

Dinky Doo's Father Revealed

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Chapter 1

Father Revealed

"Mom, who is my father?"

Ditzy Doo paused in making dinner, the grey pegasus's body stiffening as her eyes widened in shock. Turning, she looked at her daughter Dinky Doo and blinked slowly. She held her breath for a moment, slowly counting to five before letting it out. In her head, she had known this day would come, but she had hoped her little filly would be older.

Ditzy Doo knew about how the other foals made fun of her due to her mother being 'special'. As cruel as the foals Dinky's age were, they would grow out of this stage eventually. The real painful barbs were from the mares and stallions around town. The aghast looks and the back-handed compliments towards them both when they were out shopping or having dinner. The whispered conversations and darting looks. That hurt them both far more because at times they would even say such things to their faces.

But they long ago stopped letting it phase them. Dinky knew all too well her mother understood and comprehended far more than the other ponies in town realize. But, in public, the pair just kept smiling and sometimes even thanking the others for the insults and back-handed compliments of how wonderful it is that a pegasus as special as her could raise a normal - UNICORN- filly.

But, in all this time, Ditzy had been waiting for this day. When the other ponies would talk about their fathers, Dinky would always gush about her mother the mail pony. But the subject of her father had just never been brought up. As such, a slimmer of hope had risen in the pegasus that this day might never arrive.

"Mom...?" Ditzy trotted over, resting her left forehoof on her mother's shoulder with a worried look. "If... If you don't wanna talk about it..."

Ditzy looked to her daughter, a sad look in her eyes as she shook her

head. Turning off the stove, she motioned for her daughter to follow. "The muffins told me that you'd want to know someday about how unicorn fillies fill life with joy..." The grey pegasus began to lead Dinky towards her bedroom as she talked. "And my most special muffin of goodness should know about the day I met her muffin sire of good joy!"

Dinky followed silently as she nodded, the young pegasus used to her mother's unique way of talking after a lifetime. She was born with a lazy eye and mental problems thanks to something called 'Foal Alcohol Syndrome'. Uncle Quarterback told Dinky once that her mom used to be a lot worse when she was younger, which frightened the young foal to think about.

As they entered Ditzzy's room, the walls were decorated with crayon pictures drawn of all the ponies in town Ditzzy thought of as her friends. They were actually quite well drawn, despite the medium used. Every time her mother met a new pony, she'd always draw him or her that night. It was just one of the many quirks that Ditzzy loved about her mom that made her unique.

Trotting over to her bed, Ditzzy pulled aside the muffin-patterned bedspread and crawled under the bed. After a moment, she pushed a small cardboard box out from under the bed before squirming out afterwards. Shaking the dust off her body, she pushed the box towards her daughter as she swallowed hard. "All the answers about space and flying balloons are in this box, my muffin. I'll leave to finish making the tasty delights of food and happiness while you learn the science."

Dinky nodded, watching her mother leave before looking back at the box. Most of her mother's possessions had an innocent, fillylike quality to them. But this box seemed outside of the room rather than a part of it. The box itself was old and tattered, as if it had been moved many times. Using a forehoof, the young filly gently pushed the lid off the top of the box and peered inside...

The small box didn't hold much, just a scroll and some photos. Taking out the first, she saw a picture of her mother when she was younger on a farm with other ponies; some earth ponies, some pegasi, and some unicorns. They were all laughing and smiling at a picnic, and Dinky felt a tear brim in her eye to see her mother so happy.

But something else caught her eye, and she had to stare closer to see if she saw right. Yes, most of the ponies in the photo, like her mother, had the same look in their eyes as her mother Ditzzy had. Some were also in wheelchairs, and one was on crutches. But, all the ponies it seemed, were as special as her mother.

She sat the first photo in the box and drew out the second before pausing... There, in the photo, was her mother hugging a male unicorn next to a tree. His body was tan and he had a golden brown mane and tail. The thing that caught her attention the most was the fact his cutie mark was of a muffin. She stared for the longest time at the photo, her hooves trembling as she stared at the tree. Yes, it looked to be from the same farm, and carved into the tree was a crude heart with 'BM + DD' carved into the heart. It was not the best penmanship by far, but the sentiment was clear... This was a photo of her father...

Standing, Dinky's mind reeled with the implications. She had a unicorn father, and her mother had met her at some farm where everypony had been special like her. Suddenly, the years of her mother driving her to study more and more was making sense... She'd always assumed that it was just because her mother was fearful she'd end up like her, as unlikely as that is. But with two parents from such a place, the truth was like an explosion in her mind: She'd beaten the odds and made her mother so proud by being one of the top students in school. It was no wonder why her mother checked in on her every day while delivering mail!

Setting the other photo in the box, Ditzzy's body gave a nervous shudder as she stared at the scroll. Did she really want to do this? Part of her wanted to unravel the scroll now and start reading, but a twinge of fear ran through her head. After this, there would be no going back. She could no longer spend the nights dreaming away what her father was like. She'd know for sure. Was she ready to forgo illusion and fantasy for cold reality.

Grasping the scroll, she gave a nod to herself. She had to know... Not just for herself, but for her mother, too. Her mother gave up so much for her, and had put on such a brave face for the world. And her mom had kept this box safe just for her to learn the truth... She owed it to her mom to follow this to the end. Opening the scroll, Dinky settled onto the floor on her abdomen and began to read.

Dinky, I'm writing this letter to you so you'll one day know who your father is. I'm hoping I gave this box to you and you're reading it now. If You found this box by accident digging around in my room, then you are GROUNDED! Go to your room and wait for me to get home!

Dinky gave a light chuckle. smiling to herself at the little note. Even in writing, her mother did have a fun sense of humor at times. Shaking her head, she turned back to the scroll to read more.

When I graduated school, my parents had just died the year before working as weather ponies. Quarterback had just started doing construction, and I was really a hoof full. I had a lot of trouble even doing the most basic of chores, and couldn't make out more than two words. Big Bro's job needed him to go to Fillydelphia to help build a new school for a year, so he told me I was going to go live on in a special place that could help me. That was when I was introduced to the Farm.

The Farm was just on the outskirts of Coltland, and was set up to help special ponies learn to be self-sufficient. But I didn't know this at the time. No, all I knew was that the last of my family was leaving me there, and I thought it was because he didn't love me anymore. I spent the first week in my room, refusing to come out even for meals. Every day I would just remain huddled under my covers ignoring everyone and everything.

At the end of the week, I heard a soft knock on my door. I then heard someone shuffle slowly into the room before feeling something placed on my bed. Once the shuffling left, I gave a sniff from under the covers and smelled the most delicious of scents... Poking my muzzle out from under the covers, I saw the mysterious visitor had left a basket of muffins on my bed.

My stomach growled at me, so needing of food after a week of fasting. Without a care for anything else, I dug my muzzle into the basket and began to happily eat the baked delights. Of course, after not eating for so long, I should have paced myself. I ended up eating so much so fast that I gave myself an upset stomach that lasted long into the night.

Dinky sighed, resting her forehoof on her temple as she just shook her head. She's seen the results of her mother eating too many muffins many a time, and had taken to keeping a large amount of a special pink potion the nurse ponies made in bulk just for their household. "Oh, mom..." she whispered out to herself. "That's so like you."

The next morning, I felt hungry again, so slowly trotted out of my room to the main living area. The farm's main house was where we all lived, and it had been set up so every pony's room opened into the main area where they had food, games, and held classes. Several ponies saw me as I left the room and gave a friendly wave of a hoof, and I balked slightly... Almost ready to bolt back into my room.

But a nurse pony saw me and gave the nicest smile, trotting over to give a welcome. She explained about the farm, and that my brother had left me there not as a punishment-but rather as a reward to become a better pony. She then began to lead me about the farm, tugging at me at times as she showed me everything the farm had to offer.

I slowly began to come out of my shell at that farm, and began to learn how to live by myself. They started me slow, teaching me how to cook and how to help out with the farm's chores. They also began to teach me how to fly properly, something that have been a challenge in school due to my lazy eye. I learned the painstaking task of over-compensating for depth perception, and how to think that objects could be much closer than they seemed.

And every evening, after a long day, I always found a new basket of muffins on my bed waiting for me. At first, I thought they were from my brother Quarterback, and he was watching out for me and stopping by to see if I was okay. But all that changed at the start of Summer.

It was a sunny day, and Celestia's sun was shining over all of us as we made our way towards the field. We'd finished all the day's lessons and chores early, so we were having a picnic to celebrate all our hard work.

Speedy Wheels was also about to 'graduate', and we all wanted to wish him good luck. He was born with something called 'Paul-see', and lived his life in a wheelchair. But he'd been at the farm for two years, and had found a way past his chair to find out he was quite talented at delivering things. He might sit in that chair, but in it he could still go almost anywhere.

I'd been helping him out, finding I also had a knack for delivering things, as well. Between the two of us, there wasn't any delivery on the farm that couldn't reach its destination. We were an unstoppable duo, and it was with a bit of fear that I knew with his leaving, soon every one of the farm's deliveries and passing out of letters from home would fall to me alone.

But we were all happy for Speedy, none the less. The Farm had helped him find a job in Coltland with a delivery company, and had even got him a house of his own. It was going to be a big transition for him as well as for us, but he was one of the lucky ones. He was going to get to leave. Some at the Farm never could make it that far, and were here until they passed on.

But spirits were high that day, and we happily spilled out into the field to play. Even the nurses were relaxing, playing along with our games as the joyous sounds of our laughter rang across the pasture and the nearby hills.

Dinky smiled, curling up a bit on the floor as she nodded gently to herself. She could feel her mom's joy at reading this, and felt a longing to have gotten the chance to see her mom like this. Not having to put on a brave face every day, but honestly happy with no one around who made fun of her...

Several of the ponies from the kitchen had brought along soups, salads, and other delights. As the food was laid out, one thing caught my eyes: A wide variety of muffins of different flavors being set out by a tan unicorn. I trotted over, sniffing the muffins curiously before looking up at this stallion. These were the same muffins I had thought my brother was leaving me!

I turned on the unicorn, my mane bristling as I started screaming at him. Who was he to have my brother's muffins? How dare he put them out when they were left for me? Did he take them from him? Of course, with my

speech problems, it didn't come out quite the way I hoped. But the point was made that I was quite upset!

He just looked at me then quietly before starting to move his forelegs in weird motions before my face. I shook my head, not understanding, and started to yell again...before feeling his soft left forehoof gently rest upon my muzzle tip. He motioned for me to follow, and I began to balk... Why should I follow this strange unicorn anywhere. But he motioned again and again to follow, so reluctantly I agreed.

He didn't lead me far, just across the pasture to a male nurse whom he tapped the rump of insistently. The nurse turned back and smiled. I think his name was Red Cross, if I remember right. He was a nice pegasus, and had helped in some of my flying classes. "Yes...? Oh, hello Bran Muffin! What can I help you with?"

The tan unicorn brushed back his golden brown mane with a hoof before moving his hooves in weird patterns again. Red Cross looked between us both, the white pegasus nodding as his short red mane bobbed with the motion. "Ah, okay..." He then looked to me and smiled. "Ditzy, I'm going to tell you what Bran here is saying, okay? But talk to him like I'm not here."

I remember I was a bit stunned at this, but nodded quietly before looking back at the unicorn. "Why are you holding the gifts of happy rhubarbs in sunshine from big bro?"

The unicorn's hooves started their quick motions as I heard Red Cross's voice. "I'm sorry, the muffins were from me. You just looked so sad when you got here, I just wanted to do something to cheer you up. They seemed to make you happy, and you look so pretty when you smile, so I just kept bringing you muffins."

I turned to Red Cross out of habit and asked, "What...? But green marmosets of-" But I hardly got out another word before I felt Bran's forehooves grip the sides of my head, turning me to face the the unicorn again before a flurry of hoof motions began

"Don't look at him!" Red said as he translated. "He's just my voice so we can talk! We're speaking not the two of you! Don't ignore me like that again!"

I tried to calm down as they taught me to do in the speech classes. to manage the right words Finally, the words came slow, but I was able to manage what I wanted to say "You are no my brother. You are new pony. But you be nice and cheer me up. But how come you no tell Ditzzy this yourself?"

The unicorn sighed, pointing at his throat before making more motions as Red's voice nickered out again. "I was born unable to talk. Just like you, I was unable to tell others my thoughts for a long time. But here at the farm I was able to learn how to talk with my hooves just like you take classes to learn how to talk with your voice now."

I remember nodding, looking over this unicorn with a soft smile beginning to cross my muzzle. "You... You can teach your talking that no have star explosions that cause pony confusions up rivers?"

He gave a soundless chuckle, his body shaking as he nodded. "Of course, Ditzzy." I heard Red's voice say as Bran's hooves started moving again. "I'll gladly teach you!"

For the rest of the day and as Celestia's sun set, Bran Muffin then began to teach me to talk using hooves as he did. As everyone else around us was celebrating the graduation of our friend Speedy Wheels, we two were starting to find something much more meaningful. We were finding each other with our hooves in our own personal way of talking.

Dinky felt her eyes blur with tears again, and she set the scroll to the side as she reached for a hoofkerchief. Gripping it in her hooves, she wiped the tears away from her eyes as she smiled to herself. "Mom... This is a side of you I never knew..."

After composing herself, Dinky looked at the curled scroll. Could she finish this? Did she really want to learn this much about her mother's younger days? Steeling herself, she gave a nod. Grabbing the scroll, she climbed up onto the bed and curled up under the covers. The scent of her mom all around her, she unravelled the scroll and picked up where she left off.

It was hard work, but by the end of summer we no longer needed Red Cross to speak for Bran. We sat outside or in the main living area, talking with our hooves the words our muzzles refused to let us express correctly. He told me of his youth growing up in a bakery in Ponyville, and his adopted parents Carrot Cake & Cup Cake. He was really their nephew, and had lost his mother and father in a flood when he was born-the same flood that robbed him of his vocal ability.

But living there, he learned to bake and create food that filled our bodies every night. He may not have been able to talk growing up, but that silence hid a brilliant mind within full of culinary skill and expertise. His specialty, though, was muffins. And he was quickly getting me addicted to those baked delights. Even though, we were both happy.

Every day, after delivering the letters and packages about the Farm, I'd fly over to the kitchen and help Bran with preparing food. It was a simple life, but we were happy. Truly happy. We'd spend time laughing and talking with our hooves, telling each other about our days, our hopes, and our dreams... And for us, it was enough. At least at first.

I don't remember when it first started, but we began to become more than friends. The occasional nuzzle while cooking, the hugs when we met, and even the long periods when we'd just smile at each other as our forehooves rested together while at different events. The other farm residents and nurses seemed to see the growing relationship long before we did.

But all this changed at the Autumn Harvest. Every fall, after the crops that helped pay for the farm were harvested & sold, the Farm would celebrate with a large party. There was always a vote for a Prince and Princess to oversee the evening, and lots of the other residents kept giving me a knowing wink whenever I delivered them their mail in the week leading up to the Harvest Party.

Then the day of the party arrived, and we all were hard at work to make it the best night ever. Bran and I worked so hard, preparing a feast for all our friends on the Farm as it grew later in the day. Finally, we finished and

were able to carry everything out in carts before setting up a long buffet of delicious food.

Oh, Dinky, I wish you could have seen it that night. Several of the other guests of the farm had decorated the pasture and, with the help of the nurses, had set out paper lanterns to light the whole pasture in soft glows of reds, oranges, and yellows. Everything was just perfect, Dinky. Completely perfect.

The head nurse, a unicorn named Mare Blucher, gave a speech about how proud she was at all we had accomplished this year. We all whinnied and clopped our hooves in the air, happy to have this night of fun as reward. As she ended the speech, she then whipped out an envelope. "And now, to announce your Prince and Princess of the night..." She used her magic to open the envelope, then read aloud, "Prince Bran Muffin and Princess Ditzzy Doo!"

Everyone around us started to applaud and whinny, and we both just looked about in shock. Several other residents started bushing our still stunned bodies up towards the stage as we felt toy crowns rested atop our heads. Finally we reached the stage and looked out, the crowd of our friends cheering for us as they all began to chant one word over and over: "Kiss! Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!"

We looked between each other as Mare Blucher tried to quiet the group, but they kept cheering as that word was chanted again and again with growing intensity... "KISS! KISS! KISS! KISS!"

I looked at Bran, and he looked back at me as we both shrugged. At the time, we just wanted to quiet the other ponies so we could all get to the celebrations. So we leaned in close as our muzzle lips met...

I don't know how long we held that first kiss, Dinky. It was like... Summertime and flying and even muffins all together. It was like getting hugged by Quarterback... Like when my parents were alive... It was all of this all rolled up into one ball of warm feelings that ran through my body like lightning. I felt my eyes close as everything else in the world disappeared and it was just Bran and I alone.

The kiss was finally broken and we just looked at one another. It was then

that I heard the cheering from the others in the group and turned, seeing tears of joy in their eyes as they all clapped approvingly. Both Bran & I blushed furiously, our muzzles turning almost beet red as we both motioned for the festivities to begin.

As everyone filed over to the buffet to start eating, we just looked at one another for the longest time. It felt again like the rest of the world was fading away, and it was us again. Lifting his forelegs, Bran began to say the words in what had become our own private language. 'I LOVE YOU'. Smiling, I motioned back to him as tears started to brim in my eyes. 'I LOVE YOU TOO'.

That night, after the party wound down, I didn't return to my room. Rather, I followed Bran to the apartment he had behind the kitchen. You don't want to know what happened that night, and many other nights after that. Only know that we both loved each other very much. It wasn't until just after Winter Solstice that I began getting sick quite often.

We were both so scared, Dinky! For the first time in a few months, muffins were making me sick! And I didn't want to eat Bran Muffins' cooking, I just wanted to eat things like Chocolate-Covered Pickles or Cupcakes with Hot Sauce and Sprinkles! Eventually, at Bran's urging, we went to Mare Blucher to get me checked out. She watched and listened as we both told her of my health issues, and then asked a few personal questions that caused us both to blush. Finally, feeling my growing belly with her forehooves, she told us the news: I was not sick, I was pregnant. Bran and I were to have a foal together!

Things began to move very quickly after that. Bran's parents were called, and we were both helped in packing up our things. There was a party planned, and all our friends gave us such big hugs and well-wishes. The Farm was our home, but it was no place to birth or raise a foal. So, we were to go stay with his parents where we could be able to birth the foal easier.

And so we traveled by pegasus carriage to Ponyville, where his parents welcomed us with open arms. Ah, Dinky, it was wonderful. Bran started to work in the bakery, and his parents helped set us up in a house outside of Ponyville. And, one day just after Winter Wrap Up, I began to feel the sharp

pains. Nurses were called as I laid in our bed, racked in pain. But it was all worth it. After all the pain, there you were in our arms, Dinky. Our most precious muffin of all.

We lived together for three years after that, Dinky. Just the three of us as one big, happy family. You were too young to know, but your father loved you with every fiber of his being. But, The Farm needed him. They kept trying to find someone to replace him as the cook, but not a one of them had the patience to handle the job.

They needed him, and the possible outbursts from residents made the Farm a place you could never grow up in. And we wanted more for you. We wanted you to have the life neither of us could have. You had your father's brilliant mind and my voice if I'd been born normal. You were the best of us both joined into one, so we made the painful choice to be apart until a replacement could be found and your father could come home.

But, several weeks passed and we received a letter from the farm. Your father never arrived. They sent out search parties, and I spent every bit I could to try to find him. But it was like he vanished, and no one knew where he was. I know he'd never abandon you or me, so he must be dead. I only wish I could prove to you how much he loved you, my precious baby muffin. I only hope this letter serves as some solace to that fact.

Dinky sat there sniffing to herself. She knew her mother had given up so much already, but had no idea that she'd even given up the stallion in her life... All for her. Setting the scroll on the bed, she slipped out of the bed and trotted out into the living room.

Ditzy Doo sat at the table, her head in her hooves as if racked with worry. Dinky trotted up, giving her mom's side a tight hug as Ditzy looked down. Smiling in a relieved way, she leaned down to hug her daughter back as they held each other for the longest time.

Dinky looked up at her mom after a moment and whinnied out, "Mom? Can... Can you teach me to talk like you and Dad do? I'm going to find Dad. I know he's gotta be out there somewhere. And when I meet him, I want for us to be able to talk so I can find out what happened. You do so much for me, I want to do this one thing for you."

Ditzy bit her lip, trying to hold back tears as she nodded. "Of course, my precious muffin." That night, after dinner, the Ditzy began to teach her daughter the same way she'd learned: One word at a time. It wasn't until the next morning that they realized that during the night Dinky's Cutie Mark had finally appeared.

Two big muffins with a smaller muffin resting between them.

Chapter 2

Travels

A filly's Cuteceñera.

The one defining moment in her life. The time when all her friends and family gather around to celebrate that she found her special talent in life. The moment that she realizes what she is meant to do to help all of Equestria.

Dinky's had postponed hers for almost two years as she prepared for her journey. For most ponies, a Cuteceñera was a time that they were declared an adult by Equestrian standards. But today was also bittersweet for the young filly. Pacing nervously outside of Sugar Cube Corner while all her friends inside were having fun, the young unicorn looked to her mother as she spoke with a twinge of fear and worry in her voice. "Mom, will you be okay after this? I may be gone for a long time..."

Ditzy Doo reached out with her forehooves, grasping her daughter's face as she leaned forward. Resting her brow to her daughter's, the grey Pegasus' eyes brimmed in tears to show the sadness mingled with hope this day held for her. "My muffin..." Ditzy manages out, the tone of her voice showing the strain on her emotions not to cry. "You find big muffin. Even if dead, you find big muffin and let me have peace."

The unicorn nuzzled into her mom's brow, her own forehooves rising up to hug her mom back. "I'll write every day, mom... And with you being the mail pony, you're sure to get every letter. I know Dad's alive, and I'll bring him home to us both..."

Ditzy sniffled, a few tears escaping from her eyes to drop onto her daughter's back. "Just come back, little pony. Don' wanna lose both muffins."

Dinky held back her own tears, putting on a brave facade for her mother as she leaned back. Looking into those sad eyes, she smiled gently. "Mom, I've spent the past two years training myself for this search. Uncle's been

helping me build up endurance, and Twilight's been my mentor on honing my magic. Even Grandpa & Grandma Cake have been teaching me to cook so I can survive in the wild." The young filly reached out, touching her mom's muzzle tip with a smile. "And you taught me how to talk to Dad when I find him... Everyone I care for has helped me prepare, and I'm finally ready. I have to do this. And I will come home."

The Pegasus looked at her little filly, now nearly a mare in her own right. There were so many things she wanted to tell her--so many missed chances due to her inability to make the right words at times--but still she'd never been prouder of Dinky Doo. Sniffling, she slipped back from the younger unicorn and made a few gestures with her hooves.

Dinky smiled and nodded back. "I love you too, mom. Now come on! This Cuteceñera is my going away party, and I want to leave on a high note!"

By the glow of the gibbous moon, a small unicorn trotted along the dusty streets of Ponyville. On her back were several saddle bags filled with supplies, and on her face was a sad yet determined look. She'd seen her mom to bed, and didn't leave until she was sure Ditzzy was sleep. The young unicorn didn't want to leave at night, but knew she had to or her mom would convince her to stay just one more day--then one more day after that--and so forth until she ended up never leaving. Shaking her head, the filly knew she had to leave tonight, or she never would be able to.

"Sneaking off in the middle of the night, are we?"

Dinky twirled, looking out across the plaza to see a pink pony with a hot pink mane trotting forward from the shadows. "Aunt Hairspray!" Dinky gasped loudly, galloping across the plaza to give her a soft nuzzle. "I-I-I'm not sneaking off! I just have to leave now, or I may never be able to!"

The older mare nodded and sighed, her mane pulled back into a simple pony tail that still had a flair to it. "Shhh, I know dear. But there are some things we must discuss before you go, you and I..."

Dinky paused and listened, her eyes filling with curiosity. "We could have discussed them at my Cuteceñera, couldn't we?"

Hairspray shook her head and sighed. "No, dear, as that was in public. This is information you need to have, that can help you down the road. But it's not supposed to be shared."

Dinky blinked and shook her head. "But, won't you get in trouble for telling me, then? I don't want you in trouble!"

Hairspray waved it off as she chuckled. "Ah, Dinky. You're family, and I'd rather you be safe. Now, you know how some ponies will sometimes fall in love with another of the same gender?"

Dinky nodded happily. "Well, sure! My mentor Twilight and Princess Luna did that, as did Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash! Ooh, and Lyra an' Bonbon had a unicorn like me that I babysit! An' then there's-"

The filly unicorn felt her aunt's left forehoof gently touch her lips to cut her off as she nodded. "Yes, yes... We don't need a rundown of all the couples. Now, in every town in Equestria there are establishments where those who love the same gender congregate at night. These places are always full of gossip, and you may find some good leads there. Also, if you need food or lodgings, you can ask to work there for the night in barter for such."

Dinky nodded slowly as she let out a soft gasp. "That's wonderful help! But, how do I find these places? And won't they think me a... You know, a fillyfooler?"

Hairspray chuckled and shook her head. "Not unless you tell them you are. Just by being there means you support their love, and that's all they'll want. And in doing so, they'll help you if you need it. Now then, look closely..." Hairspray motioned for the unicorn to come closer as she pointed to the steps of a building she'd walked past her whole life without giving it a second thought. There, engraved into the bottom step, was Princess Luna's crest. "If you see a house or a business with this symbol, it means that this is the gathering place for that town. Look for it, if all else fails, and they'll help you. But you must never share this knowledge with other ponies. It's a secret, and it helps to keep order in Equestria to keep such things hidden from the colts and fillies."

Dinky looked up at her aunt and nodded. "Thank you, Auntie Hairspray... I don't know how you know about it, but I promise I won't abuse this

knowledge."

The pink earth pony reached out, tussling the unicorn's mane as she smiled gently. "That is a story for when you return. For now, know I met your uncle in this very bar--and I've never been happier since."

Dinky nods softly and reaches up, giving her aunt a tight hug. "I love you, Auntie... And thank you."

Hairspray hugged her back just as tightly as she nuzzled the unicorn's neck. "Ah, Dinky... I love you, as well. Now get going on your trip. And hurry back. I want to hear about everything that happened when you return as I style your mane."

The unicorn nodded as she released the hug, the smile on her muzzle reflected in her eyes as she gave a final wave. Then, turning quickly, she began to gallop towards the town's exit. Hairspray leaned against a light post, watching as the young unicorn galloped away as she let out a soft sigh before turning herself, trotting towards her sister-in-law's house for when she woke up.

Ditzy Doo flew like a Pegasus possessed, the mail pony working hard on her route to finish even quicker than usual. It'd been a week since Dinky left on her trip to find out what happened to Bran Muffin. And today, as she gathered up everyone else's letters, a letter with a familiar script had arrived addressed to her. She knew in her heart it was from Dinky, but she had to finish her rounds first. Then, and only then, would she read the letter from her daughter.

The grey Pegasus swerved, dodging a tree branch that had seemed to come out of nowhere to block her path. Shaking her head to focus, she spied the last house ahead. Landing in front of the house, she pulled out the final batch of letters and stuffed them into the mailbox. Closing her mail bag, Ditzy's face took on a huge grin as she sped towards the post office to return her mail bag so she could get home.

Dear mom,

I just reached Fillydelphia, the city of Equestrian Love, last night. Please thank Auntie Hairspray for me, as her tip helped me find a place to stay while searching the town. The mare who runs the place is really nice, and I think you'd like her. Her name's Silver Streak, and she used to fly with the Wonderbolts before retiring. Her wife is a mare named Tiramisu who runs a high-end bakery in town making desserts, and they are too delicious! I'll have to see if I can get some recipes to bring home to Grandma & Grandpa!

I haven't heard anything about Dad yet, but I just got into town. As soon as I hear something, I promise I'll send word! I love you so much, mom, and I wish you were here with me! Give everyone hugs from me!

*Love,
Dinky Doo*

"Big Bro! Big Sis!"

Ditzy Doo smiled, seeing Quarterback and Hairspray trot into the Ponyville Clinic as she tried to wave her one leg not in a cast.

"Ugh, seriously Ditzy... You need to watch where you're going! I know you get excited when you get letters, but you have to go slow on your routes so you don't smack into trees!"

The bandaged Pegasus hung her head solemnly, her eyes drooping down as she let out a low whimper. "Ditzy sorry, big bro..."

The pink earth pony reached up, resting a forehoof on the brawny male Pegasus' left withers as she tsked softly. "Now, now Quarterback. You know you're as curious as Ditzy and I am about what Dinky's been up to. And accidents do happen to even the best of us. Or do I need to bring up how you pulled those muscles last month, hmmm?"

A blush rose on the muzzle of Quarterback as he quickly shook his head. "N-n-no need to go there." Looking about for a quick way to change the topic, he spies a letter on his sister's bedside table. "So, Ditzy, you have

the next letter from Dinky? Want me to read it to you?"

Ditzy nodded quickly with her usual grin plastered across her face. "Oh, yes! Read me the muffin recipe of happy green balloons!"

Dear Mom,

After a week in Fillydelphia, I was able to track down where dad had gone to next: Hoofington. From there he took a well-traveled road that all travelers take to get to Coltland near where The Farm is. I used some of my saved coins to have a printing press make up flyers with Dad's picture on them, and then spread them about town asking ponies to send any leads to you at home.

My last night in Fillydelphia, Silver Streak and Tiramisu took me out to a fancy dinner to thank me for all my hard work at Silver Streak's club. I tried to refuse, but they were quite insistent. Tiramisu also let me have her namesake's recipe for Grandma and Grandpa, but only on the condition that she can come try it when we make it.

After leaving Fillydelphia, it was a nice pleasant gallop towards Hoofington. I rented a room with my earnings from Fillydelphia, and started hanging up more flyers. It was here that I struck paydirt finally. A private investigator named Squeak approached me the next day offering to take up my case for 10 bits a day. It is a bit strange that a private investigator has a rubber duck for a cutie mark, but his references did check out. So I told him I'd pay him AFTER he came up with evidence.

Anyhow, I love you mom! I wish you were here with me!

*Love,
Dinky Doo*

MOM!

I got the best news last night, and had to include this note before I sent it!

Squeak actually found a solid lead! An old Diamond Dog in the Hoofington Jail remembered a pony that his old pack had kidnapped with 'food on his flank'. He gave the guards the information in the hopes that, if it pans out, he might get released. I'm setting out tonight to find out if this could be the lead we've been hoping for!

*Love Always,
Dinky Doo*

The chilly night air caused a ghostly mist to slink along the ground as Luna's full moon provided light but no warmth. Under the cover of darkness, Dinky slid on all four hooves down the rocky slope with her traveling cloak pulled over her head. The unicorn grew nearer to the home camp of the remaining Diamond Dogs in this area as her adrenaline began to pump. Most of this pack had been arrested for kidnapping ponies to do their chores or mining, but the remnants of the once great pack remained hidden in the rocky plains just outside the Hoofington Police's jurisdiction. Reaching the bottom of the embankment, the filly braced herself for the worst as she crept slowly into the village.

Most Diamond Dogs lived near gem deposits or in caves, but these were living in makeshift shacks built of a few tall rocks with fabric stretched over them. Dinky shook her head sadly, seeing a pair of pups cuddled inside one of these shelters, their tiny bodies shuddering as they clung to their mother to try to get warmer in the chill night air. Shaking her head, Dinky's horn began to glow as her left saddlebag opened. A glowing blanket floated out of the saddlebag and drifted across the path to enter the shanty shack. Laying over the two pups, Dinky used her magic to tuck in the pair as their shivering began to subside. Closing her saddle bag, she gave a soft smile.

"Pony...."

The voice was harsh and masculine, whipping to her left, Dinky saw a young male Diamond Dog wearing tattered rags brandishing his claws as he stood up tall. Looking up, the Diamond Dog had to be twice her size easily. Dropping to all fours, the canine bared his fangs as he started to let out a low growl.

Dinky braced herself, pawing her left forehoof into the earth as she glared back at the dog. "You don't scare me... I want my father! Is he here?"

The male canine let out a laugh as he started to pace around the young unicorn. "There no ponies left here. Only food. Ponies tasty! And soon you be food, too!" The Diamond Dog leapt at Dinky, his teeth bared as his sharp claws for digging aimed at the young filly.

Dinky turned on her forehooves, rearing back with her hind hooves before bucking her rear hooves straight out as if apple bucking a tree. The sickening snapping sound of bones breaking in flesh could be heard as her hooves met the left side of the Diamond Dog's jawline. A gargling howl of pain echoed across the camp as the other canines stirred from their slumber.

Unfortunately for Dinky, the forward motion of the male dog caused him to push her forward as they both tumbled out into the center of the camp. The Diamond Dog landed on his back, letting out a gasping breath as blood spittle flew up into the air. Slamming into the male's chest, Dinky heard the male gasp for air as her weight knocked the air out from him. Her forehooves began to rain down on the head and shoulders of the canine, the little filly beginning to let out a scream of rage at the thought that these monsters... These beasts had eaten her father. The dog under her flailed his arms as she continued her beating, not relenting until two pairs of clawed hands gripped her about the waist to drag her off the injured male.

Dinky squirmed, her muzzle foaming and her eyes wide with rage as she struggled to free herself. "Lemme go! Lemme go! Kill y'all! Ate m'dad! Kill 'im!" She struggled in the grasp of those holding her, fighting with all her strength in the dirt as she tried to get free.

"ENOUGH!"

The bellowing female voice filled the camp, causing everyone to stop suddenly and look up. From the largest shack emerged an older female Diamond Dog, her body adorned with necklaces and rings of gemstones. In her right paw she held a staff made of one long quartz crystal, and she leaned heavily against it. "Who is this that disturbs our sleep on this cold night?"

Dinky continued trying to struggle free of the grasp of those that held her as the male Diamond Dog lifted up his head to point at the unicorn with a trembling paw. Seeing the clawed digit point at her, the filly glared angrily. "He said you all ate my father, and then he tried to eat me! I'll beat you all up! I'll do it!"

The large female looked down at the beaten male and shook her head sadly. "Ah, thought he be good stud, too..." Her crystal staff spun in the air before striking across the throat of the male on the ground. The sound of snapping bone could be heard as the male let out a bloody gurgle. Trashing on the ground for a bit, his body finally began to grow still.

Dinky swallowed hard, watching the male who attacked her die as she glanced up at the decorated female Diamond Dog. She felt the paws holding her finally let go, and the unicorn spilled forward into the circle of canines around her. Looking around, she finally got a look at the group around her. "You... You're all women and foals!"

The large female let out a low chuckle. "Sires all stupid, like this one. We weed out stupid so no in jail. Sires all stupid and get taken away! We tired of their way! We try pony way now! Bitches in charge now!" Tossing back her head, the leader of the pack let out a proud howl towards the moon as the other adult females joined her.

Looking about worriedly, Dinky tried to put on a brave face. "Go ahead, eat me! I don't care! Just let me see where you put the bones so I can say goodbye to my father before I die."

The pack leader peered at the unicorn before letting out a barking laugh. "You funny, unicorn. You no listen! We no eat ponies like you. We eat gems! That new stud, he stupid. No ponies here anymore, we set all free several moons ago."

Dinky gasped as she turned, her magic flipping up her cape as she showed the leader her cutie mark. "Did any of the freed ponies have a mark like this?"

The leader looked closely at the mare's flank for a moment before nodding. "One pony. Quiet pony. He leave with rest. He your sire?"

Dinky nodded quickly as tears began to fill her eyes. "Oh, yes! Please, which way did they go!? Please, will you let me go after him?"

The leader nodded as she pointed her cane in a direction to the west. "Quiet go that way. But to leave you must give something we need for taking stud here."

Dinky looked about the circle before seeing the two pups she tucked in with her blanket earlier. Their mother still held them in the blanket as she held them close to conserve their warmth. Smiling, she let her horn begin glowing as both her saddle bags opened. "How about blankets and a tent?"

The leader's snout took on a pleased grin as she nodded. "This sound like good trade to me..."

The Two Tree Inn was not the best place in Equestria. In fact, the creaky stone walls let in more cold air than they kept out during winter, and the roof leaked like a sieve whenever it rained. But to weary travelers passing between Hoofington and Coltland, it felt like the finest lodgings. Situated at the midway point between the two cities along the well-traveled road, it was the only place for miles to get some warm food and a bed only slightly less lumpy than the ground outside.

The owner of the Two Tree Inn currently was an earth pony named Freestone Peach, who had inherited it from his parents Clingstone Peach & Spring May. Peaches had always run the inn, named for the two signature peach trees planted out front alongside the road. Of course, behind the inn was the real peach tree orchard, but the inn always helped pay the bills when the harvests didn't bring in enough.

Freestone sat at his usual spot behind the bar, the adult stallion's soft orange coat catching the light from Celestia's sun just right as he tossed back a yellow mane with a forehoof. The stallion wasn't that old, maybe 5 summers after getting his cutie mark, but the hard life in the wilds had seemed to age him more than regular. Still Freestone didn't knock his lot in life. He was happy to help the travelers and hear their stories from the road,

and he was happy to give them a bit of comfort especially if some bought peaches to sell on the road.

Reaching for a bar cloth, the young stallion blinked as he saw a smaller cloaked pony begin to trot into his inn. Smiling brightly, he nodded hello. "Why hello there, and welcome to the Two Tree Inn! Will you be needing lodging for the evening? We have the best beds for miles! They're the ONLY beds for miles, but they are the best!"

The pony reached up with their forehooves, pulling down the grey traveling cloak to reveal a dirty blonde mane with an equally dirty pale purple unicorn horn. Letting the hood rest on her withers, a female filly nodded as her face came into view. "Yes, please. And a bath, if you have one? I ran into some Diamond Dogs a few days ago, and haven't had the chance to clean up since."

The stallion nodded and smiled. "Of course! The cost for a room with a bath is 4 bits, and that includes dinner and breakfast. We also have some Peach Schnapps an' Peach Brandy for 1 bit a drink, if you fancy that as well."

The unicorn's eyes lit up as she nodded. "Ooh, I'll try a bottle of the Peach Schnapps, then, after my bath!" She reached her muzzle into the coin purse hidden in her mane and quickly plopped out 5 bits without hesitation with a nod. "Now, where's my room, please?"

As the tired filly was lead up the stairs, the back door to the inn slowly creaked open. As the door opened wider, the tan rump of a pony could be seen under the stairs pushing the door open; his long golden brown tail swishing slowly as the door open. On his flank could be seen his cutie mark as clear as day: A muffin.

Chapter 3

Homecoming

Dinky slowly trotted down the steps after her bath, if what she'd just experienced could be called that. At this inn, a bathtub seemed to be a large metal tub usually used to hold fruit that had been filled with almost hot water. But it had been enough to get the grime out of her hair, and the light peach scent from the harvest gave her a pleasant enough scent to her hair, mane and tail.

Stretching her sore body slightly, the teen mare looked about the inn to see it had filled with some more guests. In the corner sat four griffons, their large bodies casting a shadow from the light of the setting sun as they played a round of cards. At a table next to the door, an elderly pair of pegasi sat nibbling on a salad together with a look of love for each other still shining in each other's eyes.

And by the bar, a colt no older than her sat with a lute tuning it likely in the hopes of earning a night's rest.

The older teen mare chuckled to herself, then paused in her tracks. A scent was wafting across a nose... A scent that seemed to her like home. Growing up, she'd smelled that scent every day when she came home from school. Every day her mother made one thing best of all, and that was the scent she could smell filling the inn now. The scent of muffins.

Dinky began to sniff the air deeper, a smile crossing her muzzle as she trotted up to the counter to look at Freestone Peach behind it. "Excuse me, Sir," she began in a nervous tone. "But, did you bake some muffins to go with dinner tonight?"

The orange colt looked at the unicorn patron and shook his head, his yellow mane falling down across his withers as a pleasant smile crossed his muzzle. "Why no miss, that's a kitchen helper I just hired a few days ago. He doesn't talk much, but he's a mite fine help in the kitchen."

Dinky's face paled in shock, the filly stumbling back a bit as her heart

quickens its pace. 'It couldn't be...' she thought to herself. She then shook her head and smiled. "Well, they smell so good! Would you mind if I look in the kitchen to thank the cook for what is sure to be a wonderful meal?"

The earth pony shrugged his withers and nodded. "Well, it can't cause any harm. Just don't bug him too much, we got a lot more guests coming in, an' he's gotta finish gettin' dinner ready!"

Dinky nodded and smiled. "I will try, thank you!" A smile brightened on her muzzle as she thought her journey may soon be at an end. Ducking around the counter, the mare slipped into the back kitchen with a flick of her tail.

The small kitchen took the unicorn mare by surprise by how full it was of food and cooking implements. Yet, despite the large amount of things in the kitchen, everything seemed spotless and clean. She heard the sound of sizzling, and the scent of cooking spinach mingled and danced in her nostrils with the intensifying scent of muffins fresh from the oven. Creeping around a counter, she stopped in shock.

There, in front of the oven using magic to cook several dishes at once, was her father. He looked older, his mane and tail were a lot longer, and his body looked to be a bit scarred in places. But that muffin cutie mark on his golden-haired flank was a dead giveaway. Dinky couldn't hold back her excitement, and with a loud yell called out, "DADDY!"

Bran Muffin turned his head, his ears flicking in curiosity as he turned to see the young mare standing in the kitchen. He paused, tilting his head questioningly as his eyes took on a bewildered look.

Dinky stepped out of the shadows more, the light from Celestia's sunset passing through the window to illuminate her young form as a smile crossed her muzzle. Raising her forehooves, she began the final test to make for sure it was him. She began to speak with her hooves. 'Daddy, it's me! Dinky Doo! I searched so long to find you after all these years and bring you home!'

A look of recognition crossed the older stallion's muzzle as he read the hooves before galloping forward, the male catching his daughter up in the tightest of hugs as tears began streaming down his face in relief. Dinky felt

tears filling her own eyes at the relief her journey was finally over. She'd found her father.

Freestone trotted into the kitchen, a worried look upon his muzzle as he rounded the counter's corner to see the two hugging and crying. "Is-is everything okay?"

Dinky looked up, a relieved smile on her muzzle as she nodded feverishly. "Yes, by Celestia, yes! Sir, this is my father whom I've spent the past few weeks looking for. He's been missing for so long, we feared he was dead." She turned back towards Bran and smiled. "But now I can take him home... Oh, Mom is going to be so happy!"

Freestone sighed softly and shook his head. "Aw, I can't keep a daughter from her father. Quiet, have the night off. I'll finish up dinner in here, you go catch up with y'er kin, all right?"

Bran Muffin nodded, standing up and nuzzling Dinky before making some quick motions with his forelegs.

Dinky nodded and turned to Freestone. "Um, Dad says his name's Bran Muffin, and he's thankful you let him work here."

The earth pony nodded and smiled at the pair. "Aw, that's all right. We Peaches help out travelers when we can. Now git on out of here... I'm sure you both gotta lot of catching up to do." The pair nodded and galloped out of the kitchen as the earth pony watched, then turned to the stove. "Hmmm, seems like Quiet-I mean Bran Muffin dang near finished dinner already. Nothing left to do but just watch and relax. Mmm, I love my life at times. Always a new story starting or ending at the Two Tree Inn..."

Dinky and Bran sat in the inn's main room across from each other, both too nervous to say anything. The mare had so much she had to do! She had to write her mother, she had to arrange transport home, and she had to find out the one question burning inside her heart still. Looking up with a nervous look in her eyes, her forehooves trembled as she tried several times to try to say something - only to realize she didn't even know where to begin.

Bran let out a heavy sigh, seeing his daughter so grown up and looking so confused. Raising his hooves, he began first. 'My word, Dinky. I haven't seen you since you were three years old. And look at you now. You look about to enter finishing school! But, how did you ever learn hoof language?'

Dinky blushed as her hooves responding in kind. 'Mom taught me every night after she told me about you. She told me when I was thirteen, and she spent the next two years teaching me as I prepared myself physically and mentally to come find you.'

Bran shook his head as a sad look crossed his eyes. 'Twelve years away from you and your mother, and not a day didn't go by that I didn't think on you both.'

Dinky leaned forward, an urgent look in her eyes as she slammed her left forehoof on the table. Blinking away tears, she motioned with her hooves again. 'Then where were you? Why didn't you come home!? Didn't you know how much you being gone hurt mom? Or hurt me? Every other filly and colt had two parents growing up. I just had mom, and half the time I felt like the parent. It wasn't fair!'

The older unicorn stallion slipped off his stool and trotted around, resting a forehoof on his daughter's left shoulder gently as he shook his head. 'No, it isn't fair,' his hooves began as they

danced their words in the air. 'Trust me, I tried so many times to get home. But I was being held against my will by a tribe of Diamond Dogs. They kept me for slave labor and to tend after the elderly. It was only after the tribe's mutiny against the males in charge that I was finally released. After getting lost in the wilderness for a month, I came across the Two Tree Inn, and I started working here to save up enough to make the trip home to the family I missed with all my heart.'

The purple-grey unicorn sat there, reading her father's hooves as she shook her head. 'I have money, dad. If you want, we can continue on tomorrow to Fillydelphia, send a letter to mom that I found you, and then catch the next pegasus chariot home.'

Bran shook his head in disbelief. 'But, how can you afford to get a pegasus chariot? Those are so expensive!'

Dinky just smiled softly. 'I have a friend who is a retired Wonderbolts flier. I'm sure with her help I can bring the price down to something we can afford.'

Bran paused for a moment, then gave a nod. 'Well, then we better eat up and hit the sack early. It sounds like we're in for a long day tomorrow trotting towards Fillydelphia.'

Dinky suddenly lunged forward, her forehooves gripping her father's neck as she hugged him in relief. "Thank you for staying alive, dad. Thanks for staying around until I could get you home." Bran just hugged her back, tears brimming in his own eyes as he nodded silently. Sometimes words aren't needed, and this was just such an occasion. All that was needed was a silent hug back for a filly who just missed the dad she needed in her life for too long.

Ditzy Doo trotted back and forth in front of the Sugarcube Corner, the grey pegasus looking up into the sky every few seconds as she had since the day began. Mrs. Cup Cake and Hairspray both trotted out of the store, and Mrs. Cake laid a hoof onto Ditzy's withers gently. "Ditzy, please stop this pacing! We're all excited, but they'll be here soon. The chariot's supposed to arrive at noon, and it's never late!"

Hairspray nodded as she rested on Ditzy's other side. "Yeah sis, you need to calm down! Look, your hair's a mess, and I spent all yesterday on it to make it look so perfect for Dinky & Bran's return celebration!" The pink earth pony whipped out a comb as she tsked. "Hold still, let me fix your mane real quick..."

But Ditzy paid no mind, her face looking up to the sky as her eyes brightened with joy. Lifting a forehoof into the air, she suddenly screamed, "MY MUFFINS!!!" Mrs. Cake and Hairspray turned, looking up towards the sky as Quarterback and Mr. Carrot Cake spilled from the store to see what the ruckus was. As the group looked up into the sky, they could see the chariot spiraling slowly down towards the plaza before landing before them - kicking up a cloud of dust as it did so.

Leaping off the back of the chariot, Dinky Doo and Bran Muffin gave a

wave. But before they made it more than a hoofstep forward, Ditzzy Doo zipped through the air to tackle them both in a tight hug, tears streaming from her eyes as she nuzzled them both. "My muffins... Both my muffins are home for good!"

Dinky and Bran's eyes began to spring tears, as well, as they hugged Ditzzy back just as tightly. Mr. and Mrs. Cake held each other as their adopted son long thought dead was finally home, whilst Quarterback rested a foreleg around Hairspray's withers as the other couple watched.

Finally, Bran Muffin pulled back from the hug and began to move his hooves at Ditzzy. 'There's something I've been waiting for twelve years to do, Ditzzy.' Slipping forward, his hooves wrapped about the pegasus' neck in a hug as his muzzle met hers in a long, deep kiss. Ditzzy kissed back just as hard for a bit before breaking the kiss. 'Muffin, little muffin here! Wait until tonight and we can kiss more! For now, party inside with muffins and hugs to celebrate family whole again!"

Dinky blushed, the young mare knowing what would likely happen at home that night. "Mom, I _think_ I'll stay here at the Sugarcube Corner tonight, all right? But for now, let's go in and party!" As the happy trio trotted towards the rest of the gathered ponies, the entire extended family all gathered around with happy smiles to hear what had happened, as well as to welcome home Bran Muffin.

As the group all walked into the store to celebrate, Dinky Doo paused for a moment outside to look over her shoulder towards Canterlot's mountain on the horizon. "Thank you, Princess Celestia and Princess Luna. Thank you for helping me make my family whole again." Then, with a swish of her tail, the purplish-grey unicorn dashed inside to join the celebrations.