

Trials of the Elements
Part 9

Valiant and Dr. Mend walked back toward their shared dorm room watching every alley and shadow nervously.

They were nearly back to the dorm when Valiant cleared his throat, “We've been so busy lately, I haven't had the chance to ask you how your appointment with Sea Blue went. Do you want to talk about it?” he asked cautiously.

Mend drew in a shallow, shuddering breath, then exhaled it slowly, “He showed me exactly how much resentment I have toward my mother. We didn't even start on my father or me yet. I had no idea I was so bitter. He told me to tell the voices in my head to stop whenever they pipe up. I've been trying all day. It hasn't made a bit of difference. I got sick last night when I was in the bathroom and I've been feeling sick all day. I don't know why.”

“When was the last time you ate anything?” Valiant asked.

Mend gave it some thought before answering, “Come to think of it, it was yesterday morning.” Mend chuckled harshly, “I guess that explains the stomach problems. I've just been so busy I forgot to eat.”

Valiant looked squarely at his friend, “I don't think it's just that though. I think it's stress too. When was the last time you had a vacation?”

“I don't take vacations Valiant. I don't . . .” Mend cut himself off and took a deep breath, “Maybe I do need a break.” he said realizing his voice had started to rise.

Valiant was internally pleased at the effort Mend was making, “Yeah you do.” he agreed quietly, “So, take a break tomorrow. How many bits did you bring with you?”

“A couple hundred, why?” Mend asked.

“Go into the clinic tomorrow and tell your boss you can't come in. Explain only as much as you have to. Afterward go do something that is nothing like work or work related. Go see a show, go to the park, go to the library, have a nice dinner at a fancy restaurant, go sight-seeing. There's a whole city here at your disposal. We're in the capital of Equestria for crying out loud. Have you even taken time to just enjoy it?” Valiant asked.

“Well no. I've always been too busy.” Mend admitted.

“You have every opportunity to be free for several months. Take advantage of that. Go do

whatever you want. Have fun.” Valiant encouraged.

Mend gave the idea some serious thought,
“I only just started at the clinic. It wouldn't look good if I asked for vacation so soon.”

“Do what your heart tells you to do. I won't ask you to compromise your morals, but you need some time for yourself. Focus on Mend. What does Mend WANT to do? What did you find fun when you were little?” Valiant asked.

“I honestly don't remember.” Mend said sadly.

“Then this is the perfect time to find out what you like! Try new things. A wise pony once told me that life is meant to be savored and enjoyed, not rushed and remembered. Big Macintosh doesn't have anything to do tomorrow. Why don't you go with him and see what Canterlot has to offer?” Valiant asked.

Mend's face seemed a little brighter,
“You know what? I will. I'll need you to show me where Live Wire lives before you go to work tomorrow though.”

Valiant smiled hugely,
“That's the spirit!” he said noticing they had arrived at their dorm building, “Live Wire told me the address, I'll write it down for you. Now, let's get some rest and tomorrow you get to start your vacation”

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Mend found Lemon Lime's house easily the next morning. He and Valiant had walked to the younger stallion's work-place and Mend went on alone from there. Dr. Mend wore his saddle-bags in case he decided to buy something. Lemon Lime's home was nice. It was a large apartment set nearly against the very walls of Canterlot. Mend made his way up the stairs to the seventh floor where the smaller unicorn's apartment was and knocked on the door to number 7b. Lemon Lime opened the door looking like a house-wife. The yellow unicorn wore an apron with a mixing bowl floating in the air next to him.

Lemon Lime's face lit up when he saw Mend,
“Good morning doctor!” he piped, “Come on in.” he said opening the door for Mend.

Dr. Mend stepped in and took notice of the color-coated front room,
“Is Big Macintosh awake yet?” he asked his host.

“Nope. He wakes up on his own. I think he has an internal alarm-clock or something. I can't do it. I need the loudest alarm I can get. I'm a really heavy sleeper and a big eater. I always make a huge breakfast. Would you like some coffee? I just made a pot. It's good and strong, but I could make another pot if you like it weak. Breakfast will be ready in about fifteen minutes. Do you

like biscuits? I love biscuits! I make a huge batch every morning. Did you know there are more than seventy-seven types of biscuits? Oh yeah, I also make a huge batch of fruit salad every evening for breakfast the following morning. I let it sit in a honey-based syrup overnight. That way, even if I end up with under-ripe fruit it's still sweet. Sometimes I make oatmeal too. I have some dry cereals as well if you want. My rule is, when you're here you're family. So if you see something you like, go for it, just make sure you tell me so I can get more if you use the last of it. Come take a look in my kitchen and tell me what you want. I'll make it in a jiffy." Lemon Lime said in a matter of seconds.

Dr. Mend's eye twitched slightly,
"I see now, why everypony calls you Live Wire. I could hardly keep up with you." he said pleasantly, strained, but pleasantly.

"Oh, no. That's because of my condition. I tend to go off on tangents all the time, but that's just because my mind works so much faster than a normal pony." Lemon Lime explained.

Dr. Mend arched an eyebrow,
"I wasn't aware you had a mental condition. You don't seem to let it bug you too much."

"It used to. I didn't have any friends until I ran into Valiant. I mean I literally ran into him. Since we've met, I've made a lot more friends. Evening Star, Big Macintosh, you, and maybe Trooper; I have plenty of friends now. I just have to learn how to interact without being overbearing." Lemon Lime machine-gunned off.

"And maybe a little patience too." Mend offered.

Lemon Lime shot the doctor a sidelong look,
"Why does everypony say that? I'm actually very patient. Do you know how patient you have to be to be a physical therapist? I mean really! Sometimes you have to work with a patient for years before they're healed. I have to be patient. You can't rush therapy, no matter what type it is. Injuries take time to heal, especially really deep ones. You have to be willing to give everypony time to work out at their own pace. I don't rush it, I can't afford to. For an example, take a pony who has broken their leg and needs therapy because they've been bed-ridden for weeks. Minor muscle atrophy sets in and they don't need too long before they're ready to go. Now on the other hoof, if somepony came out a coma after several years, they would need a lot of time. They would need help learning how to use every muscle again, and that can take years in itself, not to mention the exercise so their muscles are strong enough to work normally. Then to top it all off, they will need time to learn how to interact with others properly. The mind is a muscle of sorts too. Patience is a must, when dealing with any type of therapy. Some heal fast, others take a long time. It all depends on the individual."

Dr. Mend was amazed at the depth of knowledge Lemon Lime had in regard to his work,
"You seem to be an expert in the field. I'll bet your boss loves you."

Lemon Lime winked,

“Oh yeah. Dr. Avalon says I'm her favorite.”

“You work with Avalon?” Dr. Mend asked, following Lemon Lime into the kitchen.

Lemon Lime smiled over his shoulder as he plopped balls of dough onto a cookie sheet, “Of course! Why else do you think she never pestered us about how late we were at the clinic last night?”

“I thought it was because I work there.” Mend admitted.

“Oh, so you're the new guy who has her tail all twisted huh?” Lemon Lime blurted without thinking.

Dr. Mend's ears stood up on his head, ram-rod straight and facing forward, listening intently, “Really? What did I do wrong?” he asked concerned, “She never said anything to me.”

Lemon Lime blushed deep orange, “I shouldn't have said anything. It isn't my business.” he said hurriedly, which for him really meant something.

Dr. Mend pressed for answers, “Please tell me.” he asked, “I had no idea she was upset.”

Lemon Lime sighed, sliding the cookie-sheet into the oven, “She isn't upset, per-SE. See, she mentioned to me that there's this new doctor at the clinic who's a real genius. She's hot-to-trot for him. She's dropped several hints, but apparently he isn't interested. I was wondering who it was. I've never seen her go for anypony before. I always assumed she wasn't interested in a relationship. I guess she just has certain standards . . . “

“I had no idea.” Mend said quietly, “I have no experience with mares. I mean, none at all. What should I do?”

“Well, are you interested in her?” Lemon Lime asked.

Mend had to give the question some serious thought, “I . . . I don't know.” he said honestly, “She's smart and she's really good at what she does, but it would be a violation for me to date her. She's technically my boss.”

Lemon Lime blew out an exasperated breath, “That's not the question. The question is: Are you interested in her? Do you have a romantic interest with her or not?”

“I have no idea. Until recently, I didn't have an interest in anything except being the best a medicine.” Mend admitted.

Lemon Lime raised an eyebrow, as he leaned against the counter next to his fridge, "I hope that wasn't your motivation." he said evenly, "Competition is probably the worst reason to get into the medical field. You should do it because you want to help injured and sick ponies, not for your own ego."

"You've known me for a day and you're already passing judgment on me?" Mend asked becoming defensive.

"Not at all." Lemon Lime said, unperturbed, "What I'm saying is that it's a poor reason to get into it. I'm not accusing you of it, I'm just saying that maybe you missed your true talent. There are so many specialties in medicine you might have missed your real talent and just ended up settling for something else for the wrong reason. It's just a possibility. Look, we're getting off track here. Do you, or do you not have an interest in Dr. Avalon?"

"I need time to answer that." Dr. Mend admitted honestly.

Lemon Lime smiled,
"Good answer." he said opening the oven and removing the cookie-sheet, "Breakfast is ready. Take a look around, see if anything strikes your interest." he offered.

"Ah wasn't expectin' to see you here doc." Big Macintosh said from the kitchen doorway.

"Until last night, neither was I." Dr. Mend said rummaging through Lemon Lime's fridge, "Big Macintosh, how do you feel about going with me today. I'm taking a day off and I could use some company. I've never had a vacation and I'm sure I could use some pointers, besides I don't hate your company."

"Ah guess Ah could go with you doc. Ah didn't have any other plans." Big Macintosh replied.

Dr. Mend opened one of Lemon Lime's cabinets and looked around until he found something that caught his eye,
"Cream of Wheat!" he said excitedly, "My mother used to make this all the time! I haven't had it in years. Could you show me how to make it Live Wire?" he asked.

Lemon Lime smiled hugely,
"Sure thing doc."

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Dr. Mend was acting nothing like his normal self, as he and Big Macintosh sat down for lunch at an outdoor cafe. The two stallions had gone to take a tour of the Royal Palace and had even seen Princess Celestia holding court. They had walked around Canterlot until Dr. Mend spotted something that caught his eye. In one of the many groups of shops, they had found a bookstore. On a whim, they had gone in and taken a look around. They perused the selections

slowly until Dr. Mend had found a section that caught his interest: Romance novels. The pictures on the covers drew his immediate interest. Images of beautiful mares locked in the intimate embrace of studly stallions made his mind go places it had never previously gone. His imagination began to churn out potential situations and scenarios that made him blush like a school-filly. With his interest piqued, he cracked open one of the books and began to read. It contained a type of adventure he had only ever rarely dreamed of. Dr. Mend purchased the book and noticed Big Macintosh waiting for him with a thick book of his own.

The two had decided to take lunch at the closest café, which happened to be across the street. Dr. Mend had been surprised to discover that the book his huge friend had, was an adventure novel. The two of them ordered their meals and enjoyed a pleasant late morning reading quietly. Dr. Mend tore into his book with reckless abandon, finding himself drawn to the main character. She was a seamstress who had devoted her life to her work, never taking time to look for a love interest. She was awkward and uncomfortable in social situations. Dr. Mend sympathized with her.

Despite the book's cover, Dr. Mend found it not so much steamy as heartwarming. Her love interest was a poor potato vender who had been attacked one day. She had taken him into her home and helped him recover. Dr. Mend easily realized the author had no idea what they were talking about regarding medicine, but the story was engaging and sweet. The two had an attraction for each other but both were too unsure to say something about it. The situation caused a lot of angst and unnecessary awkward moments. Eventually the stallion admitted his attraction and the two had begun an elegant courtship. Dr. Mend was in the middle of a particularly intimate scene when he heard Big Macintosh clear his throat.

Dr. Mend looked up from his book, face flushed,
“Did you say something?”

“Are you alright over there doc? You look like you're about to start sweatin'.” the huge Earth pony pointed out.

“Yes!” Mend said a bit louder than he had planned, “Yes, I'm fine. Thank you for asking.”

“Did you tell your boss you wouldn't be in today?” Big Mac asked.

Dr. Mend shot up, out of his chair like he had sat on a tack,
“Shoot! No, I didn't. I completely forgot!”

“Might be a good idea. You run along, Ah'll get the tab. Ah'll wait for you here.” Big Macintosh offered.

Dr. Mend laid his book on the table and took off like a shot, heading for Dr. Avalon's clinic. He arrived, completely out of breath. The nurse at the check-in desk stood up quickly, throwing him a worried look. Dr. Mend held up a hoof to forestall any questions or concerns, while he regained his breath.

Dr. Mend finally caught his breath and trotted up to the nurse, he couldn't remember her name,

“Is Dr. Avalon in?” he asked.

The nurse nodded,
“She came in a few minutes ago. Do you need me to page her, Dr. Mend?”

Dr. Mend shook his head,
“No, I'll find her, if that's alright.”

The nurse smiled warmly,
“Sure, go on in.”

Dr. Mend pushed open the doors to the examination rooms where Dr. Avalon received her appointments. He glanced at a clipboard hanging up behind the first nurse's station. Dr. Avalon was scheduled to see a patient in exam room 4, for a regular checkup. Dr. Mend left her a note that he was waiting in her office when she finished with the patient. He headed toward her office and sat down in the same chair he had before. He estimated he had half an hour to wait before she joined him.

His mind began turning. He realized the voices were absent. He wasn't working, but they were gone for the moment, *'Maybe it's hospitals and clinics that keep them away.'* he thought to himself, *'That book was a nice change. I had no clue, ponies wrote about romance. Reading it was like a dream.'* he began to imagine the story in his mind, piece by piece until he reached the scene where the two characters were sharing their first kiss. Without realizing it, he began imagining the mare was Dr. Avalon and the stallion was himself. The mental picture was . . . interesting. Dr. Mend found himself enjoying the scene playing out in his head quite pleasantly. He imagined the feel of Dr. Avalon's coat brushing up against his own, the caress of his lips on her neck . . .

The door opened suddenly, snapping Dr. Mend out of his day-dream. Dr. Avalon entered her office and looked Mend up and down, frowning somewhat.

She took a seat behind her desk and folded her hooves politely,
“Was there something you needed to talk to me about Dr. Mend?”

Dr. Mend cleared his throat, licking his lips nervously,
“Yes, there is.” he began, “I'm afraid I won't be coming in today.”

Dr. Avalon's face fell, her expression worried,
“Is something wrong?”

“No, nothing's wrong. I just realized I've never taken a vacation. I'm . . .” he trailed off as his brain snapped a decision into place, almost without his permission, “I'm afraid I have to tenure

my resignation. I can't work here anymore.”

Dr. Avalon held her expression, but her voice gave away her concern, “Why?” it sounded choked.

Dr. Mend sat up and decided he would continue the route he was already following, “If I continue my employment here, I won't be able to date you without violating policy. Would you like to join me for dinner, once all this mess with the rogue unicorn is over?” the whole thing spilled out in a rush.

Dr. Avalon's face went from hurt to puzzled to delighted in a matter of seconds, “Very well.” she said, regaining her composure, “You can still volunteer your time here, you know. And yes, I would be delighted to go with you.” she said, cracking a smile.

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Big Macintosh watched Dr. Mend approach the cafe with the world's biggest grim plastered all over his normally dour face. Big Mac decided he liked seeing Dr. Mend happy. The older Earth pony sat down across from Big Macintosh and picked his book back up without saying a word.

Big Macintosh leaned over the table, toward Dr. Mend, “Are you alright there doc?” he asked.

Dr. Mend looked up from his book, “Oh yes, I'm fine. I quit my job.” Big Mac's jaw hit the table, Dr. Mend continued on, “Avalon and I are going out on a date whenever we finish with this whole issue with the crazy unicorn.” Dr. Mend said it all like it was nothing out of the ordinary.

Big Macintosh blinked several times before he sat back in his chair, closing his mouth, “Ah have to admit, Ah didn't see this commin' but Ah'm glad for you.” Big Mac cleared his throat and continued on, this was new territory for him, “Ifn it ain't too much to ask, what kind of traits should a feller look for in a mare? What was it that made Dr. Avalon attractive to you?”

Dr. Mend was surprised by the unusual question, “As of yet, I have no idea. I haven't taken the opportunity to get to know her outside of work. I may not end up having an attraction to her, but I realized . . . recently, that I have to take that chance or else I'll never know.” Dr. Mend sighed and scratched the back of his head with his right hoof, “If I had more sense in regard to romantic matters I would probably have been married a long time ago. I suppose the best answer I can give you is that I don't know anything about Avalon except that she's a brilliant doctor. Nothing ventured, nothing gained; just trial and error I guess.”

The massive Earth pony mulled over Mend's words for several quiet minutes before he spoke again,

“Ah'm wantin' to get to know a couple of fillies around Ponyville. Do you know anypony who has experience with love? Ah can't stand the idea of rejectin' a filly before Ah've given her a chance and there's been plenty who seemed interested.” he said bluntly.

“I can only think of one. Sea Blue has a daughter, he's sure to know more than I do, but he's never mentioned his wife. It might be painful for him. You could try asking your Granny Smith, she obviously has good experience.” Mend offered.

Big Macintosh nodded,
“That there's a good idea, Ah should have thought of it mahself. Speakin' of family, didn't you grow up here in Canterlot?”

All color drained from Dr. Mend's face,
“You know what Big Mac, there's somepony I need to visit. I'm sorry to cut out on you like this but I really have to go. I'll make it up to you, remind me. I'll meet you in Sea Blue's room at seven.”

Big Macintosh was puzzled, but he could always go back to the Tower Library and take another look at the tome about the Elements,
“Well then, Ah guess Ah'll see you later doc.” he said pleasantly.

Dr. Mend left twenty bits on the table and was gone in a flash, stuffing his book into his saddle-bags.

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He ran hard and fast, remembering the location of his destination more clearly with each turn. The way had been burned into his memory long ago. He knew the way by heart. He was following his heart, letting it guide his hooves. He moved like the wind, with every step he became more and more aware of how much he needed to arrive. His heart beat hard and fast, his thoughts raced, memories rushing back to the forefront of his mind. He realized he was crying. He needed to be there. He had never realized how much he needed it. Tears flew off in the wind as he came around the final corner, bringing his destination into sight. He never slowed down, if anything his pace quickened. He was desperate, frantic. Thirty paces to his destination. He could make out every detail, it made his heart ache all the more. He called out to his destination, crying out in earnest, desperate to be received. Twenty paces, it hurt to see, but it was a hurt his spirit yearned for like his body yearned for breath. Ten paces, his senses were overwhelmed with memories. His whole body shook, he felt weak.

Mend stood, frozen in place, weeping silently, trying in vain to blink away the tears. His chest felt tight and his mouth felt dry. His mind began bombarding him with memories. Each subtle color, every scent refreshed his memory, making the memories come alive. The reminders of the past tore through him like a hot knife through butter. Regret and pain washed over him like a tsunami, tearing away every barrier and hard place he had worked so hard to erect over the years. The wave of raw emotion subsided, leaving behind a wonderful sensation. It was an

emotion he had kept at bay, actively working against accepting its embrace. He felt lighter, as if years of accumulated dirt and grime had been washed away. For a brief moment Mend had no name for the foreign, but now welcome, intruder in his heart. Its presence opened the floodgates of his soul.

Mend collapsed, his hooves giving out beneath him, and sobbed brokenly. How could he have never come back? How could he have neglected to return to a place that meant so much to him? Mend slowly became aware of being touched. A presence surrounded him, holding him like he was no more than an illusion, a phantom in danger of dissipating in the wind. He weakly called out, his voice choked by tears. Years of anger fell away, leaving him feeling naked and vulnerable, like a newborn foal. He reached out, grasping the only solid thing around him. He held on tightly. He never wanted to let go ever again.

Mend had no way of knowing how long he stayed there. It could have been seconds or days for all he knew. He didn't care, nothing else mattered. He looked up at his anchor, his refuge. His vision slowly cleared. There, holding him on the porch were his grandparents. For the first time in his life, Mend saw through his misgivings and read the expressions accurately. There it was, shining like a beacon in the darkness, just like in his heart. He saw it and embraced it with all his soul, holding his grandparents tightly. What he saw was something he had missed terribly. Love.

The two older ponies held their grandson, once though lost to them. He felt whole. For the first time in his life for as long as he could remember, he felt whole. Mend heard a voice. It was a voice that could have come from a divine being. The voice was soft and choked with tears, but Mend heard it as clearly as the ringing of silver bells, "Welcome home."

Author's note: If you happen to see the name 'Reigniz' in the message box on the right, that's me waiting for real-time feedback, complaints, spelling error notifications, ect. If I'm there, feel free to chat. I LOVE talking to yall.