

The Creature That Came to Ponyville

A My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic fanfiction by Friendly Uncle

Part 3: The Molting

"Twilight, rise and shine."

"Mmmppphh... five more minutes mommy..."

"... oh my. Twilight, I never knew you felt that way about me. I'm not that much older than you, but if you really want to call me 'mom' that's perfectly fine."

"...buh?"

Twilight Sparkle cracked an eyelid open. Somewhere in the distance she could make out what looked like a pink and yellow blob. Something smelled wonderful.

"... Fluttershy...? what...?"

"Oh, I came over to talk to you but you were sleeping so I didn't want to bother you but you looked like you haven't been taking very good care of yourself so I tidied up a little and I made you some breakfast, I hope you don't mind."

Twilight opened her other eye and focused on the delicious smell that was coming from directly in front of her. A large platter had been placed in front of her on her desk, containing a bowl of granola, some toast, a glass of juice, and what appeared to be a fresh fruit salad.

Her stomach rumbled ominously.

"Well... gosh Fluttershy, thanks... it all looks... so..."

Twilight's tongue came into contact with a slice of strawberry, and flavor exploded in her mouth.

"OMNOMNOMNOM."

Fluttershy blushed as Twilight dove in.

"Goodness, looks like I was right! Eat all you like Twilight, there's plenty more where that came from."

"I could kiss you!"

"... oh dear. You must still be half asleep. I'll make you some coffee."

Twilight continued to steadily munch her way through Fluttershy's cooking, pausing only to throw back a cup of steaming hot java. Fluttershy was briefly alarmed, but Twilight seemed immune to searing coffee, so she just sat and smiled because she was helping.

"As much as I appreciate this," Twilight Sparkle said as she finally finished, falling back into her seat and rubbing her delightfully full tummy, "I don't think you came all the way into Ponyville just to feed me Fluttershy. What's up?"

"Oh, well, I was wondering if I could check out a couple of books, actually."

Twilight perked right up.

"Really!? That's great! You'll be the first pony to check out a book since I moved in!"

"I will?" Fluttershy blinked, "the very first? But you've been living here for months now!"

"Yeah, I guess most of the ponies in Ponyville aren't much for literature."

Twilight's ears drooped. Fluttershy quickly stepped over and pulled her upright.

"Well then, let's get started?"

"...yeah! Let's do this! The library doesn't have a huge fiction section, but most of what we have is romance, so..."

Fluttershy was staring at her. Twilight smiled, a little uncertainly.

"...why did you assume I wanted a romance novel?"

"...um... you just... seemed the type... to... I mean, what were you looking for, Fluttershy?"

"I need a book on exotic creatures," said Fluttershy, letting her mane fall in front of her face to hide her blush.

"I'm not sure we have anything on animals that you wouldn't just know already," said Twilight uncertainly, heading for the shelves.

"Well, I know a lot about local animals," said Fluttershy with just a hint of satisfaction, "but what I need is a book on foreign or magical creatures. Monsters maybe? I found something strange in the river today, and I'm trying to figure out what it could be."

"Really?" Twilight grinned as she pulled down a couple of tomes with her telekinesis, "what was it like?"

"I've never even heard of anything like it before. It looks like a snake crossed with some kind of insect, and it has the strangest head I've ever seen, shaped like a banana. And it doesn't seem to have any eyes. A lot of teeth, though. I assume it's a carnivore, but I left it some grass too, just in case."

Twilight frowned as she cleared away a couple of astronomy manuals and dropped a stack of books on rare and magical creatures on the table in their place.

"You mean it's still alive? And you just left it in your house? Isn't that a little dangerous?"

"Oh, it's not too bad. I told all of my little woodland friends to stay outside until I got back home, just in case."

"I mean dangerous for you, Fluttershy. I know you have a way with animals, but if it eats meat..."

Fluttershy giggled.

"It's barely as long as my arm, Twilight. Even if it does like the taste of pony, it couldn't possibly eat a whole one."

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The creature came to. The nearest approximation that its species had to confusion swirled through its tiny phallic skull. Gone was the cold, pounding current of the river. It was covered in a soft cloth and nesting on a cushion in a small box placed in the corner of a large room. The creature slithered out of the box and was confronted with two bowls. A swift investigation revealed that while one was filled with dead plant matter, the other contained fresh carrion.

It had survived the river, somehow. It must have been moved here by something else. Something that had built a small nest for it and shared a kill. That made no sense.

Hissing softly in sheer bafflement, the creature investigated the room. It found a number of small warrens and burrows built into the walls, and all of them scented of food, but there was no live prey to be found. The most powerful smell in the place was a scent like a large prey animal combined with a kind of flora, but the creature's limited knowledge failed to put that information into any kind of context.

The fact that it had been cared for could mean only one thing, that there were others of its kind nearby. But there were no pheromones or secretions, and this room had not even begun to be converted into a proper hive. It had to have been taken by some other kind of thing, most likely the prey animal that smelled of flowers. But why?

Pondering these questions in its limited way, the creature made its way back to the bowl full of food and began to eat. No matter how or why it had come to this place, it still knew what it had to do. It could feel its body already preparing itself for the changes to come. Ultimately, it did not matter how the creature had survived, or how it had come to be here, or why it was being provided with nutrients.

All would be consumed.

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"Oh dear," said Rarity, staring up at the dark expanse of the Everfree forest. "Why did I agree to this again?"

"Because there's a pony in trouble!" said Rainbow Dash, flying slow circles around the white and purple unicorn, "Probably. Maybe. And that means it's our job to fly to the rescue! Or gallop, in Applejack's case. Or... I guess... sort of mince, if we're talking about you."

"I am fully capable of a good gallop," said Rarity, pouting. "I just prefer not to on most occasions. There's no reason for a lady to push herself into a full gallop when a sedate canter or maybe a brisk trot would do."

"Well then get trottin'," said Applejack, passing the two ponies and continuing down the path. "We gotta get to Zecora's place and see if she's seen Dollars to Donuts around, and if she hasn't we need to do some searchin'."

"I can do that on my own, though," said Rainbow Dash.

"In the forest?" asked Rarity, raising an eyebrow, "above the canopy where you can't see anything under the trees, or below it where you could decapitate yourself on a low-lying branch?"

"Besides," said Applejack quickly, before Rainbow Dash could start yelling, "the forest's too dangerous for one pony on her own, that's the whole reason we're out lookin'. Now between the three of us I figger we can take just about anything the forest's got. Anything we need to fight I can buck, anything we can't fight Rarity can charm, and if one of us gets hurt Rainbow can go for help."

"Hey! How come I'm the one running for help!? I can kick just as much flank as either of you!"

"Yeah, but you're better'n we are at runnin'."

"... well... that... that's not the point..."

Rainbow Dash's face contorted as she tried to figure out if Applejack had just insulted her or not.

"Oh my, this may be easier than we thought."

The pegasus and the earth pony blinked and turned to where Rarity was pointing. Trudging towards them down the path out of Everfree was a familiar cloaked figure, carrying a large bundle over her back. As they approached, the figure threw back her hood to reveal Zecora, the forest's resident zebra.

"Glad am I, pony friends, to meet you on this road,
for I fear to enter Ponyville alone with such a load."

"No worries Zecora," said Applejack, "we can help ya carry it if ya need, but it sure is a good spot of luck we ran into you like this, I was hoping you could answer a question for me right quick."

"Alone my burden I may safely hold,
although it makes my heart grow cold,
and I dread the reaction of the town,
when at last I lay it down.
Nonetheless I am grateful for the help you mention,
and I will do my best to answer your question."

"Well gosh, what could you possibly have there that you'd be afraid to take it into Ponyville?" asked Applejack. Behind her, Rarity's eyes were slowly widening in horror. Rainbow Dash was looking back and forth between the unicorn and the zebra in confusion.

"A discovery of my saddest dream,
while I was walking past the stream.
A pony who never again shall wake,
and whose earthly shell I now must take."

Rainbow Dash gasped.

"Oh Zecora, that's horrible! Don't worry, we'll help you take her into town, we can-"

"Zecora," said Applejack, speaking very slowly and deliberately, "we came to see you because I think a friend of mine went into the Everfree forest alone, and I was worried for her safety. The... the body you found... does she have a red mane and a brown coat, and a cutie mark that looks like a green flag?"

The zebra stared at Applejack for a long moment before letting her head droop mournfully towards the ground. Rainbow Dash and Rarity let out cries of alarm as Applejack suddenly jumped forward, dragging the sad bundle off of Zecora's withers.

"Applejack, what are you doing!?"

"I *can't*... I can't just... I gotta see for maself!"

"Applejack!" Zecora was too upset to bother with more poetic speech, "don't!"

"I'm sorry, I just haveta..."

A flap of cloth fell away from the corpse's face. Applejack stopped and made a low moaning sound, turning away and covering her face with her hooves. Rainbow Dash was at her side in an instant, wrapping her foreleg around the earth pony and hugging her tightly. Zecora approached from the other side and gently draped her neck over Applejack's shaking form. Applejack put her hooves around her friends and clung to them tightly as she sobbed.

Rainbow Dash glanced up as she heard the musical tinkling sound of Rarity's magic, and saw the white unicorn telekinetically lifting the body onto her own back. Rainbow gawked, but Rarity shouldered the burden with only a very short and very quiet panic attack as she forced herself to get over the fact that she was carrying a corpse.

"I'll take care of this," she told Rainbow quietly, biting her lip briefly before starting back towards Ponyville. "You make sure Applejack gets back to Sweet Apple Acres."

Rainbow Dash nodded. "You can count on us."

"Once dear Applejack calms down,
I will meet you back in town.
Whatever caused this remains free,
but now it has to deal with me."

Rarity's expression hardened, and she nodded in agreement. Whatever was responsible for the sad corpse was going to be found. If they had anything to say about it, it would never hurt another pony again.

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Fluttershy hummed softly to herself as she trotted unhurriedly home. She'd had a very nice day with Twilight Sparkle. They hadn't managed to find anything like the little beast she'd found in any of the library's books, but they'd had a good time anyway, and Twilight had offered to send a description of the creature to Princess Celestia along with the astronomy report she was finishing. Fluttershy was

sure that a pony that kept such a fantastic creature as a phoenix for a pet must know almost everything there was to know about animals, and if she didn't have any direct experience with bug snakes then she would likely know where such information could be found.

Celestia's sun was slowly setting, turning the sky wonderfully ablaze. Fluttershy would soon be home with her animal friends, feeding them their supper and tucking them into bed. Twilight hadn't said anything when Fluttershy actually had borrowed a novel with a cover featuring a mare in a torn bodice embracing a powerfully built stallion. It was going to be the perfect end to a perfect day.

Angel was waiting for her on the front step when she arrived. That was mildly unusual- the white rabbit usually acted like he didn't particularly care if she came home or not. Even more unusual was that when Fluttershy moved to go inside Angel attempted to block her path, holding out one paw warningly and shaking his head.

"Wha... Angel bunny, what are you doing? Mommy's going to feed you sweetie, I just want to drop off my saddlebags and check up on our new friend first."

Angel shook his head violently and continued to stand in her way, gesturing for her to return the way she'd come.

"I don't understand Angel, what's wrong? Don't you feel well?"

The rabbit heaved a deep sigh and gestured towards the door, then put on a hideous snarl and hopped around in an exaggerated manner, swiping at invisible ponies with his paws. Fluttershy smiled warmly.

"Oh Angel, you're worried that he's going to try to hurt me! Awww, you big softie, you *do* care. Come here."

Fluttershy tried to give the bunny a hug and got kicked in the face for her trouble. Sighing, she straightened up and opened the door to her cottage. Angel went absolutely berserk, grabbing her by the leg and pulling with all his might. Fluttershy, for all of her gentle nature, was still several times the rabbit's size, and ignored him as she stepped through the door.

The interior of her cottage was dark and quiet. Fluttershy laid her saddlebags down on the couch and walked over to the corner where she'd left the creature.

The bed was empty. Fluttershy frowned. So was the bowl of fish that she'd left for it. That was strange. There should have been remnants; bones and scales and whatever organs the creature didn't want to eat.

"That little guy must have been really hungry," she mused aloud.

Angel was hopping a nervous circle around Fluttershy's hooves now, making small panicked squeaks in the back of his throat. She sighed and looked around for the creature. It was small enough to fit in the mouseholes scattered about her house, so it had probably gone in one of those in search of more food. She was glad she'd warned the mice to leave. Crouching down by the wall, she looked into one of the holes.

"It's okay little fella, come on out. I won't hurt you."

Angel tapped her on the leg. It wasn't like his usual "quit being stupid" pokes. His paw was trembling.

Fluttershy slowly turned her head to look at Angel, and found him staring up at the ceiling, eyes wide and jaw slack with horror. The pegasus felt a knot of worry tie itself in her stomach as she raised her head to follow his gaze.

A shiny black nightmare dropped on top of her, drowning out Fluttershy's panicked screams with a sibilant hiss.

-End of Part 3

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