Chapter 5: You must gather your party before venturing forth

Twilight slowly opened her eyes to see a haze of white around her. *This is it,* she thought as she looked up to the blur that was the white roof, *I've died and gone to meet Celestia. Not even a week since the Harrowing and it's all over. I should have never have joined the Grey Wardens. I should never have listened to Spike and left the Tower.*

Spike. The unicorn opened her eyes wide, looking around for the baby dragon and praying that if she really was dead, he did not suffer the same fate as well. But as her vision cleared, Twilight saw that she was not in a simple white void, but in a beautifully decorated room. Sleeping in a basket was Spike who had only minor scrapes along his scales. The violet unicorn looked down to see that she was in a bed with white sheets and fluffy pillows. To her side was the apostate Rarity, sipping form a levitating tea cup.

"Do you often find yourself in a situation where you need to be knocked unconscious to fall asleep?" Rarity asked before lifting another tea cup and moving it towards Twilight with her magic, "Drink this. You'll feel better after a quick pick-me-up, darling."

Twilight took a sip of the tea, its affects working immediately. She felt calm as she tried to recollect what happened. Applejack was with her in the observatory and she was able to light the beacon fire. Then came the minotaur and the ponyspawn archers. Then the brilliant flash of white as large wings swooped towards them.

"What happened to us?" asked Twilight as she rolled off the bed onto her hooves, "And where's Applejack? Is she alright?"

"Your boorish friend is outside with Mother," Rarity answered, "I think she is contemplating falling on her sword. I certainly hope she does it well into the Wilds where I don't have to find it. As for what happened, you can thank Mother for your rescue. She turned into a great eagle and swooped into the tower and brought the three of you here in her talons."

As Twilight stretched her legs, her staff floated from the corner of the room to her side. Though her smile was weak, it was genuine that the staff was not destroyed in the fight. She would have to thank Rarity and her mother for the timely rescue and for nursing the Warden's health.

"What about the battle?" Twilight asked as she laid another blanket overtop of Spike.

"Of Ostequus, you should know the battle was lost." Disbelief filled her eyes as Twilight took in the information. The battle was lost and everypony was dead? King Blueblood, Teryn Loghoof, all of the Grey Wardens…

Celestia's sun, Twilight thought, *Duncan*. Before Rarity could say anything Twilight rushed out of

the decorated room and into the complete contrast. She barely registered the difference in the way the room looked before finding the door leading outside. As she stepped out into the Wilds, Applejack stood there looking out into the distance towards Ostequus. The blonde mare looked defeated, but when she turned to see Twilight the earth pony leaped forward, embracing Twilight with her legs.

“By Celestia’s an’ Luna’s an’ every other holy pony’s hindquarters! I thought you’d never wake up!” Despite only knowing Applejack for a couple of days, Twilight knew there was a bond between them simply by both being Grey Wardens. The blood was their strength and Twilight could feel what Applejack was feeling as if it were ambient noise. She could feel Applejack’s sincere gratefulness that Twilight was still alive, but also the despair at the loss of the Grey Wardens in Ostequus.

Knowing of the defeat at Ostequus, Twilight wondered what Applejack and she would do now. Was there anything else Duncan was supposed to teach Twilight about being a Grey Warden? Were there anymore Grey Wardens in Equestria, and if not, would it be up to two ponies to defeat the entire Blight?

“Everypony’s gone,” Applejack said at last as she let go of Twilight, adjusting her farmer‘s hat, “The King. The Wardens. Duncan. We’re the last of the order in Equestria, Twilight, and I don’t know how to make heads or tails out of any of this.”

Anger now surged inside Applejack. Twilight took a step back as the earth pony let loose all her frustrations. “Rarity’s ma told me all about what happened. Loghoof quit the field! We lit that beacon and he ran off like a coward! It’s because of him that we lost! It’s because of him that the King and the army and the Wardens are all dead! It’s because of him that Duncan…Duncan…” Applejack slumped to her knees, her head low. “I owe everything to Duncan, ya hear? He was a good pony, who deserved better than the end he got at the hooves of a traitor. Oh, when I see Loghoof, I’m gonna buck him right into the ponyspawn, just you wait!”

“I understand you’re angry, but we need to calm down and think before we do anything brash,” Twilight said, “We need to figure out what we are going to do next. Do you know of any other Grey Wardens near to us who can help? What about the Filesians?”

“No can do,” Applejack shook her head, “Rarity’s ma said she saw Loghoof’s messengers turn away the Filesian reinforcements both chevyleer and Warden alike. We’re in worse shape than a rickety barn, and the ponyspawn are creeping north.”

Twilight thought hard on their predicament, but the situation seemed hopeless. The greatest force that existed solely for the purpose of fighting the ponyspawn was no more in Equestria, and Loghoof was preventing their fellows from Filais to assist against the Blight.

“I don’t know what we can do,” Twilight said, “We are just two ponies against the ponyspawn.”

“Is this the character of the Grey Wardens these days? I had expected ponies with a bit more…mettle. Ah but so much changes in the years.”

Both Wardens turned to see an older unicorn approach. Like Rarity, the unicorn had a white coat and a violet mane, but age had taken its turn. In contrast to her daughter, the elder’s eyes were yellow and haggard, and she was dressed in a ratty cloak. She carried a saddlebag to her side, filled with mushrooms and roots. Her cutie mark was an odd one; a red silhouette in the shape of a winged dragon.

Twilight backed away at the sight of Rarity’s mother. Her sensitivity to magic peaked around the elder mare, the very air around her crackling with magic. Rarity’s mother was old, but also very powerful. She remembered what Rarity had said, how her mother turned into a giant eagle to rescue them from the observatory in Ostequus. None of the books Twilight had read in the Unicorn Tower had ever spoken of a pony changing their shape.

The old legends in the books mentioned the “Mares of the Mire”, an old Bronco tale of unicorn witches who lived in the Potpourri Wilds, snatching up foals and putting them in soups. The presence of such an old mare made Twilight wonder if the legends were true.

“Thank you for you assistance,” Twilight said, “It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, miss…”

“Names are pretty, but useless,” the mare answered looking both Wardens over, her yellow eyes disturbing Twilight the most, “I have had many names in my life, including ‘That cursed witch’ and ‘the old hag who talks too much.’ The Broncos had a name for me once. They called me ‘Flemeth’. If you must call me by name, that will do.”

“Flemeth?” Applejack stared wide with Twilight doing the same. The name from the books, from the legends. Apparently Applejack had heard the stories too. “As in THE Flemeth? By Celestia, Rarity wasn’t the Mare of the Mire, you are.”

Flemeth laughed, a haunting laugh that left Twilight cold. “My daughter is skilled, and I have taught her what little magic I can impart to her, and that same magic I used has served you. ‘Mare of the Mire’ or not, you have been saved. What more could you ask.”

“I could ask why everything went to hay in a hoof basket,” Applejack scowled as she turned back towards Ostequus, “Why did Loghoof betray us, betray the King?”

“Perhaps this Loghoof believes the Blight is just another army he can outmatch, like playing pieces on a game board,” Flemeth spoke as she made her way towards the hut, “But he does not know the true threat of the Blight. Does not know the true evil that drives it onward with every step of their hooves. But this is only theory. No pony, no magic can truly tell the shadows within a pony’s heart, for those have greater depths than the deepest chasms of the Dark Tunnels.”

The Archdemon. The violet unicorn remembered all too well the vision she had seen in the Joining of the monster. The controlling force of the ponyspawn horde was still out there, but no one had said anything about its appearance. The dread leader of the evil army was still unaccounted for, and as long as the horde won battle after battle, it would likely not appear at all.

“If we are going to stop the Blight, then we are going to have to find the Archdemon.” Twilight knew her words were shaky at best, but she needed to put on a strong appearance not just for Applejack but for herself.

“Are you a few apples short of a bushel Twilight?” the earth pony said, “It’s just the two of us against an entire buckin’ Blight. The Grey Wardens in the past had the backing of entire armies from dozens of pony nations. And…and I don’t know how!”

Flemeth watched the two carefully before speaking. “How to raise an army, or how to kill the Archdemon. Two different questions, but the answers could turn the away the tide. I am sure there are some Grey Warden resources available to accomplish both.”

“Arl Macintosh!” Excitement rang in Applejack’s voice, “King Blueblood marched before the Arl’s reinforcements could arrive. He still has all his knights. We could petition him for help, I just know it. There’s no way no how he’ll stand for what Loghoof did.”

Realization struck Twilight as well. “What about the treaties that Duncan had us collect? Maybe we could use those as well!”

“Now there is a smart filly,” Flemeth said, “You’re welcome by the way.”

Applejack’s courage seemed to have been restored as a strategy was being formed between them. She dug out the old scrolls from her bag, grateful that they were undamaged from the battle, unfurling the contents. Twilight looked and read the contracts between the Grey Wardens and those who had signed the treaties.

“Good thinking there Twilight!” said Applejack, “We can go get help from the pegasi, the unicorns, the donkeys, and from all of Equestria itself! They’re right obligated to help us during a Blight! We can do this Twilight, we can raise an army and stand up against the ponyspawn.”

Twilight wanted to believe those words, but the task ahead was daunting. To raise an army against the Blight while Loghoof still had control of the land. To go to the furthest reaches of Equestria and into dangers unknown. Twilight levitated the treaties closer to herself so she could read them in detail, but then a small diagram fell from scrolls, landing against Flemeth’s hoof.

Before Twilight or Applejack could say anything, Flemeth picked up the diagram with her magic and brought it before her eyes. Surprise marked the old witch's features as she studied the parchment.

"Intriguing," she said at last before tucking the diagram back with the rest of the scrolls, "It would seem the Grey Wardens have access to much more than I gave them credit. That was an old diagram for a much older spell, so ancient I do not even know the words of such. Indeed, the words seem to come from the time of Luna, before her ascension."

Twilight looked at the diagram herself, but could not read the words. The ancient markings were much, much older than the treaties, and all she could make out were six points in a hexagram. "This has to be important," she said after tucking the scrolls into her saddle bag, "We'll have to find a scholar of some sort who can read ancient Imperium or other dialects from the time of Luna. Before we go, thank you again for all your help Flemeth. If it weren't for you, we'd never have the treaties or our lives."

"No need to thank me, young one," Flemeth said with a smile that frightened Twilight more than assured her, "The Blight is as much a threat to me as it is to the rest of Equestria and the world. I simply made sure that the path you walk was not cut short. There is one more thing I can offer, to aid you in your quest."

As she spoke, Rarity left the little hut followed by Spike. "Twilight Sparkle!" Rarity called, "Your dragon was eating all my sapphires, and when I found him he only gives me these wide eyes."

"I apologized, milady," Spike said trailing behind, "I'll dig up more sapphires, and rubies, and even diamonds! Anything for you. Oh, hey Twilight! Glad to see you awake. I was still conscious when Flemeth picked us up. She's pretty cool."

Twilight gaped while Flemeth laughed, this time a bit more jovial. "It would seem little Spike has taken a liking to Rarity. That is good, because she will be joining you in your journeys."

Everypony's eyes were wide with disbelief at Flemeth's statement. Twilight knew that Rarity was competent with her magic, but their journey would take them throughout Equestria. There would certainly be a lot of dirt, mud, and blood to tread through.

"Are my words mumbling in my old age?" Flemeth's smiled, "Besides young filly, you have been wanting to leave the Wilds for years, ever since you had one look at a Filesian noblewoman's gemmed dress. I have taught you everything I can, now is the opportunity you have waited for, and it is with these Wardens. They need you."

"Now wait just an apple buckin' minute," Applejack said, "I'm mighty grateful for all you've done for us Flemeth, and I'm not trying to look you in the mouth here, but we have enough troubles without adding an apostate to the list. Besides, what does miss fussy flank know about fighting

ponyspawn?”

Rarity narrowed her eyes at Applejack. In response to the challenge, her horn glowed and the most exquisitely crafted staff floated from the hut to her side. Both magical foci glowed bright before an arc of lightning erupted, frying a nearby tree to cinders.

“Right. Point taken.” Applejack took a step back as Rarity turned towards her mother.

“Mother, I’m not ready. I still have much to learn, and besides, going out there, with all the blood and the ponyspawn and who knows what other foulness will ruin all my hard work.”

“You must be ready, child,” Flemeth said, “The Grey Wardens will need your help in defeating the Blight, lest it consume everything, including me. As for you Wardens, understand that I am sending with you that which I hold most dear, my only daughter to go into the dangerous world with you. This is not something I do lightly.”

Twilight understood completely what Flemeth was doing and appreciated the gesture, though she was still hesitant due to Rarity’s own reluctance. Still, she would not turn down aid now and Rarity had shown herself a capable unicorn. She had to be living in the Wilds and facing the dangers that hid in the wilderness.

“Mother, I disapprove of this course of action.” Rarity still resisted.

Flemeth laughed. “Of that I am certain,” she said, turning her gaze back to the Wardens, “And I am sure these two will not hear the end of that by journey’s end. But it is done, and you all must go. You have appointments to keep, and a Blight to stop. I’d offer you luck, but it would seem more prudent to ignore such fancies, and simply write your own fate.”

Rarity hanged her head in defeat, only to immediately steel her gaze northward and walk with a steady gait towards the edge of the Wilds. With Spike on her back, Twilight followed the white unicorn, with Applejack trailing behind her. Flemeth watched as they left before turning back towards the hut, a smile on her lips.

“Go Wardens. You have your appointments to keep…as I have mine.”

The party travelled north through the Wilds, which were mercifully uneventful. They were also silent as Rarity cleared the path to the edge of the Potpourri Wilds. Nopony said anything as they moved forward, keeping their thoughts private. Twilight gave more thought to the magical diagram. Flemeth had said it was as old as the time of Luna, so it was a good estimate that the diagram was written in the old Imperium dialect. Twilight hoped they could find a scholar who could decipher the old text.

As they travelled on the road, the lavender unicorn looked over at Applejack. She was still looking back at Ostequus, likely still thinking back about the battle and the loss of Duncan. Twilight wished there was something she could do for Applejack, but the best she could come up with was to forge ahead and keep the Grey Warden's duties the priority of the group. It would be what Duncan would want.

The dirt path from the Wilds lead to a remnant of the old Imperium Road, a paved road with some stone pillars where shelter used to be supported. Now it was just another ruin, similar to Ostequus, old but still used. On the other end of the road sat a small village, which according to Twilight's map was the township of Ponyring.

"This quaint little village is where I went to get all my materials for my work," Rarity explained, "We can gather supplies here as well as information. Although I believe we should be quick." Rarity pointed her hoof towards the village. Many ponies were hitching carts and loading them with all their belongings. Word must have spread of the defeat at Ostequus, and now the ponies of Ponyring were forced to abandon their village before the ponyspawn claimed it as well. Earth ponies young and old were preparing their wagons for their journeys to escape the horde. Twilight wondered where exactly they would go.

The village of Ponyring was bustling with activity as refugees rushed about, getting ready for the roads ahead. Guards tried to maintain order as tempers flared, no doubt fuelled by fear and worries. The Chantry had a line up in front of its doors, and priestesses flanked by the templar gave blessings of protection to anypony who sought it. Faith was a powerful motivator and everypony needed whatever reassurance they could find during uncertain times.

Silver and gold were also powerful motivators. Merchants who hawked their wares in Ponyring were charging exorbitant prices for the necessities of travel, such as food and healing poultices. Twilight wanted to stop the extortion, but Applejack stopped her and shook her head sadly. They had to help everypony from the greater threat.

"Let's try the tavern," Applejack suggested, "Lot's o' travellers stop by hankerin' for some sweet apple cider. We might be able to find out what's goin' on around Equestria."

The tavern was packed, filled with ponies of all kinds with the smell of cider thick in the air. Many ponies were discussing where they would go during the Blight and about news from the bannorns. Twilight over heard two ponies talk about Bann Braeburn heading to Trotterim with the rest of the nobility after being summoned by Loghoof.

"Loghoof's trying to get the support of the nobility," Applejack explained, "With the king gone, he'll likely prop himself as regent, unless Teryn Highland steps in to stop him."

Two armoured ponies approached Twilight and the others. They wore the emblem of Loghoof's

cutie mark and both had sinister grins on their faces. “Well look what we have here,” said one, “The last of the Grey Wardens. Teryn Loghoof has declared you all traitors for killing our beloved King, and that means quite the bounty is on your hides.”

“Traitors!?” Applejack reared, placing herself in front of Loghoof’s soldiers, “It was Loghoof who betrayed the king! Who betrayed the Wardens! I should tan your hide for even thinkin’ like that!”

“Um…excuse me…”

Before Twilight could interrupt, a pony in a yellow coat dressed in the robes of a Chantry sister approached. There was a bow and quiver of arrows hanging to her sides. She flipped her pink mane back as she looked at the soldiers. “These ponies are probably just more refugees,” she said in a quiet voice, “It would be nice if you could just leave them be. Please?”

“They are traitors to Equestria and should be punished as such,” the larger of the two soldiers responded, “Stay out of our way, Sister, or you will meet the same fate.”

“Are we threatening the Chantry now?” said the smaller, “I don’t know about you, but that seems like attracting the wrath of Celestia by attacking her priestesses.”

The yellow pony nodded. “Your friend is right,” she said, “Also you are outnumbered. Two unicorns and an armed earth pony, and though I abhor violence, I’ve learned that sometimes it is necessary.”

The larger soldier grimaced as he realized the implications of his situation. With a loud snort, he and his fellow turned tail and left the tavern peacefully. Applejack shouted oats that Loghoof would pay for Ostequus, but Twilight was more interested in the Sister who helped them.

“Thank you for assistance Sister…”

The pony turned away, her cheeks flushed with colour. “I’m Fluttershy,” she said at last, “I was looking all over Ponyring for you, but didn’t know how to approach you all.”

“How did you know we are the Grey Wardens?” Applejack asked after she was done yelling at Loghoof’s minions.

Fluttershy pointed a hoof towards Spike. “They said the Grey Wardens have a baby dragon with them and not many ponies have baby dragons as companions.”

Spike smoothed his head scales as he smiled. “It’s good being one of a kind. Though I suppose we do stick out like a sore thumb thanks to me.”

Twilight rolled her eyes, then looked over Fluttershy once more. Why was a Chantry Sister

following their group? Did the Chantry as a whole want something from the Grey Wardens, or was it something of a personal interest? While Twilight had no ill will towards the Chantry, their priestesses and templar often had ill will towards unicorns and magic in general due to the actions of the Imperium.

There was something else off about Fluttershy. Her soft spoken nature was a contrast to that of the loud and brash forcefulness of Equestrian ponies. Then there was the way she talked, something akin to a hint of an accent long hidden away, but still accompanying the speech every few words.

“Oh how lovely!” Rarity exclaimed, interrupting Twilight’s thoughts, “Fluttershy dear, you must be from Filais! I can see it in the way you move. Such poise, such grace! I can also hear it in your voice. Oh I can’t wait to hear about Filais.”

Fluttershy blushed again from Rarity’s attention. “That just adds more to my question,” Twilight said, “What does a Filesian Chantry Sister want from the Grey Wardens.”

The yellow pony bowed her head low, looking away and muttering something Twilight could not hear. The lavender unicorn inched closer, asking that Fluttershy speak up. Fluttershy looked up to see she was surrounded by three ponies and a baby dragon all staring at her. She squeaked before inhaling a lungful of air.

“I’ve lived in an Equestrian Chantry cloister for three years and just before the battle of Ostequus I had a dream, a vision given to me by Celestia and she said that I had to find the Grey Wardens and help them defeat the Blight so I travelled all the way to Ponyring but when I heard that Ostequus was lost but there were Grey Warden survivors I stayed hoping you would come by and you did because I saw your baby dragon and then I came into the tavern behind you and here we are.”

They all blinked as Fluttyshy turned her eyes back to the ground, her cheeks redder than ever. Twilight was at a loss for words. How could this pony say Celestia talked to her directly? The Chantry said that Celestia turned away from the world after the Imperium corrupted her golden city of Canterlot and put her chosen sister Luna to the torch. The Chantry also taught that it was thanks to Luna’s ascension that Celestia even bothered to turn her gaze back on ponies.
Now this yellow pony was saying that Celestia had sent a vision to her personally. Twilight felt in the right to be more than dubious at Fluttershy’s claims. Then there was the sight of the bow which raised further concerns. Chantry priestesses were known for bad tempers, but not for violence. The appearance, equipment, and mannerisms of Fluttershy suggested the opposite.

“I know you have no reason to believe me,” Fluttershy said, “But it’s something I feel I have to do. I’m not a defenceless pony either; I can use a bow as well as any archer. But whatever you want to do is fine.”

Twilight beckoned the others to group up before decided. “What do you all think?” She asked.

Applejack shook her head. “I dunno, Twi,” the former templar looked over at the shy pony, “Her story seems off, but we do need the numbers. Maybe it’ll look good having a Chantry sister in the group as well. I’m just afraid of what will happen when we come across trouble like ponyspawn.”

“I think we should bring her along,” Rarity said, “She obviously has more skills than that of a priestess, considering her choice of arms and that she talked two of Loghoof’s soldiers to back away.”

“You just want a clothes horse to doll up in frou frou dresses,” Applejack challenged, “We need to think practical like.”

Twilight agreed. “We bring her along, and hope that bow isn’t just for scaring ponies away.”

Spike smiled and gave a short cheer. “Alright team! We have a plan! Break!” The party looked at him before he turned away, cheeks flushed violet. They turned back to Fluttershy who was waiting for them patiently near the fire.

“If you still want to, you can join us,” Twilight said. Fluttershy’s face lit up and she gave a small smile, “Just remember that we are fighting the ponyspawn. It’s going to be a dangerous road ahead. Are you ready for this?”

Fluttershy nodded. “I’ll be ok,” her quiet words belied a hidden confidence, “Filais is not so different from Equestria. Well, except for all the ponyspawn. And the smell of wet dog.”

Applejack snorted at the mention of Equestria’s smell, but said nothing as the now larger party left the tavern. They walked towards some of the merchants, looking over their supplies for what the party would need for the journey. Rarity did most of the shopping, where a single bat of her long eyelashes saw the merchants lower their prices. It seemed almost like theft, especially since they were getting the bargains while the other ponies had to suffer with high prices.

Once they were done, Twilight lifted a map of Equestria with her magic and looked over it, with the other ponies gathering around her as they walked. Red Apple Acres was to east along the southern shore of Lake Blackwater. They could go see Arl Macintosh and get his support. The Unicorn Tower still stood on its small island in the northern part of the lake itself, and Twilight would have little trouble persuading Wise Eyes to lend aid.

However, there was still the issue of the other two points on the map that the other ponies were unsure of. The Everfree forest was very far to the east, the supposed home of the largest clan of Dalish pegasi in Equestria. Twilight did not know much about the pegasi of the Dales, except they had access to magic that could manipulate the weather, build structures from clouds, and

even commune with wildlife. The idea of seeing such feats excited Twilight, but the clans were also known to be reclusive and untrusting of other ponies since the Chantry lead an Exalted Gallop against them years ago for not giving tribute to Celestia and Luna.

It would be a challenge to negotiate with the pegasi, but at least Twilight could fill the gap also being an oppressed pony. The donkeys of Orzamule would prove a different challenge altogether. The books in the tower that did have something about the donkeys only spoke of their resistance to magic, their inability to wield the arcane, and their daily struggles against the ponyspawn for living so close to the Dark Tunnels. How could she reason with the donkeys if they didn't have anything in common?

Twilight sighed. "Well girls," she said, "We need to head out in a direction soon. I think we could easily get the unicorns to help us, since I know the First Enchanter, then we can cross the lake over to Red Apple Acres and get the help of Arl Macintosh. Anyone have any suggestions?"

A bubbly voice different from any pony in the party's chimed in. "Ooh! Ooh! I have one! Pick me!"
They all looked around to see a pink earth pony with an incredibly curly pink mane inside a metal cage. She was bouncing up and down in the cage as the ponies approached out of curiosity.

"Uh…I'm sorry, but who are you and why are you locked in a cage?" Twilight asked. The look in those blue eyes gave the unicorn pause for concern. There had to be a reason to lock up a pony when the ponyspawn where fast approaching the village.

"I'm Pinkie Pie!" the pink pony exclaimed, "I was a guard in Ponyring while my family lived in one of the farms outside, but then the ponyspawn came and we got separated! I was all 'Oh no!' but my mom said 'Pinkamena Diane Pie, we are leaving Ponyring for…' For…Hmm…I can't remember! Greenwall? Bluewall? Redwall? No wait that last one is filled with mice. Oh well, I'll remember later."

"Anyways! We were separated and I didn't know which way they went so I said to myself 'Pinkie! You have to do something to tell your family that your still in Ponyring.' So I did the only thing I knew would send the right message! I had a big fun party! With cakes and treats and games and everything!"

Twilight had begun to regret asking about Pinkie Pie. "So you got locked up for holding a party?" Pinkie giggled, then shook her head. "Of course not, silly! I got locked up because the party was so loud, it attracted the ponyspawn and brought them over to the outlying farms before Bann Meyer and her soldiers could arrive. They said I wouldn't be in here very long, but it has been a few days and I have another party just bubbling inside!"

"Twilight," Fluttershy said, walking up to the violet unicorn's side, "We can't just leave her here

for the ponyspawn. Maybe she can help us on our journey?"

Twilight sighed as she looked towards Pinkie. Their group was a already consisting of a shy Chantry sister, an apostate fashionista unicorn and two fugitive Grey Wardens. How could one more crazy pony hurt the party?

"If we help you out, can you give us some help against the ponyspawn?" Twilight asked, "Like, what can you do for us?"

"Well, I know how to swing a mace!" Pinkie said, her bright smile seemingly planted on her face, "But I don't really like using it unless I have to. I am good at mixing things though! Cakes, muffins, sweets, potions, poultices, grenades…"

"Wait a second," said Applejack, "What was that last one?'

"Grenades!" With a cheer, she pointed a hoof over at a nearby discarded barrel, "I put all my stuff in that barrel. I can show you some of fun grenades I made! I even made a song about it!" Before any objections could be made, Pinkie opened her cage and rushed towards the old barrel. She dug inside the barrel until she emerged with a case filled with all sorts of different powders, extracts, phials and metal casings. Twilight's eyes grew wide as Pinkie began to sing while making a grenade:

All you have to do is take a cup of sulphur,
Add it to the mix
Now just take a little lyrium
Not a lot, just a pinch

Making these toys is such a sinch,
Add a teaspoon of saltpetre
Add a little more to the count of four
And you'll never have your fill of…

Grenades! So fun and splodey!
Grenades! Don't stand so closely!
Grenades! Grenades, Grenades, GRENADES!

Pinkie nudged the small metal bomb over to Twilight. With a ginger tap of her hoof, she looked at the grenade, then to Pinkie nervously. "Is it safe?"

"Of course it's safe now!" she giggled, "The fuse isn't lit, and it's very important to time these things right. Just like any party has to be timed right!"

Twilight raised an eyebrow before looking over at the cage then back to the pink grenadier.

“How did you get out of the cage?’ she asked, now very sceptical about everything concerning Pinkie.

“Oh, the cage was not very well built.” Pinkie demonstrated this fact by opening the cage and getting right back in it. Just as quickly as she was in the cage, she opened it back up again, bouncing in front of Twilight with that infectious smile. “So, can I come with you? Can I? Can I?”

Applejack just gave the same look that she did when Fluttershy asked. *We need the numbers,* was the wordless exchange and somepony with Pinkie’s skills would be a good addition to their adventuring troupe.

Twilight offered her hoof to the earth pony. “Welcome aboard,” she said with a faint smile, still considering if it was a good idea to let on such an unhinged pony. Pinkie took the hoof and shook it with it surprising strength. As the dizziness from the shaking faded, Twilight saw that Pinkie was now dressed in leather armour, her grenade tool kit packed away in her saddle bag.

“Ooh! That reminds me of a song!” Twilight groaned as Pinkie Pie burst into her lyrics as they made their way northward, back towards Unicorn Tower.

“We’re off to the see the wizards, the wonderful wizards with horns! We’ll find they are the wiz of a wiz! If ever a wiz was born! If ever oh ever a wiz was one…”