

I opened my eyes and lifted my head off of my soft pillow. The sun had just come, and I heard the faintest sounds of birds chirping. I smiled really wide and looked over at the calendar on my bedside table. Today was the day!

With a squeal of delight I threw my covers off of me and scrambled out of bed. I was smart enough to check my mane before bounding out of my room. It was a little messy, but I used my magic to curl it so that it looked nice again.

Since my mane looked nice again, I knew that it was okay for me to go out to see if Mommy and Daddy were awake. I hoped so. Today was a really special day, and I didn't want to miss a moment of it.

I nudged my door open and walked into the kitchen. Mommy was at the stove making toast, and Daddy was reading his newspaper. They must have heard me come in, because they stopped and turned around to smile at me. I smiled back and jumped up on my usual spot on at the table. "Good morning, Mom! Good morning, Dad!"

Dad lifted me into the air with his magic and wrapped me up in a crushing hug. "Hey there, champ. You sleep well?"

I moved my head to get away from the noogie her tried to give me, and playfully poked him in the chest. "Not at first because I'm so excited, but I think I'm okay. I'm really excited for today!" I wrapped my forelegs around my father's waist. "I can't wait for my first day of school!"

Father chuckled and finally succeeded in giving me that noogie, but he didn't do it so hard that my mane was messed up.

Mother came over to us, lifting three sets of plates of toast and glasses of orange juice. I sat back down in my chair, and Mother fondly patted me on the head. "I remember my first day of school. You're going to really love it, Rarity."

I vigorously nodded, and my eyes widened when a wonderful thought struck me. "Maybe I'll get my cutie mark at school! Do you think I will, Mommy?"

Mother smiled down at me and placed a hoof on my shoulder. "I think that my very special daughter will find her very special talent very quickly." Mother pointed to my room where all of my stuff for my outfits were. "I know that you love playing dress-up. Maybe it has something to do with that?"

I nodded and dug into my toast. It was true that I enjoyed putting on fancy clothes and making myself look nice. I even tried to design my own dresses sometimes. Maybe Mother was right about that.

We finished breakfast in no time at all, and Father lifted me onto his back as Mother put the dishes away. "You ready for school now, Rarity?"

I giggled and wrapped my hooves around his neck. "Yes, dad! I'm as ready as a butterfly that just came out of her cocoon!" It wasn't until my parents started laughing that I realized that what I had said was a little silly, but I laughed right along with them.

I jumped off of my father's back, and trotted over to a chair where a fresh, new saddlebag lay. I grabbed the strap in my mouth and put it on. It fit like it was made for me and me alone. Somehow putting on my brand-new saddlebag made everything seem much more real. It was finally time for school!

Father opened the door for us ladies as a true gentlecolt should, and locked up once we were out. I quickly bounded ahead in the direction of the schoolyard; stopping only when I realized that Mother and Father were not beside me. I turned around and saw them speaking to each other in hushed tones. Seeing them like that made my smile fall and my ears flatten. If there was one thing that could make me feel bad about today, it was what they were talking about.

My family didn't have a lot of money. Father told me that he worked as a ditch digger for the Ponyville Sewer Company, so we didn't have much money. Mother also needed to get a job to support us, particularly since I was going to go to school.

They saw me looking at them and they smiled at me again. Father locked the front door to our house and we were off. Of course, they assured me that everything was okay and that I was going to be able to go to school as much as I wanted, but I knew that I was going to come home to an empty house some days. They told me not to worry about it, though.

As we came closer to the school, I saw one of the most wonderful things that I could have ever imagined: dozens of fillies and colts my age were on the playground. They were laughing and playing in the schoolyard without a care in the world. I never really had much contact with other fillies my age because of where I lived, but the prospect of meeting some new friends made school seem even better. I ran over to the schoolyard as my parents went over to talk to my teacher. She was a tan earth pony mare with brown hair, and she looked like the most wonderful pony that one could ever meet. I knew right then that she was going to be the best teacher in all of Equestria.

I turned around to see if I couldn't talk with any of the other foals when I saw an earth pony filly with a purplish coat smiling at me. "Hi there. You must be the new kid."

"Why yes, my name is Rarity." I had to stop myself from rushing up to this filly and hugging her for all I was worth. I had never had a friend before, and meeting a filly as friendly as her was wonderful. I did manage to control myself. "What's yours?"

"I'm Cheerilee, it's nice to meet you." The filly extended a hoof and I shook it. "So, you're the pony who lives on the outskirts right? Yours is the house beyond the edge of Town Hall?"

I nodded proudly. "Yep, that's my house alright. I know it isn't the best, but it's home."

Cheerilee smiled and was about to respond, but a nasty voice from behind her cut her off. "So, [i]this[/i] is the new poor kid then?" said a colt from behind Cheerilee. "I knew she'd look like a moron."

Cheerilee's smile faded, and she sighed in frustration. She turned around to see two colts and a filly smiling evilly at me. One of the colts was an earth pony with a red body, spiky green hair, and no cutie mark. He seemed to be the leader of the group. The colt on his left was an earth pony with a light orange body, short tan hair, and a hoofball as a cutie mark. The filly was a unicorn with a yellow body, black hair that fell to her shoulders, and no cutie mark.

I admit that I wasn't quite sure how to deal with what they were saying. No pony had ever talked to me like that before. Cheerilee, for her part, glared at the trio and moved in front of me to shield her from the verbal assault. "Dug, what are you and your stupid cronies doing here?" she growled at the one with spiky green hair. "Don't you three have anything better to do than be mean to every pony you meet?"

The trio just laughed at her. "We're just here to see the poor pony, Cheerilee, relax. We heard they look like freaks and I have to admit, it's hysterical to see just how right we were!" snickered Dug

"I mean, look at her hair! It's so tacky," the unicorn filly cackled.

I blushed and put her hoof up to her perfectly styled curls. No pony had ever told me that they were tacky. My parents had always said that they were beautiful, but... were they wrong?

Cheerilee narrowed her eyes and took a step towards my tormentors. "Her mane is beautiful, Annie. You wouldn't know beauty if it came up and bit you! Now back off and leave her alone!"

"Or what exactly?" scoffed the other colt. "Are you gonna tell teacher on us? Are you gonna be a rat?"

"Yeah, Kicker, I will!" she retorted.

"Lighten up Cheerilee, we're just having fun with the poor filly. I mean, we're not the first to remind her of her sad situation, right?" Dug snarked.

I knew that it wouldn't do much good, but tears began welling up in my eyes. Even though Cheerilee was attempting to be a shield to me, I was stung by their words. Rather than invoking

a little sympathy, my tears caused the trio to howl in mocking laughter.

"Uh-oh, looks like poor kid's crying now!" Annie leaned her head down as if she was addressing a foal. "Did we hurt her wittle feewings?"

That last one did it. I began sobbing, but I had enough sense to run. It seemed that school wasn't such a good idea after all. Would Cheerilee be the only one who stood up for me? Would everypony in that class be mean to me because my parents didn't have much money? I wasn't sure, so I looked around to see if my parents were still there. My stomach clenched when I saw that they were gone. They wouldn't be back until later that afternoon, so they wouldn't protect me. They couldn't take me home and make everything okay.

As I ran, my tears obscured her vision until she could hardly see what was in front of me. I didn't care. I didn't care that I was running blind. I just had to get away from those three. However, because I couldn't see where I was going, I smacked right into something and fell to the ground. I looked up to see that I had run into my teacher.

"Oh, goodness," said my teacher with an amused smile. She turned around and saw me on the ground and she widened her smile. "Well hello there! You must be Rarity. It's—" She stopped when she saw how hard I was crying. I was acting like a newborn foal, crying as hard as I was, but I couldn't help myself. They were just so mean!

My teacher knelt down in front of me, and put a hoof on my shoulder. "What's the matter?" I was crying too hard to coherently answer her, so I merely pointed to the schoolyard where Cheerilee was still arguing with the laughing bullies. The teacher frowned. "I see," she said in a business-like tone. "Yes, I've had problems with those three before. You can just go in and sit at your desk, Rarity. Don't you worry. I'll have a talk with them."

My desk. I wasn't quite sure if I wanted to go to my desk. If I was in school, the bullies would be right next to me. I didn't want to go to my desk; I wanted to go home. It was safer there. Those three couldn't say those nasty things about me.

I will never forget what happened next, not just how much it changed my life. My teacher put her foreleg around my shoulder and gently nuzzled me. "Tell ya what, Rarity: there's a small creek behind the schoolyard, just a little ways in that direction. Why don't you go there and calm down for a while before you come back. Does that sound good?" I slowed my crying, and looked up at her teacher with hopeful eyes. She nodded and helped me to my hooves. "It's just forty or so yards that way. You can't miss it. I know it helped me relax after school when I was your age."

I sniffled and wiped my eyes. "Really?"

"Of course." My teacher patted me on the head. "You just go on and calm down for as long as you need, Rarity. I'll see you later."

I slowly nodded and, with heavy steps, I trotted in the direction where my teacher had indicated the creek was. I walked a small way into the peaceful forest near the school. I had to admit, the trees were so close together that I began to wonder whether or not this forest even had a clearing.

Of course, my teacher was not a liar. I soon pushed through the dense trees and found myself in the clearing that my teacher had described. My breath caught in my throat at the sight, and I could only think of one word to describe it: "Whoa."

The area was surrounded by tall, majestic oak trees that were spaced far enough apart that golden rays of sunlight shone through the trees into the clearing. The grass underneath my hooves was soft, cool, and the prettiest shade of green—but it was the creek itself that drew my attention. It was a small stream of water, not very wide and the water would only go up to the top of my hooves, but it trickled lazily along, seemingly uncaring of the events of the world around it.

The sound of the creek flowing calmed me down as I walked up to the stream. The clearing itself didn't appear to be too large, I could probably run around the edge in a half-minute or so, but to me it was a mighty, unshakable sanctuary. I sat down on a rock and actually managed a smile. The tears had stopped, at least. I dipped my hoof into the water and wiped my face. The cool water made me feel like my mother was there, drying my tears and telling me that everything was going to be okay. The feelings of terror and humiliation I felt during my encounter with the three bullies were fading away, as if it had never happened at all. For the first time since meeting Cheerilee, a smile formed on my face, and I laid down next to the small stream.

After about half an hour of relaxing, a nagging voice in the back of my head told me that I had better go back to school. Even if the bullies were there, the prospect of school was too exciting to pass up. Remembering the way that I had come, I stood up and trotted in the direction of the school building. As I exited the clearing, I turned back to it and promised myself that I would visit as often as possible.

When I finally entered the schoolhouse, my teacher was at the front of the class lecturing on the upcoming school year and what she expected from her students. When she saw me come in, she smiled warmly and pointed towards an empty desk. To my delight, I saw that Cheerilee was in the desk next to mine. Cheerilee smiled at me as I skipped over to my seat.

As I sat down, Cheerilee leaned in and whispered to me. "How are you doing, Rarity?"

"Oh, I'm feeling much better," I whispered back. I quickly looked around the room and noticed that none of my tormentors were there. In fact, there were three empty desks in the middle of the room. "What happened to those three?"

"They got suspended for a week," Cheerilee responded. "You won't see them for a while."

I grinned and began listening to the teacher. She took a few papers out of a notebook and laid them out on her desk. "Okay, class, there's one more thing that I'd like to talk to you about before we begin our math lesson for the day. We have a few after school activities for those of you who are interested. I've gotten a few tutors from around Ponyville, and they're all delighted to help." She cleared her throat. "Okay, just raise your hoof if you would like to sign up for a class. The first one offered is a sewing class. Who would like to join that one?"

My hoof shot into the air faster than anypony else.

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"And so the pegasi created the city of Las Pegasus to both deal with their expanding population, and promote cultural growth in another part of Equestria."

My teacher looked up at the clock hanging over the door and shut her book. "Okay, class. That's it for today." The collected foals hopped out of their seats and began putting their books away in their saddlebags. They were chattering amongst themselves, and my teacher had to nearly shout to be heard over them. "Don't forget to read pages four and five of your history books for tomorrow!"

I snapped the clasp of my saddlebag shut and levitated it onto my back. I moved closer to Cheerilee, who was putting her own saddlebag on her back. "That was a fun lesson, wasn't it?"

Cheerilee slid her pencil in one of the pockets before turning to me. "I always thought that pegasi history was cool, but I like to learn about Ponyville a lot more!"

We filed out of the schoolhouse and I headed straight for the gate. Cheerilee had paused for a moment as she expected me to wait in the schoolyard with her, but she ran to catch up to me when I kept walking. "Your parents coming to get you, Rarity?"

I shook my head. "No, they both have to work today. I'm gonna walk home."

"Well if you don't mind, I'd love to walk with you," said Cheerilee. "I don't think that my house is too far away from yours."

I cocked my head. "Really?"

"Yeah. My house is on the opposite side of town hall. It's a five minute walk, I think."

My eyes lit up and she squealed in excitement. "That means we can see each other when we're not in school!"

Cheerilee nodded and beckoned me to follow her. "Yep! I wanna meet your mom and dad sometime."

It had happened. The day had gone almost exactly as I had hope it would. School was going to be very fun, and I had a wonderful, blossoming friendship with Cheerilee. Sure I had hit a bump in the road, but I knew then that life was going my way.

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The next week was pure bliss for me. Not only were those nasty foals gone, but the classes I had were spectacular! I sat next to Cheerilee every day, and we made sure to always eat our lunches and play on the swings together. Given that Cheerilee's house was only a five minute walk from mine, there were a few days where the two of us would hang out after school.

While Cheerilee sitting next to me was wonderful, my favorite part of the day was the sewing class that I got to take. It turned out that there were styles that I had never even considered using when I was teaching myself to make clothes. I have to admit that I was really looking forwards to the end of the year project where I got to make whatever kind of clothing she wanted. I had been drawing designs for that since the second week of class.

After her first week, I found herself gleefully skipping to school alongside my mother. I rapidly talked about all of the fun things that Cheerilee and I were going to do that day, and all of the wonderful things that I was going to learn.

As we walked, I saw the schoolyard approaching and saw all that I had come to be acquainted with over the week spent happily playing in the yard while waiting for class to start. "It's school!" I squeed. "You have to meet Cheerilee!"

"Oh, I haven't met your friend Cheerilee yet, have I?" My mother chuckled. "You talk about her so much that it's about time that you introduced us."

I gleefully nodded and scanned the courtyard for her friend, but my smile fell slightly when she couldn't see her. "I guess she's not here yet, Mommy."

"Well then you'll have to have her come over for dinner tonight, if its alright with her parents."

My smile returned in full force at the suggestion, and I vigorously nodded. "That would be wonderful, Mommy! I can't wait to see her so I can—"

My words were cut off and my smile instantly faded when her eyes landed on three familiar foals kicking a ball around just in front of the schoolyard entrance. At the sight of my tormentors, my stomach clenched and I whimpered. I moved behind my mother and nuzzled up to her side.

"Mommy, maybe school isn't such a good idea today. I'm not feeling so good."

My mother frowned and cocked her head. "What do you mean?" she asked. "You were just excited to go. What's wrong?"

I shakily raised a hoof and pointed at the trio of bullies who had seen me by this point. They were flashing her those cruel smiles that I had become all too familiar with on the first day of school. My mother's eyes landed on the foals and she sighed. She herded me towards a nearby tree and sat her down. "Rarity, just because those foals are there doesn't mean you can't have a good time at school. The best thing is to ignore them. They'll get bored and leave you alone."

"But they were so mean to me," I sniffled. "Why would they do that?"

My mother extended her forelegs and wrapped me into a hug. "I don't know, Rarity," she admitted. "I don't know why those foals would be mean like that. Just know that even if they are mean, you can still enjoy school." I whimpered again and nuzzled up to her chest. She began gently rubbing my back. "You have Cheerilee and your teacher to help you out, right?" I gave a slight nod and my mother returned it with an encouraging squeeze. "You see? They don't get to control what school is like for you. It'll all be okay in the end."

I broke away from the hug and smiled up at my mother. "I guess you're right, Mommy. They can't make school bad for me if I don't want them to!" I stood up and followed my mother to the entrance to the schoolyard. I knew even then that they were watching me, but I had resolved to not even make eye contact. I was certain that my mother's advice would be right.

Well, I couldn't have hidden behind her all day, even if I wanted to. The second my mother was out of sight, the courage that my mother had helped build up inside of me drain away, leaving me nearly shaking in fright. The three of them had not let me leave their sight, but they had not come over to me yet. I flattened my ears and dropped my head as I hugged the fence; walking alongside it as if it would somehow give me protection from their wicked gazes.

I walked alongside the fence until I reached the point where the fence connected with the side of the schoolhouse. I sat down in the shade that the building provided, and rued the fact that Cheerilee was not there to help me deflect the bullies.

How I wish that had been the case. They were drawn to my fear like sharks to the smell of fresh blood. When they finally decided that I had been alone long enough, they moved in. They didn't run, they moseyed closer to me, each relishing my fear. I curled up into a ball and held out a hoof as if to stall their advance. "Please just leave me alone!"

Rather than apologize and walk off, the foals merely cackled and continued walking forwards. "If it isn't the little rat," said Dug with a malicious chuckle. "What's the matter? You can't just pony up and admit that we're right about you?"



I put my head to the ground and covered it with my forelegs to make myself seem even smaller. I wished that I could just shrink away. I'd stop existing for a little while; just long enough for them to get bored and stop trying to make fun of me.

I flinched as a hoof came down right next to my ear. Kicker was standing directly above me, glaring downward. "I wouldn't keep telling Teacher about us," he growled. "We don't like rats at this school."

I was whimpering softly; my rear hooves shaking against my chest. Neither the forelimbs I held over my eyes, nor her ears flattened against my head, shielded me from their cruel laughter. "P-please. . . leave me a-alone."

"But this is fun, isn't it, Rat?" Annie snickered. I flinched violently as I felt her stepping on my tail as she circled around me like a timberwolf. "You don't want to tell Teacher about this and stop us from having fun, would you?"

I flinched again as a twig snapped, a small sob escaped my lips. I heard Dug's snickering get closer. "Trust me, Rat, it'll be better for you if you just keep Teacher out of it. We wouldn't want you to get hurt."

I held her forelegs tight against my eyes to hold back the tears. I whimpered again and tried to back away even further, but I was as far back as I could go against the fence. The three of them stopped talking for a moment. They just stared at me. Finally Dug snorted. "I think the rat has learned her lesson. Come on, guys, let's go play on the swings."

I didn't lift my head up until the last of their hoofsteps had faded into the banter of happy foals playing without a care in the world. When I was sure that they were gone, I laid my head on the ground and cried.

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As wonderful as the first week had been for me, Dug, Annie, and Kicker made sure that the following weeks were quite the opposite. Given that they had been suspended for what they had done on the first day, they had opted to be far more subtle about it from then on. They never openly confronted me or cornered me in the schoolyard. Cheerilee was always there anyway. There would be days where I found threatening cut-and-paste notes in my saddlebag after recess, or one of the them would whisper something mean in my ear whenever I passed. I tried to avoid them like my mother told me, but it wasn't always a possibility.

Unfortunately, neither the notes nor the whispers of 'rat' could be punished, let alone traced back to the trio. They continued on with no regrets or remorse, shrugging off the teacher's constant lectures on behavior.

As the weeks dragged on, I slowly came to dread school more and more. Not even Cheerilee's presence could offset how frequently the three of them found small ways to torture me. It was always something small and seemingly insignificant: a whisper, or a ball thrown in my direction that barely missed me. The little tortures ensured they would not be in big trouble when the teacher confronted them about it. I came to loathe each day of class, waiting anxiously for where the next taunt would come from, and I found that it took fewer acts of cruelty each day to bring me to tears. Some days it was as if her teacher didn't even care; even when she knew what was happening. She did occasionally try to stop it, but wasn't in a position of power to do so.

"[i]We weren't saying anything, honest[/i]!"

"[i]It was just a joke! Can't the kid take a joke[/i]?"

"[i]We didn't throw that ball at her, we swear! Dug was tossing it to me and it got away from him, that's all[/i]!"

"[i]She told you we said that? We weren't even near her. Dug and Kicker can vouch for me. We were on the other side of the playground[/i]."

As much as they excused their behavior, occasionally they crossed the line and were given detention or even a short suspension. Each of those times I felt that maybe they'd understand that their behavior was wrong and leave me alone. I didn't want things to turn around so much that we became friends. I just wanted them to leave me alone.

It was not to be. Each time they were punished they upped the ante and found even more malicious, but equally subtle, ways to torment me. Finally, after three solid months of terror, they finally... broke me. I stopped telling the teacher, my parents, and even Cheerilee. It would only make things worse for no reason. Nothing would be done. I could only go through the motions every day. I didn't even try to cling on to the faint hope that they would just ignore me.

That's not to say that there were no respites. I still tried to visit my creek each and every day, and I often found myself staying for hours once school was over, just to relax and cry my fears away. The tranquil setting offset the fear that I felt waking up every morning. It was my last bastion of freedom; my one sanctuary where not even those three could come. They didn't know I came here, so they could not follow me. There I was safe, I was protected, and nothing could ever hurt me.

Four months into my schooling, I was sitting at her creek, relaxing after yet another rough day. Once again at recess Dug had thrown a ball just above my head. This time it clipped my horn, sending a sharp pain through the appendage. I had fallen to the ground, wailing in pain and clutching my head. Cheerilee had begged me to go see the teacher, but I merely dragged

myself over to one of the corners of the fence and pleaded to Cheerilee to just ignore it. 'if you tell it will just make it worse. If you really want to help me, just don't tell anypony,' I had said.

I idly rubbed the base of my horn where I had felt most of the pain, and leaned back against a tree. Tears began welling up in my eyes when I realized that in twelve short hours I would have to go to school again. I would have to endure a whole other day of Dug, Kicker, and Annie poking her with metaphorical needles. Then it would be another short twelve hours before it happened again.

At least here I was safe.

I walked over to my creek and stared into the water. My eyes were puffy, and my usually well-groomed mane was disheveled, making the pony in the water look quite unlike myself. Four months ago I had been practically bouncing off of wall in the excitement of going to school. Now here I was: staring at a broken mess of a pony in the water. A pair of tears rolled down my eyes and dripped into the water, sending ripples through the creek.

"Why doesn't Teacher do anything?" I whimpered. "She suspended them the first day. Why doesn't she just kick them out of school for good to make them leave me alone?"

I sat on her haunches and closed her eyes, but the second they were shut, the image of the three of them laughing at her flashed into my vision. My body was instantly consumed with rage, and I slammed her hoof down in the creek, splashing both myself and the surrounding area with water. "I HATE THEM!" I brought my hoof down again. "I WISH THEY WERE DEAD!"

I opened her mouth to let out another anguished scream, but it died in her throat when the full weight of my words hit her. "What did I just...?" She turned her attention back to the creek. The ripples, combined with how wet I was, distorted my appearance even more. My wet mane clung to my neck and shoulders, giving the impression that I was wearing seaweed on my head.

I blinked once and then looked around the clearing. "Do I really want them to die?"

Of course, good ponies don't wish death upon other ponies. I tried to push the taunts of the bullies that echoed through my mind out of it, but the more I tried the louder they became, and the more... appealing their deaths were to me.

'[i]Stupid little rat. You gonna be a chicken and tell teacher?[/i]'

I growled and pressed my hooves against my head. "Shut up!"

'[i]Look at the poor little rat. What's it like living with your kind in the slums?[/i]'

I screamed and pounded the ground with her hoof. "[i]Just leave me alone[/i]!"

"[i]bet that hurt when you got hit. Is the poor foal gonna cry now?[/i]"

"I SAID SHUT UP!"

With one final scream I grabbed a nearby rock and slammed it into the base of one of the trees. The adrenaline mixed with my rage and fear increased my drive, and the blow took a chunk out of the base. Had I done something like that before I met the three of them, I would have likely found myself horrified by my actions but now... now it felt amazing to hurt something, even if it was just some silly tree. I raised the rock and did it again. I imagined that the tree was one of my tormentors, and I was making them go away forever. To be honest, the thought was like a release. If it were really Dug that I was destroying, I could be free. I wouldn't have to be afraid anymore.

I'd be the one in control.

As I continued to pound away at the base of the tree, a question flickered in her mind for the briefest of moments. I had just imagined that I was hurting one of the bullies, but... could I do something like that for real?

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Later that week was more of the same for me. I went to school in utter silence, and did my best to ignore the torment that the bullies inflicted. None of it mattered. Nothing I or anyone else said did any good. My teacher had suspended the three of them on more than one occasion, but as I had stopped telling my teacher about their actions, the last suspension had been some time ago.

After the five hours of torture that was school, I once again found myself back at my creek. I dejectedly leaned my saddlebag against a tree, stopping only to run my hoof over several large gash marks that I had inflicted on the trunk. In fact, if somepony were to come in and look at the trees, they would find many tree trunks marred with similar marks. It had been a little addition to my routine. I would come straight here from school and pick up a nearby rock. I'd imagine the base of the tree to be one of the bullies, and then I'd... let loose. I'd scream, I'd cry, I'd even shout very un-ladylike things, but through it all I would smash the rock into the trees.

I sighed and laid down in the cool grass next to the trickling stream. I briefly considered picking another tree to attack, but for some reason I didn't feel like it today. I don't know if it was because I was too drained to even pick up my rock, but it wasn't worth the effort.

"So, [i]this[/i] is where the poor kid comes to hide like a chicken. Good job finding her, Annie," cackled an all too familiar voice.

I squeaked and my heart sank as I heard the malicious laughter of the three bullies. I bolted up, and any hopes that I was just being paranoid ended there. Dug, Kicker, and Annie all stood in front of her, laughing at me. I whimpered and began backing away. They couldn't be here! I was safe here! This wasn't where they belonged!

"No, please, just go away!"

An evil smile spread across Dug's face. "What's the matter, Rat? We just wanna talk to you."

"Yeah," Kicker added as he flanked me on the right. "We never did thank you for all of those times where you tattled and got us kicked out of school."

"No, just go away! I don't want you here, just leave!"

Annie circled to my left. "We just wanna talk, kid." She wore a grin that indicated they planned to do much more than just talk.

I cowered at the sound of Dug slowly popping the joints in his neck. "Let's show her what happens to rats in this school!"

They all took a step forward, closing in on me. I couldn't run even if I had the brain power to do so. "Keep away from me!" I squealed. I looked around the clearing looking for something, anything to defend herself with. Of all things, I was drawn to the rock I had been using to damage the trees. It was within my reach. All I'd have to do is grab it and make sure they didn't hurt me. I began inching towards it. "Just leave me alone!"

"Or what?" scoffed Dug who was advancing closer with each retreating step that I took. "It's just you and us out here. No pony can save you now! If you try to tell anyone about us beating you up—well, let's just say that no pony cares too much about the poor kids. Not when our parents actually have money!" I jerked backwards when I noticed Kicker and Annie had come even closer to my sides. "We're not in school; Teacher can't suspend us for this!"

My eyes darted around looking for a way out, yet always ended up on the rock. It was as if something was telling me that there was no other option. Still, there was another part of me that didn't want to do it. I continued to plead with them to leave me alone.

As I tried to get away, I felt a new emotion bubble up in me. It was like what I felt when I hit the trees with the rock, but it was more... potent. Beneath the unadulterated fear, something else was creeping up. It rose with my heartbeat. It was sort of what I felt like when I was angry, but still different. She whimpered and tried to push back the new feeling for fear of doing something foolish.

I saw Dug's hind legs uncoil as he lunged forward. "Get her!"

"I said leave me alone!" I screamed

The experience was quite something, actually. The moment I saw him lunge at me, it was an easy decision. I don't know if it was fear, or self preservation, but I let that new feeling drive me. I levitated the rock over to me and slammed it as hard as she could into the side of Dug's head. He collapsed without uttering a sound, almost as if strings holding him up had just been severed.

In that instant, time seemed to stop for all of us. Dug was lying motionless on the ground, his eyes wide open. A large pool of blood was forming around his head, flowing from the large gash that the rock had made when it smashed into his skull. Kicker and I simply stared silently at the corpse while Annie instantly burst into tears.

The clearing was silent for a few minutes. I was trying to register what I had done and what to do about it now. In fact, I wasn't even sure how I felt about the fact that one of my tormentors was still on the ground in front of me. I felt something, to be sure, but certainly not regret or fear. It was like another variation of the new feeling. In fact, I had gotten quite the rush when the rock had collided with Dug's head. It was one of the greatest feelings I had ever experienced! It was as if raw power had coursed through my veins in the moment that I had attacked Dug. My fear had vanished instantly; the months of torment instantly forgotten. I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding in. "That was..." I blinked once and looked down at the rock. "Amazing."

I saw the blood starting to trickle into the stream, tainting the clear water. Tainting. His blood was tainting the pure water, just as the three of them had tainted my spot. I had never really liked filth, and avoided it when I could, but growing up in poor conditions meant that I was surrounded by uncleanness. I had trained myself to tolerate it to the best of my abilities. With the events that had just happened, I realized just how horrible it was when filth was allowed to taint something so innocent and pure.

I looked up at the two remaining ponies who were still staring in shock at the lifeless body of their leader. Annie was shaking and crying. Her head was turned so that she had to look sideways to see the body. Her eyes occasionally flickered away as if she was trying to tear her eyes away completely, but her gaze remained fixed on Dug. "Is... is he dead?" she whispered.

I didn't even try to suppress the new feeling this time. This time I enjoyed it bubbling up inside of me. The creature in front of my did not deserve my sympathy. Annie wasn't a pony; she was filth! Filth needed to be cleansed, or else it would continue to taint that which was pure.

Kicker uneasily bit his lip and shakily got to his hooves. He slowly trotted up to Dug's body and uneasily poked it. His friend didn't move, causing a jittery Kicker to put his ear next to Dug's chest to check for a heartbeat. Finding none, he snapped his head back up and looked at Annie with fear in his eyes. "He's dead! The rat killed him! She—"

His words were cut short when the rock smashed into the side of his head, sending a resounding crack echoing throughout the clearing. Kicker fell to the ground and the second he hit it, I smashed his head with the rock again, and again, and again. I was getting splashed by specks of blood, and my usually pristine coat was becoming dirty. For once in her life, I didn't care about that. The only thing that mattered to me was cleansing the filth. Kicker's head was unrecognizable when I finally stopped. The new feeling had receded enough to the point where I was aware of my surroundings again. I looked up and saw Annie sobbing hysterically. I can only imagine what she must have been feeling; seeing what she had just seen. She noticed me watching her, and with a scream she shot to her hooves and ran like a bat out of Tartarus towards town.

The ensuing chase was not a long one. As it turned out, I was a far faster runner than Annie, and within a few short moments, she was smacked in the head by my rock. She tumbled to the ground and lay still at the base of one of the trees that I had damaged. Content that she victim was down for the count, I walked over to Annie and discovered that, despite the profusely bleeding head wound, Annie was merely unconscious. I sighed and sat on my haunches. I suppose that the blow wasn't fatal because I we had been running.

"What now, Rarity?" I said to myself, mimicking a trait of my father's when he needed to think. "You can't just hit her with the rock again. The other two died too fast."

"Well, Rarity, you can't keep her alive too long. You have to clean up the other two before you go home."

I groaned in frustration. This was going to be harder than I had originally thought. Sure the new feeling was nice, but I hadn't expected it would come with complications. I sighed and grabbed one of Annie's hind legs in my mouth and dragged her back to where the bodies of Dug and Kicker were. When I reached their bodies, I deposited Annie next to them and took a step back. That step back gave me a new perspective, and for the first time I saw just how large the mess I had made was. The new feeling evaporated, leaving only crippling fear in its place.

Blood. Blood was everywhere! In front of her were two colts, dead by my hooves!

I let out a whimper and slowly began backing away from my victims. "Oh no." My lower jaw quivered. "Rarity, what did you do? You killed them, Rarity. You killed them!"

A tightness welled up inside my chest and I let the beginnings of sobs escape. "You don't have good enough magic to clean them up, Rarity. Somepony is going to find this!"

Tears began streaming down my face and I sat down on my haunches to cry. I knew that it was all over. Princess Celestia herself would probably have me arrested and thrown into a deep, dark dungeon where I would never again be able to see something as simple as sunlight. The

lives of my parents would be ruined too, of course. No pony would want to be around ponies who had raised a filly like me.

My sobs grew steadily louder as the full implications of what I had done began to hit me. "IT'S NOT FAIR! I... D-DIDN'T WANT TH-THEM T-TO HURT ME!" I raised my head and looked into the increasingly cloudy sky. "I don't want to die!" I moaned. "I don't wanna die or go to jail!"

I wiped my eyes and took a deep breath. "No, you can't let that happen, Rarity. You have to make sure Mother and Father don't have to feel bad because of this."

"But how can I clean them up, Rarity?" I scanned the clearing. "There's nothing here to make the bodies go away!"

"Nothing except the Everfree Forest."

My ears perked up as the thought crossed my mind. "The Everfree Forest." I slowly pushed myself to my hooves and trotted to the far edge of my clearing. "It's close to here, isn't it? I can put them in there!"

"And no pony has to know." I turned around and began walking back to the bodies. "You can do something better next time."

I stopped in her tracks and frowned. "Next time, Rarity? What next time?"

A smile crossed my face as I looked down at the bloody wound in Dug's head. "That feeling when you hit him was really good, wasn't it? Don't you want that again?"

I clicked my tongue and pushed all thoughts of the future from her mind. "One step at a time, Rarity. No need to go planning things before their time."

I took one of Dug's forelegs in my mouth and began dragging him in the direction of the forest. After a few minutes of moving him, I managed to get Dug's body a little ways into the forest. After repeating the process with Kicker, I was sure to run as fast as I could once they were far enough in. There was no need to get myself eaten by whatever creatures were in the forest.

As I walked back, the tightness in my chest began to fade away, and I found myself with a little spring in my step. "I didn't need to cry like a foal, Rarity. It was okay."

"I think you might have just gotten away with this, Rarity." I giggled to myself and began bouncing. "It's consequence free!"

"Which means I can do it again if I like it and don't get caught." I stopped bouncing just as I reached the edge of my clearing. "And I think I did like it."



When I got back to the clearing, I saw that Annie hadn't woken up yet. I cocked my head and checked on my unconscious victim. I didn't want her to bleed out before I could have a little fun with her. After all, it wouldn't be a good punishment if she just bled out. I put my ear to Annie's chest. She still had a faint heartbeat. She wasn't dead, but she certainly would be soon.

I immediately got to work stopping the flow of blood from her head. I put pressure on the gash and used some nearby leaves as a sort of dressing. It was absolutely ridiculous, but it would have to do for now. It took a few minutes but eventually the flow of blood stopped. I was content that Annie wouldn't die before I could decide what to do with her.

After clearing up Annie's wounds, I sat down on the rock she had been sitting on that morning and began patiently waiting for my victim to wake up.

Yes. My victim. I liked the sound of that.

After a few minutes of silence, I realized a potential problem once Annie woke up: her horn. I wasn't sure what kind of magic Annie was capable of, but if she did wake up and got enough sense to use her magic, odds were that Annie could at least grab a rock as a weapon to use against me. It's what I had just done, after all.

I sighed and got up. I realized that it would be best to just send her off with the others. In the state she was in, it was unlikely that I was going to get to do anything anyway. I dragged Annie's body to where I had deposited Kicker and Dug's. However, this time what I saw made me squeal in fear, and I took several steps back from the edge of the forest. A trio of timber wolves were feasting on the remains of my first two victims. I didn't dare go near them, as I figured that I might be their dessert. Timberwolves aren't picky when it comes to prey.

I slowly dragged Annie's body away to find some other means to get rid of the evidence. I looked up in the sky when I reached my creek, and saw that it was hardly five o' clock if I learned my lessons about time well enough. Mother and Father wouldn't be home for another four hours at least.

I giggled and began looking around the creek for a means of disposing of Annie. My eyes landed on a large scrap of wood that would be perfect as a sort of makeshift shovel. I went to an open spot in the clearing and began digging around a bit to see if I could find a weak spot on the ground where I could dig a sufficient hole. I found the perfect spot underneath an old oak tree and began digging. At first, it was harder than I had originally expected, but with my magic I was able to dig well enough.

As the hot sun burned overhead, I began to get tired out. I would definitely need a bath after all of the sweating I was doing during my work, but I had a sizable hole going. It was easily deep enough to deposit Annie. I put the makeshift shovel down and massaged my head for a few

moments. It had been a bit of a strain, digging for that long, and the effort had given me a small headache, but my work was finally finished. I looked up at the sky. Only an hour had passed, so there was still plenty of time. I trotted over to Annie and, to my surprise, Annie let out a weak groan. Her leg twitched, and she tried to open her eyes. She managed to crack them open. I can't imagine what horror she felt when she saw me instead of her parents or some other adult who would keep her safe. She squealed and tried to fire up her horn. The trauma to her head was too much, and she was only capable of weak sparks.

I smiled to myself and summoned my rock. I steadied it with my magic and lifted it over my head. However, before I went in for the fatal blow, a thought struck me. I gently laid the rock on the ground. Annie was slightly more coherent at this point. She opened her mouth and whispered something that I didn't quite hear. I leaned in closer. "What's that, darling?"

"I... I didn't mean to. I'm sorry," moaned Annie. Her voice was barely audible, and tears were falling from her eyes.

I straightened up and frowned. "I don't care." My frown twisted upwards in a gleeful smile and I leaned in next to Annie's ears. "You made me scared of you for months. Now you're scared of me. It isn't fun to be scared, is it?" I giggled. "As much as I hate to admit it, I can see why you like tormenting other foals. It does give you a nice feeling, doesn't it?"

Annie opened her mouth, but a gargled moan was all that came out. I turned around and pushed Annie with my hind legs. She rolled into the grave, hitting the ground with a thud. I walked up to the grave just as Annie rolled over so she was lying face up. She raised her hoof in the air as if reaching out to me; requesting pity. I can't imagine why she thought it would work.

The tears began falling faster from Annie's eyes as I used my magic to pick up the plank. I pushed the plank into the pile of earth that I had created when I dug the hole, and scooped it on top of her. Annie began squealing like a suckling foal as the dirt was pushed back into the hole.

"No," she pleaded. Her voice was so weak that I hardly registered it. I don't suppose I would have cared even if she was louder. Another scoop of dirt entered the hole and covered Annie's right hind leg.

"No," she repeated as another scoop of dirt entered the hole. I continued to work with a passion. I was determined to bury her alive. All Annie could do was lie there and accept her fate as another scoop of dirt hit her in the face.

[center]\* \* \*[/center]

Some time later, I patted down the dirt and smoothed it out. Hopefully nopony would realize that the dirt had been dug up, but there was really no reason for anypony to come looking for them here. However, if they did...

I looked around at her clearing and saw that it really was a bloody mess. I had quite easily gotten rid of the bodies, but I hadn't thought about how I would clean up all of this blood! That uneasy fear began creeping up on me again, and I almost began crying again.

All of a sudden, I heard what to me was the most beautiful sound that I could have imagined at that moment: thunder. My mouth broke out into a smile just as a torrent of rain water fell on me. Celestia was clearly on my side today! I jumped up in joy and began bouncing around in a circle, giggling like a maniac. The rain would wash away all of the blood! My creek would be cleansed from the vileness that had tainted it. I was free from worry.

I ran back home as fast as I could, not even caring about the fact that I was soaking wet. It was the most cleansing feeling that I had ever felt.

When I arrived back at my house, my parents were still away, which suited me just fine. I trotted into the bathroom and drew a hot, relaxing bath for myself. When the tub was full, I stepped inside and slid onto my back to relive the memories of what I had just done. As I replayed what had just happened, I searched my emotions, expecting to feel some regret for what she had done. The first kill could be considered self-defense. He was going to attack me, after all. Even the courts would agree with me that I had acted in defense of my well being.

I slid deeper in the bathtub and grinned to myself. "Dug, you may have been self-defense, but your little cronies? They were just for fun. I guess you could even call it..." My grin slowly faded. "Murder. I guess it was murder."

I sighed and leaned my head on the edge of the tub. "Rarity, You got lucky. What would have happened if the rain and timberwolves hadn't come along?"

I tisked. "Well they did, and I don't have to be punished for it."

I frowned and tapped my lower jaw with her hoof. "Rarity, the events of today were certainly exhilarating, but I think it would be best for you and your family if you did not do it again."

"Oh but Rarity, we did everypony such a great service today. Now not only will they not torment me anymore, but they will leave the other foals alone too."

I clicked my tongue and began squeezing bubble bath into the tub. "Yes that's true, but what happens if you get caught, Rarity? Think of your parents!"

I chuckled and leaned back so that only the top half of my head was sticking out of the water. I dipped a washcloth into the water and draped it over my eyes. "Oh, Rarity. you must have more faith than that. I think I should do it again. It was so wonderful. I'd just have to make sure that nothing could go wrong before I tried again. I mean, with the right amount of planning, I'm sure

that nothing bad would happen."

"Well, Rarity... if you are sure that nothing will go wrong."

"I assure you, Rarity, I will do everything in my power to make sure everything will be fine."

"Well... okay, Rarity."

Satisfied, I got up out of the tub and dried myself off. I used her magic to style my mane and tail to their normal perfect curls, and sighed in contentment. Life was going my way now. If nothing else, school wouldn't be a terror for me anymore. I trotted to my room and began tossing around the idea of checking a few medical books out of the library. Those would certainly come in handy.