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“A Lovely Light, Part Two” (1450 Words)
by Scribus Caballus

*“A dream reminds you / Always shines through / Shows the light that took my fears”
-- D.C. Cooper*

Applejack was alone. The fact had settled in slowly, but as the sun fell further and further below the mountains, there was no denying it.

Applejack was alone.

Her own hoofbeats came back at her from the cliffs and boulders. When the path was smooth, she trotted, but as she moved deeper and deeper into the heart of the mountains, she found herself forced to slow to a walk more frequently.

She rounded a sharp bend just as the sun set completely, still leaving enough light for her to see that the path had fallen out in front of her, nothing but a thousand-foot drop to boulders below.

She sighed, turning away from the edge, and began to walk back. “Now, I know I saw another fork a while back there,” she reminded herself. “I sure hope Luna raises a full moon tonight...”

She didn't. The moon was a cruel, distant sliver, giving only enough light to see one's own hooves. Applejack tried to keep going, one shoulder to the mountainside to feel her way. She tripped over a rock, stumbling to the ground. “Darn it!” She grunted, standing again, placing her shoulder to the mountain again.

A stray cloud passed slowly across the moon. The mountain walls blocked most of the night's usual array of stars. Applejack shut her eyes, leaned into the mountain, and stepped high to avoid rocks.

The mountain wall ran out, and Applejack tumbled to her side, falling. Her heart raced, her scream echoed back to her, and her eyes shot open, still showing nothing.

She landed immediately.

The cloud passed from the moon, giving just enough light to see that she had found the fork in the road. The other path followed along a ridge, wide enough for one pony at a time, but lined on either side with a drop into pure darkness below.

Applejack sat up, shaking dust from her mane. Even in the middle of summer, the nights were not warm this high up. A shiver passed through her as she thought about her situation. *I'm alone. It's too dark to go anywhere. No pony else knows where I am.*

She slid off her saddlebags, then dug through them for an apple. She chewed slowly, not tasting; lost in the mountains, lost in thought. When she finished her apple, she laid down to sleep.

“Applejack!”

She was awoken by somepony shouting her name. “Applejack!” She knew the voice, but she couldn't place it. “Applejack, where are you?” It didn't make any sense; she couldn't be

here. "Applejack, come home!"

"Applebloom?"

She heard her sister call again. She stood up and called back.

"Applejack?"

"I'm right here, Applebloom!" The night was still dark, but she could clearly see the filly coming up the path.

Applebloom, however, couldn't see her. "Applejack, where are you?" She kept trotting up the path, looking left to right and back again.

"Right here! Applebloom! I'm right here!"

"Applejack!" Applebloom kept trotting, not looking where she was going.

"Stay right there, sugarcube! I'll come and get you!"

Applebloom didn't hear.

"Stop! Stay there!" Applejack galloped for her sister, but the distance between them stayed the same. She pushed, harder, faster, still going nowhere. "Applebloom!"

"Where are you?" Applebloom kept trotting, further away from Applejack.

Applejack pushed harder, straining every muscle, still losing ground.

"Apple-JACK!" Applebloom fell, screaming.

Applejack's knees gave way. She tumbled. She didn't get up. A rock stabbed into her ribs. She didn't move. She laid on the ground, watching the stars go dark as the moon turned a deep red.

Applejack woke up. She was covered in dust; it was caked in streaks around her eyes. She had been thrashing in her sleep, and had kicked her saddlebags off of the mountain. "Horseapples!" she swore, standing and trying to shake some of the dust from her body.

She snorted and flicked her tail, looking at the three paths. One was the way she'd come, headed back to Ponyville. Alone. The second was pointless, she'd backtracked it last night. Failure. The third was unknown.

"What would Twilight do?" *She wouldn't go getting her and her friends lost, that's for sure.* Applejack took a step towards the unexplored path, then stopped. Her knees felt weak. The morning sun was already warming the day, she had no supplies, no map, no help.

And that dream was still fresh on her mind.

She shut her eyes, trying not to remember. Fresh tears came through anyway. *Applebloom.* "I'm sorry, Twilight."

Applejack turned and started walking back to Ponyville.

She walked, numb, ignoring the dust she stirred, not hearing the echoes of her steps, only aware of the hollowness in her chest. She was thankful for the protection her hat offered as the sun rose higher, burning hotter, but it also reminded her of her family. She tried to convince herself that Applebloom was okay, but she couldn't shake the fear in the back of her mind. She didn't even know for whom she was more afraid.

She plodded on, down a slowly winding path, kicking small rocks with her shuffling steps. From here she could see nothing but the mountain range; close and towering to the east, standing between her and home; far and wide in the west, spanning further than she could see

or think.

Once, she thought she heard voices. She stopped, perking up her ears, trying to find them again. At first, nothing. She shook her head, tried to clear her mind. There it was, again, coming from below her. She walked to the edge of the path.

“Rarity? Fluttershy?”

“Applejack?” Rarity called back. “Is that you?”

Applejack peered over the edge, looking down at her two friends. “What are y’all doing down there?”

“Well, I should think-” Rarity stopped when Fluttershy tapped her shoulder. Fluttershy said something Applejack couldn’t hear. Rarity replied, also too quiet to hear from this distance. Rarity nodded, and Fluttershy flew up to Applejack.

“I’m sorry I interrupted. I was afraid we might start an avalanche, or wake up a... a dragon.”

“T’aint no problem, sugarcube.” Applejack smiled. “Now, where were y’all going? I didn’t expect to find anypony after last night.”

“Oh. Well, we got kind of lost after we left, and... well... I wasn’t sure where we were.”

“I see. Well, these mountains can get tricky, I reckon.” Fluttershy didn’t meet her eyes. “Well, I’m just happy to see a friendly face again. Eh, we are still friends, right?”

“Of course we are, darling,” Rarity answered, coming up the path at a delicate trot. “Everypony was having a hard time last night; no one holds it against you.”

Well, I hold it against myself.

“Now, tell us, what are you doing on the road back to Ponyville?”

Applejack turned from them, blinking away tears. She took quick, shallow breaths. “I gave up. I lost my packs last night, and I kept thinking about Applebloom... and I gave up on Twilight.” She took a step away, leaning against the mountainside, fighting back sobs. *I’m sorry.*

“Oh, you poor thing!” Applejack heard Rarity digging through her saddlebags. “Here, you’ll feel better after you’ve eaten, darling.” She laid a bundle of carrots in front of Applejack, then backed away. “Fluttershy, would you be a dear and try to find Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie for us? I’ll send up a light every half-hour so that you can find us.”

A moment later, Fluttershy flew away, and Rarity walked back to Applejack.

“Darling, eat, please.” She nudged the carrots closer. “You said that you’d lost your bags, you can’t have had breakfast yet.”

Applejack swallowed a lump in her throat. “I found some grass.”

“Certainly not enough. Not up here. Eat.”

“But I-”

“Eat. I insist.”

Applejack did. She tried not to eat too fast, but she was hungry, and the last harvest had been particularly good for carrots. “Thank you kindly.”

“Don’t mention it.” Rarity smiled. “Now, let us get one thing straight,” she continued, her expression becoming firm. “You have no reason to be ashamed for thinking of your family. Twilight would not have wanted Applebloom to grow up without a big sister, and you’re well aware of that.”

“I know,” Applejack said, taking deep breaths.

Rarity nodded. "With that said, are we going to continue searching?"

"Sure will," Applejack nodded, blinking her eyes clear. "If y'all will let me help you, that is."

"Of course," Rarity smiled. "Shall we?"

For the third time in two days, Applejack retraced her steps, leading her and Rarity back into the mountain range. Rarity sent up a dazzling light show, cascades of purple and gold reaching high into the sky.

(to be [concluded...](#))