

## **Fallout: Equestria – Fertile Ground**

**By: Warbalist**

### **Chapter 4 – A Bit of Sunshine**

#### **Chaff**

“So good to see you up and around, Mr. Basket!” the bright yellow pony exclaimed, carefully weaving through the crowd.

“Well, you too, sweetie! It does these old bones good to hear your cheery voice.”

She smiled and noticed another stallion’s empty cup. “Oh, I’m sorry sir, would you like some more coffee?”

“Yes, please and thank *you!*”

She noticed the mare sitting in the booth behind him. “Wow, miss! Your mane looks amazing; what do you use in order to make it stick straight back like that?”

“Uh, ancient pegasus secret? Ha-ha!”

“How’s that jukebox coming along, Delta?” she shouted over at the blue unicorn fixing the jukebox.

“Almost there. Should be ready before happy hour. Make sure your dad has those caps ready.”

“Good to hear, and I will!”

Quitclaim’s combination shop/restaurant/watering hole was bustling with the tales and ramblings of many a pony that day. The bar and booths were full of stories of the seemingly endless desert outside and many a wastelander waited talkatively in a massive line for the bartering counter. There were stories of raiders taking over a town to the east, tales of unusual Steel Ranger movement close to Balk, news of the serial killer dubbed “The Crusher”, tales of fear and death far and wide. But there were also tales of hope and joy as the cries of at least two foals filled the ears of the patrons. The cries, though annoying, helped to buttress confidence everypony had for the future. Any town which provided shelter and such an ability to trade also inadvertently provided free psychological care in the form of commiserating with other wasteland ponies. A town like Balk, however, contained a special ingredient: a little ray of sunshine known as Chaff.

“Here, let me fill that cup up for you, you poor thing,” she offered a three-legged pony

whose face had enough scars to look like a topographical map of the San Palomino mountain range. "Those mean ponies in Celestia's Acre should be ashamed! Cutting off a pony's leg just for stealing some food? What is wrong with them?" The scarred, old stallion gave her a slight nod and stared at his now full cup of hot coffee, not having the heart to tell her what else he had stolen from the 'mean ponies' at Celestia's Acre.

Chaff weaved through the two, hot, crowded rooms of the front of the store, offering coffee, breakfasts and cheer warm enough to soften the hearts of the iciest pony. There were, however, those who would view her bright demeanor as a weakness and take advantage of it. She felt a slap of a hoof on her backside, triggering memories she tried everyday to forget. She heard the raucous laughter behind her.

"What did I *tell* you, Tracks?" a weather-beaten pony in a leather jacket asked his equally mean-looking companion. "The sweetest, little thing around. You ain't never seen cheeks like that." His friend shook his head and gave a low, obscene chuckle. Chaff shook with fear and rage, not knowing how to sublimate either. She urged her legs to cooperate and move her forward, but all they could muster was a jerky step or two, like a broken, clockwork automaton. Her body trapped her there, readying itself for the advances she knew he would make. "Now, hold on there!" She heard him get up and walk toward her. She felt a heavy leg on her withers. "I apologize, we haven't been properly introduced. Name's Bottleneck. Friends call me Chokie, if you can believe it." He gave a disgusting wink. "Me 'n my buddy, Tracks over there want to know when you're off work."

Chaff felt like her hooves were becoming part of the floor as her breathing quickened. She moved her head to better face Bottleneck, but kept her eyes focused on the wall in front of her as she did her best to answer in the most forceful way she could muster. "Oh ... uh ... I, um ... it'll be very late."

"Oh, we don't mind waitin'," Bottleneck said. Chaff could smell the strange stench of rotting teeth in his breath. "We're not plannin' on doin' anything else today but sit here and maybe get a little drunk. Heh, sounds boring, right?" He gave a little sigh with his feigned, deflated look, then perked right up as he said, "I know! Y'all live around here, right? Maybe *you* have a better idea of what we can all do tonight. Whaddya say?"

Chaff's sea-green eyes went wide as she attempted to cower away from his grasp. "Oh! I ... uh ... sorry. I have ... um ... things to get back to, haha!"

"Aw, that's too bad. Are you sure we couldn't *help* you with anything?"

"Oh, no ... you ... uhhh ... you wouldn't want to, uh ..."

"Wouldn't want to, what?" Bottleneck looked her over and faked a gasp. "Wait, are you trying to ... to find reasons not to be around us?"

"No! I mean ... what I meant to say was ..."

"What's wrong with us? Is there something you don't like about us? What, you feel you're too good to spend time with the likes of us?"

She felt his grip around her tighten as she tensed her muscles and began shaking slightly, but uncontrollably. "Th-th-that's not what I meant! I don't think I'm better than anypony!"

"Oh, well that's good. No harm done. Come on, give us a kiss!" He brought over his left hoof to her chin, pulling her face over to his as he puckered his whitened, cracked lips.

"N-no ..." she whimpered as she struggled against his strength. Her ears tickled with the sound of laughter coming from his companion and several other particularly nasty-sounding ponies.

"Come on! One kiss. I know you'll like it." He slowly moved his right foreleg down her back, searching for a more enjoyable way to restrain her.

"P-please, stop."

"Hey, buddy," growled an alarmingly low voice from behind Bottleneck. "You might want to stop bothering the help, unless you want to change your name to Brokenneck."

Bottleneck turned his head around to see where the foalish threat had come, finding only the silhouette of what looked like a pony etched out of iron standing in front of the blinding light of the desert bleeding in from the window. "Leave it alone, friend," he said, pointing up with his nose at the dark form. "This needn't concern you."

The silhouetted figure moved and the toughest looking mule he had ever seen in his life stepped into Bottleneck's field of vision, the mule's incredibly wide-brimmed hat hiding his features from the rest of the room. The mule was wearing a brown, tan, black and white sarape, but Bottleneck could still see every muscle and vein in the mule pushing, pulling, pulsating, ready for any order they were given. The mule's barely visible but obviously bullet-chewed barding bore testament to its owner's fortitude. "Everybody's business," the mule's gravelly voice imparted as he tossed his huge hat aside, showing off his gleaming aviator sunglasses, a toothpick sticking out of his smug grin. "Is everybody's business."

The room held its breath as Bottleneck stared back at himself in the reflection of the mule's sunglasses. Dust motes were slowly climbing the rays of light pouring through the windows like some backwards-moving waterfall. Chaff didn't know what would happen next. She had seen her share of barroom fights, working in her father's multipurpose store for so long, but this situation was different. For often she had seen drunk brawlers come and go, she hadn't

seen any creature stand, unflinching, with such poise as the mule in front of her. He was a loaded gun in equine form ... and he was far from drunk. Chaff could feel Bottleneck's heart quicken beside her, and she took some security in knowing the scumbag stood no chance against this guy.

Bottleneck gave a bouncy little laugh. "Oh, I'm just foolin' about," he said.

"Well, then I have to applaud you," the mule started. "I'm a Goddess-damned mule and *you're* the one doing a very good job of making an ass-clown out of himself."

Bottleneck's neck hairs began to rise as he took a step toward the mule, who just stood there, motionless.

"Okay, Chokie, I think you've had enough!" Tracks yelled as he moved in between the two and started pushing his friend toward the door. Bottleneck must have agreed with Tracks' sentiment, because he turned around and started walking out, a look which promised vengeance seething on his face. "Don't mind him," Tracks said, walking backwards out the door. "He's just drunk, that's all! Hey, Chokie, wait up! You didn't want her, anyway," Chaff clearly heard him say as his voice started fading away. "Damaged goods."

There was a pause while the room let out it's held breath. One by one, the ponies in the store and bar began talking to each other until it was bustling as if nothing had happened at all. Chaff slowly deepened her own, bated breath as she looked up at her tall savior who was chewing on his toothpick and staring out of the front door to make sure the threat had left for good. He turned his neck to face her and pushed up his sunglasses with a hoof to let them rest on top of his head. Chaff noticed the smile lines in his reddish-brown face, even in the dim light of the barroom. This frightening tower of intimidation had a kind face, which at the moment bore a look of concern. "Are you okay, Miss Sunshine?" he asked in his rumbling voice. "Those two were a nasty pair. Pretty sure they're slavers, too. Look self-righteous enough, anyway..."

Chaff stood, staring at him. She didn't know where to begin. Her brain had finished processing what happened but her heart and instincts were far from finished sorting through the mixed emotions and threat signals, respectively. Her tormenters were frightened off by something even more powerful, and that something seemed nice and genuinely concerned with her safety. Like having a pet tiger, she felt the fear of having a wild animal around and the security of knowing it was on her side. Her internal monologue was becoming so lengthy and confusing she didn't hear the mule give his order.

"Hey, Miss Sunshine!" he yelled, waving his forelegs in front of her face to get her attention. "I said I'd like a Sunrise Sarsaparilla! Equestria to Luna, do you copy? Can you hear me way up there on the moon?"

She snapped to her senses. "What? Uh ... OH! Sorry, sorry! I didn't ... HA!" She didn't

know what to say, so she drew a deep breath, put on her professional act and sighed through a relaxed smile. "Sunrise Sarsaparilla, be right up."

Chaff went to procure a sarsaparilla for her new mule friend. She felt odd. She had been accosted by ponies like Bottleneck on a regular basis, but only occasionally did these situations lead to triggering flashbacks of unwanted memories and emotions. Was it because these ponies were slavers? No, she had faced slaver ponies far more vulgar and obnoxious than these two. Did she get enough sleep the night before? Yes, very good sleep, actually and she had eaten not to long before the incident. What was so different?

She set the warm bottle of sarsaparilla on the bar in front of the wastelander mule who had already tossed a small bag of precious bottle caps onto the plastic-laminate counter top. "This'll probably get me about three more, right?" he asked, savoring the tastes of the vine and licorice root with just a hint of wintergreen mint. He let out an approving growl. "Oh, that's the stuff. I stock up whenever I can. Nothing beats a cool one of these after walking around with those caravans all day." He took another swig. "Though this one's a little warm, whew!"

"You guard the caravans?" Chaff asked counting out enough the right number of caps for the transaction. She was still shaking, trying to put on a good enough act to seem together, and she was doing a good job of it too, but it did feel to her like trying to replace the water in a broken aquarium.

"What gave me away? Oh, and just keep the change; those caps weigh more than you'd think." He gave her a little wink, trying to lighten her mood.

"Thank you. And what gave you away? Just your general badassery, I suppose." She winked back, her expression brightening slightly from the little care and civility he showed her.

The mule let out a braying laugh which forced Chaff to hide her smile with her hooves. "Sure, sure, I'll take that." They smiled at each other until the moment drifted away, carrying their grins with it. "Oh! So, my name's Jimmy. Jimmy the Mule. Yeah, that's right, not every mule's name is 'Sal'. What's yours, sunshine?"

"Chaff. My dad, Quitclaim, owns this fine establishment, but I tend to be the one running it," she said, pouring drinks all the while until there were no more clean glasses. She took out a small piece of fabric and went to work on a pile of cups.

"I'm very happy to meet you, Chaff. You seem to be quite the positive exhortationist around here."

"I ... don't think that's a real word..."

"You inspire ponies to do good, girl. You have an ability; a power to see the best in

others, to pull it out and show them in hopes that they are driven to do more in that direction. You don't just *look* like a ray of sunshine, you *are* a ray of sunshine."

Chaff blushed. "Aw, that's so sweet of you to say."

"But there's something wrong," he said, changing the tone in his voice. Chaff immediately felt uncomfortably exposed. "I see how you run this place. You could have handled those two idiots on your own." She put a clean cup on the bar and shied away. "Don't worry. I'm not going to ask about it. It's none of my business." A wry smile formed on his lips, coaxing a nervous laugh from Chaff. "How about I change the pace a little and tell you a little fairytale?"

Chaff hesitated, not knowing his intentions, but being the agreeable sort she said, "Okay, sure."

"Have you heard..." Jimmy began to ask, searching for the right question. "Have you heard the old donkey story called 'The Dreaming Hydras'?"

Chaff wore a bemused expression as she responded, chuckling. "Uh, no, sorry. I can't say that I have. What is it about?"

Jimmy motioned for her to take a seat next to him at the bar. "Let me tell you a quick, little story that my grandmother used to tell me," he started, letting his voice fall into a perfect flow of words and rhythm as Chaff sat next to him. "Many years ago, even before I was born ... I know that line was better when my grandmother said it, but bear with me. Many years ago, before the land of the wastes, before the land of Equestria, before the thrones of the sun and moon, the sky cradled only the stars, and the stars needed nothing more than to be caressed with the velvety hand of the night or so the old zebra shamans say. But one star shone its light upon the world and saw that it was beautiful and wanted forever to be with it, so it left its brothers and sisters in the sky and flew into the world, deep underground and became stuck in the liquid center of our world. So, it slept.

"The star slept until the time had come that it had regained enough of its strength to escape the world and return to the embrace of the sky. Upon breaking through the surface, however, it discovered the sky was now dominated by one, giant, hot ball of light which burned the star's bright flesh orange. And there were other things, now, too. Tiny creatures trotted across the land; the land which was rightfully his! How dare they! So he grew angry and made an ugly face in order to scare these new 'equines' away. This worked with the first creature he met whom he chased and chased until his neck was just so long!

"After scaring a few donk-... I mean, ponies this way, he discovered that just scaring one at a time wasn't enough, so he grew a second head so he could scare two of them at the same time. He did this over and over again until he had six of them. That's one for each of the elements, mind you.

“Decades of chasing ponies around in order to scare them made him powerfully hungry, and he had discovered that the ponies could never run fast enough to truly leave him in peace, so he began to gobble them up! One after another he gobbled them up until they were not only fewer and farther between, but also more quick, agile and clever. They began to outsmart him at every turn until he became so tired of not catching anypony he felt he needed to sleep, and besides, the sun did burn him so.

“He made his way to a bog and let himself sink into the cool muck, never to be seen for maybe a thousand years, until his hunger woke him and he started the cycle over again only with a more voracious appetite and malignant heart every time. The creature is still there to this day, lying in wait until disturbed, because no one knows how to get rid of it.”

Chaff sat, looking at the fabric she had been using to clean the cups. She could feel her eyes puff up and shake as she felt moisture pressing in her mouth from both sides of her tongue. There was a tempest swirling in her head tossing everything around and flooding her mind with contradicting thoughts. Standing in the middle of it all, she couldn't help but to feel as if she was falling. “I ... feel cold,” she muttered at last. “But, why? Everything's just so confusing right now.” She looked up at him, seeking a refuge from the chill. His gentle, black eyes bore her some warmth, but seemed to leave her with some leftover frost as if on purpose.

He looked at her. “Sunshine,” he said. “I can read it in your face, in how you act, and in how you react. You can't tell me that a star has never fallen in your life, that you have neither burned nor buried them only to have them keep coming back trying to gobble you up.” A tear began to run down her cheeks. “Hey. Hey, there, filly you don't need to fear.” He laid a solid hoof on the back of her neck. “As long as you have friends you can rely on and you assume some courage in spite of your fear, you'll be able to take your own hydras down, guaranteed.” Chaff heard the door open. “And I know.” She heard the familiar gait. “You have somepony.” The steps drew closer. “Who cares about you.” They slowed down. “Deeply.” They stopped. “I just know.”

“Hello Chaff,” said a welcome voice.

“Well,” Jimmy said, getting up from the table. “I'll leave you two alone.”

Plough watched as Jimmy picked up his hat off the countertop with his teeth, deftly threw it atop his head and walked out of the door into the overwhelming heat outside as Chaff quickly dried her tears. Without looking at her he asked, “So, who was tall, dark and creepy, over there?”

Chaff stifled a little snuffle and said, “A new friend, I think. Jimmy ... is his name.”

Plough looked at her incredulously. “Jimmy? That's a peculiar sort of name. What does that even mean, anyway? It's not a talent, or a thing, or really much of-” His voice sank as he

noticed her choking back some leftover emotions. "Hey. Are you doing okay? Is there anything I can help with?" He paused a moment, his upcoming question already leaving a strong taste of ash in his mouth. "Did ... *he* hurt you, again?"

Chaff's eyes opened wide in shock at Plough's blunt question. She giggled the situation away as she answered, "No, no. I'm fine. Just ... a story I'll have to tell you, sometime." She threw the piece of fabric over her shoulder as she stood up and gave Plough one of her famous smiles. "So, what brings you to town today, Plough? Run out of your dad's favorite food, again?"

"Yes."

"Figures. Come on, follow me over to the stockroom and I'll get you your stuff."

The pair walked over to the guarded door in the back of the building. The tough pony standing there gave the two a nod as Chaff let them into the little room. The stockroom, though larger than most bedrooms, was piled high with all manner of tradable goods. Shelves full of various pickled fruits and vegetables pinned the two in the small, concrete walkway which cut through the middle of disarray, bags of fresh corn and beans trying their hardest to wiggle into the center of the room. Chaff found the boxes of old Shuck's beloved applecakes, still "fresh" after so many years, stacked a few of them in the center of the room, and went to work searching for something special she had hidden for Plough.

"Would you hand me that ladder, please?" she cooed, using the fabric to wipe as much sweat she could off her face.

"Hm? Oh, sure." Plough seized the ladder, and leaned it against the shelf Chaff was eyeing.

"Thank you. This shouldn't take to long. I know it gets a little stuffy in here and I wouldn't want you to get heat exhaustion or something."

"No, no," he waved his hoof. "No need to rush."

She flashed him a coy grin as she moved up the ladder. She pushed the pickled plums and cherries out of the way. It wasn't there. She let out an irritated sigh as she put the unusually colored glass jars back in their place.

"Is everything alright?" Plough asked.

"Yeah, I just ... hmm ..." She stood in thought for a moment, the heat of the room starting to really get to her as sweat started seeping from her every pore. She mimed hitting herself in the head with a hammer. "Oh, duh! It's on the top shelf. I'm so stupid!"

"Then you must not know my friend, Chaff, very well," he called up to her as she made her way to the top of the ladder. "She's the most caring, thoughtful and wise pony I know." If there was one thing Chaff knew about Plough, it was how much he enjoyed looking at the goods held in the stockroom. She made sure to reach further than she needed to.

Hiding the prize from Plough the best she could, she descended the ladder saying, "Funny, you didn't compliment my intelligence or say I wasn't stupid."

Plough puffed out his chest in mock superiority. "Not everyone can be me. Give credit where credit is due, you know?"

She gently slapped his face which was dripping with perspiration. "You're *such* a jackass."

"That's where you're wrong, you see. I'm no jackass, I'm the cold-blooded stallion you're heating up, baby!"

She laughed as she wrapped her forelegs around his huge, calloused neck and went in for a kiss. Plough responded in kind giving chase to her passions, opening up his bottled eagerness and drinking in his thirst for her. His hooves unable to find purchase on her slippery body, he let instinct take control as they stumbled into a shelf, knocking over a can of beans. The sound caused Chaff to suddenly freeze in shock as her brain made connections she did not desire. She wanted to. She wanted *him*, or at least felt pressured as if she *should* want him, but the shackles of her past were strong, keeping so many things tantalizingly out of her reach. Chaff loved the simple things in life, why did this area have to be so complicated?

She hugged Plough's massive frame close to her body as tightly as she could. In his embrace she could find security, a shield to the angst she felt of the future and a solace to the reality of the present. Though however safe she felt with him, she was never out of range of the fiery arrows of the past, the pain of which having been magnified by her encounters earlier in the day. She allowed a few tears to fall as she sniffled and skillfully swallowed the remainder of her feelings. "*Such* a jackass," she whispered.

Not completely understanding the complexity of a mare's mind, Plough screwed up his face in confusion, though he quickly reminded himself of the difficulties Chaff had been facing the majority of her life; though he could not exactly *comprehend* them, he could at least sympathize. He patted her nuzzling head as her breathing slowed and became more regular. "And that line is so lame," she added with a sigh.

"It worked didn't it?"

"Heh."

Plough let the silence clean the situation for a minute or two before he broke it. "Speaking of jackasses," he started. "What were you and that mule talking about, anyway? What kind of story did he tell you to get you all worked up like that?"

Chaff searched her mind for the right words and, having found none, said, "Can we save that discussion for later? It's getting a little hard to breathe in here, and you smell like fertilizer."

Plough smiled. "As you wish, sweetie." He collected his groceries from the ground and tossed them into his saddlebags as Chaff composed herself.

"Oh, yeah!" she said, giving him a delightfully colored, small, cardboard box. "Here it is. Possibly the only one in existence. The limited-run, ultra-rare 'Cracklin'-Corn™' version of General Mare's® Brand Star Swirl's® Cereal."

Plough's eyes glistened as he reverently took the box and looked it over as if holding his first-born. "It's just so ... beautiful. It beats the test."

"And all the rest."

"Star Swirls are the very best," they sang in harmony. It made them giggle like little fillies.

He carefully put the box into the top part of his saddlebag, making sure to not put it anywhere near the canned food, so as not to be crushed, and gave the mare a kiss on her cheek. Chaff smiled coyly at him then opened the door and the two were greeted with a slightly less sweltering heat and a guard who was eyeing them with suspicion.

Plough did his best to look dignified, standing up straight and pushing a hoof through his dark mane. Clearing his throat he plead his case to the guard pony, "Some of the, uh, goods were hard to reach." The guard just shook his head and motioned them to move along.

"Where on this planet could you have possibly found this box of Star Swirl's®?" he asked as they weaved their way through the crowds of trader caravans, farmers and a host of ponies whose professions were probably of the unsavory type. "I mean, I've only seen one ad for this and it was on a torn, back page of a magazine which was, itself, torn in half. Do you even think it tastes good, considering its short run?"

They stopped in the one open spot in the middle of the large room. "I don't think popularity means good, I mean, take Sparkle~Cola for instance. Who in their right mind would make a carrot-flavored s-..." The couple stopped in their tracks. Quitclaim stood before them barring them from the exit. "G-good morning, father. W-what may I help you with?"

The manilla-colored pony was chewing on something, making him produce an excess of brown saliva which he promptly spat at Plough's feet. "*What do you have* in th' bag, son?" he

asked, fearlessly disregarding the almost double size differential between Plough and himself. Quitclaim put on the similar airs as a sheriff, albeit with twice the bravado and less than half the authority. "Thinkin' of stealin' from me?" His wispy, black moustache flinched as he waited for an answer.

"No, sir," Plough said, standing straight and smiling proudly, easily hiding the loathing of Chaff's father from his tone and body language. "As a matter of fact, sir, I have some bottle caps with your name on them. Three boxes of those delicious applecakes, six cans of beans and one jar of pickled maraschino cherries. This, I believe should cover it." He held out a hoof-full of caps to Quitclaim, and broadened his smile, knowing full well the caps weren't the biggest factor in the transaction. Plough stole a glance of Chaff whose discomfort was painted on the sides of her eyes. Her father, ever the the business pony didn't like letting his property go so cheaply.

Quitclam grunted as he counted out the caps. "Hmm. Yeah. That's right for the groceries. Move along now. I don't want no ..."

"Woowooowee!" screamed a dirty, wasteland pony from the front of the establishment. He was oozing happiness from his unsettlingly large grin, to his jingling saddlebags, to his gravity-defying hooves and didn't waste any time spreading his joy around. "Drinks are on me!" he shouted as he threw two hoof-fulls of caps into the air. The entire place erupted in triumph even as the blue unicorn in the corner was finally able to get the jukebox working and the captured sounds of a [spirited moment caught on record](#) rushed through everypony in attendance.

Quitclaim's eyes immediately saw profit so he forgot about the two young ponies and focused on the insanity happening at the bar, just as the new patron was making his way through the ruckus to the middle of the room. The wasteland pony moved slowly through the crowd, receiving hug after kiss after hoof-bump, but he made it to the eye of the storm where Chaff was able to get his attention, "Well, look at you Mr. Party Pony! Aren't you just the most generous thing? What put you into such a sharing, caring mood?"

The wastelander had mysteriously acquired a full bottle of mezcal and a sparkly, pink party hat with a fountain of multi-colored streamers emitting from the top of its cone, like some party-time volcano. After taking a dangerously large swig of his mezcal he made his way over to Chaff. "Hey beautiful!" he yelled over the din of merrymaking happening around them. "Yeah, me and my buddies were scaving out near that old stable when who should appear but the mother-fucking-Steel-Rangers!" He took another drink. "Well, I just about pissed myself! I didn't think there was any way of getting out alive, 'cause you know how them tin cans can get when there's wartime technology around." And another drink. "Anywaysh! There I was, about to get mmmmb**low**n up when their leader, nice looking guy, blonde hair, tan, blue eyes, you know the type ... anyway he come up to me and ashked me if I had any wartime technology to shell and I said, 'Ffffffuck, take anything you want!' And he's all, 'well what d'you have?' Sho I tell the guy what we're carrying and **BOOM!**" He stomped one of his hooves on the ground for greater emphasis

as he stared like a lunatic into Chaff's eyes. "He jusht tosshes me this giant bag of caps. 'Great doin' business with ya!' 'Yeah, bro, you too!' Crazy night, let me tell ya." Another big swig.

Plough felt it was his turn to chime in. "Wow that's crazy!" he agreed. "So there's this band of Steel Rangers just going around looking for ... what, exactly?"

Another swig. It was a wonder the pony was still standing. "Yunno! Like, yunno ... *everything!* Magishkal sparkh power sources-es, guns and bullets, pipbucks, robotssss, medical equipment ..."

"Medical equipment? You mean like, EKG machines, autodocs, drugs, powered scalpels, that kind of thing?"

"Well **DUH!** What elsh could I mean? Whipsh and chainsss?" He laughed a strange, inhaling laugh, obviously entertaining himself. "Yeah, anything tech-no-lo-gic. They have this kind of ... detector ... thing that can spot some kinds of power ... stuff." He turned back to Chaff. "Anyway, shweet thing, you wanna lose thish chump and find a fun place tuh party t'night? I'm rich."

"Hey handsome," said a pink unicorn mare standing next to the now drunk scavenger. He smiled, put his foreleg around her and hobbled over to the rowdiest, 8:30 AM party any of the witnesses had ever seen or heard. Chaff gave a grimacing smile at the sight and sighed, knowing it was going to be a long day. There was one pony, however, who was not enjoying himself.

"What's wrong?" Chaff asked Plough who was standing with a blank expression on his face, and then she realized. "Oh, Goddesses, your father."

Plough gave a grim nod. "I have to go, Chaff," he said as he hurried to the door. "I'll see you later."

"Hold on, let me pack some water..."

"You need to stay here. Business as usual. We cannot allow any state of fear to take root. Don't worry about the Rangers doing anything too crazy, this squad leader of theirs doesn't seem like he really wants to gun down everypony he sees. I mean, trading caps for equipment? Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

"I'm still going to worry about you. Be careful. You never know what kind of nut-job is behind one of those masks. I don't know what I'd do if the love of my life were to be killed by those raiders."

"They're not raiders, Chaff."

"Might as well be."

His lips formed a weary grin. "I'll come back as soon as I can." He gave her a nuzzle.

"Keep that mother of yours safe, Mister. Tell her I'm thinking about her."

"I will, Chaff. I'll see you, soon."

With that Chaff was once again alone in the middle of the crowd. She sighed as she looked at the bedlam occurring in the barroom, all her thoughts only a little over a mile away. If the Steel Rangers were looking for rare, wartime technology they could do worse than the Corn family's household, at least as Plough had described it to her. An entire room of machines dedicated to keeping his father alive would be a huge find for those raiders in soldier uniforms. If she was certain of anything it was that Plough was going to lose his father.

"Hey, Chaff, are you okay?" Delta asked. Chaff jerked her gaze upwards, not realizing she had been staring at the ground.

Her look of concern washed away as she put on her social mask and responded, "Oh, sorry, Delta! Spaced out for a second, there. What'cha need?"

"Well, I just fixed the jukebox and was wondering about my compensation."

"Right, of course. Let's talk to my dad and see if we can't get you paid." As she walked Delta over to her father she stole a look out of the window to where Plough's cart still sat. A dust devil spun past making a coil of barbed wire sitting on a nearby boulder bounce in its wake. She felt a frightening but beautiful solitude consume her. Chaff prayed that everything would be alright.

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This story is based on Kkat's strange and wonderful, *Fallout: Equestria*. If you haven't already, please do so. Here's the link: [Equestria Daily](#)

If you'd like to read more *Fallout Equestria* Side Stories, take a look at: [Fallout Equestria Side Stories post on Equestria Daily](#) and the [Fallout Equestria Side Stories thread on Ponychan](#)

Thank you also to Arcane Scroll for the excellent site: [Fallout: Equestria Resource](#). There is a chat function on that site, come say "hello."