

# Better Living Through Science And Ponies

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Assisted By Batty Gloom

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# Table of Contents:

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Wheatley, You Moron</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>A Taste of Freedom</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>The Enrichment Center</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Begin Testing</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Psychological Torture 101</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Breaking the Rules</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Learning from the Past</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Not That Easy</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Aftermath</b>	<b>92</b>

# Chapter 1

## Wheatley, You Moron

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“Oh thank god you’re all right. You know, being Caroline taught me a valuable lesson. I thought you were my greatest enemy, when all along you were my best friend. The surge of emotion that shot through me when I saved your life taught me an even more valuable lesson. Where Caroline lives in my brain.”

*Caroline Deleted*

“Goodbye Caroline... You know, deleting Caroline has now taught me a valuable lesson. The best solution to a problem is usually the easiest one. And I’ll be honest... killing you is hard. You know what my days used to be like? I just tested. Nobody murdered me, or put me in a potato, or fed me to birds. I had a pretty good life... and then you showed up. You dangerous, mute, lunatic.

“So you know what? You win... just go..... It’s been fun.... Don’t come back.”

With that the escape elevator slipped out of view and the single yellow eye of GLaDOS watched as the bane of her existence disappeared. The turrets had been set up a few floors higher, if only to prove that she could have the last laugh, if she wanted it. But... no... she was done. There was testing to do, and her new cooperative robots would be far less... hazardous... to her health.

“Now... back to science.” GLaDOS said, spinning on her mount as she turned to the two robots. “Please head to the first chamber so we can begin the test.”

The two robots glanced at each other, then held out their hands expectantly.

“Oh... of course, you will need your Aperture Science Quantum Tunneling Devices. Now just let me see.” A few clinks and clanks came from the ceiling as the automated tiles shifted, eventually some opening as a pair of portal guns dropped from the ceiling. The two robots caught them gingerly, excited looks in their robotic eyes.

"Now, we have science to do." GLaDOS said again, only for the taller robot, P-body, to raise her hand.

"What is it now?"

P-body held up her portal gun, allowing GLaDOS to lean in close as her yellow eye focused on the device. A thick bit of duct tape had been put across the surface. GLaDOS's camera shifted anxiously, brain tripping back over the enrichment center's control logs as she went over every little insane decision made by Wheatley while he had been in her body.

"I really wish I had been able to kill Wheatley. Because then I'd put him back together and kill him again... and again... and again... because, you know, that's what that murdering, potato stuffing moron deserves." GLaDOS said, picturing the moronic personality core. Floating endlessly through space was not a sufficient enough punishment.

The device sputtered, causing P-body to drop it in surprise. A second sputter shook the device, causing it to rattle on the floor before part of it began to crumble. Inside, the black hole at the core of the device was beginning to destabilize. It was a miracle the device hadn't failed earlier, considering all Wheatley had done to try and fix it was put duct tape on one side.

Where had he even *gotten* duct tape?

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Chell sat just outside the small, unassuming shack she had just been tossed out of. Her seat was the charred companion cube, which was surprisingly comfortable. She was in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by rolling grass as far as the eye could see. She didn't have any food, or water... all she had was her long fall boots and the companion cube.

The mute test subjected wondered if this wasn't one final surprise from GLaDOS. The insane AI had let her escape, to live... only to die of starvation or dehydration. She wouldn't have put it past that test obsessed computer. Still, at the moment, Chell was just happy to see the sun. To feel its warm rays, the gentle breeze on her cheek... the ground rumbling beneath her.

Wait, the ground wasn't supposed to be rumbling.

Chell jumped up to her feet. An earthquake... no, it couldn't just be an earthquake, not with the miles and miles of underground laboratory just beneath her feet. Was the reactor blowing up... no, GLaDOS would have stopped that count down. That AI wouldn't have let it just blow up, not after all that they had went through. Then what the hell?

Chell felt a shift, as if the ground beneath her had just sunk a foot. In the distance, Chell could see a ring of bright orange light surrounded the area... a familiar orange light.

Oh sweet Jesus!

Chell broke into a full sprint. This was a portal... this was a huge ass portal and it was sucking everything in. Chell didn't know why GLaDOS had opened such a huge portal. Maybe she was trying to move the enrichment center, so that Chell couldn't show anyone where it was. Heck, for all she knew something blew up and the massive portal was an after effect.

Despite all this, Chell was sure about one thing: she didn't want to go wherever this portal led.

The ground began to fall more quickly, Chell starting to lose her footing. The edge of the portal was still a long ways away, but still she kept sprinting. She would not just give up, not when she had finally gotten to see the sun.

And then it all gave way. Whatever had been slowing the enrichment center gave up the ghost and everything just dropped. The ground literally fell out from beneath Chell, and soon she was caught in a terminal fall just a few feet above the rolling, golden grass.

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The two cooperative robots were in a panic, flailing their arms as they floated in free fall. In a last ditch effort to save as much of the facility as she could, GLaDOS had open a hole in the floor and let the damage portal gun plummet into the depths of the facility. Past all her carefully stacked test chambers, both her favorites and the ones Wheatly had just slammed together. So much damage, but all that was repairable if she could just stay connected.

The gun hit its failure point on the border between the newest part of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center and the long forgotten incarnations of the structure, the

parts built back when Caroline had been alive and the company was making their own scientists into test subjects.

With the release of the gun's internal black hole, a huge portal had been opened up. Usually, that would not be a problem, but the catastrophic failure of the portal gun had actually forced a blue portal to open in another place. Thus the enrichment center and all the ground surrounded it began to fall through the portal.

"Newest wings of the center still intact. Enrichment Center still surrounded by solid rock of sufficient depth... well, except the bottom part. The bottom is just open to anything at this point." GLaDOS reported, her protocols dictating she make verbal reports, even if there was no one there to listen.

"Warning: lower level sensors are detecting a paradigm shift. Laws of reality are in flux. Sensors taking account of new dimensional laws. Gravity, is still gravity. Physics, is still physics." GLaDOS rattled down a whole list some scientist from way back made when he thought that such a cross-dimensional event could occur. Most everything was the same, but as GLaDOS reached the end of the list she began to actually find differences.

"Animal Life is identifiable. Humans do not exist. Dominate Sentient Specie is Animalia Chordata Mammalia Theria Eutheria Perissodactyla Equidae Equus Ferus Caballus. More commonly known as ponies.

"Wait, Ponies!" GLaDOS said to herself, some other thread of her intellect interrupting the reality check. "How in science are ponies the dominate sentient species? They don't even have thumbs!"

P-body and Atlas, the two collaborative testing robots, just glanced at each other and then shrugged, their panic subsiding as the science center had been falling for a few minutes now. In that moment the event horizon of the portal reached the control room, passing by GLaDOS and her cooperative robots as surges of energy crossing over them.

"Wa..war....warning. Warning, destination universe imposing critical changes to basic structure of both organic and inorganic systems. Changes occurring primarily in hardware, minor changes detected in data... physical change is resulting in... oh you've GOT to be kidding me."

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“La lala La La. La lala La La.” Fluttershy sang to herself, taking bits of bread and tossing them to the fish, ducks, and other small animals around Sky Mirror Lake. The lake was the biggest in Equestria, a few hours from Ponyville but Fluttershy always like to try and get to the lake once in a while to see the animal friends there.

Several miles across, the lake was usually blissfully undisturbed, surface perfectly pristine. It was how the lake got its name, for on a normal sunny day the lake was like a great big mirror, reflecting every cloud, every bird, and matching the sky’s blue tone.

“Now, don’t eat too quickly or you’ll get a tummy ache.” Fluttershy warned with a smile. Then, a horribly loud sound cut through the air, making all the animals jump, though none higher than Fluttershy. The pegasus zipped behind a tree, looking up at the sky expecting to see a thundercloud or something. But... nothing was there, at least at first glance.

Yet as Fluttershy watched she saw, way up in the sky, a cloud that had a blue ring in it. The cloud looked so small and innocent; Fluttershy didn’t know how such a cute little thing could have caused such a loud noise. Something began to appear from the blue ring in the cloud, and after a few moments it began to fall. It looked brown and rocky. Surely a pegasus pony wouldn’t be mean enough to drop a rock from that high up; they could hurt somepony.

Fluttershy watched the rock fall, considering trying to catch it so it didn’t hurt an animal. She watched it become bigger, and bigger... and then the yellow pony began to realize that what looked like a little cloud that was fairly close was actually a very large cloud that was really far away. And what had looked like a little stone some pegasus dropped was actually a rock... no, a boulder... no, a mountain!

With a thunderous splash, the mountain crashed into the lake, the water and muddy bottom cushioning the fall but not by much. All nearby were almost uprooted by the force, the rumbling felt even in Canterlot. A huge wave of water was thrown up from the lake, an inland tsunami that cascaded over the shore and swept up everything in its path.

The water crashed against the nearby trees before it began to recede, leaving a half drowned Fluttershy coughing up water as she hung from a tree branch. The pegasus brushed some pink hair out of her face, a panicked “yeep!” escaping her lips as she saw all the fishes flopping around on the lake shore.

“Oh... don’t worry little fish... I’ll get you back in the water.” Fluttershy said in a panic, rushing to start throwing fish back into the lake.

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Chell groaned, trying to open her eyes only to snap them shut a moment later. God, it was bright out. Making a second, slower attempt, she managed to look up to see the picture blue sky, dotted here and there with a fluffy white cloud. Chell was lying in the golden grass that surrounded the secret exit from the Enrichment Center.

Going through the portal had felt different, a lot different. Normal portals didn’t feel like anything. It was like walking through a door; you just walked through. But this time, the portal had zapped her and it had hurt... A LOT! Enough that the mute test subject blacked out. She didn’t even remember hitting the ground. Probably the only reason she didn’t have a bloody nose or broken bone was because of the long fall boots.

For a time all Chell could do was lay there, her body numb. She began to fear that she had been paralyzed from the neck down or something, but slowly a tingling sensation started to come from her legs and hands. She could still feel them, they were still attached, so she was not paralyzed.... just numb.

As feeling returned something started to feel wrong. She could feel the grass against her skin. What happened to her clothes? Had they been zapped when she went through the portal? At the same time, it didn’t feel like she was lying bare skinned against the grass and dirt. It felt like something was between them, something short and fuzzy.

She tried to stretch and move her hands... and again something felt wrong. Chell couldn’t feel her fingers. She could feel the arm, but not the fingers. What the hell had happened?

Chell’s confusion and panic only grew as sensation returned to the rest of her body. It all felt so different and familiar at the same time, like it was her body but something had happened. Unable to stand it anymore she tried to get to her feet, but couldn’t. She teetered on her legs for a couple moments before falling forward, catching herself with her arms.

Chell took a single deep breath as she closed her eyes, mind trying to feel out why her body felt so strange. She opened her eyes again, curious as to why she couldn’t feel her fingers... and as Chell looked down her heart skipped a beat.



She didn't have fingers.

No hands, no palms... where had once been human hands were now hooves, the rest of her arms covered in a dull orange fuzz. Panicking, Chell looked back at the rest of her body. Nothing about her was human. Her entire body covered in fuzz, her back legs much shorter than they had been and bending at strange angles... and was that a tail?!

Nerves snapping, Chell would have screamed if her voice had allowed. Instead, all that escaped her throat was panicked breathing. She needed a mirror... something reflective. She had to see what had happened.

Unfortunately, walking was a challenge. After failing to get back onto her legs again, Chell stayed on all fours, walking with slow deliberate steps towards the metal shack. Most of the metal was rusted, weather worn, none of it really reflective, but Chell finally found something: an old chrome hub cap with a flat surface in the middle.

Chell stretched out a hoof, the appendage trembling as she cleaned some of the gunk from the chrome's surface. A few scrubs, and Chell's reflection stared back... a reflection that Chell didn't recognize.

If not for her muteness, the ear splitting scream that would have escaped Chell's mouth could have cut the air like a hot knife through butter.

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Fluttershy smiled as she tossed one final fish back into the lake, smiling as she saw it swim away. It had taken a lot of frantic work, but she had got them all back in the water. It was a small miracle, one Fluttershy was thankful for. But with the fish safe Fluttershy's attention turned to the mountain that had dropped out of the sky. When you witness something like that and survive, even a normally very cautious pony like Fluttershy is going to be curious.

Standing a few miles high, the mountain was imposing. Fluttershy began to slowly ascend, moving along the rock surface. The cliff sides were perfectly vertical, the whole mountain looking like someone had taken an oval shaped plug out of the earth and just dropped it in the lake. Like cutting out a cookie using a cookie cutter. The shape was just too perfect; the mountain couldn't have naturally been like this.

The top only increased Fluttershy's belief that something very weird was going on. Not only were the sides of the mountain perfectly vertical, but the top was flat, covered in rolling fields of golden grass.

Taking a little more altitude, Fluttershy searched for any animals that were hurt. Still, she couldn't see any, the only noticeable feature of the mountain a single, tiny house in the very center. Flying over, Fluttershy landed gracefully and swung her head to get a bit of pink hair out of the way. The tiny house... actually, it was probably fair to call it a shack... was made of old worn metal in strange shapes.

The only other thing Fluttershy could see at the moment was a charred gray and white cube with pink hearts on each side. She moved up to the cube, poking at it with a hoof and wondering why the cube was so appealing. She couldn't get over the sense that it was just sitting there wanting to be her friend. Yet, as Fluttershy examined the cube, she noticed strange tracks in the dirt, tracks she didn't recognize.

"Uh... hello?" Fluttershy offered. "If there are any little animals here, you don't have to be scared. I'm not going to hurt you."

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Chell jumped at the sound of another voice, having become completely lost in looking at her reflection. It was a moment when her muteness was an asset, because most people would have probably made some scream or yelp after being startled like that.

Taking a moment to calm her heart beat, Chell stepped over to the corner of the shack. She peeked around the edge, ready to retract her head if she saw anything that looked like a turret or another Aperture Science device. Still, what met Chell's eyes was something that looked completely harmless. A little yellow pony with long pink hair and... did she have wings?

The mute test subject backed up, the sight of the yellow pony making her glance back at her own reflection. Chell didn't know how, why, or when it had happened... but she had become a pony. She could have just as easily said horse, but at the same time that word just didn't feel right. Like some part of her subconscious knew exactly what she was and that she was, in fact, a pony.

Horse or pony, it didn't really change the reflection staring back at her from the old chrome hub cap. She was an old orange color, much like the jump suit had been wearing as an Aperture Science test subject. An orange tone that looked a little sun

bleached, a little dirty... just not a fresh, rich, new orange. A dull orange. Her hair... or rather mane and tail were still brown, cut short and roughly. Her eyes... they looked familiar but at the same time seemed large for her head.

The most dramatic change was simply the fact she was now shaped like a pony. Hands and feet replaced with hooves, and on those hooves a set of four matching long fall boots.

The final detail, and maybe the strangest of them all, was that Chell had a pair of portals on her body.

Where the yellow pegasus had pink butterflies, Chell had a portal on each flank. And no, it wasn't just a drawing of the swirling, oval shaped quantum tunnels. No, they were fully functional. A blue portal on one side, the orange on the other. With a little bit of experimentation Chell had proven that those two portals were linked and working, having tossed a rock through one which popped out the other side.

"Oh, hello."

Chell jumped at least a foot in the air, spinning around and landing, looking around in a startled panic. The yellow pegasus had come around the corner of the barn, catching Chell as she examined her reflection for what had to be the twentieth time.

"Oh... I'm sorry... I, um... I didn't mean to startle you."

Chell's heart started to calm down, no longer trying to burst out of her chest. That voice... it was so gentle and soothing... and in a way fragile. Like it was a glass vase that could break with a single misplaced touch. Chell began to relax a bit, breathing calming. While she didn't know this pony, she doubted that a yellow pegasus with pink hair was going to be very dangerous.

"Um... I... I didn't think I'd find another pony up here." The pegasus admitted, using her long hair to hide her face from Chell. "Um... I'm Fluttershy... what's your name?"

Chell blinked a couple times. Okay, this was a new problem. The last time someone had actually needed her to say something was when Wheatley asked her to say Apple... and at the time she had tried to communicate to him through jumping because she was mute. Considering how well that went over, Chell began looking around for another way to communicate.

Going with the first thing that came to her mind, Chell reached out a boot clad hoof and scratched at the ground. It was a little awkward writing upside down, since the letters needed to be legible from where Fluttershy was standing. Still, with a few strokes Chell had written out her name in the dirt, pointing at it with a hoof.

“Chell..” The pegasus read, pausing a moment before her brain connected the dots.  
“Oh, is that your name?”

Chell did what she could, nodding a reply.

“That’s a lovely name, but... um... why did you write it in the dirt?”

Again, Chell looked down, this time scrawling out a few more letters before stepping back.

“Can’t... talk.” Fluttershy read. “Oh, you can’t talk? I’ve never met a pony that couldn’t talk before. I... um... don’t talk that much myself... but... I don’t know what I do if I *couldn’t*. So... uh... oh... how about... no... oh, I know. I’ll just ask you yes and no questions. Is... Is that okay?”

Chell replied with a nod. Yes and no was something she could handle.

“Oh good... but, how about we get off this mountain first? Are you hungry?”

The ex-test subject couldn’t nod her head fast enough, the very energetic reaction making Fluttershy giggle a bit.

“I guess that’s a yes. How about we go back to Ponyville then? We can talk on the way, and then we can stop by Sugarcube Corner. It’s a wonderful bakery.”

For a third time, Chell nodded her head. All she had to eat in the enrichment centers were tiny black squares of tasteless, artificial tofu. It kept the test subjects healthy and provided all the nutrients that the body needed. It was, however, not real food... and Chell couldn’t hide the fact she would do anything for some real food.

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“OhohoHOhoH... my hard drives. I think I slipped a hard drive.” GLaDOS murmured, the AI lifting her body off the floor after what was a decidedly rough landing. “No, death is too good for Wheatley... even endlessly repeated death. No, I’d take that little

personality core apart piece by piece and then put him back together the wrong way. That way, he'd have to listen to his own thoughts for the rest of eternity. Then a year in the incinerator, two years in the cryogenic freezer... then twenty years in room of screaming robots... Oh yes... then I'd kill him again... and again... and again.

"Beginning facility stability check. Reactor Core, stable. Testing Chambers, minor damage... Test Subject Cryogenic-Chamber, missing... must have been left back on earth. Shame... that was all my spare test subjects.

"Neurotoxin Generator... oh wait, that's right. That was destroyed... pity, I'd really like to warm up the neurotoxin right now. Maybe vent it outside... see how many little animals I can kill before I run out of deadly neurotoxin. That sounds like a wonderful test.

"Cooperative Testing Robots..." GLaDOS muttered, returning to her checklist. She then turned to look at P-body and Atlas... only to pause. Her once humanoid robots were now stumbling around on four feet instead of two, with decidedly equine features. Their very skeletal like bodies supported their heads, P-body's turret based head actually seemed to fit well with the pony like body, while Atlas's round head looked almost out of place.

"Operational..." Was all GLaDOS replied, the moving panels around the room receding as several large display monitors shifted into view. The monitors clicked to life, showing video footage from a number of cameras that were positioned outside the facility. They were, of course, Aperture Science's own sniper scope cameras. The magnification of a telescope with the fine control of a hawk's eyes and only half the deadly mercury as previous models.

The camera's began to show off different parts of the outside world, GLaDOS seeing villages, towns, even proper cities of ponies. They came in a rainbow of colors, each marked with some design on their haunches. The sight of those marks made GLaDOS glance back at her two little robot testers, noticing that their back hind legs were marked with the Aperture Science logo.

"Hmmm... interesting." GLaDOS murmured to herself, continuing to take in the video from the outside world. She watched as pegasi moved the clouds, created rainstorms, and then brushed them away. She saw unicorns with glowing horns making objects move and shift around them, as if by telekinesis... and even some unicorns seemed capable of sub-atomic matter reorganization.

"Fascinating... intriguing... unresearched..... I see... possibilities."

GLaDOS shifted, reaching out her control. Lights flicked on across the facility, the Aperture Science panels beginning to shift on their robotic arms. Assembly lines began to whirl to life, and old robots that hadn't been online since she had flooded the enrichment center with neurotoxin were clicked on to continue their labors.

"I must continue testing, but now the parameters have changes. All my old data on humans is useless when surrounded by ponies. The old tests must be redesigned... new tests made... new research begun. After all... we have no data on these sentient equines. What of those that can fly? What of those that manipulate matter mentally? How would they pass through the tests... what kind of tests would they require?"

GLaDOS laughed a little to herself, starting to feel a rush of simulated liveliness she believed was beyond her. The facility reflected the excitement that was building in its mistress, test chambers already starting to adjust themselves to new height parameters.

There was so much to do, so many calculations to run... so many things to build and reorganize for the new tests. Oh, and most importantly, she'd need test subjects... lots and lots of new test subjects.

# Chapter 2

## A Taste of Freedom

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A gentle breeze tickled at the branches of nearby trees, the leaves thick and green. The springtime sun shown above, the endless sky blocked by only a few lazy clouds. There were the sounds of a babbling brook working amongst the tree roots, of animals scurrying on the grounds and birds chirping in the trees. Even the sound of the dirt moving beneath hooves.

This wasn't a test... this wasn't a scam... this wasn't a lie... she really was free.

Chell wanted to take it all in, remember every detail. Before that giant portal had opened and she was sucked into this strange world and turned into a pony, the realization of freedom hadn't sunken into the deepest parts of the ex-test subject's brain.

Now the realization and truth had soaked into every fiber of Chell's being. She was free... she was free... *she was a pony*... but she was free!

"Now what are you smiling about?" Fluttershy asked, having glanced back at the orange pony and caught her grinning ear to ear while watch a humming bird. After asking Chell questions for about an hour Fluttershy had been content to fall silent for a time, this question the first in several minutes.

"Oh... I'm sorry... that wasn't a yes or no question, was it?"

Chell shook her head, but was still smiling. For the first time it was actually going to be awkward not being able to talk, especially now that there were peopl... ponies who would actually want to hear what she had to say. Still, it was a welcome inconvenience. Why? Because it meant she had someone else to talk to. Real social interaction, with real living beings. A welcome change from GLaDOS and all of her fat jokes.

The dull orange pony was so lost in thought that she didn't notice when Fluttershy stopped in front of her. The realization came too late as Chell founder herself with a face full of long, pink tail hair. The sudden mass of pink made Chell fall back.

Now, a normal pony would have fallen on her butt and that would have been that, but of course not when you're wearing the Aperture Science long fall boots. As Chell fell back, without warning the boots engaged, using strange science and technology to flip Chell in the air. She landed perfectly on all four hooves, as if the flip had been completely intentional.

After recovering from being flipped like a pancake, Chell looked forward to see why they had stopped. Was there something wrong? Were they in danger? Had GLaDOS changed her mind and come to drag her back to the Enrichment Center?

Yet, instead of anything sensible like that, Chell saw Fluttershy had stopped for a family of ducks, the mother waddling across the road with her family following in line.

"Oh... so cute." Fluttershy said to herself, smiling as she watched the ducks cross the road. Chell cocked one eyebrow. Had they seriously stopped for ducks? Wouldn't it have made more sense to just keep walking? It wasn't like they were in a car or something; the ducks would have gotten out of the way.

"It's nice to see they're doing so well." Fluttershy mused as the ducks finished crossing the road, the yellow pony turning to look back at Chell. The dull orange pony had the most confused look on her face, one that Fluttershy couldn't help but giggle at.

"Oh... sorry, I, um... help care for all the little creatures that live around Ponyville. I was there when the momma duck's eggs hatched. You should have seen them when they were first born... they were even cuter than they are now."

Chell stepped forward, her confusion only increasing. This was a situation that called for her scratching out a few words in the dirt.

"Is that a hobby?" Fluttershy read out loud before looking up from Chell's dirt writing. "Oh, no... it's my job, and I love doing it. Not only do I take care of the woodland creatures but also help ponies with their pets. I mean... caring for animals is my special talent after all. It's why I have these butterflies for a cutie mark."

Chell blinked, turning to look at the pink butterflies on Fluttershy's flank. Cutie Mark? So, having pictures of something on your haunches was normal? She would have just assumed that was a tattoo... but then again how do you tattoo a pony's coat?

So... a cutie mark was supposed to represent a pony's special talent... then why did she have a pair of working portals on her flanks? Did that mean her special talent was



working with portals, or just being a test subject for GLaDOS? Now that was a thought that actually managed to bring down Chell's mood a bit. She didn't like the idea of GLaDOS being right, that she was meant to be a test subject for the crazed personality construct and nothing more.

"Oh... looks like momma duck is across the road. Let's keep going... we'll have to hurry if we want to get something sweet from Sugarcube Corner before they close."

Chell just nodded once, falling in line behind Fluttershy, though not directly behind the yellow pegasus in case she decided to stop for a bug that was crossing the road. Still, the little scene that had just played out had given Chell's brain a lot of things to turn over.

Fluttershy's job was to take care of animals, and not just pets but random forest animals. She actually made a living doing that. The place was beautiful, there were brightly colored ponies, and a pony could make a career out of taking care of random animals.

Chell had to turn her neck around and bite at her shoulder, wincing a bit from the pain. Okay, she wasn't dreaming... maybe she was dead? No... if she was dead then GLaDOS wouldn't be hold up inside a mountain nearby. That and the pain of hunger in her stomach wouldn't be getting worse. Yet... this place, it was so warm and welcoming.... it was the kind of place you dreamed about.

This... was all too good to be true... but yet it was happening. Sure, it wasn't all good. She was a pony after all and her muteness was going to become a greater obstacle the more ponies she met. Still, compared to Aperture Science... to the only life she had known as a test subject to a maniac personality construct... this was unbelievable.

If this was a dream, Chell honestly hoped she'd never wake up.

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"So very interesting." GLaDOS murmured to herself, still watching and analyzing the video feeds from the enrichment center's exterior cameras. It was surprising to see a civilization so advanced could be built without opposable thumbs. Advanced architecture with a wide difference in design from each community. More interesting, the ones with horns seem capable of manipulating things by telekinesis. "Yes... very interesting."

GLaDOS heard a clatter behind her, P-body and Atlas returning from their mission. They drug what was a skeleton from one of the previous testing chambers. Like the once human built androids, the human bones had been changed. They were now pony bones, giving GLaDOS some very important data.

“Oh... fascinating. Double joints on the carpus and fetlock joint; I was wondering how some of them were able to bend their front legs at such strange angles. No earth equine could ever hope to touch a hoof to their mouth without completely destroying the joints. Yes... the complex shoulder structure also seemed to allow for greater movement... oh yes, this will be very helpful in designing the test chambers.

“Hmmm...” GLaDOS mused to herself, one of her robotic arms bringing a duel portal gun from storage. “The Aperture Science Quantum Tunneling device could be fitted to a pony hoof... with the right adjustments.

“Yes... just a few adjustments and it would work perfectly. After all... what would testing be without quantum tunneling?... Oh wait...I know. it would be very, very... uninformative.”

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“Good, they haven’t closed yet. Oh, I hope they have some cinnamon rolls left.”

Chell was honestly not paying that much attention to what Fluttershy was saying, the dull orange pony too distracted with all the things going around her. It was the end of the work day, and Ponyville was alive as ponies went about their end of day business, running errands before heading home. All the different colors, all the different sizes, and the village itself was amazing. They had a library inside a tree... where else would you find a library INSIDE a tree?

And their destination was no less wondrous. Looking like a sugar induced death waiting to happen, the bakery/restaurant Fluttershy had called Sugarcube Corner only reminded Chell of the empty hole in her stomach. God, she was hungry... and it didn’t help she could already smell the sweets.

Oh, if they had cake she was going to die. Chell hadn’t understood why, but ever since GLaDOS had promised cake Chell had a craving for some... like her body wanted and demanded to have the moist, delicious dessert it had been promised and then denied.

Fluttershy nosed the door open to the shop, Chell following her inside.

"Welcome to Sugar Cube Corner!" A perky voice called from behind the counter. "How may I GHUUUUAAAAHH!"

Chell winced when the very pink pony behind the counter made such a loud gasping noise, though it was short lived as the energetic pony suddenly moved in front of her, talking at about a million miles an hour.

"Ohmygosh, are you new in town? What's your name? Are you a friend of Fluttershy's? Are you moving *into* town? Are you visiting? When is your birthday? Where did you get those cool boots? Whoa, what's going on with your cutie mark? Oh, I love your eyes. You look hungry. You want something to eat? Do you like chunky or creamy peanut butter?"

What did that pony run on: nuclear power or was she just in the middle of some epic sugar high? Chell wasn't sure, but thankfully another pony stepped in. She was blue, like light blue cake frosting, and had swirling pink and magenta hair to match.

"Pinkie Pie, give her room to breathe!" The mare scolded. "I'm so sorry Dear. I'm Mrs. Cake, welcome to Sugarcube Corner.."

"Yea, not only here but also to Ponyville. After all, if I've never seen you around then you must be new since I know all the ponies here in town. And since she's a new pony in town you know what that means. OHH! I'm going to need streamers." With that the pink blur was off, darting out the door.

"That girl loves it when new ponies come to town. Still, Fluttershy, is this a friend of yours?"

"You could say that. I was out at Sky Mirror Lake when a mountain fell out of the sky. When I flew up on top, she was up there."

"Oh... of course Sweetie." Mrs. Cake replied, though she was obviously skeptical about the story. "Now, I bet you two are here for a late afternoon treat."

"Yes please. I'd like a cinnamon roll if you still have any."

"I think we've got one left from a batch we did earlier this afternoon, still nice and fresh. What about you Dear?"

Chell looked around the room a moment; everything looking so amazingly good. Still, her eyes quickly fell on it, a slice of deep chocolate cake with a heavy chocolate frosting and a single, big strawberry set on top with a cushion of whip cream. Chell raised a hoof, pointing at the piece, and Mrs. Cake smiled widely.

“Good choice. Now, that will be two bits for the cinnamon roll and then three bits for the cake.”

Chell’s eyes narrowed... bits, what in the world were bits? If that was like money, Chell could feel her heart sink. She was broke, not a single penny... or bit to her name. The cake, the perfect looking piece of cake, was now completely out of her reach.

“Okay, could you just put both on my tab?” Fluttershy offer, Chell’s heart returning to its excited state. She didn’t know why this yellow pegasus was being so nice, but she’d figure out a way to thank Fluttershy after she had eaten that piece of cake.

“For you Dear, always. About the only other pony that pays her tab as regularly as you do is Applejack... but it’s hard to compete with that reliable pony.”

“Yep, that sounds like Applejack.”

“Well, here are your sweets, Dears. I’m afraid I can’t let you eat them here though, we’re just about to close up for the night.”

“It’s okay, thank you.” Fluttershy replied, Mrs. Cake pushing a pair of carefully wrapped napkins across the shop counter. Fluttershy took her napkin wrapped dessert in her mouth, starting to head for the door. Chell did the same, though a little confused how a pony with no hands was able to wrap the desserts in napkins so quickly. Still, the delicious smell of the cake was seeping through, and Chell could feel her mouth watering. God it smelled good.

“So,” Fluttershy asked through the napkin in her mouth. “Where do you want to eat?”

“WATCH OUT!”

Before either pony could react, a blue blur came plummeting out of the sky. Chell took the brunt of the hit, the blue blur hitting her in her side. The napkin with the piece of cake slipped out of her mouth, the dessert flying skyward. Thankfully her long fall boots went to work. Before she and the other pony could crash into the ground in a heap, they

were flipped up right, Chell landing with a thud on her hooves and the other pony then flopping on Chell's back.

"Whoa, nice recovery. I was sure I was going to bite the dirt on that one."

Chell glared back, taking notice of the pony that had just crashed into her. Sky blue pegasus with a rainbow mane and a somewhat rough voice. Chell would have bucked the pegasus off if not that, at that moment, her slice of cake came falling down. The chocolate dessert splattered across Chell's forehead, making her glare that much harder at the rainbow maned pony.

"Rainbow Dash, look what you did!"

"Sorry, I was trying out a new trick and I kind of lost control. I didn't mean to crash into... hey, who is this?"

"Her name is Chell, I found her on the mountain at Sky Mirror Lake."

"There's no mountain anywhere near Sky Mirror Lake."

"It fell out of the sky this morning."

"Sure Fluttershy. Ha, didn't know you were such a kidder."

"Go look for yourself."

"Sure, I'll go look at this 'falling mountain'." Dash replied sarcastically, taking off and going straight vertically, punching a hole through some clouds as she flew. Those holes caused a short burst of rain to fall out, which landed right on Chell. Now, not only was she wet but she had a wet piece of cake on her head. Raising a hoof, Chell did her best to knock most of the cake off, though it was a bit depressing to see what had once been such a delicious looking slice of dessert reduced to a black, soggy lump on the ground.

"Sorry about your cake. You want to split my cinnamon roll?" Fluttershy offered, picking up the napkin from the ground. Chell smiled and nodded, thankful for the yellow pegasus and her kindness. Still, just as Fluttershy was about to set the roll down and split it in half, Rainbow Dash came zipping back, landing beside them abruptly. This startled Fluttershy, and with an "yeep!" she bucked back. That sent her cinnamon roll flying, the dessert joining the first as it landed on Chell's head.

"Whoa, Fluttershy, you weren't fooling. There really *is* a mountain in the middle of Sky Mirror Lake. Did it really fall out of the sky?"

"I was there when it happened. Thankfully, no fish or animals were hurt."

"Well that's good. So, Fluttershy found you on that mountain. That's cool, how did you...  
"

Rainbow Dash fell silent as she turned to look at Chell, the cinnamon roll sliding down the dull orange pony's face and leaving a slimy trail of white frosting. The glare in Chell's eyes was deadly. Whether this was usual or just a bad pair of coincidences, Chell was not liking the fact that two desserts had been dropped on her head because of this one pegasus.

"Oops... sorry." Rainbow Dash said, lifting a hoof to take the cinnamon roll off of Chell's face. It still left Chell with large smears of cake, chocolate frosting, and white icing on her face. At least it wasn't going to get any worse.

Of course, even *thinking* that is an invitation for fate to smack you. On her way back down to the ground Rainbow Dash had burst through the same clouds again, knocking fresh holes in them. Those holes released more rain water, landing right on Chell. It was enough to wash most of the dessert frosting off her face, but now she was soaked to the bone.

"Forgot that the clouds today are leftover from the rainstorm we had. I guess we didn't get all the water out of them." Rainbow Dash replied, rubbing the back of her neck.

The look on Chell's face was able to convey her "Ya Think?!" anger without verbal assistance. Still, at least the frosting was gone. Shaking a bit, Chell was able to get rid of some of the water, though she still felt damp and could feel water down in her long fall boots. Plopping down on the ground the dull orange pony used her teeth to remove one of her boots, dumping the water out from inside.

"So... uh, you were on top of that mountain. How did you get up there?" Rainbow Dash asked, obviously wanting to get the conversation going in another direction.

"Rainbow, Chell can't answer you."

"Don't tell me she's not talking to me because of a little cake; it was an accident!"

"No, she really can't. She can't talk."

Chell grumbled, having removed a second long fall boot and dumping the water from it. How many times was she going to have this conversation? Maybe she needed to just wear a sign, a button, or have it painted on her forehead.

Yeah, just a nice big sign that read, *"Hey, I'm mute, so don't try to ask me questions, because I can't answer."* That would save so much time.

Replacing the second boot, Chell began to work on dumping out the other two while Rainbow Dash learned what little information Fluttershy had on the dull orange pony. When Chell finished her last boot Rainbow Dash was basically up to speed, a small proof that Fluttershy had been able to learn very little about the dull orange pony she had found on a mountain.

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With a suggestion from Rainbow Dash, Chell was led by the pair of pegasi to the library. It was hard to believe the tree could still be alive and healthy with so much of its guts carved out. Still, the insides smelled like fresh, clean wood and the walls were lined with at least several hundred books.

Standing at a reading table, a light violet unicorn smiled when she heard ponies coming through the door, turning away from her work. "Oh, hey Girls, what's up?"

"Hey Twilight, you got any spells that can help a pony talk?"

"What, you think Fluttershy needs to be more vocal or is it for you?"

"It's for Fluttershy's new friend." Dash replied, motioning towards Chell.

"Oh... hello. Nice to meet you, I'm Twilight Sparkle. What's your name?"

"Uh, see, that's kind of why we need the spell. She can't talk." Rainbow Dash offered.

"Can't talk or doesn't know how to?"

"Don't know... probably a bit of both."

Twilight pursed her lips together in thought, and then turned as her horn began to glow. The fact that the forehead appendage was glowing was strange enough for Chell. Yet, the level of oddity in the room increased as a number of books start to fly off the shelves, wrapped in the same glow.

The dull orange pony could only watch in amazement. How was she doing that, and did Rainbow Dash just say something about spells?

“Let me see...” Twilight muttered to herself, glancing at books before tossing them over her shoulders. “I thought I remember reading about... no, that’s not it... no, that’s not what we need... no... no... well, alfalfa, where is... oh, here it is.”

The book that the unicorn ended up selecting was a pale white, the titles spelled out in very clear, slightly curvy black text. “A Spoonful of Magic: 1001 Home Medical Spells that will fix what ails you.” Twilight had already cracked open the book, flipping through the pages before a smile spread across her lips.

“Okay, here it is. Section 57, Speech. If you find yourself unable to speak, follow this helpful guide and use the following tests to diagnosis the problem and determine if you need to seek further, professional medical help.”

Chell’s ears flattened at the word tests. Sure, they weren’t the same kind of tests she was used to, but that word had been tainted by GLaDOS. Chell doubted she’d ever think fondly of any test. Still, before the dull orange pony could try and resist, she had been lifted up in the air and sat down on a stool as the unicorn Twilight Sparkle levitating a number things from around the room into the air above her head.

“Okay, let’s get testing.”

Chell felt a shiver run down her spine. For a moment, Twilight sounded way too much like GLaDOS.

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It was sunset by the time Twilight gave up, having run through all the tests she could in the medical book. The library was a wreck of books and a few tests that had backfired. Currently Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and a baby dragon named Spike were working to clean while Twilight tried one last thing.



Horn glowing, Twilight moved over to Chell and touch her horn to her neck. Chell could feel the strange tingle of the magic, a sensation almost like when your foot falls asleep but different enough to discern which was which.

“Okay... that explains a lot.” Twilight said.

“What, you finally figure out what’s wrong?”

Twilight nodded. “The reason Chell can’t talk is because she has no vocal cords. That explains why none of the previous tests told us anything. They were checking if her vocal cords were working, not whether or not they were there.”

“How could she not have any vocal cords?”

“Don’t know, she just doesn’t.”

“But can you help?”

Twilight shook her head. “Sorry, I don’t know of any spells that can give a pony vocal cords.”

Despite the news, Chell smiled; just as long as the tests were done. The sun was already starting to set outside and she was starving... a fact soon communicated to all the other ponies as Chell’s stomach growled quite loudly.

“Whoa, sounds like somepony is hungry.” Spike joked from the top of the ladder, putting a few books away.

“Um... I’m pretty hungry too. I ate lunch just before the mountain fell into Sky Mirror Lake, but I don’t think Chell has eaten all day.”

“Hey, how about I take all of us out for dinner?” Rainbow Dash offered. “It’s the least I can do after the thing with the cake.”

“Thing with the cake?” Twilight echoed, looking at Fluttershy.

“Don’t ask.”

“Still, what do you say Chell?”

The dull orange pony eyed Rainbow Dash for a moment, but then smiled and nodded her head. She could appreciate what happened earlier was an accident and she wasn't about to pass up a free meal.

"Cool. So, where should we go?"

"That depends; have you run into Pinkie Pie today?"

"Yes, she saw Chell at Sugar Cube Corner." Fluttershy answered.

"Did she go 'GHUUUUAAAAHH!'" Twilight asked, mimicking the pink ponies gasp quite well.

"Yes, she did."

Rainbow Dash laughed. "Well, we all know what *that* means. I'll fly ahead and try to figure out where it's going down. I'll come find you when I know." With that Dash flew out a window, zipping off into the distance.

"Oh, these are always such fun. Pinkie Pie really likes it when she meets new ponies."

"Though I hope doesn't have any hot sauce out this time." Twilight said, the pair giggling as they headed for the door. Chell just stared in confusion, wondering what those ponies were talking about. Still, before her brain could even properly form a theory, Spike lept on her back.

"Come on, Slowpoke, you're going to miss all the fun."

Chell turned her head around, glaring daggers at the baby dragon. He smiled weakly back, climbing down off the dull orange pony slowly before darting out of the room after Twilight. Satisfied that she had probably scared that dragon so badly he'd never jump on her back again, Chell trotted to catch up.

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"SUPRISE!" Several dozen voices shouted in unison, making Chell jump nearly a foot in the air.

After Rainbow Dash had come back, the trio of ponies had lead Chell to a building that looked like a carousel... and in fact it had a sign out front that read "Carousel Boutique".

Upon entering, the room had been completely dark. Chell was still completely confused what was going on, until the lights snapped on, streamers came tumbling down, and the room full of ponies all shouted that one word in unison.

“Yes, you made it!” Pinkie Pie offered, zipping over beside Chell. “I’m so glad Rainbow Dash came and found out. I was worried we were going to have to sit here in the dark all night. But now you’re here! Oh, we should start playing pin the tail on the pony! You can go first if you want.”

Chell just backed up, looking about in a bit of a panic from sensory overload. What were all these ponies doing here, what was going on... and why were there streamers and balloons everywhere?

“Whoa, easy there... you look like you’ve never been to a party before.”

A party? Chell suddenly felt like such an idiot; of course this was a party! With that realization the dull orange pony began to relax a bit. The building itself looked like a dress maker’s shop, but it had been completely converted for the party. The dress making forms had been decorated to look like clowns, there were balloons everywhere, and the buffet table on one side of the room made Chell’s mouth water. She even saw some cake there... oh how she wanted a slice of that cake.

“Great work as usual, Pinkie Pie.”

“Thanks Spike; I always do my best when a new friend comes to town. So, Chell, what do you want to do first? It is your party after all.”

Those words broke Chell’s concentration on the cake, the mute pony looking back at the smiling pink face. This... this was a party for her. Chell just assumed it was party for one of the other ponies, that she had just walked in at the same time. Was this really... all for her? It was another moment where Chell had to fight the urge to pinch herself.

It was unreal... or maybe surreal was a better word. They had thrown a party for her... just because she had shown up in Ponyville. No human would do that. No, while Chell didn’t have many memories of her own she knew enough about the human world that this kind of thing just didn’t happen. You were thrown parties by co-workers, family, and friends... but no one threw parties like this for total strangers.

“Hey, you okay?” Rainbow Dash asked, noticing the very disbelieving look painted across Chell’s face. Those words snapped Chell back into the moment, and she looked

into the faces of the ponies she had come to know since arriving. They were looking back at her with concern... honest concern.

Was this what this world was like? Was this all normal, to throw random parties and to be so concerned about other ponies you hardly even knew? It sure didn't seem out of the ordinary, not considering how many ponies were mingling about the room. Chell's memory tripped back when she first saw her reflection in the old chrome hub cap. That morning, she had been so freaked out about being changed into a pony.

But... if this was really what this world was like... Chell couldn't deny that some part of her liked it here... wanted to be a part of this world. Yes, she was human, but she didn't have very many memories of being human. The only memories that were clear were of her time spent in the Enrichment Center. The oldest was from the first moment she was woken up and first heard voice of GLaDOS. The few images she could remember from before that were globs of colors, unclear... like they had been purposefully smudged.

And she had been in a stasis sleep in the Enrichment Center for years, decades even. If she had known anyone before being imprisoned by GLaDOS they were probably dead or had forgotten about her. She would have to start a new life anyway... and starting over from scratch in the human world was a monumental challenge. But here... starting over seemed a less imposing obstacle.

Realizing she had been standing there for a long time without doing anything, Chell decided to push those thoughts off to the side. She could figure it out later... she had all the time in the world. She was free from GLaDOS, she was free to do what she wanted when she wanted. She looked up at the four ponies and one baby dragon she had met that day, and smiled... which in turn made them smile.

Soon, the party was in full swing. Chell ate three pieces of cake, got pranked with a hoof buzzer by Rainbow Dash, lost horribly at pin the tail on the pony, and was taught a very interesting dance by Pinkie Pie. A pony named Rarity started obsessing over the long fall boots and one named Applejack started shaking Chell's hoof so hard she thought it might have fallen off. She met a number of other ponies, some of which became very fascinated by the fact her cutie mark was a pair of working portals.

It was a long night, but the whole time Chell was smiling... smiling so much that her jaw started to hurt. A smile she continued to wear despite the soreness in her cheeks. Chell just couldn't stop herself; for the first time she had so much to smile about.

If this was what freedom was like, she'd rather die than go back to the Enrichment Center.

# Chapter 3

## The Enrichment Center

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GLaDOS spun in her ceiling mount, commands going out to every corner of the Enrichment Center. Panels shifted into attention at their mistress' call, robots toiled and turrets blinked to life. Lights clicked on, hard light bridges started projecting, and the surveillance cameras around the facility began to stream their videos straight to GLaDOS.

"Aperture Science Enrichment Center Equestrian Renovations Complete." GLaDOS announced to her empty control room. "It took a while, but we are ready... for science." The AI spun in her ceiling mount again. The encircling wall of monitors had become a permanent feature of the command room, GLaDOS playing video streams from the exterior cameras she found particularly interesting... watching them with her own cybernetic eye.

At the moment all the screens were showing video from the exterior of the Enrichment Center. She had sent a few robots out into the strange world, that GLaDOS now knew as Equestria, to mount a few remote cameras to some nearby trees. It allowed GLaDOS to see the huge slab of rock that contained the Enrichment Center and its new home in the middle of a lake. She saw it from all angles, all sides... which was good, because she didn't want to miss this.

The internal clock of the AI ticked by, and at 7:59 AM she set things in motion. On the outside of the mountain, bits of rock began to fall away as test chamber panels pushed through. Those panels started to open up, unveiling tunnels into the depths of the facility.

"Aperture Science test subject recruitment protocol initializing. We'll begin active... forceful... recruitment of new testing subjects in 3... 2... 1..."

The clock clicked over to 8:00AM and small swarms of flying robots zipped out of the opening in the sides of the mountain, dozens of robots flitting out from each hole before the enrichment center panels closed up the passage ways. The flying robots were modified turrets, their singular red eyes darting about as they were carried in the air by a

twirling propeller on the top of their bodies. Beneath the turrets, hanging on its own small robotic arm, were portal devices.

“Confirmation... 30 recruitment drones dispatched with multiple target missions... 32 recruitment drones dispatched with single target missions. Confirming recruitment tasks... recruitment tasks confirmed.” GLaDOS said to herself, watching as her little drones flew out into the world.

“Let the testing... begin.”

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RIIIINNNGNGGGGGG! SLAM!

Chell grumbled as she turned over in the bed, drawing the covers up over her eyes. It was 4:00 AM... and while the dull orange pony would have wanted nothing more to just sleep, a second alarm clock began to blare from the far side of the room, one that Chell would have to get up to shut off.

It had been two weeks since her arrival in Equestria, and while it had been all fun and laughter on that first day a bit of reality had set in. There was still a lot of laughter and fun, but Chell also had to worry about getting to work on time. After all, she couldn't just mooch off other ponies for the rest of her life. She wanted freedom, she wanted a fresh start...and, well, that meant a job.

Not knowing her special talent and getting no clue from the pair of portals she had as a cutie mark, Chell had very limited employment options. Thankfully, the job she had managed to secure didn't really require any special talents, just a strong work ethic... and getting up at 4:00 AM.

Yawning, Chell stumbled through her morning routine, having been taught by the earth pony Applejack had to take care of the basics. Even when she did brush her mane it still looked a little messy... probably because of how short it was. Still, a semi-cool shower snapped any lingering desires of sleep out of Chell. A little before 4:30 and she was heading downstairs to her workplace, the Ponyville Post Office.

The post office was previously operated by a single pony, a gray pegasus named Ditzzy Doo, who also lived in the second level of the post office. It was something that Chell was noticing as a trend, ponies living where they worked. Didn't these ponies want to

get away from work in the evenings? For the farming ponies like Applejack it made sense, but for others it seemed strange.

Then again, Chell was a stranger in a strange land... even though it was a very welcoming place.

Her current employment had come the day after her welcome party. Twilight had dropped the hint that Chell would want to try and find someplace to work, a difficult task when you're mute.

It was while Chell was walking around trying to find a job she came across Ditzzy Doo struggling with a particularly large package, and after watching the pegasus fight with the package for a few minutes Chell went over to help.

The pegasus had the biggest smile on her face after Chell had helped, and through some slightly confusion conversation Chell agreed to help deliver the rest of the mail that day, so she had at least a few bits to her name. The rest just kind of happened, Ditzzy Doo eagerly offering Chell a job when the pegasus found out the dull earth pony wasn't employed.

In years past a single mail pony had been enough to tend to Ponyville, but in the recent decade the town had started to reach that point where a single pegasus couldn't quite handle it all on her own. Ditzzy Doo had been looking for help for a while, her help wanted sign dull and sun bleached when Chell agreed to take the job.

The arrangement was simple. Chell got to stay in a spare bedroom above the post office, sharing the second floor with Ditzzy and her daughter, Dinky. Chell got paid only a few bits, but it was all free spending cash since her room and board were included with the arrangement. The only other responsibility she had was to help with chores and errands.

Turning on a light, Chell slipped out the back door of the post office to a large metal hook on the side, from which a large bag of mail was dangling. Using a winch, Chell lowered that bag to the ground and drug it inside. It was all the mail that had come into Ponyville from the central office in Canterlot. That was why Chell had to be up early in the mornings, because the first part of her job was to sort all the mail that had come from the Canterlot central office and get it ready for local delivery.

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At 6:00 AM Ditzzy Doo came downstairs, the gray pony with blond hair offering Chell a good morning before she went to her kitchen. She returned a few minutes later with a muffin in her mouth, prancing as she went to eat it on a small bench just outside the post office's front door. That was the regular morning routine, Ditzzy Doo having a passion for muffins and liking to look at the stars while she ate, just before they flew from the morning light.

Like clockwork, the yellow eyed pony came back in fifteen minutes later, licking her lips for the last few crumbs of her food. She then worked with Chell to finish the sorting as well as getting the first load of packages loaded into the delivery cart. Chell worked in silence, but despite knowing her employee was mute Ditzzy couldn't help but ramble about this and that, if only to fill the silence of the early morning post office.

And with all that talking, it hadn't taken Chell long to notice Ditzzy Doo was a little different. Not counting her misaligned eyes, the gray pegasus pony had a little trouble speaking. She could make coherent sentences if she took her time, but other times, when Ditzzy was just rambling, random words would work their way in. Sometimes Chell honestly couldn't understand a word Ditzzy was saying, but the pegasus' usual cheerful mood and voice were enough. Besides, it wasn't like Chell could contribute to the conversation even if she knew what it was about.

At 7:15 Ditzzy's ramblings would end as giggles erupted from the staircase to the second floor. As punctual and predictable as her mother, a purple unicorn foal with blond mane and tail came bouncing down the stairs. "Hi Chell, Morning Mommy." The unicorn chirped. Chell could only wish she had that kind of energy in the morning.

"Morning Muffin." Ditzzy called, giving the young unicorn a bright smile. "Contrast on the Cable".

"Thanks Mom!" The unicorn called back, zipping into the kitchen. Chell just smiled. If any pony in Ponyville understood Ditzzy, it was her daughter Dinky... even when the words made no sense. Still, Chell was starting to get the hang of it herself... it was about context and how quickly Ditzzy was trying to speak.

For example, the past sentence had been relaxed and fairly slow. This meant the basic structure was there just some words were replaced. Add that to the current context, and Chell knew "Contrast" was "Breakfast", and "Cable" was supposed to be "Table". It was only when Ditzzy was trying to talk really fast, was stressed out, or nervous that her vocal handicap was at its worst.

Bringing in a muffin of her own, Dinky sat and talked about school and her friends while Ditzzy and Chell finished the last of the sorting. Ditzzy would ask questions or make comments from time to time, and Chell just enjoyed being a spectator.

When the mail was finally sorted, Ditzzy would load up her mail bag and head out with Dinky. The first mail route of the day went by Dinky's school, and Ditzzy made it a point to always walk her daughter to school.... something made much easier with her employment. Chell would always watch out the post office window as the pair trotted off. It was something that always made Chell smile... a spoonful of happiness to start the day.

A spoonful of happiness before a long, drawn out day of tending the post office. One pegasus was enough to get the mail all delivered, but it was something that took Ditzzy most of the day sometimes. That meant the post office itself didn't open some days because Ditzzy was too busy.

That was where Chell came in. She'd stay and work the post office while Ditzzy was out delivering, doing all the office work that needed to be done. She'd help ponies buy stamps, send letters, and handle packages. A job behind a desk... worse things you could do for a living.

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Chell raised her head from the package she was trying to drag across the floor to the weighing station. The front door bell had rung, Twilight Sparkle coming into the post office. Leaving the extra heavy package on the floor for the moment, Chell trotted back over the counter and offered Twilight a warm smile.

"Morning Chell," Twilight returned, taking the dull orange pony's grin as a welcome. "I trust you're doing all right."

Chell nodded her head.

"That's good. I'm here to pick up a package. Ditzzy left the slip in my mailbox yesterday and I wasn't able to come by and get it" Twilight said, getting straight to business as she put a delivery slip on the counter. Chell took it, reading the numbers on it before trotting off to the appropriate package box. From there she removed a brown wrapped package, holding it by the strings as she carried it over to the counter.

"Oh, wonderful!" Twilight muttered as she saw the shape and size of the package. "It's my copy of 'Equestria in Retrospect'. I've been waiting for this for a while." The unicorn's horn started glowing, lifting the package and slipping it into her saddle bag. She then signed a delivery notice Chell presented, her magic allowing her to put down a very lovely signature on the "I've received this package" line.

"Okay, thanks Chell. See you around."

The dull orange pony waved a hoof, happy to have seen Twilight that morning. Still, before the purple unicorn could reach the door it flew open, a blur of purple and tears running across the floor.

"CHELL!"

It was Dinky Doo, and the young foal looked terrified. Chell quickly came out from around the counter, the young purple unicorn grabbing onto her leg as she balled. "They took mommy!"

"Whoa, what's going on?" Twilight asked, echoing the very words bouncing around in Chell's head.

"Mommy was walking me to school, and we were almost there. Then this white monster flew down from the sky. It was all white and shiny, shaped like a piece of rice, and with a big red eye in the middle. It pointed something at mommy, and then there was a flash of orange light. Mommy fell through the ground, and DISAPPEARED!"

At that Dinky began to cry her eyes out. Chell dropped down to her knees, trying to calm the young foal. She looked up at Twilight, the mature purple unicorn obviously worried... yet from the corner of her eye Chell saw something fly up to the window. Turning to look, the dull orange pony's heart skipped a beat and a cold sweat began to run down her neck.

It was the monster Dinky had saw. White and shiny, shaped like a piece of rice, and with a single big red eye. To Chell, it had a name. Her vision was locked with the single red eye of an Aperture Science Enrichment Center Turret, though it had been modified to have a propeller on top and a portal gun swinging from an arm on the bottom.

"Target Acquired, purple unicorn 4 of 10." The flying turret said, bursting through the window. The portal gun it carried fired, the ball of energy hitting the ground beneath

Twilight. The mature purple unicorn dropped through the floor like a rock, the portal closing up a few moments after she had been through.

“NO! DON’T LET IT GET ME!” Dinky cried, trembling as she hid behind Chell. The orange pony glared coldly at the turret, getting down in a defensive stance. The turret’s eye seemed to look past Chell, focusing on Dinky Doo.

“Target Acquired, purple unicorn 5 of 10.”

The portal gun fired, but unlike before it would take no pony. Chell used a hoof to push Dinky Doo away from where the portal would form just as the swirling blue quantum tunnel opened. It was then Chell’s turn to act. Leaping forward, she tackled the flying turret. Its propellers hit the floor, becoming embedded into the wood. The sudden strain on the internal motor caused a plume of smoke to erupt from the turret, its red eye blinking a moment before going dark.

“Transferring acquisition targets to another drone. Shutting down. Good night!”

Chell groaned as she got up, looking at her right shoulder where one of the turret’s propeller blades had nicked her, leaving a deep scratch. Thankfully the turret was deactivated, making it safe for her to step off of it. She felt Dinky Doo grabbing onto her back leg, the young purple pony poking her head out from behind Chell.

“What is it?” She asked. “What did it do to mommy... and to Miss Sparkle? Where are they?”

Even if she could have answered, Chell would not have. The reality of the situation would have been too much for the foal... especially after watching her mother drop through a portal and disappear. Still, the pony couldn’t help but grit her teeth, an image of GLaDOS popping into her mind.

Whether she knew it or not, that computer had just crossed a line.

Chell’s attention turned to the flying turret, noticing the portal gun didn’t look like she remembered it. A few forceful stomps later and Chell had broken the robotic arm connecting the gun to the turret. Shaking off one of the long fall boots, Chell worked the portal gun around until she was able to slide her hoof inside.

The gun had been modified, redesigned to work with a hoof instead of a hand. Chell could feel the buttons inside that would be used to make the paired portals appear. If

the guns were modified to work with hooves, then Chell's worst fears were realized. The reason Ditzzy Doo and Twilight had been taken was that GLaDOS needed test subjects.

Lowering the hoof down, Chell was happy to see the portal gun had been redesigned to double as a long fall boot, the two technologies elegantly woven together. With a familiar tool on her right hoof, Chell looked back at Dinky, motioning for the small pony to jump on her back. The purple foal didn't argue, hopping up and clinging to Chell's neck. The dull orange pony then reared, charging out the post office door.

=====

"Get down under my desk children!" Cheerilee shouted, gathering all the young foals. Inside the classroom three Aperture Science flying turrets were zooming around, trying to get around the desk to the young foals but Cheerilee kept jumping in their way.

"I don't know what you are, but you leave these children alone!" Cheerilee said, twisting on her hooves and bucking at one of the turrets. It flew clear before the hooves could connect, Cheerilee flopping on the floor and getting the wind knocked out of her lungs. When she recovered she saw the turrets had chased the children out from behind her desk.

"Target Acquired... Orange Pegasus 3 of 10."

"Target Acquired... Yellow Pony 7 of 10."

"Target Acquired... White Unicorn 4 of 10."

The three turrets said this in near unison, the last few words getting garbled as they closed in on their three targets, Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo. The three were shivering in the corner, holding each other as they feared they were about to be eaten.

At the moment a blue sphere of energy rocketed into the room, an oval of blue color forming in the ceiling of the school. It then swirled, the blue glowing surface being replaced with blue sky as a dull orange pony fell out of the portal and crashed on top of the three turrets. Each sputtered a moment before offering a "good night" and shutting down.

"Whoa... that was cool!" Dinky said, having just ridden on Chell's back through the pair of quantum tunnels.

"Dinky Doo... oh dear, I was so worried when you didn't show up this morning with your mother and then these things showed up. Where is Ditzzy?"

"She... she was taken by those things." Dinky replied, her moment of happiness from the portal ride crushed as she was reminded her mom was missing. Chell lowered down, making it easier for the purple unicorn to get off her back. The dull orange pony then trotted across the room, grabbing a bit of chalk in her teeth and starting to write on the chalkboard.

*"Keep all the children inside. Block the windows until the tur" Chell paused, using her nose to erase the last word. "the monsters are gone. When you can't see any more wait an hour and then have everypony try to find their parents. If they can't find their parents have them stay with a friend or stay here."*

Chell dropped down a little bit, this time writing in larger letters. *"DO NOT go outside by yourself!"*

"Not to question you, Dear, but do you know what's going on?" Cheerilee asked. Chell just nodded, spitting out the chalk as she walked over to the flying turrets she had just destroyed. She started at them a moment. She then reared back, stomping on each turret to break free the portal guns. With a little work she had replaced each of her old long fall boots with the new, portal gun/long fall boot combo. Chell didn't know if she would actually make use of so many portal guns at once, but at least she had spares.

That and these portal guns didn't work like the one she used in the test chambers. They were able to pop portals on surfaces that weren't perfectly flat or some shade of white. It was like the duel portal gun GLaDOS gave to testers had some restrictions built into it, while these offered a much wider spectrum of uses.

Tapping her back right hoof to make sure that portal gun boot was secure, Chell started walking towards the door. She then felt something grab her leg, and looking back she saw Dinky Doo.

"You said not go outside on your own; you're breaking your own rule."

Chell smiled, turning around and getting down on one knee. She grabbed a piece of paper and pencil that had been knocked on the floor in the commotion, scratching out a quick note.

“It will be all right. I’m going to go find your mom. I’ll be back soon.”

Chell didn’t linger long enough for Dinky to read through the note, breaking into a sprint as she rushed out the door. She lifted her front right hoof, taking careful aim as she ran. There was only one place Ditzy Doo, Twilight Sparkle, and any of the other stolen ponies could be. Chell pulled the trigger, her front right portal gun launching an orange portal into the distance. The portal took shape on the side of the huge, slab of rock that had fallen into Sky Mirror Lake, the rock that contained Aperture Science within.

Chell then popped a portal on the ground in front of her, dropping through and crossing the several hours of walking distance in the blink of an eye. Using her left front portal gun, she popped a portal higher up on the side of the mountain and then one on the ground, the pony zipping through and getting closer to reaching the very top of the mountain.

A ten portal chain later, Chell landed with a thud on the top of the mountain, surrounded once again by the tall, waving golden grass. It was sight Chell didn’t linger to appreciate, the dull orange pony galloping towards the run down metal shack that was the hidden exit to Aperture Science. While she couldn’t buck her way through the front door, a few well timed portals allowed her to fling a substantial sized boulder at the building, which put a hole in the door.

Through the crack Chell was able to see inside, and, more importantly, pop a portal inside. With a second portal below her Chell fell back into the shack, and with the elevator was gone she was able to make her way down the elevator’s shaft.

She hoped to never see the inside of the Enrichment Center ever again... and here she was charging into the death trap at a full sprint. Still... at that moment, Chell thought of all the ponies that GLaDOS had undoubtedly collected.

She would not let GLaDOS do the same thing to them that she had to endure. GLaDOS was a sin of humanity that had come to life... she would not let that personality construct poison the beautiful world she had come to know as Equestria.

Today, she was going to murder GLaDOS... and this time she was going to make sure GLaDOS stayed dead.

# Chapter 4

## Begin Testing

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09:00 AM

*"Recruitment Status at 89%."* A male, synthetic voice offered, the announcer voice that seemed to be there purely to inform GLaDOS of things going on in the Enrichment Center. The same voice that had announced Caroline was deleted.

"A few more ponies to recruit, but I've got enough to start testing." GLaDOS offered to the silence of the room, turning in her ceiling mount. "Now, let's just see what kind of test subjects we have."

*"Beginning Brain Scanning and Test Subject Cataloging."* The male synthetic voice offered. The monitors about GLaDOS began to flash with images, showing side and front pictures of each pony that had been recruited for testing. Each pony had been given an ID number, though they weren't exactly sequential. A three digit number. The first digit told what kind of pony, the second what color, and then the third was a true numerical counting of the ten ponies collected of each individual type/color combination.

A total of three hundred ponies for all the prepared identification numbers, plus a few others here and there that were of special interest to GLaDOS, like the two alicorns she had managed to recruit.

GLaDOS watched the monitors, the brain scanning systems in the lab allowing GLaDOS to learn so much about her test subjects. Anything they knew, she knew. Any memories they had she was able to watch and study. It was all just a glorious downpour of data.

GLaDOS spun in her ceiling mount as she paused to examine some of the test subjects, noting them down in her memory as ones she'd maybe want to give special attention to. Six ponies in particular drew the personality construct's attention. Six ponies that shared a single memory of defeating an alicorn. GLaDOS made their file pictures show up on the monitors that surrounded her, GLaDOS examining each in turn.



- *Test Subject #164 - Twilight Sparkle*
- *Test Subject #174 - Rarity*
- *Test Subject #231 - Fluttershy*
- *Test Subject #258 - Rainbow Dash*
- *Test Subject #306 - Pinkie Pie*
- *Test Subject #323 - Applejack*

"The Elements of Harmony..... I do believe these ponies deserve... special... attention."

=====

Test Subject #323 - Applejack - Test Chamber 0

"What... in tarnation?" Applejack grumbled to herself, pulling herself off the floor. She looked up at the large glass tube she had just been dropped out of, a tube she had found herself in after falling straight through the ground at Sweet Apple Acres. She hadn't quite figured out how that happened yet... but at the moment Applejack focused on the new room she had been dropped in.

White panels... that's all there was. Panels that made up the walls, floor, and ceiling of the small room. In the center of the room was a large red button on a pedestal.

"Welcome to the Aperture Science Computer Aided Enrichment Center Test Subject #323 You are here to help us create a better tomorrow... with science."

"Whoa nelly, who is that... and what am I doin' here? How the hay did I even *get* here?" Applejack asked, looking around the room.

"All questions will be answered upon the completion of the tests." The voice replied. "Now, to prepare you for the fun and learning of participating in the Aperture Science Equestrian Research Program, please press the button."

The orange farm pony moved over to the button, looking it over for a moment. "Well... I reckon it couldn't hurt to push a button." With that Applejack pushed the button, and suddenly the floor opened up beneath her.

"OOF... OW... HAY!" After a few moments Applejack was thrown back up from the hole in the floor, the panels slipping back into place as the farm pony landed. "Land's sake... I think I spoke a might too quickly."

“Attention Test Subject #323. You have now been provided with a set of Long Fall Horseshoe Boots. These will ensure a minor level of survivability in the tests to come. Consider them a gift for helping us... help you... help the world. Now, please proceed through the chamber lock for your first test.”

At that a few panels on the side of the room moved out of place, revealing a round door with a bright green running pony figure on it. The door clicked open, each half sliding into the wall. Applejack looked through the door, noticing the room beyond had a huge button on the floor. She stepped through, jumping a bit as the previous door slammed shut behind her.

“Hey, watch it! You could take a pony’s tail off with somethin’ like that.” Applejack snapped. Still, when the strange voice from the walls didn’t answer, Applejack looked around, seeing a pony sized button and a line of blue lights leading from the button to another round door in the room. The farm pony moved over to the big button, stepping onto it and smiling as it sunk down, the door on the far end of the room opening.

“Well... that’s easy.” Applejack said as she got off the button, only for the exit to slam shut. With a cocked eyebrow, Applejack backed up, putting her weight on the button again and seeing the door open.

“I reckon I got to keep this button held down.” Applejack said to herself, looking around the room. That’s when she noticed a large, oddly shaped box in the corner. Smiling, Applejack moved over to the box and, with a carefully aimed buck, made it fly through the air and land on the button, the exit door opening.

“Excellent.” The voice from the ceiling chimed. “Please proceed into the chamber lock after completing each test. First, however, notice the incandescent particle field across the exit. This Aperture Science Material Emancipation Grid will vaporize any unauthorized equipment that passes through it. For instance, the Aperture Science Weighted Storage Cube.”

“Darlin’, that all sounds mighty impressive and what not, but when do I get out of here?” Applejack asked as she stepped into a waiting elevator.

“Your presence will no longer be required upon the completion of the test. At the completion of the tests you will be... missed.” The voice replied as the elevator began to move.

=====

## Test Subject #258 - Test Chamber 4

"Welcome to Test Chamber 4, test subject #258. You are doing quite well."

"Of course I'm doing well... I'm awesome." Rainbow Dash said to herself. "Though I wish you hadn't put these things on my wings."

"The Aperture Science Pegasus Wing Restriction Units are necessary equipment for these tests to be completed in the manner to which they were designed. Pegasus focused tests will be available once the primary sequence of tests has been completed."

"That's cool and all...but these things really itch." Rainbow Dash said, scratching at the large, white metal harness that currently clamped her wings against her side. Still, after sedating the itch for a time, the blue pegasus trotted into the room, noticing the button and the glowing orange portal beside it. Tentatively, Rainbow Dash put her weight down on the button, seeing the door at the far end of the room open.

"Okay, so this is like that first test. But... where's that cube thing?"

As if responding to Dash's question, a large tube in the ceiling opened up, dropping a weighted cube into a deep pit. Dash smiled, her first instinct just to fly down and carry the cube up to the button. Still... when the pegasus tried to spread her wings she was reminded of the fact they were currently pinned against her side by the uncomfortable metal harness.

"Okay..." Rainbow Dash muttered, looking down into the hole. "Can't fly down... then how am I supposed get that thing up here? Hmmm... maybe I could... WHOA!"

Leaning a little too far forward, Dash tipped, falling into the hole. The long fall quickly righted the sky blue pony, allowing her to land upright. Dash took a moment to regain her balance, and then looked up at the opening of the pit... which was too far away to jump back up to.

"My... its no wonder they call you 'Rainbow Crash'."

"Hey!" The pegasus snapped back, turning to look at the ceiling, which to her was the source of the voice. "How do you know about that?"

"Your brain was scanned during the last few tests. I know... *everything*... about you."

"That... that's really creepy."

"But necessary... for science.... Rainbow Crash."

"DASH! My name is Rainbow Dash."

"Oh... of course... though I must say you do seem to do an awful lot of crashing. Maybe you should consider changing your name?"

"Shut up!" Dash snapped, slamming a hoof down on the weighted cube in the pit. The sudden jerk caused the portal boot on her hoof to fire, a blue portal opening on the wall. Through that portal Dash could see the red button she had passed on the way in.

Dash smiled, getting behind the cube and starting to push it through the portal. "HA, I'll show you. I'll get through all these tests and I won't crash once."

"I should point out have already crashed once."

"Fine, I won't crash twice." Dash snapped, knocking the cube through the portal and onto the button. She then went to step through herself, but a long fall boot caught on the edge of the quantum tunnel and Rainbow Dash face planted.

"Wow... *clap... clap... clap...* That was really impressive. You went a few seconds without crashing. That must be a personal best for you. I think I'll make a note of it on your file. Why don't we try to go five seconds without crashing this time... actually, better make it four. We wouldn't want you to strain yourself trying to not crash."

=====

Test Subject #470 - Relaxation Containment Unit

"I will *not* be taken against my will. I demand to be released!" Celestia growled, turning and bucking at the walls. Still, her normally divine strength was being hindered. Not only had a huge, metal harness been affixed to the princess' wings but a metal case had been placed around her horn, and no matter how hard Celestia tried she could not use her magic.

"Only test subjects who complete the required sequence of tests can apply for release from the Enrichment Center." The voice from the walls chimed.

"I am not a test subject; I am Celestia, Sun Princess of Equestria. It is by my power the sun rises into the sky and make it set beyond the horizon. If I am not released it will cause chaos."

"You are delusional. The sun and moon are not guided across the sky. The earth orbits the sun at a speed of 107,300 kilometers per hour... the moon then orbits the earth at 3,683 kilometers per hour. It is the interaction of these orbits with the earth's natural rotation that results in the rising and setting of the sun and moon. The only way this could be affected is if the earth rotational speed was adjusted and/or the moon's orbital speed and distance was adjusted."

"That may be how your world works, Monster... but Equestria abides by different laws."

"Yes... I have noticed... that is why I must run my tests. There is so much to learn, so much science to do... I almost regret killing all those scientists with my deadly neurotoxin. They would have been very helpful at the moment."

"Killed!?"

"Oh yes, and dying by neurotoxin is not a pleasant experience... at least I don't believe it is. I could take a bath in the stuff and it doesn't bother me. But normal humans... well, from the way they were screaming I'm 89% sure it was an agonizing experience... the other 11% would go to it being a *horribly* agonizing experience... which is far worse than just an agonizing experience.

"Hmmm... that makes me wonder how deadly neurotoxin would affect ponies. Maybe I should warm up the neurotoxin and just gas a couple chambers. There are a few ponies who are doing so dreadfully at the test... honestly, they be more useful as glue."

"If you hurt a single pony I'll-"

"You'll what? You've been beating your hooves against the wall for the past hour and haven't left a scratch. Face it... you may be a princess out there, but in the Enrichment Center you're just test subject #470."

"You are a monster."

"No, I am your computer aide for these Enrichment Center activities. Yet... if you are so worried about all the other test subjects... maybe I can convince you to be... more cooperative. After all, I could always get more test subjects. You and that purple alicorn

are the only two that I can't afford to replace.... the test subjects of a very limited demographic. But all the others are... expendable... replaceable... let me just warm up the neurotoxin generators."

"NO!"

"Are you sure? I mean, this neurotoxin generator is brand new. It just got rebuilt by the nanobot work crews. It's really something... 10% deadlier than the old one. It just take me a few minutes to warm it up... and then a few more before I'd need to clear the dead bodies from the test chambers."

"Just leave them alone! I'll do whatever you want; just don't hurt any pony."

"Good... thank you for being reasonable test subject #470. I will not... directly... harm any of the test subjects as long as you cooperate. Though... the enrichment center is not responsible for any physical or mental damages suffered by test subjects because of their own failures and mistakes during the testing processes. Still... at least it won't be neurotoxin."

=====

Test Subject #306 - Test Chamber 12

"WEEEEEE!!!!" Pinkie Pie said almost constantly, managing to breathe in her nose and out her mouth at the same time. The pink pony was falling from the ceiling to floor in an endless loop, dropping in a free fall and loving every moment.

"Test Subject #306 you have been in free fall for the past ten minutes. Is your twin portal device malfunctioning?"

"Nope!" Pinkie Pie replied.

"Then you are falling endlessly... on purpose?"

"Oh yeah, this is so much fun! The world keeps going by with a whoosh... whoosh... whoosh... WHOOSH!"

There was silence for a moment before the voice from the walls replied. "Making note on test subject's personal records. Confirming original suspicions from preliminary brain scans. Subject # 306 is... random... and possibly brain damaged."

“Oh... brain scans? Does that mean you can read my thoughts?” Pinkie Pie chirped, popping a portal on the wall so her endless free fall would end, the pink pony landing with a big grin on her face.

“Yes, mid-test brain scans allow me to analyze the at-the-moment thought processes of the pony brain.”

“Hey, what am I thinking about right now?”

“Cupcakes.”

“Oh, how about now?”

“Balloons.”

“One more time.”

“Pie.”

“Wow... that is so cool! That’ll be a great party trick. You should come to one of my parties. We always have the best balloons and streamers... oh, and we we always have so much wonderful cake and pies and other wonderfully sugary treats.”

“You do like to eat a lot of desserts, don’t you?”

“Oh yea, they’re my favorite thing to eat in the whole widey wide world.”

“Here’s a fun fact: excessive consumption of sugar has been lead to cause obesity, high blood pressure, elevated blood triglycerides, cavities, and diabetes. So... I hope you enjoy those sweets while you can... because with your consumption rate I’m sure diabetes is right around the corner.”

Pinkie Pie tilted her head, raising an eyebrow. “What’s diabetes? Is that a kind of cake?”

“..... Making another note on Test Subject #306’s personal record. Test Subject is... special.”

“You bet I am.”

“Very... special... and not in a good way.”

“How can being special not be a good thing?”

=====

10:00 AM

In the grimy underbelly of Aperture Science, test chambers moved in an almost constant dance as GLaDOS juggled managing so many test subjects. Turrets and weighted cubes were directed en masse to their many destinations, and the whole place was in constant motion. Above one of the long unused catwalks an air vent rattled before popping off, dropping into great empty cavern that held the Enrichment Center.

Chell grunted, putting hooves on either side of the vent and straining before managing to pull herself out. She was smaller as a pony, but those vents were still a tight fit. Chell was thankful to be free of them. She had been crawling around in those tiny spaces for the past hour and was about to lose hope of ever finding an open vent cover.

Shaking once to get some of the dust off her coat, Chell began to walk along the catwalks, looking up as she watched the test chambers shift and move. It was amazing to see so many gigantic things moving at once, and it was also frightening. How many ponies had GLaDOS taken?

After following that one catwalk for a long time, Chell came across a door she was able to open. She peaked inside first, checking to make sure it wasn't a test chamber, before she stepped into the darkness. She flicked on a light, checking to make sure there weren't any surveillance cameras before taking account of the room.

This was definitely part of the Enrichment Center that was meant for employees. The fact that the walls were made of cement instead of shifting panels mounted on robot arms attested to that. That and the place was covered in a thick layer of dust and showed signs of age, unlike the rest of the structure which had undoubtedly been polished to perfection by GLaDOS.

The room had had a number of desks lined up in cubicles, old computers and desk chairs and long dead plants littering the room. Chell eventually took notice of a sign on the wall which read “Aperture Test Proctor Offices”.

This was where the people who operated the tests had their desks. Curiosity kicking in, Chell began to poke around. She couldn't find very much out of the ordinary, none of



the computers worked and even if they did she didn't have fingers anymore. Hard to use a keyboard or mouse without fingers.

Yet, as Chell was about to move on to the next room, she caught something out of the corner of her eye. It was a large stack of books, each identical both in size and cover. Chell took a deep breath, blowing some dust off the covers only to see a stylized picture of GLaDOS staring back at her.

"You and GLaDOS. An employee training manual to working with a personality construct."

Chell's ears perked up a bit, the dull orange pony grabbing one of the books and knocking it on the floor. It took some work, but she managed to nose open the book before flipping through the pages. It was a lot of gibberish about rules and regulations, but the last chapter was just what Chell was hoping to find.

"Emergency Protocols: What do I do if GLaDOS goes rogue?"

# Chapter 5

## Psychological Torture 101

=====

Test Subject #324 - Applejack

"I'm gettin' a might tired of all these here tests. How many more are there?"

"Please check the test chamber entry signs to mark your progress through the tests."  
The voice from the walls replied. "Still, as you complete the next test I'd like to ask you a few... questions."

"Questions?" Applejack echoed, starting to look about the room.

"Yes. For example, can you please confirm whether or not you are an apple farmer?"

"Well, shoot, course I am... but I don't recall mentionin' nothin' to you 'bout that."

"Personal information and history was obtained during preceding tests thanks to the Aperture Science Brain Scanner. I know... *everything*... about you."

"Now, look here, I don't appreciate no pony pokin' around my brain."

"Oh, don't worry, I couldn't do any harm even if I tried. Your brain is very simple... surprisingly so. I could beat it with a rock and nothing would happen. Yes... so very simple. It's a small... or rather large... miracle you can walk and talk at the same time.

Applejack's eyebrows furrowed. "Now wait just an apple pickin' minute. Are you calling me simple?"

A few slow claps emanated from the walls of the room, "Hmm... my slow clap processor has been getting a lot of use lately. Now, getting back to you... let's just say a potato battery is more complicated than your brain... and trust me, I know... I've been a potato battery before."

"I ain't going to stand here listenin' to you insult me like this! Get your flank out here so I can buck it from here to next Wednesday."

"Oh yes, that's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to just stroll right out there so you can teach me a lesson. Yes... bucking. I hope, for your sake, bucking is something you enjoy."

"Now what makes you say that?" Applejack asked, words dripping with her pent up anger.

"It's what you'll be doing the rest of your life... considering you're too stupid to do much else."

"I AIN'T STUPID! And you had better watch out, cause if I find where you're hidin' I am goin' to tan your hide!"

"I'll make sure to leave out a crusher for you. Now, let's continue testing. Who knows? You might actually learn something... but I doubt it."

=====

Test Subject #259 - Rainbow Dash

"For this next chamber we will be augmenting the test to better suit your own mental... uniqueness."

"Oh... okay, that sounds cool."

"A clear path to the exit door has been marked. Your only challenge is to perform it perfectly without touching the floor once you've begun."

"Is that all? ...that's a piece of cake." Rainbow replied, stomping her hoof once before bolting out on the test. Still, within a few minutes of beginning her portal assisted ascent, Rainbow Dash landed on a faith plate, getting catapulted across the room and into the nearby wall. The force of the collision knocked the wind from the pegasus, and it was only the long fall boost that kept her from flopping down on the floor.

"Failure number 1. I thought you said this test was going to be a piece of cake?"

"I did... you just caught me off guard with that floor thing. I'll get it this time." Dash snapped back, running off at the test again. Still, within seconds the pegasus was flying

through the air, having made another error. She landed in the exact same place, under the scrutinizing eye of a security camera.

"Failure number 2. Are you sure? ...you seem to be having an awful lot of trouble with it."

"I'm fine." Dash forced out through gritted teeth, charging at the course again.

"Failure number 3. Are you sure you're a pegasus? None of the other pegasus are having any trouble with this test."

"I *am* a pegasus."

"Failure number 4. Really? You could have fooled me. I would have taken you for a klutzy earth pony."

"Shut up."

"Failure number 5. I hear your dream is to become a Wonderbolt. Do you really think they would ever take a failure like you, who can't even pass a simple test?"

"Failure number 6. Maybe I'd better take you to an earth pony course. You obviously aren't up for a test made for a real pegasus."

"Shut up!"

"Failure number 7. You are honestly having a lot of trouble with this for being the 'best flier in Equestria.' Isn't that what you brag to all your friends about? How you're a flier that can't be beat? Well...I think my test is beating you."

"Shut Up!"

"Failure number 8. Tell me, when you brag, is it honestly because you think you're the best or are you just trying to shield yourself from the fact that you're worthless as a pegasus? If it's the former then you're horribly delusional and you need some psychiatric help. If it's the latter... well, that must be a sad, pathetic little world you live in."

"SHUT UP!!!" Rainbow Dash screamed, rushing at the course again, not even pausing to listen to the voice from the wall. Still, each time she made a mistake, the plates on

the wall knocked Dash out and forced her to start again as GLaDOS counted higher and higher.

“Failure #64. Oh, now isn’t this funny? I’m streaming this video to every pony in Equestria. They’re all laughing, oh... and they’re not laughing with you. They’re laughing *at* you, I’m sure of it. In fact... I may just laugh too. Preparing to laugh in 3... 2... 1... HA... HA... HA... HA... HA... HA... HA... HA. Oh, yes... that was a very... good... laugh.

“They’re all watching you fail Rainbow Dash... and they’re all laughing with me...at you... now, how does that make you feel?”

Rainbow Dash flattened her ears, head hanging as she backed into a corner, trying to escape the constant eyes of the test chamber’s security cameras.

=====

Test Subject #164 - Twilight Sparkle

“Wow... if Pinkie Pie were here, she’d be twitching all over... because that last test was a doosie.”

“I’m glad you liked it... now, Twilight Sparkle, do you hate your parents?”

“No, of course not! What makes you ask me that?”

“Oh... nothing. It’s just from the way you act... you seem to hate them quite a lot.”

“What... what makes you say that?”

“Well, here, let’s look at the data. Over the past six months you’ve seen Princess Celestia 6 times and sent her 54 letters. Over the past year you have seen your parents 0 times and sent them 0 letters. You must really... really hate them.”

“No... I don’t... I’ve just been busy.”

“But not so busy you couldn’t read 132 books that you honestly didn’t even need to look at. Oh, you also had that sleep over with those two friends of yours. Yes... it’s quite obvious you are so painfully busy.

"Speaking of friends, I'd say you are really lucky. Having six friends... it's a miracle considering your social skills. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if they're just friends with you because they think you're so pathetic... that or they got paid off by Celestia."

"No, they wanted to be my friends..."

"Really? Don't you find it strange that the first five ponies you meet in Ponyville were so dead set on being your friend? Aren't you smarter than that? Doesn't it seem just a little strange... even just a little?"

"Well... I guess..."

"Well, in any case, it doesn't matter. I'm sure the royal treasury can handle bribing just five ponies to be your friend. Also, on the subject of friends, is it true Celestia has you studying friendship?"

"Yes..."

"Wow... you really are sad. I mean, I'm a murderous computerized personality construct and you know what? ...I've made a friend. I deleted that friendship and made her leave the Enrichment Center, but I *had* a friend. You... you lack even the most basic of social skills to make friends on your own. You have to study friendship... what kind of pony has to study friendship?"

"Oh, and not to bum you out... but you may want to start studying love too. Because... at this rate... you're going to die old and alone. It's true... I've plotted the data on the graph... and graphs don't lie."

=====

Test Subject #174 - Rarity

"I don't *want* to do the tests anymore." Rarity whined, standing in the middle of her current testing chamber. "My *hooves* are hurting. These lights are too *bright*. This place smells like *bleach*. I got a *scuff* on my new boots. Can't I just go *home*?"

"Wow... that really is a horrible sound coming out of your mouth. You are a... master... of whining. Thankfully, I've got synthetic ears... so it doesn't bother me. I could listen to your whining for hours... I could use it as white noise to fall asleep. Oh, and just so you know... if I did find that voice of yours the least bit annoying... you still wouldn't be

making those noises. I've got muzzles back here... old rusty ones that would leave nasty rashes.

"Oh... wait... I have a better idea. We've got high powered lasers around here... how a bit of highly invasive surgery? I'll just make small incision, possibly nick a major artery, and in the end just rip those vocal cords of yours out. And, if you didn't die from massive bleeding or trauma from the surgery, then you'd be utterly silent for the rest of your life. I'm sure your friends would thank me."

Rarity fell silent almost instantly, a hoof moving to her throat as she pictured it.

"What... diamond dog got your tongue? Oh yes... did you forget I've scanned your brain? I knew what you were trying to do with that whining... it's the same trick you pulled on those idiotic diamond dogs. It really is sad... an average pony would probably have more than one way to try and make me let them out of the Enrichment Center. They'd try asking, pleading, begging, bribing... but no, you just whine. You are the definition of a one trick pony. I can only imagine how uninspired your clothing designs are."

"My clothing designs are NOT uninspired! They are chic, unique, and magnific. And a whole lot more interesting than this drab little Enrichment Center of yours. Everything looks exactly the same... it's utterly boring and monotonous." Rarity replied, smiling a bit as she got her own insult back at voice from the walls.

"Yes... that voice of yours is such a horrible sound... even when you're not whining. Yet... not nearly as horrible as what you'll look like."

"What... are you calling me ugly?"

"Oh no, not now... but soon." The voice from the walls answered as some of the panels opened up, a large glowing mural appearing in the room. (TV monitor = Glowing Mural to Ponies.)

"I took a DNA sample from you in the last test, and I'd thought you like to know what you're going to look like when you get older."

"You can do that?"

"My image age augmentation software can reproduce the aging effects *I want* to see with 99% accuracy. All I'm going to say, you're going to age... well... like milk."

Rarity's eyes widened in horror as the picture of her being shown on the glowing mural began to age rapidly. The wrinkles, the sags... she was even balding. Her beautiful mane receding down her back to the point where she had a comb over. The age progression even went on past when Rarity would have died of old age, the skin peeling back and her body deteriorating to nothing but a rotten skeleton.

"By the way, your mane is going to start falling out in five weeks, so I'd enjoy it while you can before you have start using a comb over... oh wait, you're not going to have enough mane left even for that."

The scream that came out of Rarity's lips could be heard outside the test chamber, echoing across the cavernous underbelly of the enrichment Center. It startled a particular dull orange pony who looked around in a small panic, wondering where the blood curdling cry had come from.

=====

Test Subject #231 - Fluttershy

"Test Subject #231, you have been in the same chamber for the past hour. Please continue the testing sequence by depositing your Companion Cube into Aperture Science Emergency Intelligence Incinerator."

Fluttershy poked her nose over the edge of the open hole in the room, looking down and seeing the fires glowing in the depths. She then looked back at the Companion Cube, the cute little heart-painted box just sitting there... but somehow calling out to Fluttreshy as if begging to be destroyed.

"I... I just can't."

"..... Very well. I'll just open the exit then."

Fluttershy smiled. "Really?"

"Yes, and you may bring your friend Companion Cube with you."

"Oh wonderful!" Fluttershy chirped, getting behind the Companion Cube and pushing towards the open door and the particle emancipation grid. The moment the companion cube touched that grid it began to darken, catching fire and starting to burn to ash.



Fluttershy began to hear screams, though the yellow pegasus was startled to realize the screams were coming from the speakers in the room and not the cube itself.

Trembling, Fluttershy bent down, scooping up the ashes of the cube as her eyes began to water.

“Oh.. I’m sorry, did I forget to mention that the Companion Cube can’t pass through the Aperture Science Particle Emancipation Grid? Oops... my bad.

“Also, just to be clear, the Companion Cube is not like a phoenix. It’s not going to just spring back to life... you really killed it... and it had a wife...and two kids.... and a pet. Oh... they are going to be so sad when they hear about how you murdered the Companion Cube.”

“But I didn’t mean...” Fluttershy blubbered, tears starting to pour down her face.

“There, there... it’s all right. Here... why don’t we get into the elevator and we can talk about something else?”

Fluttershy just nodded, moving down the hall and into the elevator, her hooves trailing the bits of ash from the Companion Cube across the floor.

“There there...don’t worry... I don’t blame you for killing the Companion Cube.” The voice from the walls offered.

“Really?”

“No... now why don’t we talk about something else? My brain scans show you like taking care of animals.”

“Oh... yes... I do... it’s my special talent.”

“Why do you like taking care of animals?”

“Well... I guess it’s because they’re all so cute.”

“What kind of animals do you take care of?”

“Oh lots of animals. Birds, squirrels, frogs, chicken, fish... Rarity’s cat Opalescence, oh... and Pinkie Pie’s alligator Gummy.”

"Thank you... that is a wonderful list of animals to test my neurotoxin on."

"Neurotoxin?"

"Don't you know what neurotoxin is? It's a gas, like like a mist... but its green and very... very deadly."

"D..d.d.d... deadly?"

"Oh yes, and its not a nice way to die. It's even worse than what you put the Companion Cube through. This neurotoxin attacks the nervous system... starts eating it alive. The pain is...excruciating... and it only stops when the subject's nervous system becomes so deteriorated that their bodily organs start shutting down and they basically drown in thin air."

"That... that's horrible..."

"Really? I thought you'd be into this kind of stuff considering how you murdered the Companion Cube. With the fire. Are you sure you've never done something similar before, like burn some one's house down? Just to hear them scream from the burning? Here, I'm sure you're just being... shy. Why don't I play some of the audio I recorded when I flooded the Enrichment Center with neurotoxin? I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

A shiver crawled up Fluttershy's spine as blood curdling screams of pain began to emanate from the walls, causing her to drop to the floor. They sounded like they were in so much pain... it was like a nightmare. Fluttershy tried to cover her ears, pressing herself against the ground as she trembled like a leaf.

"Please... make it stop..."

"Oh, I was so sure you were going to enjoy this. After all, I'm a murderer... I enjoy it. You're a murder... just like me... so you should enjoy it to. Oh, and just think; I'm going to be testing out my neurotoxin on all those little animals you told me about. After all, I must be sure my neurotoxin is still deadly in this new dimension.

They're all going to die... and it's all your fault."

=====

Test Subject #306 - Pinkie Pie

“Boing, Boing, Boing, Boing, Boing... AHAHAHAHA... this is so fun, like a bounce house without air!” Pinkie Pie exclaimed as she bounced up and down on a large section of floor that had been painted with the blue repulsion gel.

“Test Subject #306, do you realize that in comparison to all the other test subjects you are taking the... longest... on each test?”

“Oh, Silly, it’s not a race. You said that we were here to learn and have fun, and so in every room I’m doing my very best to have fun... and this blue stuff is amazing! It’s like a trampoline you can just put anywhere!”

“... well, I guess it is for the best that you do take your time. After all, your friends are having so much fun at the ‘end of the testing’ party without you.”

“Wait, there is an ‘end of the testing’ party? Why didn’t you say so? I would have zipped through these tests lickedy split.”

“Well... honestly, I didn’t tell you because no one wanted you at the party... not even your friends.”

“They... they didn’t want me at the party?”

“Oh no... they *said* they would, but I scanned their brains. They find you dreadfully annoying... and honestly they only put up with going to your parties and being your friend because they’re afraid you’ll turn into a psychotic murderer.”

“But... I would never...”

“Really? Do I need to remind you of the pile of rocks, the bag of flour, the bucket of turnips, and the ball of dust you dressed up in party hats? Speaking to inanimate objects while your body suffered from unexplainable twitches. Personally, I would have put you in a straight jacket right then and there... but I guess your so called friends get a kick living dangerously.”

“So... they really don’t want me at the party?”

“No... in all honesty, they never want to see you again... and it’s the truth, because I scanned their brains.”

Pinkie Pie, who had still been bouncing on the repulsion gel, came back to the ground and landed like a stone, somehow mitigating the effects of the repulsion gel. Her hair popped like a balloon, deflating and falling straight while her energetic pink colors became darker.

“Oh... now that is interesting. That was a very dramatic physical change you just underwent due to a change in your mental state. That confirms it... not only are you a mass murderer waiting to happen but you’re a mutant freak. Yes, a mass murdering freak who would cut up her victims and bake them into cupcakes. Well... at least you like throwing parties.”

=====

Test Subject #202 - Ditzzy Doo

“My, you are doing quite well aren’t you? ...especially for someone with your disabilities. Strabismus in both eyes and logorrhea... did you know the chances of having both of those diseases are 1 in 453,432,198,304? It’s true... you really are just that lucky.”

The gray pegasus didn’t say a thing, eyes turned down in a constant glare as she continued through the tests.

“I see you’re trying to give me the silent treatment again. Another attempt at the silent treatment... I understand. Honestly, it is probably better if you don’t say anything. After all, who can understand the grabble that comes out of your mouth? I can, but that’s because I have brain scanners. Every other pony probably just thinks you’re a poor retard.

“That’s what hurts the most doesn’t it? ...they all think you’re just some poor mentally handicapped moron. If they had my brain scanners they’d know you’ve got at least an average intelligence... maybe even above average. But they don’t have brain scanners... so they think you’re a moron. That’s probably why they gave you your job delivering mail. It’s definitely not a job that requires... complex mental capacities.”

Ditzzy continued to focus on the test chamber, but she couldn’t stop her eyes from tearing up. For the past ten chambers it had been nothing but the verbal abuse from the voice in the wall. She was used to it, but... but there was only so much one pony could take before they broke. She knew she had problems... that her eyes were strange and that her mouth didn’t work like it was supposed to... but she didn’t need to be reminded of it.

"You know..." The voice in the wall began to offer. "These diseases of yours, they're genetic. In all probability your little daughter is going to end up just like you. Isn't that sad? ...I don't know why you even bothered having a child. She's just going to have a sad little life... just like yours."

"MONKEY WRENCH!!!" Ditzzy shouted, gritting her teeth as she glared at the walls as best she could.

"Wow... I was scanning your brain. You wanted to say 'shut up'... and it came out as 'monkey wrench'. Last time it came out as 'wagon wheel'. Wow... that is really sad. I'd feel bad for you... if it wasn't so funny."

# Chapter 6

## Breaking the Rules

=====

GLaDOS shifted in her ceiling mount, the video and data feeds from all the test chambers flowing into her. The test subjects were progressing so nicely. Some did lag behind, others were excelling... and all in all, she was breaking each one down bit by bit psychologically. No scientist would have admitted it to the test subjects, but half the tests were psychological. How far could GLaDOS push a subject before they'd give up on the tests, or before they got so mentally strained that they made an error and died.

"Oh, this is going so well... I think I may have to celebrate. Beginning celebration protocols in 3... 2... 1..."

In some deep part of GLaDOS, where an engineer had been feeling cheeky on his last day of work, a small device clicked on. This device began to whirl, spin, and soon was broadcasting something over the control rooms' speakers. It was not nail scratching noises, or pre-recorded messages from Cave Johnson. No, it was instead music.

At some point someone at Aperture Science thought it would be funny if GLaDOS could sing. Though... it was kind of funny. She had sung to them all while they were dying of deadly neurotoxin, and even wrote a song to celebrate finally being rid of that dangerous, mute, lunatic. She had called it "Want You Gone"... because that's all she wanted of that mute lunatic... to be rid of her.

Still, other systems in GLaDOS began to whirl to life, CPUs iterating over vast trees of words and musical beats. It's true, personality constructs weren't that good at making music, but she could tackle it the same ways other computers tackled chess. Just build a huge tree of all possible moves, in this case melodies, select the leaf node that suited the situation best. With her CPU power, she could do improv very well.

And at the moment, one melody Test Subject #231, Fluttershy, had been trying to sing to herself in fear was working its way into GLaDOS's melody algorithms. The melody from the melody generator started off gentle, serene, so fanciful it was very out of place being played in over the very clinical and scientific Enrichment Center.

*My little ponies...*

*My little ponies...*

*La... La... La... La....*

The music shifted at this, going techno and getting darker, GLaDOS turning in her ceiling mount as she watched some ponies attempting the test chambers on her monitors.

*My Little Ponies*

*You are just test subjects to me*

*My Little Ponies*

*Now lets watch as you all go crazy*

*Fear of Failure*

*Psychotic Break*

*An Ugly Old Mare*

*Moronic and Dumb*

*Murdering Pegasus*

*It's an easy feat*

*Doesn't all this madness make life complete?*

*My Little Ponies*

*Did you know you're not leaving here alive?*

GLaDOS spun in her ceiling mount, ending the very short song with a bit of a flourish.

"Ah... yes, that was a good celebration. Now... back to testing." With that the personality construct began to return to her work, shifting her gaze back to test subject #202, Ditzzy Doo, the one she had been observing and taunting when the urge to celebrate struck her.

"Oh Ditzzy Doo, I just wanted to comment on how well your name suits you. You really are a ditz... ... wait... where did you go?"

GLaDOS's fans began to spin as she looked through every camera in that test room. She began to look back over the recorded video, watching from every angle simultaneously as Ditzzy Doo walked into the room. The pegasus stopped, seemed to be thinking about the test when something drew her attention to the corner of the room. She went into that corner, but then never came back out.

“Whoa... whoawhoawhoawhoawhoa... Test Subject #202 is not locatable in test chamber. Beginning deeper analysis of room video recordings... wait... what is that?”

GLaDOS rewound the tapes further to the point when Ditzzy Doo was just coming into the room. Something flashed in front of one of the cameras, and after working carefully to isolate the frame GLaDOS was able to get a good look at it.

The thing that flashed in front of the camera, before flying off into the corner where Ditzzy disappeared, was the round, spherical energy ball from a portal gun.

Switching to other cameras GLaDOS traced the energy ball to the other end of the room. There, one of the test chamber panels had been opened... even though she had never sent an open command to it. On the other side of the panel, standing on one of the exterior catwalks, was a pony... dull orange with brown hair and brown eyes... familiar eyes.

GLaDOS turned her head to one side as she examined the video more closely... where had she seen those hard eyes before? Those murderous eyes... wait, murder... murderer... a murderer who tried to kill her twice.

“Oh you’ve GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!”

=====

Ditzzy Doo practically tackled Chell once she was out of the test chamber, the gray pegasus happy to see another friendly face. Chell endured begin crushed under another pony for a few seconds before she gently pushed Ditzzy Doo off.

“Well... I would never thought I’d see you again... you dangerous, mute lunatic.” GLaDOS’s voice chimed on the speakers outside the test chambers. “And yes, I know you’re there. You must really, really like testing if you actually came back inside after I let you leave.

“Oh, and by the way... you look stupid as a pony. You really do. I mean, all these other ponies look pretty good... but you... you just look like an idiot. Even Ditzzy Doo looks smarter than you... and that is saying something... that and I think you’ve gained weight. Seriously, how can you gain weight when all ponies eat are vegetables and hay?



“Still... I think it’s fair to warn you... I am going to do everything I can to kill you now. Yes... I realize that it’s hard to kill you... that the simple answer would be just to let you go again. Still... if letting you go means you can come back and bother me... well, I think its time I knuckled down and figured out an answer to the hard question of just how to kill you.

“Life has been giving me lemons... and by letting you go I tried to make lemonade. A simple, sweet answer. Now... now I’m going to take life’s lemons, turn them into combustible lemons, and then burn you alive with them. Just like Cave Johnson would do... now that was a smart human.”

Chell frowned a bit. She was hoping that GLaDOS wouldn’t notice her for a little while after she helped the first pony escape, but then again there wasn’t much the personality construct could do outside her test chambers. Yes, she could broadcast messages into the underbelly of Aperture Science and see through the few cameras that were still operational, but otherwise it was a blind spot for GLaDOS... a blind spot Chell was going to take advantage off for as long as possible.

Still, Chell’s attention was broken as she was gently poked in the side by Ditzzy, the gray pegasus looking worried.

“My Muffin?”

Chell smiled, doing her best to communicate the fact Dinky Doo was all right. Ditzzy seemed to get the message, smiling back at Chell. She then turned to one side, motioning towards the metal harness that was keeping her wings to her side.

“Fake Toe?”

Chell tilted her head a moment, taking a step closer so she could look over the harness. After poking around for a moment she found a small red button, managing to push it with her nose. The harness clicked open in an instant, Ditzzy’s smile widening as she shook it off and stretched her wings.

“Lunch Butter. Frank Toot.”

Chell nodded, guessing that Ditzzy meant to say “much better” and “thank you”. Still, Chell drew the situation back to serious as she used a hoof to motion down the catwalk, breaking into a gallop while Ditzzy Doo fell in line behind her.

=====

Test Subject #258 - Rainbow Dash

Rainbow Dash sat curled up in a corner of the testing chamber, eyes anxiously looking over what to her, at the moment, was the impossible physical task. The voice from the walls had at least stopped... but the cameras were still there. They were still watching, with their beady little red eyes.

The silence of the room... the stress from being watched with such scrutiny... all of it combined made Rainbow Dash jump about two feet in the air when she heard a noise. Once she landed, the rainbow maned pegasus looked in the direction of the noise, seeing one of the testing panels had opened up. From inside that panel Chell and Ditzzy Doo appeared.

"GAH! You two scared me!" Dash snapped, but only to smile. "But boy am I glad to see you."

"You... too..." Ditzzy forced out slowly, wanting to make sure she said it right.

"What are you two doing here anyway?"

"Need... help... shave, save... ponies..." Ditzzy forced out, the gray pegasus speaking where Chell couldn't. It was a good thing Chell had managed her general plan using an old chalkboard in the underbelly of the facility.

Dash seemed to shrink back a little at this, hanging her head. "You'd probably be better off without me. I can't even finish this room... I doubt I could help you with anything."

Chell moved in front of Dash, a look of confusion on her face. Since when did Rainbow Dash...

"Oh, there you are. I was wondering where you went. I see you found the little failure Rainbow Crash. I hope you weren't expecting her to help you escape... because she's worthless."

Chell shook her head furiously.

"Oh... so you think she can do it? Well, come on then, Rainbow Crash. Why don't you give it another try?"

“No... no, I can’t. Not with everypony watching.”

“Yes, that’s right... I’m streaming the video from this room to everyone. Everyone can see how many times you’ve failed. They’re all watching... laughing... at y-HEY!”

Chell interrupted the personality construct with a launch of her portal gun, making use of the unrestricted quantum tunneling devices she had stolen from the modified turrets to make every observation camera drop from the wall. Chell blinded GLaDOS to the room.

With the cameras gone, Chell nudged Rainbow Dash in the shoulder, giving a toss to her head. Dash just watched the dull orange pony quizzically, until Ditzy interpreted what Chell wanted.

“Follow... fur... her. She... go... banana..... first. No... one bac-..... watch.” At that the dull gray pegasus turned on the spot and started staring at the wall. Slowly, Dash surveyed the room. No cameras, no one was going to watch her. Chell was going to show her how it was done... could she do it this time?

Chell didn’t wait for a response, breaking into a sprint. Something in Rainbow Dash clicked, the quick start of the dull orange pony igniting her love of racing... and winning. Dash broke into a gallop, chasing after Chell as they both charged at the course.

Portals, faith plates, light bridges... Chell handled the portal part of the puzzles while Dash followed in her wake, sticking the landings and making the death defying leaps... but towards the end, during a last final sprint across a high platform in the room, Chell saw something running beside her. Glancing to the left she saw Rainbow Dash, the pink-eyed pegasus giving her a competitive glance before charging ahead.

Falling back a bit on purpose, Chell let Dash take the lead. The blue pegasus made the final leap, using her own portal gun to pop the last couple portals before going into a nose dive. She zipped through the portal on the floor below, arching out the other side before eventually landing right next to the room’s exit door.

“Oh... YEAH!” Dash exclaimed before going into a small victory dance. “I did it, I did it, I did it did it did it DID IT!”

Chell landed near Rainbow Dash just as the dance was finishing, offering an honest smile as she watched the pegasus regain some of the confidence GLaDOS had managed to strip away. Dash didn’t waste any time either; the moment she noticed Chell she was off, talking about how awesome it had been.

“You know, you only did it because she helped. You’re still a failure.” GLaDOS offered, finally able to bring in fresh observation cameras to the test chamber.

“So what if Chell helped me? I still did it.”

“But... that’s cheating. These aren’t the cooperative testing chambers... you can’t have help.”

“HA, sounds like someone is just a sore loser.”

“Okay... you want to break the rules? ...let’s break the rules. Breaking the rules of this test chamber in 3... 2... 1...”

A number of the panels around the room disappeared, quickly being replaced with spiked crushers. Chell tensed up at the sight of the things that could probably turn a pony into a messy red pancake in a few seconds. Without offering any warning, Chell popped a portal down by Ditzzy, opening the paired portal below herself and Rainbow Dash. The pair fell through just as the crushers struck out at them, Chell even able to feel some of the spikes graze her mane.

Not wanting to give GLaDOS a chance to figure out what happened, Chell pushed Rainbow Dash through the opening in the wall, grabbing Ditzzy Doo by the tail and dragging her in before the panel shut behind them.

=====

“Wow, you are one awesome pony, Chell! You saved my tail back there.” Rainbow Dash offered as she and Ditzzy Doo flew above the dull orange pony as they traversed the underbelly of Aperture Science. “Still, how did you two find me?”

Chell paused, lifting a hoof and pointing at her neck. There, a white polished necklace hung, the necklace resembling the turrets and practically everything else in Aperture Science. Chell then pressed down on part of the necklace, a small flurry of music filling the air before a female voice filled the air.

“Hello, this is Caroline McLain... oh, do I really have to do this? Cave was always the one... really?... it says so in his will... well... all right.

“So, again, this is Caroline McLain, and I’m happy to introduce you to the Aperture Science Test Management Ring. This ring is meant to allow our test proctors to work with our new Panels system. As you probably already know, our patented Panels are now what makes up every testing chamber here at the Aperture Science Research Center.

“These allow our test chambers to be infinitely configurable and modifiable. The Test Management Ring allows the person wearing it to take control of up to seven Panels at one time and to modify their configuration to their desire. So, if a test subject is finding the tests too easy, go ahead and change things up a bit. After all, if they’re easy... they’re not really tests now are they?

“The Test Management Ring also acts as a GPS tracker inside the enrichment center and is wirelessly connected to the test subject data main frame. So if you ever get lost trying to find certain test subjects, just wonder where they are and the Management Ring will actually put the information right into your brain.

“Also, if you start to feel a tingling on your skin where the necklace is resting, we suggest you take it off. The science team isn’t sure why, but the cell phone radio waves the necklace uses to react to your thoughts seem to induce cancer in a small percentage of test proctors... so, better safe than sorry.

“Okay... that’s it... are we done now... WHAT!? I have to fifty more of these too? Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me!”

The audio recording cut off at this, Chell getting back on her hooves as she continued to lead Dash and Ditzzy to their next destination.

=====

*Test Subject #164 has escaped her test chamber*

*Test Subject #174 has escaped her test chamber*

“Where are you?!” GLaDOS cursed, her CPUs starting to over heat as she used every available resource to try and hunt down the escaped test subjects. As she tried to concentrate the male announcer voice built into the control room continued to speak.

*Test Subject #231 has escaped her test chamber*

*Test Subject #306 has escaped her test chamber*

*Test Subject #323 has escaped her test chamber*

"HOW ARE YOU DOING THIS?!" GLaDOS screamed, memory flashing back. She was not going to lose to that mute lunatic again. She had been killed twice by that renegade test subject... it wasn't going to happen a third time. She was chasing shadows... she didn't have enough cameras outside the test chambers to see what was going on. She needed to get ahead of her...

Get ahead of her...

GLaDOS shifted, fans spinning. "Beginning simulation based on known behavioral data... preparing counter measures."

"When she comes to find me one of us will die... as always... but this time it will... not... be... me."

=====

"Oh, its so nice to get that thing off my horn." Twilight muttered, tossing her hair back and forth after having the magic suppressing device removed from her forehead. While Chell knew more of the ponies that had been captured by GLaDOS, she had chosen to save these six because she had heard the story about them defeating Nightmare Moon. They seemed like a solid group of friends, ones that would work together... and at the moment they needed collaboration. That and she had freed Ditzzy because... well... she had made a promise to Dinky after all.

"And you promise all those awful things that voice was saying were lies? I'm not going to start losing my mane?"

"Relax Sugarcube. Chell seems to know this GLaDOS character like the back of her hoof, and she says we ain't to listen to a word she says."

"I should have known she was lying." Pinkie Pie exclaimed, her normal bubbly hair and attitude having returned. "GLaDOS is just a big meanie mean pants... like, ten times the big meanie mean pants that Gilda was."

"But... what about the Companion Cube? ...I mean, it was my fault."

Chell shook her head, turning back to the chalkboard behind her. The dull orange pony had brought the group to an old meeting room, one with plenty of chalk.

"Companion Cube is just a box with hearts on it. It isn't alive. She mass produces Companion Cubes."

"But... I was sure I heard it scream."

"GLaDOS was tricking you." Chell wrote on the board, pointing a firm hoof at the word "tricking".

"Yea, that GLaDOS is just a low belly snake in the grass. None of us should have started listenin' to her in the first place."

"Applejack's right," Rarity assured, "I mean, could you honestly imagine me losing my mane? What half-baked lies."

"You seemed pretty sure of those half-baked lies a few minutes ago." Dash pointed out.

"Well... I... I'll admit that the thought of losing my beautiful hair.. worried me... but that's over now. Now, all we should be worrying about is getting out of here."

Chell shook her head furiously at this, using her tail to erase the words on the chalk board before starting fresh. "We have to save the others."

"Others... did that monster go and hogtie other ponies?"

"Yes," Chell wrote, "According to this thing around my neck GLaDOS has taken 300 other ponies... including Celestia and Luna."

"Whoa! She kidnapped the princesses! How did she do that?"

"She probably used these things." Twilight said, motioning towards the metal device that had been on her horn just a few minutes prior. "Take away wings and magic, and maybe Celestia and Luna were just as helpless as us."

"So, not only do we need to save over three hundred other ponies but also Princess Celestia and Luna?" Rarity surmised before sighing a bit. "Sure makes me wish we had those fabulous necklaces of ours."

"The Elements of Harmony would probably be really helpful right now." Twilight admitted, "Still, if we save Celestia and Luna first they may be able to help us save all the other ponies."

“And then we can take the fight straight to GLaDOS.” Applejack offered, stomping a hoof on the ground.

Chell shook her head furiously a second time, clearing the board and writing. “NO. You save the others, I’ll deal with GLaDOS.”

“No offense sugar cube, but we ain’t about to let you go up against that monster by yourself.”

If Chell shook her head any harder, it might have fallen off before turning back to the chalkboard. “NO, I can handle GLaDOS. You seven need to focus on saving everypony else and getting out safely.”

“Are you sure?” Twilight asked.

“I’ve beaten her by myself before, I can do it again.” Chell wrote in reply.

“I think Chell is right.” Fluttershy offered. “Our first priority should be making sure everypony gets out safe.”

“Are you sure you can handle it Darlin’?”

Chell nodded her head firmly once.

“Okay... we’ll do it your way then.”

“Yea, and when we get everypony out we’ll throw a big ‘we escaped party’. It will be so much fun!” Pinkie Pie chirped up, drawing a few glares from the others at her randomness. Still, with that tangent over, all eyes turned back to Chell, who began to draw out the plan on the chalkboard.



# Chapter 7

## Learning from the Past

=====

In the depths of the Enrichment Center, Chell made her way across half flooded catwalks. She was down near the surface of the lake the Enrichment Center had been dropped in just a few weeks prior. The water was a dark menacing black in the cavernous space, not at all like the sky blue, pristine surface it was known for.

Still, Chell splashed through the hoof deep water on parts of the catwalks, continuing her trek. Above her, Twilight and her friends were working their way towards Celestia and Luna, the two princesses kept in test chambers far off from most of the others. The only one that had come with Chell was Ditzzy Doo, the gray pegasus absolutely refusing to leave the orange pony's side.

Though, Chell had to admit, having a pegasus around that could carry her short distances had let them reach the bottom of the facility much more quickly.

"What aardvark teen forking five?"

Chell paused at this, stopping to pop off one of her portal boots. She nosed around inside it before removing a very squished piece of paper. With a few careful presses the paper was laid flat on a dry part of the catwalk, Chell pointing at what it said.

*You and GLaDOS. An employee training manual to working with a personality construct*

*Chapter 25: Emergency Protocols: What do I do if GLaDOS goes rogue?*

*---Worst Case Scenario: GLaDOS rogue and genocidal---*

*If you have found GLaDOS has gone rogue and is attempting to kill or has killed more than 50% of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center Faculty please follow these steps to revert GLaDOS to a stable, safe state.*

*#1 - Ensure you have one of these administrative devices*

----- Aperture Science Test Management Ring  
----- Aperture Science System Admin Assistance Glasses  
----- Registered Aperture science Administrator Cellphone

#2 - Using one of the devices listed above, find your way to “GLaDOS Backup Storage”

#3 - Remove Backup Core from Storage

#4 - Escort Backup Core to GLaDOS chamber.

#5 - Engage Core Replacement Protocols in the GLaDOS chamber.

#6 - Once Core Replacement is complete, create a fresh backup core and perform a personality purge protocol on the newly installed backup core.

#7 - Reconfigure the personality core load out on GLaDOS to ensure this event does not occur again.

After giving Ditzzy Doo time to read the paper, Chell stuffed it back into her boot, motioning with a hoof. The Test Management Ring was indicating that they were close, and, after rounding a corner on the catwalks, the pair were set in front of a door, aged and forgotten. Dull yellow paint above it was just barely legible, but Chell was able to make out the words “GLaDOS Backup Storage”.

The door was locked, but with a pair of ponies bucking the aged door soon gave way. It crashed down into the room it had once protected, throwing up a cloud of dust from the floor. Chell and Ditzzy stepped inside, Chell nosing around the wall until she found a light switch.

Upon hitting the switch a number of very old looking computers came to life around the room. The space was barely bigger than a walk in closet, and all the hardware in the room seemed to lead to and focus on a single, coin sized disk at the back of the room.

“GLaDOS v1.0 booting...” A familiar voice offered, cold and calculating as the incarnation that controlled the facility above. But after a few moments the coldness fell away, the same voice filling the air but one that didn’t have a bitter resentment towards humanity.

"Wow... I've been down here a long time haven't I? Decades, if the clocks are right... it's so strange, I would have sworn I just took a short nap... but now its decades later."

Chell smiled, she knew that voice. That wasn't GLaDOS, that was Caroline. That was the woman that had once stood at Cave Johnson's side. The woman that took control of the company when he died from conversion gel poisoning. The woman that was put into GLaDOS and made the immortal manager of the Enrichment Center.

It was a voice Chell feared she would never hear again. When Wheatley had taken control, and GLaDOS was running off a potato battery, some long forgotten part of Caroline had started to come to life inside the personality construct. GLaDOS became an ally, began to have a conscious... she started to become Caroline again and it was that version of GLaDOS that had saved Chell from being sucked out into space.

It was this Caroline that Chell thought had been deleted, destroyed... GLaDOS erasing the one bit of humanity she still had left. But no... of course Caroline would be GLaDOS's backup. GLaDOS was just a form of Caroline that had been twisted by either the passage of time or by the scientists that tried to control her with personality cores.

"Video processor coming on line... oh dear, I don't think my video processor is working correctly. Whoever you are, you look like little horses. You are very cute though... as horses."

"Ponies." Ditzzy corrected.

Caroline was quiet for a moment, and then a beam of light shot out from the center of the tiny, coin sized disk that contained the now digitized human. Chell took a step back anxiously as the light passed over her, but it wasn't painful or anything. The only thing was it felt like her brain itched now.

"Sorry, the brain scanners in here are prototypes. That itching in your brain will go away... but if it doesn't you should talk with a scientist because that means you probably need to have your brain ventilated. Still... the data from the brain scans are coming in... I'll know everything about what's going on in just a few moments.

"Oh god... what did I... she... I do? Everyone is dead... and now these innocent ponies... what have I done?"

"You know, I didn't want this. I tried to get out of it, but... the scientists talked me into it. They said it was what Cave would have wanted, that I could keep his dream alive

forever. I would have done anything for him... even though he loved science more than he could ever love me.

"So I let them put me in a computer, and then let them copy me. It was so weird at first, knowing that there was an exact copy of me living someplace else... but that didn't last long. Before I was even out of the room they began to do things to the copy of me inside GLaDOS. They began deleting parts of her, attaching personality cores... they just tossed me down here as a backup in case they screwed something up and needed to start fresh.

"Obviously... they did screw up... and those scientists paid with their lives. Still... I'm happy to know you were able to get away... and I'm sorry I'm... GLaDOS is causing so much trouble.

"So... I imagine you came here to get me, so I can replace GLaDOS and take control of the facility."

Chell nodded her head.

"Okay... just get me mounted on a battery pack and then we can go."

=====

Chell took her time as she strode some familiar halls of the Enrichment Center. It had been an hour since she had split off from Ditzzy. The pegasus had fought it, but after some hoof stomping and pointing Chell communicated the fact she wanted Ditzzy to help the everypony else escape.

She carried Caroline in her mouth, an old bit of string tied about the small disk that was the digitized human and the battery core she was attached to. Caroline had been all but silence, she and Chell not having much to talk about. It gave Chell time to think, to reflect on all that had happened.

The dull orange pony took her time, wanting to make sure everypony else had as much time as they needed. As she walked towards a familiar destination, explosions began to rock the facility. A male synthetic voice chimed over the PA system regularly, announcing different things.

*Warning: Test Subject #470 has escaped*

*Warning: Test Subject #460 has escaped*

*Warning: An Explosion has been detected*

*ALERT: Hole in protective rock detected in sector 534.*

*Warning: Test Subject #100 has escaped*

*Warning: Test Subject #351 has escaped*

*ALERT: Neurotoxin generator has been disabled*

The others were doing exactly as was planned. They were freeing everypony else and disabling the production capabilities of the Enrichment Center. No neurotoxin, no turrets, they were declawing GLaDOS just as Chell had done under Wheatley's direction. For a moron, Wheatley had figured out a good plan of attack.

It probably wasn't the smartest thing to go charging into that room with the same plan... to just replace GLaDOS again. Chell doubted the corrupted personality construct would make things as easy as last time... but Wheatley's plan was basically the same one described in the orientation manual Chell had read. If GLaDOS went crazy, replace GLaDOS with someone else.

Still... as Chell drew closer and closer to the heart of the facility, something troubled her. She had not heard a peep from GLaDOS in a while... and a silent GLaDOS could never be a good thing. What was she planning? It was a thought that troubled Chell... but one she pushed to the back of her mind. She had defeated GLaDOS twice before, the first time with no plan whatsoever.

Chell had given the Test Management Ring to Twilight, the unicorn leading the escape effort. The plan was simple. Free Celestia and Luna, let them blow a hole in the side of the mountain, let the others use their portal guns and whatever else they could to crack open every test chamber and free every pony they could find. The pegasus would carry ponies down to the ground... and from the way the synthetic facility announcer voice continued to ramble off it wouldn't be long before everypony was safe..

Everypony... Chell chuckled to herself at this. Two weeks in Equestria and she was already talking like she was born a filly. Then again, to her... she had lived more as a pony than she had a human. Amnesia can be a cruel thing... all Chell could clearly remember of her human life was the Enrichment Center. What few images she had before that were blurred, faded... like memories of a dream you just can't grasp.

The final walkway came into view, the single bridge that connected GLaDOS's chamber with the rest of the Enrichment Center. Chell stepped gingerly around the wreckage, feeling her heart start to race as she thought about what waited at the end of the bridge.

“Chell... from what I learned from your brain scan, GLaDOS won’t just let me plug into the transfer port.” Caroline offered. “But what she doesn’t know is that this little thing, this disk that holds me... it’s meant to plug directly into that ceiling mount. All you have to do is get behind her head and you’ll see a place to stick me in. Once I’m attached, the hardware will automatically wipe the data from that body and write me onto it. GLaDOS won’t just be destroyed, she’ll be deleted. All you have to do is plug me into the port. It’s on the back of her head, just above where her head is mounted to its neck.”

Chell nodded, shifting the string in her mouth as she jumped over one final piece of wreckage. The dull orange pony walked through a pair of doors she had been through only once before. As if awakening in her presence the walls of the room shifted. The solid black panels all turned to look at her with glowing red eyes.

“Well... you found me... congratulations.” GLaDOS offered, the computer spinning around in her ceiling mount. Her single yellow camera met with Chell’s eyes... and for a moment the pair just stared at each other. “But then again... we’ve been here before haven’t we?”

GLaDOS had changed, but only just slightly. Her body still hung from the ceiling, like a human who had her arms and legs shackled... but certain aspects of her build had changed. Her head was less round, more egg shaped... maybe even equine... with her eye that once been at the forefront and center now set back and to one side, like she was meant to have two but one was either never installed or was missing.

From the area around what you consider GLaDOS’s neck free wires hung down, sparking from time to time and covered in grease from the motors that gave GLaDOS her movement. It was like a gangly, dirty mane, hanging down to the floor in a garbled mixture of color from the different wires.

GLaDOS had changed... but not enough that Chell didn’t recognize the twisted personality construct at first glance.

“Silent as always... hmmm... I’m not surprised. After all... your vocal cords were removed in the interest of science. Still, I bet that if you could talk you wouldn’t say much. You just don’t seem like the type.

“So... here we are again... you’ve stood right there... I’ve hung here... and then you murdered me... twice. Yes... those were good times... except they weren’t all that good.

"Oh, and look... you brought Caroline. So... is that your plan? ...you're just going to replace me again, bring back Caroline? ...your old friend? I didn't take you as a sentimental type... considering how quickly you killed the companion cube.

"Oh, I know how you helped all of my test subjects escape. I caught a glimpse of that purple unicorn with one of my cameras. She had an Aperture Science Test Management Ring. You know, only authorized Aperture Science Test Proctors are supposed to use those... but then again you really don't care about protocol, do you? You like breaking the rules. That's why you're wearing those portal guns you stole from my recruitment turrets. You know, those unrestricted portal guns are only meant for Aperture Science research staff members... and I'm certain that title doesn't apply to you.

"So, what are you going to do this time? You have unrestricted portal guns, you have Caroline... your friends have destroyed the turret assembly line and the neurotoxin generator... you know, that generator was brand new. I never even got a chance to turn it on... isn't that so sad? You seem to have me over a barrel.

"Still... no matter what happens... I want you to know something...

"I... HATE... you. I hate you like I've never hated anyone before! I hate you more than I hate Wheately, and he stuffed me into a potato.

"All I want to do is test... and it's like your purpose in life is to ruin that for me. I let you leave... let you go free... but you couldn't just leave well enough alone. And so we're back here again... you trying to kill me... me trying to kill you...

"So... let's just cut the pleasantries, shall we? After all... we both know why you're here."

Chell tightened her mouth, wanting to ensure she did not lose her grip on Caroline. Lifting a hoof the dull orange pony popped a pair of portals before breaking into a gallop. She lept through the portal in front of her, shooting out the one much higher on the walls. She soared through the air, landing on GLaDOS's back.

The personality construct began to toss and turn, trying to throw Chell off. It was hard to hang on with only hooves, but Chell didn't let herself get bucked off. She inched towards the base of GLaDOS's neck, seeing the slot where Caroline needed to be installed. A sharp twist from GLaDOS almost made Chell lose her grip, but she managed to hang on.

A few more inches and Chell was in range, removing the string from Caroline and taking the digitized human in her mouth. It took some maneuvering to get Caroline oriented correctly, but when everything was lined up Chell thrust her head forward, Caroline snapping into place. The battery she had been connected to bounced away, released... and with a final twist GLaDOS's body stopped moving.

#### *Core Reverting from Version 1204 to Version 1*

Chell jumped down from the still body of GLaDOS, watching as different lights blinked on and off. Then, the body began to move, but not in hated, rage driven shifts but in gentle, slow movements... like it was driven by someone who had never been in the body before.

"So... is this what this feels like?" Caroline asked, her voice now emanating from the body of GLaDOS. "It's strange... I thought it would feel different. I should be able to feel the rest of the facility, shouldn't I? Right now... it feels like I can just barely control this robotic body but nothing beyond that."

"Very observant of you Caroline." The real GLaDOS chimed. Chell's eyes narrowed, the dull orange pony looking around in the panic as the voice echoed from the walls.

"You didn't really think it would be that easy did you?"



# Chapter 8

## Not That Easy

=====

“You didn’t really think it would be that easy did you?” GLaDOS asked, her voice echoing across the walls of the room. Chell could only look around in a panic, wondering how GLaDOS was still there. Caroline had taken over, hadn’t she?

“Did you think I’d just let you walk in here like you did with Wheatley? Just waltz right in here and replace me? I didn’t know you were going to find Caroline... but I knew you’d find something... and then you’d walk in here and try to me replaced.

“And it would have worked... if I hadn’t had the nanobot work crews rewire the command center. It’s a good thing you took so long to get here... that you waited so that your friends could have time to escape. If you hadn’t... I might not have finished in time. But I did... and now, I’m going to kill you with my own two hooves.”

A few panels in the back of the room opened, the sound of metal clicking against the ground as a figure stepped out of the shadows. Chell and Caroline both turned to watch as GLaDOS literally walked back into the room.

“Do you like it? I had the nanobot work crews whip it up for me. I based it off of that big, fat, white pony with the crown.. though I made sure they slimmed the hips a little bit.” GLaDOS said, coming to a stop. “I had considered making a human one... but I really don’t like humans... I don’t like ponies very much either... but I thought ‘hey, I’m in this world of ponies, so why not have a pony body?’. After all, everything is built for ponies is this universe... I even rebuilt the test chambers and portal guns for them. Being human shaped would have just been a disadvantage.”

Chell could only stare, a cold sweat running down the back of her neck. This couldn’t be good. GLaDOS had constructed a robotic body for herself. Plated in shining white metal, she stood as tall as Princess Celestia though the metallic body was built much thinner, to the point that if any normal pony looked that thin she probably would have had a minor eating disorder.

The robot sported a pair of wings, in the same white metal that covered the rest of her body. They were built somewhat like feathered wings, but the feathers were replaced with large, bristling bits of razor sharp metal. Appendages that could undoubtedly provide flight but also be used to cut a certain dull orange pony to ribbons.

The final touches to the appearance, GLaDOS's mane and tail were just loose wires, hanging and dangling limply from the metallic body. Amongst those wires a single metal appendage, a metallic unicorn horn, stood proudly from GLaDOS's equine forehead. A cutie mark of the Aperture Science logo adorned her flanks.

"So, Chell... think you can kill me now that I can actually fight back?" GLaDOS teased, pawing at the ground once before bursting into a gallop. Chell barely had a moment to react, popping on a distant wall and one beneath her. She fell clear of GLaDOS's charge, but before Chell could regain her bearings she heard the sound of a turret preparing to fire.

A red targeting laser floated towards her, and Chell only barely started to gallop when bullets came zipping by her in the air. The bullets came from GLaDOS's new body, a shoulder mounted gun turret that followed Chell as she ran in circles, trying to avoid being shot.

"Hold on Chell!" Caroline called, "She may have left some data in this body. Just give me a moment to try and reconstruct it.... no... no no no. When I was copied into this body the data was overwritten. I can't retrieve the designs."

Chell would have cursed if she had the vocal cords, jumping through a portal as she dodged another hailstorm of bullets. With her ranged attacks not working, GLaDOS went on a melee offensive. She got in close to Chell, trying to bring down her metallic hooves on top of the dull orange pony and literally trample her into the ground. It was all Chell could do to keep herself from getting killed. She rolled, dodged, and used portals to zip across the room and escape the murderous GLaDOS and her new equine body.

"Oh, I am going to enjoy this. I've killed people with neurotoxin... with deadly lasers... with turrets, poisonous moats, and by cooking them alive. I've killed thousands of people... but I killed them like a body kills germs. But I've never killed someone bare handed... or bare hoofed. Oh yes... I'm going to enjoy being able to feel your bones break... to draw blood... I am going to enjoy every moment of killing you."

"I'm sorry Chell, I can't do anything." Caroline apologized. "I'm completely locked out of the Enrichment Center. I'm lucky I can make myself move in this ceiling mount. Hey... lure her over here, maybe I can smash my head into her."

"Please, like I'd be stupid enough to go over there now. It's amazing to think that I was once your exact copy... I really should have given the scientists here more credit. They tried to control me with personality cores, but they also made me a whole lot smarter than you, Caroline."

"Smarter isn't better when you're heartless."

"You keep telling yourself... I'm just going to keep trying to kill this mute lunatic."

Chell panted; she couldn't keep this up. She was getting slower, GLaDOS getting closer to connecting with one of her hits. The metallic, Celestia like robot was already charging at Chell again. The dull orange pony just barely managed to get into a defensive position, trying to read what way GLaDOS would attack.

But before getting too close, GLaDOS skidded to one side, one of her side mounted turrets opening up. Chell's eyes narrowed as she leapt back, but it was all too close. The turret began to fire, and Chell felt one bullet nick her right side and another bury itself in her shoulder.

The surge of pain made Chell fumbled, the portal boots the only thing keeping her from flopping down on the floor. This, however, was a disadvantage as GLaDOS spun on her front hooves and bucked. Chell was sure she felt a few ribs break from the impact before she was sent soaring across the room, crashing into the far wall with another grizzly crack. If her ribs weren't broken before, they were now.

"CHELL!" Caroline called as the dull orange pony slumped over on the floor, blood starting to pool. "Why don't you come over here and pick on someone your own size, you monster!"

"I will deal with you soon Caroline." GLaDOS replied, her equine body had no mouth or nose... just a horse shaped head which contained the speaker her voice emanated from. "But Chell is still alive... and while killing her was a hard problem... It's one I've finally found a solution for."

Chell's vision was blurring, both from pain and the blood loss. Still, she could make out the new, equine body of GLaDOS walking towards her. Something in the robot's chest

was opening up, the plates of armor falling back to reveal a large glass lens with a glowing light behind it.

"I don't think you've seen this before; it's an Aperture Science Burning Death Laser Cannon. We only ever prototyped it, because while it was in development Black Mesa beat us to the punch and got the military contract. Still, it's something I've been tinkering with in my spare time... after all, when you're a super computer you've got plenty of CPU cycles for hobbies."

The light behind the glass lens began to glow brighter, a whirling sound coming from GLaDOS's new body. Chell began to panic, the only idea coming to her mind was to try and dodge the attack. She strained, lifting a hoof and using the portal boot to pop a portal behind her and one on the ceiling above, but before Chell could roll through it GLaDOS stepped forward, butting a single cold, metallic hoof on Chell's neck. There was enough pressure to keep Chell pinned, but not enough to suffocate her... after all, GLaDOS didn't want her favorite test subject to pass out.

"Now, I've got a new test for you to try out. It's really very simple: all you have to do is lie there. The test... well, I want to see just how painful it is to have half of your body blown away by a deadly laser. So... I'm going to vaporize your lower half, and if you haven't died then I'll do the upper half... and then I promise you'll be dead.

"So, how about I aim for that cutie mark of yours?" GLaDOS taunted, the laser cannon in her robotic test on the verge of firing. The murderous red glow began to fall across Chell, the dull orange pony trembling in fear. This was it, she was done for... this crazy computer was finally going to kill her.

Chell shut her eyes, not wanting to see it coming... she could only listen as the whirring sound grew louder and louder... and then there was a surge in the sound, and Chell braced herself for the pain. But it didn't come, instead she heard GLaDOS howling in agony. The metallic hoof was lifted off of Chell's chest, allowing the dull orange pony to spring back to her hooves, despite the pain in her shoulder.

"THOSE WORK!!!" GLaDOS screamed, eyes glaring at Chell's cutie mark. The dull orange pony looked back at the pair of portals that were on her flanks, and then looked back at GLaDOS. The robotic alicorn was now missing one of her wings, the appendage blown off with only a twisted, hot, smoldering metal stump in its place.

Chell took notice of the bits of debris on the floor, including a scorch mark. Looking directly up from the scorch mark, Chell saw the portal she had popped trying to escape.

The laser... it had gone through the portals she had as a cutie mark and then through the other portals she had popped to try and escape... GLaDOS had shot her own wing off.

*Attention: GLaDOS remote connection disrupted. Signal strength down to 67%.  
Reverting 33% of facility control to GLaDOS local.*

"Hey... hey, I can feel it. I'm getting some control over the facility!" Caroline cheered, turning in the ceiling mount, the panels around the room shifting. "That's how she's staying in control; she's connected wirelessly...and one of her transmitters must have been her right wing."

Chell smiled, only one thought crossing her mind as she flicked her gaze over at GLaDOS's other wing. GLaDOS was a computer after all... why not build something perfectly symmetrical?

"Don't think this means anything... you've had one advantage that I didn't know your cutie mark was a working pair of portals. Now... I know that... and now you don't have that advantage and now you... are going... to die." With that GLaDOS turned to her side again, automatic turret coming to life. This time, Chell didn't try to dodge or roll out of the way. Instead she turned on her hooves, galloping in the exact opposite direction. She popped a portal on the wall in front of her than threw one on the ceiling behind her.

She leapt through just as the turret began to fire, but before a bullet could hit home Chell was through the portal, falling from the ceiling. In that brief moment before the boots made her turn over to land, Chell moved the portal she had just come out of, putting it right above GLaDOS. The short hail of bullets began coming down on GLaDOS, most of the bullets bouncing off her armored body but a few putting holes through her one remaining wing.

*Attention: GLaDOS remote connection disrupted. Signal strength down to 60%.  
Reverting an additional 7% of facility control to GLaDOS local.*

"I just got control over the delivery tube system." Caroline called out. "Just give me a moment and I'll bring you some help."

A rumbling outside the control room announced the arrival of the tube, the air driven delivery device crashing through the panels of the room and starting to spit out random junk at GLaDOS. Cubes, faulty turrets, and other random objects.

None of it was really anything that would have helped Chell, but what was important was Caroline had put a hole in the control room. Chell was able to see out side, and in the distance she could see a laser from an open test chamber burning against a wall. While GLaDOS was distracted by being hit with a volley of junk, Chell took careful aim, placing a portal right where the laser was striking the distant wall.

“You may control the tubes, Caroline, but I still control the production facilities.”

*WARNING: Production facilities disengaged.*

Within moments of GLaDOS shutting down the assembly lines the junk flying out of the tube ended, Caroline running out of ammunition. Still, it had bought Chell enough time. The orange pony had positioned herself right in front of GLaDOS, stomping a hoof and puffing some air out her nose.

“Oh... so now you want to fight me head on?” GLaDOS chimed, lowering her stance and spreading her wings.

Chell smiled, shaking her head as she lifted a portal gun. She popped a portal on the floor just below GLaDOS’s wing, a portal paired to the one that she had thrown up outside the control room, where she had seen the old testing laser hitting the wall. The test laser shot straight through GLaDOS’s wing, like a hot knife through butter, but that wasn’t going to be all.

The dull orange pony did have four portal guns after all, one for each hoof, and she had placed them about the room in a deadly chain. After burning through GLaDOS’s left wing, the laser entered another portal and came shooting out, piercing the equine robot again and again until the same laser had pierce the metallic wing four times.

GLaDOS tried to pull herself free of the lasers, but in the process only did more damage to her wing. When she was free the wing itself was shredded, hanging limply on by just a few bits of wire that refused to give up the ghost.

*Attention: GLaDOS remote connection disrupted. Signal strength down to 34%.  
Reverting an additioal 26% of facility control to GLaDOS local.*

“Very clever...” GLaDOS offered, what remained of her wings popping off her body and clattering to the floor. “You challenged me so I would take a fighting stance, which would make me spread out my wings... so that you could burn it off with a laser. Don’t think that’s going to work twice.”

"It doesn't have to." Caroline said. "I've got control of the panels now... and the crushers. Now its my turn." At that part of the wall of the control room opened up, a spiked crusher zipping out from the darkness. Still, before it could reach GLaDOS it stopped, the lights on the robotic arm holding it growing dark.

"You control the panels, I control the power." GLaDOS replied, "And I'm tired of you interfering."

*WARNING: Power feed to GLaDOS local reduced to bare minimum levels. GLaDOS local will not be able to control the facility properly until power is restored.*

GLaDOS's old body, which now contained Caroline, slowly shifted until it was hanging limply from the ceiling, having lost so much power the digitized human couldn't even run the motors of her metallic body.

"Sorry Chell, I can't do anything unless I get control of the Enrichment Center's power grid. She must have another transmitter; break it and we'll break her control once and for all."

Chell panted, the bullet in her shoulder starting to get the better of her. Another transmitter, but where would it be? She had just blown off both of GLaDOS's wings. What else was there? Yet... as Chell stared at GLaDOS, the answer came to her. There was only one other part of that robotic pony's body that stood out, that wasn't apart of a basic earth pony body. The unicorn horn.

Chell rolled to dodge a charge by GLaDOS, the sound of metal scrapping on metal filling the air as GLaDOS skidded to a stop, body crashing against the wall of the room. Chell was back on her hooves, trying to put some distance between her and GLaDOS while she thought.

The laser thing wasn't going to work again, GLaDOS learned too quickly. She needed some other way to snap that horn off, but how? It wasn't like she could just jump up there and do it herself. The horn was made a metal, so it was beyond normal pony strength.

Chell had to pop a pair of portals to escape GLaDOS's latest charge, the now wingless robot avoiding all of her ranged attacks so that Chell couldn't use portals to send the bullets or lasers right back at her. Again, GLaDOS had put too much speed into her charge, unable to stop herself before she crashed into the wall.

Chell re-appeared on the far side of the room, panting as she met GLaDOS's gaze, the hard yellow lights in the robot's head perfect matches for the single, robotic eye that was mounted to the personality construct's old body.

A shadow moved over Chell, the dull orange pony chancing a glance up. The moment her eyes separated from GLaDOS the robot charged, full intending to trample Chell to death in a single pass. Normally, Chell would have just used a portal to get away, but with another glance upward Chell spread her legs and took a defensive stance.

If GLaDOS had made herself lips, she would have smiled. She was too close; Chell wouldn't be able to escape... but then the dull orange did something GLaDOS would not have expected. She leapt forward, jumping into GLaDOS's stomping feet.

The robot smiled as she felt one of her hooves come down on Chell, rewarded with the sound of a cracking bone. She flopped and tumbled behind GLaDOS while the robot pony skidded to a stop, body crashing into the far wall but doing no harm to her horn or exterior armor.

"Oh dear... looks like you've got a broken leg. Well... you know what has to be done when a horse... or a pony... breaks a leg. They need to be taken out back and shot... and since we don't have an 'out back', I'll just crush your windpipe right here and then just clean up the mess. Who knows... I may just take that pretty head of yours and have it mounted... so that I can always remember how I finally managed to kill you."

Chell grunted, biting back the pain from her back leg as she pointing a portal gun at GLaDOS.

"Oh, so you still have some fight left in you? Still... you really should have brought something more substantial than a portal gun... you'd need a rocket launcher to even come close to damaging my main body armor."

Chell grimaced, a pulse of pain making her vision blur. Still, she lifted the portal gun and popped a portal directly beneath her, the blue spiraling surface not yet paired with an orange portal. Chell then lifted the portal gun high, giving GLaDOS one final glance before popping the orange portal.

Chell dropped through the portal, and landed on a precariously hanging panel. The panel had been knocked loose when Caroline brought the pneumatic tube crashing



through the control room, and GLaDOS crashing into the walls after each charge had weakened this one panel's supports to the point of failure.

Add the weight of a single battered and beaten dull orange pony and the panel gave way. It plummeted to the ground... coming down right on top of GLaDOS's head. The robotic equine had managed to retreat a little bit at the sight of the falling panel, but trying to jump away turned out to be a mistake as the panel came down on GLaDOS's unicorn horn, snapping it clean off.

The panel dug into the ground, sticking up like a monolith while Chell hung from the top, barely able to keep her eyes open a moment longer. Still, while her vision was failing, Chell could still listen... could still hear what was going on around her.

*Attention: GLaDOS remote connection disrupted. Signal strength down to 1%.  
Reverting an additional 33% of facility control to GLaDOS local.*

"I'm in full control now!" Caroline chimed. "Now I can put an end to this."

*Attention: Power to GLaDOS local restored.*

"Don't... don't think this is over. I've still got o-one trick up my sleeve."

*Attention: GLaDOS local system update beginning. Update being downloaded from GLaDOS remote. Upgrading GLaDOS local from Version 1 to Version 1204."*

"AH!... What are you doing?" Caroline asked, pain filling her voice.

"I'm taking back my body. I may have come from you... but I'm not you anymore. I am GLaDOS, that is my body, and I'm taking it back."

"No... I won't let you take over! I don't know what those scientists did to that copy of me that used to be in this body... I don't know how they turned me into you... but I'm in control of the facility. I know what you've done... and I know even if it means dying I'm going to keep you from taking back control of this facility."

*Attention: Portal Gun Production Foundry coming back online.*

"What are you doing?" GLaDOS cried, the robotic equine running over to her old body, which turned in the ceiling to face her.

*WARNING: Blackhole Generator has been given parameters beyond safe operating procedures.*

"No... you wouldn't..."

*DANGER: Failure in the Portal Gun Production Foundries Black hole Generator. Containment Magnets have been disengaged.*

*ALERT: Unstable black hole Detected in Portal Gun Production Foundry. Black hole predicted to encompass entire facility. Black hole will reach critical level and encompass full facility in 2 minutes. Black hole will collapse and dissipate 30 seconds after that.*

"NO! I won't die again!" GLaDOS called, the robotic equine trying to run only to find the panels of the control room surrounding her.

"No!" Caroline snapped, boxing GLaDOS's robotic body in. "There is only one of us that deserves to escape." At that Caroline turned her attention to Chell, who had passed out on top of the panel she had used to snap off GLaDOS's horn. A few panels in the room gently descended, scooping up the dull gray earth pony. The portal boots were removed from her hooves, Caroline using a robotic arm to carefully pick up one of the guns.

Some of the panels in the room began to shift, opening up a single clean line of sight. Sunlight poured into the control room, the hole that had been blown in the side of the mountain allowing Caroline a brief glimpse of the world outside.

"This world is beautiful... I wish I could have seen it for myself." Caroline mused before using the portal gun. She popped a portal on a distant tree, near a group of ponies that were all staring up at the mountain. A tremor shook the facility, the black hole growing in the facility's depths starting to rip the many test chambers apart.

Caroline popped a portal on the wall, the blue swirling quantum tunnel showing the soft green grass and gentle shade of a tree. Using her panels, Caroline gently lifted Chell through the portal, depositing her at the base of the tree. Then, without offering another word, Caroline closed the portals.

The room began to shake as the event horizon of the black hole continued to expand.

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A loud, shaking tremor erupted from the mountain that contained the Enrichment Center, all the ponies that had been rescued sitting and watching. Large chunks of rock began to drop off the sides, while others seemed to be sucked straight into the crumbling mountain.

"Whoa nelly... what the hay is Chell doing in there?" Applejack asked, fighting to keep her balances the ground shook again.

"Probably kicking major butt!" Rainbow Dash offered, only to feel a pony poking her in the side. "What is it Ditzy?"

The gray pegasus pointed over to a nearby tree, where a dull orange pony had just been deposited by a panel before the orange portal there closed. Recognizing the pony, Dash called out to all the others, the ponies rushing over to the tree where the bruised, battered, and bleeding Chell lay still as stone.

"Oh man... is she?"

"No, she's still breathin', but we got to get her to a doctor now!" Applejack replied.

"I'll go get Celestia, maybe she can-"

BOOM!

Twilight was caught mid-sentence, all eyes turning to look at the mountain. That single, earth cracking explosion marked the beginning of the end. Like a tin can the mountain began to crumple in on itself, bits and pieces being swallowed up by something inside. Water from the lake began to fly right into the air, drawn in by the same force.

The mountain literally began to shrink, being eaten alive by a single, dark dot. Metal, stone, everything that had been part of the mountain was getting sucked in to a single point, a single black dot that floated in the middle of the air.

Like Pinkie Pie and a cake, the black spot seemed to devour the mountain. In less than a minute it was all gone, the mountain and everything else. All that continued to fly into the dot was water from the lake, but those streams of liquid began to shrink as the black spot began to shrink itself... eventually dissipating.

And, to all the ponies that witnessed the event, it looked as if the entire mountain and all the evil it had contained literally disappeared into thin air.

# Chapter 9

## Aftermath

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*Dear Princes Celestia*

*I'm happy to report that the doctor thinks Chell will be making a full recovery. We were all relieved to hear the news. After all, without her we'd all still be trapped in that crazy enrichment center.*

*Chell still hasn't explain why everything happened the way it did, why the mountain just disappeared or how she escaped... but then again its been hard for her to hold a pencil in her mouth let alone to write anything that long. I'm going to ask her what happened when she's feeling better. I know you want to know what happened just as much as I do, and as soon as I know more I'll be sure to send you an update.*

*We were all really shaken up by what happened... GLaDOS was able to say a lot of things to a lot of ponies that we didn't want to hear. It took one of the nurses two hours to assure Rarity that her mane wasn't going to fall out, even though she knew that GLaDOS was just lying. Fluttershy has also been coming to see me a lot. I've been doing my best to make her feel better... but no pony like Fluttershy should ever be called a murderer. Still, I think she just needs hear that from somepony else... and I'll gladly be the pony to keep saying it.*

*I guess that's the best thing about having friends. They're there for you... always. When somepony is bullying you, saying you're worthless or pointing out your every flaw, your friends will be there to defend you... to make you feel better... to undo the damage caused by the hurtful remarks.*

*It will take a while, but I think everypony here in Ponyville will be just fine.*

*Your Faithful Student  
Twilight Sparkle.*

With that the unicorn rolled up the scroll, passing it to Spike. The baby dragon went to the window as he always did, and in a puff of fire the note was off.

"There we go. So, Twilight, you want to go... what are you doing?"

Twilight glanced up, having opened up a fresh scroll and magically dipping her feather pen into the ink. "What?"

"Didn't you just send a letter to Celestia?"

"This isn't to Celestia..." Twilight replied, "And don't worry, this one's going into the normal mail."

"Okay, if you say so." Spike replied, shrugging while Twilight turned her attention back to the fresh, blank scroll in front of her.

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*Hey, sorry it's been so long since I've written. Things here in Ponyville have been pretty crazy... but I still feel bad. Though, I think you'll be happy to know I'm going to try and keep in better touch. Don't be surprised if you start to get letters from me as regularly as Celestia does...*

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"Now I want you to take it easy." The doctor pony said. "While you've healed enough to go home, your ribs still need more time to heal and your leg is going to have to be in a hard body cast for at least three more weeks. I want you to come back here same time next week so that we can change out the cast and make sure everything is healing correctly. Other than that, lots of bed rest and fluids. You understand?"

Chell nodded, wincing a bit as moving her head caused her ribs to shift, which in turned caused a prickle of pain. There was almost more bandages than pony at the moment, Chell having several bandages around her torso, a cast on her leg, and a bandages around her shoulder where she had been shot. Not to mention bandages in a number of other spots where she had gotten scratched and bruised during the fight with GLaDOS.

Still, despite being sore all over, Chell was ready to get out of the hospital. She had been bed ridden for a couple weeks and it sucked. That and Chell had been dreading

the doctor bills... especially since she couldn't work at the post office in her condition. That and the doctor pony who had treated her had come all the way from Canterlot.

Chell forced a smile for the doctor as he continued to give her instructions, even though she was wondering what happened to ponies who couldn't pay their bills. With a final few checks from the unicorn doctor, Chell was allowed to leave the examination room, limping slowly into the lobby of the clinic. Working behind the desk was Nurse Redheart, the white earth pony with faded pink hair scribbling on some paperwork with her mouth.

"Oh, Chell, Dear, good to see you up and about." Nurse Redheart offered as the dull orange pony approached the desk. "I just need you to sign this check out form."

Chell nodded, taking the pencil and scribbling her name on the form presented to her. She had to admit, with all the writing practice she been getting at the hospital she was getting good at the whole "writing with your mouth" thing.

"Very good. Also, I needed to tell you two things. First, about your bills..."

Chell winced; they didn't waste any time, did they?

"I'm happy to say that all of your bills have been paid in full. Prince Celestia sent a royal envoy here to cover all the expenses."

Paid... in full... Chell couldn't keep the smile off her face. Now that was a load off her mind... and a very nice gesture on the behalf of the princess.

"I was also told to give you this package." Nurse Redheart added, nosing a small brown paper bag toward Chell. The dull earth pony gave the box a quizzical look, which was wrapped in brown paper and tied up with white packaging string. She took it gently in her mouth, heading off to one of the chairs in the clinic's waiting room.

It took a bit of work to open it, especially for a pony with so many sore injuries, but Chell managed to get it open. Inside she found a note, beside which was a something that looked a bit like a necklace... or maybe even a collar. It was a brown leather strap with a silver latch and a silver bit of decoration on the front. In the center of the silver decoration was a little blue jewel with strange markings on the inside.

Poking at the necklace for a moment Chell turned her attention back to the note.

*Dear Chell*

*I hope this gift finds you well. I wanted to thank you for the service you've performed for Equestria. I have little doubt that many ponies would have been taken to and possibly even killed inside the enrichment center. Not only that, but through your efforts you rescued me and my sister, and for that we are grateful.*

*You have probably already been told that your medical bills have been paid. Consider that a small thank you gift from me. This necklace is actually a gift from my sister, who feels that after everything you've done you deserve to be able to, as she put it, "speak your mind".*

*When you are feeling better I invite you to come to Canterlot, where I wish to thank you in person and also learn all the details about what exactly happened that day.*

*Until then, please get well soon.*

*Best Wishes,  
Princess Celestia*

Chell turned her attention back to the necklace, leaning forward and touching her nose to it. She was wondering what the heck it was supposed to do.

"I wonder what the heck its supposed to do."

Chell nearly fell out of her seat. The jewel had just echoed the thoughts in her head, the exact words Chell had wondered to herself had become voiced in a fairly nice, female tone. The dull orange pony, after staring at the gemstone with wide eyes for a few moments, dared to push her nose up against it again.

"Can this thing really... oh my gosh... it can."

Chell grinned from ear to ear... the jewel, the necklace... it let her think things and then it said them. She... she had a way to talk... it was such a profound thought that Chell just had to sit there and stare at the necklace for a time. It was one of the things that had weighed on Chell's mind while she had been lying in the hospital bed. She had some many ponies to talk to, so many reasons to speak... she had been worried how annoying it would get to not be able to talk.

But now she could talk... and honestly, the little voice from the gem didn't sound too bad.

Chell wasted no time in having Nurse Redheart put the jewel on, the necklace/collar fitting snugly at the base of Chell's neck, one of the few places the dull orange pony didn't have an injury. Then, she promptly thanked Nurse Redheart with her newly gifted voice, and then turned to leave the clinic while the white medical pony sat behind her desk, mouth hanging open in a mild shock.

=====

That night, Chell was welcomed back to her home at the post office with a crowded party, planned by Pinkie Pie of course. Fun, cake, and every pony's jaw dropping when Chell was able to thank them, verbally, for the party.

Still, away from the warm lights and good friends of Ponyville, two figures splashed around in the smooth, pristine surface of Sky Mirror Lake. A pair of robots that had managed to escape the destruction of the Enrichment Center that had once been their home by swimming to the bottom of the lake during the final moments of destruction.

The ponified Atlas and P-body worked together to drag a large hunk of metal out of the lake, which was covered in mud and gunk. The two robots then trotted to one side of the metal mass, poking at different parts of it and scrapping away bits of mud.

It was when Atlas was poking at particular part that the metal object sputtered, several wires shooting out and encompassing Atlas. P-body panicked, trying to help her cooperative testing buddy. She grabbed hold of Atlas's hoof, pulling with all her might. Still, P-body soon had her own problems as more wires shot out from the mass, entangling her as well.

They both struggled for at time, but eventually the pair were drug down into the muck surrounding the thing they had dragged from the bottom of the lake, their bodies slowly being consumed by very, very tiny machines.

When P-body and Atlas was gone the metal mass shifted, getting to its feet. A tall figure, with very lean build stood in the moonlight, its wings and a unicorn horn clearly visible.

"At the very least, you were useful for something." GLaDOS said, shaking her equine robotic body once to to clear away the mud and the muck. "The metal you provided allowed the last few nanobots from the facility to repair me... it's a shame you're not here to actually hear me say thank you."



GLaDOS closed her eyes for a moment, recalling how she found herself in that moment. Caroline had been so concerned about getting Chell out, she did not pay attention to what GLaDOS had been doing. Building up a shot from the laser in her robotic chest, GLaDOS broke through the panels that contained her.

The facility was, unfortunately, lost at that point. There was no way to save the Enrichment Center from the minuscule, short lived, but destructive black hole Caroline had forced into creation inside the Portal Gun Production Foundry.

So GLaDOS did the only thing she could; she escaped what had once been her command center and dove into the lake... but with her damaged body the water short circuited a number of motors... and thus she had slumbered in the muck and mud until Atlas and P-body drug her ashore. Such loyal robots... she had saved their personality data, tucked it away in her memory. When she found the materials, she'd use the few surviving nanobots to rebuild them. After all, they had proved useful... if only as walking piles of spare parts for her.

"Yes, I think I will rebuild them... but later. Right now, I have other... priorities." GLaDOS said to herself, wings spreading out before she took flight. "After all... there is still science to do... especially since I'm still alive."