

"It's just us again," Tarnished Teapot said to Maud as he moved closer to her. He gazed into her eyes, smiled, and then, lifting his hoof, he booped Maud on the nose. "Are you ready to continue on our adventure?"

After staring into Tarnish's eyes for a moment, Maud nodded. "Time to go look at rocks. Lots of rocks." The grey earth pony glanced at the wagon and then back at Tarnish. "You know, Tarnish."

"Yeah?" Tarnish blinked while he waited for Maud to continue.

"You did pretty good with Grey Owl. You were patient. It made me feel very attracted to you," Maud said in deadpan that could be described as the opposite of enthusiastic encouragement.

"You think so?" Tarnish asked.

"I just said so," Maud replied.

"Thanks, Maud." Tarnish leaned in a little closer. "One day we're going to be parents."

The earth pony made a sharp inhale and her eyes widened somewhat, the only indicators of her reaction to Tarnish's words. She blinked, her moment of reaction disappearing, and looked into Tarnish's blue eyes. "You know, something about that scares me more than going into a cave full of spiders."

"Me too."

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The gorge opened before them, becoming wider in the next section. There were trees down here on the gorge floor along the narrow, winding river. The road became more of a trail than anything else, there were ruts from the occasional wagon, but they were almost nonexistent in a number of places.

Because of the steep rise on either side, the sun only shone down around the noontime hours; the rest of the day the gorge floor remained in the shade. It was a cool place, full of shadows, and moist breezes blowing off of the river. It was a beautiful, but haunting place. The trees were filled with spiderwebs. Seeing them made Tarnish shiver.

As the pair traveled, Tarnish spoke with Twilight Sparkle, telling her everything that had taken place, from meeting Ortzi Goldbeak, to meeting Gorgonzola the dragon, the excursion into the spider cave, the rescue of Grey Owl, and his recovery. They spoke of Tarnish's realisations, his growth, what he had learned, and Tarnish had told Twilight everything he knew

about Flamingo, curious if Twilight could find out more, perhaps asking Princess Celestia. When that long conversation was over, Tarnish talked to his mother through the mirror.

Seeing a sign on the road, the two ponies stopped to have a look.

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“Come and see the Glory Hole,” Tarnish read aloud, his eyes reading the somewhat faded letters of the sign. Beside him, he did not see Maud and her wide eyed mouth opened expression. It was a rare moment of seeing shock plainly displayed on Maud’s face, and Tarnish missed it. By the time he turned to look at her, she had recovered. He turned back to the side. “Hey Maud, wanna visit the Glory Hole, whatever that is?”

Maud let out a little gasp and realised that Tarnish, in his [i]naïveté[/i], had no idea what a glory hole was. She blinked at her husband, both treasuring his innocence and marvelling at just how little he knew sometimes. She only knew about it because of listening to her fellow university students and their sometimes disgusting conversations.

“Come on Maud, let’s go and check out this Glory Hole place,” Tarnish begged. He pointed at the trail leading off of the road. “Come on, it’s almost noon, I bet the Glory Hole would be a great place to stop and eat some lunch. We can go and get stuffed.”

Tail swishing, Maud wished that Tarnish would stop saying ‘Glory Hole.’ Somepony had horrible taste in names. Maud sighed, feeling hot and flustered. Tarnish was almost foal-like in his enthusiasm, bouncing around, and making puppydog eyes at her.

“Very well Tarnish, we shall go and visit the Glory Hole together,” Maud said, cringing on the inside even as she said it. She endured a very slobbery kiss on the cheek as a form of thanks and she watched Tarnish through narrowed eyes.

Tarnish wagged his eyebrows. “I’m going to kiss you by the Glory Hole.”

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The Glory Hole, as it turned out, was a natural spring that trickled down from the ravine wall, filling a basin lined with blue stones. Somepony had gone through the trouble of making the basin, a place for the water to collect. The water, so clean and pure, was a natural mirror, reflecting the cloudy sky overhead and the forest all around, making it look as though there was a second world waiting just beneath the surface of the water. Somepony had left a faded wooden sign just a few yards away from the pool, and the words ‘please keep clean’ had been scratched into the wood of the sign.

As Maud started to unhitch from the wagon, Tarnish surprised her with a kiss, leaving her flustered as she thought about the words he had said earlier. She looked around, realising that this was a good place to camp. There was water, there was a firepit some distance away from the spring, and there was an outcropping of rock about ten yards from where she stood that made for a good makeshift cover in the event of a storm.

Butterflies flittered around the glen, wildflowers grew along the ground, shrubs and berry thickets grew along the ravine wall. Grasshoppers lept away from Tarnish's hooves as he explored, looking around, examining several plants.

"It's like a hole made of sky!" Tarnish shouted as he passed the pool, looking down as he went. "Oh look, raspberries!"

Reaching the edge of the pool, Maud looked down, seeing herself, seeing sky, seeing clouds, and seeing the sun in the smooth surface of the water. With the blue rocks, there was white sand filling the stone basin. The water smelled sweet. Curious, Maud returned to the wagon, jumped up inside, opened up a trunk, and pulled out the Explorer's Hoofbook of Equestria.

Sitting down, she opened the guide, looking through the index, looking for an entry. Under the 'G' listings, she found what she was looking for. [i]Glory Hole, The.[/i] She saw the page number, flipped the book open, and began to read the entry.

After skimming about the warnings that this place was not to be confused by cruisy restrooms and wagonstop bathrooms, Maud slowed down and focused on the listing, curious about this place and it's natural beauty.

It seemed that the Glory Hole was created by Princess Celestia herself when she had been out exploring. The site was over six hundred years old, the water was safe to drink, and the area had aversion spells cast upon it to keep predatory creatures away, giving shelter to all those who stopped. Lore said that water flowed from the rocks after Princess Celestia had touched her horn to it, and the water bears a faint magical signature.

At the bottom, there was a footnote stating that sometimes Princess Luna can be found here at night or just before dawn, after hunting monsters located in the Ghastly Gorge. Maud closed the book, placed it back in the trunk, and then shut the trunk lid. Lifting her head, she saw Tarnish using his telekinesis to pick raspberries from the thicket and placing them in his pith helmet.

Leaping down out of the wagon, Maud went over to where Tarnish was and sat down in the cool grass so she could watch him pick his bounty of berries. A lone butterfly, braver than the others, fluttered over and landed upon Maud's nose. She stared at it, cross eyed, not

knowing what sort of butterfly it was. It had blue and yellow wings and a bright green body. After a moment, it fluttered away, and Maud uncrossed her eyes so she could watch it as it departed.

"I want to stay here for the rest of the day... and spend the night here," Maud said.

"Mmm hmm," Tarnish hummed.

"This will be a nice place to dance."

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The sun was hidden behind the rise of the gorge, the sky was orange and all of the colours of sunset. It was cool, far cooler than it had been in a while, and the humidity was low, so the air wasn't sticky.

Maud opened her eyes, yawned, rose, and stretched. At some point, she had fallen asleep while reading. She looked around, wondering where Tarnish was, and then spotted him some distance away, looking at something. She shook herself, trying to rid herself of the sleepy feeling from her nap, and then took off at a trot to check out what Tarnish was doing.

"Be careful Maud," Tarnish said as Maud drew near. He lifted his hoof and pointed at a patch of purple flowers. Not far from the violets there appeared to be a puddle of jam. "Vomiting Violets. I, uh, discovered them quite by accident." Tarnish paused. "Did you know that red raspberries look just like blood and guts when you puke them up?"

"Ugh." Maud sat down beside Tarnish and noticed that he had a sketchbook. He had drawn the vomiting violets. The sketch was a little crude, but it was serviceable enough. He just needed practice.

"I've been wondering... I know that poison joke can be weaponised, but I'm curious if there is some way vomiting violets can be useful as weapon." Tarnish blinked. "Prolly not though. The extract would have to be stored in a container, and in a conflict, the dust or whatever would also be a danger to me. Still, it's an idea though."

"Ew." Maud shook her head. "No Tarnish, no making barf bombs." She heard Tarnish giggle, no doubt from her words, and she loved him, perhaps because of his immaturity. "If we get in trouble, you have that sword and I can throw rocks. We don't need to deal with vomit."

"I suppose you're right," Tarnish said. "Did you have a nice nap?"

"I'm all rested up for tonight," Maud replied.

