

Irreplaceable
Chapter 14 - ...WHAT?!

Spike huddled in a corner of the cave he shared with Delicraw, reading a rather large book he'd found amid a jumble of treasure by the light of a small green flame. It was a simple story book, retelling the exploits of a terrible ice dragon. The book seemed out of place in a dragon's cave, but Spike didn't care. He was just happy he had something to read. He had never been much for books, preferring organizing them to reading them, but he had an overwhelming urge to read something, anything. While the book was long, Spike finished it rather quickly, his urge to read doing nothing to diminish his usual predilection to skip the boring parts. Placing the rather large (even to him) tome down, Spike's eyes wandered around the cave as he wondered what to do next. A low grumble from his stomach tipped the balance toward finding something to eat. He wasn't quite sure why, but his mind was slowly starting to slip, and he was determined to keep himself busy to take his mind off, well, his mind. Without even thinking about it, he walked outside the cave. Locating a rather luscious patch of grass, he lowered his head and began to eat, tearing up large mouthfuls. It wasn't until his seventh mouthful that Spike stopped and took the time to think about what he was doing. *Why am I eating grass!?* *Delicraw told me that I could eat any gems I wanted!* Returning to the treasure pile deep within the cave, he set out to find the perfect gem to quench his hunger. His search lead him to a rather large spherical ruby, the most delicious gem he had ever seen. It almost reminded him of an apple. Apples, in turn, made him think of Sweet Apple Acres and the Apple family. One member of the Apple family, in particular... Big Macintosh, with those broad shoulders, that ruggedly handsome face of his, that strangely masculine yoke he always wore. Then, of course, there was Doctor Whooves; he was pretty cute, too. That mane of his... Spike couldn't help but imagine his claws running through that silky- *SMACK* Spike's head shot forward, crushing the ruby with the force of the blow. *What in the hay was I just thinking about?!* Shaking his head, he decided that sleep was probably more important than what he ate right now. Grabbing a fistful of gems, he gulped them down before curling up to sleep in a pile of gold.

Twilight sat on the floor reading a book about dragonic magic. At least, that was her plan. For some reason, even back to her old self, she couldn't concentrate on anything. Often, she found herself skipping ahead and ignoring whole parts altogether, continually having to backtrack to try and understand what she'd been reading. After the fifth time trying to read the same paragraph, she let out a scream of frustration, and kicking the book across the burnt and scratched floor of her precious library.

"Somethin' wrong, sugarcube?" Applejack asked, looking at her with concern.

"I can't seem to concentrate on anything today. It's just getting frustrating now."

"Perhaps, my dear, you could stand to eat something. Unless I'm very much mistaken, you haven't eaten since we got back from Zecora's. Last I checked, your kitchen survived unharmed; why not go ahead and get something for yourself?" As if on cue, Twilight's stomach

let out a low rumble. Smiling sheepishly, she headed off to the kitchen to get herself a bite to eat.

Once Twilight was out of earshot, Applejack turned to Rarity, shaking her head.

"I AM glad ta see the ol' gal back to her ol' self, make no mistake, but she's pushin' herself awfully hard. I don't rightly even know what it is we're all lookin' fer. I mean, Twi says we can get through to Spike so what exactly is there to read up on? We need ta take action, how're we gonna do anythin' sitting around here?"

"Oh, you know our Twilight. She is simply making sure that she has everything she might need. I *am* assuming that, since she has us all looking through old dragon spellbooks, she is looking for a way to reverse what was done to Spike."

"Ah guess that makes sense." Applejack sounded rather unconvinced. "I kinda wish Pinkie Pie was here, she always had a knack fer finding what we need."

"Indeed. But I dare you to try saying no to Pinkie when she gives you those sad eyes of hers."

"It is p...pretty difficult." Rarity gave Fluttershy a sympathetic smile, knowing full well she was often the one to deal with Pinkie's dreaded puppy dog eyes. Once Twilight's explanation of what happened to Spike had come to an end, whatever sense of propriety had been keeping Pinkie quiet and calm wore off, and she had once again become a bouncing hyperactive ball of limitless happiness and excitement, insisting that she go make Spike's favorite dessert in preparation for there eventual confrontation with him. She had also mentioned whipping up some of her famous "get better soon" cup cakes for Dash, which she insisted would help the healing process because they are 'filled with pony magic', whatever that meant.

"GAH!!!!" The three friends whirled around, shooting into the kitchen as quick as they could at the sound of Twilight's pained scream. Upon reaching the kitchen, they saw her slumped on the floor clutching her jaw, a small bag of quartz sat on the table.

"Um...Twilight, dear, you, uh... you didn't just try to eat a *gemstone*, did you?" Rarity knew how Twilight missed Spike. She had once heard that some ponies began absentmindedly picking up the habits of missing friends or relatives, subconsciously trying to fill the void they left behind, but this is just plain silly. Surely she must have known she couldn't possible eat a *rock*. Twilight gave a small, almost ashamed nod of her head.

"Now why would ya'll go and do a darn silly thing like that for?"

"I know, Applejack. I honestly don't know what came over me. I was hungry and looking for food, and I saw the bag of gems, and I just... had a craving. I can't really say what happened. I wasn't thinking, I guess." Rarity walked over to Twilight.

"Open wide."

“But-

“Open.”

Reluctantly, Twilight opened her mouth so that Rarity could peer inside.

“It’s alright now. Luckily I didn’t bite down too hard. It was mostly just shock.” At least, that’s what she intended to say. It came out more like “Auph mmph muphuh muh, muh muhayah huh.”

“That’s nice, dear.” Stepping back, Rarity gave her less than professional opinion.

“I, for one, am not really the pony with the most expertise here. Fluttershy, would you be a dear and take a look?”

“Oh, of course!” Fluttershy slipped between Rarity and Twilight, inspecting Twilight’s mouth rather thoroughly. As she did so, Twilight happened to notice that Rarity and Applejack had moved across the kitchen to have a word in private. As Fluttershy went about her work, Twilight couldn’t help but let her eyes wander over Rarity’s perfect form. She couldn’t help but understand what the local colts saw in her, there was just so much about her that was just... *perfect*. Her hair, her legs, the elegant curve of her back, her perfectly proportioned flank coupled with that dazzling cutie mark... Twilight began to long for her to turn around, just so she could get lost in those beautiful blue eyes... When Rarity finally did turn, her heart began to race as their eyes met.

“Twilight, my dear, let’s get you some proper food, and then its off to bed with you, alright? You can stay with me, seeing as the library happens to be... less than habitable at the moment. I have a spare room you can use, we just need to clean it out first. I’ve been using it as a supply closet.” Her voice was like the sound of a hundred beautiful birds singing the most amazing ballad ever written. No, it was ten times better than that, a hundred times better!

“amythin fur yuh, muh tweet ahrity” Rarity gave Twilight a confused look. Fluttershy was still busy inspecting her mouth, and her speech was quite unintelligible.

“I beg your pardon?” Fluttershy finished her inspection and gave her seal of approval; nothing had been damaged. With her mouth free, Twilight was about to repeat herself but stopped when she realized what exactly it was she had just said, and the thoughts that had accompanied it regarding Rarity. Twilight’s eyes shot wide as her cheeks turned a vibrant shade of red.

“Anything the matter, dear? You look as though you’ve seen a ghost.”

“NOTHING!...um, sorry, uh, no, nothing! Nothing’s wrong! I uh, I’m just tired! Yeah, that’s it, tired!” Twilight mimed a yawn. “ I said ‘anything for you, my good friend Rarity’. Now, come on. Let’s get some proper pony food and then head to Carousel Boutique for some rest.” Twilight finished with a large and admittedly rather creepy smile.

“Uh, alrighty then, sounds good. I’ll just go rustle up some grub fer us and meet y’all at Rarity’s.” Applejack turned and left the library, giving the burned library one last concerned glance before running off.

Twilight began pacing in circles, trying to figure out what the hay had just happened to her, why she'd thought what she had. Had she always been a fillyfooler and just didn't know it? No, no, that didn't make sense. She liked colts, she always had. She KNEW she did. Didn't she? How many afternoons had she gone over to Sweet Apple Acres and pretended to read a book in the shade, just so she could watch Big Mac and those broad shoulders of his as he worked?

"Shall we head out, Twilight?" Rarity's question brought Twilight out of her trance and caused the blush to return.

"YES, LET US HEAD OUT!" Twilight dashed past Rarity and began collecting books. In no time at all, she and her friends were off to Carousel Boutique. Rarity was rather happy her friend wasn't fighting her, trying to avoid food and sleep, as it was rather clear she was not feeling well and needed plenty of both.

Twilight sat in bed, feeling much more focused than she had earlier. The break from reading and the lovely dinner provided by Applejack had obviously helped. The bed in Rarity's spare room was quite comfortable, and the room itself had a cozy feel to it, even with all the dress making supplies piled up against one wall (organized by colour, size and frequency of use, of course). Now that she had her headspace back, she could finally concentrate. She'd found a very useful book in the library, and had almost read the entire thing. Most of it was, truth be told, rather shocking, and one part in particular made her want to cry when she realized the implications it held for Spike. Unfortunately, there was nothing on how to reverse the spell. She shook her head. *Nothing yet. I WILL find it, it's just a matter of time.* Just as she was finishing up the last few pages of the book, there came a soft knock on the door.

"Come in, Fluttershy." she said as loudly as she dared, knowing that Rarity had put Sweetie Belle to bed some time ago before heading to bed herself. The door slowly creaked open and the yellow pegasus poked her head in.

"How did you know it was me?"

"Lucky guess. What can I help you with?" Fluttershy came the rest of the way in and, closing the door, stood there silently. She was obviously trying to work up the courage, finding the best words to broach the subject. Twilight knew exactly why she was here, and precisely what she was here to talk about. She'd been hoping this conversation would be put off until much later. Actually, she'd been hoping to put it off forever, but Fluttershy obviously wouldn't let that happen. "I'm guessing you want to talk to me about... what happened in the bog." Fluttershy nodded slowly.

"It was really... surprising. I never really thought you were capable of doing... something like that. I never thought you would ever consider taking that route. I have to say, I really didn't

understand what you were talking about most of the time, either. You... you just weren't making sense."

Twilight sighed, nodded her head. She could see how, from Fluttershy's perspective, what she had done and the things that she'd said would have been rather confusing.

"I suppose it's only fair I give you an explanation. Thinking back, I honestly don't know why I was like that. I've always been good at keeping my feelings inside and handling them by myself, but ever since Spike... I've just had a difficult time dealing with anything."

"What do you mean? What feelings? That is, if you don't mind sharing..."

"I don't mind at all. In fact, it really is about time I talked to someone, I think. Do you remember my cutie mark story? How I went to the Summer Sun Celebration and was inspired by the Princess?" Fluttershy nodded. "Before that day, I was... Well, for lack of a better term, a screw up. Look, this is a rather long story. Why don't you come and join me? Come on, have a seat." Fluttershy joined Twilight on the bed and draped a wing over her friend. "Thanks. Look, I know you probably think I'm exaggerating, but it's true. I was a complete failure. My magic skills were worse than terrible. I could barely pull off the simplest of spells, and when I tried, the results were usually...unpleasant, to say the least. I always did poorly in school, and the sole reason I never got held back was that no teacher ever wanted to deal with me for a second year. I was really clumsy, too. I always seemed to be getting into accidents. I'd find myself constantly spacing out, just staring off into the distance. If you combine all of that, it's no wonder I didn't have any friends. All the other ponies in my class avoided me. They all thought I was **special**, and not in a good way."

"But you're nothing like that now. You've got plenty of friends, everypony likes you, and you're the smartest pony I've ever met! Well, I mean, you DO tend to space out sometimes and... sorry."

Twilight giggled.

"Don't be. It's true, I do still do that. Only, now my eyes don't glaze over and I don't make funny faces anymore." Fluttershy tried to hold back a giggle "Okay, so sometimes I still make funny faces. Anyway, me being a screw up all the time led me to become rather depressed. My mother wanted to take me to a psychologist, but my father convinced her to try something else first. Instead, they took me to go see Princess Celestia raise the sun, and that's basically when everything turned around for me. I was so taken aback by the beauty and power of it all, of what magic could do, it spurred me into action. I completely overhauled my life. You know most of the story from there."

"But... I don't understand, why were you like that as a filly?"

"I was... preoccupied. I was always thinking about something, trying to figure it out. To be honest, I wasn't that different when I was younger, but something that happened basically made

me put my life on hold. I was so busy thinking about it, I just stopped caring about everything else. Because I stopped caring, things started to go downhill, and that made me more depressed, which made me care even less. It was like I was digging myself deeper and deeper.”

“What were you so preoccupied with? What could’ve been so important that it could just destroy your life like that?” Twilight turned her head, looking Fluttershy in the eyes.

“I used to have a friend. Yes, *A* friend. Just one. Even back then, I was often too busy reading to socialize with anypony. She would often come to my house and force me to go outside and play a game with her and the other ponies our age. I can honestly say that, if it wasn’t for her, I would have spent my entire childhood indoors, buried in books. We were friends for about three years when it happened.” Fluttershy was silent, but nodded her head, signalling her to continue.

“Her family life began to... degrade. Her parents argued all the time, which led to her becoming a very angry little filly. She got in trouble at school all the time, and began to turn into something of a bully. She was always nice to me, though. We shared everything; our hopes, our dreams, what colts we liked... She began to stay at my house more and more often, just to get away from home. This went on for several months until her parents decided that they simply couldn’t do it anymore. They decided to get a divorce. It was a really tough time for Shadow Dancer, dealing with her parents, being forced to go to court so many times, just so her parents could fight over who got what, and which one of them would be allowed to keep her. In the end, she went with her father. This meant that she had to move, from Canterlot to Fillydelphia. Before she left, we met up for the last time. There really wasn't much to say, it was a bit awkward. When I finally got the nerve to speak up she interrupted me...” Twilight turned away, lowering her head to rest on the mattress.

“She yelled at me. She’d never yelled at me before. She told me it was all my fault, and she ran off. That was the last I ever saw of her. It wasn’t until I saw the Princess raise the sun and put my life back in order that I was able to understand. She was angry. That’s all she was, just angry, sad and hurt. She needed someone to blame. But, at the time, I believed her. She was my best friend, and I just couldn’t fathom her being that angry with me unless I really did something so horrible to her. For two years, I dug myself into a hole. I honestly thought I had ruined her life. I just wallowed in depression, trying to figure out exactly how I caused what happened to her family. I have long since come to terms with how I felt, though. It took me two years to get over it. While it saddens me to think I let myself live like that for so long, I never let it get me down. Knowing I was past that part of my life, all I could do now was just make sure I never let it happen again... but...” She closed her eyes, lost for words. Fluttershy nuzzled her affectionately. “But when all this happened... I just can’t explain it. It was like everything I had done, all the progress I’d made in all the years since then was just gone, and all those old feelings came back and just... I blamed myself for what happened to Spike, just like I blamed myself for what happened to Shadow Dancer, and all those feelings of just being useless, of being worthless, of being nothing, being LESS than nothing, of everything I touched just turning to failure... It was just too much to bear. I... I just had to end it, somehow. Fluttershy, I... I c- I can’t possibly thank you enough for helping me. If it wasn't for you and Pinkie Pie I don't think I

would have gotten better. If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't... I wouldn't be alive right now. Thank you." Fluttershy blushed.

"It was nothing..." Twilight stopped her.

"It was NOT nothing. What you did for me... I do know how I'll pay you back, though. While I still know that it's my fault this happened to Spike, I am NOT going to let that hold me back. I am going to get my Spike back. I am going to get OUR Spike back." The two shared a long silence.

"Thank you for sharing your story, Twilight Sparkle."

"You don't need to thank me. You're my friend and I owed you an explanation."

"But, that really sorta didn't..."

"Pardon?"

"Um... well, that sorta, I mean, it didn't really explain... um, anything... nevermind... forget I said anything."

"What do you mean it didn't explain anything? Come on, Fluttershy, you can tell me."

"Well it's just... You said yourself that you've made peace with your past. And while this whole incident with Spike is really big, I just can't see it causing you to act how you did." Twilight paused, considering.

"I see what you're saying. I guess what with my being so worked up and worried about Spike, I just let whatever mental barriers I'd built up-" Twilight froze.

"What? What's wrong, Twilight?"

"It... it wasn't as if. It WAS!"

"Pardon?" Twilight wheeled to face her, eyes wide with excitement.

"That's what happened! It was exactly like the mental barriers I'd built up over the years were destroyed! I've coped with those feelings all my life, and yet only now they hit me like a ton of bricks!"

"But... I don't understand... How could that have happened? Actually, it sort of sounds like the spell that was cast on Spike. It sounds exactly like that, actually." Twilight hopped out of bed and began to pace. Her mental barriers had been removed; it's the only explanation that made sense. But how could that have happened? It was as if the spell cast on Spike had...

"leaked over to me..." Twilight stopped her pacing and faced Fluttershy. "I think we may have more hope for Spike than I originally thought."

"Why is that?"

“A bond. We share a link, a magical one. That has to be it! It must’ve been created when I hatched him from his egg. This explains so much! My moods, my mental barriers, my brief but serious attraction to Rarity-”

“...What?” Realizing what she’d just said, Twilight blushed.

“Uh... please forget I just said that.” Fluttershy’s own face turned a little red as she nodded.

“Thanks, I **REALLY** appreciate it. Anyways, as I said, there is a link between the two of us. It’s been extending the effects of the spell to me, as well as Spike’s moods and emotions, probably because the barriers we’ve subconsciously built up to prevent our thoughts being shared have broken down. This explains SO MUCH. If I’m right about this link and I can safely say I am, then that means some of my emotions and feelings are leaking over to Spike. And that means....”

Twilight began to bounce happily in place, reminiscent of a certain pink party pony.

“If you’re not angry when we find him, he won’t be?”

“Not just that. You and Pinkie Pie helped me to rebuild my mental barriers, which means there is a very good chance that some of that control leaked over to Spike. That would have helped him repair some of his, too! Things are looking up even more now. We have a great chance of getting through to him!” Twilight continued bouncing, ecstatic. Fluttershy sat on the bed and smiled. Not only was Twilight back to her old self, it looked like the odds of saving their friend had just improved greatly.

“That is amazing news, my dear, now why don’t you stop jumping around and get to bed so we are all well rested in the morning?” Twilight whirled around, startled, to see Rarity at the door.

“Oh, sorry about that, Rarity. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“Not a problem, dear. I understand you’re happy. I heard most of what you’d said and am overjoyed that our odds have improved. Now will you *please* go to bed? As for you, Fluttershy, I won’t have you making your way home alone so late at night. If Twilight doesn’t mind, why don’t you two share the room?”

“I don’t mind if Fluttershy doesn’t.”

“Oh thank you for your hospitality, Rarity. The bed is large enough; I think we can share it just fine. And sorry for waking you.” Rarity gave a small smile left the room, closing the door behind her. Fluttershy got off the bed and prepared the covers for sleeping, placing the book Twilight had been reading on the night stand. Twilight turned off the lights and, climbing into bed, contemplated saying something. At first, she felt she should, but eventually opted not to.

“Thank you for sharing your story, Twilight. I know that must have been hard for you, and I promise I won’t tell it to anyone else.”

“No, Fluttershy, thank you for listening. And for saving me from myself.”

“Anytime.” Twilight turned on her side and, closing her eyes, she began to fall asleep. Just as she felt the gentle embrace of rest coming to her, a voice from directly next to her caused her to bolt upright.

“I *am* sorry to barge in on you again, girls, but I just had to ask. Did I hear you correctly when I head you say you were attracted to me?” Twilight’s eyes bugged out of her head as she stared at the shadow she assumed was Rarity.

“Uh, nope! No, I didn’t say anything of the sort, you must have misheard.” Twilight held her breath, waiting for the shadow to move.

“I’ll take your word for it. I don’t know what made me think you said that. So sorry to disturb you, sweet dreams.” Twilight could’ve sworn she saw her smile just before she left, but couldn’t be sure. Lying down again, Twilight sighed, praying that she wouldn’t press the matter further. As she began to fall asleep, she caught sight of the book she’d been reading. The memory of a certain passage leaped out at her, ruining her previous good mood. *I’m confident we can save Spike from his madness... but can we save him from the consequences of the spell?*

Spiked floated around in the void. It was a dream, of that he was certain. He watched as horrific images, the product of a broken mind, drifted past. Tiring of this emptiness, Spike imagined himself back in Delicraw’s cave. The emptiness around him started to waver, twist and shift. The sight of it was rather nauseating, though Spike doubted he had to worry about throwing up while in a dream. When the emptiness solidified, it had become Froggy Bottom Bog. Not where he wanted to be, but he wasn’t about to complain. He was knee deep in muddy water, gripping the hydra’s remaining head in his claws. Just as it had happened in reality, he began to fight against himself. Almost everything inside him urged him to finish the job, while a small part of his brain fought against it. Just as it had happened in reality, he managed to stave off his killing urge and, releasing the great beast, walked away. As he did so, the world began to unravel around him, like someone pulling the threads out of a tapestry. He wanted to flee, to run from the destruction of his dream world, but he kept walking forward, unable to stop himself. As the world continued to unravel, the ground beneath his feet disappeared, and he fell into darkness. As he fell, he could feel the emptiness around him changing again. While still in free fall, he turned around and found himself in the middle of a clearing in a forest, feet on solid ground. In front of him stood Delicraw, a sad look upon his face. Then there was pain. Incredible pain. Pain like he had never felt, in his chest. When he looked down, he saw that Delicraw’s claws were buried deep into his chest. He looked back up to see that Delicraw was gone, replaced by an entirely different dragon, the beast from the story book. This one was monstrous, even compared to Delicraw. His body was covered in spikes and scales. He wore armour, a full

suit of dragon armour. His head held a toothy grin, each of his fangs dripping what could only be blood. He gave a tug and ripped Spikes heart out of his chest.

“Sorry, Spike, but that there is the rules of the game.” as Spike fell to the ground, as if in slow motion, the last thing he heard before his thoughts evaporated into nothing was the deep, evilly screeching laugh of the dragon that killed him and the voices of his former pony friends...chanting.

“Kill...Kill...Kill...Kill...Kill Kill KILLKILLKILLKILLKILLKILLKILLKILL!” Silence. Spike was dead, everything around him was pure blackness. All hope seemed lost. But then, a light, and someone running towards him. He was small again, and the light felt good on his tiny body. The approaching figure became recognisable as a pony. It was Twilight! Spike’s joy was unmatched by even Pinkie Pie on her happiest day. He wanted to scream out to her, to call her name, but found himself unable to talk. Twilight eventually arrived, towering over him, twice as big as she normally was. She leaned down close to his ear. Spike could feel tears in his eyes. She was going to take him back, he knew it! He would be her number one assistant again, he could go home! He closed his eyes as she whispered into his ear.

“Kill...”

-To Be Continued -