



<http://lovetomorrowlove.tumblr.com/>

Applejack couldn't keep a smile off her face as she sailed *The Zap Apple* towards home. She had made a good profit on this last delivery run, and nothing could dampen her mood. Add to that how much she loved the simple act of sailing, and she was one happy pony. She had made the run from her home island to Port Ponyville often (at least four times a week, to be honest), but the feel of the wind running through her mane and the salt spray in her face never got old. It was almost enough to temporarily forget the constant threat of piracy hanging over her head.

Ask anypony in Sequestria the first thing that comes to mind in response to the word 'pirate', and it will usually be something along the lines of 'somepony who takes things that aren't theirs'. This is a generalized stereotype; but it is a true definition. Everypony who captained even the smallest vessel knew to keep their eyes peeled for the flags on approaching ships, advance strike pegasi, or even those newfangled single-pony magi-skis that announced the arrival of pirates, which could lead to at best stolen cargo, and at worst a sunken ship and a nice deserted island or a personalized rope necklace to call your own.

And none knew that better than Applejack. Her family's farm grew and kept many things, but

their apples were most famous. They had long been an important staple of the economy in Port Ponyville. Add to that the delicious cider that could be made from her apples, and there were swarms of others just itching for a piece of that pie. She was calm and collected whenever she sailed, but kept her head on a swivel as she steered her little boat back towards home. Her family had worked hard to keep the island's location a secret known to only a few trusted ponies, lest pirates or other invaders come and take all the apples. She knew all the shortcuts through other island inlets, the reef barriers, and the sandbars she could use to make anypony who followed her have a miserable time doing so. And even if they did manage to track her, the island was situated near the Everfree Triangle, which was a place feared by even the most experienced of sailors for its unpredictable seas and treacherous waters and creatures, and thus the island remained generally untouched. There was that pair of unicorns that had arrived and then left, but they had headed into the Triangle and nopony had seen hide nor hair of them again.

Not that Applejack minded, of course. It sounded cruel, but it was a cutthroat world she lived in and the less threats she had, the better.

That didn't mean she had no friends, though. During her scans, she spotted a few birds circling something brown, which quickly resolved into a large raft built of fallen logs lashed together, carrying a yellow pegasus with a long pink mane. She wore a simple shirt, short-sleeved but with long strips that hung down nearly to her fetlocks. Her shirt stopped right before her belt, revealing her cutie mark of three butterflies. Applejack grinned and pulled the sail line, raising the sail to lessen the amount of wind caught to slow herself down.

"Hey, Fluttershy!" she called as she approached. "How's that otter doin'?"

Fluttershy looked up from her raft and waved. "Much better, thanks!" she called back.

"And Angel Bunny?"

The little white rabbit riding on Fluttershy's shoulder stuck his tongue out at Applejack.

Applejack smiled. This meant he was in a good mood. "Good t' hear! Hey, brought you something!" She held up a little corked jar and shook it, making a sloshing sound.

Fluttershy squeed and flew up to meet her on the deck. "You shouldn't have," she said, but her tone of voice indicated that she was overjoyed with the gift.

"T'aint nothin'," Applejack said dismissively, leaning lazily on the steering wheel. "You're always at our island anyway, helpin' with our animals and such, it's the least Ah could do t' say thanks."

Fluttershy hugged the flask to her chest. "Thank you so much," she said again, tears starting to form in the corners of her eyes.

Applejack tugged her hat a little lower to hide her blush. Fluttershy's foal-like innocence shone through again, and frankly, Applejack was embarrassed at receiving this reaction. "Yeah, well,

you're welcome," she said.

Fluttershy looked up. "I saw Berry Punch today," she said.

Applejack snorted. Although not a direct competitor, Berry Punch was not on her list of close friends. She had some strange ideas and quirks--the main one being it was better sailing while tipsy--and her life had too many variables for Applejack's liking. "And what's that pony up to now?"

"She says she spotted pirates in this area, and said I should be on alert. I thought I should tell you."

"Ah appreciate it, Fluttershy," Applejack said, lifting her hat and running a hoof through her mane.

"But she said the flag they were flying was different. She said it looked like Rainbow Blitz's."

Now this caught Applejack's attention. Rainbow Blitz, captain of the ship *The Sonic Rainboom*, was the most feared colt in all of Sequestria. Tales of his piracy, his huge raids, his cruelty and his womanizing had been told and retold for nigh on a decade now, and Applejack had no intention of finding out if these rumors were true. "Wanna run that by me again?"

"She said it had the skull and wings and rainbow behind them. It sounded awful."

Applejack smiled grimly. "Ah take it she escaped somehow?"

"She had her Greek fire ready, but the flyby pegasus didn't think she had anything or something like that because they never tried to board her."

Applejack couldn't hold back a chuckle. Another of Berry's ideas was that the Greek fire of ancient legend had originally been an alcoholic drink, and she had devoted many a summer to 'reclaiming' the recipe. She hadn't quite succeeded in recreating it exactly according to legend (the green color always evaded her for some reason), but she had gotten pretty close--and she had the missing eyelashes and burn marks all along her body to prove it.

Applejack chose to fend off pirates in a more conventional way. She tapped the cutlass strapped to her side. "Ah'm sure Ah c'n handle myself."

"Ok," Fluttershy said hesitantly, "but be careful."

"You too," Applejack replied.

Fluttershy grinned. "Most sailors are afraid of my albatross friends," she said, pointing up to the large, circling birds. "I'll be fine. Thank you again for the cider!"

Applejack chuckled. The only thing she was afraid of when she saw an albatross was that it might leave a little 'present' on her deck. "And once again, it ain't nothin'. Take care now."

Fluttershy fluttered back down to her raft and waved goodbye. As she sailed away, Applejack made sure she kept a closer eye on her surroundings.

* * *

She was about two miles from home when she first spotted it: a whiteish cloud that moved unlike any other cloud she had ever seen. Peering at it intently, she whipped up her spyglass and focused. Sure enough, it was not a cloud at all, but a white pegasus with a yellow mane. She wore sailors' clothing, and Applejack felt a little pit form in her stomach. Pegasi wings weren't really designed for saltwater conditions, and so as a general rule, they were not good sailors (Fluttershy used easily-replacable rafts for a reason), and when they did sail, they usually kept to being a flying, short range lookout. Or, as was more likely in this case, running a pirating flyby to see if a ship had anything worth stealing. Applejack felt slightly relieved that she had stored the bits from today's sale under the hidden floor in the safe box again, but still couldn't shake that feeling of unease.

It didn't help when the pegasus descended, aiming right for Applejack's ship. With a cheery "Ahoy there!", she crash-landed and clattered across the deck in a swirl of fabric, metal, and feathers.

She looked really familiar. If Applejack didn't know any better, she'd say that this pony was almost a pegasus copy of Pinkie Pie, that pink earth pony that ran the bakery and tavern in Port Ponyville. Obviously this could not be the case, as this pony had wings and Pinkie did not.

Even so, that was her first reaction. "Pinkie Pie?"

"Nope," the pegasus responded with her face still buried in the deck. "She's my cousin. I'm Surprise, nice to meet you."

Applejack tried to keep a steady smile. There was a slight chance that she wasn't hostile, and Applejack decided to try being friendly. "Well, howdy there then, Surprise. What brings you to my little ol' ship today?"

She popped up, unhurt and still cheerful. "Oh, not much," she said. "Just doing a little exploring."

"Exploring?" Applejack asked. "Exploring what?"

"Oh, you know. Stuff," Surprise said dismissively.

"What kind of stuff?"

"Well, you see, my captain told me to bring back that horizon, and I'm trying to figure out where

it is. I haven't found it yet, you see."

Applejack suppressed the desire to facehoof. "Look, miss, that's just a sayin'. What that means is, full sail forward until he says otherwise."

The white mare cocked her head. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yep."

"Are you really, really sure?"

"Yep."

"Positive?"

"For the last time, yes. Are you sure you ain't Pinkie's sister or twin or sommat?"

"Nope. In fact, you wanna hear something funny? I'm not her cousin."

"You're not?"

Surprise shook her head. "Nope. Never even heard of her."

Applejack frowned. "Then why didja say the two of you were cousins?"

"Oh, no reason. I just wanted to distract you."

"Distract me from wha-?" But Applejack didn't need to finish that, because she heard the telltale sound of magi-skis approaching. "Pirates," she hissed, looking around and trying to determine the closest threat.

"Surprise! And that's how I got my name!" the pegasus cheered, drawing her sword and smashing the flat of her blade against Applejack's face, knocking her out cold instantly.

At least, that's what she tried to do. But Applejack was faster.

She ducked under the attempted blow and sent Surprise reeling with one punishing cross from her left forehoof. Pegasi, being generally lighter, were relatively easy to knock back--and knock out.

Drawing her sword, Applejack ran to the side railings of her ship and quickly began cutting off the grappling hooks thrown by the ponies below. She slashed ropes and in the process sliced chunks of wood out of the railing, but she didn't care. Rushing back to the wheel, she cut the rope holding up the sail, letting it fall and unfurling it completely, hoping for more speed. Spinning around, she came face to face with an earth pony mare who had somehow managed to board. She swung her sword, but Applejack blocked it and turned, presenting her rear hooves and bucking her over the railing and off the ship. She was rewarded by the sound of wood

splintering--apparently she had landed on one of the magi-skis.

Scanning the scene, her heart jumped into her chest as she saw a new ship appear in view, larger and much faster than her own. It was sleek, dark, and bore a flag that was widely known and brought a slight stab of fear into her heart. It had a large skull, facing forward, flanked by two wings, all in front of a diagonal rainbow swath. Pegasi were not good sailors, and Applejack knew of only one exception.

"Rainbow Blitz," she breathed, sprinting back to her wheel and spinning it sharply, making her ship lurch harshly to one side. She couldn't outrun the approaching ship, but maybe she could outmaneuver them.

"Wheee!"

Applejack looked back to see Surprise sitting upright and sliding across the deck--and crashing right through her guardrail to land in the sea below. Shaking her head, she brought the ship back in line with the wind, trying for more speed.

But it was not to be. Her little ship was out-powered, and pegasi and ponies on magi-skis quickly surrounded her ship. Earth ponies jumped on, climbing the railings with grappling hooks, and a couple pegasi landed from the skies. Knowing that she wasn't going to get out of this alive, but not wanting to give up without a fight, she jumped off the railing to the front of the ship and pulled out the stopper on the anchor hub, letting the anchor fall to the sea floor and lurching her ship to a sudden stop, sending her unwanted passengers skidding and scrambling for purchase on the deck. .

"Y'all want a fight? Ah'll give y'all a fight!" she proclaimed, springing back up to the main deck for higher ground, swinging her sword in challenge.

The first mare to regain her balance and step forward managed to duck the first swing, but Applejack used it to shift her weight, and drove her rear hooves into her chest, sending her flying backwards and taking out a few other pirates. The second one slashed downwards, burying her sword in the deck. Applejack kicked her over under the wheel and spun it sharply, slamming the spokes against her head. Clenching swords with the third opponent, she pivoted and shoved him backwards, using the fallen second pirate as a tripwire. She reared up, slamming a pegasus to the ground, then bucked fiercely and dropped two earth ponies where they stood. This was her ship, and nothing was getting past her.

Strangely enough, they seemed to be holding back, as if they didn't want her dead. Applejack first noticed this when a pony attacked with a staff instead of the cutlass he wore.

Ah well. Their loss. More specifically, his loss; especially when her kick went through his staff to hit him in the chest and knock him into the mast.

But the pirates kept coming, and Applejack was only one mare.

Soon, the fight ended, and not in the way she wanted it to.

A sharp whistle cut through the noise, making every pirate stop. Applejack looked up and saw a pegasus with a rainbow mane, wearing a bandana and typical pirate garb, hovering a good thirty feet in the air. At first, Applejack wondered if this could be Rainbow Blitz, but then dismissed this possibility as she was, well, a she; and a fairly young she at that, maybe her age or a bit younger.

"You're good," she called down.

"Fanks," Applejack responded hesitantly, keeping her sword at the ready.

"But I think I'm better," she finished.

"Then why don'tcha come down here and say that to my face, then, huh?" Applejack demanded.

The pegasus nodded. "I could, but that's *boring*. What do you say we set a little wager on this?"

"A wager?" Applejack asked, confused. "And the terms are...?"

"You beat me in a one-on-one fight, you sail home without any more trouble from us. You lose, and you come peacefully aboard the *Sonic Rainboom*." She paused. "Well, obviously if you die you lose too, but Rainbow Blitz wants you alive."

A shudder ran up Applejack's back as more rumors flew unbidden through her mind. "Issat so?" she asked, setting her sword down to enunciate and putting in as much venom into her words as she could. "And what does Rainbow Blitz want with me? Make me a conquest? Ah wasn't aware many pegasi liked mounting ground pounders."

"There is nothing wrong with liking earth ponies!" the rainbow mare snapped, gesturing angrily. "And no! But when you lose, you'll find out!"

Applejack stomped on the hilt of her sword, flipping it back up and catching it with her mouth. "You're cocky," she said. "Ah 'ike 'at."

The rainbow mare took a few deep breaths to calm herself down. "So, do we have ourselves a deal?"

Applejack grunted. "Ah don't think so. Ah've known enough pirates t' know y'all can't be trusted."

The rainbow mare exaggeratedly clasped a hoof against her chest and sank slightly, as if mortally wounded. "I'm deeply offended!" she said overdramatically, raising the other hoof as if in supplication to her crew. "To think, she hesitates to trust [i]me[/i]!"

The crew chuckled at that, even the ones being tended for their wounds.

"Maybe this will help." She brought a hoof up and solemnly proclaimed, "Cross my heart, hope

to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye.”

Applejack was taken aback. “You know Pinkie Pie?”

“Psh. Yeah. Who doesn't know Pinkie Pie?”

Surprise raised her hoof.

The mare frowned. “Ok... Who besides Surprise doesn't know Pinkie Pie?”

Nopony else moved.

“There ya go,” she said.

Applejack grinned and repeated the gesture. “Alright. Ah'll take that wager.”

The rainbow mare drew her sword, tossed it up into the air, closed her wings, and dropped in free fall to the deck. She landed lightly on her forehooves and caught the sword in her teeth before performing forward roll and popping up in perfect position.

Applejack responded by flipping her own sword in the air and catching it again. “Let's do this,” she growled.

The pegasus mare grinned and charged.

Applejack sidestepped and brought her sword down, but to her surprise, the pegasus wasn't there. She had ducked the obvious strike and charged right by, and Applejack didn't have time to brace herself before one of her rear hooves tagged her in the chest. It didn't hurt that much--only her pride--but it did teach her one thing.

This pony was *fast*.

Applejack stepped back and shifted into a defensive posture. The pegasus hopped around, jabbing relentlessly, looking for any chink in the armor. Applejack moved her sword slightly, doing just enough to deflect the blows. After that fight against the crew, she needed to conserve what little energy she had.

Energy which the pegasus didn't seem to be lacking. She looked more like a metal tornado, spinning and jabbing and slashing, and frankly Applejack was having a hard time keeping up.

The pegasus suddenly switched tactics, throwing her sword along the ground. As Applejack instinctively jumped over it, the pegasus jumped over her, and Applejack was still in the air and couldn't react in time. Her rear hoof slammed into Applejack's neck, sending her tumbling to the ground. She managed to hang on to her sword, and quickly forced herself upright again.

The barest hint of admiration might have flickered across the pegasus's face before she lifted her sword and charged again. She jumped up, as if ready to come down with a punishing blow, but with a quick flap of her wings, somehow shot back down to the deck and brought her sword

across. By sheer dumb luck, Applejack managed to block it and hold the blade. With powerful rear hooves, she drove the rainbow mare backwards, slamming her against the mast. The pegasus gasped briefly.

And then the pegasus opened her mouth, extended her tongue, and licked Applejack right on the nose. Applejack was, to put it lightly, astonished; and didn't even see the pegasus shift her weight. She did notice, however, when she flew through the air and landed hard on her back, with the wind completely knocked out of her. Applejack fought for breath, and her eyes refused to come back into focus. Unfortunately, she soon realized this was because her eyes were trying to focus on the sword not half an inch from between her eyes.

Applejack's ears flattened. She'd lost.

To her shock, the cyan mare flipped her sword back into its sheath and held her hooves wide. "Congratulations! You win!" she cheered.

"Say wha-?"

"You've won a first class, all-expenses paid trip aboard the *Sonic Rainboom*!"

Applejack could only stare as the mare continued her presentation, and the crew snickered.

"You'll get your own room, with a view of the sea, and you'll get to meet and greet the one and only Rainbow Blitz!"

The snickers grew louder.

Even the cyan mare joined in... and then she became deadly serious. "Drop your weapons."

Applejack growled at the mare. "You cheated!" she accused.

The pegasus's face darkened. "In what way? How was that not a one-on-one fight?"

"It... It..." Applejack thought as hard as she could, but came up with nothing. It had been underhoofed, for sure; but not technically illegal. Snarling angrily, she removed her belt and the various knives she carried secreted on her body.

The rainbow mare grinned as Applejack removed one from her boot. "You're honest. I like that in a pony."

Applejack snorted derisively. "That's rich, coming from a pirate."

"Meh," the pegasus retorted. "Honor among thieves and such."

Applejack stopped short. "Ah ain't a thief."

"And yet you still have honor. Funny how that works, huh?"

Applejack cocked her head. "That didn't make a lick of sense."

The pegasus chuckled. "It's a pirate thing."

Ah, yes, Applejack thought. Pirates. Problem is, pirates aren't the smartest ponies around. After all, going into a job where you can be killed on sight isn't very smart. So Applejack wasn't too worried. She would be out of here in no time.

After all, she had only promised to board; not to remain aboard.

Her smug thoughts were only more cemented as the cyan mare pointed a hoof and said, "Derpy, Lyra, Shoeshine. Search the ship. Take what you can, leave whatever you don't want, and then lash the rudder towards Port Ponyville."

Applejack grinned. Looks like *The Zap Apple* would live to sail another day, and probably would be recovered. The box of bits was well hidden and there was a good chance that Applejack would eventually be getting everything back.

A green unicorn mare and a blue unicorn mare on the deck groaned at the assignment, but a gray pegasus mare cheered at being chosen. She flapped her wings and crossed the space between the two ships, but misjudged the landing and quite literally crashed through the upper deck, ending up in the lower storage area, sending scraps of wood flying.

"My bad!" she called. "Oh, hey! A box full of bits!"

Applejack whimpered. Now she was afraid for her boat, her bits, and her sanity, unsure if she'd keep any of them.

* * *

She was led to what the rainbow mare had jokingly called 'our best accommodations' by a gray earth pony mare with a black mane. Like most pirates, she wore long sailors' clothing that covered her cutie mark, but Applejack could tell that this mare wasn't a seafarer from birth. She carried herself like the high class ponies that sometimes visited Port Ponyville. Her head was raised, her nose held high, and her very demeanor felt out of place.

"You don't hide your emotions well," she said suddenly. Even her voice was out of place. She had a slight accent, one that spoke of higher breeding, and definitely not one Applejack was used to hearing at sea.

"Beg yer pardon?"

"You see me as easy pickings, and intend to attempt an escape en route to your cell. Please do;

I haven't had a good fight in a long time."

Applejack fought to keep a straight face. "Ah don't know what you're talkin' about."

"You and I both know that your promise was only to *board* peacefully, not remain aboard. You are a business pony. I am willing to bet a substantial amount of money that you caught that even before you even performed the Pinkie Promise."

"You know Pinkie Pie too?"

A slight look of exasperation crossed the gray mare's face. "We've... met."

"She's a hoofful, isn't she?"

The gray mare answered in that same flat voice. "You can say that again, but I highly advise you do not."

"Sheesh," Applejack muttered. "Tough crowd."

"It's a pirate thing," she said dismissively.

Knowing they were nearing her cell, Applejack made one last effort to try and make friends.

"You said you weren't from around here; how did you become a pirate, anyway?"

"I had to flee for my life after I singlehoofedly pleased no less than eight of my father's business associates at the same time before getting interrupted by a posse of their wives and the royal guard. It was enjoyable, but made quite the mess, and I still don't think my rectum has fully recovered."

Applejack stopped short and stared at her in abject horror... until the mare shoved her back into a cell that Applejack hadn't seen and then slammed the door shut.

The gray mare giggled as she locked the door. "I can't believe you believed me. I'm impressed you've survived this long for being so gullible."

Applejack growled and pushed herself to her hooves, angry at both being lied to and at being tricked into the cell like that. "Whatever," was her less-than-intimidating comeback.

Still chuckling, the gray pony blew her a kiss. "I imagine you've been through a lot and would like some rest. Sleep well, apple mare."

"My name is Applejack," Applejack hissed.

"Apple mare," she repeated disdainfully before turning and walking away.

Applejack paced for a while, but soon realized she had nothing better to do than to collapse on the little bunk and attempt to get some sleep.

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Applejack was awoken by a harsh clanging sound. She looked up blearily and when her eyes had come back into focus, she saw a little orange pegasus filly with a purple mane banging cheerfully on the bars with a little sword.

"Knock it off," she grumbled, reaching for a pillow to pull over her head. Of course, there wasn't one; but it was still a habit anyway.

"I gotta wake you up!" she responded cheerfully. "Rainbow Blitz invited you to dinner!"

"Tell 'im Ah ain't hungry."

Still banging, she chuckled. "Rainbow Blitz said you'd say that, and then said that I had permission to keep making noise until you came!"

"So yer plan is to annoy me into submission?"

The blade paused ever so slightly before continuing its motions. "Whatever works, right?"

Applejack rolled off her bed and stood up slowly. "Speakin' of works, you better stop doing that."

"Why?"

Applejack pointed at the sword she swung. "Because you're gonna dent the blade if you keep hitting the edge like that."

The filly stopped briefly and examined her sword. "Looks fine to m-"

But that's as far as she got, because Applejack quickly reached out with a hoof and pulled her head sharply forward, slamming it into the bars and stunning her. The brief feeling of guilt dissipated as she thought of her freedom and going back to her family, and she retrieved the sword and began rifling through the filly's clothes.

"Come on, come on," she hissed. "Where is it?"

"Looking for this?"

Applejack looked up to see that gray mare from earlier, holding a key in her mouth.

"Yeah..." Applejack's voice trailed off, realizing her already shoddy plan just crumbled completely.

"I suggest dropping the sword and standing away from the bars."

“Ah suggest lashing yourself to a cannonball and jumpin’ overboard,” Applejack retorted.

The gray mare's lips tightened. “Might I remind you that the captain has invited you to dinner, and that you don’t need your tail nor cutie mark to accept that offer?”

Applejack considered this threat. She quickly weighed her options, and realized that this could not end well for her. First of all, she was fighting with a weapon not her own, which was always a disadvantage in a fight (especially when she hadn't practiced with it at all before). Secondly, she was in an enclosed space, and though it was a little sword, she didn’t have much room to swing. That might not have been so bad in and of itself, as the gray mare couldn’t swing her sword either; but the gray mare pulled out a curved dagger, and that was a game changer. The little blade would fillet her like an apple for a pie before she could even swing.

Reluctantly, Applejack dropped the sword, kicked it over by the door, and took a few steps back.

“Good apple mare,” the gray pony said condescendingly as she sheathed her weapon and unlocked the door.

“My name is Applejack.”

“Apple mare,” she repeated as she put the filly’s sword back in its sheath and gently sat her upright on the bench in the cell. She rested her head against the wooden walls and then turned and pointed, indicating that Applejack needed to move. Applejack didn’t mind too much, until Octavia shut the door behind her.

“You’re just gonna leave her there?” Applejack couldn’t help but ask as Octavia directed her from behind with a sharp jab.

“Oh, don’t give me that look. I didn’t lock it or anything, now, did I? Now march.”

* * *

The captain's cabin was just as fancy as Applejack had imagined it would be. Silks that probably cost more bits than she made in a week adorned the ceilings and corners and acted as blinds. All the furniture in the room was gilded with gold, or upholstered with velvet. Various treasures lay scattered around the room, everything from piles and bags and pots of gold coins to silver chains to small marble statues to more rubies than a dragon's hoard would have. Crowns hung from the ceiling, amulets with precious stones lined the walls--that is, where the fine art hadn't been already taking up space. Her eye was briefly caught by a golden necklace inlaid with an enormous sapphire in the shape of a lightning bolt before flicking over to the pony in the room with her. Instead of the captain, there stood that same rainbow maned pony from earlier, and Applejack couldn't suppress a frown. Apparently, she wasn't good enough for Rainbow Blitz, *and*

she had to have dinner with the pirate that had likely sunk her ship. Score two direct hits on her self confidence.

“Good to see you too!” she replied jovially. “I will be your host tonight. Come! Have a seat.” She pointed with her sword to the table, which Applejack just saw. Her mind had been too enthralled with treasures that would have made her family's life much more comfortable to notice the wide table bearing a globe of the known world, various maps and rolled pieces of paper, and a fairly simple but large spread of food.

Applejack's mouth began to water. The rainbow mare flew over to the table and with a flip, landed in a chair, leaning back and resting her hooves up on the table.

When Applejack didn't move, she grinned. “It's just gonna get cold,” she said.

Applejack slowly, and not attempting to hide just how little she trusted this mare, walked over to the table and sat down.

“Guests first, of course,” the mare said, gesturing widely.

“It's poisoned,” Applejack accused.

The rainbow mare shrugged. “Suit yourself,” she said, reaching for Applejack's plate and pulling it over to herself. She picked up the hunk of bread and took a big bite, sending crumbs flying as she chewed with her mouth open.

Applejack watched her eat with slight revulsion. “Oh... Kay...”

She then reached for the hay fries and stuffed a hoofful of those in her mouth as well. When she reached again, Applejack blocked her with a hoof.

The rainbow mare grinned. “Oh, good. Still got a little spunk in you.”

“That's what all the polite folks say,” Applejack said, pulling her plate back in front of herself.

“And the impolite folks?” the rainbow mare asked, taking a messy bite off her own plate.

Applejack chuckled. “Somethin' like stubborn, bull-headed, asenine...”

The mare leaned over, as if looking at Applejack's cutie mark. “Meh... I'd give it a six, seven at best.”

“Wait. What?” Applejack didn't understand, and was even more confused when the mare burst out laughing.

Eventually she managed to control herself, and wiped off her lips brusquely with a hoof. “Fine, I'll talk. We're after this.” And she reached into one of the many folds in her clothing and held up a little flask marked with the Apple family logo.

Applejack was somewhat dumbfounded. "This is all about some silly cider?" she couldn't help but ask. Foalnaped and lost her ship and bits over cider?

"It is not silly!" her captor retorted angrily, stowing away the cider protectively. "This stuff is nectar from the creators! I wouldn't be surprised if Celestia herself bathed in this stuff every morning!"

Applejack couldn't hide a small blush. "Well, now. That's some high praise."

"This stuff is like liquid happiness. And I want it all."

"That's not gonna happen," Applejack hissed, all good feelings vanishing instantly.

"Oh, yes it is," the rainbow mare retorted. "You are going to lead Rainbow Blitz to your home island, where we will then take all the cider you have. We'll most likely leave the rest of you alive if you do."

Applejack's eyes hardened. "Ah ain't never gonna betray my island," she growled, "so you can tell Rainbow Blitz to get stuffed."

The mare didn't even flinch. "That's cool," she said dismissively. "We've got plenty of supplies and all the time in the world. Eventually, you're going to crack." She turned and called, "Li'l Scoots?"

That little orange filly from earlier, looking only slightly worse for the wear, appeared in the doorway and looked up expectantly. She now sported a bruise on her forehead, and when she saw Applejack there, her eyes narrowed. She clearly was hoping for a round two.

"Take her back to the brig."

As Li'l Scoots saluted, Applejack couldn't suppress a smile. Maybe this time she would have more luck escaping.

"Oh, and take Octavia with you. Just in case."

Li'l Scoots looked briefly crestfallen that she hadn't been trusted to take this mission solo, but she snapped to a salute and barked, "Aye aye, cap'n!" before turning and walking confidently out of the room.

"Li'l Scoots?"

"Yes, cap'n?"

"Don't forget your prisoner."

"Oh," Scoots giggled. "Right." She returned and gave Applejack a none too gentle push on her rump to get her moving. Rolling her eyes, Applejack began walking back to her new home.

* * *

Li'l Scoots led her back to the brig, with Octavia (the same gray earth pony as before) following close behind. Applejack felt as though she were in a deadly sandwich. Well, half a sandwich, anyway. Though nowhere near a good fighter, she had to admit that Li'l Scoots was very resilient.

And maybe a bit more vulnerable to befriending.

"You mad about earlier?" Applejack asked.

Li'l Scoots shrugged. "Nah. Tavi said that it was my fault for letting my guard down, and that I shouldn't do it again."

"This 'Tavi' sounds like a smart pony."

The next answer came from behind Applejack. "Thank you, apple mare."

So much for getting on her good side... Applejack decided to change the subject. "You like serving under Rainbow Blitz?"

Now this topic Li'l Scoots was happy to talk about. "Yeah, she's awesome!" she cheered.

"She?" Applejack asked, surprised.

"Yeah, she," Li'l Scoots said, a note of confusion in her voice.

"Rainbow Blitz is a colt, right? That's what all the rumors say."

Li'l Scoots giggled, but Octavia burst out laughing, probably for the first time that month.

"What's so funny?" Applejack asked, blushing slightly at getting laughed at so often on this ship.

"And do you believe [i]every[/i] rumor you hear, apple mare?"

"My name is Applejack," she protested half-heartedly.

"Apple mare," Li'l Scoots teased, sticking her tongue out as she continued trotting down the narrow hall.

Applejack shut her mouth as they continued down the hall. She didn't say anything as Li'l Scoots gently pushed her into her cell. She didn't say anything as Octavia continued to rib her about being so gullible.

And she didn't say anything when she noticed Octavia didn't lock the door behind her when she

left.

* * *

Apple Bloom rowed her little skiff into the bay and onto the beach closest to her family's house. She had been doing her normal rounds, making sure the trees were watered and the leaves swept away from the roots, that kind of thing. But now that she had finished, she was ready to go home and see her sister again. Applejack always brought something back for her.

She burst into the house, calling for her sister. "Hey, Applejack! Didja get a good price fer our apples today?"

Her voice trailed off as she saw her grandmother and brother sitting at the table, with a stricken expression on their faces.

"Guys?" Apple Bloom asked, raising a hoof hesitantly. "What's goin' on?"

"Apple Bloom?" Mac finally said.

"Yeah?"

"Your sister... Applejack didn't make it back today."

Apple Bloom's heart leapt into her mouth. "Where is she?"

"Ah don't know," Mac said. "Ah don't know."

"Was it pirates?"

Mac's silence spoke volumes.

Apple Bloom's eyes welled up with tears and she buried her face in Mac's chest.

"Th- there's still a chance she's alive, right?" Apple Bloom asked through sobs.

"Maybe." He brought a hoof up and stroked her mane, offering comfort he himself didn't feel.

It was a cold, cold night on the Apple island.

* * *

Late that night, Applejack waited until all was silent on the ship before making her move. Gently, she slid open the door, wincing at every metallic whine and scrape it produced.

When the door had been opened enough for her to barely squeeze through, she waited, listening closely for any sound of an approacher.

The only sound she could hear was the rise and fall of the sea. Normally this was a peaceful feeling, but Applejack couldn't help but feel that this was masking some important sound.

She walked slowly, rolling each hoof as she placed it down so as to not make any noise. She jumped as she thought she heard a noise behind her, but saw nothing. Now with her heart beating furiously in her chest, she continued walking.

She froze as she heard a sound that was distinctly pony in origin. Poking her head into the next room, she saw Lyra, the mint green unicorn from before, that was probably supposed to be guarding her. However, she was currently pinned down by a cream colored earth pony mare who had placed her lips over Lyra's, and judging by the squeaks she was making, neither was going to watch for escapees.

Perfect.

She continued down the hall, climbing the stairs and making her way up to the top deck. Remaining on a lower rung, she inspected the deck. It appeared clear, so she got the rest of the way up and began sprinting towards the railings.

At least, she tried; but suddenly pain exploded behind her head and she collapsed. When she had managed to regain some control, she looked up to see Octavia, grinning evilly and holding an oar.

"Good evening," she said, in a refined, clipped voice that would have sounded more at home at a dinner party by the hostess than a pirate who had just clocked her. "Did you not enjoy your quarters?"

"Go choke on a pear," Applejack managed to say.

Octavia merely grinned and began dragging Applejack back into to her cell.

"Thank you, I needed that. In fact, I'm not even going to tell the captain you tried to escape, that's how fun it was." Octavia chuckled darkly as she locked the door for real this time. "Sleep well, apple mare."

With a frustrated groan, Applejack lay back on the bed and pulled the ragged blanket over her head.

* * *

The next morning found Applejack with a mild headache and a wet mop in her hooves, swabbing the deck. Apparently, Rainbow Blitz had a firm 'no worky, no eaty' policy, and this was her current assignment.

And as if her day couldn't get any better, Li'l Scoots was technically her superior. The filly was overjoyed to not be on the bottom rung of the ship anymore, and was enjoying her role a bit too much.

"Missed a spot, apple mare," she grinned, gesturing with a tiny wing.

Applejack responded by flicking water at her face before resuming mopping.

"Hey!" Li'l Scoots protested, rubbing a hoof brusquely against her face.

"Sorry, cap'n," Applejack said, with just a hint of sarcasm. "Won't happen again."

* * *

Applejack plopped herself down at the table and sighed. Rainbow Blitz had refused to let her in until the whole of the main deck had been finished, so the eating area was fairly empty by the time she got there.

Li'l Scoots seemed to think this normal, and happily ate her somewhat cool food. Applejack sat in a different area, picking morosely at her breakfast, which appeared to be brown mush and a rock, but had probably at some point in time been oatmeal and a biscuit. What she wouldn't give for a nice, hot apple pancake... smothered in apple syrup and served steaming hot..

She jumped as a white pegasus appeared in her field of vision. "Hi!" Surprise chirped. "Did I surprise you?"

"Kindof," Applejack muttered, looking down at her food and sending every bit of nonverbal 'go away' she could muster towards her.

Surprise wasn't good at nonverbal cues, though, as she sat down cheerfully next to Applejack (even sitting was a joyful activity, apparently) and began eating.

There was a semi-awkward silence, and eventually, Surprise broke it. "You still mad about yesterday?"

"No," Applejack answered, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "Why ever would you think that?"

"Besides the fact that we took all your bits, and left your ship with kindof a big hole in it?"

"You *what*?"

Surprise giggled. "I'm joking! Derpy's clumsy, but she's not that bad."

"It wasn't funny," Applejack grumbled, returning to her food.

Surprise smiled. "For what it's worth, I hope you get your ship back."

There was another little silence for a while, and then Applejack spoke. "What're you late from, anyway?" Applejack asked.

"Scouting," Surprise said. "We're gonna find your island and drink all the cider, and the first to find it gets second dibs."

Applejack glared angrily. "You'll never get there," she hissed.

Surprise shrugged. "Maybe, maybe not." She chewed on her biscuit.

Applejack pushed her bowl away and let her head slam onto the table. She couldn't wait to get off this ship.

* * *

Applejack stood at the front of the ship, staring out into the ocean. Her ear flicked as she heard another pony approaching from behind.

"Nice day, eh?" Rainbow Blitz grinned. Applejack didn't even need to look at her to know she was smiling broadly.

"Meh. Your food could use some work."

Rainbow shrugged. "Yeah, we're running low on supplies. We'll have to restock soon. Hopefully we get to your island before then."

"Ah have no intention of betrayin' my family," Applejack growled.

Rainbow shrugged. "Suit yourself. But we'll find it eventually. Other than that, how do you like my ship?"

Applejack wanted to say many things, but the truth came out. "It's a beauty," she said. "She sails

like a dream and she's fast."

"Everything on this ship is fast," Rainbow Blitz grinned. "Especially me."

Applejack rolled her eyes.

Rainbow turned to leave. "Well, you just keep considering my offer." She extended her wings and took off.

Applejack watched her leave. She grinned, already devising a plan... until she saw a little orange filly close by, eyes fixed firmly on her target.

"Lemme guess," Applejack said flatly. "You're my new foalsitter."

"It's a real important position," Li'l Scoots said proudly. "I might even get a cutie mark in prisoner guarding."

Applejack had had very similar conversations with her own blank-flanked sister, and could say things she never would have said to Apple Bloom. "Oh yeah? What would that even look like?"

Li'l Scoots raised a hoof... and then dropped it. "Uh... a pair of eyes?"

"Ah don't think so."

"Uh... Hoofcuffs?"

"That'd make me think you were a prisoner. That ain't such a good special talent."

Li'l Scoots sat down, mildly dejected. "I really don't know," she said.

Applejack knew that the next thought going through her mind was, 'maybe it'll never come...' She didn't mean to be hurtful; she was just tired and frustrated. Sighing, she decided to do some damage control. "Look, it could be a light or somethin', makin' sure they don't run off in the night."

"Octavia said you tried that," Li'l Scoots said, "but it didn't work."

Applejack felt a little less bad about teasing her captor now. "It didn't work yet," she said.

Li'l Scoots shook her head. "Octavia is like the best first mate ever. You'll never escape."

We'll just see about that, Applejack thought. A new plan began forming in her mind.

* * *

That night, Octavia was awoken by the sounds of a pony groaning in agony. Letting out a groan of her own, she pushed herself to her hooves and walked to the brig, where through the moonlight she saw Applejack splayed out on the ground, holding her stomach and whining.

"What is it, apple mare?" she demanded.

"Ah... Ah must've eaten somethin' bad for dinner," Applejack whimpered.

Octavia rolled her eyes. "It's a pirate ship. Everything's always bad, surely you've noticed this?"

"Yeah, but Ah mean real bad!" Applejack said.

Octavia rolled her eyes and stepped closer. "Look, if you're doing this for attention..."

But that was as far as she got, for she realized that her hoof had not hit the wooden deck, but instead something soft. She looked down and had just enough time to realize that she was stepping on a blanket when Applejack bit the corner and quite literally pulled it out from under her, sending Octavia crashing to the ground. She looked up just in time to see Applejack grab her rear hoof and pull, physically slamming her body into the metal bars and sending one right in between her rear legs.

Contrary to what many stallions believe, getting hit between the hind legs also hurts mares as well, and Octavia fought through the pain as she forced herself to sit up. Unfortunately, in this position, she brought her head closer to the bars--close enough for Applejack to drive a hoof in between her eyes, dropping her instantly.

Applejack allowed herself a small chuckle before quickly rifling through Octavia's clothes. Sure enough, the key rested on a string around her neck, and with a few quick motions, Applejack was free.

She didn't bother taking any of Octavia's weapons, as she intended to swim for safety. Sprinting out on deck, she briefly saw a flash of green before jumping overboard.

No, it couldn't be.

But as she surfaced, she heard Lyra's voice. "Mare overboard! She's escaping!"

Funny thing--most pirates aren't very good swimmers. Applejack had learned in ponds and in the ocean shallows near her island, and this sea was much rougher than she was used to. Even so, she figured she would have a fighting chance of escaping here.

This feeling of success was slightly diminished when she saw magi-skis being loaded with ponies and unicorns using lighting spells. She held her breath and dove under the surface, trying to lose her pursuers.

She waited as long as she could before surfacing, and to her surprise, noticed that she seemed

to be in the clear, relatively. She dove back under and began swimming further.

When she had run out of breath again, she surfaced as quietly as she could into the bright water. She seemed to have made her esc-

Wait.

There was a sharp pain on the back of her neck as teeth gripped her mane and physically pulled her out of the water. This was only slightly relieved when two strong forelegs wrapped around her and finished lifting her higher and higher into the air. Applejack thrashed as best as she could, until it dawned on her just how high she was, and she froze.

"I can drop you if you'd like," Rainbow Blitz growled into her ear, "but I'm thinking you wouldn't like that. Just like I don't like how you tried to escape."

"Can you blame me, though?" Applejack asked, making a strong conscious effort to not look down.

"No. I'm still chaining you to a cannonball, though. Enjoy your stay on the *Sonic Rainboom*, because you're *never* getting off."

Looking around, Applejack saw that they had formed teams of pegasi and unicorns to search the water for her. Even the smaller unicorns had their horns lit and light spells spinning. Applejack hadn't stood a chance.

Applejack groaned in defeat as Rainbow Blitz carried her back on board.

* * *

Applejack decided that cannonballs really are nothing but inconvenient.

Especially when you're slicing potatoes. Endless potatoes. Many of which are squishy and rotten and need to be thrown out. Add that to the fact that Rainbow Blitz had given her kitchen duty for the rest of her time aboard, and Applejack was not happy in the slightest.

Applejack wiped her brow again as she recounted the piles for the fifth time. Deciding she'd done enough, she got up and walked out of the scullery, leaving behind her problems and this current job.

At least, she did; until the cannonball she dragged rammed through a pile of potatoes, smashing most and scattering the rest.

Applejack looked back and slammed her head against the wall repeatedly. Oh, what she

wouldn't do to go home...

* * *

Once again, breakfast was cold by the time Applejack got there. And, once again, Surprise was there. Upon seeing Applejack, her grin widened and she picked up her plate and bustled over to where the earth pony was sitting.

As if this day could get any worse.

"Sorry you got caught," Surprise said. "You were trying so hard, too."

"Th- thanks," Applejack said. She hadn't expected that.

Surprise giggled. "Yeah. Anything that knocks Octavia down a peg is good in my book."

"How is she, anyway?" Applejack asked, knowing that her stunt last night was going to come back and bite her in the flank sometime soon.

"She's mad," Surprise said simply, "but she'll get over it eventually. She's always got a horseshoe on wrong anyway, so it prolly won't make that much of a difference."

Unbeknownst to either of them, Octavia was currently playing darts, and her target was a crudely-drawn cluster of three apples.

Applejack made a noncommittal grunt. "Ah hope not. Ah'm in no condition to fight with this thing on my leg."

Surprise shook her head. "Nope. And now there's no way you can escape. It's kindof sad, really."

"You don't say," Applejack growled. "Well, Ah don't care. Mark my words, Ah intend to get off this ship one way or another."

Surprise giggled. "Until Rainbow Blitz gets her cider, you aren't going *anywhere*. What Rainbow Blitz wants, Rainbow Blitz gets."

"What would it take to get her to want to let me go, I wonder?" Applejack muttered darkly.

Surprise took this as a legitimate question, and answered. "Well, there's always love. Love makes you do funny things for other ponies. If you became her super special somepony, she might let you go."

"Me? With her? That's ridiculous," Applejack spat. "It'd take a miracle for *anypony* to fall in love

with her, let alone me.”

“I believe in miracles,” Surprise said simply. “Besides, you’re an earth pony mare, and those are her favorite. Hey, she even licked you during your fight, didn’t she?”

“Ah still say that was cheatin’,” Applejack grumbled, burying her head into her crossed hooves. “And there’s no way Ah’d want to love her anyway.”

“Suit yourself,” Surprise shrugged. “But I bet she’s great between the sheets.”

Now with a plethora of mental images she didn’t really want, Applejack slid her bowl in front of Surprise and turned and left.

* * *

Applejack stared out at the ocean once more and absentmindedly tugged on the chain around her hind leg. She really needed to get home, and Surprise’s idea just wouldn’t work.

Would it?

Applejack had never been much for romance. Working on the farm meant she spent most Hearts and Hooves days selling heart-shaped pies in Port Ponyville. But then again...

What if it *did* work? She could make Rainbow Blitz fall in love with her, and then, when she had earned her trust and gotten the cannonball off, escape when they stopped at a port for supplies.

Applejack felt a twinge of guilt as she realized that that would be a massive lie, but she suppressed it. She needed to get home. She needed to be back with her family. Apple Bloom, Big McIntosh, Granny Smith. They needed her. And to be honest, she needed them.

And so she started her plan to make the most feared pirate in the world fall in love with her.