

## Redemption of The Fireheart

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### Chapter 1

#### **The Everfree Forest, Early morning**

“... S.k.”

*What is that...*

“M.. Sp..k.”

*I swear, I hear someone calling me.*

“Mr. Spike! Are you alright?”

Opening his eyes and allowing the first light of morning to enter his vision, Spike squinted at the source of the inquiry and jolted awake, reaching for his cane as though he was being attacked. Twisting the ornament of the cane, he withdrew a dagger from it and pointed it at the figure, which elected to back away slowly. “Easy, Mr. Spike, I’m a friend. Pipsqueak, remember?”

Of course it was Pipsqueak. Who else would be out with a wanted ex-knight in the middle of the Everfree forest but a thief? Sheathing the knife, he apologized. “Sorry Pip, that dream still gets to me even after six months.”

“It’s quite alright Mr. Spike. It’s not quite morning unless I’ve had a knife pointed at me by a nightmare-prone dragon,” Pipsqueak chuckled.

A small grin found its way onto Spike’s lips. “Bite me.” This had been the morning routine of the pair since Pipsqueak found Spike washed up on the shore of a riverbed in the Everfree Forest.

“Oh, that reminds me, I went to town and I brought breakfast with me as well.” Pip dropped a sack to the ground and rooted through it, pulling out freshly baked bread and various fruit. He surfaced from the bag a moment later with a smaller satchel that he tossed to Spike.

With a quick investigation of the satchel, Spike found it contained several small gemstones. “Pip, you didn’t... I can’t accept this,” he said while attempting to hand the gems back to Pipsqueak.

"Well, I can't very well return them, now can I Mr. Spike? If I tried to do that, the pony I liberated these from would have me thrown in jail. Besides, it's too dangerous to go back to the middle district at the moment, so enjoy your breakfast Mr. Spike." Pipsqueak pushed the gems back towards Spike.

Hesitantly, Spike took out a ruby and bit into it. The rich flavor of the stone exploded across his tongue; the taste was reminiscent of cherry rock candy blended with red wine. Almost immediately after devouring the stones, his fatigue vanished. "Thanks Pip, I needed that. Although I'm not sure how I feel about eating stolen gems..."

"*Full* is a word one might associate with that predicament, Mr. Spike," Pipsqueak retorted while constructing a sandwich out of his bread and some of the fruits.

Spike popped a few more of the gems into his mouth before contributing further to the conversation. "Right, well I have a lot of nothing to accomplish today, and I'd prefer to get started as quickly as possible."

"Actually, if you don't mind Mr. Spike, I'd like to get in a sparring session today."

"Oh?"

"You see, there are some new Knights patrolling the Lower District, and unfortunately they seem to have quite the penchant for catching me in the act."

Spike chuckled at the thought of the suckers who were charged with maintaining order in the Lower District. It was a job that was often delegated down to Knights in Training, or K.I.T.s as they were referred to, and it was the single most loathed job in all of the Canterlot Knight Corps. Anypony who took pride in that job had to have a screw loose. "Alright Pip, hurry up with your breakfast and come on. I still have a lot of nothing to accomplish after I kick your flank." Spike stood up and grabbed his cane.

Pipsqueak stood up as well and, after tying a black bandanna around his neck and struggling to fit into a short-sleeved blue shirt, secured his cutlass to his back. To his surprise, Spike simply jammed the cane into the dirt of the forest. "Mr. Spike, I think you may be underestimating me, but hey, it's your choice. Don't complain if you get hurt." Pipsqueak faced off with Spike, who adopted an empty-handed fighting stance.

Spike knew better than to underestimate Pipsqueak; they had been sparring together for the past three months as well as getting into scuffles with some of the other inhabitants of the forest. Spike limbered up before shouting to his opponent, "Have at you, Pipsqueak!"

Pipsqueak took off like a bullet, rushing at Spike, who lowered his center of gravity,

bracing himself for a tackle that never came. Instead, Pipsqueak ceased his momentum a foot away and took advantage of Spike's adamant stance by pivoting and driving both of his hind legs into Spike's chest, knocking him off-balance before pivoting again and lunging. Spike recovered, took note of Pipsqueak's lunge, and responded by using the palm of his left claw to deflect him, following up with a quick right hook.

Spike exploited this new opening with an uppercut to Pipsqueak's chin. "This'll finish you!" he shouted, lifting his leg to deliver a kick, only to find Pipsqueak had recovered faster than he'd anticipated. Pipsqueak ducked the blow as it sailed over his head and threw his whole body at Spike's only grounded leg, toppling the dragon onto the ground.

Recovering quickly, Pipsqueak reared up on his hind legs and stomped down hard on his target, who was determined not to stay on his back. Spike proved his resiliency and adaptability by seizing both of Pipsqueak's forehooves, pulling him down and pressing his legs hard into the colt's abdomen, resulting in Pipsqueak flying off of him about three feet. Spike recovered to his feet and rushed over to his grounded target, jumping to give himself the height advantage, but Pipsqueak anticipated this.

Pipsqueak rolled to his hooves, began galloping, and proceeded to lunge at the airborne dragon.

*I got him!* Pipsqueak thought, until he turned around and bit down for the weapon on his back. A weapon that he soon found wasn't there. It seemed that Spike had picked some things up from living with Pipsqueak for three months. "You missing something there?" Spike waved the sword in the air and threw it blade first into the ground next to him.

It was quite an accomplishment to be able to steal from a thief, but there would be no besting of the master today. "I could ask you the same, Mr. Spike." Pipsqueak brandished a silver pocket watch with the Knight Corps insignia of a red star on a black shield, as well as a small black satchel that Spike recognized as his wallet.

"I keep forgetting how good you are at that, it's almost annoying."

"Shall we call it a match then, Mr. Spike?" Pipsqueak asked, trotting closer to Spike.

Spike nodded as he stepped over. "Well... yeah, I guess we can call it a mat— WHOA, think fast!" Spike leapt at Pipsqueak and grabbed his neck, whipping the colt to the ground. Immediately afterward, he locked his legs around Pipsqueak's hind legs. "Say it. Say it, Pipsqueak!"

Pipsqueak tried to escape, but he couldn't after Spike's cheap shot. "Alright, alright, uncle! Now will you let go?" Pipsqueak pleaded.

Releasing Pipsqueak's leg, Spike took this opportunity to flaunt his victory. "Looks like I win again, eh Pip?"

"Only because you cheated..." Pipsqueak grumbled under his breath. He turned his attention from the gloating dragon to his breakfast from earlier only to find two of his fellow forest dwellers in ratty worn suits rooting through his spoils. He recognized them as Snips and Snails.

"Well, good morning to you as well, I suppose. Is there any reason you two are stealing my stolen breakfast?"

Snips and Snails froze for a moment and nervously turned to face the source of the inquiry. Snails elected to speak for the two. "Oh uhhh... we were just, ummm..."

"Liberating you from all these heavy fatty foods, Mr. Pip! You certainly wouldn't want to ruin your athletic physique, would you sir?" Snips sold the excuse with all the demeanor of a snake-oil salescolt. Interestingly enough, according to the stories that he told Pipsqueak, that was the business plan that got him banished from Canterlot. His whole supply caught fire after an incident with soon-to-be-ex-fireworks salescolt and partner in crime, Snails. As it turns out, any idea involving the words "shooting fireworks" and "snake-oil" is likely to get you banished from your hometown.

"Right, well if you two were hungry, you could've just asked." Pip dug into the sack and tossed the pair a loaf of bread and two apples.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Pipsqueak, sir. You are both a gentlecolt and a scholar!"

"If I were a scholar, I don't think I'd be here right now, Snips," Pipsqueak joked sardonically. "Please, stay and join us for breakfast."

"Don't mind if we do, but we have something to discuss with Sir Spike first."

Spike walked over and indulged in the conversation while leaning on his cane. "Don't call me 'sir', it's just Spike now. What do you need from me, Snips? I've a terrible amount of nothing to accomplish today and I'd like to get started as soon as possible."

"Right Si—err.. Spike, we have a—"

Snails cut Snips off mid-sentence. "We need an escort into the Upper District of Canterlot. We have a destination in mind, but there's a high chance that we may get caught by the Knights, so we need a scapegoat just in case— Oh, I wasn't supposed to read that card out loud, was I?" The only reply he received was a swift backhoof across the snout from Snips.

If all it would have taken was a hint of sarcasm to kill Snips' hope, Spike was about to commit genocide. "Scapegoat? Really? That's all the reason I need to go marching about Canterlot like an idiot. Why don't we go ahead and paint up some signs saying: 'Here's the biggest traitor your country has ever seen'. Oh! We can have a parade and cake!"

"Ahem," Pipsqueak interjected, "I think it would be polite to allow Mr. Snips and Mr. Snails to finish their pitch."

The dragon crossed his arms and turned his snout upwards before replying. "Don't be surprised when I say no."

Snips shuffled his hooves and continued. "Errmm... Well, like Snails blathered out mindlessly." Snails grinned sheepishly and a piece of half-chewed apple fell out of his mouth. "Charming... We need an escort into Canterlot's Upper District to embark on a glorious business venture that can't fail. However, seeing as we were banished, and our contact within the city is deathly afraid of the Everfree forest, we have to sneak in."

"Alright, but what does this have to do with me?"

"Well, you must understand that Snails and I lived in the lower districts, and neither of us know the area of the Middle District very well, and we have absolutely no experience in the Upper District, but—"

"I do, right?"

Snails responded with a plucky "Yup!"

Spike took a moment to mull this over. Grabbing the satchel of gems from earlier, he popped a sapphire into his mouth and began to chew. Finally reaching a conclusion, Spike turned to face the two business unicorns. "Look, I understand you guys need my help, but I just don't think that's such a good idea. If the Knight Corps recognizes any of us, they'll throw you two in prison, and probably execute me. I can't die just yet, not until I make Blueblood pay."

Snips and Snails exchanged a look at the mention of the Supreme Commander of the Knight Corps. "Blueblood, you say?"

"Yeah, that bastard betrayed me and took everything I ever loved and worked for."

"You know," said Pipsqueak, "I think I heard something about him when I went into town earlier: something about a wedding to some dressmaker from the Lower District."

Spike's eyes widened upon hearing this; it must have been a coincidence but he had to be sure. "What did you say?"

"I heard some ponies in town gossiping about it, Blueblood and some fancy name... I think it means hard to find, but I can't remember it. Gemity? Elusivity?"

"Rarity?"

"Right, that was it: Rarity. I kept hearing that the wedding was in two days. Say, how did you know, Mr. Spike?"

"Call it a hunch." Spike ran to his pile of belongings, withdrawing a jacket and an old fedora Pipsqueak had stolen on one of his many trips through town.

Snatching the tattered scarf from around Snails' neck, he asked, "How soon did you gents intend on departing to Canterlot? It seems I have some business there as well and I may just be able to accompany you." The statement raised the spirits of the two half-witted business-colts.

Pipsqueak grinned at the dragon's sudden change in demeanor. "What happened to all that nothing you had to accomplish?"

"There's always time to do nothing, I figure a little something won't cut into that. Are you coming with, Pipsqueak?"

"Well, I suppose somepony has to keep you out of trouble, so I may as well... I also have some... 'business' to take care of in Canterlot, among other things." Pipsqueak squirmed and struggled into a multi-pouched shoulder harness, stowing two daggers away in it.

"By 'business' you wouldn't happen to mean appropriating goods from local shopkeepers and hardworking jewelers, would you?"

"You ate well this morning didn't you, Mr. Spike?" Pipsqueak draped a cloak over his shoulders to hide the harness.

"...Touché"

"And besides, I think one of the local fillies fancies me." Pipsqueak said proudly.

"Well aren't you just a heart-breaker?"

Pipsqueak's face flushed a fierce crimson. "Well, I guess—"

"You should write her a letter," Spike teased.

"I couldn't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Because—"

"You should just go for it, eh?"

Turning their attention to Snips and Snails, Spike asked, "Gentlecolts, shall we proceed?"

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### **Canterlot: Lower District Gate, Mid-Morning**

The gate to Canterlot's Lower District was, as usual, poorly guarded. The only protection offered at the entrance to this level of the city came from a scraggly-looking senior knight and a couple of nervous-looking Knights in Training, who were learning the hard way just what gate-guarding duty of the Lower District entailed.

Several large stallions and harsh faced mares passed in and out of the gates unregulated, casting dirty looks upon the K.I.T.s. One made the mistake of actually attempting to perform his duties by asking a particularly large workhorse stallion pulling a cart for his business license. All the poor colt received for his trouble was a wad of chewing tobacco fresh from the stallion's mouth spat upon his face.

As Spike and his companions crossed the bridge, they wordlessly moved past the young knight who began to weep. Under any other circumstances Spike would have attempted to comfort the young knight, but at the moment, it was mutually understood that the less attention the party drew to themselves, the better.

The gate led right into Canterlot's Lower District marketplace where various stands, tents and shops were splayed about haphazardly around the homesteads which looked so decrepit they may have been condemned and rebuilt had the city cared about the well being of this district. The street was filthy and covered with trash and beggars, and though it was a perfect sunny day, the sky around this district seemed somehow darker than the area outside. The only signs of life in this district came from the sea of ponies, diamond dogs, gryphons, donkeys and cows going about their daily lives in an otherwise bland and uninspired setting. Even if Spike was the only dragon in the district, with his disguise he could still be just as easily confused for a maldeveloped diamond dog in this crowd.

Snails broke the silence that had been lingering around the group since they left the forest. “Well, it’s good to be back again...sorta.”

“I know what you mean,” responded Spike. “Regardless, we have to remain inconspicuous lest we draw the attention of any Knights— Oh come on, Pip, really?” Spike spotted Pipsqueak reaching for the wallet of a passerby. To Pipsqueak, not drawing attention to oneself meant reverting back to the behavior that got him chased out of Trottingham.

“What? Old habits die hard, Mr. Spike.” Pip grinned innocently and Spike simply facepalmed.

Resuming their path through the Lower District, Spike continued, “Well, please try to show some restraint while we’re in here. Remember: we don’t want to draw the attention of the Knights just because you can’t keep your hooves out of—”

A loud gruff voice told Spike that his attempts to sway Pipsqueak’s behavior were in vain. “Hey, just what do you think you’re doing with my wallet, little chump?” Indeed, Pipsqueak’s amazing pickpocketing skills could be foiled by a simple wallet chain, and as proof of the stallion’s accusation, Pipsqueak continued to hold the wallet in his hoof, not even bothering to drop it so he could at least attempt to feign ignorance.

His corresponding excuse showed Spike the futility of maintaining a low profile when Pipsqueak was in the group. “Umm... making sure the chain was made to withstand Sticky-Hoof Syndrome? It passes!” Pip gave a stupid grin to the stallion who stared daggers at him with a very unamused look.

Before the stallion could open his mouth to threaten Pipsqueak, Snips and Snails ran up, shoved Pip to the side and began bombarding the stallion with various sales pitches while presenting random junk they picked up off the ground. Not missing a beat, Spike grabbed Pip by the tail and nonchalantly dragged him away from the situation through the crowd. “You just can’t control that habit can you?”

“Seems that way, Mr. Spike.” Pipsqueak held up four more wallets.

Facepalming for the second time in a three minute span, Spike began to chastise Pipsqueak while the colt scrambled to his feet. “You know there’s this thing called self-restraint Pip, maybe you coul—”

“Hold it right there, thief!” The demand rang out through the marketplace and everypony present ceased moving and began searching around for the source of the voice. Eventually, the crowd was fixated on three fillies in ragged worn-out armor who began to trot slowly in Spike’s direction. Spike hoped that they would change direction or that their eyes would drift somewhere

else, but something in his gut told him that this was destined to happen. Spike pulled up his scarf and goggles to better hide his identity, just in case; the three weren't focused on him, but he took the extra precaution to avoid being discovered.

Halting fifteen meters from Spike and Pipsqueak, the orange pegasus filly spoke. "Yeah, you're the thief from this morning! Applebloom, isn't that the same colt?"

The yellow filly wearing greaves on her legs, a traditional knight's helmet, and a similar pocket-watch spoke up next. "Yeah, Ah think it is, Scootaloo. What do you reckon Sweetie Belle?"

"That's him alright." Sweetie Belle concurred.

Scootaloo yelled again. "You're under arrest by order of the Knight Corps for multiple counts of lar—larce— larc—"

Applebloom stepped in to assist her struggling friend. "It's pronounced 'larceny', Scoots."

"Whatever! You stole this morning and ran away and we're not gonna let you escape twice!"

Sweetie Belle, egged on by the authority her friends were exuding, chipped in her two bits as well. "Yeah, what they said!" As Sweetie Belle spoke, all Pipsqueak could hear was a rhythmic hum.

Scootaloo spoke up again. "Now, you can give yourself up willingly orrr...."

Scootaloo nudged Applebloom, who replied with a confused, "What?"

"Come on, Applebloom, you're supposed to say it, and then we strike the poses!"

"Say what?" Applebloom asked while shying away from her friend.

Scootaloo facehoofed. "Ugh... Or Face the Wrath of: **The Cutie Mark Crusaders, Knights in Training!**" Scootaloo shouted jumping upwards enthusiastically.

"Ah don't recall agreein' to that Scoots, I think you might have ran that by Sweetie Belle."

"I don't remember anything about any poses." Sweetie Belle said.

"Ugh, never mind we'll work on it later. Look, either get down, or get put down kid!" Scootaloo spat at Pipsqueak.

“Yeah, what she said!” Sweetie Belle chimed in.

Spike turned to face his partner who showed no sign of fear or concern, just a vacant admiring stare directed at Sweetie Belle, and came to a horrid realization: “Oh for Celestia’s sake Pip, is that the local filly you were talking about?”

Pipsqueak nodded his head without breaking focus.

“Hey, you must be his ac-acco-accom—”

Applebloom rolled her eyes as she finished the word for her struggling friend.  
“Accomplice, Scootaloo.”

“Yeah, that word! You’re under arrest too!”

Sweetie Belle once again threw in her two bits. “Yeah, give up!” Pipsqueak sighed again and his tongue hung out of his mouth slightly.

Spike grinned underneath the scarf, half because of Pipsqueak’s idiocy, and half because the dedication to the job these three exuded reminded him of when he first started with the Knight Corps. Sensing that a fight was inevitable, Spike slapped Pip in the back of the head, snapping the colt back into reality. “Pipsqueak, I think we might have to beat them here, they don’t look like they would give up a pursuit easily.”

“You’re right about that, Mr. Spike. I recall them being rather persistent this morning.” Pipsqueak used his mouth to withdraw a dagger from his holster.

“Persistent, eh? Then this shouldn’t be *too* boring.” Spike twisted the handle of his cane twice and it separated into two sections that were connected by a chain. He referred to this particular form of the cane as a ‘nunchuck’ and took a little bit of pride in knowing that since ponies didn’t have thumbs, only he and select few bipedal species could use these effectively.

Scootaloo took note of the change in demeanor her targets presented. “So, you chumps want to fight? I was getting bored anyway! Let’s see how long you last against theeee...” She nudged Applebloom again and looked at her expectantly.

Again her only response was a confused “What?”

“Never mind,” Scootaloo sighed, “Let’s do this!” Scootaloo reached a hoof into a pouch on her holster and threw several small darts at Spike and Pip. Spike took immediate action and began whipping his own weapon around his body quickly and fluidly. Each time it came around faster and harder, allowing him to whip down every one of the projectiles that flew in his direction.

On the enemy's side, Sweetie Belle reached into her saddlebags and dropped a pair of horseshoes with eight inch claws protruding from the base to the ground. She stepped into the horseshoes and, after ensuring they were a snug fit, she nodded to Applebloom. The two galloped towards their targets using Scootaloo's ranged assault to cover their approach. "Hey, Sweetie Belle, you take the colt, and I'll take the weirdo!"

"Got it, Applebloom!" Sweetie Belle yelled as she charged right at a bewildered Pipsqueak who couldn't believe his luck: the filly of his dreams was headed straight for him.

*What do I do? What do I do? Uhhh, ask her name!* Pipsqueak's musings were cut short as a claw missed his face by mere inches. "Um, hi, I'm Pipsqueak, what's your name?" Sweetie Belle ignored the idle chatter and continued lashing out at her target "Silent type, huh?" Pipsqueak leapt backwards as Sweetie delivered a straight thrust towards his head. "Or maybe you're just not a conversationalist. I'm willing to bet it's the latter." Pipsqueak ducked another swipe of the claws, and noted that Sweetie Belle's fighting style relied on the use her hind legs for support and movement while her clawed forelegs swiped the air in a frenzy. "Wow, you've got an incredible sense of balance, do you dance?" A claw took off a small tuft of his mane clean off. "Maybe you can give me lessons some time?"

"Agggh!" Sweetie Belle roared in flustered frustration from Pipsqueak's incessant chatter. "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!" With each iteration of the phrase, the filly's swings only grew in intensity and force. "Why can't I hit you!?"

"Because, I'm dodging your attacks," Pipsqueak teased. "If you want, I'll stand still, but you have let me treat you to dinner first!"

"I'll kill you!"

*She's got the voice of an angel.* Pipsqueak mused to himself as he drew his sword and parried a wild claw swing.

Spike was holding his own against Applebloom, who was proving to be a handful at the moment. The greaves she wore on her legs were quite bothersome, as her impeccable blocking skills were the bane of his nunchuck swings. Spike whipped the weapon in an arc at Applebloom again, only this time instead of it being deflected, Applebloom evaded the strike by ducking and spinning around in a circle, allowing her tail to wrap around Spike's feet. Standing up quickly, she pulled Spike's feet from underneath him and he hit the ground while she leapt backwards.

The sudden retreat surprised Spike; normally a close quarters combatant would try to keep the range to a minimum. As he sat up, he saw Scootaloo hurl another volley of darts at him. Thinking quickly, he used his tail to push himself just out of the path of the darts. Upon

recovery, he was greeted by Applebloom, who took a galloping start and slammed her helmet into his ribs, knocking him back a couple of meters. *I'm going to feel that when this is over...* he thought, gripping a claw to his side to alleviate some of the pain. *I need a more effective weapon against her.*

Spike held the nunchucks with both claws and stretched them until he heard a click and felt tension on the chain. This allowed the two ends to join together and reform his cane. Rotating it once, he pulled the cane apart to form his always dependable bo staff. Another analysis of his opponents told him that the staff alone wouldn't cut it, but he didn't want to go into any of the lethal features of the staff against a couple of K.I.T.s. He held the staff close to his face with one claw and used the other to slightly lower his scarf. Taking a deep breath, he focused, spat his green flames upon the staff, and watched as it caught fire in a matter of seconds. He pulled the scarf back up, observing the burning staff he now held. *This should be enough to deal with them.*

Scootaloo hurled another volley of darts, and Spike responded by testing out his burning staff with a light swing. All of the darts vanished in a plume of smoke the moment they touched the green flame, and the shocked look on Scootaloo's face made this moment all the sweeter; Spike was ready to mount his retaliation.

"Big deal, so you set yer fancy stick on fire. That doesn't mean you'll beat me!" Apple Bloom showed absolutely no fear as she charged at Spike with another head rush, Spike sidestepped her charge, and struck her upon the helmet with the burning staff as she barrelled through. "It's gonna take a lot more than a weak attack and a fancy light show to—"

"Applebloom, your helmet, you've got to take it off!" Scootaloo shouted from her position

"Scoots, just what are you talkin' about? Ah can't take off my helmet right now, Ah'm in the middle of a fight!"

"It's on fire, Applebloom! Lose the helmet! Now!"

"Fire?" Applebloom removed her helmet only to discover that it was engulfed by green flames, and slowly dissipating into ash.

"It's starting to look like this fight is in my favor now." Spike leapt, striking her upon the flank with the burning staff. Apple Bloom's body was enveloped in the green flames and as she kicked and screamed on the ground, she soon suffered the same fate as her helmet.

"Wh-what did you do to Apple Bloom?"

Ignoring the question, Spike turned and sprinted towards Scootaloo.

“Oh, so you want a piece, huh?” Scootaloo pulled something else out of her holster: it looked like a piece of metal with a ninety degree bend in it. Thinking nothing of it, Spike closed the distance as Scootaloo threw it at him. Reacting quickly, he jumped over the thing as it buzzed underneath him and prepared to strike Scootaloo as well when he heard a familiar buzzing sound from behind and something struck him in the back, hard. Spike fell to the ground, but not before hurling the staff like a javelin, catching Scootaloo in the chest. The green flame engulfed her as well and, like Apple Bloom, she turned into ash and vanished.

Pipsqueak could see that his idea of fighting defensively was starting to wear out Sweetie Belle, whose claw attacks had grown sloppy and sluggish. Pipsqueak took this opportunity to rush in, parrying his exhausted opponent's half-flanked swings with his knife while he planted his right fore-hoof behind her left hind leg and swept her to the ground. Backing off slightly, Pipsqueak decided not to follow up his attack because he didn't believe in going all out against the opposite sex.

His now-recovering opponent, on the other hand, had no qualms with finishing what she started. Sweetie Belle galloped and leapt, claws first, at Pipsqueak, who had dropped his guard and lowered his weapons in hopes that she was too tired to fight any more. Preparing for the searing pain that was about to ensue, Pipsqueak flinched and readied his body for the imminent cut... *any moment now... it's gonna hurt...* but nothing came, with the exception of a scream emanating from Sweetie Belle. As Pipsqueak opened his eyes, he saw that his crush was on fire, more specifically green fire, and could only watch in horror as his beloved assailant was reduced into a pile of ash before him.

Spike whipped the staff against the air and the flames extinguished themselves. “You alright, Pip?”

“You just... You just...”

“Transported them somewhere that isn't here?”

“What was that, Mr. Spike? I couldn't hear you over the sound of their tormented screams.”

“Uhh...Pip, I didn't kill them.”

“Mr. Spike, with all due respect you just set all three of them on fire and they burned into nothing. The filly of my dreams... I didn't even get her name.” Pipsqueak sank slowly to his haunches as a wave of melancholy swept over him.

“Well actually, it's a bit embarrassing to say, but my fire doesn't actually burn things.”

“What? But I just saw you set them on fire!” Pipsqueak protested.

"No, you just saw me transport them... somewhere." Spike scratched his chin as he pondered the fates of three fillies.

It took a moment for Pipsqueak to allow that realization to set in; Spike had done it in front of him numerous times before. "So where did you send them?"

"Somewhere in the Middle District, I think."

"What do you mean 'you think'?"

Spike shrugged. "Well, it's not like I stuck a directional seal on them or anything. They could be anywhere as far as I know. Hopefully the Middle District. Now come on, we've got to get going."

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### **Lower District Moat: Mid-Morning**

A flash of green light was all Applebloom saw before the world came back into focus and she found herself in an unfamiliar environment. The area around her was dark and wet, and she found it hard to breathe. Searching around her environment, she found an impossible source of light that was somehow below her feet, and her nose began to burn as it filled up with some strange substance.

Applebloom finally pieced together where she was: An unidentified body of water. Facing the light, she began to kick and swim as hard as her hooves would allow her to move. As she surfaced, she took a massive breath of air, and found that her present location was a moat. Not terribly long after that she was joined by Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle, who both emerged from green flashes beneath the water as well.

The three swam to land and Apple Bloom was the first to break the silence. "I can't believe it! Our first non-supervised patrol, and we screw it up big-time. And to top it off, he destroyed my helmet! This is downright humiliating," Applebloom whined.

Scootaloo draped a comforting hoof around her downtrodden and soaking wet friend. "We got beaten by a purple diamond dog with a crazy green fire staff. I don't recall receiving any lessons about what to do in that situation from Ms. Cheerilee. If we never see that guy again, it'll be too soon."

"But he was kinda cool!" Sweetie Belle piped up optimistically.

“Yeah, but not as cool as Rainbow Dash!”

“Ah still say Applejack is cooler—”

“Of course you’d say that, she’s your sister!”

“Yeah, well I’m willing to bet that my sister could take Rainbow Dash any day of the week!”

Sweetie Belle cut in before the argument got too heated, “Girls, I think we should report what just happened to Lady Trixie.”

There was a brief silence as Scootaloo and Applebloom stared at each other, before Scootaloo said, “I don’t think Ms. Trixie is cool at all.”

“You’re only sayin’ that ‘cause she ain’t no Rainbow Dash! You’re bein’ too biased!” Applebloom retorted

“Don’t use words I don’t know the meaning of!”

Sweetie Belle only sighed as she listened to the bickering of her friends. She reached into her saddle bags to retrieve her pocket watch, and a small note fell out. She didn’t recall ever placing it in her bag. Curious, she opened it to inspect its contents, and grew more flustered and agitated with every line she read, before finally crumpling it up and tossing it into the moat with an infuriated huff.

“Sweetie Belle, what was that all about?” Scootaloo asked.

“Yeah, I ain’t never seen you act like that before. What was that note all about?” Applebloom inquired.

“It’s nothing!” Sweetie Belle shouted, her voice cracking as she spoke, “Come on, let’s go! The faster we report this, the faster we can get those two weirdos arrested!”

“All right, sounds like a plan to me! I’ll tell Lady Rainbow Dash!”

“I’m gonna tell my big sis’ and big brother!” declared Applebloom.

“I’ll tell... umm... Lady Trixie?”

“Sounds good to me! Meet us in the Middle District later, all right Sweetie Belle?”

“You got it girls!”

“All right, Cutie Mark Crusaders! Let’s move out!”

As the three ecstatic fillies galloped back towards the lower district entrance gate, the note began to unfurl and the ink began to run and stain the water as the moat laid claim to its latest visitor.

*Dear Ms. Guard Filly,*

*When I saw you this morning, something told me that in my career as a thief, the greatest treasure that I would ever steal would be your heart.*

*Yours Truly,*

*Pipsqueak*

[The adventure continues](#)