

Perquisition

Chapter 3

The way was open.

Sketch and Kickbolt had just returned to the stairwell to proceed into the floor before the next-to-last. The massive stone slab that was in the middle of the stairs leading up had been pulled to the side, giving free passage for anypony wanting to ascend higher.

"I can't believe it! We've almost made it to the top! We might actually get to the top! No one ever got to the top before!" is what Kickbolt thought Sketch said, trying to understand her unusually quick speech.

"Whoa, calm down, Sketch!" Kickbolt said while bringing up a hoof in front of her face to keep her from rambling any further.

Sketch backed away from his hoof only to keep talking freely. "But we're almost at the top! No pony has even gotten to the top to one of the towers! the top floors were all destroyed!" Her speech slowed to something more comprehensible as she added. "How can you *not* be excited?"

Kickbolt just shrugged his wings. "Because if one of us doesn't stay calm we're probably screwed."

The sound of their hoofsteps resonated throughout the recently-opened staircase. *To think*, Sketch wondered to herself, *no pony's ever been up these stairs before...*

Kickbolt opened his mouth to ask Sketch something. "Do you know what's usually at this point?" he asked with a nervous tone. "I mean, at the floor before the last one."

Sketch had studied the reports on the other towers enough to be able to answer. "I can guess," she said as she walked up in front of Kickbolt and raised her hoof to make motions. "All towers have thirty floors, and they all consisted of different mazes along with puzzles on some floors required to get any further." She continued, "However, no pony could ever get anything from the final rooms; they were always just a pile of rubble." None of her hoof motions made any sense, but that didn't stop her from keep doing it. "Seeing as we so far have had more or less the same pattern here as the other towers, this next floor should be pretty similar to the one we were just on!" she ended with an unusually big grin on her face.

Kickbolt rolled his eyes. "All I asked about was the next floor, not the history of the towers."

As they slowly circled up around the middle section of the stairs, the steps suddenly ended. Instead, the floor was flat again while leading up to a single passage blocked by a stone slab similar to the one from earlier, except this one was made to fit the door perfectly. On their left was an open passage, leading into floor twenty-nine.

"I guess that's the entrance to the final floor..." Sketch said while staring at the closed door with longing eyes.

Kickbolt was already heading for the newly opened passage. "We'll then, let's get a move on. We're on a roll!" he yelled, followed by Sketch quickly trotting up after him, eager to get the final door open.

Sketch caught up to Kickbolt, but instead of stopping behind him as expected, she kept on running past him, into the passage leading to floor twenty-nine.

"Sketch, wait!" Kickbolt shouted after her, his voice echoing lightly into the long hallway. "What are you doing?" He began to gallop, trying to catch up to her. "That's dangerous! What if you run into any traps?"

She just turned her head around slightly to answer him, still running into the hallway. "Don't worry, there's never any traps until new corridors show up!" she said as she kept on trotting.

"That's not good reason not to be careful!" Kickbolt yelled back as he finally caught up to her, only to bite down on her tail hard enough to get her to stop.

Sketch tumbled forward, banging her chin on the stone floor. "Owwgh!" she moaned rubbing her chin. She turned to glare at Kickbolt as she asked, "Was that really necessary?" She got a scowl in reply.

Sketch realizing what he was angry about, tried to apologize. "Sorry, I guess I got a bit too carried away," she said in a quiet voice. Sketch was usually the mind of the duo, but whenever she got the opportunity to explore something unknown, she usually stopped thinking about the consequences. Like how much she wanted to get done with this floor so they could move on to floor thirty.

Kickbolt sighed heavily as he walked up to take the lead again. "You really need to be more careful sometimes," he slowly muttered. More aware of their surroundings now that he had caught up, he came to a sudden realization.

It was a lot darker than usual, and this hallway was a lot longer than the entrances to new floors normally were. He could hardly see the entrance they had used, and there were still

no new hallways to walk into. Usually it only took a few meters before they had to start deciding on which way to go.

Just as he stopped to tell Sketch what he noticed, there was a loud rumbling from far behind them. The entrance into the passage was closing; a previously unseen stone block was slowly sliding down from the ceiling at the entrance, sealing them in.

“NO!” Kickbolt screamed, as he started galloping towards the entrance, frantically searching for a way to stop it from closing.

Sketch hadn't realized what was going on before Kickbolt's outburst. When she looked back to the closing entrance she just stared at it. Her dark green eyes shrinking to the size of small dots in fear, now understanding what she had done by mistake.

The door finally slammed shut as Kickbolt got close to it, not that he could have done anything to prevent the massive stone from sealing the entrance.

They were trapped.

Kickbolt frantically started searching the door and the surrounding walls for something, anything that could open it again, to no avail. There were no inscriptions, no symbols, no buttons, and no levers. Nothing.

Sketch quietly walked up behind Kickbolt, and opened her mouth to say something, but was unable to decide on what.

Kickbolt, being unable to find any signs or any indications that the door could be opened again, turned around to face Sketch. “We're stuck...” he said, slumping down against the wall and slamming his hoof down on the floor.

“I-I... this... nothing like this has ever happened... I'm so sorry!” Sketch stammered out. “I never expected this floor to be that different compared to all the earlier ones, it never happened in the earlier towers!” Her eyes began to tear up. She looked away from Kickbolt as she began to cry.

He put on a brave face. Things were looking bad. He knew they didn't have any option but to go on. “It's okay, we'll just have to check what's at the end of this corridor, to see if there's anything to open this door.”

Sketch lowered her head, afraid to face him directly, and just nodded anxiously as she tried to cover up her own sobbing. She knew that this was her fault - because she wasn't careful enough they were both in danger now.

As they turned around to walk into the corridor again, the emeralds usually giving off light everywhere in the tower were becoming fewer and fewer the further in they went. After a while it had become almost too dark to see. Their pace into the dark slowed considerably; not being able to see clearly made it less safe to go on normally. Sketch brought out a lantern from her saddle-bag that she hoofed over to Kickbolt, who was walking in the lead. After lighting it, the pace picked up again.

Sketch tried to say something, but still felt horrible after what had happened. "I umm... just in case the lantern isn't enough, I have some illumination stones too." Her sobbing had stopped already, but that didn't make her feel any better.

"Good to know!" Kickbolt replied through the lantern he was holding in his mouth, trying to sound less gloomy than he actually was. Sketch noticed this.

They kept walking into the dark corridor, counting less and less gems that helped light the way the further they went in. After a while, the flickering from the lantern became more obvious due to the dark; there was almost no light at all aside from it.

They kept on walking, slowly. They couldn't risk any more mistakes now that they had no way out in case of emergencies. The clapping of their hooves from walking on the stone pavement became almost painful to hear - they were used to it, but here, alone and trapped in the dark, the sound was unbearable.

Then the echoes from their walking died out. They had finally reached the end of the extremely long corridor. The flickering light from the lantern stretched out as far as it possibly could in all directions in front of them; they could see nothing after what they think was a few meters.

"How come it's so dark?" Kickbolt asked, the light from the lantern jumping around as his jaw moved.

Sketch pulled out one of the illumination stones she had in her bag, ready to use it if needed. "I don't know... there are usually always emeralds giving us light no matter where we go in this tower," she pondered. "Wait, what's that? Are those emeralds?" She pointed off into the darkness. There were two small green lights coming from the darkness, although the right one was significantly larger.

Kickbolt squinted, trying to make out exactly why they were in such an odd position in there out of all places. "Looks like it, but I don't-" THUMP. He was suddenly interrupted by a loud noise.

Sketch started looking around in a panic. "What wa-"

THUMP.

Kickbolt quickly took a few steps forward while scanning as much of the darkness as his eyes allowed him to. While he still had time, the pegasus made sure that his wing-harnesses were both strapped on correctly so no time would be wasted when he had to react.

THUMP. It was getting louder, as if closer.

“The emeralds... they’re *moving*!?” Sketch cried out, just before getting interrupted by another THUMP.

The two emeralds that were earlier seen off in the distance were slowly moving up and down, while accompanied with the loud noises.

Sketch grabbed the illumination stone with her teeth and concentrated, it slowly started glowing, tendrils of light making their way into the darkness.

THUMP.

Faster and faster the glow from it started brightening up the entire chamber, not giving off light directly, but instead making everything nearby give off a small light of its own, making any other light sources redundant.

THUMP.

Their eyes shrank in immediate terror; they could now clearly see what was making the noise.

“A GOLEM?!” they both cried out at the same time.

THUMP.

The massive stone creature was about four times higher than they were, and was closing in on them with heavy steps. Its short legs made it hard for it to move around its massive body, but it had spotted the ponies and was lumbering towards them. It opened what looked like a mouth below its oddly shaped eyes and let out a rumbling sound, almost loud enough to make the entire room shake.

“What do we do?! We can’t go back, that thing could just follow us in and trap us!” Sketch screamed, on the verge of crying. She turned to see Kickbolt, looking for guidance. But he wasn’t standing next to her anymore. He was already flying towards the golem.

Kickbolt could freely use his wings in the massive room; he gained speed until he finally

planted all four hooves in the middle of the golem's forehead, trying to kick himself away from it with as much force as he possibly could. It barely even flinched.

It let out another rumbling sound as it tried to swing its long arms at Kickbolt by rotating the entire mid-section of its body. The wide angle it swung them at let the limbs easily gain enough velocity to rival the pegasus' speed.

Kickbolt, surprised by the sheer force in the golem's arms, just barely avoided them by ducking underneath the swinging arm, followed by gaining some distance between himself and the creature to dodge the second one.

Sketch was running around on the floor, analyzing the golem for any possible weaknesses. They had learned about many different creatures they could encounter while exploring. While they never expected to actually see a real golem, they knew the basics about them. Every golem had a unique weakness, something that it tries to hide or defend, but could be exploited to defeat it. Sketch knew this and knew she had to find it while Kickbolt was distracting it.

Losing interest in the pegasus that had annoyed it, it looked down to Sketch who was near the wall, and started moving towards her.

THUMP.

Sketch quickly tried to run along the wall to get around it, not wanting to get trapped. She was fast and had a lot of endurance as an earth pony, but the golem's incredibly long arms could easily reach her from far away. It still wasn't quite close enough though, and Sketch was gaining distance.

It let out yet another rumbling sound as it slowly raised both of its arms, only to slam them down into the ground resulting in small quake, but enough for Sketch to lose her balance while running and fall.

Kickbolt landed on top of the head of the golem and started slashing his wing-blades furiously at the emerald eyes. The green glow wavered slightly from the blows, but the gems themselves were unscathed.

While the golem was getting distracted by Kickbolt again, Sketch quickly got up to flee from the approaching enemy before it had a chance to reach her. Just as she was about to circle around the golem, all the lighting in the room vanished at the blink of an eye. The illumination stone's effect had ended. With their eyes unadjusted to the dark, they couldn't see anything. Sketch quickly started wildly rummaging in her saddlebags for another magic stone to give them a fighting chance.

With the sudden darkness, Kickbolt launched himself from the head, trying to get away from the constructed beast. "I can't see! I don't know where I'm going!" Kickbolt yelled as he was flying blind, trying to avoid flying into anything while staying away from the golem.

Sketch let out a muffled yell from inside her saddlebag. "I'm working on it!" she retorted as she finally found a magic stone she hoped was an illumination one within her saddlebag. She grabbed it and concentrated. It slowly started glowing as she looked up to see the two glowing emerald eyes following something to its left.

It let out another loud rumbling noise as it rotated its mid-piece, causing its arms to spin around quickly. Kickbolt, being unable to see what was happening, just barely dodged the arm by chance as it swooshed through his silver mane.

"HUURGH!!"

But he wasn't able to avoid the second arm shortly afterwards. It slammed right into his side. Luckily his wing was positioned in a way so his harness took the direct hit for him. Even so, it still winded him and crashed into the ground hard.

Sketch could hear what was happening, but she still couldn't see, the magic stone not having taken effect yet. Suddenly she could see *something*, a slight green glow coming from the behind of the golem's right leg. It was only visible for a few moments until the light caused by the magic stone took effect, immediately outshining it.

The illumination stone had finally taken effect. "KICKBOLT!" the mare shouted after spitting out the now worthless stone out of her mouth.

His harness that had taken the hit for him had blades falling off of it; Kickbolt himself was lying on the ground whimpering. His vision was quickly fading out.

THUMP.

The golem had its eyes set upon Kickbolt, who was quickly losing focus. It opened its mouth again to rumble loudly while moving towards the vulnerable pegasus.

Sketch quickly started running up behind it. With its attention turned to Kickbolt lying on the ground she could move around freely. There was no time to spare.

THUMP.

It was getting alarmingly close to Kickbolt; just a few more steps and it would be within range to hit him again.

Sketch was right behind the golem by now; she recalled the glowing spot behind its right leg. With no other options she turned around and attempted to buck the location as hard as she could before the golem would move the leg out of reach again.

As her two hind legs connected, it let out another rumbling noise. But instead of the low ones it had been making before, it was making a deep - but louder - noise, over an even longer period of time than it had before, this sounded as if it was in pain. When Sketch turned around to prepare herself for whatever reaction the golem would have, she could see for a moment how the stone surface around the place she had bucked had cracked, with pieces of the rock falling apart. Right before the golem turned around to face Sketch, she could see something moving inside of it, something pulsating.

A heart.

THUMP.

The golem was turning its massive body to keep its newly found weak spot protected. It looked down to Sketch as it swung one of its arms to send her flying, but she was able to dodge the clumsy attack with relative ease by jumping backwards thanks to the adrenaline pumping through her veins.

With Kickbolt knocked out, it was her alone versus the giant monstrosity. "It's now or never..." she whispered to herself as she dashed in between the legs of the golem. She quickly picked up one of the fallen blades from Kickbolt's harness. With the knife between her teeth she got behind it to prepare for her attack.

THUMP.

It tried to move its leg away from her, to no avail. It was too clumsy and slow to effectively escape her. It let out another rumble not unlike the earlier one when it first got hit on the leg, except that this time it was an entirely different tone, one that could be compared to screaming. It was afraid.

Sketch had finally gotten to a position where she could clearly see the open 'wound'; inside of it was a green heart, which looked organic to her, unlike the rest of the body. It was pulsating fast, each thump spreading some of the green glow that lingered across the room a few seconds before it just vanished, only to be replaced with more of the green light. With the knife between her teeth she lunged forward.

The golem finally let out a rumbling sound unlike any of the others. This time, it started as if it was screaming, but the tone became lower and lower until it finally stopped.

Sketch had stabbed the heart, which was now a piece of crumbling stone that was falling

apart. Along with this, the golem was losing its balance and eventually fell over. The green light from both the heart and the eyes had faded completely.

It was dead.

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Kickbolt opened his eyes. There was a sharp pain on his right side. "Ow!" he let out quietly.

"Relax, I think you only broke a rib along with your wing." Sketch mouthed as she was using Kickbolt's own wing-harness to splint the broken bones, along with bandaging around his chest.

Kickbolt, still not sure what had happened, quickly started getting up to look around, only to get pushed back down by Sketch before he got a chance to see anything clearly. It was dark, but apparently Sketch had brought back the lantern left by the entrance of the room to give them some light now that the illumination stones' effect had worn off.

"Calm down! We're safe! And you need to let me finish bandaging you before I can let you move around." She kept on bandaging his broken wing; the harness around it had all the golden blades removed to make it easier. "Just after it knocked you out, I was able to find the weak spot and kill it," she said while motioning towards the massive pile of rubble not far from them.

"Are we still trapped?" he asked while gritting his teeth from the pain as Sketch tightened the final bandages around his wings.

"There, all wrapped up!" she said with a smile on her face. "I'm not sure actually, there was a sound as if the doors back in the corridor was opening again, but I couldn't just leave you here alone while checking it out," she explained while helping Kickbolt stand up again. "Can you walk?"

"Yeah, don't worry. I think it's just my wing that's in really bad shape if anything," he replied while trying to shrug his right wing, only to regret attempting to do so due to the pain. "Besides the wing, there's only this ache from the rib I guess."

Sketch picked up the lantern with her teeth. "Well... let's go then!" she said, only to pause for a moment to continue. "Slowly, right?" she said with a sheepish grin.

Kickbolt chuckled. "Yeah, slowly."

“Too bad about your harness though, most of the blades on the right wing either fell off or got bent out of shape. I think I was able to collect most of them though,” Sketch told Kickbolt.

“Don’t worry about it; I’m just glad we made it out of that okay. Besides, I have spare blades back home.”

As they walked back towards the way they had first come, the emeralds covering the walls slowly started reappearing until Sketch was finally able to put away the lantern.

Sketch squinted, looking into the distance of the hallway. “Is it...? YES! The door is open again!” she happily let out. “Defeating the golem must have triggered it!”

As they finally reached the stairwell again, Sketch turned around to look at Kickbolt’s damaged wing again. “We should get back to town for now, get you looked at or something.”

“Uh... Sketch?”

“No buts!” she quickly snapped.

“The final passage is open.”

Sketch stared at him for a moment before she turned around to see what he saw. The final door that stopped them at the top of the stairwell was now wide open, showing yet another, but much smaller staircase behind it that led almost right up into the tower.

Sketch’s mouth hung wide open until she realized what she was looking at. “It’s... open? What did we do to open it?” she asked herself quietly. “Was it the golem, too? Was defeating that thing the actual way to get us both out of there *and* open this door?” she quickly asked while turning to Kickbolt.

“I don’t know... but... do you want to go in?” he slowly let out.

“What? But you’re hurt! We don’t know what’s in there!”

Kickbolt shook his head. “I’m fine, don’t worry. And you said it yourself so many times already... we’re so *close*!” he said while motioning to the newly opened door. “I know you want to, as long as we’re careful I’m sure we’ll be fine,” he said calmly.

Sketch hesitated to answer, they *were* so close now, but Kickbolt was hurt because of her recklessness. “I... I *want* to look... but...” was all she could say before Kickbolt interrupted her.

“No buts!” he let out with a grin. He started walking towards the new steps behind the door, leading directly up.

Sketch followed close behind, feeling torn. One part of her knew she should have tried harder to convince Kickbolt to return to town... but her curiosity was getting the better of her. They were here! Floor thirty!

As the two of them slowly walked up the much smaller staircase, neither of them said anything. Holding their breaths in preparation for what could be up ahead.

They were only a few steps from reaching the top, what looked like a new room was just in front of them. This is the moment they had been trying to achieve; to see what is at the top of at least one of the towers.

They walked into the circular room, much smaller than any other place they had seen within the tower, only to see-

“*NOTHING?*” Sketch let out with a disappointed tone. “There’s *nothing* here?!”

They looked around; all that really stood out in the room was a sort of pedestal in the other side.

Sketch slumped down against the floor, speechless.

Many silent moments passed.

Kickbolt eventually opened his mouth to say something comforting, but never got the chance before all the emeralds lighting the room started glowing brighter and brighter, grabbing both of their attention. He quickly positioned himself closer to Sketch. “What’s going on?!”

It was getting hard to see, the light was forcing their eyes shut. “I don’t know!” Sketch responded.

The emeralds begun resonating, along with the light that was blinding them, it was getting hard to hear anything as well. Kickbolt and Sketch clenched their ears shut from the pain beginning to form in their skulls. Their brains felt as if they were getting scrambled from inside out.

Then just as it was about to get to its worst, the process suddenly reversed. First the noise filling the room started receding, and then the lights as well, until it was as if nothing had happened.

“Are-are you okay?” Sketch asked Kickbolt with a shaky voice, almost unable to keep

her balance.

He nodded. "What the heck was that? My ears are still ringing-" He stopped. His jaw dropped as he spotted something.

"What?" Sketch quickly asked. "Are you okay? Maybe you're hurt worse than I thought after the golem! We need to get you some medical attention!" the mare continued to ramble, unaware that he was actually looking at something.

Kickbolt lightly shook his head while pointing one hoof off in the direction he was staring. Sketch eye's followed the gesture.

There was a pony lying on the pedestal.

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(Author's note: I'd like to thank ARBPW and LysanderasD for helping me with editing and making my story readable. If you liked it, please leave a comment, they're probably the biggest source of encouragement I've yet to encounter. Don't forget to rate!)