

And Then They Were Ponies

Chapter Two: Making Your Mark

"Are... Are you sure about this?" Kitone asked peering over the edge of the cloud at the ground. There was at least a thousand feet between her and terra firma.

"Are you doubting the best flier in Equestria?" Rainbow Dash answered sleepily as she fluffed a small cloud into a pillow. "Just..." Rainbow Dash began again, pausing to yawn, "do a few practice dives like we spoke about last night. You know... just to get a feel for the speeds." Kitone looked back at the cyan Pegasus, who was now lying on the cloud falling asleep in the gentle rays of the morning sun.

Kitone yawned and blinked a few times in a feeble attempt to wipe the tiredness from her eyes. This was another thing the two Pegasi had in common; they both were less morning ponies and more afternoon ponies. She felt a conflict of emotions brewing within her mind as she stepped towards the edge of the cloud. Kitone, the human one, was mildly acrophobic. It didn't take much height to get her heart racing. A simple glance over a second floor balcony was more than enough to stir a reaction in her and the view beyond the edge of the cloud should have sent her into cardiac arrest. Yet there was a conflicting calm from her Pegasus self. She was a Pegasus after all, flying went hand in hand with heights. The conflicting natural views culminated in the feeling of bile rising to her gullet. She swallowed hard, closed her eyes and took a deep breath in an effort to focus on the task at hand. "We've gotta speed things up." Kitone said to herself, remembering what Rainbow Dash had said the night before as they made their way to her cloud home. Dash had asked to see a few simple tricks and she gladly obliged the rainbow-maned Pegasus. Dash told her, in no uncertain terms, that the first thing she needed to do was fly faster. She said Kitone had a flair she liked but lacked the oomph Dash herself had.

Kitone took a few small steps back before sprinting off the edge of the cloud, spreading her wings to catch the sudden breeze. She glided around for a bit to make sure her wings wouldn't cramp up on her as she practiced her sub-sonic dives. Kitone weaved happily between the clouds as she enjoyed her first true flight. Well, technically it wasn't her first flight; there was the time she rode the huge thermals of the Appleloosan Plains. There was also the time she flew by the Glittermist Falls, the spray from the waterfall made her mane and coat sparkle in the sun. There was even the time she flew through the tempest when she took a part time job as a Mareican mailpony. Kitone shook her head as she slowed to a hover. Those weren't her memories yet they felt so... right.

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Far below the two Pegasus ponies, on the other side of Ponyville proper, a unicorn and an earth pony were slowly making their way down the path through the orchard towards the barn. "Ah appreciate the help Athemis." Applejack said as she pulled her laden cart at a steady pace, "It's still a mite early in the Applebuck season but its better we harvest the trees that're ripe now than to leave 'em on the tree to spoil while we wait for the rest to catch up."

Athemis nodded as she kept pace beside Applejack, her cart just as laden down with apples as Applejack's was. It was many times heavier than she expected it to be but she found that with a little magical push it wasn't that hard to move. "It's the least I could do in return for giving me a room for the night. I just wish I could have been of more help, what with my magic and all."

"Shoot, we got plenty picked in the few hours we've been workin' and plus, not everypony can be a Twilight Sparkle. Ah mean, it would be awful nice if you could just whisk them apples up off them trees but you're doin' mighty fine just plain buckin' 'em." Applejack said, flashing Athemis a sincere smile.

Athemis flashed a smile of her own but it was shallow. She *could* just whisk them off the tree. She had it in her, after all she was a graduate of the Grand Mareican Magic Academy. Or at least, that what she dreamt last night. The dream felt so real to her, it was like the years she spent in the academy rushed by in the span of a night. She remembered the classes, those long and arduous classes that seemed to drag on for hours. She remembered the snooty unicorns that made up most of the school populace. The Academy was known for having two types of ponies there, those who could buy their way in and those who had proven their worth. Athems was one of the latter set, being the only foals of a bookshop owner and his wife, a fact they made so painfully known. She also remembered the many times she outperformed the spoiled brats, which only added to their ire.

Athemis could probably pull the tree clean out of the ground if she wanted to but as she felt right now it took almost all her focus to pull the cart behind her. Everypony knew that if a unicorn couldn't concentrate their magic wouldn't be up to scratch and Athemis was no exception. When she tried to focus on her magic she remembered what she 'learnt' from the dream and since it felt so natural in practice, it scared her.

"And here we are," Applejack said, getting Athemis's attention, "if ya wanna head into town an' take an early lunch that'd be fine. Buckin' these here apples is the hard part and besides, Big Mac has been slackin' off all mornin'. AIN'T THAT RIGHT MAC!" The second floor of the barn erupted into a cacophony of shuffling which was quickly followed by a loud thud and a pained grunt. Applejack couldn't help but snicker. Turning to her unicorn helper she caught Athemis staring in the direction of the town and gently she nudged the unicorn, getting her attention. "You alright?"

"Huh? Oh... yeah, I'm okay." Athemis lied.

"Go on into town." Applejack said, "I know y'all made plans to meet up with yer friends for lunch. You go and find 'em and don't worry none about these apples." With a quick kick Applejack released the buckle on the harness to the apple cart which rolled back a few inches on the slight incline into the waiting frame of Big Macintosh.

"Thanks Applejack, I'll be back after lunch to help out some more." Athemis said as she galloped towards the farm's gates.

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Captain muttered soft expletives under his breath as he made his way quickly and carefully through the tables and chairs of the restaurant's outdoor dining area towards the table that his two friends were sitting at. "Sorry I'm late," he said as he took his seat, "I ended up helping Fluttershy with her animals."

"Oooh," Kitone said teasingly, "aren't you a regular Romareo. Twilight then Fluttershy? Who's next Rarity?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Captain said, "Laugh it up. I was on my way over here when I happened to pass her trying to round up some ducklings for a mother duck. They little things were making a game of it. Everytime she found them they'd run and hide again the second she turned to look for another one. Clearly wasn't a job for one pony." He looked about the table for a few seconds. "So um... how come we're here and not at Sugarcube Corner like we had planned?"

"Ath got here first and saw this place and decided to try it out." Kitone said, smiling at Athemis.

"Okay... How are we paying for this?" Captain asked.

"Kit ended up helping Rainbow Dash with her weather pony duties and apparently they got it done so quickly they really impressed the mayor and she gave Kitone a few bits for her help." Athemis said.

"It's not much," Kitone added, "but it should be able to feed us for another day or two."

"Alright, last question," Captain asked, looking at the table, "where are the menus?"

"Oh, Kit ordered for us." Athemis said plainly.

"She did?" Captain asked.

"Yes, she did. I had no idea what to order and you were running late so she placed our order." Athemis replied, leaning into the chair. "A mixed berry salad for me, a serving of crisp hay cakes with honey for her."

"That sounds good." Captain said, having already found himself enjoying ponified food after the daffodil sandwich Spike made for him that morning. "How did you know what to order Kit?"

"I dunno." Kitone said shrugging in her seat. "It sorta came to me... I'm remembering all sorts of things about my life. Well, my life as a Pegasus. Please tell me I'm not the only one." The silence from her friends spoke volumes. She looked at Athemis who was looking in her direction but deftly avoiding her gaze, a trait her human self had when she wasn't sure how to approach something. Captain on the other hand stared at the tablecloth for a few moments.

"You're not." He said softly, "While I was helping Fluttershy I decided to tell a story to help break the ice, not exactly a small task where Fluttershy is concerned. Anyway, I started to tell her the story of our adventures in the Vastwood. Well, only one tale in particular, the grandest one of all our treks into that forest."

Captain then quickly recounted the tale, Athemis and Kitone's memories of the event bubbling to the

surface as he spoke. The Vastwood was Mareica's version of the Everfree Forest but whereas the Everfree's natural growth sprung from the resonant magic of the Ancient Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters, the Vastwood's came about as a matter of necessity. It was as expansive as its name implied and the Mareica simply didn't have a weather pony fleet large enough to handle it so it was decided that only a certain distance into the forest would be tended to by the weather ponies. The forest beyond that point was as wild and untamed as the Everfree was and that is where the trio had found the Canis Major and its pups.

The Canis, like its cousin the Ursa, was a large semi-transparent beast that was the creature of the constellation it was named after. The Canis Major was a large phantasmal dog easily the size of a small house and while normally quite docile it was extremely protective of its young. Some people would say overly so considering it would chase a trio of foals who had wandered nearby purely on accident. Their size played a surprising role in their survival, being small enough to quickly navigate through the thick undergrowth kept them mere paces ahead of the angry mother. The overturned tree helped immensely as well, providing the tired runners with a place to hide from the giant dog. Luckily for them it was just trying to scare them away from her pups and left as soon as it was sure they weren't any threat.

After a few seconds of silence Athemis spoke up. "Wow... I... I remember that."

"Me too." Kitone added softly as she brushed her crimson bang out of her eye. "We need to have a serious talk about what our next plan of action is but I think it can wait till after lunch." Kitone said, perking up as she saw the waiter making his way over with a tray that carried their meals.

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On the other side of Ponyville Twilight Sparkle was making her way back to the library by herself, having spent the morning at the spa. One morning every week Spike went over to Carousel Boutique to help Rarity with her dressmaking and Twilight usually spent these mornings relaxing or, more commonly, deep in research. This morning however she took the opportunity to take a trip down to the local spa for a bit of relaxation. Twilight felt like she was walking on air, the massage that Lotus had given her was heavenly. "That pony practically pressed my troubles away with those magic hooves of hers." Twilight said to herself as she rounded the last corner on her route home. What she saw instantly brought back the weeks of tension that had just been massaged out of her muscles.

Landing in front of the library was a trio of chariots pulled by the pegasi of the Royal Guard and each chariot held four unicorn stallions that dismounted and lined up as soon as the chariots came to a stop. Each unicorn wore the traditional armor of the Royal Guard but instead of the sparkling gold it was a polished blue-gray. It would be normal for anypony to assume that they were simply ponies in the Royal Guard, which was technically what they were, but Twilight Sparkle knew exactly *who* in the Royal Guard these ponies were. That armor was the trademark of the Spiral Horn, a specialist branch of the Royal Guard that dealt with matters of the utmost magical importance. "Why would they be here?" Twilight said as she galloped over.

"Ah, Lady Sparkle." Said one of the unicorn stallions as he noticed her approach. His helmet was more ornately decorated than the other unicorns there signifying his difference in rank. "I'm Sergeant

Sunstone of the Spiral Horn.” He said, noticing the confusion on Twilight’s face. “And you look as if you weren’t expecting us. Strange... The princess did send a letter mere moments before our departure from the barracks, I’m quite surprised you haven’t received it yet.”

“Ha...” Twilight said weakly, “Well... You see... today is normally the day Spike go-”

“TWIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIGHT!” shouted a familiar voice, managing to get everypony’s attention. Twilight turned to see her number one assistant sprinting down the street, letter in hand. “Twilight. Letter. Princess Celestia. Not at Library. Ran to Spa. Ran back here.” Spike said in a single breath before practically shoving the letter into Twilight’s hooves. Twilight levitated the letter in front of her and looked at the little dragon that had collapsed in a heap at her hooves.

“Poor little guy.” Twilight said to herself. “The letter must have come while he was helping Rarity.” She levitated the dragon onto her back and pulled the remaining pins out of his thick hide. She unfurled the scroll and quickly read the contents, worry becoming evident on her face as she scanned the lines. “This... This explains a lot. It’s also a lot to take in all at once.” Twilight said, looking the armored unicorn in the eyes. “We should go inside and discuss this further. The princess said you’d be able to answer most of my questions.”

Sergeant Sunstone nodded. “I can tell you what I know, but there isn’t much else that Princess Celestia hasn’t already explained in that letter. And to be honest, given the severity of the situation, my men need to be in the field as soon as possible.”

“I agree entirely.” Twilight said as she opened the library door, “But if Princess Celestia is placing me in charge of this mission then I need to know everything that we currently know about the situation so I can make logical and informed decisions. I only have a few questions for you; it shouldn’t take more than five minutes.”

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“So you think that the longer we stay here the more we ‘remember’ and the more we ‘forget’? Athemis said in a confused tone. She looked up at Kitone, who was flying backwards slightly ahead of her.

“Basically.” Kitone answered.

“Okay, you lost me. Run it by me one more time.” Captain said, garnering an exasperated sigh from Kitone. Kitone hated having to repeat herself and starting the fifth run-through of her theory on what was happening to them was slowly pushing her past the limits of her patience.

“Guys, it’s not that hard to understand.” Kitone said. “We’re all remembering these ‘memories’ of our lives here. We all know we AREN’T PONIES, so these memories should be fake... but they aren’t! I’ve ‘remembered’ how to fly! Ath, you’ve ‘remembered’ how to control your magic! And Cap...” Kitone paused silently for a few seconds. “Celestia only knows what you remember! I’m sure without a doubt we can all agree these memories are real.”

"So what are we forgetting?" Athemis asked.

"Trivial things." Kitone said calmly.

"Trivial things?" Athemis repeated.

Kitone nodded. "I'm not sure if you've noticed but we've slowly been forgetting things. So far it hasn't been anything of major importance, I think."

"And how are you so sure about this?" Captain asked, placing a hoof to his chin.

"Because when you do try to remember what we've forgotten you remember what we should remember here?" Kitone answered. The silence and stares that followed urged her to clarify what she meant. "If you try and remember something as the human you, you find yourself remembering what the pony you remembers. Let me show you what I mean." Kitone turned to face Captain and landed softly in front of him. "Cap," she said, pausing for a moment to look into his eyes, "I want you to answer this question for me, just tell me the first thing that comes to your mind okay? Don't think too hard either, I just want the first thing that comes to your mind." Captain nodded. "What was the incident that happened at Athemis's thirteenth birthday party?"

"Easy," he answered with a laugh, "You tried to blow out the candles before Ath could and then someone pushed you and you fell into the cake."

"Haha... That was pretty funny." Athemis said while stifling a giggle.

"Laugh it up all you want, it's your turn anyway." Kitone said turning to the unicorn. "New patient, same treatment. Ath, simple question for you as well, what did we have for breakfast yesterday?"

"That's easy." Athemis said before pausing to think. "Uhh... We had... We had the last of the mixed berry fritters that the mare... at the inn... gave us."

"Quod erat demonstrandum." Kitone said with a smug grin on her face as she took to the air again.

"W-what does this mean?" Athemis asked.

"Honestly I don't know how to answer that besides the obvious statement." Kitone said.

"Which is?" Athemis asked.

"That if we don't get home as soon as possible we won't even remember we were human in the first place." Captain said, keeping pace with Kitone's flying.

"Oh." Athemis said softly to herself before noticing her friends were leaving her behind. "Hey wait up!" she shouted, sprinting down the path and into Kitone's flank. "Ow! What the hay Ki-" Athemis managed to shout before Kitone silenced her with a hoof to her lips.

"Shh... Did you hear that?" Kitone said, her ears upright and pivoting around slowly. Athemis and

Captain looked around and sure enough they heard it, someone calling out to them in the distance.

"There!" Athemis said, pointing at an earth pony that was making his way down a foot-path towards them. Between steps he waved at them until he was completely sure he had their attention. He trotted slowly towards them, his yellow-brown coat clashed almost garishly with his silver mane.

"You ponies certainly took your own sweet time getting here." He said with an air of familiarity. The silence that followed quickly turned his jovial smile into a frown. "Seriously guys, what's with the silence? It's kinda creeping me out."

"Uh, this may seem rude," Captain said, "but who are you again?"

"You're kidding, right?" the stallion said. Silence again. "Guess not..." He said. "I'm Sterling Silver; we met in Burflank a few days ago. Surely you remember that, I mean you changed your plans to come here instead of Fillydelphia so you could take me up on my job offer."

"Job offer?" Captain asked.

Sterling nodded. "I work for a mare that has an eye for collecting unique things, I mentioned to you three that I was looking for some ponies to accompany me into the Everfree Forest to search for an artifact that my employer desires. You three said you'd consider it and we'd meet here if you decided to take the job."

"And if we didn't come?" Athemis asked out of curiosity.

"I'd go it alone. It would be risky but it wouldn't be the first time I've put my hide on the line for my pay. And when they pay is this good you can't exactly complain, if you catch my drift." Sterling said with a smirk.

"I get your drift," Kitone said, "can we get a moment to hold one final discussion before we decide on a decision?"

"Go right ahead." Sterling Silver said, taking a few steps back.

"So..." Kitone said, turning to her friends, "What do you think?"

"Sound's kinda iffy." Athemis said, her concern not lost on the other two.

"I agree with Ath. This doesn't sound like its one hundred percent legal." Captain said, glancing at Sterling over his shoulder.

"The job itself does sound flaky but his story sounds legit. From what I can 'remember' Burflank was the last town we stopped in before we came to Ponyville." Kitone said. "We also need the bits right now, regardless of what we decide to do in the future we're going to need some funds to survive off on. I say we find out more about this job and then make up our minds. If we don't like it, we walk away. Any objections?" Athemis and Captain shook their heads. "Good, let's go." Kitone said.

Sterling Silver watched as the trio broke their huddle and turned towards him. He smiled gently again and said, "So, made up your minds?"

"Not entirely," Kitone said, "we'd like to talk to your employer to find out a bit more about this job before we commit to a decision."

"That's perfectly fine. Her home is just beyond those trees." Sterling said, turning down the path and pointing towards a nearby thicket of trees, his devious grin hidden from the other ponies.