

Chapter 4

Big pink balloons aren't very common in Cloudsdale. The pegasus ponies don't have any need for them, but this one had been in the city before. The balloon hovered over the surface of the cloud, and out hopped Pinkie Pie, followed by Rarity, Applejack, and Twilight Sparkle. Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash were there already because they didn't need the balloon.

"So, how'd he get up here?" Rainbow Dash asked, "he didn't take the balloon, and I don't know if dragons can walk on clouds."

"Spike *can't* walk on clouds," Twilight said. She closed her eyes, concentrating, and a trail of light streamed from her horn.

"I take it that tells us where he is?" asked Applejack.

"Not quite," said Twilight, "it tells us where he sent the letter from. For all we know, he's probably skipped town."

"You mean we came all the way up here and he might not even be around?" asked Rainbow Dash, cranky at the revelation.

"It's the only lead we have," said Twilight Sparkle, "we find where he sent the letter from, and maybe we have a better idea what he's been up to."

A colt in command of a costume carousel saw a petite purple pegasus pony enter.

"Excuse me, sir?" asked the little colt, "I was wondering if you had any mail carrier costumes?"

"I think so..." said the colt in charge, "what for?"

The purple colt found what he was looking for – several sizes too big, "trick or treating."

"Uhhh, it's a bit early for that. A bit big, too..."

"I'll grow into it," said the purple colt, "how much?"

"Fourteen bits..." the colorful clinking of coins indicated that the suit was paid for.

"Thank you," said Spike, leaving a confused but contented shopkeeper.

“He’s in there?” asked Applejack, “mighty fancy flat there.”

They were standing in front of the mansion that Spike (under the “Feather” alias) had been staying.

“Well, he’s been here. This is where the letter was sent from,” Twilight Sparkle said as she walked to the front door. She rang the doorbell, and the loud, sonorous chimes sounded.

“I should get a doorbell like that,” said Rarity.

However, nopony answered the door. The old couple was still on their holiday.

“Urghh...” Twilight said, “we come this far and they won’t even answer the door. What do we do now?”

Then, the door opened. It was Pinkie Pie.

“Hi!” she said.

“Pinkie Pie, what are you doing in there?!” Twilight asked, astonished.

“I live here!”

“No you don’t,” said Twilight in a flat tone, her eyes narrowed.

“Ya got me! But come on in!”

“But this isn’t our property!” protested Rarity, “trespassing would be exceedingly impolite.”

“Ah don’t think it’s legal, either,” concurred Applejack.

“So what are we supposed to do?” asked Rainbow Dash, “just wait here until the owners get back? And then we go ‘hey, excuse me, we’re investigating if there’s been a dragon in your house?’”

“But I don’t think we-” said Fluttershy.

“What’s the worst than can happen?” asked Rainbow Dash, walking inside, “as long as we don’t break their stuff, nopony needs to know.”

“Well, *I* am most certainly not setting hoof anywhere uninvited,” said Rarity, backing away from the door.

“Suit yourself,” said Rainbow Dash, following Pinkie Pie.

Fluttershy, Rarity, and Applejack were not budging. Twilight looked at them, then to the house, where Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash had disappeared.

“Uhh, Twi?” called Rainbow Dash’s voice. “What are we supposed to be looking for?”

It was at this point that Twilight gave up and just went inside.

A grey, blond-maned pegasus pony had received her mailbag, and was ready to begin her mail route. Meanwhile, Spike was now in the form of a fully-grown pegasus pony, and with his costume, he walked into a post office. He looked around at the mail carriers – he needed to find the right one. He saw the grey blond-maned mare, but didn’t think much of her, until he noticed that her eyes seemed to be rather askew.

He kept an eye on her – she seemed a little clumsy, like her head wasn’t all there. Well, this was perfect.

“Hello!” he said, walking up to her.

“Hi!”

“Great news!” Spike said, “you’ve been promoted!”

“I have?”

“Yeah! That means you get the day off!”

“I do?”

“Yeah! Now give me your mailbag, please.”

The mare gave her mailbag to the young stallion and left, off to enjoy whatever she had in mind for her day off. Spike was astounded that it actually worked.

“Okay, we find what we need, and we get out,” Twilight said, nervous. She wasn’t keen on breaking and entering. The spell had led them up to a bedroom.

“So, what are we looking for?” Rainbow Dash, “seems very tidy.”

“I don’t know...”

“A clue?” Pinkie Pie asked excitedly.

“More or less,” said Twilight. “But I can’t find anything that-”

“Is this a clue?” Pinkie Pie asked, balancing a broken quill on her nose.

“I don’t think so,” said Rainbow Dash, “I mean, it’s just a quill. Lots of unicorns use them-”

“Wait,” said Twilight, “a quill?”

“Uh-huh!”

“I don’t get it, what’s so special about a quill?” Rainbow Dash asked.

“Rainbow, have you ever used a quill?” Twilight asked.

“No, I can’t use- ohhhhh,” Rainbow Dash got it.

“So, that means he was here!” said Pinkie Pie.

“Wait,” said Rainbow Dash, “didn’t we already know he was here?”

Then it hit Twilight that they’d really found absolutely nothing. “C’mon, let’s get out of here before we break any more rules.”

Gloomily, they went downstairs and out of the house.

“Didja find anything?” Applejack asked.

“Nothing we didn’t already know,” said Twilight somberly.

“Guess that goes to show it warn’t worth it.”

Rarity spoke up, “I don’t think that’s a word.”

“It is now.”

The doorbell rang at a suburban home. An earth pony answered the door. There was a young purple pegasus stallion, apparently the mail character.

“Good afternoon! I got your mail.”

“Oh, thank you,” said the resident of the house.

“I should tell you, though,” said the purple pegasus pony, “there’s a bit of a new fee.”

“Come again?”

“Money times are kinda hard. There’s a delivery fee.”

“Is this a joke?”

“Hey, I don’t make the rules, I just work for them. If you aren’t going to pay for it, though...”

“Wait!” said the earth pony, running inside, “I’ll pay.”

“Thank you kindly,” Spike said, waiting. That was another thing he wasn’t sure would work. Then again, he had their mail, so he seemed legit. And even if it didn’t work on *everypony*...

“Here you are...”

“Five bits,” said Spike.

“Alright then, here’s your money.”

“And *here* is your mail,” Spike said, forking over the mail to the earth pony.

This routine continued for every house on the block, and surprisingly, most of the ponies fell for it completely (albeit with some protests).

“You left a note at their house?” Rainbow Dash asked, walking into Twilight’s library.

“I had to,” said Fluttershy, “they should know we-”

“No, they don’t need to. All we did was-”

“We’re not doin’ that again,” said Applejack, “what happened was wrong, and we gotta own up to it.”

“And we’re still don’t know what he’s up to,” said Twilight.

“Well, let’s think,” said Rarity, “what do we *know* he’s done?”

Twilight took a breath. “Okay,” she began, “so, while we were away stopping that dragon-”

“All over a teddy bear...” Rainbow Dash mumbled.

“Spike left. When he left, he stole some apples and a suit,” Twilight continued, “and he went to Cloudsdale – stayed at the home of a couple of rich ponies. Then he sent a letter indicating that he had been doing very well.”

“Is that all he stole?” Rarity asked.

“Well, not exactly,” Twilight said, “I also found a few things missing – food, mostly.”

“Any books?” Rarity asked. She’d caught something out of the corner of her eye – a gap on the bookshelf.

“Huh?” Twilight walked over to the bookshelf, “I didn’t notice that... hold on,” she ran to the front of the library, pulling several sheets of paper out of a drawer.

“What is that?” Rainbow Dash asked.

“It’s a catalogue of every book in the library. I’ve got them all arranged, now let’s see...” she went down the list, “so the missing book is in the magic section, and it’s alphabetical... *Prodigies and Paradigms*... found it,” she said, a subtle tone of triumph in her voice, “*The Practical Professor’s Portable Pamphlet Pertaining to Powerful Potions of Particular Potency*.”

“Say that five times fast,” Applejack mumbled.

“Ooh!” said Pinkie Pie, “so now he’s mixing up brews?”

“I wouldn’t doubt it...” Twilight said, thinking, “I think a lot of potion materials can be made from food, so that would explain that... the suit’s still a mystery.”

“Like, if he made some kind of potion that allowed him to walk on clouds?” Rainbow Dash suggested.

“He could be. I think there’s another copy in the Canterlot library,” Twilight said, “I’ll have to go there.”

“Ooh! Another trip!” Pinkie Pie started dancing excitedly.

“No, Pinkie Pie,” Twilight said (and Pinkie’s excitement deflated like an unhappy

balloon), “we can’t all go. If it’s a dead end, then we’ve all wasted time.”

“Fluttershy and I can go back up to Cloudsdale...” suggested Rainbow Dash.

“We could put up missing posters...” Fluttershy added.

“And sleuth around...”

“And apologize to whoever owns that house...”

“Would you forget about the house already?”

“What can we do?” asked Applejack.

“I don’t know,” said Twilight, “you might want to check here to see if any new letters arrive, or if something happens. Always returns to the scene of the crime, as they say, and he stole from you.”

“I still wish we knew *why*,” Rarity said, “it’s not like him.”

“That’s why we need to find him before he does something foolish,” Twilight said, “well, *more* foolish.”