her mouth.

"Ugh..." Was all Rainbow Dash said as she brought a hoof to her face, "Well, at least you're awake. Sorry to rush you, but we should be going. You should be all rested now, right?" She asked.

A moment later, Fluttershy finally realized there was no danger and left the bushes to stand in the clearing again, an embarrassed blush on her face, "Oh um... sorry about that, Rainbow."

Dash watched as her friend stretched her wings, checking them over to make sure they didn't hurt anymore, "I think I'm okay to fly again for a while now. I'm all rested up, thank you very much for this, Dash."

"Hey, it's no sweat. I'd do anything for a friend. I also owe you one for being smart enough to bring medical supplies. If you hadn't, well, who knows what's going to happen up there."

Fluttershy gave a meek nod and a smile before she straightened out her saddlebags, "I'm ready to go, would you mind leading the way, Rainbow Dash?"

"No problem! I'll fly up and find a good spot to start gliding from. Hopefully that storm's passed by now."

The rainbow maned pegasus took to the air, getting a feel for the winds and scouting around. Luckily for them, the storm was looking to be finishing up, and would be gone by the time they got close to it. "Alright, Fluttershy! The coast is clear! This looks like a good height to start the gliding."

"Alright, I'm coming!"

Soon enough, Dash was joined by her companion, and the two set off, gliding their way towards the mountain.

"I can't tell... how much farther do you think it is?" Fluttershy asked.

"Well... from this distance, I can see the base of the mountain, which was a lot better than before when I could only see the peak. I'd say we'll make it

there by tomorrow, and then... yeah, by the time we make it back, it'll be about three days, which should be plenty of time to spare, I hope."

"I hope so too... poor little Apple Bloom. Why did this have to happen at all, let alone to her?" She asked.

"I wish I knew, cause then I could make whatever was behind it pay before kicking it out of Equestria!" She said, putting on a brave voice, "But, I don't know what it was, or what it could even be. I just hope that somepony out there knows how to deal with it for real, instead of just a cure to fix the aftermath."

"I hope so too, Dash... I hope so too."

Together, the two flew off towards the mountain, the light of the sunset bathing them in red and orange. They flew, with a hope in their hearts that this would all be better soon.

# Chapter 6

## Twilight and Pinkie Pie, Two

"Okay, Pinkie Pie. Think you can stop shaking around for a moment while I get us across this chasm?" Asked Twilight Sparkle as she looked to her twitchy companion.

"I-I-I think s-s-so!" Pinkie said, her voice vibrating with each shake from her doozy of a twitch.

Pinkie Pie closed her eyes in focus, trying to still the intense sensations that were assaulting her body. For a moment, it looked as if she was calming down, but alas, it was to no avail, and the twitches returned in full force, much to her dismay, "N-n-nope! Guess n-n-not!"

Twilight sighed, "Of course not. Alright, just... try to stay close, but no touching, I need full focus for this. Teleporting Spike with me is one thing, but you're much bigger than he is. When this is over, I'm going to research a much better group teleportation spell." She said before closing her eyes and focusing on the spell.

She grunted with effort as she focused her magic in to her horn. She was attempting to be a bit more precise with this one, since she had more time to work on it, and soon, her horn was glowing brightly.

"Ooo! P-p-pretty!" The pink pony said as she watched the show.

In a flash, Twilight's horn exploded with light that surrounded the two ponies, and in an instant, they were gone from the spot, only to re-appear a moment later, not just on the other side of the chasm, but directly in front of the Palace of the Royal Pony Sisters. The dilapidated castle stood before them, just as they had left it over a year ago.

"It's g-g-getting stronger! We must b-b-be close, T-T-Twilight!" Pinkie said after she re-appeared.

Twilight Sparkle stumbled around for a moment as the dizziness set in, but she quickly shook it away. She gave a nervous gulp as she looked to the



castle and steelled herself for what might lie in store for them, "Okay, Pinkie... we... well, I, will think of a plan as we go along. You just let me know when whatever is making you twitch happens, alright?"

Instead of speaking her reply, Pinkie Pie merely nodded a few dozen times, aided by her never ending twitch. With that, the two ponies made their way in to the dark and spooky castle. As they went inside, Twilight noticed that it wasn't as dark as it was the last time she was here. As far as she knew, the conditions were the same, but as she looked up to the sky, she noticed that the moon was shining more brightly than usual, something she found a little strange.

"I didn't realize it was already so late. The moon's already high in the sky, which means we've probably been in here for hours... how time flies when you're fearing for your life." She said dryly, "We should start to hurry up. If it's this late already, it's going to take a while to get back after we find the plant... Hopefully we'll get back in time."

Quietly, the two companions trotted through the palace, their hoofsteps, and Pinkie's shaking, were the only things either pony could hear, and it made them terribly nervous. After the unicorn's short speech about the time, they decided to pick up the pace, moving faster and faster through the building until they finally reached its end. Throughout the short trip, Twilight had been growing increasingly nervous, and her pink companion's twitches only became more intense.

However, when they reached the back of the castle and took a few tentative steps out in to the open, nothing happened.

"Well... that was a little anti-climactic." Twilight remarked.

"Y-y-yeah! Oh wait... here it comes!" Pinkie Pie suddenly shouted, her twitching reaching its most violent state, her body contorting in ways a pony simply shouldn't, before coming to a rest.

And then there was silence.

Twilight Sparkle was frozen on the spot, her nerves shot as she waited in the silence for something to happen. But after a scant few minutes, she saw nothing.

"Are you sure it's here, Pinkie? Because I don't see a-" She said as she started to walk forward.

However, she cut herself off as she sensed powerful magic in the area. She instantly recognized it as some sort of aura based spell, and she just stepped right in to it. She knew that whatever was creating it now knew she was here.

"Uh-oh..."

"What is it, Twilight?" Pinkie Pie asked.

"I'm not sure, but something knows we're he-"

"DO NOT COME ANY CLOSER!" Came a booming voice from the shadows.

The two companions leaped back in fright, wrapping their hooves around one another in their fear as they began to cower. They watched as a pair of glowing, white eyes appeared in the shadows, glaring maliciously at the two of them.

However, as the pair of eyes realized just who the two ponies were, they softened considerably, "Twilight Sparkle? Pinkie Pie? What are you two doing here?" The voice from before asked, now sounding much more friendly.

"What the? Wait... I recognize that voice." The purple unicorn said as her eyes widened.

It was then that the owner of the voice stepped out of the shadow, and there, bathed in bright moonlight, stood the Goddess of the Moon herself, Princess Luna.

"Princess Luna!" Twilight shouted as she quickly untangled herself from her companion in order to bow before the alicorn, and moments later, Pinkie did the same.

"There's no need for that, you two, not after what you did for me. But, my question from before still stands, what are you both doing here?" The moon Princess asked.

"I was hoping to ask you the same question, Princess." Twilight said as she raised her head, "You see, one of the fillies in Ponyville has come down with a terrible disease called White Demure, and so we came here looking for a cure before it's too late!"

"Oh no... it is as I've feared... Twilight, I'm afraid to tell you, but there's no known cure in all of Equestria for White Demure. Over a thousand years ago, before I was banished to the moon, this disease had struck and took from us several ponies. The only way we were able to end it was to quarantine the sick, as well as the source of it all. We let the ponies infected live out the days they had left, but when the disease finally took them, we had to call upon a old favour to annihilate what remained. The disease has already caught six ponies across Equestria... and now seven with your filly. I'm so sorry, Twilight Sparkle..." Luna said, hanging her head.

"But... but that's not true! Okay, while it might be true that there isn't a cure known in Equestria, we got a cure from somewhere outside of it! Zecora, a zebra from a far away land, knows how to cure White Demure. She just needs a few special ingredients, and me and the others are out to get it!" The purple unicorn said, the passion in her voice increasing as she went on.

Luna's eyes widened considerably at the news, "You speak the truth? There really is a cure after all? This is wonderful news! I shall make sure to reward this Zecora for her efforts... When this is all over, you're going to have to introduce me to her. In the past, we have not had very good politics with the Zebras, but now I see that there is much our cultures can learn from each other, so that will have to change. I will see about contacting my sister about this, and make sure that we just keep those infected ponies safe until you find what you need."

"Yes. We'll have the cure soon, we hope. One of the ingredients is on the edge of the Everfree, but we should be able to get to Zecora with a few days to spare before Apple Bloom's week is up. And with your help, Princess we can get it done faster!"

"Yeah! And when we get it done, we can throw all of those poor, sick ponies a big 'You're Cured' party! And you can come to, Luna! I haven't had

a party with you yet, well, except for that one time, but that was only one time, and so we gotta have another!" Pinkie Pie said, sounding ecstatic.

However, Luna's face fell a little, "I wish I could help, but, sadly, I won't be able to help you. I'm needed here, and I don't know for how much longer."

"But why? What's so important here that you can't help us find the cure." Twilight asked incredulously.

"Let me show you both." The Princess said before her horn began to glow. Moments later, a bubble appeared around the two ponies, the both of them looking at it curiously, "This will protect you as long as I'm here. Now come with me."

With that, she turned around and walked in to the shadows, the earth and unicorn ponies behind her following along.

Twilight Sparkle watched in awe as the once dark shadows of the Everfree seemed to light up, as if the moonlight was following the Princess and being her personal guide to wherever she might want to go. As they walked through the forest, they soon came upon a clearing, and what they saw within made the two mortal ponies gasp in shock.

The clearing held several creatures, critters ranging from snakes to bats, all surrounding a single, white flower. What made them gasp, however, was that each of the animals were frozen and white, just like how Zecora had described.

"This is the source of White Demure. A deadly flower with a sweet smell that attracts unknowing animals. From there, they spread out and, when the sickness overtakes them, they turn white, like this, and crumble to dust. That dust then settles in to the ground, and from it, grows a new flower, and the cycle begins anew. I've gathered up all of the sickened creatures in the forest, and sadly, it was too late for them. I found one near the outskirts of Ponyville, which might explain how your filly became ill. Ever since I found it, I've been guarding it, keeping creatures at bay and isolating the wind, so that it doesn't spread any further." The moon goddess explained.

"Oh my... This is terrible! Those poor animals... I'm so glad I sent Fluttershy with Rainbow Dash instead of making her come here... She'd be devastated!" The unicorn exclaimed, thinking about her shy friend.

"Though... Now I'm curious, about a couple of things, actually."

"What is it, Twilight Sparkle?" Asked Luna.

"Well, you don't have any visible protection, how is it that you are around this plant but not sick?"

"Ah, yes. Alicorn immortality helps to protect against many things, White Demure included." Luna replied.

"I thought as much, but wasn't sure... My other question is... What is Princess Celestia doing in all of this?"

"Ah yes, my dear sister. She's doing something equally important. You see, simple fire doesn't destroy this plant, only stalls it, sets it back a little while. Plus, the smoke that rises from it can serve to spread it even further. The only way to completely destroy it, the way we used before to rid ourselves of it, is dragon's fire."

"Oh my..."

"Yes. Back then, a dragon owed us a favor, so with the magic from my sister and I, we forcibly contained the dragon's fire breath as he destroyed this accursed plant. Now, however, we lack any dragon allies... Except for one."

Twilight furrowed her brow for a moment, before her eyes suddenly widened in understanding, "Spike!"

"That's right. However, since he's just a baby dragon, Celestia is using a spell to store up his little bursts of flame, a spell that I have yet to learn. Once he manages to breathe out enough flames, my sister will join me here, and together, we will immolate the area and completely annihilate the White Demure. And hopefully, it will be for the last time."

"Wow... That's... I wish you the best luck in that Princess."

"I thank you, Twilight Sparkle."

"Yeah! Good luck! Hopefully this stuff will get all burned away and it won't have to bother our friends ever again!" Pinkie Pie said, crossing her hooves over her chest.

"I hope so too, Pinkie." Twilight said. A moment later, an idea came to mind, and she turned back to Luna, "Princess Luna?"

"Yes, Twilight Sparkle?" Luna replied.

"Even though you're stuck here, is there any way you can still help us get the plant faster?"

"Hmm... You know, there just may be a way. How adept are you at teleportation spells?"

"Quite good! Well, good at teleporting myself, at least. It's a huge strain to extend the spell to cover other ponies. It makes me a little dizzy every time I try it..."

Luna looked shocked for a moment, "Are you serious? You can really stretch out a teleportation spell meant for one pony and make it cover two?" She asked incredulously.

"Umm... Y-yes?" Twilight replied nervously.

"That's amazing! I've never heard of a unicorn being able to do that! You're forcing the spell beyond its limits in ways that are simply amazing, Twilight Sparkle. No wonder you're my sister's prized student." She said with a smile. She gave a small chuckle as she saw the purple unicorn blush in embarrassment over the praise, but she quickly regained her serious demeanor, "Now, bow your head, Twilight Sparkle. Close your eyes and accept my gift to you."

The purple unicorn looked to the moon goddess curiously for a moment, but, in the end, she obeyed, bowing her head lightly and closing her eyes, ready for focus on whatever it was that the Princess was going to do.

Pinkie Pie made noises of awe as she watched Luna close her eyes and begin to glow. Magic seemed to surround the alicorn for a brief moment before it started to focus upwards, the glow growing brightly as it traveled

up her body, and soon, the whole area was lit up as the magical energy was focused entirely on the tip of her horn.

Slowly, she leaned down and touched her horn to Twilight's, and passed on the light. When she was finished, she pulled back and watched as the glow she left traveled down the purple unicorn's horn and down in to her head, the magical energy passing in to her mind and granting her the knowledge it held.

As the magical energy entered her head and fused with her mind, Twilight Sparkle's eyes snapped wide open, "I... I know the spell. A group teleportation spell! How'd you do that?"

"An ancient magic that unicorns used to use to transfer knowledge from one to another. While it worked well in teaching complex spells very quickly, it was like passing a bit from one pony to the next. While you now have the spell in your possession, I've lost it." Luna explained.

"Oh! Are you sure, Princess? I don't want to take this from you if you won't be able to cast it yourself!"

"Don't worry, Twilight Sparkle. I don't see myself needing to teleport a group in the near future, and after this is over, I'll have time to learn it once again. Now, I think the two of you should be going now. I don't know where you might find the plant you're looking for, but you should hurry and be on your way. Once you have the plant, use the gift I've given you to return home and get the cure."

"Right Princess!"

"You can count on us!"

Twilight Sparkle and Pinkie Pie both raised their hooves and saluted their princess before giving her one last bow, "See you soon, Princess. Wish us luck."

"Good luck, you two. And stay safe."

At that, the two companions made their leave, the magical aura protecting them from the White Demure fading away the further from Luna they got. A new determination filled Twilight, determination drawn from the fact that not

only did the life of Apple Bloom rest on their collective shoulders, but also the lives of six other sick ponies.

As they ran through the forest, it was Pinkie Pie that broke the silence between them.

"Well, that was sure nice of her to help you out like that."

"Yes. It's going to help shave off a lot of time. I might even get back first. If I do, could even teleport the others back to Ponyville all the faster. I was worried about not being able to make it before, but now, thanks to Luna's gift, I know we're going to be able to make it." Twilight replied.

"Totally! It's going to be great seeing Apple Bloom healthy again. And all of those sad faces back at your library will turn in to smiles and it's going to be the best thing ever!"

The unicorn just gave a laugh, "Oh Pinkie, how I wish I could be as carefree as you sometimes."

"Oh, well, I am worried about Apple Bloom, there's no doubt about that. It's makes me so sad knowing how sad they are, and that she's hurting. I wanna help as much as I can, and the best way to do that is to smile for my friends, and try to make them smile too." The pink pony said, an odd seriousness filling her voice.

"You know, Pinkie... I honestly think that that's the most important thing to do right now, keep our high hopes. And out of everypony I know, you're the one best suited for the job."

"Thanks, Twilight! That means a lot."

The two shared a smile with one another as they continued through the forest. At that point in time, a smile was just what Twilight needed. The severity of the situation, while still present, seemed to lighten. In fact, everything around her, in the spooky Everfree forest, seemed to lighten up thanks to the presence of a friend. And not just any friend, but the element of laughter herself.

"So, do you think we're getting close?" Pinkie Pie asked.



"I'm not sure, this forest seems like it goes on forever. But, if Zecora's note was right, we'll know it when we get to the edge of the Everfree forest."

"Well, I hope it's soon. My tail is getting twitchy, and you know what that means!"

Twilight continued to run forward, but her eyes became immediately glued to the skies. The canopy was thick, but flickers of moonlight still pierced through the thick foliage to provide some light, "I don't see anything."

"Twilight! Look out!" Pinkie shouted.

"What are yo- Ahh!"

Sadly, the warning came too late, and the unicorn ran straight off of the cliff that seemed to come out of nowhere, beginning a freefall down in to the chasm below, screaming her head off.

"Hold on, Twilight. I'll save you!"

With that, Pinkie took a quick look around before she chomped down on a vine that she hoped was long enough. And strong enough. With the long vine in her mouth, she jumped off of the cliff, swan diving straight down in order to save her friend.

The unicorn continued to scream her head off as she fell, flailing her arms about in an attempt to stabilize herself. Over the last year, she had slowly mastered the art of falling to her doom, and she put that experience to good use. After positioning her body to catch the most wind in her free fall, her arms helped to keep her that way, to give her the slowest fall and the best chance to be saved.

Of course, all of this was purely reflexive, as inside her mind, Twilight could only think a single thought.

"Help!"

Luckily, Pinkie Pie was a mare of action, at least, she thought she was at the moment. She held her hooves forward, mimicing the way Rainbow Dash flew in order to save Rarity during the Best Young Fliers competition. While she wasn't expecting to make a Sonic Rainboom any time soon, she

was expecting it to allow her to slice through the air and let her catch up to her falling friend.

As Twilight fell, Pinkie approached. Down below, the fog of the chasm floor was approaching, and at the last minute, the pink pony made it.

She wrapped her hooves around her falling friend, clinging to her tightly as she bit down extra hard on the vine, hoping that it will pull taught at any moment. Twilight reflexively wrapped all of her legs around her companion, holding on to her for dear life as she continued to scream her head off.

A droplets of sweat beaded on Pinkie's forehead, lasting only a moment before they were thrown off by the wind. That ground was sure coming up fast. Almost too fast. And before she knew it, the two of them plunged in to the fog.

Then, everything stopped, and a loud twang echoed through the forest.

Pinkie Pie opened an eye tentatively, checking to see if they were still alive. Her neck and teeth hurt like no pony's business, but, as far as she could tell, she was still alive, and for the most part, still unharmed.

"Heyf, Wiyight..." Pinkie said with a mouth full of vine.

"AHHHHHHH!" Twilight replied.

"Wiyight..." The pink pony tried to say.

"AHHHHHHH!"

"Grr... Wiyight! Shop screanin' in 'y eya!" Pinkie Pie shouted through gritted teeth.

"AHHH- huh?" Twilight said, her screaming finally stopping as the words got through to her.

The first thing the unicorn perceived was the sound of her saviour sighing in relief. The second thing was the fact that she stopped falling, and was, in truth, saved.

"Oh my gosh! Pinkie! You saved my life! Thank you so much!" She said, as she gripped her friend a little tighter, changing her panicked grip in to a hug.

"Umm..." The earth pony replied, grunting out the sound. "'Ook." She said, pointing a pink hoof to the vine in her mouth.

"Oh! Right, sorry. Thank you so much for saving my life, now let's see what I can do about getting us out of here. Let's see... Oh!" Twilight said, as she looked down, "I think you can let go, Pinkie Pie. We're only a few feet off the groun- Waaaah!"

The moment she had heard that she was allowed to let go, she did, dropping both herself and her unicorn companion down on to the ground, "Oohhh... That feels so much better... I'm going to have to go and see Aloe and Lotus and get all these kinks out... I don't think I can even chew right now..." Pinkie groaned out.

"Don't worry, Pinkie Pie. We're almost there, I hope. When I get that plant, I'll teleport us back to Ponyville, and you can go to the masseuse while I deal with the plant."

"Okay... I think I'm just going to lie here for a little bit, let me know if we need to go far."

"Alright, you rest up, you deserve it."

Though the two of them were at the bottom of the chasm, it was a good a place to start as any. Zecora had said that she would know the end of the Everfree Forest when she saw it, and boy, did she ever see it. She was sure that this gorge marked the end of the forest; splitting apart Equestria from parts unknown to her.

With that in mind, she magically pulled out the parchment that contained information about what she was looking for, and she got to work.

# Chapter 7

## Applejack and Rarity, Two

Poke.

Poke.

"...ke up!"

"Mmph... What in tarnation?" Applejack said, sleepiness lacing her voice.

"...ake up, Applejack! We've arrived in Manehattan!" Rarity said as she gently shook her friend awake.

"Huh-wha? What? Already? Shoot... How long have Ah been sleepin'?" She asked, turning her blurry eyes to the white mare.

"The entire train ride, darling. I wanted to wake you up so that I could share all of the wonderful sights with you, but, alas, I felt it better to let you get your rest. You've been through a lot after all." The unicorn said as she placed a comforting hoof on her friend's shoulder.

"Oh well... Ah guess Ah should thank ya then, Rarity. Than-" The orange mare suddenly cut herself off as her blurry vision cleared itself, and she finally got a good look at her companion, "Rarity, what in tha wide world of Equestria are you doin' wearin' that get up?"

"Oh, this old thing? It was something I brought with me for the trip! Manehattan is filled to the brim with sophisticated ponies and I intend to mingle with as many as I can! I intend to show off my fabulous dress to them and see if I can spread the name Rarity! Dressmaker extraordinaire to the Manehattanites!"

The regal unicorn struck a pose she had been practicing in order to show off the dress she had made for just such an occasion. Every stitch, every placement, every bit of cloth was woven together masterfully to make for an absolutely beautiful dress, one that she was sure would turn the eyes of everypony that saw her.

But it was the eyes of Applejack, who was giving her a deadpan look, that snapped her back to reality.

"Oh umm... *After* we get Apple Bloom the cure she needs, of course. Eh-heh..." She said awkwardly.

"Now that's better. Come on now, let's get offa this train and get to see my Aunt and Uncle Orange. We didn't part ways on a bad note, but it wasn't a good one aither. Ah'm just hopin' that they understand and help us out." She said, letting out a sigh as she thought about having to meet them again, "Oh, do ya still have the pictures and name and stuff?"

"Why of course, Applejack. You think I would lose something so terribly important?"

"Well, no. Just makin' sure."

Together, the two ponies made their way out of the train, each collecting their things and making sure they had the bits they brought with them in the first place, just in case they needed to buy anything, not to mention renting a hotel room for the night.

Applejack wasn't too thrilled with having to spend an entire night in the city again, but, her hooves were tied to the train schedule, and since their ride home wasn't leaving until tomorrow, they were stuck. As she left the train station, she did her best to ignore Rarity's constant 'ooos' and 'awes' at every little thing she saw, doing her best to remember just where her Aunt and Uncle lived.

Despite having been more than a decade since she was last here, Manehattan was just as she remembered it; The buildings were tall, the ponies looked snooty, and nopony seemed to spare a glance at anypony else that didn't have a lick of status to them. The place was a lot different than what she had grown accustomed to in her home town, and just looking at it made her start to feel homesick all over again.

As the two walked through the busy streets, the orange mare was getting a few too many condescending looks for her liking, and it was making her increasingly uncomfortable. And what was worse was that she couldn't, for the life of her, remember which of the many buildings her relatives lived in.

"Ugch... This ain't gettin' us nowhere. Ah can't remember where they live. Ah mean, things look familiar, but Ah just can't seem ta pin which buildin' they lived in... Ah think we're gunna have ta ask 'round these parts and try ta find somepony who knows where they might be at."

"Well, that may be harder than expected," Rarity said, having returned from her adoration of the city, "In all of my short time here, not a single one of these ponies has even so much as looked at me or my dress. I've noticed you've been getting a few looks, much more than I have, now that I think about it."

"Don't go poutin'. Them looks ain't nothin' nice, that's fer sure. They're just starin' at what they think is a backwater hick way outta 'er element. No pony's lookin' at you cause yer just as fancy as they are, and unless you know ponies in this city, you won't be gettin' much in the way of attention unless you make them look at ya. Which is somethin' I'm gunna be needin' ya ta do fer me. They won't listen ta me. So, sugarcube, can ya ask around fer the oranges for me?" Applejack asked.

"Oh why certainly, Applejack! Stand back and watch as I use my charms to get the information we need to save your sister!"

With a dramatic wave of her hoof and a smile on her face, Rarity trotted towards the nearest Manehattanite she could find, and began to lay on her charms. However, after a few minutes of attempting to converse, it became obvious to her that the fellow fancy pony simply wanted her to leave them alone. Fine. She could take a hint. She could just try somepony else.

However, after she received the treatment from a second pony, then a third, then a fifth, she was starting to get at her wits end. It was like Prince Blueblood all over again, except there were dozens of him everywhere! The more she spoke to the locals, the more she began to hate this place. After a final attempt with her eighth snob in half an hour, she growled in frustration and returned to Applejack to vent her failure.

"I thought this place would be glamorous! I thought this place would be fantastic! But no! This city is filled with ingrates akin to that stupid Prince at the Grand Galloping Gala! Ohhhh how I loathe him, and I'm beginning to feel the exact same way about this city!" Rarity shouted, finally getting a few looks as she did so, but not the kind she had earlier desired.

"Well shoot... If these ponies won't even talk ta you, they musta gotten even snootier than I remember. Didn't think that was possible..." The orange mare said, slightly amazed at the depths these ponies have sunk.

"It's simply unbelievable!" The unicorn shouted. Soon, however, her fury faded and her voice returned to her regular tone, "I'm sorry, Applejack. It seems I've failed in one of the only things I could have done to be of any help..." She said, her head hanging low in shame as she sniffled lightly.

"Aww, don't worry about it none, sugarcube. We'll find somethin'. We just gotta keep looking. You can help me with that, can't ya?" The farmpony said, giving her companion a reassuring smile.

The white mare wiped a tear from her eye and smiled at her friend, "Thank you, Applejack. That means a lot. Well then, shall we venture forth in to this foul city and look for your relatives?"

"O' course! Let's get a move on."

Applejack was quite happy to see her companion cheered up and even more determined to find what mattered the most right now. Together, they walked the streets of Manehattan, turning around every corner that caught their attention and scanning over countless businesses in hopes of finding anything related to Orange Pharmaceuticals. But, as the day slowly passed, and the sun began to set, the two of them had found nothing save a few dozen ways to get lost.

"Well shoot... this ain't what I was hopin' for at all! No pony talkin' to us, and I lost count of how many times I saw that hat shop on tha corner..." Applejack said, feeling quite dismayed at the situation.

"Seventeen times, if my count is right. If I have to see that tacky hat in the window just one more time I swear I'll scream."

"Please don't."

"Oh, don't worry Applejack, it's just a figure of speech. Well, the sun is setting... I suppose we should find ourselves some place to stay the night and try again tomorrow. It's such a shame that we haven't seen... a... hmm..."

"Yeah, I suppose we should try and find a roof ta put over our heads." Applejack replied before noticing that her companion had trailed off, "Hey, Rarity? What's tha matter?"

"I think I've just seen the first bit of anything familiar since coming here. Look, over there!" She said, pointing a hoof to a crowd across the street.

"What? I don't see nothin'." The farmpony said, squinting at the crowd as she looked for whatever Rarity was pointing at.

"How can you not see them? Oh, never mind, come on. Follow me."

The orange mare simply stared for a moment as her friend made her way across the street towards the crowd for a few moments before following along. The crowd seemed to be gathered out in front of a restaurant, and the closer she got, the more she realized the crowd was a crowd in only the barest sense of the word. Sure, there was a lot of them, but almost none of them seemed to be talking to one another. That is, except for a couple of ponies she hadn't seen while across the street; a couple of ponies she recognized instantly.

"Lyra! Bon Bon! It's so good to see the two of you!" Rarity said in the most cheerful voice she had.

The couple, who had been sharing a milkshake at a table, turned their heads to see who was calling them. Bon Bon was the first to swallow down her mouthful of milkshake and speak up, "Oh, Rarity. It's good to finally meet a familiar face in this city!"

"I know exactly what you mean, darling. So, what brings you two to this... umm... fair city." The white unicorn replied, trying not to sound angry at her last words.

"It's our third anniversary, and somehow Lyra convinced me that this would be the perfect place to go to enjoy it." The pale cream colored earth pony replied.

"Hey! I was told this was a nice place. It's not my fault it's filled with snobs, I wasn't expecting this." Lyra said as she attempted to defend herself.



"Don't worry about it, Lyra. I was thinking the exact same thing until I got here myself earlier today. And at this point, I simply cannot wait to leave." Rarity said, flicking her hair as she expressed her disgust of the place.

"You and me both, sister." Replied the other unicorn.

"Next year, *I'm* picking where we go." She said, causing her wife to start sulking. "Anyway, Rarity, what brings you here, if I may ask?"

"Well, we're actually on a rather important trip, but it's not turning out so well... Since you two seem to have been here longer than we have, perhaps you can help. Do you know of a place called Orange Pharmaceuticals?" The white mare asked.

"Oh! I know! I remember that place. I got some stuff from there when I first got here, fixed my cold right up." The light green unicorn said, her face beaming, "Just head down... Uhh... Ah! That road there," She said, pointing a hoof in the right direction, "Just keep going down that road, and you'll end up at a four way street. If I'm not mistaken-"

"Which you often are." Her wife interrupted.

"Shush. If I'm not mistaken, just head right once you get to the four way street. Just keep going and look at every building, and you can't miss it. S'got a big orange on the front."

"Oh thank you so very much, darling! Well, we have to make our leave, as this is terribly important. I hope you two enjoy your anniversary despite the circumstances." She said, giving a wave to them as she began to walk off.

Lyra and Bon Bon smiled to Rarity and waved goodbye as well before going back to their conversation and milkshake, leaving the unicorn and her farmpony companion to their own devices. For a few moments, the two of them walked in silence, Applejack following her friend as they walked down the street they had been told about.

"So uhh... What just happened?"

"I just got us some directions, darling. I bet you weren't expecting that to happen all of a sudden."

"Umm... Nope, can't say Ah did. S'nice though. After all that happened today, this was like a gift from Celestia herself."

"I know exactly what you mean, Applejack. This is quite fortunate for us. It'll make getting out of here all the easier tomorrow. Let's just hope they're in the store tonight."

With that, the two continued to walk on, though there was an uncomfortable silence as a thought seemed to dwell in the farmpony's mind. After nearly a minute, she finally voiced it, "So... Anniversary?"

"Hmm? Oh, yes, it was their third anniversary, as they said. I believe they were married in Canterlot, where Lyra is from, if I'm not mistaken. Why do you ask?"

"Oh umm... Ah... Ah just didn't know is all."

"Didn't know what?" Rarity asked, curious as to what had put Applejack off her game.

"That they were married... Or that they could..." The farmpony shook her head, clearing her thoughts and getting back on track, "Anyway! We got directions an' a lil' sister ta save. Come on, Rarity, let's get goin' 'fore it gets too dark."

The unicorn glanced at her friend curiously before simply giving a shrug and following along, after all, just as Applejack said, there are more important things to deal with.

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"Well... Ah'm pretty sure this is tha place." Applejack said as she looked at the building she was standing in front of.

"I believe they intend to make that rather obvious... How did we miss this before?" Rarity asked, simply staring at the building.

"I ain't got a clue, sugarcube... Musta not gone down this street."

The two ponies were standing in front of a building, a rather large one, which had large, red, capital letters printed on to a giant orange. Underneath the red lettering was a collection of small sentences that read

off the list of things this building provided; things like orange based foods, orange based sweets, furniture, appliances, and, of course, the pharmaceuticals that they had been looking for. It seemed the building comprised everything that Mr. And Mrs. Orange owned and sold to make their way in the big city, and from the looks of things, they were doing rather well for themselves.

"The sign says it's still open... Guess we can head on inside and see if mah Aunt and Uncle are there or not. Or at least ask somepony 'bout 'em." Said the farmpony.

"I believe that would be best. We may just be able to get that train tomorrow after all." The dressmaker replied.

Together, Applejack and Rarity walked in to the shop, the unicorn using her magic to open the door. Inside, the place was huge. There were aisles upon aisles of goods and even though it was late evening, there were still quite a few ponies trotting around, going about their shopping. Neither of the two companions had been in a supermarket before, and while it was a new and interesting experience, the sheer size was going to make it hard for either of them to find what they needed.

"Now how are we gunna find anything in this place?" The earth pony complained as she looked around.

"Perhaps we should find an employee and ask about it?" The unicorn suggested.

"But how do we know who works 'ere and who don't?"

"Perhaps the ponies wearing the orange vests going around helping others and stocking the shelves." Rarity said as she gestured towards a few of the stores workers.

"Oh uhh... Raight." Applejack replied, her cheeks tinting red in embarrassment. She turned her gaze to the nearest worker, a pegasus mare working the top shelves, and cleared her throat, "Beg pardon miss, can I bother ya with a question?"

"Certainly! What do you need?" The pegasus replied with the false enthusiasm of a supermarket grunt.

"Ah was hopin' mah Aunt and Uncle Orange might be. They own this place, m'pretty sure. This here's a family emergency, and Ah really need ta talk to 'em."

The pegasus gave the farmpony an odd look, wondering if this pony was for real. On one hoof, this could just be some random country bumpkin looking to get a free ride in the big city. On the other hoof, if she really was family with the bosses, not helping her might end up badly. The worker weighed the options in her head for a moment before giving a nod.

"Certainly! Just a moment, I think Mrs. Orange is in today, but her husband is away on a business trip. I'll go and let her know you're here miss...?" The pegasus said, letting the words hang for a moment.

"Ah'm Applejack."

"Right."

With that, the flying pony flew off towards the back of the store, heading inside a pair of double doors labeled 'Employees Only'.

"Well, Ah hope she gets mah message to Aunt Orange. It's really important we talk ta her." Applejack said.

"I agree with you completely, Applejack. But... Hmm... You know, I can't believe I didn't think of this. While we wait, why don't we go and look at the medicines and herbs they already have. We might just get lucky and have it be on the shelves and save us a great deal of effort." Said Rarity as she tapped her chin.

"Yer raight. After all of this, I didn't think ah somethin' so simple as that. Come on, then. Might help pass tha time while we wait fer a word from my Aunt."

In order to pass the time, and make an inconsequential gamble, they made their way over to the medicines department. The shelves were filled with plants and vials of all kinds, each one claiming to cure one illness or another. Rarity held up the paper that contained the name and basic image of what they were looking for with her magic as they scanned the content of the shop for what they needed.

After having looked up and down the aisle twice, and not having seen a single sign of the Mandragora plant they needed, the two ponies were feeling a little disheartened.

"Well... Ah guess it was too good ta be true."

"I do believe you're right, Applejack. Well... It can't hurt to look a third time, I suppose. Though, I think we should start hoping that your dearest Aunt has some of it stored around here somewhere, or this trip will be all for naught!" Rarity exclaimed.

"Ah know just what ya mean, Rarity." Applejack said with a sigh. "Well, let's try one more taime an'- Oh, lookit that. There's that pegasus again." She said, lifting a hoof and pointing it up at the incoming pony.

"There you two are. I was looking all over for you." She said, frowning for a moment before she regained her 'delightful' composure, "I spoke to Mrs. Orange and she said that she'll see you, Applejack. Just follow me please and I'll take you to her office."

"Thank ya kindly, miss. Lead tha way." The farmpony said, tipping her hat in thanks.

With that, the two companions followed the pegasus in to the back halls of the store, heading towards her Aunt's office. Applejack gulped heavily as she thought about what her Aunt might want to say to her, about their previous time together as well as whether or not they had the plant. Soon, she found herself standing in front of the door, and with a sigh, she raised her hoof and tried to shake the sense the sense of dread she was feeling.

She wasn't looking forward to this at all.

# Chapter 8

## Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash, Two

The night sky was beautiful as the stars twinkled brightly and the full moon shined down upon the land of Equestria. The light was appreciated by many, but few ponies appreciated it more than a certain pair of pegasi, who found themselves under the pale moonlight, trying to make camp and start a safe fire at the base of Mount Marebrum.

Neither of the ponies were having much in the way of luck when it came to finding anything that could start a fire. Of all the things the two of them had forgotten to bring, they forgot to bring something that could make a flame.

Rainbow Dash had collected a bunch of dry sticks to use as kindle, while Fluttershy had found some dry bark to help start the flames. However, they soon realized that they had absolutely no supplies that could help them get this thing started. No knife with which to carve makeshift fire starting tools, no sticks that they could use to rub together without making themselves too dizzy to continue, and good rocks to bang together.

"Agh! Why didn't I think to bring something for a fire." Dash shouted, bringing a hoof to her face.

"Don't worry, Rainbow Dash. I'm the one who should have thought ahead..." Fluttershy replied.

"No, don't blame yourself. You brought medicine and food, that's pretty much the best and smartest thing you could have brought. I should have thought ahead, I just didn't see this happening... Still, at least the moon is bright, so we won't completely blind."

"And these clothes Rarity made us will keep us warm, but... it's still so very dark, and I'm not used to this forest." The yellow pony said, her head hanging low as her eyes darted around, looking for some sort of danger that might jump out at her.

"Oh Fluttershy, stop being such a scaredy pony. I haven't heard a noise except for us since we got here. There's absolutely nothing in this forest,

except for some bugs, maybe." The blue pegasus said, trying to encourage her friend.

"But that's what I'm afraid of... what if something really big and really quiet is out there and it ate up everything in the forest and that's why it's quiet? What if it smells us and comes to eat us too?"

Rainbow groaned as she watched her companion become increasingly panicked as her imagination created fears and horrors for her to be afraid of. Sometimes she wondered if the pegasus just liked being scared. "Look, you need to calm down! Let's just find a nice spot to sleep and in the morning, we'll eat and then make the trip up the mountain. The sooner you sleep, the sooner you won't have to worry about invisible monsters."

The blue mare soon found herself a nice spot to lay down for the night. With a quick look up to the sky, she gazed at the stars above, and then silently cursed the fact that she could see them so easily. There wasn't a cloud in the sky for at least a mile in either direction, which meant that they were grounded if they actually wanted to sleep. After having that nap on the ground earlier, having to sleep a whole night on the ground was not something she wanted to do, and she was quite dismayed when she realized she was going to have to.

After a moment, she lowered her head down upon her hooves, but just as she was about to close her eyes and try to sleep, she heard a strange chattering sound. Her gaze turned to the yellow pegasus laying down a few feet away from her, and she saw that Fluttershy was having quite the awful time.

The scared pony had lied down, but her eyes were darting around in fright and her teeth were chattering heavily as she spoke, "...i-i-invisib-b-ble m-m-monsters?" She whispered to herself.

Rainbow Dash was suddenly met with a conflict of emotion. On one side was her frustrations with the constantly frightened pegasus, and on the other side was her regret for adding fuel to the fire. Fluttershy was a really good friend, and in fact, her oldest one, and despite her frustrations, she genuinely cared about her, like she did all of her friends. And when one of her friends needed her, she was there to help.

After mulling it over in her head, the side of her that felt bad for her companion won out, and she made a move to help. She shifted around and trotted over to the scaredy pony and lied down beside her before shaking her wings free of her parka and placing one of them over her friend.

The pink-haired pony seemed to freeze up at this. Slowly, she turned her head to Rainbow Dash, who seemed to have already closed her eyes in an attempt to sleep, "R-Rainbow?" She squeaked.

Dash kept her eyes closed and merely waved a hoof casually before speaking, "Don't worry, Fluttershy. Nothing will be able to get you now." She said.

"W-what do you mean?"

"My wings are out from under my clothes, and I have one over you now. If any monsters come, I'll be the first one to know, and I'm awesome enough to be able to wake up, grab you, and fly off before they can even touch me. So, you don't have anything to be afraid of now. Just calm down and get some sleep. And please, no more teeth chattering, it was keeping me up."

For nearly a minute, she heard nothing from the other pegasus, not even the sound of her breathing, though she did feel it under her wing. All of a sudden she felt and heard Fluttershy's head turn away from her and rest upon her hooves.

"...thank you..."

A smile graced the blue pegasus' face as she heard those words. She had done something good for a friend, and as a bonus, she was going to be able to sleep peacefully. Mission accomplished.

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Dash was awoken by the feeling of something stirring beside her. It was moving too softly and gently to be a threat, so her body took a few moments to become fully alert instead of snapping to attention. When she finally managed to open her eyes, she saw that the movement was coming from Fluttershy, who seemed to already be awake and trying to get away.

"...mmph... Fluttershy? What are you doing?"



The yellow pegasus suddenly jumped away in fright, making their parting complete, "Oh! Umm... Sorry, Rainbow Dash. I woke up before you did and I didn't want to wake you up..." She replied, her head lowering a little.

Rainbow simply chuckled at this, waving a hoof to show it was no problem, "Don't worry about it, Shy. I didn't want to sleep in too much anyway." She said before giving out a large yawn, "So, did you get a good night's sleep?"

"Oh, yes, I had a very good rest. Thank you so much for what you did, Rainbow." Fluttershy said, suddenly turning away to pick up her bag.

"Don't worry about it. It was the least I could do for a friend." She said as she got up to stretch.

Her muscles were tight and popped audibly as she stretched, "Ugh... I am never sleeping on the ground again if I can help it." She complained. After a moment, she looked over to her left wing, the one she had used to cover Fluttershy, and sighed, "Jeez... Even my wing is stiff as a board."

With a few careful movements of her hoof, she moved her wing up and down, stretching it out enough for it to start moving on its own. After a few more moments of working the wing, she gave a few experimental flaps and found herself lifted off the ground, "There we go. No more stiff wing. Okay, you ready to go, Fluttershy?" She asked, turning to look to her friend for the first time since starting her stretches.

"Oh but..." Was all Fluttershy let out in response as she stood in front of two large leaves she had found, each covered with some of their rations for the trip. The platters each seemed to have two apples, some freshly harvested grass, as well as a single small cake for dessert. "I umm... I thought we should eat before we go. I got a little of the grass from around here to help fill out the meal and preserve our rations. If that's alright with you that is..."

In all of her want to keep going, she never stopped to think about food, but now that she was presented with some, she realized just how hungry she really was. Her face turned slightly red as her stomach gave out a large grumble, "Oh... Heh, yeah, I guess I kinda forgot about that. That's a really smart idea, Shy. I don't think I would have ever thought of that. I probably would have flown up to the mountain starving if not for you." She said, rubbing a hoof behind her head.

"You're welcome." Her friend replied, giving the blue mare a large smile.

Together, the two of them sat back down on the ground and ate in relative silence, only the sound of crunching food passing between them. While the grass was nearly as tasty as the apples or the dessert, Dash had to admit that Fluttershy was right, the extra substance helped to fill her up nicely, which was going to keep their rations going much longer. She briefly thought about packing more of it for the trip, but after a quick glance around, she saw that the pink-haired pony had already picked the only large pile of grass in the clearing, the rest of it too small to be harvested in any reasonable amount of time. Still, it was huge boon for their ration situation.

Once the two had finished, with Dash clocking in thirty seconds faster than her friend, who sped up after noticing she was done, they both grabbed their saddlebags and straightened out their parkas.

"Okay, NOW we can get going."

"I believe so. Oh! Rainbow, don't forget to lift up your hood now before it's too late, it's going to be cold up there."

"Oh, right, thanks Fluttershy."

After the of them lifted up their hoods, they began to fly straight up, no longer able to use the gliding method they used before. This was most likely going to be the hardest part, as the mountain was incredibly high and the air was only going to get colder and thinner the higher they went up.

"Do you think you can make it all the way up there, Fluttershy?" Rainbow asked after they had scaled a couple hundred feet.

"I... I think so. It's going easier than I thought, but I am starting to feel the strain. I'll do it though! For Apple Bloom." Fluttershy said, her voice filled with conviction.

"That's good to hear. Let's try and get as high as we can before we start looking for that flower. Do you still have the drawing?"

"I do! It's in my food bag. I didn't want to put it in with the medicines in case one of them broke open."

"But, what about the food? Won't it stain the paper?"

"Oh, no. I packed dry foods. Stuff that wasn't very messy. Maybe a little dusty, but that's easy to clean off."

"Oh, okay then. Well, let's keep going until we can't fly anymore, then we can touch down on the mountain and start looking."

Dash received a nod from her fellow pegasus, and with that, the two of them lapsed back in to silence as they continued to climb in to the air. They were both used to high altitudes, though, Rainbow Dash more so than Fluttershy, but having grown up in Cloudsdale, at a height of 8,600ft, they were able to climb quite high on wing power alone. However, Mount Marebrum was much, much taller than that, and at the 11,000ft mark, things began to get bad.

The air had thinned considerably, and it was taking stronger and more frequent flaps to keep gaining height. And despite the intense exercise the two were undergoing, it was getting colder and colder very fast. What made things worse was the fact that their wings weren't covered by their parkas, and the feel of fresh, chilling air beating against their wings was beginning to freeze them both.

"R-Rainbow?" Fluttershy suddenly asked, her voice chopped up by her shivering jaw.

"What is it, F-Fluttershy?" Dash asked, unable to hold back her own shivering.

"I-I think we should stop now. I don't t-think I c-can fly any h-higher. W-We should s-stop and warm up s-some."

"Yeah, I t-think you're right, Shy. Come on, let's touch down o-over there on that ledge." She said, pointing to a ridge that looked easy to climb up when they needed to.

The two pegasi slowly flew closer to the mountain, their eyes squinting in the oncoming winds and snow. With a crunch, they landed on to the fresh white powder that coated the entire peak. The moment they landed, they quickly tucked in their nearly frozen wings and slid them under their parkas in order to share in the heat it stored. Their wings immediately began to

sting as they warmed up, neither having noticed that they had become numb from the cold. Still, the stinging usually meant that they weren't frostbitten and were going to warm up soon.

"Ohhhhhh yeah, that feels really, really good. These parkas Rarity gave us are amazing!" Exclaimed Dash.

"Oh yes. They are quite snug and warm. Though, we should keep moving, our hooves are the only thing not covered, and we might get frostbite if we stay still for too long." Fluttershy explained.

"Oh yeah... That wouldn't be very good. Okay, you let me get the paper and we'll take a look over it, and try to memorize it so that we don't have to take it out very often. Then we can get moving."

"Oh, um... Alright. Here." The yellow pegasus replied as she turned, giving Dash access to her saddlebags.

Rainbow gave a nod as flicked open the bag and took a look inside. Just like her companion had said, the bag did have some food supplies in it, mostly dry hay and a few biscuits. But what she was interested in the most was the piece of parchment buried underneath it all. With a few swishes of her head, she moved the food aside and grabbed on to the parchment gently, taking it out and doing her best to make sure it didn't blow away in the wind.

With a bit of maneuvering with her lips, she managed to bite down hard on one of the edges of the scroll, making sure to hold it in place, while letting the rest fall free. However, her attempt to let the piece of parchment simply hang from her mouth for them to read was immediately thwarted by the winds around them. The paper flapped madly in the winds, obscuring the page and making it impossible to read. Dash tried her best to keep it still, but nothing she did seemed to work, and it was frustrating her to no end. However, the page suddenly stood still, for the most part, thanks to a helping hoof from her companion.

Fluttershy had bitten down on the other edge of the scroll, holding it mostly in place, "Oh! Heh... Shoul'a as'd fer halp, huh?" Said Rainbow Dash through her clenched teeth.

Fluttershy merely smiled gently before turning her eyes down to the page. The two ponies stood there, holding the short parchment between their teeth and scanned the drawing. Twilight had done a good job of drawing it down, which was going to be a big help, as well as a few descriptions, such as it being purple, and the fact that it was most likely in a cave as to keep out of the winds. They couldn't read much else thanks to their awkward angle, but they felt it was enough.

Rainbow gave the yellow pegasus a nod, and on cue, her companion let go of the page and turned to give her access to the saddlebag. With the page clenched between her teeth, she made her way to the back, but suddenly froze in place.

A humongous gust of wind blew came from nowhere and assaulted the two pegasi. They manage to buckle down enough to keep their hooves on the ground, but the scroll wasn't as lucky. The torrent of air ripped the paper out of the blue pegasus' mouth, leaving nothing but a useless scrap between her lips. Neither pony could do anything as they fought to stay standing, their only image of their goal becoming lost in the snowfall around them.

As the wind died down around them, Rainbow Dash found herself able to move and speak again, "Pthu! No! This is way too bad! I need to go after it."

"Rainbow Dash, wait!" Fluttershy cried out before Dash had time to uncover her wings.

"What? I can't wait now, Fluttershy! I have to get that paper!"

"It's too late for that now! Besides, if you go out there now, you'll get lost in the snow... And we might get separated."

The impatient pony stood there for a moment, her parkas halfway lifted to get her wing out, as she mulled over the words. Soon, she let her clothes drop back down and sighed, "You're right... I just hope we don't forget what that thing looks like."

"I'm certain we won't, Rainbow. I remember what it looks like, and I saw the part about finding it in a cave. So... I think we should get moving now and try to keep warm and find some caves around here... I just hope there's

nothing but the flowers in them..." Fluttershy said, her imagination already beginning to frighten her.

"Alright... Yeah, I see what you mean. Alright! Let's get a move on, Apple Bloom is counting on us."

She received a determined nod from her pink-haired companion and with that, the two of them began to climb the mountain on hoof, aiming to brave the cold and the elements to get that plant.

The wind was bitter and cold, and the crunching snow beneath their hooves chilled them even further. They climbed up the side of the mountain, going wherever the footholds would allow, and doing everything they could not to slip and fall. As they walked, neither pony spoke a single word, both too focused on staying standing in the terrible winds surrounding them.

As time went on, they two were becoming increasingly lost on the mountain top, with only the thought that they could simply jump off and glide away keeping their hopes up. Rainbow Dash was getting feeling the cold more and more as her hooves became numb. Her whole body was starting to shiver to produce heat, but she knew that if she kept this up, she was going to start to freeze, badly.

All of a sudden, she felt a tap upon her shoulder, and slowly turned her head to see Fluttershy, who quickly invaded her hood and brought her mouth right up to her ear in an attempt to be heard over the winds.

"Rainbow Dash, if we keep going like this, we're going to catch hypothermia. We haven't spotted a cave here yet, and if we don't find one soon, we're going to be in trouble. I umm... I have an idea to help keep us warm, and safe on the icy rocks." Said the yellow pegasus, her voice just barely making it past the wind.

After her companion finished speaking, she took her turn invading the pink-haired pony's hood and spoke to her, "Hopefully we find one soon! And what idea is that?"

She let Fluttershy back in to her hood and listened, "I'm going to spread our parkas over each other. That way, we can share body heat, and it'll help a lot. If that's alright with you, that is..."

After parting once again, Rainbow Dash mulled it over in her head for a moment, and decided that it was actually a very good idea. Wanting to try this, she gave the yellow pegasus a large nod and let her go about her plan.

It took Fluttershy only a few moments to move the parkas around. They had both been blasted by chilling winds as she did so, but the end result was more than worth it. Their clothes now resembled a tarp covering the two of them in now double thick clothing, and the two were walking side by side, keeping their shoulders together to help with the heat. The effects were gradual, but it was most definitely an improvement, and the friends began to warm up.

Now that they were both warmer, the trip through the cold was becoming easier and easier for them. The warmth they shared helped bring feeling back to their legs, which meant they weren't going to get any bad frostbite, something they were both grateful for.

As they traveled, it was Rainbow Dash that got first sight of something that wasn't a slippery rock ledge. She raised a hoof and tapped Fluttershy on the shoulder, getting her attention before pointing at a crevice in the mountain. When they got closer, the crevice seemed to lead in to a small valley in the rock of the mountain, one that looked to be shielded by the wind; and thankfully, it was.

When the two entered in to it, they felt an intense relief from the cold as the bitter chill of the wind almost died entirely in this natural shelter. While they could still hear it blowing behind them, they could hear much better now that they didn't have it blowing in their ears.

"Finally! I can hear myself breath again..." Exclaimed Rainbow Dash, "My face feels all numb because of that wind..."

"Mine too. But, at least we have some shelter now. You know, with the lack of wind, this might be a good spot for a plant, maybe? It won't hurt to look around here for a while."

"Yeah, you're right. It'll be a good place to warm up and get some food in us. Feels like we've been doing this for hours..."

"I'm not sure, I've lost all track of time, but at least it's still daylight out."

"Which is good news. I don't want to be out here come night. We'll have to take a dive off the mountain if it starts to become dark, we won't survive otherwise."

"I-I think you might be right... We should hurry up then."

"Couldn't have said it better myself." Dash replied, a smile on her face.

The small rock valley was turning out to be a lot longer than they originally thought it was. It was full of twists and turns that lead through the mountain's passes, from one side of it to another and then back again. Sometimes it went up, and other times it went down, but they could tell they were slowly gaining in height.

"This valley goes on forever! How did something like this even get carved in to the mountain? And why haven't we seen any caves yet?"

"I don't know, Rainbow Dash... Maybe somepony carved it years and years ago? I don't think it could have been water erosion..."

"It had to have been the work of something. No way this could happen naturall- woah!"

"Eep!"

Both Rainbow and Fluttershy yelped as they were suddenly pulled to the ground. The blue pegasus had not been paying attention to her footing thanks to the conversation and had stepped on an icy patch hidden under the snow. What would have been a simple tumble was made worse by the way they had set up their parkas to share body heat, and because of it, the pink-haired pony was pulled down on top of her.

"Ow! Sorry about that, Shy. I wasn't looking where I was going."

"I-It's alright, Rainbow. Let's umm... Let's just get back up carefully an-"

Her voice suddenly turned to a whimper as a horrible groaning and crunching sound echoed loudly around them.

"...what in the hay was that?" Rainbow Dash asked, her head darting around.



"I-I don't know..." Fluttershy replied.

"Well... Whatever it was, I can't hear it anymo-"

Dash's words were suddenly cut off as the sound came back, this time louder and more sinister than before.

The yellow pegasus was nearly frozen in fear at the large and terrifying sounds that were echoing around her, while the blue pegasus was darting her head around, looking for the danger. This second time it had been closer, and she was certain she had heard it coming from above them. As she looked, the sound came around a third time, the loudest it had been so far, and Rainbow's eyes widened considerably.

"Fluttershy... We need to run. Now."

"W-w-what i-is it?" Fluttershy asked, her teeth chattering in fright.

"AVALANCHE! RUN!"

# Chapter 9

## Twilight and Pinkie Pie, Final

Twilight continued her search of the general vicinity, her magic making fog flee from her presence so that she could get a better look around in her search of the elusive plant. She never traveled too far out from where they had touched down, however, not wanting to stray too far from Pinkie Pie, who was still resting away the aches and pains that she got from the fall down to the chasm floor.

As she searched along the ground, her frustrations began to build up more and more as preliminary searches were proving useless. With a flick of her horn, she checked the last area of her search, and with a sigh, she turned around and walked back to her companion empty-hooved, "Well, that didn't go so well. I didn't find a single thing out there, and I can't just leave you here like this."

"It's okay. Let's take a little break. I think I only need about five or ten more minutes to get back to my good ole' Pinkie self." Pinkie replied.

"Alright then, I suppose I could use a bit of a break after all of that anyway... Maybe I can check through my books to try and find what I need." The purple unicorn said as she sat down beside the prone pink party pony.

"Hmm... If you can't find it, why don't you try a tracking spell? Do those exist?" Pinkie suggested, letting out one of few coherent thoughts swimming around in her head.

"A tracking spell? They do exist but... Wait... A tracking spell won't help us here, but maybe a search and retrieve spell might! Oh Pinkie, you're a genius!" Twilight Sparkle shouted, her head already brimming with ideas on the right spell to use for the job.

Pinkie merely rolled on to her belly and smiled in response, her legs kicking behind her as her pep started to return in full. The unicorn, meanwhile, quickly whipped out her travel spellbook, a book she kept with her for on the go studying or just in case, and began to rapidly sift through its pages.

After nearly a minute of flipping through the pages, she stopped on one in particular and read it over, "Here it is! This should do perfect... I just hope Zecora's drawing is accurate enough."

"Good luck!"

"Thank you."

With a small burst of magic, Zecora's scroll floated up beside the book, and she looked it over carefully, taking in every detail that she could. Without a direct sample, she was going to have to go by the closest mental image she could provide, and with a spell like this, detail was important. Sadly, the drawing wasn't exactly photograph quality, but it did have basic shapes of the leaves as well as the colors, so, hopefully, it was going to do the trick.

"Alright... Here goes!" Twilight said as she began to focus her magic.

The glow around her horn intensified as she cast the spell, her face scrunching as she tried to make it work with her limited knowledge of what she was looking for. But, she wasn't Princess Celestia's prized student for nothing, and a moment later the spell took effect, the magic enveloping her horn as it began to pull her down one way of the chasm.

"Aha! It worked! But umm... Pinkie! I can't stop now that it's started, hurry up and follow me!" Twilight Sparkle shouted, her horn already dragging her away.

"Okie dokie lokie! I've had enough of a break anyway. Let's find that plant!" The pink pony said, bouncing all the way as she followed behind the unicorn.

The spellcasting pony was starting to regret putting so much power in to the spell, mostly due to the fact that being dragged by her horn was embarrassing, annoying, and was quite uncomfortable. Still, she was willing to wait it out, and just waited for the spell to come to its end, and hopefully, that's where she'll end up finding the plant they need so very much.

After several minutes of frustrated grumbling and happy bouncing, the two companions finally stopped, the spell having ended, "Finally! I was really starting to get a headache there..."

"Aww! That's too bad. That looked like it was a lot of fun!"

"I wouldn't exactly call it fun... Anyway, the spell stopped here, so let's get to looking around for it. It should be very close by."

"Alright! But we should probably really hurry up though, my tummy got all tickly a while back there, and... Yup! There it is again!"

"Tickly tummy? What does that mean?" Twilight asked.

"It means that lots of teeth are coming! I think they've been following us for a while now." Pinkie replied cheerily.

"What?" The unicorn exclaimed, "Why didn't you tell me this sooner! Oh this is bad... Do you know what it is exactly?"

"Nopey dopey! It'll be a surprise when it gets here!"

"Ugh... Okay, we don't have much time. Let's get to looking around here as fast as we can, the plant has to be here!"

With that, the two companions began their search, looking every which way to try and find a sign of the medicinal ingredient they needed to cure Apple Bloom. Twilight trusted that her spell had brought her to the right place, but as she looked all over the chasm floor, she couldn't see a single trace of it. The unicorn was beginning to get frustrated with the search just as Pinkie Pie started to jump and point.

"Twilight! Lookit! Up there!" She said as she bounced up and down.

Twilight Sparkle's eyes turned to her excited companion, and she quickly looked to where Pinkie had been pointing, and a bright smile spread across her face, "That's it! You've found it, Pinkie! Now... To get it down." She replied.

She had been met with a bit of an obstacle when she noticed that the plant, a beautiful red and yellow flower with a dark green stem and delicate, wavy petals, was nested high up above them on the walls of the chasm. The flower was at least twenty feet above their heads, and with no obvious stepping stones, it was going to be hard to get that flower down.

"It's so high up..." Twilight said.

"It is. Oh well! Just use your magic and pluck it out!" Pinkie replied.

"I can't do that! It's wedged deep in to the rock, so if I pull it, I might start a rock slide. And I'd rather not have that happen. I also don't have any scissors to cut the stem with... One of us is going to have to jump up there somehow and bite it off."

"Hmm... Oh! Why don't you just magic me up there! I've seen you lift Spike and other ponies before, why not me?"

"That's a great idea! You're on a roll today, Pinkie Pie!"

"Woohoo! I rock!"

"Heh-heh. Alright, stay still now, I'm going to start lifting you up. If you move around too much, I might drop yo-"

Twilight Sparkle's words were suddenly cut off by a loud ribbit, which echoed throughout the nearly empty chasm loudly. It wasn't until she heard the noise did she realize just how quiet it had been down here, and with a hard gulp, she turned towards its source. She desperately hoped that it wasn't the thing with teeth than Pinkie Pie had predicted.

"Oh... No..." The unicorn said as her eyes widened upon seeing the creature.

"What's wrong? Oh! Lookit! It's so cute!" Pinkie replied.

"Cute? Are you *crazy*!"

"But... Twilight, it's just a cute little froggy!" Pinkie said as she pointed a hoof towards the creature.

There, sitting in the middle of the chasm, was a small green frog, no more than a couple of inches tall, simply watching the two of them. The only thing that truly stood out about the amphibian was it's strangely colored belly and bright blue eyes.

"No, it's not! I admit you were very right about the Parasprites, Pinkie Pie, but trust me when I say that that thing is dangerous!"

"But why? It's just a frog."

"No, it's not. It's a piranha-toad! And while they can be cute on the outside, or even just by themselves, they always..."

As she spoke, more piranha-toads began to come out of the mist, jumping beside, behind, and in front of their brother, gathering in to a huge mob. Then, moments later and almost in perfect unison, they bare their razor sharp teeth and let out a growl resembling a deep humming.

"...hunt in packs." She finished with a hard gulp.

"How do you know so much about them? And what are we gonna do?"

"I'll tell you that later! And for what we're going to do... I'm going to have to try to lift you up and- Ahh!" She screamed as one of the toads leaped at her.

Thankfully, she was quick to react to the sudden attack, and with a burst of magic, the piranha-toad was sent flying backwards, back in to the green mass that was approaching them.

"Okay, fending them off and lifting you is going to be really hard..."

"Throw me!"

"What?" Twilight exclaimed.

"I said throw me! Throw me up there and I'll try to grab it. I should be okay on the way down, it's not *that* high up." Pinkie replied, looking suddenly quite serious.

The unicorn looked to her companion as if she was crazy, but a quick glance towards the oncoming, hungry horde of hopping toads, she quickly changed her mind, "Okay, hold on!"

With a large burst of her levitation magic, she picked up the pink pony, and after only a second of aiming, she tossed the other mare at the flower. She

didn't have time to look, however, as several of the piranha-toads decided to make their move, all of them hopping towards their prey at once. As she quickly remembered a certain spell, she focused and brought up a magical barrier that stopped the approaching amphibians in their tracks, sending them flying away. However, there were two distinct problems with the barrier: The first was that it was rather draining, especially as things hit it, and the second was that it was going to repel Pinkie as well, so she was going to have to take it down eventually.

Moments later, she heard the sound of scraping against the rock wall behind her, and with her barrier up, she braved a look. Up on the cliff face was Pinkie Pie, desperately scrambling, almost impossibly so, against the nearly flat rock wall as she attempt to grab the flower. However, even Twilight knew that she was going to end up falling any second now, which meant she had to take the barrier down long enough to toss the pink pony back up again.

"Come on, Twilight! Think! Hurry!" She said to herself.

Her mind raced to find a solution to their current predicament and still nothing was coming to mind. But, just as Pinkie was about to touch her magical shield, she got an idea.

"Sorry about this, Pinkie!" She shouted.

"Wha? Whoa!" The pink pony shouted as she felt something hit her in the back and send her upwards once more.

At the last second, the purple unicorn rapidly expanded her barrier, exploding it outward in a burst of magical energy that cast away anything nearby. The piranha-frogs were sent flying in all directions, many smacking up against the opposite side of the chasm. Pinkie, meanwhile, was launched back up towards the flower, giving her a second chance. However, it wasn't all good news for the two of them.

The hit had dazed the pink pony somewhat, and on her way up, she missed the flower entirely and kept on going upwards, faster than she had before. As for Twilight, the sudden expansion and dissipation of her barrier had left her drained, feeling a tad woozy. Changing the function of spells was hard work on its own; doing so on the fly was just downright exhausting. Even though she had some space to work with now, she

wasn't sure she could get the shield back up in time, but she was going to have to try, just in case her companion missed.

"Pinkie! Please oh please catch that flower, I don't think I can do that another time!" Twilight shouted as she started to feel her power wane as she charged her magic once more.

"I'll try!" The earth pony replied, her voice coming from quite a ways up.

The ravenous horde had quickly recovered, for the most part, from the sudden burst of magical energy. Far too many of them were still healthy, and they were all hungry for something none of them had eaten before. This left Twilight in a dangerous spot, and an old familiar panic when confronting danger was hitting her in full and making it hard to concentrate. She soon found herself unable to completely resurrect her barrier, her focus completely shattering as some of the front liners of the oncoming amphibians made a leap for her, forcing her to blast them away individually.

Just as her panic and fatigue was growing too great, she felt a great weight fall heavily on to her back, causing her to fall flat on her belly. "Oof!" She cried as she hit the ground. It took her a moment, but she finally managed to open her eyes just in time to spot a familiar flower dangling in front of her face. She blearily followed the stem, and found that a bright pink pony had it clenched between her teeth. Then she noticed that the pony in question was yelling at her. Why was she yelling at her?

"Twilight! Quick! Get us out of here!" She yelled.

With a shake of her head, Twilight Sparkle cast the fog in her mind aside and focused on the situation once again, "Pinkie! You found the flower! That's great!"

"I know! Now get us out of here, please!" Came the impatient reply.

"Huh? Oh! Right!" She said, finally noticing that the piranha-frogs had gotten even closer. She quickly closed her eyes and began to focus, not on defense this time, but on escape. Her horn glowed brightly, causing some of the incoming carnivores to back up a bit, having learned a lesson about that horn, as she concentrated on the spell. Her mind was filled with the knowledge Luna had sacrificed to help her out, and now, in their time of need, it was going to save their lives.



Her horn glowed brighter and brighter, the dangerous critters of the Everfree made one last leap for a chance at food, and in a flash, Twilight Sparkle and Pinkie Pie vanished, leaving nothing but a small wisp of smoke, and several confused amphibians, in their wake.

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When she opened her eyes again, the area seemed to be vastly different than the one she had just been in. The bright moonlight was bathing the colorful houses and lush greenery beautifully, filling her with a sense of peace as she looked at it. Then, she felt a terrible pain in her foreleg, a biting sting that made her scrunch up her face. Once the pain began to worsen, she blinked a few times to clear her vision and looked at her sore hoof.

And then she screamed.

She immediately launched in to the air, knocking the pink pony that was laying comfortably on her back off of her, and shrieked as she waved her hoof, "Get it off get it off get it OFF!" She shouted.

Pinkie Pie took a second to recover from the sudden tumble, but in true Pinkie fashion, she regained her composure and smile in no time at all. After making sure that the flower, the entire reason they had gone on their adventure, was perfectly safe between her teeth, she looked up towards Twilight curiously, "What's the matter, Twilight?"

The unicorn only responded by continuing her shriek for a few moments, simply shaking her hoof violently. Pinkie noticed a small green blob that seemed to be attached to the flailing appendage, and took a guess that that might be the issue. Soon, enough, however, the green blur finally relented and let go of Twilight's hoof, causing it to be launched sky high, back towards the Everfree forest where it belongs.

"Oww..." Said Twilight as she brought up her hoof to suck on it.

The taste of iron filled her mouth as she performed the rudimentary first aid, simply sucking on the small wound, "One of those piranha-frogs must have bit down on me when I was casting the spell... It's going to hurt to walk for days now." She complained, despite being used to severe pain at this point.

"Oh no! We'll have to go and see Nurse Redheart in the morning to fix up your booboo! But right now, I think there's some worried fillies that want to see us. Maybe I can throw a mini-party for when each of us gets back. Ooo! That's sounds like fun!" Pinkie Pie said, beginning to dance in place.

Twilight Sparkle gave a laugh at her friend's antics, "Alright, that's sounds like a good plan. Now come on, we should head back now so that I can preserve the plant to make sure it doesn't go bad. I'll have Owlicious fly to Zecora's in the morning while I go and get my hoof bandaged up. Hopefully the others will be here tomorrow." She said, knowing that they were mostly likely the first ones back thanks to the spell.

"Hey, if we're lucky, maybe they're already here! But wait, that'll mean I missed a mini-party! Oh no! Come on, Twilight, we must hurry. There are parties we might be missing!"

The purple unicorn gave a small laugh at her friend's sometimes one track mind. It didn't bother her, however, and she just went along with it, starting to trot towards the library, favoring one foreleg over the other.

"Oh! I almost forgot! You said you were going to tell me what those things were." Said the pink pony suddenly.

"Hmm? Oh, well, they were made by a rather... Eccentric unicorn centuries ago. She loved animals, but she wasn't exactly... The most stable of ponies. She started to use her magic on the animals to combine them in to what she believed to be better animals. She made such creatures as the first manticores, the piranha-frogs, and other such nasty creatures. She eventually got banned from doing such things, and all of her creations were sent to places like the Everfree forest. I just wasn't expecting many of them to last so long. Manticores are big and strong, so I wasn't that shocked by them, but the piranha-frogs were small and weak... I guess group tactics helped fix that problem." She explained, rambling away her rather lengthy explanation.

Pinkie Pie, meanwhile, had gotten bored rather quickly, and was midway through humming a new tune she was cooking up in her head. When Twilight finished speaking, she blinked and turned her head, "Hmm? Oh! Well, that's neat!"

The unicorn furrowed her brow slightly at her friend's lack of attention, but shrugged it off as they arrived at the library. "Alright, here we are, Pinkie. Let's go in, say hi, and get some sleep."

"Sounds good to me!"

Together, the two of them walked in to the library, both having smiles on their faces as they do so. Immediately Twilight lifted the flower from Pinkie's mouth and placed it inside a vial in order to help preserve it. With a little magic to ensure its preservation, she turned to look at the others in the room. Granny Smith, Sweetie Belle, Scootaloo, and Apple Bloom were all fast asleep, with only Big Macintosh keeping watch over them all. The moment they had entered, his eyes turned to them, a small smile spreading across his face.

"Hello, Big Mac. We're back!" She said, keeping her voice down despite her excitement.

"I see you got it." Said the red stallion, taking a look at the flower in the vial.

"Yes, we did. It was hard, but we managed to grab it at the last second and avoid certain doom. There's so much I want to tell you about what I saw but..." Her voice was suddenly cut off by a loud yawn, "...I'm needing a good bit of sleep."

"Then sleep. You two deserve it... Thank you." He said, bowing his head to the both of them.

Twilight flushes slightly from embarrassment, "You're welcome, Big Mac. You should probably get some sleep as well. At least a cat nap to keep your strength up."

"Yeah! I can stay here and watch them for a little while. I'm not feeling tired yet. I can wake you before I go!" Said Pinkie, whispering loudly.

"Are you sure about that, Pinkie Pie? You aren't exactly the quietest pony I know, and these ponies need their sleep."

"Don't worry, Twilight. I'll make sure they get a good nights sleep. Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye." The pink pony recited, performing the gestures for her infamous Pinkie Pie swear.

That was all Twilight Sparkle needed, "Okay, you can keep watch on them. Is that okay, Big Macintosh?"

"Eeyup. Thank you kindly, miss Pie." He replied, giving her a nod.

"Oh, silly! It's no problem. Now lay your sleepy head down and let your Auntie Pie take care of things."

Big Mac gave her a strange look for a moment, but decided to drop it for now. "Thank you both for what you've done for us... The Apple family won't forget this."

"You're welcome again, Big Macintosh. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to sleep."

The unicorn received another quiet nod in return as she made her way up the stairs to her bedroom. She could hear Pinkie Pie skulking around, and, true to her word, being relatively quiet. She smiled brightly as she hopped on to her bed, her mind filled with hopeful thoughts and self praise about having made it back despite the odds that they faced.

The thought that they did good brought her a peaceful sleep.

Now, it was only a matter of waiting for the others to return.

# Chapter 10

## Applejack and Rarity, Final

Thud. Thud. Thud.

Despite the fear in the pit of her stomach, Applejack's hoof smacked against the door to her aunt's office with its usual gusto. As she did so, she turned to Rarity, if only to see how she was handling all of this. She was surprised to find that her companion was showing absolutely no fear or worry, showing off an air of confidence and command. But then she briefly remembered the unicorn's lesson on stage fright when Rainbow Dash was going to the Best Young Fliers competition, and wondered just how her companion really felt on the inside.

Still, there was little time to think about that right now, as a voice came from the other side of the door.

"Hello, Applejack. Please, come in." Said a voice she hadn't heard in over ten years now.

With a gulp, she turned the handle, opened the door, and bravely walked inside. The place looked pristine, as far as she could tell. It was a perfectly immaculate business office filled with papers and filing cabinets galore. In the center of the room was a large wooden desk with small piles of mail and papers neatly organized on top of it. Finally, sitting behind the professional looking furniture, was a pony Applejack had not seen in a very long time, one that she didn't exactly have the best memories of.

"Howdy there, Aunt Orange." The farmpony said with a nod.

"A pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Orange." Said Rarity.

"I see that you haven't changed one bit, Applejack. Such a shame. Now, to what do I owe the... Pleasure of your visit?" The company owner said.

"Well, y'see... There's somethin' we need from ya. Back home, yer niece and mah sister, Apple Bloom, got herself real sick. Our friends are off doin' what they can to find tha cure, each of them findin' a piece of what she

needs. And that's why Ah'm here, to get the last thing we need ta help fix her up. That's why we came ta you, Aunt Orange, in hopes that you can give it to us." Applejack said, taking off her hat as she implored her relative.

"I see... And just what is it that you need for my umm... Niece?" Mrs. Orange asked, not having known that she had a niece until now.

"It was... Umm... Oh shoot. Rarity, what was the blasted thing called again?"

"Ahem, it was called the Mandragora Sonales, I believe." Rarity replied, placing a hoof to her chest in pride over being able to help a little.

Mrs. Orange's eyes widened slightly at the mention of the plant, "That one, you say? Well... That is quite the tall order, Applejack, dear. You see, the crops this year weren't exactly the best, and we only have a limited supply, which is why I've had it pulled from the shelves. I'm afraid I only have enough to provide to our most luxurious customers. Unless you match or exceed what they are paying for it, then I'm afraid I'll have to deny your request. I can't simply give up that much money after all."

The farmpony frowned deeply, appalled by what her relative said, and was about to start tearing her Aunt a new one when a white hoof suddenly invaded her vision.

"How much?" Rarity asked.

"The current going price is eight-hundred bits. Usually we can sell it for as cheap as twenty, but a lot of rich ponies like it to keep themselves youthful and healthy, so only the highest bidders are getting any this year." The earth pony said, seeming quite happy about her business decision.

Both of the ponies from Ponyville all of a sudden couldn't find the strength to lift their jaws. After a few moments of stunned silence, the unicorn was the first to speak up, "Eight-hundred bits? Pardon my language, but have you gone *completely mad*?" She exclaimed, "That's more than I make in two months! Not to mention expenditures and resupplying... I'd have to scrape and save for five or six months to get that kind of money. It's just absurd!"

"Yeah! What she said! Even if I pitched in, Ah don't think we'd have enough even after two months, let alone the five days that we got." Added the farmpony.

"Well, then I'm sorry, but you'll just have to do without for now, now won't you?" The corporate pony replied.

"But we can't make do without! Apple Bloom is gonna die in five days unless we get that plant! Are you just gonna let kin pass on just for a few measly bits?" Applejack asked incredulously.

"Not for a few measly bits, for eight-hundred measly bits. You need to learn that if you haven't the money in this city, there is little you can get. If she grows too ill simply because you can't pay for it, well, that simply is not my problem, now is it?" She asked, turning her nose up high, shunning the other two in the room.

To say that Applejack was furious was an understatement. It was taking all of her willpower at that moment now to avoid bucking her snooty aunt in the head until she gave up the plant, but the thought of being arrested for that and not having a chance to fix Apple Bloom was holding her in place. Her teeth grit tightly at her relative's greed, and she cursed ever being related to such a pony, and thanking her lucky stars she was born in the good part of the family.

She was literally shaking with rage at this point, and her jaw was becoming sore from the clenching. She glared daggers at her aunt with all of her might, but try as she might, she couldn't even get so much as the other mare's attention, let alone the head exploding effect she was going for. After a few moments of this, she turned tail and started to leave, not being able to stand the presence of the other earth pony.

However, just like a few minutes before, she found a white hoof shoved in front of her face, before being placed on her shoulder. "Now, hold on a moment, Applejack. While this beastly pony before us has given us quite the horrendous bargain, one should never doubt the power of... Proper negotiation, as t'were. I would like to make a counter offer to your deal, Mrs. Orange." Said Rarity, who was acting quite cool and collected about this.

The Manehattan based pony raised an eyebrow as she listened to this, "I see... Very well, you can attempt to negotiate, though do know that I won't sell it to you for any less than eight-hundred bits."

"Oh no, of course not. I don't expect you to." She says, before giving a smirk, "I expect you to give it to us for free."

Mrs. Orange started at the white unicorn for a moment, quite in the same fashion as Applejack was at the moment, before suddenly bursting out into laughter. After a few moments, the laughter died down, and she began to regain her composure, "Oh my... That is quite hilarious. Oh... Wait, were you serious? Excuse me." She said, before bursting into another round of giggles.

However, the entire time, Rarity kept her cocky grin, and Applejack simply looked confused, "What in the hay are you up to, Rarity?"

"Why, dear Applejack, I'm going to be giving your aunt an ultimatum. Either she gives us the plant for free, so that your dear sister's life can be spared, or we will ruin the one thing ponies of her... Level, cherish even more than bits.

"Their reputations." She finished after a short pause, turning to the pony behind the desk for effect.

At this, the haughty business pony shut up, not taking such a threat lightly. Simultaneously, Applejack was running the situation over in her head, but wasn't getting it just yet, "What do you mean...?" Asked Mrs. Orange.

"Well, you see, here you are, denying your own family the help they need. You're willing to let a small filly die simply because of a few bits. Sure, you most likely don't know who she is, but the part that she's family is what counts." Rarity began.

As she heard this, Applejack started to smile as she turned towards her aunt, "Yeah, that's right. S'a pretty underhanded thing ta do, Aunt Orange."

"Yes well... so what? What are you going to do about it?"

"You see, I have done work for quite a few celebrities in the past. Hoity Toity and Sapphire Shores, to name a couple of the more popular ones. I



still remain in some contact with them, as well as the others I've worked with, and it would be such an easy thing to tell them the reason their latest clothing line is late. Grieving over the loss of a loved one, whose life could have been saved if not for a *certain* cold hearted somepony."

Mrs. Orange seemed to clam up at the mention of this, running over the possibility in her head as she glared at the unicorn, "...You're bluffing."

"Nope, she ain't!" Chimed in Applejack, "An' even if she was, you know what kinda contacts Ah got. The extended Apple Family is not only really big, but they're also spread over Equestria more than most any other family! An' we Apple folk stick together. All Ah'd have ta do is tell one, just *one*, of the family members outside of Ponyville, and the news will spread to everypony in tha family in less than a week! And boy howdy, they'll start a ruckus like you ain't never seen before, and soon, everypony around... Well, shoot, everywhere will know what you did."

The other earth pony clenched her teeth and slammed her hooves down onto her desk as she heard this, "You can't do this! This is pure slander! If you start those rumors, I will make sure to have you brought to court for it!" She said, trying out a desperate plea to end this situation in her favor.

"Ah! The court! Thank you for reminding me of our mutual connection to the court." Rarity said.

"That's raight, good ole' Twilight will definitely be able to help us out there." Added Applejack.

"Twilight? Who is this Twilight? What do they matter?" Mrs. Orange asked, thinking it incredulous that somepony she's never heard of before could impede her in court.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Orange. Both Applejack and I are quite good friends with a unicorn by the name of Twilight Sparkle. You see, aside from being great friends with us, she is quite fond of Apple Bloom and her little companions."

"And what importance could she possibly have? I've certainly never heard of her."

"Well, that's because our dear Twilight Sparkle was quite the recluse until a little over a year ago, when our very own Princess Celestia told her to come to Ponyville. Now, while you might not remember her name, you might remember that somepony led us to victory in defeating Nightmare Moon, freeing Princess Luna, and reuniting the two sisters for the first time in a thousand years. That was Twilight Sparkle, personal student and beloved protégé of Celestia herself!"

Mrs. Orange's eyes widened as a chill ran down her spine. She had no idea how she had forgotten something so important on to the economic and political scales. "Y-you... You wouldn't. You can't!"

"Oh, but we can! That's the best part! When we tell Twilight Sparkle that we can't get the cure to Apple Bloom in time, why, in her grief, she'll most definitely be sending a letter to Princess Celestia, and we'll let her know every detail of your involvement. And I'm sure the Princess will be quite cross with somepony who was not only willing to let a filly pass on for her own greed, but allowed the propagation of a terrible disease that has plagued her lands before. Now, add in my connections to certain celebrities..."

"And mah connection to tha Apple Family." Added Applejack.

"I think that the Orange Company will become the most horrendous black spot in Manehattan since... Well, ever. Everypony with morals will avoid you like the plague, and those like you will with stay away for fear of catching some of your reputation. And now, we get back to my ultimatum.

"You will give us the plant we need, right here, right now, or so help me Celestia I *will* make sure that your reputation and business are run into the ground!" Rarity shouted, stomping a hoof down as she glared angrily at the pony sitting behind the desk.

Mrs. Orange glared daggers at the two ponies in her doorway, countless scenarios running in her head, and not one of them ending nicely for her. The potential ramifications of trying to save herself eight-hundred bits could cost her tens of thousands down the road. As much as she hated to think about it, she was feeling that she had little choice. Even bringing them to court for extortion could end very badly with their connections to the Princess.

"Fine..." She said through gritted teeth, her voice dripping with venom. "You will get your Celestia-damned Mandragora and you will leave here. You will leave and you will never set foot in here again! In fact, never set foot in Manehattan again!" She shouted, slamming a hoof down onto the desk in anger.

Applejack gave a small smirk at this news, "Alraight, that can be done, aunt Orange. Give us what we need, and Ah don't think either me or Rarity will ever have a reason ta come back."

"Indeed. I've grown to dislike this place quite a bit." Rarity added.

Reluctantly, the pony behind the large desk opened a drawer and fished out a key with her mouth. Slowly, she trotted over to a painting on the wall, and with a flick of her hoof, she moved it aside, revealing a rather large safe behind it. After sticking the key inside of it and turning the lock, she opened the large door to reveal an enchanted refrigerator, filled to the brim with boxes. She gracefully hopped up and walked into the safe, and after a bit of looking around, she picked up a small box tied with string.

Once she exited the safe, she tossed it, quite violently, over towards Applejack and Rarity, "There's your stupid plant, straight from my private reserve. Now take it and go!"

After a moment, the unicorn used her magic to lift the now dented packed and unwrap it to peek inside. She smiled at what she saw, "This is it, Applejack. It's a little malformed, but it definitely looks just like the picture. We've got it!"

"Great! Now let's do what everypony here wants and get the hay outta town. This whole place reeks somethin' fierce." The farmpony said, turning around to take her leave.

"I couldn't agree with you more, Applejack." Rarity added, turning her back in disgust.

"Good riddance to the both of you! And remember, never show your faces here again!"

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Laughter echoed out of the train car as it sped down the tracks back towards the hub station. After acquiring the plant, Applejack and Rarity had sought out a hotel to spend the night in, and the following morning, they immediately left for the return train back home. They had had little time to talk after leaving Orange Pharmaceuticals, mostly due to falling asleep almost immediately upon entering their hotel, and then leaving right away in the morning. But now, the two had plenty of time to converse, and were having quite the fun time doing so.

"Oh... Tha look on 'er face... It was tha best thing Ah've seen since... Well, ever!" Said Applejack, who had a huge grin on her face.

"I know just what you mean, Applejack. It was quite nice to see that witch get her comeuppance." Replied Rarity with a proud flick of her mane, "It was such a nice thing to be able to put her in her place, not to mention getting the ingredient we needed to help Apple Bloom."

The farmpony was still smiling, but her laughter died down after hearing the unicorn's words, "Yeah... Rarity, listen, Ah-" She began.

"You don't have to say anything, Applejack." The white coated pony interrupted, holding up a hoof.

"No, I gotta. It just wouldn't be raight if I don't. Rarity... Thank you. Thank you so much fer what ya did back there fer me. Ah was about ready ta up and leave... Leave what mighta been tha only chance Ah had ta save mah sister, all because Ah got so angry. But you... You calmed down, ya thought of a way ta turn it around on my aunt, and in the end, it was you that got us what we needed. So... Thank you. Thank you so much Rarity." She said, suddenly wrapping her hooves around her friend's neck in a tight hug.

Rarity was slightly surprised by the sudden physical contact, but smiled all the same as she patted the earth pony's back, "You are most welcome, Applejack. I'm happy to have provided whatever assistance I could for you and your sister."

"Assistance nothin', you did everything back there. Ya came through fer Apple Bloom... Unlike me. Ah was useless there. Ah haven't done a single thing ta help out. All mah friends are doin' all tha work while Ah just made a

mess a things..." She said, her head hanging in shame as she slowly let go of her companion.

Suddenly aghast, Rarity pressed her hooves to Applejack's shoulders and pushed her back slightly, letting her look the other pony right in the eyes, "Applejack! How could you even think such a thing!"

"Well it's true, ain't it? You got tha plant, not me..."

"But you helped immensely, my dear! Don't sell yourself short!" She exclaimed.

"But... How? Ah didn't do anythin'..." She asked.

"Think about it harder, Applejack. My, you can be quite dense sometimes." She said, giving a small giggle, "If it wasn't for you, and your connection to Mrs. Orange, we wouldn't have been able to so much as meet with her at all! You are the one who helped solidify the threat of spreading the word, thanks to your connections to the Apple Family. Not to mention joining in on my plan almost seamlessly. It really did help. Plus, you being there added a great deal of weight to our connections with Twilight Sparkle, and in turn, her connections to the Princess. You had resources available to you, and only you, which helped us get what we needed. Sure, I was the one who started the plan and came up with it, but without the weight of your words and resources, why, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere, except rudely evicted from the building. I knew that I wouldn't be able to do it without you, Applejack, and you came through not only for me, but most importantly, your sister." She finished, smiling brightly to the orange mare.

"Ya... Ya really mean it, sugarcube?" The farmpony said, wiping a hoof across her eyes as the words started to really sink in.

"Of course I do, Applejack."

Applejack's face started to light up as she took the words to heart, feeling a whole lot better about herself now, "You know, yer raight, sugarcube. Ah did get ta help after all, and in a pretty big way, too. Even if Ah didn't see it right away... Thanks, Rarity. I owe ya a lot fer all of this."

"Think nothing of it, Applejack. This is what friends are for, after all."

"Yeah, Ah suppose yer raight... C'mere." She said, wrapping her hooves around Rarity once again.

"Oh, very well then." The unicorn said, giving a small giggle before returning the hug. Moments later, however, she let go quite suddenly, "Oh! We're slowing down, Applejack. We must be arriving at the station already. Come now, let's pack our things and get ready to head back to Ponyville."

"Huh? Well, shoot. That was some fast travel this time 'round. Alraight, let's get goin' then! Yeehaw!" She said, lifting her upper body in to the air for a moment in excitement, a big smile on her face.

By the time they had gathered their things, the train had come to a screeching stop at the train station, and they were able to get off without a hitch. The two of them chatted lightly as they made their way back to Ponyville, Rarity insisting they walk instead of run, as she didn't want to become sweaty and have her hair become messy, and after telling her that they still had plenty of time before the others came back anyway, Applejack reluctantly agreed.

After a long walk, they finally found themselves within the borders of Ponyville once again, feeling like they've just come home after being away for far too long. The trip to Manehattan had only been a day, but between dealing with snooty ponies and Mrs. Orange, it felt like it had been much longer, and it was good to be back home.

"Ya reckon we should just head straight ta Twi's place? Tha rest of tha family should still be there, even if she ain't." Said Applejack.

"Hmm... I think we should. It will give them a nice boost of moral support to see us return, and the sooner they get it, the better they'll feel. I can return my things to my abode later." Rarity replied.

Together, the two of them made their way to Twilight Sparkle's library. The place was almost as quiet as they left it, and from the outside, they could hear some strange, soft sounds coming from within. "Huh... wonder what everypony's up to." Said the farmpony as she pushed the door open.

Immediately they were greeted by a blur of pink, "Shh! Everypony's sleeping!" Came the whispering voice of Pinkie Pie.

"Ahh!" Applejack yelled, before quieting down, "Pinkie Pie? What in the hay are you doin' here?"

"Watching Apple Bloom while the others sleep. Duh." The party pony replied.

"No, Ah mean, how did you get here before us? Shouldn't ya'll be knee deep in the Everfree forest gettin' yer part of tha cure? No way you could'a beaten us here."

"Oh! That's easy! When we were in the forest, we met with Luna! An-"

"You met with Princess Luna? What in the wide world of Equestria was she doing there, Pinkie Pie?" Rarity asked, suddenly butting into the conversation.

"Oh. Well, she was there rounding up the source of the White Demure, and all of the poor animals that it was too late for. She's keeping it safe so nopony else can be infected by it. She's waiting for Princess Celestia to finish up with Spike, so they can use his dragon's fire to burn it all up! Whoosh!" Pinkie said, raising her hooves into the air for emphasis.

"Dragon's fire? Oh my... this disease sounds worse the more I hear about it. And that also explains Spike's sudden need to head to Canterlot. I do hope they get rid of it all... And maybe I'll make Spike an outfit or give him a plate of my gems in thanks for what he's doing." The unicorn said, touching a hoof to her chin in thought.

"Well, that'll be mighty nice of ya, Rarity, but that still don't explain how ya beat us 'ere, Pinkie." Said Applejack.

"Oh, right. Well, before we left to go and find what we needed again, Princess Luna gave Twilight one of her spells, a really powerful one that lets her teleport herself and other ponies faaaaaar away! After I grabbed the pretty flower, she poofed us back here really fast! Just zoom! And we were here! That was a couple of hours ago now, though, and everypony in here is asleep, except for me."

"That's great ta hear! So, you got your part, then?" The farmpony asked.

"Mhm! Twilight has it in a little jar, all ready to give to Zecora when she wakes up! Did you get yours?" The pink mare asked in return.

"We sure as shootin' did! Ah got it raight here!" The orange mare said as she reached in to her saddlebag and pulled out the small box containing the Mandragora that they had sought out.

"Great! We're one step closer to have a fantastic Apple-Bloom-is-better party!"

"Heh-heh... that we are Pinkie. Ah guess we jus' haveta wait fer Dash and Fluttershy, unless they got 'ere before we did too. Uhh... they didn't get here before us too, right? Ah mean, that'd be great an' all, but also kinda impossible, Ah think."

"Oh, no, they aren't here yet. But they should be by tomorrow or the day after! Then, we'll have three whole days to spare when Zecora makes her super brew and fixes Apple Bloom. So, are you two going to come in or what? Everypony's sleeping, so it's boring, and I wanna hear your story to pass the time!"

"Sure thing, sugarcube. You wanna come in too, Rarity?" Asked Applejack.

"I think I'll pass for now, you two. I want to get my things together and make sure I look presentable for the big moment." Rarity replied, giving a smile.

"Alraight, you go on and do that now. Come on, Pinkie Pie. It's story time."

"Yay!" Pinkie Pie said, jumping a little with joy.

After she entered the library, she glanced towards her family, the lot of them sleeping peacefully. All of them except for Apple Bloom, who continued to stir under the effects of White Demure. Applejack's face fell for a moment, feeling terrible for her little sister, but a smile returned to her face as she saw the eagerly awaiting Pinkie Pie. She was going to have to stay strong, but she knew, deep down, she wasn't going to be able to feel any better until she was sure her sister was safe, and as she sat down to tell her story, a single thought passed through her head.

*'Fluttershy... Rainbow Dash... please, hurry.'*



# Chapter 11

## Cold Upon the Mountain Top

The following morning had rolled around, and the group inside of the library began to stir. The Apple family was the first to wake, and Applejack made breakfast for everypony, an act that both cheered everypony up, and took her mind off of waiting for Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy to come by.

By noon, they had begun taking turns watching the skies towards Mount Marebrum, looking for any signs of the two pegasi flying their way. No pony would let Applejack take watch, however, because they all knew it wouldn't do her any good. Instead, those that weren't keeping watch were trying to keep them all occupied and entertained. Something to just pass the time while they waited for the very last ingredient to cure the sick filly.

And it was nearing dusk when Apple Bloom's sickness took a turn for the worse. The green spots all over her had started to grow, growing faster the longer they took. From the notes in Zecora's letter, once the spots completely covered the filly's body, the green was going to start to turn white. When that happened, they had less than twenty-four hours to administer the cure, or otherwise, she wouldn't make it.

It was also then that they all started to panic.

"Why in the hay haven't they shown up yet?" Applejack asked, her mane a mess from the constant stress.

"Calm down darling... I'm sure they've just met with an unexpected delay and will be here in the morrow. We still have three and a half days. That should be plenty of time for them to come home and for Zecora to mix her brew." Rarity said, placing a hoof over the farmpony to try and calm her down.

"Ah know but... they really shoulda been back by now. Rainbow Dash said she could be there and back in less than a day. And even with Shy there, no offense ta her meant, they shoulda been back today at least."

"We know you're worried, Applejack, but you just gotta relaaaaaax. Trust your auntie Pinkie Pie. Just let me do my *thang* and I'll have you not worried in no time at all!" said the pink party pony, hopping up and down beside the orange mare.

"But Ah just can't calm down or focus on nothin' that ain't those two or Apple Bloom... Shoot!" She shouted, stomping her hoof, "Ah just... it's really gettin' ta me, ya know? Ah ain't never been this worried or stressed about nothin' in mah entire life..." She finished, lowering her head.

"Applejack... I can't even begin to imagine what you're going through, not having any siblings myself. But I know you're hurting and... well, we'll do all we can to help. And you know what? I'm... going to look up a spell I once read, one that I skipped over because I thought it would be very rude to ever use." said Twilight Sparkle, turning to her books in search of the spell.

"Huh? An' what's that?" The farmpony asked.

"It's a scrying spell of sorts. Basically, it'll let me see where the two of them have been over the last few days. It creates a small illusion and a trail that the target pony has followed over the course of a few days. It's not very precise, but, it will tell us where they are now, and we can see if they're on their way or what," she replied, levitating a book off of the shelf. "I'll read the spell over tonight, and cast it in the morning if they haven't arrived yet. Hopefully it won't be too hard to cast."

"Ah sure hope so, Twi..."

"Now come over here with us, darling. Pinkie Pie has set up another board game, and has already trounced me twice. It would be nice to have a little help." said Rarity, speaking from the far end of the library, sitting in front of a table across from Pinkie, who was busy rolling dice.

After giving a small sigh, Applejack walked over to the two ponies playing their board game, joining them in hopes that it will keep her mind off of things.

By the time the night came around, she had won a couple of games, but Pinkie Pie reigned supreme as grand champion of the dice. Most everypony had fallen asleep, except for Big Macintosh, who was still standing strong and quiet, a pillar of strength for his whole family. Twilight

Sparkle was still awake as well, working hard on deciphering the ins and outs of the spell she was working on. With everypony asleep or doing their part, Applejack finally gave in, and joined the former group of ponies, taking a restless sleep beside her sister's bed, next to Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle.

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In the morning, Applejack felt ragged and tired. The restless sleep had given her precious little energy, and even then her stress stole it away. However, when she saw Twilight trotting down the stairs, her heart swelled with hope.

"Mornin' Twi..." she said.

"Good morning, Appleja- Woah... You look umm... great!" Twilight said, giving a nervous smile at nearly misspeaking what she really thought Applejack looked like.

"So, are y'all set to cast that spell of yours?"

The purple unicorn gave a sigh, "Well, I studied the spell, and I can cast it-"

"Well that's great!" The farmpony shouted excitedly, waking up a few ponies in the room.

"But!"

"...but?" The orange mare asked, suddenly starting to deflate.

"There's a catch to the spell. You see, in order to use it to track somepony, I need a piece of that pony. Usually a tail or mane hair is good enough, or a feather in the case of a pegasus... but the problem is, I have no idea where to go and get one! Fluttershy usually keeps her house clean, so I'm not sure what we could find there, and Rainbow Dash's home is up in the clouds, and we're out of pegasi to search it for us," the studious pony explained.

"But... why can't ya just ask some other pegasus in town to go and try to raid Dash's place for us?"

"Hmm... I suppose that could wo-"

"No need!" A voice from up the stairs called.

Both Twilight and Applejack turned to the stairs, and saw Rarity, slowly trotting down the steps, "Oh! Rarity. I take it you finished up with my mirror?"

"That I have, Twilight Sparkle. Now, I believe I have a quick and easy solution to this issue."

"Ya do? Well, what tha hay are you watin' for, sugarcube? Tell us!" said Applejack.

With a prim and proper clearing of her throat, the fabulous unicorn began to speak and at the same time, trot towards the garbage bin across the room, "Well, for once, I will admit that not taking out the garbage has come in handy. Just a moment please..." she said, using her magic to carefully poke through the trash. After a moment, she exclaimed, "Aha! Here we are, darlings. Just what we needed."

With careful use of her magic, Rarity floated over what looked to be a pair of threads, a red thread and a purple one.

"What are those?" Applejack asked.

"Wait a minute... I... I recognize those!" Twilight gasped.

"Indeed you do, dear! They are, if aged and a little worse for wear, the very same tails hairs you plucked out of poor Rainbow Dash's dock when you stopped her from speeding off. I tossed them out myself and am glad that I did not deal with the garbage until now." said the white unicorn, placing a hoof to her chest in pride.

"There ya go again, Rarity, comin' through when Ah really need ya. Ah owe you big time after this." said Applejack.

"T'was nothing, Applejack, and I'll not hear another word of it!" She says, stamping her hoof down, "Now, Twilight Sparkle, I believe you have some of your magic to work?"

"Right!" Said Twilight, grabbing on to the two strands of hair with her magic, "Stand back a bit, girls."

It was by this time that some of the others had awoken as well, content to watch the others talk while they got rid of their sleepiness. By the time Twilight got hold of the hairs, however, the rest of them were quite alert, and all of them formed a circle around the powerful unicorn as she started her spell. That is, everypony except for Big Macintosh, who was content to sit by his sick sister, watching from afar.

"Here it goes..." The purple unicorn said with a grunt. With a bit of straining, a large flash of light shined out, blinding everypony for a moment. Once they regained their sight, they all gasped as they saw the illusion of Ponyville in front of them, along with a small blue dot hovering above it.

"Phew... okay. The spell is going to start now. The book said it would start a few days before getting to their actual location, so we'll be able to see everywhere Rainbow Dash went for the last few days." She explained.

"Well shoot, that's pretty handy fer a situation like this... but Ah can see the potential to invade privacy." Said Applejack.

"I know, that's why I skipped over it before... in any case, let's watch."

Everypony in the room leaned in towards the illusion. The only sounds that permeated the area were the heavy breaths of everypony, and the ignored sound of Pinkie munching on a mysterious bag of popcorn. Once the blue dot began to move, Twilight started to provide her best guesses as narration.

The blue dot started high in the sky, sitting still for several minutes inside of the image of Dash's cloud home, "I think that's her sleeping, which means this is, at the earliest, the morning that you came and got us, Applejack."

The dot soon started to move, going back and forth inside the cloud home; most likely her morning preparations.

"Oh, there she goes now. With the erratic movements, that must be her doing some tricks in the air and- Ooh!" She said, wincing along with everypony else as the dot suddenly fell to the ground.

"Wait, Ah think I remember this. This is when Ah came along and told 'er about mah sister. She did look extra dirty then fer some reason," Applejack said.

The dot then flew around the town for a short while. "That's probably her looking for us..." said Twilight. The dot then traveled towards the image of the library, the illusion zooming in as it grew closer to the source of the spell. The orb of light only remained there for a few seconds, the spell giving a sped up version of events, before it flew over to Rarity's house. Another few seconds there, and it went back to the cloud home, and then to Fluttershy's cottage.

"Alright, I think we're about to see their journey now... Yup, there they go." She said, the whole group watching the sped up trip towards Mount Marebrum. They watched the quick rest the two pegasi took, and then a pause that could have only meant they were sleeping, "That explains why they didn't arrive yesterday, I think."

They continued to watch as it began to move again, flying up the mountain for a while before nearing its peak, and then taking to the side of the mounting and moving much more slowly, "Their wings must have gotten too cold and they had to walk and... wait, what just happened?" She asked.

Everypony started in silence as, after a bit of slow movement, the blue light suddenly paused, and then was shunted to the side for a moment. It then began to move excruciatingly slow, deeper in to the mountain, before coming to a stop, taking a pause far longer than the rest they had taken before. The light stayed perfectly still for nearly three minute in the sped up illusion, before starting to pulsate with a dull blue glow.

A chill ran down Twilight's spine.

"What is it, sugarcube? Why ain't it movin' anymore?" Applejack asked.

"That... that blue pulse... it m-means that it's caught up to the present... they haven't moved in over a day." She said, her eyes wide and misting over.

A resounding "**WHAT!**" came from everypony in the room, all staring dumbfounded at the now teary eyed unicorn.

"They... t-they haven't moved in... in over a day. And I have no idea what that means... The spell says she's still there, but... it's can't tell me if she's alright or not..." Twilight explained, giving a gulp.

The room went dead silent after that; even Pinkie Pie had completely quieted, her hair falling straight in her despair. No pony made a sound for minutes, the sorrow hanging thick in the air, at least, until Applejack stamped her hoof down and stepped forward.

"Look! We can't just stand 'round here mopin' around and thinkin' tha worst. We need to get out there raight now!" She said, stomping her hoof down once again for emphasis. All eyes were on her now, and it was finally her time to shine. "Alraight, Twilight!" she said, pointing a hoof towards the purple unicorn, making her jump, "You need ta find us a way to that mountain, and pronto! I heard about yer group teleport thingy, so get on that. And take those hairs with ya, we can use 'em when we get there. Got it?"

"...Right!" replied Twilight, Applejack's conviction giving her both hope and motivation.

"Good. Tha three of us," she said, pointing to herself, Rarity, and Pinkie Pie, "we're goin' ta take a stop by Rarity's. Rarity, we need a whole set of quick, super quick, warm clothes that'll keep us all warm 'n toasty up there on that mountain."

"Of course, Applejack. I'll get right on that. Come on, everypony, to my boutique!" said Rarity, getting drawn in to the drama at hoof.

"Perfect. Now come on everypony, we got ourselves a couple friends ta save." said the farm pony, eliciting cheers from everypony in the room.

It didn't take long for the gang, at least, what was left of it, to get ready for the trip. Rarity had quickly slapped together another four sets of the parkas she had made for Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash, and quickly clothed herself, Applejack, and Pinkie Pie. Minutes later, a flash of light told them that Twilight Sparkle had arrived, and soon, she too was dressed for cold weather.

"You ready fer this, Twi?" Asked Applejack.

"I think so. It's going to be a two stage teleportation. The first stage will get us close enough for me to see the peak of the mountain and let me recharge a bit. The second stage will be getting us all there. I've only used this spell once before, and now I have twice the load, but... I'm going to try my best at it. No matter how hard, I know that they're counting on me, and I won't let them down!" Said Twilight, using her words to give herself confidence in her abilities.

"Good on ya, sugarcube. You two ready fer this too?"

"Yuppers! I've got a good feeling about this one girls!" replied Pinkie Pie.

"As do I. I'm ready when you are, ladies," replied Rarity.

"Alright! We're good ta go. Twi, do yer thing," said Applejack, nodding to the purple unicorn.

"Right!" With a nod of agreement, Twilight Sparkle moved to the center of her friends, and began to gather her magic. With the first location solidly in her mind, she focused hard, grunted with effort, and in a flash of purple light, her and her friends vanished from the boutique, leaving a small scorch mark on the floor where they all once stood.

A blink of an eye later, the quartet of ponies reappeared miles away from Ponyville, the top of Mount Marebrum now quite visible over the horizon. They took a short pause as Twilight caught her breath, ate a sandwich to keep her strength up, and began to cast once again. This time, she had a good view of the peak, but it was going to be a hard shot to make. Still, she concentrated hard on her magic, and in another flash, they were gone.

"Hey! I think we- Ahh!" screamed Twilight as she and her friends suddenly fell down towards the ground.

The purple unicorn had teleported them just a few feet too high, and with a crunch, they all landed in the fresh and powdery snow below. It took them a moment to recollect themselves, but the four friends were soon huddled together for warmth.

"S-sorry about that, girls. I was just a little bit off." Twilight said, shivering a little.



"S'alraight, sugarcube. Ya got us up here. Now, we gotta try and find 'em," said Applejack.

"It's really c-c-c-c-cold up here!" said Pinkie, her teeth chattering heavily.

"I find the snow rather beautiful, if a little too clingy to the coat," Rarity said, brushing some of the falling snow off of her coat, getting frustrated as it just kept piling on.

"Ah know it's gonna be cold. But hopefully, this won't take long," said the farmpony.

"It shouldn't. I have a spell that will help with the cold though, but first, I need to cast that l-location spell again. Get a closer look at things so that we know w-where to look," the purple unicorn said, her horn already bringing up Rainbow Dash's hair to cast the tracking spell once more.

"Please do hurry, Twilight. Had I known it was going to be this cold, I would have made their coats warmer..." said Rarity as they began to watch the illusion once again, the images more detailed now that they were closer to the current location of the target.

"Now, don't worry about it, Rarity. This ain't yer fault. None of us knew how cold it was gunna be. They probably dealt with it in their own way. Besides, pegasi are more resistant ta cold than we earth bound ponies, them coats were probably enough." said Applejack, patting the white unicorn's back a few times before quickly pulling her hoof back under the parka, the sudden exposure to cold too much to bear for long.

"Oh, I know darling, but I simply can't help but worry about it..." the dressmaker replied.

"Ah know sugarcube, Ah know."

"Girls! It's done! They don't look t-too far away!" said Twilight suddenly.

All eyes turned to the bookworm's illusion, and saw that the blue light looked to be quite close to where they were, at least, by what they could make out of the landscape in comparison to the illusion.

"Alraight, they're close. We go a direction. Come on everypony, let's move it!"

The others each gave their cheers of approval, and after Twilight Sparkle conjured up some heat, though not enough to start melting the snow, they moved on. They walked tightly side by side, with Applejack and Twilight taking the lead, and Rarity and Pinkie Pie following close behind, each of them taking in what warmth they could from the purple unicorn's magic. None of them spoke after they began moving, the wind having picked up to deafening levels, drowning out all sound. If not for the bright red color of the parkas, it might have been quite easy to lose one another.

For nearly half an hour they walked over the snow and ice, but eventually, they entered in to a small valley carved in to the peak of the mountain, every one of them thankful for being out of the biting wind. Now that they could finally speak, Applejack was the first to use the privilege, "They shouldn't be, maybe just 'round this here...corner... Oh no..."

Her words seemed to speak for everypony as they came around a turn in the valley, and saw the devastation that had assaulted the area. Where the crevice should have continued, was instead a massive pile of freshly fallen snow, the cliffs above nearly bare save for a bit of new snow.

"Girls... I think this explains what happened to them... it looks like an avalanche hit here." Said Twilight.

"Oh no... this is simply awful!" Rarity said, bringing a hoof to her mouth in shock.

"Hey everypony! Quit being so mopey! We can still find them! We're not out of this yet. I *will* have Dashie at another one of my parties, and that's that!" Pinkie shouted, almost stomping a hoof down before thinking twice about it.

"Ya know... Pinkie's raight! Remember what we saw? They suddenly got shifted. That's probably when tha avalanche hit." Applejack said.

"What are you getting at, Applejack?" asked the purple unicorn.

"Well, remember? They moved a lil' bit after that! That means they were still okay. Maybe... Just maybe, they're holed up somewhere, waitin' fer us. We can't let that hope leave us now. Not when they might need us," the

farmpony said, turning to the others to try and give them the hope they needed.

In return, she received a nod from all of them, "Good. Now, it ain't as cold 'ere. Let's fan out and search. At first sign of anythin' you... well, no, don't shout, but come a lookin' fer tha rest of us."

With that, they split up, each treading carefully as they moved towards the site of the avalanche, all of them looking for anything that might indicate where their pegasi friends had gone.

The search looked difficult, as a lot of snow had piled high, burying a lot of the valley beneath it. The fact that it had been nearly a day since the fall didn't help matters either, having allowed the wind to blow fresh powder over the disturbed terrain, making it smooth once again.

The search went on and on, and despite the lack of wind, it was still freezing cold, and it was really starting to wear on them. Their limbs grew numb from the cold; Even Twilight, who opted out of casting her warmth spell so she wouldn't be the only pony warm.

"Applejack..." came a voice.

"Huh? Oh. R-Rarity, d-did ya find a-anythin'?" Applejack asked, stuttering from the intense shivering.

Rarity spoke slowly and deliberately, the thought of chattering her teeth together beneath her, "No I... did not, Applejack. I... I simply cannot... go on anymore. I'm... nearly frozen."

The orange mare gave a long sigh, a cloud of breath filling the air as she did so. "Ah know, R-Rarity. Ah'm d-darn near out of i-"

Her words were suddenly interrupted by the sound of a loud pop. She turned just in time to see a fountain of streamers shoot up in to the air, staying on course for only a brief moment before being whisked away by the wind. Right away, she knew who had made it. And right away, she knew why.

Pinkie Pie had found something.

"Let's go!" Applejack said before suddenly bolting off over the snow towards where she had seen the streamers come from.

Once she arrived, she saw that Twilight was already there, looking into a small hole in the snow with a pink tail poking out of it. Right behind her, Rarity soon arrived, "What is... going on over here...?" She asked, both panting lightly and trying not to stutter.

"Oh good, you're here." Twilight Sparkle said, giving a sigh as she cast her spell once again, heating up herself and her friends now that they were all close.

Feeling the warmth flow over her, Applejack gave a pleased sigh, "Ahh... thanks, Twi. That feels loads now. Now, what in the hay is Pinkie doing?"

"I think I found them! I found a red thing!" The pink pony shouted from her little hole, "I dug a little more, and it keeps on going! It goes right into the mountain side. Help me dig!"

"That's why they got shunted so far! They went straight into a cave! And one of the parkas must have been ripped or something... okay, stand back!" Twilight shouted, planted her hooves firmly in the snow and grunting heavily.

With a fantastic burst of magical power, Twilight Sparkle's purple aura surrounded a massive chunk of the snow that was pressed up against the save entrance. With another grunt of effort, she lifted it wholesale in to the air, and with a flick of her horn, she threw it aside, far down the relatively safe valley path.

With the snow out of the way, they could see Pinkie sitting there, holding a piece of torn, red cloth between her hooves, pointing it towards a small dent she had dug out. The bookworm pony nodded and focused once more. Her glow felt around the snow, finding the outline of the cave entrance, and encompassed the blockage of snow within. She turned her head quickly away from the cave, and with it, the snow was flushed out, leaving the cave in plain view, and more importantly, accessible.

"Pinkie, you did real good. Come on girls, they've gotta be in there somewhere!" Applejack commanded, rushing in to the cave first.

Rarity provided the light as they rushed in, while Twilight kept up her heating spell to warm them back up after the search outside. The cave didn't seem very deep, but it had twists and turns that obscured their vision.

No more than ten feet into the cave, however, they noticed something that gave them hope.

"Look girls! A trail! There's some hoofprints, and... looks like somethin' was dragged..." Applejack said as she went along.

"Do you think it was Dashie dragging Fluttershy behind her? Oh no! That means that Flutters might've gotten hurt!" Pinkie said, placing a hoof to one of her cheeks in horror.

"Ah'm sure they're fine, Pinkie. It won't be too... there!" The farmpony shouted, pointing a hoof towards the back of the cave.

There, huddled up against one another, covered in a red parka on a bed of cold rock, were Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy, looking fast asleep.

"Oh no... no! Wake up you two!" Twilight shouted, rushing forward and forcing a huge amount of power into her heating spell, not caring about the possibility of burns around her horn.

"Woah! What's tha matter, Twi?" Applejack asked, feeling like she was being burned from the heat against her freezing skin.

"You are *not* supposed to fall asleep when you're cold! That could be hypothermia, and... it's really not good. Come on girls, we have to warm them up, *now!*" The purple unicorn shouted.

The others didn't have to be told twice. While the spellcaster remained a few feet away with her spell, the others quickly threw their own clothes over the two pegasi and wormed their way underneath to share in their body heat.

Dash and Fluttershy felt as cold as ice, and remained entirely unmoving. Bit of snow and ice that had clung to them were quickly melting away under the intense heat, but below the skin, they were still freezing.

"Oh come on, Dashie... Fluttershy! Wake up!" Pinkie Pie said, tears welling up in her eyes.

"Come on you two... You can't do freezin' ta death on us! Not after all we've been through..." Applejack said, pressing her head against Fluttershy's side.

And it was just when she was about to finally lose her hope, that her eyes opened wide.

"Applejack... what is it?" Twilight asked tentatively, afraid of what she might hear.

"Ah... Ah heard it...!" She paused for few seconds, before lifting her head and pressing it back down again on Fluttershy's side, "There it is again! It's slow... real slow. But... yeah, it's still there. Ah think Ah heard Fluttershy's heartbeat!" she proclaimed excitedly.

"Really?" Pinkie asked, suddenly pressing her ear to Rainbow's side. A second later, her tears were replaced by a bright smile, "I just heard Dashie's too!"

"Oh thank Celestia!" Twilight said, placing a hoof to her chest. "Alright! Let's keep this up! The cold slowed them down, so we need to keep the warm coming!"

With a renewed sense of hope, they all moved in closer, and although they were starting to sweat, even Rarity, they only help on tighter. Both Pinkie Pie and Applejack had their ears pressed against each pegasus, and listened to the beats of their hearts. As the minutes ticked by, the heartbeats grew in strength and frequency.

"How fast are they beating now?" The purple unicorn asked.

"About..." Applejack said, counting away the seconds as she listened, "...six every ten seconds."

"Hmm... same here!" Pinkie Pie said happily.

Twilight Sparkle breathed a sigh of relief, "Thirty-six beats a minute then, a little high for somepony like Rainbow Dash, but that's perfectly healthy. I

think they might be safe now... we just need to wait for them to wake up." She said, turning down the heat of her spell, wishing that all the snow hadn't melted so she'd have something to stop the burning feeling on her forehead.

Once their hearts were back up to full speed, it was easy to get the heat circulating through their systems, and once that happened, the two pegasi began to stir.

"Quick girls, let's get offa them, give 'em some breathin' room." said Applejack, already getting off.

"I will do so eagerly," said Rarity, not wanting to express her disgust over her somewhat sweaty state.

"Mmph..." Was the first noise either of them made, and surprisingly, it was Fluttershy, "G... Girls?" she asked, her eyes opening blearily as she woke up.

"Yay!" Pinkie said, jumping for joy before suddenly bounding towards her two almost frozen friends.

"Wait!" Dash suddenly shouted, holding out a hoof to stop the overeager earth pony.

"Huh?" the pink pony asked, stopping in her tracks, "Why?" Her lip began to quiver at the idea of being denied the hug.

Slowly, Rainbow Dash turned to Fluttershy, the small burst of adrenaline wearing off and rendering her weak once more, and nodded to her.

"Rarity?" Fluttershy asked.

"Yes, darling?" Rarity replied.

"Can you lift up the blanket, just a little?" the shy pony asked.

"For you, Fluttershy, anything." the white unicorn replied, so very happy to see her friends alive and well.

With a glow of blue magic, the parka-turned-blanket was lifted up gently, and revealed that Dash and Fluttershy had spread their wings over one another, most likely to share their warmth. But, as they gently pulled their feathery appendages back, their friends let out a unanimous gasp.

There, sitting snugly between the two pegasi, was a single, purple flower, growing straight out of the mountain rock.

In perfect unison, the two pegasi let out a few quiet words before falling back asleep.

"We found it."