

## Fallout Equestria: The Ranger of Seamane

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### Chapter 5 – Ruby's Caravan Company

*“You're kidding. You're kidding, right?” -Nightmare Moon, MLP:FiM S1EP2*

I woke up with Rose laying on top of me. She was surprisingly heavy for how thin she was as well as how quietly she moved. I gently stroked her mane as I thought. She said that she was coming with me, then I would need to split things up. For her sake I would give her the leather saddlebags and take the metal ones for myself. I would give her the varmint rifle as well. Guess I had room for the the submachine guns now. I began rearranging how things would be sorted between us. I would have to ask her when she woke up what possessions she had that she was going to take on the trip. If she didn't have any barding I would give her mine and buy myself some new barding, I had the caps after all. I also needed to ask her what she was good with, well besides the obvious ability to play me like a contrabass. I then felt my face start to burn at the thoughts of last night.

Damn could she play me, gah stop thinking about it, focus on what we need to get done before we leave town. That is when any sense of not thinking about it left as I felt a leg shift against me.

“I see someone is ready for another round,” White Rose purred.

I simply gulped, we had time, it would get blood flowing. I just needed to remember to make certain we had enough supplies between us.

“Not to long, we still have to pack and buy whatever need.” Oh goddesses it was getting hard to think.

“Alright, but, mostly packing, I took care of shopping yesterday.” She replied, the look in her eyes draining any resistance I had.

“Okay maybe two rounds then,” I said sheepishly.

She began to tune me.

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An hour later we were finishing up breakfast, most of the packing was done as well. Apparently after she tired me out last night and I passed out she had begun packing. She had her own weapons. From what I had seen, a varmint rifle like my own as well as a couple of

knives. She had her own simple set of leather armor, while she didn't have a helmet she did have a nice hat. We loaded up our gear and I offered her the SMG's, she gladly took them. Now we both were pretty well armed and at least decently padded. As we finished up getting ready Sunset and Violet came in.

"So you two headed out to Oakmare then?" Sunset asked us.

"Yep, going out there to turn on the tower for DJ Pon3 and then it is up to Colt to repeat the same thing." I felt confident in that bit of the trip.

"Be careful around both, slavers operate heavily in and around there," said Violet with a tone of concern in her voice.

"We are traveling with a caravan, when we get there going to register so slavers can't go after us." This is why I wasn't worried about the trip to that point. Going east afterwards was another story. After all it had over the years earned its name of the unbound north.

"After that we might head east to Sapphire Shores Resort as there is a tower there. That or come back down here and go through Seamane and take care of the tower there." Rose continued for me. Her voice said she wanted the second option over going near the Resort.

"Yep that is the plan." I gave a smile and a nod. Sunset and Violet shared a look then smiled at us.

"Just stay alive you two," Violet said, as the two moved to give Rose and myself hugs. "It is dangerous out there and I would say going north is safer than the Seamane ruins, lot of nasty things still lay in wait there."

"We will keep that in mind, thank you two for putting up with us," said Rose, she looked like she was just about crying, I gave her a kiss hoping it would keep her from crying. She just smiled at me.

"We won't keep you any longer, see you two when you get back." Sunset said as he and Violet backed out of the doorway so we could leave.

Sunset and Violet followed us as we went to meet with the caravan. The caravan itself was just about ready to go as I met up with Ruby. She was watching over the other six ponies who were going with us. Two of them were attached to a carriage and the other four were loading the carriage. The carriage itself was painted mostly red with white letters spelling out "Ruby's Caravan Company". I walked up to Ruby with Rose close behind.

"Morning, Ruby. Looks like we are about ready to go. So, how is this going to work, we ride or we walk?" I asked her.

She turned to me and looked over both of us. "You two will be on top of the carriage, keep your rifles out and look for trouble, I will be driving the cart, the other four will be on foot today unless things go south."

I was good with this and gave her a nod, as did Rose. Simple and right up my alley all I needed to do was keep an eye out for movement and keep my ammo close. We lent a hoof with finishing the loading of the carriage, the inside of the carriage was almost completely full of goods. What space was left in the carriage was enough space for the four ponies on foot. Which meant me and Rose were stuck on the roof of the carriage. Thankfully at some point somepony had planned for this and built more or less a chest high wall around the top of the carriage. Well chest high for most ponies, being shorter than everypony else it was closer to being a jaw high wall. I was more surprised as to what it was made out of. The whole carriage was covered in clipboards. I guessed that they just wouldn't rot like wood when wet since these things survived the apocalypse untouched. I climbed up first and gave Rose a helping hoof up.

"So Rose what have you been up to since I got you to Dune City?" I asked her as we got settled on the roof. Sunset and Violet had chatted a little with Ruby as we had finished loading the carriage, but, now had headed back to the school building.

"Well after you cleared the school house I helped set up our room, then started doing some jobs around town." She tapped a hoof to her muzzle as she thought. "Then I bought this rifle and started hunting geckos for the restaurants."

"Well good to hear you did something productive, and thank you for setting up my room." I gave her a kiss on the cheek again.

"Our room actually, and you are welcome." She gave me a smile.

Our room I mouthed, it was kind of a strange but comforting idea. I kissed her again as the carriage started to move out of Dune City. Dune City was very much home to me now.

"Then keep your eyes open, call out what you see when you see it." I turned and started to scan the area around us as I felt her give my flank a bump and then she laid down and began to keep an eye out on the otherside.

I wasn't really worried about us getting attacked this close to Dune City after having wiped out Thunderlord and his crew. So I lay there keeping my rifle close and just watched as Dune City slowly moved away and we headed out into the dunes. Some how this road had managed to stay uncovered over the years and was rather decent condition. I looked around at the six other ponies with us, all but two were earth ponies and they all had battle saddles. I seriously doubted us having issue with any pony with the weapons they were carrying. It would take a Steel Ranger or Cazador to really threaten us.

After four hours of travel we came to a stop, Ruby called for a break for those walking and pulling to relax and have lunch. Rose and myself had eaten in shifts earlier and now we were the only ones on watch. I thanked Celestia for the weather holding, it was as nice of a day as you got in the wasteland. While the others rested and ate I asked Ruby about her company. I was curious about its history and her.

“So Ruby, mind telling me the story of your caravan?” I asked while I kept scanning the horizon for any threats.

“Well it was my fathers caravan, we run from Tenpony clear out to Saint Clover. Back in his day we would go from Tenpony to a few settlements in the Fillydelphia ruins then take a old road to Dodge City. Since Red Eye started his work in Fillydelphia we had to take a different route. So now we go from Saint Clover to Dune City, then Oakmare off to Colt. From Colt we go to Old Appleloosa and take the train to New Appleloosa. After that it is a straight shot to Tenpony then we turn around and go back the way we came. Generally it takes a full three weeks to go from Saint Clover to Tenpony.”

“So it takes you six weeks to run the whole thing then?” That was a long trip I thought, “Do you have any other routes besides the Saint Clover to Tenpony route?”

“Well we have a second caravan that goes from Colt with us up to Tenpony then take the Manhattan-Hoofington highway and hit Megamart.”

Well there was a nice way to take a trip to Hoofington if I ever needed to get out there.

“So what is Hoofington like? Blasted like Seamane?” I asked down.

“Well there are a lot of hazards, your typical raiders and radiation. Also taint is heavy in that place, some folks think they might have made it there. The nastiest thing out there is enervation, it is some sort of field that turns your healing potions into poison and keeps you from healing while in them. Hell I have seen preserved corpses in enervation fields that have been there for who knows how long. Worst part, no way to tell where these fields are, completely undetectable besides watching your healing potions change colors. Thankfully nopony seems to have found enervation outside of the hoof.”

I looked down at her in horror, there existed a practically impossible to detect field of death that was in patches around a city still full of ponies. I couldn't understand why anypony would stay there.

“I know that look, yeah tons of ponies live in the hoof, you got the Collegiate, bunch of smart ponies; the Society, a bunch of stuck up rich ponies; the Gatherers, bunch of merchants, prefer the ones in Flank and Megamart over Paradise; the Steel Rangers who are at odds with

the Reapers who are a gang of the most bad ass ponys in the hoof. There are smaller gangs, but, they are more or less all tied to the Reapers.”

“So there is another town that the Gatherers run in the hoof?”

“Yeah, that would be Paradise, place is a slave trading hub. Run by this mare by the name of Usury, we stay far away from her and her friends.” Ruby said with a dismissive wave of her hoof.

“So I guess one of the things you don't trade are slaves then, glad to hear that.” Ruby gave me a nod at this, “Must be frustrating to have to go through Oakmare, Colt, and Old Appleloosa then.”

“You get used to it. I know it sounds terrible, but, there are just certain things you have to get used to in the wasteland if you want to live for long. Part of why we go to Flank in Hoofington, place is nothing but a drug and sex den, while the drugs hurt people in the long run it gives them a nice escape. Hay, we look forward to visiting flank when we do the run out there, it and Tenpony are some of the few places left to look forward to in the world.” She looked up at me and gave a shrug.

“So do you guys have headquarters or some sort of hub for the caravan?” I looked out west, still nothing moving. I turned my gaze to the MASEBS tower to the north where I had been a few days ago.

“Yep, up in Colt we have our hub, it is half warehouse and half sleeping quarters for us. Mostly people drop stuff off they want shipped somewhere or sell off to us. My oldest brother runs the place now that Dad retired to Saint Clover. My youngest sister makes the run to Hoofington most of the time, she knows it better than I do.”

“Who is your dad? Might have run into him since I'm from Saint Clover.” Everything to the north was still as well.

“Well do you know a somepony who goes by Shorthorn? That is him, for some reason he decided to change his name when he moved to Saint Clover. He still sells stuff, but, he doesn't go out.”

Shorthorn was her father?

“What is his actual name then?” I was curious.

“Ruby Sand, caravan is named after him after all.” She grinned up at me.

“Of course it is” I rolled my eyes and swept my view south, still nothing of note. “Just

before all this started I paid him a visit myself, got a lot of my stuff from him.” I looked back down at Ruby, “he is quite the sales pony.”

“I think he would be happy to hear that, which reminds me he left me a gift to give to 'that brave pony who was kind to an old merchant'.” Ruby stood up and moved to the carriage and opened it up and started to dig through the cargo.

Rose turned and looked at me with a eyebrow raised, “Kindness eh? Figured you more for generous, that or honesty.” She gave me a wink, I shook thoughts out of my head and gave her a glare, she just stuck out her tongue at me as I turned my attention back to Ruby.

“Ah here we are a limited edition Ministry Mare Statuette, lets see it is of Fluttershy.” She tossed something up at me, “catch!”

I reached out with my magic and caught the delicate looking statuette, as my magic wrapped around it I felt a surge of magic flow into me from the statuette. My first reaction was to try to toss it away as the surge hit me, but, then I felt pleasant, happier. I read the words on the base of the statuette, as I floated it closer. The inscription on the base of it read “Be Pleasant” I smiled.

“I will have to thank your father for this, when I go back to Saint Clover.” I felt a pang of guilt as I realized that might be a long time from now due to the warrant for me. “Though I may have to send a gift instead thanks to not being allowed back for a while.”

I felt a hoof rest on my shoulder I turned to see Rose, she just gave me a sympathetic smile.

“I’ll take your gift to him when we finish in Seamane, is that alright with you, Moonlight?” Rose said to me, I nodded.

“Thank you, Rose.” I gave her a kiss and sat back to take a drink of my canteen, “Looks like I wiped out most of the raiders around here.”

“Yep looks like it. Though, probably when we get closer to Oakmare we will run into a camp or two, nice to not have to worry terribly much. Both since we got two additional ponies on the look out, but, also good information on the strength of raiders in the area.” Ruby stated as she finished a Sparkle Cola, she and the other six did look rather relaxed.

I lay back down and kept searching as they finished taking their break, a light breeze kicked up and the rest of the day was a cool ride. Rose and I kept focused on looking out for trouble, thankfully nothing ever showed up. The guards walking with us started to chat as evening came, we kept going until about six from what my clock said when we stopped and made camp. As we set up I asked if they wanted me to turn on the radio I had. They all looked

up at me, confused by this notion.

“I have a leg mounted radio,” I said as I lifted my left foreleg to show off my pipbuck zero.

I saw a few eyebrows raise at the sight of it.

“Is that one of those pipbucks?” one of the earth ponies asked

“That isn’t a pipbuck, no screen on it, must be something else” one of the unicorns replied to him.

“That is right, it isn't a pipbuck, I made this myself, radio, Geiger counter, watch and calendar all built into it.” I gave a smile “basically a half baked pipbuck.”

“Nice, yeah go ahead and turn on DJ Pon3, would be nice to have something to listen to.” Ruby called up to me, I clicked the radio on and turned up the volume for them then took it off and set it inside the carriage so they could hear it clearer.

“Hey Rose does the scope on your rifle have night vision?” I said as I turned to her while checking over my own rifle.

“Yep, yours not working?” She turned to me with a eyebrow up.

“No, figuring we should sleep in shifts so we can both get enough sleep as well as have someone up keeping an eye out.” I finished checking over my rifle, it was still in good condition and the barrel didn't need any cleaning.

“Who gets first shift then? Or do we see who gets worn out first?” Rose gave my cheek a lick.

I coughed and turned away from her blushing. “I was thinking I would take first shift then wake you up a bit past midnight, so you probably should get to sleep soon.”

“Then you go to sleep and I keep guard over your flank?” She giggled and I sighed at her.

“Yes, and you can use my flank as a pillow while you keep an eye out.”

“It is such a good pillow I might fall asleep you know.” She continued to giggle at my blushing.

I just shook my head at her and laid down on my side and rested my rifle on the side of the carriage top. “Then lay your head down and get some sleep for those tired eyes of yours.”

Without any protest she laid down and went to sleep. I noticed down below the crew broke into three groups, two of them sleeping the other one staying awake. I wasn't the only one on watch which was good. I noticed Ruby climb up with my radio and her own rifle.

“You get some sleep as well, I am taking first shift, and put your 'pipbuck' back on. Don't turn on the radio, don't want any noise to drown out anything creeping up on us.” Ruby said to me with a tone of authority. I nodded as I levitated my 'pipbuck' back to me and put it back on my left fore leg.

“Alright, see in the morning I guess. Hope your watch is quiet.” I said as I curled up with Rose, while the night was cold and the breeze had died down she was warm and soft. It didn't take long for me to fall asleep. While the top of the carriage wasn't the most comfortable, it was better than the road or the sand.

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I woke up to a tongue in my mouth, to my credit I opened my eyes and kept calm. Apparently Rose decided the best way to wake me up was to kiss me. To be fair it did wake me up, I tapped her on her chest and she pulled back.

“Just wanted to wake you up in a gentle fashion. But, I need to go back to sleep, my watch is over and I am still tired.” She fought to stifle a yawn and failed as she turned away to cover her mouth with a hoof.

“Alright, well you should be fine sleeping the rest of the night. I will wake you up for breakfast.” I patted her on the shoulder as she laid down beside me. I began looking around to take stock of who was awake. I saw Ruby sleeping at the front of the roof while Rose and I were at the rear.

Rose rested her head against my side as I began my watch. I put in a ear bloom and turned on DJ Pon3 very quietly. The DJ had gone to sleep hours ago I assumed while I listened to a strange track that was being played. It didn't really fit with any of the other music the DJ played, I didn't mind, was nice to hear something different. I looked back towards the tower by Dune City and looked up at it through my scope and looked to see if I could spot the cameras on the tower. I had no luck, at this distance they seemed to be too small to pick out. I then resumed a pattern of sweeping the area around us with my rifle. The night vision scope cutting through the night and illuminating the world around me to my eye only. The hours dragged on as I listened to the music and kept an eye out. Eventually the sky began to lighten as dawn came to the wasteland. Eventually the others started to stir from their sleep.

When Ruby woke up she hopped down and helped the others break down the camp. Once it was bright enough I broke out some food and eat it. I also moved Roses hat over her



eyes so she could sleep more. It wasn't long until we broke camp and started moving again, about half an hour into it Rose finally woke up. The look she gave me when I decided to turn the table on her from last night was priceless. She did thank me for letting her get some more sleep and I gave her some of my food since it was still out. While she ate I kept a vigilant eye out, today we were going at a faster pace and every pony was on board the carriage. I watched as even the tower fell away quickly and I watched as old prewar signs told us how far it was to the next town. Each time there was a turn off for a town we all went on high alert. The ruins generally consisted of twisted metal and spears of wood sticking out of the ground. Many building were burned down, blasted apart, or simply flattened. A lot of them it didn't look like weapons fire that did it which scared me. I really hoped whatever had done this was long gone. Rose looked unsettled by it as well, but, none of the other ponies did. Of course why should they, they had run this road many times before, Rose and myself were the new ones here.

We didn't stop for lunch, instead the two ponies pulling stopped and swapped places with two in the carriage and we kept moving. I started seeing on the signs that Oakmare was about two hundred miles away. With the rate we were going we would be there in two days. The only issue would be everyone who pulled would be tired as hell by the end. I also knew this was not the full speed they could go, if needed they could push themselves, but, I doubted we really wanted to do that. As it neared three in the afternoon I saw movement far to the south, I pointed it out to Rose and Ruby. Both turned their sights and spotted it too. While they did that I checked as far ahead as I could as well as to the north and east of us. I didn't spot anymore of them thankfully, so all of the raiders were to the south. Ruby called to halt and the pullers took a break and swapped out for the two unicorns. The three of us kept an eye on the raiders, as we did we watched a fight break out and they started shooting one another. That is when I noticed one side wasn't killing, they were capturing. I pointed out to Ruby and she agreed, slavers were hitting a raider group. After a ten minute break we started up again as I kept an eye on the slavers and raiders to our south. After an hour I couldn't see them anymore. I breathed a sigh of relief, we avoided those raiders thanks to the slavers. I think this was one of the few times I could ever be thankful to slavers.

Things went smoothly for the next hour, then things went downhill fast. Hills surrounded us as we drove through a ruined city, the unicorns driving us poured on the speed. That is when the gunshots started. The two unicorns threw up shields around us as we kept going I laid down my rifle and told Rose to do the same as I focused on wrapping the whole carriage in a levitation field I saw her horn briefly light up and her magic work with mine to lighten the carriage as much as we could. It was grueling, and harder than slowing myself from falling to lighten the carriage as much as I could. I had to squeeze my eyes shut as I focused, I felt a headache start to come over me as I felt wood splinter around me and heard the battle saddles below us open up. I gritted my teeth as I felt a bullet penetrate my armor and lodge in to my shoulder. I prayed to Celestia that we would be out of here soon. I felt the carriage slow a bit as I hear Rose open up with her rifle.

I opened my eyes and saw we were just about out of the town, behind us there were a

few plumes of smoke where explosives of some sort went off. I looked forward and saw the two unicorns who had been pulling the cart sitting with Ruby and firing as fast as they could. That is when I noticed I was pulling the cart with my magic. I kept my magic going as we moved out of the town. I shouted for someone to get ready to pull the cart as my magic was close to failing. I heard the doors below me swing open.

“Keep the harnesses level and we will start pulling!” came a shout from below me, I did as they said as I saw two bucks rush up and jump into the harnesses and begin to pull at full speed. I let my magic slowly fade away. I looked at my shoulder and wrapped my magic around the wound and pulled, I felt the pieces of the bullet start to move and slide out of me. I bit back tears as I then cleaned the wound and wrapped it in magical bandages. I turned to Rose and saw she was bleeding from several spots and began to tend to her. Most wounds were from the splintering wood and grazing shots. To her merit she shrugged it off pretty well and kept firing until the town was a mile away. No pursuit came for us, but, we would be on high alert for the watches tonight.

“Well that was exciting!” I heard Ruby shout back to us, “got to hand it to you Moonlight, your magic made it a lot easier to get through there. Going to have to hire some mercenaries to go back there and clear it out.”

“I was wondering why suddenly the cart got heavier and I got shot!” I called up to Ruby and the two unicorns with her. Both of them looked rather hurt so I moved my way up to them. “Here, you two climb back here and I will patch you up.”

The two climbed back after Ruby told them to. As they climbed back I got a better look at them, they both had a lot of cuts on their undersides. I had both of them lay down on their backs and got to work on cleaning the wounds and making certain to remove splinters or shrapnel in them before giving them both a healing potion. I was glad for Rhythms spell as it let me check for any further wounds and found extensive bruising, but, nothing more. They both thanked me before moving up to sit with Ruby again. Then Ruby herself climbed back and took off her barding.

“Patch me up, those bastards may have had horrible aim but few still hit me.” Ruby said to me with a decidedly pissed look on her face. I looked her over, more than a few had hit her.

I told the pullers to slow down so I could work on Ruby. As I worked on her she started to get worse. I found several bullets had gone deep and nicked some internal organs. I knew I was on a time limit now. I focused on pulling out every foreign object in her, much to her pain, I gave her a Med-X to ease the pain. When I was done she was still bleeding externally but after two healing potions her insides were no longer messed up and she started to recover. I took my medical bandaging and covered the most severe wounds then put my horn to the smallest ones and focused on doing what healing potions did. I focused for several minutes before I gave up. I had given myself a nasty headache and had not figured out healing magic. Still though I had

healed some of the smaller injuries with my magic, and she didn't scream so it was a improvement.

"I healed you as best as I can at this time Ruby, Goddesses if I wasn't here you would be dead." I said with a sigh as I laid down next to Rose, exhausted from the heavy use of magic and the stress of working to save Ruby's life.

"Well I am glad you were here then, listen I will make certain you and Rose are covered when we get to Oakmare. You saved my life, so you are now a good friend of the company's." She extended a hoof to me, this time I properly shook it.

"A lot easier to shake hooves when I am not drunk." I smiled at her. "I also need to ask those two about that shield spell of theirs tonight."

"Not theirs, the three of us know it and work together to amplify it, why do you want to learn it?" she raised an eyebrow at me.

"Well it was pretty useful back there, I would say having another one or two ponies able to do it would be worth it." I stated as I fought back exhaustion.

"Alright, when we break for the night you and Rose come down with us and we will try to teach you it. Don't blow all of your energy on it though. Speaking of which you look very tired," at that she produced a bottle of sparkle cola, "drink this, should help keep you alert until we make camp."

I nodded as she got back to the drivers seat and then I drank the sparkle cola. It was good, warm, flat, but, good. I turned my head to look at Rose, she seemed to have relaxed as well. I rested my head on her side as I drank.

"You alright Rose?" I asked as I leaned against her, I could hear her heart still racing.

"That was the first time I shot a pony. I had seen others get killed in front of me, but, pulling the trigger myself, being the one to willingly take another life." I put a leg around her shoulder, I winced at my own wound in my shoulder, she took a swig of the cola.

"It isn't easy Rose, and it shouldn't be easy. If it was we would be just like those raiders." I confided to her, even now I didn't like the fact that it felt like killing had become easy to me.

She nodded, "raiders are nothing but ponies who lost themselves to the wasteland, who have given up any notion of virtues."

I looked at her, she knew raiders far better than I did, to hear her speak of virtues. Virtues seemed such a strange concept in the wasteland. I gave Rose a kiss and hugged her a

bit tighter.

“We just try to do better.” I suggested, after all, when killing became easy, the only thing that separated villain from hero was why you killed, not just who or what.

“Better than what? Everypony else?” She raised an eyebrow.

“We try to fight the good fight, to make the world a better place. We fight falling to the wasteland. Pick ourselves up after every fight, after every horrible thing and keep fighting. Like DJ Pon3 says heroes do.” I answered, feeling it was the best answer I could find within myself.

The look in her eyes could have melted a glacier. She hugged me back as we sat on top of the carriage. We began to hum together, no particular tune, just a tune together. As we sat together I felt my headache lessen. I made a comment to myself about the power of friendship and love as I sat with Rose and I sang a Sapphire Shores song with her. We got a look from Ruby as we sat up there and sang, then I heard the others start to sing with us. With all of us singing I felt better almost as if I hadn't been shot. We continued singing for another hour before we stopped to make camp. When we did Rose and I climbed down and helped set up the camp. I asked for everyone else to let me look them over, beyond a few bruises from where bullets had gotten stopped by their barding everypony was fine. Finally after everypony had eaten Ruby began to instruct Rose and myself in the shield spell. I wasn't able to do it, but, Rose was able to put up a weak shield. I applauded her, it was incredible to see her pick up the spell that quickly. I tried a few more times but I was too tired and my magic was spent.

“Moonlight, you climb up top and get some sleep, you will take last watch again. You need to rest.” Ruby instructed me, I could tell it was much more a command than a friendly suggestion. I didn't need to be told twice and climbed up and immediately went to sleep.

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When I woke up it was dark, wait, no that was my helmet covering my face. I slid the helmet back into place and tightened the chin strap. I felt a jolt as a wheel of the carriage hit a hole in the road. I was suddenly aware of the air rushing against me as I rolled over and grabbed my rifle. It was still dark out and Rose had been laying next to me. Something felt off about the whole situation, why were both of us asleep while we were moving. Hay, why were we going at night. There was also the problem of Rose was second watch and should have been awake. I frowned as I crept forward to see who was driving the carriage, and for that matter who was pulling. I was shocked to see that it was no pony I knew. From the way they looked they were raiders or bandits. From the fact I hadn't been woken up by the apparent theft of the carriage meant they had somehow managed to sneak it out without a shot being fired. There was no driver just the two pulling the carriage, I was half tempted to shoot them and turn around and pull the cart back to Ruby. A little voice in my head told me to ask them first why they stole the carriage. This was stupid, but, it was the right thing to do I supposed. I took in a

breath and braced myself in case we came to a sudden stop.

“Hey you two pulling, where are you going? I don't recognize you as any of the others that are part of the caravan.” I called out to the two pullers. As I suspected we came to a sudden halt. My bracing only helped until Rose smacked into my legs and shoved me over the edge into the drivers seat head first.

“Who said that,” said the the one on the right as he turned to look up at me. At least being upside down made me look a whole hell of a lot less threatening.

“Where the heck did you come from girl!” shouted the other, the two thieves gave each other a nervous glance then turned their focus back on me.

I struggled upright as blood rushed to my head as they looked at me, I just had about got upright when I fell to the ground. I picked myself up and looked at the two, both where struggling to keep from laughing. Good, don't have to worry about them being so frightened.

“You forgot to check the top” I replied flatly. “Now then who are you and why are you taking this carriage?”

They lost whatever humours thoughts were in their heads and started to look worried.

“Listen, just tell me what is going on and depending on what you say you may just have a long walk ahead of you.” I stared at them as I heard a quiet groan above me. “Or a shallow grave to spend the night in.”

“Well you see some of our friends got captured by raiders in that town you blew through. They offered us that if we gave them this carriage we would get our friends back.” One of them answered. I stared at them. Beads of sweat started to form on their brows.

“Either you are exceedingly foolish to believe a raider, or you are lying.” As I said this I saw the two look up as Rose came over the lip levitating both of our rifles aimed right at them. “Now then boys get out of those harnesses and start running.” I gave a big grin, and that did it, they quickly got out of the harnesses and started running.

“You actually want them to get away Moonlight?” called Rose down to me a hint of confusion in her tired voice.

“Yep, let them run, they deserve a second chance. Hopefully they will wise up before they get killed or enslaved.” I commented as I started to examine the carriage and harnesses.

“You didn't give any of the raiders that were holding me captive a second chance.” Rose retorted.

“Yeah, why would I, they were horrible cannibalistic monsters. And they were in the middle of killing each other. I just sped up the process. They also were different, they seemed to be not bad ponies, more just misguided. I hope they see the light.” I sighed, knowing the wasteland though, they would just die or get worse.

“You're right you know. So how are we going to get back to Ruby and the rest?” Rose had set one of the rifles back on the roof and took the drivers seat.

“Well was figuring I would pull and turn us around then keep going until sunrise or we find them. I would wager that going the opposite way that we were going would take us closer to them.” I said as I put on the pull harness, then removed the extra harness and connected myself to its attachment point. I started to pull and found out exactly how heavy the carriage was, in short, yeah it was really heavy. Then I felt a snap of the reins and gave a yelp.

“Giddy up pony!” shouted Rose, I glared up at her, then she snapped the reins again and I started to run.

“Why do they even have reins on this thing!” I shouted and was greeted with another snap of the reins.

“So the driver can guide when the pullers can't spare the energy to see where they are going. Now pull faster!” Rose commanded as she snapped the reins again, I gave out a whimper as I followed the command.

It didn't take long to turn around and get headed back the way we came. I hadn't gotten a chance to check the time but I saw the clouds start to lighten as day came. Sweet Celestia help me! When would we get back because every time I slowed down Rose would snap the reins again, and she knew exactly how to do it so they hit my flanks and got me running hard again. By the time Rose spotted the rest of the group I was exhausted from pulling the carriage, thankfully Rose had lightened up with the whipping seeing that there was only so far she could push me before I would pass out. To my credit I got much further than I expected myself to and after another ten minutes of pulling we had met back up with Ruby.

“Well look at that, you got her back with no damage, nice job you two.” Ruby was smiling and looked relieved. I unbuckled the harness and flopped on the road, my body hurt from the strain.

“She let the thieves go, they gave up the carriage pretty easily, tried to feed us some bull about raiders had their friends and they told them to get the carriage to pay for them.” Rose chuckled, “problem for them was they were horrible liars, and they were dressed like raiders.”

“Well hopefully it won't come back to bite us in the ass. Still though, don't know how they

managed to put us all to sleep.” Ruby had a concerned look on her face, and I did to now. They had managed to put everyone to sleep to steal the carriage. Neither of them were unicorns, they were earth ponies.

I stretched a bit, which hurt, “more worried by how they did that and neither of them were unicorns.”

Ruby eyed me, “you certain about that, that they didn't just have really short horns hidden in their mane?”

“Their hair was in spikes, I think we would have seen it, plus they didn't have any weapons with them.” Rose answered for me.

The two unicorns came up to me and helped me up to my feet then wrapped me in a field of levitation and set me on the roof of the carriage. I put my head on the edge and looked down at the others. Ruby was checking the carriage and the cargo, as were the others. Rose keep an eye out while I lay there. Seriously it bugged me that they apparently had some sort of sleep spell that they could cast on us, but, had no unicorns. I thought back to some old books that I had read on magic. Earth ponies supposedly had some sort of innate magic that affected what they built, making it harder and last longer. Pegasi had flight and ability to interact with clouds like I would with boxes. Unicorns had magic spells. Zebras had talismans and alchemy. Wait, could they have used some sort of Zebra magic? That was a wild idea, I tried to stifle my giggling at the absurd thought.

“What is it Moonlight?” Rose asked me taking a look at me.

“What if they had access to Zebra magics? I mean seriously I doubt it and yet, my mind it stuck with that is the only option.” I was still slightly giggling, and oh was I sore.

“Uh... Moonlight, I think you are being a bit silly, get some sleep girl.” Rose shook her head.

I curled up below the walls and kept my rifle close. I didn't feel sleepy, but, I was tired. I also was distinctly very hungry. I pulled out some food and drink and offered a bit to Rose as she joined me on the top of the carriage. I figured she probably hadn't eaten while she drove me.

“Thanks Moonlight, but, I got my own, though thank you for reminding me to eat.” She smiled at me, goddesses I loved that smile. “Just let us take care of things today, you pushed yourself enough for now.”

I nodded, turned to my food and drink, then pulled out a book and began to read. I popped in a ear bloom and listened to DJ Pon3 as I studied a borrowed medical book. It was

really cargo of the caravans, but, I had the caps to pay for it if anything happened to it. Plus books don't vanish after use like healing potions, so I didn't have to worry about reading the book damaging it. It wasn't long until we were on our way back to Oakmare. Today was the final day of travel to Oakmare, since we were closer to civilization there should be less threats. I also trusted Rose's eyes to keep a look out while I rested. Like yesterday we went fast, everyone who wasn't pulling was in or on the carriage.

\* \* \*

It was just a bit after noon, we had planned to stop for lunch. Instead another bullet zinged past my head. I turned off the radio and put away the ear bloom as I pulled my rifle to me.

"We got raiders coming from the south!" shouted Rose just before she started to fire, a moment later I heard the battle saddles of the ponies in the carriage open up as well.

I kicked myself off the wall next to me and slide up next to Rose and popped up. I immediately ducked down and pulled Rose with me as a rocket flew over us. Celestia please let their aim be as bad as other raiders with that rocket launcher! I popped up and started looking for the pony with the rocket launcher. I didn't see who had it, but, I did see a lot of raiders so I started popping shots off at the ones with the nastier looking weapons. Whoever these raiders were they had a lot of battle saddles and a lot of heavy weapons. Thankfully since we were on the move any injury that stopped them was sufficient to make us safer from the raiders. This time Rose pulled me down as another rocket flew over, a explosion went off behind us where the carriage had been. Make that two rocket launchers, both with bad aim. Thank Celestia for the small things in life. Though one was just aiming high, the other wasn't aiming ahead to make up for our movement. That wouldn't last though, eventually they would get lucky or figure it out.

"Rose we have to take out those ponies with rockets, I don't care how tough clipboards are the blast alone will probably knock us over!" I yelled over the sounds of battle, Rose nodded.

"Alright then on three!" Rose shouted back to me, I nodded, "One! Two! Three!"

We both rose as one and started firing. Anypony that got close to the carriage the ponies in the carriage got shredded. Unfortunately from the sounds of it we had taken a casualty or two already. So far the pullers were find thanks to the mint green shield around them and Ruby. I counted a dozen ponies rushing towards us, the closest of them had nothing but knives and other simple mouth held weapons. I looked further out, there was a group of raiders pulling a cart. I felt sharp pains break out against my neck and right side of my face as a bullet shattered against the clipboards below us. I wiped the blood from my goggles and checked the wound, it was just a set of scrapes, it could wait. I removed the magazine in my rifle and popped in a magazine of hollow point rounds. I pulled back up in time to see one rocket fall short and land among a few raiders, the ground exploded and so did they. The rest of the raiders didn't care



about their fallen comrades and a few even ran over the remains of their fallen. I pulled the scope up to my left eye and took aim for the pullers of the cart.

“Rose aim for the cart's pullers, seems to be where the rockets are coming from!” I hollered as a rocket streaked over us, its trail coming from the cart that I was looking at. The white smoke from it blocking my view for a moment as I heard the rocket itself explode the ground behind us.

I pulled the trigger as I aimed a bit ahead and above the head of one of the pullers. It didn't hit them but, it did hit the driver in the chest. It didn't kill him, but, he did curl up where he was holding his side. I adjusted my aim a bit ahead and fired again. This time I didn't get to see where the round went as Rose pushed me down and another rocket flew over our heads. This time followed with a lot of gunfire. Then there was a explosion and a whoop from Ruby.

“Hell of a shot Moonlight, looks like you set off the rest of their rockets!” Ruby shouted back to me.

Well that was one major threat down. I pulled out the SMG's from Rose's saddlebags and handed my pistol to Rose.

“Lets take care of the ones up close now that the rockets are down,” I racked the slide on both SMG's and stood up, not even looking to aim I pulled down the triggers on both SMG's as soon as they were over the edge.

As I rose I began to sweep the SMG's at groups of raiders. The number of ponies had thankfully started to thin out, but, there were still a dozen or so left taking pot shots at us while running up to the carriage. I heard the battle saddles below us open back up as we suppressed the ponies coming in. Click, click. I reloaded both SMG's and continued to pour rounds into the now half dozen ponies rushing up at us. I felt a hard hit to my head and I fell back I managed to keep a hold of the SMG's as everything started to spin and ring. Rose ducked down as soon as I stopped firing and crawled over to me. She mouthed something and took my helmet off, it looked like she sighed in relief. That is when a metal apple landed on my stomach.

“Fuck! Grenade!” I tried to yell, but, still nothing but ringing in my ears as I grabbed it with my hooves and tossed it as hard as I could.

It cleared the lip of the carriage and exploded. While I had managed not to get us killed the carriage was now wobbling back and forth wildly. I grabbed my helmet and put it back on, as I did, I noticed that part of it fit more tight on the left side of my head. I grabbed my rifle and slide the SMG's back into my saddlebags. I stood up and looked for what remained of the raiders. The grenade had taken down most of the ones close to us, I saw that the grenade had thankfully mostly just pelted the armored side of the carriage. I smiled, we had killed enough that they were pulling away and Ruby had managed to get the carriage to stop swerving. I felt a

round hit me in the chest but it fail to penetrate. That is when I saw the second cart, I took aim, there were four ponies with rifles aimed at us sitting in it while being pulled by some heavily armored ponies. I started taking shots as I could, now it was a sniper battle, we had the advantage of a smoother ride. But, the ponies below me were at risk due to they didn't have the cover I did on top of the carriage. I felt two more rounds hit me, both went clean through my shoulders as I bit back tears and started to fire as fast as I could. I got two then I felt another round penetrate my chest I fell back onto the roof my rifle clattering next to me as I tried my best to breath.

"Moonlight!" I turned to see Rose moving again, she was in okay condition from the looks of it.

"There are two snipers left in a cart on the hill, aim ahead of them, drop them before they get the ponies below us!" I tried to give my best commanding voice, my wounds could wait till we didn't have sniper ponies threatening all of us. She shook her head.

"I will put up a shield, you shoot." she ordered, now laying next to me handing me her rifle. I nodded.

Her horn lit up with a orange light and a bubble of magical energy faded into existence around us, I could see the strain in her face. I pushed myself back up and coughed, I used the mouth grip on the rifle and aimed down at the two remaining sniper ponies. I pulled the trigger and watched in amazement as my round went through the shield and struck the pony in the head I was aiming at. I quickly fired again and the fourth one stumbled and fell out of the cart, cartwheeling behind it before landing in a bloody heap. The pullers kept going not knowing their passengers were gone, I loaded armor piercing rounds. I should take them out too, they would keep running with us until we had to stop or they died. Wasn't it the right thing to do, they hadn't shot at us, or moved closer. I sighed and set the rifle down, I hugged Rose.

"Okay they are done Rose you can drop the shield." I felt her relax in my grasp as her horn dimming and the shield around us fading. "You alright Rose, any injuries?"

She shook her head and drew back, I saw blood on her coat.

"You look terrible, lay down I will patch you up. When we stop you can properly patch yourself up." I felt her start to push me down, I wheezed, and rolled slightly onto the side that hurt less.

"Who is still alive back there?" I heard Ruby call to us I noticed the minty shield had dissipated from around them.

"The two of us are," called back Rose, I heard voices from below us call back to Ruby as well.

“Alright, patch up what you can, we will stop in an hour.” Ruby called back to us then turned towards the pullers, “SPUR ROCK pour on the speed, break in an hour!”

Rose focused on stopping the bleeding, I held a hoof up to stop her. Then I forced myself upright and used the examination spell Rhythm had taught me, I didn't have anything still in me so I dug out a healing potion and downed it.

“Rose help me up so I can keep watch from where the raiders were coming from, you focus on everywhere else.” She nodded and helped me up.

The two ponies I spared had moved off, guess the lack of firing or orders clued them in that their passengers were dead. I was amazed we had made it through the attack once again thanks to their poor accuracy. I was also glad that the heavy armored ponies either didn't want to try coming close, or weren't agile enough for attacking the carriage outright.

I relaxed and set my rifle down next to me, this traveling was exhausting. I took off my helmet to check it, it had a hell of a dent where a bullet had hit and lodged in the helmet. I felt a pang of sorrow seeing it had completely destroyed one of the butterflies. I hoped somepony could fix it in Oakmare, but, the helmet did it's job in saving my life. I kept an eye to the north and there was still nothing... And there are ponies below me that need help now. I leaned out over the edge of the roof of the carriage.

“Hey how bad are you guys down there?” I called down to the cabin.

“We got it mostly handled, we should be fine until we stop,” called up one of the earth ponies I recognized his voice from before.

“Alright, just let me know if any pony needs help or has a sudden turn for the worst.” I called back down to them.

Just a bit longer and I could get to helping them, it was going to be a long wait knowing they are hurt and I had the knowledge and skill to help them. It didn't help that we had to keep watch just in case the raiders came back. But, everypony seemed to be in high spirits about the whole thing so not that bad I guessed. I checked over my barding noticing the many new holes and tears in it. Whatever those ponies had been firing at us packed a punch. I picked my rifle back up and resumed my watch.

\* \* \*

When we stopped I almost leaped off the top of the carriage. Instead Rose caught me and levitated me the rest of the way to the ground so I wouldn't kill myself with further injury. I began helping ponies out of the carriage. They were a bit chewed up, and there was a lot of

medical bandages. I had all of them lay down next to the carriage as Rose climbed down.

“Rose I need you to go over each of them and figure out what injuries they have and check their vitals, I will work on each one unless you think one of them needs it more than the others.” I said to her already casting my examination spell on the first pony.

He had some deep cuts and a few rounds stuck inside of him, nothing critical. I used my telekinesis to pull out all the foreign objects in his wounds the same way they came in, gave him a med-x as well as a healing potion and moved to the next one. All of them seemed to have more or less only scrapes and shrapnel from shattered rounds in them where their barding didn't cover. This didn't make my task any less time consuming though as I still had to be careful with checking over every part of them and slowly pulling material out of them so they could use a healing potion. Ruby and the twin unicorns were fine but tired, as were the pullers. Then I noticed we had a lack of ponies in shape to pull. I looked at Ruby and I think she knew it too. When I finished I walked up to Ruby, we needed a plan to get moving soon.

“Ruby any ideas?” I said as she turned towards me.

“On the raiders or getting moving.” She replied, why would she have ideas about the raiders, raiders were raiders right? It didn't matter, getting to the safety of Oakmare mattered now.

“On getting moving, everypony outside of the shield got pretty torn up, and everyone in it is exhausted.” I really hoped she had a better idea than sit here until we healed up.

“Well you seem in good enough condition, give you some buck and I know you will be able to pull it, you pulled it on your own this morning. Maybe some Dash too to put some distance from here quickly as well.” She had a grin on her face, one that made me not so comfortable being on the receiving end of.

“And when everyone piles on top of the carriage and in it while Rose whips me to keep going fast?” I said, and then immediately regretted it as my face started to burn.

“Sounds like you just volunteered, don't worry I pay my debts.” she chuckled as she gave me a bump on the shoulder with her hoof.

I sighed, “alright, well how long until we are at Oakmare then?” If I remembered what Buck was I would need a fair bit of it in order to get us there. While it stays in your system for quite a while unlike Dash it still had its limits. Hay, it also had some rather nasty side effects just like any drug.

“Well we are about four hours out so two doses should do you, also should kill you or get you addicted I would think.” She frowned for a moment, “you don't have a family history of

addiction right?”

I raised a hoof to my chin. “I... I don't know, but, two doses should be safe, just going to have to have Rose levitate the second one out to me if we don't want or can't stop.”

“Alright then, it is a plan, I will inform the others.” She began to turn to the rest of the caravan, “By the way, are they safe to move yet?”

“They should just be a bit sore, beyond that they got med-x in them and a healing potion doing its work, so they should be fine to go when you are.” And we probably should go as soon as possible.

“Then get in the harness I will inform them.” She walked towards everypony else as I fashioned my helmet back in place.

I heard her inform the others and saw Rose start to help the others into the carriage, I was going to have to figure a way to give them more protection in there for the trip to Colt. Maybe doors or slides they could manipulate from inside with their mouths or hooves. I set up the harnesses like this morning and got nice and secure, I gave a test pull once Rose was in her seat to double check it wouldn't fail. Had to admit the carriage and it's harnesses were very finely crafted to have held up this long so well. Ruby walked up to me and handed me a bottle simply labeled in ink on a bit of tape as “Buck”.

“I am glad to have you with us Moonlight, to be honest thought you would be just a pain in the ass like passengers from Tenpony and the Society used to be when we would take them.” She gave a warm smile, “alright we better get going before your marefriend gets the idea to whip you.”

I bit into a tablet of Buck and chewed it, I put the rest of the container in my saddlebag. The main boost of Buck lasted minutes, so I had to keep them close. I swallowed and felt the drug kick in, I felt much tougher and much stronger. I took a step and was surprised at how little the carriage held me back. I looked back to see I was still attached, it just felt like nothing. Then Rose snapped the reins against my flank, I could make out the grin on her face. I reared up then started to pull, I didn't need to use all my strength, I was also worried if I pulled too hard too fast I would break something. Not me though, I was tough, and nothing could stop me right now. It didn't take long for me to reach full speed, and I kept at it, really the hard part was getting up to speed, keeping it going was simple. I just had to keep my feet going. Hay, I was going to try just using my magic to lighten the load to keep up this pace when the Buck started to wear off.

It didn't take long for it to start to wear off, but, even then the amount of ground we covered was spectacular. As the buck wore off I wrapped my levitation magic around the carriage and lightened it. With that I was able to pull at the same speed with no extra effort. Magic, rocks, I thought to myself while grinning. And due to how fast I was going Rose wasn't

using the reins other than to guide me around bad patches of the road. I did unfortunately have to take another tablet of buck after half an hour. It was not easy work to pull the carriage all loaded up at a fast pace without it. I kept taking the tablets every few minutes when I started to slow down more than I was comfortable with. With me pulling in my drug fueled strength we were making great time, if I hadn't know the problems with the coming withdrawal and addiction problems if I took it too much I would wonder why they didn't just use buck all the time. As it was I was getting close to the point where I needed to stop for my own safety. So it was time to spend my magic on lightening the carriage the rest of the way.

After three hours we got to Oakmare, and I couldn't feel my legs or my horn. When we arrived Ruby had hopped down and intercepted the guards showing them some sort of pass. With that a old skywagon was moved out of the road and we were let into Oakmare. Ruby guided me to old parking lot and untied me. As soon as the harness was off I laid down. Which was a mistake as we needed to go walk somewhere else next to take care of lodgings and passes. Thankfully Rose was up for the task of carrying me, we did have to leave my saddlebags behind though because there was no way she could carry me and all my stuff on her back.

As Rose carried me I got a better look at the town. A wall had been erected around it with old rubble and chain link fence with barbed wire at the top, beyond that the town itself was in pretty decent condition. Apparently when the bombs fell those who were here just walled up and kept going as best they could. And from the looks of it they had done pretty well even with much of their crops and livelihoods being lost. The town itself was mostly based around main street, not unlike Dune City. But, it was bigger, more of the buildings further from main street were in good condition and looked like they had ponies still living in them. They also had converted a parking lot into a slave pin for holding slavers 'wares' while in town. I said nothing about it, nor did Rose. It would be more trouble than it was worth to try to take it out. The next two things I saw was a church to Luna and Celestia with its stained glass windows still intact. I really wanted to go in there when my legs worked again. Last was a bar, which had a lot of ponies going in and out of. The sign for it was a mare whose features made of neon lights, and she was wearing some rather scandalous clothing on the board behind it. The name of the bar was Love Petal, or at least it was now that someone painted over the original name.

All of us, besides the unicorn twins who stayed with the carriage, followed Ruby. We entered and loud bass heavy music greeted us, as well as many dancing ponies off to one side of the building. The rest of the bar was more like a restaurant with booths and there was a very long bar table. I really wasn't certain why we were here unless Ruby was wanting to give us a good time for the trouble of the trip. Ruby walked to a staircase in the back behind the bar, the rest of us waited for her down at the corner of the bar. I watched as mares danced on a stage around metal poles. The way they moved around the poles was... entrancing. I noticed Rose was also staring when I finally broke my attention away from them. I poked her nose with my hoof, and she blushed and turned away from me.

I whispered into her ear, "you can practice when we get some time alone, I wouldn't mind watching." I nibbled on her ear softly and smiled as her face was completely red from her blushing.

"You are going to pay for this you know that Moonlight," she hissed.

"Just paying you back for earlier today with all that whipping." I giggled as I saw Ruby come down the stairs with a few papers in tow.

The papers were a notice of protection from slavers. With them we would be illegal targets for slavers who wanted to keep their slaving license. It also informed me that you apparently had to have a license to enslave, and from the sound of it they were not cheap. And if you didn't have one or didn't have a notice of protection you were free game. I guess that is how slavers don't just slave each other and sell their 'friends' off to each other. Rose put both of ours in her saddle bag, once we had those we stopped by the carriage which was moved to a fenced lot with guards. I liked that this place had so much order, it was comforting after the raider attacks.

I gave Rose a weak hug as Ruby lead us to what would be our accommodations for the night. A simple room with a mattress for me and Rose, the rest were across the narrow hall in a common room. I thanked Ruby for the privacy, then she told me that she had taken the money for our room from my bag of bottle caps. I just glared at her and she grinned. So much for paying your debts. With that Rose set me on our mattress and unpacked the bare essentials. She had kept both of our pistols and knives with us, just in case we had any late night visitors, the rest was just food and water. She also had bundled our caps together for now and stuffed them away at the bottom of her saddlebags.

"Hey Rose, are you alright?" I asked her, she looked fine, but, I wanted to make certain she was holding up.

"Yeah I am, Moonlight. It has just been a long day. Seeing you get hurt so badly, fearing for my life, for our lives. Just a bit tired is all." She smiled as she brought over food and water for me. "Honestly even with how scary it was I am not scared of doing it again."

I nuzzled her before taking a drink of the water.

"Honestly, I would rather not to fight again, not to be shot at again. It is more fun when you are hunting things that can't shoot you back." She confessed as she laid down next to me and started to eat.

"I understand, though... I don't quite feel the same. I kind of enjoy the adventuring, not the whole maybe get blown up by a rocket to the head thing, but, maybe I am just crazy." I gave her a grin as I started to eat.

"I don't think for a second you are crazy, you just take to the wasteland better." She scolded me.

I frowned at her, the only people I considered to taking to the wasteland well where raiders and slavers. They seemed to thrive in the wasteland.

Rose caught me as I was thinking. "You aren't anything like those monsters, they just did what felt good, they didn't do anything for others. They sacrifice others for themselves, you sacrifice yourself for others. You are their opposite, they fuck corpses, you save lives."

I nodded and started to eat, she was right, everything I had seen of raiders was they were just that. Maybe that is what heroes are, ponies who thrive in the wasteland and throw themselves in harms way to help others. A hero is one who is the opposite of the worst the wasteland has to throw at us. They are the best of what remains and fight the wasteland. Societies immune response to the sickness of the wasteland. Then a thought struck me, Rose grew up as a slave to raiders, I wouldn't think she would be quite so perceptive. I swallowed and turned my gaze to her, maybe she was more than she let on.

"Rose, I hate to be quite so blunt, but..." Oh goddesses this was going to be hard to say, think of the words first.

"But, what?" She said raising an eyebrow as she chewed.

"Well, you seem to... well I didn't expect somepony who was a captive of raiders all their life to be quite like you." Well, I could have said it worse, and now I was blushing from my embarrassment of being so inept with words.

"Like me in what way? Willing to be intimate with others after a life of rape? Or maybe you thought I wouldn't be all that smart. Or maybe you thought I would be trying to cook your flesh and eat it!" She said with a laugh, goddesses that laugh was intoxicating. At least she wasn't angry.

I started to laugh with her and she smiled at me, giving me a kiss on the cheek.

"You are kind of right, I shouldn't be so okay all things considered. I don't know how I keep going, maybe I just had gotten used to it all so when you freed me and that life ended I got to begin again." I heard her whisper under her breath, "let it go, and begin again..."

"I think I can relate to you on that at least. I can't imagine what it was like for you for all those years, but, I know how it is to feel like you had a new start. I felt it when I freed everypony. Like I finally found what I should do with myself." I gave her another nuzzle then continued, "and I am glad you are here with me."



“Well, I wasn't going to stay in Dune City when there was a chance to get further away from the remains of that horrible place, not Dune City, the raider camp.” Rose said as I smiled up at her, I really couldn't blame her for wanting to get away from that town.

We ate in a shared quiet, I was still tired from pulling the cart and the withdrawal from the buck. I was worried about how bad taking buck for that long was for my system. Really if I didn't get addicted to it, and so far no signs of that had occurred, I should be fine in a day or two. I hoped. I leaned against Rose more as I felt another wave of exhaustion come over me. I took a glance down at my watch, it was just about eight, wasn't a bad time to go to sleep. I nuzzled Rose some more and went to kiss her when I saw her eyes were closed as she leaned back against me. Make that a good time for both of us to go to sleep. I used what little of my magic was left to close the bottles of water and boxes of food before levitating them away from us onto a table by the window. I slowly rolled to my side away from Rose and brought her head to rest on my chest and closed my eyes. We made it to Oakmare in one piece, kept the caravan going when it would have had to otherwise stop, killed Celestia knows how many raiders, and prevented the outright theft of the carriage with all of its cargo. Yeah today had been a busy day as well as a good day. I pushed my head down into Roses messy short green mane and smiled as I drifted off into sleep.

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Footnote: Level Up!

New Perk Added: Cherchez La Femma: +10% damage to the same sex and unique dialog options with certain characters of the same sex.