

Meteorite carefully watched her steps as she followed Rarity through a cave, glittering with gemstones poking out of the walls. Meteorite would not have normally ventured into such a place, filled with unknown dangers, but she felt safe with Rarity guiding the way. Well, safer, at any rate.

"So, who's this Maud, anyway?" Meteorite asked. "Don't think I've heard of her before."

Rarity paused momentarily, making sure her safety helmet was secure. "Ah, yes, I suppose you wouldn't. She does tend to keep to herself mostly."

"You don't say," Meteorite responded dryly, holding her own helmet still as she rounded a stalagmite, "the pony who lives in a cave outside of town is a recluse."

"Darling," Rarity said with an admonishing tone as she glanced back, "don't be rude."

Meteorite flinched slightly. "Sorry."

Rarity nodded an acknowledgment, and continued.

"In any case, yes, she spends most of her time here, but that is only to study the- er," Rarity twirled a hoof, attempting to find the right words, "-the geological... formations, here."

"I guess that makes sense," Meteorite admitted.

"Besides," Rarity continued, "I *do* see her about in Ponyville sometimes. Mostly with Pinkie."

Meteorite hesitated. "...that makes... slightly less sense?"

Rarity gave her a brief quizzical look, before her eyes lit up. "Oh, you hadn't realized, darling? They're sisters!"

Meteorite froze mid-step. "S-Sisters?" she squeaked.

Rarity nodded. "Is something the matter?"

Meteorite took a moment to process things. "U- N...No... I... just hadn't realised." She cocked her head, still thinking. "Oh, of course- 'Maud *Pie*', 'Pinkie *Pie*'. I... just didn't make the connection."

They continued walking, Meteorite still in thought.

"Pinkie's sister, huh..." she mumbled quietly, "I honestly don't know anything about her." Which was true; she could barely remember the Season One episode that flashbacked to Pinkie as a filly, and her family. The most pressing feature she remembered were the early fan names for Pinkie's sisters, Inky and Blinky, which she only still remembered today as

being taken from the names of the ghosts from Pac-Man. The name 'Maud' only threw that faded knowledge into disarray.

"What's she like?" Meteorite asked.

"Ah," Rarity mused carefully, "well... she's... definitely a pony to experience first-hoof."

Meteorite frowned. "I don't like the way you dodged answering that."

"Ah!" Rarity gasped dramatically, hoof to her chest, "how dare you even suggest such a thing! Maud is a sweet and caring pony, if... rather hard to read sometimes, but! She will protect those she cares about! I won't hear another word against her!" A moment's pause, and she took note of Meteorite smiling at her. "What?"

"Nothin'," Meteorite said, breaking into a small grin, "just amused you immediately found the words you needed from that."

Rarity blinked, calming down. "Ah, yes, I... suppose I did." She cleared her throat and continued through the cave. "I... think you'll like her, if you give her a chance."

Meteorite shrugged as she followed. "Hey, if you're vouching for her, sure."

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A short while further into the cave, a soft tinkling noise echoed past the two mares, and shortly after they found themselves in the presence of another mare, a grey earth pony, focused on two seemingly identical gemstones in her hooves, peering intensely at them. A few seconds later, she put one of them in her saddlebag with a familiar tink, and placed the other on the ground. Only then did she look up at Rarity and Meteorite. She showed no sign of... well, anything resembling emotion, which unnerved Meteorite somewhat.

"Maud!" Rarity greeted enthusiastically, "Good to see you again! How's it been?"

"It's been about the same since you asked me that yesterday," Maud responded with the driest monotone Meteorite had heard anyone in.

"Ahah-heh, yes," Rarity laughed with uncertainty, "I suppose it would!" She gestured to Meteorite. "Ah! Yes, anyway, this is the pony I was telling you about, Meteorite Shower!"

Maud slowly shifted her gaze over at Meteorite, who was awkwardly waving at her with a smile. Rarity nudged her forward, making her stumble slightly.

"Ah heh, hey there."

Maud just kept looking at her for a while.

"Hey," she eventually replied.

Hoo boy, this is tough. Meteorite cleared her throat. "S-So um," she began again, trying to fill in the awkward silence, "Rarity says you can... help me learn about rocks?"

More silence.

Oh, I don't know how to handle this. Pinkie I can handle, this is just awkward.

"I can."

-okay, finish that thought later. "Uh, great!" Meteorite paused expecting a follow-up, and quickly realised there wasn't going to be one. "So-"

"If you're serious, that is."

Meteorite immediately stopped talking, feeling caught out. Rarity, however, didn't.

"But of course she is! Aren't you, Meteorite dear?"

Meteorite could only stare back at Maud's unwavering gaze, her words caught in her throat.

"U-Uh, well.. uh... sure?"

Maud blinked.

"Okay."

Maud reached back into her saddlebag, and pulled out a greyish rock, about half the size of her head, and held it in front of her with a hoof.

"Tell me about this rock."

Meteorite's pupils shrank as she reeled back slightly. "Daaah...!"

Rarity raised a hoof in objection. "Maud, don't you think that's quite unfair on..." she trailed off, noticing neither Maud nor Meteorite were paying her any heed.

Meteorite swallowed, regaining some composure. Her eyes shifted to focus on the rock, hoping to suddenly understand it, but after a while, she sat down, her shoulders sagging in defeat.

"...I don't know. I don't even know if it's igneous or sedimentary. I want to say it's grey, but I could be wrong about that, for all I know. It probably changes colour in the light."

"No," Maud responded, "it doesn't. You're describing alkaline sodalite. There wouldn't be any near here."

"Huh," Meteorite muttered in mute surprise. *Didn't know that was a thing.*

Maud gave Meteorite a long look before replacing the rock back in her saddlebag.

"I can teach you," she said suddenly, "but I'd recommend taking a dedicated course instead. My teachings may be... a bit advanced for somepony who isn't ready."

Meteorite felt small. "Dedicated course?"

"Yes."

Meteorite looked down at the ground, then along and up at the cave walls, studying the few gemstones she could see.

"It's a whole thing, huh..." she muttered under her breath.

"Yes."

Meteorite looked back down at her hooves, guiltily. "I'm just wasting your time, aren't I."

Though she heard Rarity gasp, she heard no response from Maud and looked up at her.

"Maybe," Maud eventually said. "You don't seem like somepony who's interested in rocks. No offense."

"...I'm not," Meteorite admitted.

"Why did you come here then?" Maud asked.

Meteorite glanced aside, rubbing a foreleg with a hoof. "Um..."

"A-Ah," Rarity interjected with a nervous chuckle, "it's not that important really, Maud! She was just... wondering if it was a field she'd be interested in!"

Maud looked aside at Rarity for a moment, but resumed her focus on the guilty looking pony in front of her.

"I see."

"Clearly it's not," Rarity continued hastily, "so we'll be on our way! So sorry to have troubled you! Come along, Meteorite!"

Rarity made it a few steps before she realized she wasn't being accompanied. She turned around to see the other two still facing each other.

"Meteorite?"

Meteorite didn't respond, only taking in a breath before looking Maud in the eye.

"Promise you won't tell anypony?" Meteorite meekly asked. Maud raised an eyebrow in immediate response.

"Ah, Meteorite," Rarity called with a hint of worry, "what are you-"

"Only if it's okay if Boulder hears too."

Meteorite frowned. "'Boulder'?"

Maud reached into her coat collar and pulled out a small smooth stone.

"He's my pet rock. We're inseparable."

Meteorite fought back a chuckle, though ended up with a smile.

"Sure. That's fine." Meteorite drew in another breath. "I *did* come here to see if rocks were my thing... but... only because I don't actually know what my thing is." She shifted posture to point out her cutie mark. "I just thought... y'know... meteor, rocks..."

Maud stepped forward, her face uncomfortably close to Meteorite's flank as she inspected the cutie mark.

"I'd say it's more of a comet than a meteor, although it appears to be a clunky mixture of the two. It looks to be primarily iron, around sixty-seven percent, twenty-four percent magnesium, with nine percent ice on the surface."

Meteorite felt at a loss for words. "...s-so... what does that mean?"

Maud looked up at her. "Beats me. My speciality is rocks, not cutie marks."

Unable to help herself, Meteorite giggled. "Yeah... kinda should've realised that." The two stood apart, with Meteorite smiling. "Well, thanks for the... in-depth analysis of my cutie mark. If nothing else, it made me smile."

Maud nodded. "I'm glad I was able to brighten your day."

Meteorite hesitated, unsure if Maud meant it, but she shook off those thoughts. "I'm sorry things didn't work out, but, thanks for everything, Maud. I'm glad I got to meet you, even if it's just this once."

There was no apparent change, but Meteorite swore Maud's neutral expression became softer.

Meteorite turned to join Rarity, who was silently watching the events unfold, when Maud suddenly called out. Meteorite looked back, to see Maud holding the chunk of rock from earlier.

"By the way, it was metamorphic."