

## **A Stick in the Mud**

**By: Nickel Bristle**

*"I was never one for parties."*

The Friendship Express chugged along on the tracks as it made its way East towards the Pie family's rock farm, having only a few passengers on board. The brightly-colored train seemed to be out of place with the dull and boring backdrop of the desolate fields behind it, with nothing but rocks scattered as two ponies carefully bring the boulders from one end of the field to the other. Maud looked out of the window back at her home, keeping the ever stone-faced expression that she usually carried.

*"Even when Pinkie threw her first party, I had arrived late because of my work towards studying towards my degree. When I first stepped into the barn, I was a bit confused that my baby sister was jumping around and dancing with Ma and Pa. Still, I didn't want to leave."*

The train slowly came to a stop at the station as Maud sat up from her seat, taking the small piece of luggage that she had brought on her trip to Ponyville. She was the only pony to exit the car at this station, since the rest of the passengers were on their way to the more vibrant cities on the East Coast of Equestria.

*"I was always more business oriented than the rest of my family. It was the way that I had said the information on our supply that made the deals between our partners. As much as our business was not the most exciting product, we still managed to provide for almost all of the cobblestone and pathways in the major cities of Equestria."*

Maud slowly made her way to the farmhouse in the middle of the field, the sun almost setting behind the gloomy clouds that seemed to always cover the farm, day and night. As she walked, one of the ponies waved to her after pushing a large boulder in front of her. Without as much as a twitch of her mouth, she waved back to her sister and continued on towards the house.

*"My studies in the scientific field of rocks had given the farm the upper hand as suppliers. We made sure to only select the most solid, hard and steady rocks from our fields, while the rest were simply tossed around day after day until they were ready as well. It wasn't an easy job for any of us."*

Stepping onto the rickety, wooden porch of the farmhouse, Maud was surprised to see her mother standing in the doorway with a plate of lemonade.

"Maud!" Cloudy Quartz declared, trying not to lose hold of the lemonade in her hoof. "Why, we didn't expect to see you come back until after your research trip. How was your visit to your sister's?"

"I left early." Maud stated rather flatly, dropping her things by the door as she walked past her mother.

"Oh dear. What did that Pinkamena do to get you all bothered?" she persisted, leaving the lemonade on the front of the porch as Igneous Rock looked up from his rocking chair, not even realizing that his oldest daughter had returned home.

"Nothing. Pinkie Pie was very friendly. There were lots of parties." Maud explained, looking over at the family portrait that hung perfectly centered on the wall. Cloudy sighed, taking off her glasses to clean them with a small cloth napkin.

"You should have been there for Pinkamena's grand party with the Princess!" she commented, replacing her glasses. "The music was a bit loud for my taste but she still threw one amazing show. Your father and I had never seen anything like it!"

Maud turned to her mother, keeping the same expression on her face despite Cloudy's recollection of the Rockin' Ponypalooza Party. "You've explained that trip once before. While the family was away, I managed to secure a deal with Rich and Plenty's Pathways for Vanhoover, Manehattan and Ponyville. They were still interested in our supply even without the crystal additions."

"And we are very thankful for you, Maud, for doing all that. But you have to realize that even when you're doing business or researching all sorts of fancy rocks, there's time to be had having fun. Pinkamena knows that more than any of you girls." Cloudy continued as the two Pie sisters made their way into the house with lemonade in their hooves.

"Pinkie is still young, Ma." Maud replied, holding back a sigh. "You don't see Limestone or Marble dancing out in the fields because they're doing what has to be done. That isn't to say that you're wrong about Pinkie though."

For a brief second, a smirk crossed Maud's face as her two younger sisters with their straight manes smiled happily at the mention of their youngest sister. "I just know where having too many parties can get you, Ma. That's all."

"Well, alright." Cloudy said defeated as she sat on the couch in the house, holding a cup of plain tea. "Did you at least have some fun visiting your sister?"

"Of course, Ma. I always like seeing my baby sister." Maud replied before walking towards her room. "I'll check on Pa's receipts and totals in the morning. Good night, Ma. Good night, Limestone. Good night, Marble."

"Okay. Sleep well, Maud." Cloudy waved to her daughter.

"Night Maud!" Limestone chirped up, waving happily to her sister. Marble blinked before her sister tapped her shoulder.

"Nighty night!" she added on, waving as well.

*"I love my family. I really do."*

Lighting a match for the lamp in her plain, undecorated room. Maud sat on her bed before slowly leaning down to her pillow, the thoughts still going about in her head.

*"They don't know much outside of this farm though. I was the first one to leave to Fillydelphia to follow my rock studies at a more academic level. They were surprised to see someone from the middle of the rock fields in such a setting. Most of the ponies in the rock science classes were either bored or just wanted a good grade from an easy class. I was the only one to take the studies seriously.*

*Even then, there's something that I discovered about rocks that made me a very influential pony on the campus. It's really something I've only shared with Pinkie Pie, but she doesn't even know the half of it."*

*Fillydelphia University, four years ago...*

A young mare with a straight mane works tirelessly in the lab, bunsen burners and the like boiling away at some major experiment. One of the textbooks she has open is titled

“Geology and You: The Rocks That Will Change Your Life.” A small candle light lamp illuminates the page on the structure of a certain sedimentary specimen, one that the mare has in her possession as she carefully dips the minerals into the boiling chemical mixture in the flask in front of her. As the rocks react with the bath, they become more crystallized, each one having a different hue as the fumes out of the beaker shape into little party balloons that disappear into the air in front of her. The small mask on her face prevents her from breathing in any of the stray vapors.

As she vacuums out all of the smoke and fumes from the flask, she shakes free the crystallized rocks onto a small platter before smashing them into bits with a small hammer. The shards of the crystals crack every which way as her hooves move the solid product of the experiment into a blue plastic bag with a resealable top.

As she labels the side of the bag, a three-beat knock is heard on the lab door. She turns around, the plastic bag in hoof along with a large rock in her other hoof, just in case. Looking out of the blurry window on the door, she sees a pony with a very poofy mane smiling and shaking, almost as if he’s ready to burst into song at any moment.

Opening the door, she keeps the objects in her hooves behind her as she removes the goggles and mask from her face. The stallion smiles at her in which she only returns her flat stare back.

“I’m told that Clyde’s the one I need to see if I want to throw a party around these parts.” the stallion whispers as he appears right next to her ear. The mare doesn’t budge.

“It’s not going to come cheap. Who’s the consumer?” she replied flatly.

“We’ll, come on lady, it’s a party! There’s going to be tons of ponies having a good time!” The stallion closes his eyes and grins as the unheard music takes a hold of him as he drags the mare into a sudden waltz. The mare looks at him with an unmoved expression as she holds a rock in her hoof.

“Oh, what’s that?” he asked.

“His name is Boulder. He used to be twice this size. Please don’t do that again.” she explained, keeping the rock up where the pony could see it. Chuckling nervously, the pony gulped and held up a rubber chicken.

“Well would you look at that. I also got a friend! Say hello, Boneless!” the stallion held up the chicken to the rock, hoping the two would interact.

“Stop playing games. Do you have the money or not?” she continued, the grip on her rock in her hoof growing a bit tighter as she looked down the hallway they were standing in.

“Oh! Sure! Right here.” He pulled out a small sack of Bits from his saddlebag, tossing it on the floor in front of her. “I sure hope that stand-up club gig sticks around. I want to be the number one party pony!”

She looked down at the payment and tossed the blue plastic bag to the stallion’s hooves. “This stuff will be sure to get you there.”

He looked at the bag beneath him, the shards of crystal rocks making his eyes go wide. “Oh wow, thanks! Hey, do you know if this stuff is any good? Like, do you party yourself?”

“I don’t use my own product.” the mare stated flatly. “I don’t really like candy.”

“So, how do you know this stuff works then?” he asked, picking up the bag and stuffing it in his saddle, pulling out his sombrero on to his poofy mane.

“It’s chemically enhanced to make you have the best party of your life. You won’t remember anything but the morning after. If you want to be a party pony, there you go.”

He smirked, tilting down his hat. “Thank ya kindly, Clyde. Happy trails.”

Putting the rubber chicken in his saddle over his poncho, the stallion trotted down the hallway until he was out of side. Replacing her mask and goggles, she went back into her lab ready to break some more rock candy for the next buyer that wanted to have a good time.

*“It’s a pretty fractured business, but getting a rocktorate isn’t cheap and the farm can barely makes enough to stand on it’s own. Ponies will go through a lot to party off of cheap rocks and with my skills in the science of the field, I can supply them with what they need. Occasionally, I give Pinkie Pie some of my stuff as a courtesy, but it’s a more diluted recipe. She has enough party energy to party the night away on her own, I’m sure. Of course, I always want to look out for my little sister.”*