

There was a crash in the library.

The earth shuddered as a purple unicorn wobbled out of her study and into the library proper. She looked around in confusion as books tumbled from their shelves. Leaves fell like rain from outside, littering the floor. She quickly ran over to a small basket in the corner, nudging its contents with a hoof.

“Spike! Spike wake up! Something’s happening!”

“Huh? What is it?” the basket mumbled.

A small statue of Adam Doulasso fell from a nearby shelf onto the head of the sleeping dragon inside. He sat up with a start, rubbing his head.

“I don’t know!” yelled Twilight.

“Is it an earthquake?” asked Spike.

“I thought about that, but Ponyville isn’t anywhere near a fault line.”

Spike paused. “Does Ponyville know that?”

“This is no time for jokes!” Twilight tried to keep her balance as the shaking got worse. “This is serious!”

As she spoke the earth stopped shaking. Outside a few stray leaves rained to the ground, floating gently through the air.

“See, it fixed itself, now back to napping!”

“Spike!” Twilight jerked the blanket away from the lazy dragon. “It may be over now, but we have to figure out what caused that tectonic impaction!”

“The what?”

Twilight sighed. “The earthquake. It could be important. It’s not everyday the ground shakes beneath your hooves. What if it happens again? Who knows what could be causing it! We need to investigate.” She grabbed a pair of saddlebags from a coat by the door. “Spike, take a letter.”

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They eventually made it to the house. Flower’s sense of direction left much to be desired. Fluttershy had discovered that ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ were out of the question and had to resort to squeaking out landmarks and pointing the way as Flower’s boundless energy propelled them around the forest. They skidded to a stop as they crossed the gate onto Fluttershy’s land. A cross looking rabbit emerged from inside the house. He marched up to them tapping his foot angrily.

“Angel, I’m sorry I’m late...I didn’t want to worry you....but I met someone in the forest.” She nodded to the tall brown earth pony behind her. “This is Flower.”

Flower looked down at the small rodent curiously. “Angel?” she asked.

“Yes.” Fluttershy said quietly. “He’s my asista-...well...not really....he’s my pe-...no not that I suppose.....He’s my friend. Yes, that’s it, my friend.” She nodded to herself.

“Hello, Angel.” said Flower.

Angel's eyes shot wide, he looked between Fluttershy and the earth pony, bewildered, before making various high pitched squeaking noises.

Fluttershy looked on, confused. "Is something wrong?"

Angel pointed to the brown and green pony, who smiled in amusement.

"Flower?" Fluttershy guessed.

Angel poked his nose twice, signaling she was correct. He lowered one ear and wagged the other. He and Fluttershy did this often, this signal meant 'Is'.

"Flower is...." Fluttershy continued.

Angel touched his nose again. He raised both paws above his head and brought them down around him meeting at the bottom.

"Circle?" Flower attempted. "This is...fun!"

The small rabbit shook his head. He made the gesture again.

"Flower is....big?" Fluttershy guessed. "Well she is rather tall...but um...that's not very nice."

Angel slapped his forehead in exasperation. He hopped over to a nearby stream, quickly returning with a pile of mud, some grass, and a walnut shell filled with water. He pointed insistently towards each, then to Flower.

"Flower....needs a bath?" Fluttershy looked at the rather bedraggled mare. "Well, yes, she is kind of dirty....Um...I'm sorry...no offence," she added quickly

Flower just smiled.

Angel shook his head, squeaking angrily. He picked up the mud and patted it into a circle, layering the grass on top, and pouring water over it. The small rabbit pointed urgently at the small display then again to Flower.

Flower looked down at the mixture, her smile grew even wider. "Home," she said fondly.

Fluttershy was more confused than ever. "I'm sorry Angel, but I really don't know what you're trying to tell me..." She squinted at the circular pile of mud, which was slowly crumbling on the ground. "It's very pretty though. It looks kind of like a cookie."

Fluttershy squeaked as she found herself once again being exuberantly shoved towards the door. Angel jumped out of the way as Flower dashed into the house. The word "Cookies!" echoed back as the door slammed behind them.

Fluttershy stumbled into the kitchen, trying not to fall head over tail onto the tiled floor. She fumbled for a minute trying to keep her balance. Flower stood in the doorway smiling expectantly. "Are they in here?" she asked.

Fluttershy stood there for a moment. It'd always taken her a while to let anyone in, it was her nature. Yet in the last hour or so somepony had gone from random stranger in the woods to over for cookies before she had time to register what happened. She fretted internally, her mind turning to the thousand little things it always did in the presence of new ponies. What must the mare think of her? Her house, her kitchen, her animals, this was far too fast. But she couldn't lose focus of the main point. It was obvious the Flower needed some help, Fluttershy couldn't just turn her out.

She would simply figure out where Flower had come from and perhaps get one of the braver ponies to take her home, Fluttershy decided. Simple as that. Then she'd be back to feeding her animals and tending the garden as usual. She worried momentarily how to pose

such questions without sounding rude, but what better start than cookies? Flower's speech seemed to be getting better by the second, so if she could just find the right words she could get back to her routine.

"Um...yes, they're right over there on the counter." she nodded. "So...how about I-...well...I could put some tea on....I have some lavender and chia in the kitchen....if you like tea. If you don't I have some milk. But, if you just want cookies that's fine too." Said Fluttershy, twiddling her hooves.

Flower turned her head to the side. "Tea?"

"Well, yes, tea...do you like tea?" Fluttershy asked.

"Like tea...." Flower said experimentally. "Do I like tea?" she looked at Fluttershy curiously.

"Oh...well.." Fluttershy was at a loss. "I don't know...do you?"

Flower looked at the ceiling for a minute, her face scrunched up in thought. "Do I like tea?..." she said again. Her face grew resolute. "Yes!" she announced, stomping a hoof. "I like tea!"

"That's....good..." Fluttershy said, unsure. "I'll just fetch the kettle...if you'll wait a moment." She walked over to one of the many cabinets that adorned the walls. After some shuffling she returned with a small white kettle with a sunflower on the side. Fluttershy walked over to the sink, filled it with water and sat it over the fireplace.

A small pair of bellows were attached to the floor at the front of the hearth. She stepped on it gently with a hoof. The small embers left over from breakfast sprang to life, roaring and smoking as the fire started.

Flower's face turned white. She jumped backwards, shaking terribly. "Fire!" she yelled. "Fire!" Flower tried to back under the kitchen table though she was far too big. Cups and saucers went tumbling onto the floor shattering. Flower hunched against the wall shaking like a leaf.

Fluttershy reared back in shock. Looking at the shattered plates, Flower lay huddled beneath the table, it shook as she moved, barely managing to cover her body. Fluttershy leaned under the table near Flower's side. She tried to suppress her surprise and calm the frightened mare. "It's okay," she said softly. "It's alright, nothing's going to hurt you see?" She pointed to the fireplace. "I'm just making tea. It'll be alright." Flower's eyes were closed tight, she still shook, trying to inch closer to the wall. Fluttershy reached out a hoof, placing it gently against the her side.

"I don't like fire..." said Flower quietly. "I don't like it..." Her voice began to shake.

"That's fine," She gently patted her side. "But we're perfectly safe. Okay?"

Flower nodded, her eyes still tightly shut.

"There now," Fluttershy helped Flower out from under the table. "If you don't like fire you can wait in the living room." She gently walked her out of the kitchen. Sitting her on the couch. "Wait here alright? I'll bring the tea when it's ready."

Flower nodded, still visibly shaken.

Fluttershy tried to smile encouragingly before she returned to the kitchen and sat down to wait on the tea. Things were getting strange, Flower had reacted so fearfully to a simple cooking fire. Fluttershy knew a few ponies who weren't all that fond of fire, but none of them

reacted quite like that. She looked desperately for some way to ask Flower about it. Finding nothing, she busied herself sweeping up pieces of the plates and cups that had fallen during the scare.

The kettle whistled plaintively from the fire place. Fluttershy quickly grabbed a pot holder in her mouth gently removed it, setting it on a silver tray she had sitting on the counter. She then walked over to the glass cabinet in the corner and returned with two tea cups, each with a matching blue flower on the side. She sat them across from each other on the tray and brought it to the living room, sitting it on the table in the corner. Flower watched with interest as she set a small bag of tea in each. "You can sit down if you like....or you could stand...whatever you're comfortable with."

Flower attempted to sit in the rather small chair at the opposite end of the table. Placing her hind legs in various positions in an effort to get comfortable. Failing this, she opted to simply sit on the floor, being more than tall enough to be able to reach her tea. She smiled at Fluttershy, who smiled awkwardly in turn.

"Thank you," said Flower. "It has been very nice to meet you." She looked away for a moment. "I am sorry about the kitchen."

The yellow pegasus blushed slightly. "Well..um..thank you...It's been nice meeting you too..Don't worry about the kitchen...really, It's alright."

Flower's smile returned. "I am glad."

Fluttershy sipped her tea. "So....if you don't mind my asking...what were you doing in the woods?"

"Doing?" Flower's face scrunched up for a moment. "I do not know. I suppose I was...sleeping."

Now Fluttershy was getting somewhere. "So you took a nap and got lost?"

"No, not lost. Found." Flower grinned.

"Oh..." said Fluttershy. "What do you mean?"

"I have been lost." Flower looked at her tea, admiring her reflection in the dark brown surface.

Fluttershy was more confused than ever. "Yes, you were lost in the forest. Lucky I found you I suppose." She smiled awkwardly.

"No, I was not lost in the forest, I was found in the forest." The slender mare poked at her tea cup experimentally.

Fluttershy decided to try a different approach. "So...then...where were you lost?"

Flower stopped looking at her tea cup and thought for a moment. "I am not sure. I was there a very long time. But now," she clicked her hooves together happily, "I am here!"

This wasn't getting Fluttershy anywhere. She felt happy that Flower seemed to be enjoying herself, but she really needed more to go on. Sipping her tea thoughtfully, she noticed that Flower had yet to take a sip.

"Do you..um...not like this kind? I have others." she offered.

Flower sniffed at the cup. "I like tea." she said. "It smells nice."

Fluttershy nodded. A silence fell over the table. Fluttershy looked for something to say. Finding nothing, she continued to sip her tea, while Flower sat there sniffing the warm smoke as it rose from her cup. Finally, after several minutes, Flower bowed her head to take a sip.

The cup went clattering to the floor as she jerked backward, her tongue hanging out.  
“Hot! Hot! Hot!”

In the forest, the ooze lay in wait. The grass around it lay dead or dying in pale, browning patches, the trees it brushed against turned a sickly grey, withering as their leaves fell onto the forest floor. It had slithered to the edge of the small village and watched as the ponies there went about their business, going into shops, playing in the evening light.

It quivered and bubbled. It did not like this place.

An acorn fell from one of the rotted trees. The ooze shrank away from it quickly, hiding beneath a nearby bush.

It waited.

A squirrel scampered down from the branches. It squeaked, jumping nimbly over to retrieve its lost nut. Before it reached its destination the ooze struck.

It wrapped itself around the small creature. It struggled against the thing holding it, but the ooze covered its face, soon its struggles grew weak then stopped all together. The ooze sat for a moment, before slithering back under the bush. There was a faint sound, then a squirrel emerged. It looked normal in all respects, except that its left paw was dark purple.

The Squirrel looked towards the village, its eyes glinted against the fading light. Then it leapt nimbly towards the nearest shop, its movements were quick and efficient. It dashed through the streets without anypony taking the slightest notice.

It hid.

It waited.

Mr.Breezy hummed to himself as he walked towards his store. He sold fans and business had been slow over the winter. But he had a good feeling things would pick up now that spring had started. The second the heat began to rise he would have a line out the door, he was sure of it. Perhaps he'd be able to buy that new vest he'd been eyeing in the shop down the street. But before any of that, he'd have to make sure his store was well stocked. It would be terrible to run out if a heat wave popped up early.

As he walked up the steps towards the door his ears twitched. He turned around, thinking somepony was behind him.

The road was empty besides a few ponies getting in some last minute shopping before the stores closed. He was alone.

He shrugged; he must have been hearing things. But as he turned back to open the door he heard the sound of claws scabbling at the stairs behind him. He whirled back around, tense and ready to face what might be there.

He relaxed when he saw a squirrel sitting there looking at him with its large beady eyes.

“Oh, well it's just'a wee little squirrel!” He said, exhaling with relief. “You gave me a bit of'a scare there little beastie.” Mr.Breezy chuckled. “What're you doing out and about? You

ought to be getting ready for bed.”

The squirrel cocked its head to the side, still staring.

“Well, aren’t you friendly?” Mr.Breezy remarked. “I’m sorry I can’t stay and chat, little beastie, but I must be off to check my fans.” He turned, pushing open the door with a hoof. “You run along no-”

It struck. The squirrel leapt at Mr. Breezy’s face, its body turning to liquid mid flight. He tried to scream, but found the thing oozing into his mouth. It quickly covered his face snaking its way down his neck and over the rest of the body. He thrashed and fought violently but soon tired, falling to the ground. His legs still kicked and jerked, trying to gain purchase to fight back, but it was useless, he may as well have been kicking at thin air.

The ooze was cold, so unbearably cold.

Mr.Breezy suddenly felt sleepy. He tried to struggle more, but eventually his resistance ended. The ooze dragged him into the shop, the door slamming shut behind it.

There was silence for several minutes. The wind whistled through ponyville as the night continued its march. It was cold, colder than usual. The ponies climbing into their beds to prepare for sleep drew their covers up to their chins against the sudden chill.

As the night drew on the shop door opened. Mr.Breezy peered out. He looked the same besides a pair of shoes he was suddenly wearing. He smiled, looking around the sleeping village then turned, went back inside and closed the door.

He waited.

To Be continued.