

Chapter 2

The pair walked through the first few branches of the Everfree forest. The sun, high in the sky, was blocked out by branches, sending an ominous darkness over Sally and Kirby. Kirby, who was sitting on Sally's back, chewed on an apple while Sally marched forward. They had gone to Ponyville hours before and picked up food and other supplies. Everything had been fine until Sally was spotted by Rarity, and Rarity almost drug Sally back to her boutique just so Rarity could look at Sally's amulet. Luckily, Rarity understood their hurry, and they were able to slip away without revealing anything about their trip. Kirby had advised that it would be wise to keep their mission on a need-to-know basis. The less creatures that knew about their problem, the better.

Sally had a wide grin on her face for the last hour, and Kirby was beginning to worry about her. He stopped and turned to her. "What are you so happy about?"

Sally giggled. "This is just like Daring Do! One of her books involves her escorting a magical artifact to--"

Kirby glared at her. "You're comparing our important journey to a storybook? I can't believe this." He shook his head. "This isn't some story, this is serious business. Both our lives are in danger, yours more so than mine." He flew up to her. "I suggest you get more serious if you don't want to end up with your head on a spear."

Sally gulped and laughed nervously. "Anyway, does this amulet have any magical properties? Like, could I breathe fire if I concentrated?" Sally closed her eyes and took a deep breath then blew out as hard as she could. Kirby wiped some spit off his face. Sally smiled. "Guess not."

Kirby, now agitated at Sally, sighed. "The amulet does have magical properties, but nothing you can use. Ponies can't use magic."

Sally shook her head. "Unicorns can use magic. They are ponies too."

Kirby thought for a moment. "Sorry, ponies can't use great magic." He looked at Sally. "They can use minor things that simple creatures can use. However, not even ponies have scratched the surface of the kinds of magic that dragons can do."

Sally frowned. "Unicorns can do great magic, and Alicorns even greater! Princess Celestia and Princess Luna can move the sun and the moon."

Kirby scoffed at Sally, causing her to glare at the small dragon. "Right, moving big things is so tough. So what if they can move celestial bodies? You ever seen a dragon attack a village? The skies grow dark, storms erupt, things die. Your precious magic only comes from the stupid marks on your butts! Unicorns and Alicorns only get enough magic to help them do their special talent. Your princesses just happen to have gotten magic to move the sun and moon. Your friend Rarity, the unicorn we met earlier, has she ever done anything with her magic other than pick things up and make clothes with gems?"

Sally looked at the ground. She couldn't think of anything amazing that Rarity had done. She looked back up at Kirby. "What about Twilight Sparkle? She's one of the Elements of Harmony, most specifically the Element of Magic. Her special talent is magic."

Kirby rubbed his chin with his claw. "Special talent is magic?" His wings folded and he landed on his back two claws. "That's odd...The last pony I heard to have that talent was Star-Swirled the Bearded." He shrugged. "Still not near the level of my kin, but one of the greatest magic wielders of unicorn history."

Sally smiled. "So there. Ponies can do magic." She smiled and walked past Kirby. "Let's go, we've wasted enough time arguing about this." She marched on ahead then stopped. "Wait, I still wanna know what this amulet does!"

Kirby shook his head. "It doesn't do anything you can bother with. Come on now, we still have far to travel."

Sally heard a twig crack behind them, and she tensed up. Kirby, who heard it as well, stopped walking and turned to Sally. Sally flipped open the pack on her left flank and took out some rope with her mouth. Kirby looked at her, and he could have sworn something was different about her. Sally threw Kirby one end of the rope. "Kirby, fly up to that tree and pull me up onto that branch, something's coming this way. Hurry."

Kirby nodded and did exactly as he was told, throwing in an extra bit of magic to pull Sally up easier than without it. The two crouched down on a sturdy branch as two figures appeared below them.

"I'm tellin' ya, I heard voices around here. One of them was definitely female." A black pony stepped into the area. "I hope it was a female, I've been needin' to relieve myself for a few days." He laughed, turning towards the second pony.

The second pony glared ahead. "Keep your mind on the task at hand, Krooks. We need to get this gryphon back to the hideout before we get jumped by Celestia-knows-what. You of all ponies should know how dangerous these woods can be." The second pony, obviously the more level-headed of the two, had a large sack on his back. On the backside of the sack a rune was drawn.

Sally leaned down to get a better view of the rune. She nodded. "Kirby, stay here." She took off her packs, letting her wings go free. She stretched out her wings and smiled. "This will be entertaining." She grabbed the rope in her mouth, making the rope into a lasso. She twirled the lasso above her head and grabbed a branch on the opposite side of the ponies on the ground, breaking off the branch and swinging it towards the ponies.

Krooks didn't have time to react to the sound. The branch swooped down and smashed into him, sending him sprawling into a tree. The second pony jumped back from the branch as it swooped back to hit him.

Sally jumped off the branch and flew towards the second pony, ramming into him and sending him towards his partner. Sally grabbed the sack with her mouth and dragged it towards the tree Kirby was still standing in. She then turned her attention to the two ponies. She picked

up her rope and walked over to the two, tying them up. She looked up at Kirby. "You can come down now, and bring the packs with you." She walked over to the sack and looked at the rune on it. "I've seen this rune before. It's an old symbol. Used for warding." She took the knot out of the top of the sack. "Must've been used to stop whatever is in this bag from thrashing." She opened the top of the bag and looked inside. "Hey...There's a guy in here."

Inside the sack sat a gryphon, unconscious, but far from dead. Sally dragged the gryphon out by the scruff of his neck, almost pulling out a couple of feathers. She set him down on the ground right as Kirby flew up to her. "Hey, why did you do all that? No, wait, since when could you do all that?"

Sally threw back her mane and smiled. "I may have been acting silly before, but trust me, I am a serious pony." She looked at Kirby. "This gryphon here was being taken by those two thieves. I figured if thieves were after him, then he may be of some use."

Kirby looked unconvinced. "Or he could be so dangerous even criminals wanted him out of the way. You can't just jump to conclusions. Let's go, it's getting late and this forest is even more dangerous at night than it is during the day."

A moan came from underneath them and they looked at the gryphon. He was rubbing his head, as if he was trying to get rid of a headache. He opened his eyes and looked at Sally, then to Kirby, then to Sally again. "You two weren't the ponies who tricked me. Did you two rescue me?"

Kirby shook his head. "No, that was all Sally here."

Sally nodded. "Those two were easy to take care of. What's your story, gryphon? Name's Sally. This here is Kirby. We were traversing the forest when we overheard these two talking about taking you to some hideout or something."

The gryphon nodded. "I see. I suppose a bit of explanation is needed?" When both Kirby and Sally nodded, the gryphon smiled. "I guess there is no hiding it." He flew up into the air and stretched out his wings, making sure everything was working properly. He landed in front of Sally. "My name is Jonathon 'Silent Step' Sharpbeak."

Sally thought for a moment. "I've heard of a Silent Step before..." She patted her chin with her hoof while she thought. Suddenly, her ears shot up. "You're a thief! You're wanted from Manehattan to Canterlot!"

Jon bowed towards Sally. "My reputation does me both good and bad I'm afraid." He looked at the two. "These two crooks were after my skills. When I refused, they drugged me and stuffed me in that sack. I was lucky we ran into you or I may have been used by that filthy organization."

Sally turned towards the two ponies she had tied up. One of them stirred, but the other was out cold. She turned back to Jon. "I've never heard of a crime organization around here."

Jon nodded. "That's because they couldn't rob a frog of it's lilly-pad. Honestly, these thieves probably haven't stolen a single thing since their founding."

Sally looked at Kirby. "A thief eh? Think he'll come in handy?"

Kirby shook his head. "No way, we're not stealing from my dad. Leave him here, he's a thief and he can find his own way out of this miserable forest."

Jon shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't let you two go alone. You see, I am a gryphon of honor--"

"You're a thief."

"Like I was saying, a gryphon of honor when it comes to debt. Miss Sally, you rescued me from those crooks, and as such I am indebted to you. I shall accompany you on your journey through the forest." He held up his claws. "After all, you may need my claws, or of course, my thieving abilities."

Kirby shook his head. "No Sally. We're not taking this thief with us. My dad is already mad I stole the amulet from him, we can't have him coming along to steal gold from him too."

Sally looked at Kirby. "Well I'm already traveling with one thief, what's another? So long as he doesn't steal from us, I'm fine. Though while he's with us, he won't be stealing from anypony." He looked at Jon. "Got that?"

Jon nodded. "You have my word." He looked behind her at the two tied up ponies. One, a unicorn, was slumped against the tree. The other, the one called Krooks, was squirming about, trying to get free from his bonds. Jon walked up to Krooks. "You! I should rip your head off your shoulders and punt it a mile away." He smiled. "But I'm not like that."

Sally walked up to them. "You, the one he called Krooks, right?" She watched the pony nod. "Listen, I'll be taking Jon with me, okay?" She turned away. "Come on, let's go."

Kirby looked at the two ponies. "What about your rope?"

Sally grabbed her packs and threw them on her back, covering her wings once again. "I've packed extra. We'll leave these two for whatever finds them."

Krooks struggled to get out of the ropes. "You will pay for this! You are invoking the wrath of our organization! We will find you and slit your throats!"

Kirby looked back at them. He took a deep breath, then he breathed outward, sending flames towards the pony, which dispersed before burning him. Krooks' eyes widened, and he stared ahead, waiting for his eyes to adjust from the sudden light to the sudden darkness. However, once he regained his sight, the group was gone.

Sally, Jon, and Kirby walked through the forest. Kirby was in front, flying a couple of feet above the ground. Sally walked next to Jon, keeping an eye on him. Jon looked at Sally. "Surely you don't think I'll steal from you?"

Sally stared forward. "I don't trust you. You're only still with us because we may need you later."

Jon sighed. "Okay...But why would you need me?" He looked at her. "You don't seem like the type to get into trouble."

Sally smiled. "Well..."

Sally explained her situation and their journey to the sea. She paused in between bits and pieces to make sure Kirby wasn't listening. When she finished, she looked at Jon's face to read

his reaction.

Jon's face contorted into a confused expression. "So, you may need me to fend off bandits and other thieves?" He looked down at the amulet around Sally's neck. "That is a pretty amulet..." He looked closer at it. "Oh! That's one of the Dragon Artifacts!"

Kirby stopped in his tracks and turned to Jon. "What do you know about the Artifacts of the Dragon? No one should know about these." He glared at Jon. "Which dragon did you kill for this information? Or maybe you stole from another dragon and gave our artifacts to the banished Dragonkin?"

Jon shook his head. "No! No, wait. I don't know many details, I just know they are powerful." He dare not look away from Kirby. "I've seen this amulet before. Years ago. After I saw it I had this lust for knowledge. I had to do as much research as I could on the items. Though when I finally figured out what it was, it had vanished." He looked at Sally. "To think I'd find it here, and with a pony wearing it! This is fate! This cannot be by some mere chance."

Kirby looked at Sally. He looked back to Jon. "What all did you figure out through your research?"

Jon thought for a moment, then nodded. "I remember...There are seven of them, if I remember correctly." He looked at Kirby. "And in the right claws, they can be infinitely more powerful than the Elements of Harmony." He smiled. "They also are locked away, or at least that's what I read. Apparently they aren't so guarded."

Sally shook her head. "No, this one was an inside job. I'm sure the rest are heavily guarded."

Kirby nodded. "Jon, I've changed my mind. I still don't trust you, but I don't want you out of our sight. For all we know, you could be working for some evil creatures." He turned away. He shivered. "It's getting cold, it must be getting late." He looked at Sally. "Set up camp. We'll camp here for tonight. I'll set up a ward around the perimeter. Don't want a cockatrice to sneak up on us as we sleep, do we?" He chuckled and set off while Jon and Sally set up the camp.

Kirby looked at Sally. Both Sally and Jon had passed out early. It wasn't surprising. Sally and Jon had both been exhausted after the encounter with the crooks. Kirby yawned, tired himself, but he couldn't get to sleep. He was too anxious. He went into the trees above, watching different little fireflies fly around. He glanced over at Sally when he heard her start talking in her sleep. He crawled over to her and placed his claw on her forehead. His eyes widened. "She's sweating a lot...A nightmare?" He nodded. "I'll help ya, Sally," he whispered, placing a claw on Sally's forehead. He concentrated, then images started flying through his head, images of Sally's dream.

"Derpy Hooves! Derpy Hooves! Dummy dummy Derpy Hooves!" The chant grew louder and louder as a circle of ponies surrounded two Pegasi ponies. In the middle stood Sally and Derpy. Derpy had tears in her eyes, and was trying hard not to break down crying. Sally was in front of her, bending down in a provocative stance, glaring at the ponies in front of her. Sally's

anger rose as she heard the chant. “Stop it! Stop teasing my cousin! I’m warning you!” The chanting grew louder and louder as Sally grew angrier and angrier. She started to flap her wings in anger. “Stop it! Stop or I’ll beat up every one of you!” The figures surrounding them grew larger and turned into shadows with red eyes glowing. Sally stepped back. “Go away! Leave cousin Derpy alone!” The chanting continued. “Stop it! Stop it! STOP IT!” Sally continued to scream louder and louder.

Kirby opened his eyes. His claws instantly went to his head. He fell to the ground, holding onto his head, trying not to cry out loud in pain. He soon passed out next to Sally. Sally began to calm down as a bright blue light began to fade from her chest.