

Trials of the Elements
Part 4

Valiant led Live Wire toward the Tower Library, with Live Wire chattering the whole time about the history of the structure,
“You know, the Tower Library is one of the oldest structures in the whole of Equestria. It was formed straight out of the white marble that forms the bedrock foundation of Canterlot itself. Princess Luna was personally responsible for creating it. Princess Luna created the Tower Library and Princess Celestia created the University. Both structures were originally of the same white marble, seamless and perfect; raised straight out of the rock by magic, no artisans’ tool has ever touched the Tower Library. The original University was destroyed during the struggle between Celestia and Luna when Luna was overcome by Nightmare Moon. No pony even knew that Princess Luna created the Tower Library until recently when Princess Luna returned. Princess Celestia couldn't bear to talk about its history because it brought back too many sad memories, but when Princess Luna returned, Princess Celestia was only too happy to tell everypony who was the founder of the Tower Library. Since her return, Princess Luna has been searching out ancient tomes that had been lost since her banishment and returning them to the Tower Library. She's been reportedly seen there a couple dozen times in the past few months. I wonder if we'll see her there? Oh, I hope we get to, I'd love to meet a Princess! Hmm, maybe that's not such a good idea. I get so nervous around mares I don't know, I just start rambling so much I wouldn't know what to do. When I'm nervous I can ramble on for hours and hours and hours and hours and hours. My mind is running in circles just thinking about it. Hey, speaking of thinking, why are we going to the Tower Library anyway? Do you need to do some studying for your classes? I used to go there all the time, but the old Librarian didn't like me too well, she said I talked too much. She was always real nice about it though, oh she was pretty and incredibly smart too! She was a purple unicorn, but I never caught her name. I was always too embarrassed to talk to her much. Now, I know that may be hard to believe, me not talking much, but I stutter so badly when I'm around pretty mares. Her assistant was nice enough. His name was Spike, he was a dragon. He used to show me where the books were that I needed. He used to say that I helped him memorize the cataloging system. I don't know if that's true or not but he had trouble finding books at first. After a couple of months, he automatically knew where every single book in the whole Library was . . . “ Live Wire stopped when Valiant interrupted him.

“You knew Spike?” he asked.

Live Wire nodded his head,
“Yep, I sure did. He . . . “

Valiant interrupted Live Wire again,
“If you'll wait for a second, I can tell you the former Librarian's name, if you still want to know it.”

Live Wire nodded his head again, staying quiet, so Valiant continued,
“Her name is Twilight Sparkle. She's Princess Celestia's star pupil, and supposedly one of the

most, if not the most powerful unicorn in all of Equestria. She's really nice, but I don't get the impression she's particularly interested in romance right now. She seems too interested in her studies and besides, isn't she a bit young for you?"

"I don't know how old she is. I always thought she was close to my age. I figured she just aged well, because nopony I know could be that smart and know so much unless she was at least my age, probably a bit older. Aw shucks, I should have known she was too good to be true." Live Wire lapsed into silence for the first time since Valiant had met him.

Valiant felt bad for his friend,
"Hey Lemon, don't put on a sour face . . ." Valiant stopped speaking as what he had said sunk in.

Valiant tried not to laugh, he didn't want to make Lemon Lime feel worse, but he couldn't help himself. He stifled his laughter, biting his tongue and closing his eyes. He needn't have worried. Lemon Lime began laughing loudly in the most outlandish way imaginable, in hyper speed. The sound reverberated off the surrounding buildings and echoed through the street, making it sound like there was a whole chorus of ponies laughing. The sound was utterly beyond description and so hilarious, every pony on the street began laughing uncontrollably. Valiant couldn't hold his laughter back if his life depended on it. His laughter burst from his mouth, joining the chorus already in motion. The layers of laughter folded on themselves, perpetually increasing the hilarity until Valiant and Live Wire couldn't even continue walking. Both stallions sat down on the street, tears of mirth streaming down their faces.

Valiant was the first to recover,
"I, hehehe, I apologize. I never meant to say that, I was trying to encourage you, but it just came out all wrong."

Live Wire held up a hoof,
"Stop making me think about it, or I'll get going again. No harm done."

The two stallions rose to their hooves and began making their way toward the Tower Library again, still chuckling. They climbed the stairs up to the ornate double doors and pushed both open, Valiant on the left and Lemon Lime on the right. The Librarian was sitting behind her desk quietly, but looked up sharply at the sound of a snigger. Upon seeing Valiant, she ignored the sound and focused on the book in front of her.

Valiant was delighted to see Evening Star already in her spot near the window, except this time she wore saddle bags, which she still wore even lying down,
"Good afternoon Star." he greeted quietly, "I hadn't expected to see you here so soon, I had hoped too though."

Evening Star looked up from her book, the same old worn one from the previous night,
"I come to the Library every chance I get. I'm here every day. I love knowledge. What brings you back here so soon, and who's your friend?" she asked quietly.

“This is Lemon Lime, but he likes to go by Live Wire. Live Wire, this is Evening Star, and she likes to go by just Star.” Valiant introduced his friends.

Live Wire extended his hoof and shook Star's offered one,
“H . . . hi. I . . . I'm pleased t . . . to m . . . meet you.” Live Wire stuttered.

Evening Star put a hoof to her muzzle, giggling,
“You don't have to be nervous, Live Wire. I don't bite.”

“I . . . I'm s . . . sure you d . . . don't, but I c . . . can't help i . . . i . . . it. I g . . . get n . . . nervous when I t . . . talk t . . . to p . . . pretty mares.” Live Wire stuttered so badly, Evening Star could barely understand him.

“Well, thank you. You're very sweet. I do have a question though. Why are you called 'Live Wire' if you stutter so much?” Star asked.

Live Wire tried to answer but he couldn't get the words out, fortunately Valiant stepped in,
“He's normally a real chatter-box. He has some kind of condition where his mind and mouth apparently work about four times faster than other ponies. He generally talks so fast he's hard to understand.”

“Oh, he has Cerebral-Lingua Accelerari. That's a rare disorder, but it can be beneficial if controlled. Ponies with Cerebral-Lingua Accelerari tend to excel at anything they do, and make fantastic auctioneers.” Star informed the two stallions.

Valiant decided to get right to the point, Star had helped him the night before,
“The reason I'm here, Evening Star, is to try to learn about a friend of mine's history. That's what I was originally looking for last night.”

Star looked puzzled,
“Why? Won't she tell you?”

“He's a he, and no he won't.” Valiant replied.

“Then why don't you ask his parents?” Evening Star asked.

“I don't know their names, and I'm afraid to ask him.” Valiant said.

“Then why don't you check the Census records? You know his name right?” Star asked.

“Yes, but I have no idea when he was born.” Valiant said.

Evening Star shook her head,
“You don't need to. You can cross-reference names with birthdates, breed, coloring, and

genealogy. Canterlot updates its Census every year. There's a new copy here in the Library. I'll show you where it is.”

Evening Star rose from her cushion, put her book in her saddle bags, and unfurled her wings. She took to the air and landed up on the second floor mezzanine. By the time Valiant and Live Wire climbed the stairs to the second floor, Star already had a thick book laid out on a reading podium.

She waited patiently until the two stallions reached her, so she wouldn't have to raise her voice,
“What's your friend's name?” she asked.

“Mend.” Valiant responded.

Star began flipping the pages of the Census book,
“Hmm, Mend . . . Mend . . . here it is. Earth pony, right?” she asked.

Valiant nodded,
“Yes, he has a black coat, white mane and tail.”

Evening Star nodded,
“Yup, that's him.” she said and began reading.

After a moment, Star looked up,
“Uh oh.” she said sadly.

“What is it?” Valiant asked stepping up to the podium.

“His parents are listed as being deceased. It looks like they died when he was little, both suicides. It says like his grandparents raised him after that. His grandparents still seem to be living though.” Star said.

Valiant perked up, this was just what he had been looking for,
“Where could I find their address?” he asked.

“It's listed here.” Star said reading again, “Looks like they don't live too far away, just a couple of blocks from here.”

Valiant looked over the address, but couldn't figure it out,
“Live Wire, are you good at remembering things?” he asked.

Live Wire seemed to be alright, since Evening Star wasn't addressing him directly,
“Yes, of course. I can remember all kinds of things. Like for instance . . . “

Live Wire was cut off, as Valiant pulled him over to the podium and gently pushed his

head toward the Census book,

“Can you memorize this address, and do you know where it is?” he asked pointing to an entry in the book.

“Yeah, I had the whole page memorized before you got done pushing my face toward it. I have a photographic memory. Why, I can even remember . . . “ Live Wire stopped as he realized he was rambling again, “Sorry, I tend to do that.”

Valiant patted his friend on the shoulder,
“That's alright Live Wire. I apologize for pushing you around like that, but I'm really worried about Mend. Come on, let's go talk to his grandparents. Maybe they can tell me why he went mental.”

Live Wire and Evening Star looked worriedly at each other, then at Valiant,
“How did he go mental?” they asked almost in unison.

Valiant was already heading down the stairs,
“Come on, I'll tell you on the way.”

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“We would be honored to have such a fantastic mind on staff here Dr. Mend.” said Dr. Avalon.

Dr. Avalon was a dark yellow, middle-aged, Earth pony mare who had a mane and tail of the lightest shades of blue, highlighted with streaks of shining silver. Her cutie-mark was that of a syringe filled with a glowing, golden liquid. Dr. Avalon's mane and tail were luxurious and long, but pulled back into a pair of tight buns. Her voice was smooth but unusually deep for a mare. Dr. Mend knew it was from long hours of yelling orders to interns and nurses. Dr. Mend had come in with his résumé and applied for a position as an on-call doctor. Dr. Avalon had taken him into her office to interview him. As the chief of the clinic, the responsibility fell to her to interview all potential candidates. She had heard about Mend when she had gone to the University. The two were close to the same age, but Mend had graduated first.

Dr. Mend bowed his head politely,
“I can start as soon as you need me to, Dr. Avalon.” he said.

Dr. Avalon smiled,
“Wonderful. I'll put you on the schedule for . . . “

Dr. Avalon was interrupted by a blood-curdling scream that made both ponies jump slightly. Dr. Mend and Dr. Avalon rose from their respective seats in preparation for an emergency call on the intercom. Instead of the intercom, a light gray unicorn mare with light purple mane and tail burst through the door. Her eyes were wide and she looked nervous.

Dr. Avalon took a step toward the unicorn,

“What's the matter?” she ordered in a commanding tone, there was no hint of a request.

The nurse looked over her shoulder, then back at Dr. Avalon,
“A pegasus just came in. It looks like all four of his legs are broken in several places.”

Dr. Avalon looked concerned,
“Immobilize him so he doesn't hurt himself further. I'll be right there.” she said, then turned to Dr. Mend, “Looks like I need you right now Mend. Follow me.” she ordered.

Dr. Mend quietly but quickly followed Dr. Avalon to the scrub basin down the hallway in the clinic. Dr. Avalon turned on the faucet and both ponies began scrubbing.

“No pony since you, has even come close to matching your grades and skills Mend. You'll be a bit of a celebrity to all the interns.” Dr. Avalon said as she pushed down on the iodine dispenser.

Mend utilized a bolted down, dual-sided, scrub brush as he replied,
“I hope foalish hero worship won't hinder their performance. If I become a distraction, would you have a few words with them or should I?”

“I'll deal with it, if it becomes a problem.” Dr. Avalon said passing a towel to Dr. Mend.

Dr. Mend used the towel to wipe off his hooves,
“Let's go see what happened to this poor pegasus.”

The two doctors trotted out onto the highly sterilized Emergency Room floor to the sound of agonized wailing. Dr. Avalon assessed the pegasus' condition quickly as she approached the bed he was writhing on. He was royal blue in his coat and his mane and tail were light brown. His bright orange eyes were wide and his pupils were dilated from the pain. All four of his legs were obviously broken. Each limb was puffy and swollen in multiple places with correlating discoloration.

Dr. Avalon went right to work,
“He needs to be sedated.” she told Dr. Mend over her shoulder.

“Too soon. If he goes into shock, he could slip into a coma. Besides, we need him to tell us if he's allergic to anything.” Dr. Mend responded.

Dr. Avalon and Dr. Mend joined the nurses in holding down the agonized pegasus,
“Just had to be sure you weren't out of practice.” Dr. Avalon said to Mend.

Dr. Mend didn't respond to Dr. Avalon, instead he focused on the pegasus writhing in front of him,
“What's your name?” he asked using his hooves to hold the pegasus' head still.

The injured stallion grunted hoarsely, gasping for breath,

“Trooper.” he rasped.

Dr. Mend lowered his muzzle down, right next to Trooper's ear,
“O.K. Trooper, we're going to fix you up but we need to know if you have any allergies. Are you allergic to anything?”

“No.” Trooper grunted, “Please, make it stop!”

Dr. Mend looked up at Dr. Avalon,
“We need an Anesthesiologist to put him under, then get him X-Rays so we know what we're dealing with, then get him into surgery. Do you confirm?” he asked.

Dr. Avalon nodded,
“I confirm.” she said, then turned her head toward the light gray unicorn with the light purple mane and tail, “Page the Anesthesiologist and prep the X-Ray machine. Find us a clear surgery bay; we need to have him in surgery within half an hour.”

Dr. Mend thought fast and leaned down to Trooper again,
“How did you come by your injuries Trooper?”

“Unicorn tried to kill . . . Earth pony . . . saved her . . . unicorn bound my wings . . . magic . . . dropped me.” Trooper grunted.

Dr. Mend's head snapped up at Dr. Avalon, shock written all over his face,
“Has this ever happened before?” he asked.

Dr. Avalon shook her head vigorously,
“Not that I've ever heard. He may well be hallucinating from the pain.”

Dr. Mend took a step back as the Anesthesiologist arrived to administer to Trooper. It was only when Mend stood back that he noticed something odd. Trooper looked a great deal like Valiant, *'In fact,'* Mend thought, *'The two are nearly identical. Their only differences are their eyes and . . .,'* Mend's vision shifted down to Trooper's flank looking for his cutie-mark. Mend's eyes widened, *'He has no cutie-mark! It wasn't removed, like Valiant's, it looks like it never developed! An adult pegasus with no cutie-mark?'*

Dr. Mend couldn't peel his eyes away from Trooper's perfectly smooth and blank flank.

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Valiant, Evening Star and Lemon Lime looked up at the beautiful two-story house that matched the address Lemon Lime had memorized. The house was pure white with sky blue shutters and a covered front porch, upon which sat two well used brown, wooden rocking chairs. The front yard was a good 20 paces deep and roughly 60 paces wide, only 20 paces wider than the house itself. Small, but lush trees provided shade for the entire yard, blooming in colors of

orange, white, and pink.

Valiant walked calmly up onto the porch and politely knocked on the front door, flanked by Evening Star and Lemon Lime. After a couple of minutes, the door opened, revealing an ancient Earth pony mare. She had a coat of chocolate brown and a mane and tail of almost pure gray with occasional streaks of light pink showing through.

The old mare adjusted a pair of spectacles on her face, “Yes?” she asked, voice creaking with age.

“I’m sorry to bother you ma’am, but do you have a grandson named Mend?” Valiant asked politely.

The old mare’s features fell drastically, “Oh no. What happened?” she asked, hoof to her chest.

“I’m worried about him. He’s a friend of mine. We recently came to Canterlot to study at the University . . .” Valiant began.

“And he changed, didn’t he.” the old mare said, there was no question in her voice.

Valiant’s fears were confirmed by her statement, “This has happened before hasn’t it.” he stated.

The old mare nodded sadly, “And you are?” she asked.

Valiant, Evening Star, and Lemon Lime all lowered their heads respectfully, “I’m Valiant, this is Evening Star, and Lemon Lime.” he introduced.

“My name’s Goodie, my husband, Obsidian, is in the living room.” the old mare said, “If you’re here to try to help Mend you’d better come in.” she said holding the door for the younger ponies, “This will take a while.”

Suddenly and without warning, a sealed letter formed itself into existence in front of Evening Star, “Oh,” she said, surprised.

Valiant looked over to her, “Where did that come from?” he asked, eyeing the letter oddly.

Star shrugged, “Sorry Valiant. This happens to Couriers all the time. I have my duties, you know how it is.”

Lemon Lime looked toward the horizon,

“It's getting late. The Sun will be setting soon. You need to be careful Star.”

“I've been doing this for a long time, boys. I'll be fine.” Star said.

She picked up the letter in her mouth and took off, waving good bye to Valiant and Lemon Lime. The two stallions watched Evening Star disappear over the tops of the nearby buildings, and vanish from sight.

Turning to the living room, their attention was caught by Goodie as she yelled, “Obie! There are some youngsters here about Mend. Put on a pot of tea. This may be what we've been hoping for.”

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Applejack was highly upset, “You can't go, Big Macintosh! Ah know he's your friend, he's mine too, but you've got responsibilities 'round this here orchard. Ah can't do all your chores for long an' Applebloom's too young to help out much.” she scolded her older brother as he stoically continued packing his saddle bags.

“Ah've already asked Caramel to take care of mah chores while Ah'm gone. Give him mah pay while Ah'm away.” the immensely built, red Earth pony said softly.

Applejack blinked back tears of frustration, “But why? You've never left before, why leave now?” she demanded.

“Ah can't explain it Applejack. All Ah know is Ah have to go. Valiant needs me. Ah've saved up plenty of money and Ah'll be real careful.” Big Mac said.

“You heard what Twilight said about some crazy unicorn up in Canterlot. You're an Earth pony. How are you goin' to protect yourself? What can an Earth pony do against unicorn magic?” Applejack asked pointedly.

“Ah don't rightly know, but you didn't let that stop you now did you little sis?” Big Mac asked, “Yall defeated Nightmare Moon just fine and two thirds of yall couldn't even use magic.”

“Don't you go usin' your fancy mathematics again!” Applejack roared, “Yall ain't facin' Nightmare Moon!”

Big Macintosh buckled his saddlebags and slid them on, “No, we're just goin' to take care of a unicorn, not a diety. Ah'll be fine Applejack. Ah have to go, and you need to accept that.”

“What in tarnation am Ah supposed to tell Applebloom?” Applejack asked, nearly in tears.

“That she can't go with me.” Big Macintosh said, “She was listenin' 'till a minute ago. She, Scootaloo, and Sweetie Belle just ran to Applebloom's room. Ah think they're packin' to go too.”

Applejack sped out of Big Macintosh's room fast enough to make Rainbow Dash proud, had the cyan pegasus been present. Big Macintosh smiled admiringly at his protective younger sister. He walked over to his antique desk, which had miraculously survived the fire, and pulled open one of the mahogany drawers. Inside the drawer was a pair of envelopes, one was addressed to Granny Smith, Applejack, and Applebloom, the other was addressed to Caramel. He carefully removed the sealed envelopes and set them on his mattress, then quietly crept downstairs while Applejack was still arguing with Applebloom.

As Big Macintosh cleared the front door, he saw a cloth sack sitting on the porch with a paper tag on a thin wire tying the mouth closed. Big Mac peered at the tag and was surprised to find his name on the tag. Looking around, the huge Earth pony saw he was alone on the porch, so he picked up the sack and ran for it with the sack clanking faintly in his teeth.

Granny Smith poked her head out of the barn and smiled, “Go on an' help out that nice young stallion.” she said, “Your grandpa's solid steel shoes should help if anything happens. He don't need 'em anymore anyhow.” her hip creaked as she made her way back to the front porch and into her rocking chair, “When Ah saw you go runnin' off earlier, Ah plum knowed what you were up to. You went to get Caramel so you wouldn't be leavin' your little sisters an' Granny all alone. You never been away before so Ah says to myself, Ah says 'Granny, your grandson's headin' for trouble. He's needin' some plum good help. As much as you can provide.' Make good use o' them shoes and your Daddy's lasso. You best come back safe now, you hear.”

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Valiant and Lemon Lime sat quietly and listened as Goody and obsidian related the sad story of how Mend lost his parents, “No matter what we said or did, we couldn't convince him of the truth. One day, just before he graduated from the University, we overheard him crying in his room. He spent his days in the University dorms but he kept his things here in our son's old room. He was talking like there was somepony else in the room. He said he was glad 'they' were silent and that he had made 'them' proud. The last thing he said was 'goodbye Mom and Dad'. We never realized he was hearing voices, before then. We told him it wasn't his fault that his mother and our son killed themselves, but he was convinced that he was. In any case, the voices stopped, so we left it alone in the hope that things would stay that way.”

Valiant spoke up, “Why didn't you tell anypony?”

Obsidian replied to Valiant's query, “Like Goody said, we didn't find out until the voices had already stopped. We kept an eye on him but to our knowledge, the voices never returned. Mend left for Ponyville to open his clinic after

he graduated. We wrote him letters every week, but he never responded. We had no idea he was back in Canterlot.”

“He and I are students at the University. Princess Luna was kind enough to have every part of our first semester paid for by she and Celestia.” Valiant said.

“When you see him again, tell him we miss him. We have plenty of room here if you and he would like to stay here after your first semester is over.” Obsidian said.

“It's too early to say for sure, but I'm afraid Mend might be hearing the voices again. Do you have any advice on how to help him?” Valiant asked.

Goody and Obsidian looked at each other then at Valiant and Lemon Lime, “No, but he needs help. Try bringing him here so we can talk to him. He has to deal with this. We may have to force him to deal with it. We've talked about this and it's for his own good. If he won't seek help he may not be stable enough to practice medicine. If you see what I mean. Please Valiant, bring him to us as soon as you can.” Goody said pleadingly.

Valiant rose from his seat, Lemon Lime followed suit, “I'll do everything I can.”

“Thank you so much for talking to us.” Lemon Lime said, unusually somber and quiet.

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Dr. Mend breathed a sigh of relief. Trooper's surgery had been successful, his bones had been set, with the help of some pins, but he would be months recovering. A thought suddenly struck him, *'Valiant's potions would be ideal for Trooper.'* Dr. Mend exited the O.R. And decided to wait for Dr. Avalon.

Dr. Avalon left the O.R. As the nurse ponies wheeled Trooper into recovery, “You're as good as rumors say Mend. Trooper's surgery couldn't have gone more smoothly. You've already been a great help.” she praised.

Dr. Mend turned his head away, blushing furiously; he was not used to compliments, “I uh, have an idea about a way we might be able to speed along Trooper's recovery.” he ventured.

Dr. Avalon's ears perked up, highly intrigued, “Oh, and what would that be?” she asked.

“I would, of course, need your permission to go ahead with the treatment, but I know a surefire way to have Trooper ambulatory inside a week.” Dr. Mend said.

Dr. Avalon's eyebrows shot upward and she took a step toward Dr. Mend,

“If you're right, this new treatment could save patients weeks of recovery time and hundreds of bits. Are you sure it will work?”

“I've seen it work to lengths you wouldn't imagine. I had a patient who suffered second and third degree burns to his entire body. Through the treatment, he has no scarring whatsoever.” Dr. Mend said.

“Why haven't I heard of this before now?” Dr. Avalon asked.

“It was only recently discovered.” Dr. Mend said.

Dr. Avalon absolutely beamed,
“We'll have to ask Trooper if he's willing to undergo the treatment. Is it expensive?”

“It won't cost him one bit. I've been sworn to provide it free of charge.” Mend said.

Dr. Avalon looked suspicious,
“How?”

“It's a simple formula using common herbs in the correct proportions. I'll bring in several doses tomorrow. It's late and I haven't eaten all day.” Mend's stomach growled as if on cue, even as the words left his mouth.

“You're free to go anytime you like. My shift ended several hours ago.” Dr. Avalon hinted, subtly.

Dr. Mend completely missed the hint, being about as subtle as a peel of thunder,
“Well then far be it for me to keep anypony from their dinner. I need to study tonight. I always eat while I study.”

Dr. Avalon's ears fell somewhat,
“Oh, alright. Be sure to bring the treatment medication when you come in. Good night Mend, I'll see you tomorrow.”

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“You've been a huge help, Live Wire. You didn't have to get involved, you know. It's my own problem.” Valiant said.

Lemon Lime held out a hoof for Valiant to be quiet, before he began machine gunning again,
“You don't owe me a thing Valiant. Any problem you have, I do too. I already told you I don't have many friends, the truth is, I don't have but one, and that's you. No pony can handle everything all by themselves. I'm glad to help. I help ponies every day, it's my job, and it's what comes naturally to me. I like helping others do what they can't, in a way, I protect them. I hate

very little, but what I do hate is seeing somepony who can't help themselves, go unnoticed and uncared for by others. I know that feeling. No pony can help me with my disorder, so I give others what I can't have. It's taken me years of practice to be able to levitate a full grown Earth pony, but it's so worth it to see the looks on their faces when they take their first steps without my help. I give them back their lives. You have no idea how damaging it is to a pony, not being able to walk, or feed themselves, or do anything. It's depressing and in time it can destroy you. You may not believe it, but I'm actually very patient, I just talk a lot. You absolutely cannot be impatient with somepony who has to relearn to use their legs again. It can take years and if you try to rush them, you end up hurting them and they can end up even more damaged than before. I have to help. If not me then who? Who can do it? I have the ability to do something about it and I choose to. I don't generally care if I don't have many friends. If that's the price I have to pay to help others, then so be it. I absolutely refuse to watch anypony suffer needlessly.”

Valiant was surprised at the intensity his friend spoke with,
“I never knew you felt so strongly about it. Boy, if more ponies could hear that speech, the University would be overflowing with medical students.”

Lemon Lime shook his head,
“Nothing I say can make anypony do something. I might be inspiring to a small degree, but nothing can force a pony to do something they wouldn't normally do by themselves. It might be inspiring, sure, but they would have had to already been contemplating it on their own. Anyway, I'm starving. Come on, I know a great Bar where they serve the best hay fries in Equestria.”

“I'm sorry Live Wire, but I have to go back to the dorm. I need to try to get Mend to agree to visit his grandparents.” Valiant said.

Lemon Lime's ears fell, drooping down his head,
“Alright.” he said, then perked right back up, “Can we hang out tomorrow then?”

Valiant couldn't help but to laugh at his friend's antics,
“I'll do my level best, I promise.”

Valiant and Lemon Lime parted ways, Valiant heading back to the dorm, and Lemon Lime to the Bar he liked so much.

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Valiant trotted up the stairs toward the dorm room, dreading having to talk to Mend. Exiting the stairwell, he headed down the hallway until he reached 317. He halted at the door and took a deep breath before entering. Valiant opened the door and to his surprise, Mend was busy with a mortar and pestle, mixing up some roots, flowers, and berries that Valiant was intimately familiar with. Next to Mend, on his desk, was a large number of small, cork-topped vials.

Mend looked up, spotting Valiant,
“How much would an average adult pegasus with four broken legs need in order to be

completely healed in a week or so?”

Valiant was only too happy to answer,
“Three doses. One every 2 ½ to 3 days. You already have enough there to last you for two months at the least. Are there any pending natural disasters I should know about?”

“No, but there is some unicorn levitating and dropping ponies in the streets.” Dr. Mend said humorlessly.

“Blast! I'd hoped I had talked her out of that. Is that how the pegasus was injured?” Valiant asked.

“You had a run it with her?” Dr. Mend inquired, he was obviously worried.

“I did. I believe she was suffering from C.M.E.S. Her eyes were solid purple, a muddy disgusting purple.” Valiant said.

“That means her eyes were naturally purple to begin with. I've treated 'Caster's Stroke' before. It happened to Twilight a few times. The unicorn's coat, mane, tail, and their entire eyes change color to match their iris color. Is that what you were researching at the Library?” Dr. Mend asked.

“That was part of it.” Valiant said neutrally.

“She needs to be treated immediately. I'll bet that book didn't tell you that unicorns suffering from C.M.E.S. also experience paranoid delusions did it?” Dr. Mend asked.

Valiant shrugged,
“It may have. I don't think I read the entire passage.”

“Well if it didn't, that book needs to be updated badly. Unicorns in the throes of C.M.E.S. don't know what they're doing and through that they can end up keeping themselves in a perpetual state of C.M.E.S. until it kills them. They become sporadic, random and dangerous. They will cycle through emotions and moods rapidly, laughing one minute and crying the next. Now, a unicorn's power grows steadily when they push themselves and they have to push themselves hard when they cast while suffering from C.M.E.S. so you do the math. If somepony doesn't stop her and soon, this is going to be a calamity of epic proportions.” Dr. Mend said worriedly.

“Somepony has to stop her.” Valiant said.

“Who?” Dr. Mend asked, “You? She'd swat either of us down like a bug. The combined muscle of four Earth ponies might be able to do it, but that would end poorly. In her confused state she would probably kill herself or somepony else or even level a couple of city blocks. I've heard of other unicorns overpowering one who was suffering from C.M.E.S. by cutting them off from their magic, but I've theorized that if the unicorn could be rendered unconscious, say by a drug,

she could be subdued that way.”

“I’ll see what I can do. Hey, um, there’s something I wanted . . .” Valiant began.

Dr. Mend interrupted him,
“What are you doing tomorrow?”

“I’m planning to go to the apothecary to see if I got the job.” Valiant said.

“I’d like you to come to a nearby clinic, tomorrow morning. I’m going to present your fast-healing potion to the chief there and hopefully administer it to the injured pegasus. Oh, and Valiant?” Dr. Mend baited, “He looks just like you.”

Valiant’s train of thought vanished,
“What?” he asked softly.

“His coat, mane, and tail are exactly the same shade as yours; his face is nearly identical too. I only spotted a few differences. His eyes are bright orange, your legs are more defined with muscle, and he has no cutie-mark, as in he never developed one.” Dr. Mend explained.

“Is the clinic still open?” Valiant asked.

“He’s not going anywhere tonight. He probably hasn’t even woken up yet. We had to take him to surgery; he’ll be there when we arrive tomorrow. Now, what was it you were going to say?” Dr. Mend asked, turning back to the desk.

Without thinking, Valiant blurted out,
“Does your family know you’re here?”

Mend froze and stepped slowly back from the desk, he turned his head and looked at Valiant evenly,
“Why?” he asked sharply.

“I’ll go with you tomorrow, if you come with me to visit your grandparents.” Valiant said.

Mend’s face contorted in anger,
“How dare you go behind my back!” he bellowed, “How dare you meddle in my life! My life is my business, stay out of it!”

“I’m trying to help you.” Valiant said, trying to remain calm.

Mend continued with his raised voice,
“I don’t need any help! Not from you or anypony else!”

‘Time to play my trump card.’ Valiant thought,

“You're hearing them again aren't you?”

Mend turned his head away, he couldn't lie to Valiant's face,
“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“Yes, you do. Whether or not you admit it, you have a serious issue and you have to deal with it. I would never have guessed you were only in your mid thirties. Mend, you look like you're in your fifties! This is killing you!” Valiant said emphatically.

“Leave me alone.” Mend said softly.

Valiant had enough,
“I can't Mend! I refuse to watch you do this to yourself! You're my friend! I've already lost one friend needlessly! You said it was your job to keep other ponies from an early grave, well that's exactly where you're headed! Like you, I believe it's my job to keep others from the clutches of death, and that includes you!”

Mend rounded on Valiant,
“Do you think I like being this way? The only time they ever stopped was when I was the best! I have to make them proud!”

“They're dead Mend . . .” Valiant began.

Mend interrupted him,
“Because of me! I failed them! The shame of my failure was so great they killed themselves! Do you know what it's like living with that?”

“No! But I do know what it's like carrying the burden of death! It wasn't your fault Mend! Of any pony in all of Equestria, I should know about blame! I want to help you!” Valiant said pouring out his heart.

“You can't help me!” Mend yelled.

“You haven't even tried! I'd do anything to help you! You've already given up hope without even trying! There is always hope, Mend! I'm living proof of that! You've pushed away everypony who wants to help you, except me!” Valiant responded, finally letting his feelings out.

“Leave me alone!” Dr. Mend yelled hoarsely.

“It was NEVER your fault Mend!” Valiant yelled with driving passion, “I don't care whether or not you want to hear it, you need to hear it! You want to talk about failing? You're failing at life by staying like this! Do you honestly think your parents wanted you to work yourself to death before you're forty? Furthermore, what do you have to show for all your obsession? Your grades die with you Mend! You have no family, no wife, and no foals! You have a great talent for medicine which could be passed on! You want to know what failure is? LOOK AT YOUR LIFE!”

You're robbing untold millions of the benefit of your legacy, because you have none! And it's all because you won't let anypony help you!"

Valiant was out of breath and breathing heavily, but he continued on, "Your grandparents love you Mend. Love has nothing to do with accomplishments or lack thereof. They're already proud of you, for just being you. You're failing them by not seeking help. You're breaking their hearts Mend. They already lost a son, don't make them loose you too." he pleaded.

Mend didn't speak, didn't move a muscle. He stood in place, not moving, like a statue. His ears were empty. There were no voices, there was no yelling, and there was no blame. For a few blessed minutes, the voices had ceased, and Valiant's words had struck with power. Mend starred off into space, and saw it all again: his whole childhood flashed before his eyes, shaded in a new light with a new perspective. The pieces of his life began falling into place, reality began to sink in, but Mend hand no way of dealing with it all. As far as emotions went, he was still a foal. Silent tears slipped out of Mend's eyes and spilled down his prematurely-aged face. Mend shook with a grief he had never felt before in his life, it was one he had always been too busy for.

Valiant slowly walked up to his friend, "You have to let us help you, Mend. We want to help you, but we can't if you don't let us." Valiant planted his forehead against Mend's and closed his eyes, "Please," he whispered, "Please, let us help you."

Mend put a heavy hoof around Valiant's shoulder, clinging to his friend like a life-preserver, "They're dead Valiant." he sobbed brokenly. Mend's voice was chocked with sorrow, "Oh, Goddess, they're dead!"

Mend closed his eyes and bit his lower lip, he wanted the rare but radiant and gentle comfort of his mother, he wanted the strong, confident, and silent support of his father. Mend realized, for the first time really realized, he would never have that again. He lowered his head against Valiant's chest and began to cry out the first tiny part of the massive burden he had been carrying around for most of his tortured life. His grief came in uncontrollable waves of sobs and Mend found that he could no longer stand. He collapsed. His full weight suddenly too much for his own legs. Strangely, he didn't fall, but the fact only dimly registered in his mind. Mend, almost subconsciously, realized something. Next to him, was a source of strength he had never known, had never acknowledged. Right there, next to him was a stallion who had torn down the walls of Mend's reality, but had stayed right there with him, supporting his full weight without complaint. Valiant gently lowered Dr. Mend down to the floor, but stayed right where he was, in front of his friend.

Valiant felt the hot tears burn their way down his shoulder as Mend sobbed again, "They're dead."

Valiant wrapped his left hoof around Mend's shoulder, his head followed suit,

“I know.” he said holding his friend tightly.

Mend seemed to simply fall apart. He clutched at Valiant like he was trying to absorb the other stallion,

“I can't do this anymore, Valiant!”

“Will you let us help you?” Valiant asked remaining still.

Against Valiant's shoulder, Mend nodded weakly, the nods becoming stronger by the moment,

“I don't know what to do! Please, help me! I don't want to be alone anymore! I don't want to be alone! Please Valiant! I don't want to be alone!” he cried, his voice becoming a whisper, “I don't want to be alone.”

Mend's cries turned to soft whimpers, as he held onto the only solid thing he knew he had, his friend.

Valiant hugged Mend close, holding onto the first precious signs of recovery, and whispered,

“You never were, my friend, and you'll never be again.”

Had either Stallion been inclined to raise their head and open their eyes, they would have noticed a beautiful pair of Celestia-sized golden wings resting on Valiant's shoulders, precisely where his wing-stumps were. They didn't stay very long, but they were there, just the same.