Chapter 19

Tap groaned. Her head felt like it was going to split open. She tried to remember what happened. She remembered that there was that party, and that she got drunk.

Great, she thought, *somepony spiked the punchbowl.*

On one level, this annoyed her because it meant that ponies were getting booze without buying it from her. She'd figured that the Brothers would provide their punch and cider and cookies and other stuff that didn't get ponies drunk, and she'd go about selling liquor.

She didn't remember at which point she realized the punch was spiked, but by that point she didn't care. Everypony got drunk.

Oh, no, she thought, *even Barrel.*

It wasn't that Barrel had never drank before, just that Tap didn't want him to drink until he was older.

Well, she decided, *nothing to do but wait for the hangover to end.*

She laughed a little. The missionaries would probably not react well. Oh, how they disapproved of the booze, and yet they'd gotten drunk out of their minds. And then she got them to make out. She grinned at that. Unfortunately, that was about as far as she could recall from the previous night. Still, she found herself in her own bed, so she hoped nothing bad had happened in that hazy spot. She was still worried about Barrel and the missionaries.

Well, she thought as she opened her eyes, *better get down to work and hope–*

Her thoughts were interrupted. She saw Brother Scroll lying fast asleep right next to her, a small trail of drool trickling from his mouth. She stared at him. He was sleeping like a rock, no doubt a result of heavy drinking.

Oh, fuck... Tap looked up at the ceiling. She wondered: If Scroll didn't remember anything, then what would he do when he woke up? And what happened?

She sat up with a groan, before she saw something that made her eyes even wider. Next to Scroll was Brother White, also sleeping like a rock.

Well, damn. She lay back down, trying to think. *You know, maybe nothing happened,* she decided. *Maybe they were just too drunk to walk home and they decided to crash here.*

With some effort, she managed to haul herself out of bed and over to a cracked and dirty mirror. The reflection showed that her lust red mane was an absolute mess. She snorted in disgust before reaching into her drawer to pull out a brush.

She certainly hoped nothing had happened. If something had happened, she would like it if she were able to remember it. She turned around, looking at the two. She had to smile; they looked adorable in bed together.

There was a loud knock on the door.

"Tap?" asked Barrel's voice. "Are you alright?"

Oh, shit.

"Uhh, yeah, Barrel, I'm fine," said Tap. "Am I late?"

"Uhh, yeah."

"Well, fuck," said Tap. "Just hold on, I'll be down in a minute."

"Mmmm..." groaned Scroll. "No, mom, I don't wanna go to school, I have a tummyache..."

"Me neither," White groaned.

Tap rushed over to them. "*Be quiet, you two!*" she whispered.

"Tap, are you okay?" asked Barrel. "Is there somepony in there with you? Why is your door locked?"

"Uhh, nopony's in here!" Tap lied.

"Tap?" asked Barrel.

"Yes?" Tap asked. There was a deafening silence, broken only by Brother White squirming slightly.

“Is this what a hangover feels like?”

“Yes, Barrel,” Tap sighed. “Look, I’m a mess, could you... could you just go down and help with the drink orders?”

“Yeah, I kinda suck at that...” Barrel said.

The clopping sounds of hoofsteps indicated his departure. She let out a sigh of relief. She looked back at the bed and thought about what she was going to do about the missionaries. She needed to get them up, out of her bed, and out of her house.

“Alright, you two,” she said, walking over to Brother White. “Party’s over.”

“Mm?” moaned White. His eyes opened. “Not today, sorry. I’m taking the day off...” He blinked. “Hi. How are you?”

“Pretty shitty,” said Tap. “But that’s how hangovers are.”

“Oh... sorry,” said White as he sat up. “It’s a nice bed.”

“Yes it is,” said Tap, going back to her mirror and continuing to brush her hair. “And if you’ve got money you can use it again, but I have to get to work.”

Scroll groaned. “My head. It hurts...” He sat up. “Uh...” He looked around. “I’m in–” He faced White. “This isn’t our bunk.”

“No it isn’t...” said White.

“*Fuck,* you two are slow on the uptake,” said Tap.

White and Scroll slowly pulled themselves out of bed, shaking their heads and groaning.

“What... what *happened* last night?” asked White.

“You two got very, *very* drunk,” said Tap, “and you made out.” The missionaries exchanged shocked looks. “That’s *about* as far as I remember,” she sighed in conclusion, a small smile on her face. “I figure you guys can show yourselves out. Just don’t let Barrel see you walking out or he’ll get suspicious.”

“Is something wrong with Barrel?” asked Scroll.

“No, he’s just, well...” Tap sighed. “He doesn’t like what I do to support us. A lot of ponies tease him about it: ‘Hey, tell your sister she’s a real great screw!’ and stuff like that.” She walked to the door and unlatched the bolt.

She walked down the stairs and found herself wishing that she hadn’t opted to build the tavern to two stories again. She dreaded what she’d have to put up with when she got downstairs.

She saw her tavern full of the usual regulars. She also saw the tree. Those two silly colts were going to help her get rid of that thing if she had to force them.

An angry customer was already haranguing Barrel for screwing up yet another order.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” asked the customer, pushing himself in Barrel’s face. “When I say ‘ale,’ I don’t mean ‘ginger ale!’”

Tap walked behind the counter and grabbed a bottle. “Here!” she said, slamming it down on the counter. “Now shut up and drink it or I’ll shove the bottle up your ass.”

“I keep saying ‘we’re not drinking,’” said Brother White. “And still, we end up drinking!”

The missionaries slowly trudged into the mission house before gazing in despair at the ramshackle condition of the room. The main room was piled high with unopened packages from the day before, scattered haphazardly. The ungiven presents served as a sordid reminder that once again, an endeavor of theirs had been met with lackluster success. Still, at least one pony had enjoyed his present: Clip was snuggled up in his box, sleeping.

Scroll stood there and smiled at the sleeping colt while White carried on into the kitchen, resuming his tirade. White made a beeline for the fridge, deciding that he needed some milk. He didn’t feel well enough to use his magic, so he simply opened the door and took out the carton with his mouth. He set the carton on the counter and went for the cupboard, all the while grumbling to himself.

“How can they like that stuff... it doesn’t even taste good...”

He poured himself a glass of milk and gulped it down. “Okay,” he said. “That’s... almost better.” He marched back into the mission house and surveyed the mess. “Okay, so we’ve got a mess to

clean up, then we have to go...” His eyes fell on something in the corner of the room: the disc launcher.

He shuddered at the memory of the device. He remembered how the pegasi came flying in with tornados, and how the earth ponies had fought back. They got the idea to throw metal discs at the tornados, where they whirled around and hacked up the soldiers inside the funnel. The end result was a shower of mangled body parts mixed with rain.

Now Quake had given White one of the disc launchers and offered him the choice of using it the next time the pegasus army attacked.

White narrowed his eyes. He’d made his choice.

“Scroll, let’s get ready,” White said. “We’ve got a lot of work to do.”

White grabbed a comb as he marched into the bathroom. He cringed at the sight of himself in the mirror, with his messy mane and crooked tie. *Nothing I can’t fix*, he decided as he ran the comb through his mane. The dry, tangled mane made it difficult to pull the comb through, leading White to wonder if he should take a shower. He decided against it; he needed to keep focused.

“All right!” he boomed as he walked back into the mission house.

“Whu…?” Clip said as he was roused from his sleep.

“Scroll,” White said as he walked up to the disc launcher, “any chance you could help me with this thing?”

“Uhhhh…” said Scroll.

White tried to hoist it onto his back, but it proved just a little too heavy for the unicorn. His legs nearly gave way, but Scroll rushed over to help him hold it up.

“Woah, hold on there…” said Scroll. “Maybe we should, um…” White’s eyes met with his. They were close, almost close enough to touch. “Maybe we should put it in the wheelbarrow?” he finished.

CLANG! went the device as it fell into the wheelbarrow. The launcher was so heavy that it left a dent in it.

“Alright! Good,” said White, hurriedly pushing the wheelbarrow out the door.

“Uhh, White?” asked Scroll. “What are we doing?”

“What we are doing, Brother Scroll,” explained White as he took a breath, “is formally declaring our intentions to General Quake.”

“You did that two days ago…”

“Different declaration, Scroll,” said White. Scroll noticed that White was pushing the wheelbarrow toward the docks. He had to wonder just what was going on inside White’s head. He considered the way White acted: theatrical; bombastic; feelings first, thoughts later.

Ships were coming into the harbor, as usual. There were some crates on the dock: the islanders’ exports. The ships were, of course, carrying supplies for the mission, and Quake was there as usual to see if there was anything he wanted first claim to.

“Hiya, Quakey!” called White. Quake turned his head around to look at him, his eyes wide and his face bearing an expression that said that if White called him that again he’d shove those discs up his ass, one by one. “So,” said White, stopping and leaning on the wheelbarrow, “you gave me this, this thingy here, right?”

Quake glared at him.

“Yeah, option of helping you shoot some of them wingers outta the sky, right?” White asked. “Well, I’ve come here to give you my formal reply!”

“White...” said Scroll.

“And?” Quake asked.

White walked next to the wheelbarrow and placed a hoof on it. Then, he pushed. All eyes were on the wheelbarrow as it rolled off the edge of the dock, splashing into the water.

Everypony watched in stark silence. Scroll was slack-jawed. White simply smiled smugly at the general, who glared back.

“You fucking little horner faggot fuck...” growled Quake.

“Scroll?” said White.

“Yes?”

“Run.”

Barrel gave a flustered sigh. Once again, he’d mixed up an order and the customer was yelling at him. He wasn’t paying attention, though.

“Are you even listening to me?” asked the customer.

“Hey!” Tap butted in. “You got a problem, you talk to me. Got it?”

“Just wanted my fucking cider...”

“Fine,” said Tap as she went to the stack of bottles. “Barrel,” she said, turning to her brother, “could you go down to the cellar and bring up some bottles?”

“Bottles of what?”

“Bottles of anything. Just get some bottles.”

Barrel didn’t ask any further questions and simply headed for the cellar door. In a way, he was slightly relieved that he had been given a task that he couldn’t possibly screw up.

He lit a candle at the bottom of the stairs and looked over the rack of bottles. After coming to the conclusion that Tap just did this to get him out of the way, he sighed and walked past the shelves of booze to the wall. He pried off a loose plank of wood to uncover a small box. He opened the box, counting a small pile of copper coins. He added a few more coins to the chest: his little “rainy day” fund for the tavern. He hoped that maybe, just maybe, this could be something he could do to help.

He returned to the rack and put a few random assorted bottles onto a tray before ascending the steps again. He got to the top and saw Tap navigating the customers with drink orders.

“I got the bottles,” Barrel said as he set the tray down.

“Uh-huh,” said Tap.

“Sis?” he asked.

“Uh-huh?”

“Could I go head over to the mission house?”

“For how long?”

“I dunno. Just to see how everything’s going?”

“Okay. Just be back before the lunch rush,” said Tap.

Barrel nodded and headed out the door. He paused for a moment and sighed before resuming on the route to the mission house.

“Hey, fatass!”

Oh, fuck no...

“Hey, fatass!” Buzz repeated. “What’re you doing? Off to a gay orgy?”

“I don’t think they do that,” said Barrel. “I think they’re monora... mon... like married or something.”

“Yeah, you’re too fat to get laid.”

“Go away, Buzz.”

“Hey, you ever see Scroll suck–”

“Is there something in ‘fuck off’ that you don’t get?” Barrel snorted. “And you *really* seem like you got ‘gay’ on the brain, y’know that?”

Buzz backed up a little, looking at the glaring fatass - that last sentence hit a nerve with him. He then spotted a smaller colt he could pick on and ran off. Barrel ignored him and walked up to the doors of the mission house.

White was slumped in a seat, staring up at the ceiling. Scroll sat next to him, holding a cold

water pack to his face with one hoof while his other hoof brushed aside the unicorn's bangs.

"Please, White, you scared the bejeezers out of me," said Scroll.

"Worth it..." said White. "Totally worth it."

"What happened?" asked Barrel. The missionaries looked at him.

"Oh, hi," said White.

"We had to run for our lives," said Scroll. "Quake got *mad*."

"He beat you up?" Barrel asked.

"What? Oh, no no no..." White said, laughing. "I just hit a low-hanging beam. Anyway, once Quake stops fuming we can go out and try some door-knocking. Scroll, why don't you see how the bread's coming and fix Clip some lunch?"

"Okay," said Scroll. He hopped off the seat and went into the kitchen.

"Ain't he the best?" asked White. "Good cook."

"I'm still learning!" Scroll called.

"So modest."

Barrel blinked. "So," he said, "anything I can help with?"

"Hmm," said White. "I'm not sure..." He saw Barrel, his head hanging low in self-pitying dejection. "Hey, you okay?"

"I keep screwing up," said Barrel. "Like I can't get anything right, and I'm always just... taking up space. I mean, it's just sometimes I feel so... so useless, like I'm just getting in the way, and I just want to help..."

White set down the water bottle, revealing a black eye. "Hey, you're a great guy. I mean, I can't imagine what Tap'd do without you."

"She probably wouldn't be a whore." A heavy silence set upon the room.

“Now...”

“It’s because of me,” said Barrel. “If she were on her own the tavern’d bring in enough money, but... with two of us, she has to, has to...”

White got up from the seat. “Barrel, it’s not your fault,” he said.

“Yes it is,” said Barrel. “If I could just... do something she wouldn’t have to go around...”

White needed to think of something and think of it fast. “Actually, Barrel,” he said, “I think I can think of something you could do...”

Barrel’s ears pricked up. “Really?”

“Yeah,” said White. “Any chance you could keep an eye on Clip while Scroll and I go out and try to feed the... unusually unhungry poor?”

“Well...” said Barrel, “I have to be back at the tavern for lunch, but I think I could bring Clip along?”

“Well, that’d be great,” said White.

“Oh, and Tap says you need to get over there and get the tree out.”

“Eheheeheheh...” White laughed nervously. “Right, we’ll do that.”

Scroll poked his head out the door. “White? Bread’s ready.”

“Good!” White exclaimed as he shot out of his seat. “Now let’s get it loaded into the wheelbarrow and...”

He stopped, having just remembered that they no longer had a wheelbarrow. “Well, I didn’t think that through.” He looked back at Scroll. “Well, we’ll fill up some saddlebags and take those.”

White got up and marched into the bunk room before emerging with several saddlebags. “Okay, you get the bread, I’ll get the books!”

White tossed some of the saddlebags to Scroll, where they draped over his head. Scroll retreated

into the kitchen. White proceeded to stuff his own saddlebags with books, before draping them over his back. He let out a soft ‘oof’ upon the realization that bags filled with books were actually quite heavy. Scroll emerged with his saddlebags bulging with loaves of bread. Clip followed out of the kitchen as well.

“Alright, Clip,” said White, “Scroll and I are gonna go do some mission work. Brother Barrel here’s gonna look after you, okay?”

“Okay,” said Clip. Barrel tried to smile and appear friendly.

“And Barrel?” said White. Barrel looked at him. “I’d just like to tell you that you’re a great friend. Remember that.” He turned back to Scroll. “Alright, let’s go.”

Barrel and Clip looked at each other.

“Do you like checkers?” asked Clip.

“You what?” asked Tap.

“I just agreed to look after Clip while the missionaries are doing stuff,” said Barrel. “I mean, he isn’t gonna be a problem, is he?”

Tap peered down at the little pink colt looking up at her. “Well...” She really didn’t like that Barrel had basically just volunteered both of them for foal-sitting duty, but on the other hoof... “Aw, alright.” She rubbed the colt’s head. “But if he needs food, it’s on those two.”

“I already had lunch,” said Clip.

“Whaddya know, those two *can* do something right,” said Tap. She turned to a customer, passing a bottle to him. “Barrel, could you bring up that cask of cider?”

“Alright,” said Barrel.

“Cider?” asked Clip. “I love cider!”

“Iiiiii don’t think that White and Scroll would approve of you drinking this stuff,” Tap laughed. “Wouldn’t it be funny to see them get mad?” she wondered out loud. “Guys like that are either really funny or really scary when they get angry.”

“Mister Quake gets mad a lot...” said Clip. “So does everypony else.”

“When the general gets mad, the roof shakes,” said Tap. “When he just cusses at you that means he’s in a *good* mood.”

The door swung open.

“Give me a fucking drink or I’ll bash someone’s head in,” snorted the general.

“See?” asked Tap. “Good mood.”

The general made a beeline for the counter, shoving one stallion off of his stool and sitting down on it.

“Get me a fucking whiskey,” said the general.

“What’s the matter today?” asked Tap. “Did the horner blind you with the glare from his teeth?”

“Bad word!” Clip exclaimed. The general stared at him.

Tap took a bottle of whiskey from behind the counter and placed it in front of the general.

“My little brother is taking care of their...” Tap tried to explain. “Their kid.”

“Forget it,” said Quake, taking the whiskey. “I don’t want to fucking think about those two faggots right now.”

Tap left the counter to tend to an order from the other side of the room. Barrel nervously walked around behind the counter, trying to take care of drink orders while avoiding the general’s scrutiny. Quake, however, was too preoccupied with his drink and leering at Tap to give a fuck about Barrel.

Barrel watched the general nervously. “Uhh...” he said as he saw the general chugging down whiskey. “I don’t think that’s good for you...r liver.”

“Fuck your liver.”

“Actually it seems a bit more like fuck *your* liver...”

Clip, meanwhile, had clasped his hooves over his ears in an effort to not hear the bad words.

Quake looked over Barrel. "'Bangable' doesn't really run in the family, does it?"

Tap returned to the counter and began sorting and pouring drinks. "Barrel," she said, "could you fetch some more beer from the cellar?"

Barrel nodded and walked off.

"Must be hard, keeping a tavern running and holding up your brother."

"We manage."

"The wingers are coming," said Quake. "They'll attack tomorrow." He turned to the rest of the bar. "You hear that? You'd all better get a gun or get out of the way when they hit."

Some ponies promptly cleared out. Others were surprisingly lax, or at least wanted to finish their drinks before running to their respective basements.

"Oh, fun," Tap said sarcastically. "I guess this means 'in case I die' sex?"

"I don't *die*."

"I was talking about your soldiers."

Quake snorted. His eyes, however, fell on the locket around her neck.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Huh?" Tap asked. "Oh, it's just something one of the missionaries gave me. It was a present for that Hearth's Warming thing."

Quake, having finished off the whiskey, slammed the bottle onto the counter, shattering it. Clip flinched in alarm.

"Sorry," grunted Quake. "Fighting wingers is fun. 'Specially when you break their wings. They start shitting themselves when that happens. Gimme a beer."

Tap complied with the order as Quake looked at the tree and the decorations. Clip, meanwhile, squirmed nervously in his seat. The general was a big scary dirt, after all. He smelled bad, too.

“So this thing,” he said. “I help myself to one of their shipments as usual, and what is it? Toys. Fucking toys.”

“I got a robot!” Clip piped.

“I don’t think they got any of *those*...” said Tap. “I don’t think they were really able to give anything away. Even if the foals in town didn’t already openly mock them, White being accused of being a foal molester–”

“I wouldn’t put it past them,” said Quake as he took a swig of beer.

“Oh, I would,” said Tap. “I mean, White’s *obviously* a virgin. At least...” She thought back to how she woke up that morning. “I think. He was then, anyway, that’s what’s important.”

Clip, unable to follow the conersation, had hopped down from the stool. He walked around the tavern, looking at the various dirt ponies who ignored him. He looked at the Hearth Warming decorations, wondering why in the world Tap would want to take them down. They were nice and pretty and the Brothers had worked hard on them.

Barrel emerged from the cellar with a hogshead on his back. “Is this enough?” he asked.

“Yes, Barrel,” said Tap.

“Big keg there,” said Quake. “How much did you water it down?”

“You see right through all the tricks, don’t you?” asked Tap.

“You bet your ass I do,” said Quake. “That’s why you have to learn a whole lot of other ‘tricks.’”

“Uhhhhhhhh...” said Barrel. That had to set some sort of record as the worst innuendo he’d heard in his life.

Tap took a rag and wiped the broken glass from the whiskey bottle off the counter.

“Barrel, make sure everything gets taken down to the cellar,” she said.

“Why?” asked Barrel.

“There’s going to be an attack tomorrow.”

Barrel stood there for a minute before turning to go up the stairs. Quake continued drinking his beer when the door opened.

“We’re here!” called Brother Scroll’s voice. “Came to help with the OH NO WE’RE SORRY!”

Scroll stared at the general, who looked at them with a look of dismissive disinterest.

White walked up behind Scroll and bumped into him. The unicorn, it so happened, now sported a second black eye. The general got out of his seat and brushed past them, but not without violently shoving the unicorn aside.

“Oof!” said White as he hit the floor. “Well, that could’ve gone worse.”

“The fuck happened to you?” asked Tap as she swept the broken glass into the garbage bin.

“Hit a beam,” said White.

“Twice?”

“Uh-huh,” said Scroll. “It was kinda awkward the second time...”

“Anyway,” said White, “we wanted to help you clean up the...”

He spotted Clip, who was standing on a table in the middle of some card players, staring down a very annoyed-looking earth pony.

“Cliiiiip!” said White, walking up to the group. “Sorry about that...” he apologized to the card players. “He likes climbing things.”

Scroll looked at the tree. “Y’know,” he said, “when you get things out you never think about putting them away.”

“Hindsight’s a bitch, ain’t it?” asked Tap.

“Uhh, something like that,” said Scroll as he set down one of his saddlebags.

White had walked up to the tree and began to take down the ornaments, floating them into the saddlebags. The other ponies were still clearing out, leaving only the card players and the usual unconscious bum.

“Did you enjoy the party?” Scroll asked.

“Yeah,” said Tap with a soft grin, “the show was nice.”

“Umm...” Scroll blushed. “Hey, where is everypony?”

There was a *bang* from upstairs. The few ponies remaining all looked up.

“What the...” said Scroll.

“Barrel?” Tap asked. “Barrel!” She bolted for the stairs, with Clip and the missionaries in pursuit.

Tap ran to Barrel’s room and threw the door open. Barrel was lying on the floor, clenching his jaw. A smoking gun lay next to him, and the window was open with a bottle sitting on the sill.

“What happened?” asked White as the two missionaries failed to get through the doorway at the same time. Clip merely hopped over their backs.

White looked down at the floor and saw the gun.

“You...” he grunted as he managed to finally get through the doorway.

“I tried to shoot the bottle...” said Barrel. “I think I broke a tooth.”

“Barrel,” said Tap, “what were you *doing?*”

White sat in front of Barrel.

“Open your mouth,” he said.

Barrel sheepishly sat up. “Well, there’s an attack coming and I wanted to...” Seeing an angry glint in White’s eyes, he shut up and opened his mouth. The fact that White had two black eyes served to make him appear somewhat unsettling.

“Barrel...” mumbled White. His horn lit up, lifting the broken tooth fragment off of the floor. “Barrel, Barrel, Barrel... We don’t do that.”

There was a glint of light as he mended the tooth. White got up and walked over to the gun. “No, no, no no no no no no no no no no no no no no *NO!* We don’t do that,” he repeated, lifting the gun into the air. “We don’t, we don’t use *these!*” He spat, throwing the gun out the window.

“That was mine...” said Tap.

White took a deep breath. “You said there’s an attack coming?”

“Tomorrow,” said Tap. “Quake told me.”

“Okay, we’re gonna have to round up everyone,” said White. “Get everypony we can into the mission house.”

“It’ll be all crowded again?” asked Clip.

“Think of it...” said Scroll, “as more of a party.”

“Because those always go well,” said Tap.

“Well, you’ll come, right?” asked Scroll.

Tap laughed. “Well, sure. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to get my gun.”

She turned to leave the room, but she saw something that stopped her. She noticed Scroll’s gaze, which was on his companion. White was standing at the window, glaring outside.

“Hey,” she said, “you okay?”

White slowly turned. Scroll bit his lip - the bruises on White’s eyes made his face seem sunken and gaunt.

“White?” Scroll asked.

“Scroll,” said White, “you get Clip back to the mission house quickly. I’ll meet up with you and we’ll try to round up anypony we can.”

“Got it,” said Scroll. “C’mon.”

“Okay!” said Clip. “Will we be baking pies again?”

“You bet!” said Scroll as the two left.

“I’ll help,” said Barrel, following the two.

Tap watched as the three left, before turning back to White. “I dunno how much luck you’ll have. They probably all still think you’re a foal-fiddler.”

“It doesn’t matter what they think,” said White quietly. “All that matters is what’s right.” He clenched his eyes shut. “And I know what’s right, and I’ll do it. And I’ll *always* do it.”

Tap looked at that strange, stupid white unicorn standing on the verge of tears. She remembered her gun out in the street below and briefly wondered if somepony had stolen it. Well, the general might give her another for the right price. Still, she had to look at the unicorn. After all that steadfast confidence, it seemed like he was desperately clinging to something.

“You really believe that, don’t you?” she asked. “I guess that’s what I like about you two. But y’know, I can’t help but feel that by the end of your little mission you’re gonna have a whoooooooole lotta regrets.”

White opened his eyes. “Regrets?” he asked. “If I can tell myself in full honesty that I did everything I possibly could, that I didn’t stray from my mission and that I managed to wring some true good out of my time here... Well, I nearly gave up once. I won’t do that again. I couldn’t look at myself in the mirror, or look Scroll in the eye again if I did that. I made a promise, Tap. A promise...”

He turned and headed out the door. Tap watched as he left, and Scroll’s voice drifted in through the open window, imploring anypony who would listen to come to the mission house to wait out the storm.

They wouldn’t listen.