

“Good morning, cruel, cruel world...”

Twilight's sleep-encrusted eyes were half open, lavender pupils staring at the ceiling above her bed. Her unfocused gaze passed through the wooden planks, ignoring them. She was looking towards an indiscernible point in the distance where the remnants of her peaceful night's sleep now lay, forever outside of her grasp.

She could hear rustling nearby and a disgruntled voice murmuring to itself. It was barely noticeable against the cacophony coming from outside of the house, though. That infernal noise had taken her out of a wonderful dream and deposited her into a cruel reality of constant dissonance and a disturbing lack of caffeine. If the sounds of tossing and turning she heard from her own room were any indication, she hadn't been the only victim of a rude awakening.

Twilight reached a purple hoof around her bed-stand. After a few tired swipes, she held an alarm clock in front of her face. She rubbed her bleary eyes and read the digital numbers: 8:00 am.

*“Well, that's not much earlier than I'd planned to wake up... I guess.”* Twilight let out an audible sigh. *“Guess it's time to start the day.”*

She sat up in bed, wobbling back and forth a bit as her internal gyroscope righted itself. Once she felt able to stand on her own without falling over, she hopped out of bed with a 'clop' as her hooves hit the cold floorboards.

Twilight Sparkle shook her head, dark indigo and pin-streaked mane swaying with the motion. She stretched her limbs, bending low to the floor. On her left flank there was an emblem of a 6 pointed pink star surrounded by 5 smaller white stars - her "cutie-mark".

The source of the rustling, a diminutive figure covered entirely in blankets and huddled up in a small cushioned basket, continued to roll about and mumble incoherently. Twilight smiled apologetically, and nudged the bundle gently.

“C'mon Spike, I know you've got to be awake. Can't stay in bed all day.” She added that last part when her assistant huffed angrily and turned around again but otherwise did not answer her. Twilight nudged him again, a tad more forcefully, but only received the same response for her efforts. “So you want to play hardball, eh?”

The horn on Twilight's forehead began to light up with a purple glow as she worked her unicorn magic. The bundle of cloth containing her assistant slowly levitated into the air while being enveloped in the same purple glow. She tilted it until a purple and green-scaled figure began to slide out.

Twilight's eyes scrunched in concentration as her draconic assistant was lowered to the floor feet-first, and then she relaxed. The magical aura surrounding the dragon relaxed as well, and when it dissipated, Spike fell flat on his face, light green cheek-feathers splayed out and his green back spikes ruffled.

“Stubborn until the very end, I see.” Twilight sighed heavily and left the dragon on the floor as she walked towards one of the many windows in her second story bedroom. She pushed the window

pane outward, and the sound from outside hit her even harder.

Twilight looked out into the streets below. She withheld a gasp; there didn't seem to be a single square inch that didn't have at least one hoof occupying it. The sky was no less cluttered, as pegasi were flying around various buildings and adorning them with green ribbons. Amidst the sounds outside, Twilight heard a band, or perhaps fifty of them, playing all manner of tunes. Two ponies passed by, talking to each other excitedly, and the eavesdropping unicorn managed to pick up the phrase "glue meddlin".

*"Did I hear that correctly?"* Twilight idly wondered. *"I hope Pinkie hasn't mixed paste in her pastries again..."*

Twilight heard a highly exaggerated yawn from behind her, and she turned her head to see Spike finally opening his sleepy green eyes. The dragon stared at the ground before looking at Twilight with a poorly-acted, quizzical expression.

"Hey, how'd I end up here?" he asked with all the innocence of a convicted criminal.

"You were probably sleepwalking again. That was your excuse for why I found you rampaging through a city made of stacked books last week, right?" Twilight asked with a slight smirk. The dragon's cheeks took on a reddish tinge.

"Very funny. What did I tell you about using your magic on me without asking?" Spike asked, sounding quite indignant.

"Who says I did? You wouldn't know; you were asleep, after all." Twilight replied, scoring as close to a victory as she could find in such a silly argument. She poked her head back out the window. "Ponyville sure is busy today. Does everypony know something I don't?"

"Sure, lots of things. Like how to respect people's privacy, how to treat people kindly while they're asleep, and how to not upset fearsome dragons." Spike ticked off his answers on his fingers, before looking up at Twilight's unamused expression. "Well, among other things."

"Fine, Mr. Unhelpful, I'm going to find out what's going on then. You should come too, unless the floor is really that comfortable for you." Twilight began to walk towards the stairs. Spike scoffed.

"What's to stop me from going back to my bed?" the dragon asked. As soon as the words left his mouth, his bed was covered in purple magic and levitated to the top of a nearby bookshelf. "Well what's to stop me from using your bed?"

"If you get on my bed, I'm not levitating it onto a bookcase. I'm sending it to the top of the tree." Twilight responded, voice unreadable. She descended down the stairs without a look behind her.

"Jeez... and she thinks I'm the grumpy one in the morning." Spike huffed before diligently following her down the staircase.

---

## **My Little Pony: The Glowmelon Mystery**

### **Chapter 1**

Twilight closed the door behind her as she and Spike prepared to brave the crowded streets of Ponyville. The young dragon took one look at the thick crowds before hopping atop Twilight's back.

“Wow, you never realize just how many ponies live in Ponyville until something big starts happening.” Twilight spoke to both herself and her young charge. “I still don't even know half of these ponies by anything more than their cutie-marks.”

Twilight heard a "whoosh" and felt the effects of air-displacement up above her. She tilted her head up and saw a streaking sky-blue figure, trailed by a stream of color that matched the mane and tail of the pony who created it. On the speeding figure's flank rested the symbol of a multicolored lightning bolt shooting out from underneath a cloud, but it could barely be seen at the speed it's owner was traveling.

The pegasus known as Rainbow Dash carried a roll of something green in her hooves as she approached the top of Twilight's tree-house. Then the pegasus disappeared in another bolt of color, traveling around and around the treetop faster than Twilight's eyes could follow. When the whirling rainbow came to a stop, a long green banner gently fell atop the branches, barely visible among the green leaves.

Rainbow Dash held her chin in her hoof as she inspected her handiwork, before finally giving a shrug. Then she looked down and saw Twilight watching her from down below. The pegasus began a slow descent towards her friend.

“Oh hey Twilight, you're finally up!” Rainbow Dash exclaimed. Spike coughed into his hand, and the pegasus smiled awkwardly. “Oh, and you too, Spike.”

“Yeah, we're up. And so is everypony else, it seems.” Twilight replied as a pony jostled past her in a hurry. “Seeing as how you just did... something to my house, I take it you know more about what's going on than I do.”

“Oh yeah! It's a great day to be alive, Twilight! It's the fourth annual Glowmelon Festival!” Rainbow Dash vaulted up into the air, taking the opportunity to do a few cartwheels before landing back down on the ground.

Twilight raised an eyebrow as Dash panted from her small bit of exertion, and she waited for her friend to continue. The pegasus caught her breath and gave a lopsided grin.

“Sorry, I've sorta been up all night getting things ready with Pinkie. Drank a huge cup of coffee. Big mistake. Or maybe it was the best idea ever? Hard to tell with all this buzzing in my head. By the way Twilight, why are you vibrating like that?” Rainbow Dash finally stopped talking, and Twilight saw that the mare's lavender violet eyes were jittering back and forth in her skull.

“I'm, uh, trying out a new spell. Thanks for noticing.” Twilight smiled awkwardly. “Uh, by the way, where are Pinkie and the rest of the girls?”

"I'm not sure about the others. I talked to them all earlier, spreading the good news and all that, but I haven't seen anypony around since then. Except of course for-" Dash's sentence was cut suddenly cut off.

"Dashie! I didn't give you permission to take a break!"

The voice was familiar, albeit at least ten times louder than it should have been. Twilight and Rainbow Dash watched as a bouncing pink pony made of pure energy approached them, looking very out of the ordinary.

Three multicolored balloons marked the mare's hopping flank, and looked ready to float off into the sky. That was normal; what was different was the strange brass contraption that hung around her head and matted down her poofy pink mane, for the purpose of holding a megaphone in front of her mouth.

"C'mon Dashie, get that keister into gear! Move those hooves! Flap those wings! Do... something with ribbons! And lots of them!" Pinkie commanded, and Dash screamed and took to the sky like a thunderbolt. Pinkie watched her friend fly away before looking down to see that Twilight and Spike hadn't joined Dash's stratospheric expedition.

"Oh, hi Twilight!" Pinkie Pie greeted her friend, mere inches from the unicorn's face, blue eyes shining brightly. Twilight was sent reeling backwards, and Spike jumped off her back so as not to be crushed.

"Hi Pinkie..." Twilight responded as politely as possible, cringing all the while. "Do you think you could...?"

"Oh, sure!" Pinkie answered the unfinished question while throwing her head back in a motion that left the megaphone positioned above her head. "I mean, oh, sure. Tee-hee!"

*"Okay, either she said something about kosher tea, or I need an ear examination."* Twilight clopped her ears repeatedly with her hooves. *"Well, at least now I know the buzzing in Dash's head wasn't just from the coffee."*

"Hey, are you two okay?" Pinkie asked, sounding concerned. Spike ignored the question and turned to Twilight.

"Hey Twilight? I don't think you'll need to worry about me sleeping in again. In fact, I don't think I'll ever be able to fall asleep again." the dragon's unfocused stare and monotone voice gained a giggle from the pink pony.

"We'll be fine in a few minutes, I'm sure." Twilight responded to Pinkie's question, prodding Spike with a hoof and not getting a response. "Hopefully."

"Well that's good! I wouldn't want you to miss out on the gu-gu-gu-grandiful Glowmelon Festival, just because of a little thing like a blown ear drum!" Pinkie hopped up and down, knocking

the megaphone back over her mouth in the process. Luckily, she removed it before she spoke again. "So, how excited are you? Are you excited? Because I'm excited! I bet I'm more excited than you are! How excited are you anyways? Hah, I'm ten times more excited! Twenty times even! Excited at the atomic level!"

"That's gre-" Twilight began.

"If you cut me in half I'd explode!" Pinkie pushed her face close to Twilight's own. "That's how excited I am!"

*"Oh boy. Maybe Spike had the right idea about sleeping in this morning."* Twilight glanced over at her apprentice. *"Too bad he still has that thousand yard stare thing going."*

"Okay, you've made your point, heh heh..." the unicorn nudged the pink pony's head back a few inches with her hoof and took a deep breath. "This glowmelon thing must be pretty special if it's got both you and Rainbow Dash so animated."

"Well duh! Didn't Dashie tell you? She's been staying up every night this week, waiting for the signs that the festival was going to start!" Pinkie Pie explained. "I've been making her thermoses of my special hot chocolate coffee, in exchange for her having to wake me up as soon as it was time to start preparing for the party!"

"I see." Twilight responded calmly. She did a double take. "Wait, hot chocolate coffee? Do you have any idea how much caffeine would be in that? How often do you drink that stuff?"

"Tee-hee! All the time, of course!" Pinkie answered, taking out a thermos and sipping from its caffeinated contents. "Ahhh..."

*"Well that certainly answers a lot of questions."*

Suddenly, Twilight heard what sounded like applause and the stomping of hooves. The sound was rolling in from the edges of town.

Dash landed back down next to Twilight and Pinkie Pie, and her face was positively beaming despite the dark rings under her eyes.

"They're here! It's starting!" she said excitedly, before taking off once again.

"Who's here?" Twilight asked, but Dash was already too high up to hear her question.

"It must be Glowmelina's little helpers!" Pinkie Pie hopped up and down, the megaphone bobbing back and forth over her head like an upside down pendulum and amplifying every other word.

Twilight watched as the crowd around the two began to split apart, moving to either side of the road and clearing a path. Twilight followed the crowd and Pinkie unquestioningly. She heard the sound of trumpets playing far up the path that'd just been made. The purple unicorn poked her head out from the crowd and stared out as far as she could see.

Slowly, she watched as various shapes and figures appeared on the horizon. Moving through Ponyville was a procession of forest animals, both large and small. Tinier creatures were carrying wooden platters over their heads, while the larger ones pulled wagons. Curiously, the contents of the wagons seemed to be glowing with a green light.

But Twilight's eyes were drawn inexorably to only one creature in the parade. Heading up the pack, and pulling the largest wagon into Ponyville, was one of the legendary manticores.

The lion-like beast looked enormous, even from a distance. Its large, blood-red mane stood out against its yellow coat, but not as much as its bat-like wings and pointed scorpion tail. Combined with the teeth jutting out from its lower jaw and its pointed ears, the manticore's appearance was nothing short of demonic.

*“Oh Celestia, I hope that thing is only here to get a splinter taken out. I've got to get Spike out of here!”*

Twilight's entire body tensed as she looked around anxiously, but she saw that nopony else was preparing to run for the hills like she was. Her body relaxed somewhat, but there was still a look of confusion on her face.

The manticore strolled past her, head held with a regal air. Most of the ponies seemed to be torn between being awestruck by the fabled creature's presence or being enraptured with the glowing contents of the cart it pulled. Once the beast had passed, the crowd Twilight had found herself in started to follow it.

“C'mon, hurry up Twilight!” Rainbow Dash suddenly shouted from up above, and Twilight saw that the pegasus had picked Spike up at some point. Twilight followed the will of the crowd and her friends. She eventually found herself at town square, in the group of ponies that surrounded the animals and their payload.

“Wow, I can't believe there's really a manticore here this year!” Rainbow Dash exclaimed, landing next to her two friends and jostling two other ponies in the process. Spike was knocked off the pegasus' back by the landing and sat on the ground shuddering.

“A m-m-manticore?” the tiny dragon stuttered, daring a glance at the ferocious winged beast. The manticore seemed to stare back at him, and its tail swayed playfully and sadistically. Spike screamed and jumped several feet into the air, landing on Twilight's head and taking hold of her horn. “Fire, fire, fire! Augh, how do I work this thing?!”

Spike tried to aim Twilight's horn as if it were a rifle as several confused ponies stared at the pair, and Twilight smiled back uncomfortably. Pinkie just giggled.

“Oh Spiky, there's nothing to be afraid of! Probably!” Pinkie tried to assuage the young dragon, punctuating her point with another giggle.

“So you say, and I don't see anypony else running for the armory...” Twilight said, trying to look

up at the little soldier who was manning her turret. “But, why, exactly?”

“Because no creature who's brought a load of delicious glowmelons into Ponyville could possibly be up to no good! Duh, everypony knows that!” Pinkie answered, bouncing on her hooves. Then she immediately stopped, landing with her four legs spread apart and standing stiffly with a shocked expression on her face. “Unless its just a trap to lure us into a false sense of security, so it can pounce on us!”

Now it was Pinkie Pie’s turn to receive awkward stares from the rest of the crowd. Twilight nudged the statuesque mare with a hoof.

“Um, if you're going to run, shouldn't you get started?” she questioned.

“No. First I get my glowmelon, and then I run!” Pinkie answered, following up her comment in a whisper. “It's the perfect plan...”

Twilight turned her head and saw that Rainbow Dash was no longer by her side. Instead, Dash was flying towards the wagon that the manticore had brought into town. She reached into the cart and pulled out a shining green orb, which she lifted into the air above her head.

“Yes! Let the Glowmelon Festival begin!” Rainbow Dash shouted out, causing the crowd to erupt into cheering. She flew back towards Twilight, Pinkie, and Spike as the other ponies began to surge towards the carts.

“Sorry to steal your line Pinkie, but you seemed to be a bit out of it.” Dash apologized to Pinkie Pie, who abruptly snapped out of her stance.

“Oh, don't worry about it! You worked just as hard as me for all of this.” Pinkie said, watching as other ponies began to grab their glowmelons. “Oh! I almost forgot, I need to go help Mr. and Mrs. Cake hand out the plates and utensils!”

Pinkie Pie rushed off towards Sugarcube Corner, neglecting to pick up a glowmelon in her hurry. Rainbow Dash nudged Twilight with an elbow.

“What are you waiting for? Go get yourself some of this!” Rainbow suggested, caressing her glowmelon lovingly as she drooled.

Twilight nodded nervously and took towards the crowd. Spike immediately hopped off of her head and stood next to Rainbow Dash.

“No way am I getting near that thing!” the dragon exclaimed, pointing at the manticore. Twilight smiled back at him unconvincingly before joining the line of ponies that had formed near the monster.

The manticore's line was the shortest of all those available, and it only took a single look at the beast to know why. Twilight gulped as she watched other ponies grab their glowing melons, the manticore staring at them all the while. When it was her turn to pick one out, she nervously trotted up

to the monster and attempted to smile at it.

“H-hi.” Twilight's shaking voice was barely audible. She pointed towards Spike, who was watching her uneasily. “Um, my assistant over there, he'd uh, like one too, so is it okay if I...?”

The manticore stared at Twilight disinterestedly before shifting its gaze to the tiny dragon, who gasped and attempted hide behind one of Rainbow Dash's legs. After a few tense moments, the manticore snorted, turning back to Twilight with a shrug.

“T-thanks?” Twilight answered nervously. She hopped up onto one of the wheels of the wagon and grabbed two glowmelons, and then awkwardly walked back to Rainbow Dash and Spike using her hind legs. She let out a sigh of relief.

“See? No problem!” Rainbow Dash clapped Twilight on the back, causing the unicorn to almost drop the two melons.

“Yeah, no problem. Heh.” Twilight laughed nervously, letting the glowmelons down onto the ground. She nudged one of them towards Spike. “Here you go, Mr. Commando.”

“Oh, uh, I was just kidding about that "killing" stuff, heh heh.” Spike's laugh lacked genuine mirth as he picked up the fruit that was nearly as big as he was. He glanced again at the manticore. “I'm just uh, gonna go back to the library now. I'll see you girls later.”

With that, Spike quickly waddled off towards someplace safer for a baby dragon.

“So, how do we eat these things?” Twilight asked as she watched Spike disappear into the distance. But when she turned her head, Rainbow Dash was no longer by her side. Instead, a glowing melon came crashing down right in front of her, breaking open and splattering against the ground.

Rainbow Dash landed next to the fruit and dug right in, loudly and messily tearing into the fruit. Juice and seeds stained Twilight's coat, causing her to cringe and take a few steps back.

“I'll... just wait until Pinkie brings a plate by.” Twilight decided, taking herself and her glowmelon to a nearby unoccupied table. It only took a second for Pinkie Pie to walk by, and the pink pony handed her friend a plate and a knife with a smile.

“Don't forget to save the seeds!” the pink pony cautioned before darting back towards another pony that was lacking their silverware.

Twilight's horn lit up as she grasped the knife with her magic. She cut the glowmelon into four and then eight slices. Setting the knife down, she slowly and tentatively raised a piece of the melon to her lips, and took a miniscule bite.

Twilight's eyes suddenly dilated, growing to the size of dinner plates. Her entire body began to shiver, starting from her head and working its way down her spine. A low moan escaped her throat unwillingly, and she almost convulsed in her seat.



*"Surely... surely, this is the most delicious thing I have ever tasted..."*

It took a full ten seconds for Twilight to recover from her euphoria, and after it passed she levitated the chunks of the glowmelon back into a single whole.

*"I can't eat this in public; it'd be almost... obscene."* Twilight thought to herself as she looked around. *"Maybe I'll take it some place more private... like the library. With the lights turned off and Spike locked out..."*

Twilight moved to sit up from the table, but stopped when she saw one of her friends daintily strolling towards her.

"Hi Twilight. Are you having a good Glowmelon Festival?" Fluttershy asked. The yellow pegasus's voluminous pink mane nearly enveloped her face, but Twilight could still see her smile and kind blue eyes. Her large pink tail trailed her like a cape as she approached.

"Yeah, this thing is really delicious. Almost... indecently so." Twilight's mouth was starting to water, and she swallowed quickly "But I'm not too hungry right now, so I'm going to save mine for later."

"Yes, that's what I do as well." Fluttershy laughed almost imperceptibly, sitting her butterfly-marked flank down on the bench and her glowmelon down at the table. "This is your first Glowmelon Festival, isn't it?"

"Yeah. I'd heard it mentioned a long time ago, but there were no records of it in the library. I've been trying to get an answer to what it is all day, but everypony has either been too busy or too excited to tell me anything, or they weren't around. Speaking of which, have you seen Rarity or Applejack yet today?" Twilight asked, tilting her head to the side.

"Oh, I saw Rarity for a second out of the corner of my eye, but as soon as she picked her glowmelon, she headed straight home in a hurry." Fluttershy explained, and Twilight nodded understandingly. "You shouldn't expect Applejack to show up, though. Ever since she was unable to plant her own glowmelon field after the first festival, she swore she'd never celebrate the day again."

"I see. And I can't imagine these things would be easy to grow. I've never even heard of them before, even with all the books I read." Twilight admitted.

"Yes, they're a mysterious present. Glowmelina's gift to us all." Fluttershy spoke the name almost reverently.

"Who is Glowmelina? Pinkie mentioned that name too. Is he or she a citizen of Ponyville?" Twilight questioned.

"Well, the rumor is that she lives in the Everfree Forest and grows the glowmelons in secret. The only time anypony hears from her is when she sends the animals of the forest out to deliver her harvest to us, along with a short letter." the yellow pegasus explained sagely.

“Really? That sounds a bit suspicious to me.” Twilight cupped her chin in her hoof, but was distracted when Rainbow Dash suddenly landed on the seat next to her.

“What does? Are you talking about Rarity not being here? Cuz I know the answer to that one!” Twilight noticed that rings under the pegasus' eyes had disappeared, and, on the whole, she looked to be a lot healthier after having eaten the glowmelon. “Oh man, you should have seen her during the first Glowmelon Festival! Hah! Oh, it was great! Actually if you wait right here, I can go get the photos!”

“T-that won't be necessary Rainbow Dash.” Fluttershy quickly interjected. Twilight raised an eyebrow but remained silent. “And no. We were discussing Glowmelina.”

“Ooh! I know all about her!” Rainbow Dash seemed to swell with confidence. “I heard she's 5 feet tall and has a bunch of tiny ponies do all the gardening for her.”

“I heard she's a strong and beautiful alicorn who grows glowmelons with her magic.” Fluttershy countered peacefully.

“I heard she rides a wagon pulled by 5 cockatrices and a dog!”

“I heard she made friends with one of every species of animal in the world.”

“I've heard she beat up a manticore and forced it to work for her! And I totally didn't make that up just now!”

“I heard she's made of bubblegum and puppies!” Pinkie Pie popped up, causing all of her friends to jump in their seats “So, who we talking about?”

“Well those are all interesting theories. Some more interesting than others...” Twilight ignored Pinkie's question for the moment. “But it sounds like no one knows anything for sure.”

“Actually, I think it's supposed to be that way.” Fluttershy began to explain, but Dash took the reigns of the conversation.

“Yeah right! It's like Daring Do says, what good is a mystery if you don't bother to solve it?” Rainbow Dash quoted, drawing a smile out of Twilight.

“Well I'm sure it serves a purpose for the person trying to keep it a mystery.” Fluttershy replied considerately.

“Meh!” Dash dismissed Fluttershy's case with a single syllable. She turned her attention back to Twilight. “Twilight, what do you think?”

“What do I think?” Twilight repeated the question.

“Yeah. I'm proposing that the four of us...” Dash began, but Pinkie Pie suddenly gasped and held her hooves to her cheeks.

“Oh my gosh! I just remembered! I used paste in the pastries back at Sugercube Corner again! I gotta go!” Pinkie quickly darted off in the direction of her workplace, leaving her friends behind.

“Okay, I propose that the three of us follow these animals back to their source and find out the real story behind the Glowmelon Festival!” Rainbow Dash continued her speech as if it had not just been interrupted.

“I'm not sure” Twilight answered noncommittally, glancing at her glowmelon and then the direction of her home.

“If Glowmelina really does live in Everfree Forest, we'd be following the animals back to a v-very dangerous place...” Fluttershy pointed out, shrinking in her seat.

“Danger, shmanger! We've been there plenty of times. Heck, even Apple Bloom's been there plenty of times!” Dash pointed dramatically towards the young filly who just happened to be passing by, who stood stock still with a glowmelon shining through her saddle-pack.

“Please don't tell mah sis I got a glowmelon. Ah know she hates them!” Apple Bloom practically cowered under their gazes. She was only a small pony, with a pale yellow coat, red hair, and no cutie-mark.

“No worries, kid.” Rainbow Dash giggled.

“Thanks!” Apple Bloom's face lit up. She began to leave, but then paused. “Hey! Can ah go with you to the Everfree Forest?”

“No.” Twilight quickly said, causing Rainbow Dash to close her mouth. Apple Bloom only looked disappointed for a second before she continued on her way to wherever she was going.

“I'm still not sure if we should even go...” Fluttershy placed emphasis on the “we”.

“Neither am I. But...” Twilight looked away from Fluttershy's silently pleading eyes and instead turned to Rainbow Dash's mile-wide smile. “Well, it would be pretty interesting to find out what's really going on here. And, if things do start to get dangerous, we can always head back home.”

“Alright!” Rainbow Dash pumped a hoof in the air victoriously.

“Yay.” Fluttershy sighed, but didn't voice anymore dissent.

Suddenly, the ground shook and they heard a loud explosion coming from the direction of Sugercube Corner. The three gathered ponies looked towards Pinkie Pie's home and place of work. They watched as what appeared to be an off-white liquid spewed out from the chimney. The strange substance flew high in the air. Then it began to rain down upon Ponyville.

A small glob landed on the table Twilight and the other girls were seated at, just barely missing her and Fluttershy's glowmelons. Rainbow Dash blinked and dipped a hoof into the substance. She tasted it, and immediately her eyes bugged out of her head and she began to gag. It took the pegasus

several moments to regain her composure.

“Well, It finally happened. Mr. and Mrs. Cake turned Pinkie Pie into Pinkie Glue.” Rainbow Dash deadpanned.

---

## Chapter 2

The room was dark, lit by candlelight and the obtrusive sun rays that made their way through the drawn curtain. Thin smoke wafted through the air, carrying with it a pleasant burning scent. Twilight lounged on her bed, staring at a plate in front of her. It contained a slice of glowmelon, still faintly pulsating with green light.

“Oh glowmelon, we've been going at it for hours... don't you think we should slow down?” Twilight's voice was low and seductive as she gazed at the fruit with ravenous eyes. “Well, I suppose you're right. One more tiny nibble couldn't hurt...”

Twilight slinked across the bed towards her prize, tail twitching. She took the melon chunk into her hooves, slowly bringing it to her lips.

“Hiya Twilight!” Pinkie Pie greeted Twilight from outside the bedside window.

“Sun of Celestia!” Twilight screamed, throwing the glowmelon into the air to splat against the ground. She started to hyperventilate, and looked at her friend in surprise.

“What'cha doin'?” Pinkie asked curiously, tilting her head to the side.

“Nothing! Nothing at all!” Twilight answered quickly. She rapidly blew out all the candles surrounding the bed and snuffed the incense sticks.

“Really? Because you were reminding me a lot of Rarity at the first Glowmelon Festival just now.” Pinkie brought up. “Ooh, maybe I should go get the pictures and compare the two of you!”

“T-that won't be necessary.” Twilight echoed Fluttershy's earlier statement. “Why are you here? How are you here?”

“Oh, Fluttershy asked me to come get you. Her and Rainbow Dash have been knocking on your door for the past five minutes, but you haven't been answering.” Pinkie explained. “As for how I'm here, well...”

A look of confusion passed over Pinkie's features as she tilted her head to the side, looking above herself and then below. She stared at Twilight for a single second before falling out of view. Twilight heard a loud “thump”.

The unicorn sighed while she picked up her alarm clock and checked the time. It was 1:00.

*“Darn, that's right. I was supposed to meet those two an hour ago so we could start our*

*investigation.*” Twilight thought to herself as she set the device down, lighting up her horn. The lights in the room lit up as well, following her lead. She hopped out of bed and next to the remains of her glowmelon, which she stared at with pouting lips. Then she trotted downstairs with her head hung low.

She opened the front door and saw Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and Pinkie Pie waiting for her. Pinkie was already talking a mile a minute.

“And then it looked like she was going to start making out with it or something, and I said 'Hiya Twilight', and then-” Pinkie stopped talking when she saw that Twilight was looking at her with rosy red cheeks. “Ooh, do you want to finish the story yourself?”

“So! Glowmelina! We're going to go find her, right?” Twilight spoke quickly, her voice wavering slightly under Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy's curious stares.

“Oh, I'd love to come Twilight! But I'm still having to clean up the mess I made around town.” Pinkie Pie giggled, pulling out a mop and a wash-bin. “Would you believe this is the second time I've done this?”

“I believe it. I was stuck to Applejack's flank for nearly half a day the last time.” Rainbow Dash replied with a laugh. Pinkie giggled as well.

“Oh yeah, I remember that now. Anyways, I have to go. Have fun everypony!” Pinkie waved and bounced off towards something that needed cleaning.

“What about you Spike? Do you want to come along with us?” Twilight turned to ask her assistant, who was busy adjusting the cuffs on his tuxedo.

“Huh? Oh sorry, but I'm kind of busy.” Spike answered as he took a small bouquet of flowers out of his pocket and started to head up the stairs. “Tonight I've got a date with a lovely glowmelon.”

“Not on my bed!” Twilight frantically shouted after her apprentice as the door closed behind the dragon. Her two friends again looked at her with odd expressions. Twilight smiled back awkwardly, and pushed the two out of the doorway. “C'mon, we have to get moving before the caravan leaves!”

Twilight shut the door behind them and followed her two friends as they led the way. It didn't take long for them to find the group of animals and their wagons. Many ponies were walking up towards the small animals and depositing glowmelon seeds into the platters.

“Did you remember to save your seeds, Twilight?” Fluttershy asked.

“Oh, uh, no. Pinkie even told me to, but I forgot.” Twilight admitted, looking a bit ashamed.

“Psh. Who lets a little thing like seeds bother them? I just swallow 'em.” Rainbow Dash stated proudly.

“Oh no, Rainbow Dash. Don't you know what happens to ponies when they swallow

glowmelon seeds?" Fluttershy asked, her eyes narrowing but a small smile creeping across her face. "They start to grow a glowmelon in their stomach."

Rainbow Dash just laughed at Fluttershy's attempt to sound sinister, and Twilight chuckled as well.

*"Actually, considering that we don't know anything about the glowmelons or this Glowmelina pony, that could actually happen."* Twilight shook her head. *"Just one more reason to expose the mystery behind this festival."*

The manticore roared ferociously, and ponies who'd been going to deposit their seeds scattered. The other animals seemed to take this as a sign, and they began to hitch themselves back up to the wagons.

"Okay, they must be getting ready to head back. All we gotta do is follow them." Rainbow Dash explained the plan.

"Yes, but quietly." Twilight whispered back, watching the manticore stand up and shoulder its burden.

"Are you sure we should be doing this?" Fluttershy asked. She gulped as the manticore stared at her with mild interest.

"Of course. It's up to us to solve this mystery, for all of Ponyville." Twilight's voice was resolute and her expression was firm.

The animals finished their preparation, and started to walk down the path that led out of Ponyville. A few ponies were cheering and waving goodbye, so Twilight joined in.

*"Be seeing you again soon."* Twilight smiled craftily. *"Real soon."*

---

"Hmm. Okay, they're still just moving forward. Keep up the pace, everypony." Rainbow Dash called out from up above before landing down on the grass next to Twilight Sparkle and Fluttershy. The three friends trotted side by side.

"Okay, phase 1 of... 1 is going pretty well then." Twilight responded, nodding her head. "All we have to do is keep following them at a safe distance, and we shouldn't be found out."

"Unless they have very sharp eyes or very sharp hearing." Fluttershy stared at the large empty meadow that surrounded them.

"Or very sharp teeth!" Rainbow Dash stood up on her back legs and posed as if she were ready to attack the yellow pegasus. Fluttershy backed up a bit but didn't change her expression.

"I don't think teeth are sensitive in the same way." she replied coolly before she continued to

walk at her previous pace.

“Rainbow Dash, keep it down. You too, Fluttershy.” Twilight spoke softly, cocking her head to the side with an odd expression. “Wow, there's something I never thought I'd say.”

“Sorry...” Fluttershy whispered so quietly that she was almost inaudible.

“This is all so weird. The squirrels that showed up at night to post the announcement of the festival? Weird. The parade of animals into Ponyville? Also weird. But a manticore? That's just so beyond weird!” Rainbow Dash's voice scared away a nearby butterfly.

“Thanks for the recap, but what did I just say about being quiet?” Twilight asked, eyes narrowed.

“Sorry. It's just weird. And I know I keep saying that, but, well, it is.” Dash retorted, her voice only slightly lowered. “This ish is so not natural.”

“Shh! And I wouldn't even be out here if I didn't think something was going on.” Twilight answered as she turned to the quieter pegasus. “What's your opinion on this, Fluttershy?”

“M-my opinion?” she answered Twilight's question with another question, though her friends could barely hear her. “Well, I guess it's... weird. I suppose...”

“Hah, see? Everyone agrees with me, Twilight!” Rainbow Dash loudly boasted.

“I never disagreed with you!” Twilight finally lost control of herself.

“Shh, Twilight, keep your voice down.” Fluttershy whispered, causing the purple unicorn to sigh in frustration. Rainbow Dash laughed into her hoofs to stifle the noise.

“Okay, new rule. No one is allowed to say the word 'weird'.” Twilight decreed.

“What should we say instead, then?” Fluttershy asked innocently.

“I don't know. Abnormal, mysterious, kooky, spooky, queer...” Twilight rattled off synonyms.

“Hmm, I get it! So like, Fluttershy is pretty queer, right?” Rainbow Dash blurted out of nowhere, causing Twilight's head to jerk backwards as if she'd been hit in the face with a bucket of water.

“Excuse me?” Fluttershy asked with a small hint of indignation.

“Yeah. I mean, you gotta know most of the animals in and around Ponyville, but they haven't told you anything about Glowmelina?” Dash asked, her tone of voice entirely serious.

“Well, they aren't exactly the most conversational creatures...” Fluttershy admitted, hanging her head low. “They've never shown me anything to do with it, so I've just assumed that I'm not meant to

find out.”

*“That is bit weird. I mean, odd. But why is she coming with us then?”* Twilight wondered to herself. *“Maybe it's like that time we tried to throw a surprise party for Pinkie Pie, and she got the wrong idea. Maybe Fluttershy feels left out.”*

“Don't worry, Fluttershy. After today, we'll know whether or not they've had any reason to keep it a secret from you.” Twilight smiled genuinely. “After all, 'what good is a mystery if you don't solve it?'.”

“Daring Do, whoop whoop!” Rainbow Dash cheered loudly, causing Twilight to cringe.

“Yay...” Fluttershy sighed, sounding very unenthusiastic.

*“Well, at least I 'cheered' one of them up.”* Twilight thought with an awkward smile. *“I should kick myself just for thinking that.”*

“You should probably check our heading soon, Dash.” Twilight advised her friend. Rainbow Dash gave an informal salute before taking off. She returned almost as quickly as she'd left.

“We're gonna wanna start leaning left-ish.” Rainbow Dash motioned vaguely with her hoof. “Like, about 20 degrees lefter.”

“Huh. That's the same report you had a few minutes ago. You don't think these animals are leading us on a wild goose chase, do you?” Twilight asked her two friends, looking around the rolling meadow apprehensively.

“Psh, no way. There aren't even any geese in that pack; trust me, I would remember. Me and geese go waaaay back.” Rainbow Dash swept her hoof out wide. Twilight and Fluttershy both shared a perplexed stare, but followed Dash's directions.

---

“Wait, are those hoof-prints?” Twilight spoke up, calling Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash to her side. Indeed, there was a distinct hoof-print in the patch of dirt. Twilight placed her hoof in the indent; it was a perfect fit.

“Okay, so maybe there was a goose, and I just didn't see it.” Rainbow Dash shrugged. “I don't have griffon eyes, you know.”

“This is a very wild goose...” Fluttershy lamented, hovering over the ground and massaging her legs. Twilight sighed.

“Okay girls, we're obviously going about this the wrong way. I'm not sure how, but the animals seem to know we're following them. Maybe its because some of us can't keep quiet for ten seconds, or maybe its because one of Dash's goose friends is acting as a double agent?” Twilight accused, and Rainbow Dash glared at her. “Sorry. I'm just a little tense.”



“Maybe we should just go home?” Fluttershy asked hopefully, but Twilight shook her mane.

“I'm not ready to give up yet. We've come too far to back down now. We just need to come up with a new plan.” the unicorn responded, taking a rest and sitting down.

Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy followed her lead, lowering themselves onto the grass and forming a small circle. They sat in silence, intermittently staring at the ground or the sky. Rainbow Dash entertained herself by ruffling her mane and blowing it out of her face. When she grew bored of that, she started to tap at the ground idly, and, as time wore on, the tapping gradually grew louder and louder.

“Augh, this is so hard!” Rainbow Dash finally exploded.

“We've barely been thinking for a minute.” Twilight said.

“I mean, if it was just me and Fluttershy, we could just fly way up and track them from the sky. But noooo, you have to go and ruin everything by not having any wings!” Rainbow Dash accused the flightless unicorn.

“Oh, Dash, I'm so sorry. If I'd have known you felt that way, I would have gone back in time and come out of my mother as a pegasus.” Twilight said this with the utmost sincerity, which caused Rainbow Dash and even Fluttershy to giggle.

“Hah, that's alright, Twilight.” Rainbow Dash said. “Not everypony can be as cool and feathered as me. We'll think of something that doesn't involve bending, uh, space-time.”

“Glad to see all those books are improving your vocabulary.” Twilight chuckled for a moment and then stopped. “Wait. Maybe the sky is the answer!”

Twilight's two friends just stared at her, confused. The unicorn stood up excitedly.

“If you two fly up and create a big enough cloud, I could use my cloud-walking spell to sit on it, and then we could all follow the animals from the air!” she explained her plan, Rainbow Dash's smile growing wider by the second.

“Great idea!” Dash congratulated. “Wait right here!”

The speedster took off by herself, leaving Fluttershy in the dust. She ascended high into the sky, until she was able to touch the fluffy white wisps that populated it. Rainbow Dash pounded her hooves together and began to punch and kick the clouds into a pile. A particularly large cloud tried to escape in the chaos, but Dash dashed towards it and grabbed it from behind. She flipped into the air and drove the errant cloud into the rest of the wisps she'd gathered.

Rainbow Dash wiped a bit of sweat off her forehead, moved behind the makeshift sky raft, and lowered it to the ground where Twilight and Fluttershy were waiting.

“Alright, hop on!” Dash said excitedly.

“Hold on, I need to get the spell working first.” Twilight concentrated, and closed her eyes as her horn began to glow with its characteristic purple tinge. A purple aura covered her hooves and dissipated. After that she hopped atop the cloud and, thankfully, did not fall through. Fluttershy joined Twilight wordlessly.

“Alright, and now we're off to find Glowmelina!” Rainbow Dash said, and she proceeded to rocket the cloud back into the sky at high speed. Fluttershy screamed.

---

“Augh, just go into the Everfree Forest already!” Rainbow Dash shouted at the animals below from her perch on the cloud.

“This is getting a bit dull. They just keep going around and around in circles.” Twilight's eyes followed the herd as it continued to aimlessly wander. “The sun will be going down in another hour or so.”

“This is hardly the adventure I was looking forward to.” Dash huffed and pouted.

“But it is much safer.” Fluttershy said as she snuggled into the cloud with a faint smile. Rainbow Dash groaned pitifully and began to beat her hooves against the cloud. Twilight rolled her eyes and sighed, turning to look back at the animals. Her eyes shot open wide.

“Actually Rainbow, you just might get your wish yet!” Twilight remarked, waving her hoof and calling the blue pegasus over to the edge. “You see that? This is the first time I've seen them heading in a straight line since we got up here.”

Indeed, the animals finally seemed to have a distinct heading. They were already nearing the forest.

“If they continue in their current direction, they'll reach the edge of the Everfree Forest in under a minute.” Twilight calculated.

“Awww yeah!” Rainbow Dash shouted. She jumped off of the cloud without another word, flying behind the skyward platform and pushing it at sub-sonic speed straight towards the tree-line. Fluttershy squealed, but her voice was devoured by the whipping wind. The cloud abruptly stopped, nearly sending Twilight and the yellow pegasus flying into the forest.

“And now we just have to wait until they enter the forest!” Rainbow Dash climbed back onto the stationary cloud and began to stomp her hooves in anticipation. She monitored the animals below anxiously, a manic smile on her face.

The manticore stopped just short of walking into the woods, the rest of the animals following its lead. A stray sheep “baa'd” in a questioning tone, and a boar replied with a haughty snort. The manticore silenced both of them with a leer and then pointed with two clawed fingers in two separate directions.

The animals nodded in unison and started to split up. Most of the wilder creatures braved the entrance to the Everfree Forest, while the animals carrying carts and bowls all followed the manticore's new path alongside the tree-line.

“Wow! Twilight, tell me this is not so totally queer!” Rainbow Dash asked. Twilight smacked the side of her head with a hoof.

“This is just too bad. We can't follow all of them. I guess we'll just have to head home.” Fluttershy opened her wings and began to daintily flutter off the edge of the cloud, but Rainbow Dash grabbed the poor actress by the tail before she could get away.

“Oh no you don't.” Rainbow Dash admonished her friend, reeling the pink tail in and depositing Fluttershy back on the cloud. “This is easy. All we have to do is split up.”

“Hmm, I'm not so sure about that.” Twilight said, her face twisting in thought. “In the past, we've always succeeded by staying together.”

“I agree, I agree!” Fluttershy emphatically agreed with her unicorn friend, nodding her head repeatedly.

“Don't worry Fluttershy, I'll handle the big bad forest.” Dash thumped a hoof against her own chest. “You and Twi can just follow the silly old manticore.”

“I don't agree, I don't agree!” Fluttershy squealed and shook her head back and forth, but Dash had already flown off the cloud. The pegasus gently pushed the cloud back down to the ground.

“You two can hoof it from here, right?” Dash asked rhetorically, knocking the cloud away with a dismissive motion of her arm.

“Hold on, I'm not sure this is even necessary.” Twilight spoke up. “All the creatures carrying the wagons and bowls are heading off in one direction; if either of the two groups were heading back to Glowmelina, it would be them.”

“Hmm, an interesting theory.” Rainbow Dash admitted, before starting down the path through Everfree Forest. “But the rumors say Glowmelina lives in the forest. We can't leave any stone unturned, or any path unfollowed.”

“Rainbow Dash!” Twilight worriedly called after her friend. The pegasus began to disappear into the shadows.

“Don't worry, I'll be fine!” The pegasus dismissed them. She heard a rustling in the bushes next to her. She stuck her head into the bush, and then pulled it out. “Oh hey Fluttershy, I think one of your chickens got loose agai-.”

There was a freakish hiss, and, in an instant, Rainbow Dash was turned to stone.

“Cockatrice...” Twilight sighed. “Of course.”

---

Twilight struggled to push the stone-gray Rainbow Dash up the gentle slope; Fluttershy tried to help, but could add little to the effort. The two struggled for an eternity, and finally made it to the top. Twilight looked out and saw that the entourage of animals was still out in front of them.

“Good, we haven't lost them.” Twilight Sparkle said, panting heavily and leaning against the petrified pegasus.

“Shouldn't we be trying to fix Rainbow Dash right now?” Fluttershy asked concernedly.

“There'll be time for that later. Besides, she did this to herself.” Twilight reasoned, hopping up and taking a seat on the statue's back. “Even if it was a reckless thing to do, Rainbow Dash got herself turned to stone trying to help us solve this mystery. She wouldn't want us to drop what we're doing just to help her.”

“Did you ask her that?” Fluttershy muttered under her breath.

“What?” Twilight asked. Fluttershy didn't repeat herself. “Anyways, I have the cure for petrification back at the library. As soon as we figure this thing out, we'll have Rainbow Dash good as new.”

“If you say so.” Fluttershy sighed, looking at the confused expression on Rainbow Dash's frozen face.

“Right. We won't let Rainbow Dash's sacrifice be in vain.” Twilight answered with a too-cheery smile. She looked back towards the animals, and her mouth fell open.

Where previously she had seen a line of animals carrying wagons and bowls, she now saw nothing at all. The tracks in the grass simply disappeared, just as if the animals had disappeared into thin air.

“No!” Twilight finally shouted as realization sunk in. “No! We came so far! We did so well! Except for Rainbow Dash, but, she'll get better!”

Fluttershy looked at what Twilight was seeing and sighed in relief.

“There there, Twilight. You did your best.” Fluttershy placed a hoof on her friend's shoulder. “Maybe it's like I said before. Maybe we just aren't supposed to find out about some things.”

“But that's not true! All my life I've been charged with finding the answers to questions that other ponies don't even ask. Even my job right now is to find out the nature of an abstract concept – friendship.” Twilight rapidly explained. “This glowmelon mystery is huge, and I can't just sweep it under the rug like I did with Pinkie Pie's pinkie sense.”

“I'm... I'm sorry, Twilight.” Fluttershy backed off a bit. Twilight's shoulders slumped and she shook her head.

“No, I'm the one who should apologize. It was clear you never wanted to come along with Dash and I, but I dragged you along anyway.” Twilight's voice was heavy with sadness and disappointment. “We'll take Rainbow Dash back to my place, and I'll fix her up with the potion Zecora gave me.”

“Okay. But please don't beat yourself up about this, Twilight.” Fluttershy responded, sounding almost as depressed as her friend. Twilight's head shook again.

“Don't worry about me, I'm fine.” Twilight replied, though her voice still carried the tinge of sadness. She hopped off of Rainbow Dash's back and stared back into the nothingness that the animal caravan had disappeared into. “I guess this is just one mystery that I won't be able to solve...”

Twilight continued to stare out into the distance for a while longer. But there was nothing out there. Just the setting sun, the sky, the grass, and the odd green glow.

*“Wait... odd green glow?”*

Twilight rubbed her eyes and looked again. Indeed, a small pulse of green light could just barely be made out against the duller green of the grass.

“Fluttershy, look!” Twilight grabbed Fluttershy's cheeks and pointed her face towards the glow.

“I don' shee anyshing.” the pegasus answered, squinting her eyes. But then the light grew much larger, and a portal began to open up.

All of a sudden, animals started to pour out of the empty space as if they had just walked out from behind a curtain. They were no longer carrying carts or bowls, and they dispersed throughout the field from the point where they had originated.

“This is great! Rainbow Dash, we'll be able to find out about Glowmelina after all” Twilight dropped her friend's head to the ground and spoke to the statue.

“She can't hear you, you know.” Fluttershy pointed out with a raised eyebrow. Twilight barely noticed, paying full attention to where the animals were coming out of.

Soon, the trickle of critters slowed down and came to a complete stop, but, if the slight green glow was any indication, the door or portal that they'd come through was still open.

“Alright, it should be safe now. Let's go!” Twilight wiggled her rear like a cat eyeing a toy before bounding down the hill and towards the light.

“But what about...” Fluttershy began to speak, but Twilight was already out of earshot. Fluttershy sighed, and then felt a tiny foot against her hoof. She looked down to see a small white rabbit. “Oh, hi Angel Bunny. Would you mind helping me get my friend down the hill?”

Angel stomped the ground a single time.

"I thought not." Fluttershy sighed once more, and then moved behind the statue and began to push.

---

Twilight Sparkle passed a few animals as she ran towards the entrance. None of them were dangerous, so she didn't pay them much attention. Though she did spot a lone goose, which almost made her laugh.

It was only a short jog to the source of the light, and Twilight made it there at a good clip. She could see now that the glow seemed to be peering out of a crack, as if a door hadn't been fully closed. Using her intuition, she decided to see if there actually was a door. Her horn lit up, and a purple glow began to feel around the empty space in front of her. It latched onto something round and pulled, opening the portal wide.

"Wow!" Twilight couldn't help but remark at what she saw. Behind the door was a small garden, with glowmelons still fresh on the vine, pulsating with the light that had gained her attention. Twilight took a step inside. She could see the wagons and the bowls of seeds sitting against a wall that couldn't be seen, similar to how the door had been hidden.

*"It's like an invisible shed. Except, I can still feel the wind and the sun."* Twilight thought to herself as she entered. The door closed behind her automatically, but she didn't pay it any attention. *"This place is amazing!"*

Twilight didn't see anypony or any other creature around. A few indiscernible posters decorated the invisible room, but otherwise, it appeared uninhabited.

"Hello? Is anypony here?" she called out, looking around eagerly. Nothing answered her, but she did hear a rustling from the far side of the shed. Twilight noticed a single glowmelon begin to slowly and dramatically rise into the air. "Glowmelina?!"

The glowmelon suddenly shot upwards, and underneath it, wearing the glowmelon like a hat, was the manticore. All of the color drained from Twilight's body.

"G-glowmelina?" Twilight asked a second time, much more hesitantly. The manticore replied with a ferocious roar.

The manticore charged straight for her.

---

### Chapter 3

Twilight screamed and dashed towards the exit. Unfortunately, she missed the door, and crashed headfirst into an invisible wall. She pounded at the wall with her hooves, but it didn't give. The manticore was getting closer.

*“Oh Celestia, where's the door?!”*

The hair on her back stood on end, and she took off to the left into the glowmelon patch. Not a second later, the creature smashed into the wall with a sickening, splintering crash. The impact sent wood chips flying through the air, a few of which were now embedded in the manticore's feline face. The beast roared in pain, and Twilight spared it a single glance.

*“What is this shed made of?”*

No matter where the chips had come from, the beast was now in pain and even angrier than it had already been. It bellowed once more before charging at its quarry again.

*“This is bad, this is bad! I'll be torn to shreds if I can't find that door!”*

Twilight quickly surveyed her options. There was very little room for her to run. The glowmelon vines blanketed two-thirds of the room and were heavily concentrated on the left and right sides. The vines were covered with sharp thorns, and Twilight had already cut herself by diving out of the manticore's path and straight into them.

She needed a distraction. Thinking quickly, she picked one of the few unpicked glowmelons with her magic, and with a strong telekinetic force, hurled it at the manticore in front of her. The melon exploded into green juice and fruit-flesh. It didn't exactly knock the beast down, but it did momentarily stop its charge. Twilight ran to the wall opposite of where she'd entered, and knocked frantically with both her hooves and a spell.

“Please have a rear exit!” she pleaded out loud, but no matter how much she pounded and propped, the wall stood firm. That meant that the only way out was where she'd come in. And that direction was blocked by a savage monster that was slowly approaching its cornered prey.

Twilight's horn shone bright as another glowmelon flew through the air towards the manticore, and then another.. The first hit the beast square in the side of the head, but the second was swatted out of the air by an enormous clawed paw. Body trembling from overexertion, Twilight levitated another melon to her side, but didn't throw this one away so quickly.

She magically swung the fruit as if to strike at the manticore again but pulled back at the last second, causing the beast to dodge the feint. Then she brought the melon to herself, and grabbed onto it for dear life before flinging both herself and it over the manticore and towards the other side of the room. Twilight felt the swish of claws through her tail as she passed over her assailant.

*“I'm dead! I'm dead! I'm going to hit the wall and fall apart into two pieces and-”*

She released the glowmelon before it collided with the wall and fell to the ground. Without even taking a moment to make sure she was intact, she turned her back to the invisible barrier and began to buck at it with both her hind-legs, moving a bit more to the left every time she was met with firm resistance.

She kept her eyes on the approaching predator and threw more projectiles at the beast to keep it at bay. Before long the vines were looking much barer than before, and the manticore was looming ever closer. She couldn't bear to look at it's hungry eyes anymore and turned around.

Twilight's eyes shut tightly as tears began to fall down her face. She knocked on the wall, moved a bit, knocked again, moved a bit, knocked again, blindly threw a glowmelon, moved a bit more, and then repeated the desperate cycle.

*"I can't find the door! I can't remember where it is! I'm going to die here unless...!"*

Suddenly, she felt the wall give under her hooves, just a bit. She quickly tossed the last glowmelon in the room at the manticore, not daring to open her eyes and see if it had hit its mark or not. Her horn lit up as purple light scanned the flat surface and found the doorknob. Grasping it with her mind, she pulled, and then pushed, and then the door opened. So did her eyes.

Fluttershy was on the other side, with the statue of Rainbow Dash by her side. Twilight opened her mouth but before she could utter a single word, the pegasus pushed past her and into the cabin.

"ROOOOOOAR!"

The sound hadn't come from the manticore.

Twilight shakily turned her head around. Fluttershy was standing up to the manticore. In fact, the vicious killer was cowering before the tiny yellow pegasus.

"H-how...?" Twilight stuttered.

"I'm so sorry, Twilight!" Fluttershy turned her head to apologize, before refocusing her stare on the manticore. "Bad! That was a bad kitty, Hal!"

"Hal?" Twilight asked confusedly, still shaking with adrenaline. "You know this monster? You're on first name basis with this monster?!"

"Oh please don't think too badly of him, Twilight. He's really quite nice." Fluttershy said meekly.

*"Fluttershy is apologizing for the manticore. Clearly, up is down, left is right, and I am a seapony named Steve."*

"He must have gotten too greedy with the glowmelons, and then tried to run you out when you caught him." Fluttershy continued, failing to notice Twilight's eye twitching.



"I don't think he was trying to run me out as much as he was trying to run me through. With his claws." Twilight argued, but Fluttershy didn't pay any attention. The pegasus flitted up to the manticore's head, taking off the glowmelon that still crowned it.

"Now, say you're sorry." the beast master demanded. The manticore looked at the ground sheepishly before issuing an apologetic lick to his tamer's face. Fluttershy giggled, but quickly regained her stern facade. "To Twilight as well."

The manticore approached Twilight morosely, tongue lolling out of it's mouth.

"Uh, it's okay, really." Twilight said with an extremely strained smile. The manticore appeared to shrug, and then walked past her and towards Everfree Forest.

"See you next year, Hal! Oh, and try not to get lost on the way back to the shed next time!" Fluttershy waved goodbye to the retreating hybrid, and it actually waved back as it entered into the woods. Twilight's ears pricked up.

"Wait, do you that mean the animals hadn't been onto us, and they'd just been going in circles because the manticore lost its way?" Twilight asked. Fluttershy turned to Twilight, finally able to give her friend her full attention.

"It seems that way." Fluttershy answered, eyes looking back and forth nervously. "I'm, uh, guessing you have a few questions for me?"

"Understatement of the year." Twilight deadpanned.

---

Twilight Sparkle was seated near Fluttershy in the invisible shed. Rainbow Dash's immobile form stood next to them. Angel was there too, using the statue as a sofa. Twilight was rubbing her temples with both hooves.

"So let me get this straight. You're Glowmelina?" Twilight asked, voice strained with incredulity.

"No. Well, sort of. I mean..." Fluttershy stumbled over her words. "You see, Glowmelina doesn't really exist. She's imaginary, and I created her using my imagination."

"Okay, but why?" Twilight questioned her friend. Fluttershy didn't answer immediately and made a variety of soft, uncomfortable sounding noises.

"Maybe it'll be easier if I start at the beginning..." Fluttershy sighed.

"Go ahead. It's not like Rainbow Dash is going to start eroding." Twilight replied with a slight smirk, tapping her frozen friend's leg for emphasis.

"O-okay..." Fluttershy began her tale.

---

*"I might have told you this before, but when I was just a filly, I got my cutie mark when I landed in a field near Ponyville and made friends with all of the wonderful creatures I met."*

A very young Fluttershy pranced through the fields, small critters following her as if on parade. A butterfly landed on the little filly's nose, and was reflected in her bright blue eyes.

*"From then on, I took regular trips from Cloudsdale to the surface to play with all my new friends."*

"I promise to come back soon!" Fluttershy waved to the sad little animals as she ascended back into the sky, the symbol of butterflies forever etched onto her flank.

*"One day, years later, I was being picked on by a couple of bullies in school. Rainbow Dash used to be there to protect me, but she had dropped out of the school the year prior, saying that 'the system' had been holding her back."*

The blow rocked Fluttershy onto her side, the soft cloud floor of Cloudsdale breaking her fall somewhat. She flipped over and started to dig into the fluff, like a gopher might dig a hole. Two masculine shadows approached her from behind.

"Aw, you didn't catch them that time either." one of the two colts remarked, pointing at Fluttershy's cutie mark, and the numerous red rings around it.

"Don't worry, I'll get those nasty bugs off you, Fluttercry." the other pony chuckled, brandishing his bug net.

*"The only way I could think to get away from the ponies who were bothering me was to head down to the ground, and so I did."*

Right as the bully swung again, his target fell through the floor and into the blue sky below. Fluttershy began to scream as she tumbled out of the city.

The wind smashed into her face, stinging her eyes and collapsing her wings to her sides. She free-fell for minutes on end, until a hawk appeared by her side, matching her falling speed.

"Air Razor?" Fluttershy called out to the bird, who's only response was to flap its wings. It did so repeatedly, until the pegasus's eyes went wide. "Right!"

Fluttershy's wings slowly peeled off of her sides, and her feathers caught the wind. Following the hawk's lead, she pulled out of the dive-bomb and went soaring through the sky. Fluttershy sighed in relief, and began to slowly descend in concentric circles.

By the time she reached the ground, the hawk had left. She felt her hooves graze the ground, and let herself collapse. Her heart hammered away in her chest as her eyes fluttered shut.

*"I... kind of passed out when I got there. When I woke up, I found that I wasn't alone."*

When Fluttershy opened her eyes, all she saw was a pitch white expanse, only interrupted by two black dots.

The two dots blinked.

Fluttershy gasped and backed up, spooking the tiny rabbit in front of her. The bunny quickly bounced off.

“No, wait, I'm sorry!” Fluttershy called after the rabbit before giving chase. “My name's Fluttershy! I'm not going to hurt you!”

*“But, when I tried to say hi to him, he ran away. I didn't know if he was alone or not, so I followed him for a bit.”*

“No, don't go in there little bunny!” Fluttershy shouted as she was led towards a dark and foreboding forest. The rabbit approached the entrance to the shadowy place but turned away at the last moment. Sighing in relief, the yellow pegasus continued to follow her quarry.

*“I don't know how long I was following him, but it must have been quite awhile. He finally started to get tired, and I thought I had him for sure. But then he just... disappeared.”*

Fluttershy stared at the blank space in front of her, where the tracks just disappeared into nothingness. She looked at the spot from every angle, until she noticed a sliver of green light. She pushed her nose through the crack and nudged the door open.

*“That's when we both discovered the glowmelon patch.”*

Fluttershy stepped into the room, awestruck. Though many glowmelons were dark, faded, and rotten looking, some plump green fruits littered the invisible cabin. Hiding behind one of the fresher melons was the white rabbit, peeking out at Fluttershy and ducking down as soon as their eyes met.

*“Neither of us had ever seen any fruit like the glowmelons before, and we didn't know what to think of it. But the bunny sure seemed eager to try one, so I broke one open for us to taste.”*

Fluttershy gnawed at the hard exterior of the fruit, and, when that didn't work, tried to bounce it against the ground like a basketball. The rabbit shot the pegasus an annoyed look, to which Fluttershy smiled apologetically. Finally, she tied a white cloth over her eyes, and poised a hoof over the melon. With a 'hiya!', she cleaved the glowmelon in two.

The rabbit hopped up and down excitedly before setting to work on nibbling the new treat. More hesitantly, Fluttershy gave the glowing green interior a lick. Her wings extended outwards, and she couldn't help but start to flutter in the air in delight.

*“It was the most delicious fruit we'd ever eaten, and rabbits don't usually care that much for fruit! The bunny and I spent the rest of the day in the garden, eating and playing until nightfall.”*

The rain poured down above their heads but not onto them. The raindrops plunked against the roof that wasn't there before sliding down the walls that couldn't be seen. Throughout it all, Fluttershy held the white rabbit close to her. The two looked out into the darkness peacefully, safe in their little hideaway from the elements.

*"His parents never came looking for him."*

Fluttershy woke up to the sight of the white haze once again, but, this time, she wasn't so quick to react. She nuzzled the ball of fuzz, eliciting a yawn from her tiny companion.

"Time to wake up, little angel." Fluttershy cooed. The rabbit's eyes fluttered open, and his back legs started to jitter. The pegasus received five small knocks on her nose, but she took them in stride. She smiled as the bunny hopped upright and stared at her.

---

"Wait, does that mean the rabbit in this story is...?" Twilight began to ask. Fluttershy nodded.

"Yes, my little Angel." Fluttershy closed her eyes happily. Nearby, Angel rolled his own eyes and then covered his ears with his paws as he lay across Rainbow Dash's backside.

"Aww, that's so sweet." Twilight remarked, ignoring the rabbit's poor attitude.

---

*"I decided to turn the shed into a clubhouse, just for the two of us. Angel Bunny would live there, and I would visit at least once a day. By the time I was out of school, I had moved in as well."*

Fluttershy dusted the walls with a feather duster, causing clouds of gray to puff out of the ether. Drawings and posters covered the walls, and near the back of the room sat a modest mattress with a basket next to it. Setting the duster aside, Fluttershy looked at her current residence with pride.

*"I always wondered who had built the cabin, and who had grown the glowmelons, which is what I'd started to call them. It must have taken an awful lot of magic, because the glowmelons grew without needing my help at all. It was a good thing too, because I'm no good at farm work."*

Fluttershy turned to look at one of the pictures on the wall. It had been drawn with crayons and it appeared to float in mid-air. The pony in the drawing wore a magician's hat and held a hoe in its teeth; the name 'Glowmelina' was scrawled underneath it next to the name 'Fluttershy'.

*"When I was younger, I'd draw pictures of what I thought the pony who had created all this might look like. Eventually, I named her Glowmelina. Then, I started adding onto the character until she resembled the stories you heard today. She may have been imaginary, but she was based on somepony or someponies that had once lived here."*

---

"When Angel and I decided to move to Ponyville, we didn't tell anypony about our secret getaway. We still wanted to keep it a secret, just between us. But when I started to meet more and more friends, I decided that I wanted to share Glowmelina's gift with everyone." Fluttershy explained.

“So you decided to create the Glowmelon Festival.” Twilight guessed. Again, Fluttershy nodded.

“Four years ago to the day. With the help of all my animal friends, I spread the rumors of Glowmelina and brought as many glowmelons as I could into town, right when they were at their ripest. Each year's festival was more impressive than the last, and the myths about Glowmelina grew into something I couldn't control anymore. It was wonderful.” Fluttershy concluded, eyes closed.

“Wow...” Twilight managed to utter at the end of the story. “That's... quite a story. I can honestly say I hadn't been expecting to find out one of my best friends was behind all this.”

“You wouldn't have, if there was anything I could do about it.” Fluttershy stated simply. “But I know how you get when you think something needs to be explained. There's no stopping you.”

“Maybe someone should stop me sometimes. I always seem to get attacked by some violent creature every time I even try.” Twilight smiled lightly. “Hydras, tartarus hounds, manticores... You'd think I'd have gotten the hint by now.”

“It's in your nature to be curious.” Fluttershy tried to mirror the unicorn's expression, but her smile wavered. “I suppose you'll keep searching for the real Glowmelina now, after you've told everyone in Ponyville the truth...”

Twilight didn't immediately answer, instead taking note of Fluttershy's morose body language. She glanced at Rainbow's immobile form and the wondrous garden in which they all sat. She cupped her chin in a hoof, the vaguest hint of a smirk playing across her lips.

“Well I can't exactly turn back now. An invisible shed in the middle of nowhere, glowing fruit that doesn't grow anywhere else? It doesn't make any sense, and I have to know how this all came about. So yes, I plan to continue to search for Glowmelina, or whoever is behind this all.” Twilight finally answered, in the most academic of tones. “But, just because I'll be searching for the truth doesn't mean that everypony else is.”

“What do you mean?” Fluttershy asked, cocking her head to the side.

“You don't have anything to worry about Fluttershy.” Twilight smiled, putting a hoof on her good friend's shoulder. “I'm not going to tell anypony about this.”

“Really?” Fluttershy asked hopefully, and Twilight nodded in response.

“My lips are sealed.” she went through the motion as well, pretending to zip up her mouth with one of her hooves.

“Oh, thank you Twilight!” Fluttershy hugged the unicorn, a lone tear falling down her cheek.

“Don't mention it.” Twilight giggled and unwrapped herself from the hug. “This festival is your gift to all of Ponyville; I don't want to take that away from you. Someday, you might have to let the

secret go. But that day doesn't have to be today, or any day soon.”

“Thank you.” Fluttershy said with a smile.

“What did I just say about not mentioning it?” Twilight laughed, causing Fluttershy to laugh as well. Twilight's laughter dissolved into a yawn. She looked through the transparent ceiling at the darkening sky. “We should probably head back to Ponyville now, before anypony gets suspicious.”

“Right.” the pegasus nodded, and then got behind Rainbow Dash. Angel Bunny hopped down as Fluttershy raised her hooves up towards the pegasus' rear, and then stopped. She repositioned her hooves slightly, but still didn't place them on the stony flank. She pawed at the ground uncomfortably, slightly blushing. Twilight rolled her eyes and giggled lightly.

“I'll take that.” Twilight said with a smile, replacing Fluttershy behind the statue.

---

“Augh, my head...” Rainbow Dash moaned, laying on Twilight's bed with an ice-pack held to her head. She was back to her old, prismatic self again.

“Sorry. The effects of a cockatrice stare can linger for quite a while depending on how long you take to unfreeze the victim.” Twilight responded, standing at her desk just a ways away from her friend.

“Well it feels like there's salamanders crawling through my veins setting everything on fire!” Dash howled. “What were you and Fluttershy doing when I was frozen? Sitting on your plots?”

*“No, but Angel was sitting on yours...”*

“We followed the animals as long as we could, but we never found Glowmelina, so we brought you back.” Twilight answered truthfully and then turned her head towards the stairs. “Spike! Could you bring me a scroll please?”

“Pony feathers! You expect me to believe that you two didn't find out anything at all? Fluttershy was sure in a hurry to leave when I asked her about it.” Rainbow Dash replied accusingly, sitting up.

“It's been a long day, and we're all tired. She just wanted to go back home.” Twilight explained as Spike waddled into the room yawning, a blank scroll in his hand. Twilight nodded as she took it from him. “You're welcome to stay here tonight if you don't feel good enough to fly home, Rainbow.”

“Maybe.” Rainbow answered noncommittally, rubbing the ice pack over the rest of her body like a sponge. “That Glowmelina is a slippery one. You aren't going to give up now, are you?”

“Of course not. Though it might take us awhile to find a new lead, you can be sure I'll follow this mystery to its end.” Twilight reassured the pegasus. “But for now, let's all just relax.”

Rainbow Dash sighed, flopping exaggeratedly onto the bed. Twilight smiled as her quill levitated into an ink jar, and then met the parchment face.

*"Dear Princess Celestia,*

*I've always believed that ponies should question what they know and seek out the answers. And I still believe that. However, sometimes in our search for the truth, we can end up stepping on the hooves of others. Such a situation must be treated carefully. The truth is valuable, but sometimes a pony's secret can be worth just as much.*

*~Your faithful student, Twilight Sparkle"*

Twilight nodded her head and rolled up the paper. Spike hopped up onto the desk, took the scroll in his hand, and took a deep breath before blowing green fire over it. The flames consumed the parchment, and the two watched as the embers disappeared into the night sky.

---

Princess Celestia sat on her throne in Canterlot castle. Her left hoof tapped at the ground impatiently, and her eyes continually wandered towards the clock. Suddenly, Twilight's letter materialized before her, startling her. The princess unraveled the scroll and read through it carefully, smiling all the while.

"What an interesting letter. More... cryptic than usual." the princess remarked to herself. "Though I suppose, considering the subject matter, I can't fault my student for being vague."

A royal guard entered, startling the princess a second time.

"Excuse me Princess Celestia, but there's a strange package for you from Ponyville. There's no return address and it's, uh, glowing." The guard pony said. "Should we have the bomb squad look into it?"

Celestia's eyes to light up in delight.

"Oh, that won't be necessary! Have it brought in!" the princess requested eagerly. The guard obliged, and returned less than a minute later with a glowing square package. He carefully placed it on the ground in front of her. Celestia nodded repeatedly. "Thank you, you may be dismissed."

The guard bowed once and then left the room. As soon as he left the room, Celestia tossed the scroll away and quickly levitated a plate and knife out from behind her throne. She tore into the box with her hooves like a filly on Hearth's Warming Eve and pulled out a large, shapely glowmelon. Brandishing the knife with speed and expertise, she cut it into a number of pieces, and then took a bite almost immediately.

"Delicious..." Celestia shivered with delight. She eyed the only words on the box of her gift. "I wonder if I'll ever find out who this 'Glowmelina' pony is..."

THE END

---