

VAGABOND
PART 3

Pinkie Pie trotted into the kitchen where Fluttershy was busy chopping up some fruit, “Hi Fluttershy! Whatcha doing?” Pinkie asked.

Fluttershy jumped several inches into the air but managed not to drop the knife, “Oh Pinkie, you shouldn’t sneak up on anypony like that.” Fluttershy said setting down the knife, “I know that Vagabond will have to be here for a while; and if he is, then Big Mac will be too, so that will be three ponies I have to feed for a while.” Fluttershy paused to take a breath, “So . . . I thought I should get a head start on the food. Um . . . Pinkie Pie, would you be . . . willing to help me . . . if you don’t mind that is.” Fluttershy asked.

“Sure thing!” Pinkie Pie said bouncing just like always.

Fluttershy passed Pinkie a knife, a bowl, and a pile of fruit. The two friends began cutting, slicing, and chopping every piece of fruit they could get their hooves on.

Big Macintosh carried Vagabond back into Fluttershy’s front room, and set him down gently on the couch. Vagabond was in immense pain. Pain however, was an old friend to him so he tried to just endure it.

Vagabond looked up at the massive red pony, “I heard Pinkie call you Big Macintosh. Is that what you like being called or is there something shorter?”

“Big Mac’s fine with me.” he said.

Vagabond nodded, “Big Mac it is then.”

“And you’re called Vagabond?” Big Macintosh asked.

“That I am.” Vagabond answered uncertainly.

“Do Ah have to worry about ya hurtin’ anypony here?” Big Mac asked.

“No.” Vagabond said simply.

Big Macintosh looked sternly at the injured blue, former pegasus, “Good. You behave yourself and we’ll get along just fine.”

Someone was knocking on Fluttershy’s door yet again. Big Mac casually walked over an opened the door. Dr. Mend nodded to the massively-built stallion, “Good afternoon, Big Macintosh. Is Fluttershy in? I was hoping I could check up on the patient. He could probably use another dose of pain killers.” Dr. Mend said. Big Macintosh stepped aside and let Dr. Mend in.

The Doctor then noticed Vagabond starring at him,
“You're awake!?” he asked eyes wide.

“That I am sir.” Vagabond responded.

“Don't call me sir. You may address me as Dr. Mend.” he said putting his bag down next to the couch,
“How do you feel?” Dr. Mend asked shining a light into Vagabond's eyes.

“Lame, very hungry, and in quite a lot of pain.” Vagabond responded.

Dr. Mend's eyebrows arched in surprise,
“Didn't the girls give you the medicine I left?”

“I have no idea. I haven't had anything since I awoke.” Vagabond said almost too evenly.

“I'll give you something after you've eaten.” Dr. Mend said, then noticed something odd, “You're sweating. How bad is the pain?”

“Probably close to the worst I've ever felt, physically.” Vagabond let himself grunt the words, since Dr. Mend had noticed the perspiration.

“And yet, you are calm?” Dr. Mend asked puzzled.

“I'm used to it, to a point.” Vagabond said.

Dr. Mend was about to ask what Vagabond meant when Pinkie Pie walked in carrying a big bowl of fruit salad on her back,
“Hi Dr. Mend!” she greeted in passing.

The older stallion, normally very taciturn, smiled warmly at the pink pony,
“Oh, hello Pinkie Pie. I didn't know you were here.”

“Yeah,” she said setting down the bowl on the Front Room table, “I'm helping take care of Vagabond here.” she said heading back into the kitchen.

Dr. Mend smiled at the work pony,
“Thank you for letting me in Big Macintosh. Would you be so kind as to tell Fluttershy I am in?”

“Ayup.” Big Mac said turning toward the kitchen.

As soon as Big Mac departed Dr. Mend turned and faced Vagabond. Dr. Mend's face was a thunderhead,
“You are called Vagabond?” he asked seriously.

Vagabond nodded,
“I am.”

Dr. Mend narrowed his eyes dangerously,
“That title is only placed upon those suffering prolonged punishment for the most serious crimes. I’m not legally allowed to ask for specifics, but what was the crime?”

Vagabond clenched his jaw and closed his eyes,
“Involuntary Unlawful-Act Ponyslaughter.” he said crisply.

“Alright, let me tell you something.” Dr. Mend said getting in Vagabond’s face with gritted teeth, “The filly who has taken you in, is the sweetest pony I’ve ever known and the rest of her friends are close up there. If you so much as say a harsh WORD to any of them, I’ll make sure you receive an injury that will NEVER heal.”

Dr. Mend took a deep breath and sat back, his smile was seemingly warm, but there was a diamond edge to his stare, “It’s nothing personal, but I won’t let anyone hurt a single pony here, especially these fillies. Do we have an understanding . . . Vagabond?” he asked coldly, placing extra emphasis on the last word.

Vagabond’s expression went completely blank, all life pulled out of it,
“I’ve NEVER intentionally hurt anypony and I DO NOT plan to start now.” he hissed angrily.

“Well that’s good!” Pinkie Pie said shoving a large bowl of fruit salad in front of Vagabond’s muzzle.

Dr. Mend looked up startled and quickly smoothed over his expression,
“I didn’t see you there, Pinkie Pie.”

“Well duh! I mean it’s rude to butt in on a conversation, so I just watched until you two looked like you were done.” Pinkie said trotting back into the kitchen, “Are you staying for lunch Dr. Mend?” she called.

“Thank you, no.” Dr. Mend called back to her. He then stood up slowly and whispered to Vagabond, “Remember what I said.” Dr. Mend turned to leave and reached for the door. Big Mac held it open for him.

“Oh!” Dr. Mend said surprised, “I didn’t hear you return Big Macintosh.”

Something on the table by the door caught Dr. Mend’s eye and he snatched it away into his black bag, “Thank you. I’ll be by tomorrow to change his bandage. Good afternoon.” Dr. Mend said and departed.

Big Macintosh closed the door. Vagabond silently noticed Dr. Mend never gave him the pain medication. He gritted his teeth for a brief moment before trying to calm himself down. He shifted slightly and the bandage rubbed against his wing stumps. The pain was intense. Vagabond’s eyes watered, the rubbing felt like a cheese grater against his already tender skin, ‘*Endure it.*’ he concentrated, ‘*You deserve every second of it.*’ his mind began to drift. The pain was bringing with it, a numbing haze. Vagabond’s mind recalled the time when others said similar words to him, ‘*Criminal! Monster! Killer! Suffer! SUFFER AND DIE! DIE SLOWLY AND ALONE! DIE! DIE! DIE! DIE!*’ the chant played over and over again; the last moments in his town as he stood before them begging for forgiveness and proclaiming his sorrow for his actions. Vagabond threw up his well-built and well-used emotional wall and steeled his will, ‘*STOP THAT! Your PATHETIC tears helped nothing then and they’ll help*

nothing now!' he scolded himself silently, through tightly closed eyes and gritted teeth, *'Suck it up you worthless monster! Show these kind ponies how grateful you are!'* his mind began to slow as the pain receded, *'They are the first to show you any compassion since you killed Arabesque. Don't you DARE throw that in their faces. They have given you more than you deserve and you know it! The care they're giving you should be going to some pony who deserves it, but they chose to help you.'* Vagabond finally focused his thoughts enough to open his eyes.

The bowl of fruit salad on the table smelled heavenly, and the pain had receded somewhat. His mouth began to water, but he noticed that Big Mac had laid down on the floor and was staring at him, "What? Have I done something wrong?" Vagabond asked.

"Not that Ah've seen." Big Mac said simply.

Vagabond was puzzled. It was an odd statement, surprisingly complex for its brevity. Vagabond pondered all the possible connotations and finally settled on an assumption which seemed likely, *'What he means is that he hasn't seen me do anything wrong. I think he's also saying that he is only going to judge me on what he actually sees me do. The whole 'who you are, not who you were' thing.'*

"Big Mac?" Vagabond asked.

Big Macintosh raised an eyebrow in response, so Vagabond continued, "T-thank you." Vagabond said stuttering, "Truly. Thank you."

"Ayup."

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Twilight was getting frustrated,
"What are you not telling me Rainbow Dash?" she asked.

Rainbow Dash couldn't look her friend in the eye,
"I'm not leaving anything out!" she said exasperated, "I told you everything that happened with Vagabond. What kind of name is that anyway?" Rainbow Dash asked changing the subject.

Twilight began to pace as she explained,
"It's not a name per se, it's a title."

"A title? You mean he's famous?" Dash asked.

Twilight shook her head,
"More like infamous. The title 'Vagabond' is only placed on somepony who committed a serious crime. It doesn't happen often, generally it's only bestowed when a death is involved. Vagabond means 'wanderer' or more specifically 'one who is without a home'. A pony is named Vagabond then exiled from their home and travels continuously, doing everything in their power to atone for the crime. Most ponies who commit such a crime, do so intentionally and don't much care, until they realize that the spirit of their victim is tied to them. The spirit of the victim judges and torments the Vagabond constantly until the spirit forgives the one who caused their death."

“When is that normally?” Rainbow Dash asked.

Twilight shuddered slightly,
“Usually when the Vagabond dies, which tends to happen within a week or two. Which is why the Vagabond you found puzzles me. He’s been a Vagabond for five years, that’s really unusual.”

“Why haven’t I heard about this before?” Rainbow Dash asked.

“It doesn’t come up often because most ponies die of natural causes. Besides who wants to talk about death and misery when there’s so much life to live?” Twilight said.

“Have any Vagabonds ever been forgiven and lived?” Rainbow Dash asked.

Twilight nodded sagely,
“Yes, there are four historically. In every case, once the Vagabond was forgiven, they went on to live out their lives normally. Also in every case, the spirit of the victim tasked a different pony to tell the Vagabond he or she was forgiven. I thought maybe the spirit told you, but it looks like the Vagabond isn’t done with his punishment.”

“Can you tell me anything else about the ponies who had to tell the Vagabonds they were forgiven?” Rainbow Dash asked.

Twilight Sparkle looked askance at her friend,
“Did you decide to change your story?” she asked.

Rainbow Dash made a rude noise,
“Psh, no! I’m just curious.

“I’ll have to look it up. I’ll let you know if I find anything.” Twilight said, ‘*Even though I KNOW you’re not telling me everything.*’ she thought.

“Thanks Twilight, I have to go. See you later though.” Dash said flying out the window.

Twilight began her research immediately. Spike was out visiting Rarity again. Twilight decided not to rush him. She needed him to send a message to Princess Celestia, but that could wait, there were books to read.

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Rarity was feeling very out of sorts, ‘*I never say things like that. Not only is it unladylike but it’s presumptuous and mean. He WAS responsible for a pony’s death but he didn’t seem . . . NO! I simply CANNOT make a judgement call, I don’t know all the details. Remember Rarity, to assume, makes an ass out of you and me.*’ she thought quietly to herself as she worked.

Rarity blinked in surprise,
“That was MOST unladylike.” she said out loud.

“All you did was pin up that hem Rarity.” Spike said.

He stood stock-still, modeling a small tuxedo for the skillful and perfectly groomed pony. Rarity hadn't realized she had spoken out loud. She put down the pins, “I'm sorry Spike. I suppose I'm simply too distracted to work right now. Thank you for modeling for me though.” she said replacing the pin cushion.

Spike began carefully removing the tux,
“Do you wanna talk about it? Maybe I can help.” Spike offered.

“I shall try. Thank you Spike.” Rarity said taking a couple of deep breaths, “I may have said some rather hurtful things earlier today.”

“That's easy.” Spike said waving a claw, “Just apologize to the pony you said those things to. I'm sure if they see that you really mean it they'll forgive you. Anyone who knows you, knows you're not mean, besides I'm sure you couldn't have said anything **THAT** hurtful.” Spike said honestly.

Rarity cringed,
“It was really mean darling.”

“If it really WAS so bad, Rarity, you should give them something.” Spike suggested.

“Spike! I would NEVER try to bribe anypony. The very notion of it is just simply ghastly and ever so tacky.” Rarity said, hurt that Spike would even think of it, *‘I'll admit, I do have my shallow moments but I wouldn't dream of stooping so low. It would be an insult to anyone with even a shred of decent character and I would be debasing myself too.’* she thought furiously.

“I didn't mean a bribe. Bribes are shallow. Give them something meaningful, like you put some thought and effort into it.” Spike suggested.

“But how? I don't even know this pony?” Rarity admitted.

“Then get to know them. All seems pretty simple to me.” Spike said partly under his breath.

Rarity gave the idea earnest thought,
“You know Spike you're right! I'm going to march over there right now and get to know him.” Rarity said with genuine conviction.

Spike wilted inwardly, *‘Him? Aw man. Just when I thought we had a connection.’*

“Would you like to come with me darling?” Rarity asked Spike heading for the door.

Spike hid his emotions so Rarity wouldn't feel bad,
“No thanks, I need to get back to the library. Twilight's probably throwing a fit.” Spike said following Rarity out the door.

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Rainbow Dash was having problems of her own. She had returned to her cloud-house and was trying, and failing to take a nap. The vision of the dead pony, Arabesque, kept playing over and over in her head. Rainbow Dash grunted in frustration.

“What the hey did she mean, ‘When the time is right?’ When is the right time to tell someone something like that?” Rainbow Dash corrected herself, “No, she said, ‘When he is ready’ How am I suppose to know when he’s ready?” she yelled, “Arg! This is so frustrating!” Rainbow Dash rubbed her head with her hooves and thought out loud, “I shouldn’t have kept Arabesque a secret from Twilight. She’ll help me, she’s great with weird cryptic stuff like this.” Rainbow Dash swallowed her reservations and decided to bite the proverbial bullet. She went back to tell Twilight.